

Chapter 6

The six character positions

The six character positions (boundary, oral, control, holding, thrusting and crisis) are explored in depth in this chapter. Each character position is explored in terms of significant life themes, the associations with particular areas of the body, interpersonal dynamics and areas of challenge and working edges. A brief explanation of the yearning, denying and creative aspects of each character follows the main body of information about each character position.

The boundary character position

Existence and safety are significant life themes for us as boundary characters. In our appearance, energetic expression, and actions, we will sense an uncertainty as to whether or not we are welcome or belong (Kurtz, 1990: 43). This links to the fact that the boundary character position starts to form either before or during birth, or in our earliest phase of life, which gives that uncertainty deeply felt roots. Uncertainty is something of a boundary watch word – uncertainty about existence, reality and making safe contact with ourselves, others and what is happening around us. Those of us patterned by the boundary character will return to the same questions, consciously or unconsciously: Do I exist? How do I exist in a dangerous world? Am I real? What is real? Our life work (and the work our body needs to complete) is to make sense of what it means to fully arrive and to be as present as we can be in the world.

Our deep-seated boundary fears of taking our place, and making contact, mean that our relational strategies are likely to be about:

minimizing self-expression and emotional contact with self and others. The pattern reflects threats to survival and the core material will organize perceptions, feelings and actions around a theme of inescapable danger. Kurtz, 1990: 43

When there is any perceived threat to our safety (for example, walking into a roomful of new people), we might experience an inward or outward sense of freezing, or making ourselves invisible, energetically 'leaving' our body through disappearing into our heads. As a result, boundary characters can come across as aloof, distant, slightly alien, overly analytical and logical (as we take refuge in our heads for the 'right' answer), and at times, strongly in touch with 'other'-ness or a mystical connection.

In this section, the boundary character position is explored in terms of energetic factors, relational factors, the influence upon physical appearance and exploring the eye segment block, which is the area of the body particularly associated with this character.

At least part of the character will be built upon a basic uncertainty about their own wholeness and reality, and every crisis of life will be experienced as a threat to *being*.

Totton and Edmondson, 2009: 67 (original italics)

This quote gives a clear indication as to why boundary character energy can seem somehow withdrawn: because of that underlying uncertainty around wholeness and reality. This withdrawal of energy can give us the appearance of being ungrounded, or undergrounded. We give a strong impression of living in our heads, a perceived 'safe escape' from the world and relationships. Kurtz calls the boundary character 'sensitive/withdrawn', with the name giving an immediate energetic sense of this character position (Kurtz, 1990: 47).

As a result of life events witnessed by those of us influenced by boundary strategies, there is likely to be a central theme and

questioning around boundaries, physical and otherwise: “Do I have any? Where are they? Is it safe to let anything come through them?” (Totton and Edmondson, 2009: 67-68) There is likely to be an internal sense of “Where do I end and where do you begin?” Those of us with this character patterning are likely to feel some confusion on a basic energetic level as to whether or not we are contained by skin. Not only do we feel this lack of containment and wholeness, there can also be a very real terror of fragmentation and of falling apart. The seeking, sometimes piercing, expression in our eyes as a boundary character shows our deep longing for and simultaneous fear of contact with ourselves and others.

Given that the key theme of the boundary character is focused around existence and feeling welcomed and belonging, it may come as little surprise that when our attempts to make contact with others are experienced as too scary; one of our key strategies is to ‘float off’, away from the contact that may be experienced as too invasive. Obviously we do not disappear physically, but energetically we are long gone, leaving a sense of relational vacuum.

Lowen gives a detailed description as to how those of us with boundary character conditioning experience an overall lack of unity and wholeness in our body. He comments on the important energetic separations between our body and our heads, with a splitting of our body at the diaphragm, a disunity of the trunk and the pelvis and disassociations of the extremities (Lowen 2003: 338).

Lowen continues to point out how those of us with this patterning maintain only a tenuous connection in terms of our body-mind unity, particularly when we become cut off, or dissociated from our body. He gives the example of how we use our body a little like we would use our car, in a mechanical, utilitarian way (Lowen, 2003: 334). We may often feel cut off from a more live, immediate, kinaesthetic sense of our body in the

moment. In this process, those of us with this patterning lose, what Lowen calls, the body as a 'bridge' between our inner reality and the material reality of the outer world (Lowen, 2003: 334).

This perhaps helps to explain why boundary characters can appear to almost look a little 'alien' and 'other'. As a young baby we did not have the energetic sense that we were actually present in our body, let alone relating to, and accepted, by other earthlings, as that information was not forthcoming from our early environment. Energetic interruptions around pre-birth, birth and our early life on earth mean that – in an energetic sense at least – we are still finding a way to arrive fully, to feel sufficiently safe to make contact with others, and to be present in our body.

Kurtz gives the example of Mr. Spock (from the popular US television series *Star Trek*) as an example of the traits of this character position: "Mr. Spock, though fictional, is a good example; the person's movements may be stiff and/or awkward, bodies are often thin and very tense and tight." (Kurtz, 1990: 43) It is not uncommon for those of us with strong boundary character patterning to take up some form of physical activity, often quite early in life, as a way of trying to become more coordinated, to feel less awkward or clumsy, and perhaps intuitively to feel like our movements (and psyche) are more joined up.

The formation of the boundary character position is strongly linked to armouring in the eye segment block. One reason for this link to the eyes and the upper head is because we seek immediate contact with those around us from the moment we are born, a natural human survival instinct. We need to receive the message – energetically, verbally, and through touch – that we exist, that we have arrived, and that we are welcome and safe. Without feeling these messages via the eyes (literally, being seen and able to see our carers) and skin, as a baby we become incredibly confused and distressed as to whether we are actually real and whether we have been safely delivered. Given that this is a pre-

verbal stage, or an in utero stage of development (Smith, 1985: 92), this confusion can be experienced extremely acutely. As a newborn baby it was impossible for us to give verbal expression to these intense feelings, at a time which is such a seminal and formative point of life.

As a baby we are so dependent upon others that we need mirror-like validation to know that we are real and safe. If we did not experience this, through sufficient eye gazing contact and soothing touch, we may well have developed the sense of incompleteness of the boundary character. Our bioenergetic system will then be built around an underlying, pre-verbal uncertainty about our relationship with reality and the reality of ourselves and others.

A strong theme will be the importance of really seeing and understanding, having a well-functioning 'lens' on life and anchoring ourselves through our eyesight, vision, and visions. This will be influential in how we relate to others. Lowen writes about the experience of others, coming into relationship with the boundary character:

You do not feel that he looks at you or that his eyes touch you, but that he stares at you with seeing but unfeeling eyes. On the other hand, when his eyes focus on you, you can sense the feeling in them; it is as if they touch you.

Lowen, 2005: 59

As a boundary character, we continue to seek the warmth of contact and safety through our eyes; yet that contact is also the thing we fear most. Part of this patterning is characterised by a strong, seeking, or distant, faraway look as we lose contact and disappear into our mind's eye. When contact is not made, or perhaps made and experienced as too invasive, our eyes have a "typical *faraway* look of remoteness" (Reich, 1990: 430, original italics). By being able to 'really see', those of us with this

patterning will be able to assess our safety, often with a sense of hyper-vigilance, knowing whether it is okay to be present in a situation.

