

Three Page Abstract
*Listening to the Body: Three Pragmatic Case Studies of
Body-Centered Psychotherapy*

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Abstract

This research project studies three case studies treated by Body-centered psychotherapy practitioner Laurie Schwartz, L.M.T., M.S. Each case was based on the initial twelve sessions of an open-ended treatment. All sessions were videotaped, and subjects filled out quantitative and qualitative measures regarding process and outcome. The method of the study involved the Pragmatic Case Study Method, which involves having the Body-centered Psychotherapy practitioner clarify her guiding conception and examining how it functions with actual clients across a treatment. The goal of this exploratory research was to articulate important Body-centered psychotherapy themes (i.e., integrating touch and talk) to inform future research.

Overview

Body-centered Psychotherapy (BcP) practitioners continue to search for a place in the psychotherapy canon. This doctoral dissertation in Clinical Psychology (Rutgers University, NJ) attempts to explore Body-centered Psychotherapy (BcP) through clinical research. Specifically, the focus of this exploratory study of the work of an expert Body-centered Psychotherapy practitioner is a way to unpack some of the basic elements of Body-centered psychotherapy. This study addresses such questions as: What does a Body-centered psychotherapy look like? How does Body-centered psychotherapy integrate talk and touch in a unified therapy? What is distinctive about Body-centered Psychotherapy? How are verbal and somatic interventions used in a single therapy, and how can these seemingly diverse therapeutic means be best combined into a single modality?

One of the greatest challenges in studying body-oriented techniques lies in the practice itself: How does language capture the experience of body-awareness? How can you talk about felt experience, and how can such experiences be measured and/or described in verbal language?

Because there is sparse research on BcP's theoretical methods and practices, the Pragmatic Case Study Method ("PCS Method") is a suitable strategy for beginning to systematically study BcP in detail and in context. Through such case studies, this project is a first attempt to articulate the themes and ideas that inform the work that is currently being practiced in the clinical field.

Using a systematic case-study method, including video and audio taping of sessions, as well as quantitative and qualitative process and outcome measures, this study attempted to identify themes, describe terms, and continue a dialogue on research on a holistic psychotherapy model.

¹ For purposes of the dissertation, authorship is only Amelia Kaplan. In future articles for such journals as Hakomi bulletin or USABP, authorship will include Amelia Kaplan and Laurie Schwartz.

Conceptual Method

The present study uses the case-based Pragmatic Case Study Method (“PCS Method”) developed by Fishman (1999, 2000). The Pragmatic Case Study design draws on Disciplined Inquiry (Peterson, 1991), a method of action-research (Schön, 1983) which offers a structured way to investigate themes in applied psychology, i.e. elucidating factors in determining what about a treatment is distinctive and useful.

The Pragmatic Case Study involves articulating the “guiding conception” of a practitioner and how it interacts with the client’s needs in treatment. The guiding conception is the practitioner’s theory of practice, which includes theoretical assumptions concerning assessment, goal setting, techniques, treatment plan, and interventions. Subsequently, the PCS Method examines how the practitioner’s guiding conception interacts with the particular needs of clients, which influences the process and offers feedback to the system.

This study examines a Body-centered Psychotherapy clinician’s “guiding conception” theory of practice and how it interacts with three clients in treatment. Through systematic inquiry of these actual cases, the PCS Method offers 1) an approach to developing thematic guiding principles of Body-centered psychotherapy and 2) an opportunity to see how they play out in real treatment cases.

Research Design

This research examines three case studies treated by Body-centered Psychotherapy practitioner Laurie Schwartz, L.M.T., M.S. While treatment length of the actual cases is open-ended, only the first twelve sessions are included in the research. The data consist of assessment measures of the subject pre- and post-treatment, process measures during treatment (which involved ongoing examination by both practitioner and clients who filled out weekly process questionnaires that were developed jointly by the clinician and researcher), videotaping of all therapy sessions, transcription of sessions, review of the video with the practitioner, and an exit interview with each subject.

The videotapes themselves are a crucial source of information – both as independent sources of data and as a method for practitioner review. Part of the data analysis includes the therapist and researcher reviewing the videotapes of these sessions to articulate how her guiding conception interacted with the presenting problems and goals of the subject, and how she integrates that information into her theoretical intent and procedure which will guide the next intervention.

The BcP practitioner for this study, Laurie Schwartz, L.M.T., M.S., was selected through a network of BcP practitioners because of her experience and training in the field, and because of her highly regarded reputation among practitioners. She is a certified Rubenfeld Synergy Instructor, a Certified Hakomi Therapist with 17 years of clinical experience, and currently is an advanced supervisor of therapists and teacher in the Somatic Experiencing method. She also has a commitment to research in the field of body psychotherapy. She has already been videotaping clients for several years with the intent of engaging in clinical research.

Laurie has synthesized 25 years of training in Body-centered psychotherapy into a guiding conception that integrates aspects of Rubenfeld Synergy, Hakomi, and Somatic Experiencing, with a trauma-orientation. When a person is traumatized, the person’s nervous

system becomes frozen in time (Levine, 1997). Laurie works with the client through the use of mindfulness (Kurtz, 1990) to bring the client back into biological self-regulation. Teaching people the language of sensation and helping them become more aware through mindfulness of their bodily experience, they can begin to regain self-regulation of the nervous system and thereby resolve long-held trauma responses in the body.

Analysis

As described, the method of analysis is dictated by Disciplined Inquiry, in which the client's needs are identified and examined as they interact with the practitioner's theory and technique. Particularly, the focus is on how the practitioner engaged in choice points and shifts in technique with feedback from the client. By carefully monitoring the work of a single therapist, this research is designed to explore in "thick" detail (i.e., using quotes from the actual sessions) what are some important themes involved in a BcP treatment. Identifying themes hopefully contributes to a dialogue on the mechanisms of change found in this treatment modality.

There are many limitations of the study. It is concerned with examining what happens in the naturalistic practice of Body-centered Psychotherapy rather than with investigating practice in an externally controlled environment. There was no control group, however there were some quality controls that are discussed at greater length in the dissertation. This study can be considered a preliminary examination of Body-centered Psychotherapy.

Summary

The project's aim is to contribute to development of theory, research, and practice of Somatic Psychology, as well as to bring attention to this important area. By looking at what is distinctive about a Body-centered Psychotherapy approach, this study can also begin a process towards researching efficacy. By identifying themes and defining terms in BcP treatment, we can begin to devise research to look at whether it is effective to combine talk and touch in a single therapy, and if it is, what are the mechanisms of change in a combined talk and touch integrative therapy.

This study aspires to contribute to the field by exposing themes that arise in Body-centered Psychotherapy, and how these themes are worked with across several BcP cases. By examining these cases, this study attempts to examine the theoretical underpinnings of actual cases in order to elucidate concepts of how the theory and techniques of BcP may be distinctive and useful. The objective is twofold: 1) to apply the Pragmatic Case Study Method to three cases of Body-centered Psychotherapy; and 2) to begin the explanatory process that will contribute to the field of Somatic Psychology. My intention is for this work to contribute to the articulation of themes for larger research studies. Following the work of such pioneers as (Klem, 1985), this study will attempt to define terms for future research, thereby creating a framework of concepts for further study in BcP.

It is intended that these cases will ultimately become a part of a growing database of Pragmatic Case Studies (Fishman, 1999; 2000) that will help practitioners make informed choices about matching treatment with clients (Howard, Moras, Brill, Martinovich, & Lutz, 1996). These cases will contribute to a movement towards "patient-oriented" research, which views the client as the basic unit of analysis, as opposed to the more typical, group-oriented "treatment research" (both the "efficacy" and "effectiveness" types), which views the

intervention model and associated treatment procedures as the basic unit of analysis (Howard et al., 1996; Lambert, Hansen, & Finch, 2001).

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