

Learning from Sabina Spielrein: charting a path for a relational drive theory

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“This demonic force, whose very essence is destruction (evil), at the same time is the creative force, since out of the destruction (of two individuals) a new one arises. That is in fact the sexual drive, which is by nature a destructive drive, an exterminating drive for the individual, and for that reason, in my opinion, must overcome such great resistance in everyone.”

S. Spielrein, 1909, in a letter to Freud

Abstract

The authors critically reflect on the insistence of late Stephen Mitchell, who is considered to be the founder of relational psychoanalysis, on omitting biological drives from the relational psychoanalytic theory and defining relationality in categorical and exclusionary terms as incompatible with Freud's drive theory. It is argued that while Mitchell's motives were understandable, the split between relationality and drives is no longer justified. It is suggested that the pioneering work of Sabina Spielrein, in particular her seminal paper *Destruction as The Cause of Coming into Being* (1912), can help provide conceptual tools for reintegrating relationality and drives and charting a path for a relational drive theory. In Spielrein's text, the sexual instinct is conceptualized as a thrust towards interorganismic merger – “transformation from I-ness to We-ness” – a process that intensifies the psychophysiological processes of growth and change. The sex drive for her, then, is fundamentally a relational drive. The authors additionally comment on the phallogocentricity and heteronormativity of the drive theory as we know it and suggest tools for developing a relational theory that could make room for women's and queer subjectivities. Case material is used to illuminate the theoretical concepts.

Keywords: Sabina Spielrein, Mitchell, drive, relationality, postmodernism

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Esther's memory: in my second year of graduate school in clinical psychology, the psychodynamic theory teacher asked the students to vote for either drive theory or object relations, based on what we found more convincing. Everyone in the class voted for object relations, except for two men (one of them gay, the other, a good friend of mine, a Marxist ecofeminist with a degree in women's studies) and myself, who went for the drives. Others in the class had a hard time with our choice, pointing out that the Freudian drive theory was reductionist and socially conservative.

A discussion ensued about how one could describe heterosexual intercourse without falling into the Freudian active male-passive female dichotomies, and my friend said, “Why, intercourse is the vagina squeezing and sucking in the penis!” I forget how the discussion evolved from that point on, but what I learned from the professor’s question was that a theory that could hold both sex and relationships was too much to hope for: it was either one or the other. I subsequently trained in relational psychoanalytic work and relational psychoanalysis became my home and professional identity. But in my heart, the old love affair with the drive theory lived on.

Destruction of the drive theory as the cause of coming into being of the relational theory

Stephen Mitchell was doubtless one of the seminal figures in the late 20th century psychoanalysis. In 1983, he and Jay Greenberg co-authored the influential text *Object Relations in Psychoanalytic Theory*, in which they argued that many different psychoanalytic theories, including various object relations theories, self-psychology and the interpersonal (Sullivanian) psychoanalysis, were in agreement about one central point: that the psyche was formed and defined by interpersonal relationships, not biological drives. Through the publication of this text, relational psychoanalysis, the school of thought that has since profoundly affected the fields of psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic/psychodynamic psychotherapy, was conceived. Mitchell went on to outline the principles of the new movement in his subsequent books, including *Relational Concepts in Psychoanalysis* (1988), *Hope and Dread in Psychoanalysis* (1993), *Influence and Autonomy in Psychoanalysis* (1997) and *Relationality* (2000). In addition to his intellectual contributions, he played a pivotal role in founding the institutions of the relational school: the journal *Psychoanalytic Dialogues* and the headquarters of the relational training - the New York University Postdoctoral Program in psychotherapy and psychoanalysis.

In his early works – *Object Relations in Psychoanalytic Theory* (1983), co-authored with Greenberg, and *Relational Concepts in Psychoanalysis* (1988) – Mitchell postulated that relational theory was virtually incompatible with drive theory. This claim is stronger in *Relational Concepts*, a more mature work: “The strategy adopted in this volume has been to develop an integration of the major lines of relational-model psychoanalytic theorizing into a broad, integrative perspective – from which the concept of drive, as Freud intended it, has been omitted” (p. 60). Freud, according to Mitchell, chose not to integrate relational and drive theories, focusing exclusively on the drive theory (which, it may be argued, contains certain relational components within it that neither threaten nor challenge its reliance on the drives as the primary explanatory feature). One can imagine Mitchell stating something like, ‘I am choosing to do the same, except that at the fork where one would choose between relationality and drives, I am choosing relationality.’ “That is not to say that they cannot be put together – any array of disparate concepts can be joined if one is clever enough. The question is whether it is conceptually and clinically economical – whether it is *useful* to do so” (Mitchell, 1988, p. 54).

Mitchell based his reasoning on two assumptions: (a.) drive and relational models represented two distinct sets of models – the only question was whether or not the two sets of models could be compatible (he leaned towards the conclusion that they were not), and (b.) drives could not be contained within the relational theory – to deal with drives, one would need to contend with the whole package of a drive-based theory, which needed to be accepted on its own terms as it were. In other words, while relationality could be claimed to already be present within the drive theory, it was not possible to similarly find room for the drives within the relational theory – there was no symmetry.

