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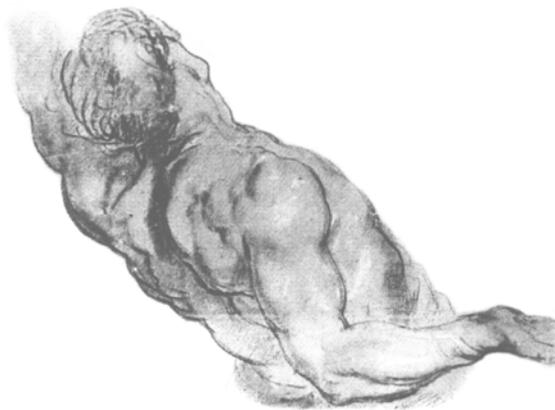
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USABP Mission Statement

The USABP believes that integration of the body and the mind is essential to effective psychotherapy, and to that end its mission is to develop and advance the art, science, and practice of body psychotherapy in a professional, ethical, and caring manner in order to promote the health and welfare of humanity.

The Continuum Theory of Human Development: A Theory of Life Span Development and its Application to Therapeutic Intervention

Stefan Deutsch

Abstract

The Continuum Theory of Human Development has proven to be an effective theory of development across the lifespan. It works in an integrated, sequential manner on four fundamental tracks which are all developmental. They are (1) awareness (2) envisioning (3) communicating (4) loving unconditionally. Whether the objective is a life goal or emotional healing for an individual it has also proven to be useful when applied to therapeutic interventions. Two case studies illustrate the applications of the method.

Keywords

Self-actualization – Unconditional love – Lifespan theory – Adult development - Neuroplasticity

Introduction

The Continuum Theory of Human Development hypothesizes that a functional unity – the nature of which is probably very similar to the functional unity that the United States Association for Body Psychotherapy (USABP) refers to when discussing Body and Mind¹ – exists between Body, Mind and Self.² It posits a theory of lifespan, has a developmental model of Self, hypothesizes about the origins of dysfunctional behavior, and has a variety of diagnostic and therapeutic techniques used within the framework of the therapeutic relationship. (using USABP descriptives)³ In addition to having an applicable framework for therapeutic interventions, the theory also provides insight and guidance for parenting, aging, personal development, marriage, midlife crisis, etc.

The theory, when applied, has proven that it can provide a fresh lens through which to view human development. This in turn provides a new perspective on the causes of behavior and approaches to psychotherapeutic interventions. The Continuum Theory works in an integrated, sequential manner on four fundamental tracks which are all developmental – they are awareness, envisioning, communicating, and loving (unconditionally) which directly affect the neuroplasticity of the brain (Schwartz and Stapp, 2005), causing substantive and lasting changes in behavior along the life span.

According to Fritz Perls (1951), awareness is 90% of healing. We claim that awareness is 100% of the beginning of healing. Without awareness the process cannot even begin. Tracking a client's body signals - the beating foot, the clenched fist, the redness in the eye, the averted glance, the deep sigh, the misplaced laughter, the cough, and a myriad of signals large and small - and pointing to those signals, bringing clients back to their own body from the story they want to tell, from the mind they want to live in, without fully feeling their feelings - is one of the gifts of the Gestalt therapy approach. As Perls says, "The body never lies..." whereas clients have become adept at manipulating language and with it, the therapist. Working with the body therefore creates a present-centeredness, an ability to be in the moment whereby one can connect to one's thoughts and feelings. As a further expression of bodywork, Gestalt Therapy advocates the affirming touch of a hand, holding of the client's hands, the holding of a client in a fetal position, a hug, laying a client on the floor while gently soothing him or her – all as part of the expressed need for nurturing on the part of the client, and with the expressed permission of the client. These are acts of giving unconditional, loving energy. Many clients are in therapeutic relationships simply for the unconditional acceptance that a therapist can provide. This system of cosmology brings both the client and therapist face to face with unconditional love. Using those terms as a central feature of each session, illustrates that these moments of contact clearly represent the giving of and the getting of loving energy for both. I will go into further detail and give you a functional definition of loving energy - what it is, where it comes from, and why it is so important in healing - later in the paper.

