

What is Your Definition of Embodiment?

Edited by COURTENAY YOUNG

Introduction

The title of this ‘article’ was a particular question posted by Serge Prengel (though the question was – apparently - originally suggested by Maci Daye: “*The intent of the question was to bring some definition to a term that we body psychotherapists organize our work around and promote in our clients*”). It was posted in early May 2013, as a ‘Featured Discussion’ to a Linked-In discussion group about ‘Somatic Perspectives on Psychotherapy’.¹ This discussion group has between 3,760 and 3,955 members (the figures are somewhat rapidly growing) and started in February 2011. Presumably most of the ‘members’ are self-selected Body Psychotherapists or body therapists. This topic obviously struck a particular chord – of enthusiasm, interest, or enquiry – as it generated more than 70 comments in just 16 days, and about 81 posts in total. So I thought that it might also be interesting to share this discussion with readers from a wider audience, as well.

Since I am very interested in this sort of organic ‘developed’ discussion, and since I will probably soon publish a volume on “Body Psychotherapy and Embodiment” via Body Psychotherapy Publications (www.bodypsychotherapypublications.com), I have spent an evening or so collating and editing all these responses – so far – into what I hope is a reasonably coherent whole, emphasizing several reasonably identifiable ‘threads’ within the discussion, and I have only edited a few of these posts for reasons of punctuation, spelling, repetition, syntax, classification, or where the comment was not pertinent to the discussion, etc.

However I am hugely grateful for all the participants to this discussion and therefore I list these people below as (albeit inadvertent) ‘co-authors’ and references. Many other people have ‘followed’ this discussion, or ‘liked’ a particular post, even though they did not contribute directly. My thanks go out to them as well. If anyone did (or does not) want their comments or name included, or felt (or feels) that I have misrepresented them in some way, I have already invited them to suggest changes, amendments, or that I omit those comments, or their posts. I was (and still am) happy so to do and I take the silence from the rest as tacit agreement for publication in this particular format.

I also offered this as an ‘article’ to the International Body Psychotherapy Journal, but ... after some correspondence ... they ‘declined’ to publish it: the main objection being, as I understand it, that the various “authors” (contributors) had not given their specific written permission for publication, despite their contributions having been voluntarily submitted by them into the public domain: and that people might not be so free and frank if they knew an article was going to come out of it.

Such a reservation was expressed by Pam Trice in another discussion about this very point: “*But, mostly, I fear that the true freedom of exploration may be lost if discussions become open to this "article generation." Quite frankly, if I know a comment may be part of a published work – I may not make it!!! One of the beauties of online "group member only" forums is the ability to process, vent, not have it all together, learn from one another, etc. ... being worried about having a comment or thought all worked out takes away the learning process that is such a gift of group forums such as this ...*” My views on this (which incidentally correspond with most of the prevailing views in journalism)² are that if you don’t want to make a comment, don’t make it. But if you do make a comment in a reasonably public forum, then you may find yourself being quoted. C’est la vie!

However, the “Group Rules” were modified in June 2013,³ after I had posted my efforts – i.e. this article – so I do not feel bound by this rule change retrospectively, given that I had posted the article with very reasonable provisos.⁴

Definitions of Embodiment

Over and above the basic question (above), Serge Prengel had also added a couple of other parameters to the discussion, but these were not picked up on quite so enthusiastically as the original question:

“To what extent does being embodied correlate with the capacity to experience pleasure, generally, and with sexual pleasure, in particular. What activities do [you] use to help clients become more embodied?”

It is also not totally clear whether these questions were part of the original question from Maci Daye, or additional points coming from Serge. However, various people addressed the basic definition of embodiment:

“Embodiment is the feeling of being at home in your body. A mixture between sitting at a warm hearth, being welcomed by your dearest friend, and having a sense of your body as the instrument through which you experience your life. That's the feeling. Embodiment requires a willingness to be present. It requires learning to become comfortable in your body.” (Ashley Ross)

“Embodiment is a synonym for somatic (for me). I find embodiment to be the relationship between the body and the mind. Both the body and mind have to be accessible and working together to be able to be aware of experiences and process those experiences. In contrast, people can have extremely high intellect and reasoning abilities, but they are not able to be embodied because the information from the body is not an active player in the processing of information. Those "gut" feelings are necessary to acknowledge as an element of being embodied.” (Heather Corwin)

“To be fully embodied means to be deeply present, to not only the physiologic responses in your body down to your breath and the ebb and flow of all of your energy, but to one's emotional state as well.” (Patti Okun)

“I believe that embodiment is the capacity to be within one's body in a mindful way. Being in one's body, to me, also necessitates being connected to all our parts (body/mind/spirit). I see embodiment as the manifestation of self, the bodily interaction with not only the environment (external) but also the mind and spirit (internal).

I also believe that our capacity to experience pleasure and all our range of emotions comes from an embodied place or state. How can we know what we are feeling if we don't check in with our body, physical sensations, and felt senses?” (Paula Lorimer)

“So far, I am cataloguing ideas like "being at home in our body," "being present or mindful to our internal experience," "accessing what's happening in our internal world," "sourcing information internally vs. externally" "recognizing and attuning to the ebb and flow of energy" (which is how I view embodied eroticism). For me, being embodied also suggests a closer connection to our instinctual or less strategic self, and following authentic and integrated impulses for expression (initiation, movement, approach, action, stillness).” (Maci Daye)

“Embodiment for me is something that exists on a continuum, moment to moment. Most people move in and out of bodily awareness throughout the day. At times it may mean feeling at home in your body, as Ashley describes. It can mean noting and even following your bodily desires and urges, which can be lovely when the timing is appropriate. I think of dancing as a good example of this, allowing movement to be led by the sensations you feel in response to music, or even to a desire to express emotions, passions, or dreams.” (Judy Lightstone)

“My working definition of embodiment for myself: "Learning to receive the body as gift to be cherished vs. experiencing the body as object to be evaluated." ... The broad approach taken by several commentators above vs. funnelling embodiment down immediately to sexuality grounds –

places our sexuality in a relational context (with oneself and or others). Given that in our modern culture, we experience an overemphasis on sexuality -- (one only needs to scan the magazines at the checkout counter or watch prime-time dramas for an hour) ... can over time reduce us to being defined solely by our sexual behaviors -- outside of relationships. I believe sexuality to be one of the many aspects of our embodiment -- but not the most defining.

For example, at certain times in life, one may be without/unable to engage in sexual expression due to lack of a partner, separation due to deployment, physical injury, etc. ... but one does not become less of a person because of this ... although one may feel a sense of loss. But does the individual miss the simple physical/sexual release OR do they miss the connection/relationship that is affirmed through sexual expression? Perhaps it is both. Freud's theory, of course, focused on the primacy of sexuality to human development. I tend toward the Attachment theorists (Bowlby, Ainsworth, etc), who focused on the centrality of relationships to healthy development ... of which sexuality can be a part. Starting first with relationship (which is mediated by embodiment) allows us to affirm all relationships whether sexuality is part of its expression or not.” (Dr. Pam Trice) [NB: This comment took off into another thread – see below]

“I just wanted to add briefly that for me 'embodiment' captures a simplicity - an authenticity - an unadorned honesty - the truth of this body that knows not how to lie. By definition, that truth is occurring in present time - the only place that the body and its truth (lived experience) can be found.