What is going on energetically for the boundary character, relating to self and world? We have seen how those of us influenced by this position can at times seem out of touch with reality, operating in a survival way. This may or may not be obvious to those around us, given that we can 'float off' but still appear to be physically present and make the right noises. Lowen talks of the ego of the boundary character being a "will without an I." (Lowen, 2003: 333) In other words, we have a weaker ego strength than other characters, a less defining sense of 'I', 'me', 'mine', because of this uncertainty about existence and being welcomed. Having said that, we have a sense of will, but it is likely to be more akin to a: "power to do things and not as a power of thought." (Lowen, 2003: 333)

Those of us with armouring shaped by the boundary character position can have a rich inner world, often shaped by deep analysis and intuition. What we find more threatening is the stepping out to relate to others. Lowen points out how: "Ingrained characterological attitudes of 'I won't' and 'I can't' are missing" (Lowen, 2003: 333) from this character position. Because we are already uncertain about our connection with reality and being present, there is not the same need to fight this reality or to see it as unfair or unjust (as we might if we were also influenced by the oral character position), which we will look at in the next section. As a boundary character our main work is to come to terms with existing and arriving, daring to connect more fully with the material world, and full, sustained relationship with a grounded sense of self and other.

Under extreme stress, those of us with boundary character patterning can have strong survival functions and be highly attuned to external forces and energies. This attunement has a number of consequences. It means that boundary characters:

“responds to affection immediately and directly but just as immediately will he freeze in a situation which he feels is negative” (Lowen, 2003: 334). In relationship we may:

find ourselves seeing other people as feeling angry or afraid when that is what *we* are feeling, or perhaps we let other people’s ideas take us over and dominate our own sense of things.

Totton and Edmondson, 2009: 68 (original italics)

There can be an extreme sensitivity to the psychic and ‘spiritual’ realms. When this is grounded and integrated, it can be a gift; when it is a heightened indiscriminating awareness it can be unclear and confusing. That confusion may be experienced as a deep uncertainty about who or what is real, and what is inside and what is outside.

In looking further at the interpersonal dynamics of the boundary character, one striking thing is that we expend quite a bit of energy in avoiding contact and relationship. As Fenichel points out: “The emotions of these persons generally appear to be inadequate... They behave ‘as if’ they had feeling relations with people.” (Fenichel, 1945: 445) Or as Kurtz says: “Feeling like strangers in a strange and dangerous land, these people strongly limit self-expression and contact with others,” (Kurtz, 1990: 43) Lowen goes on to point how our aggression can be “ ‘as if’ aggression, it is ‘put on’ as a matter of survival,” (Lowen, 2003: 332) rather than being a more integral part of our experience.

In summary, the themes that pattern boundary character’s inner working are safety, being welcomed and making contact. These are reflected in our need to see (and our corresponding eye segment armouring) and in our tendency to live in our head, unable to inhabit the life of our body because we are still working towards a sense of wholeness. Our lifework is to bring more awareness in weaving a greater sense of head and body unity, for

example, by starting to pay more kindly attention to those situations where we disappear into our head. We might breathe and ground ourselves as we feel the familiar pang of uncertainty about what is inside or outside, as we pick up cues from the energy and atmosphere around us; vital information to which others are oftentimes oblivious. In relationship, our work will be to feel safe and present in making authentic contact with others.

Yearning boundary character position

Those of us influenced by the yearning boundary position are likely to feel a strong sense of yearning for contact with others, yet an equally strong feeling that contact will further threaten us. This can feel like an impossible place in which it feels unsafe to be alone and out of contact with ourselves, and even more unsafe to seek contact with others. We are likely to have a strong sense of being less real – or ‘differently’ real – compared to the other humans we see around us.

I often notice this with therapy clients who have had a lifelong sense of not being real or belonging, in quite an existential way. This feeling and fear may have been reinforced by the criticism and derision of others telling us that we were (or are) weird or eccentric. Relationally, we are likely to experience a push and pull pattern of fear between the longing for others to help us feel more real and present and the intensely felt fear that this contact will create further damage and put more distance between us and the reality in which we see others living.

It is important for boundary characters to understand and make sense of the world. We are likely to approach life with a strong sense of quest; really *seeing* what’s behind life: the big questions. We may approach this quest intellectually (like the academic in the ivory tower or scientist in the laboratory) or in an intuitive, equally intense questing way, seeking information from many dimensions of experience (perhaps inspired by the mystical or archetypal dimensions). An important life theme will

be experiencing ourselves fully enough, and being present enough, so that we are able to engage with life. This safety may be provided by the context in which we live or by an internal sense of creating the conditions to know we are now safe enough to be present.

Denying boundary character position

If we have been shaped by the denying boundary character position it is likely that we are still largely removed from a wish to be present in the world. Those of us patterned by this aspect of the boundary character are likely to believe that we can only trust our own reality, and no one else really exists, in terms of dependability and relationship: others are aliens or fantasises, existing in the 'no-go' zone of relationship. As a result, we are likely to retreat into the infinite, cosmic resource of our own mind and our rich and vivid imagination. One of our core themes as a denying boundary character is that we will seek to 'complete' ourselves alone, avoiding having to make contact with others, or as little as possible. We are likely to choose to stay as far as possible away from the world, literally or metaphorically. We will prefer to live far away from the threats of making contact with others, in the safety of our imagination and clear-thinking, logical mind.

Creative boundary character position

The creative boundary character position is exemplified by those of us who are in touch with a truly infinite web of realities, with information and flows of energy at every level, from the intellectual, logical, energetic and mystical. We will have an amazing capacity to notice things, think, analyse and synthesise information from a multitude of sources. We will draw upon logic and inspiration as we connect with others, and with all phenomena: revealing and creating patterning and making sense of the whole. We will have the capacity to stand back from the

fray of relating to and making contact with others, without having to stand outside and withdraw. In a 'spiritual' context, we are likely to feel a certain ease in facing the 'big' existential questions about life, death, the nature of self and so on. In fact, we are at home in this realm, supported by having a clear-thinking mind and sensitivity to accessing information from a multitude of information channels.

The oral character position

"The person may feel there is some tragic flaw in them that makes them unacceptable to others and there is likely to be an inner rage about being abandoned." (Kurtz, 1990: 44)

Moving down the body, to the area of the mouth and jaw, the key issue for the oral character position is that of need and support. The formation of the oral character starts at the stage of feeding as a small baby. Whilst this 'feeding' most obviously focuses upon food, it also includes our associations with our early experiences of other forms of nourishment (or a lack of nourishment). Our key concern will be around getting what we feel we need. Conversely, for those of us with more strongly denying oral patterning, there may be a strong denial that we have any needs at all, material or otherwise. Those of us with oral patterning may find that we are often concerned with getting enough, whether that is love, food, comfort, friendship. We will experience fear underlying our acute experience of lack; a fear which can 'cut to the quick', in terms of generating worry and fretfulness.

Those of us patterned by the oral character are likely to resonate – at times, at least – with the following:

'The world is empty and does not hold anything for me' may be equivalent to 'I am empty and cannot hold anything or anyone securely'.

Klein, 2002: 310

When we sense an imminent lack of nourishment and support we begin to feel deflated and in danger of falling into depression. The oral character is the character position which is most strongly linked to depression, as explored later in this section. Our sense of need is expressed in a range of ways. We might be endearing and gently demanding, right through to expressing ourselves in a bitter, biting and cutting way. Lowen reminds us that our experience shaped by this patterning can elicit:

deep-seated feelings of loneliness, disappointment and helplessness. Lowen, 2003: 149

In this section the oral character position is explored in terms of energetic factors, relationship influences, and the influence upon physical appearance and an exploration of the jaw segment block, which is the area of the body particularly associated with this character position.

Similarly to the boundary character, our energy as an oral character tends to be held high in our bodies. The result of this is that we often feel and look ungrounded and disconnected from the earth. We might typically have a thin, soft, ungrounded body, finding it hard to sustain our energy. The oral character may be taller than average, tending to have fairly undeveloped muscles and a deflated chest area. Lowen (2003: 173) points out how those of us with oral patterning tend to have grown up too quickly, without sufficient nurturing. In seeking a stronger sense of being rooted, Lowen notes our body energy is constantly rising upwards, seeking the original nourishment which was not satisfied at a young age.

