

Armoring: The Disembodied, Collapsed, and Compressed Character Structures

Chapter

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ARMOR AND CHARACTER

The psychological equivalent to armoring manifests as *character*. Alexander Lowen says about the term character as it is used in the psychological sense, "The word character is related to 'characteristic' and implies that an individual behaves in a typical or predictable manner, whether good or bad" (*Bioenergetics*, p. 337). Wilhelm Reich described character as a chronic, automatically functioning mode of reaction, "[Character is] the sum total of typical attitudes, which an individual develops as a blocking against his emotional excitations, resulting in rigidity of the body, lack of emotional contact, and 'deadness'" (*Character Analysis*, p. 44). Lowen adds, "Character is also a psychic attitude which is buttressed by a system of denials, rationalizations, and projections and geared to an ego ideal that affirms its value" (*Bioenergetics*, p. 137). The term character is *not* being used in this book to mean moral strength, fortitude, reputation, an eccentric person, or a theatrical role.

Armor and character work together. Character emphasizes the *form* rather than the *content* of a person's psychological defenses. It is a person's typical way of *acting and responding*. Armoring is the *physical* structuring and manifestation of these characteristic *psychological* defenses; that is, armoring is the physical partner of psychological character defense. However, rather than being like a *static* suit of armor as worn by a medieval knight, armoring is an active and interactive *dynamic* defense system. As mentioned, armoring can be defined as chronic patterns of involuntary tension in the body that dampen or block emotional expression, alter perception of the outer world, alter perception of the inner psychological world, diminish or eliminate kinesthetic awareness, and restrict range of motion. Armor and character form an integrated defense system that simultaneously protects against the perceived for-

bidden internal impulses and the perceived threatening external stimuli of the outer world. As Reich puts it, "Armoring deflects and weakens blows of the outer world as well as the clamoring of inner needs" (*Character Analysis*, pp. 338-9).

Armoring and character develop because a perfect equilibrium rarely exists between the individual's needs and desires and the demands of living in the world. Because of this reality of life, each person must adapt to the outer world and, to do so, control certain inner impulses. As a consequence, most people carry some armoring. Two critical factors determine the type of character structure that is formed. One factor is the *timing* of the emotional stress relative to the stage of personal development. For example, character formation takes on a different pattern if it forms in the first 6 months of life when an infant is in the stage of being accepted than if it takes place at around 3 years of age when autonomy issues are foremost. The second is the *degree of intensity and frequency* of the stress. A single stressful developmental or emotional event might not lead to character formation, but if the intensity and frequency are greater, it could.

The child's defense against the emotional stress can eventually create a pattern that, in a sense, is devoted to coping with a particular set of problems. Rather than being a collection of diverse defenses, character and armor become a unified system of defenses that encompasses both mind and body. As a result, this unified defensive system necessarily combines a psychological pattern with a physical pattern that manifests in psychological defenses and chronic muscular tension. In this sense, the patterns develop cognitive, emotional, and physical structure. The structuring of psychological defenses—character—and physical muscular tension—armor—together can take different patterns. We have selected the four structures that stand out and also correlate to the major developmental stages.

In practice, most people do not have a pure character structure, but some form of combination. At the same time, most people, perhaps around two thirds, have a predominant character structure. The type that predominates usually has something to do with the stage of development with which a person ends up having the most difficulty. As in many things in life, timing affects character formation, that is, the time of life in which stress takes place.

As each character structure is described, the reader may find him- or herself identifying with each one. The reader may even feel he or she fits each type. This is a form of "medical student's disease" in which one identifies with the conditions one is studying. Being able to imagine oneself as each type is a form of learning. However, there is a deeper meaning to this and why this happens. All of us pass through the same "way stations" in childhood. We all need to feel accepted and wanted, to be nurtured, to develop a sense of autonomy, and to have the right to feel and want. We all can recognize the pain of not having these needs satisfied. We have all journeyed along the same human path on the way to physical and psychological adulthood.

If we successfully have these intrinsic needs fulfilled, we become equipped to have emotionally healthy lives. If not, we get "stuck" at that particular "way station" and have difficulty moving forward until we "solve" the problems presented by that particular stage in which we are stuck. More formally, being stuck is termed *arrested development*. Because we share this developmental commonality, we can identify with all the character structures in some way.