Whether that truth is warm, blissful or filled with sorrow and grief, I see embodiment as the courageous capacity to lovingly open to more and more of our moment-to-moment, bodily felt experience. So I suppose, I'm saying that for me, embodiment is consciousness (awareness) energetically or emotionally grounded in the body. It's also what I think of as 'showing up' or being fully present ... which I believe is inherently healing both for self and other.” (Pam Dillon)

“I'm really interested in how ungraspable this concept is. And in attempting to define it, I find myself forced down a route of looking at the pathology of dissociation to understand better the more functional association of mind and body. Which is highly ironic, because I am often critical of pathology-based definitions of physical health.

So starting from a basic statement of the definition of health ... one definition might be ... health is the ability for the body and mind to be in unison to the degree most appropriate in any one moment, and for all their resources to be appropriately and freely available in each moment. There are a lot of caveats in that sentence. So dissociation is actually an appropriate (and healthy) response to some situations. It becomes inappropriate and potentially unhealthy - just like any other physiological or mental state - if it lasts just a moment longer than the situation requires it to last. And the longer that mis-match between internal state and external environment persists, the more unhealthy the situation becomes in many ways. I would say that embodiment is one way of looking at this definition of health from the pov [?] of the relationship between the mind/consciousness and the body - both terms being used in their loosest possible sense. So embodiment distils down to a mutuality between mind and body such that they are in proper relationship. The mind should in most circumstances be firmly anchored to the body by somatic experience and should be willing to listen to and respond to the wisdom being expressed by the body. The body should likewise be informed, nourished, empowered, directed by the compassionate attention of the mind. There is not a simple point of stability in this relationship unless one enters a meditation in a safe place.

Admittedly the above definition is inherently tautological. But it is not possible to remove oneself from a body or mind to be able to define embodiment from outside the box. It is an experienced process.” (Andrew Cook)

“I come from a Bodydynamic body-centered therapy perspective. An embodied person is fully grounded, is connected to her balance points, is aware of her center, is aware of and has [her] flexible boundaries, connected to her breath and flow, and can connect with others from this place without losing any of these essential abilities.” (Sally Sepath)

“Neurobiology has found that there is no center or organizing matrix found within the brain. This center may be organized around becoming embodied. I experience embodiment as an awareness of our container, uniquely different for each person and experienced through mindfulness. Like mindfulness, we go in and out of that awareness. And yes, with trauma we learn to focus away from the locus of the pain, which often originates in or is stored in the body. My practice is based in embodiment, as I am a Movement Therapist and Body Poet.” (Yahya Suzanna Nadler)

“I like how Heather describes it as an interaction, a communication, between mind and body. I have been made aware that Eastern traditions, which for the most part have been spared the Cartesian split of mind and body, laugh when us New Age evangelists talk about mind-body integration. They laugh because there is nothing to integrate; mind and body have never been separate. They are two parts of the same whole. My challenge is to stay embodied when I am required to use my intellect. When I am being truly authentic, my body holds the far greater wisdom. On a good day, I listen to my body first.” (Giselle Teller-Holt)

“And here is my take on embodiment: An impression of one’s full range of experiences, including sensation, thought, emotion, relationship (both with oneself and with others), and culture; the somatic meaning of those experiences; the manner by which the body expresses those experiences nonverbally; one’s ability to fully sense, feel, and be in one’s body; how one experiences oneself in relation to others and one’s world, and others and the world in relation to oneself; how one resonates with those intersubjective experiences; and how those resonances inform and engender presence and authentic living.” (Nevine Sultan)

A couple of also people tried for a very basic definition:

“Embodiment: The state of being in one's body; i.e. [being] in touch with one's feelings, sensations, thoughts, and boundaries.” (Scott J. Winfield)

“A brief addition: Embodiment is the practice of living from the inside out. When the mind quiets and comes to appreciate being part of the flow of life (as opposed to being separate from it), the wisdom that comes through our proprioceptive system, emotions and energetic sense of ourselves — that is in resonance with the environment around us — does create a sense of coming home. When we lead our life from this place things just seem to go better.” (Jim Matteo-Shepard)

“Embodiment can be defined as a subjective experience, as a felt sense of being in my body, identifying with the 'lived body' moment-to-moment. There is a lot going on in the body, on all kinds of levels, every second, and it is one of the functions of consciousness to screen out the bulk of it. So 'embodiment' cannot mean that I am aware of everything that is going on, that is impossible as we know from neuroscience. However, it does mean that reflective awareness and spontaneous processes come together, pretty much in the sense of Winnicott's phrase "psyche indwelling in the soma" (1987). In simple terms it means sensing, feeling, imagining and thinking are working together as aspects of an organismic, embodied experience of interdependent self as process. The crucial aspect of embodiment, therefore, is not the body per se, but the mutual, reciprocal, self-regulating and self-organizing relationship of body and mind as antagonistic and complementary poles of experience: psyche and soma coming together as differentiated poles, being experienced as intimately related, as the ground of subjectivity. In this definition, then, there is no 'embodiment' without subjectivity or intersubjectivity. Embodiment also means that parts of our conceptual system and therefore some aspects of our language are structured by the features of our bodies and the functioning of our bodies in everyday life.

Embodiment encompasses more than the (human) body. The body is some particular living entity whereas embodiment refers to a general process. Images and texts are embodied in media, a measuring system becomes embodied in an instrument, meaning is embodied in signs, habituation is an embodiment of ways of life, etc.

About intersubjectivity, Donald Winnicott once said: ‘there is no such thing as an infant’, meaning, of course, that whenever one finds an infant one finds maternal care, and without maternal care, there would be no infant. Ana-Maria Rizzuto adds ‘Communications between

mother and child involve their entire bodily being; voice, posture, gestures, closeness of bodies, and ways in which their bodies fit into each other in moments of physical contact.'

The principle that 'nurture' gets internalized and embodied as what was previously conceived of as pure 'nature' was implied in character analytic theory all along: emotional interpersonal processes become internalized and embodied as body/mind processes. The way the infant is held and related to becomes the way the person's mind is capable of holding and relating to their feelings, which is reflected in the way the brain relates to body physiology, which is reflected in the way different sub-systems of the brain relate to each other (e.g. the cortex to the limbic system)." (Dirk Marivoet)

Serge Prengel later added his own contribution into the question, "What is Your Definition of Embodiment?"

"It's very nice to see "embodiment" discussed as a process of how we relate to ourselves. In writing the preceding sentence, I hesitated for a moment, because the structure seemed to call for the phrase "how we relate to our bodies", and, of course, writing this way would pull us back into the mind-body dichotomy. So I would like to share the following way to express this, to see if there is resonance with it (or invite a discussion of where there might be differences). I would like to include two notions:

- One is that "embodiment" is what happens when we shift our attention, from what is colloquially referred to as "being in our head", to what is known colloquially as "being in our body". It's a shift in focus.. but not a shift away, eliminating one to replace it with another. Rather, it is enriching the source of information available to us to include more of what is colloquially known as "the body".

