

Yoga Based Body Psychotherapy: A Yoga Based and Body Centered Approach to Counseling Livia Shapiro

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Abstract

This paper presents Yoga Based Body Psychotherapy, a five-stage approach to counseling high-functioning adult clients. This approach utilizes yoga postures and developmental movement patterning to assess, identify and support the processes of growth and change in clients by expanding their developmental edge. Yoga Based Body Psychotherapy pairs yoga principles called the Universal Principles of Alignment with the developmental movement pattern known as the Five Fundamental Actions, within a framework for counseling called the Interaction Cycle. The aim of this approach is twofold: to overtly bring yoga postures into the context of body psychotherapy to support further development of body-centered ways of counseling, and to afford a new lens for the practice of yoga postures by making their inherently therapeutic nature overt in the context of a psychotherapy session so that eliciting emotional material becomes a potentially viable content for healing, growth and change. A brief review of the literature covering yoga therapy, yoga in psychotherapy and yoga in body psychotherapy is offered with outlines of the Universal Principles of Alignment, the Five Fundamental Actions and the Interaction Cycle. Yoga Based Body Psychotherapy is then explicated and examples for application are provided. Further considerations exploring where this approach might go in the future and limitations conclude this paper.

Keywords: yoga, developmental movement, Five Fundamental Actions, Interaction Cycle, Universal Principles of Alignment

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This paper presents Yoga Based Body Psychotherapy, a pairing of yoga principles called the Universal Principles of Alignment (Friend, 2008), and a developmental movement sequence called the Five Fundamental Actions (Aposhyan, 1999). The aim of Yoga Based Body Psychotherapy is to support growth and change in clients using this pairing in combination with Susan Aposhyan's framework, known in body psychotherapy as the Interaction Cycle. Yoga Based Body Psychotherapy uses yoga postures paired with natural movement patterning to observe, identify, and support the process of change in psychotherapy. While yoga asana practice is not psychotherapy, it has been shown to be inherently therapeutic (Milligan, 2006). Yoga practiced as a routine over time seems to facilitate not only a physical adeptness, but also a mind-body connection in which awareness of one's subtle body and energetic movements is felt, fostered, and understood (Lohman, 1999). Similar to yoga practice, the Five Fundamental Actions as understood by Aposhyan may not be overtly psychotherapeutic but, when presented as stages of human development with an inherently therapeutic nature, may be considered

helpful to one's psychosocial- and spiritual growth. Yoga Based Body Psychotherapy makes the inherent process of emotional and psychological awareness encouraged in the practice of yoga overt within the context of the psychotherapeutic container by utilizing yoga postures paired with the psychotherapeutic support from the Five Fundamental Actions and the Interaction Cycle.

Body psychotherapies use a broad spectrum of movement-based and body-centered techniques to assess and treat psychological distress and support the process of change and transformation. The pairing of the organic movements of developmental life and the controlled movements of yoga postures inside the safety of the relationship of therapist and client provides a strong framework for holistic healing at the levels of body, mind and spirit.

The Five Fundamental Actions is a developmental motor sequence derived from studies of early motor development in humans and the evolutionary origins of movement. The sequence, Yield, Push, Reach, Grasp, Pull, demonstrates how human beings learn to engage with the world through giving and receiving in satisfying ways (Aposhyan, 1999). Aposhyan's work in this area is strongly influenced by Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen's work, which is known as Body Mind Centering. Aposhyan has further developed Body Mind Centering into a psychotherapeutic application with the Five Fundamental Actions in the Interaction Cycle (Aposhyan, 2004). The psychotherapeutic application of developmental movement patterning has also been pioneered by Ruella Frank, whose work, encapsulated in six fundamental movements, utilizes early motor patterning within the framework of Gestalt therapy as a form of body psychotherapy (Frank, 2001).

The Interaction Cycle is a psychotherapeutic exploration of the relationship of early motor patterning and an individual's relationship with what they want, the goals they are interested in developing in psychotherapy and in their lives. The Interaction Cycle contextualizes a client's progress in an individual psychotherapy session as well as the path of psychotherapeutic work over time. Four steps comprise the Interaction Cycle; Embodiment, Desire, Awareness and Feedback, and Process (Aposhyan, 2004). These four steps are similar to the progression of the Universal Principles of Alignment (Friend, 1998) in providing the sequence to construct a yoga posture, organize the progression of a yoga class and in how a yoga teacher might provide feedback or adjust a yoga posture. Yoga Based Body Psychotherapy pairs the Five Fundamental Actions with the Universal Principles of Alignment within the framework of the Interaction Cycle.

