

Healing the Divided Self: Exploring Biodanza as a Humanistic Path to Mental Health and Well-being



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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	3
About me and Biodanza.....	5
How this monograph is organized.....	6
Chapter 1 - The Fragmented Self.....	9
Introduction to chapter 1.....	9
Philosophical Roots of Fragmentation.....	11
Cultural and Religious Influences on Fragmentation.....	14
A Personal Perspective on the Fragmented Self.....	17
Chapter 2 - The Conventional Mental Health Landscape.....	19
Introduction to chapter 2.....	19
Dissecting the Fragmented Healing Process.....	20
The Role of Depression and Antidepressants.....	23
Cognitive Behavioral Therapy: A Closer Look.....	27
A Personal Perspective on Conventional Mental Health Treatments.....	34
Chapter 3 - Holistic Approaches in the 21st Century.....	36
Introduction to chapter 3.....	36
The Divided Brain: Insights from Iain McGilchrist.....	37
Trauma and the Body: Bessel van der Kolk's Perspective.....	41
Towards a Holistic Vision: Dr. Gabor Maté's Contributions.....	46
A Personal Perspective on Holistic and Integrative Medicine.....	51
Chapter 4 - Humanistic Medicine.....	53
Introduction to chapter 4.....	53
Biodanza introduction.....	54
Biodanza Definition.....	60
Empiricism and Scientific Research in Biodanza.....	62
The Biocentric Principle and Systemic Integration.....	64
Healthy Identity and Authenticity.....	69
Santiago Theory and Structural Coupling.....	72
The Power of Group Dynamics in Identity Reinforcement.....	76
Humanistic Medicine and Human Health.....	81
A Personal Perspective: Structuring Moments.....	82
Final Words - Monograph Conclusion.....	86

Introduction

The pursuit of mental health and well-being is a deeply personal and complex journey, one that often encompasses a variety of therapies and approaches to healing. In this monograph, "Healing the Divided Self: Exploring Biodanza as a Humanistic Path to Mental Health and Well-being," I share my unique perspective and experiences in seeking mental health through various treatment modalities, ultimately discovering the profound impact of Biodanza on my life.

My personal journey towards healing began with a long-standing battle with Complex Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (CPTSD), which led me to explore numerous therapeutic approaches over the years. From alternative medicine to conventional mainstream methods, through to Biodanza, I immersed myself in a variety of treatments in search of lasting relief. While some provided temporary respite, it was upon my return to Biodanza in 2011, after a nine-year hiatus, that I became fully aware of the transformative shift Biodanza provided me in my overall health.

In order to fully appreciate the unique qualities of Biodanza, I embarked on a comprehensive exploration of mainstream therapies such as cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), psychoanalysis, and antidepressants. This investigation led me to delve into the philosophical foundations of modern medicine and contrast them with the humanistic principles of Biodanza. As a result, I developed a deeper understanding of the different approaches to mental health and well-being, allowing me to better articulate the distinctiveness of Biodanza.

In this monograph, I strive to strike a balance between the academic rigor of research and the personal, introspective nature of my experiences. Although the initial chapters focus on the historical and philosophical context of conventional medicine and mental health treatments, my personal journey with Biodanza remains the cornerstone of the narrative. My aim is to engage readers, whether they are Biodanza educators and enthusiasts, or the general public, in a discussion about the benefits and limitations of conventional therapies, as well as the unique aspects of Biodanza.

It's worth mentioning that I don't aim to present Biodanza as a universal solution, or perpetuate the idea that it's solely based on esoteric concepts and therefore biased and lacking scientific rigor. Instead, I want to share my personal viewpoint on how Biodanza, when combined with other therapeutic methods, has greatly influenced my mental health and overall well-being. Through an honest and unbiased account of my experiences, I hope to encourage a better comprehension and recognition of Biodanza as a distinct and beneficial approach to mental health and well-being.

This monograph serves as a testament to the power of Biodanza as a humanistic path to healing and the potential it holds for promoting mental health and well-being. Through a blend of academic investigation and personal reflection, I invite readers to join me on a journey of discovery and healing, exploring the untapped potential of Biodanza as a transformative force in our lives.

About me and Biodanza

My Love Affair with Biodanza

In the depths of anxiety and depression in 1993, I stumbled upon Biodanza in Brazil. During that time, I struggled with an alcoholic mother, shouldered the responsibility for my 12-year-old sister, and sought help from a psychologist.

From 1993 to 2002, I immersed myself in Biodanza, attending weekly classes, life-changing workshops, culminating with the impactful Minotaur project workshop. This incredible journey propelled me towards newfound self-esteem, courage, and the strength to make life-affirming decisions. I left an abusive job, found peace of mind away from my alcoholic mother, and pursued an MBA despite financial challenges. My supportive facilitator, Veronica Swalf, stood by me through it all.

Moving to Australia in 2002 marked a nine-year hiatus from Biodanza. My mental health spiraled back into anxiety and depression, despite becoming deeply involved at different stages with philosophy studies, cognitive behavior therapy, Psychoanalysis, martial arts and social dancing. My marriage crumbled, and my overall well-being deteriorated. Anti-depressants offered no solace.

However, in June 2011, everything took a turn when I enrolled in the Biodanza School of Australia. In just a few months, I confronted the negative influences in my life, ended a failing marriage, and welcomed a new and loving partner. A couple of years later, while at the height of my IT career, I transitioned to a new job and pursued my aspiration of becoming an executive coach. This marked the beginning of what I now refer to as a "biocentric lifestyle" - a way of living where my focus is on prioritizing the things that nurture life within myself, others, and the world at large, above all else.

Throughout my life, having grown up with an alcoholic mother and a bipolar father, I suffered the constant effect of Complex PTSD. Although I tried various treatments like CBT, holistic therapies, and anti-depressants, none could penetrate the deepest layers of my psychological turmoil. Biodanza was different—it was the lifeline I needed.

In 2011, as I recommitted to Biodanza, I sought to understand its unique power. My findings are documented in this monograph—a testament to the incredible gift of Biodanza, the dance of life, from Rolando Toro Araneda.

How this monograph is organized

In this section, I explain the organization of my monograph to help readers understand the rationale behind each chapter and allow them to navigate the content more effectively.

Monograph Audiences

My monograph serves two main groups of readers. The initial group consists of Biodanza educators or didacts who are either interested in evaluating my understanding of the Biodanza system or seeking insights into how someone with 30 years of exposure to the system comprehends its theory.

The second audience comprises non-medical professionals and Biodanza enthusiasts who have a personal interest in mental health. In this case, my objective is to demonstrate how Biodanza sets itself apart from and enhances existing mental health therapies in a manner that no other individual approach has been able to achieve in my personal journey.

Sequence of Discoveries

The monograph follows a sequence of discoveries I made while managing my mental health challenges. It discusses the limitations of conventional mental health therapies, the emergence of new academic therapies, and presents Biodanza as a unique approach that transcends reductionist tendencies and expands the notion of holistic medicine. This sequence respects my personal history, informed by Freud and Jung's ideas of personal and collective unconscious, and expanded through the Biodanza concept of vital unconscious.

Chapter Summaries

- Chapter 1: Roots of Fragmentation and The Divided Self

This chapter aims to reveal the reasons why, psychologically speaking, humans end up with a divided sense of Self. I examine the philosophical roots of separation in human thought and cultural and religious influences that reinforced this behaviour, leading to this sense of fragmentation.

- Chapter 2: The Conventional Mental Health Landscape

In this chapter, I evaluate mainstream therapies, cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), psychodynamic therapy and antidepressant medications, and explore the shortfalls arising from their one-to-one basis and segregated approach to mind, body, and emotions.

- Chapter 3: Pioneering Holistic Approaches in the 21st Century

In this chapter, I examine the emergence of Integrative Medicine, which encompasses both conventional and complementary approaches, and delve into the work of three influential academics: Iain McGilchrist, Bessel Van der Kolk, and Gabor Maté.

- Chapter 4: Humanistic Medicine

In this chapter, I delve into the humanistic approach of Biodanza as a system that fills in the gaps left by both conventional and Integrative Medicine. As with Integrative Medicine, Biodanza highlights the need for the individual to be seen as a whole person and placing this need at its core. Biodanza however does this systemically and aims not only for mental health, or an integration of mind-body and emotions, but for a humanistic health, that incorporates all aspects of human existence.

Personal Experience and Academic Insight

In each chapter of this monograph, my aim is to maintain a balanced approach to the subject matter. To accomplish this, I provide evidence-backed facts, emphasizing scientific findings across various fields of human science. I then discuss the prevailing academic consensus on the topic, followed by my own anecdotal experience, which inevitably connects to my understanding of the Biodanza system.

This approach is not only based on my desire to present a balanced view of the topic and Biodanza, but also reflects my personal journey in finding emotional stability. Growing up, I didn't have healthy references from my parents for living an emotionally stable life.

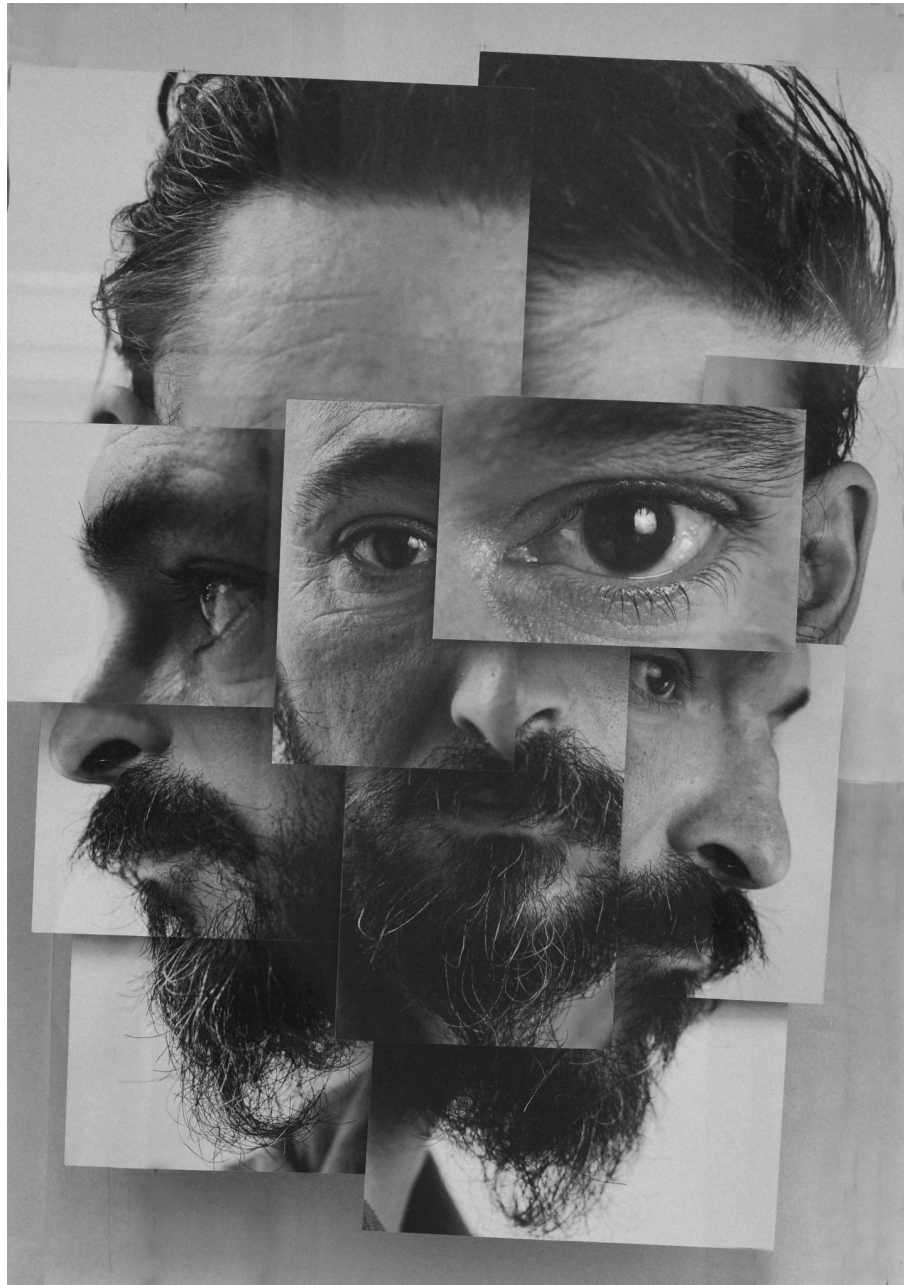
My perceptions were often put in doubt by the instability of my dad's bipolar disorder and my mom's alcoholic raging feats. This situation made it difficult for me to trust my own thoughts and feelings.

To find solace, I turned to philosophy and later during my university years, I added in the scrutiny of the scientific method. These two together allowed me to build a framework of thought that brought the emotional stability I needed without constantly gas-lighting and doubting myself. In other words, I learned from academia, a trustworthy and stable source, how human life is supposed to be and what limits and benefits each method, treatment or system of thought has to offer.

My attention then turned to becoming conscious of my actions and emotional reactions in living my life and to compare with what science and academia had to say. This process of critical self-reflection and comparison helped me to develop a greater understanding of myself and the world around me.

Through my personal experience, I have come to appreciate the value of combining personal experience with scientific research and academic consensus. This approach allows me to present a more complete view of the topics covered in this monograph and their relevance when related to the Biodanza theory. Therefore, in each chapter and section of this monograph, I present my anecdotal experience and conclusions. This presentation style allows readers to gain insight into how the ideas and concepts discussed in the chapter apply in a real-world context and how Biodanza assists this ontogenesis.

Chapter 1 - The Fragmented Self



Introduction to chapter 1

Chapter 1 of this monograph aims to reveal the reasons why, psychologically speaking, humans end up with a divided sense of Self.

It examines how Humanity went from perceiving reality as a whole and started making sense of the world in subparts. It delves into the historical development of the concept of duality, which has shaped various philosophical, cultural, and religious traditions.

The first section, "Philosophical Roots of Fragmentation," traces the origins of duality in different philosophical systems, from Taoism's Yin and Yang to Descartes' Cartesian dualism. This exploration provides insights into the evolution of human thought and our understanding of reality as separate phenomena.

The second section, "Cultural and Religious Antecedents," examines how the philosophical idea of duality has been embedded in the human experience through various cultural and religious practices. By analyzing ancient traditions and religions such as Chinese mythology, Greek mythology, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, and Hinduism, this section reveals the underlying theme of a lost paradise, representing humanity's separation from a state of harmony or divine unity. The examination of these stories and myths demonstrates the pervasive nature of dualism in our collective consciousness, shaping our perception of the world and our pursuit of solutions in a reality marked by contradictions.

These perceptions eventually lead us to see ourselves as divided entity from the world around us and the need to categorize to engage with reality.

Philosophical Roots of Fragmentation

Introduction to Duality in Philosophy



Eastern Philosophical Traditions: Taoism

The historical development of the notion of duality can be traced across various philosophical traditions, reflecting humanity's enduring fascination with the concept of opposing forces or elements shaping reality. In the context of Taoism, the principles of Yin and Yang laid the foundation for understanding the dual nature of reality and the balance that exists within it. Some essential works on this topic include Lau's translation of the Tao Te Ching (2003) and Kohn's anthology on Taoist experience (1993).