Another common response to learning about character structures is that they can seem to give negative portrayals. To an extent, the negative flavor comes from looking at what results from negative outcomes in human development and from the focus that psychology, psychiatry, and psychotherapy have on psychopathology. However, the character structures are also portraits of *survival-motivated adaptations*, and in that sense they are positive in that *they reflect the human desire to live*

and thrive to the extent that is possible for each person. Indeed, as a character structure develops a survival-oriented solution to the problems confronting an individual, the solution involves emphasizing the development of certain attributes that can also be seen as gifts or strengths. For example, character structures may develop strengths in a similar manner to how people who lose their sense of sight may develop a heightened sense of hearing and touch.

These character structures are presented as a tool for gaining greater insight into the psychology of the body, a deeper understanding of your clients' responses to your work, and forming effective therapeutic strategies. They should stimulate readers' thinking and awareness, which is more the intent than presenting an exhaustive discussion of character analysis. Critiques of character typology have stated: (1) Character typology is more accurate the closer a person fits the description of a structure, but less accurate the more someone is a mixed or "in between" type; (2) because our bodies are highly complex, each person possesses many idiosyncratic nuances, some of which can be psychologically significant, and character reading sometimes leaves the subtleties of body structure aside; and (3) in terms of etiology, character tends to emphasize the relationship with the mother, while not looking as much at the father, other people, and the family system, with the result that the conflict between mother and child is sometimes distorting in its emphasis and accent. Furthermore, character analysis is not the only psychological system for understanding people, and the authors make no claim as to which is *the* best.

However, having said this, our experience has been that these ideas about character are enormously useful and practical. We have found in our teaching and practices that understanding character is an effective way to gain a better understanding of the psychology of the body. In practical terms, understanding character structure is a good way to get hold of the relation between body structure and personality, to learn how to apply that insight to how and why people respond differently to different kinds of touch, and to know what kinds of touch to use with different clients. Understanding character also helps us to understand better the limits imposed on clients by previous life experiences. At the same time, any system of psychological classification is bound to be limited to some degree and reductionistic. *Nobody can be reduced to a label and a precise set of traits.*

We are describing a systematic method of defending oneself when we describe character, rather than actually describing the "self." These labels should not be offered or presented to clients. In our practices, we rarely discuss these labels with clients. We use them primarily for our own guidance. When kept in respectful perspective, understanding character can be very rewarding and immensely effective in deciding how to work with and respond to a client. Please keep this "grain of salt" offered here in the back of your mind while reading on.

The discussions about character in these chapters are based primarily on the theories and writings of Wilhelm Reich, Alexander Lowen, Malcolm Brown, and David Shapiro, along with the writings of Stephen Johnson and Edward Smith and our own experiences from our work with clients. We have sought to minimize jargon when possible and avoid using psychopathologizing language, so we have accordingly used terms that in some instances differ from the terminology used by these writers.

THE DISEMBODIED STRUCTURE

The primary traits of the *disembodied* structure are to dissociate thinking from feeling and to withdraw inwardly, and to break or lose contact with the world or exter-

nal reality, especially when such contact is threatening. Contact with the body is also greatly reduced. People with this structure tend to "live in their heads." Very early in life they experienced rejection by their main caregiver, which was felt as a threat to their very existence. To survive, especially to deal with such intensely terrible feelings, as children they cut off all feeling and split from their bodies. As adults, intimate, feeling relationships are both difficult to establish and avoided. The disembodied structure is overcharged, undergrounded, and underbounded. The holding pattern is held together (Lowen 1971).

Psychological Dynamics

People with a disembodied structure exist in a fundamentally extreme state of chronic dissociation, divided between the head and body. They are *literally living in thought or fantasy and not in their body* (Smith). Their sense of self is located exclusively in the head, as if the head were floating above nothing, or directing the body as if it were a machine. As a result, such people literally do not feel their body. This is why the term *disembodied* is used to describe this structure.

The head-centered orientation may manifest as detailed self-observation and self-direction through thought. People with a disembodied structure may be acutely self-conscious, observing every minute action they do as if they were observing someone else. Movement is often initiated and guided by their head, which gives their body verbal mental directions. For example, to brush their hair, they might tell themselves (silently to themselves as thoughts) to put their feet on the floor, to stand up to walk across the room, to pick up the hair brush, and then draw the brush through the hair.

