Running head: MY PROFESSIONAL GENEAOLOGY

My Professional Geneaology: The Makings of a Future Somatic Psychotherapist

Lexi O'Neill

Naropa University

November 19, 2012

My Professional Genealogy: The Makings of a Somatic Psychotherapist

As the first semester of my graduate education in Somatic Psychotherapy at Naropa University comes to a close, I examine the influences that lead me to follow this unique career path. To facilitate accommodation of new theories into my prior schema of knowledge, I situate my own lineage within the grander context of the history of Somatic Psychotherapy. I analyze the distinction between Body Psychotherapy (Somatic Psychology) and Body work, and discuss ethical implications of using touch within my therapeutic practice. Furthermore, I discuss the utilization of contemplation, creativity, and intuition within my constitution as a future therapist. It is helpful to understand my lineage as simply a part of a more diverse web of Body Psychotherapy sects; from Freud's psychoanalysis which spawned the work of Alfred Adler (Humanism), to Carl Jung (existentialism), to Wilhelm Reich (Bioenergetics).

Personal Reference Points

My intimate connection with my body started with dance. Using my body as an instrument of expression, I danced ballet, modern, and jazz for 16 years. As I developed from a child into a young adult, I watched my body grow and be sculpted by hundreds of hours of practice. I experienced a deep attunement with my own body, and I noticed that as long as I was dancing consistently I was hardly ever sick and always felt energized.

After a snowboarding accident in which I crushed my sacrum at the age of 17, I laid in the hospital with 30 fractures in the thickest bone of my body, wondering if I would ever dance (or even walk) ever again. Luckily, missing my spine by about a centimeter, I did not need surgery. Due to the nature of the injury, the only therapy possible was Deep Tissue Massage, which worked to soften the fascia around my sacrum in order to, eventually, move my pelvis back into alignment. This injury taught

me firsthand how connected the body is; the impact of the chairlift pole sent a ripple from my sacrum all the way up my spine, dislocating my jaw. I was also exposed to other forms of somatic body work in an effort to recuperate such as Rolfing and Deep Tissue Massage. The effects of this accident lingered with me throughout my undergraduate education at Loyola Marymount University. Seeing no future in dance after my injury, I chose to study Psychology. The combination of not dancing anymore and dealing with the injury left me in search of another form of movement.

I found yoga to be deeply healing: spiritually, physically and mentally. This part of my lineage is a keystone of my introduction to the mind-body connection. I became a student of the Exhale Center for Sacred Movement in Venice, CA where I took classes under enlightening yogis such as Shiva Rea, Sean Corn, and Kishan Shah. Shiva Rea integrates the *tantric bhakti* roots of yoga with vinyasa flow to create a transformational prana flow yoga. It was in Shiva's classes that I practiced *ujjayi* breath-work, and was introduced to a quantum approach to the body. Kishan Shah studied in the Himalayas with Swami Govinda, a Vaishnava religious leader, at the Sivananda Yoga & Vedanta Ashram. Studying yoga with Kishan, I gained deeper insight into Ayurvedic medicine and thus the effects of the external world on one's internal homeostasis. It was through my yogic practices while simultaneously studying psychology that I began to understand how my yoga practice could empower my ultimate goal: to aid others in discovering their most authentic and optimal selves. The way yoga translates into my lineage as a Somatic Psychotherapy student is concisely stated by Susan Aposhyan, who points out, "The ancient traditions of yoga, meditation and tai chi . . . guide the practitioner toward an optimal integration of body and mind, and thus an optimal utilization of the self" (Aposhyan, 2004, p.15).

While pursuing a B.A. in Psychology at Loyola Marymount University (LMU) I was drawn to Humanistic Psychology. The humanistic paradigm utilizes client-centered, Gestalt, existential, and the experiential therapies, among others (Lambert & Ereckson, 2008). People are conceived as fundamentally healthy beings; thus mental health is a natural progression of life, ultimately reaching *self-actualization* (Resnick et al., 2010). Having developed a strong connection to my body through yoga and dance, I valued my own intuitive sense as an authoritative voice of reason and motivation within my being. Thus I was attracted to holistic views of psychology such as Humanistic theories; *organismic valuing*, evolutionary knowing of what is good for oneself, and the *real self*, the part of one's being that is rooted in an actualizing tendency and follows organismic valuing (Resnick et al., 2010). The introduction to Humanistic Psychology I received at LMU further sculpted my current theoretical orientation by supporting my innate sense of "knowing" what my organism needs, and validating it as an authoritative sense.

