

## INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH

# Belonging to Earth

### *Body Psychotherapy, the Seasonal Attunement Model, and Reclaiming Our Wild*

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#### ABSTRACT

In this paper, I determine how body psychotherapists can support clients' recognition of belonging to the natural world to support greater resilience and healing. The research begins by determining what multidisciplinary fields are saying about the importance of the relationship between humans and Earth. It then researches approaches from body psychotherapy that support resilience and healing, and highlights ways this overlaps with the research from multidisciplinary fields.

From here, the Seasonal Attunement model was created. A case study shows the Seasonal Attunement model supporting a client in reclaiming her anger and the potential this suggests for bigger societal change. This leads to a discussion of possible implications of this research for the field of body psychotherapy, including why supporting clients' relationship to the natural world is imperative for well-being.

**Keywords:** the natural world, Earth, body psychotherapy

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*Our bodies are not separate  
from the greater bodies  
that we live, cohabitate, and die in.*

In this paper, I determine how body psychotherapists can support client recognition of belonging to the natural world to support greater resilience and healing. In the past decade, we have seen an increase in studies of the nervous system. This has contributed to how body psychotherapists work with trauma, resilience, and healing. The field largely focuses on techniques *the individual* can do to regulate their nervous system. During a training, Anna Chitty, craniosacral and Somatic Experiencing expert, asked the class – other than the individual, “what regulates the nervous system?” (2021). This led me to wonder – *how can recognition of our belonging to Earth support resilience and healing in the counseling relationship?* Recognizing our belonging – to not only ourselves and each other – but our belonging to the natural world is essential to our well-being.

This topic has been adequately researched by many peoples throughout recorded history. However, body psychotherapy rarely includes the natural world in its approaches or research. Two days after I completed this paper I heard Jeanine Canty, author of *Returning the Self To Nature*, speak at Naropa University (2023). I was humbled when she named core principles in ecopsychology and deep ecology that overlap with what I write about in this paper. This highlights a need for increased interdisciplinary conversation.

As counselors, we walk alongside clients in their quest for greater wellbeing. As body psychotherapists, we work closely with the body and the nervous system to do so. Sessions often include clients identifying resources that support nervous system regulation, increase emotional regulation skills and support trauma to sequence through the body. Raising clients' awareness of their belonging to the natural world may increase the resources available in sessions. This promotes resilience and healing.

My hope is that this paper sparks interdisciplinary conversation between body psychotherapists and wisdom holders in other fields. This paper does not begin to cover the depth of wisdom and research that centers humans belonging to Earth. As a white, U.S. citizen and CIS-woman, I occupy many privileged identities. I am dedicated to listening to different voices in the field and learning how to incorporate clients belonging to Earth in a way that is congruent, appreciative, non-appropriative, and meets clients in their identities.

There are three key terms in this paper. First, *the natural world*, which includes the physical environment, living organisms and nonliving components such as air, minerals and rocks (Macy & Brown, 2014). It includes both saturated city streets and undeveloped land. While the form may shift, the natural world is always present. Second, *Earth*, which is used interchangeably with the natural world. Third, *body psychotherapy*, which "is the study of the relationship between our body sensations, thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. Somatic approaches are guided by the viewpoint that what we are thinking becomes a feeling in the body—and similarly, the ways in which we move and breathe impact our thoughts and emotions (Schwartz, 2021, p. 97).

This paper: 1) presents research on what experts across fields are saying about the necessity of including clients' belonging to the natural world, 2) determines key principles of resilience and healing from a body psychotherapy perspective 3) provides counselors with the *Seasonal Attunement Model*, 4) presents a case study showing the application of the model to support a client in reclaiming anger, and 5) discusses important implications of this research for the field of body psychotherapy and for the world at large.

## 1 Research

### What Benefits Occur From Recognizing Our Inseparability With The Natural World?

The inseparability of humans from the natural world has been extensively researched for centuries. Experts of the medicine wheel, ayurveda, celtic healing, and Chinese medicine, just to name a few, speak extensively about this relationship. Many of these systems use a four or five quadrant model to classify different elements, seasons, emotions, herbs, medicines, physical, spiritual, emotional themes and so much more (Bear & Wind, 2006; Plotkins, 2008; Matthews, 1989). This suggests a shared belief between modalities that incorporating relationship to the natural world supports client well-being.

The research for this paper focuses on Chinese medicine, ecopsychology and interdisciplinary case studies. Chinese medicine offers a unique perspective because of its extensive application and centuries of research. Ecopsychology offers a unique perspective because it weaves Earth based connection into a Western counseling model. Interdisciplinary studies offer a unique perspective because of its diversity of voices and case studies. By bringing in these three approaches, the research provides an opportunity to notice similarities and differences across modalities.

