

# *Mutilation and the power of shame as the “guardian of dignity”*

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## **Abstract**

This paper intends to broaden the subject of shame with a view to including and developing the theory and practice of Bioenergetic Analysis from the foundations laid out by Wilhelm Reich and Alexander Lowen, pioneers of body therapy. “We don’t have a body”, we are a systemic body. This paper will draw from the views of Chilean neuroscientist, Humberto Maturana, within the fields of Biology of Cognition and Biology of Love, as well as from Polish philosopher and sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, a great modern thinker on the frailty of bonds. I will add some recent Bioenergetic Analysis articles from the journal of Bioenergetic Analysis published in the period of 2011-2017. I understand shame as sensations that might develop from childhood and take hold of our true self, mutilating spontaneity and freedom, deeply impacting on our sense of dignity. However, I also see it as a multigenerational inheritance passed on in the form of beliefs and values that strongly interfere with bonding. As I see it, Bioenergetic Analysis in the field of family therapy can restore generational wounds in face of contemporary challenges.

**Key words:** self, body, bioenergetic analysis, systems therapy, transgenerationality.

## **Introduction**

Gregory Bateson was a biologist and anthropologist who conducted research and worked in the fields of anthropology, sociology, linguistics, ecology and cybernetics. He was also a major systemic thinker and epistemologist. At the Mental Research Institute (MRI), Bateson engaged with the anti-psychiatry movement, developing an epistemological framework for the advancement of a new understanding on insanity, the double bind theory from a cybernetics viewpoint. Stemming from his research into

double bind among individuals with schizophrenia a cross-disciplinary team was gradually formed at the MRI. Bateson understood that all systems were influenced by and exerted influence on family systems leading to pathological interactions. Therefore, his new proposal was to go beyond the work with the subject. Family systems required working on interaction patterns that reinforced the ailments of all members. Double bind takes place when an individual receives conflicting emotional, verbal and physical messages. The researchers noticed that those highly emotionally impaired individuals often would suffer from an inability to process internal and external communication they would receive. Research was carried out that developed therapeutic approaches using a range of techniques, sharing a belief that multigenerational and transgenerational phenomena were structured intersubjectively within an ecosystem (Nichols and Schwartz, 2007). Systems theorists Humberto Maturana (1998, 2001, 2002) and Fritjof Capra (2006); and Maria José Esteves Vasconcellos (2007), who calls herself an “epistemologist” developed a novel paradigmatic view on the complexity of events, procedural instability and intersubjectivity which broke away from conventional science and the paradigms of simplicity, linearity and subjectivity impacting global, interpersonal and transgenerational development.

In this paper, I will address shame as a central issue through research focusing on Bioenergetic Analysis linked to traumas that exert psychosomatic and mutilating influences on organisms and on the status individuals operate in life, including the development of armouring, which reverberates on character traits. The key concern in relational systems theory is to restore damage caused by previous generations that impact on contemporary and future generations. I will seek to advance a theoretical link between systemic assumptions and Bioenergetic practise with couples and families. To do so, I drew on systemic authors and family therapists. The foundations of body therapy in Wilhelm Reich and Alexander Lowen, as well as articles from the Bioenergetic Analysis journal published from 2001 to 2018. The aim is to allow for an understanding of the benefits that body interventions in Bioenergetic can bring about to Transgenerational Systems Therapy.

### **Foundations of Systems Theory**

All members of a community are organized in a vast and complex network of dependent relations. All human beings are part of a mutually interdependent process natural to ecosystems. The living systems theory

offers basic foundations of organization, which are open networks of energy and resources. Systemic structures evolve as a result of their record of changes and are intelligent because of the inherent dimensions of the vital process.

“Interdependence -mutual dependence of all life processes on one another - is the nature of all ecological relationships. The behaviour of every living member of the ecosystem depends on the behaviour of many others. The success of the whole community depends on the success of its individual members, while the success of each member depends on the success of the community as a whole” (Capra, 2006, p.231/232).