- The other is to replace "being in our head" and "being in our body" with other phrases: "top-down perspective" and "bottom-up perspective". In a broad sense, it corresponds to having a sense of what is a human being as part of the continuum of animal life, where our so-called higher processes are seen as evolving from more primitive functions (and related to the notion of "embodied cognition"). In a practical way, it means paying more attention to such things as sensations, sensorimotor experience, "felt sense"... "

Anne Calajoe shared about embodiment from a somewhat more philosophical sense:

"The quote from James Joyce, "Mr Duffy lived a short distance from his body" seems to be where many people are taking up residence. Bodies can be painful, messy and heavy to carry around. The mind can detach. Embodiment can be a way of trying to find your way home between your head and your body. Some days you arrive home and say "Ahhhh ... home sweet home!"

Other days the house is a mess and you're distracted. Dark places are encountered when moving about the house. Sometimes you're feeling your way around in the dark looking for the light switch. Moving into your body is a felt-sense process of where you decide to take up residence."

This was followed up on:

"Anne, what a powerful description of embodiment! I'd like to quote you in some of my workshops. The "envelope of the body" makes me think of Ken Wilber and levels of me/not me – spaces that we enter into. Your vivid imagery depicts how exhilarating and treacherous it can be to follow the inner topography of the body: the somatic landscape of our personal and evolutionary history. Like others, I believe that we have to still our minds to maximize sensation and that breath may be a portal to this pulsing, feeling, barometer of our experience."

Later ... "As Pam says, "learning to stay there...with love, patience and non-judgement." Pam, I love the notion of a continuum from dissociation to enlightenment. I view health as integrating [particularly exiled] parts of ourselves that are currently unconscious. Many people think their body is something to "tote around" (like Anne describes) or simply expresses their history and identity in material form: "I have three scars, a birthmark and weigh 20 pounds more

than I did in high school." From my perspective, embodiment involves inhabiting our physicality vis-a-vis sensation, memory and emotion in the here-and-now." (Maci Daye);

Embodiment according to 'methods' of Body Psychotherapy

There were a couple of mentions of the way different methods or modalities of Body Psychotherapy viewed this issue of embodiment. We heard a little from Haomi, in some of the posts from Macie Daye; there were also a couple of posts from the Bodydynamic perspective. Here is a major one:

"Yes, this is one of the most interesting discussions I have followed. I like both the more mental approaches and the more physical ones towards understanding and describing embodiment. And I feel challenged to reframe the body psychotherapy I do practice in terms of embodiment. In this I am aided, as is Sally above, by practicing Bodydynamics, which is based on a large amount of empirical study that revealed the psychological function of each muscle, and when it comes into conscious control developmentally.

While Bodydynamics is best known for its model of Seven Developmental Stages, another aspect of it is more relevant here. In this part, the ten "Ego Functions" as they are called, describe the growing physical and mental abilities that span the developmental stages. These abilities are, for the context of this discussion, an attempt to describe the many different ways that "embodiment" is actually embodied. Each one involves many muscles, often from very different parts of the body. These muscles can be used to aid the verbal therapy, and to help develop or unlock a person's abilities.

These skills or abilities include the more familiar ones of Grounding (what is the concrete, physical reality), Centering (what's true for me in this moment), and Boundaries (what's me and what's outside me).

The other seven include: Connectedness, Positioning, Social Balances, Cognitive Skills, Energy Management, Self Assertion, and Patterns of Interpersonal Skills. Each has several sub-categories, and all address the many ways a person experiences and interacts with themselves, others, and the world. Or how they don't.

*I could say a lot more, but I won't. If you are wanting to follow up on this please see bodydynamics.com or the recently published reference book *Body Encyclopedia*, authored by two of the Bodydynamic founders." (Joel Isaacs)*

This was followed by:

"Since the contributors represent a variety of schools/paradigms, it might be helpful to compile some definitions of embodiment according to the different schools: Bodydynamic, Hakomi, movement therapy, etc. Some of us are oriented to the beliefs expressed in the body, others to consciousness, still others to the actual physiology of the body. At some point, I will try to organize these responses in accord with these systems. Thanks again for engaging so deeply around this question." (Maci Daye)

Is Embodiment a State or a Process?

In trying to define 'Embodiment', some people began to differentiate 'Embodiment' as being between a 'state' and a 'process': this is rather like the question in fundamental physics about 'matter' being either a 'particle' or a 'wave': and maybe it is both, dependent on how you look at it:

"Is embodiment a state that we move in and out of regarding certain experiences? [Or] a term for awareness of that state? A constant process active in each experience we have as humans-which we move along a continuum of awareness regarding?

My sense is that it is each of these and probably more. I would add that embodiment is not always a positive experience. In somatic counter-transference and trauma, it is the embodied response that is not attended to that can result in fatigue, illness." (Dr Elisabeth Crim)

"Embodiment like "enlightenment" is not a final destination. It is a process of descending into deeper layers of the body, uncovering the stories that are buried beneath the flesh. Opening

the envelop of the body, exploring the skin, fascia, muscles, bones, nerve endings and sensations can be like repelling down the side of a mountain, finding the entrance to a cave, spelunking your way through the cavern, its a mapless inner journey. Embodiment is a process of integration that requires levels of processing. It is a visceral felt-sense of Being. Dislodging the busy highway of the mind allows us to drop into the physical body exploring the feelings, emotions, thoughts, sensations beyond the boundaries of our skin. When we clear the space within ourselves to Be present, we can experience the full capacity of pleasure.” (Anne Calajoe)

“Serge, I ... agree whole-heartedly that being "embodied" is a shift in focus, not necessarily a shift in state. It has to do with what we direct attention to. I also see the body as the 'experiencer' of the bottom-up raw data that gets either hijacked by our neural templates into something familiar ("top down" processing a la Dan Siegel) or met in a fresh, open and direct way. It's the latter potential that may speak to our shared definitions of embodiment, which requires investigating what is true, now, before the data is organized automatically by our neural attractors and other implicit bio-psychological processes.”

“I often speak of the "container" when I teach embodiment. We are the container for this dynamic life force that moves through us. From my perspective, this force is very dynamic and variable. Our capacity to attune to this life-force and the information contained within would get very close to my notion of embodiment. Within Hakomi, we let the body direct us to whatever is in need of healing or self-expression. There is trust that even when this energy is constricted it is wise to "join with" the constriction, rather than try to "break through" or try to direct it somewhere. This is because mindfully engaging with the body enables our intrinsic blueprint for growing and becoming to unfold more freely and explicitly.” (Maci Daye)

“I resonate with much of what is being said here about the meaning and experience of embodiment and particularly appreciated Courtenay's question as to is it a process or state? Seriously, I could go either way, but then perhaps it is both at the same time. Also, I'm intrigued with what Serge pointed to being embodied as a shift in focus from a "top-down" to "bottom-up" perspective. This gives me pause to feel that embodiment and body-mind unity occurs when our thinking is based on our body feeling awareness as a premise for our logic rather adopting some external view of ourselves or external judgement of who we are. So there is an inside - out awareness that occurs during embodiment, and as a result we connect our life force to flow through our thinking process.” (Martha Char Love)

The State (or Process) of Un-embodiment

Other people commented on the difficulties about embodiment and also about whether it is a state or a process: Hinda Blum writes:

“Yes, embodiment is the feeling of being at home in one's body (as Ashley has said), but that is confusing, especially with dissociation and difficult feelings. So I work with being present and one part feels and what the connection might be, layers and layers of this and inner conversation, until I find some authentic truths and emotions that help me to connect, to release and to understand. This is my process. I also encourage others to do the same if they are able, and use music in my work to do the same.

