

NEWS FROM The Psychomotor Institute

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Q&A with Albert Pessó

What is Pessó Boyden System Psychomotor (PBSP)?

It is a body-based psychotherapy that helps individuals unlock old, deficit-ridden memories and create new memories in their place.

How does it work?

We put the theater of the mind in the room. By using other individuals or objects to represent loved and negative aspects of figures from the client's past, we externalize those memories, then, on the stage where that memory is played out, we change the action through role-playing with idealized figures who enact longed-for outcomes. This helps the client satisfy unmet needs of the past and constructs a new, more positive memory.

What is the basic theory behind it?

That bodily-based experiences in our past are the source of our implicit and explicit memories. In short, they are a record of how we *lived* in the world in the *past* and the basis for how we chose to *live* in the world in the *present*.

How does PBSP differ from traditional psychoanalysis?

In psychoanalysis, they say, 'Look at the deficit; grieve about it; now get past it.' A lot of body therapies emphasize catharsis, with no context, no interaction. We say, 'Your body is anticipating the satisfaction of filling that deficit, so let's invent that satisfaction.' The client brings in that satisfaction through role playing. On a *motoric* level they touch, they hold, they hear, they feel, they get the sensory change. *They create a new memory.*

(more)

Isn't touch very controversial in psychoanalysis?

Yes, it is. And for very good reason. That's why, in PBSP, there is never any contact between the therapist and the client. That is why we have what we call "ideal figures." These are members of the group session who are chosen by the client to represent the invented, wished-for figure who might have been. It is they who provide the physical contact.

But what's the difference between imagining what might have been and having somebody make believe they are there? Isn't it all just make-believe anyway?

I understand the skepticism. But scientific research shows that memories are reinforced by action and motion. We don't learn from concepts and words. Seeing is believing.

But even if they have an emotional response, don't the clients just leave in the end saying, "It would have been nice if I had parents like that, but I didn't."

We found a way to tuck it into the past so it's linked to the old memory of the deficit on a felt basis. We're asking them to use their mind's eye not only to see what was there, but to be *in* their mind's body *back then* and take the information into the *real* body. We're depositing the memory back at that age. That's making a new memory.

Do you use regression to get them there?

No. We use what we call microtracking, which awakens their present adult consciousness to the issues of their past. In the session, which we call a Structure, we very closely watch the client's face and body language and listen to his or her words and - in the role of witness -- give names to the emotions rising up out of the unconscious. Little by little, they become aware of the memory of the event that is at the root of the present issues.

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That doesn't sound very body based.

We don't get it out of the body first. We go from the present, parse out the threads of emotion, of values, of thoughts, and then -- like using search & find in a word processor -- we ask, 'Where did that come from?' As soon as a pattern emerges, they have a feeling in their body and they start to remember something of the past.

That's where the body comes in?

Yes. Once they start to think about a key figure from their past, we ask them to pick out someone or something -- like a pillow or chair -- to represent that figure they are seeing. We make the room a replica of the inner theater. So now we have them stereoscopic seeing; they're not only in that scene, not only remembering that scene, but they're *seeing* that scene. Then, through interaction with the ideal figures, they start to *feel* on their actual body and they get impulses that have to do with the unfinished memory. We let them complete it by acting out what they would have liked to have happened back then, within carefully constructed limits.

And that makes a difference?

Our perceptions of the world are based on our learned history. Change that history and their emotional expectations change. They start to perceive the next instant of the present differently. It's as if this new past has taken hold as they now ascertain what the new possibilities are based on this new history.

But it doesn't change what actually happened.

No, and we don't want to erase their history. But experiencing the satisfaction of this new supplemental memory makes them better able to forgive. They're less likely to look for the ideal mother in real-time. They can re-taste this new memory, like doing a meditation. The construct of the ideal parent becomes like a Philosopher's Stone, they can pluck out the meaning and replay that ideal mother or ideal father in other events that were traumatic.

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How did you develop this approach?

My wife, Diane, and I were dance instructors in the late '50s and early '60s. We were working with movement, and when we asked our dancers to let their bodies' move based only on how they felt all kinds of emotions came out. We started as dance teachers and all of a sudden we were into these kids' lives. We rediscovered for ourselves how the brain works by discovering how the body moves, then we could really understand the relationship between mind and emotions.

It's a big jump from dance to psychological work.

Well, we saw that when there was an emotional expression, there was an innate requirement for interaction that will somehow complete the expression. We began to look at the whole interactive model and saw it as a shape, countershape thing. For every expression, there was an anticipated, wished-for response from the outer world. So we rigged the outside world to provide that. That's when we created the idea of the Structure, a session in which we fulfill a wished-for past.

So this is a dance therapy?

No, and it's not a body practice like yoga or Sufi dance, either. It has nothing to do with rhythm or visual design. We discovered it through dance, but it's about ordinary human behavior.

How has this been accepted by the psychological community, given that neither you nor your wife hold academic credentials in psychology?

It is considered one of the oldest somatic therapies. Not only have we trained hundreds of therapists, but many other kinds of therapists come to us for their own therapy. Both Diane and I have served on the staff of major hospitals and I have even taught PBSP for Harvard.

Can anyone with psychological problems be helped by this therapy?

Anyone who is able to distinguish between what is real and what is fantasy.

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Doesn't that imply it all comes down to childhood?

I would have a bias that way. If we're having troubles living, it's got to have to do with some kind of distortion or bias in the way we're looking at the world. If you have enough satisfaction in your history, you can deal with the fact that the world is a tough place, but if you don't, you often can't cope.

And you can learn to cope by releasing the old memories?

Not just releasing memories. Making *new* interactive motoric memories while experiencing yourself at the right age with the right kinship relationships.

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