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Mindfulness & Bodyfulness: A New Paradigm

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The word mindfulness, though it has been used for centuries, may be both poorly defined and poorly used. Though the word connotes mental processes, the construct often includes embodiment practices such as yoga, sensory tracking, conscious breathing, tai chi, and qi gong. This can generate confusion, conflation, muddled research, and an anti-somatic bias. The author proposes the invention of a new term, bodyfulness, in order to centralize the often marginalized voice of the body in therapeutic, empirical, sociocultural, and contemplative practices.

Keywords: mindfulness, bodyfulness, contemplative practice, mindfulness research, embodiment, somatic psychology

Introduction

In English, the word *bodyfulness* strikes most of us as odd and awkward. Why is that, aside from the fact that it is newly invented? How can I be “full” of body? What qualities and states would that word signify? The word arose out of a contemplation of the word *mindfulness*, a word that is becoming increasingly known and used in popular culture. Other “fullness” words in the English language are in general use as well—thoughtfulness, heartfulness, soulfulness. These “fullness” words connote positive human traits, traits we all want to cultivate. They imply caring, consideration, sincerity, deep reflection, loving kindness, and engagement with deeper places within oneself.

People invent words because they want to be able to express something they experience. Naming something gives that thing coherence, validity, solidity. As Daniel Siegel states in *The Mindful Brain*,

Words are digital packets of information that convey to ourselves and others our models of conceptual reality—how we see and think about the world. They’re part of the brain’s top-down apparatus for ordering and making sense of incoming sensory information. (Siegel, 2007, p. 54)

Words actively shape how we perceive the world, creating a set of verbal categories for our experiences to live in, boxes that were handed down to us by

family and culture as kits to be assembled into an adapted shape by our personal histories. These boxes are tremendously useful and at the same time always more or less distorting. We constantly get in trouble because we mistake the word-box for the reality of our lived experience, and can start dumping all sorts of connotations, biases, and historical events into the word-box, potentially poisoning it so much that we have to stop using it. I remember once helping a young German friend to practice English. He said the words “colored man.” I anxiously corrected him, stating that the phrase should be “man of color,” and that saying colored man would be terribly offensive. He didn’t get the distinction, and it sparked a long talk about the historical use of the word *colored* in the United States, and how deeply wounding and insulting the placement of a single, seemingly innocuous word can be because of the oppression that rode along with it in the word-box.

At moments like these we have an opportunity to see outside the verbal boxes, a typically disorienting event that happens every time we authentically make contact with another person’s language system, whether it be religious, ethnic, gendered, geographic, or professional. We often learn something about our own notions of the way we assume things work at these moments. Certainly these moments rattle and potentially reshuffle our internal dictionaries.

Dan Siegel goes on to talk about how poets “up-end” our verbal boxes:

Our ordinary language can be a prison, locking us in the jail of our own redundancies, dulling our senses, clouding our focus. By presenting ambiguities, by using words in unfamiliar ways, by juxtaposing elements of perceptual reality in new combinations, by evoking imagery, poets and their poetry offer us fresh, novel possibilities for experiencing life. (Siegel, 2007, p. 54)

As humans we need to make words, and after a time we need to shake out the accumulated debris that human nature sticks onto them, whether by way of poetry or a change of social convention. At the same time, some lived experiences seem so powerful and transcendent that they leave us speechless and we purposefully don’t create word-boxes for them so we can keep them undistorted. We have even invented a word for not assigning a word to these experiences—ineffable. It is often the ineffable experience that we choose to express in bodily ways—through movement, gesture, dance—so that implicit neural mechanisms can process and express wordless experiences directly, creating a powerful intersubjective resonance within and between people.

The “fullness” states cited above—mindful, thoughtful, heartfelt, soulful—all live in positively connoted and slightly ineffable word-boxes. They all endeavor to express a state of attentiveness, a quality of occupying our heart or our mind so completely that we experience a state of realized human potential. Even though all word-boxes will get us into trouble, these states themselves are something we can

safely strive for, as they seem to represent some of the best qualities that humankind has to offer.

