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Decluttering the Mind: A Creative Approach Towards Becoming

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DECLUTTERING THE MIND:
A CREATIVE APPROACH TOWARDS BECOMING

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Thesis submitted to the faculty of Columbia College Chicago

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for

Master of Arts

in

Dance/Movement Therapy & Counseling

Department of Creative Arts Therapies

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to explore the researcher's mind, as defined within the field of interpersonal neurobiology (IPNB), and concept of self in the context of professional development as a dance/movement therapist. An embodied artistic inquiry methodology was chosen to support this in-depth reflective exploration, utilizing visual art making and movement as methods of data collection and analysis. Primary research questions were inspired by Rogers' (1961) views of psychotherapy, asking "Who am I as a therapist?" and "How may I become myself as a therapist?" The process was further structured through Siegel's (2010a) nine domains of integration: consciousness, bilateral, vertical, memory, narrative, state, interpersonal, temporal, and transpirational.

Fourteen themes were identified through dialogue transcript, creative synthesis, conversations with a research consultant, and a resonance panel. Themes were organized into two groups: (1) steps describing and supporting the process of becoming, and (2) a description of this researcher's concept of self and its creative potential. In addition, two overarching themes—transgenerational trauma and the connectedness of brain, mind, and relationships comprising the triangle of human experience (Siegel, 2007)—were discovered. The metaphor of decluttering a physical space was used to help explain the results. Ultimately, the results culminated into a creative approach towards becoming by decluttering the mind, supporting therapeutic effectiveness and professional development.

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Introduction

As far as I can remember, I have been intrigued by complexity. Combined with my excitement over sharing newly discovered connections and explaining them to others, this fascination contributed to what I would later discover to be two of my fundamental values in life: learning (growth) and sharing (contribution). This ultimately got me interested in learning about the complex workings of human behavior and experience, sparked my curiosity for neuroscience, and guided me when choosing interpersonal neurobiology (IPNB) as the theoretical framework from which to work as an emerging dance/movement therapist and counselor.

While going through any graduate program offers an abundance of complex topics to be explored, I found two to be particularly intriguing: the concept of personal and professional growth or development, and the concept of self. Without the time to indulge in an explorative process due to the intensity of the program, I experienced chaos rather than complexity. Confronted with the question of “who am I,” I did not know what this basic concept was or where to start. This made me doubt my ability to change or grow, personally as well as professionally. After all, to observe change, one must be able to identify the initial stage of something. Without this, growth either appears to be absent or non-directional. Hence, this thesis reflects my journey of discovering who I am and this place of self from which I can build complexity, including my professional identity as a dance/movement therapist.

Literature Review

The Search for Self

Essence, core or true self, being, and ipseity are all concepts that reflect a belief that humans possess innate and perpetual characteristics, which can be discovered (Gregen, 1991; Haynes, 2016; Laffont, 2012; Lutz, Dunne, & Davidson, 2007; Schlegel & Hicks, 2011; Schlegel, Vess, & Arndt, 2011). From spirituality (Merton, 1972) and psychology (Jung, 1959; Rogers, 1961), to media and folk theories (Gregen, 1991; Lakoff & Johnson, 1999; Schlegel & Hicks, 2011), Western theorists have engaged in this search for self, agreeing that discovering, accessing, or aligning one's action with a "core-self" creates meaning and well-being (Schlegel & Hicks, 2011; Schlegel, Vess, & Arndt, 2011). This further informs therapists working from psychotherapeutic frameworks and healing approaches, such as internal family systems (Schwartz, 2013), client-centered therapy (Rogers, 1961), or authentic movement (Adler, 2002; Cahill, 2015), when creating interventions with the goal of finding and/or aligning actions with the self to promote health.

Interpersonal neurobiology (IPNB) recognizes an ipseitous self as an essential way of being, or an invariant quality and grounded essence of a person (Siegel, 2007). Based on Lutz, Dunne, and Davidson's (2007) concept of ipseity as the minimal subjective sense of "I-ness" in experience, the ipseitous self emerges as a state of mind in which one can experience the full range of awareness (Siegel, 2007). This full range of awareness consists of primary sensory experiences unaffected by higher cognitive processes (top-down processes), which influence perception or the processing of new information (Siegel, 2007). Hence, accessing the ipseitous self enables one to become fully present in the moment and to create a mind that is bare, non-judgmental, non-reactive, and non-conceptual (Kabat-Zinn, 2005, 2013; Siegel, 2007).

The mind and human experience. The topic of the self cannot be discussed without looking at the concept of the mind. The discussion on how to define the mind is ongoing, often including polarized ideas about the connection and relationship between the mind and the body (Gregory, 2004). IPNB describes the mind as a self-organizing mental process regulating an internal flow of energy and information (Siegel, 2007). Here, energy is an umbrella term for kinetic and electrochemical energy converted into patterns of neural firing. Patterns matching with prior learning constitute information (Siegel, 2012a). Furthermore, the mind emerges from neurophysiological processes distributed within the skull brain and the body proper—termed the brain—and from relational experiences in which the flow of energy and information is shared between people (Siegel, 2012a). Hence, the mind is defined as the embodied and relational process regulating and emerging from the flow of energy and information (Siegel, 2012a).

Created by the dynamic interplay of these three dimensions—the mind, brain, and relationships—human experience emerges, shaping how one perceives reality and relates to the world and others (Siegel, 2012a). Consequently, IPNB calls this interdependent concept the triangle of human experiences (Siegel, 2012a). In addition, human experiences are shaped by elements that enter awareness, which can be divided into the five senses of seeing, hearing, feeling, smelling, and tasting; the sixth sense of interoception (bodily sensations); the seventh sense of activities of the mind (thoughts, feelings, intentions, attitudes, concepts, images, beliefs, hopes, dreams); and the eighth sense of relationships with others (Siegel, 2007). These eight senses make up the flow of energy and information within the triangle of mind, brain, and relationships (Siegel, 2007).

Before these senses enter awareness, they are filtered by four streams of awareness (Siegel, 2007). Those streams are sensation, observation, conceptualization (thought), and

knowing (Siegel, 2007). When these streams are balanced, they create a harmonious flow of energy and information, which enters awareness and gives human experience a quality of being flexible, adaptive, coherent, energized, and stable (FACES; Siegel, 2007). Thus, to access the full range of human experience and the ipseitous self, one must be able to create this harmonious flow by being open to the input of all eight senses and how they are filtered by the four streams of awareness (Siegel, 2007).

