



The Body as Container of
Instincts,
Emotions
and Feelings

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THE BODY AS CONTAINER OF INSTINCTS, EMOTIONS AND FEELINGS:

Muscular awareness plays a role in coping with emotional arousal. Each muscle in the body becomes active psychomotorically during a certain developmental phase and carries certain capacities of the personal - so called ego-functions. For instance, the ability to stay grounded, to reach out, to say yes, to say no, to stay upright, to hold yourself together and to cope with emotional arousal are skills supported by specific muscles. (Brantbjerg & Ollars 2006)

This thinking expresses one of the key concepts of the Bodydynamic system. According to the Bodydynamic theory, containing energetic and emotional charge is seen as a central psychomotor skill. The muscular body functions as a container for energy charge, specifically for instincts, emotions and feelings.

In order to discuss containing something, it helps to know and define what it is you are containing. In everyday language the term "feelings" is used, without precision to what inner states this word describes. It is useful to differentiate between different levels of "feeling states" in terms of helping people to understand, contain and express these states better. The Bodydynamic model differentiates between instincts, emotions and feelings.

This article will present the thinking behind the differentiation between instincts, emotions and feelings - how the Bodydynamic system understands the 3 levels - what skills and ego-functions are crucial in coping with them and concrete exercises, giving examples of how to train the skills. This article will address different coping styles and difficulties of each that are frequently seen. The article will conclude with a comparison of this model to other theories, looking at strengths and weaknesses.

INTRODUCTION TO THE 3 LEVELS

A feeling state is experienced differently depending on whether the person is reacting instinctually, emotionally, or from the feeling level.

At the **feeling level**, where most people spend most of the time, we are in a state of conscious awareness. At the cortical level, the level of conscious awareness, we have our language capacity, and an ability to put abstract concepts together and understand things in ever more complex ways. The feeling states in the cortex hold a level of differentiation unavailable at other levels. We don't just name the emotional state, for instance anger, by saying that we are angry. More specific terms are used, like frustrated, irritated, disappointed etc. Many different words can be used to express a feeling state on this level. However, they do not express the basic emotion directly, the pure anger for instance. Feelings may express a combination of anger and another emotion, or anger combined with thoughts related to the anger, thus differentiating the feeling and expressing nuances of it. The quality on this level is a capacity for differentiation and nuancing. The risk of using feeling language is that the basic energy in the emotion gets lost or is kept out of consciousness.

Emotions on the other hand are seen as biological reactions we share with other mammals. Since such animals live in packs, where there is a social order and a definition of social roles, one can see basic emotions expressed between them. One can observe the same basic emotional reactions in people and how emotions are used for regulating interaction. The emotions are seen as an inherent biological potential. Through the personality development we learn how to handle and how to express the basic emotions socially at the feeling-level. The feeling aspect is not innate. It is impacted and formed by upbringing, cultural norms, "pack"-norms etc. The basic energy in the emotions is different. Emotions lie under the cultural impact as a healthy potential that is there to support us in finding ways of containing and expressing the emotions through acknowledging their basic being.

At the **instinctual level** the activation is dominant in the brainstem which relates reactions to a question of survival.

To differentiate between instincts, emotions and feelings it is meaningful to relate these three levels of reaction to the structure of the human brain.

These different aspects of emotional arousal each relate to one area of the brain, which shows the dominant activation level when we are in these states.

The human brain is an add-on brain, where the lower brain is complete in and of itself, being able to function by itself, without the input from higher functions of the brain. As described above, the quality of feeling states is different depending on what part of the brain is primarily in charge.

The human brain is often referred to as the triune brain. (MacLean 1990) This is because it is composed of three more or less separate brains, one stacked on top of each other. Each brain level was added at some point in evolution and has its advantages and serves a useful function. No brain level is more or less useful than the others. They all serve specific purposes. Our culture usually refers to the lower brain as primitive and sets up the cortex as more civilized. However, each brain level addresses a specific function and is useful in its own way. It is important not to split the cortex off from the rest of the brain.

The personality of the cortex often wants to stay in charge and control, splitting consciousness off from our evolutionary older resources. In an emergency, the conscious level of our personality connected to the cortex has to let go and lower levels of the brain take over, to respond fast enough.

In those situations we are lucky to have the evolutionary old parts of the brain, capable of responding reflexively very fast.

The lower brain is referred to as the reptilian brain because it has a structure similar to that of reptiles. The reptilian brain is composed of the brainstem and cerebellum. This brain is the basic brain of reflexive response and movement, the brain of instinct and survival. It is complete by itself. The responses at this level do not go higher in the brain. They are automatic responses such as fight/flight/freeze, which need to happen immediately, without thinking about them, without hesitation. The time of this area of the brain is in the here and now, with no thought of the past and the future, and the question is of survival. The response is reflexive and immediate, fast and efficient, because it is necessary for survival to respond immediately. If one's response had to wait for the time to think about it, the person could already be dead or injured.

The behavior coming from the brainstem level or reptilian brain can be observed in the behavior of the lizard. No thought goes into whether the lizard will attack in killer-rage a creature smaller than itself for food. The response is automatic, as is the response to flee or to freeze in panic. And pleasure could be passively sunning on the rock, taking in warmth, a deep rest to restore resources. In addition, there is no emotional bonding at the instinctual level besides a drive for sexuality merely for procreation, a mating drive. There is no attachment to each other or to young. There is no survival advantage to staying together as a group. In fact, in the desert environment, it is more advantageous to be spread out, to fill the niche independent of each other. At the instinctual level, response to the environment is immediate and harsh, including the automatic vomit of disgust.

Felt in the human body, instinctual reactions can be compared to high electrical voltage. Instincts arise lightning fast and run with a very high charge through the body like a lightning, leaving us somewhat shaky afterwards, when it is safe to "land" again.

The next higher level of brain stacked on top of the reptilian brain is the mammalian brain, the brain of herd or pack animals. This brain includes the limbic system, the level of emotions. These are basic to all mammals and in all cultures (Paul Ekman in Joseph Ledoux 1996 and in Goleman 2003) and are tied closely to body sensations and physiology (Pert, 1997). Emotions play an important role in bonding and regulating interaction in a herd or tribe. The survival of the pack is a primary consideration.

In group and pack behavior, each member of the group needs to mediate his/her behavior in order to function within the group. A crucial part of regulating behavior and interaction in a group happens through emotional exchange.

The mammalian brain is active when basic emotions are aroused and basic emotions have been found to be present cross culturally (Joseph Ledoux 1996, Goleman 2003). Different definitions of what is seen as basic emotions have been presented. The Bodydynamic model suggests the following 7 states as basic emotions:

Anger, fear, sadness, joy, shame, lust, and disgust.

All of these basic emotions are seen as holding a necessary and supportive function in group- or pack- communication. They are each biologically healthy and serve a regulatory function of keeping the pack together and organized. Even shame is a healthy emotion when considered at the level of pack animals (and human beings). We need to know what serves the pack or not, to be corrected by the alpha male or female to be brought back into doing what is useful for the pack. If we couldn't feel shame, we couldn't learn from failure. We know innately what serves the tribe or not. At this emotional level, shame is felt, not thought out at a cortical level. We know in our gut that we have done something wrong. We know from within that this was not OK.

People who cannot feel this kind of basic shame at all are considered psychopaths. Without the capacity for feeling shame they don't care what their actions do to the pack. Shame is a necessary, healthy emotion like all the others.

The behavior coming from the mammalian brain, including the limbic system is affiliative, working toward the coherence of the group. Survival depends on the survival of the pack. This level can be seen in the wolf pack. There are communications of emotion, connection of pairs in mating, a hierarchy of alpha male and alpha female, with members of the pack following the direction of the alphas. This society has order organized around the hunt and bringing down larger animals for food. The expression of the emotions has survival value in keeping connection, taking orders for the hunt, regulating interaction in the pack, playing and protecting the pack from danger.

The basic emotions are experienced in the body and wave through the body, often changing from one emotion to another. If emotions are allowed to flow, to arise, to reach a climax and to decline again, they seem to move like waves into each other, processing whatever has impacted us through a series of emotions. Emotional response is not naturally processed through only one emotion. To "get over" something, we often go through both sadness, fear, anger, joy, and maybe more of the 7 basic emotions. To see this natural flow, it is only necessary to watch a young child cry, to watch the emotion fluidly move from for example fear to sadness, to anger to joy. These waves are healthy and we believe that they play an important role in regulating and processing emotions. The potential for letting emotional waves come and go is innate. There is a deep body-knowledge of how to regulate emotions. The muscular body provides us with a container for the energy and the hormone system is active in regulating the waves. If this process is trusted and allowed to move through the body, emotions rise, move on into other emotions, dissipate and resolve.

Newer research in the field of psychoneuroimmunology (Pert 1997) points to the neuropeptides and their flow in and between the nervous system, immune system, endocrinal and gastrointestinal system as the bodily aspect of emotions. Thus making the picture much bigger than just the connection of the emotions to a specific part of the brain.

Pert's description of emotions equaling chemicals flowing around in the body supports a picture of the emotions as energy waves. This energy moves like water, like waves through the body. The waves can be small or big, or the water can be quiet. This symbolic language has been shown to be supportive in teaching people to lean into the innate healthy potential in the emotions.

