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NATURAL MASSAGE

Notes on an aspect of biotherapy

Introduction

To understand the place given to Natural Massage in my therapeutic approach, we must take a brief look at a few bio-analytic concepts.

Ecology is the branch of science which studies the relationships of living things to their physical surroundings and to one another. Organisms and the physical environment in which they live form an ecological system, or ecosystem, which is regarded as the basic unit of ecology. Within every ecosystem there is an environment into which a particular plant or animal species will fit exactly, with the prospect of optimal functioning. This distinctive habitat is known as the plant or animal's ecological niche.

The bio-analytic view is that the human mother is the natural ecological niche for her baby.

The word ecology stems from the Greek **oikos** meaning house. When baby is with mother it is at home. It is where it belongs. The idea of the baby being at home does not mean it is at home living in the same house as its mother and the rest of the family. The building is not the baby's home. Nor are babies at home in their cots, or in their prams during the day, and they are not at home in their cots at night. Mother forms a natural ecological niche for her baby only where they are in almost constant skin-to-skin contact during the early months of their relationship after birth. The mother must carry her baby in skin contact throughout the day and sleep with her baby at night. As the months pass, baby learns to crawl, and moves away from and back to its mother. Mother and baby are always within sight

and sound of one another, and slowly the child gains the ability to stand and to walk. From conception until the child is safely playing with friends away from any sensory contact with its mother is the **contact phase** of child development. Under natural conditions a mother and her baby are inseparable. Their relationship is so intimate that in Biotherapy we use the term **motherbaby** to emphasise the fact. The mother is fulfilled by regulating her life in accordance to her own and her baby's needs, and her baby would not survive very long without the presence of its mother. Within such an essential relationship the partners should not be regarded as self-regulating individuals, they live by **mutual regulation**.

It is normal in many societies to leave babies on their own for long periods of time. Generation after generation of women, isolated when they themselves were babies, learn to isolate their own babies in turn. We have all been isolated from our mothers, by our mothers. We are all the victims of innocent victims. Isolated babies make for a society of isolated, alienated individuals. Mothers unwittingly separate themselves from their own babies. What we do to our babies stems from our second nature, our distorted nature. People in civilised societies, and in some tribal societies, have lost their **natural sense** of what is instinctively appropriate behaviour and instead follow unnatural social norms - commonsense. All of us have suffered the distorting effects of contact deprivation. The **natural personality** is virtually unknown.

This study looks upon Natural Massage as a treatment for contact-deprived people. It is a treatment for touch deprivation that can be given without professional supervision and is therefore a form of **mutual help therapy**. This is the first in a series of bio-analytic studies on aspects of the contact phase of personality development. The series continues with a study of the application of Natural Massage in the motherbaby relationship: Motherbaby Massage and proceeds to outline radical changes in motherbaby care that are necessary to prevent contact deprivation.

Centripetal Massage and Centrifugal Massage

Massage is the term applied to various manipulations that are used on the soft tissues of the body to help return them to optimal tone. The tissues are stroked, kneaded, compressed, struck or shaken with the hands.

Massage has been used for thousands of years by physicians as a remedy for obvious discomfort. Recently it has become popular as an activity to be enjoyed between friends. Massage does not occur spontaneously as a natural way of maintaining or strengthening friendships among healthy members of a community. Massage between friends is in fact still therapy. They are unconsciously healing one another. This form of massage originates as a response to touch deprivation. It is a way of making up for a lack of loving touch that should have been given during babyhood and childhood.

The name of my approach - Natural Massage - is in fact a contradiction in terms. Massage is not a natural activity, it is a therapy. Natural Massage refers to an approach that has evolved as an extension of the natural impulse to stroke. Because it follows on from a natural impulse, it has been called Natural Massage.

There are two classes of massage when viewed in terms of the direction of tissue fluid circulation. They are centripetal massage and centrifugal massage. Taking blood as an example we can either massage along the course of the blood flowing in the veins, or in the direction of blood flowing in the arteries.

Centripetal Massage - the movements are directed from the periphery of the body toward the centre, mainly in the direction of the venous blood flow.

Centrifugal Massage - the movements are directed from the centre towards the periphery of the body, being mainly in the direction of the arterial blood flow.