Eastern Philosophical Traditions: Buddhism, Hinduism, and Zoroastrianism

As we move forward in time, Eastern philosophical systems continued to explore the concept of duality. In Buddhism, the principle of dependent origination emphasized the interconnectedness of all phenomena, as described by Rahula in "What the Buddha Taught" (1974), a clear indication that at that stage, humans were already interpreting reality as separate phenomena and Buddhism was trying to address the effects of this way of thinking. Hinduism posited the union of consciousness and matter through the concepts of Purusha and Prakriti, which can be found in Radhakrishnan and Moore's "A Source Book in Indian Philosophy" (1957). Zoroastrianism, on the other hand, explored cosmic dualism, with an eternal struggle between the forces of good and evil, as discussed by Boyce in "Zoroastrians: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices" (2001).

Ancient Greek Philosophy: Pythagoreanism and Plato

The Western tradition's exploration of duality can be traced back to ancient Greek philosophy. The Pythagorean concept of harmony derived from opposites laid the foundation for later developments, as illustrated by Huffman's work on Philolaus of Croton (1993). Plato's theory of Forms further established the dualistic perspective by dividing reality into the material and the ideal realms, as evident in his "Complete Works" (1997).

Christian Dualism: The Soul and the Body

Christianity also embraced duality, particularly in its understanding of the soul and the body. This perspective, which emphasizes the separation of the spiritual from the material, has had a profound impact on Western culture and philosophical thought. Key texts on this subject include Augustine's "Confessions" (1961) and Aquinas' "Summa Theologica" (1947).

Modern Philosophy: Descartes and Cartesian Dualism

Finally, the concept of duality culminated in the modern philosophy of Descartes. His famous statement "cogito, ergo sum" (I think therefore I am) formalized the mind as the synthesis of being, separating existence from the body. Cartesian dualism has been a cornerstone of modern philosophy, inspiring numerous debates and further developments in the study of the mind and consciousness. Essential works on this topic include Descartes' "The Philosophical Writings of Descartes" (1984) and Hatfield's "Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Descartes and the Meditations" (1998).

Academic Conclusion: The Evolution of Duality and its Impact on Human Thought

This investigation into the evolution of duality offers significant insights into the origins and development of human thought, as well as how we perceive and comprehend the world around us. Tracing the journey from the Taoist principles of Yin and Yang to Descartes' Cartesian dualism, this historical analysis emphasizes the central role that duality and separation play in various philosophical traditions. Ultimately, these concepts have become fundamental in shaping our understanding and interpretation of human experiences.

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Cultural and Religious Influences on Fragmentation

Introduction: The Intersection of Philosophy, Religion, and Culture in Dualism



While philosophical antecedents, such as Taoist principles of Yin and Yang and Descartes' Cartesian dualism, lay the groundwork for understanding the idea of duality, it is through religion and culture that these ideas come to life and influence human behavior. Religion and culture, defined here as the values people collectively adhere to when living together, play a critical role in shaping how individuals act. By investigating the connections between philosophical origins and the cultural-religious expressions of dualism, we gain a deeper understanding of the human pursuit for meaning in a world defined by contradictions, with particular emphasis on the practical impact of these ideas on everyday life.

The philosophy of dualism discussed in the previous section can then be observed as having deep roots in human history, appearing in numerous ancient religious and cultural traditions.

This enduring idea posits that reality is composed of opposing forces or principles, which manifest in various ways. One common theme throughout these traditions is the idea of a

lost paradise, a place or state of existence from which humanity has become separated. Here we will explore the cultural and religious antecedents of dualism by examining five ancient traditions and religions: Chinese mythology, Greek mythology, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, and Hinduism. Each of these traditions and religions offers a unique perspective on dualism and the loss of paradise, but their collective stories reflect the broader human tendency to interpret reality by categorizing it into parts.

Chinese Mythology: Pangu, Nuwa, and the Cosmic Order

Chinese mythology offers an insightful starting point for our exploration of dualism, as it features the story of Pangu and Nuwa. In this myth, Pangu, a primordial being, separates the heavens from the earth, thereby creating the dualistic cosmic order of Yin and Yang (Wu, 1990). Nuwa, a goddess, then shapes humanity from the earth's clay, imbuing them with both divine and earthly qualities. The myth of Pangu and Nuwa demonstrates how dualism is expressed in Chinese cosmology, with the contrast between heaven and earth, Yin and Yang, and the divine and the mundane.

Greek Mythology: The Myth of Pandora and the Dualistic Nature of Existence

Greek mythology offers another example of dualism in the myth of Pandora. In this story, the first woman, Pandora, is created by the gods and given a jar containing all the world's evils. When she opens the jar, these evils are unleashed, forever separating humanity from the idyllic, paradise-like existence they had previously enjoyed (Hesiod, 700 BCE/1988). Here, dualism is exemplified by the contrast between the prelapsarian world, which was free from suffering and strife, and the postlapsarian world, marked by pain and adversity. The myth of Pandora serves as a metaphor for the dualistic nature of human existence, in which both positive and negative experiences coexist.

Zoroastrianism: The Struggle Between Good and Evil and the Loss of Paradise

Zoroastrianism, an ancient Persian religion, also demonstrates the concept of dualism through the story of the fall of Gav and Gav-Evadat. In Zoroastrian cosmology, Ahura Mazda, the supreme god, represents the force of good, while Angra Mainyu embodies the force of evil (Boyce, 1984). The myth recounts that Gav, a primordial bovine, was killed by Angra Mainyu, leading to the creation of Gav-Evadat, an idyllic paradise. However, when humans entered this paradise, they were deceived by Angra Mainyu into performing evil acts, causing the loss of Gav-Evadat (Dhalla, 1938). This story illustrates the dualistic struggle between good and evil, as well as the loss of an earthly paradise that results from humanity's moral transgressions.

Buddhism: The Buddha's Journey and Transcending Dualism

Buddhism offers a different perspective on the theme of the lost paradise through the story of the Buddha leaving his palace. Born into a life of luxury, Prince Siddhartha Gautama eventually renounces his royal status to seek the truth about the nature of existence (Strong, 2007). After witnessing suffering and death, he realizes that life is marked by impermanence and suffering (dukkha). Siddhartha's departure from his palace symbolizes his rejection of a false, illusory paradise in pursuit of a deeper understanding of reality. The Buddha's eventual attainment of enlightenment under the Bodhi tree reflects his transcending of the dualistic nature of worldly existence, achieving a state of spiritual unity and harmony (Nhat Hanh, 1999).

Hinduism: Maya, Cosmic Illusion, and the Underlying Unity of Existence

Hinduism, another Eastern tradition, explores the concept of dualism through the idea of Maya, the cosmic illusion that veils the true nature of reality (Radhakrishnan & Moore, 1957). Within this framework, the phenomenal world is perceived as an interplay of opposing forces, such as good and evil, pleasure and pain, or light and darkness. However, these dualities are ultimately seen as illusory, obscuring the underlying unity of existence represented by Brahman, the ultimate reality (Zaehner, 1966). In Hinduism, the loss of paradise is not a historical event, but rather a state of spiritual ignorance that can be overcome through the pursuit of knowledge and self-realization.

Conclusion: The Cultural and Religious Expressions of Dualism and the Human Psyche

In conclusion, the cultural and religious antecedents of dualism can be found in a diverse array of ancient traditions, such as Chinese mythology, Greek mythology, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, and Hinduism. These traditions share a common theme of the loss of paradise, representing humanity's separation from a state of harmony or divine unity. This symbolism can be understood as a natural cultural consequence of the human propensity to interpret existence as a duality of forces.

Throughout history, humans have sought to make sense of the world and their place in it by categorizing reality into parts. This tendency to perceive dualities is deeply ingrained in our psyche, shaping the stories and myths that form the backbone of our religious and cultural traditions. By examining the diverse expressions of dualism in ancient religions and mythologies, we gain valuable insights into the ways in which the human mind grapples with the complexities of existence and therefore ends up separating himself from the world.

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A Personal Perspective on the Fragmented Self

At the age of 15, my perspective on life took a significant turn when I received a birthday card bearing the message, "Happiness is not in others, it is within us," even though it was mistakenly attributed to Confucius. This profound statement prompted a shift in my focus from solving my parents' problems to self-reflection and personal exploration.

Motivated by this newfound outlook, I embarked on a journey of self-discovery, immersing myself in the study and practical application of various philosophical ideas. I delved into Buddhism, explored the teachings of Osho, engaged in disciplines such as Jiu-Jitsu and Aikido, and voraciously consumed self-help literature. This pursuit led me to complete a course in comparative philosophy within the classical tradition, which eventually enabled me to become a teacher and co-found a branch of that philosophical school after my move to Australia in 2002.

Among the many influential moments along my path, encountering Aristotle's "Nicomachean Ethics" held particular significance. Through this work, I learned that the true happiness, referred to as eudaimonia by the Greeks, was the ultimate aim of human life and was thought to be attained by leading a virtuous existence. Aristotle's philosophy emphasized the importance of aligning our actions with our highest ideals and values. Fleeting emotions were viewed with skepticism, while virtues such as courage, wisdom, justice, and generosity were held in utmost esteem. Aristotle believed that these virtues could be developed through practice and habituation, offering the promise of personal

growth and a more fulfilling life.

However, as I adopted these beliefs and emphasized the mind's control over emotions, an unintended consequence emerged in my mid-20s. The separation of experiences into categories of good and bad, driven by societal expectations, further exacerbated the division within my sense of Self. This division not only affected external perceptions but also disrupted my existential aspirations as a young man.

Chapter 2 - The Conventional Mental Health Landscape

Introduction to chapter 2



Chapter 2 delves into the evolution of medicine and its deep-seated connection to the dualistic nature of philosophy, religion, and culture. As medicine developed, it embraced the dualistic worldview, compartmentalizing the human being into distinct parts in order to better understand the intricate workings of the human body and mind. This fragmentation was driven by the human tendency to interpret reality through dualities, which is evident in various philosophical, religious, and cultural contexts as seen in chapter 1.

The influence of dualism on the development of medicine has shaped the way healthcare professionals approach the treatment and understanding of human health. By breaking down the human being into smaller components, medicine has achieved remarkable advancements, yet it has also led to a reductionist view of health and well-being. This perspective may inadvertently overlook the interconnectedness of the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual aspects of a person's health, hindering the development of a more effective approach to healing.

In this chapter, we will examine the effects of this fragmented view in what is now referred to as mental health and then evaluate the top two most prescribed evidence based modalities of treatment in Australia, the UK and the USA: Antidepressants and Cognitive Behaviour Therapy.

Dissecting the Fragmented Healing Process

The Roots of Fragmentation in Medicine

The science of medicine has long been rooted in the understanding of the human body as a complex system composed of individual parts and organs, each serving specific functions. This approach can be traced back to the Renaissance, a period marked by a rapid surge in scientific knowledge, intellectual curiosity, and an increasing objectivist and rationalist worldview (Porter, 1999). As a result, many aspects of a person's existence were neglected. For instance, the emotional dimension of human beings was often considered a mere byproduct of our biology, rather than an integral aspect of our well-being.

The Dualistic Legacy of Descartes and Freud

The dawn of the modern era saw the rise of scientific and rational thought, with great minds such as René Descartes laying the foundation for a dualistic understanding of the world, separating the mind from the body (Descartes, 1641/1984). This distinction set the stage for a medical approach that focused on the physical aspects of human health, while largely disregarding the emotional, spiritual, artistic and many other human dimensions.

It was not until the 19th century that the idea of treating mental conditions or illnesses gained traction, primarily through the work of Sigmund Freud (Freud, 1895/1955). Freud's psychoanalytic approach emphasized the importance of the unconscious mind and the role that unresolved conflicts and repressed emotions played in the development of psychological disorders. However, the 20th century saw a renewed focus on the biological underpinnings of mental illnesses, with treatments increasingly centered on pharmacological interventions and talk therapy (Kandel, 1998).

Limitations of the Scientific Method and the Reductionist Approach

One major limitation of the scientific method, as it has been applied to biological experiments, is its inherent disregard for emotional measures. The reductionist nature of

this approach often involves breaking down complex phenomena into smaller, more manageable components, making it difficult to account for the interconnectedness of biological, psychological, and social factors (Engel, 1977). This has resulted in a medical system that tends to view individuals as a collection of functional organs, rather than as unique, holistic beings.

As a result, the role of emotions in health and illness has often been overlooked or underestimated, with research and clinical practice primarily focusing on the identification and treatment of specific diseases or disorders (Cassell, 2004). This neglect of emotional factors extends to the design and implementation of biological experiments, which rarely take into account the cultural and religious beliefs that provoke emotions.

The Emergence of Integrative Medicine and the Biopsychosocial Model

The growing awareness of the limitations of this fragmented approach to medicine has led to the emergence of more integrative models that seek to address the whole person, rather than merely targeting specific symptoms or dysfunctions (Snyderman & Weil, 2002). One such approach is the biopsychosocial model, which posits that health and illness result from the complex interplay of biological, psychological, and social factors (Engel, 1977). This model acknowledges the importance of emotional factors in health and healing, and encourages researchers and clinicians to consider the individual as a whole, rather than merely focusing on isolated aspects of their biology.

Moving Past Cultural and Religious Dualism in Medicine

Despite a growing understanding of the importance of a more complete view of medicine, our cultural and religious beliefs often encourage a dualistic perspective. This perspective has greatly shaped the way medicine is viewed and practiced. Ideas such as Heaven and Earth have traditionally emphasized the notion that human experience can be neatly separated into distinct parts (Kaptchuk, 2000). This dualistic mindset has led to a medical system that focuses more on treating individual organs and functions, rather than gaining a broader understanding of the human body as a unified entity.

Specialization and the Fragmentation of Healing

The fragmentation of modern medicine can also be seen in the way that specialization has come to dominate the field, with physicians and researchers often focusing on narrow areas of expertise (Ludmerer, 2015). This trend has undoubtedly led to significant advances in our understanding and treatment of specific diseases and disorders.

However, it has also contributed to a fragmented system of healing that can struggle to address the complex, interconnected nature of health and illness.

The Future of Integrative Medicine and Holistic Approaches

In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of incorporating emotional, cultural, and spiritual factors into our understanding of health and healing (Puchalski et al., 2009). This has given rise to the field of Integrative Medicine, which seeks to combine the best of conventional and complementary therapies, while also emphasizing the importance of patient-centered care, preventive measures, and the cultivation of a strong therapeutic relationship between patient and practitioner (Maizes et al., 2009).

Integrative Medicine represents a promising step towards a more holistic approach to healthcare, which acknowledges the uniqueness of each individual and the importance of addressing the full spectrum of their needs – physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual. However, significant challenges remain in the quest to overcome the deeply entrenched cultural and religious notions of duality that have shaped the development of modern medicine (Kaptchuk, 2000).

Conclusion

The development of modern medicine as a fragmented system of healing can be traced back to the Renaissance and the rise of objectivist and rationalist thinking. This approach has led to significant advances in our understanding and treatment of specific diseases and disorders but has also resulted in a medical system that often fails to appreciate the complexity and interconnectedness of the human experience.

The cultural and religious notion of duality, reinforced by objectivism, has further contributed to this fragmentation, preventing medicine from finding treatments that consider the human being as a whole in all of its expressions, not just as an isolated group of biological entities. The growing awareness of these limitations has led to the emergence of more integrative and holistic models of care, such as the biopsychosocial model and the field of Integrative Medicine. While these approaches represent important steps towards a more comprehensive understanding of health and healing, there is still much work to be done in overcoming the deeply ingrained cultural and religious notions of duality that continue to shape our medical system.

