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CONFERENCE REPORT

Reflections on the 13th International European Association for Body Psychotherapy (EABP) in conjunction with the Chiron Association of Body Psychotherapy (CABP) Congress of Body Psychotherapy in Cambridge, UK

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I attended the 13th International European Association for Body Psychotherapy Congress (EABP) in conjunction with the Chiron Association of Body Psychotherapy Congress of Body Psychotherapy in Cambridge, UK, to experience body psychotherapy from an international perspective. There is increasing cooperation between the EABP and the US Association for Body Psychotherapy (USABP). Several USABP Board members attended the EABP Congress, and a sense of family and connection radiated from our shared experiences as we moved within familiar territory despite being in a foreign land.

Entitled ‘The Body in the World: The World in the Body’, the Congress offered keynote addresses, panel discussions, pre- and post-conference workshops and a plethora of workshops designed to educate through experiential and didactic formats (recordings of the main presentations are available via the EABP website – www.eabp.org). In addition, a Research Symposium followed immediately after the Congress, with USABP members Rae Johnson and Christine Caldwell participating, along with other European researchers and presenters: Helen Payne, Frank Röhricht, Sheila Butler, Stefan Priebe, Courtenay Young, Elisabeth Sedlmayr-Länger, Maurizio Stupiggia, Eric Wolterstorff, etc.

The Cambridge Congress was organised around the EABP General Assembly with interesting options for non-members. One such offering was a workshop sponsored by publisher Taylor & Francis. Members of the editorial team of *Body, Movement and Dance in Psychotherapy* attended (Founding Editor, Helen Payne, and Gill Westland, co-editor) as well as a representative from Routledge (Beth Davidson, publisher for Behavioral Sciences). The small group offered plenty of personal interaction. The presentation included detailed handouts on the peer-review process as well as how to submit and how to promote your work. I spoke from a student’s perspective noting regulations such as needing a certain percentage of

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citations from peer-reviewed journals in our written work and the reality that only materials from peer-reviewed journals are allowed in dissertation writing. Furthermore, 85% of our cited research must have been conducted within the last five years. Students need current literature, and it must come from current researchers and practitioners. Despite feeling overwhelmed or uncertain about scholarly writing, practitioners need to realise that our history is embodied in their individual practice, but it will only expand and support new practitioners if they reach out to larger academic, as well as non-professional audiences. There was clearly a willingness to support one another to bring research and case studies and literature reviews to a scholarly audience. Maybe this will help to get Body Psychotherapists writing!

Pre-conference experience

I attended Stephen Porges and Sue Carter's pre-conference workshop entitled, 'Polyvagal Theory, Oxytocin, and the Neurobiology of Love: Using the Body's Social Engagement System to Promote Recovery from Experiences of Threat, Stress and Trauma'. The room was filled to capacity and many participants were turned away because organisers could not arrange for a larger room. Time with Steve and Sue is always an enlightening experience, and this workshop was no different. I walked away from their individual PowerPoint presentations with new information augmenting my current understanding of the social engagement system and love beyond the physical manifestations overseen by the vagus nerve complex. First identified in Porges' Polyvagal Theory, the 10th cranial nerve aka the vagus nerve complex was thought to be the root of the social engagement system – facial expressions, tone, vocalic, heart rate, respiration and so forth. Today, Porges is also looking at cranial nerves V, VII, IX and XI and the role their functions play in social engagement and love.

I will never listen to the song, 'The Look of Love', the same after Porges grounded songwriters' Burt Bacharach and David Hal's lyrics within the vagus nerve system:

The look of love (gaze) ... Is in your eyes (muscles around the eye) ... The look your heart can't disguise (heart is regulated by vagus nerve) ... The look of love (oxytocin) ... Is saying so much more (facial, neck and lips are innervated by the vagus nerve) ... Than just words could ever say (prosody under vagal control) ... And what my heart has heard – Well, it takes my breath away. (respiration vagal control)

Humour and science: a comfortable relational exchange between Steve and Sue existed as each offered his/her expertise and research. I could have stayed several days.

The Congress proper

The overall flow each day felt different from most conferences I have attended. Many events were planned within a small time frame with events extending late into the night. For example, we had two keynotes on Friday with Sue Carter stepping in for Daniel Stern, who had broken his hip and could not travel (and as of this writing has sadly passed away). She covered bonding and attachment along with her

research on oxytocin where her husband, Stephen Porges, discussed social bonding in adults via his Polyvagal Theory during the second Keynote address.

Saturday was largely devoted to Relational Body Psychotherapy. The theme was presented by a panel of speakers: Shoshi Asheri, Asaf Rolef Ben-Shahar, Roz Carroll, Michael Soth and Nick Totten, who shared their thoughts on embodied relational work. After the panel, core groups, designated by Congress organisers, met to discuss reactions and considerations.

Concurrent workshops were abundant as well as a late-night gala dinner and dancing at the Kings Chapel – a once in a lifetime opportunity for many in attendance as only Kings College students were typically allowed into the dining hall. Mingling with Congress attendees and presenters in a more informal atmosphere also led to unexpected connections. I met Gerda Boyesen's daughter, Ebba Boyesen, and was able to share my dissertation research study based in part on her mother's work with the vagus nerve. We are now 'LinkedIn' and able to converse about my work, her work and her mother's work.

