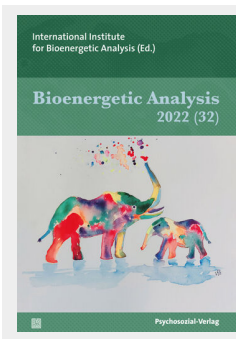


Helen Resneck-Sannes

Bodies In Disassociation: Microaggressions and Re-traumatization



Bioenergetic Analysis

32. Volume, No. 1, 2022, Page 67–83

Psychosozial-Verlag

DOI: [10.30820/0743-4804-2022-32-63](https://doi.org/10.30820/0743-4804-2022-32-63)



Reviewers for this issue:

Léia Cardenuto, Garry Cockburn, M. Rosaria Filoni, Maê Nascimento, Vincencia Schroeter and Odila Weigand

Translators of abstracts for this issue:

Claudia Ucros (French), Rosaria Filoni (Italian), Thomas Heinrich (German), Rebecca Liu Jianpu (Chinese), Angelina Samartova (Russian), Jaime Perez (Spanish), Maê Nascimento and Leia Cardenuto (Portuguese)

Submissions for consideration for the next volume of *Bioenergetic Analysis* must be sent to Maê Nascimento (maenascimento@terra.com.br) between June 1st and September 1st, 2022.

Bibliographic information of Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek (The German Library) The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>.

2022 Psychosozial-Verlag GmbH & Co. KG, Gießen, Germany
info@psychosozial-verlag.de
www.psychosozial-verlag.de



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0). This license allows private use and unmodified distribution, but prohibits editing and commercial use (further information can be found at: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>). The terms of the Creative Commons licence only apply to the original material. The reuse of material from other sources (marked with a reference) such as charts, illustrations, photos and text extracts may require further permission for use from the respective copyrights holder.

Cover image: Vincencia Schroeter, *Mother and child elephants together* © Vincencia Schroeter

Cover design & layout based on drafts by Hanspeter Ludwig, Wetzlar
Typesetting: metiTec-Software, www.me-ti.de

<https://doi.org/10.30820/0743-4804-2022-32>

ISBN (Print) 978-3-8379-8404-0

ISBN (PDF-E-Book) 978-3-8379-7854-4

ISSN (Online) 2747-8882 · ISSN (Print) 0743-4804

Bodies In Disassociation: Microaggressions and Re-traumatization¹

From Isolation to Connection

Helen Resneck-Sannes

Bioenergetic Analysis • The Clinical Journal of the IIBA, 2022 (32), 67–83

<https://doi.org/10.30820/0743-4804-2022-32-63>

CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

www.bioenergetic-analysis.com

Abstracts

The following is a Keynote given at the 2021 Bioenergetic Pre-Conference in Brazil. It describes how members of an institute or a therapist can precipitate re-traumatizations by not empathically connecting with a person's description of prejudicial and racial trauma in her history. The process of disassociation is described, as well as a path for empathic understanding.

Keywords: disassociation, microaggression, racism, bias, re-traumatization, empathy

Corpos dissociados: micro agressões e retraumatização

Do isolamento à conexão (Portuguese)

Este texto foi apresentado como palestra na Pré- Conferência Internacional do IIBA, que teve lugar no Brasil em 2021. Descreve como membros de um instituto, ou um terapeuta podem precipitar uma retraumatização por não terem tido uma conexão de empatia com a descrição de uma experiência pessoal de um trauma relativo a preconceito. Descrevo tanto o processo de dissociação como o de um caminho para uma compreensão empática.

Corpi in dissociazione: microaggressioni e ritraumatizzazioni

Dall'isolamento alla connessione (Italian)

Quella che segue è una relazione presentata alla conferenza dell'IIBA del 2021 in Brasile. Descrive come i membri di un Istituto, o un terapeuta, possano causare ri-traumatizzazioni.

¹ Keynote Address to the 26th IIBA Conference, October 2021.

ni non collegandosi empaticamente con la descrizione che una persona fa di un trauma causato da pregiudizio e razzismo vissuto nella propria storia. Viene descritto il processo di dissociazione, nonché un percorso per la comprensione empatica.

Corps en dissociation: Micro-agressions et re-traumatisation De l'isolement à la connexion (French)

Le texte suivant est un discours prononcé lors de la conférence Bioénergétique 2021 au Brésil. Il décrit comment les membres d'un institut ou un thérapeute peuvent provoquer des re-traumatisations lorsqu'ils ne se connectant pas avec empathie à la description réalisée par une personne d'un traumatisme préjudiciable et racial faisant partie de son histoire. Le processus de dissociation est décrit, ainsi qu'un chemin pour une compréhension empathique.

