

# **The Nature of Repression (and How to Unrepress)**

## **The Art of Breaking Character [‘Essays For Change’ #2](#)**

**\*\*Please email me with feedback if this document was too challenging/confusing or abstract for you. I will be continuing to refine it over time, and your feedback - positive and constructive/negative - helps me do so :) \*\***

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#### **1. Origins of Repression**

A newborn child exists in a state of complete openness and fluidity. It is a mysterious state to us, in part because it is completely unrepressed, but it is also an *immature* or *unwise* state. The child has no issue transitioning moment to moment between joy and sadness, fear and anger, awe and laughter. It does not get in its own way at all emotionally. It does not self-inhibit, nor self-judge, nor self-sabotage - but it makes many ‘mistakes’.

The child stumbles, falls, breaks things, gets angry at its parents for trying to help it. Even the most patient and loving parents will eventually lose their composure a little and react disproportionately. Perhaps they get slightly angrier than they should be, or (when the child is old enough to understand them) make a slightly harsh or misplaced comment. Children are incredibly sensitive, and so these moments of “imperfect parenting” do not have to be extreme for the child to learn the essential message of repression: “*some of what I am is not OK. I had better hide it so that I remain safe, accepted, loved.*”

Many events in the child’s life produce an emotional response. But if the child does not feel safe to feel the emotions as and when they arise - because they are not actually physically safe, or because those around them have not helped them feel physically safe - “big boys don’t cry,”

“nice little girls don’t get angry,” etc. - then the emotion gets stuck in their system, trapped in the body. This is the birth of trauma.

Over an entire childhood (and some of this continues into adulthood for many, especially those who continue to experience abusive treatment from others as an adult), most people undergo a vast number of experiences which they do not have the capacity to process at the time. As a result, we become adults and, having never been taught that we have been repressing emotions our entire life, we end up weighed down by 18 (or more) years of unconscious trauma that is clogging up our system and keeping at bay vast amounts of peace, love and vitality, as well as a long list of personality traits and emotional states that feel mysteriously inaccessible to us (eg. healthy anger, intimacy, femininity, patience, kindness etc.).

If I could sum it up in brief, we repress because we feel we have to - because we interpret the circumstances and events of our childhood (whether it be at home, at school, or anywhere in our culture or community) as indicating that we must push down some of what we are in order to have our needs (for safety, belonging, love, connection, intimacy etc.) met.

## **2. 4 Types of Repression**

As far as I can tell, there are 3 types of emotional repression, and one additional form of repression involving the repression of traumatic memories.

- **Shame-based repression** (“I’m unworthy because I contain the capacity for X”)
  - Rooted in self-rejection, self-judgement, self-condemnation.
  - The root of our judgements of others
  - Can arise from self-concept dissonance (“I’m not the kind of person who does X. It is therefore shameful if I do X”)
  - Most often what lies in our “shadow” is kept in place by shame-based repression
  - Found most commonly (in my experience) in the stomach/abdomen/back regions, or in the face/jaw.
- **Fears of Expression** (It is dangerous for me to express Y)
  - Rooted in self-protection from harm
  - Rooted in the learned belief that it is dangerous for us to be transparent about what is inside us, that it is unsafe for us to express (in front of others) our anger, sadness, fear, femininity, sexuality, joy, confidence, dissent etc.
  - Usually lives in the neck, jaw or face area.
- **General Emotional Repression** (My trapped anger, grief, fear, shame, hatred, or disgust keep at bay my capacity for Z)

- Rooted in a more general clogging up of our mind/body/spirit system with
- Stems from emotional overflow or overwhelm
  - Examples: my trapped fear keeps my inner sense of safety dormant; my trapped hatred keeps at bay my capacity for wonder; my trapped anger keeps at bay my capacity for self-protection; my trapped grief keeps at bay some of my capacity to love.

There is also Structural/Dissociative repression, usually occurring in response to severe traumatic episodes –“I cannot know this. I must forget what happened here.”

I will not be talking about this or helping people with this. I am not qualified to do so and have no experience with it.

### 3. Understanding Resistance

If you have never released any repressed emotions (i.e never experienced the release of emotions that you know originate in the past and not the present):

The first thing to recognise is that these emotions have remained repressed because you have been subtly and unconsciously (if not explicitly and intentionally) resisting them for much of your life. Learning to unrepress then means you are therefore trying *to release your learned tendency to resist*.

This resistance takes many forms. Some of these are long-term behaviours, some are patterns of thought, some are about how we use our body to numb ourselves to our own pain, or to armour it against threats we do not even know we are imagining and then fearing.

