

Edward Thomasson and Adrian

2020 OCTOBER BY EDWARD THOMASSON AND ADRIAN

This is an edited transcription of an hour-long conversation I had with my friend Adrian, who is a big support to me. In the interview I note when we are laughing together. It sits a bit awkwardly in the text, like canned laughter, but we laugh with each other throughout the conversation, so it seemed important to try and transcribe that too.

Edward: First, let me just explain to you why I asked you to talk with me. Basically I've been asked to speak to someone who is part of my support network about how we support each other. The first person I thought of was you because you've been a constant support in my life since I've met you, or re-met you, more specifically. I'll explain for people reading this how we know each other and maybe you'd like to reflect back on that and add in any details, but not too many.

We laugh

So, we met in a support group, but before that, in a different time, in a different way, we had met before: we had had sex at my flat, when we were both having a pretty difficult time for similar reasons. I think the reason I thought of you straight away is because meeting you in the support group, at that moment, in that new place, having known you before, has been really important for me, transformative. We're linked back to where we've both come from, but our relationship is part of the healing of all that too, if that makes sense. Somehow the fact that like we've been in these different places together really deepens the support that we can offer each other. We've seen each other at our worst. Well, I don't think you've seen me at my very worst actually.

We laugh Adrian: Yeah, gosh, thank you for thinking of me, it's really touching and lovely because that's all I ever wanted, to be a support to others. And that is one of the reasons why I got into trouble in the past because I'd tried to rescue other people in an egotistical way. But

our relationship is different from that. And I think what you're saying is fascinating because as empathetic as we try to be for each other, it helps so much if we know that someone else has gone through exactly the same thing. So to have our paths crossing like this, in this direct way, it does something. Obviously, in the group we go to, I hear my experience in what other people say a lot, and that's amazing in itself, to understand I'm not alone, that someone else is dealing with the same shit that I'm dealing with. But then to experience it with another person, that's even more powerful.

Edward: Yeah it's like, 'we've all been there', but we literally have, been there together, in the same place!

We laugh

Adrian: Yeah, and that really aids our understanding of each other, the compassion and support that we know each other needs.

Edward: So there was a couple of things I've written down about the actual mechanisms of all this because I actually I think that there's a sort of real practicality to it, not like I'm using you, but there's a sort of functional-ity to it. All of these words sound really uncaring.

Adrian: I think you're right, when I'm explaining these new tools that we're learning in our support group to people, it does sound a little bit functional and cold. I think what that speaks to is that relationships are very often codependent in some way. That's actually what we think care is, what we're told good relationships look like, disappearing into each other. These new tools appear colder because they're less emotionally entangled, so they do sound less romantic. But that's because romance is codependent really.

Edward: Romance is actually genuinely a fantasy. Adrian:
Yes! Edward: It's literally a genre, like fantasy.

We laugh

Adrian: So, you were saying you want to talk about those practicalities? What popped up in my head was this idea of validation

and how, in general, we say that validation isn't a great thing to seek all the time, but really that's what I do with you: if I'm feeling down, I ring you up and I'm seeking validation, I'm seeking acknowledgement of my feelings. I'm seeking a little bit of validation; I want you to make me feel a bit better about myself.

Edward: I think that maybe it's less transactional than that. I think some-times it's much easier to listen to someone else and hear how they're actu-ally feeling, than it is to hear yourself and listen to yourself. I think when I'm in a bad place, it's very easy for me to paint everything with a very certain colour palette. When I reach out to you, I'm asking you to just introduce a bit of colour and that's not validation. It's having an outside view and that's so helpful. But I always negate the idea of validation, and it's actually not that negative, is it? It's totally fine.

Adrian: Yeah, we wouldn't exist without it, we're social beings, we need it.

Edward: You mentioned codependence, and the opposite of that is inter-dependence, I think. Without wanting to get too termy, the support group that we go to is built on interdependence, and then echoing that, or prob-ably in light of that, our relationship is really interdependent too. It's what we're describing, I think. Basically, what I've been learning over the last few years is that it really does take a village. I really do not go through one day feeling independent now and I'm so grateful for it.

