

Tocando o Coração

Diana Guest¹

¹Psicoterapeuta e membro do Faculty- IIBA. Tem ensinado no Brasil, Nova Zelândia, China e Estados Unidos. Coordena atualmente a Formação com grupos em Pequim e Shanghai.

Resumo: Este artigo é uma versão modificada de um discurso na conferência IIBA 23 em Porto de Galinhas, Brasil. Através da integração de um estudo de caso da análise bioenergética e pesquisa atual Eu ofereci insights sobre o processo não-verbal, neurobiológico, e energético entre o cliente e o terapeuta. Eu também demonstrei a importância dos aspectos relacionais do processo terapêutico em análise bioenergética.

Palavras-chave: Bioenergética, Somática ligação empática, a sintonia, Porges, medo do amor, medo da vida, toque.

Getting to the Heart of the Matter*

Abstract: This paper is a modified version of a keynote address at the 23rd IIBA conference in Porto de Galinhas, Brazil. Through the integration of a case study of bioenergetic analysis and current research I offer insights into the nonverbal, neurobiological, and energetic process between the client and the therapist. I also demonstrate the importance of the relational aspects of the therapeutic process in bioenergetic analysis.

Keywords: Bioenergetics, Somatic empathic connection, attunement, Porges, fear of love, fear of life, touch.

Introduction

I am honored to be a keynote at this conference and especially that it is in Brazil. I have felt so welcomed and honored by the Brazilians. You have been very healing for me and I have learned about receiving love that I do not fully comprehend. So when the SC asked me to be a keynote, at first I thought **no way** and I said let me think about it. I did... and then said yes. However, now I would like to say that my ego has abandoned me in my hour of need and I am left with my real self to manage my anxiety and fear as I begin.

I stand before you on the shoulders of many who have gone before me and the many teachers I have had in Bioenergetics throughout the world. We are all so fortunate to belong to such a global community. I have had the privilege of traveling to Greece, France, Italy, Portugal, Spain, Brazil, New Zealand and even China to meet other people who are committed to the life of the body, who are struggling to overcome the fear of life and the fear of love.

* O Texto mantém as características originais do manuscrito enviado pela autora.

Today I am going to share some of my personal struggles with fear of life and fear of love and how I came to claim my body and feel and respond from my heart. How I got to feel my heart. To do this I must revisit my mother's inability to connect and her fear of life. I must revisit the terror of the infant who does not exist without the other

Like every child I was born with a need to connect, in fact, when first born we do not know that we are separate. Mother and baby are in a symbiotic state. And we know that success in this phase is critically important for the development of a healthy self. As Bioenergetic Analysts we study attachment theory and the neuroscientists tell us about the impact of this early stage on the brain in the volumes of books that are written on the subject. Alan Schore writes the "capacity to experience, communicate and regulate emotions may be the key event of human infancy" (*Affect Dysregulation*, 2003, p. 72). *A General Theory of Love* talks about "The lack of an attuned mother...is a shattering injury to the complex and fragile limbic brain of a mammal" (Lewis, T., Amini, F., Lannon, R., 2000, p. 89).

In Bioenergetics we know that when the natural impulse of the child to connect is blocked, the life force is blocked, for each of us it is different and depends on when that block occurred. What I hope to share with you today is the concept that fear of living and fear of loving is a defense in service to the false self. In service of our survival, in an attempt to modify ourselves, in service of some sort of connection to someone very important. We did this out of love. Out of a child's heart. Our heart hurts and we don't even know it. We just seem to have problems with our relationships or navigating life. This is where and why many of us enter therapy. I know I did. I remember hearing Dr. Lowen say that the reason people enter therapy may be a problem in their life but the real reason people come to therapy is that they want to love and be loved. When people ask me what I do for a living I say, I help people increase their capacity to give and receive love. "The capacity to give and receive love implies good contact, and an open heart, literally and biologically. Whatever else love is, it is a biological phenomenon that can be felt" (www.reichandlowentherapy.org).