Sensation stimulated by outside events, such as being touched, may also be mediated through this kind of mental running commentary. For instance, our clients living within this structure have reported that sometimes the only way they can begin to feel a massage is through an internal voice pattering something like, "Now he is touching my ankle; now he is touching my shin." The tone of this internal voice is often monotone or flat. A client with this structure may even report feeling "flat" or "one-dimensional." This disconnectedness accounts for the lack of spontaneity and awkwardness that one can observe.

The profound *disconnection* of thought, action (if it occurs), and feeling has powerful existential impact. People living within this structure not only experience a deep disconnection within themselves, but also between themselves and the rest of the world. Clients with this structure often describe their disconnection from the outer world as "living behind a glass wall" where they can see everything, but cannot feel anything. A sense of alienation results, leaving the person locked within a structure that generates crushing loneliness.

Although they are lonely, contact with others presents a paradox for people with a disembodied structure. They long for contact with others, but they also fear it because contact exposes them to rejection. *Rejection is a central issue of this dynamic.* They feel fundamentally rejected and subsequently reject themselves and their own body, frequently reject others, and fear rejection by others. Feeling so intensely vulnerable leads to a strong defensive need to guard against contact. The conundrum they face is if any contact somehow gets through, they will be nearly defenseless.

People with a disembodied structure are vulnerable in relationships to a sense of betrayal. They do not open up to others very often, but if they do, the trust they

then place in another person is nearly absolute. Such absolute trust can lead them to expect that the other person knows and understands them better than they really can. When the other person begins to show that he or she is not all-knowing, the person in the disembodied structure may feel betrayed (Lowen 1975). A hallmark phrase of people with a disembodied structure is "You should know, and if you don't, you've betrayed me." As a result, the paradox of contact *with* others extends to living in paradox when *relating to* others. Although they are often hypervigilant, perceiving and noting the emotional atmosphere around them in great detail (Johnson), at the same time they may be completely unaware of and insensitive to the needs and feelings of others around them.

For the most part, however, contact is avoided. *Withdrawal* is a primary survival strategy for the disembodied structure. Other survival strategies include becoming superior to others, "rising above" situations and other people, or becoming hypercritical. However, being dissociated from almost all feeling, using aggression as a defense is difficult and rarely used.

Because people with a disembodied structure often have no bodily sensation, they also cannot sense where they begin and end, which reflects being highly under-bounded. They also often have distorted sensations of how big or small different body parts are and frequently believe their head is much bigger than it actually is. The lack of bounding results in people with a disembodied structure being engulfed by the relatively unfiltered input streaming in from the environment. They are also prone to project their prolific fantasies onto the outside world.

The disembodied structure is highly defended against feelings. Feelings that are able to break through into awareness often include or consist of terror, extreme anxiety, and a pervasive feeling of being "bad." To keep these feelings out of awareness, people with a disembodied structure may be "spaced out" for substantial amounts of time, construct elaborate fantasy worlds, live in books, play complicated computer games, or work out patterns of abstract thought.

The intellectual defensive style often cultivates highly sophisticated cognitive abilities (Johnson). As a result, people with a disembodied structure tend to be drawn toward careers and activities that emphasize using the intellect and imagination. Such work also provides a comfortable refuge, allowing them to operate within their "safety zone" of being in their heads. Such activities also allow them to be socially isolated and remain out of feeling contact with others, since social contact may create too much anxiety. Examples of such careers would be computer-oriented jobs and jobs in physics, mathematics, philosophy, ministry, writing, and art. All of these also often center on thinking abstractly, theory, and intellectual creativity (Johnson). The absent-minded professor is a classic stereotype. This is *not* meant to imply that *all* people who are in these occupations have a disembodied structure.

Although people with this structure may feel "bad," they may also have a grandiose ego ideal in which they feel "special" (Johnson). This sense of specialness, which often manifests in fantasy, offsets feelings of rejection, alienation, and nonexistence that lie beneath the surface.

Each character structure has comparative degrees of severity; therefore, the disembodied qualities of some clients will not seem as evident or severe as others. In some cases, the disembodied characteristics do not seem so evident because the people with this structure developed the ability to *compensate* for or disguise their disembodied characteristics. As a result, they learn to use their highly developed head-centered thinking abilities to figure out social reality and convention to overcome their lack of relatedness (Lowen 1971). In general, regardless of character

structure, when a person makes adaptations that help him or her function but do not fundamentally affect the person's character structure, it is called a *compensation* and the person may be referred to as *compensated*. As an illustration of a compensated disembodied structure, consider Louis.

