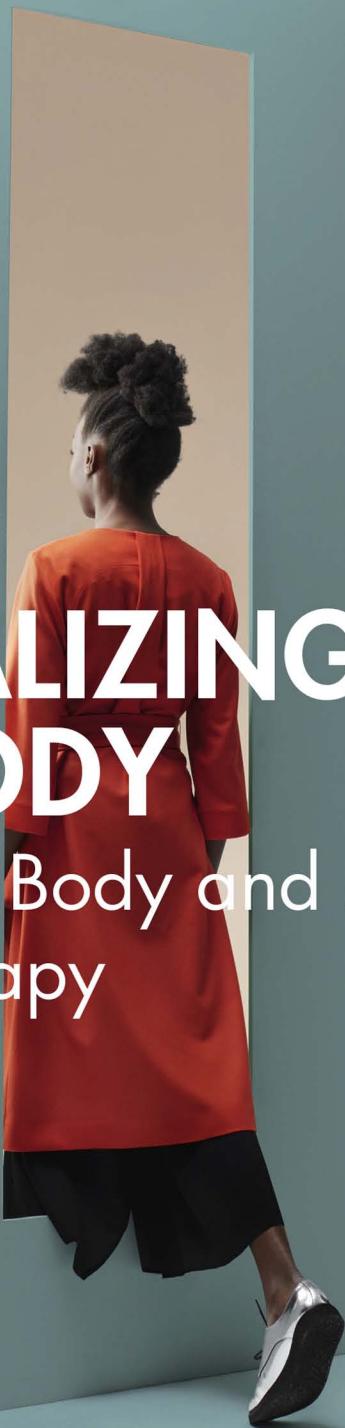


ULRICH SCHULTZ-VENRATH

# MENTALIZING THE BODY

Integrating Body and Mind in  
Psychotherapy



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# Mentalizing the Body

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*Mentalizing the Body* brings together theory and practice with the latest neurobiological and developmental psychological findings to understand the relevance of the body in a wide range of mental disorders, especially personality and somatization disorders.

Ulrich Schultz-Venrath provides insight on individual bodily phenomena within psychotherapeutic treatments – experienced by patients as well as therapists – and focuses on the importance of the intentionality of bodily symptoms and how they can be integrated in the talking cure. *Mentalizing the Body* expands the work of Anthony Bateman and Peter Fonagy, adding the “body mode” in contrast to the popular concept of “embodied mentalizing.” Promoting mentalizing in psychotherapy while taking the body into account helps not only patients with somatoform and eating disorders, but also those whose psychological complaints have a missing connection to the body. Schultz-Venrath provides detailed insight on the range of therapies and treatments available, from individual and group psychotherapies to body, art, and music therapy, with clinical case studies and diagrams throughout.

*Mentalizing the Body* will be of great interest to practitioners and researchers – from psychoanalysts and psychotherapists to psychiatrists and psychologists seeking to understand the mentalization model, and all healthcare professionals working with severe mental disorders.

**Ulrich Schultz-Venrath, MD** is Professor of Psychosomatic Medicine and Psychotherapy at the Faculty of Health, University of Witten/Herdecke. He is a neurologist (DGN), psychoanalyst (DPV, IPA), and training group analyst (D3G, EFPP, GAS), chair of the Institute of Group Analysis and Mentalizing in Groups (IGAM), and working in private practice in Cologne, Germany.



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Integrating Body and Mind  
in Psychotherapy

Ulrich Schultz-Venrath

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## Chapter 1

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# Introduction to a Complex Theme

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Nothing is so familiar and simultaneously so unfamiliar as our own body. This is true especially when we lose control over our body and have yet to regain that lost control: Our body speaks to us. You can love your body, hate it, be ashamed of it, be proud of it, nurture it, damage it, abuse it – like an object. The body is where our affects dwell and emerge from; where our basal needs, instincts, and desires are localized; it's the resonance chamber of our selves, our “we,” and of all the groups we feel attached to or excluded from. Without our body, with all its affects and emotions, there would be no split-off feeling, no intersubjective life, no communicative exchange – indeed no thoughts at all. Yet the body was not always seen that way apart from a few exceptions.

The Indo-Germanic languages possess several different expressions that refer particularly to somatic experiences, or sometimes to individual organs, to idiomatically describe our emotions, psychosocial phenomena, and strains. For example, “turn a blind eye,” “with a heavy heart,” “bundle of nerves,” “hole in my gut,” “gets under my skin,” “pain in the neck,” “dagger to the heart.” Most of these expressions refer to sensual experiences we have all had in life: To “sense” comes from the Latin *sensus*, meaning “sensation, feeling” but also “understanding.” A “feeling” is also something we actively do, by directing our attention to our inner workings (Fiedler et al., 2011). To “perceive” something means to “thoroughly grasp,” a complex sensual event of transforming what we “sense” into a physical expression. If you listen carefully to what someone is telling you, you will notice a mixture of body language and spoken language, whereby the words stand in for physical processes as well as emotional impulses. We humans can feel and be felt both physically and emotionally – even if it is not always completely clear how that occurs (e.g., “I was touched by your story . . . ,” “It really moved me to hear . . . ,” “It just gets under my skin when . . . ”).

