

Carditive Psychology & Carditive Therapy: A Christian Model for Understanding and Working with the Heart

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What is the psychological heart?

Western philosophy, psychology, and a great deal of therapy have concentrated on the mind, intelligence, and cognition

It's not hard to see why:

The mind is an extremely powerful mode of human functioning, and it has accomplished so much. It's also easily accessible, and it's processes would seem to be the most accessible to self-awareness and scientific investigation



But the heart is also important

While more subtle and enigmatic, the heart guides the soul, providing the deep direction and motivations of human life. In that way, the mind is subservient to the heart

Because the heart is more obscure than the mind, it has been sadly neglected in modern psychology. The field is dominated with books and articles on the mind and cognition, but there is very little written on the heart (though aspects of the heart have been increasingly explored).



Humans refer to the heart a lot in everyday speech a lot!

"I mean it from the bottom of my heart"

"Take heart"

"Follow your heart"

"I had a change of heart"

"She has a heart of gold"

"He lost heart and gave up"

"He wears his heart on his sleeve"

"He's heartbroken."

"She has her heart set on going to college"

"We had a heart-to-heart conversation"

"He's heartbroken"

"She's heartless" "Have a heart"

"Listen to your heart"



The heart is the most common psychological term in the Bible

"Hear, my son, and be wise, and direct your heart in the way" (Pr 23:19)

"Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the LORD weighs the heart" (Pr 21:2)

"The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. Who can know it? (Jer 17:9)

God promised to make a new covenant with his people: "I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people." (Jer 31:33)

"Pour out your heart like water before the presence of the Lord." (Lam 2:19)

Jesus said, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Mt 6:21)

Paul prayed for some believers that "Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith" (Eph 3:17)

"Love one another deeply, from the heart" (1Pe 1:22)



Christian psychology has focused a lot on the heart over the centuries

"The heart is restless, O Lord, until it finds its rest in You" (Augustine, Confessions)

"Anything on which your heart relies and depends, I say, that is really your God" (Martin Luther)

"The heart has its reasons which reason does not know" (Blaise Pascal, Penseés, #277)

"It is the heart which experiences God, and not the reason" (Pascal, #278)

"Heart of my own heart" (A name of God in the hymn, "Be Thou My Vision")

"Cor ad cor loquitur" ("Heart speaks to heart" on John Henry Newman's coat of arms)

According to Eastern Orthodoxy, psychospiritual growth involves continual repentance and prayer to "bring the mind down into the heart." (Muse, 2015, p. 136)

"Your heart is your inward self, your personality, your 'actual you,' and what you treasure—what is important to you, what you are centrally attached to—determines what that self is like." (Roberts, 1997, p. 85)



So, what is the psychological heart?

It is rooted in our neurophysiology, interoception (internal body awareness), and early socialization through language

As we develop, the psychological heart gets associated with our physical heart, because emotional experience is processed in our chest, connected to our heart, lungs, and gut, through the vagal nerves and the many neurons we have in our heart (40,000), lungs, and gut (over 100,000,000)



So, what is the psychological heart?

As a result, humans come to sense their deepest emotions, motives, memories are stored and experienced in the heart

The psychological heart is the center of one's being and the deepest part of one's being, the site of the unconscious, our intuition (our truest insights and discernment), our emotions, our truest, defining emotions, our core beliefs, core identity, core values, truest character, our true self, and the place where the Holy Spirit dwells

So, it's just as psychological as the mind or cognition



Christian psychology needs to do research on the heart

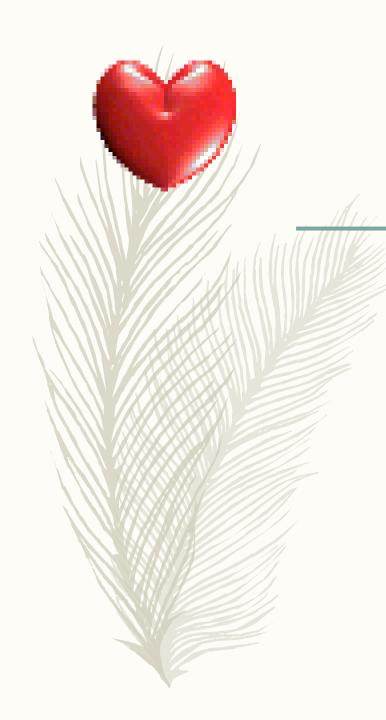
I have begun with a qualitative study on the heart, interviewing 25 Christian philosophers, theologians, artists, psychotherapists, and spiritual directors

The next step will be to do a study of the uses of heart on Twitter over the last 5 years

Discourse analysis of texts in English over the past 200 years

Questionnaires focused on distinguishing the mind and the heart

Cross-cultural research is needed to document that the heart is a universal psychological construct



What is carditive therapy?