Louis

Louis is a very energetic and extroverted person with a high degree of curiosity about other people. Initially, Louis comes across as affable and easy to know. However, one day after a workshop, Louis's children came to meet him. Louis picked up his children to hug them, and, in doing so, his chest, head, and neck never yielded to the embrace with his kids. Louis clearly loves his children very much, but his body could not respond to the bodily contact and feeling. Louis does not appear outwardly disconnected from others or his own feelings, but his responses are mediated and buffered by his head, that is, his mental process. He has learned to be a social person and to make social gestures. He may not be "in" the gesture in the moment, and this is how the disembodied quality manifests, in Louis' case, subtly.

Even though people with a disembodied structure often think rather than feel, they do experience *intolerable* anxiety. They may not be able to experience it directly, but they know they "have it." It may be experienced as distress, anguish, desperation, or, very often, existential angst. This anxiety can build until it reaches an excruciating state and becomes difficult to bear. This is the point at which people with a disembodied structure disconnect or dissociate from their bodies with even greater intensity, because they perceive their bodies (consciously or unconsciously) to be the generators of the anxiety. By going into their head, they literally "rise above" the anxiety. This is a defensive strategy to avoid disintegration or annihilation, which the person living in a disembodied structure fears above all.

Etiology

To understand the cause of the disembodied structure, we must go to the time between prenatal existence (Smith) and the first 6 months of life and recognize the *absolute existential dependence for survival the newborn has on those caring for him or her*. The newborn normally is assured of continued survival and a feeling of security by feeling welcomed and loved by those around him or her. This feeling of welcome and acceptance cannot come through words or thoughts because a newborn is not developed enough to process this form of communication, but it can be communicated to the newborn through touch, attention to needs, and the energetic perception of the caregivers by the newborn. *The connection with his or her caregivers represents life itself for the newborn and establishes a foundation of existence and identity* (Lowen 1971). However, if the newborn is thrust into a hostile physical or emotional environment, he or she will feel mortally threatened. To disconnect with his or her caregiver means to be rejected *to the core, to be nothing*. This feeling is *unbearable* for almost anyone in such a predicament, especially a completely vulnerable infant who has no defenses.

This unbearable feeling is in the body. To survive the intolerable situation, the infant *must* escape the body. The infant experiences fragmentation and atomization,

that is, breaking apart into bits. The infant must simultaneously hold him- or herself together, which is done at the joints, but escape the body entirely because the infant's body is the locus of pain and anxiety. The infant flees to the head—that is, the mind.

Cognitive functions develop prematurely when anxiety causes a split between the head and the body (Brown). At the infantile level, these cognitive functions are not performed through words. Instead, the infant nonverbally "figures out" how to survive a hostile environment by developing a set of responses to that environment. The infant can figure out, for instance, when crying will generate a hostile response from the caregiver. Even though an infant may not be able to stop crying in certain circumstances, he or she may be able to modify or curtail it. We can observe that certain immature domestic animals modify their behavior in response to their caregivers. Human newborns also display this ability.

What constitutes such a hostile environment that can lead to the development of this structure? Sometimes, it is a situation that has more to do with circumstances than human fault, such as premature birth with extended periods spent in incubators with inadequate human contact, severe long-term illness after birth during which the child is close to death, death of the mother or primary caregiver, illness of the mother that results in prolonged separation of mother and infant, or hospital restrictions that do not allow mother and infant enough physical contact to bond.

At the relationship level, this existential crisis occurs when the primary caregiver does not bond with the infant or, more severely, feels hostile—consciously or unconsciously—to the newborn. (Lowen 1971). This is not set into place by being angry at a squalling baby for a short time, but by a continual situation of hostility and disconnection at a human level. This often leaves the infant with a feeling of being cast out into outer space without a tether, since the primary caregiver is the anchor in the infant's world.

Some people with this structure describe themselves as being the "hated child" (Johnson). More than being not wanted, they are often hated simply for their existence (Smith). To complicate matters further, this hate may never be openly expressed, but is acted out in subtle and unspoken ways. The "hated child," however, is living in a poisoned atmosphere that he or she perceives, even though the child may not be able to articulate what it is. This is most likely to occur in families in which the hatred is manifested as a prohibition against feeling and transmitted with an underlying pervasive sense of coldness.