All societies build their models of groupings and family arrangements and so there is a tendency to creating images, ideals, specially moulded by social representations which implicitly carry preconceptions, beliefs, expectations, values, occult rules of coexistence that can form the basis for healthy development or a realm for negating one’s true self, specially faced with a prevailing model in complex Western societies. A hegemonic, patriarchal, hierarchical, capitalist, bourgeois, heteronormative model which bars singularity and deconstructs the complexity of co-existence based upon acceptance of changes. This hegemonic model no longer mirrors empathy but images of a false self from the early bonding process. Novel forms of bonding in the differentiation process of systems, developing a false self which impacts intersubjectivity. In opposition to linear and dualistic Cartesian thought, in the middle of the 20th century, scientists in all areas of knowledge started to develop theories of complexity and cybernetic which understand simplicity as complexity, stability as procedural instability and neutrality as intersubjectivity. This novel systemic practice and thought leads us to the many possibilities of change, interferences in complementary knowledges and multiple inclusions. We quit being observers to find ourselves implicated with our intersubjective self. According to Maturana (2005), it widens our organismic knowledge, our cognitive reflexions and experiences making way for new and more comprehensive views and sensations.

“Because a circumstance leads us to see the other as equal, an act we habitually call love. Besides, all of this makes us realize that love or, in case we don’t want to use such a strong word, accepting the other together with us in co-existing is the biological foundation of social phenomenon” (Maturana, 2001, p. 268-269).

In contemporary times, we have used the word ‘families’ rather than ‘family’ because the new arrangements are quite diverse, including conventional families, monoparental families, divorced parents, families with children from past marriages living together with children from current marriages, grandparents taking care of their children’s children or coming to live with their children and grandchildren, same-sex couples, poly-amorous relationships and even families that see their pets as part of the system. The issues and conflicts, which have always existed, have been raised in the therapeutic setting more genuinely with clients seeking care and change from relational conflicts in their own co-existence, as well as in the form of severe traumas. The traumas which have impacted families the most in the therapeutic setting include suicide attempts, abusive relationships, betrayals, intrafamily violence, sexual abuse among children and adolescents, addiction, mental disorders, secrets and occult and painful phenomena from past generations.

“We see and treat the nuclear family and at times the extended family because we are experts in seeing them and not because there is such a way, as a clearly delineated form. We study the family because we see it, because we evoke it with our models and inquiry (...) We are immersed in multiple, complex and ever-evolving networks, within which we “extract” the family when we ask, for instance, “Who is part of your family?”

### **Shame and Somatic Development**

Shame as a primary emotion is still being developed in body psychology. Research into shame is being done in Bioenergetic Analysis (Conger 2003, Resneck, 1991, Bedrosian, 2015, Carzedda, 2015) showing its devastating impact in the organism, felt as a psychosomatic manifestation that may result in emotional and mental damage such as anxiety and depression, among others. Shame can conceal unconscious primary sensations which will manifest firstly through feelings of fear, sadness, restrained anger, narcissistic defenses and feelings of guilt and humiliation. Such defenses can become chronic blocks impeding spontaneity through armoring and subjective and intersubjective energy dynamics. In Conger (2003), he seeks to explore “discretion shame, dishonour shame and the transition from traumatic shame to acknowledgement shame” through a somatic and analytical process in which he resorts to play as an empathetic tool with clients seeking to restore spontaneous vitality. Two important points highlighted by Conger are the mirroring process from the mother-baby relationship to invasive looks and attitudes of another, of an unsafe

environment that might be abusive, hostile, humiliating and violent. Conger, in the end of his article, leaves us with this unsettling remark:

“Bioenergetics” central question might be: can we live with our failure, with the body we cannot change, with our body of shame, with our terrible sorrows, as our not-redeemed shadow? Can we live and work head-on with this failed aspect no matter what our gifts might be? Not teaching others to forgive their bodies means we haven't grasped deeply enough our own body of shame”

To Resneck (1991), where there is a situation of expectations from this ‘other’, a child will try to experience the family wish and narcissistic image so he/she can feel grand or tend to fail. On the other hand, a child that is never seen and oftentimes criticised and humiliated will lose his/her autonomy and develop low self-esteem. In both situations, Resnick underlines the structuring of an ashamed self which mutilates the psycho-body development of genders. Armoured men and women in positions of inequality in their childhood psychosexual development. The elements resulting in shame and narcissistic vulnerability occur more often in families. Let's now consider two types of inducing shame within families.

