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Narrative Identities

Psychologists Engaged in Self-Construction

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CHAPTER 13

Dancing Stories

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The request to write an autobiography about oneself as a psychotherapist raises important questions about the nature of autobiography, the nature of the self, and the nature of therapeutic work. In this chapter, therefore, I will attempt to respond to each of these questions in turn by weaving together stories from my life with reflections on those stories.

It is only recently that the subject of women's autobiography, or women's *bios*, women's *aute*, and women's *graphia* has been a legitimate subject of critical or theoretical study (Smith, 1987, p.7). Psychoanalysts like Nancy Chodorow and Luce Irigaray argue that men's autobiographies are individualistic and objective, while women's are relational and subjective (Gilligan, 1982). Women's stories retain the symbolic preverbal language between mother and infant, while men's stories reflect the Oedipal separation from the mother. It would follow that women's stories would not follow the male heroic stories of individuation, and indeed Carolyn Heilbrun (1988) shows that women authors tend to attribute their achievements to another person or to a force other than themselves.

Who is the "I" in a woman's narrative, therefore? Perhaps the "I" is more diffuse, multiple, and non-linear than the male "I." Is there an encapsulated self, or is the self created in a context of events and in relation with others? To what extent is the self influenced by gender and by personal history?

What does it mean to be a psychotherapist? Is it a profession or a calling? How is one's perspective as a psychotherapist affected by one's personal history and self? Is psychotherapy an objective scientific process based on prediction and control, or a subjective artistic process that uses the therapist's self as the primary tool?

The narratives that follow will focus on these questions through the themes of the self, gender, body, and spirit.

Who am I?

"I" was always a "we" and an "I." Born as the fraternal member of a set of triplets, my life has been shaped by my earliest experiences of being my own egg. That led to a lifetime of feeling different, longing for community but always being "on my own path"; profound loneliness and yet spirited independence; efforts to understand the meaning of the number "three," (archetypes of three sisters, three Furies, triple Goddesses); asymmetry as a model of change, instability with the potential for a greater dynamic stability, and appreciation for the paradox of belonging and not belonging. In my early memories, my sisters talked to each other at night while we all slept in the same room. Even though they were asleep, their nonsense talk was in perfect synchrony, with comments and pauses as if it were real conversation. I listened from the other end of the room, feeling out of the vibration, alone in an ancient way. And yet we were teased as we spoke of "our" mother. We were dressed alike until we were 12 years old, on all-triplet television shows *Name That Tune*, and *Merry Mailman*. We still confuse memories and identities ("No, that happened to me!"). Our mother taught English in the 1950s; we were taught to speak properly and politely to every stranger who accosted us, as we always were in public. We all performed well, and were always at the top in our classes. My sisters sang and I danced and drew. We played musical trios, and my sisters swapped lead roles in the camp plays. They were specimens in grade school biology class, demonstrating that as identical twins, one was right-handed, the other left-handed, one had a crooked tooth on the right side and the other on the left. We inevitably attracted attention; the most conspicuous outfits were three white bunny suits given to us by a business partner of my father. We still tell stories to each other about three little girls holding hands and wearing white fur coats, hats, and muffs on the New York City subway. On the one hand, we performed for the guests and were dolls ("poupée"), as Jean-Paul Sartre describes himself in his autobiography. On the other hand, we had extremely generous and supportive parents who encouraged us to individuate and believe in ourselves. Finally, my experience of being born into a "litter" gave me a very special bond with my sisters. We always trusted each other with our latest rebellions against the parents, as we still do with our secrets, dreams and fears. We learned a kind of loyalty that turned out to be unfortunately naive in terms of the rest of the world, and learning about

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My way has been a search for "authenticity" (Bugental, 1989), "sincerity" (Sartre, 1964), and some understanding about why I was put on this earth in this odd configuration.