There are questions we could ask about these assumptions. For instance, are relationality and drives really so far apart from one another? Is dividing all psychoanalytic theories into drive-based vs. relational necessary or helpful? Why cannot relational theory contend with drives?

Perhaps the most important question of all, which Mitchell curiously did not ask is, what is the cost of developing a full-scope psychoanalytic theory that altogether excludes drives, in terms of that theory's capacity to explain and predict aspects of human experience? He made no ontological claims with respect to biological drives – he never claimed they did not exist. Assuming, then, that Mitchell did believe drives to exist, acting as motivational factors that influenced the individual's choices – what would the theory lose by leaving them out? The argument that integrating relational and drive models is not economical or useful is a curious one – are these good enough reasons to let go of them? Is being economical what is most important for a good theory, or is it its explanatory power? Can a whole range of bodymind phenomena whose physicality is quite pronounced, at times excessive (Stein, 2007): sexuality, aggression, pregnancy and childbirth, and more – be fruitfully thought about with no reference to biology?

An additional question of much relevance, one that Mitchell sadly did not live to ask – is whether it is still important now, thirty years down the road, when we already have a broad corpus or relationally themed texts – a relational “canon” (Harris, 2011), when the relational school has formed a distinct identity, and with its institutions flourishing nationally and internationally – to maintain the split before relationality and drives? Was this step of ceremonially casting away drives perhaps mainly “useful” – to use Mitchell's word – at the onset, to differentiate from Freud and mark the territory the new relational theory would occupy? When speaking of hypnosis, Mitchell (1997) suggested that Freud wished to differentiate psychoanalysis from hypnosis precisely because psychoanalysis emerged out of hypnotic work. Therefore, wrote Mitchell: “It was crucial for psychoanalysis to differentiate itself from its ancestor, hypnotism, and its reliance on the personal power and influence of the therapist... Where hypnotism added influence, psychoanalysis removed historical influences; where hypnotism directed and shaped, psychoanalysis liberated and released” (p. 8). We may argue that Mitchell's relational conceptualization was similarly defined and created against Freud's drive theory, and it was necessary for him to create that binary in order to establish his views as autonomous.

Was the issue of “economical” theory-making primarily Mitchell's own individual concern – a very understandable one? Forging an ambitious new theory is no easy task, and perhaps throwing away what he considered to be the drive theory made it easier for him to integrate a vast body of other psychoanalytic theories – object relational¹, self-psychological, interpersonal and even humanistic-existential ones (e.g., Erich Fromm's), which differ substantially from one another. Excluding drives may have helped Mitchell in his important and difficult undertaking of theoretical synthesis. That he could not find a way to make drive theory part of that innovative synthesis does not mean that this cannot be done in principle.

Postmodernism and its pressures

Letting go of drive theory by relational psychoanalysis can also be understood as the payment of dues to what was one of the most influential cultural and intellectual forces at the time the relational movement was conceived – namely, postmodernism. Unlike the relational

¹ While Klein's theory is arguably steeped in drive theory, recognizing biological drives both as primary contents of infantile fantasy and as causative of the later development of symbolic thought, Greenberg and Mitchell (1983) classified her theory as relational, by overemphasizing its object relations aspects and deemphasizing the drive aspects.

formulations, drive theory was difficult to reconcile with the postmodern emphases on aspects like language and culture, experience as socially constructed, and moral and ontological relativism. Fortunately or unfortunately, the exclusive grip of postmodernism on Western culture may be beginning to loosen (Eshelman, 2008; Huber, 2014). Additionally, with the maturing of social theories of sexuality, their contrarian aspects are becoming less pronounced - recognition of the importance of critiquing social forces that shape sexuality may no longer require insistence that everything about sexuality is only social and nothing is biological. Unless viewed through the programmatic lenses of postmodernism, the relational view of the human being as an emergent sociopsychological phenomenon must not exclude its understanding as a (socio)biological organism.

Have you met? Sabina Spielrein

Sabina Spielrein (1885-1942) was a Russian-born psychoanalyst. Initially a patient of Jung's, she subsequently became his student, colleague and intimate friend. She was in contact with Freud, discussing theoretical and intellectual matters with him both in person and in writing, and presented to the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society. She also maintained professional and intellectual ties with Vygotsky, Luria and Piaget (the latter had at one point been her analysand). Her theoretical work on both sexuality and language acquisition is innovative and profound, and it is a shame that she is not more widely read.

Although Spielrein's name has been popularized in recent years, thanks to texts and films that have been produced about her, such as Covington & Wharton's (2006) *Sabina Spielrein: The Forgotten Pioneer of Psychoanalysis*, Marton's (2006) *My Name Was Sabina Spielrein* and Cronenberg's (2011) *Dangerous Method*, there is still a tendency, both in professional circles and popular culture alike, to think of her primarily in the context of her relationship with Jung, rather than as an important theorist in her own right. This disturbing trend is carried to the extreme in Cronenberg's film, where Spielrein is depicted as engaging in sadomasochistic sexual practices with Jung. A number of professional papers, notably Lothane's (1999) *Tender Love and Transference: Unpublished Letters of CG Jung and Sabina Spielrein*, concern themselves with the question whether or not the relationship between the two was ever consummated - a question that doubtless bears heavily on Jung's reputation as a physician and analyst but is irrelevant when it comes to evaluating Spielrein's own contributions to the field.

