

Integration and Well Being

Please note: this model is based on recent research including the work of Daniel Siegel (Siegel 2007; 2010), from which it is largely drawn. There is an extended version of this paper that embraces some cultural aspects of integration – notated as C6-B [April 2013].

Preamble

There are various models of mental health. I am drawn to a model by Daniel Siegel, with three domains: one of chaos; one of dullness / lethargy / depression; and one of harmony and integration. We can summarise these as follows:

- i. When we are feeling anxious / disturbed within: this may be associated with a sense of internal chaos. At such times we may have a feeling of dis-integration.
- ii. When we are feeling lifeless and unable to respond appropriately to what is happening: here we may have a feeling of rigidity within; this can be associated with certain forms of depression / despondency.
- iii. When we are well and feeling in the flow of life: here there can be a sense of integration within us.

This implies that for mental health we need to steer a course between the chaotic and the excessively rigid. Mental distress and disturbance of any sort involves some form of internal non-attunement with our selves, and / or a feeling of impending disintegration. Mental health, on the other hand, implies responding to whatever life brings with flexibility, coherence, and mindfulness: and this will be associated with a sense of integration.

From this perspective, lack of integration reflects mental disturbance, whereas internal integration implies well-being. Some of these dynamics are illustrated schematically in Figure 1.

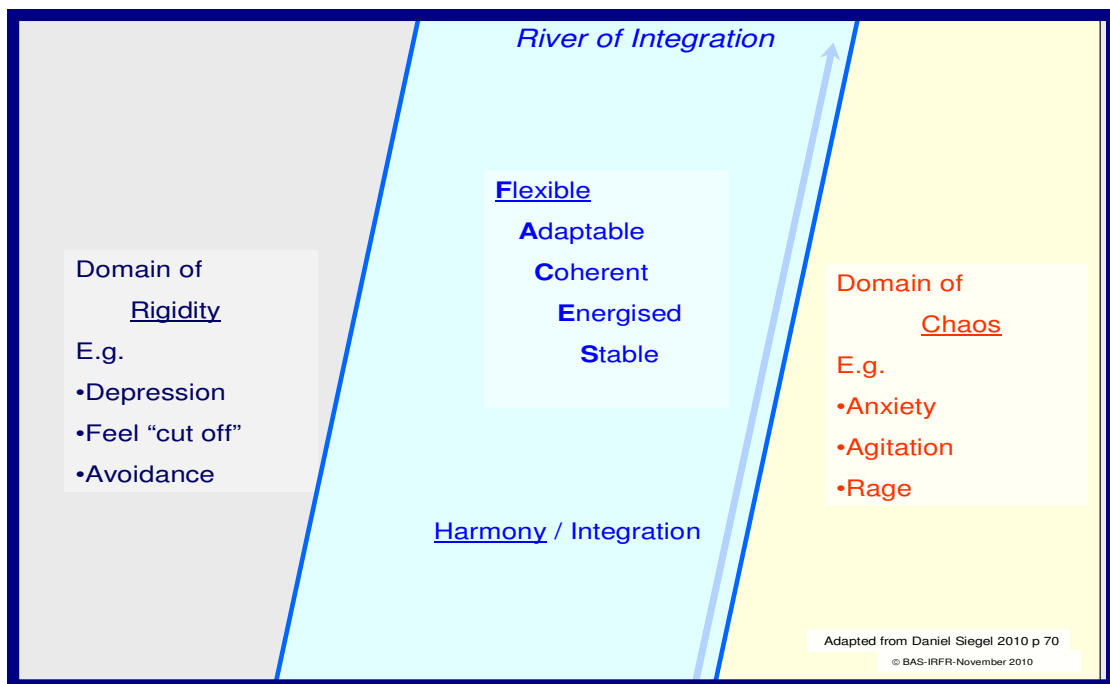


Figure 1
The River of Integration
Based on Siegel 2007; 2010

Note that rigidity tends to occur when we become depressed, feel “cut off”; and when we avoid people or matters. On the other hand, chaos can be associated with anxiety, agitation, and rage. Disturbing memories can of course cause us a great deal of distress and disharmony.

The hallmarks of integration and harmony, it will be seen, embrace the concepts of: “Flexibility; Adaptability; Coherence; Energy; and Stability” (Siegel 2007; e.g. pages 78; 207; 332). So when we are in the flow of life, we will feel both in harmony and energised.

One of Daniel Siegel's approaches to those suffering from inner disharmony is to facilitate the development of internal integration. This can take various forms, and here we will focus on two of these: vertical and horizontal integration (Siegel 2007; 2010).