If you look at all the words humans use to describe how they “feel,” you notice a certain lack of precision: It often remains unclear whether we are dealing with sensual-physical perceptions, with feelings (emotions, affects), with thoughts (projections, wishes), or with behavioral impulses. How the words necessary to describe our subjective bodily perceptions came to be remains one of the mysteries we address later in more detail. Ideally, a patient and their therapist possess

a rather well-differentiated vocabulary to characterize such subjective perceptions, affects, and emotions. Using language can help to differentiate our subjective sensations, yet the act of speaking must necessarily consider the “preverbal” state that precedes every word spoken. “The preverbal is called a ‘pre,’ a ‘not-yet,’ a ‘not-whole’ of a signifying process that concludes itself in the word culminative” (Leikert, 2019b, p. 34). Psychotherapists would be well advised to use their own vocabulary to express subtle differences and to attend to and apply these terms critically in therapy, particularly when dealing with emotional and preverbal states. For that is where mentalizing begins and wherever more complex terms and ideas about emotional and physical phenomena are “created” (Plassmann, 2019b, p. 6).

The term “mentalizing” is considered the ability to understand oneself and others regarding inner mental states closely connected to bodily perceptions. Bodily perceptions are situational, intersubjective, and dependent on the person in question; they consist of proprioception, exteroception, and interoception. *Proprioception* describes the perception of one’s own location and movement in space, based on the stimuli emerging from our inner body and neuromuscular spindles. *Exteroception* (from the Latin *exter* “outward” + *recipere* “to assume”) describes external perception, such as what the exterior surface of our body perceives (“haptic perception”). *Interoception* is the perception we have of our own bodily organs.

Fonagy (1991) was the first to define the human ability to perceive both conscious and unconscious mental states in oneself and others – the ability to mentalize. Later, mentalizing came to mean a more or less preconscious, imaginative ability to intentionally exchange so-called terms of mental states (thoughts, feelings, convictions, desires). Only then does the individual truly understand, both implicitly and explicitly, their own actions and those of others as meaningful. The riddle of how exactly the mentalizing of bodily perceptions proceeds, ending in the development of an “embodied” self that can feel and speak “mentalized,” is presently not completely understood. Two very opposite models – the simulation theory and the theory-theory – presently dominate the scene: The former assumes that humans can simulate the experiences of other human beings; that they use mirror neurons and common sensory-affective circuitry and shared feelings to develop such an understanding of others (Gallese & Caruana, 2016). The latter has more physical leanings and assumes that we human beings cognitively derive “rules” by observing the social structures around us and use them to construct theoretical convictions and purposes (Baron-Cohen et al., 1985).

Even if it is now accepted that a certain level of mentalizing precedes the development of language, we still don’t know whether the way a mother or a father comes to understand the inner workings of their child – how they turn that into a physical experience and communicate it “prelinguistically . . . long before the appearance of the first word” (Bateman & Fonagy, 2019, p. 7) – is a truly “embodied” form of mentalizing.

Historically speaking, the English term “mentalization” was originally mentioned in connection with physical processes. In 1888, the neurologist James

Leonard Corning introduced the term “mentalization” in a paper he wrote on headache and neuralgia, quoting a certain Hammond who had carried out a series of precise urine analyses to discover the composition of urine under “increased mentalization.” He reported that an increase in mental effort increased the amount of urine secreted (Corning, 1888 [2018], p. 196). It further surprises that the British dermatologist, psychiatrist, psychoanalyst, and group therapist Dennis Geoffrey Brown (1928–2004), used the term mentalization as early as 1985 – and thus long before the appearance of the mentalization model – in a contribution titled “The Psychosoma and the Group”:

The *meaning* of physical symptoms and expressions needs to be discovered, and at the most primitive (“true” psychosomatic, or protomental) level *created*, for mentalisation to bypass, reverse, or better still, grow out of somatization. As I say sometimes to patients, we need to grow *down* as well as up. This calls for *trust on both sides*, that anxiety, pain, helplessness and rage can be tolerated. Whether in group or individual therapy, we must be able to facilitate communication at deeper, primitive levels, and ultimately translate them into words. We have to dare to go to levels where it is hot, as Foulkes put it.

(Brown, 1985, 2006b, p. 21)

Affects and emotions play a major role in all mental and psychosomatic disorders. The complaints of patients with so-called somatic symptom disorders or somatization disorders are multifaceted and difficult to decipher. The history of psychosomatics is full of somatoform disorders that have stumped both physicians and psychotherapists. The reason may lie in the fact that symptoms revealed through body language are hard to address using only differential linguistic methods. Yet, this loss of differentiation may sometimes also be traced back to the physicians themselves, who employ wild descriptions to diagnose the broad family of anxiety disorders instead of following sound scientific procedures. They are witness to the breakdown of the intersubjective exchange at a moment when the patient and the therapist should have been busy finding a “new” common language – which is necessary if they are to use their common (!) understanding to enact change, namely, a transformation of the symptoms. Numerous case studies reveal how physicians and psychotherapists, as part of the therapeutic relationship, use empathy, vigilance, challenging interactions, and conscious restraint to influence the course of the disorder – for better or for worse.

Affects and emotions are not only expressed physically but are themselves physiological expressions: Every emotion is accompanied by a physiological change; for example, fear is paired with palpitation, anger with an increased heart rate and blood pressure. Phenomena of this nature have been known since the work of Franz Alexander, one of the earliest pioneers of psychosomatic medicine, and belong to normal human life (Alexander, 1948). They only become disorders when there are too many or too few affects and emotions over a longer time; when they assume

a certain dominance or rigidity in the life of the patient, what we now call emotional dysregulation. This is true especially for the negative affects, which presumably stem from our evolutionary survival instincts and have embedded themselves deeply in our memory. Happiness is nice to have, but it contributes precious little to extending our life, much unlike fear and disgust, two affects that warn us of imminent dangers. The confrontation with persistent and “difficult” affects is one of the central challenges to any therapist (Plassmann, 2019a).

