

Connection in a Torn World: An Integrative Approach in Psychotherapy

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Abstract: In an age of fragmentation, polarization and destruction, this article explores integration and Integrative Psychotherapy as a response to the current world situation. We explore the meaning of integration in psychotherapy and deepen and broaden human and world perspectives. Our starting point is the premise that therapeutic approaches enrich each other in dealing with disintegration in a torn world. This premise is applied to Gendlin's experiential approach and Siegel's interpersonal neurobiology. We emphasize the value of integration and an integral view of man and worldview, including applying positive disintegration on a global level. This article contributes to the psychotherapy discourse by unfolding layers of integration and promoting interconnectivity in our rapidly changing and fractured world.

Key Words: Integrative psychotherapy, world fragmentation, therapeutic perspectives, focusing, window of tolerance, integral humanity and worldview, global positive disintegration

In early October 2023, EAIP's 11th Integrative Psychotherapy Congress was held in Georgia at the interface of Eastern Europe and Western Asia. The main themes discussed during the congress were that, 'Human Rights, Connections and Diversities', are essential in our present world and also for mental health. In his opening speech, the association's president spoke about the vital role of integration and the connection in diversity as core val-

ues and challenges to be cherished. (Van den Bosch, 6-10-2023). One day later, war broke out in Israel.

*You want it darker
Hineni, hineni
I'm ready, my Lord"*

(Leonard Cohen)

In the interplay between the push for integration at the EAIP Congress and the real-

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ity of crisis and war, the need for integrative approaches is stressed all the more. *‘Hineni, Hineni’*^[1] – Here we are, ready to go deep into one of the essential foundations of mental health amid disintegration and destruction.

Clarifying the concept of integration: Distinguishing and connecting

The term ‘integration’ is often linked with migrants or refugees, which seems to imply assimilation. However, what is actually unilateral adaptation is not integration. Just as in a choir, when distinctive voices are singing, they come together in harmony without losing their individuality. The process of being included in a larger whole also requires mutual alignment and connection between different elements. In other words, differentiation and integration go hand-in-hand, and the connected whole is greater than the sum of its parts, as is illustrated by the example of a choir.

Nevertheless, what do we mean when we talk about Integrative Psychotherapy? What does the concept of integration mean in the context of mental health care? What distinguishable elements call for connection?

Let us begin with the central figure: the client. When a person is integrated, this is reflected in a natural vitality, a healthy adaptation and coherence – like a smooth singing of different aspects of life. However, seeking psychological help often implies a degree of disintegration. There is a restlessness or emptiness where thoughts and feelings do not merge seamlessly; desires, wills and actions do not merge vividly. Relationships with others, with the world

around, or with life itself, are complicated. Body, mind and environment are not well aligned. Integration, in this context, means seeking renewed alignment, connection, and balance with the inner self, others, and the flow of life; it is a pursuit of wholeness, meaningfulness, and connection.

Neuroscientist and psychotherapist, Daniel Siegel, uses the metaphor of the ‘River of Integration’ – a flow on the ‘edge of chaos’. The stream moves between rigid order and chaotic randomness, blending the familiar and unfamiliar in an ever-evolving stream of differentiation and connection (Siegel, 2022, p. 130). Examples of states beyond the ‘River of Integration’ include outbursts of anger or fear and being overpowered by a sense of paralysis or emptiness (Siegel, 2010, p. 263).

On a global scale, events such as floods, pandemics, and wars, reflect the chaos of disintegration. On the opposite side, increasing hardening, rigidity, and apathy, manifest themselves. These events reflect a world fluctuating between the extremes of chaos and rigidity, where striving for integration and a renewed balance is crucial for global well-being.

We are in an existential crisis. Emmy van Deurzen, philosopher and existential therapist, spoke about it at the EAIP Congress (see next article). The turmoil and disasters in the world affect all our lives and potentially endanger them. Connections and meaning are simultaneously destroyed at many levels. It comes down to finding new connections and new actions to survive and feel of value in this world, argues van Deurzen. We need a total transformation, new resilience, and a broader human horizon (Van Deurzen, 07-10-2023).