Cuerpos en Disociación: Microagresiones y Retraumatización Del Aislamiento a la Conexión (Spanish)

Lo que sigue es una conferencia magistral pronunciada en la Conferencia Internacional del IIBA 2021 en Brasil. Describe cómo los miembros de un instituto o un terapeuta, pueden precipitar retraumatizaciones al no conectar empáticamente con la descripción que hace una persona de un trauma racial y causado por prejuicios en su historia. Se describe el proceso de disociación, así como un camino para la comprensión empática.

Körper in Dissoziation: Mikroaggressionen und Re-Traumatisierung Von der Isolation zur Verbindung (German)

Der folgende Text enthält die Eröffnungsrede, die auf der bioenergetischen Konferenz 2021 in Brasilien gehalten wurde. Er beschreibt, wie Mitglieder eines Instituts oder ein Therapeut Re-Traumatisierungen auslösen können, indem sie sich nicht empathisch mit der Beschreibung eines vorurteilsbehafteten und rassistischen Traumas in der Geschichte einer Person verbinden. Der Prozess der Dissoziation wird beschrieben, ebenso wie ein Weg zum empathischen Verstehen.

Отделенные тела: микроагрессия и ретравматизация От изоляции к соединению (Russian)

Ниже приводится текст выступления на онлайн конференции ИВА по биоэнергетике 2021 года в Бразилии. В нем рассказывается, как члены правления института или терапевт могут спровоцировать повторную травматизацию, не сопереживая человеку, описывающему предрассудки и расовые травмы в своей истории. Описан процесс разотождествления, а также путь к эмпатическому пониманию.

解离中的身体：微侵入和再次创伤

从隔离到连接 (Chinese)

下文是2021年巴西的躯体动力分析大会的主题演讲，描述了一个机构的委员会成员，或者一位治疗师，由于缺乏共情的和他人连接到一个人在个人历史中由于偏见和种族歧视而造成的再次创伤，描述了解离的历程，和带着共情去理解的方法。

Introductory Statement for Journal Article

This Keynote is a description of my interaction with the Board of Trustees of the International Institute for Bioenergetic Analysis. People, like myself, who have experienced trauma due to prejudice, homophobia, or racial injustice can become reactive, when we receive a response that isn't empathic to our injury. While the Board of Trustees was working diligently to write a social justice statement, my traumatized protector was operating as a filter on high alert and was reactive to any information perceived as dismissive. I needed a more empathic response, but the inability to respond is a problem for all of us who deal with social injustice. The media inundates us with stories of bombings of synagogues and mosques, murders of people color, attacks on homosexuals and transgendered; and we so often see the misery of unhoused people shivering with cold, that our psyche disassociates; and can even sometimes, normalize these encounters. The Board of Trustees is comprised of people, like ourselves, who when working on issues of social injustice are not able to always respond in the most optimal empathic manner; and as a result, we sometimes traumatize the people we most want to help.

Introduction to Keynote

This morning's talk is about microaggressions and how they can provoke a re-traumatization. A microaggression is a statement, action, or incident regarded as an instance of indirect, subtle, or unintentional discrimination against members of a marginalized group such as a racial or ethnic minority. These transgressions occur against the "other", those who are not members of our tribe.

So, hello all. Let me take a look at you, my tribe. We members of the IIBA represent people from a more diverse group than any other therapy institute that I know. And, it is in this institute, where I have developed my therapy skills and made lasting friendships. People are tribal, tending to look out for members of our own family, religion, and/or ethnic group, which is sometimes detrimental

to people who aren't a member of our tribe. For example, the war between Arabs and Israelis, Bosnians and Serbians. Our tribe, Bioenergetics is an offshoot from Reichian analysis. Reich was developing his ideas as Nazi Germany rose to power. Although he was born Jewish, he never directly confronted antisemitism but did write about the armored man, whose heart is closed and who is disassociated from his vulnerable self, allowing him to engage in acts of cruelty. Reich is our legacy and I come from a Reformed section of Judaism, whose mission is to heal the world. Not to convert. It is very challenging to convert to Judaism, but as Rabbi Tarfon, said: "It is not your responsibility to finish the work of perfecting the world, but you are not free to desist from it either." And as the Talmud says: (A book interpreting Jewish law) "Pray as if everything depends on God. Act as if everything depends on you." So, it has been my intention, as well as that of my grandmother, parents, my two brothers and our children to live a life of engagement in social justice. Combating the myriad aspects of racism and prejudice is one way I hope to make the world a better place for people who are transgendered, Muslims, Jews, Asians, people with dark skin, homosexuals, and all those whom we consider to be the "Other".