The practice of yoga postures known as Hatha Yoga is a physical discipline that creates friction and heat in the body and the mind through increasing awareness and physical capacity. Yoga is a Sanskrit term from the root "yuj" literally meaning "to yoke" or "to unite". Hatha means "to strike", as in striking a match. The practice of yoga postures literally creates union through friction as the muscles and bones work together and in opposing directions (Iyengar, 1989). B.K.S. Iyengar, one of the foremost practitioners, scholars and teachers of yoga who facilitated Hatha yoga's development in the west, describes yoga as "the union of the soul with the Universal Spirit". He goes on to say that despite this seemingly abstract notion, "the science of yoga helps us to keep the body as a temple...Yogic practices help to develop the body to the level of the vibrant mind, so that the body and the mind, having both become vibrant, are drawn towards the light of the soul" (Iyengar, 3). John Friend, who capitalized on principles of movement common to the understanding of yoga postures, and developed a succinct style of yoga known for its anatomical principles and emotional process, founded Anusara Yoga, a style of Hatha yoga (Friend, 1998).

Hatha yoga has historically focused on controlling and in many ways manipulating one's body and breath into shapes and forms based on energetic lines in the body (Walsh, 2007). Yoga as a discipline utilizes controlled movements, often restrictive in nature, to create the union or joining alluded to in its definition. Body psychotherapy supports natural organic movement by privileging the inherent intelligence of the body. Yoga derives its benefit in part from the client trying on the shape of the posture and receiving its benefits whereas, on the other hand, natural movement patterning derives its benefit from the process of the client experiencing their movement as it sequences through their body. Psychotherapy clients often come to therapy with impairment in their capacities to express themselves or experience their world. Therefore the intention of pairing yoga with the Five Fundamental Actions in the framework of body psychotherapy's Interaction Cycle is to offer the possibility that sequencing organic movement processes inside the structure and boundaries inherent in yoga postures may lead to a satisfying relationship with expression, motivation, giving and receiving. Natural movement sequencing may facilitate a sense of spontaneity, a natural expression, and a quality of freedom. Yoga postures can facilitate a sense of boundary and containment, supportive for exploring new relational and behavioral options safely. The practice of yoga in the psychotherapeutic context gives clients more intentional options to explore their body in motion and track how doing so affects their sense of self. The Interaction Cycle in combination with yoga postures also allows for the witnessing attention of the therapist, which supports the client's ability to eventually witness themselves and heal core emotional wounds, a phenomenon that does not occur overtly in yoga posture practice alone.

Yoga Therapy

Yoga Therapy is defined by the International Association of Yoga Therapists as "the process of empowering individuals to progress toward improved health and wellbeing through the application of the philosophy and practice of Yoga". This model asserts that Yoga stands on its own as a therapeutic modality for physical and psychological issues. Yoga Therapy uses yoga postures as well as the theory of Ayurveda, the science of yoga and subtle anatomy, to alleviate physical and psychological symptoms (Iyengar, 1989). The current literature on Yoga Therapy focuses on the use of yoga for physical and psychological conditions including back pain, heart disease, anxiety, depression, and eating disorders. In these cases, a protocol of yoga postures is often prescribed along with breathing techniques and meditation in combination with postures (Shapiro, 2007; Walsh, 2008; Vera, 2009). The idea is that an inclusive yoga practice will on its own be therapeutic and healing for the discomfort the client is experiencing.

Yoga in Psychotherapy

Yoga has a growing presence in the literature as a potentially viable intervention due to its capacity to increase mind-body awareness. In 1970, Fisher proposed that one's perception of their body strongly influenced their life (Fisher, 1970). Clance and Mitchell showed in 1980 that body awareness in children and positive body image were increased through yoga practice (Clance & Mitchell, 1980). A study in 2007 found that yoga has potential as a complimentary treatment for depressed patients taking anti-depressants (Shapiro, Cook, Davydov, Ottaviani, Luchter, & Abrams 2007). In 2008 a study by Fernros, Furhoff, and Wandell illustrated the benefits in overall health of mind-body therapies including body movement, breath therapy, guided imagery, and mindfulness meditation (Fernros, Furhoff, Wandell, 2008). These studies

seem to support the notion that yoga practice is indeed therapeutic. Turner and Turner in 2010 indicated that yoga practice is beneficial to mental health in its reduction of anxiety and depression via self-report measures, and indicated its effectiveness in easing anxiety and stress which in turn impact other mental and physical health problems (Turner & Turner, 2010).