Sunday offered two more keynote addresses with Mary-Jayne Rust exploring Ecopsychology (she challenging participants audience members to consider where their food comes from, how it is raised and the impact on our Earth; her passion was evident and well received) and Rubens Kignel pondered on social justice (though it was difficult to hear his presentation).

On Monday, EABP Congress organisers facilitated a forum for all participants to look at key issues, tensions and creative directions that arose during the Congress concerning our future as practitioners and our contribution as a field of Body Psychotherapy. Unfortunately, I was unable to attend this discussion as well as experiential workshops with my time devoted to meetings and a family commitment. I had to leave Cambridge slightly early, en route to Hamburg, Germany for my family sojourn and for an interview with Dr Gerhard Schroth on Prenatal Bonding (BA). The term BA refers to Bindungs-Analyse by Raffi.

Congress asides

Teatime, along with fresh fruits and cookies, became a conference favourite. Booksellers and publishers offered book signings; the *Body, Movement and Dance* journal hosted a drinks evening; Courtenay Young presented his new publishing house, Body Psychotherapy Publications. His latest edition (Young, 2012), entitled *About Relational Body Psychotherapy*, was available and featured the work of many contributors present at both the EABP Congress and the USABP conferences. There was also the added benefit of sightseeing: Cambridge offered tourists delights from punting on the River Cam to exploring The Backs (walks that afford views of the backsides of famous colleges), Trinity Church and walking the Fells Way to Grantchester for tea at the Orchard Garden Tea House, a favourite writer's hangout.

Reflection

The overall tone within this diverse international crowd was one of a close-knit community; a sense of connection existed. People talked freely with one another (despite language differences) and offered a warm welcoming through touch,

gesture and facial expression. I felt an easy flow between myself and others. During the lunch break, people moved outside to appreciate the sun and congregate in groups; rather than cluster within known circles, strangers invited others to join in so no-one was left seated alone (unless by choice). I gratefully appreciated the open expression and the room for all to gather and share with equal appreciation and respect.

Panel presenter Asaf Rolef Ben-Shahar's presence on stage mirrored this sense of opening and availability. He walked across the stage in his socks to greet an auditorium filled, almost, to capacity and shared his need for help to regulate his sense of nervousness, his need for all of us to provide a container to support his participation. He presented himself as soft-spoken, gentle, vulnerable, honest as he shared his recent experience with the whooping cough and his fear when it passed on to his two young daughters. Humour, guilt, frustration, embodiment – his story mirrored many personal experiences shared during the Congress which shed light into the depths that Body Psychotherapy can reach within a human being.

Summary

I met many therapists who regularly contribute to peer-reviewed journals and professional magazines. And I hopefully enticed many new writers to submit their work. The people I spoke with were busy with their own lives, yet appeared eager to share their process, their research, their ways of knowing and being with a larger audience in order to advance the field. There seemed to be, in my perspective, less of a sense of loyalty to one's methodology and one's original trainer and more of a respect for the wider field itself and a sense of, 'What can I contribute to move our field forward?' Body Psychotherapy has a long history and is said to be well established in Europe; people are familiar with the work of others and their scope of practice. So perhaps there is less need to protect and defend one's own work and process. Perhaps there is more space to embrace diversity.

In the USA, there is a push to spread the word about Body Psychotherapy and validate its existence as a form of therapeutic intervention because it is not yet considered a cohesive, well-integrated discipline (Barratt, 2010). There is a call for evidence-based practice; yet, many in attendance in Cambridge wondered where the person's 'body' was in the Polyvagal Theory and expressed concern by the push for neuroscience and brain studies, along with evidence-based studies that leave embodiment out by focusing on behavioural and neurological adaptations. As EABP member and author Heller (2012) noted, 'Neurologists are unable to explain the dynamics of the mind by observing the brain and psychologists can't explain the dynamics of the brain by observing the mind' (p. 116). Researchers are in fact evaluating evidence related to 'the effectiveness of a treatment with respect to the individual's adaptation or adjustment to the prevailing social order' (Barratt, 2012, p. 129). The field appears to be at a very important juncture.

I am fascinated by the possibility of an all-participant assembly at the next World Congress for Body Psychotherapy in Lisbon, 2014. The potential results of that dialogue intrigue me as we work to bring awareness and validity to body/mind therapeutic practices within the overall science of somatic psychology (Barratt, 2010). Learning how different countries approach body psychotherapy, how their

organisations support and validate this work in the current social/cultural milieu and how they are valued/accepted as healers fascinates me. Hearing about it on a personal level as well as from a structural/organisational level has the potential to offer an integration of standards (and/or standardisation perhaps) and intimate knowing and reflection, leaving me with the overriding question: How do we create a worldwide movement that impacts healing on an embodied level?

These conferences are usually biannual, with the next EABP conference scheduled for 2014 in Lisbon and the next USABP conference in 2015.

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