

A Reply to Mendaglio and Tillier

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When Dąbrowski cast his theory in a series of formal statements (hypotheses), he was clear that the hypotheses were tentative and that new research findings will necessitate changes and revisions in the theory and its concepts. Mendaglio and Tillier see the theory as cast in stone and invariable: Dąbrowski's "choice of terms and their definitions cannot be a focus of criticism: after all, TPD is his theory." Consequently, Mendaglio and Tillier blindly stand by even the most absurd, inadvertently erroneous statements that are contradicted by the whole theory.

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It is gratifying to see one's work examined in a critique. I appreciate the effort of my friends, Sal Mendaglio and Bill Tillier. Alas, it is misplaced. Mendaglio and Tillier take the position echoed in the title of Dąbrowski's play, *Nothing Can Be Changed Here* (Dąbrowski, 1979). To them Dąbrowski cannot be questioned.

The issue at hand is whether the label 'primary integration' for Level I in Dąbrowski's theory is defensible. I argued that Level I is neither primary nor an integration on the evidence from developmental psychology that (a) childhood is not a period of personality integration and (b) Level I is not the starting point for development through positive disintegration (Piechowski, 2014). The evidence from 50 years of research on child development alone is sufficient to invalidate the concept of primary integration and yet Mendaglio and Tillier are unresponsive to it. That we are social beings already at birth is basic knowledge and to ignore it is to ignore our primate origins.

IS THERE AN ARGUMENT FOR PRIMARY INTEGRATION?

Mendaglio and Tillier claim that "Dąbrowski's whole theory is predicated on the view that the initial level of integration represents lower, rigid structures guided by primitive instincts and drives" (2015, this issue, p. 226). The entire theory with all its complexity to rest on the premise of a rigid primitive structure? If this were true, the theory would never rise from such incumbency. Does reasoning rest on

primitive areas of the brain? At the lowest level there is no capacity for development through positive disintegration. There is no inner psychic milieu; there are no developmental dynamisms; no transformative potentials exist. As a first level of *development*, Level I is an oxymoron—no development in Dąbrowski's sense takes place here. It's a category, a box for everything that's not disintegrating. How could this possibly be the cornerstone of the theory? Development through positive disintegration, or *true development* as Mendaglio and Tillier wish to call it, begins at Level III. For Dąbrowski development is multilevel. He always emphasized this. The logic of the theory bears this out.

Equally so, unilevel disintegration (Level II) cannot be a prelude to positive disintegration because no transformative dynamisms are present. It is only with the emergence of disquietude with oneself, astonishment with oneself, and the like that we are on the threshold of spontaneous multilevel disintegration and true Dąbrowskian development begins. As I have said previously, and I am glad to repeat, a flatland does not become a mountain unless there is a force to push it upward (Piechowski, 2014). Multilevel potential is that force.

For whom did Dąbrowski develop his theory? He said this in detail (Dąbrowski, 1972; my revised awkward translation for which I apologize):

Hail to you, psychoneurotics!

You who see sensitivity in the insensitivity of the world,
uncertainty among the world's certainties.

You who so often experience others as yourselves.

You who sense the anxiety of the world,
its narrowness and boundless self-assurance.

Hail to you!

For your phobia of washing your hands from the dirt of the
world,

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For your fear of being locked in the world's limitations,
 for your fear of the absurdity of existence.
 For your subtlety in not telling others what you see in them.
 For your awkwardness in dealing with everyday things,
 but deftness in handling the unknown,
 for your transcendental realism but lack of everyday realism,
 for your exclusiveness and dread of losing those you love,
 for your creativity and ease of wonder,
 for your maladjustment to that "which is" but
 adjustment to that which "ought to be,"
 for your great but unutilized abilities.
 For the belated recognition of your greatness,
 and of those like you who will come later,
 and will also not be recognized.
 For your being treated instead of treating others;
 for your heavenly power forever being pushed down by
 brutal force;
 for that which is prescient, unsaid, infinite in you.
 For the loneliness and strangeness of your ways.
 Hail to you! (p. xvi)

Who is he addressing? Those on the path of autonomous (multilevel) development, seekers, empaths, visionaries, those mistreated for telling the truth, pathologized for their sensitivity and imagination—not anyone in Level I or II. The value of the theory lies precisely in mapping this kind of development. That this was always Dąbrowski's focus is evident already in his earliest work (Dąbrowski, 1937; Dombrowski, 1929). The theory would lose none of its value if the two lower levels were never added.