The highest level of the brain is the Cerebral Cortex. This part of the brain contains the capacity for higher cognition and for spoken language. The Prefrontal Cortex is known to be crucial in regulating emotional expression in socially functional ways. Through activity in the Cortex we gain consciousness of ourselves. It is this part of the brain that makes us distinctly human.

These brain functions enable us to manage and fill out differentiated social roles. We become capable of choosing different behaviour in different situations, choosing different kinds of expression of our emotional reactions.

The more differentiated the language we each have available, the more possible ways we have of expressing emotions.

The advantages of this development of the brain are huge. It provides us with the possibility of conscious choice, separating us from being driven only by instinctual and emotional responses.

A challenge and a possible disadvantage of the access to cortical functions show up in different levels of communication.

The cortical feeling-language with all its nuances opens up a huge possibility for misunderstandings. Naming the basic emotions directly in simple language, like saying "I am sad, I am happy, I am angry, I am disgusted etc" leaves little room for interpretation. This simple language touches mutual body knowledge about the emotions. On the contrary saying: "I am frustrated, I feel let down, I am disappointed, I am tired etc" has more nuances in the expression, more social adaptation, but there is no guarantee that the person you are communicating with understands what state you are in when using these nuanced words. What one person means by frustration can be quite different from what another means. There are many gradations of words that refer to feelings, none of which mean exactly the same from one person to another.

The feeling-language often expresses mixed emotions, and emotions mixed with thoughts. This is emotion tempered by role and language linked to social adaptation.

TRUSTING THE HEALTHY BIOLOGY - and supporting the access to it

Culture very often teaches us to control instead of to contain and to express our emotional reactions or some of them. This leads to a weakening of healthy skills in coping with all 3 levels.

The socially adapted language of feelings may create a distrust of both instincts and emotions, and may teach us to perceive all of them or some of them as threatening our stability. In language, we often turn around the action of having feelings as if we were passive to the process. We say, "It makes me sad/angry/ etc."

Healthy coping skills in dealing with instinctual and emotional reactions have both a body component and a cognitive component.

To be able to access the biologically healthy function of instincts and emotions you need a body capable of containing and channeling the energy level of the reactions. Presence in the body, especially presence in the muscles has shown to highly support this capacity. With a weak muscular container, impacted by a large number of given up (hypo-responsive) muscles, a person will either tend to be overwhelmed by emotional charge, or will lower the energy level in the emotional response which results in little conscious access to emotions at all.

With a held muscular container, impacted by a large number of tense and controlled (hyperresponsive) muscles, emotional expression is held back, producing a body like a pressure cooker ready to explode feeding the idea that it IS dangerous to let emotions be expressed.

In a later paragraph concrete body exercises will be described. These are designed to support muscular awareness of a healthy container for energy charge in the body.

On a cognitive level the way we think about emotions and instincts matters. If our thinking tells us that emotions and instincts or some of them basically are threatening, destabilizing, chaotic, antisocial, a possible escape from responsibility etc, it will impact how we approach them. And how we think and feel about ourselves when facing these reactions.

The language used in this article refers to trusting the healthy potential in all 3 levels: Instincts, emotions and feelings.

This is not an idealistic point of view. Instincts and emotions can be very powerful and challenging reactions. You certainly need skills both bodily and cognitively to handle them in healthy ways so they don't come out destructively, or you are forced to choose to shut them down or drain them of energy.

But basically we believe that the energy in instincts and emotions is trustworthy. We are born with them. They hold important functions for us both in terms of survival and in terms of being able to interact with and bond to our fellow beings. The body holds the potential for knowing how to contain and channel the energy in instincts and emotions, knowing how to allow them to flow through the body and this potential can be supported and trained.

Instincts and emotions are a part of our being which we are not able to remove from the psyche. We can create defense patterns to diminish our awareness of them, but basically we cannot get rid of them. Instincts and emotions will always play a role in our state of being, hidden or overt. Seen from this perspective it seems a wise choice to look for accepting and containing strategies, to get the best out of our biological potential.

Talking about the healthy potential in both emotions and instincts makes a difference. It supports the possibility for leaning into and allowing the energy to move through the body instead of being stopped or diffused. This in itself is a psychotherapeutic method. Good enough ego-functions like centering, grounding, reality testing, energy containment, boundaries are all necessary for this trust to have a safe ground to sink into. People with considerable weakness in these ego-functions would need to strengthen these first before "leaning into the flow".

INTERACTION BETWEEN THE 3 LEVELS

This paragraph will address aspects of how instincts, emotions and feelings impact each other, and especially the crucial role the emotions play in this interaction.

Feelings and emotions

Earlier on, we mentioned the challenge of being understood when speaking from the feeling level. This challenge grows when the person speaking is more distant from acknowledging, knowing and containing the underlying emotions.

Saying for instance: "I am tired", when asked how I feel, is an expression on the feeling level that may be attached to a number of different underlying emotions or even instincts. If I know myself what underlying emotions are present in me; for instance that I am deeply sad and have been sad for a while. I can still choose the same expression "I am tired", but it feels different inside.

Experience indicates that it also feels different on a nonverbal level to the person I am communicating with. The ownership of the underlying emotion fills me out inside, I become present in a deeper level of my being and I can still choose in my social role and my feeling-language how I want to communicate in each social context about this inner state. Lack of ownership of underlying emotions and instincts will tend to make the feeling language more superficial, more flat, and more responsive to social expectations than to personal presence. As a result of the lack of personal language, it becomes harder to understand or grasp what the person is actually trying to communicate. The capacity to acknowledge, name and contain emotions thus has an impact on our communication on the feeling level, providing us with more feeling of depth and supporting our personal integrity.

Discovering or honoring underlying emotions previously ignored by our consciousness often results in allowing this emotion to start flowing in waves, maybe moving on into another emotion, and finally letting the emotional arousal come to an end. No emotion lasts forever if the natural flow is allowed.

In the above-mentioned example of tiredness with underlying sadness, naming and acknowledging the sadness led for the person to really feel the sadness, allowing it to flow in waves through the body without questioning it or having to explain it. Then it moved on into some shame and finally into release and a more joyful state.

Instincts and emotions

Instincts are released in situations dealing with life and death, or situations that trigger memories and patterns related to life and death.

These reactions come when they come. They are not under control by the cortex. Faced with existential threat another part of us takes over and the personality is wisely enough set aside.

When we are reacting from the instinctual level, the emotions are not present. It is irrelevant, and seen from a survival point of view unwise, to feel how a traumatizing event impacts you emotionally, what it does to you personally, while you are in the acute phase, where strategies for getting you through the traumatic stress alive has highest priority. The transitions from normal consciousness to instinctual survival consciousness and back again challenge our coping skills to a great deal.

Skills in owning and coping with emotions play a significant role in these transitions. Good capacity for containing and coping with the energy charge in emotions supports you in staying present in your personality level also when intensity heightens emotionally. You can be there, you can feel what is happening, feel the impact on you, feel your fear, anger, disgust or whatever is awakened, until the intensity in what is going on may reach the level where the instinctual level takes over and the emotions are naturally set aside.

Coming back from the instinctual level the capacity for coping with emotions becomes a landing platform. Coming out of the acute phase in any kind of survival threat, intensity decreases, we come back into "normal" consciousness and thus also back into starting to realize what happened to us and into potentially reacting to it emotionally. Skills in coping with emotions help us to release the impact from having been threatened, through trembling, crying, expressing anger, screaming, feeling disgust or shame. Slowly we become capable of thinking more clearly again. Lack of skills in coping with emotions will impact this landing process, often leading to parts of the high intensity being left encapsulated or dissociated.

To land from high intensity you need skills, and you need safety.

Body awareness, and specifically awareness of the muscles, supports finding safety in your own body again.

Skills in coping with emotions supports again finding safety in flow and in emotional contact.

A safe environment, in terms of a place to be and people to be with, is important to support the individual skills. Landing from high intensity is basically a social process. Ideally we land in the "pack", providing us with the protection and contact necessary for landing and for releasing the emotions. (Brantbjerg, Marcher & Kristiansen 2006)
Think of a pack of zebra's "landing" after having been chased by a lion and one of them has been killed. The pack will stand in a safe corner of the savannah, eating grass, pushing, rubbing against each other's bodies. They "land" together in what looks like emotional contact among zebras. They don't land in isolation.

As described in the 2 paragraphs above, coping with emotions plays a role in both how we cope with feelings and how we get back and forth from instinctual reactions. Capacity for flow and processing is highly supported by emotions. Without this capacity we risk getting stuck either in more purely mental based language or in life/death driven reactions.
The emotions can be seen as a bridge helping us to get back and forth between different levels of our reaction and helping us to stay in flow.

TYPICAL PATTERNS

Few people if any get through our personality development with full access to the healthy potential for coping with emotions.
We end up with different patterns and different habits around handling emotional charge. These patterns are often rigidified with repetition in our system and changing them is challenging. We need to be conscious about the patterns and we need to build up alternative skills to take over.
This paragraph will speak to some typical patterns and some of the challenges they are giving us.