Humanistic Psychology's exploration of the issue of embodiment has its roots in Wilhelm Reich (1949) and the theory of *bioenergy* and in the study of perception (Zaner, 1964 as cited by Resnick et al., 2010). Wilhelm Reich is considered the "Father of Somatic Psychotherapy" for his contributions to foundational theories. "Muscular armor" is Reich's term for the muscular rigidities which block impulses to action which are inconsistent to the neurotic character (Smith, 1985). The release of the muscular armor and the relative psychological character structure regains homeostasis. Reich (1949) also saw the libido as "bioelectrical energy," later "orgone" energy. Reich saw the solution to neurosis in the attainment of *orgastic potency* through the dissolution of muscular armoring. Reich's contributions to Somatic Psychotherapy influenced my current theoretical orientation by laying the foundation for this

relatively new sect of Psychotherapy which includes the body as an undeniable asset to be utilized in the therapeutic process.

Fritz Perls was a student of Reich's (1949) in 1933 and continued on to develop Gestalt therapy, drawing from: psychoanalysis, Reichian character analysis, existential philosophy, Gestalt psychology and Eastern religion (Smith 1976 as cited by Smith, 1985). A central commonality between Perls and Reich is the strong emphasis on recalling past events both cognitively and also feeling them emotionally in the present, therefore enhancing awareness and processing it within therapy. As Freud's metaphor eloquently states, "neurosis cannot be hanged in effigy" (Smith, 1975). For both Reich and Perls the process of change must include a phase of *breakdown* (Reich, 1949) or *impasse, implosion and explosion* (Perls, 1969). The idea of being able to sit with an experience in discomfort before being capable of transcending it is also echoed in my yoga practice from the wisdom of Eastern religions. Thus, finding the wisdom of enduring suffering is a theme which I bring into my constitution as a therapist.

Humanist's such as Carl Rogers, Abraham Maslow and Alfred Adler laid the foundation for new branches of psychology to take form, such as Formative Psychology and Positive Psychology. Stanley Keleman was a senior trainer at Alexander Lowen's Institute for Bioenergetic Analysis and attended the Alfred Adler Institute where he was greatly impacted by Adler's ideas on the relationship of the state of the organism to its functioning, the will to power, and the role of society in personality development (Resnick et al., 2010). Therefore he brings together Reichian influences (through Alexander Lowen) and Humanistic influences (through Alfred Adler) in Formative Psychology, a methodology for teaching individuals how to participate in their own formative process (Resnick et al.,

2010). Keleman's book, *Emotional Anatomy* (1985), was very influential in helping me to understand the field of Somatic Psychology, and I continue to follow his work, especially around the last stage of life: death and dying.

Ontological Coaching

Most recently added to my lineage is the field of Ontological Coaching, "the practice of facilitating new possibilities in the personal and/or professional life of an individual (or group) by making him aware of his participation in the construction and co-creation of the reality he perceives" (Olalla, 2004, p.1). The Newfield Network is an international coaching and consulting company which was started by Julio Olalla - a Chilean writer, philosopher, and pioneer in the fields of executive coaching and transformational learning. A core theme of ontological coaching is the understanding that in order to effect real, lasting change, the body, mind and emotions must be in coherency with one another. There is a holistic view of the human organism which echoes theories from Humanistic psychology. Language is not separate from our emotional life and physical body, it is in relationship between the three parts (language, emotion, body) that our "way of being" is comprised (Brothers, 2005). Julio cites influences from Joseph Campbell, the late philosopher, lecturer and writer, who was greatly influenced by Carl Jung and Sigmund Freud during time spent in Europe in the modernist era (JC Foundation, 2012). Integral theorists, Dr. Clare Graves, Rupert Scheck, Dr. Don Beck (Spiral Dynamics), and Ken Wilber have all influenced the philosophies of Ontological Coaching as well.

Ontological Coaching integrates somatic work into coaching by exploring the Body Dispositions, or how the body is shaped by moods and emotions. Coaches practice helping the coachee

shift out of moods by embodying a new disposition, for example shifting from resignation to determination. Upon questioning Julio about his influences he cited hundreds of hours working with people of a variety of cultures, Richard Strozzi-Heckler's *Strozzi Somatics*, and Gabriel Roth's *5 Rhythms*.