This volume was originally titled “Mentalizing Somatic Symptom Disorders.” However, while writing I realized that the diagnosis of a somatic symptom disorder is as broad a term as the Grand Canyon. Furthermore, many mental disorders sometimes occur “only” with temporary, more often though with long-term, trans-diagnostic somatic symptoms. Medical histories are much like literature genres: Some are short stories, some are long novels. Thus, we can categorize psychosomatic disorders as those with clearly metaphoric/symbolic meaning and those in which cumulative stress has led to a truly functional disorder. Hence, the body is simultaneously the source and the projection screen for all sorts of mentalization disorders – even for organic diseases such as Parkinson’s, myasthenia, multiple sclerosis, radicular compression syndrome, and many other syndromes, in which, because of certain transference events, the symptoms suddenly improve or disappear (Kütemeyer & Schultz-Venrath, 1997).

This book feeds off the over 40-year experience gathered with psychosomatic medicine, which began with a group of inquisitive and creative physicians at the Neurological Clinic of the Free University of Berlin, all of whom were devoted to the bio-psycho-social model of the Heidelberg School of Neurology. My own mentor, Dieter Janz, a master at gathering a medical history who amazed and “infected” his students with his methods, was also the Editor of the Collected Works of his mentor, Viktor von Weizsäcker. The latter once said, “We begin not with knowledge but with a question” (von Weizsäcker, 1926). This paved my way much later to the mentalization model of Peter Fonagy and Anthony Bateman. Connecting diagnostic and therapeutic competence with state-of-the-art research results that today are blooming in the mentalization model as a work in progress – that is what this book is about.

Whereas the bio-psycho-social model of psychosomatics presently represents the most comprehensive model of disease with a polypragmatic treatment concept in the absence of an evaluation (Egle et al., 2020), the mentalization model was born out of the lack of effective psychotherapeutic methods to deal with borderline personality disorders (Bateman & Fonagy, 2008). In the meantime, modifications of the MBT concept have been successfully applied to many different mental and psychosomatic disorders. Yet, a true scientific exchange with the bio-psycho-social model and the integration of the two remain elusive and await resolution.

For psychosomatics and even more so for psychiatry in general, the mentalization model represents a future-oriented project that serves to integrate the various disciplines of the neurosciences, cognitive psychology, and the more modern approaches to psychoanalysis under the aegis of treatment. We need both a better

understanding and a common and increasingly differentiated vocabulary if we want to understand the complex processes of retreating into the body or persevering in the body. Mentalizing is the magical word, an important code word, since it consists of the ability to properly attribute inner states (feelings, thoughts, intentions, motives) to the behavior of both oneself and others.

Some have tried to differentiate between emotional and cognitive mentalization, whereby the former deals with the body and its sensations, the latter with a form of mentalization oriented toward the cognitive, meaning it can recognize the inner states of others quite well but fails to feel them. We often meet with such phenomena in patients with somatic symptom disorders, depersonalization, borderline, and antisocial personality disorders. Mentalizing as a process (and not mentalization as a noun) has found its way into other psychotherapies and proved to be effective, even when most protagonists of the various techniques didn't plan it that way.

The adage of Edward Weiss from 1947, namely, that psychosomatics does not mean doing less research on the body but rather more research on the psyche, was long the gold standard of the psychosomatics scientific community. Not a few of the exponents of psychosomatic medicine adhered to this postulate and forgot about the body – despite their pretense. More unconsciously than consciously they hitched their wagon to Freud, who was a lifelong skeptic about – if not a declared opponent to – psychoanalytical psychosomatics (Schultz-Venrath, 1995). Once psychosomatic medicine became an established subject, psychosomatic relations were increasingly “psychologized” in psychometric tests, thus becoming less somatic and less clinically relevant. It was easier to gain a medical understanding by emphasizing the “soma” as a biological entity, losing in the process any understanding of the libidinal-erotic, aggressive, or narcissistic body.

When dealing with the body, in addition to a secure attachment, the development of the regulation of affects and emotions plays a central role in the development of one's (physical) self – and survival. A child is not a tabula rasa; rather, like all living beings, it is born with a series of congenital and protomental needs. Today, we like to think that a newborn enters the world with a bundle of intrauterine experiences that have ingrained themselves in their procedural memory as a sort of implicit relationship knowledge and define their postnatal life. The ability of a newborn to differentiate the smell and voice of their mother from that of others (DeCasper & Fiver, 1980), to imitate facial expressions and gestures (Meltzoff & Moore, 1977), and to be soothed by music heard in the womb are all essential proof of prenatal and perinatal learning and relationship processes.

Freud's notion of the three psychosexual developmental steps – “oral,” “anal,” and “genital” – refers to the dominance of somatic needs in early childhood which serve to organize mental structures. However, in the meantime, the very somatic nature of these terms, which mark the phases of libido, has been lost because of their largely metapsychological application. Modern analytical developmental psychology no longer remembers that the successive nature of Freud's model of

erogenous zones served as a model for structuring *affective* bodily experiences. We see in this in a pretty little story Szekely tells (1962, p. 301):

A child not quite 2 years old is looking out of the window. Outside it is snowing, and a bird is hopping about on the window-sill picking up breadcrumbs. The child watches all this with interest. Suddenly the bird drops something. The child goes over and sees a white speck in the snow. “Birdie do big,” calls out the child. There is nothing very remarkable in this. But the question arises: How does the child discover or know what the bird has done?

He wonders how the child knows that the bird has defecated.

The product, the bird’s faeces, resemble snow, since it is white, and not the child’s own product, which is brown. Moreover, the child has never seen the act of defecation, and consequently has no visual memory-trace to draw upon. He has only somatic and coenesthetic memory-traces of defecation, for the child has experienced it only as a pleasurable bodily process in himself, and not as a visual event. How, then, did he identify what he saw?