Therapeutic Tools to Assist in Healing Relationships

¹ ".....the common underlying assumption being that a functional unity exists between mind and body. The body does not merely mean the "soma," which is separate from the mind, the "psyche." Although many other approaches in psychotherapy touch on this issue, body psychotherapy considers this principle to be fundamental." (USABP website)

² I believe that Mind in some cosmologies often includes more than Brain, and other times, refers to Brain alone. Not being certain how USABP defines Mind, I will treat Mind as synonymous with Brain for this paper. In my definition of Self, it is not used synonymously with Mind.

³ "Body psychotherapy involves a developmental model, theory of personality, hypotheses about the origins of psychological disturbances and alterations, as well as a rich variety of diagnostic and therapeutic techniques used within the framework of the therapeutic relationship." (USABP website)

As fundamental and foundational as awareness is, my belief is that it is only the beginning. Someone becomes aware of their anger, rage, and resentment toward another person in their life. I am referring to anger that was repressed, unexpressed, or expressed but without satisfactory resolution. This is an important first step. Yes, finally acknowledging and expressing it is freeing, and in that sense healing. Often it only serves to end that relationship, which is not the ultimate goal of the individual in therapy. The ultimate goal, for which many do not feel empowered enough and trained enough, is to transform that relationship into a loving, nurturing one. But how does this person get from that rage to transforming the relationship into a close, loving one? Without a vision of having a loving relationship, without knowing how to communicate both the anger and vision in a loving way, and without knowing how to keep the context – that the healing of the relationship is the ultimate goal – people wind up venting, dumping and losing viable relationships. As Harville Hendrix says in his training, “I divorced a perfectly good woman.” That happens over and over – and often as a by-product of therapy.

For clients to simply go back to a parent, spouse, sibling who hurt them and say “you really hurt me”, or “you are hurting me and it is not acceptable,” is not fully healing because it is missing the empowerment piece. It is missing the knowledge and power to transform that, or any relationship, and the tools necessary to give the relationship the best chance possible. It is missing vision, communication and unconditional loving. The confrontational nature of many of these disclosures results in the denial on the part of the other, defensiveness often in the form of attacking back, and the withdrawal of both from the relationship as much as it is feasible. This can include spouses and siblings who stop talking, adult children who don’t call their parents, or friends of 20-30 years who will never see each other again. This is often the result of a communication without vision, without the know-how of communicating lovingly, and without having part of the vision as central to an unconditionally loving relationship, instead of just ‘telling the truth.’

Awareness Beyond Gestalt Therapy

The Continuum Theory continues where Gestalt Therapy leaves off and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy begins. CBT emphasizes goal setting – achieved by making changes in thinking and behavior. In this work we call it “the creating a vision phase.” Although creating a vision can start at the beginning of working with clients, its completion should come after a client has come into full contact with his or her feelings through the awareness work. A clear awareness of what is, without denial, is needed to create a powerful and complete vision. The form and content of the vision will go through changes throughout the process. The next question this client needs to answer for him or herself is, “What kind of relationship do I want to have if I could have it be my ideal relationship? What is my goal here?” Creating a vision where there is a lot of history is a skill that needs to be taught and it takes clients time to learn. In essence, what I ask of my clients is to completely discount their past interactions, let go of their experiences with the person they are trying to heal their relationship with, and just say and write down exactly what they want. We are not discussing whether it is possible or not, only focusing on what he or she wants going forward.

To Change Relationships, We Need Vision

Most clients struggle a bit with this phase because for them, writing a list of things they want seems to be too similar to wishful thinking. “Of course I would like a close, nurturing relationship, but this self-centered person never provided that for me, so how is anything going to change?” “My mother never said she loved me, so I know she doesn’t.” “You can’t change a person and I don’t want to even try.” After we surmount this obstacle and get into writing a vision, and a new goal for the relationship, often the behavior of the client begins to subtly change toward the other. The purpose of the exercise is to bring guidance and direction to one’s own behavior. If you want a loving relationship perhaps you need to initiate certain ways of behaving and respond in certain ways to behavior which are different from the way you used to initiate and respond.

The reason interactions begin to change, if ever so subtly, is because each human being needs to always give love and hopes always to get love in return. You can rely on this like gravity, $E=Mc^2$, or like the earth spinning on its axis every 24 hours. Once the vision is written, the truth is out: no more hiding the painful fact that what the client wants is a loving relationship. So why do we act in ways that are unloving when that actually hurts us, as well as the other? And because human beings need to always give love unconditionally and hope always to get love unconditionally, when the other perceives that something is changing - that clients are behaving more unconditionally, giving them the life-sustaining energy that they need so much – it begins to subtly change their actions and reactions as well. Now the relationship begins to slowly spiral upward instead of the downward spiraling it has been stuck in for years, or even decades. We have introduced unconditional loving energy into the equation.

