

THE SWEETIE PIE SYNDROME

by
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The Problem

Sweetie Pie Syndrome typically starts in childhood — it is usually characteristic of females, but it does occur in males. This condition begins as young children are either ignored by or are demeaned by a parent or parents. This behavior can also be role modeled by a parent. As a result of this chronic neglect, abuse, for example, these children develop a sense that a) there is something wrong with them, b) they are basically unlovable, and/or c) if they do not do things to be accepted, they are unworthy. They then develop a behavioral repertoire of constantly trying to do good things and help others to gain a sense of worthiness and lovability. But no matter what or how much they do, the dysfunctional parent perpetually ignores or fails to respond with recognition, positive reinforcement and love. So, the children invest in doing more. These children attempt to demonstrate their value by constantly bringing with them the habit of helping others. As these individuals mature, they bring this basic self-concept of unworthiness along with them to progressive developmental stages—they must keep doing more, to no avail.



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There is yet another aspect to the Sweetie Pie personality. It is a longing to be accepted by someone like the parent who was authoritarian and unwilling or unable to be emotionally accepting. They are drawn to self-serving, entitled mates hoping to receive the empathy and tender, loving care that they never received from their similar parents. And because they are sweet, passive, only too willing to be giving, responsive, and silent regarding their own needs, they are targeted by emotionally insensitive, self-serving, often narcissistic partners. They are naive to what was role modeled for them by parents in childhood and their domineering spouses in adulthood. This is what they experienced as they grew up and is unconsciously replicated in their adulthood. As life goes on in their relationships or marriages, they become more and more disillusioned with their relationship, but they push their feelings down and they remain disquieted but silent. Their spouses' negativity is not challenged. Or, when confronted, it is minimized, ignored or responded to with reverse blaming.

Some Sweetie Pies find husbands who are more passive like themselves. Their

domineering parents maintain their stature throughout their offspring's life. They will not tolerate their children being in a relationship with a partner who insists on being dominant. At most, they will tolerate a partner who will be passive in their presence.

Sweetie Pies themselves are not consciously aware of being Sweetie Pies. They do not recognize or appreciate their own precious good deeds, intelligence or vulnerable traits. If their significant relationships are not satisfying, they are likely to blame themselves. Then they do more to attempt to

gain recognition. Giving becomes an addiction. Like an addiction to smoking, alcohol, amphetamines, gambling or sex, when a little giving does not quiet the deeper causal feelings, they increase the stakes and give even more. The problem is the underlying issue is not about their giving. It is about self-value, self-recognition, self-acceptance and self-appreciation. So, like the alcoholic, drinking more does not solve the underlying problem, nor does giving. It has a negative effect. The child's problem-solving skill and the need to give become stronger.

Potential husbands found their Sweetie Pie wives attractive not merely for their looks, but for their passive dependence, their predisposition to give and take care of and their non-confrontational, non-demanding passivity. The partners are drawn by their own self-image of dominance, feeling of strength being reinforced by the Sweetie Pies' neediness for acceptance. They gain ego strength from their Sweetie Pies' perception of their power, ability to structure events and control. The partners also derive a sense of freedom and independence from Sweetie Pies who would not and could not make demands on them.

If the partner is sensitive, empathic and proud enough to confirm the Sweetie Pie for her or his growth, three things happen. First, the partner gets stronger for demonstrating his or her compassion. Second, the Sweetie Pie gets stronger from the confirmation. Third, the relationship becomes stronger and more loving.

These partners are usually individuals with little or no psychological or emotional perceptiveness and awareness. They lack insight, compassion, empathy and intimate communication skills leaving emotional wounding in its wake. Emotional expression and charm are usually public and superficial to impress others or to manipulate.