It's curious that in English we don't have a distinct word to express a state of being present and aware in the body—a deep state of somatic wakefulness—a state of profound occupation of the present moment, as it becomes explicit in flesh and nerve and bone. Interestingly, philosophers, scientists, and psychotherapists are beginning to explicate different bodily states that involve heightened somatic awareness (Fogel, 2009; Hanna, 1987; Johnson, 1994; Shusterman, 2008), wordlessly shared intersubjective relating and knowing (Fosha, 2000; Stern, 2004), and the body-to-body transmission of healing (Wilkinson, 2010). Many related words abound—somaesthetics, embodiment, somatic modes of attention, implicit relational knowing, the intersubjective field, mirroring, and attunement, to name a few.

I am attempting to add a new word here, called *bodyfulness*, that can function as a rubric for centralizing the body within the intrapsychic and social contexts it has long deserved to occupy but has not achieved in most modern cultures, especially Western ones. Perhaps this is because *bodyfulness* has been so ineffable that we just didn't want to box it up until now. But more likely it's because we can't name something that we don't regularly know how to feel, or that isn't important to us, or that we actively marginalize.

This article is about inventing a new word so that something important might be valued and communicated amongst us. It's about inventing a new word so that certain valuable experiences and states can become more coherent, supported, and accessible to more people on a daily basis. It's about finding a more delineated home for body-based contemplative practices. It's about foregrounding an unrealized aspect of human potential that just might have a profound effect on our futures.

A Lived Context

I came to this word, *bodyfulness*, slowly and honestly. It began in my living room when I was about six years old, as I danced for my parents and their friends one evening. The look of tension and disapproval on their faces as they politely watched me jump and wiggle was so shaming to me that I stopped dancing entirely until I was a Cultural Anthropology student at UCLA, when, out of a desperate need for a required performing arts elective that had to be on Tuesday and Thursday mornings, I took a modern dance class. Within weeks my world was up-ended, which is to say that it was made right. As I stretched and gestured and moved across the hardwood floors, it was as if I *re-membered* myself. I certainly recognized myself for the first time in a long time. I “came out,” not so much as a dancer, but as a purposeful, conscious mover.

I devoted my career to the academic study of movement, and serendipitously landed at an institution in Boulder, Colorado, that was founded by a Tibetan monk named Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche. He called it Naropa University, and instructed

faculty and staff to apply non-sectarian meditation principles and practices to higher education. I found myself in an academic and scholarly setting that also valued wakefulness, meditation, and compassionate action. Over time something ineffable in this environment seeped in to me, and that something was mindfulness. Slowly this time, my world turned and again oriented in the right direction. Contemplative practice was the last missing element, the piece of the puzzle that brought everything into a coherent and refined clarity. Both mindfulness and bodyfulness were and continue to be essential to my sense of a coherent and productive self.

Life at the Margins

My six-year-old dancing disaster was neither unique nor unusual nor particularly remarkable. What it was, was pivotal. It vividly marked the moment when I joined the ranks of the majority of people who feel shame when they view or directly experience their body. Body shame is so rampant in the US that nine out of ten people, when shown a silhouette of their body, will have a negative emotional response (Jackson, 2002). Interestingly, this negative feeling occurs independently of what the person weighs. Research shows that in the developed countries we tend to internalize a shame-based image of our bodies fairly early and fairly enduringly (Tiggemann, 2002). Part of what I will propose is that this internalized “somatophobia” results from most of us growing up in cultures and sub-cultures that valorize *bodylessness*.

From the time that we humans began to sharpen our wits we began to dull our senses. The marginalization of the body has such a long and cross-cultural history that we barely notice or care that the oppression of our bodily selves is constant, insidious, and potentially devastating (Berman, 1989). We can see this in two ways; first, in the historical use of physical difference as a weapon in the oppression and persecution of individuals and whole populations; and second, in the devaluing of the body itself as a source of identity and authoritative knowledge about our direct, lived experience of the world.

In this context, bodyfulness is not something we can afford to marginalize any longer. As technology becomes increasingly complex and crucial to modern living, the urge to keep over-valuing thoughts and ideas increases as the need for—and valuing of—physical labor decreases. Nielsen ratings note that in the U.S. both children and adults spend an average of six hours a day sitting still in front of some kind of screen or monitor. Yearly, we are not only exercising less but we are simply moving around less as well. In the remaining physical labor jobs, many require rote, repetitive, assembly line movement, the unnaturalness of which causes multiple detrimental side effects, often named as *repetitive motion syndrome*. And as modern societies increasingly give their best resources to those of us who can understand and operate complex technology, we who are brought up with technology are becoming increasingly both privileged and disembodied. By disembodied I mean ignorant of or ashamed of our physical natures. We can download, upload, text

message, Twitter, and blog, but we are losing the ability and the interest in being able to construct a bookshelf, fix a toaster oven, or do the samba.