As a result of this the oral character can convey a sense of physical neediness and, at times, a strong sense of being deflated and close to defeat. This puts me in mind of a plant that has bolted; it has grown 'leggy' prematurely, rather than developing strong roots and having a slower, steadier pace of growth, fed

with all the necessary nutrients. Those of us with oral armouring sometimes look as though we might easily fall down, as we are not well rooted (and do not feel well nourished) in our place on earth.

The oral character position is linked (more than any of the other character positions), to occurrences of depression, which are partly explained by the energetic patterning of this character. Those of us with oral patterning have a central theme of anxiety around support, nourishment and fear that there is not, and will not, be enough – love, food, care etc. Lowen (2003: 152) notes how our sense of disappointment and lack as an oral character is based around fear of rejection which is ultimately a fear of losing the longed-for loved object as a baby. In not getting our needs met we can fall back into this original depressive state, where the love object (originally the love and nourishment of our primary carers) is not available, giving rise to fear that we will never get the nourishment that we need to survive and thrive.

Because of this link between oral character patterning and depression, Lowen (2003: 145) suggests that the oral character shows more than any other character the dependence of what he calls the “psychic function” (how our mind and mental processes work towards certain outcomes) upon our underlying ‘bioenergetic’ processes (how and where our energy flows within us, as well as how energy interacts and is transformed between each of us, as living, breathing, organisms). Simply put, our mind and mental faculties are very much shaped by the flow, strength and vitality of our physically-experienced energy. This process and interrelationship is, in Lowen’s opinion, most clearly shown in the pattern of falling into depression for those of us with oral character patterns.

The main physical area of focus here is the jaw and throat segment. The mouth and jaw are critical parts of the vocalising and feeding process. Totton and Edmondson (2009: 72) point out how an oral block can interfere with the full pleasures of activ-

ities such as drinking, eating, kissing, singing and talking, and those of us who have adopted oral strategies will either overindulge in these things or find difficulties in engaging with them in some way. They also point out that in the jaw segment there is often held back anger, a desire to bite, which when suppressed can give rise to underlying hatred (2009: 35). The needs that were unfulfilled as a child can exist under the hard blocking of the jaw, particularly anger, disappointment and resentment about not being fed, nourished and supported.

The oral character search for getting our needs met will be a central theme in our relationships with others. This will be our default position, in the way that an infant at first looks to his or her mother or main care-giver to do this. As an oral character we seek love, security, and care, looking for our needs from others rather than recognising that much of the time as an adult we need to learn to fulfil our own needs. This is the crux of the dynamic between self and other for the oral character position; fully realising that we can and do learn to meet our own needs without falling into the familiar cycle of depression.

Realising this is likely to be something of a breakthrough for those of us with oral character patterning. It will also mean that we start to see how much we load on to our relationships with others, in terms of seeking our needs outside ourselves, albeit that this habit is out of awareness much of the time. This was an understandable expectation as an infant, when we were completely dependent upon our carers. This expectation becomes more problematic as we get older, as it is unlikely that anyone experienced being perfectly nourished, although not everyone experiences it as problematic to the extent that they develop oral armouring and oral character strategies.

What is most important for those of us who resonate with the oral character position is to become aware of the level of our expectations in coming into relationship with others, experiencing the world through a 'hungry' position of needs and

wants. That which the oral character:

holds out as love is experienced by others as a demand for love... his attitude in the love relationship is not based on the adult pattern of give and take.

Lowen, 2003: 153

The more we can create a balance between meeting our own needs, accepting support from others, and meeting the needs of others, the more balanced and positive will be our relationships with others.

It can be illuminating to understand how this works interpersonally. In terms of the central oral theme of getting what we need, those of us with oral patterning can get into a challenging cycle of feeling the acute anxiety and fear of not feeling like we will get 'enough': love, care, whatever defines this 'enough'. The nature of this 'enough' is almost immaterial. We have seen that what motivates us is a deeply experienced sense of focusing upon getting whatever it is we feel we need. Because of past experiences of not getting what we needed (perhaps mostly strongly experienced at a pre-verbal stage), we feel fear and reticence in making an effort to reach out for what we want or need. This can become a vicious circle – we avoid reaching out for what we need because we fear being disappointed. In avoiding reaching out we can fuel the self-fulfilling prophesy that we rarely get what we need. As Lowen says:

(the oral character) hopes to get what he wants somehow without reaching for it; in this way he can circumvent the feared disappointment.

Lowen, 2003: 154-155 (author's brackets added)

Our lifelong strategies as an oral character will have been a constant search for the place, person, event, and situation who, or

which, will meet our needs, relieving our fears about our inability to survive alone. What we seek in relationship with others will be intricately tied up with our oral needs and a very real sense of imminent or ongoing deprivation. We can experience a very tangible fear of abandonment and fear of loneliness, strengthening our sense of neediness. At other times in our lives this empty, lonely search for nourishment can tip into bitter resentment and moaning about life's injustices. Those of us with oral patterning have a strong reluctance to accept the fact that life is, at least at times, a struggle, because accepting that would feel simply overwhelming.

In summary, patterned by the oral character position, our central themes will hinge around need and support. If our lifework as a boundary character is to accept that, yes, we *are* here on earth and we *are* real, our lifework as an oral character is to accept that we can survive, partly through being supported by others and partly through meeting our own needs. As an adult our work is to realise that we are able to cope, meet our own needs, as well as looking for significant, caring others with whom we can experience the giving and taking of support.

Yearning oral character position

As a yearning oral character we long to feel well supported and nurtured. More often than not we act from a sense of neediness, dependence and complaint. We may experience strong feelings of isolation, depression and powerlessness. We often see ourselves as being too weak to meet our own needs, let alone those of others, with a common complaint that others continually fail to support us.

I am reminded here of a traditional Buddhist image – the Tibetan 'wheel of life' (see Sangharakshita, 2002: 13-29). This ancient image depicts a circle divided into six segments, with each segment relating to a different realm of existence. These realms can be seen as reflections of our own internal states at

different times. One of the realms is the 'hungry ghost' realm, in which beings are always searching for food and sustenance, they keep searching and searching, but they are never satisfied, regardless of how much they eat and drink.

Denying oral character position

As a denying oral character we are incredibly self-reliant and avoid looking to anyone else to fulfil our needs, at all costs. As Kurtz says, our central strategy will be to:

organize perceptions, feelings and actions around themes of challenge and going it alone.

Kurtz, 1990: 44

It will not occur to us to seek support for anything in our lives. We will push ourselves to achieve things and face challenges alone. This constant striving – a lone quest – bears some surface similarities to the actions of the thrusting character position. The main difference is that as a denying oral character we are seeking to prove to ourselves that we do not need anyone else to survive. As a thrusting character we act like this driven by a more explicitly competitive, out-to-win driver.

We might resonate with the denying oral character position if we tend towards being overly self-reliant and individualistic, finding it impossible to ask for anything from anyone, fearing that this would compromise our self-sufficiency. This over self-reliance is likely to stem from our experience (or lack there of) of nurturing and feeding having been intolerable as an infant. Our resulting strategy is to 'go it alone' and deny having any needs. This character position can lead us to become very isolated, concealed behind a façade of 'I don't need anyone or anything'.