Access to emotions and feelings, to be and stay open is challenging when there is so much fear and blockage from dysfunction, and sexual abuse. Still the process is hopeful and rewarding.”

“I appreciate your mentioning that embodiment is not always a positive experience. ... Sadly, the people that often come for psychotherapy may be unaware of their body (due to dissociation/trauma), be overly aware of their body (pain syndromes/physical challenges), punish their bodies (self-injury), or experience their body as an enemy (eg, eating disorders), among other things. What I am mulling over is Maci's question regarding pleasure in general -- and then, How do we assist clients to experience pleasure and joy in their bodies (which includes sexuality) -- when this has not been their experience to date?” Dr. Pam Trice);

One of my own early contributions to the discussion was:

"I am really very interested in "exactly" what we might mean - and there are obviously several different definitions - of "Embodiment". Is it a state, or a process? Do we assist our clients towards an (enlightened) state of 'Embodiment' or - by affirming their current state of embodiment (or not), do we help them become more embodied? Can we be really dis-embodied?

Does early trauma and other impacts (or "insults to form" - Keleman) have the effect of diminishing our natural and original state of embodiment; or (hopefully temporarily) dis-embodimenting us (as in dissociation); or condemning us to a partial state of embodiment, where we 'think' we are in touch with ourselves, but ... is this really our Self? Where do out-of-body experiences fit in?

Is what we (Body Psychotherapists) mean by "embodiment" the same as what is meant by embodiment in (say) "mindfulness" practice - CBT or Thich Nhat Hahn - or other 'body therapies'. Does full "embodiment" also bring us into contact with our more spiritual aspects?" (Courtenay Young)

Thank you for your contribution Sally. So, from your perspective, being embodied is a particular state, not just inhabiting oneself or directing attention to the felt experience, but having a particular QUALITY of experience. What's your response to the commentators who have suggested that those with a chronic illness or trauma history may not touch into an open, grounded and flowing state, but rather, discomfort and fear connected to intense sensation or emotions stored in the body. Would you say they are not embodied yet?" (Maci Daye)

In response to that last post from Maci Daye, Andrew Cook writes:

"Maci - If it is only considered in terms of the physical senses and physical body, all one can say is that the sensory system is either hypersensitive or has numbed out, and often both in different parts of the body, but it would be difficult to say that someone was less embodied because of that change in sensory state. However, it's more than that. Embodiment is to do with a spatial intermeshing of consciousness and tissue and a degree of stability in that relationship that is appropriate to the environmental conditions NOW. If someone is "beside themselves", they are not strongly embodied. If they are unable to connect their awareness (and therefore will) to the motor system in a way that allows them to feel and use the strength of the muscles, then they are not very well embodied. The specific history ("trauma" or not) is irrelevant to this. I think the T word is over-used and over-loaded."

"I agree with Andrew. There appears to be a false dichotomy emerging between physical body and cognition. Keleman likes to describe how the body grows its brain; how form establishing thinking patterns and narratives: to separate sensation as 'better' than other processes seems unhelpful. Andrew's statement is excellent: (Stephen J Buehler)

"Maci, You ask a good question: "What's your response to the commentators who have suggested that those with a chronic illness or trauma history may not touch into an open, grounded and flowing state, but rather, discomfort and fear connected to intense sensation or emotions stored in the body. Would you say they are not embodied yet?"

I see trauma as interfering with all the resources I mentioned. (flexibility, grounding, centering, holding boundaries, etc.) For one instance, we know that trauma is always a boundary infringement and as such interferes with healthy and flexible establishment of boundaries, which can continue for years if the person does not go through a healing process. The lack of healthy boundaries certainly inhibits embodiment." (Sally Stepath)

Language Issues

For others, there was a more professional issue about the use of language:

"I [am]working on my dissertation which will be a phenomenological inquiry into sexual compulsivity as an embodied experience. As many times as I have used this word, I am finding it difficult to define and operationalize. I think the word speaks to the ability to allow mind and body, sensation and intellect, knowledge and intuition to function in an integrated manner. I have

been also working with the Focusing process (Gendlin) as a way to facilitate an embodied experience where what we sense can be uncovered with language. ... I am working with Focusing (Gendlin) to facilitate awareness of the felt sense.” (Giselle Teller-Holt)

Scott Winfield commented: *“I think this thread is meaningful in that it asks us to think about words and terms we may use frequently but without ever defining them. And then we talk to each other and maybe to clients but we never really know if we are using these terms in common or not. It’s like the term 'flow of energy' as an example. We are pointing at 'something' but it is much to our credit if we strive for more precise definitions; and that those definitions aren't contradicted by accepted knowledge in our or other specialties of science and accumulated wisdom and truth. The perverted use of 'quantum theory' by many is a great example of what we should be trying to avoid as respectable professionals.”*

“In research focusing on literacy practices, I used the term 'embodiment' to refer to ways in which human energy (physical, emotional, cognitive, imaginative) goes into the creation of an object (in this case a 'literacy artefact') and is thus 'embodied' within it. I was interested in the physical, material and visual characteristics of children’s 'projects' (created during semi-independent home/school 'project work'). Each project's unique 'physical characteristics' can tell us something about its production, the understandings, attitudes and feelings of the person producing it, its life experience so far, and expectations of how it is to be handled in future. Evidence of all sorts of activities and decision-making can be 'embodied' within an object of this kind, which may evoke many different responses in the person reading or handling it.” (Fiona Ormerod)

“I have rarely used this term in my 38 years as a body shrink since I could never before get my mind around a good definition, so I thank Serge [or whom ever] for posing it on this forum. I have always used the phrase 'to be fully at home in ones' body' to convey what seems to be one of the definitions floating within this tread for many of us. Now I can use the word if I can find others to talk to who agree with my [and our] use of it. BUT, as always, double check that your students, clients or colleagues are on the same page you are with these definitions.” (Jac Conaway)

Working with Embodiment

Some people commented about working with embodiment in their client work:

“As I work with women, developing and nurturing a relationship with our cyclic nature is foundational.” (Ashley Ross)

“When I work with embodiment with clients, we connect to where one feels each specific emotion, whether or not there is movement or "stuckness". If one is embodied, I feel they are in touch with all pieces of themselves so that that is what they bring forward as well to the other.” (Patti Okun)

“I work from a somatic psychotherapy approach and use the body in therapy to help clients become mindful and access what's happening in their internal world. When a client reports a feeling, say anger or happy, I ask what in your body tells you you're angry? That you're happy? Clients then need to go inside to answer the question. When someone can answer from a somatic and mindful place, I consider this embodied.” (Paula Lorimer)

“I’m still very interested in "how" we support embodiment in our clients and how recovering our capacity to be embodied (I agree it can be obscured, exiled or numbed) increases our ability to experience pleasure, generally, and sexual pleasure in particular.” (Maci Daye)

“My experience of working with the principles of Formative Psychology, as both client and therapist, is that the "how we support embodiment" is best explained by Keleman's term: co-bodying. This process of self-attunement, relational mindfulness and forming somatic shapes, often occurring as a backdrop to the narrative content of the therapy, is a sort of neuro-physical-energetic joining.

