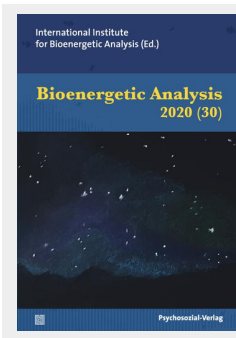


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Love as Regulator of the Life Force¹

Pye Bowden

Abstracts

The author proposes a role for love in the regulation of the body. Regulation of the life force is critical for a newborn baby because the baby cannot regulate itself and because early patterns of regulation have surprising longevity. A mother who loves her baby is regulated by her own loving, since pleasurable emotion is the consequence of a body that is regulated. She can then pass this regulation onto the baby, body to body. Lowen surmised that love was somehow connected to the organ of the heart and McCraty et al. from the HeartMath Institute have confirmed this connection and have demonstrated that the heart is also responsible for the central system-wide signalling that synchronises the body as a whole in pleasurable feelings such as love. The author shares a personal reflection that illustrates the power of love in the life and death struggles of early infancy.

Key words: love, homeostasis, primordial feelings, heart, coherence

L'amour comme régulateur de l'élan vital (French)

L'auteur propose un rôle pour l'amour dans la régulation du corps. La régulation de la force de vie est essentielle pour un nouveau-né car le bébé ne peut pas se réguler tout seul et parce que les modèles de régulation précoces qu'il met en place ont une longévité surprenante. Une mère qui aime son bébé est régulée par son propre amour, car une émotion agréable est la conséquence d'un corps qui se régule. Elle peut ensuite transmettre cette régulation au bébé, de corps à corps. Lowen a supposé que l'amour était en quelque sorte relié à l'organe du cœur. McCraty et al. de l'Institut HeartMath ont confirmé cette connexion et ont démontré que le cœur est également responsable du signal central qui synchronise le corps dans son ensemble par le biais des sensations agréables telles que l'amour. L'auteur partage une réflexion personnelle qui illustre le pouvoir de l'amour dans les luttes de la vie et de la mort dans la petite enfance.

1 Panellist Response to Guy Tonella's Keynote Address to the 25th IIBA Conference in Portugal, 25 May 2019.

El Amor como regulador de la fuerza vital (Spanish)

El autor propone un papel para el amor en la regulación del cuerpo. La regulación de la fuerza vital es crítica para un bebé recién nacido porque el bebé no puede regularse a sí mismo y porque los patrones tempranos de regulación tienen una longevidad sorprendente. Una madre que ama a su bebé está regulada por su propio amor, ya que la emoción placentera es la consecuencia de un cuerpo que está regulado. Luego puede pasar esta regulación al bebé, cuerpo a cuerpo. Lowen supuso que el amor estaba de alguna manera conectado con el órgano del corazón, y McCraty, del Instituto HeartMath como AI, han confirmado esta conexión y han demostrado que el corazón también es responsable de la señalización de todo el sistema central que sincroniza el cuerpo como un todo en sentimientos placenteros como el amor. El autor comparte una reflexión personal que ilustra el poder del amor en las luchas de la vida y la muerte de la primera infancia.

L'amore come regolatore della forza vitale (Italian)

L'autrice parla del ruolo per l'amore nella regolazione del corpo. La regolazione della forza vitale è fondamentale perché il bambino appena nato non può regolarsi da sé e perché i primi schemi di regolazione hanno una longevità sorprendente. Una madre che ama suo figlio è regolata dal suo stesso amore, poiché l'emozione piacevole è la conseguenza di un corpo regolato. Può quindi passare questa regolazione al bambino, corpo a corpo. Lowen ipotizzò che l'amore fosse in qualche modo collegato all'organo del cuore e McCraty et al. dell'Istituto HeartMath hanno confermato questa connessione e dimostrato che il cuore è anche responsabile della segnalazione a livello di sistema centrale che sincronizza il corpo nel suo insieme in sentimenti piacevoli come l'amore. L'autrice condivide una riflessione personale che illustra il potere dell'amore nelle lotte di vita e di morte della prima infancia.

O Amor como Regulador da Força Vital (Portuguese)

O autor propõe uma função para o amor na regulação do corpo. A regulação da força vital é fundamental para um recém-nascido, porque o bebê não pode regular a si mesmo e porque os padrões iniciais de regulação têm uma longevidade surpreendente. Uma mãe que ama seu bebê é regulada por seu próprio amor, já que a emoção agradável é a consequência de um corpo regulado. Ela pode então passar essa regulação para o bebê, corpo a corpo. Lowen supôs que o amor estivesse de alguma forma conectado ao órgão do coração e McCraty et al., do Instituto HeartMath, confirmaram essa conexão e demonstraram que o coração também é responsável pela sinalização geral do sistema que sincroniza o corpo como um todo, em sentimentos agradáveis como o amor. O autor compartilha uma reflexão pessoal que ilustra o poder do amor nas lutas de vida e morte da primeira infância.