Reflection

The theme of solitude is not common in the psychological literature, but it appears vividly in literature and philosophy. I think, for example, of the fundamental existential issues of facing one's aloneness, which I found in the writings of Albert Camus, Gide, Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir. Or in one of my favorite French writers, Colette, who wrote in *The Vagabond*: "Must I discover and perpetually renew in myself that rich fund of energy which is essential to the life of wanderers and solitaries? Must I, in short, struggle – ah, how could I forget it? – against solitude itself? And to achieve what? What? What?" (1955, p.121).

Clark Moustakas, a psychologist, bravely depicts loneliness in a heuristic essay and concludes: "No formula can predict the profound awakenings and discoveries that will occur in a person's inner searching. Nevertheless, inherent in loneliness as I have come to know it are guidelines to a new life" (1972, p.5). Irwin Yalom names aloneness as one of the four existential challenges of life (1980). For me, an existential approach to psychology is foundation to my theoretical approach.

Facing the existential void of our aloneness or mortality is, I think, the critical turning point in therapy and in life that lets us create in the face of this void. It gives us the freedom to create, and the motivation to be authentic. Performing for others as a child made me acutely conscious of acting, and of the roles played in everyday life. I had a tremendous longing for authenticity, which is why the work of Rollo May, James Bugental and other humanistic psychologists spoke so clearly to me (Bugental, 1989; May, 1975). I also enjoyed the Jungian concepts of persona and archetype (Jung, 1966), and therapies that use masks, create characters, and tell stories.

Finding a balance between unique and archetypal selves is not simple, and takes wisdom. While I do not believe that there is one "authentic" or monolithic self (Gergen, 1991; Hillman, 1975), I also do not think there are no essences or universals. In a therapeutic session, therefore, I might explore "subpersonalities" through verbal and nonverbal imagery, as well as universal constants like "love" and "compassion" and "home." I find it helpful, therapeutic,

tically, for a client to appreciate the absolute uniqueness of his or her experience in all its rich texture. At the same time, when appropriate, he or she can also see this experience in a larger context of cultural or historical patterns. The discovery that we share our most human dimensions with others is deeply therapeutic for many people.

Being a triplet has also influenced my therapeutic posture. I easily create sister transference relationships, which obviously can be either helpful or problematic. I fantasize about writing articles on how the feeling of sisterhood is therapeutic in and of itself, and how in so many ways we are older and younger sisters to each other. Instead of "re-parenting" as therapists, we "re-sister." I often hear another kind of loneliness from a woman client who has never had a sister, and a lack of certain interpersonal "litter" social skills. I have clients who have never been teased as youngsters and need to learn. I have even tried to talk my sister into co-writing something with me, and she faintly agrees. So far we haven't done a thing.

Being so tuned into each other also gave me a very early experience of a nonverbal way of knowing. Nonverbal communication training helps me pick up on the nonverbal correlates of subgroup formation in a therapy group, for example. The work of Davis (1970), Schefflen (1973), and Birdwhistell (1970) helps me analyze group process or dyadic relationships. The experience of deeply felt implicit knowledge corresponds for me to the "personal knowledge" (Polanyi, 1958), or embodiment as "kinetic melody gifted with a meaning" (Merleau-Ponty, 1963, p.130). The effort to describe levels of meaning in nonverbal communication led me to the subject for my dissertation, which was a phenomenological study of what I called "Kinaesthetic Imagining," and published as an article (Serlin, 1996). It also led to a framework for understanding kinaesthetic transference and countertransference in psychotherapy (Serlin and Stern, 1998).

Psychology of women

As this form of knowing is the shadow side of the dominant culture's overt, verbal language, it tends to be more usual among women (Goldberger, 1996). Women's narratives are more likely to be personal, embodied, relational, and woven rather than linear (Plaskow and Christ, 1989). They may be, by their very nature, anti-authoritarian and anti-hierarchical. Smith calls this "an unspoken presence, that feminine unconscious repressed by the masculine logos, always threatens to disrupt the narrative order and to destabilize the fiction of identity the autobiographer inscribes" (Smith, 1987, p.41).