Ultimately, a truly humanistic approach to medicine will require not only a shift in clinical practice and research methodology but also a fundamental reevaluation of our cultural and philosophical assumptions about the nature of the human experience. The

interdependence of all that is part of the human expression is essential when treating the individual as a human being.

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The Role of Depression and Antidepressants

Building upon the previous discussion on the fragmented nature of modern medicine, this section will explore the consequences of this fragmentation in the treatment of mental health conditions, particularly with regard to the use of antidepressants. We will delve into the limitations and potential drawbacks of these medications and emphasize the need for a more integrative approach to mental health care.

The Rise of Antidepressant Use and Growing Concerns



The early 21st century witnessed a growing health crisis in the form of depression, with antidepressants becoming the most widely prescribed class of drugs, even in the absence of active promotion by pharmaceutical companies (Kirsch, 2010). The rise of antidepressant use, particularly selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) and other similar medications, has been accompanied by an increasing awareness of the limitations and potential drawbacks of these drugs, as well as a growing body of research questioning their efficacy in treating depression and other mental illnesses (Cipriani et al., 2018).

The widespread prescription of antidepressants can be traced back to the 1980s, with the introduction of SSRIs such as Prozac (fluoxetine) (Healy, 1997). These medications were hailed as a major breakthrough in the treatment of depression, as they were believed to be more effective and have fewer side effects than earlier generations of antidepressants, such as tricyclics and monoamine oxidase inhibitors (MAOIs) (Baldwin et al., 2016). The popularity of SSRIs soared, and by the turn of the century, they had become the most commonly prescribed class of drugs in many countries, including the United States (Kessler et al., 2005).

Effectiveness of Antidepressants and the Chemical Imbalance Theory

In recent years, however, new scientific research and meta-analyses of existing studies have called into question the effectiveness of antidepressants in treating depression and other mental illnesses. A number of these studies have found little evidence to support the notion that antidepressants are significantly more effective than placebos in ameliorating symptoms of depression (Kirsch et al., 2008). Additionally, concerns have been raised about the potential side effects of these medications, including weight gain, sexual dysfunction, and an increased risk of suicide in some populations (Fergusson et al., 2005).

Despite these concerns and the growing body of evidence questioning the efficacy of antidepressants, they continue to be heavily prescribed by healthcare professionals. One possible explanation for this phenomenon is the influence of pharmaceutical companies on medical education and practice, as well as the pervasive belief that depression is primarily a result of a chemical imbalance in the brain that can be corrected with medication (Lacasse & Leo, 2005).

While it is true that antidepressants can help alleviate the symptoms of depression for some individuals, they do not address the underlying societal, cultural, and emotional factors that contribute to the development of depressive disorders. In many cases, the focus on pharmacological interventions has overshadowed the importance of addressing the root causes of depression, such as adverse life events, trauma, social isolation, and the influence of cultural beliefs and values on emotional well-being (Horwitz & Wakefield, 2007).

The Need for an Integrative Approach to Depression Treatment

The reliance on antidepressants as a primary treatment for depression can be likened to the use of analgesics like paracetamol or ibuprofen to mask the pain caused by a broken bone. While these medications can provide temporary relief and allow the individual to function more effectively, they do not address the underlying cause of the pain or facilitate the healing process. Similarly, the use of antidepressants may help to alleviate depressive symptoms in the short term, but they do not address the deeper emotional and psychological factors that contribute to the development and persistence of depression. In some cases, this reliance on medication may even be counterproductive, as it can discourage individuals from seeking other forms of treatment that may be more effective in promoting long-term recovery and well-being (Hollon et al., 2005).

There is a growing consensus among mental health professionals that a more holistic and integrative approach to the treatment of depression is needed, one that takes into account the complex interplay of biological, psychological, and social factors that contribute to

the development of depressive disorders (Andrade et al., 2018). Such an approach may include a combination of evidence-based psychotherapies, lifestyle interventions, and, when appropriate, pharmacological treatments. Importantly, this approach recognizes that the treatment of depression is not a one-size-fits-all endeavor and that individualized care is essential to address the unique needs and circumstances of each patient (DeRubeis et al., 2014).

Conclusion: Shifting the Paradigm in Mental Health Care

In conclusion, the extensive use of antidepressants, particularly SSRIs, to treat depression over the past several decades has been accompanied by a growing awareness of their limitations and potential drawbacks. The continued prescription of these medications, despite a lack of robust evidence supporting their efficacy, highlights the dangers of a fragmented approach and the need for a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the causes and treatment of depression.

By adopting a more integrative and holistic approach to mental health care, we can better investigate the underlying emotional and cultural factors that contribute to depressive disorders, rather than relying solely on medication to mask symptoms. Ultimately, this shift in perspective and practice will be essential in promoting the long-term recovery and well-being of individuals struggling with depression and other mental health challenges.

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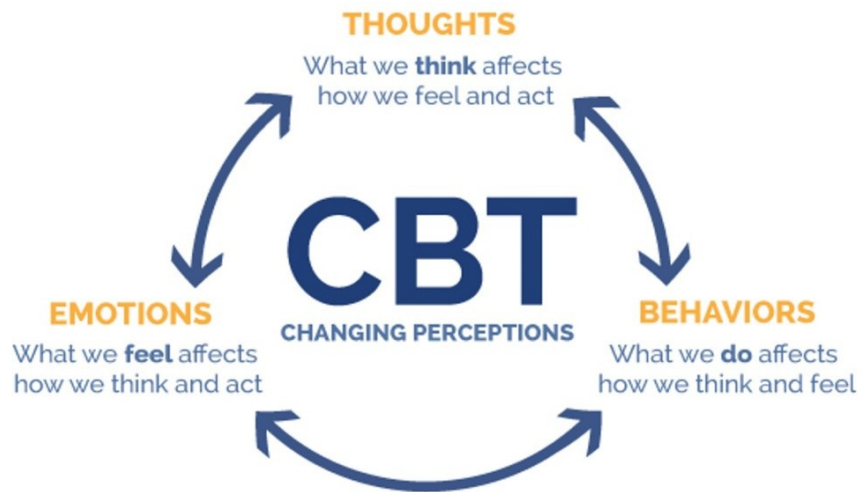
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Cognitive Behavioral Therapy: A Closer Look



In the previous section, we examined the complex nature of depression and the role of antidepressants in addressing its symptoms. As we further investigate the conventional mental health landscape, it is crucial to explore other therapeutic approaches, such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT). In this section, we will delve into the strengths and limitations of CBT, emphasizing the need for a more holistic and integrative approach to mental health care.

CBT has established itself as a popular and widely-used psychological intervention, largely due to its empirically proven effectiveness in treating a broad range of mental health conditions. However, as with any therapeutic modality, CBT is not without its limitations.

Benefits of CBT

CBT has a strong foundation in empirical research. A plethora of studies have demonstrated its effectiveness in treating various mental health conditions, such as depression, anxiety disorders, obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and eating disorders (DeRubeis et al., 2014; Cuijpers et al., 2013). Research indicates that CBT can lead to significant improvements in symptoms and overall functioning, as well as reduced relapse rates compared to other forms of therapy (Vittengl et al., 2007). These factors are the main reasons why CBT has been endorsed by leading mental health organizations, such as the American Psychological Association (APA) and the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) in the UK (American Psychological Association, 2017; National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, 2019).

In Australia, CBT is the only method considered by Beyond Blue to be safe enough to successfully address both anxiety and depression.

CBT is a structured, short-term intervention that typically lasts between 8 and 20 sessions (Beck, 2011). This format is appealing to many clients and clinicians, as it allows for a focused, goal-oriented approach to treatment. The time-limited nature of CBT also makes it a cost-effective option for those seeking therapy.

CBT emphasizes the development of practical skills and strategies to manage symptoms and improve overall well-being. This approach empowers clients by teaching them how to identify and challenge negative thought patterns and maladaptive behaviors (Dobson & Dobson, 2018). By fostering self-awareness and self-efficacy, CBT equips individuals with tools they can continue to use long after therapy has ended.

CBT's principles and techniques can be easily adapted to address the unique needs of different populations and conditions (McMain et al., 2018). This flexibility allows clinicians to tailor the therapy to the individual, enhancing its effectiveness. Furthermore, CBT can be integrated with other therapeutic modalities, such as mindfulness-based approaches, to create a more comprehensive treatment plan.

Shortcomings of CBT

While CBT is effective in addressing the cognitive and behavioral aspects of mental health conditions, it often fails to delve into the deeper, underlying causes of an individual's distress (Shedler, 2010). In some cases, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and complex PTSD, research has shown that the root of the problem may lie in the nervous system's dysregulation (van der Kolk, 2015). In these instances, CBT's primary focus on thoughts and behaviors may not be sufficient to address the true source of the issue.

CBT's primary focus on cognition can sometimes lead to neglect of other important factors that contribute to mental health, such as emotions, relationships, and cultural contexts (Hayes & Hofmann, 2018). By concentrating solely on thoughts and behaviors, CBT may fail to address the complexity and multidimensionality of human experience. This limitation may leave some clients feeling unheard or invalidated, ultimately hindering the therapeutic process.

Furthermore, although CBT has proven effective for a range of mental health issues, its efficacy in treating severe or chronic conditions, such as schizophrenia or borderline personality disorder, is less established (Tarrier & Wykes, 2004).

Dropout rates

Another potential shortcoming of traditional CBT is that its success largely depends on the client's willingness and ability to actively engage in the therapy process (Fernandez et al., 2015). This requirement may pose challenges for individuals who struggle with motivation, concentration, or insight. In cases where individuals face overwhelming adversity, emotional and nervous system activation may make it difficult, if not impossible, to retain engagement in treatment (Porges, 2011). An alternative is to leverage the power of the group. Group CBT can offer social support, promote a sense of belonging, and facilitate observational learning from peers who share similar struggles (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). However, traditional CBT may not place enough emphasis on the potential benefits of group dynamics and social bonding.

There is a substantial body of research comparing the effectiveness of group CBT to individual CBT and other group therapy treatments. Overall, the findings suggest that group CBT is an effective treatment for various mental health conditions, although the specific advantages of group CBT compared to individual CBT or other group therapy treatments may vary depending on the condition being treated.

On Depression, a meta-analysis by Cuijpers et al. (2013) found that group CBT was as effective as individual CBT, with both modalities resulting in significant reductions in depressive symptoms. Additionally, group CBT was found to be more effective than other group therapies, such as psychodynamic group therapy and interpersonal therapy groups.

On Anxiety Disorders, a meta-analysis by Norton and Price (2007) revealed that group CBT was similarly effective as individual CBT. The authors noted that the effect sizes were somewhat larger for individual CBT but not significantly different from group CBT.

Deciphering Dropout Rates: Engagement Challenges in Group CBT

When it comes to PTSD and other conditions that have roots in the emotional, nervous, or endocrine systems, the research on the effectiveness of group CBT is not so conclusive. A meta-analysis by Sloan et al. (2013) found that group CBT was effective in reducing PTSD symptoms, with moderate to large effect sizes (*).

However, individual CBT showed somewhat larger effect sizes compared to group CBT. The authors also noted that dropout rates were higher in group CBT compared to individual CBT, suggesting that some individuals may find it challenging to engage in group settings for trauma-related issues.

Other studies have examined dropout rates in CBT and explored factors contributing to patient attrition. While it is challenging to attribute dropout rates solely to the lack of willingness and ability to actively engage in the therapy process, several studies have identified factors that may contribute to attrition in CBT, such as motivation, therapeutic alliance, and severity of symptoms (Fernandez et al., 2015). Fernandez et al. (2015) conducted a meta-analysis examining dropout rates in CBT and found that the overall dropout rate was 19.7%. The study identified several factors, including a lower therapeutic alliance, greater severity of symptoms, and lower socioeconomic status. Westra et al. (2016) also examined the effects of integrating motivational interviewing with CBT and the results showed reduced dropout rates compared to standard CBT, suggesting that addressing motivation may improve engagement and reduce attrition in therapies.

While these studies do not directly measure dropout rates due to the lack of willingness and ability to actively engage in the therapy process, they do highlight the importance of considering factors such as motivation, therapeutic alliance, and symptom severity when examining patient attrition.

Conclusion

In summary, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) is a well-researched and widely-endorsed therapeutic modality with numerous benefits. Its structured, time-limited nature, emphasis on skill-building, and adaptability make it a popular choice for clients and clinicians alike.

However, it is important to acknowledge that CBT is not without its limitations. Its focus on cognition and behaviors may leave some underlying causes unaddressed, and its efficacy in treating severe mental health conditions remains less established, with dropout rates of roughly 20% (Fernandez et al., 2015).

CBT relies strongly on the patient's willingness to remain engaged and doesn't harness the power of the group or community in a systemic way. This aspect, in particular, poses a challenge for public health systems in finding enough medical practitioners to attend to public demand.

To address these limitations and move towards a more holistic and integrative approach to mental health care, it may be beneficial to consider incorporating additional therapeutic modalities that focus on emotional processing, relational dynamics, and the broader sociocultural context. Integrative approaches that combine CBT with other evidence-based treatments, such as psychodynamic therapy, acceptance and commitment therapy, or mindfulness-based interventions, can provide a more

comprehensive and personalized treatment experience for individuals with complex mental health needs.

Furthermore, exploring the potential benefits of group therapy formats, where individuals can benefit from the support and shared experiences of peers, can enhance the therapeutic process and help mitigate issues related to dropout rates. Group CBT, when properly implemented and facilitated, can offer a sense of community, validation, and social connection that may contribute to better treatment outcomes.

As the field of mental health continues to evolve, it is essential to recognize the value of evidence-based practices like CBT while also embracing a broader perspective that considers the unique needs and experiences of individuals seeking treatment. By integrating different therapeutic approaches, tailoring treatments to the individual, and fostering a collaborative and supportive therapeutic environment, we can strive to provide more effective and comprehensive care for individuals facing mental health challenges.

NB:

(*) Effect sizes are statistical measures that quantify the magnitude of a treatment's impact. In the context of research studies, effect sizes help assess the practical significance of the findings. They provide information about the strength and direction of the relationship between the intervention (in this case, CBT) and the outcome measures.

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A Personal Perspective on Conventional Mental Health Treatments

My journey with mental health began at 25 years old, with my initial exploration into psychoanalysis. At the time, I was in the throes of battling with tobacco and sex addictions. Psychoanalysis offered me some understanding of the roots of these compulsions, providing a valuable tool for prevention and management. It was a process that required me to acknowledge my fears, desires, and insecurities, and led to a level of self-understanding that I believe was crucial for managing my addictions.

However, at this stage of my life, the dualistic worldview inherent in conventional medicine was most evident. The focus was on the symptoms - my addictions - while largely ignoring the complex interplay of biological, psychological, and sociocultural factors that contributed to my struggle. In this sense, the treatment was inherently reductionist, treating the parts without addressing the whole.

Fast forward to my 40s, I started with CBT but saw little benefit in the practice. I then reverted to a psychoanalysis treatment that was instrumental in resolving marital issues. However, during this period, my sex addiction had returned. It was a stark reminder that mental health is not a linear journey, but rather one that ebbs and flows, with setbacks and progress intertwined.

The reappearance of my addiction, despite the psychoanalytic intervention, spoke to the limitations of a one-size-fits-all approach. It hinted at the presence of a more complex underlying issue, which was later identified as Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (CPTSD) resulting from growing up with an alcoholic mother and a bipolar father. This revelation was a clear indication that psychoanalysis alone could not address the nuances of my psychological trauma.