Centripetal Massage

Massage is thought to have originated from the impulse we share with other animals to lick an open wound, or lessen the pain of a bruise by rubbing it. (6) The original form of massage is believed to have developed as a response to obvious pain. It was used by physicians as a remedy in ancient Chinese, Indian and Egyptian civilisations. The early Greeks also knew about the curative effects of moving soft tissues.

The Greek physician Hippocrates (c.460-377 BC), regarded as the father of medicine since classical times, knew the value of massage for relieving pain. He wrote that after replacing a dislocated shoulder, ' . . . it is necessary to rub the shoulder gently and smoothly. The physician must be experienced in many things, but assuredly also in rubbing . . . For rubbing can bind a joint which is too loose, and loosen a joint that is too hard . . . However, a shoulder in the condition described should be rubbed with soft hands, and above all things gently; but the joint should be moved about, not violently, but so far as it can be done without producing pain.' (4) Hippocrates began what has become a tradition of massaging centripetally. Western civilisation inherited this tradition from the Greeks and has continued to massage more-or-less in a centripetal direction throughout its history. (1) Two outstanding contributions to the development of massage within this tradition have been made by Pehr Henrik Ling and George Downing.

Pehr Henrik Ling founded the Central Institute of Gymnastics in Stockholm in 1813 and taught his system of gymnastics there until his death in 1839. His principal book **Gymnastikens Allmanns Grunder** (General Principles of Gymnastics) appeared in 1840. In keeping with a long tradition, exemplified in the previous quote from Hippocrates, massage and exercises were inseparable parts of Ling's Swedish Gymnastics. There are four parts to his system: educational, medical, military and aesthetic, but the emphasis was on medical gymnastics, which was divided into active, passive and duplicated movements. Massage was classed as passive gymnastic movements and came to be called Swedish Massage. Ling used the terms rolling, slapping, pinching

shaking, vibration and joint movement and introduced four terms from the French: effleurage, pétrissage, massage a friction and tapotement.

During the early 1970's George Downing developed his distinctive approach to massage. He also sees massage as a healing art, but takes it out of the hands of professionals. Massage should be shared between friends. It is a unique way of communicating friendship. In his book **The Massage Book** (3) he describes one of many possible variations of a caring massage developed at the Esalen Institute called Esalen Massage, which is a variation of Swedish Massage. The Esalen Institute in Big Sur and San Francisco is the Mecca of Humanistic Psychology therapies.

Centrifugal Massage

Natural Massage breaks with the tradition of massaging centripetally. It returns to the instinctive centrifugal massage of before Hippocrates. Returning to the massage of the Homeric Age (c. 1000 BC) and of Herodikus (c. 500 BC) and Herodotus (c. 484-425 BC) (1).

Like all other mammals our skin is covered with hair. On various parts of the body, hairs slope in the same direction and course over the surface along tracts called hair streams. The general direction of hair slope is centrifugal, that is, it flows from the head down to the feet and down the arms. (see Figures 1 and 2: Diagrams of direction of human hair streams) (2). When we stroke someone on impulse as an expression of affection, without realising it, we almost invariably do it in the direction the hair streams. It seems probable that the way we stroke today is a vestige from prehistoric times. Our ancestors had thick coats of hair and whereas stroking down the hair may well have been a soothing experience, stroking against the flow may have been very annoying. Our distant relative was 'getting his back up'. If you receive centripetal massage (up the legs, back and arms) you are 'being rubbed up the wrong way'. Natural Massage is centrifugal; it follows the path of the hair streams.