This process can support goals like: developing more/less/harder/softer layers of boundary, moving or expanding aliveness around the physical and/or energy body. Both of these processes are very helpful to enjoying and managing life, and without skill around them people can feel victim to (and separate from) their experience.” (Stephen J. Buehler)

“I approach embodiment in my treatment with my patients and in my own process with myself as a neuro-biochemical process, a somatic experience, and energy process that is continuous, always active. We attune to it, recognize it, and work from and with it through mindfulness with ourselves and our patients. It is part of what I address when teaching on somatic transference, compassion fatigue, and the reasoning behind my creating treatment teams to attend to mind-body-spirit processes and clinical intuition.” (Dr. Elizabeth Crim)

I was exploring an aspect of this dialogue this morning with my somatic mentor, and feel calling to describe in words here:

- I (often the very defined, personal experience of "I") live in the world through structure, mental cognition, seeking to know and doing. This has use and value.

- I (often the more universal, collective experience of "I") live in the world through fluidity, somatic knowing, resting in the unknown and being. This has use and value.

The gross movement, the nuanced exchange of this polarity of experience ... is "me." So, I suggest that "embodiment" is my participation in this process of living.” (Stephen J. Buehler)

I have another declaration at this point: one of my ‘posts’ was the following concerning quite a long article that I had written and published several years ago, on “The Process of Re-embodiment.” *“If anyone is interested ... it is available as a free PDF download here:*

www.courtenay-young.co.uk/courtenay/articles/Doing_Effective_Body_Psychotherapy_2.pdf”

Some people said that they found this useful or interesting.

Other Paths to Embodiment

For some people, there are also ‘other’ paths to embodiment, other than (just) Body Psychotherapy:

“Yoga is also a path to embodiment!” (Anne Calajoe)

“I became a yoga teacher at 23 ... right around the time that I was an undergrad specializing in psych. and phys. ed. I was always drawn to that interface of mind and body. Recently, I've decided to do a Yin Yoga teaching training. Last night in my Yin Yoga class, I realized how this particular yoga practice is the essence of embodiment ... An ever-deepening invitation to move inside our places of holding and to stay there...exploring them with love, patience, non-judgment, curiosity and tenacity. Amazing stuff!

For me, the body is the unconscious (dark-shadow, emotional-cellular) mind. Our thinking, somewhat conscious, ego-mind ... being the often safer place to hang out.

Perhaps embodiment exists on a continuum from the terrorized states of dissociation to states of enlightenment. As my favorite Jung quote states: ‘We do not become enlightened by imagining figures of light but by making darkness conscious. The latter procedure is disagreeable however and therefore not very popular.’”

The truth can be scary and as I posted earlier, I do believe that embodiment is an act of courage.” (Pam Dillon)

Another of my own contributions started another ‘thread’:

“The (traditional) Japanese martial arts / philosophy are supposed to have thought that we actually have three brains: in the Head, the Heart and the Hara. One [brain] in the head - for thinking; one in the heart - for feeling; and one in the belly (called the 'hara') - for being in proper touch with ourselves. David Boadella writes about the 'Head, Heart & Hara" in his book, "Lifestreams".

There are internet posts and other books about this (e.g. www.cygnus-books.co.uk/head-heart-and-hara-peter-wilberg.html)

In China, within Tai Chi practice, this third 'brain' (or centre) is called the Dant'ien: the 'elixir field', the 'energy centre', the 'centre of one's being'.

In the West, we talk about 'gut' feelings, and within Biodynamic Psychology, the whole Boyesen philosophy was about emotional digestion: the 'gut' being the day-to-day channel for this emotional digestion.

So ... my question for this group ... is 'embodiment' (just) being in touch with this centre; with our gut feelings; with the centre of our being; or is it (possibly) something more than that?" (Courtenay Young)

"OK, I'll [also] add a couple of off-the-wall aspects to this. The "traditional" Christian prayer position with palms together, very very lightly sprung (rather than forcefully or floppy) is a very effective embodiment mudra. Interestingly the two more modern prayer hand positions tend to (when I've experimented with them from this pov) lock everything down or separate head and body. The (Hawaiian) Huna view was that the connection to our higher selves is through conscious connection to the body. This was echoed by Julian of Norwich, and also by the 20th century mystic Bruno Groening, who told people that an important factor in receiving divine energy is they should be aware of their body." (Andrew Cook)

"In following the thread of Courtenay and Andrew, the body is a vessel, container of energy. Embodiment is more than being in touch with our gut feelings. The head, heart and hara are knots along the central channel of the body that ripen as we process the unconscious material behind these energetic areas. The Hara: center of being, womb of creation "elixir field" opens into the heart that emanates the essence of the true self uniting with the consciousness of the head in the process of integration. From here there is a sense of expansion into the unified field, a connection rather than separation with the web of life that surrounds us." (Anne Calajoe)

"In art psychotherapy, images can be described as 'embodied' when we experience them as 'resonating' with energy. Joy Schaverian (The Revealing Image, Jessica Kingsley 1999), coming from a psychoanalytic perspective, makes what I think is a useful distinction between the 'diagrammatic' and the 'embodied' image, or between diagrammatic and embodied aspects (since she suggests the two aspects may be present in one image). She explains that the 'diagrammatic' aspect is not 'imbued with life' in the same way as the 'embodied' aspect, as it is the 'embodied aspect' which 'transcends what is consciously known', is the object of transference, and may be experienced 'in a magical manner' because it is 'authentically connected to the emotional experience of the artist'.

I am not sure if others will find this useful, but I thought I would share these ideas, as it can be helpful to look at concepts from different angles!" (Fiona Ormerod)

"I can very much relate to Giselle's comment, 'On a good day I listen to my body first.' I find it so easy to get tangled up in too much thinking! For me, this realisation came, initially, through learning to mediate. Then, as a client in therapy, I came to understand that deeper self-awareness and self-acceptance go hand-in-hand with learning to listen to the whole body. I also found that spontaneous art-making can offer a safe outlet and containing space for expression of intense feelings that might otherwise remain trapped inside the body. Later, as a trainee art therapist, I learned how important it is to pay attention to one's whole body, in responding to the client and their image, and in taking care of oneself.

My UK art psychotherapy training was very much rooted in the psychodynamic tradition. We were certainly not trained as analytic art psychotherapists and I would not use art for 'diagnosis'. However, a client may find that an image or series of images made spontaneously in art therapy may draw attention to or help shed light on 'somatic' concerns. Art-making involves physical activity of different kinds (eg using clay is very different from using paints or pastels). In art psychotherapy, body, conscious mind and unconscious imagination have the opportunity to 'dance' together within the safety of the

therapeutic space, in the creation of an 'embodied' image that exists physically outside the body but is rooted in the client's inner experience. Art-making may feel 'revitalising' in itself, but, with the support of the art therapist, can provide a starting point for further reflection, exploration, and processing. I think of art psychotherapy as holistic, in that it has to do with paying attention to the whole human 'being'. ” (Fiona Ormerod)

A Case History

Often much can be conveyed in how we approach the question of embodiment with our clients:

“Today I was giving a session: my client is male, 52, and is currently addicted to (about 18) Solpadine tablets p.d. (an OCD containing paracetamol and caffeine). Both parents are dead; he has an elder sister with severe learning disabilities, for whom he is now legally and technically responsible; and he is in a relatively stable relationship with an elder woman actress of about 60+ - and they have their problems. He is always worried about himself.

We have been looking for several months (fortnightly sessions) at what is "wrong" in his life - his addictions (to alcohol and nicotine as well - now largely under control); his inability to form a committed relationship (despite the stability of the last 6 years or so; his solpadine addiction; his sense of being 'held' into a fixed pattern that he cannot break; his internal critic; and so on and so forth.