This rejection is a shock to both body and soul. People with this structure sometimes report the sensation of being "electrocuted" as infants. They do not mean this literally, but are reporting that the *rejection is shocking*. Sometimes, they actually appear as if a jolt shocked them. Their eyes are wide open, joints are rigid, shoulders raised, and back stiffened.

The first 6 months of life establish the foundation for relatedness, safety, security, acceptance, and belonging. If the infant is wounded around these issues and during this particular time, future developmental stages also become harder to complete. Because this wounding is so early, the person is imbued with a sense of anxiety that seems to have no source. From the moment the person is conscious, he or she feels that something is "wrong" with him or her or that he or she is bad at the core, which adds to any sense of alienation. Physically, this kind of alienation is established through lack of touch, touching with an absent quality, or touch that carries a hostile feeling. *To be in touch becomes a negative thing.* Here is an example of someone who was threatened by touch.

Roberto

Roberto was a client who was aware that he had little bodily feeling. He had been born into a wealthy family that turned over taking care of the children to hired help almost immediately. Roberto had little contact with his parents and developed the attributes of the disembodied structure. When Roberto became an adult, he married and had children. His family physician, who was aware of Roberto's limited emotional range, told Roberto that it was important that he hug his children and give them affection. Roberto carried out the instructions dutifully. However, after he hugged his children goodnight each evening, he actually had to vomit because of the extreme discomfort and anxiety he felt from touching his children. Although he loved his children, for Roberto, touch had become sickening early on in his life. To be more precise, touch brought Roberto into his body, and his body was a place of discomfort. It did not feel good to be there.

As Roberto grew older, he retreated even farther from feeling. He shut down his senses. He could not smell or taste much anymore and was beginning to lose his hearing. He was abandoning his body, a carrier of pain and anxiety for him.

Roberto's case is extreme, but serves as a good example of how touch and being embodied can be threatening. Touch serves as a connection to the body and to other people, which stimulates anxiety in the disembodied structure. Since touch is the main medium of massage, therapists need to consider this in their work with clients with a disembodied structure.

Appearance

Disjointedness and disconnection distinguish this character structure in the body, as well as the psyche. People with this structure may appear to move mechanically at the joints. Movement often has a marionette-like quality, with extreme stiffness, woodenness, or frozenness seen in the body. The body may appear lifeless and like an object. People with this structure often report that at times in their life they have felt like dolls, machines, robots, computers, or other mechanical objects. They also may describe feelings of being "not real" or feeling like an alien. They are often, but not always, ectomorphic (Smith, 1985), that is, elongated, thin, bird-like, rail-like. They are frequently physically awkward, but some people living in this structure have had dance or other forms of body-related training and have learned to move more gracefully. However, the training is not integrated in the body, so they are actually mentally directing themselves rather than simply moving. Even with the grace that may result from training, a lack of fluidity and an echo of the stiffness may remain (Lowen, 1971).

Disembodied structures have knotty armoring. The knots tend to be present in most places in the body, but especially around the joints, which accounts for the stiff, even disjointed appearance often observed. The holding around the joints is an indication that they are *holding themselves together*. The armoring is an attempt to defend against a feeling of disintegration or flying apart. As explained in the etiology section, people with a disconnected structure faced overwhelming feelings of rejection. This is experienced as a shock to the body. The tightening around the

joints seeks to counteract this shocking effect and hold the person together. For someone who has never experienced this structure or such a threat, imagining what the terror is like and what it is about can be difficult. However, if you have had nightmares about falling into little pieces or becoming atomized or can imagine it, you can begin to understand this fear.

High levels of knotty armoring in the occipital area of the neck reinforce, on the bodily level, being in the head (Lowen, 1971; Smith, 1985). The tension in the occipital area forms a "ring of fire," which discourages any forays from the head into the body. This is why disconnected people at first tend to fear massage in the neck area and feel fragile. Later in the therapeutic process, they may come to crave being worked on deeply in that area. The armor band at the base of the skull keeps the charge extremely high in the head and possibly low in the body. However, hidden deeply and walled away within the endoderm is another high charge that fuels the anxiety felt by people with a disembodied structure (Lowen, 1971). In terms of body structure, the strong band of tension at the occiput can lead them to hold their head in a position that is tilted back so that they appear to be "looking down their nose," aloof, or superior. The blocking at the base of the neck can also lead them to tilt their head to the side (Lowen, 1971).