Mendaglio and Tillier assert that primary integration is a 'central concept,' a 'fundamental construct,' and is 'integral to Dąbrowski's overall approach.' This position presents several problems. First, the fundamental concepts of the theory are multilevelness and developmental potential, not primary integration. Second, two types of personality development are distinguished: unilevel and multilevel. In elaborating his theory, Dąbrowski's main effort was toward elucidating multilevel development. His theory would be just as powerful if Level I were never included. There is nothing essential about it to the conceptual structure of the theory.

THE FOUR ERRORS OF HYPOTHESIS 2

When Dąbrowski arrived in Montreal in 1965–1966, his theory was not yet completed. He met there with the philosopher Andrew Kawczak. Together they worked on the 72 formal statements defining the theory (Battaglia, 2002). None of them address developmental potential. This work preceded our work sessions on the other chapters of *Mental Growth Through Positive Disintegration* that began in early 1967 (Dąbrowski, 1970). I would read the draft of his chapters and ask him for explanations, which I would write down and then translate. Pages of the book, particularly pages 31–32, show how the concept of developmental potential was beginning

to take form: the coexistence of overexcitabilities and of certain opposing traits like introversion and extraversion with potential for transformation.

The 72 statements are *hypotheses*—propositions to be examined, tested, and modified as a result of research findings:

There is no intention here to establish "the Laws" of mental development. The theory of positive disintegration is to be considered mainly as a series of inductive empirical generalizations. Some of them have been confirmed in experimental studies. Others are mere working hypotheses which require a great deal of further research and possibly a modification or reformulation. (Dąbrowski, 1970, p. 130)

The bone of contention is hypothesis no. 2. (Note: it is a hypothesis! A hypothesis is not a statement of fact.)

The full cycle of ontogenetic mental development of man includes five main stages: primitive integration, unilevel disintegration, spontaneous multilevel disintegration, self-directed multilevel disintegration, and secondary integration. (Dąbrowski, 1970, p. 132)

This is followed by a qualifying comment:

This hypothesis should not be interpreted as a classification, a mere typology, but rather as a type of biological generalization, since it refers to every individual that possesses the full endowment and developmental potential peculiar to this species. This claim is based on the temporal sequence of the above five stages, their irreversibility, and on already known mechanisms of causal connection. (Dąbrowski, 1970, p. 132)

Why do Mendaglio and Tillier insist on defending hypothesis 2? Is it to assert that whatever Dąbrowski said is gospel truth? (It is this kind of attitude that led Piirto [2010] and others to regard the followers of Dąbrowski as something of a cult.) Mendaglio and Tillier do not treat hypothesis 2 as a proposition subject to examination and revision but as a statement that cannot be questioned. They treat the theory as a closed text in sharp contrast to Dąbrowski's openness to verification, modification, and reformulation.

Hypothesis 2 is contradicted by everything in the theory. The added comment offers some undefined wormy terms. What could they mean by 'biological generalization'? The reference to "every individual that possesses the full endowment and developmental potential" (Mendaglio & Tillier, 2015, this issue, p. 221) declares that such an individual could start at Level I and proceed in development to Level V in one lifetime. But the basic tenet of the theory is that individuals at the lowest level have very limited developmental potential or none. The basic requirement of multilevel development is missing—"At the level of primitive integration, strictly speaking, there is *no inner psychic milieu*" (Dąbrowski, 1970, p. 24, emphasis added). You cannot

have it both ways. One may suppose that ‘full endowment’ refers to the overexcitabilities plus intelligence. However, the phrase ‘known mechanisms of causal connection’ is nothing but an enigma wrapped in mystery.