Creative oral character position

Patterned by the creative oral character position, we will have a

big, healthy appetite for life, secure in the knowledge that life now provides what is needed enough of the time to stem our continual fretting. This sense of abundance – rather than the abject need of the yearning oral character – can lead to a sense of potency here, in caring for ourselves and others. Some of us are likely to take centre stage as extremely eloquent communicators. The taking centre stage aspect of the creative oral character position is shared with both the creative crisis and control character positions, as we shall see later on in this chapter. For the oral character, taking centre stage is linked to our desire to gain interest, attention and love. The association between the oral character and speech is a reflection of the nature of oral armouring being based in the jaw and mouth area. This expression can give voice to a whole range of themes, for example, recognising inequalities in society around us and adding our voice in countering social injustices.

The control character position

The key issue for the control character position is that of validation. As a control character our armouring and strategies developed as we took our first wobbly steps towards independence in our interactions with our significant others. Our exploration of our growing independence is likely to have seen us wanting to influence and shape, testing our new discovery that we were an independent being. In developing control character patterns, our playful testing and experimentation would have been denied or thwarted. We received the message that trying out our independence was unacceptable. This denial of our experience would also have obscured our sense of understanding the other person in those interactions.

As a result, as an adult we find it hard to experience ourselves just as we are. This will particularly be the case with regards to our independence, for fear that we will again experience that sense of being invalidated, rather than being accepted or

affirmed and allowed to feel okay as a separate being. We will feel a strong impetus to be in control, shaping and organising those people and things around us, including how we present ourselves to the world. One friend with this conditioning says of herself:

I step outside of myself to see how I'm doing. Is how I appear acceptable to myself? Am I portraying myself as I wish to be portrayed?

For whatever reason, our early carers may not have had the capacity to engage with our play and experiments, dominating our early attempts at trying out our power or giving us the message that this experimentation was not acceptable or right. Feeling the force of this message enough times, we are likely to have internalised the sense that being independent and testing out our power was simply not okay. Consequently we felt invalidated, with an accompanying feeling of a lack of control and the development of armouring (physical and emotional) around our heart area.

In feeling unable to experience our sense of independence in a straightforward way – for fear of it being denied again – we are unable to sense and respect the independence of others, and their reality (lest they overpower us). Those of us patterned by this character position have therefore developed the strategy of being in the world through staying in control of ourselves, others, and events, so we constantly feel our impact, affirming to ourselves that we are valid and acceptable beings. As a control character we will want to make our mark in order to be present in the world.

Kurtz calls the control character position two different names, the first 'tough-generous' and the second 'charming-manipulative', which gives a clue as to the strategies of this character position. He goes on to point out that: "both types try to control others; one uses power and generosity, the other uses seduction

and charm.” (Kurtz, 1990: 45) As a control character, we may adopt one of two main strategies: a charm offensive (seductive, magnetic, and charismatic), or telling others what to do (and how and when to do it).

In this section the control character position is explored in terms of energetic factors, relational factors, and the influence upon physical appearance. The chest segment block is explored, which is the area of the body particularly associated with this character position.

Our energy and armouring as a control character is concentrated in our chest and heart area. In the yearning and denying manifestations of this character our energy will be more congested, or split off, in this area rather than energy flowing and moving more freely, as patterned by the creative control character position. The heart and chest area is the important meeting point for energy rising up from our contact with the earth, and down from our connection with the sky. In terms of control character armouring: “The jammed up heart of the control character usually manifests physically as a sense of bulkiness and inflatedness in their upper torso.” (Totton and Edmondson, 2009: 74)

In terms of physical appearance, Lowen (2003) and Totton and Edmondson (2009) point out how we might tend towards having smooth features and perhaps flabby, rather than strongly defined, muscles. Totton and Edmondson (2009: 40-43) observe how the chest and heart need to be open for us to express strong feelings and to feel expansive emotions. When those of us with control character armouring feel defensive we become more tightly closed around the heart, attempting to protect and defend ourselves and our deepest feelings. This strategy is not only to protect our hearts, but also to make us appear stronger (and, quite literally, more ‘armoured’) than we inwardly feel. As the armouring of the heart segment starts to dissolve:

We sense ourselves as strong, real and formidable, without being aggressive or having anything to prove: a *soft* power, which asserts our need for contact yet is able to deal with hostility or coldness.

Totton and Edmondson, 2009: 42-43 (original italics)

Our main intention (consciously or subconsciously) will be to hide our true intentions, keeping our tenderness and fallibility well under wraps. We will aim to gain influence in our relationships either through being tough (perhaps a form of 'tough love') or wonderfully charming. This patterning can play a strong part in our energetic sense and force field. Kurtz observes: "The surface behaviour will feel 'slick' and elusive. The person usually has a desire to be in a position of power or authority." (Kurtz, 1990: 44)

In relationship with others, those of us patterned by the control character position tend to have a definite, at times overbearing, presence, as we remind others of our influence. What characterises our style of relating tends to be choosing either one of two strategies:

We can seek to *dominate* other people, by physical force or by force of will; or we can seek to seduce and *manipulate* them... Underlying either strategy is a fundamental lack of belief that other people are *real*, that they have feelings and needs, experience pain and pleasure.

Totton and Edmondson, 2009: 74 (original italics)

What underlies this unrelenting need to control and shape? Our driving force is a deep fear that we will once again feel invalidated and not seen for who we really are. In our independence not being accepted and validated we became confused as to whether we had influence in the world, and whether we could accept the influence of others without feeling overcome

ourselves. So this confusion stems from the experience of not being allowed to experiment creatively and safely with our own sense of independence interacting with the power of others, in the dance of learning about how to be and how to come into contact with others at a formative point in our lives.

As adults, those of us with control character patterning fear that this invalidation will happen again. To avoid this, we will have developed effective strategies to protect ourselves, notably through controlling others (and thereby being in the 'driving seat'):

The basic uncertainty will be about whether or not one can have one's needs met in a straightforward way. The expectation is that others will use one's needs and vulnerabilities against one.

Kurtz, 1990: 45

These strategies work inasmuch as they keep others at bay and seem to put us in charge. They start to falter when we want to make fuller, more authentic human contact, without the constant tension and exhaustion of having to be the 'mover and shaker'. The work for those of us with control character conditioning is to gradually allow others to be real, experiencing and shaping their own reality, without that being a threat to our own sense of reality.

This difficulty in showing vulnerability is a characteristic shared with those of us shaped by the thrusting character position (which will be explored later in this chapter), although it stems from a different developmental stage. Those of us with patterning from either of these character positions will find it hard to allow ourselves to feel vulnerable, let alone to share it with others – even those close to us. What we might see as personal 'weakness', others may simply see as straightforward human fallibility. Patterned by the control character position we

fear that if we show vulnerability our experience will again be denied. We therefore feel we must remain in charge to prevent a repeat of feeling vulnerable and invalidated. Patterned by the thrusting character position, our fear in showing vulnerability is that we will be the 'loser' which, as a thrusting character, is tantamount to being destroyed, and facing the prospect of quite literally collapsing in a heap.

There are also similarities between the control character position and the crisis character position, particularly with regards to the seductive, charming elements of how this character patterning manifests. As a control character we can use our charms to get our own way, cajoling others to see things from our point of view. For those of us with crisis character patterning, seduction and charm are habitual ways of approaching contact with others. This charm masks our longing for – and simultaneously, our fear of – relationship. We approach relationship with charm, attraction, excitement and play, as a way of diverting attention from real contact with others. Whilst this seductive behaviour appears similar in both the control and crisis character positions, the origins of the development of these strategies are quite different.