Cruelly, people who haven't had access to this technological privilege are becoming increasingly marginalized and *mis-embodied*. Mis-embodied can be defined as being "made less than," physically. Sociologist and feminist Judith Butler (1993), for instance, uses a play on words in English when she writes about how in many cultures women's bodies don't *matter*, and are literally *de-materialized*, made invisible. Whether we are made to feel less than others via how our body looks or how it operates, modern society's new racism, classism, ableism and sexism may be increasingly enacted through the politics of the body. Physical labor itself may be being relegated to the margins of society. With few exceptions, those who labor with their bodies are seen as simpler, stupider, poorer, less hip, lower class, unfortunate, etc. And as we hire these people to come to our homes and do physical labor that 20 years ago we used to do ourselves but now don't have the time, inclination, or know-how to do, we participate in a mutual embodiment gap that robs both groups of the basic resources to live a bodyful life.

Phenomenologist, post-constructivist, and feminist philosophers have admirably grappled with these issues, and even though their writings hint at an appalling lack of getting up, going outside, and moving around on their part, they seem to be endeavoring to help us reclaim the lived experience of the body as having inalienable rights, authoritative knowledge, and valuable perspectives. Though it is beyond the scope of this paper to cover these important people, the work of Bourdieu (1984), Butler (1993), Csordas (1994), Gatens (1999), Irigaray, Johnson (1987), Grosz (1994), Merleau-Ponty, Husserl, Shusterman (2008), and others can inform this discussion.

The Words in the Boxes

Bodyfulness is at its heart a contemplative practice, and this distinguishes it from *embodiment* for this reason. Bodyfulness can be cultivated by conscious, disciplined activities that increase our capacity to first be embodied, then increasingly bodyful. Embodiment is an oft-used word in the fields of dance/movement therapy, sociology, and body psychotherapy, and it is the closest term to bodyfulness that we have had up until now. Embodiment tends to be generally defined as the tangible form of an idea. The body is certainly tangible, and it likely comes from an idea (Gatens, 1999), but bodyfulness is more than just embodiment. I would define embodiment as awareness of and attentive participation with the body's states and actions. Bodyfulness begins when the embodied self is held in a conscious, contemplative environment, coupled with a non-judgmental engagement with bodily processes, an acceptance and appreciation of one's bodily nature, and an ethical and aesthetic orientation towards taking right actions so that a lessening of suffering and an increase in human potential may emerge. Just as psychologist Abraham Maslow

noted that all humans, when they reach a threshold of safety, security, and belonging endeavor to fully realize their potential, so embodiment can be seen as a basic human need, and bodyfulness can come to express our fully self-realized physical nature, held at the same level of importance as mindfulness.

The word *mindfulness* has been holding aspects of the body in its definition since its origins. For a variety of good reasons, the body and its processes are usually included in discussions of mindfulness. Siegel, for instance, includes the body in his recent definition of mind:

Our human mind is both embodied—it involves a flow of energy and information that occurs within the body, including the brain—and relational, the dimension of mind that involves the flow of energy and information occurring between people.... (Siegel, 2007, p. 5)

Jon Kabat-Zinn (2003) states that “An operational working definition of mindfulness is: the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally, to the unfolding of experience moment by moment” (pp. 145-146). The shortest meaning Kabat-Zinn and other authors give to mindfulness is “moment by moment awareness.” Kabat-Zinn has developed Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), which includes under its umbrella body scanning, yoga, and sitting meditation, an excellent example of the conflation of mindfulness and bodyfulness.

