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Embracing Unity: Reconnecting with the Self in Contemporary Culture through Dance/Movement Therapy Values

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Dance/Movement Therapy Values

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Abstract

This thesis explores the interplay between a sense of wholeness, environmental factors, inner conflict and injuries, and the transformative journey towards rediscovering one's sense of Self on a psyche somatic level. This paper delves into the significance of the Self as a central archetype in the human psyche: the totality of one's consciousness, encompassing both the conscious and unconscious aspects of an individual. By recognizing and confronting the unconscious aspects– of inner conflicts, polarities and perceptions– individuals can start to develop a healthier sense of self, based on self-acceptance and self-compassion. The interconnection between movement through dance/movement therapy values and self-acceptance is profound. Movement and inner-witnessing entails embracing the freedom to move without any judgment, enabling individuals to express their true selves through bodily motions. Within this practice of self-expression and exploration lies the potential for gaining profound insights into one's emotions and thoughts. As individuals learn to observe and embrace their movements without harsh criticism, they naturally foster a sense of self-acceptance that grows within them.

Key words: the self, unity, depth psychology, self-acceptance, dance/movement therapy, resilience

Acknowledgement

This part is in Turkish for my beautiful mama. Annem, sana sonsuz teşekkür ederim. Iyi ki varsin, iyi yoldaşımsın. Rabbim ruhunun derinliklerini bulmanda yolunda ışık olsun.

Back to English. I'd like to express my deepest gratitude to some pretty awesome and wholesome people in my life who have supported me throughout what seemed like a rollercoaster of a journey, aka grad school.

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Introduction

The sense of Self has been a topic of philosophical, psychological, and scientific inquiry for centuries. It is a fundamental aspect of human experience and identity. The exploration of the Self can be traced back to ancient philosophical traditions, artistic expressions and religious texts (Scalabrini, 2022). What constitutes the concept of Self? How do human beings derive meaning from this notion? Furthermore, can we assess and evaluate our experiences related to the Self?

Throughout my life, I've experienced numerous instances where I felt estranged from my true Self, often without a clear understanding of its significance. In those moments of disconnection, I found it challenging to maintain an open and curious outlook. However, as I traversed the path of life and encountered its meaningful synchronicities, I began to discern patterns that contributed to this sense of detachment.

Over the years, I embarked on a journey of self-discovery, observing the cycles of disconnecting and reconnecting, sometimes mired in confusion. Eventually, I found myself drawn to the field of dance/movement therapy, where I could delve into a new realm of consciousness and receive valuable support. Through this therapeutic avenue, I explored various dimensions of my being, gaining a deeper understanding of my Self and my relationship with the world around me.

The primary purpose of this paper is to present a compilation of interconnected findings, drawn from the research of numerous individuals, and my own observations of patterns manifested in the lives of my clients concerning disconnection and the concept of the Self within contemporary culture. Several themes have surfaced during this exploration, including the impact of shame in a culture prone to it, the complexities of balancing the desire for connection (attachment) with the need to remain authentic (maintaining one's true Self), our intrinsic human

needs and how they are perceived in present times, the physiological manifestations of disconnection within our bodies, and effective methods for reconnecting with ourselves and others, fostering resilience to not only survive but thrive in our lifetime.

Brené Brown: Am I Enough?

According to Brown (2012), shame can be described as the apprehension of disconnection. In her work, she delves into the idea that as human beings, we are inherently wired to seek emotional, psychological, cognitive, and spiritual connections, love, and a sense of belonging. Brown strongly contends that it is through these connections that we find our purpose and meaning in life, making them the very reason for our existence (2012).

Shame is the deeply painful feeling or experience of believing that we are flawed and for that reason unworthy of love and belonging. Feeling shame then births the thought of: "I'm not good enough for connection, for belonging or love. I'm unlovable. I don't belong". Shame is the fear stemming from actions taken or opportunities missed, an aspiration unmet or a target unachieved, leading to a sense of unworthiness for genuine connections with others (Brown, 2012).

Brown (2012) states that shame is a universal human experience. Her research has identified twelve distinct categories of shame, which include: appearance and body image, financial status and work, parenthood, family dynamics, parenting, mental and physical health, struggles with addiction, experiences related to sex, the process of aging, religious beliefs, surviving past traumas, and being subjected to stereotypes or labels (Brown, 2012).

Shame is more than just a passing emotion; it's a deeply felt and real pain. The brain's chemistry reinforces the significance of social acceptance and connection, making the anguish caused by social rejection and disconnection genuinely hurtful. In 2011, a National Survey on

Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) research supported by the National Institutes of Mental Health and the National Institute of Drug Abuse, suggested that from the brain's perspective, experiencing intense social rejection hurts in the same way as physical pain does (2012). So when shame is defined as an intensely "painful" experience, it's not an understatement. Neuroscience advancements support the notion that emotions can cause genuine suffering, validating what's intuitively been known all along. (Brown, 2012).

Trying to articulate emotional pain, including shame, is challenging. Similar to the difficulty encountered in describing physical pain, shame resists being encapsulated by words. It seems to recoil from being openly expressed, preferring to remain hidden and unspoken.

According to Brown (2012), shame not only brings about disconnection but also leads to a sense of scarcity. In cultures where there is a heightened awareness of lack, scarcity becomes a pervasive issue - the constant feeling of "never enough." This scarcity mindset affects various aspects of human's lives, including safety, connection, money, and resources. The mind is constantly engrossed in the act of calculating one's possessions, deficiencies, and desires, as well as pondering the possessions, needs, and desires of others.

Brown describes the self-defeating nature of constant evaluation and comparison by highlighting the detrimental consequences of continuously measuring one's life, family, relationships, and communities against an unattainable, media-driven standard of perfection (Brown, 2012).