Women's narratives are related to nature in a creative collaboration. The sister theme in my own narrative takes me to ecofeminism as "a sisterly bond, a fundamental rejection of all forms of domination, whose necessary goal is diversity rather than dualism" (Gaard, 1993, p.7). This takes me to a feminist view of science: "The-Feminine in each of us – the part that sees life in context, the interconnectedness of everything, and the consequences of our actions on future generations can help heal the wounds of our planet" (Shepherd, 1993, p.1).

I have been blessed with some extraordinary women mentors, and try to continue that tradition today with my students or supervisees. My advisor in the Honors Psychology program at the University of Michigan was Judith Bardwick, who was reading newly written chapters of her book on the psychology of women. I then apprenticed with Anna Halprin, who put together dance and movement with Gestalt therapy. With Anna, we did movement improvisations during rush hour traffic in San Francisco, and sunset rituals on top of Mt. Tamalpais. I feel it important to document these women's contributions to help balance the history of psychology and as a corrective to psychological theory. I interviewed Anna Halprin for an article published in the *American Journal of Dance Therapy* (Serlin, 1996). My first real therapist and wise old woman grandmother figure was Laura Perls. My therapy with her flowed into study at the NY Gestalt Institute in 1975 and then teaching with Laura and others. Trained as a concert pianist and dancer, Laura helped create Gestalt therapy as an "aesthetic philosophy" (Serlin and Shane, 1999), which provided a strong theoretical framework for me to conceptualize movement as meaning in process. I was with Laura, her daughter and granddaughter, when she died, and have made a videotape and written some articles that place her appropriately in the history of the development of US Gestalt therapy. As one of the founders of Gestalt therapy, she was not given credit. Her softer, more nuanced approach needs to balance Fritz's aggressive confrontational style. During this time, I also studied with Irmgard Bartenieff, one of the students of Rudolf von Laban, the grandfather of modern dance. Irmgard (Bartenieff and Lewis, 1980) taught us effort-shape analysis and space harmony, which were extremely sophisticated time-weight-flow analyses of movement. This system was applied to a wide range of issues, including the analysis of hospitalized psychiatric patients (Davis, 1970), workers in an assembly line, and cross-cultural dance. I wrote my master's thesis at Hunter College on the nonverbal correlates of valium on behavior and on couples in therapy. I still use effort-shape (Labanotation) in innumerable ways in my work; sometimes it is just a subtle recording of nonverbal behaviors during a

verbal therapy session, to overt dances that are movement choirs with a Laban-based structure like *Race for the Cure*. In my writing, I have tried to find a verbal equivalent of a process language like Labanotation or Gestalt therapy as a language for psychotherapy that is based on the arts, and not a linear medical model (Serlin, 1989).

Finding one's voice as a woman was always a central area of my research and clinical interest. Simone de Beauvoir, Virginia Woolf and Mary Catherine Bateson were "sisters," and I built later courses on Women and Narrative on their theoretical foundations. I made pilgrimages to Virginia Woolf's house in London, and spent a day with Helaine de Beauvoir. I not only read Simone de Beauvoir's manifesto of the second sex, but I followed her footsteps through cafés and the student demonstrations in Paris, 1968. She and Sartre talked to a group of us students before we were tear gassed. I have explored and written about the voices of those women artists who commit suicide, and the dark side of creativity called "The Anne Sexton Complex" (Serlin, 1994). Students who take courses in Women and Narrative study the lives of women role models such as Marie Curie, and discover imagistic (rather than verbal) narratives in the lives of artists like Georgia O'Keefe. I may suggest that clients get in touch with the narratives of women in their family and cultural context. They may find inspiration in a family elder to guide them or discover their place within a family context or set of traditions. Or else they use narrative as a research methodology (Howard, 1991; Lieblich and Josselson, 1997; Polkinghorne, 1988).

