Lidy Evertsen

Active Pause August 2011

Lidy Evertsen, originally a professional classical singer and voice teacher, was trained as a Unitive Body Psychotherapist in the early nineties. Soon she became involved in the Bodynamic System. Now she is a certified Bodynamic Therapist, Bodynamic Shock Trauma Therapist and a trainer in the Foundation and Shock Trauma Training. Lidy has a private practice in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. She runs international Bodynamic Trainings in cooperation with Lisbeth and Ditte Marcher, also in Amsterdam. Since October 2010 Lidy has been the president of the European Association for Body Psychotherapy (EABP). Lidy's special interest is working with dissociation and working with clients who endured long term trauma.

Serge Prengel, LMHC is the editor the *Relational Implicit* project (http://relationalimplicit.com).

The following is a transcript of the original audio. Please note that this conversation was meant to be a spontaneous exchange. For better or worse, the transcript retains the unedited quality of the conversation.

Serge Prengel: This is a conversation with Lidy Evertsen. Hi Lidy.

Lidy Evertsen: Hi Serge, how are you?

SP: Good thanks. So would you describe a little bit what your work is?

LE: My work is diverse, but what I would like to talk about now is my work with people who are traumatized. And my background in this work is the Bodynamic system. And what we do in the Bodynamic system is reworking the trauma. Not before we have worked on resourcing the client so that the client is able to stand a higher charge before we go into the trauma itself.

SP: So working through the trauma, but the priority is to first resource.

LE: That's right, and the idea is, how can we say that? The whole Gestalt of an experience can be brought forward including unconscious decisions and things like that that people have taken during the trauma, and are still working in their nowadays life.

SP: So there's something like a whole Gestalt of what happened that's still continuing in people's lives.

LE: Well, the fact that the whole Gestalt is not conscious, that is what influences the client's lives. So they split off parts of the experience and the idea is to get all parts of the experience back, in order to give the clients the possibility to work it through.

SP: So you bring parts of the experience back together?

LE: Yes. So, if they can tell it, so they use words, and they can feel their emotions and sensations, and they can also place it in a timeline of their lives. You understand what I mean.

SP: Yes, yes. So bringing all these parts together and the context, the timeline. So really integrating that experience instead of having it be split off.

LE: Yes, that's right. So that by containment of the body itself, and also the containment that is provided by the knowledge of things, people can stay in their bodies. Instead of what they did during the event because the situation was so threatening and the charge was so high that they couldn't do anything else but leave their bodies.

SP: So, at that time the body was not able to contain, and we're making that happen, the ability of the body to contain.

LE: So we think that otherwise it has no use to go again through the whole story if you can't do it in another way.

SP: That would just be re-traumatizing.

LE: Yes, right, yes.

SP: So we're talking about containment and the body as a resource and container.

LE: In fact, yes. But also about being conscious. So, you could say during the traumatic event, the responses are automatic. They come from the reflex system, and the idea is to get the acting part more conscious, so that it doesn't become automatic every time the stress goes up a little higher.

SP: So, all of this in the presence of consciousness.

LE: Yes, right.

SP: So this is what happens, the general mechanism of trauma. So is there something special when there is repeated trauma?

LE: Yes, what I often see in my clients is that when during childhood there is long-term stress and trauma, that they start organizing their whole system more in parts. It's in a way a beautiful way to deal with things, because what I see is that people are able to keep all their possibilities available just by having them a little apart. So, what I see, a person is able to make beautiful art or having a very good job on one hand, because some child parts so to say, are more separate, and they can be on the side when the person is busy working for example. And on the other hand, it's of course not easy because the other part is that there is a lot of chaos inside sometimes. Because there are different interests inside from the different parts, so taking a decision can be difficult sometimes. So that's why while working with these clients, we are aiming at resourcing the different parts and most of the time we deal with age level for example.

SP: So that sense of, people get organized or survive repeated trauma by cutting of into parts, and they can function in some way, well. But there is also a chaos that happens there, and you're describing how in therapy you deal with these different parts and maybe the different ages.

LE: Yes, and sometimes with different gender.

SP: What would be an instance of that?

LE: What you could see in a woman who grew up being abused, sexually abused. And then you can see that sometimes around the age of 6 or 7, the memory layer of that age, that they don't feel themselves as a girl but more like a boy. And sometimes you can have more grown up parts who are male, which serves doing a certain job, going out at night, being more brave—as a male—things like that.

SP: So these different parts are going to be different ages, functions, genders. So a way of adapting to different parts of reality.

LE: Yes, in a way you could say it's a bit of an exaggeration of what we all know as a personality. Early, you could say all of the parts that are normally glued together, are connected together, now are just put a little apart.

SP: So instead of a flow between these different parts, very strong walls. They don't flow into each other.

LE: That's right. Certain parts don't know about each other, even. So, that can be really handy sometimes. I mean, when you have to do a tough job and you don't know about the child part within you, that helps you doing this tough job. Only there is one problem, if stress goes up too high or certain things happen, then the child part can come up, which also makes for chaos and insecurity.

SP: So can we talk about how you work with that in therapy?