Dąbrowski’s description makes nonsense of their assertion that development through positive disintegration can start at Level I. How could full endowment and developmental potential be present and yet be completely shut down when we know that:

One can already observe in a child one and a half years old certain fairly well differentiated potentials of the developmental instinct. These can be expressed through various differentiated forms of psychic hyperexcitability such as sensual, psychomotor, emotional, imaginal, or intellectual hyperexcitability. (Dąbrowski, 1970, p. 31)

These are signs of the potential for autonomous development; that is, multilevel development. Is it possible to think that they are totally shut down for a cold season of primary integration and then reawakened for multilevel development? (I deliberately omit Level II here because it also has no multilevel potentials.)

I pointed out that hypothesis 2 contains two errors: equating development through positive disintegration with life span (temporal) sequence and that primary integration is the starting point. But wait—there are two more. The third error rests in hypothesizing that full endowment (i.e., strong developmental potential) can be so suppressed that the individual would be limited to primary integration. The fourth error is to say that the ascendance of levels is irreversible. It is contradicted by *hypothesis 8*: “Prolonged states of unilevel disintegration end either in reintegration at the former primitive level or in suicidal tendencies, or in a psychosis”—Level II reverting to Level I (Dąbrowski, 1970, p. 135). Statements made in hypothesis 2 do not appear anywhere else in Dąbrowski’s opus. Clearly a mistake, the misbegotten hypothesis 2 should be disregarded and discarded.

Mendaglio and Tillier argue that primary integration has a genetic basis. A genetic component in psychopathy is not evidence for the soundness of the concept of primary integration. Dąbrowski’s often cited estimate was that about 70% of the population are primarily integrated. The evidence for a genetic basis exists only for psychopathy that affects only between 0.6% and 1.2% of the male population (Coid, Yang, Ullrich, Roberts, & Hare, 2009; Neumann & Hare, 2008). Consequently, the genetic argument does not hold.

It is nothing short of amazing that Mendaglio and Tillier completely ignore how well Bandura’s eight mechanisms of disengagement of conscience fit primary integration. These mechanisms operate everyday. They operate on the majority of us who are not of psychopathic constitution. This alone is sufficient to explain how social pressures from authority, neighbors, or the pulpit lead people to act against their conscience while protecting their sense of being good.

Mendaglio and Tillier are having none of it. So much for agreeing with “the need to shed new light on TPD [by] . . . the use of psychological research findings” (2015, this issue, p. 223). It is well known that the Nazi war criminals were mediocrities as persons. Two prominent examples come to my mind of individuals undistinguished as young people but who engaged in psychopathic behavior on a monstrous scale. Heinrich Himmler grew up in a family no different from my own. There was closeness between the parents and their two sons. One was a soldier in World War II but did not become a Nazi. His brother wanted to be an agronomist but later became devoted to Hitler, was a hard-working organizer, and gradually rose in the ranks of the Nazi party (Smith, 1971). Extermination camps were his design to engineer the death of 6 million Jews and hundreds of thousands of others. Josef Jürgen Stroop carried out the liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto. As the resistance turned out to be harder than anticipated, he burned the whole quarter and everyone in it. As a young man, Stroop was seduced by the propaganda of German superiority, the cult of toughness, and the danger of degeneracy posed by inferior races (Moczarski, 1981). Not genetics, but disengagement of conscience made these ordinary men into ruthless executioners.

IS THE CASE UNMADE?

Toward the end Mendaglio and Tillier reaffirm the accidental error that, “Advanced development proceeds *from* primary integration *to* secondary integration” (on the condition that strong developmental potential is present; Mendaglio & Tillier, 2015, this issue, p. 226). They have not thought through what this means and it only serves to create confusion. The statement that strong developmental potential could enable development from Level I to V in one lifetime appears only in that one misbegotten hypothesis 2 and nowhere else. Instead of thinking about how to adapt advances in psychological research (positive psychology comes to mind) to the theory and see what confirms and what disconfirms its particular tenets, they muddy the waters by creating a semblance of a controversy.