Understanding the forms resistance can take, we begin to see that much of what we call our lifestyle or personality may in fact be a series of resistance mechanisms.

### 4. Forms of Resistance

- **Distraction/busyness:** Externally, it can look like a constant desire to be busy, or to distract yourself, or to numb yourself with drugs, alcohol, sex, or other forms of pleasure or artificial ecstasy.
- **The Need for Control:** Internally, it can look like a consistent attempt to *control* your experience, to resist or push away any form of discomfort or pain, and a general refusal to surrender to emotions. It is a fundamental distrust of experience.
- **Outsourcing Distraction/Comfort:** It can look like relying on others to make you feel safe, or to make you feel loved, or to make you feel seen - another form of distraction, albeit one that has been highly normalised in our societies
- **Resistant Beliefs:** Resistance can take the form of narratives or beliefs that affirm to us that we do not need to change anything about ourselves, or that we can't change: “if it

ain't broken don't fix it", "I'm already healed", "it's all in the past. No need to go digging up skeletons", "people don't change", "I'm stuck like this", or denying that there are any repressed feelings at all.

- **Overintellectualising/overthinking:** spending time in the head to avoid spending time in the body, where the trapped feelings all live. Thinking *about* feelings instead of feeling directly. Thinking can feel safer than feeling, but it is a resistance to the very thing that will actually heal us, and actually allow us to have more peaceful thoughts.
- **Spiritual Bypassing:** Using spiritual practices or beliefs to avoid dealing with painful emotions. For example, insisting that "everything happens for a reason" or trying to stay in a constant state of "positivity" can become resistance to acknowledging and processing grief, anger, fear, shame etc.
- **Somatic Armouring:** Physical tension or bodily contraction as a form of unconscious resistance. Chronic tightness in the jaw, shoulders, gut, or pelvis often reflects long-held emotional suppression—your body quite literally holds the resistance.
- **Identity Resistance:** clinging to identities that keep one from feeling: "I'm not a crier", "I'm not an angry person", "I'm just a simple, happy guy. Nothing to look into here".
- **Projection:** "Everything in the unconscious seeks outward manifestation." Our trapped feelings - eg. anger - get pushed out onto others via psychological *projection*, and so instead of facing our own anger directly, we interact with the imagined anger of others. This is the source of many intrusive thoughts of being attacked or otherwise harmed by others, and can be thought of as another source of unconscious resistance.
- **Repression Through Routine:** rigid schedules or rituals that prevent emotional space. Structure becomes a wall against introspection or emotional spontaneity.
- **Selfless Resistance:** Addictive helping or fixing others. Constantly focusing on other people's pain instead of your own.

## 5. Investigating Resistance

Investigating resistance mechanism requires us to first and foremost be kind to ourselves, recognising that it is perfectly understandable and reasonable (and very, very common) to be employing a wide range of these resistance mechanisms to keep us from feeling what we are afraid of feeling. There is no need and no room for self-judgement here (but if you are judging yourself for your resistance, remember to try not to judge yourself for *this additional layer of judgement*. Let yourself judge yourself if you need to, and try and examine that judgement itself as another layer of resistance to feeling).

It is unlikely we can overturn one of our resistance mechanisms without recognising it *as a resistance mechanism*. Once we see clearly what we have been doing to hide our own pain from ourselves, we can develop the courage to recognise and release this form of resistance, and allow to the surface what this has been obscuring (=covering up). This is precisely what allows us to heal and resolve the patterns, emotions and distortions of our subconscious mind.

In general, investigating resistance is about looking with curiosity (not judgement, or self-loathing) where we once refused to look - at our past, at our self-limiting beliefs, at our parents, at our negative emotions like hatred, anger, fear etc., at our current relationships, at our triggers, at our coping strategies. When we stop resisting we find all of this can begin revealing many hidden truths from us.

## **6. Curiosity and Courage**

Curiosity and courage go hand in hand in this. We cannot be completely curious without having the courage to look without pre-judging. We must be willing to open ourselves to the unknown - to look without knowing in advance what we will find. This takes both courage and curiosity.

Luckily, curiosity is perfectly natural for us, even if it gets somewhat knocked out of us by our fear of life. We can always regain it. The same applies to courage - even if we have become afraid of life, our courage is waiting for us to resummon it. And there is perhaps nowhere where we are rewarded more for our courage (and our curiosity) than in investigating our inner world of repressed emotions.