Today, I said ... "What about what is right with you? Can you begin to feel OK about yourself? Not just as a thought-form, but more in your body?" and - as we talked - and discussed it as a more viable option to his 'neurotic pattern (rather like driving on the right in USA, and on the left in UK), he began to realise that maybe, just maybe, he could begin to 'feel' this embodiment of OK-ness, for who he is right now, not for some ideal to be reached, and this might just be better than worrying about the more neurotic aspects.

It was a good session: all about embodiment - right now! Who he is, right now! How he feels about himself - right now! And how that (embodied) feeling is really not so 'bad', neurotic, or anything else - other than what he actually is, right now, which is a caring, compassionate person, and still with a few minor hang-ups. We'll see how that lands with him over the next fortnight.” (Courtenay Young)

How to Become (more) Embodied

I tried to address this in my article or essay, mentioned above. Other people in this series of ‘posts’ also addressed the question how to become more embodied:

“I believe we are already embodied but not always aware of it. I usually find myself lost in concepts and judgments about own and interactive experience. Awareness of embodiment is often resisted, spending long time identifying with the cognitive and narrative self. Direct experience of the body can sometimes reveal long body patterns of painful chronic reactions: crystallization of fears and other unconscious emotions. Mindfulness practice welcomes and befriends this body-emotional experience as it slowly and kindly approaches it creating space and warmth around.” (Sebastián Medeiros)

What has Embodiment to do with Sexuality?

Serge Prengel originated this particular thread of discussion in his original addition to the main question; and it was then picked up again by Dr. Pam Trice (above); and then Maci Daye picked up on this theme again:

“I agree that sexual expression is not the most important aspect of embodiment. However, I don't equate sexual expression with release. I see it as an aspect of our embodied eroticism, which Joy Davidson describes as a "sense," much like seeing/hearing/tasting. From my perspective, to awaken our senses and respond to this dynamic energy requires sensitivity to our present moment awareness and the ability to inhabit ourselves in an integrated way. This may involve recovering our capacity to be safely self-connected to our physicality and may not be contingent upon having a sexual partner. Stephen, thanks for sharing your thoughts on co-bodying. I'd love to hear more

comments about the relationship between embodiment and sexuality/pleasure and other ways to support embodiment in your clients.” (Maci Daye)

“I chose this question because I am writing and teaching about embodiment for a training I created for couples on “The Art and Practice of Mindful Sex.” You can hear the interview I gave with Serge at <http://www.somaticperspectives.com/2013/05/daye/> For me, the key to mindful embodiment is bringing curiosity to our felt experience.” (Maci Daye)

Which nicely leads us into the next topic.

What is the connection with mindfulness?

A number of respondents linked – in some way – embodiment with mindfulness:

“I think mindfulness is crucial to our awareness of embodiment...and our embracing of our whole and True Self. I believe a lack of mindfulness leads to consumerism, and ironically being consumed (addictions in their various forms.) Mindfulness, on the other hand, enables us to be transformed and changed by our experiences...which when applied to our sexual lives, allows us to know and be known and to be transformed in ways that are almost beyond expression...and we begin to borrow the language of the mystics.” (Dr. Pam Trice)

“As a Hakomi Therapist and Trainer, I use mindfulness to access and transform these invisible organizers of experience, and also enlist the client's higher order processes in translating experience into meaning.” (Maci Daye)

Another thread of consumers and consumerism was also picked up on by Rosalyn Stewart:

“I resonate with your (also wonderfully expressed) comment Pam that lack of embodiment ultimately leads to 'being consumed by consumerism'. We know how scary it is for some clients to connect mindfully with themselves and/or with others and we will have experienced some degree of this ourselves. I think an essential part of our role as therapists is to find ways of making the process of embodiment safe, encouraging and increasingly satisfying for clients. I agree that the experience of embodiment is something that can be deeply shared between two people and that it is beyond words (though some of the mystics do get pretty close!). We need to listen and create space for this embodied silence during sessions.”

And this nicely links us back into how we actually work with our clients.

Appreciations

In the category of general appreciations, we find a large number of quite effusive comments:

“Thank you all. It is rare to read a thread that is so compelling to me.” (Jim Matto-Shepard)

“Here! Here! I plan on incorporating so much of this wisdom the next time I speak or write on this issue AND in how I continue to deepen my conceptualization of embodiment. I will credit you as I go if I use you Brilliance and wisdom here.” ... [also later] ... I plan on incorporating so much of this wisdom the next time I speak or write on this issue AND in how I continue to deepen my conceptualization of embodiment. I will credit you as I go if I use you. ... Brilliance and wisdom here. (Dr. Elisabeth Crim)

“I feel very much in sync with much of what has been shared so far.” (Serge Prengel)

“What a great question! I'll think more on this and get back to you! I look forward to reading others' thoughts.” (Heather Corwin)

“This discussion comes at a perfect time for me.” Giselle Teller-Holt)

“I am delighted that several people in their initial comments have taken the broad approach to embodiment. ... [later]... Enjoying and appreciating all contributions to this discussion.” (Dr. Pam Trice)

“Fantastic discussion everyone, thank you so much!” (Rosalyn Stewart)

"I've just begun to read this thread. Very rich. Thank you to all. ... What a juicy topic!"
(Pam Dillon)

"Love this discussion! Interesting to see the different perspectives." (Dr. Elisabeth Crim)

"I am so delighted that my question has generated such a rich on-line exchange." (Maci Daye)

"This is really an interesting discussion."(Sally Stepath)

"Love following this thread about ways we sink into our bodies like pearl divers and bring back the treasures found within, no matter what they may be. Just to examine the contents and be with whatever arises in the discovery. Incredible process!!!!" (Anne Calojoe)

"Ah, the subtlety of trying to define embodiment is complex because it takes us into trying to define different states of consciousness. As we deeply focus on anything, this process can become a one-centered attention and meditation has occurred. So, yes, Maci, I agree there are many levels to embodiment." (Yahya Suzanna Nadler)

"These comments are continuing to be so rich and layered." (Maci Daye)

"What an interesting discussion! I am new to this group and have found it fascinating to read through these postings. As an artist with a background in literacy research and art psychotherapy I am interested in the ways in which artifacts might be described as 'embodied'."
(Fiona Ormerod)

"It is mind boggling the amount of comments, all very interesting and stimulating ... another thought came to mind regarding the evident complexity in arriving at a definition of embodiment ... I wonder if what is coming to light is the inherent dichotomy between body and mind with both competing for supremacy? I also wonder if this is also what is behind the animosity existent between body based psychotherapists and psychoanalysts again with both claiming some ownership of the truth. Is embodiment then about creating a bridge where communication can be had on an even base in which not one or the other dominates but more like a dance between the two in recognition of each other? Elisabeth I would love to read your articles on the topic my e-mail is: lulyleon1@hotmail.com." (Lucy Leon)

"Being in the moment as this process evolves is literally a work in progress. The unified field so alive and interactive in the fabric of this tapestry that you weave together for all of us. I am so honored to add a thread," (Anne Calajoe)

"Have just read your draft article, Courtenay, and am most impressed with the work you have done in organizing all these responses into a coherent whole! Well done!" (Fiona Ormerod)

"As I go about an exhaustive review of the literature on body psychotherapy and embodiment in preparation for a phenomenological dissertation, this discussion has been especially intriguing, diverse, informational, and insightful. It has also been extremely inclusive and tolerant, and for that, I am most appreciative. I am very grateful to be a member of this vibrant community of psychotherapists.