1. **Editor’s Note:** *‘Hineni’* is Hebrew for “Here. I am” and is the response that Abraham gave when God called on him to sacrifice his son Isaac. It is also the name of a prayer of preparation and humility, as chanted by the cantor on Rosh Hashanah.

We need a broad perspective. This brings us to yet another context in which we use the word integration in psychotherapy: the therapeutic approach. Depending on the school that the therapist belongs to, the person coming into counselling is helped according to a particular method: analytical, behavioural, cognitive, experiential, existential, contextual, systemic, etc. However, integrative therapists combine these different views and utilise methods from several therapeutic perspectives. This allows them to apply a 'flexible' therapy, tailored to the client's world. This integrative nature promotes a holistic approach, and offers a treasure chest of opportunities, so as to effectively respond to the complexity of human experiences and challenges.

In conclusion, whether addressing the intrapsychic, relational, or transpersonal wholeness of an individual, the healing of the world, or the interaction of various therapeutic approaches, integration involves the alignment, interplay, and connection of different parts, nurturing diversity and coherence. In essence, integration is shaped through interaction, where the harmonious flow of the 'River of Integration' can serve as a metaphor for both personal growth and global well-being. In a world undergoing existential crisis, and oscillating between chaos and rigidity, the pursuit of integration and the discovery of new meaningful connections remain crucial – a necessity for survival and for the restoration of a healthy balance and well-being. Integrative Psychotherapy may play a crucial role in this transformative process.

How the lens we look through influences the creation of our world

Now that we have explored the concept of integration, we can turn our gaze to the different lenses through which we view the world. We

can explore how the lens that we look through shapes our perception and how Integrative Psychotherapy can be a valuable tool for embracing diverse perspectives in this complex world.

A worldview acts as a lens through which we see everything, often without being fully aware of it, argues author and integrator Jeremy Lent in his book, *'The Web of Meaning: Integrating Science and Traditional Wisdom to Find Our Place in the Universe'* (2021). A worldview affects the way we act. When we believe that all living things are family, we will treat them differently than when the natural world is a resource to be exploited. We often do not realise that we observe the world around us a lens or window, and it is through dialogue with others that we can broaden our viewpoint. In encounters with others, we become more aware of the invisible window through which we look, allowing us to take a different perspective. Watching through a particular lens adjusts our perception, which can change the meaning that we assign to events and to what we desire, want, and do. A different perspective can then bring movement to a stalled story, or calm to too much chaos. It affects how we *'shape our reality in interaction'* and influences a person's integration with self in relation to others and the present world. As integrative thinkers, we have brought together the interaction between perceiving, wanting and acting, in the 'I.V. Triangle', in total, the Triangle of Conceptual Interaction (Vleugels & van den Bosch, 2008). More about this in the section, *'The Basic Frameworks'* (below). We also emphasise that individuals' perceptions, desires and actions are partly determined by social constructions and shared meanings in their environment. Social constructivism (Berger-Luckmann, 1966) puts this interaction between individual and collective aspects at the very centre: especially of subjective cultural aspects, such as human and worldviews. The prevailing worl-

dview affects each of us. However, this also applies the other way around. As Jeremy Lent aptly noted:

*Once we shift our worldview,
another world becomes possible."*

(Jeremy Lent, 2021, p. 12)

The Bifocal Glasses: Multiple perspectives

"It is widely acknowledged and empirically supported that the client's role is pivotal for the success of psychotherapy, closely followed by the significance of the therapeutic relationship" (Norcross, 2002).

These two elements form the cornerstone of our integrative approach. To articulate our vision and methodology, we employ a metaphor: the glasses with bifocal lenses, glasses with lenses that are different from each other. Without alignment with the client, this becomes a cold tool for use. However, with the right essential attitude of the therapist and, in collaboration with the client, it is a tool that brings movement and foster integration.