When I was prescribed antidepressants at 45, I experienced firsthand the potential downsides of this commonly prescribed treatment. After a single dose, I encountered severe side effects: my senses were numbed and I suffered immediate memory loss. The effects were so intense that I couldn't recall dance steps I had been teaching for the past five years, forcing me to stop teaching until the effects wore off.

This encounter with antidepressants brought into sharp focus the concerns I have raised in my theoretical discussion on this chapter: that the use of these medications can be a double-edged sword. While they can offer relief for some, the potential for adverse side effects and the lack of a holistic understanding of the individual's context can lead to outcomes that are less than satisfactory.

My experiences, I believe, underscore the importance of a holistic, integrative approach to mental health treatment. They highlight the limitations of a dualistic, reductionist perspective and point to the need for treatments that respect and address the complex interplay of the biological, psychological, and sociocultural aspects of a person's health.

In summary, my personal journey with mental health treatments, both psychoanalysis and medication, intertwines with and reflects the theoretical perspectives discussed in this chapter. The limitations and benefits of these approaches, as experienced by me, provide a testament to the complexities of mental health treatments and the need for a more broad and nuanced approach.

Chapter 3 - Holistic Approaches in the 21st Century

Introduction to chapter 3

In the previous chapters, I explored the foundations of fragmentation, delved into the conventional mental health landscape, and examined the limitations of mainstream therapies such as cognitive behavioral therapy and antidepressant medications. Recognizing the need for a more comprehensive approach to mental health, this chapter investigates the emergence of pioneering holistic therapies in the 21st century.

Drawing from the insights of Iain McGilchrist, Bessel van der Kolk, and Dr. Gabor Maté, I will discuss the importance of adopting an integrated, whole-person perspective when addressing mental health challenges. This chapter will delve into the theories and contributions of these trailblazing figures in the field, showcasing how their work complements and enriches one another, ultimately providing a more nuanced understanding of the human experience.

Furthermore, I will examine the broader societal implications of adopting a holistic approach to mental health. This includes exploring the role of social determinants of health, the impact of childhood trauma, and the importance of early intervention and community-based resilience. By integrating these concepts, I aim to pave the way for finding more effective, empathetic treatments and a new paradigm for mental health and well-being.



The Divided Brain: Insights from Iain McGilchrist

Iain McGilchrist: Reviving the Holistic Approach to Mental Health

In this section I delve into the work of Iain McGilchrist, a renowned psychiatrist, and author whose research on brain lateralization offers valuable insights into the divided nature of human experience. McGilchrist emphasizes the importance of the right hemisphere of the brain in fostering mental well-being, advocating for a more holistic and balanced approach to mental health that incorporates the arts and humanities. His work serves as a crucial reminder that the road to healing mental health disturbances must involve a comprehensive understanding of the human experience that transcends duality.

Iain McGilchrist has made substantial contributions to the field of mental health through his exploration of the importance of the right hemisphere of the brain and its role in mental well-being. In his seminal work, "The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World" (2009), McGilchrist provides a comprehensive examination of the relationship between the two hemispheres of the brain and how their interaction influences human experience, behavior, and mental health. His work emphasizes the significance of a balanced and holistic approach to mental health that incorporates the arts, humanities, and emotions, drawing on historical practices that involve community engagement and a deeper understanding of the human condition.

"There is a world of difference between the two cerebral hemispheres. Both are involved in almost everything we do but each has a type of

attention that it brings to the world. The brain is in many ways a metaphorical machine: it can understand things and see things in no other way than as a metaphor."

Iain McGilchrist



The Right Hemisphere and its Role in Mental Well-being

McGilchrist's investigation into the hemispheric asymmetry of the brain reveals that the right hemisphere plays a crucial role in mental well-being. Traditionally, the left hemisphere has been perceived as the dominant and more important hemisphere, responsible for language, logical reasoning, and analytical thought (Gazzaniga, 2000). In contrast, the right hemisphere has been associated with creativity, intuition, and emotion (Ramachandran, 1998). However, McGilchrist's work reveals that this simplistic understanding of the brain's lateralization is insufficient.

In "The Master and His Emissary," McGilchrist (2009) demonstrates that the right hemisphere possesses a unique ability to process information in a holistic and contextual manner, allowing individuals to understand the world and their place in it more comprehensively. This capacity for integration and synthesis enables the right hemisphere to play a critical role in empathy, emotional intelligence, and interpersonal relationships, all of which are essential for mental well-being (McGilchrist, 2009).

McGilchrist (2009) argues that contemporary Western society has become

overly reliant on the left hemisphere's analytic approach, leading to a fragmentation of experience and a reduction in the ability to perceive and appreciate the interconnectedness of life. This imbalance contributes to the rise in mental health issues, such as anxiety, depression, and loneliness, as individuals struggle to find meaning and connection in their lives (McGilchrist, 2009).

A Balanced Approach to Mental Health

McGilchrist's work advocates for a more balanced approach to mental health that values the contributions of both the left and right hemispheres while incorporating elements of the arts and humanities. This approach acknowledges the importance of engaging the right hemisphere in therapeutic practices to foster mental well-being. McGilchrist (2009) argues that the integration of the arts, humanities, and emotions into mental health care can help address the underlying causes of psychological distress by promoting personal growth, self-reflection, and a deeper understanding of the human experience.

Historically, various cultures have recognized the importance of the arts and humanities in promoting mental health and well-being. For instance, Aristotle believed that engagement with the arts, particularly tragedy, could lead to emotional catharsis and moral insight (Aristotle, 1995). Similarly, the ancient Greeks employed theater as a form of therapy, using plays to explore human emotions and relationships in a communal context (Meineck & Goldstein, 2019). McGilchrist's approach seeks to restore this historical recognition of the therapeutic potential of the arts and humanities in mental health care.

Evidence of Effectiveness

There is a growing body of empirical evidence supporting the effectiveness of incorporating arts and humanities-based interventions in mental health care. Several studies have demonstrated the benefits of engaging with the arts, such as music therapy, visual arts therapy, and dance/movement therapy, in reducing symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress, as well as improving overall well-being (Stuckey & Nobel, 2010; van Westrhenen & Fritz, 2014; Karkou & Sanderson, 2006).

Furthermore, research has shown that engaging with literature, philosophy, and other forms of humanities can enhance self-awareness, empathy, and emotional resilience (Djuric & Persic, 2020). For example, a study by Kidd and Castano (2013) found that reading literary fiction led to improvements in

Theory of Mind (ToM), a cognitive capacity closely related to empathy and social understanding. Similarly, a meta-analysis by Matarasso (1997) concluded that community-based arts projects could lead to improved social cohesion, self-esteem, and mental well-being.

McGilchrist's work has also inspired the development of innovative therapeutic approaches that incorporate elements of the arts and humanities, such as bibliotherapy (using literature to promote personal growth and emotional healing), philosophical counseling (using philosophical inquiry to address psychological distress), and narrative therapy (focusing on the stories people construct about their lives and experiences) (Cohen et al., 2018; Raabe, 2001; White & Epston, 1990).

Conclusion

Iain McGilchrist's contributions to the field of mental health have revitalized the importance of a holistic approach that emphasizes the crucial role of the right hemisphere of the brain and its involvement in mental well-being. By advocating for the integration of the arts and humanities into mental health care, McGilchrist's work restores historical practices that foster community engagement, self-reflection, and emotional healing.

The evidence supporting the effectiveness of his approach in practice is compelling, with numerous studies demonstrating the benefits of arts-based interventions and humanities-focused therapies. As mental health care continues to evolve, McGilchrist's insights and contributions serve as a valuable reminder of the need to maintain a balanced and comprehensive perspective on the human experience, acknowledging the essential role of both hemispheres of the brain in promoting mental health and well-being.

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Trauma and the Body: Bessel van der Kolk's Perspective

Introduction

In the previous section, we discussed the groundbreaking insights from Iain McGilchrist, who emphasized the importance of a holistic approach to mental health, advocating for the integration of the arts and humanities into mental health care. As we move forward, we will explore the work of Bessel van der Kolk, a pioneer in the field of trauma research, whose findings complement and expand upon McGilchrist's emphasis on the holistic approach.

This section will delve into van der Kolk's perspective on the complex relationship between trauma and the body, showcasing his seminal work, "The Body Keeps the Score," as well as other influential publications. We will examine how van der Kolk's research underscores the vital connections between the brain, mind, and body in the healing process, challenging the traditional mental health care practices that often focus solely on the mind.

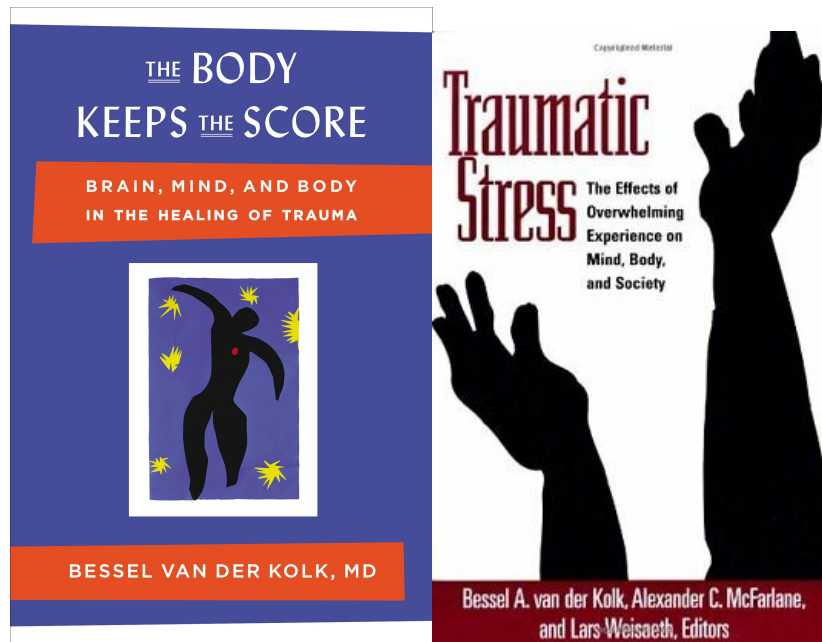
Furthermore, we will explore how van der Kolk's work aligns with McGilchrist's emphasis on integrating arts and humanities into mental health care. Van der Kolk's research on the neurobiological underpinnings of trauma highlights the importance of self-expression and emotional processing in the reintegration of disrupted neural pathways and healing. Innovative approaches to trauma therapy, such as somatic therapies, neurofeedback, and mind-body practices like yoga and mindfulness, will be examined as valuable components of a holistic treatment approach.

By bridging the gap between McGilchrist's insights and van der Kolk's perspective, this section aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how addressing the psychological, physiological, and social dimensions of mental health can lead to more effective and empathetic treatments for trauma survivors.

"As long as you keep secrets and suppress information, you are fundamentally at war with yourself...The critical issue is allowing yourself to know what you know. That takes an enormous amount of courage."

Bessel Van der Kolk

Three publications of Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma



In his seminal work, "The Body Keeps the Score," van der Kolk (2014) explores the ways in which traumatic experiences affect individuals at the physiological level. He posits that the body's responses to trauma often become deeply ingrained, resulting in lasting physical and emotional consequences. These consequences can manifest in various forms, including anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Van der Kolk's research emphasizes the importance of understanding the connections between the brain, mind, and body in the treatment of trauma. In doing so, he challenges traditional mental health care practices that often focus solely on the mind, neglecting the essential role of the body in the healing process. His work demonstrates that trauma is not just a psychological phenomenon but a physiological one as well, requiring a more comprehensive approach to treatment.

In "Traumatic Stress," van der Kolk and his colleagues (1996) delve deeper into the impacts of traumatic experiences on individuals and the broader society. They explore the complex interactions between psychological, biological, and social factors in the development and treatment of trauma-related disorders. The authors argue that understanding these interactions is essential for developing effective interventions that address the root causes of trauma and promote healing.

In his 2015 publication, "Assessment and Treatment of Complex PTSD," van der Kolk outlines the challenges faced in diagnosing and treating individuals suffering from complex PTSD (C-PTSD). This form of PTSD often arises from

prolonged exposure to trauma, such as childhood abuse, domestic violence, or extended periods of warfare (van der Kolk, 2015). The symptoms of C-PTSD can be more severe and persistent than those of traditional PTSD, making treatment particularly challenging.

Van der Kolk (2015) emphasizes the importance of a holistic approach to treating C-PTSD, incorporating not only psychological interventions but also targeting the physiological effects of trauma. He advocates for a combination of evidence-based treatments, including trauma-focused cognitive-behavioral therapy, eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR), and somatic therapies, among others. These approaches aim to address the complex interactions between the brain, mind, and body in trauma recovery, offering a more comprehensive path to healing.

Complementing Holistic Treatment Approaches

The integration of the arts and humanities into mental health care, as advocated by Iain McGilchrist, is an essential component of the holistic treatment approach promoted by van der Kolk. Both researchers recognize the importance of addressing not just the psychological aspects of mental health, but also the physical and social dimensions that contribute to overall well-being.

Art therapy, for example, offers a creative outlet for individuals to express and process their emotions, fostering self-reflection and emotional healing (Malchiodi, 2012). Engaging in creative activities can also help to regulate the body's stress response, reducing the physiological symptoms of trauma (Porges, 2017). Additionally, community engagement initiatives, such as support groups and community-based arts programs, can help to build social connections and reduce the isolation often experienced by trauma survivors (Mendenhall, 2012).

Van der Kolk's work on the neurobiological underpinnings of trauma further reinforces the importance of integrating arts and humanities into mental health care. His research demonstrates that traumatic experiences can lead to disruptions in brain function, including alterations in the neural pathways involved in emotional regulation, memory, and social cognition (van der Kolk, 2014). Engaging in activities that promote self-expression and emotional processing, such as art therapy or writing, can help to facilitate the reintegration of these disrupted neural pathways and promote healing (Stuckey & Nobel, 2010).

Innovative Approaches to Trauma Therapy

Bessel van der Kolk has been instrumental in developing and promoting innovative approaches to trauma therapy that recognize the interplay between the brain, mind, and body. These approaches include somatic therapies, which focus on the body's role in the healing process, as well as interventions that target the neurobiological mechanisms underlying trauma-related disorders (van der Kolk, 2014). For instance

- Somatic therapies, such as somatic experiencing (Levine, 1997) and sensorimotor psychotherapy (Ogden, Minton, & Pain, 2006), encourage individuals to engage with their physical sensations, emotions, and cognitive processes in order to process traumatic memories and promote healing
- Neurofeedback is another innovative approach to trauma therapy that has gained traction in recent years, in part due to van der Kolk's advocacy. (Fisher, 2014) & (van der Kolk et al., 2016)
- Yoga, mindfulness, and meditation have also been recognized as valuable tools in the treatment of trauma. These practices promote self-awareness and self-regulation, helping individuals to develop a greater sense of control over their thoughts, emotions, and physiological responses to stress (Follette, Palm, & Pearson, 2006)

Conclusion

Bessel van der Kolk's contributions to the field of trauma and mental health have significantly advanced our understanding of the complex interactions between the brain, mind, and body in the healing process. His research has shed light on the pervasive effects of trauma on both the individual and societal levels and has informed the development of innovative, holistic treatment approaches that address the root causes of trauma-related disorders.