And because we are therapists, I wish to talk about injustice as it asserts itself in an international therapeutic organization, like the IIBA, and in our therapy offices. Specifically, I am focusing on racism. I am using this term, loosely to describe bias by one member of a group or institution toward another. Although institutional racism influences personal choices, as a therapist, my focus is on each person and how to educate and help her navigate this treacherous field, specifically in our therapy offices.

Of course, if I am to be effective as a therapist dealing with issues of social justice, then it behooves me to be conscious of my implicit beliefs and traumas regarding this issue. I was unaware of a trauma until recent events conspired to recreate the perfect storm inside of me. But first, I want us to engage in a little exercise. Sit with your feet flat on the floor and take some time to ground, breathing into the lowest part of your back on the inhale; and gently let out a long exhale, while pushing into the floor with your feet. Eyes can be closed or open but with a soft focus. Exhale should be soft, not pushing the breath. Inhale and exhale without a pause between the two.

Now, imagine that you are leading a bioenergetic group. It is primarily composed of white people, maybe one Asian, and one black person. A white person enters the room and looks at the black person and says: "I don't want to be in a room with a nigger". What do you as group leader do or say? Remember your response. I will return to this later.

Social Justice Statement

As I mentioned, I was unaware of my own traumatic history regarding racism and prejudice until recently. For some time Jayme Panerai, a Faculty member and Member of the Board of Trustees, and I have been trying to have a statement of social justice placed on the IIBA website. Although some people were supportive, a statement was never posted. With “Black Lives Matter” claiming headlines worldwide, I suggested the possibility of a social justice statement being posted on the IIBA website to the IIBA Faculty at a meeting a few months ago. I was advised that a statement should be submitted to the Board of Trustees (BOT), who had the authority to place the statement on the official website of the IIBA. I enlisted Scott Baum’s input, as he was a previous President of the IIBA, and I felt I needed an ally and witness in this process. He helped me write the last part, which is especially important. Here is the statement.

The members of the IIBA share in the anguish and rage felt by many at the growing list of names of people of color who have fallen victim to discrimination, hatred, abuse, violence and murder, in the United States and worldwide. These victims are a representative group of the many people, worldwide, who have suffered, and died, at the hands of those whose hatred, prejudice, and abuse of power free them to enact the most destructive elements of human nature. The response to the current pandemic caused by COVID-19 reveals the ways that these same forces are manifested. There is a disproportionate toll on the lives of people of color and the poor, resulting in reduced access to healthcare, less access to well-paying jobs, fewer opportunities for educational and social advancement and distinct over-representation in prison systems, at least in the US.

The IIBA recognizes the inherent destructiveness in these outcomes and the actions and attitudes that lead to them. This acting out of destructiveness goes directly against the philosophy and mission of the IIBA. We are founded on principles of acceptance of the human in all of us, and in the equal value of all human beings. We are united in our struggle to face and restrain the destructive in ourselves and those we work with. The IIBA pledges to provide a safe place for people of all philosophies, nationalities, genders, sexual orientations, races, and religious beliefs, to engage in a process of self-exploration and healing. And we make an affirmative commitment to study the origin, facilitation, and expression of destructive impulses, in ourselves and others, that lead to the furtherance of human suffering. Signed: Helen Resneck-Sannes, Ph.D.

It was after submitting this statement that my husband I took off to Mexico. We had completed our round of vaccines and wanted to travel, while we felt safe and ahead of possibly another wave of a variant of the virus. A year had passed and it was my first opportunity to be mask free, but I still had the residual fear of dying from Covid, was aware of my bodily space and out of habit was still holding my breath if people came to near, so as not to breathe in the virus.

It was a sunny day in Mexico, and cool breezes swept over me as I lay peacefully resting on one of the few lounge chairs with padding, which my upgrade to elite status at the resort had awarded me. I found myself surrounded by Republicans and a very loud Trump supporter, whose speaking voice was a shout and I was also aware that I was the only Jewish person present. I was acquainting myself with the others, finding about who they were and about their lives, while staying silent about my own political beliefs. It was then that I received a letter from the Board of Trustees saying the statement was “too long and too political (and many felt this is primarily a US problem)” and that the statement would be shortened for the website. I agreed. It was long ... but too American and too political? Couldn't at least the last paragraph be included?

A couple of days after I receiving the response from the BOT, I received an email from my best friend in high school reminding me that when I broke the traditional boundaries and became the first Jewish person attending my high school and to this day the only Jewish person, the Ku Klux Klan put up threatening signs on my school bus route. This memory was the impetus for my following response to the IIBA.