Scarcity does not suddenly manifest in a culture; rather, it takes root and thrives in cultures that are shame-prone, deeply immersed in comparison, and plagued by disengagement. According to Brown, a shame-prone culture doesn't imply collective identity of shame, but rather

an abundance of individuals grappling with feelings of unworthiness, which significantly shapes

the overall culture. (Brown, 2012).

In Brown's insightful analysis (2012), she proposes that human's preoccupation with

scarcity has become a pervasive cultural phenomenon akin to post-traumatic stress. Notably, this

concern is not confined to the broader society, but extends its grip into the fabric of one's

families, workplaces, schools, and communities. Throughout these realms, Brown observes a

common thread of shame, comparison, and disengagement, which ultimately manifests in one's

disconnection to courage, compassion, and meaningful relationships (Brown, 2012).

An essential aspect of this interconnected struggle is the emergence of shame, which

gradually permeates any social system until individuals start to withdraw to protect themselves.

This disengagement leads to a lack of active participation, stifles individual's contributions, and

fosters indifference (Brown, 2012).

In essence, Brown contends that addressing this culture of scarcity and its accompanying

dynamics is crucial in restoring humanity's capacity for vulnerability, empathy, and genuine

connection. By recognizing these patterns and fostering a culture of abundance and acceptance,

individuals can create a more caring and compassionate society (Brown, 2012).

According to Brown's research (2012), several behavioral indicators suggest the presence

of shame in a culture. These indicators include name-calling, blaming, gossiping, showing

partiality, and engaging in harassment. However, an even more evident indication of shame

pervading a culture is when shame is used as a pervasive management tool. Brown points out

that this becomes apparent when individuals in leadership positions resort to bullying others,

publicly criticizing subordinates in front of colleagues, delivering public reprimands, or

establishing reward systems that intentionally belittle, shame, or humiliate people (Brown,

2012).

How are Individual's Struggles and Behaviors Related to Protecting Themselves?

To safeguard against shame, vulnerability, and a sense of purposelessness, individuals

often resort to complete disengagement. When they perceive their leaders, whether teachers,

bosses, parents, or politicians, failing to uphold their end of the social contract, disengagement

also becomes a common response (Brown, 2012). This phenomenon is vividly exemplified in the

realm of politics. Many politicians create laws but fail to abide by them, and their actions often

remain consequence-free, in stark contrast to what an ordinary person would experience if they

engaged in similar behaviors—likely facing arrest, termination of employment, divorce, and

other negative outcomes.

The division arises between one's actual thoughts, feelings, and actions, which are

shaped by the cultural influences and practiced values, and the desired thoughts, feelings, and

actions, which represent one's true aspirations. This disparity in values creates a significant gap.

As Brown aptly points out, cultures that dehumanize individuals contribute to extreme

disengagement, generating value gaps that real people find challenging to bridge successfully

(Brown, 2012).

In today's current society, a prevailing misconception persists, wherein many people still

embrace the notion that shame serves as an effective tool to maintain order among individuals.

However, this perspective poses a significant threat to an individual's well-being. The link

between shame and detrimental consequences, such as violence, aggression, addiction,

depression, bullying, and eating disorders, cannot be ignored (Brown, 2012).

Numerous studies and research indicate that shame does not yield positive outcomes whatsoever. On the contrary, there is no data to support the idea that shame can serve as a useful guide for promoting good behavior. Instead, it often becomes the root cause of destructive and hurtful actions, exacerbating problems rather than offering solutions. Therefore, the belief in shame as a means of control and focus on fostering healthier and more constructive approaches to promote positive behaviors and emotional well-being in individuals must be reevaluated (Brown, 2012).

It is inherent in human essence to seek a sense of being deserving of love and acceptance. When an individual encounters shame, they yearn for worthiness, as it creates a disconnection within oneself. During times of distress, whether engaged in a cycle of shame or simply grappling with the fear of it, one tends to resort to self-destructive behaviors and may inadvertently shame others as well.

Brown argues that one way to look at the three components of scarcity and how they impact culture is to return to the following questions. It's helpful to think about any culture or social system that one is connected to, whether that's within one's family, friends, classroom, community, or work team (Brown, 2012):

Shame: Is the act of belittling or inducing fear of ridicule utilized as a means of managing and controlling individuals? Does one's self-worth become intertwined with achievement, compliance, or productivity? Is the tendency to engage in finger-pointing and blame-shifting considered a commonplace behavior? And lastly, does perfectionism pose a significant concern (Brown, 2012)?

Comparison: Has creativity suffered muting and suffocation? Are individuals' value solely gauged by adhering to a narrow notion of perfection or a singular expression of talent (Brown, 2012)?

Disengagement: Are individuals often afraid of venturing into new experiences or embracing risks? Do people tend to remain reticent instead of openly sharing their stories, experiences, and ideas due to the comfort it provides? Is there a pervasive struggle among everyone to gain recognition and be acknowledged (Brown, 2012)?

Upon reviewing the aforementioned questions and contemplating the broader cultural landscape, encompassing media, socio-economic, and political dimensions, Brown unequivocally responds with a resounding YES, YES, and YES (Brown, 2012)!

If individuals don't assert themselves and stand up for their genuine beliefs, the prevailing culture will continuously impose its influence, leading them to default into a mindset of scarcity. Humans are urged to actively participate and courageously embrace challenges whenever their choices challenge the prevailing atmosphere of lack (Brown, 2012).

In her exploration of the cultural phenomenon of scarcity, Brown puts forth the notion that countering it does not necessarily involve embracing abundance. Instead, she contends that the true antidote to the "never enough" mindset is what she terms "wholeheartedness" – a state where sufficiency and worthiness prevail (Brown, 2012). At its very essence, wholeheartedness encompasses vulnerability and a sense of worthiness. It involves bravely confronting exposure, uncertainty, and emotional risks while acknowledging and accepting that one is inherently enough. Brown goes on to define *vulnerability* as the willingness to embrace uncertainty, take risks, and open oneself up emotionally.