Davis and Hayes have pointed out that mindfulness is related to the term *mentalization*. Similar to drawing a distinction between embodiment and bodyfulness, these authors want to tease out the distinction between mindfulness and mentalization, noting that

mentalization is “the developmental process of understanding one’s own and others’ behavior in terms of individuals’ thoughts, feelings, and desires. Both constructs emphasize the temporary, subjective, and fluid nature of mental states and both are thought to enhance affect regulation and cognitive flexibility” (Wallin, 2007). Mindfulness differs from mentalizing in that mindfulness is both being aware of the “reflective self” engaged in mentalizing, and the practice of fully experiencing the rising and falling of mental states with acceptance and without attachment and judgment. (Davis & Hayes, 2011, p. 198)

Mindfulness practices have become more popular and well researched in the last 30 years (Brown, Ryan, & Creswell, 2007). Using mindfulness to facilitate psychological as well as physical benefits constitutes a potentially radical shift in emphasis for psychotherapy, for instance. As Brown, Ryan, and Creswell put it, “Of overwhelming interest to most psychologists is the *content* of consciousness—thought, memory, emotion, and so on—rather than the *context* in which those con-

tents are expressed—that is, consciousness itself” (2007, p. 211). In other words, a shift in the field is occurring that may de-emphasize working with the content of our memories and emotions, and instead attend to the solid architecture of attending to those contents. This distinction can be crucial for the bodyfulness construct as well, because the same shift of emphasis may apply, helping us to befriend the *act* of (and the skill of) somatically attending as the most important element of healing, more than analyzing the physical contents of what we experience. As Siegel puts it: “It is not about meaning in the usual clinical sense of explaining the present in terms of the past and establishing associative linkages that are interpretable. It is about experience as it is lived” (2007, p. xi).

When we engage in what is most commonly understood as mindful awareness, one of the most frequent objects of awareness is the body, especially our breath and our sensations. The task is to observe the process of breathing and the flow of sensations in an open, non-categorizing, non-judgmental way. This practice, which trains the mind towards disciplined attention, can have beneficial emotional and physical effects. Immune function can improve. Stress lessens (Baer, Carmody, & Hunsinger, 2012). Deficits and disorders of attention can resolve (Burg, Wolf, & Michalak, 2012). Mental and emotional illness can lessen (Goldin & Gross, 2010; Green & Bieling, 2012), likely because of the psychological freedom that ensues from attention remaining “quiet and limber, *without attachment* to any particular point of view” (Davis & Hayes, 2011, p. 198). Mindfulness may be important because it develops optimal states within us, states that increase physical, emotional, and mental coherence and competence, as well as neural integration.

In this sense, the word mindfulness likely sits in an ill-fitting word-box. When we use this word, it’s hard not to think, barring Siegel’s definition, of the mind as thoughts and inner words, as rationality and logic, cogitating and ruminating. The word *contemplate*, for instance, typically means to think about, or be thoughtful. Though we often profess that an awakened and self-reflective life involves much more than what these terms connote, still we tend to centralize the mind when we use the word mindfulness. Even though meditation, one of our central activities for the cultivation of mindfulness, often focuses on the development of what can occur in the gap between thoughts, the reference point is still the thoughts themselves. In some meditation disciplines we are asked to consider bodily sensations as a type of thought, and dismiss them as such. The effects of mindfulness practice mentioned above are certainly indicative of a much more holistic process at work than that which confines itself to the frontal cortex and left hemisphere, yet it does not go far enough.

As noted above, in many mindfulness practices, body processes are the object of focus. Sensations are witnessed in an encompassing and non-judgmental manner, disciplining oneself to experience the sensation without reacting to it in a way that

can increase one's suffering. This begins to circle in on bodyfulness, but not quite. For one, it often restricts or inhibits movement, the system through which the body knows, identifies, and enacts itself. In other meditation forms, one is encouraged to meditate on the nature of the body itself, as it grows, develops, gets sick, and dies. Or, mindfulness will sometimes involve body practices such as yoga or qi gong. This also begins to approach certain aspects of a bodyful life. But the body itself is capable of awakened states that go beyond these methods and practices, beyond embodiment. The capacity to pay attention, for instance, is at its core a body process (Hanna, 1979). It is this emergent and somewhat ineffable territory that needs to be explored.

Some of what could be considered as under the rubric of bodyfulness has been already articulated in the name of mindfulness, as noted above. The word-boxes for mindfulness are messily used, often poorly defined, and can misrepresent what is actually going on. Because of this, I will take a stand for this word *bodyful* as a separate and important construct in our cultivation of a conscious, contemplative, creative, and contributive life. To say "bodyful" creates a new box, one we have gradually lost as we developed and evolved as human beings. Similar to the re-purposing of words so that they reclaim status and empowerment for oppressed peoples (words like queer and gay in the United States), or ones that seek to dignify power differentials (saying "administrative assistant" instead of secretary), using the word *bodyful* may be as much a political act as a literary or poetic device.