Of course, the analytical observer immediately understands the anal reference as how the child cognitively views the world, although we are in fact dealing with a body-mind organization (cf. Chapter 4).

Similarly, the concept of drives “as a term denoting the border between the mental and the somatic” (Freud, 1915c, p. 214) fails to acknowledge how the body serves as a basis for mental functions in psychoanalysis. Basic emotions are based on instinctive behaviors, which in turn may be traced back to innate action impulses (such as the newborn’s search for the mother’s nipple). These impulses are employed to fulfill the respective specific needs (such as searching, fleeing, attacking), yet to this day there is no broad agreement about the type and number of such innate needs.

The unloved, hated, pained body of the patient often plays a greater role in the physical countertransference during psychotherapy than the therapist would like to admit, for example, when it “brings tears to my eyes” or “makes me choke up.” How the therapist listens to the body and its stories (in this we largely follow Alessandra Lemma (2014)) is highly influenced by their own subjectivity, that is, their own generally tabooed experiences with their body, its affects, and emotions as well as the theoretical and technical conclusions and assumptions derived from those experiences. Presumably, that also determines what theory they adhere to as part of their training and how they apply the interventions it foresees. Whether candidates and training analysts truly delve into their own somatic sensations as part of the training analysis and training therapy is at the least questionable in light of the mutual tabooed nature of the matter. This may also be seen in the difficulty of doing research into the supervision of psychotherapeutic training candidates (Grünewald-Zemsch, 2019).

In addition to the continuing separation of body and soul in psychoanalysis (and the methods derived from it), in recent years we have observed a revival of interest

in somatic events: The body is being “rediscovered,” especially because of the recent profound neuroscientific findings. This is reflected in a series of publications concerning the body that suggest the need for greater inquiry into the embodied olfactory, visual, auditory, and haptic resources. Bodily resonance refers to both how interoceptive signals are experienced as well as to the interaction with the therapist. Mimicry, gestures, postures, prosody, and respiratory motion are all decisive in how the other person is emotionally perceived. Perception and affective assessment have a corporeal component and influence one’s counterpart in a sort of circular flow of reciprocal impact, culminating in a mutual physical resonance.

It's worthwhile here to take a more exact philosophical approach: “Resonance” is not just a metaphor for a certain experience of an emotional state; it is also a type of relationship determined by four components: touch (affection – where the affects are active), self-efficacy (feedback), adaptation (transformation), and unavailability (since one cannot willfully establish resonance) (Rosa, 2019, p. 38f.). “A smile on the face of a loved one *may* turn hard and icy, the purring of the cat *may* cease, one’s favorite music *may* leave us unmoved, the forest or the ocean *may* deny us any resonance” (Rosa, 2016, p. 295).

From the perspective of the mentalization model, it seems wise for the patient and the therapist to search together for the kind of feeling and meaning of a physical symptom that – inasmuch as it existed at all previously – may go missing along with the resonance. Paying proper, meaningful tribute to a symptom that does not pit the body against language fosters an otherwise sometimes marginal treatment motivation and strengthens the working alliance. This occurs when the therapist, through acceptance and encouragement, directs attention to the symptom. Everyone knows that there's nothing more hurtful – and sometimes more healing – than the spoken word. On the one hand, there is no contradiction between speaking and body (Buchholz, 2014, p. 113). Bodily presence emerges in language, or better said: in speaking and in conversation accompanied by gestures and mimicry. On the other hand, the body constantly sends out messages (e.g., about early traumas) that those affected cannot express themselves in any other way. The SARS-CoV-2 pandemic with its many lockdown-induced online therapy sessions made clear to psychotherapists that video meetings fracture the line between body and speech, ultimately leading to disengagement (Weinberg & Rolnik, 2020) – while also demonstrating how important physical presence is if therapeutic intervention is to be successful. The psychoanalytic community still fails to reflect that the couch setting is essentially a kind of disengagement that is primarily focused on listening and associative and imaginative activity. Or as Fonagy (2022, p. 208) says,

the potentially uncomfortable implication for psychoanalysis of this idea [of MBT, USV] is that the aim of therapy is not deepening specific understandings, but rather the capacity for understanding, almost regardless of the specific unconscious conflicts which may bring a patient into treatment. In other words, the “medium is the message.”

## 1.1 Affects, Brain, and Body: The Development of An Affective Self

This chapter explores the significance of touch and physical interactions in human development and well-being. It emphasizes the importance of early attachment experiences through touch and sweet sounds, highlighting how newborns rely on physical contact to regulate various bodily functions. It explores various aspects of touch, ranging from early attachment experiences to cultural practices, and emphasizes the interplay between the body and the mind in shaping our experiences and perceptions, developing an affective self.

The initial interactions one has with other human beings occur while still in the womb, and at the latest upon birth, (ideally) through loving touch and sweet sounds. A newborn is rhythmically and melodically caressed and cuddled by its primary caregiver(s), generally the parents, and in recent decades this knowledge has been able to transform even the most sterile forms of obstetrics (Böhme, 2019). Touch is so essential because the newborn can barely see beyond the first 30 cm. Immediately after being born, the newborn stabilizes its breathing, body temperature, pH balance, and even its blood-sugar level exclusively through skin contact (Winberg, 2005). Further, touch during breastfeeding triggers the excretion of oxytocin, a well-known attachment hormone. But mothers, too, profit from the early contact with their babies, which in turn allows them to breastfeed better and longer.