“If the family is too anxious about the child's success and does not help him/her develop a self-assessment and lets the child be their narcissistic extension, their own dreams and fantasies of what could be, then they will be subjecting the child to ridicule when outside the family.”

In face of the issues raised by Conger and Resnick I share another viewpoint, with Bioenergetic exercises of polarities which are complementary under a family systems perspective. I have used Bioenergetics in family therapy and I have witnessed that the mutilating power of shame conceals powerful defense mechanisms. Hiding shame may mean safeguarding one's dignity, surviving family tragedies, honoring values held by one's predecessors, taking ownership of one's name and erecting borders against the vast continent of ancestral pains. When such systemic ashamed self reveals the power which are blocked they are liberated and that which was enslaved over a transgenerational path turns out to be a rich conscious potential resignified in its own value... from slavery to liberation! This inheritance is to be reintegrated into one's own organism strengthening the true self for future generations to mirror.

To help us broaden our systemic view, Humberto Maturana in his “Biology of Love” (2002,2011) highlights that around three million years ago, generation after generation, hominid groupings between sexes were

made stronger through the sharing of food, protection, care, tenderness and sensuality, which he named conversations. “All of these are reflexes, like natural aspects of this mode of life”. To him, survival of our species was made possible through love for collaboration and for as long as there is love we will continue to develop. Competition is always destructive as it rejects the other as a legitimate other. In biology of humanization, denying the other implies a wish to take possession and this process has developed in relationships based on narcissism, fragility with the other seen as disposable, with competitiveness, excluding and non-collaborative heteronormativity bonds:

“Humanity began around three million years ago - generation after generation – a mode of living in conversations that involved collaboration between sexes in everyday life, through the sharing of food, tenderness and sensuality. All of this took place without reflexes like natural aspects of this mode of living.” (2011 p.18)

Bauman (2004), when addressing contemporary social bonds and liquid love, says that the metaphor of liquidity is, in fact, quite simple. Like all liquids, today’s social arrangements cannot keep their form for too long. They are in constant transformation. This does not mean there are no solid bodies. The only reason to call our modernity liquid is to distinguish it from solid modernity, that from the times of our ancestors. Our grandparents built solid structures because they realized that the world, they inherited from our great-grandparents was not enough. Today, Bauman says we live in what he coined liquid modernity. We modernize what is created today and what we created yesterday. And we modernize not because the old model might have grown old or obsolete but because the new is supposedly newer. This has become a cycle, an obsession. In a consumerist culture relationship are immediate, pleasure is short-lived and satisfaction is instantaneous as if they could be discarded. “Loving means transforming the other into a defined someone, it means making the future undefined. Agreeing with the indefinite nature of future. Agreeing with the life lived, from conception to disappearance, in a single place reserved to human beings: that vague extension between the finitude of one’s deeds and the infinitude of one’s objectives and consequences.” (Bauman, 2004 p.36). Systemic body therapists are faced with this challenge of keeping themselves grounded and their solid bodies balanced. Strengthening the feeling of belonging and the contingency of the ephemeral in relationships.

Both Hellinger (2007) and Fonte (2016) converge on the influence our ancestors have on our positions, attitudes and relationships in all areas of life. Our fate is interlinked with our forebears. We experience

sensations, emotions and feelings that pass on from generation to generation and remain occult like unconscious loyalties. “In loving our ancestors, we move away from ourselves taking information that don’t belong to us so we can return to our primordial energy, our unity, which is our ancestors. This is the challenge” (da Fonte, 2016, p.70). To Hellinger, in the family community some members will seek to balance their nuclear system making an effort to give away their own lives for losses, bankruptcy, illness, betrayal, violence, sorrows, among so many other phenomena that marked generations. “In this way, within this narrow community of destiny, bonds and the necessity for reparation lead to equilibrium and to a share in guilt and disease, in fate and in the other’s death.” (Helling, 2007, p.288.).

To Resneck, Eros, the energy of love and passion, flows unrestrained when the pelvis is not mutilated. Energy in the psychosexual stages of development runs up from the back down to the front part of the body through the heart. When the heart pulsates freely and the body vibrates with its emotional and healthy movements and the capacity to claim its rights is not hindered; assertiveness then becomes expansion, love and does not freeze and the negation of the true self does not grow into hatred or revenge. (1991).