Bodywork vs. Body Psychotherapy

Body work or *body-making*, as Don Hanlon Johnson (1997) terms it, is made up of a collection of methods and names: Sensory Awareness, the F. Matthias Alexander Technique, Gerda Alexander's Eutony, Rolfing, Moshe Feldenkrais' Awareness through Movement and Functional Integration, Lomi, Continuum, Aston-Patterning, Body-Mind Centering, Trager, Hakomi, the Rosen Method, Breyer Work, Process-Oriented Psychology, Authentic Movement, Craniosacral Therapy, Orgonomy, Bioenergetics, Radix and more (Johnson, 1997). The common thread between all of the aforementioned techniques is a shared "radical assumption that firsthand bodily experience is the matrix for our ideas, values emotions, and spiritual commitments. . . [a] place to look when trying to resolve human ills, whether disease, emotional unrest or spiritual malaise" (Johnson, 1997, p.9).

Body work shares some commonalities with body psychotherapy but it is important to distinguish between the two. Some commonalities include the centrality of the direct experience of the body in the healing process, and a "respect to the archaic wisdom" (Johnson, 1997, p.9) held within our cells, fibers, muscles, communities and relationships. Notably, Body Psychotherapy differs with the added element of the therapeutic process. Body Psychotherapists are held to a different standard of ethical guidelines, outlined by the United States Association for Body Psychotherapy (USABP), and must abide by those guidelines if they choose to integrate body work into their somatic

psychotherapeutic practice. Specifically the USABP Ethical Guidelines (2001) explicitly state in the Ethics of Touch; "[Therapists] make every attempt to ensure that consent for the use of touch is genuine and that the client adequately understands the nature and purposes of its use," and "touch is only used when it can reasonably be predicted and/or determined to benefit the client . . . never to gratify the personal needs of the therapist" (p.8). This involves extreme discretion on my part, as a therapist, to judge whether or not the client is psychologically able to give informed consent and be cognizant of the implications of using touch.

Furthermore, I will take special care to evaluate the use of touch on a pragmatic level before implementing it in therapy; weighing the risks and rewards, and being certain that the rewards will outweigh the risks. My somatic lineage has instilled in me a deeper understanding of my own mind-body connection and I have learned of the wisdom held in the connection from theorists such as Reich (1961), Aposhyan (2004), and Caldwell (1997).

Creativity, Intuition, and Contemplative Practices

I have the realization each time I sit with someone and am completely present, that I am beholding a miracle of a unique being in front of me. What I find so intriguing about this work is the shared humanity underlying individual stories of grief, trauma, depression, etc. Being present is a key component of accessing the intuitive powers within me. In my nascent practice of Focusing, I have become more attuned with my own felt-senses and am learning the wisdom held within them. Focusing has taught me an invaluable lesson of the beauty to be discovered in silence between the therapist and client of not knowing; learning to cherish, trust, and follow the cloudy moments and vague messages (Cornell, 1996). In these moments, my intuition is like a lighthouse guiding my ship through the fog of

uncertainty.

Contemplative practices like yoga and meditation have been immensely helpful in helping me to harness my own intuitive powers. Mindfulness allows me to notice the nuances of my body's intuitive messages being sent to my "logical" brain for processing and expression, without being interrupted by mindless chatter. This embodied insight is a uniquely powerful awareness, capable of effecting change in behavior because, as Eugene Gendlin (1981) describes, it is *felt* (Johnson, 1997).

In becoming more attuned with my own felt senses and intuition through contemplative practices such as meditation or even more simply, mindfulness, I open up possibility for my creativity to blossom. I am grateful that my lineage has given me a plethora of experiences from which to draw creativity from; choreographing dance, flowing movement in rhythm with music, studying various philosophers and psychological theories, creative writing, various forms of yoga, traveling the world, etc. I was pleasantly surprised to have found a connection between my passion for poetry and creative writing in my work as a therapist. The use of metaphors in description can help us to grapple with feelings or emotions that are hard to define. The body is also a metaphor translating life situations into body states (Caldwell, 1997). Creativity is imperative in the Gestalt counseling process; in the phase of creating an experiment, I am challenged as a therapist to come up with an action which will translate the emotional wounds from the past into a present situation which can be confronted and processed within therapy. Creativity, for me, has the flavor of freedom, spontaneity and possibility. The ever-changing universe requires us to be constantly and unconditionally creative (Caldwell, 1997). When we shift from a habitual pattern of behavior and give ourselves the freedom to create new opportunities in our lives, our spontaneity allows more attunement to the flow of impulses from our authentic selves.