Research also shows the benefits of yoga in creating an experience of mindfulness for both the clinician and the client (Davis, Daphne M. & Hayes, Jeffrey, A., 2011). Mindfulness as healing and therapeutic especially in combination with medical treatment and psychotherapy was made popular through the Mindfulness Meditation movement and Jon Kabat-Zinn (Kabat-Zinn, 1996). Currently there is research illustrating that yoga and meditation support practitioners in their own self-care regimens to avoid burnout and fatigue. Several studies point toward the benefits of psychotherapists' utilization of mindfulness-based stress reduction, yoga, and meditative disciplines to mitigate the stress impacts of being in the healthcare field (Shapiro, Astin, Bishop & Cordova, 2005; Bruce, Manber, Shapiro & Constantino, 2010; Davis & Hayes, 2010; Walsh & Shapiro, 2006; Christopher & Maris, 2010).

Yoga in Body Psychotherapy

Little research exists on the pairing of Hatha yoga practice and body psychotherapy specifically, perhaps because yoga is often considered to be its own body-centered technique. The literature on using yoga-based interventions in the context of psychotherapy primarily focuses on the application of Iyengar yoga, an alignment-oriented style of Hatha yoga (Brammer & Ingram, 2010; Monk, Elizabeth & Turner, Charlie, 2010; Khumar, Kaur & Kaur, 1993). One of the applied programs offered through Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen's School for Body-Mind Centering directly pairs yoga posture practice with the principles of Body-Mind Centering. In this approach, yoga practice as well as anatomy study are explored through the lens of "...how the body systems and developmental movement patterns support and initiate movement" (Bainbridge Cohen, 2008, p. 193). This approach does not designate itself as a psychotherapeutic application or intervention, but it does describe how to practice yoga postures in a gentle organic process supported by evolutionary movement and the systems of the body, rather than in the classical restrictive style.

Five Fundamental Actions

Susan Aposhyan explains in *Body-Mind Psychotherapy* (2004) that in order to have a satisfying relationship with need, want, expression, giving and receiving, one must develop a relationship with the Five Fundamental Actions: Yield, Push, Reach, Grasp, Pull. There are myriad ways these essential actions might become truncated, such as trauma, early attachment wounding, or life situations in which one learns maladaptive ways to meet their needs in the world. They are progressive, each action building upon the one before (Aposhyan, 1999). Each action has both a physical movement and a psychological quality that supports simultaneous growth of the physical capacity of the body and the social-emotional growth of the whole being.

Yield, the first action, refers to a dynamic pulsation in the body, a relaxed state without collapse. One is in contact with the ground that supports them as well as their internal, fluid state of wakefulness. Yield is full of engagement, marked by alertness and openness to receive impulses. Yield relaxes one's body and nervous system and is thought to be the state in which as a baby, one rested in the womb. Receiving support in a relaxed but alert way, with awareness, is the primary goal of Yield. (Aposhyan, 1999).

The second action, Push, organizes the muscles of the body toward movement and often reflects the client's orientation toward their motivating source. The action of the body is to press down into the ground, which rebounds as a counter-push rising up the spine, providing tone in the body. The muscles of the body create tone and support dynamic oscillation between the extremities and the core of the body. It is initiatory as well as organizing and provides the backdrop for going out and taking action in the world (Aposhyan, 1999).

Push makes the body toned, alert and strong enough for the third action, Reach. In Reach, one extends out toward a stimulus with the tone created from Push. Reach is about moving toward what one wants and acting on what one knows to be true. Reach extends from the core of the body out to the extremities (Aposhyan, 1990). It provides the capacity for one to extend oneself beyond one's personal kinesphere into one's interpersonal field where there is potential for interconnectedness.

Once Reach has extended thoroughly to grab hold of the stimulus, the fourth action, Grasp, follows. Grasp is the stage in which one takes hold of what one wants. This action facilitates one's capacity to hold onto and take in what one wants. This action requires one to grab hold of one's desired stimulus with their endpoints such as hands or feet. To Grasp is to risk engaging with the outside world and take the world in toward oneself. Through this action, one learns one can take hold of what one wants or needs (Aposhyan, 1990).

Grasp is followed by the action, Pull, in which the desired stimulus is pulled into one's personal kinesphere. Pull is how one's needs and desires ultimately get met with one's own effort. It helps to facilitate the dynamic relationship between self and the world outside as dynamic and co-participatory. Pull brings the outside world into one's personal world out of choice (Aposhyan, 1999). It is how one learns one is capable of getting what one wants with effort, strength, and will power.