### **A Systemic View on Contemporary Clinical Practice**

I would like to begin this section with a clinical note on a session I led in late December 2018 when a 29-year-old female client who had previously been my client gave me a call and scheduled an urgent session. She had been living abroad for more than two years doing a PhD. This client had been in a three-year relationship but never had sexual intercourse with the boyfriend nor with other men as she abided by family values including being a virgin until marriage. When she left Brazil two years ago and went to live by herself in an apartment, she thought she would be free from her family’s oppression. While living abroad, she had short-duration relationships and was more daring in her sexuality but would feel ashamed and would freeze before engaging in sexual intercourse breaking the moment of intimacy. She said she knew these were irrational attitudes as she consciously felt liberated and that is why she has resumed her therapy sessions for the coming she will be likely living in Brazil. After returning to her parents’ home she felt as if she was regressing. At that point I realized and felt in my body what in family therapy we call unconscious loyalty with family values. Still today I find myself embarrassed in face of

some of my family's values, especially those held by my paternal family that differ from my experiences as an adolescent and from my father's expectations, as he was a psychiatrist with strong patriarchal and sexist values, having died 32 years ago. I therefore felt body resonance. I intuitively asked my client to speak about her family. She said her grandmother had taught her very dear values; she cried and then she remembered being a lively and joyful girl; then she felt her grandmother's disapproving looks as she played with boys and whenever sex was being talked about. I told her to stay in a grounding position and lift her arms over the head while she kept breathing, interlocking her fingers as she looked up. I have done this exercise when dealing with strong memories of late family members. My intention is to enable feelings of grounding and connect with the person who is no longer physically present. Meanwhile clients should continue to feel their vitality without letting go of that love-filled connection at another dimension which give rise to strong feelings of absence. This way one can update and resignify values without the feeling of betrayal towards someone he/she so deeply love(d). The client was very emotional and her body started to vibrate. She felt like asking her grandmother for forgiveness and telling her she would lead her own life and sexuality. I suggested that she should give her grandmother's fate back to her and stay in the inverted grounding position. I then told her to get rid of all the burden and try a positive look of her grandmother. I stood in front of her as she got back up in the grounding position. I waited for a moment while she turned her eyes to me as I felt deeply connected with a feeling of acceptance. I also felt an inner sense of reparation of my own sensations of denial. After a lapse of time when she kept looking at me, she began to laugh softly as if laughing with her whole body. I recalled passages from one of Lowen's books (1982) on gracefulness as she looked weightless, soft and free. She then told me her brother would say women were like pearls that needed to remain shut until men came to open them. She now felt her body was opening up. Then the title of an important book by Brazilian writer Rubem Alves, "*Ostrafeliznãofazpérola*" ['Happy oysters don't make pearls'] sprang to mind as I told her that that was because oysters need to remain shut to make their pearls. The writer resorts to the metaphor to maintain that in order for us to be happy, active and living we need to be open. The client laughed further saying she would now tell her brother: "I am now opening up by myself and showing my pearl". We both laughed and at the end of the session she told she felt more free too and that she had too received love and strength from her grandmother and that she would nurture that memory of a positive look coming from her



grandmother. She smiled and said: “just like yours” rather than that other of disapproval.

In Bedrosian’s “The Energetics of Couples Therapy” (2015, p.76), she writes about couples therapy using Bioenergetic Analysis interventions developed by herself and about the participation of Robert Hilton and Diana Guest, in her research and practice, highlighting that:

“One of the premises of Bioenergetics is that people protect themselves from their childhood wounds on a bodily level as well as on a mental/emotional level. These defensive contractions restrict vital energy in the organism and compromise the other’s context. Since these wounds are embedded in the cells of the body, the age and chronicity of the wounding determines the characteristics of those contractions and resulting adaptations, as well as styles of relationship.”