Those of us with deeply ingrained control character patterning have been deeply wounded in the heart area. As we gradually feel more able to express our love, and as our sense of validation is not so externally-oriented, we will become less concerned with controlling others. Our façade of being king or queen 'pin' will also be less of a shield. Our lifework as a control character is to initially become aware of our armouring and strategies, and to allow ourselves to come into relationship with a softer sense of our potency and longing for influence. This is, of course, very challenging. As Totton and Edmondson remind us:

The control character with their locked-up heart is wounded

in a very deep place. But always, the wound represents the potential for growth: people whose energy focuses in the control position are people whose energy focuses in their heart – people with ‘big hearts’, with the capacity for big expression.

Totton and Edmondson, 2009: 75

Yearning control character position

Those of us who resonate with the yearning control character position will recognise our intense need to be noticed and to be central to things, having our successes seen and validated. We will also be aware of a deep-seated desire to get others to do what we want them to do and our disappointment when they refuse to ‘play ball’. However, to our dismay, our efforts to control others are often thwarted, leading to a strong sense of disempowerment. In this scenario we start to question the reality of others, when we realise that people are not validating our experience. We long to be in relationship on our own terms, with a ‘real’ person who will see how successful we are, and will not try to diminish our sense of ourselves.

Denying control character position

As a denying control character, we deny any interest in being around anyone else. Our general view of others is that they are weak, stupid and therefore a waste of time. “Why bother relating to weak and stupid people?” we might ask ourselves. We may go one step further and deceive and manipulate others. We might justify this to ourselves by thinking that others clearly deserve such treatment, if they are dumb enough to come across as so weak and malleable in the first place. Our priority is to focus first and foremost upon getting what we want, when and how we want it. We are likely to believe deep down that if we act with sufficient strength of character we have a right to whatever life has to offer, come what may. This might give us a rather ‘puffed

up' appearance, or energetic sense, as we attempt to appear dominating.

Creative control character position

As a creative control character we are likely to be a magnanimous, magnetic leader, big hearted and caring for those over whom we have power and influence. Most human beings have a lot of love to give and an almost universally recognisable human tendency is towards growth, wanting to love and be loved, acting from the heart. As a control character, the freedom to express this love and care is coloured by our prior experiences of just how much our energy and expression was blocked and limited. We are likely to be drawn to, and shine in roles in which we can be appreciated for our charm, charisma and ability to get things done.

The holding character position

Self-regulation and a sense of autonomy are the key life themes of the holding character position. The holding character is formed at the time of toilet-training and learning the rules dictating behaviour. This character position and its armouring would have formed when we were small children, feeling shamed or humiliated in connection with our toilet-training, timing, or 'making a mess'. Regulation, timing, rules and our relationships with others around these themes will be significant.

As a holding character we will be concerned with how we regulate ourselves, striving to get things 'right', and feeling a pressure to do things in the 'right' way. When all this pressure becomes too much we can feel very stuck. We can reach a point of near immobilisation and inability to act, which feels impossible in a very real, physical sense. This immobilisation may arise from inner confusion and frustration, or a sense of digging our heels in, in response to a pushy response from others, a pattern which is explored later on. We start to experience our own

autonomy through re-establishing the relationship between our bodily sensations, natural rhythms and the ability to respond to these sensations in our own time, space and through feeling our sense of potency and wholesomeness.

In the rest of this section the holding character position is explored in terms of energetic factors, relational factors, and the influence of this character upon our physical appearance. The buttocks, thighs, and anus are the areas of the body particularly associated with this character position and its armouring. We might also be acutely aware of the tension in our shoulders (associated with feeling the 'weight of the world').

Those of us with holding character armouring will often appear well grounded. We will tend to hold our energy low down in our bodies, which may well be reflected in our body shape, the regions of our body where tend to carry weight and our muscular development. Our sense of groundedness is in sharp contrast with the more 'sky-like' nature of those with boundary and oral character patterns, discussed earlier. The holding character provides a very different visual and energetic image, with a sense of being rooted to the earth, with a low centre of gravity.

The immediate physical and energetic sense we portray as a holding character is that of solidity, presence and being earthed – sometimes veering towards being stuck and rooted to the spot. With the oral character position I explored how there is a tendency to cyclical mood swings, with highs and lows. As a holding character, by contrast, we tend to experience anxiety to the point of immobilisation (particularly in an environment or relationship where persistent criticism is common place). As a result, those of us with holding character patterning can appear to experience a great deal of suffering – weighed down by this – reflected in the tension in our neck and shoulders. Theodore Reik described this aptly as: "like sinking in a quicksand where every effort sends one deeper." (Reik quoted in Lowen, 2003: 203)

Physically, we will tend to be wide-shouldered, or well-built, with slab-like muscular development. Our voice emerges from deep in our body. Our head tends to be set well back in our bodies, with our eyes sunk deeply in our heads, and with a thick neck. This physical stance can be particularly accentuated at times of experiencing shame, with our armouring showing the containment and internalising of energy. Kurtz gives the holding character the name 'burdened-enduring' (Kurtz, 1990: 45) which is useful in providing a very immediate sense of the physical and energetic stance of the holding character, seeming to carry the weight of the world. Those of us with this patterning also give a strong positive sense of being in touch with the goodness of our natural strength, natural rhythms and the ground. In the creative holding character position, rather than appearing stuck:

Energy can be held and used; there is a quality of determination, patience, taking your time, working *with* the material world rather than against it – a willingness to get your hands dirty.

Totton and Edmondson, 2009: 77 (Original italics)

As we have seen, the areas of the body where our armouring is likely to be most strongly experienced and pronounced are the anus, buttocks, thighs, and shoulders. Those of us adopting holding character strategies are likely to experience an anal block, which, in practice, means that our body is structured to contain and hold in energy, absorbing incoming energy so that it solidifies into defensive armouring in this region of our bodies. This links back to the time when we were given the deeply disapproving message that our natural bodily rhythms were unacceptable; so we assumed that we were unacceptable. The energetic block is linked to this message, internalised as a child and still experienced as inhibiting our natural connection with the rhythms of our bodily fluids, matter and functions. Our

bodies, and its bodies of energy, may literally appear (or feel) 'squashed', matching our squashed experience as a child at the important developmental stage of toilet training and rules, which is particularly linked to the body and its matter.

In approaching relationship with others those of us with holding character armouring have a very strong desire for approval:

They strive to please hoping that approval will bring love. In this, of course, they are constantly disappointed. We do not judge those we love and we do not love those that we judge. It is humiliating for an organism to feel that its security and acceptance depends upon its servility.

Lowen, 2003: 200

This strong need for approval brings a sense of servility, combined with the underlying distrust that whatever we do will be met with further disapproval. This can reaffirm our original sense of shame and fear of further shaming. We are likely to hold a secret well of rage against rules, even though we are often so rule-abiding ourselves. This rage will be well concealed in the armouring of our anus, buttocks, thighs, shoulders and neck, with the rage itself being seen as 'nasty' and needing careful containing. Totton and Edmondson point out how:

Anger turned inwards often becomes directed at the self in the form of guilt – this is the emotional correlative of physical holding, the person 'feels like shit', like dirt, worthless, foul.

Totton and Edmondson, 2009: 76-77

In making contact with others we often give the covert, perhaps subconscious message, 'you can't make me'. In this scenario, the person to whom we are relating may have the experience of feeling provoked in a very subtle way. This strategy consists of

seeking the longed-for approval of another, whilst holding a deep fear of impending disapproval. We look covertly for the other in the relationship to do things for us (echoing the pattern of our original carer being overbearing, 'for our own good'). We are likely to experience an internal tug-of-war around wanting to be pushed to take action, whilst simultaneously resisting, digging in our heels in a 'you can't make me' way – resenting feeling pushed, whilst still inviting it. This can be a very confusing dynamic to be around for those who do not understand the need of the holding character for autonomy and time and space in which to act.