Liebe als Regulator der Lebenskraft (German)

Für die Autorin spielt die Liebe eine Rolle in der Regulation des Körpers. Die Regulation der Lebenskraft ist entscheidend für ein Neugeborenes, da es sich nicht selbst regulieren

kann und da frühe Regulationsmuster überraschend langandauernd sind. Eine Mutter, die ihr Baby liebt, ist reguliert durch ihre eigene Liebe, da angenehme Emotionen die Konsequenz sind für einen regulierten Körper. Sie kann diese Regulation über den Körper an ihr Kind weitergeben. Lowen vermutete, dass die Liebe irgendwie verbunden war mit dem Herzorgan. McCraty et al, vom HeartMath Institute haben diese Verbindung bestätigt und haben gezeigt, dass das Herz auch verantwortlich dafür ist, dass das ZNS Signale weitergibt, die den Körper als ein Ganzes synchronisiert in angenehmen Gefühlen wie die Liebe. Die Autorin vermittelt eine persönliche Reflektion, die die Kraft der Liebe in den Lebens- und Todeskämpfen der frühen Kindheit sichtbar macht.

Любовь как регулятор жизненной силы (Пай Боуден) (Russian)

Автор рассматривает роль любви в телесной регуляции. Крайне важно то, как регулируется жиненная сила новорожденного, потому что младенец не может сам себя регулировать, и потому что эти ранние паттерны регуляции оказываются, на удивление, долговечными. Маму, которая любит своего младенца, регулирует её собственная любовь, так как приятная эмоция исходить из тела, которое уже отрегулировано/настроено. Тогда она может передать эту регуляция младенцу, от тела к телу. Лоуэн высказывал предположение, что любовь каким-то образом связана с сердцем как органом, а Маккрати и др. из Института математики сердца подтвердили эту связь и продемонстрировали, что сердце также отвечает за передачу сигналов в рамках всей центральной системы, которая синхронизирует тело как единое целое в таких приятных чувствах как любовь. Автор делится личными размышлениями, которые демонстрируют силу любви в борьбе жизни и смерти в раннем младенчестве.

Introduction

In his Keynote address, Guy calls upon us to leave our hearts, minds and eyes wide open while we think about “what is bioenergetics” – not only through the lens of the whole world, but also of the universe beyond. And not only through the vast spaces amongst and beyond the stars but also down into the heart of nature and its invisible particles of matter ... and everything in between. Guy also reminds us as bioenergetic therapists to remember and deeply recognise all this, because “it is engraved in us- in our physical-chemical properties”, and in our “vital pulsations” and “corporeal rhythms” (Tonella, 2019). In other words, we humans ARE all this. And furthermore, he points out that bioenergetics took on the shape it did because Reich and later Lowen, “relentlessly traced” (Tonella, 2019) the profound Force that bound this all together. They called it bioenergy – “energy of the universe converted into biological energy” (Tonella, 2019) and it became the home of Bioenergetic Analysis.

While Guy has seemed to point our way to everything as we have seen, there is much more in the pages of his Keynote. For instance, he seems to have produced updated versions of the fundamental bioenergetic concepts, basing them on the radical principles of the life force itself. Guy's Keynote also has the feeling of including us all, since it seems honed by his years and years "on the road" and by the multitude of societies, cultures and races that he has immersed himself in, and seen so deeply. And so, for me, his presentation today feels a bit like a Christmas stocking filled with many gifts – learnings from his travels in lands near and far that we can read again and again to renew our inspiration in Bioenergetics.

The Role of Love

Understandably, after all this I asked myself: whatever have I got to say? What can be added to this? Eventually an answer came to this question: I could see the place for a feminine perspective. For me, Guy's paper did have on reflection, a sense of the masculine. Perhaps this was because of its cosmic scope and intricate scientific detail. And while there was more than a hint of the sacred, as seen in the merging of all things, there seemed also some feeling of restraint: self-regulation was a relatively common theme and love wasn't in the foreground.

And so, I would like to share some thoughts about 'two-person' regulation and the role of love in this critical life endeavour. Now yesterday at the Conference, we had some powerful input from Professor Darcia Narvaez describing what families and communities so desperately need if they are to thrive and how often these days this is just not available. There was the implication that love was involved – or not involved – but the word was pretty much invisible, and never centre stage. This presentation starts with love and seeks to ascertain its influence, its properties and the power that creates and drives it.