Gabor Maté: What Is Normal?

Similar to Brown's findings on the topics of connection, shame, and vulnerability in contemporary society, Maté highlights the crucial role of connection in our physical well-being, as well as our personal and societal sanity (Maté, 2022). He emphasizes that human beings are deeply influenced by the interplay of biological, psychological, and social factors. Thus, the escalating loneliness epidemic prevailing in Western culture today extends beyond being a mere psychological issue; it has evolved into a pressing public health crisis (Maté, 2022).

As individuals strongly endorse status, money, and image as essential concerns, they are less likely to engage in ecologically beneficial activities and become emptier and more insecure. This then invites lower-quality interpersonal relationships. Sequentially, the more insecure one feels, the more one focuses on material things. When materialism promises great satisfaction and, instead, yields hollow dissatisfaction, more craving is created. The self-perpetuating addictive motion is one of the mechanisms by which consumer society maintains itself by exploring the same insecurities it generates (Maté, 2022).

The prevalent product of the culture today is disconnection, which encompasses loneliness, alienation, loss of meaning, and dislocation. This pervasive phenomenon has led to a concerning increase in addiction, mental disorders, and chronic illnesses among people. The underlying cause can be attributed to the profound malnourishment of the mind, body, and soul that has weakened human beings (Maté, 2022).

The establishment of a society built on wealth and power, with inherent disparities based on race and gender, places a disproportionate physiological burden on certain individuals. In a culture that fosters a fearful competition among people and groups, the triggers for stress affect all social strata, yet their impacts are not equally distributed. Although the personal stresses arising from losing authenticity and disconnecting from one's true self can be felt across different

classes, the way the body responds to stressors to restore balance, as well as the strain imposed

by power imbalances, predominantly weigh down those who are politically disempowered and

economically underprivileged (Maté, 2022).

Similarly to Brown, Maté relates that all stressors represent the lack or threatened loss of

something an organism (human) perceives as absolutely necessary for survival. A forthcoming

loss of food supply, for example, is a major stressor for any culture. So is, for human kind, the

absence or threatened loss of love, dignity, work, self-esteem, or meaning (Maté, 2022).

The myth that portrays humans merely as isolated individuals pursuing personal

ambitions has been dispelled. By letting go of this misconception, individuals can avoid

becoming increasingly disconnected from crucial aspects of one's true self and neglecting

essential elements necessary for one's overall well-being (Maté, 2022).

According to Maté (2022), the core needs of human beings encompass various aspects

that have been explored throughout history. These fundamental needs include relatedness,

belonging, or connectedness, autonomy, mastery or competence (the pursuit of skills), original

self-esteem (a sense of self-worth that is not contingent on external achievements, possessions,

or the validation of others), trust (feeling supported in both social and personal resources that can

help navigate through life's challenges), and purpose, meaning, transcendence (recognizing

oneself as part of something greater).

Attachment and Authenticity

A recurring theme that Maté observed throughout the years is that of the inescapable

tension between two essential needs: *attachment* and *authenticity*. This clash is the base for the

most widespread formation of trauma in today's society: that is, the "small-*t*" trauma manifested

through a disconnection from the self, even in the absence of abuse or a huge threat (Maté, 2022).

Maté, following Bowlby's model, defines attachment as the drive for closeness, proximity to other beings, in not only physical but also the emotional sense (Maté, 2022). It is a complex, developing process where the human infant, during the first year, is gradually able to display attachment behaviors such as protesting mother's departure, clinging when frightened, greeting when the mother returns, following when able, which are actions that are all instinctual and rooted in the biological fact that proximity to mother–because it is essential to survival– is satisfying. The formation, continuance, and renewal of that proximity creates feelings of love, security, and joy. A lasting or untimely disruption, on the other hand, brings on anxiety, grief, and depression (Karen, 1994).

Maté relates that in infancy, the dependence one has is an obligatory and long-haul proposition. Everything from crying to cuteness–two crucial cues babies transmit– is an intrinsic behavior tailored by Nature to keep one's caregivers continuing to give and care. Even so, an individual's need for attachment does not end once they're out of diapers: it continues to motivate them throughout a lifetime. The fundamental aspect that sets apart one's primary attachment relationships is their ability to establish a blueprint for how individuals approach all their important connections, long after they have moved beyond the critical "do-or-die" phase (Maté, 2022).

Another core need for humans is authenticity. Maté acknowledges that definitions vary, yet the one that best reflects his discoveries in this discussion is the quality of being true to oneself, and the capacity to create one's own life through a deep knowledge of that self. Like attachment, he explains, it is a drive rooted in survival instincts. At its core, it simply means

knowing one's gut feelings when they arise, and valuing them. Picture one's ancestors on the vast savanna, their instincts finely attuned to the presence of natural predators. How long would they last if they ignored these gut feelings that warn of danger? Authenticity, in its truest form, involves staying connected to a sense of self that arises from one's unique and genuine essence—a kind of internal GPS that guides them. It allows an individual to navigate life with integrity (Maté, 2022).

A healthy sense of self doesn't mean one stops caring for others or becomes impervious to their influence. On the contrary, it empowers them to remain compassionate and open to others' impact on their lives. To be authentic is to embrace a mindset of expansion and inclusivity (Maté, 2022).

Children often find themselves caught in a troubling dynamic where they receive messages that only certain aspects of their identity are acceptable while others are not. This creates a dichotomy within them, leading to a fractured sense of self (Maté, 2022). For instance, when they hear phrases like "Good children don't yell," it can inadvertently imply a potent threat: "Angry children aren't loved." Consequently, in their annoyance, they may feel compelled to suppress their emotions and behave in ways they think will gain parental approval, as a means of survival.