I hope the reader will notice places of overlap and places of difference with their own orientations. The archetypal nature of this research question means that we each know something important about this topic through our lived experience. I invite the reader to use their first-hand experience to amplify this conversation.

## Chinese Medicine

Chinese Medicine dates back 3,000 years with the earliest writings from the 11<sup>th</sup> century during the Shang Dynasty (Freed, 2021). In *Between heaven and earth: A guide to Chinese medicine* (1992), authors Beinfield & Korngold speak extensively to the theory and application of Chinese medicine. This will be the primary source used for understanding core principles in Chinese medicine.

One core tenant in Chinese medicine is that humans are “a microcosm of the universe that surrounds them, suffused with the same primeval forces that motivated the macrocosm” and are “part of one unbroken wholeness, called Tao, a singular relational continuum within and without” (p. 5). In essence, Chinese medicine sees humans as inseparable from nature and constantly in relationship and impacted by external forces.

The concept of *Qi* highlights how Chinese medicine operates from the assumption of the inseparability of mind, body and nature. *Qi* is an “invisible force”, and is seen through what it “fosters, generates and protects” (p. 30). *Qi* is what creates the manifestation of all life forms – from organ systems, to thoughts, gardens, four-leggeds, oceans, mountains, and the galaxies (p. 35). All manifestations of *qi* are mutually dependent and influence one another. Therefore, the cycles of the human body mirror the cycles of the Earth (p. 33).

Chinese medicine balances *qi* to increase client well-being. Balancing *qi* requires a recognition of parallelism and synchronicity, a theory which states that “forces that govern the cycles of change occurring in the external world are duplicated within our human bodies and minds.” (Beinfield & Korngold, 1992, p. 42). According to the authors, patterns in nature mirror patterns in our bodies, and vice versa. Through observing these patterns in nature, Chinese medicine created a five-phase system to support healing. The five-phase model includes five elements, five seasons, five personality types and five organ systems. Techniques used to support clients’ *qi* are informed by the relationship observed and documented in the five-phase model. Increasing a client’s well-being requires a knowledge of the cycles and qualities of Earth.

The authors then explain how the idea of separation between mind, body and nature began in the 17<sup>th</sup> century in Western culture when French phi-

losopher Descartes wrote about Cartesian dualism. The Western world interpreted his writing as the mind and body being separate entities. Referred to as the Cartesian split, many body psychotherapists believe this philosophy hugely influences Western psychology today (Ford, 1999) and can be seen through wide use of approaches that focus on the mind. Body psychotherapy works off the assumption that the mind and body are inseparable, and incorporates techniques that encourage whole system awareness (Schwartz, 2021).

## Ecopsychology

Like the five-phase model above, Bill Plotkin’s *Eco-Soulcentric Developmental Wheel* described in *Nature and the human soul: Cultivating wholeness and community in a fragmented world* (2008) is based on the assumption of the inseparability of humans from Earth. Plotkin created this model through observing nature which is seen through the incorporation of the four seasons, the four compass directions and the diurnal cycle.

Plotkin sees psychological wholeness as connected to one’s relationship with the natural world and believes nature “supports our personal blossoming (...) through her spontaneities, through her beauty, power, and mirroring, through her dazzling variety of species and habitats, and by the way of wind, Moon, Sun, stars and galaxies” (p. 20). Plotkin hypothesizes that wilderness-based counseling is effective because it supports clients’ emotional, somatic and imaginative experience in relationship to nature’s enchantment. He believes this facilitates human wholeness which is often missing in Western society. Much like we saw in Chinese medicine, this model operates from the assumption that recognizing one’s belonging to the natural world supports healing.

## Interdisciplinary Studies & Psychedelic Studies

*The myth of normal: Trauma, illness and healing in a toxic culture* (2023), written by Gabor Maté, starts by discussing how systems in the United States and Canada create illness in its residents. Towards the end of the book, Maté brings in diverse voices to discuss avenues for healing in these societies.

Maté states that oneness with nature supports healing, something many of the world’s Indigenous cultures have recognized for centuries. Ac-

ording to Navajo activist Pat McCabe, “When you are part of that larger community, Earth, and you are accountable to this mad romance with birds and fish and trees and mountains and sky, you have more to compel you, to guide you” (McCabe as quoted by Maté & Maté, 2023, p. 471). This suggests that recognizing one’s belonging to Earth increases a sense of relational responsibility that facilitates reciprocity, a potential resource for clients.

Wade David believes that nature based metaphors, such as “mountains [a symbol] of strength and constancy; rivers embody change, flow, even life itself” (Davis as quoted by Maté & Maté, 2023, p. 479), shape how humans live their lives. It provides a way to listen to nature’s signs and discover one’s place in the world. Again, by acknowledging one’s relationship to Earth, it might support clients’ understanding of belonging.