Vertical Integration

It can happen that as we grow up we become out of touch with our bodies and what is going on within. We can call this a lack of vertical integration. For example, we may be out of touch with our heart – both physically and metaphorically. This means that we may be living in a heartless manner: and we may be unaware of this.

Mental training that helps us get in touch with our body can, in this situation, be of particular value. Such mental training includes, for example, certain forms of yoga, Positive Mental Training, Meditation and Autogenic Training (AT). In Autogenic Training, we start with a simple body scan (which over time allows us to get in touch with various parts of our body); and then the First Standard Exercise focuses on the dominant arm (i.e. the left arm for the left handed: right for right handed). Each new Standard Exercise focuses on a different part of the body (or physiological process in the cases of the third and fourth exercises). Thus the very essence of AT can be reframed as promoting vertical (and horizontal) integration.

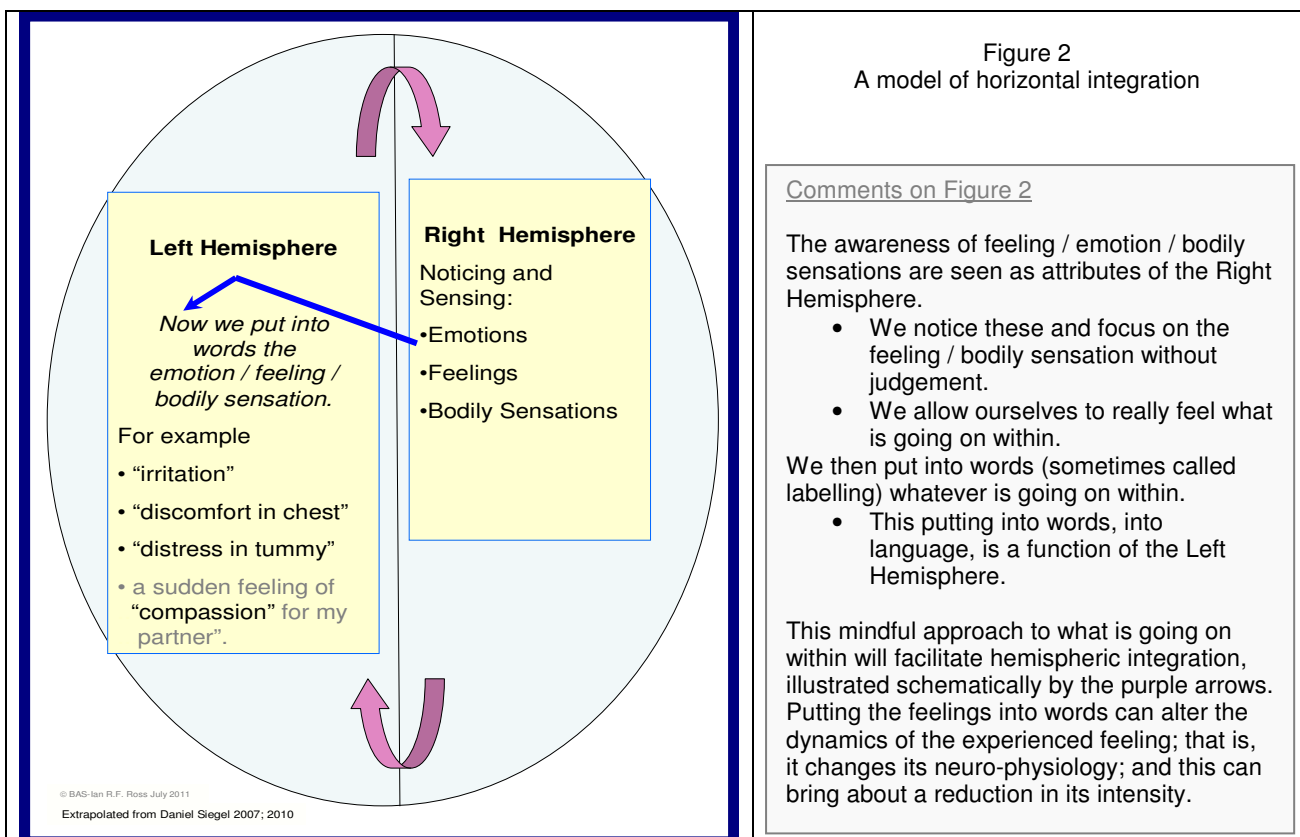
Horizontal Integration

We may live our lives very much in our heads – for example with the Left Hemisphere attributes of thinking, reasoning, logic and language. In this situation, we may be out of touch with our emotions and feelings; and it will be difficult for us to be attuned to ourselves or others – including our partner, our children, and close friends; we will tend to lack empathy.