Another consequence of such messages is the internalization of the belief that they are only lovable when they excel or achieve success. This sets them on a path where they feel compelled to strive for perfection in everything they do, and they rigidly identify with specific roles to gain love and acceptance. Unfortunately, in this process, they become disconnected from their vulnerable side, which also needs to know that it's okay to fail or be ordinary and still be deserving of love and care (Maté, 2022).

Ultimately, these early experiences can shape a child's perception of themselves and influence their behavior throughout life. The longing to be loved and accepted may drive them to extraordinary lengths to maintain an illusion of perfection, all the while denying themselves the comfort of self-compassion and the acknowledgment that it's okay to be imperfect. In order to foster a healthier sense of self and genuine self-acceptance, children need to be encouraged to embrace their whole being, with all its flaws and vulnerabilities, knowing that love and support are unconditional and not based on achievement alone (Maté, 2022).

Although both needs are crucial, there is an order. In the first phase of life, attachment unfailingly takes the lead, so when the two become conflicting in a child's life, the outcome is almost predetermined. If the choice is between hiding feelings, even from oneself, and getting the basic care needed, and being authentic and going without, the first option is going to be chosen every single time (Maté, 2022).

Abraham Maslow: Living Or *Preparing* To Live?

A person is both actuality and potentiality. – Maslow, 1968

Human needs and human motivation are among Maslow's area of curiosities and discoveries. In his theory of Human Motivation, Maslow's concept of "basic needs" emerged from his interest towards a question about psycho pathogenesis: *What makes people neurotic?* In short, Maslow's response was that neurosis appears fundamentally and initially as a lack, similar to deficiency diseases. It arises from the deprivation of specific satisfactions that he referred to as "needs," much like water, amino acids, and calcium are necessary for health, and their absence can lead to illness. Many neuroses stem from unfulfilled desires for safety, a sense of belonging and identification, intimate love relationships, and recognition and esteem, among other complex factors (Maslow, 1968).
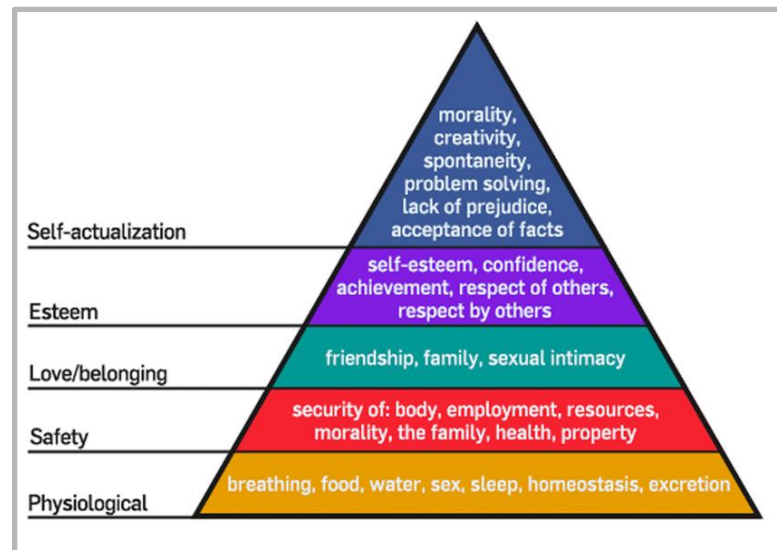
Figure 1. **The Hierarchy of Needs Pyramid.** Maslow first presented his hierarchy of needs in his paper "A Theory of Human Motivation" in 1943. There were initially five basic needs according to Maslow, he later added Self-Transcendence into the pyramid. (Maslow, 2015).

Deficiency Needs vs. Growth Needs

Maslow separated his concept of the hierarchy into two different overarching types of needs: deficiency and growth needs. According to Maslow, the first four tiers of the needs (physiological, safety, love/belonging, and esteem) are motivated by deficiency, meaning, there is a change in the motivations as these needs are met. Maslow argued that deficiency needs are rooted in a person's desire to get rid of deficiencies or obtain things that they are lacking. As a person obtains the things they lack, their motivation to acquire the very things decreases (Maslow, 1968).

On the other hand, with the growth needs, the motivation increases as they are met. Self-actualization, Maslow writes, is the pursuit of personal growth, thus making it a growth need. Growth needs stem from a desire to become better and grow as a person. As a person fulfills

growth needs, their motivation increases as their desire for wholeness increases. In terms of

motivation, individuals who are in good physical and psychological health have already satisfied

their fundamental requirements for safety, belonging, love, respect, and self-esteem. As a result,

their primary motivation comes from the desire for self-actualization (Maslow, 1968). Self-

actualization is defined as the continuous realization of their potential, abilities, and talents,

fulfilling their life's purpose or calling, embracing their intrinsic nature, and striving for inner

unity and integration.

As stated above, *motivation* for Maslow–alongside all historical and contemporary

theories of motivation–is the need, drive, and motivating states to get rid of something that is

annoying, unpleasant, irritating and undesirable. However, he further questions whether the

motivational life consists purely of a defensive removal of irritating tensions, or if the only goal

of tension-reduction is a state of passive waiting for more unwelcome irritations to occur and in

their turn, to be dispelled (Maslow, 1968). His curiosity remains: "Then how does change, or

development or movement or direction come about? Why do people improve? Get wiser? What

does zest in living mean?" (Maslow, 1968, p. 29).

Growth, alone, is a rewarding and exhilarating process, the continuous increase of

understanding about people, about the universe, about Nature, or about oneself; the opening of

creativeness, in whatever field, or, most importantly, to have the ambition to be an authentic

human.