The metaphor of the lenses of bifocal glasses creates two different areas of vision: one for distant and one for closer observation. The glasses symbolise a therapy where we can alternate between taking a broader viewpoint and deepening up close: for example: *"How do you personally experience this situation?"* (individual); *"Do you know any other people who suffers from this?"* (collective). We can also see the glasses' lenses as a more subjective or objective view. In other words, we can shift from an inner perspective to the measurable or visible outside, and *vice versa*: for example: *"What do you experience more deeply emotionally when you think about it?"* (inside experience); and *"What do you usually do when you worry?"* (outside behaviour). We can also shift to an inner perspective of a family or culture: for example:

"Are there certain expectations or norms from your culture that influence how you deal with these emotions?" (inner / collective culture). Additionally, we can explore the visible and measurable collective exterior, in other words, the influence of the client's living environment and surrounding systems: for example: *"In what ways do news and the political situation affect you personally in these stressful global times?"* (systems: outer / collective culture).

Philosopher, Ken Wilber (2000, 2017) encapsulated these perspectives or domains into a meta-model: the 'Four Quadrants', a framework comprising four interacting windows. These Four Quadrants assist us in comprehending how individuals, collectives, internal experiences, and external circumstances interact and are interconnected. More on this will be discussed shortly with our basic frameworks.

The Basic Frameworks

The variety of therapeutic perspectives makes integrative therapy flexible and versatile. However, interventions or techniques are not used arbitrarily. Alignment with the client and the therapeutic relationship is the absolute basis, and the theoretical frameworks, or conceptual models, surround these basic attitudes. We mostly limit ourselves to the I.V. Triangle, the Four Quadrants, and the Layers of Depth.

- **The I.V. Triangle**, in full: The Triangle of Interaction (Vleugels & Van den Bosch, 2008; Vleugels, 2021) maps the complex interaction between person and environment, and between perceiving, wanting and acting: the points of an isosceles triangle. The sides of the triangle symbolise a processual, semantic and behavioural track in counselling clients. The triangle as a whole symbolises a path between taking control and following what an-

nounces itself. The I.V. triangle focuses on the person as a whole with all its named components. Finding an entry with one component will also affect the strongly interconnected other components. The triangle becoming a tetrahedron (a pyramid with the triangle as its base) indicates the transpersonal nature of integration:

When we succeed in meeting the other person with an open mind and open heart, when there is a mutual resonance and trust in the shared process, the person's identity expands. As the self merges into something else, it expands itself.

(Vleugels, 2021, p. 114–115).

- **The Four Quadrants**, as proposed by Ken Wilber (2000, 2017), offer an integral perspective on human experience and development. There are two axes: one axis goes from individual to collective, and the other goes from internal to external (subjective/objective). The four quadrants help in understanding different aspects of a complex reality.

1. **I** (*Individual Subjective*): This quadrant deals with an individual's inner experiences, such as thoughts, emotions and consciousness. For psychotherapists, this can refer to exploring client's inner world, including their subjective experiences and psychological processes.
2. **THE** [*singular*] (*Individual Objective*): This quadrant deals with the objective exterior of an individual. It focuses on the physical body, the brain and observable behaviour. The influence of nutrition and medication is also part of this quadrant.
3. **WE** (*Collective Subjective*) refers to shared values, cultural beliefs, relationships and subjective experiences

within groups. For psychotherapists, this means understanding the influence of family, social and cultural contexts on the individual psychological well-being of the clients.

4. **THE** [*plural*] (*Collective Objective*): This quadrant deals with the influence of the broader social and institutional context within which families and individuals function and the dynamics, roles, hierarchies, communication styles and patterns within a family or group.

Each of the four perspectives in this framework has its validity and form of truth. They complement each other, and there is coherence and interaction between them: for example, our inner feeling world (internal/individual), our worldview (internal/collective), our brain (external/individual), and our environment (external/collective) influence each other and our well-being. Consciousness, the cultural, physical, systemic world, and natural habitat are distinct areas that can interact. This integral model recognises the interconnectedness of these various aspects and the mutual influence in human experience and development. A striking example of mutual influence can be seen during the COVID-19 pandemic, which demonstrated how a worldwide health crisis can profoundly impact various aspects of individuals' lives. From individual emotional experience to social, economic, and political dynamics, the pandemic has shown how feelings of social isolation can lead to an increase in loneliness and anxiety, which can then affect both mental and physical health. In addition, economic uncertainty and unemployment can cause significant stress and tension, impacting people's mental and physical well-being and brain functionality, resulting in global repercussions. On the other hand, positive forces such as solidarity, flexibility in working from home, and growing environmental awareness

can benefit the individual psyche and global well-being. Personal well-being contributes to a balanced world and vice versa.

