

Transformative Moments: Short Stories from the Biodynamic Psychotherapy Room

With Dr Elya Steinberg

Biodynamic Psychotherapy: An Overview

She says, "If only I could say everything I want", and tells us that lately she has begun writing a diary, despite her inner struggles. When she talks about her writing she diverges and tells how sometimes a style of writing can change and turn the most secret thoughts in her diary into what she calls "real writing", and gradually the energy in the room changes and we all feel that we are marching "into the real" with her. From the universal pain that pounds the room sprout new buds, her pale face becomes pink once again; her hands that previously froze over her mouth awaken and begin to move seemingly of their own accord in excitement, in order to add additional dimensions to the pouring words. Her body straightens up and starts swaying to the rhythm of her words, and she no longer needs support for her back, which was previously aching, and it seems that the strength of her vitality serves her and is like an internal support invisible to the naked eye, enabling her to sit straight and at the same to develop new dimensions. Gottfried, my co-facilitator for the group "Attending to the Silence" says, "Look how the energy in the room has changed". And this new recognition in transformation beyond the old standpoints is molded; another option beyond the painful dynamics of victim-aggressor-collaborator.

Jerome Gropman (2004) describes in his book 'Anatomy of Hope' a true hope. True hope as opposed to the common approach to optimism, according to which "everything will sort itself out eventually". The main difference between hope and optimism is rooted in total reality. Hope is a feeling of elation that we see – in our mind – a way to a better future. Hope does not disregard the deep pitfalls and setbacks, significant fears and anxiety down the road. True hope is not misleading, and is based on a focused perception of reality. In the Biodynamic Psychotherapy group-room we all felt, true hope for transformation concealed in the ability for self-expression and self actualization that appears in all its glory, the ability to create subjectively and individually, which cannot be annulled or suppressed.

(From A session of a therapeutic group for the post-Holocaust Generation – "Attending to the Silence": And this is the seventh time I have left this somewhat alienated, but at the same time, familiar room, trembling... Elya Steinberg, 2008)

Psychotherapy is defined as a mental or emotional therapeutic process engaged in by people who suffered crises or distress which presented as mental. But body-psychotherapy's fundamental assumption is that every mental process presents both mentally and in a physical manifestation, which cannot really be separated, unless for the needs of discourse and after-the-fact discussion. For example, in the case with which I began this blog post, when her mental and emotional realization started to unfold and evolve this was concurrent with the appearance of bodily manifestations. We saw an integrated process of emotions and soma: in her body posture and movements, her breathing pattern, her energetic presence and her resonance with the group, which changed completely. Her process is one integrated collection of phenomena.

I wish to emphasize the relatively straightforward view that accepts a practical mind-body-brain-soul unity, in contrast with any philosophical (or otherwise) view that purposes dichotomy. The practical mind-body-brain-soul unity seeks to melt away conceptual barriers between different disciplines in health care, for the sole purpose of moving forward our understanding of human discomfort, illnesses, joy, pleasure and hope. The main thought in mind here is how to support health and wellbeing.

Non-verbal psychotherapy methods

Most psychotherapeutic methods offer only verbal discourse. Biodynamic psychotherapy, a type of body psychotherapy, an offshoot of biodynamic psychology, proposes a combination of verbal and non-verbal methods.

The two non-verbal methods that are unique to biodynamic psychotherapy are biodynamic massage and vegetotherapy.

Biodynamic massage differs from other kinds of massage for several reasons: the intention, the directionality, the ethical therapeutic boundaries, and the holistic approach to the individual, which views the individual as a system with self-organizing and self-leadership capacities.

The basic structure and aim of biodynamic psychotherapy in general, and biodynamic massage specifically, are identical, because biodynamic massage is one of the most basic tools of biodynamic endeavors. The aim is to set in motion the capacity for self-regulation, new insights, a changed perception, and more effective intra-personal communication and integration for the individual, as a system comprised of the body, spirit, and mind.

That system's power is grounded on the flow of energy and information between every subsystem of which it is composed. Not as a metaphorical idea, but simply because this is human existence – of which there is no other kind, in the simplest and most direct sense.

Psychotherapeutic work within the intersubjective, non-verbal space

Biodynamic massage is psychotherapeutic work within the intersubjective, non-verbal space. The non-verbal intersubjective space is structured from the total fundamental flow of interactions; any interaction out of the total structured interactions, through the flow of energy and information. Most interactions are not necessarily conscious, and not all of them necessarily must be conscious: the therapist does not always have to be aware of them, as long as the therapist senses the general direction of the conscious level, at least partially, at a certain stage of the therapeutic process.

Intention and directionality are, above all, psychotherapeutic

The objective of biodynamic massage is psychotherapeutic, above all.

For example, supporting self-fulfillment, the central therapeutic idea in logotherapy, a concept Victor Frankl developed, to work toward full self-acceptance. It's much like the therapeutic principles Carl Rogers defined: here, acceptance is achieved both through words and physical experiences in which the individual senses complete acceptance of his body via touch as an unmediated method.

We explore the possibility of remedial experience for people who as children experienced deficits of touch, or actual abuse. And we also support integration. Daniel Siegel has proposed nine domains of integrations that I will enlarge on in another article.

However, the basis of the integration idea resembles the idea that Fritz Perls developed in Gestalt therapy that the whole is more valuable than the sum of its parts. A conscious debate by the various parts can help people towards more effective inner organization that allows them to manage their life.

Changed perception is another effect that has frequently been clinically observed after people were given biodynamic massage. I worked with one client intensively, once a week for over a year. After one of the biodynamic massage sessions, she smiled as she got off the treatment table, and said, "I don't know what you did. My husband is the same, the kids are the same, the British weather is the same but everything feels different." Her change in perception was an organic authentic change, not an enforced cognitive attempt.

One Simple-Complex Unity

For clarity's sake: because the mind does not exist as part of the human reality, but rather as a highly complex process of physiological processes structures on a

millennium of interactions between the cells and various living systems, we can only detach it from the mutual existence for the purposes of discourse.

I'll present some of this discourse here, in my blog, over the following 6 weeks. I offer my concepts and clinical applications in hopes of stimulating both interest in this process and collegial interactions with you.

Please email your thoughts to Nancy@nancyeichhorn.com for posting on the SPT Magazine blog and SPT Magazine's Facebook page. If your post is accepted, she will also request a jpeg file headshot and brief bio to accompany your post.

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