Maslow reports that satisfying deficiencies avoids illness and growth satisfactions bring

about positive health. There is a real *clinical* difference, he writes, between fending off threat and

positive triumph, in other words, between protecting and defending oneself, and extending for

fulfillment, excitement and growth. It is like a contrast between living fully and preparing to live

fully, the same way as growing up or being grown (Maslow, 1968).

The way all trees need sun, water, and food from the environment they are in, people also

need safety, love and recognition from *their* environment. At the same time, in both cases, once

satiated with these elementary, species-wide necessities, each person and each tree continues to

develop in their own unique style using these necessities for their own private purposes which is

where the real development of individuality can begin. In a deeply meaningful sense,

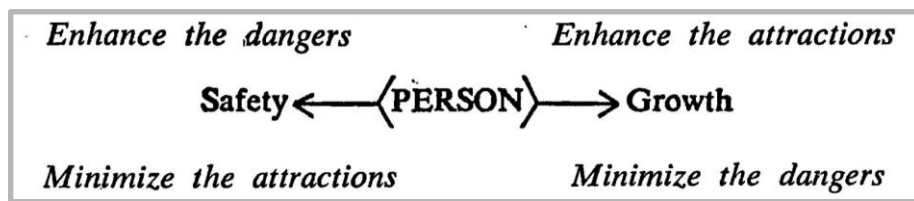development then becomes further determined from within rather than without (Maslow, 1968).

Figure 2. **Toward a Psychology of Being.** Safety is a fundamental component in the
process of self-actualization and plays a crucial role in enabling individuals to reach this
level (Maslow, 1968).

Feeling safe is a crucial factor in the process of self-actualization. Maslow proposed that

certain needs must be met before individuals can focus on higher-level needs. Safety needs are

one of the lower-level needs, and they include personal security, financial stability, health, and

overall well-being. These needs must be adequately addressed before an individual can fully

engage in self-actualization pursuits (Maslow, 1968).

Here's why feeling safe is important in self-actualization: Feeling safe in terms of having

psychological security provides a stable foundation for an individual's emotional and

psychological well-being. When basic safety needs are met, people are better equipped to

explore their inner selves, face challenges, and pursue personal growth without being

overwhelmed by fear or anxiety; A sense of safety in terms of growth motivation allows

individuals to shift their focus from mere survival to personal development and self-

improvement. When people don't have to constantly worry about their safety, they can channel

their energy and attention toward fulfilling their potential and pursuing their passions; Self-

actualization often involves taking risks, trying new experiences, and stepping outside of one's

comfort zone. Feeling safe encourages individuals to be more open to exploring new

opportunities and embracing challenges that lead to personal growth. A secure and safe

environment fosters creativity and innovation. When people feel safe to express themselves and

their ideas, they are more likely to engage in creative endeavors and think outside the box. Self-

actualization is closely related to authenticity– being true to oneself and living in alignment with

one's values and beliefs. Feeling safe allows individuals to be more authentic without the fear of

judgment or rejection (Maslow, 1968).

  In essence, feeling safe is a fundamental aspect of Maslow's self-actualization theory

because it provides the necessary foundation for individuals to focus on personal growth, explore

their potential, and pursue a meaningful and fulfilling life. When safety needs are met,

individuals are better equipped to embrace challenges, be creative, and live authentically,

ultimately contributing to their self-actualization journey.

Carl Jung: Layers: A Quest To The Self

  Jung's encounter with the Self emerged from the depths of his inner conflicts and inner

turmoil. Navigating through a dense thicket of intertwined emotions, memories, images, and

ideas, he found himself without any guidance or maps to rely on. This phase marked the

discovery of his inner world, where he encountered the anima and a multitude of unconscious

fantasies and images (Stein, 1998).

Amid the tumultuous surge of unconscious material, Jung grappled with the task of

organizing these chaotic images and emotions, seeking to understand their interconnectedness

and significance. To maintain emotional balance, he turned to practices like yogic breathing

(Stein, 1998).

However, at times, the intensity of his emotions threatened to overwhelm his sanity and

psychological equilibrium. To find solace and stability, he sought refuge in play therapy,

meditation, active imagination, and drawing. These therapeutic techniques provided him with a

means to find calmness and regain his footing amidst the inner storms (Stein, 1998).

The Self is the most crucial feature of Jung's entire vision, and it is fundamental to his

psychological theory. He was curious about the depths of the Self and introduced "wholeness" as

the term most equivalent to the Self (Stein, 1998). Wholeness stems, practically speaking, when

the Self is realized in consciousness. At the same time, this is not completely achievable

according to Jung, since the opposites and polarities that exist in the Self are forever generating

new material to integrate. Nevertheless, practicing wholeness regularly is the way of the Self.

According to Jung, every individual possesses the God-image, representing the Self, deep

within themselves. This imprint, akin to a stamped mark on a coin, originates from the archetype,

which is the original and master copy. The Self, acting as the center, harmoniously integrates all

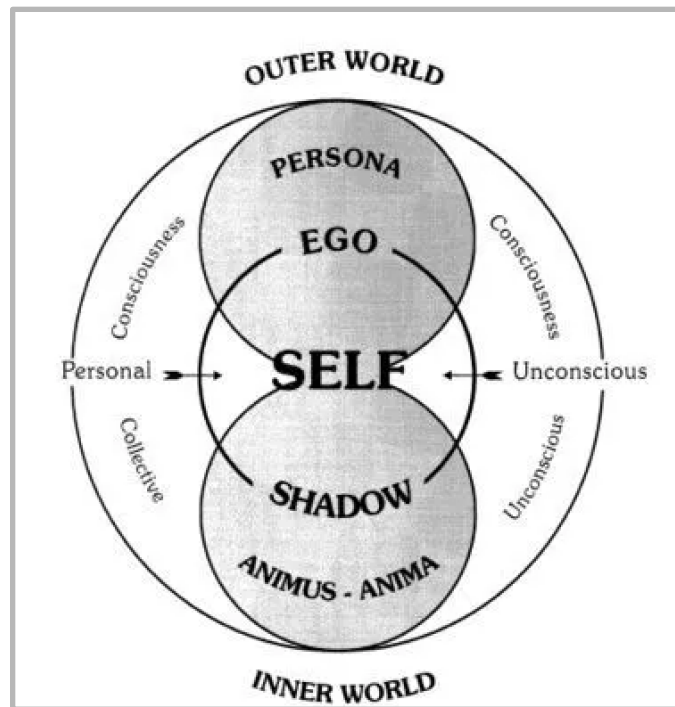aspects of an individual (Jung, 1947).