As the Sweetie Pies get stronger either through life experience, e.g., getting a job, volunteering, forming friendship relationships or receiving psychological treatment, spouses do not become impressed, appreciative or proud of their spouses' growth and strength. Dominant spouses work harder to put their passive partners down and attempt to crush their Sweetie Pies' threatening new-found strength and growth. If spouses wanted to reinforce their partners' maturation and strengths, as well as their relationship, they would take a very different stance in the relationship. Often these individuals are unable to conceptualize the kind of emotional compassion and actions that would be necessary to achieve this. Unless a partner is too insecure to self-examine, too self-serving or too rigid, he or she should be only too willing to negotiate a resolution to satisfy a mate and the relationship. If the partner is sensitive, empathic and proud enough to confirm the Sweetie Pie for her or his growth, three things happen. First, the partner gets stronger for demonstrating his or her compassion. Second, the Sweetie Pie gets stronger from the confirmation. Third, the relationship becomes stronger and more loving.

When problems are encountered, arguing is never the answer. In fact, their partners are likely to become distant, demeaning, defensive or blaming of the Sweetie Pies for any problems. In contrast, productive problem-solving finds a solution where both parties feel like winners.

Five Factors Influencing Resistance to Change

There are five factors which make transcending the Sweetie Pie Syndrome difficult. The first is a long-standing belief of one's being inferior and undeserving. As already stated, this often comes from childhood and one or both parents' treatment of this child. The child then internalizes the parents' behavior and believes the way she or he is being treated is because of who they are. They deserve this treatment. Children and adolescents are unable to psychologically perceive who their parents are as people and understand why they are that way. They see parents not for who they are, but for what they are — authority figures to be obeyed.

The second factor to resisting change is habitual behavior of denying one's positive attributes. If you compliment or say a positive thing to the Sweetie Pies, they may not pay attention, not respond, deny the compliment or deflect by changing the subject. They cannot identify with what they do not believe. By not accepting the compliment they fail to reinforce and strengthen their inner self, their core, inner truth, positive traits and the spirit within. This leads to staying the same — no personal growth.



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The third is habitual behavior of focusing on others and helping others at one's own expense. Because external expressions of appreciation that are not taken in and believed, the Sweetie Pie must help more and more to try to feel okay. But helping becomes addictive. Furthermore, those who are manipulators may identify the Sweetie Pie as someone of whom they can take advantage. Being used becomes the nature of their relationships. While they may become inwardly hurt over being perpetually used, Sweetie Pies are unable to back away or change their behavior. That would just be more evidence of their unworthiness.

The fourth factor of resisting change is dependence on another who is unable or unwilling to provide confirmation, appreciation and love. This other is very likely to replicate feelings of a parent who was not supportive or loving. If Sweetie Pies can get this other non-emotional person to give them love, they will finally get what they did not get in childhood. But precisely because they found someone like the non-loving parent, their need for love is destined to fail and their dependency deepens. Furthermore, if there is observable behavior on the partners' part of Sweetie Pies getting stronger, the partner will become hostile, demeaning, even punitive. Sweetie Pies

fear becoming stronger because they may be rejected, abandoned and alone. These factors inhibit healthy progressive change.

The fifth factor is physical/somatic holding. Feelings are not merely thoughts. There is also a body-based component to them. Feelings are held in nerves that are connected to muscles. Sweetie Pies want to internalize or deny feelings that are too painful to be aware of or experience physically.

They brace in order to numb and push down those feelings and make them consciously invisible. Pushing down feelings leads to depression. Tight muscles intensify anxiety. Furthermore, physical holding restricts and minimizes free movement, movement then becomes tiring. Tight muscles often wear down cartilage between the bones leading to arthritis. It can also lead to dependency behaviors for comfort like over-eating which then leads to obesity, or drinking, leading to alcoholism. This bracing compromises the immune system making individuals more susceptible to illness. Pushing down feelings is very damaging to the body. It can be a precursor to digestive problems, even cancer.

Treating the Sweetie Pie

Sweetie Pies seek treatment because of depression or chronic pain that the medical system has been unable to help. Marital problems are not originally the focus. Sweetie Pies subconsciously or unconsciously know that the authority figures in their lives do not like having their power questioned or challenged. Questioning or focusing on the relationship is threatening. If they immediately focus on the domineering partner who has been a taker, unsupportive or hostile, they will only be more disappointed and frustrated. As a



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result, treatment must be slow. It starts with expression and exploration of the presenting problems which ultimately are symptoms. Slowly, treatment highlights how the Sweetie Pies can provide self-recognition and self-support given the presenting situational and underlying emotional issues. Finally, relationships are examined.