I am struggling with the BOT's response to my social justice statement for the website: That it is too political and American. I don't swim in a white heterosexual male Christian fish tank. I am on the outside; and for me, as well as many others, the entitlement and hatred of the white heterosexual Christian majority have left scars of personal trauma, that you don't want to know about, any more than I do ... And to avoid them, you name them as political, and thus not a priority for the IIBA. For me, your response is re-traumatizing.

I have always been afraid of being invaded by the Nazis or a hanging mob, so that I have learned to lie down and pretend I am dead, barely breathing, so they will ignore me, thinking I am already dead. It is my personal trauma as well as many other peoples throughout the world and does not feel political.

A couple of days after receiving the BOT's letter, my best friend from high school, wrote, reminding me that when I began to attend my high school in rural Indiana, being the first and only Jewish person; probably to this day, the Ku Klux Klan (a white Evangelical Christian terrorist organization, like neo-Nazis and skin

heads and all those other white Nationalist hate groups, who have found a foothold throughout the world) posted hate signs along my bus route. When she reminded me, I had a vague flash of knowing, but not remembering and really truly don't want to remember it now; or think about it, or deal with it any more than you.

I do remember the threatening phone calls and the cross burned on our lawn, because my parents were invited to cross a line, that had been forbidden to Jews.

When in high school and my parents did cross the line and moved into a Christian neighborhood and I was asked to integrate the two communities, the hate words and rejection didn't feel political, but, personal. I overcame the initial onslaught and became an accepted and well-liked member of my high school. I am lucky. Many people have other stories.

To say this is an American issue surprised me even more. Synagogues, Mosques and cemeteries are bombed and desecrated in Germany, France, and Italy. Muslims, transexuals, and Asians are being harassed and murdered. Dark skinned people in New Zealand and Brazil face racism every day.

Dark is bad. White is good. It echoes around the world.

I understand how you don't want to face these issues. My bioenergetic therapist made disparaging remarks about Jews during my therapy. I accepted them, knowing I must take it because that is how the world works.

So, I was at first willing to shut up, except for the loud sounds of Reich and Lowen roaring at you as they turn over in their graves.

And now I want to add that injustice only becomes political, when a law is enacted against it. It is okay to have slaves, rape and murder your wife, until a law is enacted preventing it. Then those acts are political. And to make my point that this is not only an American issue I refer you to the articles in the latest issues of our own IIBA journals.

Universality of Sexism and Racism

Monica Monteriù (2021) states: "The issue of maltreatment of women and how it is widely known, worldwide and a cross-cutting phenomenon, present in every social class, regardless of education, income, culture, origin or age. Equally known are the disastrous effects on women's health, in many instances recalled by the World Health Organization" (p. 121).

Fina Plà Vila (2021) elucidates the harmful effects of sexism and that it is so deeply rooted that we reproduce it unconsciously (p. 179). Rossana Colon-

na (2021) discusses the effects of internalized homophobia and chronic trauma resulting from the threat of violence when displaying homosexual preference in public, leading to increased vigilance and inadequate coping strategies for dealing with the perceived stigma. And this quote from Maria Cristina Francisco (2021) states beautifully how the trauma from racism, while denied cannot be avoided.

“Racism is so established in our everyday lives that those who are not paying attention believe it does not exist. However, those who suffer from its presence know all too well about its existence. Racism is in the air and the senses recognize it. It goes down your throat and suffocates you. It touches your skin and freezes you. It makes noises in your ears and drives you mad. Your gaze is on trial. Racism has grounding, it is rooted and sustains itself in relational bodies and minds. It dictates our way of seeing, understanding, and acting in life. Like a virus, racism infects the body. No one is immune. (I repeat). No one is immune. Even those who do not consider themselves to be racists reproduce various racist practices with immediate or slowly unfolding effects that are even lethal, both physically and psychologically” (p. 13).

Into the Trauma Vortex

I received a letter immediately back from the BOT advising that the statement is a priority and is being considered for the website, perhaps incorporated into the Strategic Plan and maybe into the ethics statement. I wrote back:

Thank you for your quick response. I am sorry that I misunderstood your previous email. I was in Mexico surrounded by Republicans, and a very loud abrasive Trump supporter, The process of re-visiting that time, when my community chose me and my family as integrators was more painful than I had thought it would be. However, at the end of a few days in Mexico, the Trump supporter has been silenced and I was accepted into the group of Republicans, so my past still serves me as a bridge builder. Thank you for hearing me and now I would like to move on from my own past, not think about it and continue to work for social justice.

Sometimes, events in the world, when there is trauma carry us into a vortex from which we cannot escape. At that point, I had really given up hope that anything I did would actually make a difference for people to have an empathic understanding. Although I was in Mexico, a self-part was back in high school, managing how I was perceived by others. Somehow, the previous interchange regarding having

it on the website was wiped out of my conscious awareness. And, I have no conscious memory of writing the email responding to it.