The flow between all 7 emotions

Some patterns deal with how we handle the flow between the 7 emotions, anger, fear, sadness, joy, shame, lust, and disgust. Are all 7 welcome in our repertoire? Are some emotions more "popular" or allowed than others?
One person may allow flow in anger, lust and joy, denying or repressing the 4 others. Another person may do the opposite: Allow sadness, shame and fear and not being conscious of the rest.
There are numerous variations possible in this landscape. You might be interested in making your own variation conscious. Which emotions do you feel regularly? Are there some of the 7 mentioned emotions you never consciously feel? Which of the 7 do you allow yourself to express?
An interesting way to think about the emotions is that healthy flow in the emotions probably includes them all. Not that all 7 emotions necessarily awaken every time something impacts us. But if all 7 are available there is more flexibility and a bigger chance for success in processing an emotional impact.
Some specific emotions cannot process other emotions. Shame cannot be successfully processed through anger. Anger cannot be successfully processed through sadness. Sadness cannot be processed through sexuality etc. Allowing a free flow in one of the emotions will eventually lead to a shift into another emotion. No emotions last forever, if they are allowed to flow.

With some emotional channels shut down, we end up with other channels being overused and we thus have a hard time reaching full release.

If the hypothesis is true that we have 7 biologically based emotions they must all play an important role in how we process what happens to us.

Supporting flow between more emotions is a therapeutic method. Asking for what emotion comes next when a wave of sadness is ending, showing interest in the flow between emotions has a potential for supporting a satisfying release. Asking about the emotions that don't occur by themselves can support the allowance and flow into these emotions. Sensing the flow from anger to disgust for example can open up to a fuller sense of release. Disgust is often unconsciously hidden under anger or under shame.

Check it out yourself. How do anger and disgust feel different to you? They each have a boundary-marking aspect to them but each has a different quality. Allow yourself to really feel disgust, to let it fill out your body and energy space, own it and also own that you have a choice of how to express it. This can be a very exciting and satisfying experience. Owning all the emotions can be both exciting and satisfying.

Muscular patterns around emotions

Another personal style is to impact the general energy level in the emotions either through holding a low energy level or a high energy level.

Low energy level in the body connects as earlier mentioned to a high amount of hyporesponsiveness (low tension) in the muscles. (Bernhardt, Bentzen & Isaacs 1997).

Hyporesponse is a defense pattern. A strategy of giving up, lowering charge, getting away from "impossible" impulses or emotions through giving up tone in the muscles that potentially could hold charge, for example the breathing muscles or the stomach muscles.

Sense your breathing. Especially the movements in your diaphragm and in your ribcage.

Now imagine that the muscles involved in these breathing movements give up, loose energy, and then sense what happens to your breathing. What would it feel like being in contact with an emotion in that body state? To be angry or sad or feel your sexuality? (Go back to normal breathing and your normal energy level again through breathing consciously in and out a couple of times.)

In terms of coping with emotions a predominant hyporesponsive pattern leaves the person with the inability to contain emotional energy. This can lead to either a pattern of getting overwhelmed or flooded by emotions when they occur or having low energy in the emotional waves in general, not experiencing strong emotions, a more depressed pattern.

With a given up muscular container it is not possible or recommendable to go for stronger emotional flow or expression. Expression without containment makes you even weaker, more overwhelmed. It may force you into instinctual reactions instead, if you go into strong expression.

The container needs to be strengthened before expression can be handled successfully. Stimulating concrete muscle sensation and slow activation of muscles support this process, building the capacity to tolerate energy charge in the body. With a stronger awareness and a higher energy level in the muscular container it becomes possible to own and name the emotions, and thus have a ground for finding a level of expression that fits your energy level.

The opposite pattern is held by a high amount of hyperrepsonive (tense) muscles, holding back impulses or emotions, holding back expression.

This pattern stacks up energy in the body, holding a high charge without releasing it. Holding back is a way of blocking the natural flow in emotions. You can stop the flow, hold it back, control it by tensing for example your breathing muscles or stomach muscles.

Breathe in and then hold your breath. Sense how your diaphragm is tense - and sense that you can keep this tension even if you start to breathe. You can hold back while breathing. In terms of sensing emotions what does that feel like? What would it feel like sensing joy, disgust, anger or fear in that body state? What happens to the feeling of flow or wavelike movement?

The access to sensing and expressing all or just some of the 7 emotions can be blocked by this pattern. If the expression of all 7 emotions is held back, the energy level will be quite high, which risks pushing the person into instinctual explosions - instead of emotional outlet or release.

To support changing this pattern you need to build up safety around releasing energy. Pushing back to back, wrestling for fun, meeting another persons body capable of pushing back with equal amount of strength is helpful. Being met with strength and firmness enough by another person allows you to hand over some of the control, not having to hold it all yourself, gaining more space for breathing, flow and release. Stretching or other ways of loosening up tense muscles is also helpful. Basically what needs to happen is that the muscular container grows less restricted, allowing a freer breathing. Through that freer breathing, the flow of emotional energy can happen again.

Both of the above-described patterns hold a connection between muscular container, breathing and emotional flow. These 3 components are interrelated. Breathing provides the body with basic life energy, building up and releasing energy all the time. Breathing happens in a muscular container and the tone of the muscles impacts how the container works:

- as a flexible, alive body space allowing emotional flow to move through
- as a restricted body space controlling emotional flow
- or as a flaccid body space leaking energy and thus lowering the flow or leaving it poorly contained.

Most people hold a mixture of these strategies, holding back in some muscles, giving up in others and having access to healthy resources in others again. This is one way to understand the complexity of the patterns we are facing in ourselves in how we handle emotions in daily life.

In some parts of the body and in some situations you may have a tendency to impact your emotional flow by giving up, by leaking, needing to support the muscular container with gentle awareness. In other situations, in other parts of the body, related to other emotions, you may know the pattern of control, holding back, not wanting to show how you feel. Ideally we need to release the held back energy, make noise, let go, for us to get into and allow emotional flow.

In our experience it is helpful both to understand the dynamics around emotional contact and to work with supporting more resourceful strategies to know these 2 typical defense patterns and to respect the difference in what is needed to dialog with them.

Patterns around instincts

The dynamic around handling instincts in the body is different from handling emotions. Emotions are ideally contained in and expressed through the muscular container, as described above. In the instinctual level, movements and actions are released reflexively, leading to other movement patterns than the ones being directed by conscious will. The instinctual energy comes lightning fast and can be experienced like electricity running through the body, a different sensation compared to the fluid waves of the emotions.

In terms of handling this powerful, highly charged instinctual energy in the body it is not a question of the body containing it. What is most functional is to be capable of letting it run through you. To allow this, the physical body can function like a kind of lightning rod, channeling the instinctual energy down into the earth or out in space.

The body skills supporting this capacity connect to the reflex system: Holding reflexes carrying the body, the breathing reflex and others.

Skill training that support the contact to this reflexive level in the body will be described later in the article.

Typical defense patterns involving how the instinctual level is handled relate to trauma, high stress or peak experiences. (Brantbjerg, Marcher & Kristiansen, 2006)

The instinctual energy can get stuck in the body in a high charged adrenalin driven state or in a deeply collapsed or frozen state, never really "landing". Leaving the body in a stressed physiological state. This is what trauma therapy is dealing with: How to release instinctual energy that never found a landing platform.

On a simple level what is helpful is to train centering and grounding and being able to lean into letting yourself be carried reflexively. Finding the centerline in the body and lean into that, feeling your sitting bones and your feet in contact with the ground and allow the instinctual rush go through you, instead of holding it back. Doing this often leads to trembling afterwards, and access to emotions.

Cognitive patterns

Throughout life we learn how to handle emotions when they occur, through giving up, controlling or allowing flow. And we also learn how to think about them.

Patterns of how we cope with emotions and instincts are not only held in the muscles, in the breathing and in the reflex system, they are also held in our cognition as mentioned earlier.

How do you think about emotions and instincts today? And how did you learn to think about them when you were a child or a teenager? What are the norms in your culture and subculture around emotions and instincts, now and earlier in your life?

Norms are held in the cortex, not in the parts of the brain where instincts and emotions are released. This often presents us with the challenge of having to negotiate between two parts of who we are: The biological responses coming from the brainstem and the limbic system - and the culturally biased thinking coming from the cortex.

Cognitive patterns are held in the cortex and based on cultural and subcultural upbringing. These cognitive structures often don't trust the healthy potential in the emotions and instincts. Language and judgmental norms can be used to stop or hold back or give up the fluid nature of emotions or to distance you from your own emotions when they have occurred in culturally unaccepted ways. And judgmental norms can also make it harder for us to release instinctual energy or allow it to land through the body. This pattern is often seen as a component in stuck trauma patterns. (For more information about this: Brantbjerg, Marcher & Kristiansen, 2006).

When we judge emotions as negative, we get much more easily stuck in them. We tend to try to stop or hide or remove the emotion. We may even forget about it.