The other aspect of this subtle provocative behaviour, which is particularly the case if we resonate with the yearning holding character position, is to subtly mess up everyday events, reflecting our original letting go being labelled as 'making a mess' as a young child. These events are often simple things such as being late, and forgetting things, concealing a very subtle and seemingly passive spitefulness emerging from the blocked rage of which I talked earlier.

The result of subtly but consistently messing up everyday events is eventually met with the frustration and disapproval of others. We are subsequently likely to feel disapproved of, energetically affirming the status quo of our character armouring and reinforcing the 'you can't make me' vicious cycle in relating to others. This pattern is often playing out behind a façade of smooth niceties, in an effort to be liked, even if the net result is frustration all round. To sum up this complex and at first, seemingly contradictory dynamic, Lowen says:

We are dealing with a personality in which indirection, ambivalence and manipulation of situations are the characteristic qualities.

Lowen, 2003: 209

To summarise, our central themes as a holding character are the dynamics of holding in versus letting go, and fear of showing ourselves, lest we are once again shamed. These are the themes that pattern our inner dynamics, concentrated in our pelvis, chest, buttocks and anus, neck and shoulders. Our lifework as a holding character is to become more aware of our natural rhythms, reconnecting with these on our own terms, rather than habitually fitting around the timetable of others.

As Kurtz (1990: 47) points out, those of us influenced by this character position want to feel an absence of pressure, responsibility and guilt. We wish to be free to do things for ourselves and to express ourselves fully and freely. Energetically, this integration is likely to be realised through our having the conditions to have the time and space to re-acquaint ourselves with our natural rhythms and our experience of those rhythms. From this greater sense of ease, rather than anxiety and distrust, comes a sense of us being grounded in our own strength and potency.

Yearning holding character position

Those of us patterned by the yearning holding character experience very strong urges to make a mess, let go, and bring our insides out, giving ourselves the chance to be admired and to feel recognised and affirmed. These strategies seek to release blocked and stuck energy – resulting from our energetic containing and holding – particularly in the lower part of our bodies. We are likely to sabotage anything that gets in the way of this yearning (the aggressive aspect of the passive-aggressive patterning). We also express a lot of energy in our attempts to break free from the constricting aspects of containment; breaking through and disrupting whatever gets in the way of that process.

Denying holding character position

The denying holding character is expressed in over rigid, habitual, regulated attitudes to time, systems and lifestyle in

general. Those of us who recognise this particular aspect of the holding character will understand the mix of inner tension and anxiety. We are also likely to recognise the constant pull of what we should be doing next, rather than being able to be more present in the moment. This leads to a rigid adherence to following rules, timetables, and procedures in order to be rewarded and to feel a sense of worth. The denying holding character is likely to express passive-aggressive strategies in frustrating others by inflicting rules upon them or by boring and frustrating them through long-winded expression and rigidity of character. Living life 'by the clock' will also be expected of others. This is the aspect of the holding character position which is associated with the archetypal bureaucrat.

Creative holding character position

If we resonate with the creative holding character we have the grounded ability to stand in our own potency and strength and act from that basis. Inwardly this reflects our sense that we are now free to follow our own rhythms and values, appreciating the stuff of which we are made. We may be the 'salt of the earth'; in touch with our sense of earthiness, not afraid to serve others – in the best sense of the word – and to get our hands dirty through hard work. This sense of service means we are capable of working in a very committed and dedicated way, working systematically and with perseverance. There can also be a strong sense of honouring the rhythms of nature and respect for the rhythms of other beings, in a very grounded, wholesome and kindly way.

The thrusting character position

As thrusting characters we are very much focused upon asserting ourselves. We assert our needs and wants at all costs, in order to feel alive and present. The development of this character position is linked to the time when we were toddlers, finding our way in

the world and experimenting with our sense of rebellion in figuring out – quite wilfully – what was and was not up for negotiation with our carers. In being met with either strong disapproval, punishment, or, even more extreme, a thrusting parent who did not welcome our assertiveness, armouring will have formed around issues of assertion and punishment.

The thrusting character position is formed when this natural experimenting with rebellion is seen as ‘bad’ and ‘wrong’, or when our parent or carer crushed our will:

built into their character from then on will be a quality of *hatred* and *revenge* that subtly flavours everything they do.

Totton and Edmondson, 2009: 78 (original italics)

Thrusting characters tend to frame situations and events in terms of winners and losers and achievement and failure. Those of us shaped by the thrusting character position will find it incredibly challenging to allow anyone else to win. We will find it virtually impossible to allow our soft, human vulnerability to show in relationship with ourselves and others, seeing this as a sign of weakness and, from the point of view of our childhood experiences, potentially dangerous.

In this section, the thrusting character position is explored in terms of energetic factors, relational factors, and the influence upon our physical appearance. The areas of the pelvis, thighs and lower back are explored, which are those areas of the body particularly associated with the thrusting character position.

In terms of body armouring, as a thrusting character we will experience a pelvic block against softness and the expression of vulnerability. Our physical appearance is likely to be athletic, with a strong appearance and well-developed muscles; a mesomorph-type body. Very often those of us influenced by this character will have a body in the shape of a ‘V’, with narrow, powerful hips and wide shoulders, accustomed to carrying

premature responsibility. Our energetic presence will concentrate upon achievement, will power, pushing ahead and 'type A' behavioural characteristics (Friedman, 1996). Reich points out how thrusting characters tend to come across as:

self-assured, sometimes arrogant, elastic, energetic, often impressive in his (or her) bearing.

Reich, 1990: 217 (author's added brackets)

The pelvic block against softness and other aspects of thrusting character armouring would have formed at the age of about four or five. At this point in our lives we could walk, explore and had started to experiment with our sense of independence and testing our wilfulness. Typical events linked to testing out this assertion may have been play time and bed time. When our natural sense of experimenting with our assertion was met with strong judgement or, more influentially, the sense of being crushed by a thrusting parent, the thrusting character armouring would have formed. An important emotional aspect of our armouring as a thrusting character is the quality of revenge that flavours our actions, based on the early blocking of our natural assertion.

In portraying a sense of assertion we make our presence known, appearing upright and rigid, with an air of determination and wilfulness. To not be constantly upright would be tantamount to our admitting defeat and a risk of being destroyed by others. We are likely to experience injury and illness related to stress due to this need to be so upright, 'on top' and in the lead.

Our life work as a thrusting character is to allow ourselves to soften, to contact our sense of vulnerability and not to have to approach every aspect of life as a challenge to be overcome or an obstacle to be destroyed. This will not be easy work. Firstly, it is deeply unsettling for us to let our guard down in any situation, in fear of once again feeling crushed. Secondly, we tend to turn those we encounter into potential or actual opponents, the

moment that they challenge any aspect of our behaviour. There are very few contexts in which we are challenged by others because we can be fearsome in our interactions, so that others tend to defer to us. If we can learn to start to turn inwards, then we can start to find out find more fully 'who's at home' and to see the effect we have on others.

We may, however, be forced to look at our behaviour and reflect on our character when we face physical problems. Then we face the fact that we, too, have a human, fallible body just like everyone else. For example, we may start to learn to meditate at the recommendation of our doctor to help with high blood pressure. Or we might come to see a Body psychotherapist as a last ditch attempt to figure out why we are unable to rid ourselves of chronic back pain, which has become debilitating, threatening our much-valued sense of uprightness and peak performance.

At first glance, those of us influenced by the thrusting and control character positions seem very similar in our shared wish to control people and events. The difference here is that as a control character we feel valid and alive so long as we are in control of others. As a thrusting character our assertive drive gives us a sense of being alive, so long as we can dominate others in our lives. As a control character we do not automatically feel the need to put others down – so long as we have an overall sense of control. As a thrusting character we generally frame events and relationships as a game or war with two sides: winners and losers. It is, of course, important for the thrusting character to be on the winning side (and, preferably, the team leader).