I continue to stay interested in the psychology of women in many ways. I interviewed Aniela Jaffe about Jung and dancing (Serlin, 1992), co-wrote a chapter on Women in Humanistic Psychology for the *Handbook of Humanistic Psychology* (Serlin and Criswell, 2001), belong to Division 35 (Society for the Study of Women) and the Women's Caucus of the Council of Representatives of the APA. I currently supervise interns at a feminist clinic where we are developing a training program with a depth psychological perspective. Writing about women, creating curricula, getting involved in my professional association are all forms of social activism for me, of trying to walk my talk and embody my values.

It was Virginia Woolf who asked: "Who am I, what am I, and so on: these questions are always floating about in me" (Woolf, 1953, p.85). I find that many of my women clients suffer from various forms of social oppression, and finding their authentic voice is another keystone of their therapy.

Reflection

Both humanistic psychology and women's ways of knowing share values related to personal experience, tacit ways of knowing (Polanyi, 1958), the importance of finding one's authentic voice (Maslow, 1962), and a collaborative method of psychotherapy (Hare-Mustin, 1983). Women's ways of knowing include the following elements:

1. *Connectedness* – using empathy and intuition rather than argument and separation to seek collaboration with others.
2. *Social construction of methodologies* – seeking meaning rather than truth through descriptive and qualitative research (Howard, 1991; Polkinghorne, 1988).
3. *The Self* – known in relationship with others, demonstrates the “paradox of separateness within connection” (Jordan, 1991, p.69).
4. *Dialogical knowing* – transforming an “It” into a “Thou” (Buber, 1985; Friedman, 1985; Goldberger, 1996, p.221).
5. *Feeling* – that which is inseparable from thinking, allows us to feel ourselves into the world of the other (Goldberger, 1996, p.224).

A postmodern perspective shares an interest in “the situational and cultural determinants of knowing” and “the relationship between power and knowledge” (Goldberger, 1996, p.8). Feminist thought extends humanistic values to the “ecosocial matrix” (Spratnak, 1997) of body and earth.

The body

It is often through women's bodies that their voices come. The clinical work that I did with women who were living with breast cancer involves some of the most profound therapeutic experiences of my life. In 1995, I organized an Arts Medicine program at the Institute of Medicine and Philosophy at California Pacific Medical Center. I won three grants from the Susan Komen Foundation to organize 12-week Dance Medicine groups. We created imagery and healing rituals for each member as she dealt with mastomectomies and reconstructions (Serlin *et al.*, 2000b). We participated in the Annual Race for the Cure, and entered a collaborative art project created by the group into the Art.Rage.Us exhibit in San Francisco. We became activists in the Hike Against the Odds, and sat at tables distributing literature about resources. Doing therapy with this group is different from doing traditional psychotherapy, in ways noted by David Spiegel *et al.* (1989). This approach is

congruent with a feminist approach to psychotherapy, which is collaborative and egalitarian (Hare-Mustin, 1983).

The power of dance to heal had early roots in my interest in folk dance. At age 14, I began folk dancing in Israel. This was followed by a small performance with my Zionist group in Carnegie Hall when I was 16, and years of Balkan dancing. I traveled through the Balkans during the summer of 1973, danced in small villages in Yugoslavia, and lived in Turkey for one month. I participated as a research assistant at Columbia University with Alan Lomax, the anthropologist who did cross-cultural field research in dance, using Labanotation to document patterns of simplicity and complexity across cultural traditions. I still use folk dance as a foundation for my work, whether in the "gerobics" groups I lead in nursing homes in Massachusetts or in the warm-up for the annual Race for the Cure.

The ancestors – What's in a name?

Being a triplet was rare. We heard figures of it being 1:10,000 in those days before any fertility medication. Nor was it part of our family history – it seems to have been a complete fluke. Although we were each full weight and full term, and my mother gained so much weight that she couldn't see her feet, she and my father said they believed their doctor who told them to expect one child. So my mother and father had one boy's name prepared. It was Eric, and so my middle sister got the name Erica. When the naming got to me as the last one, I got the fathers' names. For a girl to inherit the names of family men is unusual in a traditional Jewish family; however, the families of my parents were not traditional, and were involved in left-wing politics and labor unions, Yiddish music and culture.