At this point, I am wondering whether that was the point of disassociation or when I received the email: "I hear your passion and also the trauma you carry in your body." I didn't have a broken leg. Healing it in my body? Injustice and persecution have been happening since the beginning of time. What I heard was: "shut up, handle it, and go away". The same type of response I had heard from another international faculty member, who replied that I grew up in an awful place that allowed these things to happen. She grew up in Nazi Germany. I didn't understand how these people, who I know to be caring, sensitive individuals could be disconnected from an empathic understanding in their responses.

I do remember that after reading that last statement: "the trauma you carry in your body", hurt and puzzled, I go to sleep in my chair by the ocean. When I awake, everyone has departed. A woman has left her purse with her cell phone sitting on the table. I put her phone in her purse and walk to where she is playing volley ball, to let her know that I am leaving and does she want her purse. As I walk toward the game, I feel like I am in a movie and none of this can be real. I don't feel present. The Trump acolyte is jumping up and down, yelling and screaming and turning red. He looks like a child having a temper tantrum. And then, the ball is served. It arcs in the air and sways way far to the left, coming right at me. No one moves. Like someone has stopped the film action, and we are frozen. I lean forwards to catch it; and then for some reason, stop myself. A young Mexican boy runs for it, but feels the same magnetic force pushing him away from the ball. A white young teenage girl leaves her place at the net, reaches for it and jerks back. We are connected by some mysterious force.

I tell the woman about her purse, she says its fine, and asks if I will be at the beach, tomorrow. I say: "yes". And the next day my status is risen, so that people are asking my advice on certain matters. Like in high school I have gone from being a dirty Jew or Kike, who drinks blood during Passover Seders to an officer of clubs, one of the editors of the yearbook and school paper and having leads in the school plays.

I am white so I can conceal my beliefs and religious preferences. The same is true for LGBTQ people. Gender and sexual preferences can be concealed. As Lingardi (2007) writes:

"We are led to ask ourselves a silly question which obviously is not supposed to have an answer: what's worse, being penalized because of our skin color, but enjoying our emotional bonds making our life worth living, or being born in an apparent context

of equality and then having our right to our emotional integrity denied and being forced to internalize and conceal this trauma?" (p. 145; translated by the author)

I don't find this question silly. The need to belong, to be a member of a tribe during adolescence is strong, even if it means silencing my beliefs. Blacks, Asians don't have that option. Their skin color, the shape of their eyes, give them away. They can't merge into the group and deny who they are. However, maintaining the connection is at a cost.

Part of me split to become a member of the tribe and left the other part behind and that self-part became the "Other." In my paper on shame, I discuss how outliers – the only Jew, the only homosexual person – may hide, trying to conceal the shame they feel at the rejection. The self that is being protected can become hostile to the part that doesn't have the support of the culture or the community. The hater inside can become anti-woman, anti-sexual, racist and attack the life force inside, that wants to erupt, but can't. Your mind can't be allowed to know of the hostility around you (Resneck-Sannes, 2019, p. 53).

I returned home, but looking back I can see now that I was in a trauma vortex that Peter Levine describes as an eddy off-shooting from the stream. This is a powerful current that derails the progress of the stream and can elicit in others the most re-traumatizing responses. We have names for it, like projective identification. I see couples activating, where lines of one person's traumatic script is negatively feeding into his loved one's script. They are re-traumatizing each other without understanding that they are living in two different dramas right now. I often have clients ground and then walk toward each other and reach. The woman who has been afraid of her angry father sets up severe boundaries with her partner. I ask her to look at the man who is in front of her now. Instead of the angry threatening father, there is a man with shoulders bent forward with hurt and sadness emanating from his eyes. Then, I ask him to approach her. Look at her. Is this woman who is setting up severe boundaries your cold mother; or, a woman who is frightened? He looks at her and sees her stiff body, and that her eyes are wide with fear.

Also, while this enactment is occurring with the Board of Trustees, I am emerging from living with a background of Covid, which is threatening to overwhelm us with horrible outcomes for people of my generation, death or a life of infirmity, post Covid syndrome. So, there is quite a bit of wariness about contact and distance, and personal space. With the effectiveness of the vaccines, the threat of Covid dissipates and we are no longer walking away from people. Walking calms the amygdala (the part of the brain that responds immediately to threat). As we emerge from our fear, we come into fight, so, there is quite a bit of aggres-

sion. And people are emotionally erupting around me. I am enveloped in a field of traumatic energy that elicits statements from people like: “Why didn’t you go home, when I told you to.” It was in another context, and a few years ago, while at a dinner, a woman told me that United States is a Christian country and non-Christians should leave.