Van der Kolk's work complements the advocacy of Iain McGilchrist for the integration of the arts and humanities into mental health care. Both researchers emphasize the importance of addressing the psychological, physiological, and social dimensions of mental health in order to promote healing and well-being. By incorporating evidence-based treatments, such as trauma-focused cognitive-behavioral therapy, EMDR, somatic therapies, and mind-body practices, along with the arts and humanities, mental health professionals can provide a comprehensive, holistic approach to care that meets the diverse needs of trauma survivors.

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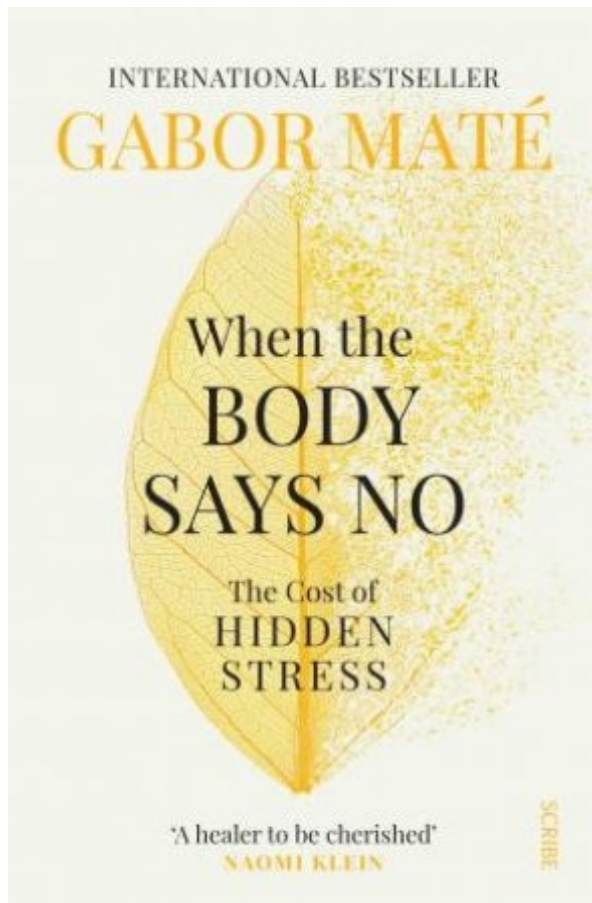
Towards a Holistic Vision: Dr. Gabor Maté's Contributions

As we have seen in the previous sections on Iain McGilchrist's and Bessel Van der Kolk's work, a holistic approach to mental health emphasizes the interconnectedness of the mind, body, and environment. Dr. Gabor Maté's work

aligns with this perspective, advocating for a comprehensive understanding of addiction and mental health issues by considering the broader context of an individual's life. In this section, we will explore Dr. Maté's holistic approach, focusing on how his ideas contribute to our understanding of the complex factors influencing human behavior and wellbeing.

"Trauma is not what happens to us, but what we hold inside in the absence of an empathetic witness."

Gabor Maté



The Foundations of Dr. Maté's Holistic Approach

Dr. Maté's work is centered on the belief that addiction and mental health issues cannot be adequately understood or treated without considering psychological, social, and biological factors. He posits that childhood trauma plays a significant role in the development of addiction and mental health

disorders. By examining the interplay between these factors, he encourages a more compassionate and empathetic perspective towards individuals struggling with these issues.

The Impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and Social Determinants of Health

One of the key tenets of Dr. Maté's approach is the acknowledgment of the role of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) in the development of addiction and mental health problems. Research supports this connection, with studies showing that individuals with a higher number of ACEs have an increased risk of developing substance use disorders, depression, and anxiety (Felitti et al., 1998; Dube et al., 2003). Dr. Maté argues that by addressing the root causes of addiction and mental health issues, such as childhood trauma, we can develop more effective and compassionate treatment approaches.

Dr. Maté also emphasizes the importance of considering the social determinants of health, which include factors such as income, education, employment, and social support. Research has shown that these determinants can have a significant impact on mental health and addiction (Marmot, 2005; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009). By recognizing the influence of these broader social factors, Dr. Maté's holistic approach encourages a more nuanced understanding of addiction and mental health, moving beyond the traditional focus on individual pathology.

The Mind-Body Connection

Another important aspect of Dr. Maté's work is his emphasis on the mind-body connection that inexorably links his work with Bessel Van der Kolk's one. Dr. Maté argues that physical and mental health are deeply interconnected, with psychological stress and trauma manifesting in the body as chronic pain, immune system dysfunction, and other physical ailments (Maté, 2003). This perspective aligns with research demonstrating the connection between psychological stress and physical health (Cohen et al., 2007; McEwen, 2008). By acknowledging the mind-body connection, Dr. Maté's approach encourages a more integrative approach to treatment, considering the whole person rather than just the symptoms.

Addressing Critiques and Limitations

Despite the compelling aspects of Dr. Maté's work, some critics argue that his emphasis on trauma and social determinants may overlook other factors that contribute to addiction and mental health issues, such as genetic predisposition and neurobiological factors (Volkow et al., 2016). Additionally, there is a need for more empirical evidence to support some of his claims about the relationship between trauma and various physical and mental health disorders. Nevertheless, Dr. Gabor Maté's holistic approach has indeed resonated with many practitioners and researchers in the fields of addiction and mental health, inspiring further research and the development of innovative treatment methods.

For example, Harris and Fallot (2001) explored the concept of trauma-informed care in their work, emphasizing the importance of understanding and addressing the impact of trauma on mental health and addiction. Similarly, Dr. Bruce Perry, a renowned trauma expert, has developed the Neurosequential Model of Therapeutics (NMT), which emphasizes the importance of understanding the neurobiological effects of trauma and stress on the developing brain (Perry, 2009). Additionally, Dr. Peter Levine's Somatic Experiencing method focuses on the mind-body connection and offers a therapeutic approach to resolving trauma and stress-related disorders (Levine, 2010). These examples of research and practice demonstrate how Dr. Maté's work has influenced the broader field of addiction and mental health, encouraging a more holistic understanding and approach to treatment.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Dr. Gabor Maté's integrative approach to addiction and mental health aligns with the holistic perspectives of Iain McGilchrist and Bessel Van der Kolk, emphasizing the interconnectedness of psychological, social, and biological factors. While there is no single academic consensus on his work, his ideas have significantly contributed to our understanding of the complex factors influencing human behavior and wellbeing.

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A Personal Perspective on Holistic and Integrative Medicine

As I've alluded to earlier, my personal journey with CPTSD, resulting from a turbulent upbringing, made me realize the necessity of a more comprehensive, holistic approach to mental health treatment, as the psychoanalytic intervention alone was insufficient.

The theoretical foundations laid by Iain McGilchrist, Bessel van der Kolk, and Dr. Gabor Maté in Chapter 3 offer fresh insights that align with my lived experiences. McGilchrist's emphasis on the interconnectedness of our cognitive processes, van der Kolk's research on trauma's profound impact on the body, and Maté's insights on the pivotal role of early life experiences in shaping mental health, all reinforce the importance of a holistic approach to mental health.

My journey to healing was by no means linear. Over the years, I sought solace in the philosophy of stoicism and the discipline of martial arts, hoping that controlling my emotions would bring about happiness and fulfillment. Also, in my quest for connection and community, I immersed myself in the vibrant world of Brazilian social dance.

While these activities offered a temporary respite from my inner turmoil, they were not sufficient in addressing the deep-seated emotional wounds that stemmed from my childhood trauma. These practices, along with my busy work schedule, served as distractions, allowing me to avoid confronting the painful realities of my past. They were essentially forms of emotional numbing, similar to the numbing effect of the antidepressants I tried.

On the social dance experience, despite the applause and adulation I received from my students, I felt a deep void within me. The personal connections I made were surface-level, devoid of the deep, emotional intimacy that I craved. These connections were a mere facsimile of the unconditional

love and acceptance I yearned for since my childhood.



For sure, these Integrative Medicine practices offered a more comprehensive approach to my psychological challenges. I no longer was dependent solely on drugs and psychotherapy, I had a community around me and a sense of belonging, of being special. But after a few years, the cracks showed up. This sense of belonging and being special was conditional. It involved an inhuman amount of effort to give night time classes, perform in social parties and festivals, adding to my already highly demanding profession as Head of IT of a large multinational organization. My marriage challenges were not fully addressed and in fact the social dance commitments amplified the differences between me and my wife at the time.

When I turned 45, after months of couples therapy, on top of years of individual therapy, I returned to Biodanza. What I discovered then, goes far beyond what these holistic practices provided me. These findings will be explained in the last chapter of this monograph.

Chapter 4 - Humanistic Medicine

Introduction to chapter 4

“Give me an opportunity to live a healthy experience and my autopoiesis will take care of the rest”

- Claudio Gomes

In the previous chapters of this monograph, I have explored the historical influences shaping the understanding of mental health, the limitations of conventional therapies such as cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) and antidepressant medications, and the promising emergence of Integrative Medicine as a response to these limitations. I have acknowledged the significant contributions made by academics such as Iain McGilchrist, Bessel Van der Kolk, and Gabor Maté in broadening our perspective on the interconnectedness of physical, mental, and emotional health.

In Chapter 4, I delve into the humanistic approach of Biodanza, a system that I believe, fills in the gaps left by Integrative Medicine due to its historical underpinnings. As with Integrative Medicine, Biodanza highlights the need for the individual to be seen as a whole person and places this at its core. Furthermore, it extends the view of humans as part of a larger collective, both human and non-human. Biodanza embraces the idea that an individual's thoughts, emotions, and actions are intrinsically connected to their environment, personal history, and the histories of their family and community. By drawing upon the rich tapestry of the human experience and incorporating insights from anthropology, Biodanza offers a perspective that encompasses the entirety of a person's existence.

This chapter does not use Biodanza to discredit or replace the valuable work done by both conventional and Integrative Medicine researchers and practitioners. Instead, it proposes that Biodanza can complement and expand upon the achievements of these 21st-century medicine academics by integrating scientific rigor with a deep understanding of the human condition. The

Biodanza system's respect for the scientific method ensures that its approaches and techniques can be seamlessly combined with the existing repertoire of treatments.

As you explore the principles and practices of Biodanza in this chapter, you will discover a system that harmoniously blends the domains of humanities and science, offering a comprehensive and empathetic path towards health that goes beyond the categories of mental health and well-being. By recognizing the inherent interconnectedness of individuals, communities, and the environment, Biodanza presents a transformative and humanistic approach to healing the divided self.

Biodanza introduction

Biodanza is a therapeutic modality developed by Rolando Araneda Toro in the 1960s and 1970s. At its core, Biodanza is a system of human integration, personal growth, and self-discovery that utilizes movement, music, and interpersonal connection to stimulate the individual's inherent potentials for health, well-being, and self-realization. This section will provide an overview of the principles and practices of Biodanza and examine how it serves as a powerful counterpoint to traditional mental health philosophy, offering a more humane path towards healing and well-being.

A Humanistic and Integrative Approach

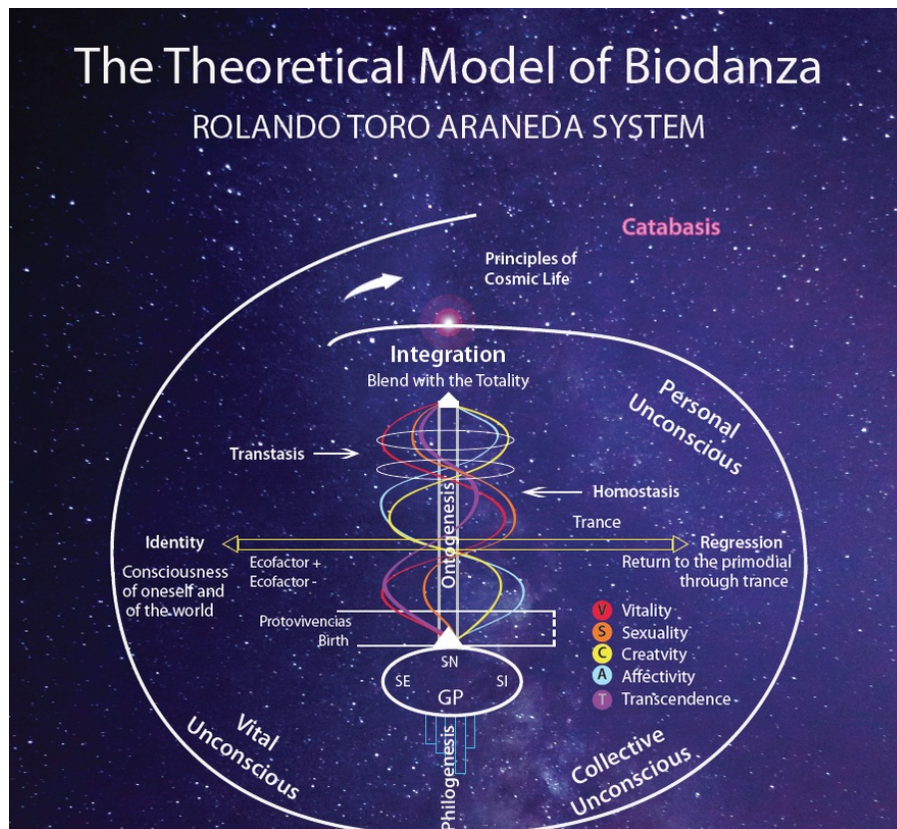
Biodanza operates from a biocentric outlook, which recognizes the mutual links between all living entities and the necessity to nourish life in its entirety. This viewpoint significantly differs from the Western mental health treatments that tend to be individualistic and reductionist, frequently focusing solely on the individual and treating symptoms rather than the root causes of distress.

Biodanza's main focus is to preserve the individual's unity of mind, body, and emotions while interacting with others. This integrative approach recognizes that our physical, emotional, and mental health are closely intertwined with our personal identities and our relationships with others. Therefore, efforts to enhance health and well-being should address these components together.

Given this perspective, the term "mental health" seems incongruent with Biodanza's philosophy. The human experience is an integrated one where the mind is inseparable from the entirety of its existence. As seen through the lens of Biodanza, there is no isolated "mental health", but rather a more

encompassing, holistic concept of health—Human Health.

The Theoretical Foundations of Biodanza



Several key concepts underpin the Biodanza model and its system. In this section I will mention the vital unconscious, the vivencia, and the five lines of vivencia.

Vital Unconscious

The concept of vital unconscious refers to the idea that our bodies possess an innate intelligence that regulates vital functions without our conscious awareness or control. This includes processes such as heartbeat, breathing, digestion, and hormonal regulation. These functions are essential for maintaining life, and the vital unconscious ensures that they occur automatically and seamlessly, without requiring conscious attention or effort.

The vital unconscious operates through a complex network of neurological,

hormonal, and physiological processes that are constantly adapting and responding to internal and external stimuli. This network is constantly monitoring and adjusting the body's internal environment to maintain homeostasis, or a state of balance and stability. For example, if the body becomes too hot, the vital unconscious will trigger sweating to cool down the body. Similarly, if the body is deprived of oxygen, the vital unconscious will stimulate breathing to increase oxygen intake.

While the vital unconscious operates largely outside of our conscious awareness, it can still be influenced by factors such as stress, emotions, and environmental conditions. For example, chronic stress can disrupt the body's hormonal balance, leading to a range of physical and mental health problems. Similarly, exposure to toxins or pollutants can interfere with the body's natural detoxification processes, leading to illness or disease. Understanding and supporting the vital unconscious is essential for promoting overall health and wellbeing.