Interaction Cycle

The Interaction Cycle is "a four-step cycle that joins both clients' and therapists' awareness of how clients' developmental processes are manifesting in the clients' bodies at a particular moment" (Aposhyan, 2004, p. 86). The four steps of the Interaction Cycle are Embodiment, Desire, Awareness and Feedback, and Process. The psychotherapeutic focus of the Interaction Cycle is a client's developmental edge, which Aposhyan explains as "the border between our strengths and our challenges... identified as a place in the body, or more behaviorally as the limit of our current abilities, or as the distinction between behaviors that are mastered and behaviors that are untried" (Aposhyan, 2004, p. 86). The experience of the developmental edge happens quite naturally in the practice of yoga postures. The shapes of the postures lend themselves to understanding one's physical limits and boundaries. They challenge one's bodily range of motion and flexibility and highlight growing edges in internal and external movement awareness and boundaries. The Interaction Cycle in combination with the Five Fundamental Actions explores a client's developmental edge by asking questions around motivation, desire, giving and receiving in the world. "What does the client want? How and where is she or he motivated? What is alive?" (2004, 1999, 87-8).

The first step, Embodiment, focuses on therapists' grounded relationship to themselves as cultivated through self-awareness and presence. The fullness of the therapists' aliveness and presence creates the ground for spontaneity and creativity in the session. It is the root of a healing psychotherapeutic environment. A steady yoga practice, as the literature mentioned

above illustrates, facilitates the therapist's Embodiment. The client focuses on increasing awareness within the session by noticing and identifying sensations or taking deep breaths (Aposhyan, 2004). This kind of centering in awareness may look similar to the beginning of a yoga session.

The second step, Desire, focuses on understanding the client's wants and motivations. When a client identifies his/her desire, he/she accesses understanding of his/her Developmental Edge. As a client builds his/her sense of embodiment, he/she learns where he/she is in space and in reference to him/herself. As he/she understands his/her desire or motivation, he/she begins to understand his/her relationship to that desire. Aposhyan notes that when a client identifies his/her desire and motivation, his/her vulnerability increases as he/she comes to see how realistic it is, or how long it has been buried inside him/her, or the reasons around what is limiting him/her (Aposhyan, 2004).

The third step, Awareness and Feedback, focuses on making the client's identified desire into a bodily-understood reality. The interventions used to explore where and how desire appears in the body or moves within the body are broad. Feedback is offered in Awareness and Feedback by the therapist as an open-ended question, a focused question, within a menu of options, through being descriptive, or by offering an interpretation (Aposhyan, 2004). This kind of feedback can be utilized not only for organic natural movement sequences but also for the practice of yoga postures in session. Yoga Based Body Psychotherapy contributes yoga postures specific to each action and step to fully explore how a certain desire feels in one's body by practicing a posture that illuminates the developing edge. This may offer understanding of where a client is in relationship to his/her desire and his/her developmental edge at a somatic level.

The fourth step, Process, asks the client to stay with the awareness and sensations of his/her physical and emotional process with the help of the therapist. The client is supported by gentle structure from the therapist in guiding his/her emerging experience. The therapist supports the movement in the client's body to express fully through his/her endpoints, mouth, hands, heart, pelvis and feet, so that a complete sequence of movement is experienced. This is facilitated through gentle feedback and suggestions as the client moves (Aposhyan, 2004). In so doing, the client meets his/her Developmental Edge, where patterned ways of moving expand toward a new range of motion and emotion, physiologically and psychologically.

Universal Principles of Alignment

The Universal Principles of Alignment (Friend, 2008), encapsulated in Anusara Yoga have deep roots in Iyengar yoga. Each of these principles has a physical expression as an action in the body that helps to organize both the outer construction of each yoga posture as well as create a psychological or emotional effect inside the body and experience of the yoga posture (Friend, 2008). The Universal Principles of Alignment act much like the Five Fundamental Actions in that they are a developmental sequence of movement patterns. They are: Open to Grace, Muscle Energy, Inner Spiral, Outer Spiral, and Organic Energy.

As a result of being in physical bodies, Anusara principles posit, human beings arrive in their bodies and minds already contracted, or prohibited in movement and self-awareness. In addition, it is assumed that one may have already experienced trauma that hinders not only the actual movement required of yoga postures, but the capacity to fully experience one's life. The universal Principles of Alignment, then, are designed to support liberation, integration,

transformation and experience of living into one's fullest potential. Toward that goal, Open to Grace is the first stage of opening and grounding. During Open To Grace, one softens one's skin, feels the weight of one's bones and releases tension in one's musculoskeletal system (Friend, 2008). This is intended to be physically settling and deactivating for the nervous system. It creates a space in which to practice yoga that is open yet alert and welcoming of possibility, change and growth. Open to Grace is about receiving, being and allowing for support as a human being in the world. It shows up as the quality with which one is present, felt energetically as well as seen visibly in the one's posture when there is ease and comfort emanating from it.