Being in touch with our emotions, and being empathic, are associated with Right Hemisphere dynamics. In mental health, the two hemispheres (left and right) are in proper communication with each other (McGilchrist, 2009); they have become integrated. This is called horizontal integration.

So if we are out of touch with our emotions and inner feelings, we can choose to develop our skill in Mental Training¹ – which will facilitate re-integration with our feelings, and also facilitate horizontal integration; and at the same time help us to develop the crucial middle pre-frontal cortex functions described in C2 of this series.

The horizontal integration is thought to come about in a variety of ways: Figure 2 illustrates one of these possible ways.



¹ Just as an athlete would allow his muscles to become fit by undertaking regular physical training.

Mindfulness and Integration

Note that simply naming (labelling) our feelings is not sufficient to bring about horizontal integration. Research by Creswell et al (2003) indicates that for the “affect labelling”² to be effective, we need to develop Mindfulness (through, for example, mental training such as meditation / AT). In particular, there is an association between:

- i. Mindfulness and the activation of certain pre-frontal cortex areas (especially the middle pre-frontal cortex (MPFC): MPFC activation is itself associated with specific socially desirably functions such as empathy, insight, and attunement to others (Siegel 2007; and C2).
- ii. Mindfulness, affect labelling, and reduced activation of the amygdala: i.e. affect labelling in those who have Mindfulness skills leads to reductions in the fear / anxiety circuits of the amygdala.

Autogenic Training, Off-Loading exercises, affect labelling and well being

Many people have benefited from the Off-Loading exercises that are integrated with Autogenic Training. This can help us to get rid of any backlogs of unresolved emotional issues. However, once we have got rid of this backlog, judicious use of affect labelling both during an AT Standard Exercise session, and say the three minute exercise as suggested by Segal, Williams, and Teasdale (Segal et al 2002 e.g. pp 184 & 241) – may, in the light of recent research, be more appropriate.³

Autogenic Training brings about psycho-physiological changes within us (Schultz & Luthe 1969 p 1), and thus helps us to remain – most of the time – within the “river of integration”.

References and sources include

Creswell, J. David; Way, Baldwin M.; Eisenberger, Naomi I.; Lieberman, Matthew D. 2007	
Neural Correlates of Dispositional Mindfulness During Affect Labelling –	Psychosomatic Medicine 69:560–565
McGilchrist, 2009. The Master and his Emissary: The divided brain and the making of the Western World.	ISBN 978-0-300-1-4878-7
Panksepp, Jaak: 1998. Affective Neuroscience: The Foundation of Human and Animal Emotions	ISBN 0-19-509673-8
Siegel, Daniel J. 2007 The Mindful Brain. Reflections on Attunement in the Cultivation of Well-Being	ISBN 10: 0-393-70470-X
Siegel, Daniel. J. 2010. Mindsight - transform your brain with the new science of Kindness	ISBN 978-1-85168-761-9
Schultz, J.H; Luthe, Wolfgang; 1969. Autogenic Therapy: Volume I; Autogenic Methods. [BAS 2001];	ISBN 0-356-22736 -7
Segal, Zindel V.; Williams, J. Mark G.; & Teasdale, John D.: 2002	
Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy for Depression: a new approach to preventing relapse.	ISBN 1-57230-706-4

Linked themes in this Autogenic Dynamics section

B3	Emotional Operating Neuro Circuits - a brief introduction to Affective Neuroscience and the work of Panksepp
B2	Reframing, Reappraisal, and Well-Being
C2	Mindsight – our seventh sense and associated pre-frontal cortex functions
C6-B	Integration and Well Being – Dancing in the Flow of Integration (a long version of this paper)
C7	Being in touch with our feelings – Hemispheric Integration (includes the concept of Affect Labelling)
C8	Lost or disturbing memories – Memory Integration
C9	Making sense of our lives – Narrative Integration
D1	Reflections on foundations for Mindful Living

² The term “affect labelling” does not particularly appeal to me, but it is the term used in recent scientific literature (e.g. Creswell 2007). We can simply name the emotion, or put into words what is going on within us.

³ The Off-loading Exercise have the potential to activate, for example, the FEAR and / or RAGE circuits (Panksepp 1998; and B3 on this website). This in not the case in Affect Labelling or the three minute exercise.