In *Layers of Depth* (van den Bosch, 2012), the starting point is our human stratification. We can tune into a biological, behavioural, cognitive, existential, systemic and archetypal layer. All these layers can provide information about the person and the problem. They offer various potential entry points to more integration: for example, tuning into the cognitive layer can help to look at the client's thinking. What kind of beliefs and values does the person hold, and how do these affect their problem? A systemic key can examine the client's interactions with others. Tuning into this layer can help understand how family and social systems affect the person.

Problems or psychological symptoms often arise or worsen through the interplay of interdependent and complementary biological, psychological and social factors. Starting from alignment with the client, it comes down to giving space to all human dimensions: for example: asking about possible spiritual beliefs and rituals that can provide purpose and direction in challenging times invites talking about the spiritual and religious dimensions often neglected in therapy; asking how someone wants to be addressed and probing what masculine and feminine mean to someone can be an invitation to talk about gender. In an integrative approach, human beings belong in all their layers.

All these frameworks offer guidance in finding openings, symbolic keyholes and the corresponding key, which can open doors to greater integration. They also help us to become aware of the perspective, the lens through which we look at the client, and the problem when using an intervention or technique. They provide a framework to monitor the whole person and the bigger picture. The aim of all this is

not utopian perfection, but expansion, deepening and integration as a function of the client's well-being and the world, with respect for their limits and limitations, and an eye for qualities and possibilities. The frameworks focus on a holistic/integral approach to people and the world. Furthermore, the realisation is that we are all inter-connected:

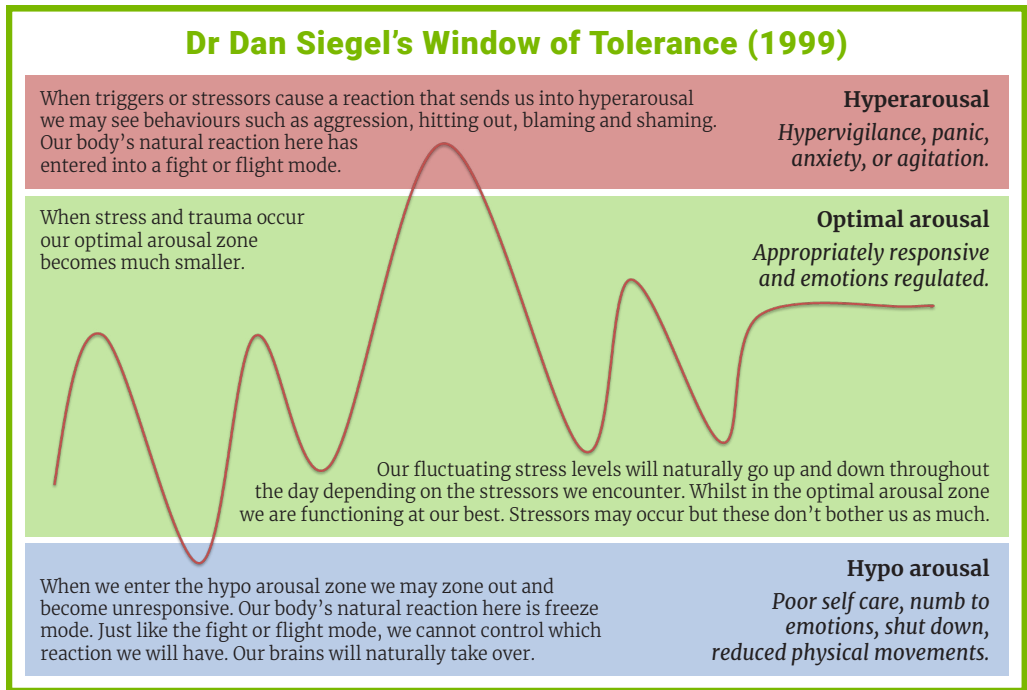
A wider perspective, revealed in new views of contemporary science and echoed by the wisdom of generations of indigenous and contemplative traditions, unveils that who we are, our deeper reality may actually be something more than isolated individuals interacting with one another.