Touch is important throughout life. If a child falls and skins their knee, the parents take the child in their arms, quickly look after the wound, and rub the bruise. If a friend is in mourning, we tend to take their hand, put an arm around their shoulder, or hug them. If we like someone, we want to touch them. Touch between and among humans thus plays a special role: It is not just a tactile affair but is an event controlled by special nerves, the so-called c-fibers, which pass the feeling on to the insula of the brain. Becoming aware of touch takes place not just in the somatosensory cortex, but also in parts of the prefrontal cortex and the posterior parietal lobe, which we now know is the seat of awareness and body perception. Thus, the brain network responsible for the perception of tactile sensations is much more complex than previously thought (Rullmann et al., 2019). In the meantime, Elias and co-workers (2023) found the relevance of special touch neurons, which are required for sexual receptivity and sufficient to induce dopamine release in the brain. Switching off these neurons caused female mice to reject males with whom they would normally have tried to mate. Their findings establish a special skin-to-brain circuit encoding the rewarding quality of social touch.

How a child develops as a subject greatly depends on the quality of the physical interactions they have with their caretaker(s). As adults, children who have been humiliated, beaten, or sexually abused suffer more from major mental disorders

or developmental retardation than do their contemporaries who were spared such experiences in their younger years. This leads to the question of what the basic reasons are for such vulnerability and whether they are connected to a modified perception of touch. Tactile sensations influence brain development, provide a sense of one's own body, and serve as well to regulate stress. Put differently, do experiences of violence in early childhood lead to a permanent shift in how social stimuli are perceived and interpreted?

During the recent Covid-19 pandemic, one could observe the effects of social and physical distancing: The desire for intimate contact became ever greater the longer the necessity for social distancing lasted. The problem is not the total amount of supportive touching people remember having experienced during childhood, but rather the individual differences in the type of attachment style they experience: “the more anxiously attached a person is, the more touch was craved during COVID-19 and the more avoidantly attached a person is, the less they craved for touch in this period.”<sup>1</sup>

Independent of such occurrences, our Western culture has developed a touching (sub)culture, perhaps as an answer to an ever more digitalized, disembodied world. Proof thereof may be found in the many yoga studios, massage parlors, tantra centers, cuddle parties, and animal-based psychotherapies that have blossomed.

Up to the 20th century, affectionate touch was considered part of the so-called common feeling (*sensus communis*), a familiar part of both the psychological and physiological vocabulary, comprising all sensual perceptions that have their origin within the organism and are not part of the usual five senses. Today, this term has been replaced by more specialized terms such as body scheme, body image, and body self (Fuchs, 1995). Whereas *body scheme* refers to the constitution of the body, *body image* has more to do with the role of the intersubjective context in which the body develops. Body image consists of a “system of perceptions, attitudes and beliefs relating to one’s own body” (Gallagher, 2005, p. 24). The mentalization model can make an important contribution to our understanding of the developmental factors and fantasies that accompany the inner representation of the body (= body image) (Lemma, 2014, p. 5), which is distinguished from the innate body schema. If resonance and reciprocity go missing in the early relationship between a baby and their primary caretaker(s), the child develops neither representations nor a stable body image. The consequence: In later years, traumatic experiences lead to resomatization, something Dennis Brown (2006a, p. 52) called “dementalization.”

Although we may seem convinced of what we are feeling, it is not unusual that in fact our feelings are not that secure, as they depend on the respective situation or how much stress we are under. Feeling nothing at all, on the other hand, may point to a certain sort of psychopathology – but not necessarily. “The fact that we do not always know what we feel is important, as it is vastly underestimated in contemporary accounts of emotion” (Jurist, 2018, p. 9). One prerequisite for being able to recognize and apply experiences from the earliest years in psychotherapy is the ability to sense somatic sensations that emerge as affects and develop them into emotions as part of a conscious process.

The absence of empathy – in addition to feelings of hate – results from the absence of affect regulation in a teleological mode, a frequent precondition to aggressive impulse breakthroughs, leading at worst to homicide. The ability to empathize demands a sufficient level of development of the basic five senses (hearing, smelling, tasting, seeing, feeling), which are complemented by other sensual competencies, such as temperature (thermoreception), pain (nociception), balance (vestibular sense), depth (proprioception), and several interoceptions (e.g., thirst, hunger, and blood-pressure regulation), which function as detectors or sensors. Without these “senses” – Leikert (2019a) rightly speaks of a sensual self – our perception would be very limited indeed. People whose anxiety symptoms trigger a true catastrophe (such as having a heart attack and the feeling of impending death) cannot suppress the feeling during an acute attack. There is a good cause to conclude that such a situation is based on unstable representation experiences in their procedural memory, formed either from an exaggerated and overwhelmed (or vice versa: completely missing) mirroring of childish emotions caused by early caretakers. This in turn leads to neurobiologically disrupted representational mapping (Fonagy et al., 2002 [2004], p. 34). When representations are absent or fail to be linked together, this emerges as a type of pre- or non-mentalizing mode (cf. Chapter 5.1). Then, only dedicated therapeutic interactions accompanied by congruent mirroring processes can establish a mentalizing and ultimately reflective mode. The body-mode originally put forth by Diez Grieser and Müller (2018) and expanded on by the author is presently not included in the mentalization model. The term “embodied mentalizing” appears for the first time in a chapter on eating disorders by Skarderud and Fonagy (2012, p. 359) and is defined in the glossary as follows: “in which the body is used to fill in moments of mentalizing failure. The term is elaborated to cover mental states related to a person’s physical being, including perceptions and cognitions about bodily function and sensorimotor perception” (p. 513). But the term “embodied mentalizing” now in use in the mentalization model does not accurately reflect the phenomena captured in the body-mode: Mentalizing does not (yet) take place in the body-mode or, as Jurist (2022, p. 200) formulates: “The body is not a receptacle for unwanted mental life; it informs and supports mental life.” Independent of the type of pre-mentalizing mode, certain sensory perceptions cannot be meaningfully applied to interpersonal homeostasis on their own if stable representations are missing to structure sensory experiences.