Only after tripping over the dishwasher and bruising my hip, legs and arms was I woken out of this trancelike traumatic state. Silencing, keeping quiet, and not speaking are ingredients that feed isolation; and, consequently, loneliness. I feel alone in a state of deep grief. It was that last sentence: “the trauma you carry in your body” that put me in a trance.

Coming Back to My Body

Coming back into my body, I feel waves of intense sadness sweeping over me. I reach out to a group in Santa Cruz with whom I am beginning to form a connection. We are psychologists for social justice. They are empathic, joining with me, willing to respond to my grief. I began having a headache in Mexico when this all started and the pressure in my head is building. I know I need to cry, but I can’t, as crying has never been easy for me.

I think about driving two hours to Berkeley so that Sylvia Conant can go into my occipital ridge and help me release. I am afraid, though. She is the only person I have talked with about this exchange with the Board of Trustees, other than my husband, the political justice group, and Scott, who I asked from the beginning to join in the email exchange, as I felt I needed a witness. And I have only shared some of this with Sylvia. I meet with a group of bioenergetic therapists every six weeks, but I don’t bring it up there. I don’t trust them to get it.

I trust Sylvia to go into my occipital ridge, look into my eyes and hold whatever I am feeling as I release it. She was my bioenergetic trainer, a colleague who has enriched my professional life with her endless curiosity about healing trauma in the body. She is a wonderful friend of immense courage. With all that I have written, I still am hesitant. I hope she will be there, but I am afraid to take a risk and let myself be that vulnerable.

As Lowen says:

“Both feelings, longing and hopelessness, threaten to undermine the person’s defense against the feeling of heartbreak and open the gates to a flood of sadness in which he fears he may drown. Still, the impulse to break out and to find love,

no matter how painful, will inevitably arise, and with it a feeling of panic at the prospect of being abandoned again” (Lowen, 1988, p. 81).

I lie on the floor, ground and charge and have a memory of Sylvia’s hands on my head and begin to sob deeply, feeling the pain of my broken heart. And at the same time my mind comes back on line and I am having an onslaught of memories: past threats, rejections, and comments hinting of past violence to Jews. I remember the events but the details blur. I can’t identify the people making the comments. I am well-versed on PTSD and realize that I am experiencing intrusive memories (not flashbacks) of this material that I have not forgotten ... just don’t want to know about. And finally, these memories coalesce into a map and I am beginning to understand in a way that I never have ever tried to comprehend how I ended up being the only Jewish family in that neighborhood and the only Jewish person at that rural school.

After deep sobs my headache resolves and I now know what trauma was being reactivated by the BOT. As I had no awareness of the email about the statement appearing on the website, I couldn’t understand why the IIBA was so dismissive in their response, I heard that this was personal, didn’t involve them and that my trauma was not their problem. How could people who are members of this organization respond so dismissively? Why couldn’t the IIBA respond? Wishing me healing in my body? So, is it my Jewish body or being born in rural Indiana that is the problem?

Perhaps, it is as Bessel Van de Kolk (2014, p. 194) says:

“Nobody wants to remember trauma. In that regard, society is no different from the victims themselves. We want to live in a world that is safe, manageable, and predictable – and victims remind us that this is not always the case. But in order to understand trauma, we must overcome our natural reluctance to confront it and cultivate the courage to listen to the testimonies of survivors and help them go on with their lives.”

Human Suffering

I walk by some unhoused people, looking out from their makeshift shelters. I see their suffering. They look cold and hungry. Often, I offer them a protein bar or at least engage in a brief conversation; but other times, it is too much and I stop feeling ... avoid eye contact, and am distant. I remember Liane Zink at the panel

in Portugal talking about her heart ache when she saw the suffering of the poor in Brazil, aching when she sees the homeless. I saw her pain. She was ignored. We go numb, because it is too much to bear.

I am so sad. John, a member of my social justice group tells a story in response to my heartache. He was working with a group on racism in Washington DC. There were about 300 men and one of the black men began screaming, angry, appearing that he might become violent. All of the men surrounded him and John; who was one of the facilitators and is white, began saying things like: "I get it. I get what you have been through." The black men tell him to leave. You don't get it. They say he wants to know that you have his back. Have his back. Will protect him. Will stand up for him. He tells this story and I break into deep sobs. Who will stand up for me? Who has my back?