By supporting the vital unconscious to express through movement and music, Biodanza helps individuals access their natural healing capacities and restore balance to their physical, emotional, and mental states, a process that in science is called homeostasis.

Vivencia

Vivencia is a philosophical concept that refers to the subjective experience of life, including our emotions, sensations, perceptions, and personal meaning. It emphasizes the importance of lived experience, and the unique ways in which each individual navigates the world and makes sense of their surroundings. Vivencia recognizes that our experiences are not objective facts, but rather are shaped by our own unique perspectives, histories, and contexts.

A crucial element of Vivencia is the "intensity of experience," which refers to the depth and emotional richness of an individual's interactions with the world.

Vivencia is closely related to phenomenology, a philosophical approach that seeks to understand the nature of experience and consciousness. According to phenomenology, our experiences are not simply a passive reflection of the world, but rather an active and creative process through which we construct meaning and understanding. Vivencia takes this further by emphasizing the personal and subjective aspects of experience, and the ways in which our

emotions, desires, and values shape our perceptions of reality.

Vivencia has implications for a range of fields, from psychology and therapy to art and literature. It suggests that in order to truly understand a person's experience, we must be willing to listen to their unique perspective and honor the complexity and richness of their lived reality. By embracing vivencia, we can deepen our empathy and compassion for others, and cultivate a greater appreciation for the diverse ways in which we all navigate the world.

The vivencia experience is a central component of the Biodanza process, referring to a lived experience that engages the individual on a deep, emotional and biological level. Through the use of carefully selected music and movement exercises, Biodanza induces this phenomena of vivencia that stimulates the individual's inherent potentials and facilitates human growth and transformation.

The Five Lines of Vivencia

The five lines of vivencia are a categorization created by Rolando Toro, to depict different expressions of the vivencia phenomena. By categorizing these expressions in five lines, it provides a framework for understanding the different types of experiences that Biodanza seeks to invite. These lines are:

1. **Vitality:** Experiences designed to energize and balance the neurovegetative system, enhance overall vitality, and promote a healthy, active lifestyle.
2. **Sexuality:** Experiences aimed at awakening and expressing healthy sexuality, fostering self-acceptance, and enhancing intimate relationships.
3. **Creativity:** Experiences that encourage self-expression, innovation, and the development of personal and artistic creativity.
4. **Affectivity:** Experiences focused on building emotional connections and bonds, fostering empathy and compassion, and enhancing social skills and relationships.
5. **Transcendence:** Exercises that help participants connect with the natural world, cultivate a sense of belonging to something greater than themselves, and develop a more profound sense of meaning and purpose in life.

By engaging in Biodanza exercises that induce these five lines of vivencia, participants can experience a wide range of benefits, including increased vitality, improved self-esteem, enhanced relationships, greater creative expression, and a deeper connection to the world around them.

The Role of the Group and the Facilitator



The group setting is an essential element of the Biodanza experience. There is no such a thing as a Biodanza on my own. The group is essential as it provides a supportive environment for participants to explore their emotions, connect with their bodies, and engage in meaningful relationships with others. The group acts as a safe container for personal growth and transformation, allowing individuals to break free from isolation and experience the power of community and social connection in the healing process.

In this context, a Biodanza session promotes the role of a facilitator, rather than the role of a therapist. The role of the Biodanza facilitator is to guide participants through the various exercises and vivencias, ensuring that the environment remains supportive, non-judgmental, and conducive to personal growth. Facilitators are trained to select appropriate music and movements that align with the objectives of each session, as well as to create a warm, welcoming atmosphere that fosters trust and emotional openness.

How Biodanza differs from conventional and alternative psychotherapy

Biodanza is more than just an alternative psychotherapy; it is an extension of the human sciences, incorporating elements from various disciplines such as art, philosophy, anthropology, and social sciences. Biodanza can operate on its own, and it also complements existing approaches to healing, with a focus on prophylaxis, existential rehabilitation, psycho-physical integration, re-education of affectivity, and treatment of mental and psychosomatic illnesses.

Biodanza is grounded in the belief that the focus should be on developing the potentials of health rather than starting from a point of illness, which

contrasts with the essence of traditional psychotherapy. To illustrate this, we can compare the fundamentals, objectives, instruments, and areas of application for both Biodanza and psychotherapy.

Fundamentally, psychotherapy is based on cognitive-verbal structures and experimental psychology, while Biodanza relies on cenesthetic-vivencial structures, i.e., what I feel and what I live, as well as an interdisciplinary approach. Psychotherapy is centered on the psychology of the personality, whereas Biodanza is focused on identity. Additionally, psychotherapy employs scientific language, while Biodanza utilizes both scientific and poetic language indiscriminately.

In terms of objectives, psychotherapy is strictly therapeutic with the goal of curing illness. Biodanza, on the other hand, has a strictly educational focus aimed at developing human potential, transforming individuals, and altering alienating cultural values. While psychotherapy seeks to make unconscious conflicts conscious, relying on verbal elaboration of conflicts, Biodanza aims to create a new sensitivity in life. Biodanza believes that the vital unconscious, whilst remaining unconscious, can deal with the conflicts by itself, provided positive ecofactors, such as an appropriate music, encounters, contact and caress are present.

The instruments employed in psychotherapy include diagnosis methods such as anamnesis, questionnaires, projective techniques, free association, and dream analysis. Biodanza, in contrast, uses music, movement, and vivencia. It also employs induction of vivencias through exercises with singing, dances, ceremonies of encounter, contact, and caress.

Psychotherapy's areas of application include neurosis, psychosis, behavioral and adaptive disorders, psychopathology, and mental deficiency. Biodanza, however, is designed for everyone, with a focus on expression of creativity, education and prophylaxis, existential rehabilitation, and organic self-regulation.

Unlike traditional psychotherapy, Biodanza avoids using diagnostic methods and medical classifications, such as those found in the DSM-5, which can put a person into a diagnostic box and may overlook unique aspects of their psychological experiences. These categorizations can limit the understanding of the individual and their complex human needs. Biodanza, on the other hand, takes a more person-centered approach, focusing on the individual's unique experiences by facilitating self-expression.

In summary, psychotherapy's essence lies in its therapeutic focus, starting from

the point of illness, and utilizing diagnostic methods and categories. Biodanza, on the other hand, has a pedagogic and therapeutic focus, is based on the study of the human being as a totality, and aims to achieve psycho-physical integration, existential rehabilitation and a re-education of affectivity - the capacity to feel.

Biodanza Definition



During the facilitator formation course, students are presented with an immense number of books that shape the ideas behind Biodanza system. These works, spanning various disciplines, contribute to a holistic understanding of human nature, interconnectedness, and the universe. The first set of these books is presented when Biodanza is defined in the first weekend of the course.

Rather than rewriting the Biodanza workbook text, I chose to present a resume of the books Rolando Toro refers to and make an analogy on how I understand

these books are reflected in the Biodanza system.

In "Entre le cristal et la fumée," Henri Atlan explores the concept of complexity and self-organization in living systems. This idea highlights the balance between structure and chaos in natural processes, emphasizing the importance of adaptability and flexibility in human life, which is reflected in Biodanza's fluid approach to movement and emotional expression.

"Wholeness and the Implicate Order" by David Bohm delves into the interconnectedness of the universe, proposing a new framework for understanding the world as a unified whole. This idea of interconnectedness is crucial in Biodanza, which fosters a sense of unity among participants and emphasizes the importance of relationships and social bonding.

Edgar Morin's works, "Le paradigme perdu: la nature humaine" and "La Méthode 2 - La vie de la vie," challenge traditional, reductionist views of human nature and life, advocating for a more complex and multidimensional understanding. These ideas align with Biodanza's holistic approach to human well-being, integrating mind, body, and emotions in the therapeutic process.

In "Synchronicity: The Bridge between Matter and Mind," F. David Peat explores the idea of meaningful coincidences and their potential implications for understanding the nature of reality. This concept can be related to Biodanza's focus on intuitive movement and the idea that seemingly unrelated events may have deeper connections.

"Autonomie et Connaissance" by Francisco Varela investigates the relationship between autonomy and knowledge in living systems. This work emphasizes the importance of individual self-regulation and personal growth, which are central to Biodanza's approach to self-discovery and empowerment.

Fritjof Capra's "La rete de la Vita" focuses on the interconnected web of life, suggesting that all living systems are part of a larger network. This idea of interconnectedness is fundamental to Biodanza's emphasis on community, relationships, and social support.

In "Atoms of silence: an exploration of cosmic evolution," Hubert Reeves discusses the origins and development of the universe, illustrating the deep interconnectedness of all existence. Biodanza embraces this concept by fostering a sense of unity and connection among participants.

"The Holographic Paradigm," featuring the work of Ken Wilber, Karl H. Pribram, and others, explores the idea that the universe operates like a hologram, where each part contains the whole. This perspective can be linked

to Biodanza's focus on the interconnectedness of mind, body, and emotions in the healing process.

Murray Gell-Mann's "The Quark and the Jaguar" investigates the relationship between the micro and macro aspects of the universe, emphasizing the complex interconnectedness of all phenomena. This idea is mirrored in Biodanza's holistic approach to well-being.

Paul Davies' "The Intelligent Design" examines the question of how life emerged from the physical universe, suggesting that there may be a deeper purpose and meaning to existence. This idea of a purposeful universe resonates with Biodanza's emphasis on the exploration of human potential and the quest for personal meaning and fulfillment.

Rolando Toro Araneda's "El Principio Biocéntrico" is the only book in the list that specifically relates to Biodanza. In this work, Toro outlines the fundamental principles of Biodanza, including the idea that all living systems have an inherent potential for growth and evolution, and that music, movement, and emotional expression can support well-being and self-realization. This book provides the theoretical and philosophical foundation for Biodanza and is considered a key text for facilitators and researchers.

Empiricism and Scientific Research in Biodanza

About Empiricism and Scientific Research

Empiricism is a philosophical doctrine that claims all knowledge is derived from sense-experienced phenomena. It's a cornerstone of the scientific method and rejects the notion of innate ideas or knowledge not directly accessible by experience. An empiricist believes that the only way we can know about the world is through our five senses.

Scientific research, on the other hand, refers to the systematic pursuit of new knowledge about the natural world. This process involves formulating hypotheses, designing and conducting experiments, collecting and analyzing data, and drawing conclusions. The results are usually subjected to peer review and replication to ensure their accuracy and reliability. The objective is to produce factual, unbiased, and verifiable information that adds to the body of knowledge on the subject of study.

Though seemingly distinct, these two concepts are deeply interconnected. The

scientific method, used in research, is essentially an application of empiricism. Empiricism drives the methodology of observation, experiment, and experience that fuels scientific research. In this sense, both uphold the critical value of evidence. Observations in scientific research are, in fact, sensory experiences that feed empirical knowledge.

However, a significant difference between empiricism and scientific research lies in their scope and functionality. Empiricism is a broader philosophical doctrine and a way of understanding knowledge, while scientific research is a particular way of applying empiricist principles. It involves other principles, too, like falsifiability and reproducibility, which don't necessarily apply to empiricism.

Research Origins of Biodanza

"To investigate Biodanza is like investigating a deep treasure in the ocean, or looking at an undefined universe full of incredible and beautiful miracles."

"Investigar en y con Biodanza es como investigar un tesoro profundo en el océano, o mirar un universo indefinido lleno de milagros increíbles y hermosos" (Stueck & Villegas. 2008)



Biodanza originated as an empirical practice in the 1960s and 1970s by Rolando Toro. Emerging primarily from shared sensorial experiences, Biodanza has evolved over the past decades, garnering academic attention and scientific scrutiny.

The initial research stages of Biodanza were characterized by informal observation, spearheaded by founders Toro, Maturana, and Varela. Through the years, noticing Biodanza was constantly being referred to as an "alternative medicine", due to lacking a substantive body of academic research, Rolando

Toro partnered with Marcus Stueck and Alejandra Villegas, both established Biodanza facilitators and Psychologists. They listed 5 research questions, aka Masterplan, which should be worked on:

1. Affectivity and Blood Pressure
2. Biodanza and Psychoneuroimmunology
3. Biodanza with children
4. Biodanza and epigenetic research
5. Biodanza and Biophotons

University of Leipzig Psychology Professor Dr. Stueck's research, compiled on the [Bionet.name website](#), has shed light on various of these aspects of Biodanza, namely:

1. Refinement of Biodanza's theoretical model.
2. Life science research on Biodanza's biological effects.
3. Quasi-experimental studies on weekly Biodanza classes.
4. Research on Biodanza's extensions.
5. Cross-cultural studies of Biodanza.
6. Evaluation of Biodanza teacher-training quality.
7. Studies on Biodanza's impact on children.

Over 30 papers have been presented since 1999 and these research areas have significantly improved our understanding of Biodanza, offering substantial evidence that supports its benefits and practice. Moreover, a PhD dissertation completed at Leipzig University in 2006 amplified this understanding by examining the effects and processes of Biodanza, focusing specifically on self-esteem and wellbeing.

As opposed to many dance practices such as social dancing, that promote wellbeing benefits purely from a subjective experience, Biodanza has transitioned from a practice rooted in sensory experiences to a scientifically-supported therapeutic method. The accumulated research underscores Biodanza's efficacy in enhancing mental health and wellbeing across various populations and contexts.

The Biocentric Principle and Systemic Integration

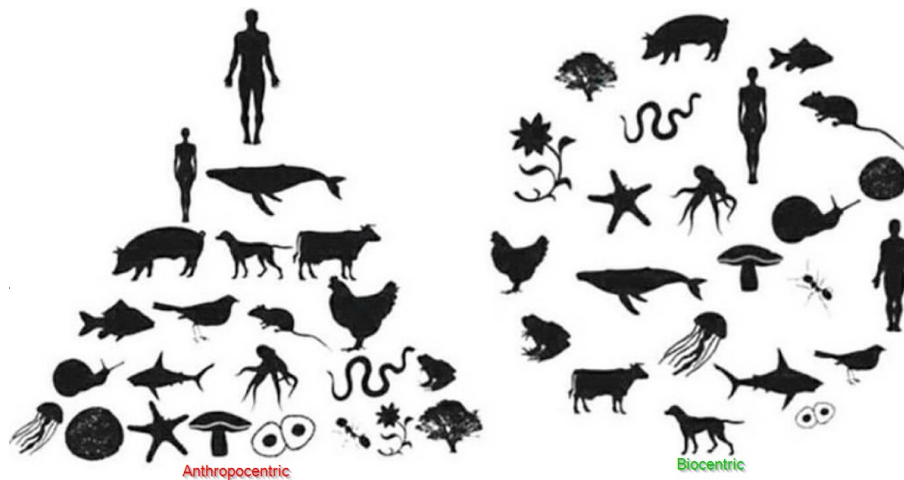
“The Universe exists because life exists”

Most of this monograph, highlights the historical influences shaping the understanding of mental health, the limitations that derive from it and the effects on conventional therapies such as cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) and pharmacological drug therapy.

While the 21st century Integrative Medicine has significantly advanced our approach to healing, its foundational research principles remain rooted in the same historical influences as conventional medicine. Both originate from the Renaissance era, leading to a shared pitfall: fragmentation. Both methodologies attempt to understand the human being in parts – conventional medicine examines human components in isolation, while Integrative Medicine aims to combine these parts into a cohesive whole. But what if, instead of dissecting the human into fragments for examination, we considered the human as an integrated whole from the outset?