I had been in therapy a few times in my life, I'd go for a few sessions and then the therapist would tell me that it seems like I had a good grasp of things and send me on my way. I got approval and reinforcement for functioning out of my character structure, my fear of being truly alive. This is also referred to as the false self and mine was a very well constructed false self with a voluminous vocabulary of words. I could look really good and talk a good story but I still felt anxious and terrible on the inside. I was afraid of life, was disconnected from my body and didn't have a clue that I was. I did not like my self and was not connected to my heart. Now, like I said I didn't realize this and would have denied it to anyone that said such a thing. I once **again** had a relationship crisis and I was in search of a therapist... **again**. I found bioenergetics quite by accident. A friend gave a couple of referrals who happened to be Bioenergetic therapists. I went with the one closest to my home. I remember knocking on the therapist's door the first time. He opened the door and I remember a feeling shot through my body and somehow I knew this time would be different and it was. I had finally met up with a therapy whose mission is to gently and at least temporarily dismantle the false self, melt the characterological armour. Bioenergetic therapy is after what's behind the false self, the real self, in what ever state of health and damage that real self is with it's fullness

and it's voids. Bioenergetics believes in the wisdom of the body and it was through the discovery of my body and my heart that I experienced healing. I opened my heart to my therapist and as luck would have it he opened his to me. It was through this love and the tending to my body that the healing of my negative introjects and the journey into facing **my fear of loving and fear of being open in my life began**.

Most people would say I look pretty fearless but my vulnerability/ openness was blocked. My body was leading me into a new environment, into new support, into a new way of coming through the old pain and my therapist was my guide and support through this harrowing journey. As Winnicott stated, the infant's job is to inhabit his body. That was my journey in bioenergetic therapy.... to inhabit my body, which meant I **would feel** my state of nothingness, **I would feel** my disconnection from my heart and **I would feel** my fear of being open in my life. And I would have to feel my broken heart. In Love, Sex, and Your Heart, Lowen writes "In the final analysis, to surrender in love is not to surrender to another person but to one's self, one's heart and one's desire for love. (1988,p. 36) If we don't love, we risk no loss of love, and we cannot be abandoned. But we are trapped behind our own defenses, which by their very existence ensures that our worst fears are justified." (1988, p.88) In my armoured thinking: I thought I loved, but I now know I loved with my head, not my heart.

Now, this discovering of my nothingness, finding my heart, embracing my aliveness has been a long and daunting task because as I said I was not in my body at the time when I began bioenergetic therapy. I think this is not unlike most clients when they walk into our offices for the first time. You see as a young child I had to develop language (my left brain) in order to get a connection with my mother because of the emptiness of my mother. My mother was disconnected from her inner life and was unable to sufficiently interpret the nonverbal expressions of her infant, me, producing a situation where she demanded that I get words as soon as possible to relieve her anxiety and/or frustration and to make her job easier. My mother somatically conveyed her need for me to become communicative with **words** as soon as possible which was much too soon for me. The development of the false self through language grew while the connection with my internal experience declined. Daniel Stern (1985) writes that ..."language is a double-edged sword. It...makes some parts of our experience less shareable with ourselves and with others. It drives a wedge between two simultaneous forms of interpersonal experience: as it is lived and as it is verbally represented" (p. 162). "Language, then, causes a split in the experience of the self" (p. 163). That is what happened to me.

In Bioenergetic Analysis, we know there are many segmental splits. To name a few: the arms from the heart, the legs from the pelvis, the head from the torso. I split off my inner experience and my words became my way to survive. My mother's unconscious inner experience also became my priority. My motivation was to obtain a connection to her. She was withdrawing and angry with very little tolerance for affect. She turned on me as an agent and representative of my father who left her when I was about 14 months old. The development of speech was an attempt to give my mother what she needed for connection. However, it evolved into a way of hiding the damage done by the absence of empathic connection. This destructive, unconscious dynamic was a formative power influencing my emotional development and identity (Tucillo, E, 2013). My words came to be valued as more real because there was a repeated denial and disconnection

from my senses. I was raised with fear. I was frequently told by my mother that I was not feeling what I was feeling or that I was not experiencing what felt so real to me. My reality was denied time and again.