Because this issue is about coming home. It is about, as the poet Mary Oliver (1986) once wrote, "let[ting] the soft animal of your body love what it loves." As Theresa Silow, a German academic teaching in the United States, puts it, "The body is not a thing we have but an experience we are" (2012). Bodyfulness is about working towards our potential as a whole human animal, one that breathes as well as thinks, moves as well as sits still, takes action as well as considers it, and exists not just because it thinks, but because it dances.

The Research

Luckily, it may be possible to use research findings as well as poetry and philosophy to shake up and sharpen our concepts about mindfulness and bodyfulness. In a very cursory run-through of the most extensive and robust research findings, results point to mindfulness and bodyfulness practices as an important influence on physical, emotional, and mental health. In many cases, these practices are lumped together and called mind-body medicine or mind-body therapies, thus making it difficult to tease out differential effects. This paper will begin with studies that emphasize meditative mindfulness, then cover mind/body research, then research that may fall under the rubric of bodyfulness.

Beginning in the mid 1980's, researcher/clinicians such as Jon Kabat-Zinn (1985), using clinical trials, found that mindfulness meditation reduced physical pain, nega-

tive body image, mood disturbances, anxiety, and depression, as well as increased self-esteem. This positive effect was maintained at least 15 months afterward, with the researchers noting that mindfulness meditation seemed to carry an intrinsic motivation, as subjects reported continuing the practice on their own because they enjoyed it. Kabat-Zinn and others speculated that because the practice was inexpensive to teach, because it stressed self-observation and self-responsibility, and because it was self-administered by participants such that they used it under their own control, that it also enhanced insight and self-worth. They speculated that mindfulness could be used on multiple levels, “ranging from relaxation and anxiety reduction to profound personal transformation” (p. 187). Numerous other studies have found that MBSR positively effects both cognitive and affective processing (Ramel et al., 2004).

Particular attention has been paid to mindfulness and emotional processing. A meta-analysis of studies showed that “even brief laboratory training” can help participants process affective stimuli, and that eight weeks of mindfulness practice resulted in participants increasing their ability “to uncouple the sensory, directly-experienced self from the ‘narrative’ self,” as well as increasing their capacity to “talk about past crises in a way that enabled them to be specific and yet not be overwhelmed” (Williams, 2010, p. 1). Mindfulness training has also been found to “restore balance between affective and sensory neural networks—supporting conceptual and body based representations of emotion—which could be one path through which mindfulness reduces vulnerability to dysphoric reactivity”; this in turn showed up as decreased depression scores (Farb et al., 2010, p. 32). Some of the possible mechanisms for this effect are a decrease in “rumination via disengagement from perseverative cognitive activities, and enhance[d] attentional capacities through gains in working memory; these cognitive gains, in turn, contribute to effective emotional regulation strategies” (Davis & Hayes, 2011, p. 200).

Several brain-imaging studies have also shown that mindfulness practice improved both working and declarative memory as well as affective processing and regulation (Chiesa et al., 2010; Jha et al., 2010; Williams, 2010), noting that mindfulness training can constitute a protective factor against high-stress contexts.

Other meta-analyses of cross-sectional, correlational, experimental, and intervention research on the effects of mindfulness-oriented interventions on psychological health concluded there are positive effects on subjective well-being, reduced psychological symptoms and emotional reactivity, increased empathy, improved behavioral regulation, improvements in ADHD, and increased response flexibility (Davis & Hayes, 2011; Keng et al., 2011; Smalley et al., 2009; van der Oord et al., 2012).

Using laboratory methods, particularly brainwave studies, other researchers found that meditation self-induces gamma synchrony, which tends to predict the integration of “distributed neural processes into highly ordered cognitive and affective functions,” and that this “could induce synaptic changes” (Lutz et al., 2004,

p. 16369). Another researcher found that meditation activates the left prefrontal cortex, an area in the brain associated with positive emotion (Robbins, 2004). Related to this, Brown and Ryan (2003) found that people with more mindfulness felt pleasure more frequently and intensely, felt bad less often and less intensely, and felt more autonomous about their daily activities.

Interestingly, a study done in Germany found that when therapist trainees learned and practiced Zen meditation, that not only did they experience tangible benefits for themselves, but their clients also displayed greater reductions in overall symptoms, faster rates of change, scored higher on measures of well-being, and perceived their treatment to be more effective than clients of non-meditating trainees (Grepmaier et al., 2007).