Maté shares a case study where a client using psychedelics reports a powerful experience of deepening connection to the natural world. According to Rick Doblin, psychedelics facilitate experiences of being part of something bigger, and “when you are no longer looking at things from the perspective of ‘I’, you feel a newly released potential and sense of connection” which provides possibility for moving out of familiar patterns (Doblin as quoted by Maté & Maté, 2023, p. 460). Maté gives other case studies where psychedelics included healing experiences when clients connected with Earth. This suggests that connection to Earth provides resources for many clients.

## 2 Resiliency and Healing From A Body Psychotherapy Perspective

As we have seen, recognizing our interdependence and inseparableness from nature has been used to support healing across many different cultures and modalities, and for thousands of years. Colonialism, capitalism and Western culture, only a few hundred years old, disrupted this. We see the impact of this in the framework of Western psychology which focuses primarily on the mind. Body psychotherapy focuses on body and mind, yet often leaves out clients’ relationship to Earth.

My curiosity grew about the intersections between modalities that highlight interdependence with Earth, and modalities in body psychotherapy. I began researching healing and resilience from a body

psychotherapy perspective to determine parallels between these approaches. My research focuses on polyvagal theory and the *window of tolerance*, the ADEP model and mindfulness based approaches to working with trauma.

### Polyvagal Theory (Dana and Porges), The Soul Nerve (Menakem) & The Window Of Tolerance (Siegel)

According to *Polyvagal Exercises for Safety and Connection: 50 Client-Centered Practices* (2020) by Deb Dana & Stephen Porges, polyvagal theory works with the vagus nerve, a family of neural pathways, to increase resilience and healing. This theory states that there are three expressions of the vagus nerve – the sympathetic nervous system (fight/flight), and two expressions of the parasympathetic nervous system, the ventral vagal system also known as the social nervous system (safety, connection, belonging), and the dorsal vagal system (immobilization) (p. 0–50).

Dana & Porges speak to how trauma can shift a person out of the ventral vagal system and into habitual sympathetic activation and habitual dorsal vagal immobilization. This creates feelings of disconnection and dysregulation in the nervous system. Resilience comes from “recognizing moments of dysregulation and connecting with resources to return to regulation” (Dana, 2020). This is referred to as vagal tone. Polyvagal theory supports clients in identifying resources in their life to increase vagal tone, which often include places that support co-regulation, connection and belonging.

Dr. Dan Siegel (2010) talks about a similar concept through the lens of the *window of tolerance*. According to the *window of tolerance* a person’s optimal range of arousal is where connection and emotional regulation occur. This relates to the social nervous system. If a person is above their *window of tolerance* they are considered to be in a state of hyperarousal, which relates to the sympathetic nervous system. If they are below their *window of tolerance*, they are in a hypoarousal state which relates to the dorsal vagal nervous system. Like Dana & Porges (2020), Siegel believes that the *window of tolerance* can shrink through trauma, and can widen through the cultivation of resources.

In *My grandmother’s hands: Racialized trauma and the pathway to mending our hearts and Bodies* (2021), Resmaa Menakem, provides tools for in-

creasing resources to support healing. According to Menakem, the *soul nerve*, or the vagus nerve, is in constant communication with both our inner and outer environment through sensations, emotions, and wordless knowing. This communication takes place “not only between different parts of the body, but also from one person to another” (p. 147). I would expand this to include communication with the natural world. Menakem believes that understanding the communication of the vagus nerve provides clients with the opportunity to identify where they experience a sense of belonging, connection and co-regulation, and where they do not. This increases clients’ awareness of what supports their vagal tone.

Belonging can be a privilege. Systems of violence, like white supremacy, create environments where marginalized identities do not experience belonging or safety. According to Menakem, this must be recognized and incorporated into approaches that support resiliency and healing. Resources that support vagal tone can differ depending on client identities and the contexts they live in. He focuses on three different bodies in the United States – Black bodies, white bodies and police bodies. Body-centered responses developed by African Americans which include “collective humming, rocking, rhythmic clapping [...] just to name a few” have contributed to resilience in Black bodies (p. 15). He outlines different body-centered responses for different identities.

Menakem states that while resources that support vagal tone depend on client identities, everyone can be supported by learning how to settle their body. He gives different practices for settling the body and working with the *soul nerve*. He shares that instead of focusing on reducing stress, clients can increase coherency and flow by “tapping into the energies that surround and move through everything in our world” (p. 51). This relates back to concepts of working with *qi*. It suggests that Earth provides an avenue for co-regulation and healing.