I was named Ilene with the letter I for Isadore, my mother's father. She adored him, and was so desolate when he died that she promptly got pregnant – with us. The story about him is that he was a gentle and cultured soul who earned a basic living as a house painter in the Bronx ("when the Bronx still had potato fields"). He came from Russia with his young bride from Kamenetz Podolsky in Ukraine to New York City. We have a photo of him, small and dapper, with his blonde and pretty young bride, in a (probably) rented suit and stiff smile, taken in a Russian photography studio in New York in the early 1900s. My mother came very close to naming me Isadora, but was afraid that I would be called Izzy like her father. Nevertheless, I feel sure that the archetype of Isadora Duncan runs deep in my soul. I live in her hometown, and am

working with colleagues on a chapter about her. Is she an image or template for me? I think so.

In a self-made coming of age ceremony at age 30, when I went off to graduate school in psychology in a new part of the country, I took again my given name Ilene. This was a change from my childhood tomboy nickname Leni, which close friends and family still call me. Taking on the full birth name with a conscious appreciation of the legacy it carried was an important part of my growing sense of identity during my middle years.

My middle name is Ava. I was probably 40 years old before I admitted this to anyone – the name always sounded so pretentious. In fact, I was actually named for my father's father Avraham, Abraham, or Avram. This grandfather, whom I never knew, was described by my father as a kind and scholarly man who earned a living with candy stores and as a tailor on the Lower East Side of New York. We knew that he had some siblings in the United States, but never knew that others did not come over from Poland and were sent to Treblinka. Two years ago some cousins and I discovered this family secret. We visited Bialystok, found the villages of these relatives, and said Kaddish in Treblinka.

Knowing about this part of my family has made an enormous difference in how I articulate my identity to myself. Now I understood some of the profound grief and survival experiences of my father and his family. I understood a great deal more about my father's expectations for his children, and the frustration of his having no male heirs to inherit the business he built. As the family tomboy, I carried the math, science, and sports role. Getting interested in poetry and French literature marked my initiation into my womanhood, as I fell in love for the first time in my late teens. Getting back to math and science has been a struggle since, although I found ways to call on my "inner tomboy" to help me pass the psychology licensing exam. I understood aspects of my sadness as carrying a cultural connection to the Holocaust. I am now focused on inner and outer psychological repair work, trying to find a way to help "repair the world": "Tikkun Olam." I am finding small ways to sustain family, like visiting my father's parents' graves in New York and cleaning and maintaining them. Seeing my own personal issues in the context of my family and world politics gives me an invaluable perspective on them and helps me find ways to move from grief to reconstruction.

Reflection

In my experience, many of us today are rootless, lost, and do not know who we are. The parents of baby-boomers tried to forget the pain of World War II

and their immigrant pasts, and looked into the optimistic American future. Today we no longer have the family home where the photos and narratives are stored. We have intermarried, and are changing/losing traditions (Serlin *et al.* 2001a). I have found, in my own life and with my clients, that some form of creative recapulation and experiencing of family history can stabilize the personality and contribute to a sense of belonging and identity. We need to find a balance between getting stuck in a sentimentalized or literalized version of our stories and the freedom to create new ones. As we do this, we need to give voice to the different aspects of ourselves.

In one clinical case, for example, a young client had lost both her parents within a year, and suddenly found herself the new family parent. She was worried about the holidays and how she could now hold the family together. By creating a shared space where family members could bring their favorite Christmas mementos of the parents and family, they were able to talk about their grief and also begin a process of rebuilding.

I have also noticed that the breakdown of traditional religious guidelines on how to live have left many people with the task of creating their own system of morality or spiritual beliefs. They may come into therapy with a crisis of identity, or meaning and purpose. As I have written, I believe that psychologists should be prepared to deal with issues of religious and spiritual diversity in their training programs (Serlin, *in press*).