(Siegel, 2022, p. 4)

An Example of Therapy Integration: The Synergy between Focusing and Window of Tolerance

The complexity and disintegration of the world demands a lot from our nervous system and quickly puts us on the bank of destructive chaos, or rigidity. People's destructive and flattened behaviours are not immediately conducive to global balance. How do we break this vicious cycle? What can Integrative Psychotherapy do? An essential task for the therapist is to deal with the psychological imbalance and promote integration in the client by using various therapeutic perspectives and methods. By combining different approaches, inner, relational, and systemic aspects can be integrated, promoting a more connected world.

To illustrate how therapeutic approaches and associated techniques enrich each other in addressing clients' emotional dysregulations, let us connect Eugene Gendlin's experiential view and his focusing process (2003), with Daniel Siegel's 'Interpersonal Neurobiology' and his 'Window of Tolerance' (2010, 2012), utilizing



Ken Wilber's 'Four Quadrants' as an overarching framework (2017).

Eugene Gendlin's experiential approach focuses on exploring inner experiences and cultivating awareness of the body. The value of Gendlin and his approach, which should not be underestimated, is in making it clear that in addition to the healing therapeutic relationship, fostering the client's good relationship with themselves is essential. Despite the therapist's receptive and non-judgemental basic attitude, the client sometimes fails to engage mindfully with himself, thus failing to establish a inner healing relationship and integration. Gendlin describes the healing inner relationship as a psychological state with a proper distance from the self to the inner flow of experience (emotions, body sensations, images, live situation). That proper distance means getting in touch with our experience without coinciding with it or being cut off. To this

end, he developed 'Focusing', which involves making contact with inner physical signals in a gentle and non-judgemental way. More than a strict method, focusing is a therapeutic process in which a series of – not necessarily linear – steps are followed, so as to promote a deeper understanding and acceptance of inner experiences. The first focusing steps involve making space for the inner self and finding the proper distance between self and experience. (Gendlin, 2003; Leijssen, 1995).

Gendlin's approach and Wilber's quadrants complement each other by promoting a holistic understanding of the human experience. Gendlin's focus on individual inner experience offers a deep understanding of Wilber's first quadrant, which encompasses subjective experience. Gendlin contributes to a deeper understanding of individual perspectives and subjective reality by paying attention to perceptible inner knowing. Wilber's quadrants,

in turn, provide a framework for understanding the broader context of these experiences, extending to collective, cultural, social and objective aspects. The synergy between Gendlin's focus on the individual and Wilber's broader perspective can result into a more comprehensive approach to human experience, considering both the depth of individual experience and the broader context.

Dr. Daniel Siegel's 'Interpersonal Neurobiology' exemplifies an approach that integrates interactions across multiple quadrants. Inner processes, such as thoughts and consciousness (individual, subjective), are linked to individual neural processes (individual, objective) and interpersonal relationships (collective, subjective, and objective). Siegel underscores the importance of understanding and promoting a healthy interaction between the brain, psyche, and the impact of social relationships on neurobiological functioning. Relationships, psyche, and brain form three mutually influencing aspects of well-being within one energy and information system (The Triangle of Well-being, 2010, p. 24).

The Window of Tolerance, a framework developed by Siegel (2011, p. 56–59), represents the optimal state in which a person can regulate emotions and physical reactions, and also respond to stress and challenges in a balanced and effective way, with room for flexibility and adaptation. When moving to one edge of this area, we approach chaos, whereas moving to the other edge, we are close to rigidity.