Muscle Energy is the second stage, centered on gathering strength and power physically, energetically and emotionally. From the rooted, grounded and open place of Open to Grace comes steady muscle power that creates the organization toward action in the body. Muscle Energy gives power and purpose not only to the muscles and bones but also to one's mind and emotions (Friend, 2008). Feelings of an internal locus of control are increased as one literally engages oneself into action to produce a result. Self-chosen action yields the psychological benefit of willpower, purpose and strength. One's body literally becomes stronger and more integrated as one's muscles engage and pull in from one's endpoints to one's core. The stability of the bones and muscles afford a sense of containment and inner stability for the mind and emotions.

The third stage, Inner Spiral, widens the body from the center outward. It begins at the feet and rises up the legs and torso, expanding the width of the body in a side-to-side broadening action (Friend, 2008). Inner Spiral moves one's thighs backwards and turns one's inner thighs slightly inward and wide to counteract the very common over-external leg rotation that human beings develop by walking. Inner Spiral creates a sense of deepening, a sense of accommodation, a sense of width and breadth from the inside out. The rooting of the thighs backward into one's body facilitates the alignment of the psoas muscles as well, which tends to calm the nervous system (Friend, 2008). There is also a sense of receptivity, sensuality and access to creativity associated with this phase. Inner Spiral is connected to both one's creative nature in the world and learning how to accommodate oneself and others.

The fourth stage, Outer Spiral, energetically moves from one's waistline down the body to one's feet, countering and complimenting Inner Spiral. The waistline contracts, the lower belly lifts, the tailbone lengthens, and a tone to the curve in the spine is created (Friend, 2008). The energy of one's body is directed down and out as one's whole body tones, preparing for outward directionality or extension. Outer Spiral increases one's sense of purpose and determination, facilitates willpower and supports decision-making. It allows one to root not only into the power of one's own effort, but into one's own knowing—into one's desires and unique ways of being. Outer Spiral sets the stage for differentiating and becoming oneself in the world.

Organic Energy is the final Universal Principle of Alignment. The bones of one's body extend fully in dynamic balance from the core out through peripheral extremities and endpoints such as the hands, feet, head and tailbone (Friend, 2008). Organic Energy fosters a sense of being oneself in the world without pretense or apology. Organic Energy is intended to be a satisfying completion to the yoga posture, as well as to afford awareness and the opportunity for one to make an offering from oneself out into one's world. Outer Spiral turns the yoga posture into an emanation—a non-verbal gesture of internal experience.

Yoga Based Body Psychotherapy

Yoga Based Body Psychotherapy utilizes a series of five stages, *Sense, Initiate, Form, Experience* and *Receive*, conceptualized within the broad framework of the Interaction Cycle. Although these stages fit together sequentially and can resolve in the course of one session, each stage may also be practiced individually. A therapist may spend entire sessions in one stage, and the arc of therapy may also be viewed as following the sequence over time.

Sense

Sense centralizes on active receptivity within both client and therapist. This stage combines Open to Grace and Yielding in the context of a psychotherapy session that utilizes yoga. Much like the step of Embodiment, *Sense* is the initial stage of a session, of assessment, and of any intervention and of the arc of therapy. The therapist is first highly spacious in order to receive the client and is open to the experience of both the client and themselves. In *Sense*, the therapist helps the client ground by being present in his or her own body. *Sense* is not only the stage in which the client and therapist attune to one another; it is the stage in which clients first attune to themselves. The client is encouraged in *Sense* to feel his/her skin and notice his/her breathing, allowing him/herself to arrive in his/her body. This is similar to the beginning of most yoga sessions as well as the first moment in which a yoga posture is practiced.

Initiate

The second stage, *Initiate*, further supports embodiment and creates containment in the therapeutic relationship, the therapy session, and in the client. *Initiate* joins Muscle Energy and Push and is the way in which a client's body orients to engage his/her muscles and bones to make the shape of a yoga posture. *Initiate* is felt in the body through cultivating proper tone of the muscles. Ideally the muscles are toned, not too tight, not too loose, in order to support the body to create specific actions needed to do the yoga postures and basic actions. *Initiate* also sets a sense of boundaries between therapist and client, which cultivates a safe and productive therapeutic relationship. This stage is the preparatory place for a client to begin exploring his/her wants and motivations, like with the step of *Desire*. *Initiate* introduces the notion of developmental edge. It is the place and space in which a client begins to see where he/she is inside him/herself and what he/she wants in relationship to his/her world.