Figure 3. **Jung's Model of the Psyche** (Jung, 1960).

The Archetypes

The psychic system as a whole consists of numerous parts (Stein, 1998). Jung proposed

the existence of archetypes as universal, recurring symbols or themes in the collective

unconscious of all human beings. He believed that these archetypes shape our thoughts,

behaviors, and experiences. These archetypes offer insights into the complexities of the human

psyche and the process of self-discovery and personal growth. Jung identified four fundamental

archetypes.

The persona is the social mask or role that an individual presents to the outside world. It

represents the image we project to others and is often shaped by societal expectations and norms.

While the persona serves a necessary function in social interactions, it can lead to inner conflicts

when an individual becomes too identified with it (Jung, 1969).

The Self represents the integration and unity of the individual's psyche. It is the *center* of the personality and the striving for wholeness and individuation. Jung saw the Self as the archetype of order and totality, transcending and encompassing all other archetypes. It is often symbolized by mandalas, circles, or other symbols of unity (Jung, 1969).

The Shadow is the unconscious and repressed aspect of an individual's personality. It contains all the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that the person considers undesirable or socially unacceptable. Jung believed that confronting and integrating the shadow is crucial for personal growth and individuation (Jung, 1969).

The Anima and Animus represent the feminine and masculine aspects within an individual of the opposite sex. In men, the anima is the unconscious feminine qualities, while in women, the animus is the unconscious masculine qualities. Integrating these opposing aspects is essential for achieving a balanced personality (Jung, 1969).

The ego plays a significant role in the overall structure of the psyche. Jung saw the ego as the center of consciousness and the aspect of the psyche that individuals identify as their "self" (Jung, 1968). It is the part of the psyche that differentiates a person's subjective experience from the external world and other individuals. Jung believed that the ego's primary function is to maintain an individual's sense of continuity and personal identity.

Jung believed that the ego undergoes various stages of development throughout an individual's life. It evolves through interactions with the external world, the assimilation of experiences, and the integration of unconscious contents. By navigating this developmental process, individuals can achieve a more integrated and authentic sense of Self.

The ego is deeply ingrained in the body and harbors a profound fear of the body's

mortality, as the ego believes that its own extinction will follow the death of the body. However,

according to Jung, the ego's existence is not confined solely to the physical aspect. It is a

complex entity that cannot be fully explained. Experience shows that it has two seemingly

distinct foundations: the physical body and the psyche (Stein, 1998).

On the surface, the ego appears to be rational, cognitive, and focused on reality.

However, in its deeper and more hidden layers, it is susceptible to the ebb and flow of emotions,

fantasies, conflicts, and influences from the unconscious mind, both physical and psychological.

Due to this vulnerability, the ego can easily be disturbed by bodily issues and psychological

struggles.

Jung explains that the ego's expansion is facilitated by the demands placed on an

individual to adapt to their physical and mental surroundings. This process draws upon a

potential focal point in consciousness, strengthening its capacity to operate effectively and

guiding consciousness and the body towards specific goals. The ego exists as a virtual center of

consciousness from birth, but it gains its significance and influence as an actual and functional

center through interactions between the psychological and physical aspects of the individual and

the environmental context that requires responses and adjustments. Jung proposes that a

moderate amount of conflict with the environment and some frustration are, therefore, the

optimal conditions for ego development (Stein, 1998).

The Ego Functions

The ego performs vital functions, encompassing sensation, intuition, thinking, and

feeling. These apperceptive functions play a crucial role in enabling individuals to navigate the

complexities of the world. Jung explains that these four functional types are the evident ways

through which consciousness establishes its orientation (Chodorow, 1991).

Sensation, the realm of sense perception, informs an individual about the existence of

something. Thinking, on the other hand, provides insight into what that something actually is.

Feeling, drawing from an individual's personal values, evaluates whether the encountered

experience is agreeable or disagreeable. Lastly, intuition grants the ability to discern the origin

and potential trajectory of the experiences or phenomena in question. Together, these functions

of the ego facilitate a comprehensive understanding of the surrounding reality and aid in

effective engagement with the external world.

Relationship between Ego and Shadow

The ego and the shadow have a complex and often dynamic relationship. When an

individual identifies strongly with their ego, they tend to project their disowned or unacceptable

traits onto others, perceiving them as the embodiment of these qualities (Stein, 1998). This

projection helps them avoid facing and accepting these traits within themselves. For example, if

someone strongly denies any aggressive tendencies in themselves, they might project that

aggression onto others and perceive everyone around them as hostile.

Relationship between the Persona and the Shadow

The persona and the shadow are intertwined in a complex relationship. The persona, as

the socially acceptable mask, is often designed to hide or repress certain elements of the shadow.

By doing so, the persona helps maintain a coherent and acceptable image to the outside world.

The danger arises when an individual identifies too strongly with their persona and suppresses

the shadow aspects to an extreme extent. This can lead to a dissociation from one's authentic self

and create internal conflicts. The more an individual denies or disowns parts of their shadow, the

more those unconscious elements may manifest in unexpected and often destructive ways (Stein, 1998).