There are many similarities between this 'Window of Tolerance' framework and the 'River of Integration'. However, the River is a metaphor, referring to the movement of a system through time, while the Window of Tolerance refers to a particular state at a particular time. In the Window, the middle space is represented as an arousal zone, a tolerance zone within which we function well. It is an integrated

state with a connection between the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems. Outside that zone, in arousal terms, we go into hyperarousal (nervous system overactivity, chaos) and hypoarousal (underactivity, rigidity). We are no longer integrated and we do not longer function in an adaptive and harmonious way. The aim is to keep or bring clients (and ourselves as therapists!) within healthy and workable boundaries. (Siegel, 2010, 2012).

Hyperarousal, where a person is overwhelmed by emotions or physical reactions, is similar to what Eugene Gendlin describes in 'Focusing' as being too close to the inner flow of experience. Hypoarousal, where someone feels disconnected or cut off, corresponds to what Gendlin calls the 'too-large distance'. What is called in Focusing 'searching for the right distance', Siegel calls 'widening the zone of tolerance'. The added value lies in understanding the interplay between physiological arousal, inner experience, and interpersonal relationships, allowing for integrated interventions and techniques to address physiological, relational, and inner aspects of self-regulation."

Tools to Promote Integration

How can both Siegel's and Gendlin's ideas be supportive in promoting a client's integration, and how can their principles and interventions be jointly used to support the recovery process of person and world?

The Window of Tolerance serves as a structured framework for understanding emotional regulation and provides clients with valuable insights into physiological and emotional aspects of stress reactions, linking them to underlying problems. It contributes to a better understanding of people's reactions when they lose an appropriate distance from their experiences. Moreover, it contributes to insight and meaning (semantic line of the I.V. Triangle). By learning how to stay within The Window of

Tolerance, people can increase their ability to deal with the challenges of political and cultural factors, without becoming overwhelmed (behavioural line). Focusing, representing the active steps of this process, involves observing what is happening internally (process line), allowing a bodily-felt meaning (semantic line) to gradually emerge. This unfolding reveals incremental steps toward focused behaviour. The intrapsychic alignment and deepening facilitated by focusing contribute to emotional regulation, self-insight, personal growth, and integration.

Siegel, as a contemporary neuroscientist, highlights the positive impact of intrapsychic attunement or interoception on the brain and stimulates interpersonal alignment and empathy:

“The more we focus our attention towards bodily sensations within our subjective experience in awareness, the more we activate the physical correlate of insula activation and subsequent growth. (...) The more interoception and insula activation, the more capacity we’ll have for attuning to others and being empathic toward their experience.”

(Siegel, 2010, p. 46).

So, Focusing indeed promotes, not only intrapsychic, but also relational and neural integration! For both Gendlin and Siegel, cultivating a friendly, non-judgemental attitude and awareness of thoughts, emotions, and bodily sensations, form the basis for self-regulation and integration. Both state that ‘safety’, both in terms of the client’s connection with themselves, and in their relationship with the therapist, is highlighted as a crucial step towards self-regulation. The therapist acts as a co-regulator; an external regulatory mechanism through which the client can better understand and regulate his emotional state. Therapists are skilled in being openly present with their bodies, and in regulating their

emotions. By doing so, they create a support system for their client. To this end, Siegel recommends that therapists regularly carry out ‘body scans’, sometimes with the help of a tape where the speaker gently guides the client through a gentle exploration of all their different body parts.

From both the experiential approach and interpersonal neurobiology, various strategies are provided to address hyper-arousal (too small a distance) and hypo-arousal (too large distance). To regulate hyper-arousal (and too small a distance to experience), any safe steps that increase distance to experience can help. For example, ask the client to shift attention outside: listen to sounds in the street, or observe objects in the room. This allows the client to return within the Window of Tolerance, or the appropriate distance from the experience. The reassuring presence of the therapist, plus simple grounding breathing and relaxation exercises, can thus help to regulate hyper-arousal. Placing the problem at more of a distance in the therapy room creates an essential space for the client.