Form

The third stage, *Form*, combines Inner Spiral and Reach within the context of deciphering the client's *Desire*. This stage marks where the therapist gathers information from the client as the session progresses. In essence, the therapist reaches toward the client, while the client reaches into himself or herself. As experience is shared, emotions may begin to expand. It is here that potential core material might be accessed as the foundation of grounding and safe boundaries have already been set. In this way, there is a reaching or stretching into experience and emotion as well as an extension into the therapeutic relationship.

Experience

The fourth stage, *Experience*, pairs Outer Spiral and Grasp in the context of Awareness and Feedback. A decisive quality characterizes *Experience* in which the client and therapist co-participate in defining viable content, goals and motivations for therapeutic work. The session

has a certain momentum and the therapist and client are in co-creation. In the body, *Experience* is a toning and integrating of the body much like *Initiate*, except now with a greater directional quality of either outward or inward direction through the endpoints (mouth, hands, heart, pelvis, feet) of the client's body. This helps to root the tailbone toward empowered action when doing a yoga posture or basic action. *Experience* supports resting into a yoga posture and the immediate experience. This stage tests the client's capacity to stay with what is happening, to stay with the posture, to collect new information regarding the immediate experience and to navigate the developmental edge. A focused attention on delineating experience, clarifying experience, and working through experience is present in this stage.

Receive

The fifth stage, *Receive*, pairs Organic Energy and Pull inside the framework of Process. Like the Process step of the Interaction Cycle, *Receive* in Yoga Based Body Psychotherapy focuses on the integration of psychotherapeutic material, experience, and awareness. *Receive* denotes how the awareness and witness of the client supports their own insight. This awareness can come via feedback from the therapist, or through the client's experience of their own practice of yoga postures and basic actions. The equal giving and receiving of dynamic action in a yoga posture mirrors the dynamic understanding of oneself in relationship to self and other. The sustained effort required in a yoga posture helps a client learn how to stay in his/her emotional experience. Integration and insight are often visible in a yoga posture when the posture itself becomes a kind of offering, infused with the client's emotional content.

Application

The following application includes brief case examples with general themes and clinical issues tending to occur in high-functioning adult clients. Specific yoga postures are outlined for use with these clients in each stage of Yoga Based Body Psychotherapy and their relationship to the Interaction Cycle as a psychotherapeutic approach.

Sense

Deepening one's embodiment is the ground from which desire and motivation can be felt, identified and understood—this is the main psychotherapeutic theme of *Sense*. This stage asks, "Can I settle into this moment? How do I feel in this moment?" As the literature of mindfulness indicates, grounding and embodiment techniques are therapeutic and support the context of psychotherapy. *Sense* is the ultimate example of Yield as it stands in the Five Fundamental Actions as both client and therapist feel the present moment inside themselves and between each other. This is how the session itself begins to develop its embodiment.

Sense can be practiced in both active and passive postures. "Xavier appeared more passive in his stance with a dominant parasympathetic nervous system response. I practiced *Sense* in a mobilized active way with Xavier to help him learn that *Sense* is not a collapse or abdication of the inner or outer structures of their body. Rather, a dynamic aliveness inside yields receptiveness and wakefulness outside. Using dynamic standing postures including lunges and symmetrical standing poses seemed to provide an understanding of *Sense* as active." These poses require the client to practice staying present and engaged in their body and yet relaxed and easeful in their feet. "Yamit appeared rigid and in her sympathetic nervous system. I utilized postures requiring settling in a passive manner to afford health. Supine postures requiring Yamit's legs

to be active granted understanding of softening into the support of the ground." Without this kind of grounding and support, the client may be too loose in his/her body to create strong activation of the muscles or over-grip when they engage their muscles.

Initiate

Initiate asks, "Where am I in relation to myself and to others?" *Initiate* is the beginning of identifying the client's desire as it helps cultivate the container for him/her to safely identify and work toward what motivates them. Practicing Muscle Energy and Push through yoga postures as a means to identify self and self in relationship to other affords a greater embodied understanding of boundaries and begins to delineate developmental edge at its most basic source. This physically creates the container for knowing clearly what the client desires.