Precisely because Sweetie Pies are helpers and givers to others, self-recognition, appreciation and support are hard to accept. While treatment may highlight these traits, the clients' long-standing, unconscious, habitual, intellectual and physical holding patterns block self-awareness and self-nurturing even before the client walks out of the office. Early stages of treatment introduce and reinforce self-reflection, self-recognition, self-appreciation and self-

support. Later stages of treatment pursue underlying feelings and causal events that led to the presenting problems. The next step is taking action and giving or asking for support for themselves.

A phenomenon that often arises in personal growth is pseudo-psychic set-back (Kisch, 2018). When individuals experience emotional growth, they may get in touch with negative feelings they were not strong enough or sufficiently supported to deal with in the past. They may experience this event as regression or staying the same or getting worse. It actually occurs as a result of their getting stronger. They need to realize they are now able to address events and emotions regarding those events that they were unable to cope with in the past. If addressed, these memories provide opportunities for healing and self-growth to become stronger, and indeed even wiser, in supporting themselves and others.

Transcendence

Recovery from long-term, unconscious and habitual holding patterns is slow and requires hard work. Repressed memories and pushed-down traumatic feelings are not merely unconscious thoughts. They are cognitive awarenesses that are held down by unconscious physical holding patterns. In order to transcend lifestyle patterns of numbing these memories, five steps are necessary. First, physical holding patterns must be identified. Second, these patterns must be released. Third, the emotional issues that are being pushed down and being forgotten must be identified. The Trager (1987) Psychophysical Integration therapy developed by Milton Trager, M.D. is a psychophysical approach that can identify physical holding patterns in the body. It can also release these patterns. NeuroEmotional Technique (NET), a procedure developed by Chiropractor, Dr. Scott Walker (2008) and practiced by chiropractors and somatic psychotherapists, is particularly helpful. NET identifies the

feelings beneath symptoms, identifies their origins and extinguishes the psychophysical holding pattern. Fourth, new behaviors to cope with stressful events must be developed to transcend old patterns, and they must be repeated to stamp them into new habitual neuro-physical behavior patterns. Fifth, there is an essential need for the Sweetie Pie to talk with the inner child and provide, not advice, but recognition, emotional support, validation and love.

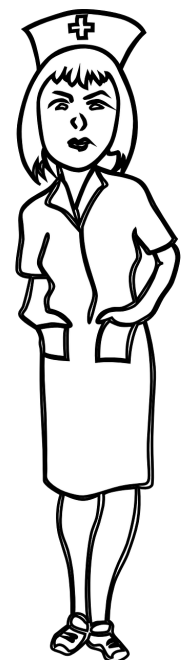
Transcending the Sweetie Pie Syndrome takes a lot of courage, stamina, and consistency. As Sweetie Pies get stronger, they will be clearer about their feelings, needs and being deserving. They will be more predisposed to speak up in support of themselves. The Sweetie Pies will have a new perspective of their past and insights to their personality. If there is a sensitive, reasonable, loving partner there will be a discussion to discover a resolution to conflicts — everybody wins. The relationship will become deeper and stronger — more loving. If there is a self-indulging partner, there will be resistance and conflict. The partner will become arrogant, angry and/or more controlling. Dominance gives the partner a sense of superiority. Unfortunately, it also destroys love. When threatened, the partner will want to shut down discussion by leaving until the overt conflict passes. Anger and blaming toward the domineering partners intensifies those individuals' resistance and denial. Those partners, rather than recognizing and appreciating how their actions effect the Sweetie Pies, blame back. Those individuals have to give away their sense of command — unacceptable to them. The partners want the Sweetie Pies to once again become comfortable being passive and subservient. The partners become more dominant, demeaning or withdrawing. Under those conditions the Sweetie Pies have to remain firm and determined. Indeed, the Sweetie Pies may decide being alone is a better alternative than constantly being demeaned, used and neglected.