Effective Communication Needs Love

After writing the vision, the client has a goal - part of which, in this case, has to do with improving a relationship. In essence, it includes another person, as opposed to losing weight (which only includes the person wanting to lose it). If a goal involves others, it must be communicated to others. A client needs to own their goal, know it by heart, and wait for the right

time to communicate this goal. As part of the preparation, we begin to work with the fact that the other person needs to love, and needs to get love for their very survival – emotionally speaking. Knowing that people want to love - need to love, helps us accomplish two important things. One is that people do not hurt us, or behave conditionally because they have a goal or plan to do that. It is in spite of their needing loving relationships and closeness. They are actually sabotaging one of their most important needs. What this means is this – they are not acting in ways that hurt us **INTENTIONALLY**. As a matter of fact, they are missing the very tool set – awareness, vision, communication and the ability to be unconditional - that we are trying to learn and use. What this concept helps to support is our ability to forgive the other. The purpose of this is not for us to accept the acts that hurt, but to see them as unintentional. From this context we can formulate what I have found to be the most powerful statement anyone can say to another. This statement dissolves most- if not all, of a person's defenses as it creates a new context, one that both persons know to be the truth.

“I know you love me and you know that I love you. I know our relationship has been painful at times and we have distanced ourselves from each other, because we just did not know how to forgive and heal. My vision is for us to begin that healing so that we can have a close, nurturing, loving relationship. I hope you know that I am being sincere and that you will consider this a request for us to move our relationship closer. There is no rush on my part, it is a vision I will hold onto and patiently wait for you to join me – hopefully soon.”

What most people don't know about visions when applied to relationships is that they have the same power as when we apply them to wanting to buy a house, wanting to become a teacher or lawyer, wanting to take a trip – in other words, we know that everything starts with a vision and if we hold onto it, we find ourselves moving toward that vision until we have the reality. Visions are incredibly powerful, focused energies – and like a focused light beam – the laser, are able to literally go through obstacles placed in front of them.

The fourth track which I also begin working with right from the first session is unconditional loving energy and behavior. Here is a functional definition for loving unconditionally.

Definition of Loving Unconditionally

Loving Unconditionally - The giving and receiving of loving energies under any and all circumstances. Whether another's behavior pleases us or displeases us. It is always a conscious choice that must be done on a consistent basis with those you're in relationship with. To be clear: what it does not mean is accepting any and all behavior from others. As a matter of fact, it demands that you also love yourself unconditionally which means that you only accept unconditional behavior from others, and you let them know lovingly, in no uncertain terms, when their behavior is not acceptable.

The Importance of Loving Unconditionally

There are four life-sustaining energies human beings need: air, food and water being the three that science addresses. The Continuum Theory states that there is a fourth life-sustaining energy that human beings need and that is “loving energy.” This energy is needed as nourishment specifically by the Developmental Self, as opposed to the body or brain per se – although the three are fully integrated. This would explain two very important things. 1) Why conditional behavior feels so painful to all human beings: loving energy is being withheld, and 2) Why the body and brain still can function well when we feel rejected and unloved, but another part of us feels pain. We know that it is not our liver, kidneys, bones, or heart. Therefore logic tells us that it must be something else other than the body. That other part in pain must be the Self. Loving energy has quantum energetic properties, generated by conscious will, that are brought into existence from one moment to the next. Loving energy can be sent (given) to another or withheld from another. **This is the reason we feel loved, even when no one touches us or we feel pain, again, even when no one touches us.**

The Life-sustaining energies of air, food and water are cyclical; they need to enter the body, be utilized and leave the body. An interruption in either direction is painful and life threatening. It seems to be the same with loving energies. It is equally painful to have our love, our ‘exhalation’ of loving energy, rejected as it is to not get love. Finally, whenever we ‘ingest’ life sustaining energies of air, food and water, we feel energized. It is the same with loving energies. When we are deprived of any life sustaining energy, we feel weak and lethargic. Most often this is the case when we are deprived of loving energies. Since loving energies behave much the same as life sustaining energies we can deductively surmise that loving energy is a form of life sustaining energy.