Both polyvagal theory and the *window of tolerance* highlight the importance of supporting nervous system flexibility through resourcing to increase resilience and healing. “Trauma and healing aren’t just private experiences. Sometimes trauma is a collective experience, in which case our approaches for mending must be collective and communal as well” (Menakem, 2021, p. 13). Therefore, both

self-care and community-care approaches matter when it comes to healing.

Supporting client resilience requires multicultural reflexivity. Dr. Carla Sherrell’s model *The 4 Perspectives/Lens* (2021), provides a way for clients and counselors to consider the complexity of influence on a client’s life. It provides awareness around intrapersonal, interpersonal, cultural, and institution/structural influences. It highlights impacts between client identities and the contexts they live in. This model is one way to include multicultural considerations when identifying resources, resilience and healing with clients.

### Emotional Connection & The ADEP Model (Fosha)

In *The transforming power of affect: A model for Accelerated Change*, Diana Fosha (2000) outlines her model called ADEP which centers around the belief that connection to emotions is essential for healing. According to Fosha, in order “[to] live a full and connected life in the face of difficulty and even tragedy requires the capacity to feel and make use of our emotional experience” (p. 13). She says that to access the life-giving energy of emotions, one must recognize where it was necessary to cut off emotional experiences and to return to a relationship with one’s emotions.

Fosha states that counselors support this process by mirroring clients in their emotional experience. Often when a counselor mirrors core affect it increases resonance, emotional literacy and differentiation. She believes this provides clients with an opportunity to be with their emotions without being overwhelmed by them. This requires the counselors or the holding environment to be regulated and intact, which supports co-regulation as seen in polyvagal theory.

Similar to Menakem’s work, Fosha highlights the importance of connection in the healing process. She believes that “... the difference between aloneness and the sense of being integrated in the mainstream of mutuality – community – is created by the act of affective communication with one other person, who is open and interested” (p. 28). While Fosha talks specifically about counselors mirroring clients’ emotions and providing co-regulation, increasing awareness of the mirroring and co-regulation happening between human and the natural world also increases emotional nourishment,

belonging, mutuality and connection (Menakem, 2020; Beinfield & Korngold, 1992; Plotkin, 2008).

### **Mindfulness Practice For Body Awareness (van der Kolk)**

In *The body keeps the score: Mind, brain and body in the transformation of trauma* (2015) Bessel van der Kolk, talks about the ways in which the body both holds and heals from trauma. He shares how clients' awareness of somatic experience is foundational in supporting the healing process.

One way to increase somatic awareness is to support clients' interoception, or the "awareness of [their] subtle sensory, body-based feelings" (p. 98). Van der Kolk states that by listening to body-based feelings, clients increase their ability to identify what they are feeling and how it relates to changes in their inner and outer environment. This in turn allows clients to see what changes are desired depending on messages from their body. He shares that one way to increase interoception is through mindfulness practices that strengthen the prefrontal cortex or the part of the brain that observes experience. Somatic interventions like Focusing or movement sequencing are examples of mindfulness based techniques that support increased somatic awareness (Schwartz, 2021).

Van der Kolk believes trauma treatment should not only address the past, but also focus on increasing presence in one's day-to-day experience. This requires oscillation of attention from one's internal world to one's external world. Until clients find awe in "everyday things like taking a walk, cooking a meal, or playing with your kids, life will pass you by" (p. 73). Accessing awe in the day-to-day requires awareness of both the internal and the external environment. By supporting clients to bring attention to how the cycles of the natural world relate to one's own somatic experience, clients gain skills in oscillating between the body and the natural world. This inherently increases presence in one's immediate experience.

### **3 The Seasonal Attunement Model**

Body psychotherapists are at the forefront of many trauma-informed treatments. They have expanded the field's understanding of how to work with the body and the nervous system to support resilience and healing through utilizing techniques that in-

crease somatic awareness (Schwartz, 2021). The next evolution in the field will be incorporating clients' belonging to the natural world more explicitly into the techniques. This is a strength of ecopsychology, a framework rooted in the belief that the healing of humans is inseparable from relationship to Earth (Canty, 2023). This paper hopes to increase conversation and inspiration across fields.

I am proposing the Seasonal Attunement Model as one way for body psychotherapists to incorporate clients' inseparability from the natural world into sessions. This model increases client's sense of belonging (Menakem, 2021), understanding of nervous system states (Dana & Porges, 2020), emotional literacy and regulation skills (Fosha, 2000), and embodied mindfulness practice (van der Kolk, 2015). Clients may fill in this model with wisdom from their culture, or they may embark on new discoveries outside of any practices or models they have known. Therapists may incorporate their own lens and knowledge into the model when it is culturally appropriate and clinically relevant.

