

Promotion of health and biodynamic psychotherapy

Dr Elya Steinberg asserts that, by integrating all human dimensions, biodynamic psychotherapy promotes the restoration of health as advocated by WHO

In biodynamic psychotherapy, we emphasise the importance of an integrated approach to promoting health that brings mind, emotion, body and spirit into a deeper connection and reawakens wellbeing. Health is defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) as: 'A state of complete physical, social and mental well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. Health is a resource for everyday life, not the object of living. It is a positive concept emphasizing social and personal resources as well as physical capabilities' (WHO, 1986). WHO also suggests that health promotion is 'the process of enabling people to increase control over and to improve their health'.



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Dualistic thinking

In the 1930s, the idea that there is an emotional base to somatic diseases was revolutionary. Today, the concept is holding us back (Antonovsky, 1998). Its very existence suggests that there are diseases that have an emotional base and there are diseases that do not. The term 'psychosomatic illness' supports dualistic thinking and prevents us from understanding that all forms of human suffering happen to a complex organism, that every disease has a psychological aspect and a somatic aspect (as well as spiritual, social, ecological and political aspects).

The search towards health has brought me to Professor Aaron Antonovsky's concept of 'salutogenesis' (Antonovsky, 1979). 'Antonovsky stated that disease and stress occur everywhere and all the time and it was surprising that organisms were able to survive with this constant mass exposure. His conclusion was that chaos and stress were part of life and natural conditions. The interesting question that came to his mind was: how come we can survive in spite of all this? In his world health is relative on a continuum and the most important research question is what causes health (salutogenesis) not what are the reasons for disease (pathogenesis)' (Lindstrom and Eriksson, 2006).

The re-establishment of health

Biodynamic psychotherapy provides a model of integration of non-verbal communication and verbal communication, based on acceptance of intrinsic affective and physiological states and their communication explicitly and implicitly through appropriate active contact between minds, spirits and bodies in every degree of intimacy as a frame of work. This model promotes salutogenesis, the re-establishment of health.

Gerda Boyesen's (1972–1976, 1980, 2001) analytical observation of the healthy and unique nucleus of a person in its physical, mental and spiritual aspects looked towards new theoretical horizons. In biodynamic psychotherapy, the objective is not only to help alleviate and decrease physical and emotional pain and suffering. It also aims to promote health by enabling pleasure and inner happiness through the development of innate personal potentials present in every person, the subjective truth and the finding of one's personal vision, meaning and sense of agency, thus supporting a sense of coherence in oneself.

Gerda Boyesen named the approach biodynamic psychotherapy because of the dynamic integration of the biology and the psychology of the person through the therapeutic process. The uniqueness of biodynamic psychotherapy comes from the use of body psychotherapy techniques guided by certain philosophical principles. The three main tools are biodynamic massage, rooted talking and vegetotherapy. These methods are used by biodynamic practitioners as pillars to promote natural movement towards health. This idea has recently received support from natural science, which recognises an innate capacity for physiological as well as emotional

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regulation (van der Kolk, 1996; McEwen, 1998; Schore, 1994, 2003a,b; Ogden, 2006; Fonagy, 2004; Phillips, 2008; Yehuda, 1991, 1993, 1995, 2009).

Multidimensional levels

Biodynamic psychotherapy relates to a multidimensional level of subjective experience and phenomenology at any given moment. In biodynamic psychotherapy, this phenomenology contains the non-verbal experience and crosses the boundaries of spoken language. It relates to the innate 'communicative musicality' (Trevarthen, 2004, 2005, 2009), to rhythm and prosody, to voluntary and involuntary movement manifested in micro-movement and macro-movement, to breath, to the position of the body, to the ability to move and the quality of the movement, to external and internal signs and symptoms of the autonomic nervous system, to echoing sympathetically with the other and the ability to use mirror neurons and adaptive oscillators.

We have learned from current neuroscience and psychotherapy (Van der Kolk, 1996, 2006) that most experiences are automatically processed on a subcortical level, that is, by unconscious interpretation that takes place outside awareness. Insights and understanding have only limited influence on the operation of these subcortical processes when addressing the problems of traumatised people, who, in a myriad of ways, continue to react to current experience as a replay of the past. There is a need for therapeutic methods like biodynamic psychotherapy that do not depend exclusively on understanding and cognition but on perception of self through body awareness and the physiological ability of the body to process and regulate stress and emotions.

Inner resources and resilience

During a biodynamic psychotherapy session, we explore traumatic responses of the past at different developmental levels. Traumatic memories are often dissociated

and may be inaccessible to verbal recall or processing. Therefore, in biodynamic body psychotherapy, close attention is paid to the development of inner resources and resilience to deal with dysregulation and helplessness, as well as to careful timing of the exploration and processing of the traumatic past and present. For example, in such a session, we may support integration of sensory input with motoric output to enable effective movement and action in perceived life-threatening situations, rather than being trapped in helplessness and hypoarousal states. Or we might help to find an internal framework which enables self-regulation of the hyperaroused state on a bodily level using, for instance, biodynamic massage as a means of stimulating the parasympathetic nervous system and working towards physiological equilibrium, as well as translation of the experience into communicable, verbal language.

Biodynamic psychotherapy is a comprehensive method, which looks at the broad spectrum of health, resilience, healing and hope along with careful examination of the pathogenesis. It has added the dimension of the body to the therapeutic discourse. It stresses the spiritual dimension in addition to the physical dimension, the importance of movement as well as the spoken word. This integration of all human dimensions promotes the restoration of health as defined by WHO. [P](#)

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