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The Benefits of Being Average

By Steve Rogers, PhD

Average - it's a word that stimulates discomfort and unease. We want it to describe someone else, and we aspire to exceed it, even to the point that most of us believe we are above average. Psychological research consistently shows that we believe we are more attractive than others, smarter than others, and even better drivers than our peers. But when it comes to mental health, average and ordinary are better than extraordinary. They are also the antidote to many psychological conflicts.

This is explicitly evident in the neuroscience finding that striving to be superior triggers feelings of inferiority. The attempt to exceed our commonness communicates to the brain that we are inadequate and unacceptably flawed (from the brain's perspective, why would we need to be superior unless there was a problem in our current station?). It convinces us that we need to move from a sensed minus to a sensed plus position, so in our attempt to be extraordinary, we deepen our conviction that we are insufficient and inferior. Therefore, if you strive to be extraordinary, brace yourself for accompanying feelings of inferiority.

Averageness is also an essential ingredient to intimacy and connection. It's through our imperfections, our unique blend of strengths and weaknesses, and our humanity that we bond and connect with others. When given the option to be in relationship with someone who is perfect or someone who is imperfect, we reliably choose the latter because imperfection is relatable and relational. And for any individuals who do achieve the extraordinary, they have discovered that it's incredibly lonely and isolating, positioned on a pedestal of adoration but ultimately alienated.

To attempt to exceed averageness also encourages existential angst. According to existential therapists, a belief in our specialness is often an attempt to distance ourselves from the reality of our mortality, so by trying to surpass our averageness, we are participating in a denial at worst, and a repression at best, of our finitude and fragility. In doing so, we lose the ability to enjoy and value life in the limited time we have, all while stirring up more anxiety about death and discomfort with our temporality.

Finally, striving to be more than average prevents feelings of success. Many people believe that their success, if achieved, is the result of trying to be extraordinary, as if they wouldn't have accomplished their relational, financial, spiritual, or professional victories without striving to be exceptional. This might be true for a few select individuals, but for the vast majority, the successes we have achieved are not due to our pursuit of the extraordinary, but rather other variables that we either downplay or ignore, like character, intellect, compassion, and conscientiousness. Not only that, but when we embrace our averageness, there are more opportunities for accomplishment and success, and it is easier to celebrate, internalize, and enjoy these successes because we aren't trying to surpass them or focus on what has yet to be attained.

Therefore, embrace your averageness, knowing exceptionality breeds insecurity and that averageness fosters contentment, intimacy, acceptance of existential reality, and enjoyment of what you have accomplished.

Hope and Healing Through Professional and Clinical Competence, Faith-Based Wisdom, Warmth, and Compassion.

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Relational Aspects of Therapy

By Karis Sykes, LMFT

People often assume the main work of therapy is to gain skills to directly address the problems they are facing. While this is an important goal to work towards, the relational dynamic between client and therapist provides a model and mirror for the emotional, behavioral, and relational work it takes to concretize healing and transformation. How we feel about, react to, and engage in conflict with our therapist is often how we show up in our own lives, and the container of the therapeutic space provides the safety to engage, challenge, and nurture ourselves in the direction of health and wellness, as well as to employ the skills we may learn in therapy. The trust that's built between therapist and client is essential work so that we can benefit from the emotionally corrective experiences that relational therapy can provide.

Building trust is essential in the therapeutic relationship because it also models the building of self-trust, which fosters empowerment and change. Trust can be built by having someone show up consistently for you, having someone celebrate your wins and feel the pain of your losses with you, having someone else hear and hold the most tender parts of you. A therapist might encourage trust in the relationship by asking what safety feels like in connection with another person: "How are you able to know you feel safe in our relationship? I wonder if we could explore what indicators your body gives you?" If a client isn't sure what they want to process in a session, a therapist might encourage mutual trust by asking "would it be okay if I gave you a moment to think about what you might need?" It's important to practice attuning to your needs in the presence of another person without feeling rushed. A client might even want to check in with the therapist after sharing some challenging content, and a therapist might say, "thank you for thinking of me. I want to hold this with you and I hope you can trust that," because I want them to know what it's like for someone to willingly show up for them.

My favorite aspect of relational therapy is the emotionally corrective experiences that can come in any form, depending on a person's needs. An emotionally corrective experience is when the therapeutic dynamic repairs some relational damage from relationships past, but instead of experiencing whatever impact they weathered last time, they experience care and attuning. If a client tells me they didn't want to come in for a session that day, I love saying, "I really appreciate knowing you can trust me enough to tell me," because I want them to know they can show up as they are and it's possible that it won't change how I view them or care about them. When a client is feeling a lot of emotion, I love taking the time to let them feel their feelings, rather than rush to intellectualize, because I want them to experience someone being with them in their emotion and not being left alone in it. Through rupture and repair in a trusting therapeutic relationship, a client can learn to handle conflict, coached through regulating emotions in the midst of conflict, and rewiring our brains for healthy conflict. This can happen when a client is misunderstood in session, but learns that this doesn't mean they're wrong or bad, or that it's a threat to connection. A client may learn to take feedback without taking it as criticism of their character. Clients experience emotionally corrective experiences when they name their needs and allow someone to support them in it, when they can be messy in front of someone else and receive love, especially without having to earn it first.

Farewell Note From Catherine House, LMFT

I am writing to say goodbye to this wonderful Center and to all the awesome people with whom I have worked and counseled. I am retiring!

As I look back on Hope's history, it was exciting to be included with Diana Sunukjian and Jodi Ditmar to pray, plan and prepare to start the Center. After six months, we opened the door to a Christian Counseling Center. That was 34 years ago and we are still open.

I want to thank God for all of His provision. I was always given loving support when I had struggles. Thank you Diana, Jenny, Karen and all of our current staff, Becca, Steve, Natalie, Karis and Carolee. Most importantly, thank you God for providing your awesome people who have provided financial support, excellent ideas, offices, and encouragement during bountiful and difficult times.

I have been mightily blessed and so it is with a heavy heart that I say goodbye.

–Fondly, Catherine