The biocentric principle is a philosophy that highlights the interconnectedness and interdependence of all living organisms and their environments. This contrasts with anthropocentrism, which positions humans at the center of the universe. The biocentric principle acknowledges the inherent value of all life forms and strives to foster harmony and balance among them. In this dissertation, we will delve into the origins, motivations, and commendations of the biocentric principle from an academic standpoint. Ultimately, we will assert that the biocentric principle presents a more humanistic and integrative worldview than the fragmented and objectivist perspectives that have prevailed in Western thought since the Renaissance, Cartesianism, and the Industrial Revolution.

Origins of the Biocentric Principle



The biocentric principle can be traced back to various philosophical and spiritual traditions throughout history. Ancient civilizations, such as those in India, China, and the Americas, often embraced a worldview that recognized the interconnectedness of all living beings and their environments. For example, the concept of "ahimsa" in Indian philosophy, which advocates non-violence and respect for all living beings, can be seen as an early expression of biocentrism (Narayanan, 2008).

In Western philosophy, the biocentric principle began to emerge in response to the growing dominance of anthropocentrism during the Renaissance and Enlightenment periods. Thinkers such as Baruch Spinoza, Arthur Schopenhauer, and Albert Schweitzer each advocated for a more inclusive and holistic view of the world that acknowledged the intrinsic value of non-human life (Schweitzer, 1966). However, it was not until the 20th century that the biocentric principle gained widespread attention, with environmental philosophers such as Aldo Leopold (1949), Arne Naess (1973), and Paul Taylor (1986) developing comprehensive theories of biocentrism.

Motivations for the Biocentric Principle

The biocentric principle has emerged as a response to several concerns and challenges in modern society. Firstly, the environmental crisis caused by human activities has led to a growing awareness of the need for a more sustainable and harmonious relationship between humans and the natural world (Leopold, 1949). By emphasizing the interconnectedness and

interdependence of all living beings, the biocentric principle seeks to promote an ethic of care and stewardship that can help address the ecological challenges we face.

Secondly, the biocentric principle challenges the anthropocentric worldview that has dominated Western thought for centuries. This worldview has led to a fragmented and objectivist understanding of the world, in which humans are seen as separate from and superior to the natural environment (Taylor, 1986). By contrast, the biocentric principle promotes a more integrative and holistic perspective that acknowledges the interconnectedness of all life forms and their environments.

Praises of the Biocentric Principle from an Academic Perspective

From an academic perspective, the biocentric principle has been praised for several reasons:

1. **Holistic understanding:** The biocentric principle promotes a more holistic and integrative understanding of the world, recognizing the complex interrelationships between living organisms and their environments. This perspective is increasingly supported by scientific research in fields such as ecology (Odum, 1969), systems biology (Kitano, 2002), and complexity science (Mitchell, 2009), which demonstrate the interconnectedness and interdependence of natural systems.
2. **Ethical implications:** By recognizing the intrinsic value of all life forms, the biocentric principle provides a strong ethical foundation for environmental conservation and stewardship (Leopold, 1949). This approach challenges the anthropocentric ethic that has justified the exploitation and degradation of non-human life, and instead promotes a more compassionate and responsible relationship between humans and the natural world.
3. **Psychological and social benefits:** The biocentric principle has been linked to

improved psychological well-being and social cohesion (Rosenberg, 2015). Individuals who embrace this worldview are more likely to experience a sense of connection and belonging to the larger web of life. This sense of interconnectedness can foster empathy, compassion, and cooperation, leading to healthier and more sustainable communities.

4. Interdisciplinary approach: The biocentric principle encourages an interdisciplinary approach to understanding the world, recognizing that complex environmental problems cannot be solved through a single academic discipline. By promoting dialogue and collaboration between various fields, such as biology, ecology, philosophy, and sociology, the biocentric principle can help generate innovative solutions to the challenges we face (Naess, 1973).

Conclusion: The Biocentric Principle as a Humanistic Alternative

The biocentric principle offers a compelling alternative to the fragmented and objectivist worldview that has dominated Western thought since the Renaissance, Cartesianism, and the Industrial Revolution. By emphasizing the interconnectedness and interdependence of all life forms and their environments, the biocentric principle fosters a more holistic, integrative, and compassionate understanding of the world.

This humanistic perspective challenges the anthropocentric ethic that has justified the exploitation and degradation of non-human life, and instead promotes a more responsible and sustainable relationship between humans and the natural world. Furthermore, the biocentric principle encourages interdisciplinary collaboration and dialogue, fostering innovative solutions to the complex environmental challenges we face.

In conclusion, the biocentric principle provides a more humanistic and integrative worldview that can help guide us towards a healthier, more sustainable, and compassionate future. By embracing the biocentric principle, we can foster a greater sense of connection and belonging to the larger web of life, promoting empathy, cooperation, and stewardship for the well-being of all

living beings and their environments.

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Healthy Identity and Authenticity



During the late 20th century, a crucial aspect frequently overlooked in mental health treatments was the emphasis on cultivating a healthy sense of identity. Numerous academic theories and research findings underscore the connection between a robust sense of identity and positive mental health outcomes. A strong, coherent, and stable identity is associated with enhanced self-esteem, reduced anxiety and depression, and improved overall psychological well-being. The scholarly consensus highlights the significance of a healthy identity for mental health and psychological well-being, underscoring the role of a stable and coherent sense of self and the fulfillment of psychological needs in fostering positive mental health outcomes. Although the relationship between identity and mental health is intricate and shaped by a myriad of individual, social, and environmental factors, maintaining a healthy sense of identity is crucial for achieving a positive mental health state. The most relevant theories and concepts in this field are:

- Erikson's Psychosocial Theory of Development: Erik Erikson's theory emphasizes the importance of a strong sense of identity for psychological well-being. According to this theory, individuals go through eight stages of psychosocial development, with the fifth stage (adolescence) being

particularly crucial for identity formation. Successfully navigating this stage and developing a clear sense of self can lead to a stronger sense of psychological well-being. In a treatment context, this implies that helping individuals develop a strong sense of identity is essential for positive health outcomes (Erikson, 1950).

- Self-Determination Theory (SDT): Developed by Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan, SDT is a well-established theory in psychology that focuses on the role of intrinsic motivation and psychological needs (autonomy, competence, and relatedness) in personal well-being and development. According to SDT, when individuals' psychological needs are satisfied, they develop a more robust sense of self and experience greater psychological well-being. In the context of treatment, this suggests that attending to these psychological needs can contribute to more positive health outcomes (Ryan & Deci, 2000).
- Identity Status Theory: Developed by James Marcia, this theory is an extension of Erikson's work and proposes four identity statuses (identity diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium, and identity achievement) based on an individual's level of exploration and commitment to various aspects of their identity. Research on this theory suggests that individuals with a well-developed and stable sense of identity (identity achievement) tend to have better mental health and psychological well-being compared to those in other identity statuses. This finding highlights the importance of addressing identity development in treatment to promote positive health outcomes (Marcia, 1966).

Regrettably, conventional mental health treatments often neglect to measure a healthy sense of identity, primarily focusing on symptom reduction and management instead of nurturing a strong sense of self. In contrast, Integrative Medicine acknowledges the importance of a healthy identity, though it frequently remains limited to the individual level. Again, I propose a treatment approach that instead of trying to patch things, systemically incorporates this aspect, and addresses the intricate interplay of individual, social, and environmental factors influencing identity and mental health, from its philosophical and praxis roots.

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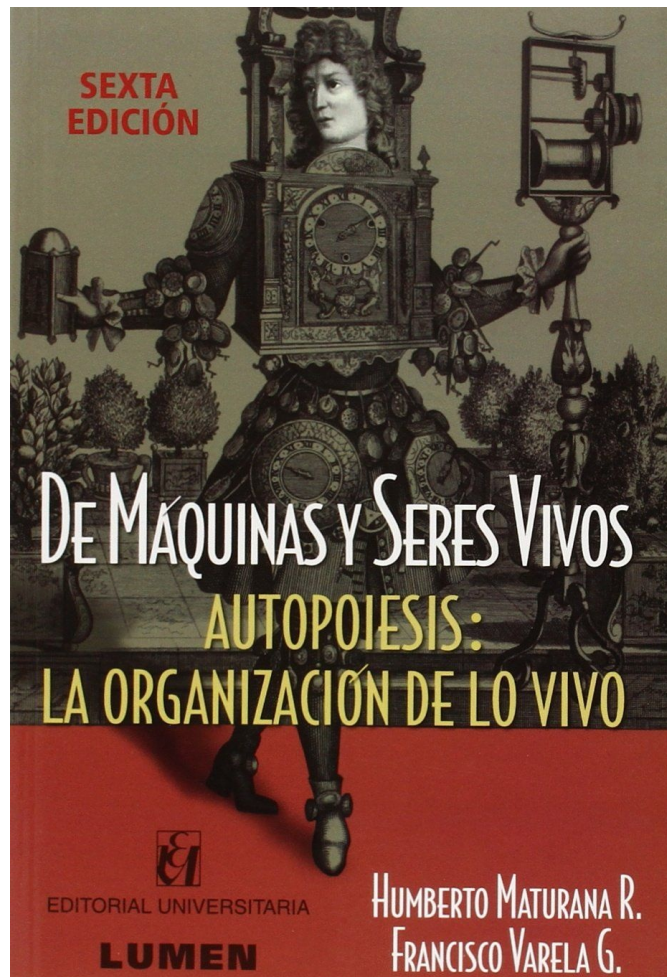
Santiago Theory and Structural Coupling

"Like the stars that adorn the night sky, we are interconnected constellations, each shining with its unique brilliance yet dependent on the collective light."

- Stan Grant Australian journalist, author, and television presenter.

"We are all strands of the same web, connected by the threads of life's intricate tapestry."

- Aboriginal Proverb



The Santiago theory of cognition or autopoietic theory of cognition, was developed by Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela in the 1970s.

At its core, the theory proposes that living organisms are self-organizing systems that are closed off from the environment but constantly engage with it through a process of "structural coupling." This means that organisms continuously generate and maintain their own structure through interactions with their environment, and in doing so, they also generate meaning and sense-making.

The concept of autopoiesis is central to the theory, referring to the self-generating and self-maintaining nature of living systems. According to Maturana and Varela, the defining characteristic of a living organism is its ability to continuously produce and regenerate its own components while maintaining its overall organization as a system.

From this perspective, cognition is seen as a biological process that arises from the interactions between the organism and its environment. Rather than being a representation of an objective reality, cognition is an embodied and situated process that emerges from the organism's ongoing interactions with its environment.

The Santiago theory has been influential in a range of fields, including biology, philosophy, psychology, and cognitive science. It has been applied to areas such as artificial intelligence, robotics, and cybernetics, and has influenced the development of other theories such as enactivism and embodied cognition.

Structural Coupling

Structural coupling is a concept that is central to the Santiago theory of cognition. It refers to the ongoing interactions between an organism and its environment that lead to the generation of meaning and the formation of a self-organized system.

According to the Santiago theory, living systems are structurally coupled to their environment in a way that allows them to continuously generate and maintain their own structure. The environment provides the system with the resources and constraints that it needs to maintain its organization, while the system generates meaning and adapts to changing circumstances through its interactions with the environment.

Structural coupling is often described as a circular process, in which the system and its environment are mutually dependent and continually influence each other. This means that the system is not simply a passive recipient of information from the environment, but rather an active participant in the process of generating meaning and adapting to changing circumstances.

In the context of human well-being, the concept of structural coupling emphasizes the importance of social and environmental factors in shaping individual experience and behavior. It suggests that humans are not separate from their environment, but rather are constantly interacting with and shaping it through their actions and perceptions. As such, interventions aimed at promoting well-being may need to take into account the broader context in which individuals are embedded, including social and environmental factors that may be contributing to stress or distress.

Applications

The Santiago theory has been applied to artificial intelligence and robotics by emphasizing the importance of embodiment and situatedness in cognitive systems. This means that cognitive systems, whether biological or artificial, need to be situated in an environment and must interact with it in order to generate meaning and adapt to changing circumstances.

In robotics, the theory has been used to develop robots that can adapt to changes in their environment and learn through interaction. For example, robots have been

developed that can learn to navigate through a complex environment by exploring and adapting their behavior based on feedback from their sensors. You might have experienced such system if you have seen a robot vacuum cleaner at a home.

In the field of cybernetics, the Santiago theory has been used to develop models of self-organizing systems and to study the emergence of complex behaviors in social systems. The theory has also influenced the development of artificial life and evolutionary robotics, which are approaches to modeling and simulating living systems and their evolution.

The Santiago theory has also influenced the development of other theories such as enactivism and embodied cognition. Enactivism, for example, emphasizes the role of action and interaction in cognition, and argues that cognition arises from the ongoing interactions between the organism and its environment. Embodied cognition emphasizes the importance of the body in cognition, and argues that the body plays a central role in shaping and constraining cognitive processes. Although not directly attributed to, this idea is also the philosophical underpinning of Bessel Van der Kolk and Gabor Maté as presented earlier in this monograph.

Overall, the Santiago theory has had a significant impact on a range of fields, from biology to philosophy, and has provided a framework for understanding the complex interactions between organisms and their environment.

Biodanza and The Santiago Theory

Rolando Toro was profoundly influenced by this theory when developing Biodanza and both Biodanza and the Santiago theory emphasize the importance of embodied experience and the interconnectedness of the individual with their environment. Biodanza is based on the idea that dance and movement can help individuals to connect with their bodies, emotions, and the world around them. The Santiago theory, suggests that cognition arises from the ongoing interactions between the organism and its environment, and emphasizes the importance of embodied awareness and situatedness.

In addition, both Biodanza and the Santiago theory view human well-being as a dynamic and ongoing process. The concept of Autopoiesis is inherit to the Biodanza theoretical model. Like a shoe that adapts to the feet and the feet that adapts to the shoe, we adapt to our environment and our environment in turn adapts itself to us.

This is the philosophical root of statements such as: “ My identity reinforces itself in the presence of another”. The Santiago Theory, their theories and models of autopoiesis and structural coupling complement the Biocentric principle and its own theories, to form

the values and guide the ethics, as in the way of systematically thinking and acting, of a Biodanza facilitator.

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The Power of Group Dynamics in Identity Reinforcement



In the contemporary world, the role played by a cognitive behavioral therapist can be likened to that of a behavioral engineer repairing malfunctioning psychological machinery (Hofmann, Asmundson, & Beck, 2013). This role is readily understood and embraced by people in technologically developed societies, where mental health treatment has become increasingly individualistic and detached from the collective experiences that have characterized human societies since time immemorial. Although psychotherapy is an invention of the 20th-century West, all known cultures have traditionally attempted to understand and treat psychopathology and mental disturbances by bringing the community together in healing rituals (Frank & Frank, 1991). These rituals provide the afflicted person with a sense of social support and solidarity, intrinsically assuming that the remedies for mental disturbance rely not only on the mind but on physical processes as well (Turner, 1967).