The development of a body-self cannot proceed without the development of stable neuronal structures in the brain. Living systems consist of open, circular feedback loops in which the system components interact reciprocally – either horizontally or vertically. We already know that the regulation of the immune system, like the regulation of the hormonal and nervous systems, does not occur in isolation but rather in the form of reciprocal influence (Federschmidt, 2017). Immune cells have receptors for both neuropeptides (neurotransmitters) and hormones. Vice versa, the nerve cells have receptors for the transmitters of the immune system, along with the special role played by cytokines. All immunological organs are

connected to the fibers of the nervous system. Like the hormones, the transmitters of the nervous system influence the central nervous system and with it our mental health.

Against the background of these bio-psycho-social linkages, the body mirrors the psyche, and the psyche mirrors the body. That is how the hormones in a mother-child dyad interact as well, including their blood-sugar and adrenaline levels, their smiles, their gestures – and their emotions. That is what Winnicott (1952 [1958], p. 99) in his now-famous expression tried to formulate: “There is no such thing as a baby, but only a mother-and-baby unit,” which has opened the way to the further understanding that there is no such thing as a mother-and-baby unit extra-context, outside of the triangular context including the father. But it was also Winnicott who attempted to “think of the developing individual, starting at the beginning” *without opposing the mental and the physical*.

Here is a body, and the psyche and the soma are not to be distinguished except according to the direction from which one is looking. One can look at the developing body or at the developing psyche. I suppose the word psyche here means the imaginative elaboration of somatic parts, feelings, and functions, that is, of physical aliveness.

(Winnicott, 1949 [2014], p. 244)<sup>2</sup>

Today, the brain is considered an active organ. In the sense of being a predictive brain, it can generate predictions and hypotheses based on sensations (= expectations), which are not limited to reactions to stimuli. It can predict physiological needs, and it can even try to fulfill those needs before the body calls for them (e.g., if your blood pressure were to adapt only after coming to a stop, you would faint). Energetically speaking, that is clearly a more economical solution and serves to adapt to challenges (“allostasis”).

Vice versa, individual influences from early childhood (“imprints”) and adolescence play a major role in the form of expectations. Participants in experiments report that they experience less pain if the expectation of pain is lower than the actual stimulus. Put differently, if you expect intensive pain, then the subsequent perception is much greater, something that is pronounced especially among anxious people (Paulus & Stein, 2010); also, the side effects of antidepressant medication, such as frequency, intensity, and impairment, over time were more strongly associated with increases in depressive symptoms for patients with panic disorder compared to those without panic disorder (Shankman et al., 2017). It is presumed that this effect stems from a heightened interoceptive awareness of changes in their body, which means such patients are at higher risk than those without an anxiety disorder. Whether interoception is more or less developed appears to depend on the attachment style and the attachment representations. Discrepancies between the expected inner state and the inner state that is actually experienced may precipitate a whole spectrum of maladaptive behaviors that seek to modify the inner milieu to adapt it to the expected state.

When emotional-somatic feedback regarding a secure attachment goes missing over a longer period of time, the results can be dramatic: Romanian orphans who, near the end of the Ceausescu era, were forced to spend their first years of life in extreme emotional deprivation had adult brains that were on average 8.6% smaller than those of comparable British children who had been adopted shortly after birth (Mackes et al., 2020). These effects were found particularly in regions of the brain concerned with functions such as organization, motivation, integration of information, and memory. Interestingly, the right lower temporal lobe of the Romanian children was larger than that of the English children; one interpretation of this phenomenon is that the brain was trying to compensate for the negative effects of deprivation. Romanian children with the largest growth in this area showed low-level ADHD symptoms.

A neuronal and neuroendocrine deficit prevents proper mentalizing by dampening the ability to adaptively calibrate stressors and affects of all types (see Figure 1.1). In addition to impairments in the synaptic and dendritic connections in the brain, we find damage to the so-called stress system – the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis – and to the entire affect control. Further, several neuropeptides are impaired, the best researched being oxytocin. Oxytocin, as it turns out, plays a major role in social belongingness, attachment behavior, social support, maternal behavior, and trust as well as protecting against stress and anxiety. Both emotional and sexual abuse during childhood results in, among other things, a reduced level of oxytocin in the brain fluid of adult women (Heim et al., 2009). All of which relates to problems of social class: Not only are persons with low and medium income exposed to more stressors, which in turn make them vulnerable to all sorts of somatic and psychosomatic disorders (including a propensity toward dissociation),

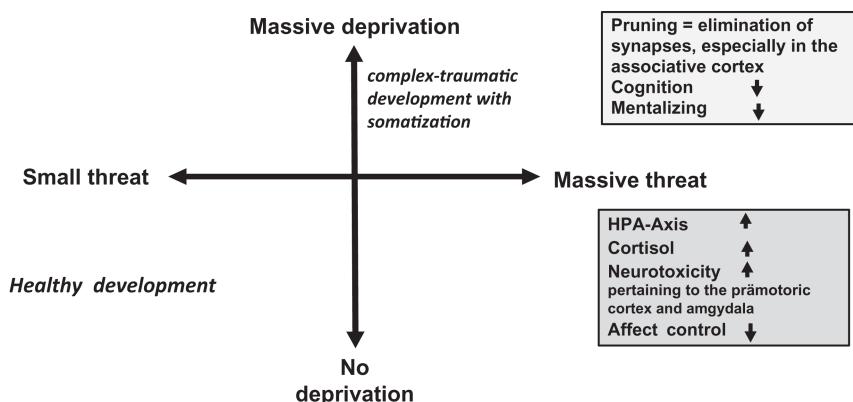


Figure 1.1 Early negative childhood experiences (deprivation and vulnerability) as dimensions of neural development, impaired affect regulation, and mentalization deficits.