NATURAL MASSAGE

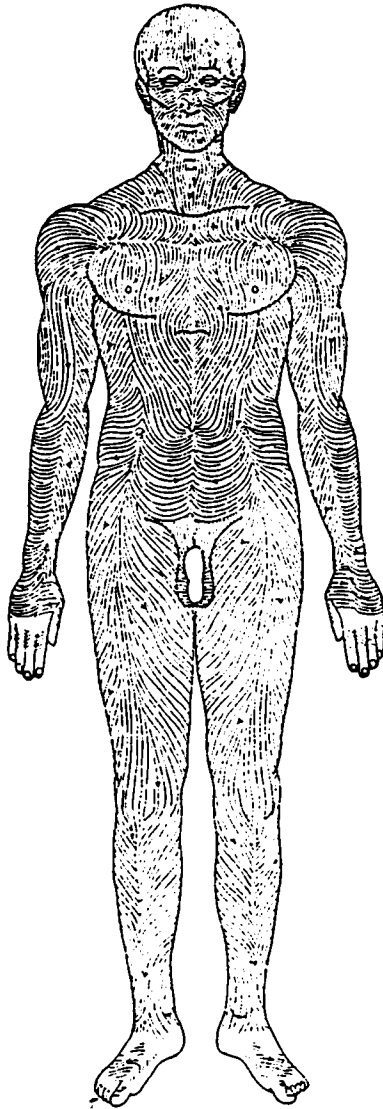


Fig. 1. Diagram of the direction of human hair streams.

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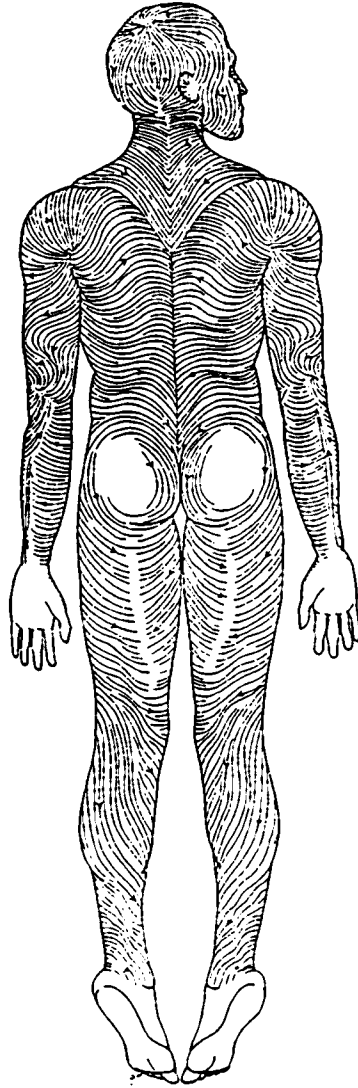


Fig. 2. Diagram of the direction of human hair streams

The original form of massage may have developed from using pleasurable, reassuring strokes to calm down an individual who was agitated by another individual, or was suffering from pain. It served to maintain collective and individual peace and lessen pain. Let us look at an example of the way other animals touch that helps sustain the dynamic cohesiveness of their societies.

Most mammals when first making contact with each other touch with their noses. It is when we look at the order of mammals to which humans belong, the primates, that the hand becomes the most common part of the body used to make physical contact. This is particularly so in the higher primates. (5) The higher primates are the New World monkeys, Old World monkeys, the apes and finally ourselves. Primates, like other mammals, keep their hair and skin clean by grooming. They lick, comb, or part the hair with the hands and remove particles with fingers or lips, depending on the range of grooming behaviour of the species.

Beside self grooming, many primates groom one another. This social grooming is called allogrooming. They do it at the same time (mutual grooming), or in turn (reciprocal grooming), or one individual may give and not be groomed in return (one-sided grooming). Generally speaking there seems to be a transition from self grooming to allogrooming and from using the mouth to using the hand as we go up the evolutionary scale. (8) Highly social primates groom one another more frequently than is necessary for cleaning alone. It is a very important way of maintaining peaceful relationships within their societies. From the relaxation response observed in primates receiving grooming, it seems to be a very pleasurable experience. The important link between non-human primate allogrooming and human stroking is that they are prominent examples of social touching that help to maintain peaceful, pleasurable and relaxed relationships.

Natural Massage Practice

Massage is a French word. It comes from the French **masser** (apply massage to), which is a Franco-Indian eighteenth century adaptation of the Portuguese **amassar**, meaning to knead. Amassar is itself derived from yet another word **massa**, meaning dough.

The natural impulse to care for another person by stroking part of their body is developed into 'natural' massage when light stroking is deliberately given over the whole body down the hair streams. Massage as an art is the result, as distinct from stroking as a natural activity.