Articulating the self

I kept a diary from age nine. One entry at age ten showed a struggle with my anger toward my mother, who would not let me go barefoot outside because I had a cold. Looking at this entry 45 years later, I was surprised not only by the strength of my feelings, but also the moral dimensions of my questions; for example, I wrestled over whether it was wrong to be angry toward my mother. I had a private spot at a lake near our house where I hid my journals and communed with them while sitting on a tree; carving out private time within a strongly connected collective has always been an edge for me, never easy, but always essential. Asking myself questions about ethics, meaning, and motivation were natural. I think I was perhaps an "old soul."

But reflecting on the family, talking about family issues with each other and our friends was a natural path to psychology for all of us, and my middle sister is a family therapist. Although we picked a similar field, however, our different perspectives reflect our personality and birth order differences. She was the middle sister and known as the "Philadelphia lawyer" who mediated

between her more hot-headed baby and older sister. Her PhD is from an APA approved clinical psychology program, while I was more attracted to the existentialist philosophers, dance and the arts, Gestalt, humanistic and Jungian psychology.

I do therefore think that one's choice of psychological or philosophical perspective is both a reflection of, and an influence on, one's personality. Yet the relationship between private experience and its public expression is complicated. One goal of therapy, I think, is to bring about a greater coherence among levels of cognitive and non-cognitive, rational and non-rational levels, individual and group, modes of experience and expression. Going beyond traditional dichotomies of mind and body, however, may mean going beyond Western, Cartesian psychology. For me, this was studying Gestalt theory and therapy with Laura Perls at the New York Gestalt institute as a kind of "applied philosophy," then Tibetan Buddhism, and phenomenological and archetypal psychology at the University of Dallas. I try to ground my observations in some form of political action; I got involved in Division 32 of the American Psychological Association, and as past-President and Representative to Council, I tried to represent a humanistic perspective in traditional psychology (Serlin *et al.*, 2000a).

The early experience of being an observer in life was basic training for my becoming a psychologist. However, the questions I asked myself were not addressed by psychology, but rather by philosophy. I found in Gide my affirmation that one had to break out of the bourgeois family in order to find real authenticity and freedom ("only the bastard has a right to be free"). At the University of Michigan, a group of us created courses on humanistic and existential psychology, and interdisciplinary courses in French and psychology. We had student sit-ins and practiced activism, discussing our actions in our philosophy class on existentialism with Fritz Hofmann. I was seriously interested in issues of authenticity, family and government oppression, personal and political liberation.

Spirit and psyche

Finding coherence among all my parts was not as easy as it may have sounded above, and these parts were often in conflict. For example, the philosophical psychology at the University of Dallas was grounded in a conservative contemplative Catholic monastic tradition, and I was a Jewish dance therapist from New York. By experiencing the sometimes excruciating squeeze of a male authoritarian classroom and paper writing disciplines, I saw more clearly

by contrast the world from which I came and took for granted. Yet it also propelled me into action to reclaim my own life. Having to consciously reclaim my Judaism led me back to temple and the mentorship of a far-thinking rabbi and philosophy professor. I was homesick in Dallas, not only for familiarity, immediate family and friends, but also for my tribe. A few years later, I went back to Israel to rediscover my Zionist roots, was able to balance the idealist image of Israel from my youth with the reality of the volatile country today, and come to terms with my having left Judaism. I studied for my Bat Mitzvah with a woman rabbi and group of women, and chanting the ancient melodies was a high point when I turned 50. Yet I continue to struggle with the role of women in Judaism, and try to find places to bring a feminist perspective into the tradition. For example, each year at Passover I offer a Miriam's dance at the place in the text where the Red Sea parts. Since Miriam's song is the first song in the Bible, the women play tambourines and dance in a serpentine line around the Passover tables in a tribute to the gifts of Miriam the Prophetess.