If the Sweetie Pie continues to grow and press issues and the partner cannot tolerate having a co-equal as a partner, the relationship may become untenable. There will either be constant conflict, or the relationship will end. This is one of the consequences and fears of the dependent Sweetie Pie. Therefore, it is important for the Sweetie Pie to be prepared to see clearly who the partner is, to pace confrontations, and to know the potential consequences of getting stronger in an inequitable relationship. It is important for Sweetie Pies to give themselves recognition and appreciation for each step of their growth no matter how small. It is also important to know how one will manage if the partner chooses to leave the relationship either with an affair, affairs, or divorce. Having friends and meaningful activities can help buffer the grief and pain of separation and support growth.

Working with Sweetie Pies: Three Examples

Peggy

Peggy was a thin, soft-spoken former nurse. She dressed modestly—her top blouse buttons always buttoned, and she wore facial makeup to cover her “imperfections”. She was referred by her physician for psychotherapy a year and a half after her husband died. She somaticized her emotional stresses and fears. She had paradoxically braced shoulders (Kisch, 2014). She felt weak and vulnerable if her shoulders were soft and flexible. Married for close to 50 years, she suffered from issues with sleep, chronic tiredness and fatigue ever since her husband's death. She felt lost. She had



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chronic digestive problems. She was afraid to drive. Three years after her birth, Peggy's father left her mother. When Peggy was 14, her father divorced her mother. He was chronically angry, a critical perfectionist with others, but not himself. Both of her parents were alcoholic. When just 9 years old, she was grabbed and kicked by two older boys in the neighborhood. When she told her father, he punished her.

When she was 20, Peggy's father remarried a woman who rejected Peggy and was perpetually hostile toward her. At the time of our meeting, Peggy had a 50-year-old daughter who, like her father, had been perpetually hostile toward her. If there was something Peggy perceived a family member's needs that she had not provided, she suffered from guilt. Her life has been focused on helping others—her family at home, children at work. Now, at 75 years of age, she volunteered at Hospice. Family events with brothers and their children were and still are heavily alcoholic. She felt guilty if she did not attend—she always attended.

Her husband, who was bright enough to get a doctoral degree, was not emotionally expressive. His father was a non-emotional authoritarian. On one occasion her domineering father-in-law threw her against a wall and kissed her on her lips. She felt physically molested and thought of slapping him but would not have dared to do that.

Her otherwise controlling, authoritarian, domineering husband took no action. Peggy dutifully turned her pay check over to her husband. He was recalcitrant over giving her money for groceries. With his and her funds, he purchased 11 long-range rifles and took guided hunting trips costing thousands of dollars. Only once in the course of their relationship did he tell her he loved her. It was in the last months of his life after he had a stroke.

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Peggy learned, as well, that setting boundaries, being firm does not require yelling or threatening, which only creates more conflict and distance. Expressing oneself can be soft, but solid. And it needs follow-up, for instance: "Do you remember I raised an issue with you the other day? Well, have you thought about that? Where are you with it now?" The issue is a seed that needs periodic watering. If there is behavioral rather than verbal change by the partner, that change needs verbal recognition and appreciation by the Sweetie Pie. That verbal support for the change is more powerful when followed up by some kind of physical contact—a touch to the hand, arm or shoulder — not sex! If a partner and/or family member becomes defensive when confronted, or blames back rather than entering into problem solving, this is a sign of lack of willingness to change. If there is no positive behavioral response, short-lived behavioral response or merely lip service from the partner, the couple will become more polarized. Sweetie Pies may ask themselves, "If I had a friend who lives as I do what would I tell them? Is what I would tell my friend the truth? And, if it is, is that what I tell myself?"

After 20 sessions that includes somatic release, Peggy felt more relaxed and pain free. Her digestion improved. She now gives herself daily chest compressions, gentle pressure to the rib cage, which is relaxing and gives her more energy. This releases her intercostal muscles between the ribs, allowing for more oxygen for strengthening on the in-breath and more release of carbon dioxide and stress on the out-breath. She does movement exercises in the morning, which helps her to feel better. As a result of her psychotherapy sessions, she came to realize she had insufficient support growing up. Her anxiety-ridden mother constantly lived in fear. Peggy internalized her mother's fear and worried over her mother's inability to provide her with comfort and support. She is becoming stronger as a result of therapy.