As others fight back in response to our provocation, our aggression will be inflated, as Reich reminds us:

He (or she) is felt to be totally aggressive and provocative by those who are not in control of their own aggression.

Reich, 1990: 218 (author's added brackets)

The more others fight back, the more determined to fight and win we become. We secretly respect those who can meet us head-on, without aggression, modelling a full sense of being human, embodied and not afraid of our wilful presence. Such a person might also command our respect by demonstrating that it is also okay to be human and have human fallibilities and weaknesses, without being at the mercy of these fallibilities. In the long run it is only through learning to meet others and accepting them for who they are that we can start to experience real contact with others, rather than always being the winner, the high achiever, and the one with adrenalin coursing through our veins.

An added physical dimension here is that the thrusting character can find it physically uncomfortable to cry, as the movement of crying is antithetical to the rigid armouring of this character position (Lowen, 2003: 264). Even in private moments of vulnerability, we are likely to find that our bodies are armoured in such a way that means that tears and the release of soft, heartfelt emotion is deeply uncomfortable, as well as challenging our need to be upright and on guard at all times, regardless of the cost.

In Kurtz's schema of character strategy, the thrusting character relates to what he calls the 'industrious-overfocused' character. Kurtz points out how our main strategies are to work hard, keep going, let nothing distract us and take refuge in action (Kurtz, 1990: 43). He goes on to point out that, for the thrusting character, the missing core experience is:

to be loved, appreciated, just for who you are, freedom to relax and play. Kurtz, 1990: 47

This lifework of learning to be who we are, to relax and play is important work if we are to experience real contact with others, without having to turn interactions and relationships into a game

with winner and losers, however overtly or covertly we do this. We can gradually soften our drive to get revenge against our original carers, the first people to crush our sense of natural, curious, assertiveness.

I have explored how we are likely to find it very difficult to engage with this pelvic block to softness, to show our vulnerability and to allow ourselves to be human, given our defences and strategies. What adds to this difficulty is the fact that in much of mainstream life a thrusting approach to life is affirmed, particularly for men, most notably working their way up the high-powered, corporate career ladder. For those of us who find ourselves with thrusting character patterning, there is little obvious incentive (at least, in mainstream worldly terms) to engage with and become more aware of the more negative, limiting and damaging aspects of our behaviour.

Of course, there are those of us who express our thrusting character strategies in a much more creative way, achieving a great deal for the good of many others, rather than just for our own sense of achievement and need to conquer. As those of us with thrusting character armouring start to recognise our own strategies and defences, it is likely that our assertive, upright need to achieve will be expressed more creatively. As Totton and Edmondson remind us:

The creative side of the thrusting character is its energy, drive, courage, ambition, physical and mental élan; its willpower and discipline.

2009: 79

Yearning thrusting character position

Those of us who recognise ourselves as having been patterned by the yearning thrusting character position are likely to relish feeling successful, strong, risk-taking and defeating those who stand in our way. We are very proud of our successes; in fact,

they define who we are. We seek ever harder, more stimulating challenges, whether that is a higher mountain to claim, a stronger conflict with a work colleague or even pushing ourselves crazily hard in meditation, striving to break through hindrances and obstacles in a wilful way. The downside of this constant working and fighting is that we rarely relax or let go, which can have a detrimental impact on our health and our ability to be in non-combative relationships with ourselves and others.

Denying thrusting character position

The denying thrusting character lives life looking out for number one, living from a 'dog-eat-dog' outlook on life. Here our connection with our vulnerability and feelings are tenuous, which means that our ability to empathise with others is also lessened. As a result we despise, ridicule, and humiliate others, particularly those of the opposite sex. We find that life generally holds little enjoyment; in fact, if we see someone else enjoying themselves, we are likely to respond through attack, verbal or physical, covert or overt.

Creative thrusting character position

Those of us who resonate with the creative thrusting character love stretching our abilities. We aim to do the seemingly impossible, thereby pitting ourselves and our skills against the world – loving the buzz. I am reminded of the mountain climbers in the film, *Touching the Void*, climbing an impossibly difficult mountain in far from optimum conditions, driven by the compelling nature of stepping into the unknown of such a challenge. Life is only worth living when we know we are trying our absolute hardest. This may well be for a worthwhile cause, and we will enjoy basking in the success following that achievement, before moving quickly on to the next challenge. We seek out and carve out opportunities to live life fully at every possible moment.

The crisis character position

Making contact and relating are our key themes as a crisis character. The areas of the body linked to the formation of this character position and its armouring are the thighs, pelvis, chest and eyes. Those of us patterned by crisis character patterning can give perplexing energetic messages; we are desperate to make contact, yet we are terrified to do so, with our energy sometimes whipping into an inner frenzy. This character formed at the time when we were taking on all that it means to be a boy or a girl; our gendered identity in the world. This is a complex process and a delicate time in the development of any individual, in terms of how conditioning extends from the familial through to the social, political, economic, religious, and cultural. Attraction is an important theme; as Kurtz reminds us: "The basic uncertainty will be about whether or not one is interesting, attractive or wanted." (Kurtz, 1990: 46)

Some of our key life questions will be about contact: how do I make contact and stay safe? Can I make contact without it being sexual? Can I be myself, without having to be attractive and/or entertaining? As a crisis character we often become overexcited or bewildered in the face of making contact with others. This is such a familiar sense to crisis characters that it may not be identified as overexcitement or bewilderment, but simply the familiar deep down 'fizz' and fear which accompanies approaching others.

Those of us shaped by the crisis character position can become more relaxed in making contact through giving ourselves the chance to be really quiet and still, rather than through constantly entertaining, playing and performing for others. For some of us it is only through fully and deeply experiencing this quietness – which is likely to be deeply unnerving and challenging at first – that we realise how fear, mingled with excitement, underlies much of our motivation and shapes our life energies.

In this section the crisis character position is explored in terms of energetic factors, relational factors, and the influence upon our physical appearance.

Staying in a similar region of the body to both the holding and the thrusting characters, the particular areas of the body connected with crisis character patterning and armouring are the pelvis, thighs, and chest. The atmosphere we create around us tends to be one of high charge, with a strong underlying fear. We tend not to be very well grounded, but instead prone to sudden bursts of energy, emotional expression and the dramatisation of events. Our eyes will also play an important part in this dramatisation and our ability to attract and enchant. Whilst the thrusting character position is characterised by a pelvic block against softness, the pelvic energetic block for the crisis character is against opening and surrender. This block to surrender is linked to the developmental stage at which the crisis character position developed.

This pelvic block developed when our early emerging sexuality was met inappropriately. This inappropriateness may have taken many forms: deep disapproval, being told off for our nascent sexual feelings, or an inappropriate sexual response from the adults around us. This response tends to lead to feelings of overwhelm and immense fear linked to the development and expression of these early sexual feelings, which become ingrained in emotional and physical armouring. Those of us with this armouring fear opening up, or surrendering to, the felt sensations and pleasures in our bodies, for fear of feeling overwhelmed once more as we were as a young child (and perhaps, as an older child and an adult).

What happens for the crisis character around contact with others? When someone shows an interest in us we tend to experience a 'fizz' of excitement, alongside a corresponding 'freeze' of energy, as we feel unable to cope with this longed-for attention. Attention can induce a sense of terror. For this reason,

our persona as an entertainer is a very effective distraction from revealing who we really are, aside from our dazzling performances and over-the-top drama. In providing surface entertainment we effectively conceal who we really are, hiding behind our exciting façade. What can be even more confusing in understanding this strategy is that we can even confuse ourselves as to who we are, hiding from ourselves behind the myriad of ways in which we face the world. This may be particularly the case if we also resonate with boundary character patterning, with the ability to 'tap into' different channels of energy. Life can become rather like a hall of mirrors.