When working with high-functioning adults, one of the key goals in therapy often is exploring their Developmental Edge regarding differentiation. Clients working on this goal are often learning how to have productive and positive relationships with both self and other. The high-functioning adult client can ascertain the right amount of engagement in their body necessary for a yoga posture by engaging Muscle Energy or practicing the basic action Push. This can cultivate the understanding of how much engagement they might need in relationship. "Alan has a tendency to fuse with others. I used asymmetrical standing postures to support an understanding of the muscular engagement and self-assertion needed in different degrees. In these postures Alan's legs work together, but not in the same amount. Thus the complexity of action mirrors the holding of multiple perspectives in life. Alan also has difficulty engaging his muscles and pushing through his legs, as observed in his postures thus far. I utilized single-leg balancing postures to build strength, and asymmetrical standing poses to foster how he could potentially engage himself. I found progress in Alan's process of differentiation and cultivation of sense of self in practicing these postures."

Form

Form asks, "What do I want and how am I in relationship to it?" Here the client clearly identifies his/her desire or motivation and begins to understand his/her developmental edge in relationship to that desire. In the high-functioning adult working on relationships, the client may want a healthier relationship with his/her partner. The use of yoga postures in *Form* are intended to help the client embody the identification of his/her desire by helping him/her open the body from the inside out and construct the yoga posture into its basic form. "I supported Beth in doing her yoga postures with openness in order to facilitate the realization of the depth of fusion Beth has with her partner. Beth reported that her relationship to her yoga postures is similar to the way she relates to her partner."

Postures where the client's legs are wide and their hips can move freely allow natural opening in the pelvis and legs and are relatively simple in construction. Wide-legged symmetrical standing postures and wide-legged seated postures require the maintenance of this kind of opening. These postures also require actions similar to Inner Spiral in which their thighs are moving back and wide, their low back is deepening into its curve and their waist line is expanding laterally as well as moving backward. This expansion is similar to Reach and can broaden a client's awareness and surface emotional content. Widening the back of the body, such as in forward bends, can lend an understanding similar to Reach in which the client is extending out from his/her center into his/her world. Inviting clients to practice this quality of reaching from the inside out to extend themselves is beneficial not only for stretching their body in the yoga posture; it yields the capacity to access *Form* in life, which may be as simple as allowing themselves to have a desire at all.

Experience

This stage asks, “Where am I in relationship to my desire?” Postures accessing movement of the client’s tailbone facilitate *Experience* and teaching a client to stand up for what it is that motivates him/her even when challenged by the outer shape of a posture or life. As the client executes a posture, he/she comes to find how close or far away he/she is from his/her desire or goal.

Often in back bending, for example, if the tailbone is not extended down toward the feet, the lower back will compress and cause pain, serving as immediate feedback that there is misalignment. Rooting through one’s tailbone in an active and decisive way cultivates inner strength, presence, and sense of self. “*Wendy has little self-identity. I have observed Wendy do her backbends in such a way that her low back is exploited in over flexibility and accommodation. I find this similar to an underdeveloped Grasp in the Five Fundamental Actions. We worked on developing appropriate tailbone action so the backbends became an expression and experience of Wendy’s sense of self rather than an abandonment of herself. This seemed to teach Wendy that she can be in relationship to self and other simultaneously.*” The backbends also open the heart region, often stimulating emotional release as well as bringing up fear, which is similar to the emotional component inherent in Grasp and Outer Spiral.

Receiving

Receive asks, “Can I be fully in relationship with my desire? Can my desire be met?” The way a posture is executed increases or decreases the capacity of *Receive* both in a yoga pose and in life. *Receive* is increased when attention is brought to the endpoints of hands, fingers, feet, toes, mouth and pelvis. It is where the developmental edge is tested and expanded. The discomfort it takes to hold a posture is the discomfort it takes to stretch into new kinds of movement patterns in one’s body and new ways of being in relationship in the world. Coaching a client to do a yoga posture and point his/her fingers in a clear line from shoulder, through arm, to wrist, and out supports extending more energy through the arm and creates an opportunity for the expression of energy to move in a way that is more satisfying and fluid.