Source: Schultz-Vennrath 2021; modified acc. to McLaughlin et al. (2014).

their ability to counter their symptoms through mentalization is weakened (Goldstein et al., 2019; Purgato et al., 2018).

In animals, life in a monotonous and socially isolated environment leads to the constrained production of new neurons in their gyrus dentatus, part of the hippocampus. Similar results were found in adults who had spent over 14 months in the Antarctic on their own, including the reduction of the gray substance in the right dorsolateral prefrontal cortex (DLPFC), the left orbitofrontal cortex (OFC), and in the left parahippocampal gyrus of their brain (Stahn et al., 2019). In this respect, impairments of neuronal development due to experiences of deprivation and threat with effects on affect regulation should be properly addressed during psychotherapy as deficits with regard to any limitations of mentalizing (McLaughlin et al., 2014; Sheridan & McLaughlin, 2014).

Only in the new millennium has interest in the importance of affects and emotions for attachment style, the body, and the development of an affective self emerged in the psychotherapeutic scene. Nevertheless, we are “far from having exhaustively researched” the physical and corporeal processes, the role of physical self-awareness in countertransference, and a patient’s “integration of somatic perceptions in the chain of associations” (Leikert, 2019b, p. 30). Affects and feelings were long deemed to be of little value in the scientific and clinical world; even as recently as 1987, children were being operated on without the use of anesthesia, on the assumption that they felt no pain (Coates, 2016).

Every newborn, every adult can feel anger – when they receive no response to their interests, when they are ignored, or when their wishes are thwarted. We have all experienced the feeling of being abandoned, of feeling sad. Many of us enjoy playing together with others. These affects are based on nonverbal, physical, and sensomotoric-neurobiological states of our organism in a particular situation. Every affect has its own intentionality, for example, when we spit out something revulsive or toxic or when we take joy in interactions with others. The idea of “intentionality” goes back to Franz Brentano, who suggested this term to describe mental phenomena (such as conviction, desire, perception, intention, etc.). “No physical phenomenon reveals something like that” (Brentano, 1874 [2008], p. 124f.). Independent of the discussion of whether or not affects are inborn, intersubjective, or both, they are quite definitely culturally embedded and change from time to time. For example, during the Middle Ages, it was not unusual to see people shamelessly defecate and urinate in public, wherever they happened to be at the moment. Then came the common public toilets.

Throughout modern European history, we can observe an ever-higher level of the threshold for shame and embarrassment, in correlation with the erection of individual toilets and washing rooms, witnesses to the new physical boundaries that ran parallel to the establishment of modern civilization (Elias, 1939; Gleichmann, 1979). We should recall that Freud’s theory of phases (oral, anal, genital) was considerably influenced by these cultural developments. At the turn of the century, the smell of fecal matter in Vienna had reached a level such that it, like many other cities throughout Europe, decided to alleviate its misery by building a sewer system. Whereas earlier the farmers had come to town to haul off the remains and

were even willing to pay for them, the city folk now had to pay for its removal. It wasn't much of a stretch for Freud to equate anality with money.

That is a good example of how affects are related to the situation and the person involved (Trevorthen, 1979, 1993), even if we do tend to divide up affects into those that process information (e.g., curiosity), regulate relationships (e.g., anger), or are self-reflexive (Wöller & Kruse, 2018, p. 138). They have two dimensions: one on the level of arousal, one with a "hedonic tone" (Hill, 2015), that is, they are accompanied by either negative or positive states of over-or underexcitation as well as feelings of desire or aversion, pleasure or displeasure. This is reminiscent of concepts from psychoanalysis, namely, that affects that appear later in life may be traced back to neonatal states of contentment or discontent (Krystal, 1978). Later this becomes connected to two very different lines of development: a child's nonverbal affective system and a verbal, desomatisized adult system: "The core of the self is thus nonverbal, unconscious, and embedded in the matrix of affect regulation" (Schore, 2007, p. 43).

The mentalization model rests on the theory of the formation of representations for affects based on the proper attachment to primary caretakers; it tries to integrate several other models that concentrate on the (largely three-part) development of an (affective) self, whether under consideration of findings from developmental psychology or not:

- *Daniel Stern*, who introduced his intersubjective self-concept and dynamic forms of vitality, expressed in terms such as "exploding," "pulsating," or "fading"; these describe more "how" (i.e., the manner) and the style, rather the "what" and "why," of affects. We are, he thought, unable to detect or imagine unseen mental activities such as thoughts, emotions, or even "will" without movement. For Stern, the development of representations or descriptions of an emerging self or "core self" is the central prerequisite for the structuring of a self (Stern, 1985 [1992]; Stern, 2010a). He differentiates between semantic and procedural representations, whereby the former enable symbolization via language and the latter serve as knowledge concerned with, say, *how* to ride a bicycle. Stern was one of the first researchers to declare that interpretations (sensu becoming aware of repressed drives and fantasies) did not suffice to induce change during psychoanalytic treatment (Stern, 2012, p. 52; Stern et al., 2010).
- *Antonio Damasio* presented a neuroscientific concept of four different levels of life regulation. Basal life regulation consists of simple, stereotypical patterns of reaction, among others the regulation of metabolism and reflexes. This forms the basis for emotions (corresponding to the affects) with their complex and stereotypical patterns of reaction, among others the primary (congenital) and secondary (social) emotions (e.g., embarrassment, guilt, pride) as well as background emotions (well-being or discomfort, calmness or tension). These, in turn, spawn feelings as sensory patterns, signaling pain, lust, and emotions, which then turn into ideas and, at the highest level, the higher thought processes (= consciousness) (Damasio, 1994, 1999). He preferred the term "somatic markers for inner

mental states” over “affects,” which he thought were acquired through experience but could go missing because of neuronal or cultural damage. They are expressed – among other things – in tension, sighing, or cramping.