### **How To Use The Seasonal Attunement Model**

In the Seasonal Attunement Model there are opportunities for clients to do the following:

- **Identify Seasons**  
What seasons do you observe where you live?
- **Identify an Emotion**  
Is there an emotion(s) that you or your community feels is most dominant during each season?
- **Identify Observations Of Self During Season**  
What do you notice somatically, affectively and cognitively during this season?
- **Identify Observations Of Natural World During Season**  
What do you notice happening in the natural world during this season? What are the qualities of plants, animals, the sky, the sun etc. at this time?
- **Identify Words and Color Associated With Season**  
Are there greater themes or metaphors that you or your communities observe?  
Is there a color you associate or see in nature during this season?

**SEASON**

SELF CARE:  
COMMUNITY CARE:

EMOTION: \_\_\_\_\_  
WORDS: \_\_\_\_\_

NOTICE IN NATURE	NOTICE IN SELF
------------------	----------------

NERVOUS SYSTEM STATE:  
\_\_\_\_\_

**SEASON**

SELF CARE:  
COMMUNITY CARE:

EMOTION: \_\_\_\_\_  
WORDS: \_\_\_\_\_

NOTICE IN NATURE	NOTICE IN SELF
------------------	----------------

NERVOUS SYSTEM STATE:  
\_\_\_\_\_

**SEASON**

5 SEASON  
ATTUNEMENT

EMOTION: \_\_\_\_\_  
WORDS: \_\_\_\_\_

NOTICE IN NATURE	NOTICE IN SELF
------------------	----------------

NERVOUS SYSTEM STATE:  
\_\_\_\_\_

SELF CARE:  
COMMUNITY CARE:

**SEASON**

EMOTION: \_\_\_\_\_  
WORDS: \_\_\_\_\_

NOTICE IN NATURE	NOTICE IN SELF
------------------	----------------

NERVOUS SYSTEM STATE:  
\_\_\_\_\_

SELF CARE:  
COMMUNITY CARE:

**SEASON**

**The Seasonal Attunement Model® ■ 5 Seasons**  
*can be used with clients who relate to five seasons*

**SEASON**

SELF CARE:  
COMMUNITY CARE:

EMOTION: \_\_\_\_\_  
WORDS: \_\_\_\_\_

NOTICE IN NATURE	NOTICE IN SELF
------------------	----------------

NERVOUS SYSTEM STATE:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**SEASON**

SELF CARE:  
COMMUNITY CARE:

EMOTION: \_\_\_\_\_  
WORDS: \_\_\_\_\_

NOTICE IN NATURE	NOTICE IN SELF
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NERVOUS SYSTEM STATE:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**4 SEASON ATTUNEMENT**

EMOTION: \_\_\_\_\_  
WORDS: \_\_\_\_\_

NOTICE IN NATURE	NOTICE IN SELF
------------------	----------------

NERVOUS SYSTEM STATE:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

SELF CARE:  
COMMUNITY CARE:

**SEASON**

**The Seasonal Attunement Model® ■ 4 Seasons**  
*can be used with clients who relate to four seasons*



**SEASON**

SELF CARE: \_\_\_\_\_  
COMMUNITY CARE: \_\_\_\_\_

EMOTION: \_\_\_\_\_  
WORDS: \_\_\_\_\_

NOTICE IN NATURE	NOTICE IN SELF
------------------	----------------

NERVOUS SYSTEM STATE: \_\_\_\_\_

**SEASON**

SELF CARE: \_\_\_\_\_  
COMMUNITY CARE: \_\_\_\_\_

EMOTION: \_\_\_\_\_  
WORDS: \_\_\_\_\_

NOTICE IN NATURE	NOTICE IN SELF
------------------	----------------

NERVOUS SYSTEM STATE: \_\_\_\_\_

**4 SEASON ATTUNEMENT**

EMOTION: \_\_\_\_\_  
WORDS: \_\_\_\_\_

NOTICE IN NATURE	NOTICE IN SELF
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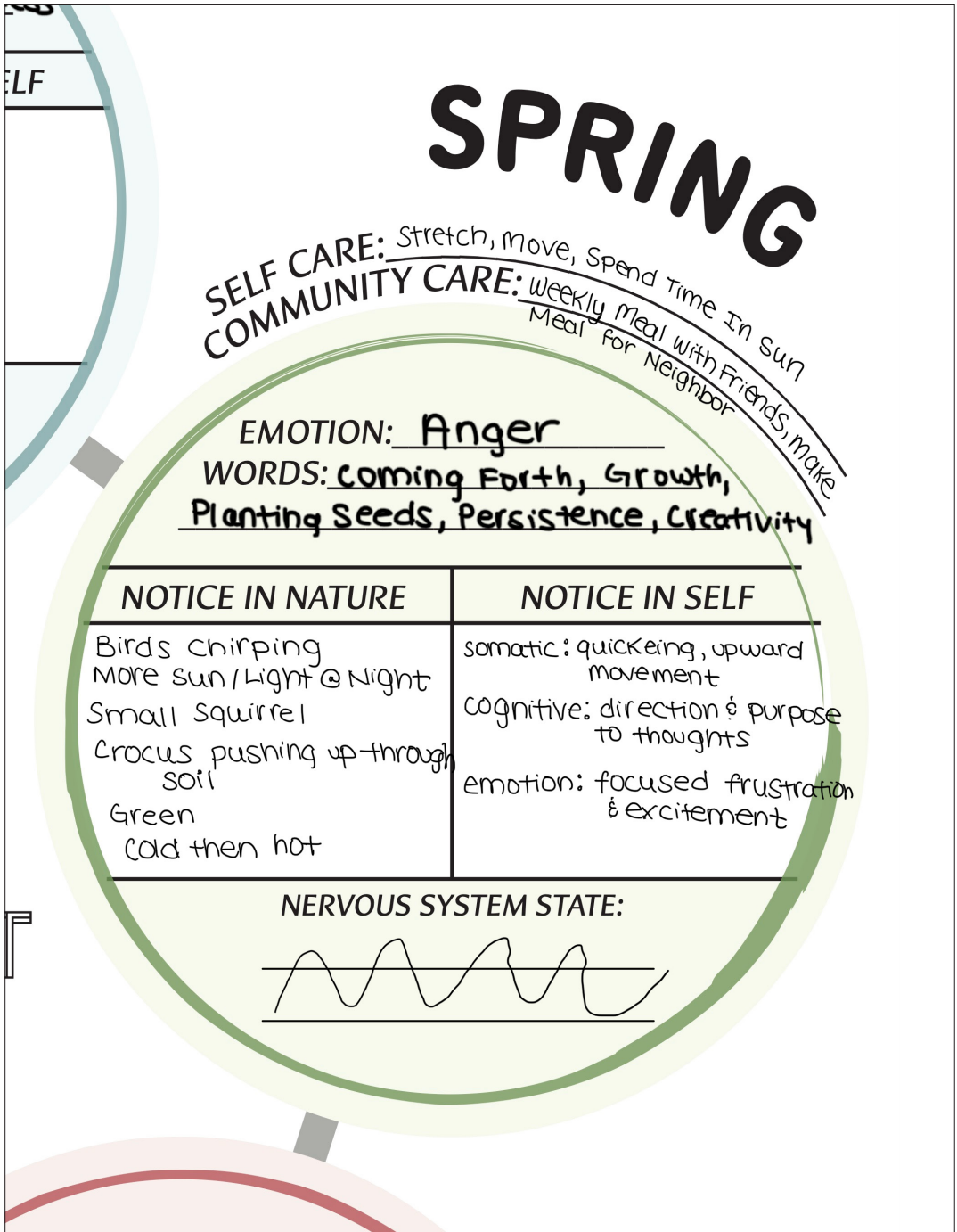
NERVOUS SYSTEM STATE: \_\_\_\_\_

SELF CARE: \_\_\_\_\_  
COMMUNITY CARE: \_\_\_\_\_

**SEASON**

### Incorporating A Chinese Medicine Lens

*The model above is filled in with observations from Chinese medicine. It is inspired by my studies in meridian massage. The emotions and colors associated with the seasons come from Beinfield & Korngold (1992). The words associated with each season come from acupuncturist and body psychotherapist, Elena Giuliani.*



**Incorporating A Chinese Medicine Lens** filled in by a client

The emotion and words section were kept from the Chinese medicine lens. The client sat outside for one hour and wrote down their observations of the natural world and simultaneously wrote down observations of their somatic, cognitive and emotional experience. They then drew their nervous system state, which fluctuated between their window of tolerance and hyperarousal (Siegel, 2010). From the insight they gathered, they then wrote down self-care and community-care needs. This model can also be filled in with observations over the course of a longer period of time, as well as by a group of people.

■ **Identify Nervous System States (Polyvagal Theory & Window Of Tolerance)**

Is there a pattern to your nervous system state during this season? Do you spend more time in the social nervous system, sympathetic nervous system state or dorsal nervous system state? Do you spend more time in hyperarousal, in your *window of tolerance*, or hypoarousal?

Clients can draw above the top line to indicate being in hyperarousal, can draw between the two lines to indicate being in their *window of tolerance*, and can draw below the bottom line to indicate being in hypoarousal.