To achieve psychological balance and growth, Jung proposed the process of individuation, which involves integrating the conscious persona with the unconscious shadow (Stein, 1998). This integration requires self-awareness and acceptance of both the positive and negative aspects of the Self. Embracing the shadow allows an individual to be more authentic, less judgmental of themselves and others, and leads to a more integrated and whole personality.

Emergence of the Self: Individuation

Throughout their lives, individuals experience various forms of development and undergo numerous transformations at different stages. The overall process of achieving a sense of completeness throughout one's lifetime, where the Self evolves within the psychological framework and consciousness, is referred to as individuation according to the concepts proposed by Jung (Stein, 1998).

Individuation is a lifelong process of self-discovery and psychological development. It involves embracing and integrating all aspects of the self, including both conscious and unconscious elements (Stein, 1998). The process aims to achieve a harmonious state of wholeness and individuation, wherein an individual attains a deep understanding of their true self and purpose in life.

One of the most challenging yet essential aspects of the individuation process is confronting the shadow. The shadow represents the hidden and repressed aspects of an individual's personality, often comprising negative traits, desires, and unresolved emotions. To achieve wholeness, individuals must confront and integrate their shadow elements (Stein, 1998). This involves acknowledging and accepting the darker aspects of oneself without succumbing to

them. By doing so, individuals liberate themselves from the grip of unconscious patterns and

pave the way for personal growth and healing. This process also leads to increased self-

awareness, authenticity, and a better understanding of ourselves and others

At the heart of the individuation process lies the concept of the Self – the central

archetype that represents the unified and integrated personality. The Self acts as a guiding force,

striving for harmony and fulfillment. As an individual progresses through the individuation

journey, they become more attuned to the Self, aligning their thoughts, emotions, and actions

with their authentic nature (Stein, 1998). The individuated personality is not without flaws, but it

possesses a deep sense of purpose, resilience, and self-awareness.

**Bessel van der Kolk: The Body- How Do We Know We're Alive?**

Van der Kolk reveals his studies on the undeniable connection between the mind and the

body. In the chapter *Losing Your Body, Losing Your Self*, he shares Lanius' studies on the idling

brain, the "default state network" (DSN) in relation to understanding how inner injuries (also

known as trauma) affects self-awareness, in particular, sensory self-awareness (van der Kolk,

2014).

For her studies on the idling brain, Lanius recruited a group of sixteen individuals who've

had a healthy development in life where they've felt seen and heard despite their traumas (inner

injuries). She asked them to lie in a brain scanner while thinking about nothing in particular.

Knowing that this is not an easy thing to do for anyone– as long as we're awake, our brains are

always producing–she asked the individuals to focus on their breathing to help empty their minds

as much as possible. She then replicated the same experiment with eighteen individuals who've

had severe, chronic inner injuries that still overwhelm their central nervous system (van der

Kolk, 2014).

When you have nothing in particular on your mind what is your brain doing? It turns out

that you pay attention to your*self*: the brain areas that work collectively to create your sense of

"self" are activated by the default state (van der Kolk, 2014).

When looking at the scans of the first group, Dr. Lanius found activation of the default

state network (DSN) region which is the midline structures of the brain, starting right above our

eyes, running down the center of the brain all the way to the back. Van der Kolk reports these

midline structures to be involved in our sense of self. The largest area at the back of the brain is

called the posterior cingulate which is our internal GPS, giving us a physical sense of where we

are. It is actively connected to the medial prefrontal cortex which helps us with emotional

processing, memory, and impulses. It is also linked with brain regions that register sensations

coming from the rest of the body: the insula (relays messages from the viscera to the emotional

centers); the parietal lobes (fuses all five sensory information); and the anterior cingulate

(synchronizes emotions and thinking). All of which contribute to consciousness (van der Kolk,
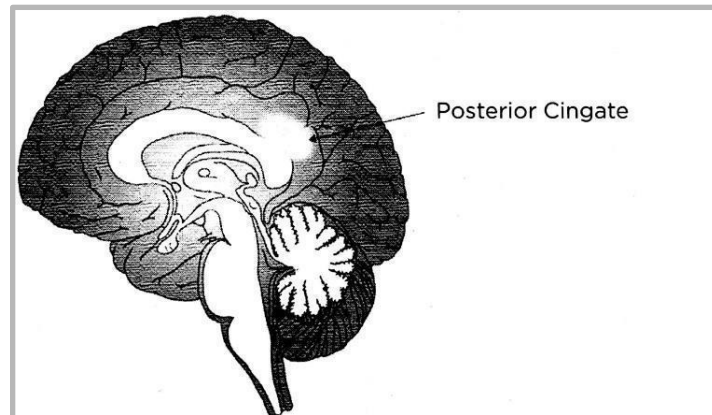
2014).
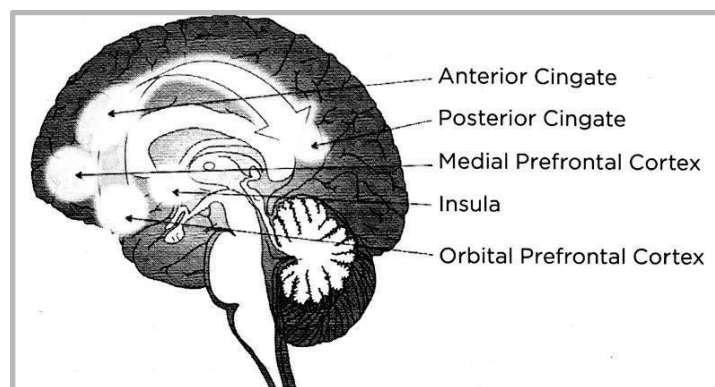
Figure 5. **Locating the self.** The default state network. Starting from the front of the brain which consists of: the orbital prefrontal cortex, the medial prefrontal cortex, the anterior cingulate, the posterior cingulate, and the insula. In individuals with histories of chronic trauma the same regions show sharply decreased activity, making it difficult to register internal states and assessing the personal relevance of incoming information (van der Kolk, 2014, p.91).