One core-mechanism to achieve a harmonious flow is integration, the linkage of differentiated elements of a system (Siegel, 2010c). Differentiation is explained as segregation or specialization, and linkage as the connection of those segregated or differentiated parts (Siegel, 2010a, 2012a). Consequently, differentiation and linkage of the eight senses and the four streams of awareness create a harmonious flow from which one can experience the full range of awareness and access the ipseitous self (Siegel, 2007). However, if integration is impaired or when one stream of awareness becomes dominant, experiences might be characterized by rigidity (extensive linkage) or chaos (extensive differentiation; Siegel, 2012a).

Mental clutter. Throughout life, human experiences create engrained patterns of neural activation (Siegel, 2007). Based on prior learning, those patterns potentially shape the streams of awareness and how incoming senses are filtered (Siegel, 2007). Referred to as top-down processes (Siegel, 2007), they often become automatic, working outside conscious awareness. Linking elements of awareness, they allow rapid assessment of situations, preventing the mind from being flooded and overwhelmed with disconnected stimuli and, therefore, chaos (Siegel, 2007). At the same time, they potentially narrow one's range of experience by making one or two streams more dominant, increasing rigidity (Siegel, 2007). As the range of experiences becomes narrower and perception of reality less clear, one might experiences life less fully, as a

routine, dull, or lethargic (Siegel, 2007). It is these aspect of potentially restricting a full range of awareness and making experience less clear that motivated the use of the term mental clutter as a metaphor to refer to reflections of engrained patterns in mind, brain, and relationships. This term will be used interchangeably with top-down processes or engrained patterns.

Decluttering. To be able to re-establish access to the full range of experiences one must free the incoming information of the eight senses from the automatic influence of top-down processes, while remaining able to link separated elements to each other. Siegel (2007) refers to this process as dissolving top-down enslavement. He further proposes that dissolving the top-down enslavement does not necessarily mean getting rid of those processes, but instead developing the ability to bring them into conscious awareness, to observe them, and, if necessary or wanted, to intentionally suspend them for a while (Kabat-Zinn, 2005; Siegel, 2007). Siegel (2007, 2010a) calls this ability *mindsight*.

Mindsight. Siegel (2010a) defines *mindsight* as a form of focused attention, which enables one to monitor and modify the flow of energy and information. At the heart of *mindsight*, he sees the process of reflection and its components of openness, observation, and objectivity (Siegel, 2007, 2010a). He further highlights mindfulness as an essential starting point and mindful awareness practices as ways to train the skill of *mindsight* (Siegel, 2007). By purposefully and intentionally paying attention to the unfolding of moment-by-moment experiences with curiosity, openness, acceptance, and love (COAL), one gets to know the elements that make up experiences and learns to differentiate them from each other (Kabat-Zinn, 2005; Siegel, 2007). In a sense, it allows one to declutter the mind.

Domains of integration. The healing capacities and health benefits of mindful awareness practices have been extensively researched and confirmed over the past years (Adele & Feldman,

2004; Baer, 2003; Brown & Ryan, 2003; Carson & Langer, 2004; Epstein, 2001; Germer, Siegel, & Fulton, 2005; Kabat-Zinn, 2005, 2013; Lutz, Dunne, & Davidson, 2007; Santorelli, 1999).

Using mindful awareness practices as main intervention techniques in his psychotherapeutic practice, Siegel (2010a) proposes nine domains to promote integration and move an individual towards mindsight and health, called domains of integration: consciousness, bilateral, vertical, memory, narrative, state, interpersonal, temporal, and transpirational (Siegel, 2010a; 2012b).

Consciousness, bilateral, and vertical. Consciousness is defined as the subjective experience of awareness (Siegel, 2012a, 2012b) consisting of two aspects: the elements one can be aware of and the ability of being aware of awareness itself (Siegel, 2012b). Integration of consciousness involves fostering the ability to differentiate and link the eight senses and distinguishing the awareness of these senses with the awareness of awareness itself (Siegel, 2012b). Bilateral integration looks at differentiation and linkage of the left and right hemispheres of the brain and their processes, resulting in creativity, richness, and complexity (Siegel, 2010a, 2012a). Meanwhile, vertical integration results from the linkage of differentiated areas of the nervous system, ascending from the body proper through the brainstem and limbic areas arriving at the cortex (Siegel, 2010a, 2012a). This is most commonly addressed as body-mind connection. Allowing signals from muscles, bones, and hollow organs to enter awareness, as well as input from subcortical processes such as survival reflexes and emotional responses, vertical integration enables one to consciously experience the wisdom of the body and intuition to blossom (Siegel, 2012a, 2012b).

Memory and narrative. The natural flow of memory involves integration of initial inputs from the various layers of implicit memory (perception, motor action, emotion, bodily sensations, schema, priming) with each other to form the factual and autobiographical aspects of

explicit memory (Siegel, 2012b). Thus, memories enable one to create a coherent sense of self across time (Siegel, 2012a). Integration in this domain focuses on arranging implicit pieces into coherent pictures of lived experience and facts about the world (Siegel, 2012a, 2012b). In addition, relying on integration of the other previous domains, narrative integration sorts through memory, here-and-now experience, and imagination to create a coherent picture of one's life story (Siegel, 2012a, 2012b).

States. A state of mind is defined as a cluster of context dependent mental activities activated at a given moment in time (Siegel, 2012a). They can be fleeting, such as feelings, thoughts, and behavioral patterns, or more enduring. The latter can turn into repeated associated qualities that define a "self" and are therefore called self-states (Siegel, 2012a). Here, a self-state must be differentiated from the ipseititious self, as one can have several context dependent self-states (or identities), but only one ipseititious self, underlying all of those. State integration then focuses on promoting differentiation and linkage within and between states (Siegel, 2012a). It occurs when one can link elements of thought, feeling, memory, and behavior to optimize functioning while being able to release associations and create new ones to adapt to changing environmental demands (Siegel, 2012a).

Interpersonal. In addition to inter-state and within-state integration, IPNB defines a "we-state" as the integration of two minds (Siegel, 2012b). Compassionately resonating with another person and their internal experience while maintaining and honoring one's differentiated self, lies at the heart of interpersonal integration (Siegel, 2012a, 2012b). One of the main mechanisms that promotes interpersonal integration is the activation of the resonance circuit, a multilayered neural network that enables a person to attune one's own internal state with the mental state of another person (Iacoboni, 2009; Rizzolatti & Craighero, 2004; Siegel, 2007). Hence, integration

can be initiated either through an attuned connection with another person or through self-reflection, as both promote neural integration in the resonance circuit (Siegel, 2007, 2012b).

Temporal. The human mind has the unique ability to map time. One can remember the past, perceive and compare it to the present, and imagine a future (Siegel, 2012b). This ability to mentally time travel creates the conflict of longing for certainty, permanence, and immortality while realizing uncertainty, impermanence, and the end of all things (Siegel, 2012a, 2012b). Temporal integration means honoring this seemingly contradictory interplay between longing and reality (Siegel, 2012b).

Transpirational. The final domain, transpirational integration, describes a state in which all eight domains of integration are differentiated and linked in themselves and then linked together. Literally meaning “breathing across integration,” it describes an ideal state of integration: integration of integration (Siegel, 2012a, 2012b). Characteristics are defined as an awareness of an expanded sense of self and feelings of being connected and belonging to a larger whole (Siegel, 2012a). This form of integration seems to emerge naturally, without planning, intention, or expectation, through the integrative work done in the other eight domains (Siegel, 2012b). It is this state that brings one into one’s ipseitous self (Siegel, 2007).

The Process of Becoming

The search for self potentially leads to health and well-being, making it of interest for the helping professions. In his compilation of papers, *On Becoming a Person*, Carl Rogers (1961) proposed that the client’s search for self is at the heart of psychotherapy. While Rogers (1961) primarily speaks about the process of becoming within his clients, he acknowledges that effective psychotherapy requires therapists to be congruent and real. Therefore, therapeutic

effectiveness and, arguably, professional development as a therapist are directly connected to the search for self and the process of becoming a person.

Professional development. The interest in professional development, including therapist development, is reflected in a variety of career development theories and models as well as extensive research in the topics of expertise and professional mastery (Chi, Glaser & Farr, 1988; Ericsson, 1996; Ericsson, Charness, Hoffman, & Feltovich, 2006; Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2013; Skovholt & Jennings, 2004). Looking back at 25 years of studying therapist development, Rønnestad and Skovholt (2013) proposed three models—phasic, theme, and cyclic/trajectories—conceptualizing characteristics of and conditions for mastery in psychotherapy. Moving through several phases between novice student and experienced professional, one arrives in the senior professional phase after years of experiences (Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2013).

The movement through these phases can be further explained through several general themes, including integration of personal and professional self (Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2013). Recognizing that not all therapists develop optimally and that some never reach the senior professional phase despite extensive experience (Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2013), they highlight the importance of self-awareness and continuous reflection in their cyclic/trajectories model of therapist development (Jennings, Skovholt, Goh, & Lian, 2013; Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2013). This model is initiated when therapists experience difficulties or challenges in their professional or personal life. Most importantly, the way a therapist handles those difficulties informs professional development or stagnation. The ability to handle difficulties and challenges in a complex and at times ambiguous social context by openly and flexibly engaging and functionally concluding a reflective process is what promotes professional growth. Therefore, reflection is at the heart of therapists' professional development.

Professional development and IPNB. Similarities are revealed when comparing Rønnestad and Skovholt's (2013) models of therapists' professional development and previously reviewed concepts of decluttering the mind and the ipseitous self. In general, there appears to be a continuous and cyclic flow of differentiation in response to difficulties and challenges, and subsequent linkage of differentiated elements into a coherent whole throughout the entirety of professional life, highlighting the importance of integration. In addition, the cyclic/trajectories model (Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2013) highlights the importance of reflection, breaking it down into three types: reflexivity (the cognitive and affective capacity to reflect), reflective stance (the attitude to explore and understand experiences in the therapist's life with curiosity and openness), and reflective activity (the process of thinking about all aspects of the therapist's life and the metacognition of this process; Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2013). This aligns with Siegel's understanding of mindfulness with the three components of reflection (objectivity, openness, observation) at its heart (Siegel, 2007, 2010a). Mindfulness can be used to assess professional counselor development or stagnation through monitoring and modifying the flow of energy and information, assessing the state of integration within the nine domains, and promoting differentiation or linkage. Furthermore, Siegel (2010a) suggested that mindfulness provides therapists with empathy and insight to more deeply sense and understand themselves and others within relationships (Siegel, 2010b), supporting the formation and quality of the therapeutic relationship. Thus, mindfulness, including reflection, is essential for developing the counselor's self-understanding, personal and professional growth, and clinical effectiveness (Siegel, 2010b).

Creative Approach Towards Becoming

As stated earlier, mindfulness can be developed through mindful awareness practices. While the body proper as part of the brain is of great importance within most mindful awareness

practices (Kabat-Zinn, 2005, 2013; Lakoff & Johnson, 1999; Siegel, 2007), it is usually used as a point of focused attention, limited to communicating sensory input or the wisdom of the body. Equally, movement or body action as an expressive and creative reflection of human experiences (Tortora, 2006) is rarely considered within prominent mindful awareness research as a means of providing an additional way of knowing. Therefore, to contribute to the existing literature on mindsight, mindfulness, and professional development, I engaged in an embodied artistic inquiry self-study to explore the depth of my mind. Through this, I participated in a deep, reflective process utilizing visual art, writing, and movement as reflective tools. The assumption was that this would support my professional development as a dance/movement therapist and shed light on top-down processes, including personal movement styles (Tortora, 2006). This process further shaped my understanding of a therapist's ability to access the ipseitous self as a starting point to perceiving professional development and identity as a creative approach towards becoming whatever the client might need in the moment, supporting the therapeutic process.

The structure of the research was guided by the reviewed literature and Rogers' (1961) questions within the context of professional development: "Who am I as a therapist" and "How may I become myself as a therapist?" To narrow the scope of these primary research questions, a secondary question was developed guided by Siegel's domains of integration (2007): "What is my experience of self within [name of domain of integration] in relationship to my professional development?"

Methods

Methodology

Investigating the primary research questions through Siegel's domains of integration, I explored my internal world and, therefore, investigated a concept which cannot be quantified in absolute terms by current technology, often working outside of conscious awareness (Siegel, 2010a). Seeking out alternative ways of knowing, a qualitative research approach in the form of an embodied artistic inquiry (Hervey, 2012) and in the framework of a constructivist paradigm (Mertens, 2015) was used. This methodology integrates analytic and aesthetic ways of knowing while acknowledging the creative process of the researcher and the need for in-depth self-observation and self-reflection (Hervey, 2012; Siegel, 2007, 2010a). In addition, a willingness to expect the unexpected, to appreciate paradox, and to have patience for the unknown characterizes an embodied artistic inquiry research approach (Hervey, 2012). As the process of reflection is central for seeing the mind clearly in IPNB and openness is defined as a central component of reflection (Siegel, 2010a), this methodology aligns well with the topic of this research. Finally, I recognized that the study would be conducted in a social context using a language (English) different from my mother tongue (German). Providing opportunities and ways of expression for aspects not related to the cultural context of this study or encoded in a different language was another reason to choose this methodology.

Population and Data Collection

I, a female-identifying international student from Germany enrolled in a US American dance/movement therapy and counseling graduate program and in my late-20s, was the sole participant of this self-study. Though I had a bachelor's degree, this was the first time that I was preparing to work in a field as a professional.

Data collection was executed in a studio on Columbia College Chicago's campus. The space was set up prior to the data collection process with the computer, recording program, and art materials ready to use. Artistic methods of data collection were used, focusing on movement video recordings, reflective writing, and visual art making. Over the course of 10 weeks, movement and art in the form of paintings and drawings, using different mediums such as chalk, colored pencils, watercolors, acrylic paint, and tissue paper, were created in response to the secondary research questions. Each week data collection evolved around one domain of integration organized in the order Siegel commonly lists them in his books (Siegel, 2010a; 2012a; 2012b). Data was collected during the same two hours over two days. Movement created in this process was recorded for analysis purposes. In addition, reflective writing took place in the form of unstructured journaling after each data collection session in response to the created movement and art. The second data collection session each week was an opportunity to focus and clarify the process of the first session. As a result, the data collection process replicated the structure and art material used in the first session.

Procedure

Each week started with a basic literature review on the week's domain of integration. On the days of data collection, the space was set up as previously described and the name of the domain written down on a large piece of paper. This was done to acknowledge my tendency for visual learning, enabling me to keep a mental image of the domain while moving or art making. Each data collection session started with mindfulness awareness practice using Siegel's wheel of awareness breathing exercise (Siegel, 2010b) until a mindful state was achieved, characterized by the subjective experience of openness, observation, and objectivity. When this state was achieved, I projected the mental image of that week's domain in the front of my mind, staying

aware of any changes in sensations, images, feelings, and thoughts (SIFTs). Visual art or movement was then created in response to those changes. The decision between visual art making or movement was an intuitive one. While engaging in movement or art making, I tracked SIFTs and let them guide my decisions in the art making/movement process. The first part of data collection was completed when all SIFTs had been accounted for and the desire to create subsided. This was followed by responding to the experience of the first creative process with the other medium. Data collection for the day was concluded with journaling SIFTs that had emerged during the movement and art making processes.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was an integrated part of the creative process and occurred concurrently with the data collection phase as well as afterwards. In embodied artistic inquiry, data is analyzed by transforming the raw data into a new form, bringing themes, patterns, or the essences of the data into awareness (Hervey, 2012). Two types of data analysis methods were used: dialogue transcript and creative synthesis. Dialogue transcript involved transforming the raw data by creating a dialogue with it instead of its interpretation, and enabled me to create and elaborate on the meaning (Hervey, 2000). The process occurred non-verbally by using movement or visual art making as forms of communication (Hervey, 2000; Tortora, 2006) and was described in the second step of data collection when I responded to initial movements/artwork with the other medium. Creative synthesis, in accordance with Forinash's (2012) steps for qualitative data analysis, was used on the raw data as well as the transformed data, looking for recurrent themes in movements, drawings, and writing. In all steps, movement and/or art making was used to deepen the analysis process.

A research consultant was used, who was a recent graduate of an art therapy master's program, to support meaning making and analysis of visual artwork, create deeper insight into psychological processes, and help answer the research questions (see Appendix A). Meetings were held after week six, reviewing art work of domains one to four, and after the end of the data collection period, reviewing art work of domains five to nine.

Lastly, an individual thesis presentation was organized. The presentation incorporated an art gallery, displaying the visual art work created during data collection, as well as a [movement performance](#). The movement performance was followed by a question and answer (Q&A) session. Insight gained through the presentation and Q&A was incorporated into the results.

Validation Strategies

Rich, thick description was used as a validation strategy, incorporating detailed description of movement, artwork, unstructured journaling, and developed themes in the discussion (Creswell, 2013). In addition, a resonance panel was established and used immediately after the end of the data collection period as well as during the analysis phase to modify and refine themes and to provide external validation (Curry & Wells, 2006). The panel consisted of four people, including one peer, one board-certified dance/movement therapist (BC-DMT) who had significant insight into the theoretical framework of IPNB, one movement pattern analyst, and the previously mentioned research consultant. Participants of the panel were of different stages of professional development, ages, cultural backgrounds, and familiarity with me. The intention was for this panel to bring diverse perspectives to the evaluation of data and results. Due to sickness, the peer was not able to attend the first meeting, which looked at the data in chronological order of creation. Panelists were not notified which domain the data belonged to or of my

own SIFT responses. All participants attended the second meeting at the end of the data analysis period, examining the analysis process and results as related to the research question.

Results

Fourteen themes were identified during the analysis of artwork, movement, and journaling (see Figure 1). Overall, a movement towards integration and an improved ability to be open, objective, and observant were identified in all domains between the first and second session of data collection within each week, interpreted as indicators for professional development. Consequently, themes reflected my current state of integration and how integration and professional development could be supported, answering the primary research question of “How may I become myself as a therapist.” Themes emerging in response to domain nine (transpirational integration) were understood as the closest state towards my ipseitous self, answering the primary research question of “Who am I as a therapist.” Lastly, two overarching themes—transgenerational trauma and the triangle of human experience—were discovered, clarifying my path of professional development.

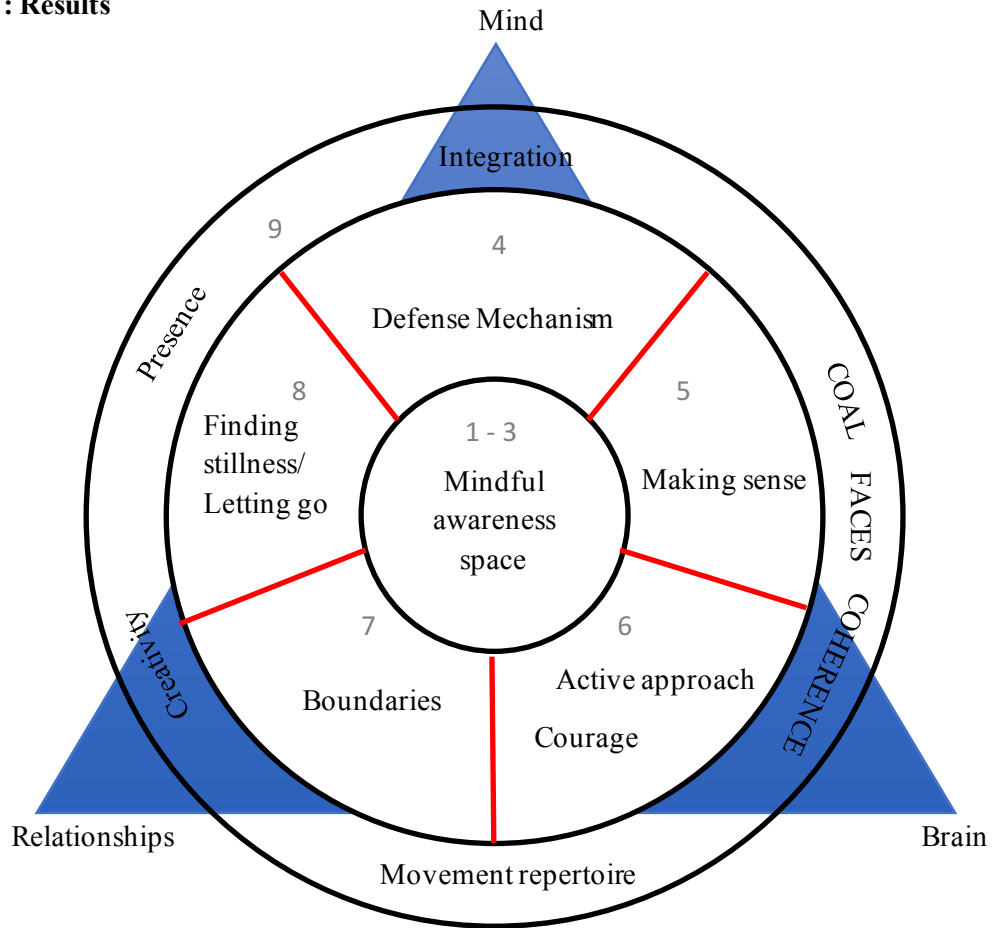
In analyzing domains one to three, it became apparent that all of them contained the concepts of flow, energy/chakra/fire, and space. Further steps of data analysis helped clarify this theme as sensing the flow of energy and information within a three-dimensional space, which I termed a mindful awareness space. Qualities of these first three domains would show up repeatedly in all following domains, prompting me to consider the theme of mindful awareness space as a central theme on which all of the others are built.

Two overarching themes emerged at the end of the data analysis process in conversation with the research consultant and in discussion with the resonance panel. The first one was the connectedness of brain/body, mind, and relationships, supporting the idea of an interdependent triangle of human experience and well-being, and a shared flow of energy and information (Siegel, 2007). This was revealed in the recurrence of a set of three objects or primary colors.

Further exploration showed a strong association of yellow with the brain, including the extended nervous system throughout the body. Blue was used in most paintings resembling a string of air or thread. In conversation with the research consultant, a hypothesis was created identifying these blue threads as a symbol of cognitive processing, representing the mind. Red was then attributed to the concept of relationships to complete the triangle.

The theme of transgenerational trauma was discovered in the data from domains one to eight during the final resonance panel discussion. Represented as sensations of heat and tension; images of containment and being flooded with stimuli, such as barbed wire, rain drops, and the ocean; feelings of nausea, suffocation, and anxiety; and perpetual thoughts reflecting a dominant left hemisphere; the trauma shaped the way I experienced the first eight domains of integration. The trauma was not visible in the domain of transpirational integration. As the elements of the trauma seemed to prevent or disrupt the process of integration, it was interpreted as a challenge that had to be overcome for optimal professional development to occur.

Figure 1: Results





- # 1 – 9: Domain of integration
- 1: Integration of Consciousness
 - 2: Bilateral Integration
 - 3: Vertical Integration
 - 4: Memory Integration
 - 5: Narrative Integration
 - 6: State Integration
 - 7: Interpersonal Integration
 - 8: Temporal Integration
 - 9: Transpirational Integration

COAL = Curiosity, Openness, Acceptance, Love

FACES = Flexible, Adaptive, Coherent, Energized, Stable

COHERENCE = Connected, Open, Harmonious, Engaged, Receptive, Emergent, Noetic, Compassionate, Empathic

 Transgenerational trauma

 Triangle of human experience

Discussion

Results emerging from data analysis are organized into two groups: (1) steps to support the process of becoming, reflected in themes of domains one to eight, answering the primary question of “How may I become myself as a therapist”, and (2) a description of my ipseitous self through themes of domain nine, answering the primary question “Who am I as a therapist.” In addition, I found the metaphor of decluttering a physical space helpful to explain the results and described the process.

Decluttering

Based on my experiences, I divide the process of decluttering a physical space into five steps: (1) create conditions, (2) identify, (3) question, (4) act, and (5) maintain. The first step of creating conditions establishes a space in which clutter can be brought into view without being buried or swept away by it. This implies finding the time to fully pay attention and engage in the decluttering process, to decide on an area to start the process, to create the environment to do so, and to pull the clutter from its usual storage places. The next step is to look closer at the elements of the clutter, involving breaking up and spreading out the pile. This further enhances one’s awareness of what is owned in that identified area. After creating the conditions and identifying the clutter, step three is to figure out the relationship one has with its elements. This means asking questions such as, “What is the value of this?,” “Do I need this?,” and “Is it still necessary?” The relationship one establishes to different elements of clutter will then guide the decision of what to do with them, leading into step four: to act. Elements one perceived as valuable or necessary might be re-organized and stored, while those seen as useless or unnecessary are sold, donated, or thrown away. In either case, it is necessary to become active to promote change.

There are several benefits of decluttering. Because one has identified, established a relationship with, and organized the clutter, each element becomes more accessible and, to an extent, more meaningful. The now open space invites endless possibilities to create or engage within it. The state of knowing what one owns without having to fear hidden surprises or skeletons in the closet could further be empowering, which might translate to an openness to invite other people into that space.

As one moves on with life and invites guests over, step five of maintaining a decluttered space becomes important. To enjoy the benefits of a decluttered space, one should constantly or at least repeatedly engage in the process of decluttering. In its simplest form, decluttering becomes a creative approach towards life by engaging in a cyclic process of creating conditions, identifying, questioning, and acting.

Decluttering the mind. My own process of becoming appears to follow a similar course, with the answer to “Who am I as a therapist” emerging from beneath the clutter. The domains of integration enable me to define and hone in on different areas of my mind, while the embodied artistic inquiry approach (Hervey, 2012) provides alternative ways of seeing and knowing when re-evaluating the clutter. Emerging from the data of domains one to three was a three-dimensional space reflected in moving in three dimensions and approaching artwork from several angles, aligning with step one of the decluttering process: creating the environment. This mindful awareness space was initially experienced as overwhelming, and included the visceral sensation of tension, heat and nausea, and imagery reflecting drowning in the forms of seaweed, the ocean, and raindrops. However, with the progression of the research, these experiences changed into feelings of COAL, indicating an increased ability to step back and observe, openly and objectively, whatever enters my awareness. This points towards the development of reflective

awareness (Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2013; Siegel, 2007), which appears to be promoted by a movement towards integration within consciousness, bilateral, and vertical (Siegel, 2010a). In addition, shared symbols of energy, chakra, and flow in artwork signify the flow of energy and information within this mindful awareness space (Siegel, 2007).

Through memory integration I can identify or uncover the elements contained within the flow of energy and information. This skill was represented in my creative process, in which I would spontaneously wrap my drawings in white tissue paper. I would then recognize the impulse to brush over the covered painting with water, making the tissue paper transparent and revealing the paint underneath. In conversation with my resonance panel, I could further attribute some elements (e.g. the overwhelming visceral experience of tension, heat, and nausea) to the implicitly stored collective trauma connected to my cultural identity as being German and the Holocaust, which seems to have been passed down transgenerationally (Van der Kolk, 2014; Volkan, Ast, & Greer, 2002). Volkan, Ast, and Greer (2002) refer to this form of collective trauma, impacting large groups of people over generations, as a large-group chosen trauma. In my case, this implicitly stored trauma results in defense mechanisms keeping me contained, rigid, and removed from direct experience, primarily through an overpowering left hemisphere. This was displayed in the use of smaller paper size, the already mentioned wrapping in white tissue paper, and calculated or mechanical looking gestural movements, which were also prominent in my response to bilateral integration. In addition, movements revealed low intensity and bound flow, supporting the feeling of inhibition and constraint (Kestenberg et al., 1999). This use of low intensity, bound flow could further be interpreted as a restricted flow of energy and information within the triangle of human experience (Siegel, 2007) and mindlessness (Kestenberg et al., 1999). Hence, it can be assumed that my movement towards integration and towards the self

beneath the clutter requires resolving the large-group chosen trauma, or bringing the top-down processes connected to it into awareness and resolving its top-down enslavement (Siegel, 2007).

As I move from memory integration into narrative integration, I start to question elements entering my awareness with COAL. I ask “where does this come from”, “is this useful”, or “does it add value or meaning to my experience?”. This allows me to connect elements and to create a coherent narrative, moving towards narrative integration. In my data, this was visible in colors and shapes being patchy and compartmentalized in my first drawing, but intertwined and merged in my second one. The intertwining and merging made the drawing appear more fluid, pointing towards a progression out of rigidity and into flexibility, and suggesting an increased flow of energy and information with FACES. While I cannot connect a specific start or end to the large-group chosen trauma, preventing me from creating a coherent narrative of it, questioning it makes me understand that not all of its elements have a restrictive effect on me. In fact, I now perceive much of my passion for multicultural awareness and my constant desire to let it grow to be fueled by the history of my country. I further feel that it provides me with an important story to share with others and offers a reference on how others might experience trauma.

Going along with the metaphor of decluttering a physical space, the next step implies action. Interestingly, data created in response to state integration showed a marked amount of passivity and immobility, visible in a prevalent use of passive weight (Bartenieff, 1960). This passivity was perceived differently by me and my resonance panel. While I experienced the engagement in passive weight as comfortable and soothing, my resonance panel described it as marionette-like; while I interpreted my indulgent movements as a way of honoring every aspect of the moment, they expressed a strong desire to see me break out of it. Their observations deeply resonated with me, but I struggled with this apparent dissonance. However, exploring it

further by engaging in spontaneous movements in response to both sides, I realized that the experience and solution of this dissonance reflected state integration, honoring the newly found connections and differences within and between states while maintaining the ability to actively adapt existing associations and patterns (Siegel, 2010a). It became clear that to move forward in my integrative process I have to adopt an active stance, to break out of my passivity while continuing to honor all aspects of my experience.

My data further contributed insight into how to achieve this active stance. The more active movement sequences showed increased connection to patterns of breath, core-distal, head-tail, and upper-lower, all required in the process of creating total body integration (Hackney, 2002). Finally, the word courage emerged in my reflective writing. Siegel (2007) recognized that being mindful requires courage as top-down processes have strong neural connections to back them up. Therefore, one must actively go against what one knows and what might feel comfortable. In addition, Rogers (1961) stated that the attempt to face and evaluate whatever comes to awareness without judgement requires courage as one risks to be changed in response to it. He further stated that this might prevent one from listening to understand, and instead compel one to listen to evaluate and respond (Rogers, 1961). This appears to be the case for listening to others as well as one's own internal signals, and can be related to my defense mechanisms responding to the large-group chosen trauma. I see this step of the integrative decluttering process as the transition from mindfulness—the monitoring of elements in awareness—to mindsight, the monitoring and modification of them (Siegel, 2010a).

As I move forward in the data analysis process, continuously deepening and actively engaging in the decluttering process of domains one to six, I experience a change in my interpersonal relationships. This change takes place in my perception of boundaries between me and

others, contributing to my exploration of interpersonal integration. While my boundaries felt rigid during my data collection process, I start to see them as more fluid and flexible, shifting between and within environments and situations as data analysis proceeds. My data reflected the rigid state, depicting the image of a screw and distinct borders between colors and shapes, which both my research consultant and my resonance panel perceived as odd and disconnected. The earlier mentioned use of low intensity, bound flow (Kestenberg et al., 1999) resurfaced, connecting the rigidity of my boundaries to the defense mechanisms. However, with time I feel more open to others, actively seeking out interpersonal interactions. I better tolerate situations in which I feel my boundaries are violated, approaching such situations with curiosity and responding with an adjustment in boundaries or actions to keep myself safe.

Moving into temporal integration, I realize that the process of decluttering the mind and the movement towards integration is an ongoing one, beginning at the described place of mindfulness. This creates an interesting paradox: having to find stillness to move forward. In my data, I would move forward and backward in space, walking on and off an imaginary grid. However, it was not until I found stillness that my desire to create subsided, which I interpret as a sign of entering a stage of observation and acceptance of the present, unaffected by top-down processes and preoccupations with the past or future. This place of stillness feels active and engaged, connecting back to the understanding of mindsight as an active and engaged stance incorporating mindfulness as a starting point. In addition, the theme of letting go to complete the cycle emerged in discussion with the resonance panel. They voiced a desire for me to let go, which contrasted my movement of holding myself back, planting my feet into the ground with my hands, and not following through in movement phrasing (Bartenieff, 1960). Furthermore, letting go of my artwork after my thesis presentation through the physical act of throwing it away was

the most powerful. Only afterwards did I feel like I completed the decluttering cycle and completed the cycle of reflection.

Uncluttering the self. Moving towards integration in domains one to eight blends into my experience of transpirational integration, accumulating in brief moments of experiencing a place of clarity. A sense of boundless openness, filled with sensation of warmth, lightness, and COAL arises. From this place I can observe, identify, and question the elements I think make up who I am as a person, and as a therapist. The closest concept I can relate it to is presence: a pure form of receptivity or an unrestricted openness to the unfolding of opportunities (Siegel, 2010b). In this open state of presence, supported by my growing ability of mindsight (Siegel, 2010a), I can feel the flow of energy and information shape into the eight senses, forming states of mind (Siegel, 2012a). Sometimes one or several of these senses are more dominant over the others, but overall this shaping process of states of mind create a sense of self characterized by a FACES flow. From this place, my “self” is formed by the elements that make up the state of mind in the moment, relating to Siegel’s concept of self-states (Siegel, 2012a). Conclusively, “I” am the result of a constant process of becoming in the moment, formed by the integrated interplay between elements of awareness between the brain, mind, and relationships. The minimal sense of “I-ness”, which I experience in the boundless place of presence before a state is formed or between states, is what I consider my ipseitous self (Siegel, 2007). Emerging self-states further show qualities best described in Siegel’s (2007) acronym of COHERENCE. “I” feel more connected, open, and harmonious (less stressed and better able to self-regulate), more engaged in life and conversations, receptive, and emergent by becoming aware of small daily changes within myself, noetic, compassionate, and empathic (Siegel, 2007).

The idea of the self as a constant process of becoming through integration is represented in an increase of creativity. Siegel (2007) sees creativity as an innate quality of humans, emerging from integration and easily observed in children. Rogers (1961) described the conditions for creativity as openness to experience, an internal locus of evaluation, and the ability to toy with elements and concepts. This implies a lack of rigidity and permeability of boundaries in concepts, beliefs, perceptions, and hypotheses, and an ability to play spontaneously with ideas, colors, shapes, and relationships, ultimately giving one the power to transform (Rogers, 1961). My extended movement repertoire (Tortora, 2006) and playful, childlike approach to art making reveal my increase in creativity as reflected in my data and supported by feedback from my resonance panel and research consultant. I feel a stronger connection between body parts and movements, being able to move more effortlessly and with free flow (Kestenberg et al., 1999). I access larger parts of my kinesphere and surrounding space, play with effort qualities on their respective spectrum, and move from gestural movements towards posture-gesture mergers (Bartenieff, 1960, Lamb, 1965; Moore, 2005). As I start to trust my body and its insights and strengths, I become more open to pushing the boundaries of my movement tendencies and the capabilities of my body, further becoming more expressive. Indicating more of an increased state of total body integration, this translates to the oscillating relationship between inner connectivity and outer expressivity (Hackney, 2002). In addition, my resonance panel, research consultant, and I described the artwork most strongly associated with integration as childlike, reflecting an explorative approach to creating. Finally, the paint of my artwork would move beyond the boundaries of my paper. Conclusively, my art would become, shift, and transform moment by moment, similar to how I experience my “self” become within presence.

Creative Process of Becoming within Professional Development

Even though I did not work as a dance/movement therapist in the process of this research, I have no doubt that it contributed to my professional development. Essentially, the process of decluttering the mind parallels Rønnestad & Skovholt's (2013) cyclic/ trajectory model, both describing a cyclic process towards integration and with reflection at its heart. My individual thesis performance further supported the importance of closing the reflective cycle, in my case by letting go, to prevent stagnation resulting from premature or inadequate closure (Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2013).

In addition, the results of dissolving top-down enslavement potentially make me a better therapist, either by supporting the therapeutic relationship or by becoming my "best self" (Norcross & Karpiak, 2017). Both have been identified as important indicators for therapeutic effectiveness and expertise (Gelso, 2002, 2010; Norcross & Karpiak, 2017; Norcross & Lambert, 2011; Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2013). Recognizing my concept of self as a creative process, being a therapist turns into a creative approach towards becoming within the therapeutic relationship. Working from a place of seeing elements of my mind clearly, allows me to optimally respond to the ever-changing and individual needs of my clients and to adjust therapeutic goals, objectives, and interventions accordingly. It further keeps me aware of instances of projection (American Psychological Association, 2009) or countertransference (Figley, 1995, 1999), and increases my multicultural awareness by knowing my own cultural background and influences. In addition, an increase in creativity supports my work as a creative arts therapist.

Lastly, reaching a place of clarity helped me uncover fundamental values and the professional direction I want to take. As a result, I can foster skills and confront myself with challenges and difficulties in selected areas to boost my professional development intentionally.

Consequently, I do not see professional development simply as a byproduct of experience, but as a process that can be fostered by promoting differentiation and linkage in identified areas.

Limitations, Implications, and Future Research

While the concept of ipseity and integration are understood as universal human concepts (Siegel, 2007), this study is not without its limitations. One prominent limitation within this artistic inquiry self-study was the duration of it. While the data collection period was 10 weeks, most of the important results emerged during and towards the end of the five-month data analysis process. It is not possible to say if a shorter or longer duration of study would have changed the outcome. It is also possible that the results were influenced by events occurring during this five-month period and may additionally be shaped by three years of reflection that began at the start of this graduate program. In addition, being the sole participant of the study limits the generalization of the results. Others may or may not relate to or experience the process of decluttering the mind and this approach towards becoming in the same way. Overall, the subjective and non-verbal nature of the data prevents generalization as it is not quantifiable and not easily translated into verbal language. However, I attempted to translate internal experiences into verbal language by working closely with external reviewers (resonance panel, research consultant, thesis advisor) and cross-checking the evolving results with the original data. It is important to highlight that my perception, understanding, and articulation of results was framed by IPNB, dance/movement therapy theories, and western principles embedded in my cultural background.

Despite the limitations, I see several implications and possibilities for future research. Potentially, the proposed creative framework could aid the personal and professional process of becoming for other students or professionals in the creative arts therapies or other helping professions. As the process of promoting integration within the nine domains is already used in

clinical contexts, the metaphor of decluttering a space might be helpful. Because movement towards total body integration was observed, future research could focus on movement interventions, incorporating patterns of total body connectivity (Hackney, 2002), and their influence on personal and professional development.

Other implications could be found in therapist's self-care and burn-out. As reviewed, integration is a core-mechanism to move a person towards health and wellbeing. I experienced a significant reduction of stress and anxiety by implementing results of the research into my personal and professional life when faced with challenges and difficulties. Therefore, this research might bring additional insight and perspective to the discussion of therapists' wellbeing.

Finally, there is potential for the field of multicultural awareness and communication. This study shows that therapists' own cultural backgrounds can have a significant impact on the ways they perceive and interact with the world, including their clients. Insufficient insight into one's own cultural background or a resistance to explore the trauma that might be attached to it could potentially limit the effectiveness of the therapy. In addition, the metaphor of clients bringing their own clutter can be perceived as them bringing their own individual culture into the therapeutic space, each element of clutter reflecting a cultural aspect. Not every element might be of importance within the therapeutic process, just as not every personal element of clutter of the therapist might be of importance. However, having the ability to observe, identify, and question the cultural elements that are at work or present in the therapeutic space could be one way of defining multicultural awareness.

Summary

Simplicity allows for complexity. This is one of the fundamental truths that I discovered in this journey. In addition, relating to a Marcel Proust (cited in Kabat-Zinn, 2005) quote, "The

true journey of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes but in having fresh eyes” (p. 196), engaging in this embodied artistic inquiry self-study allowed me to look at my mind and my concept of self with fresh eyes, using movement and visual art making as alternative ways of seeing. Guided by Siegel’s (2012a) domains of integration, I discovered and learned something about the clutter that makes up my mind, and became clearer about my concept and elements of self. Working from a place of mindful awareness, identifying and questioning rigid and engrained patterns reinforced by the large-group chosen trauma, and taking an active stance supported by my movement towards total body integration and courage, made my previously rigid boundaries more fluid, culminating in a state of presence as a starting point for the process of becoming. The cyclic and continuous quality of the decluttering process enables me to re-discover myself day by day, with new insights emerging from new challenges and difficulties. Connecting to what Sue Carter (cited in Devereaux, 2017) called the “dance of life”, this allows me to actively participate in the dynamic play of change, growth, and health, contributing to personal and professional development. Simultaneously, the creativity that emerged out of integration equips me with a multitude of possibilities to receive and respond to challenges along the way.

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Appendix A

RESEARCH CONSULTANT AGREEMENT

This agreement is made between researcher, Jessica Lochte, and research consultant, [NAME], for the following services beginning on September 24, 2016.

Services. Beginning on September 24, 2016, and remaining in effect for the duration of this Agreement, the research consultant shall provide Jessica Lochte with the following services, without limitation.

The research consultant agrees to meet with the researcher twice over the period of the data collection process (September 24, 2016 – December 18, 2016). Specific mutually agreed upon session dates will be determined. During the sessions, the research consultant will support the researcher in analyzing the visual artwork created in the data collection process. Research consultant will be responsible for viewing and discussing each piece of art from previous weeks, with an option to facilitate art making while considering a prominent theme within the data, and participating in a discussion with the researcher regarding observations. The research consultant agrees that any artwork created in these sessions remains in the possession of the researcher. In addition, the research consultant is invited to participate in two resonance panels, which will meet mid-December 2016 and at the end of February/beginning of March 2017. Session dates will be mutually agreed upon in conversation with other participants of the resonance panel. The researcher acknowledges that the participation of the research consultant in these resonance panel meetings is optional.

Both researcher and research consultant acknowledge the different nature of research consultation and art therapy.

Compensation. The work performed by the research consultant shall be performed voluntarily and without monetary or any other compulsory form of compensation.

Signature of Researcher

Date

Signature of Research Consultant

Date