## **7. Understanding Emotional Capacity**

We fear making contact with trapped/repressed emotions because we imagine they will be too much to handle. There is some logic to this fear, because there are emotions inside of us which are too intense for us to handle right away.

But we can think of feeling repressed emotions (=unrepressing) as similar to lifting weights. You would hurt yourself if you tried to lift the heaviest weights the first time you ever go to the gym. But we know not to do that.

Our body knows not to bring up the really heavy stuff. It knows to build our capacity slowly over time.

We will start with some crying, some light fear, some light shame, a bit of anger, a bit of grief. As we learn to get comfortable with these, we feel safe to allow more intense feelings to arise.

Our emotional capacity expands over time, and before we know it, we can handle intense emotions without being overwhelmed.

## **8. Technique for Unrepressing**

The essential task of unrepressing is learning to surrender (=stop resisting/release control of experience) *so that the body can heal itself* by resolving the energetic loops that have been stuck in place by our refusal to feel them.

Emotions are simply energy-in-motion (e-motion). We are learning to get out of their way so they can complete their path through the body and return the system to harmony/coherence.

To learn to surrender, we need to make ourselves feel safe to do so. This is where it is essential we learn to create a sense of *safety in the body*.

We repress emotions because we do not feel safe in our bodies to feel them.

Creating safety in the body is very much like creating a sense of safety in any unfamiliar landscape. We need some patience, and some capacity to investigate with curiosity and courage so that we can begin to map out this unknown terrain and make it feel more familiar to us.

You can try [meditations like this](#) or you can simply listen to music or sit in silence and let your awareness inhabit your body, focussing directly on the feelings of having/being a body.

You will likely find at some point that there are areas where you can't feel anything, or where you can feel physical pain or tension. These are areas where there is likely trapped emotion. Over time, you can develop the courage and curiosity to go looking into these areas. If you can do so with enough of a sense of surrender or non-resistance you can allow the emotions to surface and be released. In most cases, if you have been repressing your whole life, you may need to add something else into the mix to bring emotions to the surface:

## **9. Practices for Unrepressing**

Often we need to do something to our system to raise the overall energy levels so that repressed emotions/material can surface for us to meet, accept and release. Here are some things that you can try (bear in mind I am not a medical or legal professional and cannot recommend all of these to everyone. You must use your own discretion and consider the risks that may apply to you):

- Breathwork (holotropic, Wim Hof, pranayama)
- Cardio Exercise (running, dancing, lifting weights, Hight Intensity Interval Training, etc.)
- Psychedelics (psilocybin “magic” mushrooms, LSD, ketamine, MDMA, cannabis) - be careful with dose, set and setting. The lower the dose, the safer you will feel on the substance.
- Meditation (concentration meditation, open awareness meditation, self-compassion meditation, transcendental meditation)
- Sweat lodge
- Reiki/other energy healing modality
- Massage
- Trauma Release Exercises
- Spending time in nature

After or during one of these, return to the above exercise and focus on a) recognising that you are safe b) releasing control of your experience so that the emotions can ‘take over’. Remember, you can ‘turn off’ an emotion at any time if you want to get up and walk away, or simply distract yourself, so you are not trapped in the emotion. You just have to be ‘surrendered’ (with hands off the steering wheel) whilst it is passing through you, in order for the energetic circuit to complete itself and for the emotion to be permanently released from your system.

Music recommendation: Music for Psychedelic Therapy - Jon Hopkins

## 10. Final Thoughts

Unrepressing is about the healthiest, wisest, sanest, and most loving thing you can do both for yourselves and for others. You will find as you undergo this process, you are making yourself unstuck in all the ways you thought you were stuck. I call this *breaking character*, and it is, in my opinion, the ultimate purpose of our lives. It unlocks parts of us we did not know existed, and gives us access to degrees of joy, peace, love, connectedness and wisdom that we did not know were possible and could hardly imagine in advance.

You *will* thank yourself for taking the time to dedicate yourself to this process. It may be tricky at first, and it is not without challenges, but you can quickly gain momentum, and begin to see results that will give you confidence that you are doing exactly what you are meant to be doing, and transforming yourself into who you truly are, beneath the layers of noise, repression, and lies.

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I wish you all the best. If you have any questions send me an email at [robby.french11@gmail.com](mailto:robby.french11@gmail.com).

[I also offer 1-to-1 spiritual/psychological guidance and mentoring if you would like to work with me directly.](#)

[Check out my website](#) for some of my writing, and to find out more about me and my work.

Consider following me on [TikTok](#) and [Instagram](#). And I make music [teehee](#).

Love

Robbie :)