Constructing a bridge between mind-body therapies and mindfulness by studying the relationship of embodiment to mindfulness, researchers in Germany and Canada found that by analyzing gait patterns in formerly depressed patients both before and after mindfulness training, that gait patterns normalized. They noted that these findings show not only cognitive but embodied effects of mindfulness training (Michalak et al., 2011). Other researchers who included martial arts in their construct of mindfulness as they studied troubled adolescents found improvements in ADHD symptoms and relationships to parents, as well as decreased anxiety (Heydick et al., 2012).

When research looking at the construct of mind-body medicine or mind-body therapies is reviewed, findings tend to replicate the lessening of pain and decreased anxiety and depression, and improvements in ADHD symptoms seen in the meditation research. Meta-analysis of mind-body studies reveals a widening of salutary effects, however, including a decrease in migraine headaches, fibromyalgia, multiple sclerosis, epilepsy, stroke, and Parkinson's disease. Practices included in the definition of mind-body therapy were meditation, relaxation, conscious breathing, yoga, tai chi, qigong, hypnosis, and biofeedback (Wahbeh, Elsas, & Oken, 2008). Obviously, this is a very wide and inclusive net, spanning both top-down and bottom-up techniques, but it again points to the possible efficacy of present-centered, experiential practices that involve the body (via sensory awareness and movement) and involve a capacity to pay high quality attention.

A second meta-analysis of mind-body medicine treatments, which included relaxation, cognitive behavioral therapies, meditation, imagery, biofeedback, and hypnosis, found considerable evidence of efficacy in the areas of ameliorating coronary heart disease, headaches, insomnia, incontinence, chronic low back pain, disease and treatment-related symptoms of cancer, and improved post-surgical outcomes. They found moderate evidence for the efficacy of these treatments in the areas of hypertension and arthritis (Astin, Shapiro, Eisenberg, & Forays, 2003).

Some areas of research focus more directly on body-centered practices or states as highly related to health and well-being, or the lack of it. For instance, it

has been postulated that postural control problems may be a *core feature* of bipolar disorder, not just a random symptom. Researchers at Indiana University speculate that specific problems adapting to changing sensory input may lie at the core of this psychiatric disorder (Bolbecker, Hong, Kent, Klaunig, O'Donnell, & Hetrick, 2011). This dovetails with various theories of schizophrenia that correlate it to sensory integration problems.

Multiple studies show a strong relationship between exercise or dance and a lessening of depression or anxiety and an improvement in declarative memory (Leste & Rust, 1984; Martinsen & Solberg, 1989; Nakamura et al., 2007). Combining dance/movement therapy and yoga has been shown to increase stress management and communication skills, as well as ameliorate pro-social behaviors (Barton, 2011). Another study found that body awareness training assisted emotional processing (Sze et al., 2010), and a qualitative study found that developing a heightened sense of bodily movement “engenders an interconnected, bodily-grounded sense of cultural identity” (Potter, 2008, p. 444).

This review of the research literature is by no means exhaustive. It is meant to illustrate the conceptual and linguistic overlaps in terminology and practices, as well as point to the increasingly robust evidence that direct, lived experience that involves wakefulness, physical self-reflection, active engagement with bodily as well as cognitive states, and a strong emphasis on the architecture of consciousness rather than its contents seems to predict broad and profound well-being.

What lies ahead likely involves the sorting out of the underlying mechanisms that allow many varied, experientially-based treatments to work. In a sense, we may be looking at a kind of neo-behaviorism, one that can be profoundly more sophisticated, one that centralizes body-centered self-reflection, one that abolishes the arbitrary and false distinction between physical, emotional, and mental health, and one that reclaims overarching human values such as empathy, compassion, relational attunement, and the need to live a contemplative, creative, and contributive life. The construct of bodyfulness may be an essential element in reaching these goals.

Actions and Applications

The construct of bodyfulness, as it has been laid out so far, has both personal and social implications. From this perspective, it can influence individual healing and well-being as well as being able to steer society towards a more sustainable and just expression.

One of the first ways an individual or group can oppress another is to make their body wrong—the wrong color, size, shape, posture, gesture, or movement (Caldwell, 2013). Sociological literature calls this “othering.” My current research interest lies in this area. How do we not only make bodies in general inherently less valuable than the mind, but how do we “other” specific bodies that are different from our own in such a way that causes oppression and social injustice? What are

the effects of this oppression in the bodies of the people who are marginalized for being somatically different?