I get it. The members of the Board of Trustees of the IIBA won't help hide me from the terrorists who might bomb my synagogue. As I mentioned earlier, I have erased an awareness that a statement will appear somewhere on the website. For me, it feels like even making a statement can feel too risky for some. I call Scott and tell him we need to talk. I am leaving this organization. I can't belong to a therapy organization, refusing to take a public stand. Then, Scott tells me that I have been asked to give a Keynote. It is on the website. Of course, it is in Brazil. And it is in Brazil. The land of great music, sound systems, food and beautiful people who love to party and sing and dance, whose citizens have been tormented by an authoritarian power-hungry leader, who's people are starving, who have one of the highest murder and Covid rates in the world. Brazil, where they have started a clinic for indigent mothers, who gave an excellent Keynote on racism and introduced the topic into our Journal. They want me. I am giving this talk.

And the result of all this? What I hope for is the outcome of this story is that if you have people of color, or Asians, or Muslims, or Jews, or traumatized women, or transsexuals: Know this. Please get this. Be ready to watch their back.

Responsiveness to the 'Other'

What would that look like? What if that person in a group with only one black person had a chance to decide whether she wanted to deal with this racist person in a group of all white people? She may have some needs that you haven't thought of. She's not speaking up unless she knows that you have a supporting hand on her back, that you are aware of her need for protection, that you will attend to her first. First. Not the white racist or the misogynistic rich famous movie star. You

will change the rules and the homosexual, the transgendered, the abused woman, black people will be watched over. They don't come into the group with the same entitlement as the others. Notice that most songs about loving each other are from black artists. As an outlier, I have always had to open my heart, to try to belong, to be part of the tribe. In the therapy room, please open your hearts and let us outliers, who don't have the culture's first place be part of your tribe. To care about us as much as you care about your own.

Now back to our initial exercise. Do you remember your response? Well, I now ask you to re-visit your response. Imagine the group again. White members with maybe one Asian, one black. A white person enters the group and looks at the only black person with hatred and says: I refuse to be in a room with that "nigger". What would you say?

Now imagine you are in a group with someone you feel protective of – a daughter, a friend, a client – and she was recently raped. A man enters and looks at her lasciviously and says: "We guys could have fun with that hot little body of yours."

Think of the first response you gave at the beginning of this talk. Now, given what you know are you going to handle it differently this time? When someone is a member of your tribe: like your daughter, or a friend, you respond differently.

There was a first draft of my Keynote. The responses to reading that draft differed, if given by a homosexual, a person of color or a Jew vs. a white heterosexual non-Jew. The white non-Jews were hesitant, feeling the BOT was over-portrayed as the villain, while the others responded more empathically, even saying they were crying while reading it, and were resonating with my experience of being "other". However, if the focus is on the BOT or IIBA as villains, then I have not accomplished anything by writing this Keynote. The members of the BOT are elected volunteers, representing each of the geographic areas comprising the IIBA. Decisions are made using a system, called, gradients of agreement².

Although to achieve an agreement is sometimes a long arduous process, the result is that any member who has a hesitation has a voice and for a "yes" vote, almost everyone has to agree, although one person can still register a "no". The BOT did decide to post a statement on the website, which is assurance that the issues were addressed, that almost every member of the BOT is in agreement concerning what it states. The final outcome is that the statement is buried deep in the website; so that realistically, it is almost impossible to locate, which can

2 For a complete explanation of gradients of agreement: <https://www.lucidmeetings.com/glossary/gradients-agreement>

be seen as avoiding taking a public stand. However, posting on a website with a group of words is meaningless, unless followed by a commitment to act on those words. Having a statement without an accompanying empathic understanding is more destructive than having no statement at all.

Conclusion

We are therapists; and if we make a statement about our willingness to acknowledge the trauma from systemic racism, then the statement must be followed by a commitment to actively work on our own individual numbing and disassociation. I read to you again the end of the statement, which is Scott's addition:

“The IIBA pledges to provide a safe place for people of all philosophies, nationalities, genders, sexual orientations, races, and religious beliefs, to engage in a process of self-exploration and healing. And we make an affirmative commitment to study the origin, facilitation, and expression of destructive impulses, in ourselves and others, that lead to the furtherance of human suffering.”

This organization which is composed of multiple nations, and ethnic groups, religions, and races has not only supported me in giving this Keynote, but is encouraging me to share my truth and has asked me what they need to know that would have prevented the re-traumatization.

I remind you that the denial by the organization of the importance of acknowledging social trauma has been happening for a long time, such that I had asked Scott to be a witness to ensure that another person was aware and could verify my reality. This was the first time the organization presented a willingness and opportunity to consider a statement.

