

A Psychology of Action: The Role of the Body in the Treatment of Trauma

November 21, 2008

BC Association of Specialized Victim
Assistance & Counseling Programs

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Procedural Memory

- Most human behavior is driven by procedural memory —memory for process and function— and is reflected in habitual, automatic responses and well-learned action patterns.

- Procedural memory includes functional actions (i.e., how to tie your shoes), as well as habitual, automatic processes and responses: movements, postures, gestures, autonomic arousal patterns.

Physical actions are
creating the context for
mental actions. Damasio, 1999

Functions of Boundaries

Containment

Capacity to acknowledge and tolerate various sensorimotor, emotional and cognitive states.

Protection

Capacity to safeguard the self from harm.

Screening

Capacity to select stimuli that are appropriate to take in and keep out stimuli that are inappropriate

Ogden, 1999

Boundary Styles

Underbounded:

Habits of passive□□□□□□; difficulty differentiating, saying “no”; collapsed body, softer muscular definition.

Overbounded:

Habits of active defense; difficulty with trust, intimacy, vulnerability, saying “yes”; tense musculature.

Vacillating Boundaries

The person swings back and forth from underbounded to overbounded.

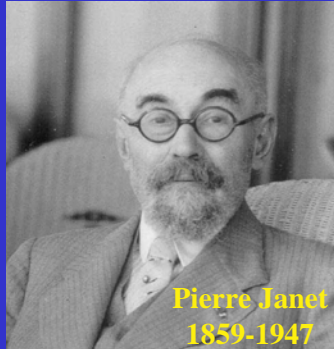
Incomplete Boundary

Boundary problems emerge in certain situations, such as in a love relationship, with authority figures, parents or children, men or women etc..

Ogden 1994

A Guiding Principle: Help Clients Execute “Acts of Triumph”

The patients who are affected by traumatic memories **have not been able to perform any of the actions characteristic of the stage of triumph.** (1925)



Social Engagement System Ventral Vagal Complex

facial muscles, larynx, middle ear; communication

Mobilizing Defenses: Increased SNS

Attachment Cry: voice, movement toward safe person

Flight: legs; movement away from source of threat

Fight: arms, shoulders; movement toward the threat; aggressive action

Immobilizing Defense: Increased SNS

Freeze: stiffening; shallow, fast breathing, tense muscles

Immobilizing Defense: Increased Dorsal V. Tone

Collapse/submission: ‘feigned death;’ limp, flaccid muscles

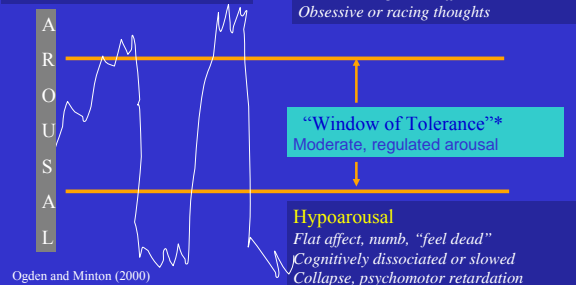
Adapted from Porges’ Polyvagal Hierarchy

Trauma-Related Dysregulation

Freeze: “The deer in the headlights”

Mute, paralyzed
Frozen defensive responses:
“I couldn’t move”

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Hyperarousal

Emotionally reactive, impulsive
Hypervigilant, hyperdefensive
Intrusive images and affects
Obsessive or racing thoughts

“Window of Tolerance”*
Moderate, regulated arousal

Hypoarousal

Flat affect, numb, “feel dead”
Cognitively dissociated or slowed
Collapse, psychomotor retardation
Disabled defensive responses

Ogden and Minton (2000)

*Siegel, D. (1999)

Levels of Information Processing

• Cognitive Processing

Conceptual information processing, reasoning, logic, meaning-making and decision making.

• Emotional Processing

Articulation and expression of feeling and affect; adds motivational coloring to sensorimotor and cognitive processing.

• Sensorimotor Processing

Processing of the body; sensory and physiological sequences, fixed action patterns, defensive responses, physical structure, and habits of posture and movement.

Top Down

Bottom UP

Ogden & Minton, 2000

A Psychology of Action

Each action affects a person’s integrative capacity: “The achieved and completed act raises it while an unfinished, failed, or curtailed act lowers it” (Ellenberger, 1970; Janet, 1935). It is important to assess which actions remain incomplete or unexpressed and help clients learn to complete these actions and thereby bring forth new capabilities. **These incomplete or undeveloped actions, when practiced and actualized, form the starting point of new tendencies** (Janet, 1925).

A Psychology of Action

“When you hear something, you will forget it.

When you see something, you will remember it.

But, not until you do something, will you understand it.”

Chinese proverb

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www.sensorimotorpsychotherapy.org

Sensorimotor Psychotherapy Institute

Pat Ogden Ph.D., Founder & Director

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