I do not seek to boil this case down to one session. I understand deep repression can be found on the parental level too. I just wanted to show that traumas related to culture and values pass on from generation to generation. In Bioenergetic Analysis, even when we are working with clients in their individuality, we are doing systemic interventions in the nuclear and extended family, their relatives, and oftentimes we deal with damage caused by grandparents and great-grandparents, which still impact bonding processes and unconscious psychosomatic repetitions. These are very clear in the illness process, partner choices, relationship with children and grandchildren and particularly in the position one takes in life and their emotional behavior. If we therapists broaden our systemic perspective to body therapy interventions, we may understand that by working on emotions from past generations we may heal today’s generation and our descendants. In all of Reich’s work he makes use of the following sentence: “love, work and knowledge are the wellsprings of our life. They should also govern it; and full responsibility should be borne by working men and women everywhere”. (p.21). To me, this is about a systemic view springing from Reich’s work since the 1930s, Character Analysis (1995) and The Function of the Orgasm (1994), a revolutionary and visionary work, especially from his early research into the armouring process in the organism through his later research into Orgone and cosmic energy. I would like to highlight another passage from Reich’s “The Function of Orgasm”, which to me makes all the sense when working with couples and families: “Theyouth would feel no hostility towards tradition, they would in fact have respect for it if without taking risks they could say: “We will take this

from you because it is convincing, it is fair, it is about our times too and may be develop. That, however, we cannot accept. It was useful and truthful for your time...it would be useless to us". "And this youth should be ready to hear the same from their children." (p.22). I have used this passage in the therapeutic setting depending on the context and on the family or couple in the process of differentiation. I suggest something along these lines: "I am very sorry but this does not belong to me. I respect our differences but each one is responsible for their changes". In the systemic practise this yields good results following the inverted grounding making eye contact or after exercises on boundaries.

I also seek to address Lowen's "The Betrayal of the Body" (1979) in which he writes about the schizoid masks, body tightness, fragmentation and collapse. On schizoid traits he wrote: "he believes he cannot afford any feelings or wishes as this would make him/her vulnerable to some sort of rejection or catastrophic abandonment" (p. 69). When an individual is imprisoned in an ego of idealizations resulting in loss of identity, a fragmented and collapsed organism, energetically I think of systemic shame as a possibility of reaching out to a family in its existential structure. "Schizoid sentimentalism results from withdrawing feelings from the self and the body. It denotes a loss of one's identity which is offset by social identifications" (p.72). However, in this aspect, I see the imprisoned individual as someone trapped by undistinguished characters in fusional relationships risking to lose their own meaning of life and of building their fate. In "Fear of Life", Lowen (1910) sets the context for self-perception and self-awareness as a body in its state of vitality and responsive spontaneity, and the self (itself) which is a body with sensations and sentiments from its own desires.

"The loss of authenticity also takes place on the social level. Personal values are sacrificed for the sake of money and power. Mass production does away with authenticity in products made out of effort while advertising turns mocking into a virtue. In a technological culture the only known values are money, power and success. Authenticity is a thing of the past, currently represented by genuine parts at an antique shop." (p.85).

Within this new context, expanding Bioenergetic Analysis foundations beyond individual interventions has shown to be a promising path. Shame is a very appropriate theme to be worked on from a systemic perspective, particularly with exercises that include looking, touching and shared emotional expression. Families are often reluctant to engage in

shared suffering to avoid the pain that may be felt by the other and in most part because they feel ashamed to reveal their true frail sentiments through emotional displays, crying, expressing anger towards loved ones, showing pain and opening up their hearts in tenderness seeking to overcome disagreements.

### **Bioenergetic Analysis in a Systemic Practise**

As I said earlier, different configurations of couples and families have come to my practice with a variety of conflicts. Lately I have relied on strategic therapy, Bowen techniques, Nichols and Schwartz (2007) and systemic relational therapy (Rosset 2008, Andolfi, 2018) which converge and complement each other in their foundations and techniques, placing emphasis on the spontaneity of the therapist's self. In this section I outline basic aspects of Bioenergetic Analysis in Family Therapy. In systemic relational family therapy, I highlight Rosset (2008). The aspects I have sought to focus on in my current research which are part of my practice with families is understanding that personal struggles are related to communication that become conflicts and then evolve into family patterns of suffering. Strategic therapy seeks to understand patterns of interaction in family behavior that are unconscious and repetitive with families stuck in a crisis zone very often due to an upbringing filled with negative criticism which underestimates and humiliates individuals, requiring interventions focused on the here and now. Work on verbal and body communication is important through positive aspects that may recognize and renew the healthy potential which is blocked, freezing the energy and expression of affection. With this end, we engage everyone in understanding the family dysfunctionality, the goals for developing the system and how each member feels in face of the conflicts. It is important to stimulate suggestions to dealing with conflicts and to build strategies (Nichols and Schwartz, p. 156-159) and solutions making it clear the roles of each member, once anything affecting a family member will impact another and the system as a whole, which is also based on neuron mirroring. "Sometimes observation of only fragments of a whole action pattern is sufficient to convey an anticipation of what the other person is about to do (p.31 Umiltá et al.2001). This is not only true for actions but also for feelings and thinking patterns. Intuition needs to be supplemented by rational analysis (which is slow). Fear, stress and tension significantly reduce the signal ratio of our mirror neurons".