Adrian: Yeah, it's weird, because I still strive for independence, it's a goal of mine. One of the images I have in my head is being a monk, because they're the most like self-contained people, but even monk's live in a community, even they have so much interaction and so much dependence on that village.

Edward: And all that interaction is pretty hard too. Earlier you were mentioning you used to want to save people. I wanted to feel connected to everyone, and as gorgeous as that sounds, it's not. And I was doing it wearing fucking heavy armour. I would have to really armour up with what-ever I could find to go around and look for all of

this connection that I'm talking about, and armour gets heavy after a while if you know what I mean. There is something about wanting to move beyond the limits of our own bodies in both these things.

Adrian: Yeah, if I look back, I was looking for connection and intimacy and belonging too. But at the time it felt like the exact opposite. It was all about escape and numbing and detachment. I felt like I couldn't belong. I couldn't cope with the world I was living in. None of it was about connection. Looking back, I can see that's exactly what I wanted, but I literally went the other way. I wasn't seeking connection because to me it just wasn't work-able. So the only way to cope with the lack of connection was to escape even more, to detach completely and just destroy myself basically.

Edward: As you're saying that, I know that's it's a part of my experience too, but I find it much harder to describe it because...

Adrian: It's bleak

We laugh

Edward: Well, yeah, it's bleak, but also you saying it now is not bleak at all, it's brave, I don't think I'm that brave. But we're talking about it now, from another place, and with each other. Well, not a totally other place, I mean, it's not like: oh, it's all gone actually, totally good now!

Adrian: Cured!

We laugh

Edward: They're not going to be able to all hear all the laughter in the transcription which is a shame, because basically that's what I mean, it's not bleak because we are sharing it with each other and laughing about it now. When we're in the support group that's what's happening too: the action of the group is to dismantle the shame that we are holding inside ourselves by making it public, or semi-public in the group. Shame is debilitating, it makes me feel very lonely, it's something that I probably will have to hold in various ways forever.

But a little bit of it is destroyed every time I reach out for help because I can make something new that's stronger than this thing that makes me feel alone.

Adrian: Agreed, it's a really weird one because like, obviously it's not enjoyable to hear other people's negative experiences, to know that they went through those things, but there is something so comforting in it. Like you say, it removes those layers of shame when you hear that, because you go: you look like a pretty together kind of person, but you've done this or you've been through that. It helps me to rationalise things, because when I'm not in a good place, I don't see myself as attractive or kind. Whereas if I see someone else and I see that they've got positive qualities, but they've gone through something, then I go, okay, well, you know, it happens to the best of us. And that removes a layer of shame. And I go, okay, well maybe I'm not a completely bad person. Maybe I do have positive qualities too. I just went through this shit.

Edward: It's another fantasy really.

Adrian: Shame?

Edward: Well yeah, that's total bullshit. But I meant the fantasy of this seamless existence, that we can move through things perfectly and be so fluent in life that we're just STUNNING. It doesn't exist. And yet that's the way that we meet each other all the time, expecting ourselves to do that and also expecting other people to do that too. I speak for myself here, and it's not like: oh my God, I live without shame! It's so much part of me I don't even know where it is all the time. But I know that if I talk about those things that they lose their power to affect me negatively and affect other people negatively, if I can just acknowledge them and just put them outside rather than keep them in. And that comes back to practicality and thinking about our relationship again, because I know that if I've done something that I feel a bit weird about, I know that I can describe it to you. And that's really practical.

Adrian: Yeah. there's just this level of care and support and love and lack of judgment.

Edward: That's what you think.

We laugh

Adrian: There's like a lack of judgment there from my side, at least. I was thinking when you were describing that, the feeling when you don't want to share something, but you know you should share. It just reminded me of the fear, it's like the fear of a child, a child in fear of being rejected or being told off or being punished for doing something wrong or saying something wrong.

Edward: Like in school that when we get something wrong, we're punished. It's kind of the opposite of what should happen.

Adrian: Agreed.

Edward: We should be held.

Adrian: Hell yeah!

Edward: Thank you for holding me Adrian.