So I learned to doubt any sensation and eventually lost touch with my bodily experience. I learned not to trust my experience of my “reality”. I lost my connection to my heart and try as I might I could not get my mother to receive my love. The more I tried to get her to respond to my love, the worse it got. I had become her negative transferential object. I represented the rejection of her husband/my father and the rejection of her own mother who got in the car one day and drove away leaving the entire family when my mother was 6 years old. She had a very traumatic childhood filled with abandonment and abuse. Notice if you will as I share my story the development of armouring that leads to fear of living, fear of loving. This armouring I developed as a result of my mother’s negative transference toward me is an example of the transgenerational chronic relational trauma that Elaine Tucillo wrote about in our 2013 IIBA Journal.

Experientially speaking I became a shell that looked and acted like a smart, good girl filled with hatred, pain, sorrow. I got good grades, never snuck out of the house, never did drugs, babysat for my half-brother and half-sister, helped with chores around the house. Like I said I was a nice false self good girl, and I harbored a deep hatred toward my mother, far more than I could have imagined. But if I disconnect from my experience and use my words and achieve through my ego then I could be successful in the world. Then no one would know that inside I felt empty except for my hatred. I certainly wanted to hide that. No one would know that my mother didn’t love me. No one would know that I didn’t like myself and no one would know my heart was caged. Even I wouldn’t know! As Daniel Stern (1985) writes in The interpersonal world of the infant: “How we experience ourselves in relation to others provides a basic organizing perspective for all interpersonal events” (pp. 5-6). So you guessed it, my basic organizing perspective was to use my words and not feel. I did spend a lot of time crying growing up and was labeled as “too sensitive” which is ironic as I was being trained to disconnect from the truth of my experience, the truth of my feelings. Of course, I did feel the hatred toward my mother and her rejection of me but I could not really feel love. Lowen says that we can’t love someone whom we fear. I would like to add, fearing that parent does not stop our primal need to be loved by that parent and thereby learning how to love. I certainly feared my mother. I had internalized my mother’s nothingness, my mother’s fear. I had no feedback loop, no bridge between my emotional sensory life and my words. My words were adaptive in service of a limited connection but my real self did not develop. I tried to “logically” figure out what I had done to make my mother act this way. Why did she hate me so much? My adoptive father would tell me, “oh, you know sis, you just need to use finesse with your mother” and I would say no, I don’t know how to do that. Why can’t I just be me? I was so angry. My mother rejected who I was and so eventually so did I.

I’D LIKE TO READ this poem by Paul Neruda which I think expresses my feelings for my mother.

I do not love you except because I love you

I do not love you except because I love you;



*I go from loving to not loving you,
From waiting to not waiting for you
My heart moves from cold to fire.*

*I love you only because it's you the one I love;
I hate you deeply, and hating you
Bend to you, and the measure of my changing love for you
Is that I do not see you but love you blindly.*

*Maybe January light will consume
My heart with its cruel
Ray, stealing my key to true calm.*

*In this part of the story I am the one who
Dies, the only one, and I will die of love because I love you,
Because I love you, Love, in fire and blood.*

I did want to feel my love for my mother but it was covered in hate. And her rejection of me was just too painful. My survival required contraction and withdrawal from feeling, and retreating into my intellect so that loving became a cognitive process.

Now back my bioenergetic journey of uncaging my heart. My Bioenergetic therapy and my relationship with my therapist provided a pathway to rediscovering more of the lost me that was in me as a body. Now mind you the therapeutic task was very daunting and, in therapy, this sensing my body and revealing my real self was not pretty. I raged and hit and screamed my way out. Behind the false self, my characterological armouring, was raw emotion, a primitive state. I cried and cried and was asked what I was sensing in my body, what was I feeling. With all my words I could not describe my experience. When asked what I was feeling the answer was often I don't know or nothing. I was beginning to feel the nothingness inside and how disconnected I was from sensation. My real self had not evolved or grown. It needed to be shaped and molded and caressed without words. I needed a somatic empathic connection and someone to help me sense myself. I needed help building a bridge between my internal state and an emotional vocabulary. Alan Schore (2003) writes "...the psychobiologically attuned caregiver...facilitates the infant's information processing by adjusting the mode, amount, variability, and timing of the onset and offset of stimulation to the infant's actual integrative capacities. Their mutually attuned synchronized interactions are fundamental to the healthy affective development of the infant" (p. 76). I found a short clip of a mutually attuned interaction that I want to share. You can find it on youtube: https://youtu.be/JZd-EEa_IzI. You will see these twin babies holding hands and "talking" with each other. This is particularly important in the first 16-18 months when the right hemisphere of the brain is developing and is deeply connected to the limbic system which is dominant