LE: Yes. You can say the beginning is with most clients a bit similar. That I start teaching them, if necessary, to tell about their sensations—inner and outer. And then we have a look at what they are making out of that, how they interpret the sensations. For example, somebody tells about a tingling feeling in the stomach or a tight feeling in the throat. And I ask what feeling/sensation do you feel behind that? So that's a kind of base that we first must go through so we can develop a common language.

SP: So the paying attention to the sensations and expressing it.

LE: Our sensations what it means, what kind of information does it give to you? Then we also start to work with what they perceive in the outer world and what they make out of that. So that adds to the common language as well.

SP: So for instance, perceiving outer world. What do you mean by that?

LE: What they see factually. So for example if we do this in context I can ask 'Can you have a look at me, and what do you see?' People sometimes think this is a very awkward question. But then we can see whether their outer perceptions can be reality tested, so to say. When they look at me and they say, I see you're angry, then we try to find out what is it exactly that you see and what brings you to the interpretation of angry? And through these steps it becomes often clear with the client

that there are several reactions to certain perceptions. Then we start to look for, how do you feel when you see e.g. me as angry? How do you feel yourself, what age level? Feeling male or female?

SP: So you have described a process of what seems like calibration. First paying attention to sensations, being able to pay attention to what they mean, express it. Paying attention to what people see, when they look at you, what it is that's shaping what they see and how they see you, and working with that.

LE: In that way, we kind of explore what there is active in their personality. Normally there is a first layer that we come to or that we have access to. Then we start to work with those layers or those personality parts according to age level and according to the themes that are important for these parts and their function in the total group or total personality. And in the Bodynamic system we also work with character structures, Bodynamic characters structures. And the themes of the different parts, I work with them the same as I would work with certain character structures.

SP: So character structure would be something that is developmental at different stages, people adapting to frustrated needs in a certain way.

LE: So you could say it's a developmental chart that we keep in the back of our minds and that describes seven stages with each three positions that can be the result of that development. The formation is from intra utero until around 12 years old. You could say that the normal grown up person has a combination of different positions that were taken during growing up. So that's what I use, although we are making or discerning shock trauma work from character structure work, but when I'm working with people who have parts in their personality, I do character work with each part of their personality.

SP: So on one hand there is developmental stages. On the other hand there is the separation into parts, inflicted by trauma. Within the parts you are working with the various developmental stages of each part.

LE: Yes. Normally you can see that, for example, when there is a part that feels like a $2_{1/2}$-year-old child, then I work with the developmental structure around $2_{1/2}$ years old.

SP: Yeah. So what is it like to work with these parts, or these structures? Is it possible to talk about a case?

LE: I'll make a combination since I cannot talk about a client that can be recognized. I'll throw a few cases into one bowl. For example, a woman of 50 is very intelligent, but has a lot of problems with keeping a job. Is also once in a while very emotional, so has to cry a lot, has not really an idea of what is happening. So then we start talking and sensing, discovering as I just told you. And then it appears that there is a part that is very intellectual and organizing, inside of her. And there is also another part in her that is really playful, enjoys life and doesn't want to bother too much about serious things. And there's a part that's very anxious, and that's what we discover after some time. Well, the work that we then do is to let them [the various parts] come into contact. Normally, they would fight for the room, so to say. What I try to do is convince the three parts, or [I should say] to let them get acquainted and let them see the function of each of the others, so that it becomes clear that they all have [a function], that it is important for all if they can work together, instead of fighting each other. So, this also has to do with establishing a working relationship with me. So each

part has to make his or her relationship with me, then I can help support what they need in order to live with each other. So what happens then is after a while, then they are more listening to each other, more working together. What happens often is that they start to get a little but of each other's traits. Maybe you can translate that on a brain level that more systems in the brain are connecting. What typically happens then is that if there comes a bit more of a balance in this group of three, then a second layer steps forward. So more hidden personality traits, then we start to work with them as well. So in the end the whole system can be mapped and gets to know each other.

SP: So these conflicting parts, instead of being each separated and not communicating, having a sense of more of a way of them working together instead of fighting for space. And as they do there is kind of less of a stark difference between them, they start to expand and then connect.

LE: Yeah, they start to accept each other then maybe respect or understand each other. Then often when they start to work together, they also start to connect in a way that for example, the part that was always only brainy starts to also feel some emotion.

SP: So how do you work with these parts? In the case of that example, we're talking about to communicate with each other, how does this happen within the course of therapy?

LE: Well, of course at a certain part in time we have identified the parts. Then I keep asking the client when we are working on a certain issue, from which part he or she speaks at the moment. It's not really my job to identify them, teaching that it's the client's job to identify the parts; it's their personality.

SP: So the client names that right now they're talking from the brain part. Is it the client who names these parts, calls it brainy or playful? How does it come out to be aware of it?

LE: I ask the client, does this part have a name, how would you like to call this part of you? Some clients have names for their parts, other clients name parts by their function. But it's the client who names the parts, not me.

SP: So what you're saying is that some clients have already names so that often enough there is some awareness from the clients of these parts. It's not something they just discover with great surprise in the sessions.