The most relaxing position for the recipient is flat out on a massage table, mattress or on the floor. It is easiest to give when the recipient is on a massage table. Figures 1 and 2 show an adult male as he would appear while lying on a flat surface. It is a matter of mutual preference whether or not powder, cream or oil is used to reduce friction between the hands and the skin of the person being massaged. Some substances are absorbed by the skin and scientific research is needed to measure their effects in the body.

The amount of time taken to massage someone will depend on their age and size, the area, volume and condition of their tissues, and the number of levels being moved. Other factors are the rate at which the movements are given and the type of movement. It is necessary to create a calm, unhurried atmosphere in which the person treated is given time to settle down and relax in a safe environment, and after, the massage time should be allowed for continued relaxation.

At the heart of Natural Massage is style, not technique. One person is sensitively in tune with another, who is guided into blissful relaxation by being touched all over.

Natural Massage movements are divided into two classes:

Stroking - Various stroking movements.

Pressing - Various pressure movements.

These movements may be used to stimulate different tissues found in four depths of the body. They are the skin, subcutaneous connective tissues, skeletal muscles and lastly the bones and joints.

Skin level

Fat level

Muscle level

Bone level

As far as is possible all movements are given at an even rate and a steady rhythm.

Stroking

Stroking is the most commonly used of the two basic massage movements. Take another good look at Figures 1 and 2 and follow the hair streams on the person you are massaging while stroking on the skin and fat levels. On the muscle and bone levels, stroke down the course of the muscle fibres and along the length of the bone in the general direction of the hair streams.

Skin level stroking: The open hands are softly moulded to follow the body contours. Finger pads and balls of the thumbs may be used on the face and wherever else it is felt necessary.

Fat level stroking: Depth of contact will vary according to the thickness of the fat layer. Light stroking may be given using the whole flat of the hand to move a thin deposit, with a transition to finger pads, balls of thumbs and heels of the hands, on progressively thicker layers of fat.

Muscle level stroking: Stroke down the length of the skeletal muscle. The amount of pressure required to contact the muscle will depend on the depth and consistency of the overlying skin and fat. Stroking throughout the muscle may be made difficult by the shear bulk of the muscle and its tonus. Finger pads and

thumbs may be found useful while keeping the whole hand in contact with the skin where possible. It is especially important not to cause pain by pressing too deeply into excessively tense muscles.

Bone level stroking: Bone can be felt where the overlying tissues are thin enough and relaxed enough to permit contact, and at the joints. Be gentle. Stroke down, along the length of the bones.

Pressing

Muscle level pressing: Pressure movements are directed through the skin and fat layers to the muscle layer to stimulate excessively tense (hypertonic) or excessively relaxed (hypotonic) muscle tissue. Muscle tissue is pressed against underlying muscle tissue and the surface of the bone beneath the muscle. Muscles are massaged by using little circular movements of the thumbs and fingers without sliding over the skin surface. The skin and fat will move because of their elasticity. When it is time to move on, pressure is released at the muscle level and applied again further down the muscle. Pressure on the muscle must vary to allow for the condition of the muscle under your hands. It is important not to inflict pain, and to vary the pressure so that muscles are pressed lightly where they attach to the bone, and more deeply at the main bulk of the muscle.

Skin level and fat level pressing occurs because these tissues will be moved while focussing on the muscle level. **Bone level** is rarely given and then only gently.

With practice you will become more sensitive in your touch and will learn to empathize if you receive massage yourself. There has been little scientific research into the effects of the widely used forms of centripetal massage and next to none on centrifugal massage. The field is wide open for a comparative research programme.

References and Notes

- 1) BEARD, Gertrude and WOOD Elizabeth C. **Massage: principles and techniques.** Philadelphia. 1964.

- 2) **Diagrams of the direction of human hair streams.** My thanks go to Glenn Martin for the two diagrams. They are a composite of illustrations found in the three works detailed below and from personal observation. It must be remembered that the diagrams are only a general representation.

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- 3) DOWNING, George. **The massage book.** London. 1973.
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- 6) RANDELL, A.W. Massage through the ages. **Physiotherapy** (London) 1955. 41(10).
- 7) **Shorter Oxford English Dictionary.** 1973.
- 8) SPARKS, John. Allogrooming in primates: a review. In: MORRIS, Desmond (ed.). **Primate ethnology.** London 1967.
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