for the processing of emotional and bodily information (Shore, 2003 p. 238). My mother could not provide this attunement and so I was in the infancy of my sensory self. As I said earlier, my father left when I was 14 months old and then my mother and I moved and she took me to a babysitter on Monday morning and picked me up late Friday. So my mother and I became even more estranged. In my therapy, my therapist became my psychobiologically attuned caregiver, bridging for me what I could not until I could begin to sense and identify myself. He found my self before I knew I had one and he waited patiently as I emerged. He worked with my body-self. It wasn't about my cerebral cortex (the language center) It was about connecting with **my** internal world, my experience, and learning to trust myself.

I did a lot of body work in therapy and in many sessions my therapist held me, sometimes physically, sometimes emotionally. It wasn't about the words. It was about experiencing myself and coming to know myself as a body. It was about that somatic attunement, limbic connection, the heart to heart connection with the other. The presence of his calm heart, holding me, quieted the terror in my heart of being met. A point I want to make is, being provided that which I needed all my life, **love**, was indeed a terrifying prospect. It was a fear releasing journey. It was about slowing down and giving myself time to sense my self, to go at my pace, not the pace of the other, in other words, while my therapist held me in his loving embrace, I as a body experienced terror and he allowed me my terror which allowed me my body self experience. To begin to claim myself through "a body as me". To become embodied. Al Lowen writes "Bioenergetics rests on the simple proposition that each person is his body. No person exists apart from the living body in which he has his existence and through which he expresses himself and relates to the world around him.....The more alive your body is, the more you are in the world." While Lowen says the proposition is simple, the process is anything but easy. (Bioenergetics, 1975, p. 54) I took that to mean I'm suppose to feel my body, feel my heart. However, as these feeling states emerged, as life emerged in my body-self I often had no words. **But to have my life with without words was far far better than to have my words without my life.**

I remember the first time I better sensed my self as a body, I realized I had no sensations or feelings in my arms. My experience was that I was armless! With more bodywork, I began to experience sensations in my arms and through that, the delicious discovery of my hands. I was like an infant looking at them, examining them, feeling them. I can remember getting in my car and being amazed at how the steering wheel felt to me. It was as though I was feeling tactilely through my hands for the first time. I went through a phase of washing my hands frequently. I found myself agitated when I experienced my hands as hot or sweaty or dirty. So I learned I had to go back to the beginning and discover myself as a body and to experience myself from the inside out that was facilitated through contact with my therapist. This claiming of myself had to come through my body-self.

High tech sonograms reveal that the arms begin as buds on the heart and so our arms grow out of our heart. No surprise that I could not feel my arms until I could begin to feel my heart. We can't really hold with our arms until we've been held by someone who is connected with his/her heart. My therapist's heart spoke to me through his arms and my heart responded in kind. And it is because of this hard work that I am able to

connect on a heart level with MY clients. A long-term male client (12 years) terminated with me this spring. I would like to share with you the note he gave to me as part of our termination process. You see, he is blind due to a shot in the face so he often brings in his writings. This one caught me by surprise. And yes he gave me permission to share this with you.

Dear Diana, “You haven’t just touched my life, you’ve remolded it. You’ve reached in and grabbed, shaken, prodded, and caressed my heart.Thank you. God, do you know how deep in me my thanks comes from? It comes from the pit of my stomach, from my entire heart and my entire brain. You’ve given me your trust, your vulnerability and your love. But you didn’t just give them to me, you showed me how to. Before meeting you they were only words. You didn’t just talk about them, you trusted, were vulnerable with and loved me. And because you did, I learned how to trust, be vulnerable with and love you. And just because we’re saying good bye doesn’t mean we won’t always have, as well as cherish each other’s trust, vulnerability and love.” That note made me cry! I miss working with him.