LE: Most of the clients have a notion of the different stances they can have, so that's no surprise. It's a surprise when new parts step forward, especially when more aggressive parts are stepping forward, that's normally not a nice surprise. For me, that's a sign when things are going better, when those parts come forward. Now we can go and work with the strengths.

SP: As you work with the parts, what do you do to explore the parts?

LE: Well, again, looking for sensations, some parts have difficulty feeling sensations. So they have to learn that and name them, then see what it means in terms of emotions or feelings. Then translate that into possible action, that's something they have to learn. That's kind of resource work that we do. So each part in itself, you can say needs resourcing. And the whole group needs to work together and learn to know each other. The way we are working is so diverse. For example, what we do in Bodynamics is make a relation between the tension of muscles and the character structures.

So when there is hypo-responsiveness in certain muscles, that corresponds to hypo-responsiveness in certain themes. That's also what we do with certain parts, resource hypo-tense muscle and the connected theme. Or helping hyper-responsive muscle to express the theme. So I can have an example. If you take a muscle in the upper arm that's called the deltoid, and if you take the front part of the deltoid, that comes in action during the first year in development of a child. And it's helps with stretching out the arms, reaching out to the parents. So if there was not a good response, the child gives up. So the grown up with this history doesn't know about reaching out, not in the body. So if one of the parts has a hypo-responsiveness in reaching out, we go work with this muscle and with the theme of reaching out.

SP: So, for instance in the case of the under-developed deltoid muscles. I assume that just lifting weights does not really solve the problem.

LE: Not really, because it's not only the training of the muscle, but the consciousness of the content of that muscle. So we think that the muscle that develops in a certain period becomes willful, that the theme that develops at that moment goes together with the consciousness of that muscle. If you start to lift weights, but still are not contacting the content of that muscle, there is still a possibility of a kind of hypo-responsiveness. The muscle can be strong but the response of the muscle can still be hypo.

SP: So how would that be visible physically, is that something you just notice emotionally or in terms of behavior or is that also something that you notice physically?

LE: You can see it. If a muscle is hypo you can see that the area where the muscle is, is not so much alive as you would expect. If a muscle is hyper, then there is a kind of holding back in that area. You can also feel it if you touch the muscle and stretch it in a certain way that Lisbeth Marcher and the people around her developed. But the muscle comes back when you stretch it in that particular way. And if it comes back more slowly, that indicates a hypo responsiveness. When it comes back quicker, then it is a hyper responsive muscle. But you need not touch. You can also see it very well. When I train with people in the foundation training and I show a few muscles in the hypo or hyper-responsiveness then they all recognize it.

SP: So we're talking about this in the context of doing the work to explore and develop what is affecting the parts.

LE: Yes. So, it's working on the developmental stage that a certain part is in. Also working with what we call ego functions on the bodily level. So ego functions means all that you need in order to live an adult life. You can work with those functions very bodily, so with muscles or with connective tissue, mostly muscles. And that's what I try to do with the clients and their parts, if we work with an individual part, so to say.

SP: When you say work with the part. What is going to happen in the session about it? Is it something that is directly related to the muscle itself?

LE: Say that, at a certain point in time, a part comes forward that feels abandoned and hopeless. For example, we see this hypo responsive front part of the deltoid, and I think in the back of my mind that we need to do something with the contact here, maybe especially with reaching out. So then we start paying attention to the muscle for example, that could be touch or that could be just

making movements where the muscle is involved in. Then we work towards the contact where the muscle is involved, the reaching out contact in this particular case. And we work this out between us, so I act, could you say, as the parent part. So in order for this child part in the client to experience something that it didn't know and that adds to the repertoire of, in the end, being an adult.

SP: So as we're coming to the end of this conversation, can we talk about how these various parts communicate with each other?

LE: In the beginning, it needs to go with my help so to say. Sometimes we, like in Gestalt conversations, in a big group we use pillows or something to give the whole group a place. And then the client can switch places in order to talk from the different parts, that is a way to do it. For other clients it's easier to just mention, now I'm speaking from this or that part. So they have different ways of doing this in themselves.

SP: So that sense of as they name them and explore each of them, then there is a sense of integration that happens.

LE: Yes, that's what I see happen after some time, that some of the parts are coming closer together, communicating more easily with each other. Then they start to fulfill each other's positions also, to a certain extent. Then you see a sort of grouping, so sets of personality parts that belong more together. And I doubt whether, if a person has many parts, I doubt whether they integrate totally in the end. I've never seen that, but they come closely enough together in order to get rid of the chaos and instability.

SP: And as the parts become more integrated, do you notice that at the body level?

LE: *(Tentatively)* Yes. On one hand, there is less change in tone of voice, in body posture and also more ability to fill the body out. So that's what I see on the body level. The panic has disappeared because when people come with a lot of division inside of a personality, there is also a lot of panic. And you can see that disappear.

SP: Thanks Lidy.

This conversation was transcribed by Alex Curtis.

© 2011. All rights reserved. *Active Pause* and its web address (activepause.com) should be properly cited when these contents are used in any form.