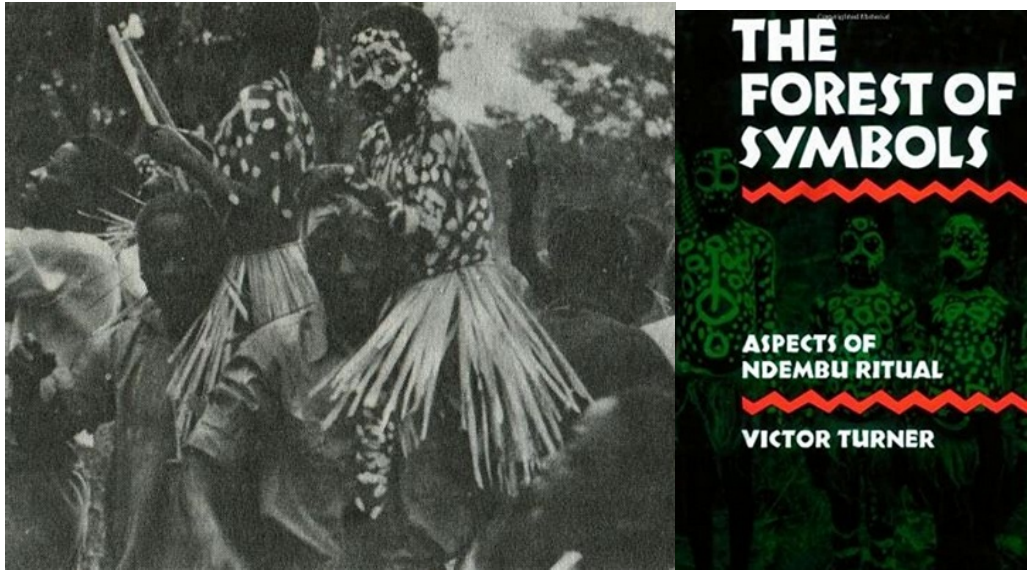
The shift towards individualistic mental health treatment began with the advent of the First Industrial Revolution, which transformed society in numerous ways, including the organization of labor and the way people interacted with each other (Mumford, 1961). As the world became more mechanized, so too did the approaches to mental health treatment, with the rise of therapies such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Bibliotherapy, and pharmacological interventions like anti-depressants, which do not require the individual to be in groups (Hofmann et al., 2013). This shift can be attributed, in part, to the increasing emphasis on efficiency and productivity, values that have driven the industrial and post-industrial societies (Ritzer, 1993). In this context, mental health treatment has largely become a means to restore individuals to their roles as functional and productive members of society, rather than addressing the root causes of their distress, which often lie

in the very structure of society itself (Horwitz, 2002).

The isolation that has characterized much of modern mental health treatment can have detrimental effects on patients, as numerous studies have demonstrated the importance of social connectedness for mental well-being (Cacioppo & Cacioppo, 2014). When individuals suffering from anxiety and depression become isolated, their symptoms often worsen, highlighting the crucial role of social support in recovery (Pfeiffer, Heisler, Piette, Rogers, & Valenstein, 2011). This is consistent with the work of Iain McGilchrist presented in the previous section, who advocates for the inclusion of humanities and arts when treating patients (McGilchrist, 2009). He argues that a reductionist approach to mental health treatment, which focuses solely on the brain and cognitive processes, fails to take into account the broader context of human experience, which includes the importance of social connections and cultural expressions.

Similarly, as mentioned previously in this monograph, Bessel van der Kolk's work on the effects of trauma emphasizes the importance of addressing the ways in which trauma is stored in the body, rather than simply focusing on cognitive processes (van der Kolk, 2014). His research underscores the need for a more holistic approach to mental health treatment that encompasses not only the mind but also the body and the emotions. This more integrative perspective aligns with traditional healing practices, which often involve the entire community and engage various aspects of human experience, from the physical to the emotional and the spiritual (Turner, 1967).

Case Study: Ndembu Ritual



In his groundbreaking anthropological work, "The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual," Victor W. Turner, a British cultural anthropologist, presents a detailed ethnographic study of the Ndembu people, a Bantu-speaking ethnic group living in what is now Zambia (Turner, 1967). The primary focus of the book is on the Ndembu's ritual practices, which Turner examines through the lens of symbolic anthropology. Turner's work explores the rich symbolism embedded within Ndembu rituals and the various ways in which these rituals function to maintain social cohesion and express cultural values. He introduces the concept of "social dramas" to describe the transformative processes that occur during these rituals, which often involve a movement from a state of social conflict or tension to one of resolution and harmony.

In one example, a patient held a position of power in the community, and the shaman listened to gossip and the patient's dreams, persuading the community to confess any grudges. After a ritual in which the shaman required the patient to shed blood, the mood became jubilant, and the people who were estranged for years joined hands warmly. This case illustrates the power of collective healing rituals in restoring not only the mental health of the individual but also the social fabric of the community.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the disconnection from collective healing opportunities that has characterized mental health treatment since the First Industrial Revolution has had significant consequences for both individuals and society as a whole. The

shift towards individualistic therapeutic modalities such as CBT, Bibliotherapy, and anti-depressants has largely neglected the importance of social connectedness and the complex interplay between mind, body, and emotions in the healing process. The work of Iain McGilchrist and Bessel van der Kolk highlights the need for a more integrative and holistic approach to mental health treatment that includes the humanities, arts, and an understanding of the ways in which trauma is stored in the body.

Moreover, the study of traditional healing practices, such as those of the Ndembu people, provides valuable insights into the potential of collective healing rituals to foster social cohesion, resolve conflict, and promote mental well-being. As our society continues to grapple with the challenges of mental health, it is essential that we critically examine the individualistic assumptions that underpin much of our current treatment approaches and consider how we might learn from and incorporate the wisdom of collective healing practices into our mental health care systems.

The rediscovery of the unity of mind, body, and emotions offers a promising way forward in addressing the limitations of individualistic mental health treatments that have arisen since the First Industrial Revolution. This is however not enough. By embracing the power of community, social connection, and the arts, we can work towards a more integrative approach to what's referred to as mental health that acknowledges the complexities of human experience and the importance of collective healing.

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Humanistic Medicine and Human Health

In this concluding chapter of the monograph, I shed light on the underpinnings of Biodanza theory. I introduced pivotal concepts like Vivencia and the Biocentric Principle, and elaborated on the crucial role a facilitator plays in aiding the healing journey. I also emphasized the importance of fostering a robust identity and authenticity as a powerful agent for overall healing and health. Drawing from the Santiago theory, I introduced the concept of structural coupling, underscoring the significance of another human's presence in any therapeutic intervention. We are not singular entities, and the impact of group dynamics on identity reinforcement is a phenomenon rooted deeply in our ancestral past, still evident today in indigenous cultures.

Biodanza system is grounded in empirical and scientific inquiry, and its substantial literature encompasses academic papers and the human sciences. We are more than just measurable data - we also encompass our thoughts, feelings, and actions, particularly those we perform in the presence of others. Consequently, elements such as history, philosophy, culture, and arts are all integral to our wellness.

Through this discourse, my intention was to highlight the distinct approach that Biodanza employs compared to Conventional and Integrative Medicine. Rather than dissecting individuals into separate facets, Biodanza fosters a harmonious integration of expressions. It champions the unity of thoughts, feelings, and actions, acknowledging that a person who thinks, acts, and feels cohesively is a person in good health.

Biodanza delves into the anthropological origins of humanity, welcoming the authentic expression of human archetypes through gesture and movement. Furthermore, Biodanza recognizes that a solid sense of identity is key to well-being, and this identity is an ever-evolving entity needing consistent reinforcement in the company of others. This becomes a systemic aspect intrinsic to the method. In Biodanza, there is nothing to avoid, no disease to seek out. The focus is on life-affirming, biocentric aspects. A facilitator looks for the wellness within each person and creates conditions to enhance it in the company of others.

In conclusion, it's time to move beyond categorizing our health as physical or mental. We are whole human beings, and our health is human health.

A Personal Perspective: Structuring Moments

Myrtes Gonzales: Structuring Moments Theory



In the last few years, I came in contact with the work of Myrtes Gonzales and her the theory of Structuring Moments.

Gonzales is a well respected Brazilian didact who practiced Biodanza for many decades and later became a Psychologist. In her investigations and experience as a facilitator, she noticed how people changed perceptions and behaviours based not on the ideas they had, but on the experiences they lived.

She highlights the significant impact of particular experiences, termed "experiential points of Vivencia," on a person's identity formation. Gonzales emphasizes that these intense moments, however brief, leave a lasting imprint, becoming part of an individual's identity structure. She believes that these points, related to human relationships, possess the potential to either construct or deconstruct personal identity depending on their

nature and how they are experienced.

Gonzales identifies five key points in her theory. She asserts that genuine eye contact, or the "Gaze," fosters deep connection, while a sincere "embrace" serves as an expression of trust, welcoming, and comfort. The power of the "praise" lies in its authenticity and qualification, distinct from hollow flattery. Gonzales views "play" as the pleasure and motivation derived from experiences, including work. Lastly, the "caress" symbolizes non-verbal communication through touch, conveying love, kindness, and affection. Gonzales concludes by stating these five elements, when experienced profoundly, can significantly contribute to structuring one's identity.

Key Points

- Gaze: A feeling of being seen and genuinely connected with.
- Embrace: A sincere, welcoming gesture that opens up our most vulnerable parts.
- Praise: Authentic and qualifying words that reveal admiration and respect.
- Play: The pleasure and motivation in experiencing something, including work.
- Caress: A non-verbal communication of love, kindness, and affection through touch.

Personal experience

My first encounter with Biodanza in 1993 was nothing short of an emotional deluge. The session started off innocuously enough, a gently undulating opening circle that quickly became the wellspring of a profound and unanticipated release. Just a few minutes into the dance, I found myself crumpled on the floor, a flood of tears freely flowing from me. The outpouring was met with warmth and acceptance. The dancers offered not just comforting glances, but also soothing touches and nurturing hugs. I had ventured into a space that permitted the sharing of the most fundamental human needs: To be seen, to be touched, to be embraced. This single session brought me face to face with a level of profound intimacy and connection that I had never known before.

And, this transformative experience had immediate ramifications. A mere week later, when my boss demanded I stay late, I found the courage to refuse. A yearning for the sense of belonging I had experienced in my Biodanza class won over my deeply entrenched fear of authority. For the first time in my life, I prioritized my needs over work, leaving my co-workers stunned by this newfound assertion of self-worth. Looking back, it was the gaze, embrace, and caress I received during the Biodanza class that had imbued me with an unshakeable sense of self-esteem.

The exchange with my boss was almost comical in hindsight. Our dialogue revolved around a single point of contention. He needed me to finish my work, and I needed to attend my Biodanza class. After what felt like an endless back-and-forth, my boss

attempted a different tactic—silence, accompanied by an expression of annoyance. I responded calmly, arranging to see him the next morning before leaving. The memory of this interaction underscores the transformative power of the gaze, embrace, and caress I experienced in Biodanza.

A few years later, in 1996, I was living in the same family home I'd grown up in. I shared the house with my mother and my younger sister, shouldering half the household expenses while trying to manage the tumultuous dynamic between my sister and our alcoholic mother. I had already rented an apartment but was struggling to muster the courage to break free from my childhood home. That was until the Minotaur Project, which coincided with my imminent 30th birthday.

During the Minotaur Project workshop, my birth was re-enacted—an unsettling experience as I found myself stuck halfway, only able to move forward after much encouragement and a final gentle push. It was a poignant reflection of my own birth, a difficult one that had necessitated a Caesarean section. The following Monday, I finally made the announcement to my mother—I was leaving. Ironically, my friend (and landlord) made an insightful observation that moving into the apartment was akin to "giving birth" to myself, noting I'd been renting the apartment for nine months. He was unaware of my Biodanza experience, making his words even more profound.

Fast forward to 2014, and I found myself navigating a demanding job as the Head of IT for a large multinational, supporting my partner's Biodanza classes, and also teaching social dancing for 15 hours a week. I yearned for the attention and praise that I never received from my parents, and found it in social dancing and professional success. But it wasn't enough.

One frosty winter morning in Canberra, I found myself participating in a Biodanza session. The theme for the day was "Opening Vital Spaces." I'd participated in this exercise numerous times before, each time throwing myself into it with gusto. But that day was different. I was too weary to move, but my vital unconscious was aflame with possibilities.

As the music progressed, I metaphorically opened a door nearby instead of charging at distant ones. As I stepped into this new space, I felt content and alive, not needing to chase distant dreams. Gaze, caress, and embrace followed, further cementing my

vivencia. In the following weeks, I closed my social dance school and dedicated my energy and teaching efforts to fostering Biodanza in Australia.

Final Words - Monograph Conclusion

"And the day came when the risk to remain tight in a bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom."

- Anais Nin.



As I gather my thoughts to conclude this monograph, I am met with a profound sense of gratitude. The journey of writing this document has spanned a decade, from the end of the Biodanza School of Australia in 2012, my initial discoveries and musings, to the final articulation of the experiences, theories, and insights that shape these concluding remarks.

What started as a process of self-discovery, informed by various philosophical ideas

and self-help literature, evolved into a deep exploration of the fragmented self. My early encounters with Aristotle's "Nicomachean Ethics" opened my eyes to the inherent value of leading a virtuous existence, a life driven by one's highest ideals and values. However, it also led to the unintended consequence of a divided sense of self, a division that disrupted my existential aspirations.

The journey of exploring conventional mental health treatments, such as psychoanalysis and medication, brought me face-to-face with the dualistic worldview inherent in mainstream medicine. My personal experiences with addictions, relationships, and the re-emergence of complex post-traumatic stress disorder (CPTSD) underscored the limitations of this dualistic, reductionist approach, but also the importance of a holistic, integrative approach to mental health treatment.

My exploration into holistic and integrative medicine shed light on the crucial role of the interconnectedness of our cognitive processes, the impact of trauma on the body, and the influence of early life experiences on mental health. Despite the various paths I pursued for solace and healing, including stoicism, martial arts, and Brazilian social dance, I discovered the essential role of human connection and community. However, these endeavours were merely emotional numbing strategies, masking the deep-seated emotional wounds from my childhood trauma.

Biodanza, as explored in the final chapter, has been an enlightening foray into a system that views individuals as a part of a larger collective. This humanistic approach, which seamlessly integrates scientific rigour with a deep understanding of the human condition, offers a comprehensive path towards health, going beyond the traditional categories of mental health and well-being.

Writing this monograph has been transformative in itself. My journey with Biodanza and the experiences I shared with more than a thousand individuals along the way have opened my eyes to a level of compassion I had previously not known. The system has offered me an affective reeducation that goes beyond understanding my feelings; it has taught me to recognise and learn from the emotions of others.

"We are an unfinished poem"

- Rolando Toro Aranedo

In these words I found the peace and inspiration I needed to conclude this work. This Biodanza journey, spanning 30 years of my life, has indeed been a *Vivencia*, an embodied, lived experience. It was only by accepting my incomplete understanding of life and its intricacies, and by embracing the notion that we are all 'works in progress',

that I was able to complete this monograph.

I wish to express my profound gratitude to my Biodanza mentors, peers, and the community, including **Veronica Swalf, Maria Lucia Pessoa Santos, Kate Clement, Catherine Borgeaud, and Heleen Fourie**, who guided, supported, and nurtured me throughout this journey. I would also like to acknowledge the invaluable contributions of the students of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Biodanza School of Australia, who brought their humanity, resilience and presence to this exploration.

My hope for you, dear reader, is that this monograph may serve as a catalyst for your own exploration, for gaining new insights into your own journey, and for understanding the human experience in all its complexity. The journey towards well-being is an ongoing process, filled with challenges, triumphs, learnings, and unlearnings. But at the heart of it, it is a journey towards understanding and embracing the totality of the human experience.

"The wound is the place where the Light enters you."

- Rumi

This journey, with all its pain, joy, discovery, and revelation, is indeed where light has entered me. And it is in sharing this light that I find purpose and meaning.

Keep dancing, keep discovering, and keep growing. The journey continues...