■ **Identify Self-Care and Community-Care Resources**

What kind of self-care supports you during this particular season? Rituals or practices?

What kind of community-care supports you during this season? (Community care might include resources provided by humans, plants, animals, the unseen world, minerals, the elements...)

**Why Is This Model Relevant To Body Psychotherapists?**

The Seasonal Attunement Model offers a structured way for body psychotherapists to incorporate clients' relationships to the natural world into session. By doing so, therapists have the opportunity to use clients' interconnectedness with the natural world to support well-being (Beinfeld & Korngold, 1992; Plotkin, 2008; Maté, 2023). The model includes principles from the three body psychotherapy modalities researched above.

- The Seasonal Attunement Model incorporates four main concepts from polyvagal theory and the window of tolerance. First, clients identify their dominant nervous system state in different seasons (Dana, 2020; Siegel, 2010). Second, it highlights our inherent belonging to the natural world, and therefore supports this hardwired need (Menakem, 2021). Third, it identifies self-care and community-care needs (Menakem, 2021). Fourth, clients fill in this model based on their identities and the contexts they are living in (Menakem, 2021).
- The model incorporates three main concepts from Fosha's work (2000). First, a wide spectrum of emotional expressions are normal-

ized in a client's life. Second, the model brings awareness to the potential of the natural world providing a regulated and intact holding environment. Third, it decreases separation and increases mutuality by highlighting the mirroring that occurs in the external environment.

- The model further incorporates two concepts from van der Kolk's work (2015). First, clients track what they notice somatically during the different seasons. By doing so, clients increase their interoception. Second, clients track what they are noticing in nature during each season. This supports them in observing present moment qualities in their external environment, which brings attention to one's immediate experience. Both interoception and present moment observations of the external world support embodied mindfulness practices and therefore healing.

**Considerations When Using The Model**

A client might be in a different season of their life than the season of the natural world around them. For example, a client might lose their job in Summer, and feel that their internal season feels closer to that of Fall. It may be important to bring awareness to the difference between their internal season and the external season to increase self-compassion and to identify support needed. Flexibility exists in the way clients relate to the model. Each person will find unique needs and balance in their relationship to the seasons.

Many cultures across the world revolve around seasonal attunement. Clients will bring depths of wisdom to this model, including rituals and practices from their cultures. Multicultural reflexivity is important when working across differences.

Through using this model, clients may recognize a desire for embodied practices and rituals and not know where to begin. The work of Melissa Michaels, a leader in the field of body psychotherapy, offers many possibilities for embodied ritual in her book *Youth on fire: Birthing a generation of embodied global leaders* (2017). She provides tools for tracking somatic, affective and cognitive experience and includes vast opportunities for self-care and community-care practices. Her work advocates for a caring and accountable relationship to all of life. It is a beautiful resource for this model.

This model can also be used as a tool for burnout prevention for counselors. By using this model, counselors identify how cycles and seasons shift their capacity to show up for clients. It provides flexibility in self-care and community-care practices, and provides motivation for regular seasonal assessment of the support needed to provide counseling in a sustainable way. It brings awareness to vast resources available in counselors' relationship to Earth.

This model runs the risk of appropriation. As a white CIS woman born in the U.S., I have been accustomed to taking from other cultures. It has been so normalized by my privileged identities that I often do not recognize I am doing so. My intention is to always explicitly name the lineage that I have learned from, to receive permission from the lineage to use the wisdom, and to consider whether what I am offering is congruent with my knowledge and what has been asked of me. If there are pieces I am missing, I hope to know. My intention for this model is that counselors who incorporate it will do the same.

## 4 Applying The Model In The Counseling Relationship

I worked with a client for a year who I will call Ivy. Ivy identifies as a CIS, white woman who reports having no significant trauma history and came to counseling for support navigating autoimmune symptoms. During our second session, I asked Ivy about her relationship to anger. She reported not being angry and unable to remember the last time she was. After discussing polyvagal theory, she identified feeling in a habitual dorsal vagal state.

I was curious about exploring Ivy's experience of sympathetic activation, and particularly anger, to support the possibility of mobilizing from a habitual dorsal vagal state (Dana & Porges, 2020). Since Ivy reported having a hard time connecting to anger, I asked about her relationship to Spring as an entry point. Anger is associated with Spring in Chinese medicine (Beinfeld & Korngold, 1992).

We talked about what she notices in nature during Spring. She reported loving to watch the blossoms pop out from the trees. We moved into an experiential where she embodied that blossom popping out of a tree. In the process she described noticing a lot

of energy, the movement push, and a slow and deliberate pace. I asked her what emotion she might associate with these qualities and with a surprised face she said ANGER!