In treatment she realized emotional stress was the root of her digestion problems. At a recent lunch meeting with her daughter, when her daughter broke into a usual tirade against her, Peggy said, "Stop! I will not tolerate this anymore." Peggy then stood up and left the restaurant. As a result of her mother's confrontation and self-respect, her daughter has distanced from her and she has not lashed out since this incident.

Peggy has gained weight, talks with a stronger voice, sits with her head up straight and her shoulders back without pain. Her top two blouse buttons are now open, and she no longer wears facial makeup—appreciating her own natural beauty. Peggy no longer attends family alcoholic events and has no guilt. She clearly is a stronger person. Though issues of not being deserving still recur, they are not as frequent.

Rick

Rick is a 65-year-old university professor. He wanted to be employed in a profession where he would provide support and education for youth.



Both of Rick's parents came from dysfunctional homes. They gained a sense of personal worth from an academic orientation — not parenting. Rick's mother had an emotionally abusive father. Every day after returning from school her father would ask her, "What did you learn in school today?" One day she told him what the teacher taught, and her father replied, "Your teacher never taught you that. If you don't tell me he did not teach you that, I am locking you in the basement." She refused to lie so she spent a cold night locked in a dark basement. The next day she brought a letter home from her teacher confirming what she had told her father the teacher had taught the day before. In response, her father took her out of high school because education was wasted on women who simply get married and have children. Having such a father left her cold and distant to men.

When Rick was in the fourth grade, his mother passed a high school equivalence exam and subsequently went to college and then graduate school. She became a school psychologist. Rick's mother was emotionally distant and critical of his not being sufficiently academic. Rick felt no TLC, recognition, or appreciation from his mother. His mother had high academic expectations for Rick but gave him no academic support or encouragement. In late childhood she accused him of being "brain damaged." Clearly this university professor-to-be was not brain damaged.

Rick's father had a physically abusive father. Rick's father was not physically abusive to Rick, but not having received loving role modeling himself, he did not know how to demonstrate TLC to his son. Neither of Rick's parents knew how to harmoniously resolve conflict. Periodically, in his childhood, they fought intensely Rick hid in a closet repeating, "I'll never be like them. I'll never be like them. I'll never be like them."

Rick suffers from chronic back pain. In a NeuroEmotional Therapy (NET) bodywork

session, Rick's back pain was identified as being related to his sensitivity to his mother's "shame." And when tested for its origin it dated back to the first trimester in utero. He was picking up his mother's feelings of shame over being held back by her father and not academically actualizing herself. Rick was an unwanted male child. The NET procedure released this neuro-chemical holding pattern and eased his chronic back pain. It also helped him to feel more confident in himself.



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Rick was married three times. In his first two marriages he attracted two women who were not nurtured by their parents. He was a giver and caretaker for women who perceived their role in a relationship as needing to be cared for. His wives were receivers, not givers. After enough years of affectionless relationships, the first two marriages ended in divorce. Rick offered alimony to his second wife who was gainfully employed as a non-tenured assistant

professor. He was concerned that if she was not renewed, she would be financially vulnerable. Again, he was protecting her. Shortly after the divorce was finalized, she was tenured, received a promotion and raise, but she continued to accept alimony. She was in a new relationship but delayed marrying her new partner until her alimony expired.

Rick did marry a third time. Three years after his second marriage had failed, he met another caregiver, a Sweetie Pie. She was the product of an alcoholic step-father and her own three divorces. Both Rick and his new partner knew what it was like to be without nurturance and love in life. Both were only too willing to provide that support to a partner. However, they were reticent to enter another marriage after their experiences. Nevertheless, the two Sweetie Pies took the plunge and got married. Their relationship deepened with time. Because Rick had received support before his Sweetie Pie wife entered the scene, he had the skills to nurture a healthier relationship which did allow for more healing for both of them, and it continues.

Joyce

Joyce, 66-years-old, sought psychotherapy as she grappled with her alcoholic husband of 45 years. He perpetually had anger issues and went on tirades. His father was a raging alcoholic and his mother was co-dependent, emotionally superficial. Joyce's mother was a chronic drinker. When she stopped serving alcohol to her mother, her mother stopped visiting her. Later in her life, Joyce's mother developed dementia and Joyce took care of her. Joyce has lived with chronic frustration for a lifetime.