As Bioenergetic therapists, we know that a correctly timed, appropriate touch or holding is an important intervention. Dr. Dacher Keltner at the University of CA, Berkeley states that the science of touch shows that when “we receive a friendly form of touch it releases oxytocin, a neuropeptide that promotes trust and this shuts down stress related parts of the brain, the amygdala and locus cerelias. It also activates the vagus nerve”.. and the vagus nerve connects the cranial brain and the heart, lungs and stomach.

As far back as 1872 Darwin stated that “when the heart is affected it reacts on the brain; and the state of the brain again reacts through the ... vagus nerve of the heart;...the two most important organs of the body.” (Porges, p. 52) When the ventral vagal system is activated it is a way of achieving personal safety. And when the ventral vagal nerve is activated the heart is in a reciprocal place of giving and receiving. Porges said: “The heart relates and relaxes and down-regulates all the sympathetic” responses (webinar NICBAM).

I found this picture and article about twin premies on the internet. Each was in their respective incubators, and one was not expected to live. “A hospital nurse fought against the hospital rules and placed the babies in one incubator. When they were placed together, the healthier of the two threw an arm over her sister in an endearing embrace. The smaller baby’s heart rate stabilized and her temperature rose to normal.” Today they are healthy adults. (https://youtu.be/0YwT_Gx49os)

Porges further states that the vagas nerve “is the love nerve in your body”. It is the caretaking nerve in your body. (webinar NICBAM). I take this to mean our heart is a sensory organ and when our cranial/cognitive functioning is armoured, we will have a difficult time trusting the sensory experience of our heart. We will fear that sensory experience. We will be tempted to resist it psychically and somatically.

It was with my therapist’s frequent, regular and sustained touch that I gained trust in myself and trust in him and began to connect with my heart brain. This allowed me to began to feel love as a body experience, not just a mind experience.

As I became more aware of my senses I was often overwhelmed because I didn’t know how to manage all these feelings and sensations. I remember remarking, “now that I have all these feelings what do I do?” My heart felt as thought it would burst out of my body and this was down right scary to me. I felt more

connected to my self and the world around me. This feeling state was in a pure form. When one functions from that realm of cognition only, words and their arrangement and use become more valuable than the reality of the real self/body. One remains more involved in verbally redefining one's description of one's experience through word uses. This is common ground in all character styles. Operating out of and in that defense is more real to one's armoured self than the damaged self that lives behind it. As one is prompted to become more in contact with the real self, the body, the void, the sense of disconnection, sensory numbness and one is nudged out of the false-self- functioning, one begins to naturally experience panic..., terror..., fear..., anxiety. I think one of the strengths of our Bioenergetic training and therapy is that we become able to stay present with the deep wounding and the deep affective states of others because we have had to experience this ourselves.

Because my therapist could tolerate and work with all these primitive states **I knew love not as an idea or concept but as a real felt experience. My heart was alive with love. I could even feel my love for my mother!** In fact, just a couple of year before her death I was visiting her on her birthday. I had decided to take her to lunch and for a pedicure. Just the two of us. Later that day I heard her tell my father that it was the best birthday she could remember. That was the greatest gift she could give me. I still smile when I think of that day.

Now I have to say that loving and being loved in a therapeutic relationship was plenty scary! Now the even more scary part is when we take ourselves into the larger world. And even more frightening is when we begin to develop an intimate primary relationship with another human being.

I work with couples as well as individuals as I am sure many of you do. I find that I agree with Lowen, that people come into therapy because they want to love and be loved. I have on my website that I "increase peoples' capacity to give and receive love." Talking about fear of love, it is rampant in our world today! And yet we are determined to "reach out and touch someone". We are velcroed to our cell phones, hearing every beep and chime that someone is calling, or texting or emailing us. In this world of instant remote communication, we supplement our relationships with an assortment of technological devices and applications like facebook, facetime, instagram, pinterest, what's app, skype, etc. in the hopes that these devices will strengthen our sense of connection and "keep us in the loop". This social craze masks our deep desire for organismic human contact and yet allows us to keep ourselves even further than "an arms length" away from true intimacy. (Perel, 2006)