Destruction as the Cause of Coming into Being: drives in relationality, relationality in drives

In Destruction as the Cause of Coming into Being, Spielrein raises the question of the negative emotional reactions such as anxiety and disgust, commonly accompanying sexual activity. Other theorists, she states, have linked these to the taboos on sexuality and resulting sexual inhibitions that exist in our (i.e., European) culture. She argues that there is a deeper reason for these reactions, one that goes beyond the socially sanctioned negative attitudes towards sex. The fear and disgust, Spielrein suggests, are already embedded within the sex drive itself. Because during sex, intimate contact occurs between two individuals - one enters the other - the processes of "destruction and reconstruction, *which are constantly occurring during normal circumstances too*, occur particularly intensely²". According to Spielrein, in the course of the sexual act, the male element merges with the female, which, in turn, becomes destabilized and assumes a new form, mediated by the "foreign intruder"

² This sentence was translated from the original German. The available English translation appears inaccurate.

(Spielrein, 1994, p. 157/Spielrein, 2011).³ There is no way for an individual not to know – if only indirectly, through the emotions s/he is experiencing – that her or his organism [the choice of the word – “organism” – is significant, as it could be understood as referring to both body and mind] is being destroyed and reconstituted. Anxiety, fear and repulsion, then, are the organism’s natural reactions to the subjectively known objective fact of its own destruction.

Spielrein further elaborates the biology of reproduction to demonstrate or explain how and why sexual intercourse causes destruction and reconstitution: the male and the female cells unite, each losing its own individuality to give rise to new life. In lower organisms, she notes, the parental organism dies in the process of giving life to the new generation. While humans do not fully die in this process, the difference, she claims, is merely quantitative. The sex cells contain the genetic memory of the entire organism and their merging is a significant event, mirroring the merger of the individuals occurring during the sexual act.

It is unclear whether Spielrein understands the biology of conception as the most real or profound aspect of what happens to individuals during sex, nor whether she believes the merger to be less complete in instances where no conception occurred in the course of the sexual act. My own (Esther’s) impression is that she views the merger of the cells, the physical merger of the copulating couple and their psychological merger as different aspects of the same event, neither being primary or exclusively causative of the others but rather, all being interdependently causative – a “dependent co-arising” (Macy, 1991), to use a Buddhist term.

Next, Spielrein makes an unexpected move (unexpected, that is, insofar as we expect drive theorists to downplay the importance of mother-infant primary bonds), stating that “we could just as readily derive everything from the nurturing instinct rather than from sexuality” (p. 159). In other words, the basic drive operating in the arena of primary caregiving is no different from the one guiding adult sexual relationships: it is the (relational!) drive to dissolve the boundaries of the ego and merge with another person – being destroyed and reconstituted in the process. Spielrein also admits that sexual activity, for some people, can primarily be motivated by the need for nurturance: “Although the need for nurturance cannot be entirely replaced by coitus, we often see overwhelming sexual desire in undernourished individuals” (p. 159).

Spielrein then argues passionately against ego-psychology. Human psychic life, she states emphatically, is guided by unconscious impulses that lie much deeper than the ego and are ultimately unconcerned with our egoic-level reactions of pleasure or pain. In fact, she suggests, citing both Mach and Jung, the ego is composed of many parts and inessential – “the chief characteristic of an individual is that he is “dividual” (p. 160). She goes on to demonstrate the counter-currents of differentiation (generating an egoic experience) and assimilation (transcending the ego and shifting into a “We” mode) in art, dreams and various forms of psychopathology, arguing that even in cases of artistic autoeroticism (of which she sees Nietzsche as a prime example), the artist’s experience in producing his work of art is often one of getting destroyed and reconstituted by what he creates. In the last part of her paper, she explores the mythological motifs and images of coming into being through destruction.

³ The menacing connotations of the word “Eindringling”, “intruder” and the phrase “fremden Eindringling”, “foreign intruder” (appearing in the 1994 English translation as “unfamiliar intruder”) are apparent – suggesting that Spielrein thought of intercourse as inherently violent. Such unreflective blending of maleness and violence can, of course, be argued to have the effect of naturalizing male sexual violence, and would hardly be tolerated in a contemporary text.

The main reason, Spielrein explains, that we overlook the destructive aspect of the sexual drive is because in the normal experience, the sensation of coming into being is somewhat stronger than that of getting destroyed – yet we should not forget that the coming into being was made possible by the destruction. The sexual instinct, she maintains, which is also the instinct of preserving the species (distinct and in a sense opposed to the individual self-preservation instinct), “expresses itself psychologically in the tendency to dissolve and assimilate (transformation of the “I” to the “We”)” (p. 174⁴).

Self preservation is a “static” drive that protects the existing individual from foreign influences; preservation of the species is a “dynamic” drive that strives for change, the “resurrection” of the individual in a new form (p. 174).²

We can see how for Spielrein the species’ preservation instinct is fundamentally a relational instinct that forces the individual (illusory to begin with, as at the deep levels the human psyche is not differentiated – it is the species’ psyche) to surrender (to use Ghent’s, 1990 term) to We-ness with others, whether one’s caregivers/care receivers or sexual partners. Though the act of surrendering is objectively dangerous, certain to destroy the individual as s/he was prior to that act, and therefore evokes fear and repulsion, in health, the relational instinct to surrender nonetheless wins over.

Though “dividual”, precarious and uncertain, the individual is, in Spielrein’s theory, assumed to exist prior to the action of the drive – there is someone there whom the sexual drive can destroy. This differs substantially from Freud’s overarching view that drives, as dynamic forces, exist prior to any structural formations, and it is only through their action that structures like the ego come into being (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1973; Schmidt-Hellerau, 2001, in Bass & Michels, 2002). One implication of this pre-drive individuality is that an individual can be presumed to have a measure of subjectivity and agency enabling him or her to choose how to encounter the drive. Another is that, unlike two drives, two individuals can enter an intersubjective relationship.

While Freud did acknowledge “the social drive”, as one of the many different kinds of drives that he postulated (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1973), for Spielrein, the major drives themselves (sexual and nurturing drives) are social and relational in essence. That the relational striving to transcend the ego and merge into We-ness is, for her, the core of the drives, is also what accounts for the non-dualism of her understanding of drives: unlike Freudian theory (from 1920 on), which viewed the life and death drives as competing with each other, she conceptualizes destruction and coming into being as the effects of one basic drive. Dying and becoming are, for her, not in conflict – rather, they are interdependent, and parts of the same process. Viewing the destruction or death aspect as predominant, a separate force rather than part of the continuous cycle of dying and being reborn is, for Spielrein, a neurotic symptom: “In neuroses, the destructive component is predominant and, in every symptom, voices its opposition to life and genuine destiny” (p. 173).

Spielrein’s *Destruction as a Cause of Coming into Being* inspired Freud’s theorizing about the death drive, as he stated in a footnote to *Beyond The Pleasure Principle* (1920) and it has been argued that Jung’s concept of transformation also owes much to this text, which Jung read closely and edited yet failed to reference in his own 1912 *Symbols of Transformation*, despite

⁴ Here Spielrein’s views markedly differ from Freud’s (1920) view that interorganismic merger increases the vitality of each individual organism participating therein – and hence, desired by the organism in the hope of increasing its own aliveness, irrespective of the production of new life or ensuring survival of the species.

his promise to do so (Bettelheim, 1983; Skea, 2006). Klein knew and cited Spielrein's work (Vidal, 2006), though not *Destruction* specifically. While it is not known whether Winnicott ever read this text, it seems to anticipate his much later work on the destruction of the object as a precondition for its survival and usability (1968). Spielrein's tightly-packed text contributed to Freudian theory, analytical psychology and possibly object relations as well. Today, over 100 years since its publication, *Destruction* is still fresh and full of nutrients. The author's marvelous capacity to refuse widely accepted dichotomies beseeches us to make use of her work to enrich relational psychoanalytic theory and practice by undoing what seems to be an unnecessary dichotomy between relationality and drives.

Does it have to be all about procreation?

A major problem that we are prone to encounter as we attempt to incorporate drive theory in general, and Spielrein's thinking on drives in particular, into relational theory, is the phallocentricity and heteronormativity of the drive theory as we know it – including Spielrein's thought. *Destruction* emphasizes procreation, understands sexual desire as driven by the reproductive instinct, and equates sex with (unprotected) heterosexual intercourse. For our purposes, these formulations are problematic on many counts: they fail to take into account the advanced contemporary technologies of both pregnancy prevention and pregnancy initiation, enabling millions in the first world and beyond to have sex without pregnancy risks – or, alternatively, to get pregnant without sex.; They are ignorant of the uncontested facts that penis-vagina intercourse is neither sufficient nor necessary for the majority of women to orgasm – hence, unless only male satisfaction is considered important, intercourse cannot be the only or the main sexual act in heterosexual sex, and that women's sex drives persist well beyond the childbearing age – and, of course, they are completely dismissive of same-sex sexual desires and practices.

Mitchell was passionate about depathologizing homosexuality (e.g., Mitchell, 1981) and this may well have been one of his motives for disidentifying from the drive theory, whose essentializing preoccupation with the differences between the sexes and their biological functions made homosexuality sound like an aberration in need of an explanation if not correction. Whether or not this was his conscious intention, letting go of biological essentialism did help make relational psychoanalysis more gay-friendly, in both theory and practice. The problem, however, is that the baby – drive theory – has been thrown out with the bathwater of homophobia.

Articulating a non-phallogentric, non-heteronormative relational drive theory: steps and directions

Is psychoanalytic drive theory inherently phallogentric and heteronormative? Not anymore than psychoanalytic theory and practice are in the general senses. While legacies of sexism and homophobia cannot be erased, the relational movement has certainly taken giant steps to advance feminist and queer perspectives in psychoanalysis. It is certainly possible to develop a relational drive theory that could match other aspects of relational theory in its feminism and queer-friendliness. Doing so would require taking a close and honest look at biological instincts and drives while still keeping one's feminist and queer glasses on – a challenging project no doubt, but think of the rewards!

What follows is an outline of some of the directions for integrative biopsychological theorizing that could help make this kind of theory possible. We hope that this paper would ignite further endeavors to bring the two together.

Drive as organismic rather than merely evolutionary

Thinking of the biological sex drive as primarily physical under the Darwinian model entails the danger of falling into “anatomy is destiny”: if it is physical, then it must be a function of the specific form the body can take, based on that body’s sex – which in turn can lead to gender-essentialist theorizing about male vs. female sex drives. This Darwinian/Newtonian logic represents a linear causality that no-longer befits the complexity of thought characterizing contemporary science and psychotherapy. Alongside anatomy is destiny, we can understand drive within the conceptual framework of “the body as agency”, where drives are seen as means of expressing, relating and motivating us as bodies. However, a shift in understanding body might be needed if we are to follow drives as embodied, lest we are back before we know it to the naturalization of female masochism, male sexual aggression, female monogamy, male non-monogamy, all females are born to be mothers, and so forth.

To avoid the trap of gender essentialism, we may begin by tracing back Freud’s original formulations regarding the sex drive as energetic (1959). According to Lowen (1990), Freud initially thought of the libido as physical energy, but having failed to prove the existence of such physical energy, later redefined it as psychic energy. Freud’s attempt resulted from his attraction to, and reliance on Darwinian evolution theory. Freud’s relationship with the body was satiated with causal thinking, viewing the physical as the origin of the psyche and attempting to track psychological phenomena to their primary somatic processes (Capra, 1982). Psychoanalyst and neuroscientist Eric Kandel (2001) shared Freud’s belief that mind functions could one day be fully explained in biological terms. From this perspective, the body is seen as a primary process, devoid of subjectivity and incapable of relating. While we cannot refute the evolutionary aspect of embodiment, we wish to suggest that another body exists, an organismic body that is emergent – neither alienated from its drives nor a slave to them, but instead a unified organic system seeking both to preserve its being (body as biology) and to connect with other beings (body as object seeking). This view is the central understanding in body psychotherapy which originated in the work of Wilhelm Reich and culminated in contemporary relational body psychotherapy (Hartley, 2009; Young, 2012).

Reich has returned to the physical energy formulation, and his student Lowen (1990) spoke of bioenergy, which he defined as “the energy of life”, a concept based on and closely related to Bergson’s *elan vital*. However, there is an essential difference between Freud’s view of the body and that of Reich’s and Lowen’s, and it is the latter view that can be of help to us on our quest to re-embrace drives within relationality. While Freud viewed the body either in mechanical terms or as an unruly primary process, both Reich and Lowen recognized the body’s agency and its capacity to self-organize. “For too long,” wrote Lowen (1965), “Western thought has regarded the body as a mechanism, an instrument of the will, or a repository of the spirit. Modern medicine, for all its advances, still holds to this view. We do not take our bodies seriously except when something goes wrong” (p.316). Should we agree to see body not merely as primary process but also as organized and emergent process (subsymbolic, if you will, Bucci, 1994), that is - as sociobiological organism, we may be able to cease treating the body as an other, and re-identify with our embodied being and embodied relating. Otherwise, “the body as means of expression, the body as I-me, is easily forgotten” (Svensen & Bergland, 2007, p.44).

Whether defined as primarily physical, primarily psychic, or neither/both, a drive that is originally and ultimately energetic (and organismic) can be seen as expressing itself in both the body and the mind – any body and any mind. Such an understanding relies on seeing the bodymind as both functionally-identical (bodymind) and complementary (body-mind). A drive so envisioned necessarily exceeds the body as a vehicle for evolutionary procreation, or of other

causal dogmatism and determinism. Therefore, drive cannot be confined to one or another set of sex organs. Its emergent and creative purpose may be envisioned, in line with Spielrein's formulations, as transcending individuality in the service of promoting life and unity yet does not have to be as narrow as procreation.

The aggressive drive, the sexual and even the death drive, could thus be seen as serving both the function of the organism as a body wishing to express itself (the complementary, yet separate body-mind), and the function of the organism as a body wishing to relate (representing the bodymind). Paraphrasing Winnicott, Orbach (2003) argues, "There is also, I suggest, no such thing as a body; there is only a body in relationship with another body" (p. 10). We wish to claim that both are true. The body as distinct from the psyche (body as biological) and the body as relationship (bodymind as an emergent object-seeking phenomenon) are in dialectic and complementary tension with one another, weaving relationality and drive. Within this tension, drive is a function of our organismic creativity, which forever seeks others to co-embody with. As Totton (Asheri, Carroll, Rolef Ben-Shahar, Soth & Totton, 2012) phrased this: "Our body bathes in and soaks up the embodied presence of the other; we catch fire from them; we breathe them in and metabolise them; we reverberate to their rhythms, and our own rhythms shift to echo them. Out of this meeting of realities, a third, shared reality is born."

The drive that is not one: making room for multiplicity

Irigaray's (1995/1977) critique of the Freudian theory of sexuality – which, for our purposes, can also be applied to Spielrein's drive theory – focuses on its phallogocentric totalitarianism:

"Psychoanalytic discourse on female sexuality is the discourse of truth. A discourse that tells the truth about the logic of truth: namely, that *the feminine occurs only within models and laws devised by male subjects*. Which implies that there are not really two sexes but only one. A single practice and representation of the sexual (p. 86)."

As Irigaray's analysis aptly shows, there is no room in the Freudian theory, with its obsessive emphasis on penis-vagina intercourse and reproduction, for the particularity of women's experiences of their own sexed bodies and sexual desires – e.g., the intimate experience of having one's labia rub against each other, the ability to feel sexual arousal and pleasure in nearly every part of one's body, thus experiencing one's entire body as an erogenous zone, and the subtle pleasures of lesbian eroticism.

"I love you who are neither mother (forgive me, mother, I prefer a woman) nor sister. Neither daughter nor son. I love you - and where I love you, what do I care about the lineage of our fathers, or their desire for reproductions of men? Or their genealogical institutions? What need have I for husband or wife, for family, persona, role, function? Let's leave all those to men's reproductive laws. I love you, your body, here and now. If/you touch you/me, that's quite enough for us to feel alive (p. 209)".

In line with Irigaray's suggestions and her poetic illustration of her ideas, it is vital, when reengaging drive theory, to make room within it for multiplicity. Drives and sexualities need to be studied phenomenologically, in an experience-near (Kohut, 1977; Rapoport, 2011) fashion, with curiosity about the infinite variety of sexual desires and practices alongside the recognition of the unifying universal themes. Irigaray specifically focuses on desires and pleasures associated with having a female body. Equally important is to keep opening up the space for queer, bisexual, transgendered and intersexual subjectivities, to enable the articulation of the particular sexual desires of the elderly and the differently abled and to continue studying ways in which cultures both facilitate and impede our access to our bodies and desires.

Can Spielrein's basic idea about the sex drive as the drive to surrender to relatedness ("Wenness") coexist with this interest in multiplicity and variety of desires as subjectively experienced? Is it useful to have her formulation in mind even as we acknowledge that, on the level of our differentiated subjectivities, we feel "driven" to have different kinds of sex and for different reasons? The subjective desire may be for touch, or it may be for affective discharge, an energetic boost, an experience of closeness with a loved one, or to form/validate/change one's own identity. We may feel driven to penetrate, to possess, to give of ourselves, to experience parallel play, to disentangle ourselves from our last partner. We may even at times be driven to procreate – less common as a motivation for sex but still an option! Does distinguishing between the unconscious, undifferentiated, universal driving force that Spielrein describes and our highly differentiated individual subjectivities address the problem of prescriptive totalitarianism that Irigaray points to? When viewed as organismic, drives become dynamic and changing alongside the subjectivity, rather than sublimating to enable socialization

Animal studies

Research on sexual behavior and gender patterns among non-human animals can be helpful in developing a non-heteronormative, non-phallogocentric drive theory. Homo- and bisexual behaviors have been observed in at least 450 species, spanning every major geographical region as well as every major animal group, and there is abundance of evidence that animals in a wide variety of species routinely engage in sexual activities that are entirely unrelated to reproduction (Bagemihl, 2000). Such activities seem to serve no "function" besides the obvious ones of pleasure-seeking and/or affectionate bonding. In light of these observations, any formulations squarely equating sex with heterosexual intercourse or the sex drive with the procreative function appear preposterous. Such conceptions appear to be based on little more than the vestiges of the Victorian sexual repressiveness and some of the heavily dated preoccupations of the late 19th century medicine and biology. Natural scientists of that era attempted to systematize human sexuality, by subjecting it, in line with the positivist *Zeitgeist*, to principles of rationality and goal-directedness as well as by establishing rigid, essentialist and complementary notions of what constitutes maleness versus femaleness. Needless to say, many of these notions are to this day alive and well in biological sciences. The natural world itself, however, does not always manifest clear distinctions between male and female behavior patterns, is not consistently patriarchal and most definitely not all heterosexual. Relational psychoanalysis, along with other contemporary social sciences, has decisively differentiated itself from natural sciences and this differential has made it easier for it to position itself as a feminist and queer-friendly discipline. Nonetheless, avoidance of everything biology-related should not be a pre-condition for feminism or queer-friendliness. We should keep reminding ourselves that oppressive phallogocentrism and homophobia have much more of a stronghold in animal sciences than they do in the animal world.

Could nature and nurture hit it off with each other?

While the social pressures to ally with one or the other end of this dichotomy are relentless, we really need to learn to think integratively should we be able to describe complex natural-social phenomena with any degree of accuracy. Instead of maintaining contrarian positions, e.g., that gender identities and roles are entirely independent of biological sexual characteristics or, conversely, fully defined by them, we need to be looking more closely at how (biological) sex and (social) gender bidirectionally impact each other's development – including how sexual-biological characteristics develop in response to social realities (Fausto-Sterling, 2012), and how body and

culture are in dialectic relationship with one another (Appel-Opper, 2010; Rolef Ben-Shahar, 2015). For instance, instead of assuming that the sex drive, in its basic form, is equivalent to the procreative drive, we can direct our attention to social mechanisms that encourage individuals to experience and interpret their sex drives in certain ways and not in others. For example, it is useful to look at how women and queers are pressured to ignore various aspects of their sex drives and how in pronatalist societies, individuals of all genders are likely to experience a stronger procreative drive than people living in societies where procreation is relatively deemphasized (Weisz, 2014). An integrative look of this kind would be qualitatively different and nurture different sensibilities than either altogether discounting the sex drive, as Mitchell did, or assuming it to be phallogocentric and heteronormative, as Spielrein did.

Relational body and drives: a dialogue

A relational drive theory would need to be a theory of a relational body - a body that is emergent and subjective and that can interact with biological drives in ways other than mindlessly submitting to them or heroically conquering them to prove its autonomy. In Freudian theory, body is an object of the Id; the only choices available to it are submitting and rebelling. As Butler (1990) points out, Freud established links of signification between corporeality and femininity - the feminine was the body, while the masculine was the universal abstraction. Objectification of the body, then, is closely related in Freudian thought with the passivity and masochism that is attributed to femininity. Granted, objectification has its place in erotic imagination but this done-to (Benjamin, 2004) reading of the body allows little room for intersubjectivity. If we are to envision a relational drive theory, we need to learn to think of the body's relationship with the drives in the language of curiosity, exploration, mutuality and play, alongside that of power, conquest and possession.

Master narratives tend towards absolutism and exclusion of the other. While Freud's theory is highly biologically centered, Mitchell's is mind-centered. The challenge is to develop a theory that might enable us to think of ourselves, fluidly and interchangeably as bodies, minds and bodyminds, sometimes as unified, other times as split, along the lines of Benjamin's thinking on intersubjectivity and Spielrein's on sexuality: continuously shifting between recognition and objectification, destruction and reconstruction. A relational drive theory requires a creating of a language that acknowledges the power and vitality of the drives while also acknowledging the subjectivity and agency of the body.

An illustration from Asaf's clinical work

Rob is psychoanalytic psychotherapist, thirty five years old. He left Italy fifteen years ago and moved to England, a move he saw as necessary for allowing himself to be openly gay. He sought therapy due to his uncontrolled sobbing around sex. For the last eight years Rob has been in a committed relationship with Michael, the first serious and long-term relationship he had. He described their relationship as loving and passionate, and continuously growing. Yet every time Rob was penetrated, he described a wave of terror flooding him, upon which he would begin to sob uncontrollably. This scared both him and Michael, and impacted their sex life and love life.

Having attempted to understand this in his analysis for a few years, Rob was recommended to seek body psychotherapy, and came to see me. At first, we tried to continue looking at his terror through the object relations lenses, focusing on parental and religious disapproval, his own homophobia and his abandonment anxiety, as well as issues of power and powerlessness. In our work, Rob kept trying to provide graphic details of his and his partner's sexual relationship, while

I endeavored to phrase these in relational terminology, perhaps out of my own fear of engaging with homoerotic countertransference.

After a year of us working together, and during a shared therapeutic exploration that involved touch, Rob lay on his stomach, fully dressed, and I placed a hand over his back. This touch, with me in control - "topping" - allowed me to engage in homoerotic fantasies that I dreaded to entertain with him looking. It was safe enough for me to play. Long minutes passed with very little happening, and I found myself drifting away. My hand felt heavy on his back, and for a moment I could not differentiate my hand from his back; it was as if they were glued together, part of the same tissue. This had a profound effect on me; there were drops falling on Rob's back and it took a moment for me to realize these were actually my tears. Yet I was not dissociated. This felt frightening and at the same time completely engrossing and promising. I wanted to remove my hand and leave the room, but also to leave it there forever, to never part. "Every time Michael comes inside of me," Rob broke the silence, "I feel that I die inside of him, that I am consumed by our togetherness. I seek it and fear it and the intensity of this feeling frightens me." Rob turned to see if I understood him, and saw my face, and my tears. Another pause ensued, following which he asked, "But how come this doesn't freeze you?" My answer was simple: "Because I could see you".

There are many possible ways of interpreting and understanding our interaction. It is important to say that following that session, Rob had a major shift in his experience of sexual contact. He realized that it was not his sensations and feelings that were the problem, but rather the way he conceptualized them as meaning something negative about his relationship when in fact, "it was a real celebration to realize my capacity to surrender to Michael and to our connection, and it sure is as terrifying as it is blissful."

Could it be beneficial to view the therapeutic interaction, and Rob's struggle in general, through the integrative drive-theory-object-relations lenses? To consider his body as both pleasure-seeking and object-seeking - an emergent bodymind that both craves and dreads an intersubjective experience?