Decisions guiding loving behavior are a form of thought, and are quantum energetic episodes which can be consciously generated by the Self, like staying patient, calm and loving, even when upset. They may also be subconscious and automatic, like jumping out of the way of a moving car or yelling when someone says something we don't like.

Once a client has gotten in touch with the fact that a certain relationship is painful and lacking love, has created a new vision for that relationship, has understood that what has transpired - as painful as it may have been, was not intentionally orchestrated by the other, that this other being needs to love and be loved as much as he or she - and has learned to communicate his or her vision in a loving, inspiring, enrolling manner - he or she is now ready to reach out to this person and

communicate their vision. For some, the safest and most comfortable way of initiating communication and putting their vision out there begins by writing a note or an e-mail.

Synonyms for Loving Energies

Like Eskimos who have many words for snow, we have many words we use which are synonymous with loving energy and transfer a quantum amount of loving energy to another. They are: warmth, kindness, patience, encouragement, acceptance, understanding, appreciation, inspiring, affection, compassion, empathy, a touch, a hug, generosity, giving, just to mention a few. But when I work with clients I have noticed that none of the substitute words have the kind of visceral, energizing effect on human beings as does the word “love.” When people are confronted with their need for love, with the absence of love in their lives, with the fact that they and others in their life **deserve** unconditionally loving behavior without having to earn it, and with the fact that their behavior toward themselves or others has not been unconditional, they often break down and cry – which they definitely do not do when words such as compassion, or empathy or acceptance - or even affection, are used.

An Effective Model for Psychotherapy

When training or healing the physical body/brain we can explain in simple lay terms exactly what an athlete or a client needs to do, and why, for optimal results. The broken foot of my wife needed a cast until the bone healed, after which she needed physical therapy to 1) Strengthen the muscles that atrophied, and 2) bring back flexibility to her joints and muscles that stiffened from the cast during the months she had to keep her leg up and the bone was healing. She understood exactly what was happening because bones and breaks and healing and physical therapy have been defined in lay terms. This helped her buy into the process instead of being skeptical and dismissive.

Whether the objective is a life goal or emotional healing, and whether the client is a parent, an employee, a student, or a couple, having each understand how human beings function enrolls them in their own process and takes the mystery and gamble out of it. This is especially important and apparent in therapeutic interventions where healing is the goal. Having a client know what is being done and why enrolls them into the process because they can understand it.

Again, using this cosmology, I devised a process of educating, training and when necessary, rehabilitating the Self, which results in achieving both life goals, and what we call healing in psychotherapy. But my clients never feel that there is something wrong with them, psychologically or otherwise. There is never a label put on them. What they understand is that their potential for navigating life has not been developed fully and they have never been given the life skills and tools necessary which is the reason they are struggling in certain areas of life.

Consider the following Case Studies:

- #1. A 5 year old wanting a candy bar before dinner.
- #2. A distraught mother of 3 ADD boys, with an ADD husband ready to have a mental break down.

The problem each of these individuals face is caused by the lack of education, training and nourishment of their Self, and the continuing consequences thereof.

In Case Study #1 I will use the concept of the Developmental Self and its four facilities to explain how the theory applies to parenting, at a time when either most of education and training or damage takes place. In Case Study #2 we will see the results of damage to Self; as our language so aptly conveys, damage to Self-esteem, to Self-respect and to Self-support. We bundle it by saying someone is being Self-destructive. The Continuum Theory simply acknowledges that being Self-destructive is a result of damage to Self – specifically Self’s four facilities.

Case Study – #1

Let’s break down the following scenario to see what is needed in education and training for the highest level of Self’s potential performance to be reached. Also, we can see how generally this potential is unintentionally damaged, causing major problems for intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships.

- A 5 year old becomes insistent before dinner – is he/she hungry and wants a candy bar?

A child will have an innately healthy reaction to being hungry, according to the developmental model of Self:

Child becomes aware of hunger - awareness

Child loves/cares about meeting its needs - loving oneself unconditionally

Child has a vision/goal of meeting its needs - vision

Child asks for a candy bar to meet its needs - communication

Child insists on getting a candy bar - loving oneself unconditionally

Mother knows better, candy bars will ruin the child's appetite: she ignores the request, or says no, or gets angry. How do her responses damage his Self, its four facilities, and reaching Self's full potential?

Child becomes aware of hunger: given any number of the Mother's responses, child concludes that there is no point in becoming aware – in Gestalt we call this 'an introject' - since his awareness is ignored, discouraged. Self's awareness is damaged.