Today in many parts of the world, we have commercials on television about how people found their true love, easily, by filling out a few forms, answering a few questions or even a lot of questions. We have dating sites that advertise: Get love without risk, get perfect love without suffering. (Badiou, 2012). Alain Badiou, a French philosopher, writes that he believes this sort of advertising reflects a "safety-first concept of love". "It is a love comprehensively insured against all risks: you will have love, but will have assessed the prospective relationship so thoroughly, will have selected our partner so carefully by searching online-by obtaining, of course, a photo, details of his or her tastes, date of birth, horoscope sign, etc – and putting it all in the mix you can (then) tell yourself: 'This is a risk-free option!'" (Badiou, 2012, p. 6) This is a clear

example of the rampant fear of love, fear of not being loved, fear of getting it wrong, fear of the loss of love, fear of intimacy, fear of life, fear of fear! **But loving nor living is risk-free.** When we open our hearts to loving, as well as living, we risk experiencing hurt and pleasure!

However, love cannot be given on the basis of a complete lack of risk, no chance encounters, nothing random. It's the let's stay "safe" approach. **Love is not safe.** When we love, the other can hurt us. Love makes us vulnerable and vulnerability is terrifying but it is also the truest mark of courage. When we love we also face the fear of loss of that love. The greater the love, the greater the loss we risk having. And the greatest loss is in that romantic relationship. We are in love with the illusion of the other person and it is how we work through the disillusion and disappointment that determines our ability to sustain a loving relationship. What we love is the possibility of being safe to be open and be truly ourselves. Love is embracing difference. Badiou writes: "Love ... is a construction, a life that is being made, no longer from the perspective of One but from the perspective of Two." (Badiou, 2012, P. 29)

In this poem by Robert Bly, he speaks of a third body that is co-created by an intimate relationship.

THE THIRD BODY

Robert Bly (Housden, 2003)

A man and a woman sit near each other, and they do not long
At this moment to be older, or younger, or born
In any other nation, or any other time, or any other place.
They are content to be where they are, talking or not talking.
Their breaths together feed someone whom we do not know.
The man sees the way his fingers move;
He sees her hands close around a book she hands to him.
They obey a third body that they share in common.
They have promised to love that body.
Age may come; parting may come; death will come!
A man and a woman sit near each other;
As they breathe they feed someone we do not know,
Someone we know of, whom we have never seen.

If we can live through our disappointment of the other and their disappointment of us, then we have the only possibility of deep love and intimacy and the best sense of safety we will ever achieve as an adult. This requires tenacity and trust in oneself. Henry David Thoreau once stated "there is no remedy for love but to love more."

Some concluding comments I'd like to say are because of my commitment to my work as a Bioenergetic client. Because of my work with my therapist, I wanted to know what it **felt** like to be really in

love **wholeheartedly**. I had been “in love” before but it was a falling in **love with my head**. Remember me speaking earlier of my concept of love from my armoured self was a thinking process. Then I fell in love wholeheartedly with Michael Brennan, another body/self that strives to be alive, to be connected to another human at a deep level. We have been together 20 years now and have had to traverse that road of disillusionment and disappointment in each other and I am happy to say we are successfully living our life together in a loving way (most of the time) and our love has not waived during these more challenging times.

I want to ask each and every one of you: How does your fear of life, fear of love, fear of loss, keep you from having the life you want, that you dare? What in you, as a somatic and cognitive organism, holds you back from opening your heart and whole heartedly and whole bodily falling in love with another and in love with your life. Where do you experience your holding?

As I said in the beginning, it is because of Bioenergetics that I have traveled to many parts of the world and connected with people through my heart. I am part of this amazing global community, with all our differences and all our similarities. Being truly alive is about **who you love and how you love!** How you experience love as a body-self. . How do we DARE TO BE TRULY ALIVE,, with our energy flowing..., with our creativity flowing..., with our hearts open to each other... to help each of us be the most alive beings and to support the heart and soul of this organization..., the world..., both our organismic personal world,... and the world around us. Thank You!

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