And, there isn't anywhere better to look at these questions than where the new-born meets its mother. Now, as we know from the writings of Steven Porges and Allan Schore, this tiny newcomer is in dire need of a "regulating other" and simply would not survive without it. So, we might assume that evolution would have produced something powerful to keep that baby alive. And when we look at the pathway from the beginning of pregnancy to its birth, the baby's mother has been strongly invited out of her head and into her body through the experiences of pregnancy, morning sickness, and the birthing process. And then there are the hormonal tides awaiting her when that baby is born. All of this, we might imagine, is a valiant attempt by nature to provide the most reliable life force regulation possible.

Of course, it does not work out like this for all babies but if the mother can respond to the power of her own hormones, then she will love her baby, because that is what those hormones are for. And that in turn means she will be likely to

care for it through both good and bad times. Other mothers, however, may not get access to this ability and may not love their baby – they may resent or even hate it. Again, we know from Alan Schore’s work that there is likely to be a considerable difference in the life force regulation of those two hypothetical babies. And it is likely that at least some of this difference is about the mother’s ability to love.

Love and Regulation

So, what is the role of love in regulation? In Damasio’s book *Self Comes to Mind* (2010) he clearly states that powerful positive feelings such as love, are simply by-products of a well-regulated body. In fact, the experience of pleasurable feelings is a sign that one’s bodily systems are functioning in the most favourable place within their own narrow homeostatic range. And furthermore, when this happens, these systems are also in a state of coherency with each other. Damasio notes that the effect of all this produces a sense of ‘fluidity and ease’ in the whole body. The reverse is also true. Homeostatically “dangerous ranges (express themselves) as not-so-pleasant or even painful feelings” (2010, p. 55).

So, the mothers who have been able to come through the birth process with the effect of serotonin and oxytocin in place are not only likely to love the baby, this love will ensure that the mother’s own body is being positively regulated. And this will give the mother a much greater ability to respond calmly and empathetically when the baby is distressed. She can hold that baby’s breaking heart close to her own steady heartbeat ... or she can walk the baby, or she will do whatever is going to calm its painful state. But this is not all!

Damasio calls the baby’s earliest feeling experiences “primordial feelings” (2010, p. 20) and describes them as “wordless, unadorned and connected to nothing but sheer existence” (p. 21). These feelings arise in the periaqueductal gray (PAG) of the upper brainstem and are simply the result of the baby’s response to the particular environment it has been born into. More importantly, these very early feeling states become embedded within the homeostatic process itself. This happens because the PAG is one of three upper brainstem nuclei that are tightly bound together, in a “thousandth of a second” feedback loop with the body. And, their combined role is to maintain life. The presence of the PAG’s feeling experience within this fundamental life regulation loop means, that while patterns of homeostatic regulation in the physical body are being set early on in life, so too is the patterning of these early emotional states. Damasio goes on to say that these early states become a “deep root which cannot be alienated” (p. 200) and that they become “indispensable components of the self” (p. 76). So, we see from this, that the emotional component of early life force regulation is likely to have a disproportionate power over how this baby is going to feel.

The net effect of all this is that loved babies' bodies are likely to be increasingly regulated by the Social Engagement (Ventral Vagal) (Porges, 2011, p. 120) setting of the mother's ANS, while the lives of resented or hated babies will more likely be dysregulated by the mother's Dorsal Vagal System, and as we were told yesterday at the Conference, this latter has a devastating and lasting impact on self-regulation. And so, we see again, that the profound differences in those two hypothetical babies' lives, right from the start, may well continue unfolding throughout their life spans. And this would suggest that the presence of love in that baby's life is likely to have a considerable impact on its life ahead.

Now I'd like to return briefly to Guy's Keynote and to his description of love as a "state of being that dwells deeply within us". He also notes that "it is handed on to us through the process of attachment by our biological mother" (Tonella 2019). And this most certainly seems to be just the case.

The Heart – Regulation, Resonance and Coherence

The question now as we go deeper into the qualities of love becomes, how does this fluid, easy state of the body that underpins love come about? And does it have anything to do with our hearts? We know that the ANS is the deepest layer in this process, but how might this state get organised in the body proper? And it seems that Lowen, in his Preface to "Love, Sex & Your Heart" (2004) was wondering something similar when he said, "If the heart is involved in every experience of love, as it seems to be, then we must assume that such expressions as a "heart filled with love" also describe a physical phenomenon." And then he adds. "Although hearts do not fall to pieces when love is rejected or a loved one is lost, clearly something breaks in such situations."

So now we have one answer: Damasio tells us that the heart doesn't break when we feel "heart-broken", but that heartbreak is a symptom of a heart, mind and body that are all functioning under homeostatic strain. This creates dysregulation and plunges us into one of those "not-so pleasant or even painful feelings" (2010, p55). Yes indeed!