With hypo-arousal (and an excessive distance from the client’s inner self), every safe step that reduces the distance from the experience can help, such as eye-contact, encouraging one to be present in the moment, and to move actively and consciously in physical activities, such as gardening and creative or artistic work, also helps to reconnect with the body and one’s emotions (Leijssen, 1995; Weiser & Cornell, 1996; Siegel, 2010).

It is thus crucial to tailor interventions to individual client needs and limits, when applying these many integration techniques. Additionally, adjusting the intervention technique based on whether calming or stimulation is required is important. For instance, visualisation of a peaceful and relaxing environment may serve to calm, while suggesting an activ-

ity in that environment may provide stimulation. This flexibility ensures that the therapeutic approach is attuned to the unique needs and preferences of each client

In conclusion, integrating Gendlin's focus on 'inner experience' and Siegel's Interpersonal Neurobiology creates a powerful approach with which to give therapy. Promoting a kind attitude and mindful awareness aligned with the Window of Tolerance creates a holistic framework. Focusing promotes the deepening of the therapeutic process, while the Window of Tolerance primarily provides a structure that strengthens the recovery process, together with relational aspects and informational facts about the brain's structure and systems. Practically, these include interventions that adjust the distance to inner experiences, depending on the level of arousal. Both advocate the flexible application of various techniques.

Linking an experiential approach with Interpersonal Neurobiology is one of the many possible combinations that can be made in Integrative Psychotherapy to promote wholeness and connectedness. And the world needs it!

The Value of Integration and an Integral Worldview in our time

In today's world, with all its complexity, integration is increasingly essential. It requires a thoughtful balance between taking direction and reacting to what happens to us, where interaction between perception, desires, and action can lead to emotional well-being, meaningful choices, and humane action. (Vleugels & van den Bosch, 2008; Vleugels, 2021). We are a "self-in-relation", where personal integration and relational and social connectedness are crucial. Bruno emphasised at the EAIP congress (6-10-2023) that integration is not about tolerance; it's much more than that,

as diversity and connectedness add colour and richness to our existence.

Daniel Siegel teaches us that an integrative interpersonal relationship stimulates integrative tissue growth in the brain. This means that we are not our brain, but – until very old age – human beings are able to develop their mind, especially in relationships with others. This message is hopeful for the world, and particularly relevant for therapists, educators, parents and all those who care for others (Geuzinge, 2014). These days, it is important not to cling to excessive individualism, but to contribute actively to the well-being of others. As Dirk De Wachter (2022) emphasises, connectedness with others provides support, meaning, and comfort. Awareness of interdependence between people is a powerful driver for a more integrated and empathetic society. Interconnectedness, on various – possibly even spiritual levels – underlines the importance of our engagement with the world, as advocated by authors such as Siegel (2022) and Lent (2021). The existential crisis of Western man challenges us to self-reflect profoundly, and to develop a deeper understanding of our role in the world (Vanhooren, 2023). Emmy van Deurzen (7-10-2023) also stressed the importance of this, at this conference in Georgia:

"We need to remember who we are and where we belong, with a map of the landscape around us: a sense of direction and a compass to find our way. A broad perspective."

The need for personal, relational, and transpersonal integration is becoming more urgent than ever before. An integrated humanity and a new worldview is emerging, anchored in a philosophical movement that seeks to integrate all human wisdom. It connects new insights from contemporary science with the ancient wisdom of indigenous and contemplative traditions. We are challenged to forge

new, meaningful connections, and to create a new narrative, aimed at connecting and integrating. This integral humanity and worldview focusses on a humane society, where diversity and healthy competition do not come at the expense of the greater good, but contribute to the well-being of the whole community. The aim is to strive for a society where everyone can flourish, mainly because of the fact that the greater whole is flourishing, and vice versa, as Jeremy Lent stresses (2021). Every action creates a ripple and triggers change.

Positive Disintegration on a Global Scale?

“Positive disintegration on a global scale? Creativity and innovation often emerge at the edge of chaos.” According to the philosopher of science, Ervin Laszlo (2005), complex dynamic systems are most creative at the crossroads of collapse and breakthrough. The idea that current fragmentation and disintegration, both at the individual and global levels, can eventually lead to positive change offers a hopeful perspective.