Multicultural Aspects and Blind Spots

I believe it is imperative to examine my beliefs and theories through a multicultural lens. Examination of my own cultural identity is a formative process in self-identification which is important in awareness of ethnic differences and my own cultural biases. In the process of developing cross-cultural counseling competencies, it is important that I understand what cultures have influenced me, and where my blind spots are regarding cultural understanding.

In my lineage, there is much wisdom from Eastern philosophies that has been enmeshed in many sects of Body Psychotherapy, and other parts of my lineage such as yoga. Ron Kurtz's Hakomi therapy, Jungian Analysis, and Alexander Lowen's Bioenergetics, all cite influences from Eastern philosophies. In my own lineage, my early life was based in practices and traditions of the Western world, but as I grew older and began to study a breadth of religions (Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Judaism, Christianity) and philosophies, I found myself more in alignment with Eastern philosophies and practices. Beyond the wisdom to be gained from a multicultural view, it is also important to understand the diversity of values and beliefs held amongst different cultures in creating the relationship with my clients.

The many bodywork modalities and the field of Dance Movement Therapy are both blind spots in my genealogy, which I intend on exploring further during my graduate studies at Naropa University. In regards to bodywork, I have a nascent understanding of the fundamental concepts and practices of the techniques of Rolfing, Feldenkrais and Alexander technique and am eager to learn more. I am also intrigued to know more about the Lomi school, which "mixes gestalt therapy with . . . Reichian breath-work, body education techniques, Eastern spiritual practices, Vipassana meditation, Hatha

Yoga, Aikido, and Tai Chi Chu'an" (Caldwell, 1997, p.24). This genealogy project has also further supported my desire to apply for the dual-tract at Naropa and add Dance Movement Therapy to my repertoire.

Conclusion

This paper has given me a more concrete understanding of the lineage of Somatic psychotherapists and their influence on each other. Through the research process I discovered how my own mentors were connected to the greater schema of somatic psychology; such as Julio Olalla, whose lineage of influence stems back to Jung, and Shiva Rea who shares a commonality with Somatic theorists through Eastern philosophy. For my career as a somatic psychotherapist, I believe it's imperative to draw a distinct line between bodywork and body psychotherapy, and to make this clear to prospective clients as well. This paper helped me to find the right verbiage in making this distinction. I enjoyed writing about creativity, intuition, and contemplative practices in connection to psychotherapy because I believe that those are three key aspects which make great therapists stand out amongst good therapists. Finally, in my discussion of multicultural aspects of my genealogy, I realized how much the foundational theories of Somatic psychology are influenced by Eastern philosophies even though they were derived from the Western world. The process of researching for and writing this paper has been an invaluable process of self-discovery, and leaves me eager to explore more modalities within the Somatic family.

References

Aposhyan, S. (2004). *Body-mind psychotherapy: Principles, techniques and practical applications.* New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Co.

Brothers, W. C. (2005). *Language and the pursuit of happiness.* Naples, FL: New Possibilities Press.

Caldwell, C. (1997). *Getting in touch: The guide to new body-centered therapies.* Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Publishing House.

Cornell, A. W. (1996). *The power of focusing.* Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications.

Gendlin, E. T. (1981). *Focusing*. New York, NY: Bantam Books.

Johnson, Don Hanlon (1997). *Groundworks: Narratives of embodiment.* Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books.

Lambert, M. J., & Erekson, D. M. (2008). *Positive psychology and the humanistic tradition,* Journal of Psychotherapy Integration, 18(2), 222-232. DOI:10.1037/1053-0479.18.2.222

Olalla, J. (2004*). From knowledge to wisdom: Essays on the crisis of contemporary learning.* Boulder, CO: New Possibilities Press.

Perls, F. (1969). *Gestalt Therapy Verbatim.* Moab, UT: Real People Press.

Reich, W. (1961). *The function of the orgasm.* New York, NY: Farra, Straus & Giroux.

Resnick, S., Warmoth, A., and Serlin, I. A. (2001). *The humanistic psychology and positive psychology connection: Implications for psychotherapy,* Journal of Humanistic Psychology 41:13. DOI: 10.1177/0022167801411006

Smith, E. W. (1975*). The role of early reichian theory in the development of gestalt*

psychotherapy: Theory, research & practice, 12(3), 268-272. DOI: 10.1037/h0086442

Smith, E. W. L. (1985). *The body in psychotherapy.* Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc.

Zaner, R. M. (1993). *The problem of embodiment: Some contributions to a phenomenology of the body.* The Hague, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff.