

'Becoming an Embodied Therapist: Accessing the Language of the Body in the Treatment of Eating Disorders'

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This pre-conference workshop was a part of the ADTA 46th Annual Conference, 'Collaborations, Different Identities, Mutual Paths' held in October 20 – 23, 2011 at the Radisson Plaza Hotel, in Minneapolis. A conference as welcoming as the one held the previous year in Brooklyn, New York City.

Minneapolis, known as the City of Lakes and the Mill City is built on both banks of the magnificent Mississippi, at the river's narrow point, where it adjoins St. Paul, the State capital. Its fascinating history includes being the former flour mill capitol of the USA.

The conference itself provided opportunities to renew friendships and make new ones; mingle midst the colourful trade displays, and attend the many conference highlights, as well as workshop and paper presentations.



The dance following the Banquet

The highlights included movement choirs in opening and closing ceremonies; the Business Breakfast with award presentations;

Poster Sessions; Authentic Movement 'Drop Ins'; Special Interest Groups; dance performances and the exciting Banquet and Dance. Once again, and I am sure every year, as soon as the food was cleared away and tables removed there was an explosion of dance movement therapists onto the dance floor in response to the music. The only breaks being when the band had to take a rest!

I attended many interesting workshops but just chose just one to reflect on. This was a one day pre-conference workshop:

Becoming an Embodied Therapist: Accessing the Language of the Body in the Treatment of Eating Disorders

This was led by Susan Kleinman, who specializes in the management of eating disorders. My reason for choosing this one to report on is because the thrust was to "to learn how to discover and trust the innate ability to 'attend' empathically, respond authentically, and translate non-verbal experiences into cognitive insights" (Kleinman 2011, Abstract). And although I am not involved in working with people with eating disorders, I felt it had general application to other population groups. The workshop focused on using dance movement therapy principles as a basis for body/mind exercises to "integrate a more embodied approach into traditional psychotherapy theory and practice" (Kleinman 2011, Abstract). Her work seems invaluable; understanding the principles would enhance any therapist's practice.

Susan's approach is a 'bottom-up' approach, involving sensing what is happening through the body and taking it into a cognitive level. Susan's basic framework, as I understand it, involves centering through exploration, discovery, acknowledgement and connection. That is, using movement that stems from 'body talk' or personal movement expression or body language and **exploring** it. Or **exploring** movement that might stem from reading a poem or other writing, or reading a story that can be translated into movement. For example, a child's story can be used to reach the problems often encountered in this population. That is getting in touch with creative expression rather than obsessive focus on the body. **Discovery**, as I understand it, relates to the movement exploration helping the client get in

touch with their feelings rather than just their physical bodies; then **acknowledgement** of the feelings is an important step. Then from this **connecting** and finding ways into relationship, using dyadic processes, with the development of this being working on stories together and processing them on a body level.

Susan stressed:

- The importance of relationship between therapist and client
- Understanding cognitive and body levels of processing information
- Acknowledging that the body level of knowing or of awareness, often precedes the mind level of knowing or awareness
- And that although all feelings are OK, even if they are difficult to acknowledge, the need to recognise what they are

A further point from Susan reminded DMTs that we need to be embodied therapists (that is more connected to one's selves) to work successfully with clients, and to do this we need to work with concepts that emanate from one's inner experience.

Susan named these as including:

1. Rhythmic Synchrony;
2. Kinesthetic awareness; and
3. Kinesthetic Empathy – or the ability to feel in self and reflect.

She suggests the focus for the work is on facilitating the expression of thoughts and feelings that underlie the presenting problems and that this should be done via access to body language. "Techniques emphasizing these concepts challenge therapists to expand their own therapeutic boundaries, without losing their therapeutic balance, in order to think with their body as well as their mind" (Kleinman 2011, presentation Abstract).

Susan also talked about 'focused journaling' as a means of stepping into a different expressive domain for understanding. It allows the therapeutic process to take form with the Cognitive Markers providing a frame of reference for what is happening in the therapeutic process for both therapist and client. This assists them to record and process their experiences in and away from the therapy. The key concept of the workshop was that experiential understanding leads to cognitive

understanding, and cognitive insights can come from the translation of feelings. Susan stressed that the therapist's use of self in this process is her most important tool.

Reference:

Kleinmann, S. (2011). ADTA Conference Proceedings, Minneapolis: USA.

And for those interested in delving more deeply into this material, Susan provided the following reading list:

Bloomgarden, A., Mennuti, R., & Cohen, E. (2003). Therapist Self-Disclosure: Implications for the Therapeutic Connection. *The Renfrew Center Working Papers*, Volume 1, Fall. Philadelphia, PA.

Chace, M. with Dyrud, J. (1993). Movement and Personality. In S. Sandel, S. Chaiklin, & A. Lohn (Eds.), *Foundations of dance/movement therapy: The life and work of Marian Chace*. (pp. 252-255). Columbia, MD: The Marian Chace Memorial Fund of the American Dance Therapy Association.

Kleinman, S. and Hall, T. (2006). Dance/Movement Therapy: A method for Embodying Emotions. In W. Davis & S. Kleinman (Eds). *The Renfrew Center Foundation Healing Through Relationship Series: Contributions to Eating Disorder Theory and Treatment Volume 1: Fostering Body-Mind Integration*. (pp 2-19). Philadelphia, PA.

Kleinman, S & Hall, T.(2005), Dance Movement Therapy with Women with Eating Disorders 2005. In *Dance/Movement Therapy, A Healing Art*. Reston, VA. Revised Edition, The American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance.

Kleinman, S., Submission for the Record, Statement of The American Dance Therapy Association to the Sub-committee on Ways and Means, House of Representatives Hearing on The Congressional Budget Office's Analysis of the President's Health Care Reform Proposal, Volume X11, President's Health Care Reform Proposals: Impact on Providers and Consumers, Part 3 of 3, February, 1994, Serial 103-91, US Government Printing Office, Washington, 1994.