From here, we processed messages she received about anger growing up including it being dangerous and shameful. She processed grief about why this energy had been cut off, which related to her socialization as a CIS woman. This client felt her lack of connection to anger was influencing her autoimmune symptoms. In our work together, she expressed how she was grateful "to get to reclaim my bitch!"

As I was working with this client, I was struck by the parallels between what she was reporting and what I had been reading in Maté's book *The myth of normal: Trauma, illness and healing in a toxic culture* (2023). According to Maté, anger is an evolutionary response that allows us to define our physical and emotional boundaries and to say No. Dr. Julie Holland notes how women's repression of anger correlates with rates of "depression [and] autoimmune disease" (Maté, 2023, p. 333).

Supporting healthy anger is crucial to healing (Maté, 2023). Anger, which includes sympathetic nervous system activation, often allows the nervous system to move out of a dorsal vagal state (Dana & Porges, 2020). By incorporating the Seasonal Attunement Model into the session, it normalized anger for this client. It provided a way to access emotion (Fosha, 2000) through observations of Spring. By embodying the bud popping out of the tree, the client increased interoception (van der Kolk, 2015) and recognized that her anger belonged (Menakem, 2021). By reclaiming her anger, her range of emotional experience also widened (Fosha, 2000). This is a radical act in a society that profits off of the repression of women's anger.

As I continued to use this model with clients, it not only provided an opportunity to reclaim anger, but to also reclaim grief, fear, joy and worry. Clients reported greater acceptance of their internal range of emotion when they identified ways the seasons mirrored their experience. Our bodies are not separate from the greater bodies that we live, cohabitate, and die in. Acknowledging our interrelatedness supports befriending the internal seasons and emotions experienced throughout life. It is a reclaiming of our wild selves.

## 5 Discussion

The research for this paper clarified the question: *How can recognition of our belonging to Earth support resilience and healing in the counseling relationship?* It can support resilience and healing by illuminating one's belonging to something vast, our inter-relatedness with all living things, relationships of reciprocity, resources available in the natural world, avenues for co-regulation, connection and belonging, opportunities for present-moment awareness, the normalcy of emotional expression, the necessity of anger, interoception, community practices and rituals, and increasing awareness of the coherency, flow and *qi* that moves through and supports all of life.

The interdependence between humans and the natural world has been researched for centuries and many modalities offer models for incorporating this into sessions (Daly, 2013). However, body psychotherapy often does not explicitly name the importance of this connection. A strength of this research is that it contributes to the conversation of how to incorporate the necessity of belonging to Earth into techniques used in body psychotherapy. A limitation of this study is that the research only scratches the surface of these conversations; many wisdom holders who have much to contribute were not named. I was surprised to find the ease and overlap between body psychotherapy techniques and Earth based healing modalities. I hope further research continues to fill this gap.

Over the course of writing this paper, I worked with clients wanting support in their relationship to emotion. I was fascinated by a common theme of confusion and suppression of anger arising with clients who identified as white, U.S. born, CIS-women. Many felt deeply impacted by being socialized to be “nice, kind, caring and pleasant”.

This paper offers a model for body psychotherapists to both conceptualize and work with anger in a way that honors its power for destruction and its power for healing. It can be seen as the energy that pushes a sprout out of the soil, to the energy that burns down a forest. This model offers the same opportunity for working with all emotions – joy, worry, grief and so much more. Counselors must consider who is safe enough to express emotion in different contexts.

Continued research will determine benefits and drawbacks of including clients' relationship to Earth in body psychotherapy sessions. It will include further research from a multicultural and social justice perspective. It will include case studies to determine when the Seasonal Attunement Model is applicable and appropriate. The breadth of information on this topic highlights the need for conversation and collaboration across modalities. I hope this paper sparks further research from diverse perspectives.

The purpose of this paper was to research the hypothesis that incorporating clients' relationship to Earth increases well-being. Menakem says “Whether your body is Black, white, or otherwise, you and other members of your group need to care for yourselves, care for each other, and help one another mend and grow. You will also need to create a new culture” (2021, p. 289). There is an opportunity for a new culture to be seeded in body psychotherapy. One that not only advocates for the inseparability of body and mind, but the inseparability of body, mind and Earth. This provides opportunity for mending and growth.

## Conclusion

As the field of body psychotherapy continues to expand, interdisciplinary conversations create a great weaving of wisdom. Recognizing our belonging to ourselves, each other and Earth, amplifies resilience and healing available to both clients and counselors. The Seasonal Attunement Model offers one avenue to do so. May this paper inspire further conversation, research, curiosity, and action. May we continue to advocate for a future that includes the resilience and healing of all living beings. May we support the present moment awe of a setting sun, a swimming fish, a squirming worm, and the rising moon. Our future depends on it.



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