Child loves/cares about meeting its needs: child concludes I am not loved, not worthy. The ability to love oneself and create the vision of having one's needs met is damaged.

Child has a vision/goal of meeting its needs: child concludes that there is no point in having goals - having goals and vision is discouraged. The ability to vision is damaged.

Child asked for a candy bar to meet its needs: child concludes there is no point in communicating – communication is discouraged. Self's ability to communicate gets damaged.

In the future this person will 1) not be aware of his hunger, 2) deny his hunger when asked, 3) not ask or insist upon having his hunger met, or 4) become aggressive and violent, trying to meet his needs.

This simple example is played out in many, many forms again and again in most people's lives with much more negative and significant results than the example of not getting a candy bar. In order to develop Self's four facilities, the mother would first have to have engaged the child in the following way: by patiently saying "I hear you are hungry and you want a candy bar." In validating his awareness, the mother has accomplished 90% of the task of raising a healthy adult. She validated the child's Self by acknowledging the awareness, the goal/vision of having his needs met and the communication of the child, all in one fell swoop. The result is that the child learns the value of being aware, having a goal, and communicating it. He also learns that loving oneself, and feeling worthy of meeting one's needs is a positive, not a negative thing.

The actual result, whether the child gets the candy bar, becomes secondary – because it is when Self is not validated, and its needs are not acknowledged, that all four of its facilities are damaged. The sentence: "I hear you are hungry and you want a candy bar" – can be followed up by giving the child a number of choices, again with the understanding that developing a child's Self is of paramount importance developmentally – even more so than if he eats candy before dinner or not. "So candy bars are delicious and I can understand why you want one. But what is the problem with having a candy bar just before dinner? Yes, they do spoil our appetites and also they are not going to help us grow strong and smart. So here are a couple of options, tell me which one you want: Option #1 or Option #2. Which one would you prefer?"

This validates and then empowers the child, giving him the power to make the best choice for himself and feel that his life is in his hands. When we parent or educate children as if they did not have a 'Real Self' we fail to recognize the importance of responding to their awareness; we fail to understand the need to be unconditional, to develop their ability and courage to communicate their needs, and to love themselves.

We can easily substitute an adult in the place of the child. Not acknowledging someone's needs, their awareness, and not hearing their communications feels unloving, and since we all need love, the individual will feel hurt. Not being aware of our own needs as adults, not having the vision to get it, not knowing how to ask to have those needs met in a loving manner, and not knowing how to love others unconditionally creates the pain people experience in their relationships.

Case study #2

- A distraught mother, C., of 3 ADD boys with an ADD husband, is ready to have a mental break down. Communication with husband is totally frustrating her, she feels no support from him. The typical upper middle class goals of college and professional careers for her under-achieving boys seem unrealistic, which is also depressing her. She is contemplating divorce, is a perfectionist, and is self-critical.

According to the model of a Developmental Self, C. is aware of being frustrated, feels alone, hopeless, and is physically and emotionally exhausted. Her only release is tears. She is not aware that she screams at her family a lot and that this has consequences. She has no positive vision to inform either her actions or communications.

- C. is angry, not listened to by husband or children, feels unsupported, screams - awareness is damaged
- C. has a context guiding her vision that it is useless to talk, nothing will change, kids won't be successful, she is a failure as a mom and wife - visioning is damaged
- C. can't motivate husband or children and can't communicate without screaming - communication is damaged
- C. criticizes herself endlessly, and does same with husband and children, little patience - does not love others and herself unconditionally

C's story was: nothing will ever change and she is afraid that she doesn't have the strength to go on. She feels sabotaged by a husband who has no patience and says all the wrong things to the kids, and makes her job even harder with them. She doesn't think she can communicate and be heard or that she can behave with her family in an unconditional way. She feels she has failed as a mother and wife.

C. was anxious to make some changes before her family fell apart. We created a detailed vision that included some of the following – “Her husband respects her and is willing to listen; she believes in her children and treats them patiently; she has been and will continue to be a caring, loving mom; she herself is OK; perfection isn't necessary, that her many good qualities are sufficient.”