Joyce and her husband were heavy drinkers in the beginning of their relationship. After six years of marriage, Joyce quit drinking. Joyce had considerable unresolved feelings stemming from her parents' relationship and growing up in an alcoholic home. Joyce's two adult children were both heavy drinkers

but have been sober for years.

In treatment Joyce grappled with her passivity which dated back to childhood and her mother's role modeling. Joyce had to psychologically break away from being dependent and focusing on her abusive relationship in order to discover her true self. After two months of therapy, Joyce left her husband and moved in with her 36-year-old daughter, who provided Joyce with support and love. Joyce had been going to ALANON for 12 years. After two weeks of her absence, the husband took himself to Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). The husband claimed that he gave up drinking and Joyce considered returning home. Joyce saw AA work with both of her children and had faith that it could work for her husband. Joyce said that she would move back home with her husband if he completely stopped drinking, but she would no longer be passive. She would no longer tolerate his drinking.

With treatment Joyce discovered inner feelings dating back to childhood. These were feelings of abandonment, lack of love, support and tenderness from her parents. Joyce also experienced a strength in her voice that she had not known. She developed a sense of clarity regarding her thoughts. She realized her somatic tightening came from a fear of being known and perceiving herself to be inferior. She wanted to release somatic holdings of negativity and actualize her voice. Joyce no longer has anxiety as to whether her thoughts and words come out right. She realized, "I have not been okay just being me. To be okay I had to do something for someone else." She has a new goal — "to let go of my bracing." Her brother-in-law asked her husband for \$40. Her husband wrote him a check for \$500. She let him know, "That was a mistake." She expressed this to her brother-in-law also but added, "perhaps not strongly enough." In the past however, she would have said nothing.

Her husband had been wanting sex. The couple had not had sex for two years. We discussed the fact that while sex is often called "making love" without mindful, caring, intimate feelings, sexual acts are just mechanical. They may serve as a stress release for one of the partners. This is not "making love." It makes the Sweetie Pie nothing more than an object. It obliterates any sense of love. For some, any form of touch is an invitation for sex, in which case the partner will miss a sentiment from the heart. This can potentially be hurtful to the partner, the Sweetie Pie, and just serve to emotionally push the Sweetie Pie away.

Joyce understood the difference between sex and intimacy. Joyce recognized that her husband's neediness and her sense of responsibility did not generate intimacy. She had no desire for sex. Now her

husband was able to admit that he had "always felt inadequate and hid it with bravado and alcohol." Her self-realizations are leading to his self-awarenesses and behavioral change. Sex is once again coming back into their relationship. But it is different than it ever was before. It is a mutually sharing event.

Joyce has another new goal — "loving and caring for myself." She recognizes, "I am able to voice what I want more often. I want to release traumatic experiences from my tissue." She wants to recognize more quickly what she is experiencing in the moment and respond appropriately with strength in her voice. After five months of psychophysical release, Joyce demonstrates the strength, wisdom and courage to turn around a lifetime of holding.



Conclusion

For positive change to occur strength is required. This is not tight muscle strength. That is part of the problem. Tight muscles lead to pressure on the nerves, and inhibition of free flow of oxygen to the brain, heart and all the body's cells. Tightened muscles constrict the rib cage, which inhibits the intake of oxygen that brings strength into the body, heart and brain. Tightened muscles also lead to the inhibition of carbon dioxide release adding more stress and anxiety. The somatic tightness that accompanies a trauma, if not released, unconsciously holds the memories in the nerves and muscles of that event for a lifetime. For change to take place, one must be motivated and feel inner psychological strength to perceive and understand what was formerly unconscious and threatening. One must be able to anticipate resistance from within and without and be prepared to take corrective emotional, physical and behavioral action. The strength that is required for both the Sweetie Pie and the partner is core emotional and spiritual strength. It takes moving one step at a time and recognizing and celebrating both the internal and external results. It requires cognitive self-recognition, emotional appreciation and even celebration for the courage that is required to take these steps no matter what the outcome.



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