Take shame for example. People tend to hide when they feel shame and stop the wave of the emotion, not trusting the healthy potential in the reaction. Few people have learned that shame can be processed in contact just like all other emotions. You can own your shame, you can carry it with dignity, feel it, contain it, let it flow, let it be expressed. And it will move on into other emotions like all the other emotional reactions regulating interaction. These words support accepting shame as a natural reaction when we have done something that we know from inside the body was wrong, thus offering an alternative to the judgmental language connected to the emotion.

Realizing what cognition is connected to the different emotions for you is part of opening up to a more supportive language. Knowing what you think about emotions makes it easier to discover when your cognition gets you stuck in an emotion.

Whenever I get stuck emotionally, the first step in changing is to discover that I am stuck. Then I use the language presented in this article to support myself in getting back into flow. I ask myself what emotions are present, naming them in simple language. Just doing that restores some of the flow. Naming is neutral. It is just stating what is, not dealing with if it is good or bad. Then I sense my muscular container and tell myself that it is okay to trust the flow in the emotion, my body can contain it and it is okay to let it move. This strategy has the potential for reaching beyond my judgmental or rejecting cognition and building another more supportive cognitive path supporting the flow in the emotions.

In order to support healthy skills in coping with emotions, we thus also have to address the cognition offering a more accepting language and a better understanding of emotional flow. We acknowledge the different parts of who we are, which need to cooperate in terms of handling emotions.

THE BODY EGO, INDIVIDUAL EGO, AND ROLE EGO

Differentiating between 3 aspects of the personality: Body ego, Individual ego and Role ego presents another language useful in understanding and describing patterns and different resources in coping with the different feeling states: instincts, emotions and feelings.

The Body ego is the first aspect of personality to be established, whereby we comprehend the world directly through our body senses and psychomotor experiences. During the first 2 years of existence the Body ego is our only ego aspect providing us with a direct body-oriented way of making sense of what is happening to us.

The body ego is the part of the personality active in body mirroring, in picking up body messages from yourself and from others telling you how you feel and how others feel. The Body ego strongly supports sensing instinctual and emotional reactions in ourselves and in others.

Without a presence in the body you have a hard time mirroring another person precisely and also being aware of your own state emotionally or instinctually.

The resources and skills in the Body ego can therefore strongly support your access to your innate knowledge about the basic emotional and instinctual response and also about more vague emotional moods which are present in the young child.

Instincts and emotions are not clearly separated in early life. The distinction between them comes with a more developed personality which has more skills to cope with in meeting the outer world. In the beginning, any threat will be existential, touching the instinctual level.

The Individual ego is established beginning approximately at 2 years of age and develops through individuation and separation processes. The Individual ego is the part of us becoming aware of the fact that we as individuals are different from other individuals. The development of the Individual ego is strongly connected to the development of language.

When the basic emotions can be named and clearly separated from each other which happens ideally throughout the first 2 years of existence, you can step into a new skill regarding how to contain and cope with emotions. At this time you also separate emotions more clearly from instincts. Up to then the emotions are expressed in sound and through impulses. The child hits when angry, spits out when disgusted, jumps up and down when happy etc.

The new coping capacity is supported by the muscular ability of controlling body functions developed at the same age level.

Naming the emotions in simple language like: I am angry, I am sad, I am happy, I am scared, I feel shame, I feel disgust, I feel sexual lust. These words contain the emotion and express it in a contained form.

This simple language becomes an additional container cooperating with the body container. Through naming it, the emotion becomes clearer and more distinct, often also more powerful.

Try to say these simple sentences just listed without using any other words, no explanations, no justifications, just naming one emotion at a time.

And notice what impact it has on you bodily, in terms of presence etc.

Often when more complex language is learned, it dominates and we look upon using this language as more valuable. Including precise and simple language to name and communicate emotions is part of training healthy emotional coping skills.

The Role ego starts developing when one is around 3 years old. From then on we can adopt roles and apply them in a social context. Ideally, this new skill is established based on the sensation of being me in my body, and on acknowledging me as a separate individual. The development of the Role ego brings a much more detailed language. We become capable of choosing different words depending on the social context we are in.

We learn to hold a façade, sorting out what we want to be visible to the outer world and what we want to keep to ourselves. We learn to name things more according to the social context than to the basic emotions.

These are important skills in terms of functioning in a society.

Ideally we can function with cooperation between the 3 levels of the ego, so the role ego doesn't exclude the knowledge from the 2 other levels, but still chooses the outer expression depending on the context.

What often happens instead is that the role ego shuts out or diffuses the knowledge from the 2 other levels. So the biological knowledge about emotions becomes unconscious.

This is a cultural pattern layered in the Role ego. Different cultures will have different versions, different emphasis, and different norms impacting how the cooperation between the 3 ego-aspects is impacted.

The material presented in this article has a chance to reach behind the cultural norms about emotions and support a fuller cooperation between the ego-aspects, reaching for the healthy potential in all of them.

The skills of the Body Ego and Individual Ego are the most supportive in getting into the natural flow of emotions. The Role Ego gives us the ability to choose how we express ourselves in social contexts.

THE WHOLE MODEL

What follows on the next page is a model gathering the information brought forward in this article.

The model suggests what reactions could be named as instincts, as emotions, and as feelings.

This model is to be considered as a hypothesis, not a final truth.

There may be more reactions relevant to mention under instincts or better words for the ones standing there.

Notice that there is no equivalent to shame under instincts. This is a conscious choice. The instinctual level is dealing with here and now survival. There is no past, no future, only here and now. In that state you are not dealing with regulating behavior in the pack, and shame as a reaction to not following the biological rules for pack behavior is not relevant until you land into the emotional level again.

In the professional field today, there are different views on how many basic emotions humans have access to coexist. Paul Ekman includes for example curiosity as a basic emotional reaction, as seen and recognized crossculturally. It could be added to the list. The Bodydynamic model, however, suggests 7 emotions to use for inspiration and further investigation.

On the feeling level thousands of words could be mentioned, showing the variety and richness of detail in the language of the Cortex, and the Role ego. Some feeling-words express more than one emotion, like jealousy. And these express different mixtures of emotions and instincts in different people. For some people jealousy can contain a large percentage of sadness even touching instinctual grief and maybe a small percentage of shame and fear.

For others anger and rage is dominant with some sexuality and maybe fear in addition. You can describe your own version and ask other people of theirs. This will give you an interesting insight into how big a variation lies behind feeling-words, challenging the possibility for being understood when we use them unless we name the underlying emotions and instincts also.

Other feeling-words contain a mixture of emotional or instinctual reactions combined with thoughts. Take feeling offended for example. To be offended will often contain some amount of anger but also thoughts about right and wrong, norms being overstepped.

It is an ongoing challenge to be curious to what lies under the feeling words, what emotions and instincts and thoughts feed them with energy. Curiosity can lead to more awareness of what feeling words you are actually using yourself in your communication and of what the underlying states are, as you are more able to name them and to choose how to deal with them.

Dignity and mutual connection

Under each column it says "Dignity and Mutual connection". In the Bodydynamic system these 2 concepts are perceived as being essential innate energy states. We define mutual connection as a factual and given state of being energetically connected to everything else in existence, and dignity as the essential capacity to carry ourselves and let ourselves be carried by this energy, a rising of energy that we share with all other beings.

Throughout our personality development we are faced with dilemmas often forcing us to choose between dignity and mutual connection, giving one higher priority than the other, closing down or giving up part of our access to these fundamental energies. This is one way to understand and describe defense patterns around our feeling states also. Our defense strategies are created to handle situations where the access to being met in either dignity or mutual connection or both is limited. For example we create defense strategies to handle situations of how we are met in our instincts, emotions or feelings.

Putting Dignity and Mutual connection under each column indicates the idea that the 2 essential energies potentially are present inside all the feeling states: instincts, emotions and feelings.

Dignity and Mutual connection can be expressed through all 3 channels. Take your time to take in that idea. In any arousal of an instinct or an emotion, you can lean into your innate dignity, being carried in your body, and into your connection to what is outside of you: people, animals, the earth, the sky etc. You have the potential for feeling carried and connected when expressing shame, disgust, sexuality or any other of the emotions, or instincts or feelings.

Think of all the emotions one at a time and try to lean into the presence of dignity and mutual connection at the same time. This is a way to support acknowledgment and containment of the emotions. Emotions are what they are: they come, they go, they play their role and underneath them we are carried by more fundamental energies: dignity and mutual connection.

You can do the same with the instincts, one at a time and you can also do the same with your feelings.

Dignity and mutual connection are energies much bigger than the personality. They belong in the Self. They are spiritual concepts.

Putting them in the model also suggests that a fourth column could be introduced - a column of spiritual feelings.

It lies outside of the frame of this article and the model presented here to go far into the spiritual level. Mentioning it though is important because it may help to distinguish what is described in the model, and what lies outside of it.

A spiritual feeling feels distinctly different from sensing an instinct, an emotion or a feeling.

Spiritual feelings involve an expansion out of the personality, taking you into states like bliss, gratitude, humbleness, the spiritual dimension of love, balance, connectedness, etc. An interesting fact is that the instincts also are reactions outside of the personality. The instincts are awakened when the personality cannot cope with the situation anymore and the survival intelligence in us takes over.