Traumatic fields around people can pull for re-traumatization. During this time, the members of the BOT representing each of their countries were managing Covid, with their accompanying anxiety and grief and were likely in their own activation. And, I am being pulled by my already activated nervous system, into an environment mirroring an earlier trauma, and once again receiving the message that the statement is: “too political and too American”. It is about you, but really doesn't concern us.

My response to: “What could have made the process with the Board of Trustees easier for me?” First of all, every email I sent was attended to and I never felt dropped. The Board was attentive and was working diligently to write a social

statement. However my traumatized protector was operating as a filter on high alert and reactive to any information perceived as dismissive. In an ideal world the BOT could have responded with: “The BOT is strongly in support of your statement. It invites us into an examination of the destructive elements from our culture that live inside us.” Or, they could have responded with caring and concern in response to my email sharing my memory of the Ku Klux Klan. “Thanks for sharing your history. What happened to you is awful. We are engaged in discussing the statement for the website.” “What happened to you sounds hard. I am so sorry you had to suffer that treatment. I understand how affected you are by these issues and we are addressing them.”

Those words would have helped offset the: “too American and too political statements”. I would not have heard once again, that the IIBA is unwilling to take a stand. This is not something we want to look at or know about. Take your traumatized body away and heal thyself.

What I truly long for is a more bioenergetic response, with an empathic understanding of the wound. Traditional bioenergetics placed people in stress situations, with the idea that the information could help break through the unconscious barriers against feeling. My husband, a non-Jewish white male was asking me what is it that people aren't “getting”? After several days of trying to tell him, and out of frustration, I did something quite mean. He has one shoulder that never fully developed its musculature, due to having polio as a child. He was coming through the door after walking the dog and I said to him, “You can't come into this house (our home). We can't tolerate cripples”. His face showed shock, and then deep pain. I watched his shoulders slump and he stared at the floor.

I felt so bad, as I gently said: “You are starting to self-attack. You don't need to do that.” I held him and we were both teary. He said: “I get it. Now, I understand.”

By writing this Keynote, I'm hoping that you will have a more empathic understanding of the self-attack that accompanies the rejection of us due to religion, skin color, sexual identifications and preferences.

After the traumatic memories and with the support of the social justice group in Santa Cruz, memories of teachers and friends who supported me during that time began emerging. And what has enabled me to continue sharing my process has been the support and caring from people from my bioenergetic tribe. I am deeply touched. Thankyou.

Never forget that justice is what love looks like in public – Cornel West

Love isn't a state of perfect caring. It is an active noun like 'struggle' – Fred Rogers

References

- Colonna, R. (2021). When it's Love, it just happens – The Development of the Sexual Self in a Heterocentric Society. In M. R. Filoni (Ed.), *Bioenergetics and Gender, Love, Sex, and Relationships* (pp. 41–64). International Institute for Bioenergetic Analysis.
- Francisco, M. (2021). Speaking and Listening in Racial Relations. *Bioenergetic Analysis*, 31(1), 9–23.
- Lingiardi, V. (2007). Citizen Gay. In M. R. Filoni (Ed.), *Bioenergetics and Gender, Love, Sex, and Relationships* (p. 145). International Institute for Bioenergetic Analysis.
- Lowen, A. (1988). *Love, Sex, and Your Heart*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co.
- Meyer, I. H. (1995). Minority Stress and Mental Health in Gay Men. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 36, 38–56.
- Monteriù, M. (2021). Violence in Intimate Relationships: Emergency Room Intervention and Psychocorporeal Focus on the Phenomenon. In M. R. Filoni (Ed.), *Bioenergetics and Gender, Love, Sex, and Relationships* (pp. 121–136). International Institute for Bioenergetic Analysis.
- Plà Vila, F. (2021). "Relationships in the XXI Century: Intimacy in Postmodern Times". In M. R. Filoni (Ed.), *Bioenergetics and Gender, Love, Sex, and Relationships* (pp. 161–188). International Institute for Bioenergetic Analysis.
- Resneck-Sannes, H. (2019). Shame: Wanting to be seen and the need to hide. *Bioenergetic Analysis*, 29, 39–56.
- Rogers, F. (2019). *The World According to Mr. Rogers: Important things to remember*. New York: Hachette Books.
- van der Kolk, B. (2014). *The Body Keeps the Score*. Penguin.
- West, C. (2011). Quoted from speech at Howard University.

About the Author

Helen Resneck-Sannes, Ph.D., is a psychologist in private practice, and has lectured and taught in universities and colleges. She is a well-published author and is most known for her ability to integrate diverse concepts into the theory and practice of bioenergetics. She is a member of the international faculty, and has been a Keynote speaker at conferences, co-editor of the journal, and has led training groups in the United States, Canada, Europe and New Zealand.

helenrs@aol.com; www.helenresneck.com