In contrast to cognitive therapy, it focuses on the heart

It works with those therapeutic modalities that especially connect with and access the heart: relationality, the body, emotion, narrative, symbol, music, and communion with God, with the ultimate goal of character and spiritual formation



Let's start with the emotions



Emotions are signs

What is a sign?

A sign is anything that points to something else.



Emotions convey value and meaning

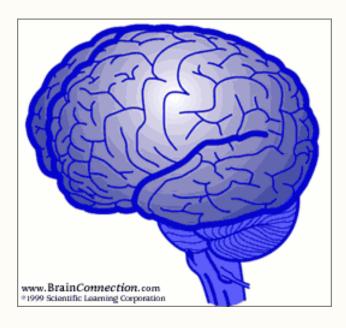
About...

- •The good of a good creation and the bad of a fallen world
- Pleasure and unpleasure (emotions are *bivalent*)
- As we mature, our bivalent emotions evolve into good and bad, and later holy and sinful
- •One's perceptions about good and bad



Emotions can be stored in memory...

in the brain.





Situation	Appropriate Emotion	Meaning
Violation or attack	Anger	Injustice, defend, surmount
Death, abandonment, neglect	Sadness	Loss warrants grief, support
Anger of others, violence	Fear	Danger
Self-recognition of wrong- doing or being deficient	Guilt/Shame	Hiding signifies there's something wrong
Offensive or dirty stimulus	Disgust/Contempt	Avoid or reject object/person
Pursuit of our Good	Joy/Contentment/Love	Flourishing

(adapted from Johnson, 2017; Pascual-Leone, 2019)



Working with Emotion Process diagnosis & emotional processing

Specific types of emotion (process diagnosis) require specific types of emotional processing (moment-by-moment intervention)

Process diagnosis:

- 1. What type of emotion is this?
- 2. What is the client's zone of proximal emotional development? (What is the client capable of?)
- 3. What types of emotional processing are needed at this moment?

Emotional Processing:

Process of emotional change whereby emotion schemes are activated so that the network of information can be exposed to new information

Working with Emotion

In the zone of proximal emotional development

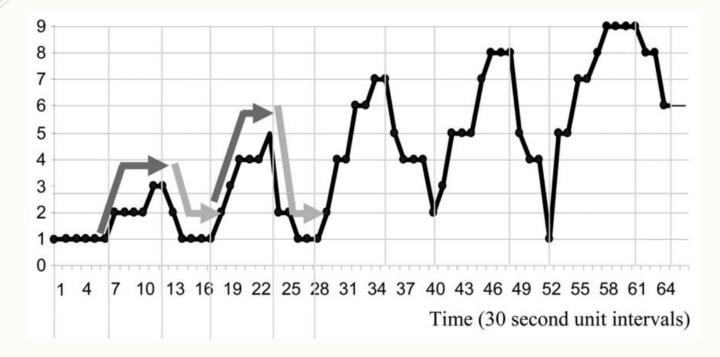
Zone of proximal emotional development: the level of emotional processing that the client is able to carry out successfully on his/her own, with support or assistance from the therapist (Leiman & Stiles, 2001)

Sequential model of emotion processing (Pascual-Leone, 2018; Pascual-Leone & Greenberg, 2007)

- Productive emotional processing is characterized by step-wise movement from global distress to greater emotional differentiation and meaning-consent
- By being a holding environment of the client's emotions, therapists provide scaffolding that can enable the client to learn how to tolerate, maintain, and resolve previously overwhelming negative emotions

Working with Emotion The zone of proximal emotional development

Emotional repertoire: clients' emotional range and flexibility increases in productive sessions