People with a disembodied structure may have difficulty making eye contact, which may come across as shyness or cold rejection. They may habitually turn their head slightly so that they look at others out of only one eye. Tension located around the temple, as well as the occiput, sometimes affects the appearance of the eyes, which in some individuals may appear absent or vacant and in others too intense and burning.

The faces of people with a disembodied structure can appear drawn, expressionless, and mask-like (Lowen, 1975). They frequently speak in a monotone except when very agitated. The vocal tone accompanies the mechanical quality seen in the body.

Other identifying features include raised shoulders such that their body seems to be "hung from a coat hanger," rather than standing on the ground. At the same time, they may actually be gripping the ground with their toes as if to hang on. People with this structure tend to have exaggerated high arches in their feet. The shoulders may also curl forward, as if attempting to protect the chest, while the scapulae are immobile (Lowen, 1971).

The chest is usually deflated in the upper region with little muscular or fatty tissue protecting the ribcage, giving a sense of vulnerability. Some people with this structure are very sensitive in the sternum area and cannot bear to be touched there, even by themselves or clothing. The lower half of the rib cage is often flared outward owing to a holding in of the diaphragm. People with a disembodied structure usually have great difficulty breathing in: "The expansion of the chest cavity is accompanied by a contraction of the abdominal cavity. This prevents the diaphragm from descending . . . so that a downward movement of the lungs cannot occur" (Lowen, 1971, p. 375). This type of breathing is called *paradoxical breathing*.

Because people caught in the disembodied structure live in a state of unconscious fear, the body chronically expresses this intense fear and anxiety through signs one would see in an acute fear situation, such as shallow breathing, and energy drawn away from the limbs and into the center of the body, leaving the hands and feet perpetually cold (Lowen, 1975).

Finally, the disembodied structure is undergrounded, underbanded, and overcharged. The undergrounding is accounted for by the head-body split and general disconnection, underbanding by the high level of vulnerability and expectations of

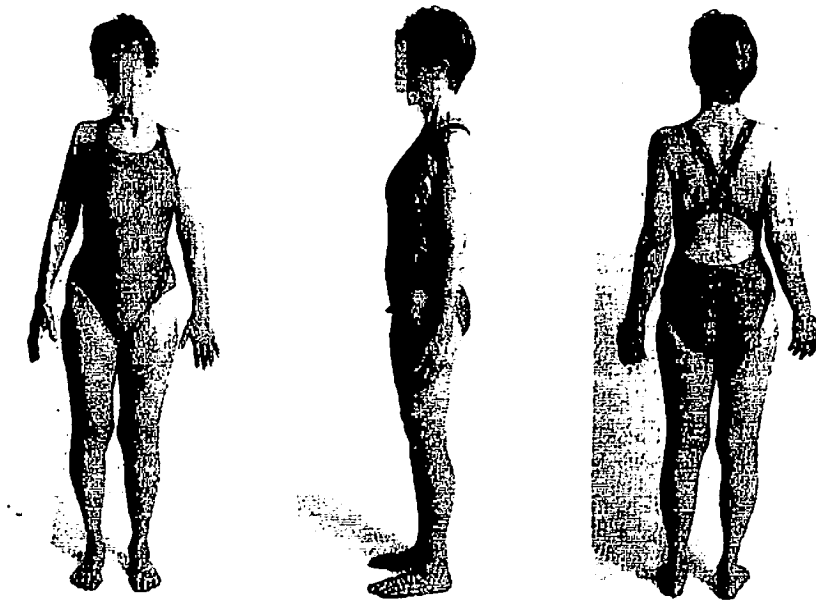


Figure 8.1

Disembodied structure. Front view: Note rolled forward, flared lower rib cage, bird-like, elongated appearance, holding at joints, tilting of head, and lack of contact with the ground. **Side view:** Note contraction around occipital area and extended neck, holding of diaphragm. **Back view:** Note the "hung-up" or hanger-like appearance of shoulder and upper back, and lack of contact with the ground. All views show the general disjointed quality of this structure.

others to know how they feel, and overcharging in the head, around the joints, and deep in the core, although the rest of the body is undercharged.