This entertaining façade masks our immense – sometimes paralysing – inner fear. This behaviour – as well as our swiftly darting and dancing energy – is a manifestation of the armouring we developed as a defence strategy. Very often our bodies tend to attract attention in that we appear curvy, with a full build and a graceful way of moving. This body shape makes sense on the level of the crisis character being so fascinated by (and fearful of) attraction and relationship. We simultaneously find it disturbing to appear curvy and attract attention, yet our performing style attracts further attention. Our deep underlying ambivalence around real contact stems from our fear (linked to the pelvic block) of being overwhelmed as we were as a young child, during our first stages of sexual awareness. We also give a mixed message to those around us, almost as though we are play acting:

In a sense they are pretending, but the pretence is an *involuntary* reaction to deep panic. The panic is completely rational in origin: dangerous and scary things *did* happen.

Totton and Edmondson, 2009: 83 (original italics)

Energetically, one of our most noticeable and striking aspects is our constantly darting energy. The denying crisis character can portray a sense of somewhat muffled energy, often channelled

into anxiety, appearing to be passive and numb in the face of sexual attraction from others. As crisis characters we have seen how our energy is constantly on the move, responding to the stimuli and excitement of the environment. This also means that we are often very sensitive, as we have developed a heightened awareness of verbal, non-verbal, energetic, visual and kinaesthetic clues to what is going on.

As a result of developing this heightened awareness of energies at work, as a crisis character we can appear to be – or to mimic – the other character positions: our energies constantly moving in response to the stimuli of different situations. The reason for this may be that we are genuinely influenced by the dynamics of other character positions. We also tend to be something of a chameleon, ready to adapt to our environment and to be experts in knowing the rules (implicit and explicit) and how to play with them (particularly if we are a creative crisis character). Because the central theme of this character position is relationship, we have an absolute fascination with figuring out the rules, roles and atmosphere in any given social situation. We are adept at observing, understanding, and mimicking (consciously or subconsciously) others in adapting to the environment. In knowing a culture and its rules we gain a greater sense of security in tuning into all the available cues. In this way we have the knowledge at our fingertips to know how to charm and entertain those around us, or when to run from impending danger, or perhaps when to take over and cause a stir or start a fight (if we are also patterned by the control character).

What makes the crisis position recognisable is its air of panic, of high charge. Everything is life or death. There is often either a theatrical exaggeration to the person's style, or a deathly stillness which is equally theatrical.

Totton and Edmondson, 2009: 83

The energetic aspect of this armouring is a readiness for energy to move, respond and dance, suffused with a sexual or sensual edge. On the surface, it can appear that our energy is very much flowing. Looking more closely, our excitement is intertwined closely with fear and anxiety. This relates to what has already been said regarding our attraction to making contact and relating. We tend to sexualise situations, relating in a flirtatious way. Lowen reminds us that crisis characters:

will unconsciously seek situations which excite them and increase their inner charge. This is the bioenergetic explanation of their flirtatious behaviour.

Lowen, 2003: 233

Those around us will be entertained, charmed, and even hypnotised by the chaos and drama we create. Kurtz calls this position the 'expressive-clinging' character, and points out that our strategies are to dramatise events and feelings to get attention and to avoid feelings of separation from others (Kurtz, 1990: 43).

Our contradictory dynamic of creating a drama and drawing attention to ourselves, yet at the same time wishing to keep people at bay, is very effective in maintaining our superficial identity as a fun-loving entertainer, seductress, or party planner, whilst concealing who we *really* are. Or at least, this is an effective strategy until such time when we want to make authentic, human contact with those around us, or they want to make contact with us, rather than contact based purely upon sexualised, dramatic excitement. Others can experience us as elusive and frustrating as they try to make genuine contact. The more others approach and try to make contact with us, the more we are likely to freeze or take flight, or do anything to avoid being present and authentic.

Reparative situations are those in which we are free to rest, free to be quiet, free not to entertain, not have to be sexual, and

not to have to live with the persistent fear of being invaded or overwhelmed. It is in these situations that those of us with this character patterning will start to realise that we can receive the attention and care of others purely by being ourselves, as we are, without entertaining or creating a drama. We then start to realise that we have a choice in the matter, at least some of the time. Kurtz points out that the missing core experience for the crisis character is:

freely given love and attention, not to have to struggle for attention, freedom to rely on relationships.

Kurtz, 1990: 47

Yearning crisis character position

As a yearning crisis character we experience life as being 'too much', we experience ourselves as 'too much' and, as a result, we act in an over-the-top, dramatic way. Those of us with this character patterning will experience life as being full of exciting and terrifying events, people and phenomena. We often long for attention, but cannot quite keep still for long enough to be seen; wiggling uncomfortably as we stand in the longed-for limelight. It is particularly important for us to find out the rules in each situation we encounter, to help manage our sense of utter fear and panic. Once we know the rules, and have mastered them, we seek to break them in the most shocking way possible. Much of our behaviour and experience is risky and charged in an overtly sexual way.

Denying crisis character position

If, as a yearning crisis character, we are in a constant state of charge and excitement and fear, as a denying character, by contrast, we have closed down to life's stimuli, as it felt just *too* exhausting and dangerous. We are likely to be motivated by keeping excitement at bay, so it does not become 'too much' and

so we do not become 'too much' for others, a very common fear we have in relating to others as a denying crisis character. As a result, we are likely to have an interesting relationship with play; limiting the amount of play and excitement we allow ourselves to experience, compared to a creative crisis character.

We are prone to experiencing ourselves as passive victims at the hands of the actions of others. At some point in our lives, this may well have been the case. Perhaps we were genuinely a passive victim at an age when we had no means to defend ourselves and feel safe enough. We tend to experience excitement as if it were outside of ourselves, rather than in our embodied experience. We deny the sexual dimension of our lives and feel awkward talking about it, yet people still find us sexually attractive, which we find extremely challenging. To counteract this, we may aim to appear androgynous, somewhat invisible and out of reach in our strategies.

Creative crisis character position

As a creative crisis character we will be well versed in knowing how to have fun with, bend, and break social rules, knowing that life is a game to be played and to be enjoyed. We can choose confidently how intimate to be with others, and have the wherewithal to take responsibility for our choice and the effect those choices have on others. As a creative crisis character we know how to genuinely play (rather than to play *act*) in relationship to ourselves and others, to entertain, to pretend, to exaggerate and be wild and exciting. We can play without that play having to be overly-concerned with attractiveness or sex. We are likely to be much more at home in our own skin with our sense of attractiveness and sexuality than denying and yearning crisis characters, realising that there is a choice in whether or not to engage with the sexual dimension of relating.

Reflections – reflecting on the six character positions

Having read this chapter:

- take the time and space you need to reflect on each character position in detail, sensing and feeling your way into each position
- note down and reflect upon the particular aspects of the character position(s) which are most immediately recognisable in your experience. How and when do you most notice these particular aspects of character positions? Do you resonate with the yearning, denying and/or creative aspects?
- notice with which of the character strategies and patterns you resonate, during meditation, as well as in everyday life
- reflect on how you might resonate with two or more of the character positions, and how they work in relationship with each other. For example, if you resonate with the holding character in often feeling stuck, this stuckness may hold you back in relating to others fully, which relates to your boundary character patterning and its related fear around contact and existence
- reflect on particular life themes with which you are familiar in your process and how these might link to the character position(s). You will have a chance to reflect on these more fully in the following chapter.