- *Jaak Panksepp* suggested so-called basic affect systems, evolutionarily derived from the animal world, which gave our understanding of the development of a body self a new foundation. These systems stem from the subcortical brain structures of mammals, in the sense of a *primary process* (for which Panksepp chose to use the beginning letters of the seven affect systems). The *secondary process* is based on “inbuilt emotional learning mechanisms,” and the *tertiary process* is represented by “emotional thoughts and deliberations that are so evident in human experience” (Panksepp, 1998; Panksepp & Biven, 2012, p. xi). That is where the representations develop that demonstrate a certain level of stability in children aged 3–4 years. But “according to Panksepp there are three types of affect: homeostatic and sensory ones (both of which are bodily) and emotional ones (which involve the body but cannot be described as ‘bodily’ in any simple case” (Solms, 2021, p. 101).
- *Sebastian Leikert* refers to Wilma Bucci, Jörg Scharff, Daniel Stern, and Ulla Volz-Boers. He assumes that the world of representations of the self consists of three different layers: the body self (corporality), imagination, and language, each of which has a different means of organization. As far as treatment is concerned, Stern and Leikert lie very close to the mentalization model, for which a “differentiation of the somatic self-awareness” is suggested for “detoxifying the body self” (Leikert, 2019a, p. 26f.). This largely corresponds to the differentiation of affect experience foreseen by the mentalization model.
- *Mark Solms* reflects on the emergence of consciousness, which is far more primitive than we often assume: It arises in brain regions that humans share with fishes:

The simplest forms of feelings – hunger, thirst, sleepiness, muscle fatigue, nausea, coldness, urinary urgency, the need to defecate, and the like – might not seem like affects, but that is what they are. What distinguishes affective states from other mental states is that they are hedonically *valenced*: they feel “good” or “bad.”

(Solms, 2021, p. 96)

The valence registers “the *degree* and *direction* of homeostatic deviations from our biologically viable states” (Solms, 2022, p. 168), giving all affects and emotions a dimensionality. On the other side indicate all affects that they are governed by homeostasis led by the pleasure-unpleasure principle.

To date, the affect and emotion literature has failed to come to a consensus about what exactly affects, emotions, and feelings are – and how a self arises from them. In the cognitive neurosciences, emotion is defined as “free from affect” (LeDoux, 1996). Damasio, however, does not use the term “affect” at all, preferring to speak

of the “primordial feelings” of the proto-self, which stores information via the body; this corresponds to the affect system. Damasio sees the prefrontal areas of the brain, home to most secondary feelings, as the decisive neuronal system for obtaining the signal apparatus of the somatic markers acquired by experience (Damasio, 1994). Contrary to those who prefer to differentiate feelings through the affect-labeled mirroring of important others, Damasio imagines a neuronal self with two categories of representations: topographically organized ones and acquired dispositional ones, which are responsible for memorable imaginations within the smaller neuron complexes – and thus form our memory. Although Damasio did not concern himself with findings from developmental psychology, he does defend an inter-subjective position: Consciousness “is rooted in the representation of the body” (Damasio, 1999, p. 37) and can only develop “when the organism’s representation devices exhibit a specific wordless knowledge – the knowledge that the organism’s own state has been changed by an object – and when this knowledge occurs along with the salient representation of an object” (Damasio, 1999, p. 25).

Both in colloquial speech and scientific treatises, affects and emotions are often equally considered unconscious forms of expression, feelings are generally conscious and representations of affects and basal emotions. There have been many attempts to define emotions. In short, one can say: Whenever powerful waves of affects overflow us, we are experiencing an emotion; in turn, if similar, less powerful but still persistent feelings occur, we can speak of a mood (Panksepp, 1998, p. 47). An overwhelming number of emotions is normally accompanied by a disruption of the usual neuronal mechanisms connected to rationality and cognition. At that point, basal, phylogenetic, and ontogenetic older brain stem systems assume the control over our behavior.

As plausible as such a description may be, it fails to do justice to the complexity of how affects and emotions control personal features, personality, and the self – and vice versa, how the autobiographical self influences affects and emotions. It also cannot properly explain how emotions truly function and can trigger an individual’s feelings, which are subsequently registered as such. A further conundrum lies in the fact that many terms describing emotions, such as love, shame, and anger, differ from one culture to another and from one language to another, even when translating the exact same terms.

In his monumental work *The Expression of Emotions in Humans and Animals* (Darwin, 1872 [1934]), Charles Darwin assumed that every culture experienced six basic emotions: joy, sadness, fear, anger, surprise, and disgust. Very detailed linguistic-statistical studies have shown that terms for emotion display both cultural variations and universal traits (Jackson et al., 2019). For example, people who speak Mwotlap on the island of Vanuatu in the South Pacific have no exactly equivalent expression for the English term *love*; the closest equivalent is the verb *tam*, meaning some form of empathy, largess, and hospitality. That fairly well describes the English idea of *neighborly love*, while failing to include *romantic love* (expressed in that language by a different verb for something like “need” – “I need you”) (Matacic, 2019). Even in Western cultures, whose expressions for

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