Therapeutic Strategy

In a sense, seeking out a body-centered method like massage therapy is a big step for people with a disembodied structure. After they become aware of their need to become more embodied, they are very motivated, increasing the chances of therapeutic success.

In the first several sessions of massage therapy, the person may not feel very much in response to touch. Because the knots are so hard and tenacious and the client has a

relatively low level of feeling, the massage therapist may be tempted to work aggressively to "break open" the armor. However, doing this would ignore the very purpose of the armoring, which is to *keep the person away from any source of anxiety*. In the case of a client with a disembodied structure, *the source of anxiety is the body itself*. Opening the body too rapidly can flood the individual with the very feelings he or she is trying to avoid and defend from experiencing.

The key is to *invite* disconnected people into their bodies rather than break them open. The massage therapist often faces a therapeutic conundrum when working with clients with a disembodied structure. The massage therapist's usual goal of loosening tension to create a more pleasant relaxed state sets up a paradoxical result. Helping clients with a disembodied structure "be in touch with their body" can turn out to be a scary experience for them because the body is the repository of the excruciating pain that their defenses are designed to keep out. For people with a disembodied structure, to be in the body means to face the pain of rejection and all the awful associated feelings. Therefore, inviting this type of client into their body means facilitating a gradual "putting one's toe in the water" progression of bodily feeling, so that they are not taken to the point of being overwhelmed. The challenge is to allow some opening and let it be tolerated before going further (Johnson). Clients with a disembodied structure must discover for themselves, through their own experience, that they can tolerate feeling their body *and* feeling their feelings. They also need to learn to tolerate the surges of anxiety that may come upon them when they begin to feel, and then let themselves feel safe and comfortable with the experience. Once they begin to request more pressure and more depth while being touched, *then* the massage therapist can comply.

An important direction here is that the work must be done incrementally so that sensation is built upon sensation (Johnson). If the therapist goes too fast, the client will retreat back into his or her head. Therefore, any indication of dissociation or splitting is a sign that the pace of the work is too much for the client to tolerate. Starting with parts of the body that already contact the world is usually safer, such as the head, hands, and feet. These areas usually feel less vulnerable. Therefore, a session with this type of client may begin by simply touching the hand at the fingertips and waiting for a signal that moving beyond this area, such as the back of the

hand, is okay. An example of incremental pacing is that the person with a disembodied structure may be able to feel a toe, then the outline or edges of the foot. Feeling only the outline may last for quite a while, but then the outline might begin to “fill in” and become an experience of a three-dimensional foot. People with a disembodied structure feel flat and two-dimensional to themselves—cognitively, emotionally, and bodily. As the body begins to be experienced three-dimensionally, a foundation is made for feeling in general to be experienced more fully.

Massage can also bring both a sense of connection to the body and connection *between parts* of the body that the client may never have experienced. Because *disconnection* is a trait of the disembodied structure, facilitating connection can be quite beneficial. A great deal of disconnection occurs at the joints in the disembodied structure; therefore, working with the joints can substantially increase connection and awareness. Holding joints between your hands firmly for several minutes can bring about both connection and relief. In essence, with the therapist holding the joint together, the client no longer has to create the excessive tension needed to do so. A second technique consists of gently “pressing” or pushing bones toward each other in the joint area.

After the body begins to feel safe and “thaw out,” clients with a disembodied structure develop a delightful insatiable need for massage and begin to crave ways to feel their body. When the client reaches this point, the enthusiasm and child-like discovery of every new body sensation that the client experiences can be inspiring. As massage progresses, this client may ask for seemingly painful amounts of pressure, especially in the area around the head. This amount of pressure may be necessary now to bring feeling into the numbed areas. What might be painful for another person who does not have a disembodied structure has become pleasurable for the client who does, so any reluctance that the massage therapist may have to applying such pressure at this point in the process must be suspended. In contrast to the beginning of therapy, the client now *needs* to break through.

When the client is ready, apply moderate pressure to the forehead, increasing the pressure gradually if the client tolerates it. Sustain the pressure without movement of the hands for several minutes. An added benefit of this technique is that it calms mental activity, especially the mental chatter and images that are manifestations of the extreme anxiety typically generated by disembodied structures. If the client reports physical rather than mental sensations, then the technique is working well (Figure 8.2).