In his analysis, Rob's body-dread was interpreted as inferred - as representing a pattern of relating (fear of annihilation, homophobic, a response to superegoic paternal disapproval etc.) and not directly of the body. But in our encounter, and in our enactment, it was an organismic dread - not merely a psychological fear, but a desire-and-fear enmeshed together in Rob inasmuch as he was an embodied organism. To return to Spielrein's conceptualization, we can understand the embodied-dis-course between us (and the enactment), and the intercourse between Rob and Michael as having both drive and relational components - a felt-and-embodied opportunity to die as an individual and be reborn as a third, then let the thirdness die and be recreated in our renewed individualities - a process as terrifying as it rewarding. This may be viewed as a subsymbolic (Bucci, 1998) or polyrhythmic (Knoblauch, 2011; 2012) demonstration of the somatic primacy of intersubjectivity.

What touch offered us, and what penetration offered Rob was organized, yet not symbolized. It was an invitation to relate to his relationship as both physical and relational, and consequently invited processing that demanded drive-based as well as relational conceptualizations. Attempting to address Rob's terror without attending to Rob-as-body would not only miss something fundamental about the pain, but also rob him of the potential held therein: Rob was able to experience unity, getting lost, enmeshing with his loved one. In my understanding, his sexual experience was an evidence of health, of his capacity to surrender. Such a deep surrender into the body-in-relation necessarily also entails annihilation dread, but of the bodymind, and not simply of the psyche. Rob's experience of sexual contact, and our shared experience of touch, demonstrate

the organismic and non-linear (or procreative) essence of drive in general and sexual drive in particular: it being about an organism seeking to express itself and experience pleasure, while connecting with another in body and mind. This was a place where bliss and hell were intertwined, illustrating the philosopher Ananda Coomaraswamy's (1940) argument: "No creature can attain a higher grade of nature without ceasing to exist" (p.6).

Surely, this short case illustration can be explained separately by drive theorists and object relationalists. We hope to have demonstrated that there is value in holding both, and that these may complement rather than exclude one another.

Drive-Relational Synthesis

Once we have disentangled the sex drive from procreation and acknowledged the multiplicity of ways in which it can be experienced, we can return to Spielrein's basic formulation concerning sex drive: namely, that intimate physical and emotional contact with another human being necessarily entails intensification of the processes of psychophysiological self-change (destruction and coming into being) – and that in its most general form, the sex drive can be thought of as the drive to surrender to overwhelmingly intimate contact with another in order to produce thirdness. While Spielrein had in mind the production of the physical third – a child – her idea can be expanded to include the psychological, relational third, or the intersubjective field, as conceptualized most extensively by Benjamin (e.g., 2004). The radical organismic transformation of one's subjectivity and identity that this process entails can, as Spielrein suggests, explain the common reactions of fear and avoidance of truly intimate sexual contact – the kind that was occurring between Rob and Michael. In Ghent's (1990) words, "the ultimate direction (of the surrender to intimacy with another) is the discovery of one's identity, one's sense of self, one's sense of wholeness, even one's sense of unity with other living beings" (p. 109). What we learn from Spielrein is that sexual contact can enable the individual to experience a particularly powerful form of surrender, one that can be experienced as death and lead to a profound individual transformation, physical as well as psychological. Our individuality as we knew it prior to the encounter, dies and is replaced with the experience of the thirdness, subsequently leading to the birth of new individuality. An integrative Spielreinian-relational formulation along these lines could provide a basic conceptual framework for a relational drive theory.

Summary

The cultural forgetting of Spielrein was, of course, no coincidence. She was omitted, because she was a woman, because she refused to give up her intellectual autonomy by allying herself exclusively with either Freud or Jung and because her integrative, drive-relational view of human psychology was too daring and excessive to be truly appreciated in the analytic climate of her time. Our ambitious hope for this paper is not to create a fully hermetic relational drive theory, but to ignite a dialogue and discussion, to bring Sabina Spielrein back from the periphery of psychoanalytic thinking into the center and reconsider the reconciliation of drive and relationality, of body and psyche, in a way that is perhaps only possible today, over thirty years into the establishment of the relational turn. Now that relational concepts and practice are widely accepted, perhaps it is possible to go back and pick up the pieces we left behind, and bring our shamed and exiled body, with its wishes to express and connect, with its wild and untamed desire to relate and manifest, back into the center stage of theoretical discussion. We wish to reclaim the space of the bodymind in theory since, to be truthful, it has never left the field of human relatedness, only the science of human relatedness.

Should our endeavor be successful, a separation which was once deemed essential can now begin to melt and relational psychoanalysis may enjoy both the wealth of drive theory, with the conceptual tools that it offers for recognizing our organisms as biological, and the richness of relational theory, which allows us to conceptualize the ingenuous ways in which our organisms relate and seek connection. Perhaps, as Sabina Spielrein finally assumes her place of honor alongside Freud and Mitchell, and her libidinally charged brilliance, her daring to speak as a desiring subject in the era of female masochism and penis envy, and her willful determination to integrate where others split, will become something that psychoanalytic culture can grapple with. For us, opening up to Spielrein's legacy has stemmed from, and in turn fostered, our desire to connect as well as our connection to our desires. Learning from her means learning to appreciate how synthesizing desire and connection is not only possible, but essential for fully understanding our human organismic experience.

BIOGRAPHIES

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