The theory of positive disintegration, developed by Kazimierz Dabrowski, suggests that personal growth and development often stem from inner conflicts and tensions. Dabrowski (2017) argued that these conflicts can lead to a ‘positive disintegration,’ in which individuals redefine themselves, and achieve higher levels of psychological development, by overcoming personal crises and cultivating their unique potential personality. This process includes re-evaluating all of their values, moral growth, and pursuing of higher ideals.

Daniel Siegel argues that if we always stayed in the centre of the Zone of Tolerance, we would **not** enable change within our systems, because we would not provide an opportunity for the required ‘controlled disorganization and reorganization’. Moving with the client into and

out of these precarious transition zones brings new possibilities (Siegel, 2011, pp. 57–58). But, how do we do this at the global level?

Conflicts, tensions, and crises in society, and between nations, lead towards a collective disintegration. It is a positive thought that this process can contribute to social change and new opportunities. Moving on the borders of chaos, and from there towards a transformation, requires ‘controlled uncontrollability,’ a handling of what comes to us; a creativity where knowledge and experience are connected to a state of ‘not-knowing’ that expands the field of our vision (Wings, 2021, pp. 181–182). It requires collaboration and courage – the courage not to get entangled, or disengage ourselves from the destructive extremes of chaos and rigidity.

We will have to rethink our societal values, promote moral growth, strive for higher ideals, and develop new systems and structures that better meet the needs of society as a whole. Positive disintegration at the global level is much more complex and challenging than at the personal level, because of the many factors and stakeholders involved. It requires alignment, dialogue, and commitment from individuals, communities – and nations – to pursue positive global transformation jointly: this is complicated and vital, but not insurmountable. A first small step can be to realize deeply, that we can be both fragmented and whole, individually and globally. As the author and poet, Ramsey Nasr writes:

“I cherish the havoc in my soul. There is room to be broken as well as whole.”

Mother Georgia

From our sixth-floor hotel room, we gaze over Tbilisi, Georgia’s capital, discussing the challenges facing the world and psychotherapy today. Then, there she is, visible on a hill

overlooking the city: Kartlis Deda, the Mother of Georgia – a monumental statue of a woman holding a bowl in her left hand and a sword in her right.

The bowl and the sword: an ancient symbol of the integration of opposites – two forces working together to achieve greater balance and harmony. The bowl symbolises receptive, giving, and peaceful qualities, while the sword represents strength, combativeness, and protection. Their cooperation helps us navigate conflict and enhances our capacity for love.

However, an imbalance – too much bowl without the sword, or vice versa – leads to adverse outcomes. When there is too much bowl and the sword is missing, the bowl does not provide security and care, but suffocation or boundlessness. On the other hand, when there is too much sword and the bowl is missing, the sword offers destruction and chaos, not protection or adventure. The cooperation and balance between these opposites are crucial for a healthy society and for greater well-being and harmony.

Working with polarities and integrating opposites is fundamental to Integrative Psychotherapy. Therefore, the image of Kartlis Deda, the Mother with a bowl and a sword, serves as



an apt symbol with which to conclude this article.

Conclusion

In an era dominated by fragmentation and destruction, the concept of integration (and of Integrative Psychotherapy) offers a promising response to the contemporary world situation. We have delved into the meaning of integration in psychotherapy, revealing how deepening and broadening human perspectives

can serve as powerful tools. This enrichment of therapeutic approaches, exemplified by Gendlin's experiential approach and Siegel's interpersonal neurobiology, serves to counterbalance disintegration in our torn world.

The layers of integration are highlighted, from the I.V. Triangle to the Four Quadrants. This conference, '*Connection in a Torn World: An Integrative Approach in Psychotherapy*' contributes to the psychotherapy discourse by unfolding layers of integration in a society, amidst chaos but yearning for cohesion. This article emphasises the crucial role of integration and invites a deeper understanding of an integral worldview, where positive disintegration can bridge apparent contradictions. This work argues for the union of opposites – a much-needed message in our time.

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