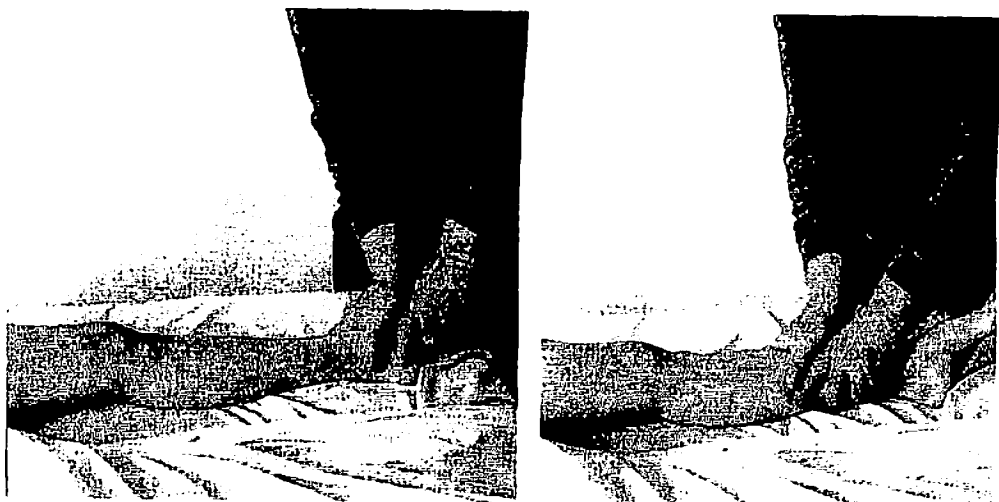
Working to bring more energy into the body, particularly the legs and feet, will benefit the client in two ways. First, the disembodied structure maintains a high charge (an overcharge) in the head, and a much lower charge (an undercharge) in the rest of the body. Increasing charge in the rest of the body lessens the overcharge in the head. Second, this also increases grounding, which benefits the under-grounded disembodied structure by bringing the client into a greater sense of here and now, concrete reality. Therefore, as the client’s tolerance for touch increases, invigorating work can be done on the legs and feet.

Bounding is a challenge for clients with disembodied structures because they must have “enough body” to build boundaries. Therefore, bounding will improve when they are more able to be in their body. One simple way of improving body boundaries, after trust is established, is to firmly apply broad pressure to each body



Figure 8.2
Technique of applying pressure to the forehead. Applying a moderate to heavy amount of pressure to the forehead. This pressure is held without movement of the hands for quite some time.

Figure 8.3
Technique of applying pressure to each body part. One simple way of introducing body boundaries, after trust is established, is to firmly apply broad pressure to each body part for a moderate amount of time.



part for a moderate amount of time. This helps clients with a disembodied structure to feel their boundaries (this technique also works for any underbounded clients (Figure 8.3).

The therapeutic relationship with clients with a disembodied structure must be monitored carefully by the massage therapist. As explained earlier, these people are prone to mistrust and feeling betrayed; therefore, being scrupulously honest about communications is vital. This does not mean that the massage therapist must disclose his or her personal life or every thought. It does mean, for example, that if you cancel a session because you are ill, you need to explain why you are canceling.

THE COLLAPSED STRUCTURE

The primary traits of the *collapsed* structure are a tendency to be dependent, low aggressiveness, and an inner feeling of needing to be supported and taken care of. People with this structure experienced a lack of fulfillment in infancy, leading to an underlying experience of deprivation. Having difficulty standing on their own feet literally and figuratively, they tend to lean on or cling to others to prevent their collapse. Some people may adopt a compensating pattern based on exaggerated independence, but this fails to hold up under stress. Energetically, this structure is undercharged and is also underbounded and undergrounded. In contrast with the disembodied structure, energy flows out to the periphery, although weakly, rather than being frozen at the core (Lowen, 1971). The holding pattern is held down.

Psychological Dynamics

People with a collapsed structure have a strong need to be *dependent*, and they feel profoundly powerless. They seek rescue and fear abandonment (Keleman), which they try to deal with by ascribing a powerful role to select others, relating to them on a "big one, little one" basis. The big one is their designated rescuer. This means the other person is cast into the "big one" role of being powerful enough to provide for their needs, while they have the "little one" role of being taken care of. By inflating (i.e., building up) a person upon whom they want to depend and giving the