Perhaps the cultivation of bodyfulness on a social level can be a way to vaccinate us against social injustice and autocracy. If individual members of a society readily knew and valued what they were feeling, if they listened to and respected their embodied experience, they might be more likely to resist being “othered,” and less likely to succumb to any social pressure to “other” people different than themselves. A person who is keeping track of their embodied experience is more likely to keep track of their rights as an embodied being, value the rights of others, and to feel empowered enough to stand up for them effectively.

Bodyfulness may also be able to help balance the rights of the individual with the needs of the community. While living a bodyful life, we not only value our individual experience via somatic self-reflection, but we put ourselves in touch with and under the influence of other bodies. Humans are social animals, and our sociality is navigated by our body-to-body relationships. Because bodyfulness awakens empathy, attunement, and bonding, it can help us care for our own somatic experience while at the same time being connected to, influenced by, and even regulated by people and things around us.

Bodyfulness may also contribute to a shift in developmental theory and identity theory, with broad social implications. Currently, theorists such as Kegan, Hermans, McAdams, and others are challenging our classic understanding of human development, put forth by luminaries such as Piaget and Erikson. For instance, Erikson felt that identity development serves an integrative function, providing one’s life with unity and purpose. He and Piaget also hinted that development begins bodily, but culminates in the crowning achievement of cognitive capacities that make us who we are. McAdams (2006), however, believes that we need a theoretical framework that can accommodate multiplicity, conflict, and even contradiction in the structure of the self. He asserts that we don’t need to assume a singular identity, or even a selfhood, which dovetails with many contemplative traditions that assert that a fixed sense of self creates suffering.

Hubert Hermans writes about the self as a dynamic multiplicity of relatively autonomous I-positions. “Positioning” may be a more dynamic alternative to the static concept of “role,” he notes:

The I fluctuates along different and even opposed positions, and can give each position a voice so that they can talk/relate to each other. Each voice has a story to tell about his or her own experiences, from his or her own stance, resulting in a complex narratively structured self. (2001a, p. 248)

Here we begin to see the concept of narrative identity. McAdams notes that “We use the term *narrative identity* to refer to the stories people construct and tell about

themselves to define who they are for themselves and for others. Our narrative identities are the stories we live by” (2006, p. 4).

Both Hermans and McAdams wonder what kinds of self-narrated stories, both redemptive and transformative, are associated with psychological health and psychosocial maturity. They offer that we can use the telling of life stories as a way to work through negative life experiences and ultimately find redemptive meanings for them.

Narrative identity, the idea that we form a sense of identity via the stories that we tell about ourselves, constitutes an important advance in our fields. It can have a bodyful application, and this application may be vitally important. Though narrative identity may be an advance in the field, it will likely benefit by being broadened by the inclusion of nonverbal narratives as well as verbal ones—what I call *body narratives*—the body telling its stories on its own nonlinear and nonverbal terms. Once again, we impoverish ourselves if we assume that identity or narrative is exclusively verbal in nature.

Part of what may be included in the bodyfulness construct is the reality of embodied sensing and moving as a series of relatively autonomous “I positions”—a present-centered and quite literal positioning of the physical self in both a personal and social space. These conscious body movements generate a fluid, nonverbal narration of self and identity no less important than the verbal stories we may tell. Health and well-being may be powerfully and centrally generated by the redemptive and transformative nonverbal action sequences that occur when we engage in bodyful practices. Let us advocate for the body to tell its stories on its own terms, through expressive movement, practiced and elaborated in daily life, without the hegemony of being boxed up into verbal explanations and rationalizations. Because the body moves, our sense of self can move with it.

This idea may be related to developments we continue to witness in the research on emotional processing. Antonio Damasio’s book *Self Comes to Mind* seems to assert the idea of a freestanding and life-long body identity, one that both begins and continues with a “proto-self,” formed by proprioceptive, interoceptive, and exteroceptive stimuli (the sense of one’s body position in space as well as sensing inner and outer events). This translates to an identity that is fundamentally identified with and managed by how we track our bodies as they feel and move, and how we situate our moving bodies in the world.