With high-functioning adults, it may be that in sustaining the posture they come to realize how vital their needs in relationship to their partner actually are. “*I observed Carry’s hands and feet limp as she extends her arms and legs in her postures. I wondered if this could indicate a lack of fully sequenced embodiment in Carry’s identified desire within therapy. This seems to be her developmental edge. I invited Carry to explore extending and expressing herself fully through her endpoints in her postures. This appeared to engage the rest of her limbs more fully. I observed movement and Carry’s emotion fully sequence through her whole system.*” This kind of full extension and expression potentially create radical change in how the client experiences him/herself in relationship to his/her desire to be in a healthy relationship. The client is essentially expanding his/her developmental edge, just like Organic Energy offers the final expression of a yoga posture. *Receive* has an energetic quality of satisfaction found in Pull and in Organic energy that can be noted in the full expression of hands and feet, fingers and toes and the quality of the expression on the client’s face. The full completion of this stage moves right back into another wave of *Sense*—whether it is in another yoga posture, or another session altogether.

Further Considerations and Limitations

Yoga Based Body Psychotherapy is simple in its following of a developmental order like natural movement patterning, and is complex in that the therapist must learn which yoga

postures lend themselves to particular stages. In this way the clinician requires training in both body psychotherapy and yoga. This kind of training may not necessarily require the same skills needed for one to teach yoga. A skill set including the appropriateness of various yoga poses as applied to the understanding of natural movement patterning is necessary. The clinician should also be able to assess movement patterns by observing a client move in yoga postures as well as be able to articulate feedback.

The application provided in this paper is based on the high-functioning client. This is not to say Yoga Based Body Psychotherapy is inappropriate for clients in extreme states such as psychosis, experiencing active symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, or severe characterological issues. However, the method might look different in that it would most likely move more slowly over the course of therapy.

The movements required to execute yoga postures will perhaps easily activate clients with severe trauma. Thus the majority of time will most likely be spent in the earlier phases of the sequence. Touch may also be challenging for some of these clients, meaning that verbal feedback would be the primary mirroring capacity for the therapist to offer the client. Furthermore, Yoga Based Body Psychotherapy is somewhat dependent on the capacity for the individual client to grow in his/her witness capacity. There may be other methods of psychotherapy that involve mindfulness techniques better-suited to facilitating the growth of a healthy witness function in clients experiencing extreme states.

Conclusion

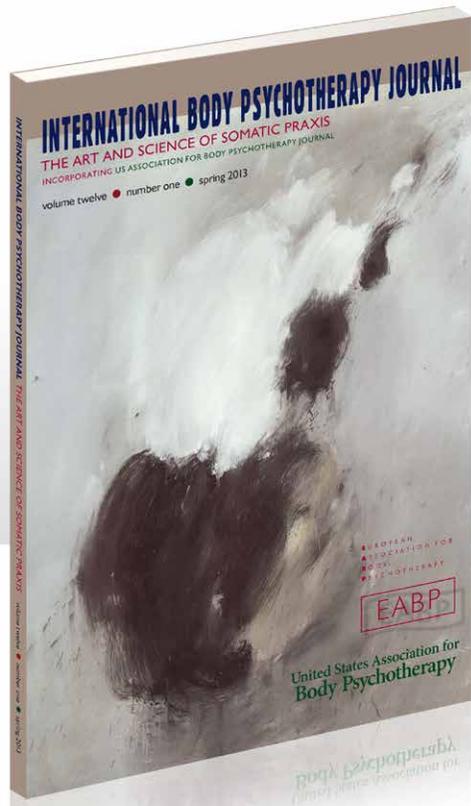
The teachings and practice of Hatha yoga, though ancient in many ways, in their modern configuration play a significant role in the development of mind-body holism and understanding. Similarly, body psychotherapy is pioneering new concepts and interventions for the assessment and treatment of psychological distress. There is ample opportunity in the marriage of natural movement patterning as understood by body psychotherapy and Hatha yoga practice as understood by skilled teachers and scholars to support change and transformation. The pairing within the psychotherapeutic approach of the Interaction Cycle invites more organicity into the highly structured nature of yoga practice so that it can be in service to healing psychological distress in an authentic, natural way. Introducing yoga postures overtly into the psychotherapeutic context provides body psychotherapy with another mode of movement analysis and structural intervention to explore with clients, thus broadening the scope of the field. This paper is part of a rich and growing conversation in which both yoga and body psychotherapy are contributing to and expanding the ways we conceptualize health and disease in modern times.

BIOGRAPHY

Livia Shapiro is graduating from Naropa University in May of 2013 with a master’s degree in Somatic Counseling Psychology. She has extensive training in Hatha Yoga and has been teaching yoga since 2004. She works primarily teaching yoga and providing educational programs for yoga teachers about important elements of body psychotherapy to improve their teaching skills and support their continual emerging processes. Christine Caldwell and Leah D’Abate from Naropa University supported the writing of this paper. Email: lgsyoga@gmail.com Website: www.ecstaticunfoldment.com.

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