I rediscovered Judaism in the community. I spent Shabbaton with Chassidic families, danced all night with the Torah, and joined with Starhawk (1988), Ester Broner, and other Jewish warrior women to create an all-women's Torah Scroll that is now housed in the Jewish Women's Library in Los Angeles. I lived near and visited the Israel Levin Center on Venice Beach written about so movingly by Barbara Myerhoff, an anthropologist who lived with, loved, and wrote about these old Jewish people (Myerhoff, 1978). As Gelya Frank described Myerhoff's method: "Myerhoff's vision of the people at the Israel Levin Center was a form of redemption through historization. She assumed the role of a granddaughter who took time from her busy and successful life to give her 'grandparents' the recognition and respect they deserved" (Frank, 1995, p.209). Years later, I worked in nursing homes where I often experienced myself as their granddaughter, and was given a lot of love in return. It is a different form of transference, and the healing happens through this love.

My own path through spirituality is in some ways typical of others of my generation. Not finding a spiritual connection in the suburban reform Judaism of my childhood, I turned to Buddhism in my twenties. I became a student of the notorious Tibetan Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche, and taught dance therapy at the Naropa Institute. Learning meditation has been another cornerstone of my therapeutic practice. It comes into play whether I am sitting in a therapeutic session, or teaching someone to center and focus. I have tried to write about bringing spiritual perspectives and practices into psychotherapy

(Serlin, in press), while also being cautious about spirituality sometimes being used as a defense against feeling. I have found the Buddhist Abhidharma to be an extremely sophisticated psychological system with a taxonomy of human thought, emotion and action based on thousands of years of meditation insights. It is another fluid, process-oriented language, very different from the more rigid Western systems that emphasize psychopathology. While I struggled for some years with not knowing whether I was Jewish or Buddhist, I found my way to "Ju-Bu" through Jungian analysis and writing about this experience (Serlin, 1986). To this day, I think of Buddhism as my spirit and Judaism as my soul.

These questions of soul and depth could not be found in Gestalt and humanistic psychology, and I began to delve into Jungian psychology. I studied with James Hillman during my graduate work at the University of Dallas, and entered Jungian analysis at that time. I did a pre-doctoral internship at the C.G. Jung Institute of Los Angeles, and studied in the sandtray room of the Children's Clinic. Jungian psychology gave me an archetypal and symbolic language system that was invaluable for depth therapy work, both verbal and dance. I taught in Zurich, where I experienced a more pure archetypal approach. I found the stories and myths enchanting, yet at times disembodied and forced. I was uncomfortable with discussions about Jung's relationship with the Nazi party, and found some traditions underlying classical Jungian theory to be socially regressive. I learned more about the feminine as an archetype and my own feminine side, while I also rebelled against it as dogma. My mentors in the Jungian world were primarily creative and nontraditional therapists on the fringes of the Jungian community, for example, Ernie Rossi, Marvin Spiegelman, James Hillman, and Andrew Samuels. To this day, however, I still feel very attracted to a Jungian depth perspective, and it informs my work thoroughly.

Reflection

Having a spiritual perspective in psychology raises a difficult question: To what extent is our identity that of our cultural and historical context, and to what extent is our real identity a spiritual essence? I once heard Jean Bolen say that from a spiritual perspective we are primarily spirits temporarily inhabiting this body in this time and place, whereas a humanistic perspective says that we are primarily humans in this time and place, but have spirituality in our nature. That definition has remained with me since then, and seems useful. I have believed both passionately at one time or another.

However, having a spiritual perspective on psychology can immensely broaden the clinical work. Echoing personal issues with cultural myths and universal energies can help a person emerge from the cocoon of a narcissistic preoccupation with self.

Conclusion

Selves are fluid and escape definition. However, over time my affiliations, writings, and clinical work have grown into commitment. This commitment has taken the shape of a perspective which is simultaneously humanistic-depth-feminist-somatic-artistic. What these theories share is the importance of personal experience, tacit ways of knowing, holism, and interconnect-edness. These qualities are embodied through relationship, engagement with the world, and creative work as a psychotherapist. At the end, there is the question posed by the poet, Mary Oliver, about how each of us will live this one wild and wonderful life.

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