In a relatively short amount of time she became more aware of her own reactions to situations. Her words and communications were informed by her new vision: her positive goals for the family, children, and husband. Her behavior became more unconditional. Her family began to notice changes – she became more patient, spoke with a calmer voice. They responded. After about 6 months of work, her husband, liking the changes he noticed in her, decided he wanted to learn how to listen better and came to a few sessions where they learned and practiced mirroring – an attentive listening tool. That experience aligned him with C. and he stepped back from criticizing the children, and started interacting with the children by following her lead. She also became more accepting of herself, focusing more on her strengths than weaknesses. She also came to acknowledge the success she had in developing her four facilities and her Self's potential. After one year of relatively sporadic visits (20 at most) C. decided that things were so much better at home and with herself that she no longer needed to continue. The goal with C. was to re-educate and train the four facilities of her: “what if Self was real.” We successfully rewired her brain by working with the four fundamental tracks in an integrated, simultaneous way.

Conclusion

The recent discoveries of the brain's neuroplasticity explain how working on the four developmental tracks are causing lasting and substantive changes in behavior along the lifespan. By working with one's Developmental Self and training its four facilities, we are able to utilize the brain's ability to reorganize and grow new neural pathways, and optimize the degree of rewiring that occurs in the brain. The Self, given the opportunity to develop and rewire the brain, helps us to be exponentially more powerful and effective in life – to accomplish things we haven't been able to by just using the body or the brain. Just think about the effectiveness of a Gandhi, a Mother Teresa, a Martin Luther King Jr., and many other lesser known but equally Self-actualized individuals. When the Self fully potentializes, our life experience is transformed. A potentialized Self gives us a sense of control and this is when we can begin to truly shape our life and take responsibility for who we have become.

Afterthoughts

My background is in both philosophy and physics. When I first embarked on a mission to create a lifespan theory it seemed to me that a coherent and cohesive theory about who human beings are, and how we develop, should be able to answer any question that pertains to a stage and development within that stage along the life span. In other words, a theory of development or therapeutic intervention that claims to be useful should be equally applicable to effective parenting, as it is to aging, as it is to explaining mid-life crisis, healing marriage strife or offering enrichment, or be applied to therapeutic intervention. It is my personal belief that ‘theories’ that are not universal and focus on only one area, and are not useful when we try to apply them to another area, are missing something central and therefore make their effectiveness questionable. The Continuum Theory has proven to be efficacious when applied to any and all areas.

Since I am continuing with my mission to create a super-ordinate theory of human development that is grounded, simple to use, and effective across the lifespan, your feedback to the above statement, as well as to the concepts of the Continuum Theory of Human Development are not only appreciated, but invaluable.

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Biography

Stefan Deutsch received his BA in physics and philosophy from Hunter College, and then went to NYU graduate school for Movement Therapy. His love for the logic of philosophy and the theoretical discipline of physics made him realize that it was the theoretical realm of human development throughout the lifespan that he was interested in. So he decided to home school himself. Years of reading and questioning led him to find answers about life span and human development that satisfied his seeking mind, his logical mind and his need for disciplined thinking. Presently he is writing a book about his theories and is a Gestalt Psychotherapist. stefandeutsch@msn.com

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How does material in this manuscript inform the field and add to the body of knowledge? If it is a description of what we already know, is there some unique nugget or gem the reader can store away or hold onto? If it is a case study, is there a balance among the elements, i.e., back ground information, description of prescribed interventions and how they work, outcomes that add to our body of knowledge? If this is a reflective piece, does it tie together elements in the field to create a new perspective? Given that the field does not easily lend itself to controlled studies and statistics, if the manuscript submitted presents such, is the analysis forced or is it something other than it purports to be?

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First consideration will be given to articles of original theory, qualitative and quantitative research, experiential data, case studies, as well as comparative analyses and literature reviews. Submission of an article to the *USA Body Psychotherapy Journal* represents certification on the part of the author that it has not been published or submitted for publication elsewhere.

Initial submission should be e-mailed to jacarletonphd@gmail.com as an attachment in Microsoft Word.

Manuscript should be double-spaced in 10pt. type, Times New Roman font, with at least a one inch margin on all four sides—please include page numbers, otherwise manuscript should be free of other formatting.

Title, full authorship, **abstract of about 100 words and 3-5 key words precede the text.**

Please include an endnote with author's degrees, training, mailing address, e-mail fax, acknowledgement of research support, etc.

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The editors are eager to receive letters, particularly communications commenting on and debating works already published in the journal, but also suggestions and requests for additional features or departments. They may be sent to the email address below. A selection of those received will be published in the next volume of the journal.

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