Serge, many thanks for this wonderful (and very timely) discussion topic. Courtenay, a special thank you to you for compiling all of these colorful responses into a single document. I can't begin to tell you just how much I appreciate that." (Nevine Sultan)

There were – incidentally – no comments posted that seemed to be overtly negative or critical, except a slightly provocative question from Richard Lawton: *"As there is no evidence whatsoever for human existence outside of an embodied state, isn't this a slightly odd question?"* To which, Maci Daye responded:

"Yes. I appreciate the point of voice, to be human is to be incarnate. Yet, so few people are encouraged to consider the implications and possibilities. Many people view the body as simply a machine or something that handicaps us in some ways. Those who are still embedded in the cartesian mind-body split think that being an "enlightened" human is to be identified with the

reasoning faculties of the intellect. Body psychotherapists believe body and mind jointly reflect and express our deepest beliefs and attributes as humans. We invite clients to source the wisdom of the body, to integrate the somatic levels of experience. For this reason, it helps to have some understanding of the "what" "why" and "how" of embodiment."

This brought the following rejoinder:

*"Maci - Yes, I know, I was simply throwing a provocative angle on an *intellectual* discussion about embodiment - a notion that never ceases to amaze me (I alternate between amusement and anger whenever I read highly intellectual papers on body psychotherapy).*

What is it to be embodied? To be able to: - Hear my skin when it tells me someone has encroached on my boundaries - Feel my gut when it reacts in anger to threat - Express the flow of energy in my pelvis - Voice words when my jaw wishes to move - Allow my hands to reach out and touch - Be supported by legs. And so on. It's not rocket-science. Our distant ancestors were doing it long before intellect was even a twinkle in evolution's eye." (Richard Lawton)

Diversions

There were some interesting (possible) diversions: Lucy Leon wrote:

"I trained in body psychotherapy some years ago & now undertaking psychoanalysis & training to work with children. Now finding the connections between the two approaches very interesting. Can we say that behind somatic pain or discomfort are unprocessed/undigested feelings/emotional reactions that have not been processed and have remained lodged in the body & the unconscious and that have yet to be processed in order to become thoughts that can be expressed & digested/processed/come to terms with? I wonder if the danger with body psychotherapy is that it can get too focused on searching for pleasure, or the getting-rid-of the discomfort, without arriving at the underlying unconscious material behind the discomfort: the dangers [of this] being that benefits could remain short-term or superficial? Can we work with expansion without fully understanding what's behind the contracting & less pleasurable sensations? Is embodiment [only] when we feel expansive & flowing? [Is it only] the pleasurable experience of feeling one with the universe in its expansion & contraction, embracing all sensations positive & negative & both becoming one with the power of the breath?"

This comment was strongly supported by Scott J. Winfield: *"Bravo Lucy! I agree wholeheartedly with you. I am also trained in both body psychotherapy and psychoanalysis and see the very same things you are pointing at."*

At which point, I intervened, possibly rightly or wrongly, in an interject that I thought might have maybe killed this particular thread:

"Whilst this may well be a very valid criticism, I think that you may be confusing some body therapies and Body Psychotherapy. Ideally, Body Psychotherapy, by looking at the feelings that lie behind the somatic distress, does indeed help to process the unconscious material, as there is a direct link to this material, via the somatic distress or sensations." (Courtenay Young)

"From my perspective, this [... enlisting the client's higher order processes, to translate experience into meaning ...] is what body psychotherapies are designed to do (at least psychodynamically-oriented ones) [so] I support Courtenay's recommendation that we differentiate body therapy from body psychotherapy." (Maci Daye)

Another 'diversion' was into the responses to the topic of trauma: we have seen indications of the connection in various of the co-respondents already: but Giselle Teller-Holt 'put the question' so to speak:

"I too am working on a phenomenological dissertation. In fact, I defend my proposal on Monday. I have found this discussion to be very helpful in collecting my thoughts about embodiment. One statement that has been rattling around in my head for the past couple days is the comment that trauma is the result of boundary violation. I am incorporating modern attachment theory into my work and find the lack of attunement by parental figures to infant affective states to be foundational to what is later experienced as trauma. I have tried to reconcile

this with the notion of boundary violation and have not found a way to do so. I would love to hear what others think about this."

This evoked a couple of responses:

"Giselle, great question. The image of "boundary violation" feels intuitively related to what happens when a battering ram destroys a wall. So what happens when there is "simply" lack of attunement, and no battering ram?

Let's forget for a moment the idea of boundary violation to see what happens in attunement. The experience of attunement is that of resonating, of being resonated with. The infant sees its happiness reflected in the parent's happiness, and gets to relate the inner state to its visible manifestation. When the infant has difficult feelings, intense feelings, the parent can feel for the child, but at the same time is a larger container within which the intensity is diluted, and becomes more bearable. Etc, etc...

The point is that we are relational beings. So the "unit" is not just one person, the baby or the parent. In the experience of attunement, the dyad is the unit. This is not just a mystical notion. The attachment theory is about what happens as a result of experiencing ourselves within the larger unit of the relationship. What we carry with us as "individuals" is the "training" we got as part of this attuned unit.

So when there is lack of attunement, this larger unit is harmed, and this capacity of ourselves that is developed from being part of the attuned unit is harmed, just as effectively as it could be with a battering ram." (Serge Prengel)

"Giselle - Something I see when there has been lack of attunement is that the client's ability to contain and self-regulate is impaired, to the extent that their own strong emotions are perceived as traumatic, often leading them to develop very rigid and tight boundaries (what I term energetic withdrawal to the core). Lack of attunement is indirect boundary violation. The parent is not actively violating boundaries, but their failure to intervene allows the child's own fragile & developing boundaries to be overwhelmed from inside." (Richard Lawton)

"Love the attunement. I don't come from an attachment pov, so tend to use a slightly different definition, Giselle. Trauma results when our resources are inadequate to deal with what we are faced with. For a baby, I guess no attunement means that it's on its own, and since the parents are supposed to provide all the external resources, that results in an unresourced state. I understand that the emotion of profound awe is also possible (for an adult), and personally I am particularly curious what would predispose someone to awe rather than trauma." (Andrew Cook)

"Andrew, I love your comment: "Trauma results when our resources are inadequate to deal with what we are faced with." Levine takes this one step further and has found it is in the freeze state that trauma sets in.

I believe that what predisposes someone to awe rather than trauma is the ability to regulated affective states. Awe happens when someone is able to stay regulated enough to be present to the experience. I appreciate that you do not take the attachment POV but Schore has found in his research this starts with right brain attunement between parental figures and baby.

I did not mean for this to sound like a lit review but I am in the middle of preparing for my dissertation proposal defence and am deeply immersed in this material. Please forgive my indulgences." (Giselle Teller-Holt)

I think that we have all likely observed that one child [or adult] is traumatized by a particular event while another is not. While these observations are confounded by the assumption that there are important differences [even if unnoticed by the observer] between the 'assaults', I believe that we need also to look at the way the child relates to the assault as well as the characteristics of the assault itself.