Carditive Therapy in Practice





Together, we can help counselees experience and differentiate their true emotions

- 1. Let's do a body scan
- 2. Role model tolerating the counselee's emotions. Being a "container."
- 3. Help counselees to be alert for signs of emotion.
- 4. Help counselees to distinguish emotions from each other.
- 5. Help counselees to value the revelation of bad emotions. Seek to normalize them (given their story).
- 6. Explore places where emotion would be expected, but is absent. Seek to uncover the layers of emotion, including the inhibiting emotion (usually anxiety).
- 7. Close your eyes and breathe through your heart



Working with Emotion Facilitating productive emotional processing

- 1. Awareness, engagement
- 2. Expression & arousal
- 3. Emotional down-regulation

empathic exploration and experiencing (e.g., focussing)

self-soothing skills with Jesus and others

4. Reflection on emotion

narrative re-storying & interpretation of core themes

- Coherent narratives are constructed experientially in the context of the Christian metanarrative of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation.
- 5. Sequences of emotional transformation
 - "Changing emotion with emotion" (Greenberg, 2002)

Co-activation of incompatible emotions to create a new emotional experience

Experiential Interventions Enactment (Chair) Tasks

Secular EFT interventions have been well-validated empirically and they can be redeemed and incorporated into Christian practice

Task Marker	Intervention	Modification
Self-Evaluative Split (self-criticism or dilemma)	Two-chair dialogue	Jesus' speaking can soften self-criticism
Self-Interruptive Split (blocking feelings)	Two-chair enactment	Jesus as a compassionate healer, eager to listen
Unfinished Business (lingering bad feelings re: significant other)	Imaginal confrontation (empty chair)	Jesus conversing with oneself or significant other

Can also incorporate **Christian spiritual disciplines** such as: prayer, meditation, singing, communion with God, communion with our friend, spiritual reading, and bringing negative emotions to the cross



Help counselee distinguish between good created/redeemed emotions and sinful or damaged emotions.

- 1. Emotions from creation (e.g., anger at perpetrator)
- 2. Emotions that flow mostly from sin (e.g., anger at God for the difficulties in one's life).
- 3. Emotions that are better understood as a result of damaged creation structures (e.g., intense anxiety in the face of someone who's angry.
- 4. Emotions that flow from redemption (e.g., love of God).



Combine healing emotions with negative emotions

- 1. Tie it into the glory of God: "My life is contributing to the glory of God."
- 2. Tie it into God's story: "My story is becoming part of God's story of healing and glory."
- 3. Tie it into Christ's death and resurrection: "My anxiety was nailed to the cross. Now / nail it there by faith and surrender it (taking the time necessary), and allow God to raise me from the dead (taking the time necessary) by my replacing the neg. emotion with a resurrection emotion in Christ: joy/contentment/love.



Specific In-Session Strategies

- . Gently pursue emotions: asking questions that help the counselee explore his or her emotions, like "What is the worst thing about that memory?"
- 2. Depending on the degree of trauma and stage of therapy, we can try to bring Jesus into it.
- 3. Let's close our eyes and locate an embodied negative emotion, symbolize it, and surrender it to Christ on the cross
- 4. Let's close our eyes and go into our hearts and focus on the indwelling Holy Spirit, opening up to him, and welcoming him into your presence



Specific In-Session Strategies

- 3. 2-Chair technique: Old self and new self having an emotional conversation.
- 4. Use guided imagery to symbolize guilt and shame and receive washing and cleansing from the blood of Jesus or the water of regeneration (Titus 3:5).
- 5. Counselee prayer to God, expressing emotions to God. This is called lament



Out-of-Session Strategies

- 1. Promote private and public worship of God
- 2. Assign homework and practice for during the week
 - a. Identification of emotions
 - b. Journal about one's emotional experiences (past/present)
 - c. When negative emotions arise, practice taking them to God and expressing them to God in prayer
 - d. Monitor emotions during emotional episodes
 - e. Practicing meditation and guided imagery that activates and processes emotions redemptively; the deeper, the better.

Practice the "Death/Resurrection emotion shift":

Activation of neg. emotion => taken to the cross

Experience of pos. emotion in its place => the fruit of resurrection





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