I believe that mirror neurons as described in Koemeda Lutz's "Mirror neurons and body psychotherapy" (20011, Vol 21) enable us to use techniques with eye movements and to develop self-regulation within a family system. Therapists will broaden their views of systems coming to understand that transgenerational forces are a resource in the therapeutic setting that "exert critical influence on current relationships". Family therapy allows for repairing experiences with a goal to discussing and reframing old relational paradigms which are traumas stemming from the original family. (Andolfi,2018, p. 51.)

### **The Family S Case**

A mother of two children, aged 8 and 11, came to therapy because the children had been fighting too much and wouldn't stop disparaging one another, often engaging in physical aggression to the point of hurting one another. The mother said she had tried by all means to set limits, from having long talks to bedroom time, to restraining them, suspending outings and even physically deterring them. The older child had been in therapy and had been reluctant to go to school, thought she was ugly after having put on weight, had panic attacks when alone at home but relied on help from her two grandmothers. In the first few sessions, which I call a moment of emotional listening and welcoming, were hard as they wouldn't stop arguing. We couldn't discuss a therapy contract with them. In-between arguments I would playfully suggest and challenge them to keep in silence, breathing and making a sound as they breathed out. They thought this was funny and would laugh; the aggressive drive would then water down although the older daughter would engage in countertransference with myself and wanted to leave the room. At first, I would sustain the limits but when I felt the attitude sought to disregard and manipulate the family therapy, I suggested that she could leave the room and wait outside. At these moments the mother would feel stronger and would begin to be more assertive and that way our therapy contract was developed. In another session when the conversation was growing hostile and disrespectful, I stepped in and suggested that they did a standing grounding with their mother standing in front of them and that the mother would demonstrate with her eyes how she felt when quarrels broke out while they tried to understand their mother's feelings through her look. They engaged in body resonance. Once more there was the game of silence and this time with the eyes too. The mother's first look was of fatigue and they guessed it. I then suggested that she sat on a comfortable chair and while there she flipped her body and placed the palm of her hand on the ground as I held her head

on my hands. The children would remain standing watching while their mother was being held. After some time, I suggested that the mother should do an inverted grounding getting up from bottom up until she was again in a standing grounding position facing the children again. I then asked them to walk around the room as they stretched and walked. When they stopped they should look at each other again. This time the mother had a look of relief although it revealed great sadness. In the mirroring process, sadness was also seen in the children's eyes. That was when the mother revealed her pain and spoke quietly saying that she was very sad. The mother said she felt lonely trying to take care of the two children, which she sometimes failed to do, as she needed to work and have some fun with friends. When she got home there were arguments and cursing. The two children, especially the older, cried and said she missed her father so much, that it had been less than two years since the divorce, that she had no friends, feeling rejected and different, ashamed for no longer having a complete family, that she had locked herself in her bedroom and did not understand and felt angry. The youngest was moved and apologised for calling her crazy but that she needed to put out all that was bad inside and that she had been arguing with her friends too and was distancing herself as a result. I asked them to form a circle holding their hands and that they should look at one another while they slowly got closer. I gradually pulled out of the circle asking them to continue. "Family therapists cannot observe and experience from outside. They must be part of a system of independent individuals. In order to be an effective member of the system, they must respond to the circumstances in accordance with the rules of the system, while keeping himself/herself as available as possible. This is known as therapeutic spontaneity." (Minuchin S. Fischman C, H, 2007 p. 12). They hugged and cried together while I touched firmly their backs and said: "Yes, I do understand how hard it is to live without daddy home but you told me mom, daddy and the grannies took good care of you and they also feel sad". I also said "they still have a family only their father was no longer home", and asked them "where might he be now?". The oldest answered: "in my heart". The younger sister said she kept many pictures of him and that she and her mother would pray for him everyday. She thought he was everywhere, even with the grannies." As we wound up the session, the mother's look was tender and firm and they said: "mom, you're very strong". The mother replied calmly: Yes, but I too suffer. I love you! Our home needs limits and respect." I told them to remember to breathe, keep silent and look, and that even if there were arguments, as children are still