A word of caution may be in order, one that can be seen occasionally on bumper stickers that exhort us, “Don’t believe everything you think.” It speaks to one of the major pitfalls of cognitive, left hemisphere processing, which is that through its compelling need to create coherent narratives, our left hemisphere will just make things up, regardless of their veracity. This tendency is called the interpreter mechanism (Gazzaniga, 2000). At the same time, we must caution ourselves not to believe everything that we feel or sense or enact bodily.

This may point to the fundamental difference between embodiment and bodyfulness. In embodiment we know what we feel and sense, but in bodyfulness we somatically reflect upon our embodied experience in a way that tempers the compelling and habituated action patterns of the moving body.

How can bodyfulness be cultivated in daily life? We can promote and develop bodyful practices that replicate the way the body is actually constructed—as a sensorimotor and visceral/limbic loop. In other words, we can develop practices that circulate from tracking sensations as they enter our awareness, engaging with them so that they are processed in complex and conscious ways, and expressing the resulting experience in wakeful, expressive movement that in turn generates novel sensations that can be processed and expressed in conscious ways. This loop is replicated in the visceral limbic system by tracking visceral states as they process into emotional states, and participating with the resulting affective motor plans as they are expressed in conscious movement, which then moves us to new feeling states. These two loops are supported and fueled by full, conscious breathing.

These loops can in turn be worked with in two ways. First, by uncovering and examining sensorimotor and visceral/limbic historical “records” and procedural memories associated with past neglect or trauma that have created affect-laden action sequences that in turn have created a disturbed sense of self, other, and world. Second, by promoting practices that work directly on body tone and attentional architecture, so that the act or skill of somatic self-reflection is efficient, graceful, and sharp.

Because the capacity to pay high quality attention is a shared mechanism in the constructs of both mindfulness and bodyfulness, we need opportunities to work on attentional skills directly (Wallace, 2006). Meditation is an extremely effective discipline, over 3,000 years old, that has stood the test of time as a central means of cultivating attentional capacities. In my work, I also introduce more body-centered and movement-oriented ways to practice attentional focus, ones that overlap physical and attentional toning (Caldwell, 1996).

From this perspective we can also create balance by alternating between mindfulness and bodyfulness practices, what Silow (2012) calls *ascent*—movement from direct experience towards abstract thought, coupled with *descent*—a return to individual, subjective, sensuous depth. Again, this mirrors the way the body actually oscillates, between top-down and bottom-up processing, the balance between them as what promotes health and well-being.

Related to the idea of body tone, bodyfulness can be enhanced by developing more conscious control of the moving body. This literally requires an almost athletic use of the body so that postural tone and movement efficiency are promoted. Interestingly, research is currently validating the strong relationship between body and postural tone and attentional clarity and focus. (Hannaford, 2005; Lefevre, 2002;

Woollacott & Shumway-Cook, 2002). In turn, attentional focus is strongly correlated to both intelligence and creativity. This likely is what Csikszentmihaly refers to when he speaks of optimal experiencing and “flow” states (2008). We need to get up and move around more, in ways that challenge not only our thinking but our cardiovascular, vestibular, and musculo-skeletal systems as well.

Phenomenological experience is a central theme in bodyfulness. Siegel states it beautifully when he writes: “The idea of *presentness* is key. The present moment that I am after is the moment of subjective experience as it is occurring—not as it is later reshaped by words” (2007, p xiii). The point here may also be that the present moment is even more than an embodied experience. Frank and LaBarre state that:

... engagement in the world with flexible movement and action is important itself since movement and action are always a part of perceiving, feeling, thinking, and meaning making... sensorimotor learning is not merely a stepping stone to higher orders of learning and thinking or verbalization. These abilities do emerge later out of action, but they do not displace sensorimotor engagement or necessarily come to control it, as has been conventionally thought. In fact, on the contrary, we always think with our bodies; that is, with the practiced action repertoires that begin to develop in the first year and through which we perceive, understand, and interact with the world. Yet, this domain is being hidden from our awareness by our routine ways of functioning and by the lack of concepts and a usable vocabulary that can help us see differently. (2011, p. 7)

In many ways, it comes down to “unhiding” our awareness of our bodily movements—the beating heart as well as the raised arm. The lungs inhaling and exhaling as well as the stomping of the foot. The oscillation of brain waves as well as the sways of the samba. When combined with absorbed attention to both the inside and outside world, we find our way home, to the natural state of the individual and social organism, and find ourselves embedded in a bodyful life.

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