Strong developmental potential means potential for multilevel development. An individual with strong developmental potential cannot be confined to primary integration nor to unilevel disintegration. What makes for strength in developmental potential? The strength comes from intense overexcitabilities, above-average intelligence, and dynamisms of inner transformation. Strong emotional overexcitability means responsiveness to the feelings of others and compassion. Strong intellectual overexcitability means questioning established views and values; it means searching for truth. Strong imagination means divergent and creative thinking, reaching forward and mining the past. Dynamisms of inner transformation are the drive toward higher values. These qualities are built into the very essence

of the individual. By what means could such qualities be reduced to primary integration? It would have to be a spike through the brain, like the one that penetrated Phineas Gage's skull and reduced this fine, bright young man to a coarse, irascible, and foul-mouthed individual (Damasio, 1994).

A SINGLE THEORETICAL DISAGREEMENT

Mendaglio and Tillier try to give the impression that there were a number of differences in my work on the theory, but only one issue surfaced while Dąbrowski was still alive. He disagreed with Maslow's claim that lower needs must be satisfied before higher needs can be fulfilled. Dąbrowski did not know that Maslow abandoned this position (Maslow, 1971). His other objection was to the characteristic of acceptance of self, others, and nature by self-actualizing people so that they:

tend to be good animals, hearty in their appetites and enjoying themselves without regret or shame or apology. They seem to have uniformly good appetite for food; they seem to sleep well; they seem to enjoy their sexual lives without unnecessary inhibition. (Maslow, 1970, p. 156)

This clashed with Dąbrowski's ascetic view of people at the fourth developmental level. Nevertheless, detailed analysis of the 15 traits of self-actualizing people showed that they correspond very neatly with traits of Level IV (Brennan & Piechowski, 1991; Piechowski, 1978, 1990, 1991, 1992; Piechowski & Tyska, 1982). Furthermore, Dąbrowski never understood, nor do Mendaglio and Tillier, that Maslow's work was a confirmation of his construct of Level IV and that this gave evidence of the power of his theory as a framework enabling us to see other findings in relation to each other. When two independent lines of research and theory converge, it makes for a very strong case that what they are about is real.

MINOR POINTS

- Creating an alternate theory, as Mendaglio and Tillier suggest, does not resolve theoretical disagreements and contradictions, not until the old theory is disqualified and discarded.
- In pointing out common error 3—disdain for unilevel disintegration—I most certainly was not referring to Dąbrowski but to the zealots who latch onto the theory to elevate themselves.
- To insist on psychomotor and sensual overexcitabilities as 'lower' forms smacks of prejudice analogous to looking upon black skin as inferior. Ditto for 'primitive' integration. Overexcitabilities are descriptive variables. They have not been studied in unfolding lives to

judge them as 'big' or 'lower' forms. There is work to be done. But we have at least one finding that both psychomotor and sensual correlate with level of development (Lysy & Piechowski, 1983).

- As Mendaglio and Tillier point out, the research on authoritarian personality was criticized for its methodology. However, interpretations of what it stands for differ. They cite one source as equating it with 'sado-masochistic character'; others point out that it essentially represents old-fashioned conservative values (Ray, 1990). Be that as it may, authoritarianism is alive and well. Our national and political life is rife with racial prejudice, thinking in stereotypes, mendacious propaganda, undercutting science, and so on. As part of its 2012 platform, the Texas GOP set itself the goal of eliminating critical thinking from public education (Delisle, 2014).
- Deference to authority is a powerful social force. Reevaluation of Milgram's experiments does not change that. One of the aspects of sexual harassment, which eventually made it illegal, is that the abuser's higher rank—a position of power—makes the subordinate fearful and unable to defend himself or herself.
- Dąbrowski published his dissertation under his phoneticized name Casimir Dombrowski (1929).
- Mendaglio and Tillier cite their review, from 2006, of the research on overexcitabilities but somehow omit the more recent and broader review—the unique lens on giftedness that Dąbrowski's theory provides—in a chapter written in warmhearted collaboration between Marjorie Battaglia, Sal Mendaglio, and myself (Battaglia, Mendaglio, & Piechowski, 2014).

CONCLUSION

Mendaglio and Tillier's defense of the concept of primary integration is without foundation. They present no evidence for its validity nor reasons why the misleading term should be retained. They should have realized that hypothesis 2 is only a hypothesis and that it was conceived in error since it is contradicted by the entire theory.

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