I believe that understanding this 'way' of responding to the assault is vital, perhaps even the ONLY issue in understanding the 'way out' of the traumatized state. Helping a client to reexamine exactly what happened within them at the time of the assault is crucial to helping them 'let go' of the trauma. Of course, this 'way' is often informed by the more general atmosphere that

the child operates in [such a 'non supportive' one or a 'harsh' one], but what keeps the trauma 'encapsulated' for a long time [into adulthood for example if not worked through with the help of a sympathetic adult] is the 'way' that the child related to the assault.” (Jac Conaway)

Wider Perspectives

What else is ‘out there’ about this topic of enlightenment?

“If you Google the word 'embodiment', you get about 35,800,000 results. This is perhaps an indication that 'embodiment' is used by many different groups and in many different ways.

However, if anyone is interested, there is another internet featured article available as a free PDF download, on "The Creative Embodied Experience: The role of the body and the arts in infant mental health" by Suzi Tortora: www.suzitortora.org/pdf_creativeEmbodiedExp.pdf

And Andrew Harris also has an internet website on 'Embodiment' with some good links to resources: www.embodiment.org.uk/bibliog.htm

There is also conference in Boulder, Colorado in October 2013 on "Embodiment": www.livingembodiment.org/About/index.html Does anyone else know of any other good resources or ways forward?

There is another interesting resource available here: it is ‘The body: A phenomenological psychological perspective’. The body has traditionally been treated as a biological object in psychology. However, some psychologists believe there is more to our bodies than that, as they recognise that it is through the body that we relate to other people and the world about us. This unit explores one particular theoretical perspective on embodiment: the phenomenological psychological perspective. This is an approach to psychology that acknowledges the social nature of embodiment, placing embodied experience centre stage in all psychological understanding. This unit is an adapted extract from the Open University course Social psychology: critical perspectives on self and others (DD307): www.open.edu/openlearn/society/politics-policy-people/sociology/the-body-phenomenological-psychological-perspective/content-section-0”

There's also a brand new article on "Reflection, reflective practice and embodied reflective practice" by Jennifer Leigh & Richard Bailey that has just been posted on the Journal of "Body, Movement & Dance in Psychotherapy" website: here: - www.tandfonline.com/action/showAxaArticles?journalCode=tbmd20#.UZNh5YLrjmE which might be of interest: (Courtenay Young)

“Loved your comment and query Lucy! I too cannot digest all of this, but found yours to resonate with my focus these days. I am psychodynamic. I speak, write, and work therapeutically and within a treatment team in which we are attending to the somatic transference. I have found some psychoanalysts a bit defensive, re: bringing body into it the process of treatment, however, I have more quite open and joining the integrative discussion and work! Email me for a couple of articles I wrote on the topic: ElisabethCrimPhD@MoonstoneCenter.com” (Dr. Elisabeth Crim)

Conclusions

“This discussion thread makes me think we might take an integral position indicating levels of body consciousness from the purely "biological" to the "energetic," and create categories of awareness of bodily experience as well, from not-at-all embodied to inhabiting our internal felt sense in an on-going way. We might also compare the views of intelligence encoded in the tissues in an enduring way, perhaps generating a sense of self as Damasio suggests, vs. being the witness of something more variable that we attune to. Some contributors have focused on consciousness, other's sensation and emotion, others degree of bodily awareness vs. lack of awareness, still others on degree of pleasure vs. pain. There may not be one definition of embodiment, but rather, degrees and levels. I'd love to hear your reactions...” (Maci Daye)

“Thank you Courtenay for compiling this wealth of insight. One of the ways I practice my own embodiment is thought Focusing (Gendlin, 1978). During a session today with my Focusing partner I notice how important breath is to my own sense of embodiment. I will be exploring that further in the future.

This discussion is so timely for my learning needs. Thank you all who have participated. I appreciate the diversity of comments about embodiment. This is a rich experience, conferring with a global community of scholars and clinicians.” (Giselle Teller-Holt).

This concludes the quotes, posts and commentary on this discussion. I am sure that you will agree that it was very rich and interesting.

The ‘**Editor**’ (or ‘collator’) of all these texts and the ‘**Author**’ of some of them is:

Courtenay Young, who is an experienced Body Psychotherapist, who has worked in many different areas and environments and with different client groups. He was a founder member of USABP, and is an Honorary Member of EABP, having been the General Secretary and past-President, as well as performing other functions, like starting the EABP Bibliography of Psychotherapy, the EABP website (www.eabp.org) and recently becoming a director of Body Psychotherapy Publications, (www.bodypsychotherapypublications.com) etc. He is also a member of the EABP Science and Research Committee.

He is currently the Editor of the EAP’s *International Journal of Psychotherapy* (www.ijp.org.uk); has been on the Editorial Board of the journal: *Body, Movement and Dance in Psychotherapy*. He was the main writer for the EAP’s Project on Establishing the Professional Competencies of a European Psychotherapist (www.psychotherapy-competency.eu), and is one of the editors for the forthcoming (Feb, 2015) *Handbook of Body Psychotherapy and Somatic Psychology* – to be published by North Atlantic Books. He currently lives and works and has a private practice in and around Edinburgh, Scotland.

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Endnotes:

¹ Somatic Perspectives on Psychotherapy: May (2013) Featured Discussion: What is your definition of "embodiment"?

https://www.linkedin.com/groupItem?view=&gid=3788739&type=member&item=238207105&qid=8f999f2e-376f-447e-8d66-8e6b7f8d6382&trk=groups_items_see_more-0-b-ttl

² **On the Record:** "On the record" means anything that the source says can be reported, published, or aired. All conversations are assumed to be "on the record" unless the source expressly requests—and the reporter explicitly agrees—to go "off the record" beforehand. NYU Journalism Handbook for Students: accessed 18/5/14: <http://journalism.nyu.edu/assets/PageSpecificFiles/Ethics/NYU-Journalism-Handbook-for-Students.pdf>

³ Group Rules as of June 2013: "The purpose of this group is to host discussions. It is not to produce documents: neither as a way to keep a record of particularly interesting discussions, nor as a group paper on any topic.

Of course, it is understandable that interesting discussions will stimulate participants’ thinking—in fact, this is very much hoped for. It is also understandable that people so inspired will want to express their thoughts in their academic work, in writings or workshops, etc. This too is a desired outcome of the group’s activity. But any such communication is something that people do as individuals, not in any way as an expression of the group’s process.

If your writing is inspired by the group’s discussions, please follow these guidelines, regardless the nature of the paper, even if it is an unedited transcript: - You can only quote somebody if you obtain their permission. People can be contacted through Linked In. If you don’t get an answer after a week, simply assume that this person is not willing to be quoted. ...”

⁴ “Dear Correspondents, I have been collecting all these comments in a (reasonably coherent) article format and am now considering whether it is worth publishing this document - or not.

I will put it "up" on my website, with no other access than to people on this discussion group. Please click [here] in order to download it as a PDF in its current format.

If you do not like your comment, posed in the way that it is, or if you want to withdraw (or amend) your own

comment, please contact me - privately - which is probably the best and simplest way. <courtenay@courtenay-young.com>. Then I can amend the document suitably and 'refresh' the PDF file.

In due course, and with any other additions, until this discussion is "closed", I will keep adding to the file and refreshing the PDF.

Maybe this is suitable for the (newly refreshed) International Journal of Body Psychotherapy: Jacquie Carleton, please note.”