This opens a parallel between spiritual feelings and instincts, both of them layered outside of our personality, in a more expanded consciousness. Spiritual feelings are often available when we are present in our instincts, which opens up peak qualities in the middle of our coping with existential threat.

Brain Stem	Limbic System	Cortex
INSTINCTS	EMOTIONS	FEELINGS
In common with reptiles	In common with mammals	Norms & values Sharing of culture.
Condition life/death swings	Handle interaction needed for survival of the herd	Making and celebrating community
RAGE	ANGER	Irritated, frustrated, provoked, etc.
MORTAL DREAD PANIC DREAD HORROR/TERROR	FEAR	Anxiety, afraid, frightened, spooked, anxious, etc.
GRIEF	SORROW	Sad, moody, whining worried, etc.
CALMNESS PLEASURE	JOY	Delighted, happy, excited, etc.
MATING LUST PROCREATION	SEXUALITY SEXUAL LUST	Excited, attracted to, fancy you, have the hots for, etc.
REVULSION	DISGUST	Unpleasant, despised, undignified etc.
	SHAME	Guilt/shame, shy, embarrassed, etc.
.....
DIGNITY MUTUAL CONNECTION	DIGNITY MUTUAL CONNECTION	DIGNITY MUTUAL CONNECTION

BODY EXERCISES FOR BUILDING THE CONTAINER

Specific body exercises can be used for activating body sensation and becoming aware of the body as a concrete container for both emotions and instincts.

The following exercises are examples of resource oriented skill training used as a psychotherapeutic method.

In doing the exercises individual dosing is important. The same exercise can be done with big or small movements, with little, more or a lot of strength, longer or shorter time. Each person has to look for the individual, optimal way to do the exercise, to come closest to gaining access to the psychosocial potential connected to the muscles getting activated. Without this inward listening the exercises may not have a conscious effect or may have a negatively loaded effect instead of activating resources.

Each person also has to look for the exercises that awaken what is experienced as resources in a fairly easy way.

Working with the body is a highway to both the original psychological potential connected to the muscles and also to what has impacted this potential throughout our lives.

To use the exercises in a resource oriented way: Go for the exercises that awaken resources. Don't stay long in exercises that are difficult for you or that awaken unpleasant states and respect your own optimal dosing.

If you cannot make an exercise work, don't stay with it and keep trying. We always have good reasons for holding on to defense patterns in the body. Don't try to force it. Build up alternative skills. That is the philosophy behind the exercises.

The following sequences of exercises are taken from workshops lead by Merete Holm Brantbjerg, focusing on instincts, emotions and feelings and how to cope with them. They are examples only. A large variety of other exercises could be used for training the same coping skills.

COPING WITH EMOTIONS

Muscular container around the physical balance point in the body

This paragraph will present exercises supporting awareness of the muscle groups in the lower part of the trunk. These muscle groups build the muscular container around the physical balance point in the body which is located just in front of your 4th or 5th lumbar vertebrae. And they support sensing the physical balance point, the center of the body.

1. Start with moving all your joints, just to start sensing the body. Move without strain. Imagine that you put oil into the joints and move them like you would move a mechanical joint to loosen it up, to make it move more freely. Start with the joints in your toes and your ankles and move up through all the joints in the body. Sense how all the joints can cooperate in movement.
2. Sense the area around your physical balance point. It is located just in front of your 4th or 5th lumbar vertebrae. Picture how big the lumbar vertebrae are. They reach all the way into the centerline of the body from your back, approximately 10 cm or 4 inches in depth. As you picture it, move your spine, especially in your lower back, being aware of your center as you move.

3. Choose a partner. Stand hip to hip and push against your partner's pelvis. Push from the side, from the back, from the other side with the intention of pushing from the center of the body, filling you up from inside while pushing outwards. From the front you push up against the other person's hands holding the front part of your hipbone. Look for your optimal amount of strength in the push. Don't exhaust yourself. Go for feeling filled up from inside.

4. Sit on the floor, balance on your butt. Move legs and arms in different directions. You can lean your arms/hands against the floor, if it feels like too hard work, but keep moving. Sense how stomach and back muscles cooperate in the movements. Sense the contact between your sitting bones and the floor. Sense how your movements circle around your center and your sitting bones. Make the movements smaller and smaller until you only have very small movements on the sitting bones. Let the movements stop and sense how your weight is carried by the floor through your sitting bones and how the pressure from the floor comes up to your sitting bones. Sense your center and the connection to the floor from there. (This exercise activates all the muscles in the muscular container in the abdomen and deep muscles lying close to the center).

5. Bring this awareness and sensation into standing. Get up slowly. Move back and forth on your feet. Look for a way of getting up while you stay in contact with the balance point and the sitting bones, which you found on the floor. How is it to get up standing like this? How does it feel standing now?

Activate some of your big butt muscles in standing by lifting one leg at a time backwards and to the side. (*Gluteus maximus* and *medius*) You can feel the muscle activation either from inside or with your hands. Extend your arms behind your back and clasp your hands to activate a big support muscle in the surface of your lower back (*Latissimus dorsi*). Swing your arms back and forth like in walking and sense how you are using the same back muscle and your stomach muscles (*Obliques*). Push out on the legs to activate a muscle on the front side of the hip and the whole outer side of your thighs. (*Tensor fascia lata* + *Tractus iliotibialis*).

Sense all these muscles together: abdominals, back, butt, and hip. These muscles are all part of the muscular container around your center.

6. Now pay attention to the diaphragm. Are you aware of where this muscle is? It is located just under the lungs, arching up over the abdominal cavity, and extending with attachments down the spine to just behind your center on the lumbar vertebrae. To activate this muscle, pay attention to your breathing. Breathe in, hold your breath for a while, and then exhale. Muscularly the diaphragm is the ceiling in the container around your center. Breathing with the diaphragm builds up energy in the container and may help you sense your center.

7. Make a cross crawl movement standing, meaning that you approach right knee and left elbow to each other, and then shift to left knee and right elbow and keep shifting. Mark the end of each movement with a little sound. Remember to look for your optimal dosing. This movement can be done small or big, long or short. Doing cross crawl movements activates a muscle lying deep in your stomach (*Psoas*), very close to your center. Activating this muscle builds up energy in the center-area. Sense your center-area after having stopped the movements. How does it feel now?

8. Make slow movements involving all parts of your body. One slow continuous flow of movement. Hold the intention of moving around in the room - not staying in one place. Notice your center while you do this. To hold your balance in the slow movements, attention has to go into the center-area. Pay also attention to the bottom of your muscular container, your pelvic floor. This muscle is also active in holding balance. Try it out by giving up for a while in the pelvic floor and sense what happens to your balance. Reestablish a more active contact to the muscle and sense that the pelvic floor cooperates with all the other muscle groups surrounding your center. Keep your eyes open while you make the slow movements. Notice how contact with yourself and with your surroundings feel in doing this.

Slowly come to a stop. Feel your center and feel all the container muscles in your abdomen, surrounding your center. Stomach, back, butt, hips, diaphragm and pelvic floor. Feel your breathing in the container. Your center, your muscular container and your breathing are always there and they hold a capacity to contain your emotional energy. How do you feel now?

9. What feeling state is present in you right now? Name it for yourself in your own language. Imagine that you allow the energy in the feeling state to move in waves through your body. Stay in contact with your center and your muscular container around the center. Allow the state you are in to flow. Do you get impulses for movement? Follow them. Allow the flow in the state you are in to come out in the body through movement.

Share with somebody or name it for yourself how this felt.

Emotional flow

Now having established a container in your abdominal cavity, having had your first training in allowing a feeling state to flow in the body, take a look at the list of the seven basic emotions. Pick one of them, one that you are curious about. Don't choose one you have a really hard time with. Training skill has the best chance for success if you have fun. Remember that all 7 emotions play a healthy regulatory function in group life. Each regulates important aspects of interaction. Each has the capacity for flow inside of you and in contact, eventually flowing and moving into other emotions and finally being released.

1. Pay attention to your body. Sense your center and the muscular container in your abdomen. Bring your awareness to the emotion you have chosen. You may recall last time you felt this emotion to help it become present in your body right now. Sense the body sensations that go with this emotion for you. Imagine that the energy in the emotion can move in waves, can flow. Let it flow inside and through your body. Let it move through you. Sense your breathing. Breathing stimulates flow. If you stop your breathing you also stop the emotion from flowing. The center is there, the container is there and the energy in the emotion can flow.

Notice your movement impulses. Let those movements come out in your body. Are there any specific impulses in your arms? What do you feel like doing with your arms while sensing the emotion and letting it flow? If you are passive, given up or held back in your arms, it will probably be harder to allow the emotion to flow. The arms hold a lot of movement possibilities connected to expressing emotions. Find the level of movement that you like with this emotion.

Do you feel like moving around? Do it. The legs also hold impulses connected to coping with emotions.

Don't try to force the emotion to flow, just notice how it flows. Don't hold on to it either. It may move into another emotion after a while. Allow that.

Pay attention that there are others in the room. Notice how it feels to sense your body and your emotion while connecting with others.

Find a partner. Stand in front of each other and keep following the above instructions. Sense your emotional state now. Sense your body container and allow the emotions you are aware of to flow. If the emotion you have chosen moves into another emotion, allow it. Continue to be in interaction bodily with the other person in that awareness. Notice what happens to your emotions and to your body sensations when in contact.

Discuss your experience with your partner. What helped you to get into the emotion? What made it move? How did this whole exercise function for you? Sensing your center, sensing the muscular container, allowing an emotion to flow, adding movement impulses, being on your own or being in interaction with a partner.

You can try out the above sequence with any of the 7 emotions and through that probably discover some of your own patterns in how you process them differently.

The basic principles in sensing and activating the muscular container, sensing the center, naming what emotion is present in you, allowing emotional energy to flow, allowing movement to go with the flow - all of that you can train on your own. Building up your personal ownership of your emotions.

For integrating the skills more deeply, you need to train them in contact also. Emotions are basically social. The patterns we have around emotions are created in interaction and integrating new skills happen in interaction.

I therefore recommend that training happen both on your own and in contact.

The upper part of the muscular container.

The full container for energy charge in the body includes the whole trunk, from the pelvic floor to the throat and head. What was emphasized in the previous paragraph was the abdominal part of this container.

In the following exercises, examples are given of how the thoracic or chest cavity can be stimulated as part of the body container for emotions.

1. Start with moving all your joints, just to start sensing the body again. Especially focus on moving your arms, shoulders and ribcage. Find movements that feel pleasant. Don't work hard.
2. Push your palms towards each other in front of your breastbone - and sense how this movement activates the big chest muscle. (Pectoralis major) Do it again and pull your shoulder blades together also (activating muscles between your shoulderblades also. The Rhomboids).

This exercise activates, in an easy way, muscles both on the backside and the front side of the upper part of your body container.

3. Slow flow in circles. Form in groups of 3-5. Stand in a circle. Hold each other's hands firmly, so you can place yourself in positions where you would lose balance if you didn't hold the hands. Find balance together while you move in slow flow. Sense your feet and the contact to the ground. Sense your center and sense the contact through the hands. Get into positions and movements using your shoulders and arms in many different ways. This way of moving activates all muscle groups in the upper part of the torso and connects it to the abdomen and the legs.

Share shortly in the group how it feels in the body after the exercise.

If you don't have a group of people to work together with, you can do the same exercise in couples or by yourself. Make the slow movements focusing especially on movements in the upper part of the body and in the same time stay connected to your center and feet.

4. In pairs. One person gives resistance to different parts of the other person's ribcage, front side, sides and backside. Move up to the hands, respecting the dose that feels right. And through the movements get in contact with the whole ribcage. Find a way of letting your breathing cooperate with the push into the hands. Pay attention to how you stand on your legs. Stand so you carry yourself. Building up energy needs body containment and it needs your grounding.

If you are on your own you can get into sensing your ribcage through breathing into the different parts of it. Let your breathing touch the front side, backside and sides of the ribcage. Remember to respect your own optimal dosage. Breathing consciously into the ribcage for a while can open up to many different sensations and emotional states. Follow your curiosity and respect your own limits and boundaries.

5. Sense the muscular container in the whole torso now, combining the sensation of the lower and the upper part. How does that feel? To include the whole trunk in your concept of a container for emotions?

6. The diaphragm is the biggest breathing muscle in your body impacting the capacity for building up energy in the muscular container strongly. Work in couples - on the diaphragm. One person gives contact and resistance to the other person's diaphragm by placing the hands just below the curved line of the ribs on the front side of the body.

First allow the push from the hands, contract the front side of your body. Then push up against the hands. Push them out. Respect individual dosing. Some people love using a lot of power in this (hyperresponsive diaphragm). Others feel quite weak in the movement (hypo-responsive). You may use a sound also when you push out. Or first hold your breath while pushing out, and then release the energy in a sound when you finish the push.

7. Notice your breathing now. Notice how your diaphragm is involved in the breathing. Sense the part of the diaphragm that attaches to the front of your 4th - 5th lumbar vertebrae, connecting it to your center through fascia. Now notice the top of the dome of your diaphragm to the left, the part that touches your heart from underneath. When you breathe fascia connected to your diaphragm stimulates your heart. Now notice both these parts of the diaphragm at once and realize that your center and your heart is connected or simultaneously activated with every breath you take. This connection is part of your body container for emotions.

8. Sense the full container of your trunk from your pelvic floor up to your diaphragm and up to your rib cage. Sense your center and your heart inside of the container and your breathing working in the container like a pulse in and out. What does it feel like to include all of these sensations in the idea of having a body container for your emotions?

Emotional flow - again.

Look at the list of 7 emotions again and choose one. You can choose the same one or another one. Go with your curiosity.

Follow the same guidelines described earlier including the whole torso as container.

Here in short version:

Bring the emotion to your consciousness. Sense the body sensations that go with this emotion for you.

Sense your muscular container in the whole torso, around the center, and around the heart.

Allow the emotion to flow inside of the container and through it.

Sense your breathing. Let it stimulate the flow in the emotional energy.

Find movement impulses that go together with the emotion and follow them.

Use your body and especially your arms.

If the emotion you have chosen moves into another emotion, allow it.

In couples, stand in front of each other and keep following the above instructions.

Sense your body container and your emotional flow while in interaction with the other person. If the emotion you have chosen moves into another emotion allow it. If more emotions are present simultaneously allow one at a time to come to the foreground in the flow.

Share with your partner how this whole sequence worked for you. What emotion did you choose, how was it to let it flow in the bigger body container. Was it different to be in the emotional flow alone or in interaction and what was the difference?

Bringing the heart into focus as part of the container in cooperation with the center touches an important theme around emotional coping patterns.

The heart plays a big role in how mutual connection is expressed in contact.

For example, there is a big difference between being angry, disgusted or afraid with an open or with a closed heart. And also in being met.

Can you stay in contact with your heart when being in emotional arousal? In all the emotions or just in some of them? Can you combine presence in your heart with presence in your center?

The diaphragm exercises described in the above paragraph can be used to support the skill of connecting presence in the heart with presence in the abdomen, the gut.

Knowing about the anatomical connection between the 2 areas via the diaphragm and the fascia system gives both cognitive support and sensory support. It may actually help you to know that the 2 areas ARE connected in your physical body if you have old habits of separating them. And it certainly helps to sense it.

MAKING THE CONTAINER COMPLETE - including the head.

The exercises in the previous paragraphs have covered most of the body, supporting sensory awareness of the muscular container in the trunk, movement impulses in the arms and legs and connection to the ground through both the feet and the sitting bones.

The only part of the body not yet focused on is the neck/throat and the head. The complete body container also includes the head and the energy field around it. To include the head in the sensory awareness has a potential for supporting integration between presence cognitively, emotionally and bodily, an integration needed for having access to our full range of coping skills and being flexible in how we use them.

1. Sitting or standing, go inside, get a sense of your body container, and a sense of how your body is meeting the floor. Gravity provides us with a downward connection to the ground. The weight of the body is literally falling towards the ground all the time. In the same time the ground is giving a counter pressure, stimulating an upward going stretching reflex going up through our feet, legs, sitting bones, sacrum, spine, all the way up through the vertebrae in the neck, stretching the neck to the top of the head and above it. Grounding goes in two directions: down to the ground and up from the ground. Sense these two directions in your body right now.

Sense your center, your physical balance point. Think of the size of your lumbar vertebrae and the front side of them to support sensing the center. Take your attention to all the muscle groups surrounding the center: the sides of the body, the butt, back, diaphragm, abdomen, and pelvic floor. These muscles provide you with the lower part of your muscular container.

Notice your breathing, both in your abdomen and in your ribcage. Sense how the diaphragm connects the 2 parts of the container. Focus on the physical container around the heart and lungs: the rib cage, the breast muscles and the muscles in the upper part of your back and around the shoulder blades. Sense both parts of the physical container of the body from your pelvic floor to your throat and neck. You also have an energetic container, a personal energy field belonging to you. Use your arms for a while to just take in this concept. You can both use movements of pushing and of gathering with the hands to sense your personal space. Sense it all around your body, around the lower part of your body, the upper part and around your head. Follow the sensation of the energy running through you, up through your spine to your head balancing on top of your spine, to the center of your head. It may be useful to move your head a little, with small movement in the top vertebrae to get a sensation of where the middle of your head is.

2. Work in couples. One person gives contact and resistance to the backside of the other person's shoulders, shoulder blades, neck and forehead. Move up to the hands using the contact for a kind of active massage. Find the amount of strength it feels good to use in the different areas. This exercise can support the connection between head and body through activating and loosening up all the muscle groups involved in this connection. Use your own hands for moving and stretching your facial muscles.

3. Your cranium, the muscles in your face and the fascias on your skull provide you with a physical container for your head. Sense this container and connect it to the other levels of your body container. Sense the energy field around the head and connect it to the energy field around the rest of your body. Sense your breathing and the pulse it gives in your whole body. Be aware of all three levels of your container, physically and energetically, in standing and in moving around.

4. What feeling state are you in now? Are there emotions present in you? In small waves or big waves? Or is there "quiet water". Allow whatever feeling state or emotion you sense to flow in you, in and through your physical and energetic container. Or choose one of the 7 emotions again. Include your head and the energy field around your head in the container. What difference does it make for you to include your whole body in the container? Does it feel different to allow the flow in the emotion when your head is included? Does it feel different to interact with other people? Share your experiences with a partner.

For some people it becomes harder to feel the emotional energy when the head is included in the container. For others the container becomes more whole, safer, or sometimes more light, more expanded, supporting the emotional flow with a different quality.

Each person contains his emotions in a unique way. Some are able to contain with only one container of the three, some with two, and some with all three. Notice what part of these containers is available for you. Are some of them weaker or stronger than others? Whatever way you can contain your emotions is of value. Working with sensing all three containers and the connection between them holds the potential for opening up new possibilities, gaining more flexibility and resources in your emotional coping.

BODY SKILLS FOR COPING WITH INSTINCTS

To cope with instincts you need the body to function as a kind of lightning rod, to be able to channel the high charge through the body, not storing it, not getting stuck in it. The skills supporting this channeling relate to the reflex system in the body more than to muscle awareness.

The following series of exercises was developed as part of a trauma therapy training - training the therapists bodily in being able to cope with high intensity.

In these exercises the focus is on raising the energy level in the body, approaching the level of charge present in instincts through building up to and stimulating reflexive movement patterns.

Equally important is the focus on how to get back down to more normal energy charge again in a safe way. In other words, how to land from having touched the instinctual level.

Exercises for warming up and supporting the personality to get ready to approach the reflex system in the body. (This is a repetition of some of the already described exercises with an addition).

1. Start again with moving all your joints. Do the slow flowing movements and do the cross crawl movement standing. Do both of these exercises with the intention of heightening your energy level. Strengthen your muscular container by activating some or all muscle groups in the container. You may choose some of the exercises activating many muscle groups at once. Support especially the parts of your muscular container that has a tendency to be less present. As soon as you heighten your energy charge these are the parts of you least capable of handling the charge. If you support them beforehand you raise your capacity for handling high charge.
Push back to back and side to side with a partner, wrestling a little and sensing your physical power being met in the contact. Stay centered while doing it. Remember to go for individual success. Working with less power can have more powerful results!
Sense your big toe, move it away from the other toes. Walk pushing off the ground with your big toe. Sense your large butt-muscle getting activated in walking (*Gluteus maximus*), swing your arms back and forth while walking (*Latissimus* and *Pectoralis major*). Lean into the support from the back while walking.
How is your energy level now? Your readiness?

Exercises for getting in contact with reflexive movement patterns.

2. Lie down on the floor. Make big movements involving the whole body. "Mess around" on the floor. Contracting your body and stretching it out. Sense your physical balance point as your center in the movements. Move around it.
3. Lie on your back. Pull your knees towards your chest. Move your sacrum in circles against the floor. Move the rest of your back against the floor. Move both legs over to one side and sense the rotation and stretch in your lumbar spine. Do the same thing to the other side.
4. Still lying on you back, put your feet on the ground. Lift up your spine - one vertebra at a time - until you rest on your shoulders. Then lay your spine down on the floor slowly, one vertebra at a time. Do this 2 - 3 times.

The 3 previous exercises are an opportunity for you to get out of your Role ego by messing around on the floor. These movements help you to let go and to move your spine more flexibly. The spine is crucial in raising and channeling high intensity. It is a central part of the "lightning rod" for energy in your body.

5. Sit up slowly so you take the sense of contact with the floor with you in changing position.

6. Make big movements in all directions with arms and legs while balancing on your butt. You may lower your arms and support the body with them so it doesn't become too hard work but keep making big movements.

Sense how you move around your center, your physical balance point.

Make the movements smaller. Sense your sitting bones.

Make the movements smaller and smaller and smaller, until you only make tiny small movements sensing the contact between your sitting bones and the floor and your center of gravity.

Let the movements stop. Sense how your weight is being carried by the floor through the sitting bones and how the energy and physical pressure from the floor and the earth is coming up to your body through the sitting bones.

How is it for you to sit like that? Put a couple of words to it. It may be difficult to find words in the state you are in now, but finding words is part of building a connection between the personality and a higher charged state.

The same exercise can be done sitting on chairs, if you have limitations in your body making it hard to find a balanced sitting position on the floor.

Through this exercise your body has a chance for getting closer to being carried by the upward moving standing reflex in the body. Some of the muscle patterns can let go - and the reflexes can take over. If you can lean into being carried by the reflexes you get into a state of presence where your energy level can raise without hard work. You can get present like an animal both resting and totally ready to react at the same time. This is the level of presence where we are ready for instinctual reactions. Doing these exercises is a bodily path to approach this level of consciousness.

7. Stand up slowly so you take the contact with the floor and the sitting bones up with you. When standing still lean into the sitting bones as if you were sitting on pillows or air. Sense that you are carried by the floor through your feet. Sense how your weight is coming down to the floor through your feet and how the floor and the energy from the earth is coming up to your body through your feet and through your sitting bones. How does it feel to stand like that? Name it. Often a mixture of peaceful being and readiness to react can be sensed.

8. Sense your sacrum, the bottom part of your spine. For some people sensing the sacrum supports the capacity for leaning into the sensation of being carried reflexively.

Find someone to pair up with. One stand behind the other. Put your hand on the sacrum of the other person. Take time for the sacrum to rest. Stand on your own feet and lean into the hand. The holder behind is to very lightly lift the other up from the sacrum by pushing a little forward and upward with the hand, helping the spine rise and helping the energy to rise through the spine. Allow the hand to do the rising. Notice the timing with this. Keep in your self. Keep your hand there. Energy moves into the standing person's body. When energy rises reflexively very often the breathing changes. Suddenly the breathing deepens, a deep inhalation is released. The stretching reflex and the breathing reflex cooperate.

Now let the other person know when you are ready to finish and gradually take away the supporting hand. Can you describe what this feels like, how this changes the sensation of standing? There can be a here and now quality. A presence. A readiness. Effortlessness. A potential for only using the reflexive activity in some muscles necessary to stand and no more.

This is a very powerful exercise. The potential is that it strongly supports the capacity to go into the state of being carried by the reflexes - and through that to become capable of carrying high levels of intensity.

9. Walk around in the room - leaning into the reflexive way of being carried and breathing. (Put on some fast music, for example techno music). Start playing with balance. Let yourself fall into sudden fast movements and then go back to slow movements again. Make these shifts many times. Play with it. Stay in contact with your sitting bones, your sacrum, leaning into the reflex carrying you and your reflexive breathing. Let your reflex movements automatically find your balance again when you let yourself fall.

10. Play with having somebody suddenly stop the music and immediately release some of the energy charge into one precise movement accompanied by one contained sound. Sense your spine and the rest of the vertical connection through your body. Sense the energy down your legs into the ground. Sense the energy connect to a point above your head. When you make a movement and say a sound, sense this connection. Let all the energy run in this connection and in your breathing.
Do this 2 - 3 times.

Playing with gravity and shifting between very fast and slow movements are ways to activate reflex movements. When you fall, you don't have time to think. While moving you just find your balance again reflexively. Experience has shown that it is possible to raise the level of intensity to a very high level through doing this. You can raise the intensity to the level where you can sense possible instinctual reactions. Guiding you directly into releasing instinctual reactions would not be ethically right to do. Instinctual reactions come when they are needed in situations touching life and death or situations with very high intensity.

What is possible and ethically acceptable in my opinion is to guide you into the level of intensity where the capacity for releasing instinctual reactions is touched. And where memory of instinctual reactions may be touched.

11. Keep walking around in the room. Sense the heightened intensity. Sense that this is the state of consciousness where powerful instinctual reactions could be channeled through you. Panic fear - rage - disgust - sexual mating - screaming in sadness - or be in a pleasurable being - like in the eye of the hurricane.
All these reactions may come as fast as a lightning and may go through your body, running up and down through your spine and the rest of your body, connecting you to the ground and to space above you. Sense the kind of contact you experience with your surroundings and other people in this level of intensity.
Think of the words "dignity and mutual connection". Both can be experienced in this highly charged state. The energy in dignity can run freely through the vertical channel in your body. And your breathing reflex connects you every microsecond to what is outside of you. This is a kind of mutual connection that is not so much connected to you as a person, but more to you as a living being.

Landing into emotions again

Notice when the level of intensity starts falling by itself. You may want to turn it up again. Sense that you can do that and how you do it. Sense how you can regulate your energy level so you can stay in contact with the instinctual energy level and the reflexive movement patterns.

Next time the level of intensity starts falling again, allow it. Sense how it happens in the body. Be aware of staying in contact with the spine and your upright position. Don't allow the body to collapse when the energy level starts dropping.

Focus on sensing your muscles again. What movements do you feel like making when you sense your muscles? Sense your arms. What movements do you feel like making with your arms?

And what emotions do you land in? Name them to yourself - and allow them to flow.

Notice the contact with the others in the group. Notice the difference between how contact is experienced in this level of intensity compared to the high level just before.

Find your balance between making movements by yourself and moving together with someone else. Do you feel like using your arms together with somebody? Do it.

Landing from high intensity and instincts is a vulnerable process. Many people tend to get depressed when they land because they collapse instead of land. The contrast gets too big that way. Other people don't want to land. They avoid the shift back into the personal level of consciousness.

Getting back from high intensity and from instincts, you go through the emotional level.

We land through emotions. Personal contact is important in that process. If there is no contact when you land from high intensity, the risk is bigger that you get stuck in certain emotions like sadness. Or that you don't want to land.

Landing in a social context will often make it easier to let the emotions flow and shift.

Different people have different styles in landing depending on our resources and our defense strategies and our relationship to the emotions. People want more or less contact, more or less movement etc.

Find the best way for you. Above all, remember the principle of not collapsing in the body. Slow landing is safer than a crash. For a safe landing you need the channel for high energy charge in the body to be working, the vertical connection through your body, feet, sacrum, spine, neck, top of head and above. You also need your breathing working both reflexively and also muscularly, slowly connecting you to your muscular container again.

So, when you sit down, stay in contact with the vertical connection through your body, sense your sitting bones and your center and sense what it feels like coming back from a high level of intensity. Are there still emotional waves in you? If so, allow them. Also name the emotions to yourself and let them shift into each other until the process at some point probably comes to rest. Stay in contact with your center.

THE FEELING LEVEL

A lot of different exercises can be created for dealing with the feeling level. A few will be presented here to hopefully awaken your curiosity and creativity for going further into this level yourself.

The feeling language is the language most of us use all the time in daily life when we communicate. When we express how we are and what we feel.

Focusing on the connection between this level of consciousness and the level of emotions and sometimes even instincts is interesting and worthwhile doing. It can bring more consciousness to the hidden levels of our communication and to what actually drives us to say what we say.

Think of the last 2 months. What kind of daily life expressions have you used when asked, "How are you?" Find two or three different expressions. Examples of expressions can be: "I am actually fine". "I am busy and somewhat tired". "I am stressed" etc. When you have found them, say them loud to somebody and check out what happens in your body while using these expressions.

Then look at the chart of emotions and instincts. Take one feeling expression at a time. What percent of each of the seven emotions does your feeling expression contain? Is there instinctual energy lying behind the expression also? Name the emotions and maybe instincts. For example: Behind "I am busy and somewhat tired" could be: I am 50 % sad, 25 % scared, some of it approaching panic fear, 10 % angry and 15 % happy. Another person could have entirely different percentages of emotions and instincts lying under the same expression. Find yours and name the emotions and instincts in simple sentences to your partner.

Then go back to the feeling expression saying it loud again. This time, be aware of what emotions and maybe instincts are lying behind the expression. How does it feel in your body now? What difference does it make to be aware of the underlying emotions and instincts? Both for you in saying it and for the person hearing it?

Think of last time you felt jealous. Check out with yourself what percentages of what emotions and instincts were present in you in the feeling of jealousy. Share this with a partner or more people. Notice how many versions of different emotions or instincts can be covered by the same feeling word.

The above can be done with many other words like: Tired, disappointed, stressed, busy and many more. Use your own creativity. It can be fun doing it and it sharpens your awareness of how different emotional realities can lie behind the feeling words. Misunderstandings can easily happen. When we don't misunderstand each other all the time in the feeling level it is due to the nonverbal communication carrying the messages from the emotions and instincts which lie behind the words. Through body resonance we register all the signals telling us about the other person's emotional and maybe instinctual state.

Love is not mentioned in the model. Take a moment to think about what love is for you. Are emotions and instincts included in love? Some of them or all of them? Used on the feeling level, what cognition goes with the word for you? Is love a spiritual feeling? Is both dignity and mutual connection part of it? Is it something bigger than it all?

The question may not be easy to answer, but trying to do it can open you up to realizing why so many misunderstandings can occur in communication around love. We often don't have the same inner reality lying behind the word. We may have different percentages of emotions, instincts, feelings, thoughts, spiritual feelings constituting our experience of what love is. Knowing your own version could help you to communicate your own inner reality clearer. You might also become curious to what lies behind other people's messages when they communicate to you about love.

CONCLUSION – strengths and weaknesses in the model.

The model and the exercises presented in this article have been taught in workshops and trainings since 1999 in several countries. I have taught it myself in Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Canada, Holland and USA. The model was presented for the first time in Vancouver in 1999.

Prior to this the concept of basic emotions have been part of the Bodydynamic system for many years. (Jarlnæs 1994)

One of the biggest contributions in what this work presents lies in the practical application of the model through the concrete language and the exercises. The exercises have been refined over many years. They hold a high level of precision, building on knowledge about psychomotor development and the healthy potential connected to each muscle in the body. The exercises also rely on knowledge about trauma and methods of working with healing PTSD.

Theoretically the model is simplified. The brain function in the 3 levels of feeling states is way more complex than presented here.

The list of instincts is probably not complete. There is a clarification to be made between survival reflexes and instincts. Some of the instincts named correlate clearly to survival reflexes: Rage connects to fight reflex, panic fear to flight reflex, disgust to vomit reflex. With other of the mentioned instincts it is harder to find directly correlating reflexes. Vice versa the protection reflex doesn't find a correlate in the list of instincts. This may suggest either that instincts and survival reflexes are 2 different aspects in our survival kit or it may suggest that something is not quite clear in the concept of instincts described in the model. That the concept covers different aspects without clarifying it. The list of emotions could include more information from other models like curiosity as listed by Paul Ekman. The facial expression of curiosity is seen in pack animals too. And curiosity plays a role in regulating interaction in the pack and securing its survival. So based on the criteria for the Bodydynamic list of emotions, it can be included. And it could correlate to the orienting reflex on the instinctual level.

Compared to other models, this one describes a clear distinction between instincts and emotions. The theory of the Triune brain formulated by Mac Lean supports this distinction. A number of other models or theories dealing with emotions don't do that (Goleman 1995, 2003, Pert 1997). A usual model describes the difference between activation in the old parts of the brain: the brainstem and the limbic system and on the other hand the cortex, sometimes referred to as "the low road and the high road". (Dan Siegel 1999). Compared to the model presented here it would mean that the instincts and emotions go in one mutual box, connected to the low road and the feelings go in another box connected to the high road.

A way to understand this difference is to relate to the activation in the brain. Emotions in the Bodydynamic model are described as connected to activation in the limbic system. This is not the whole picture. As soon as an emotion is contained and named, part of the cortex is involved. What is described as healthy coping with emotions in this article involves a cooperation between activation in the limbic system and probably the prefrontal cortex. The prefrontal cortex provides us with a capacity for inhibiting impulses thus giving us time to contain and choose expression of emotional arousal.

The concept of emotions as it is described here thus provides a bridge between pure activation in the limbic system (the low road) and access to coping skills in the cortex (the high road).

Without these skills functioning it is harder to differentiate between instincts and emotions. The emotional arousal will come solely from the limbic system being expressed reflexively, thus approaching instinctual behaviour.

A more thorough definition of the 3 levels thus is:

Instincts are part of survival reflexes and also include other reactions to life threatening circumstances. They are activated from the brainstem, the reptilian brain.

Emotions are activated from the limbic system, the mammalian brain. Emotions play a basic role in regulating interaction between pack animals - including humans. In early childhood (less than 18 months (Siegel 1999, Yvonne Agazarian 2006) emotional arousal is expressed directly from the limbic system into action. The only container function lies in the Body ego. From about 18 months and older, a connection to the prefrontal cortex develops providing us with the capacity for inhibiting impulses, and for naming emotions in words. We can think before we act. Emotional arousal can be contained and expressed in cooperation between the limbic system and the cortex.

Feelings also include cooperation between emotional arousal in the limbic system and the cortex, but the balance between the 2 is different compared to the state of emotions. In the feeling level the predominant activation in the brain comes from the cortex, possibly from specific parts of it.

Contribution of the model to trauma therapy:

The differentiation between instincts, emotions and feelings presented in this article is primarily based on empirical data from psychotherapeutic work and from observing animal and human behaviour.

In working with resolving unresolved traumas the distinction between instincts and emotions is very meaningful. It is important not only in terms of understanding the process unfolding, the different states the client or you yourself go through, but also in terms of being able to guide the process.

The difference between the states of consciousness and arousal present in the acute trauma phases and the states people get into when they come out of the acute phase and start landing is evident. This difference is a key to understand the differentiation between the concepts of instincts and emotions presented here.

Successful landing after traumatic events involves all 3 levels - instincts, emotions and feelings. The instincts are present in the trauma, in the acute phase. When you get out of the acute phase and hopefully find safety again, you start landing. The landing process takes you through different stages bodily, emotionally and cognitively. The body is trembling, releasing the high charge in movements. Emotional reactions come when you start sensing in your body and personal identity what happened to you. And finally you re-find language from the cortex including your feeling language. You may start being able to reflect and look for an understanding of what happened.

Distinction between instincts, emotions and feelings can help the therapist navigate in the landscape of traumatic reactions. What state is the client in? What skills are useful in that state? How am I impacted myself by traumatic material as a therapist or just as a human being? And what skills can help me process the impact?

Knowing the 3 levels in yourself, knowing them conceptually and knowing skills connected to each of them helps you to answer these questions and help you to cope.

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