learning to deal with hard events, they could find different ways to express their pain without needing to hurt the other.

In the following sessions, they were different and asked to talk about their conflicts. They told me about other creative forms of arguing. They were closer to one another. I began to make sense of the emotional energy flow and that enabled me to understand the tension, loading/unloading, and through Bioenergetic interventions I helped facilitating the system's self-regulation. "The systems (family, couples, individuals, groups and institutions) operate on a quantum of energy and vitality, in a flexible and fluid form or frozen and repetitive." (Rosset, 2008, p.58). One way to see a family is to see it as an organism with energy movements of circular feelings and exchanges, experiencing the complexity and ambivalence of affection. This is a proposal from the systemic relational therapy which seeks to build interventions through systemic reading and building changes out of each one's responsibilities (Andolfi, 2018). Body exercises, including face-to-face grounding among other possibilities, too may help understand the important hierarchy in the structural therapy, borders and limits across subsystems. In this case, the grandparents, the mother, the children and the uncles and aunts in the extended family on both side who are integral parts of the family context. To Nichols and Schwartz (2007, p.193), when writing about techniques in structural family therapy, whose one of the pioneers was Salvador Minuchin, and in spite of all techniques available, warn that "After a therapist masters the basic aspects of structural theory, he/she must learn the approach in a way that adapts to his/her personal style". To family therapists, this was one of Minuchin's most important contributions. Improvisation, the use of creativity and spontaneity in a therapeutic setting. (p.180-204)

The mother wanted her happy and pleasurable life back again, without feeling ashamed for being a mother and also being happy and pursuing her new goals. She is a young woman full of vitality. She felt ashamed by her mother-in-law who was very close. She is ashamed to show her desire to live despite the divorce and the ability to take care of her daughters. The sessions are ongoing and I realize and feel the importance her ex-husband who still doesn't come to therapy because he travels too much on business. I feel that both her mother and her mother-in-law have been trying to replace the love of their son/son-in-law for the children. Later on, the father, grandmothers and other members of the family might come along and join the process so we can work on what the structural therapy calls subsystems and borders. The importance of the bonds of love and the capacity for

differentiating functional family positions. Each one should occupy and incorporate their place in the transgenerational system.

### **Conclusion**

At this point in my practice and research, I have grown more aware of the convergences between systems therapy and a broader transgenerational view of couples and families, especially in using the self and creativity of therapists with body interventions from Bioenergetic Analysis. I would also like to mention the inspiring work of Garet Bedrosian, “Energetics in Couples Therapy” published in the Bioenergetic Analysis Journal 2015, p.75-97). I would like to repeat one sentence as I finish this article: “I trust the process and believe that the authentic and energetic need to love and be loved will lead to healing, vulnerability and intimacy”.

With regards to the issue of shame, this has been a recurring theme in generational conflicts: family honor, ruptures and new relational arrangements, adoption, same-sex couples, sexism/feminism, sexuality, secrets and conflicts related to beliefs, values and ancestral and transgenerational myths interfering with the sound development of the ashamed self in relationships.

About the case reported above, I would like to close by recalling a sentence I heard at the 2018 PDW in Salvador, Brazil, in a workshop led by Rebeca: “Shame as a guardian of dignity”. To me, when such profound pains are revealed, fears and humiliations also become guardians “of liberation”. I said this myself after my personal work in Track 3 with local trainers supervised by Diana Guest, also an international trainer and the current president of IIBA. When I did my work, I expressed shame for my father, assigning a novel meaning to the power and restored love I felt for him. I therefore conclude by having undergone a body experience of shame, which to me was a guardian of dignity and today has become a guardian of liberation! And it has also become the theme of this paper.

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