The second question is, how is it that these total body events come so miraculously into resonance?

Now McCraty and his colleagues at the HeartMath Institute have come up with some relevant thinking about this in their article "The Coherent Heart" (2006). This paper describes their first ten years of research and how they were mindful of Damasio's position that negative and positive emotional feelings are created by negative and positive body states. In a recent review of their early work McCraty described how their research had focussed on the heart because they found this particular organ was the most sensitive measure of emotional change (2009, p. 57). Having established this however, they then went on to ask them-

selves, as Lowen had, why people had experienced the feeling or sensation of love (and other regenerative emotions), as well as heart-ache, in the physical area of the heart?”

To find answers to this more fundamental question McCraty described how they had carried out detailed research focussing on such measurements as the EEG, (brain waves) SCLE, (skin conductance) ECG (heart rate), BP blood pressure and hormone levels. As a result of this focus on the heart they found that it was not the heart rate, or even heart rate variability that was the most significant aspect of the heart's involvement in emotion. It was its rhythmical patterns of beating. As well, they came to see that communication and synchronicity within and amongst the body's systems occurred *because of* the “generation and transmission of these of heartbeat rhythms” (2009, p. 56). They also came to believe that this means of transmitting signals was only one of four ways in which information from the heart was passed on throughout the body and brain. The other ways were neurological, hormonal and electromagnetic. From these experiments McCraty and colleagues proposed that the heart was in fact generating “system-wide signalling” and that this was what produced a “global level of organisation that bound and synchronised the body as a whole” (2009, p. 60). This seemed to them a good fit with Damasio's conviction that it was the coherence level of body and brain functioning that determined whether pleasurable or painful feelings would be experienced. And now it seems that the heart might stand at the centre of all this.

Now whatever your view of the work carried out by the Heart/Maths Institute and the way they have progressed this information I have to say, their portrayal of the heart as a conductor of the orchestra makes sense to me in understanding the constant ebb and flow of the ever-varying emotional states that we experience. And by now it also seems to me unsurprising, that the presence of a loving mother's beating heart in a baby's life not only profoundly affects the course of its life, it must surely be one of the most powerful life force regulatory devices known to mankind.

Personal Story

I'd now like to add a small unplanned story to end this paper. My mother really wanted a fourth baby. My father was finishing his doctorate and this baby was to be hers as he didn't want another child. When the baby was born they each wanted a different name for this baby but couldn't agree on which would be the main one. So, the baby never really got a name and is still known by the nickname which happened to turn up around that time. But now, after many, many years of deep bioenergetic work, I have experienced and recognised a number of feeling states that can only pertain to that baby. In each there is the absolute absence of

words, the utter helplessness of being a bundle that could be handed around at will and there was the simplicity of beingness – and somehow a knowing.

When this baby first arrived in the world, she seemed to just know, that she knew this mother very well indeed and had been bathed in her love all the time she had been growing in her womb. This baby also seemed to know that she herself was love – this deriving from the comfort of the loving maternal body. My mother told me many years later that when she first saw me, there was a something about me – I seemed to be saying “here am I, this is me”. One day recently when I was involved in a group session lying down and listening to some exquisite music, I realised that I would have to tune out because something very deep was stirring. Later I was thankfully able to replay the same music and dropped again into this same state. This time I *was* that tiny baby with that mother, and I was bathed in the bliss and glory of a universe where humanity and spirit were one. This state was so clear to me that I surprised myself by suddenly speaking out loud in wonder – my mother was “the love of my life” – and in that instance, recognised all the terrible failures of connection that I had experienced throughout so much of it.

When I tried to put the blissful part of this experience into words later that day, the only thing that described the experience of being that baby was that I was simply a shining star of energy that was composed of my own and my mother’s love and that it went out beyond us into the universe. I was blissfully unaware at that time, however, that there was an “other” who would soon obliterate all this.

And now in present time, as I at last finish struggling with myself to complete this presentation, I realise that the life and death struggle between my parents for the heart and soul of that baby, was being played out as I have tried to write a piece about love and early regulation. One moment I have felt high on the crest of a wave and the next I was plunging down into the depths of hopelessness. But now, I am inspired by Guy’s statement that the connection with the mother consists of “star dust – converted into atoms, cells, hearts, womb, brain, implicit memory and arms outstretched to another”. So now I am deciding that it is time to walk away from under some existential sword that has always been threatening to fall down on me if I had too much of anything. As from now I would hope to live more permanently, more radiantly in that powerful life force of love I had so briefly experienced, right at the beginning of my life.

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