On the other hand, the scans of the eighteen individuals with chronic inner injuries, some with severe early-life trauma, revealed that there was almost zero activation of any of the self-sensing areas of the brain: the medial prefrontal cortex, the insula, the anterior cingulate, and the parietal cortex did not activate at all; the only area that had a slight activation was the posterior cingulate which is in control of our basic orientation in space (van der Kolk, 2014).

What is observed in this situation is a profoundly tragic adjustment. These individuals have undergone a devastating adaptation to block out terrifying sensations, but in doing so, they have also numbed their ability to experience life to its fullest. Ironically, in ordinary circumstances, these very brain areas are responsible for processing the entire spectrum of emotions and sensations that form the core of a person's self-awareness – their fundamental sense of identity. When this self-perceiving mechanism malfunctions, it becomes imperative to discover ways to reawaken and reactivate it.

Embodied Awareness: Exteroception

Building upon van der Kolk's aforementioned statement, the significance of inner-sensing

finds further exploration in the investigations of exteroception. Exteroception refers to the

process of sensing and perceiving the external environment through one's sensory organs, such

as sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell (Blanke, 2012). These sensory inputs play a crucial role

in shaping an individual's sense of self and understanding of the world around them. The sense

of self is a complex and multifaceted construct that is heavily influenced by the information one

receives from the external world through exteroceptive channels.

The importance of exteroception to an individual's sense of self can be understood

multidimensionally. The first of these is self-identity and recognition where exteroceptive

sensory inputs help one recognize oneself as distinct individuals within the environment (Engel

& Singer, 2001). For example, visual cues allow them to see their reflection in a mirror,

reinforcing their physical appearance and uniqueness. This visual self-recognition is an essential

aspect of self-awareness and self-identity. The second dimension is spatial awareness whereby

the information obtained through exteroceptive senses enables an individual to navigate and

interact with the physical world. Understanding spatial location in relation to objects and other

people is crucial for maintaining a coherent sense of self in space and during movements

(Blanke, 2012). Exteroception also contributes significantly to one's social interactions. Visual

cues, facial expressions, body language, and tone of voice all play vital roles in perception of

others and how others perceive them (Engel & Singer, 2001). These interactions shape social

identity and influence how they see themselves within various social contexts. Body image and

perception are also influenced by exteroception, as it helps humans develop a mental image of

their own bodies. Visual and tactile feedback, for instance, allows them to understand their body

shape, size, and posture (Serino & Haggard, 2010). Body image plays a crucial role in overall self-concept. Senses have the ability to produce emotional responses (Blanke, 2001). These emotions, in turn, contribute to one's self-awareness and self-understanding. For example, seeing a beautiful sunset may evoke a sense of awe and appreciation, leading to a positive emotional experience that can influence one's sense of well-being and identity. Learning and adaptation are also supported by exteroception as humans learn about the consequences of their actions and behaviors in the external world. This learning process helps them adapt their behavior and responses to different situations, shaping their sense of competence and agency in the world (Blanke, 2001). Senses are crucial for a human's survival as it enables them to detect potential threats or dangers in the environment. For example, an individual's ability to hear a car honking, see an approaching object, or feel a hot surface helps them avoid harm and respond appropriately to the situation.

In summary, exteroception plays a fundamental role in shaping one's sense of self and their understanding of the world. It provides individuals with vital information about their physical presence, interactions with others, and their place within the broader environment. The integration of exteroceptive sensory inputs with other internal processes contributes to the complex and dynamic nature of one's sense of self.

Embodied Awareness: Interoception

Interoceptive awareness also plays a pivotal role in recognizing the internal physiological processes associated with emotional experiences, serving as a vital link in integrating bodily sensations, cognitive functions, and emotional feelings (Price & Hooven, 2018).

Interoception is the bi-directional communication between bodily sensations and various levels of cortical supervision. This intricate process facilitates the transmission of information

regarding invisible internal physiological states to cognitive centers in the brain, ultimately contributing to both physical and emotional well-being (Critchley & Garfinkel, 2017).

The majority, if not all, of our intense emotional experiences are rooted in sensations coming from the body. These sensations play a crucial role in our survival by helping us respond appropriately to signals related to our physical well-being, such as hunger, temperature, and pain. They also contribute to emotions related to social integration, like affection and intimacy, as well as emotions associated with physical survival, such as fear and anger (Craig, 2015). Having interoceptive awareness, which involves identifying, accessing, understanding, and responding appropriately to internal signals, gives us a significant advantage in making continuous adjustments in life.

Dance/Movement Therapy Values: How It Could Help With Our Quest For Unity

The symbols of the self arise in the depths of the body, and they express its materiality every bit as much as the perceiving consciousness. The symbol is thus a living body. –Jung

Movement is defined in various ways based on context. The common denominator found in the numerous definitions of movement is "change", and change is only possible through the process of movement (Studd & Cox, 2020). When something moves, a change occurs. When something has changed, it has moved.

According to Whitehouse, movement emanates from a distinct inner impulse that possesses the essence of sensation. This inner impulse unfurls outward into the expanse of space, manifesting as visible physical actions. When one follows this internal sensation and permits the impulse to materialize into physical actions, it embodies active imagination in movement (Chodorow, 1991).

Whitehouse was one of the earlier dance/movement therapists in the United States who delved into the intricate relationship between movement and the human psyche (Chodorow, 1991). Her work introduced a profound conceptual framework that examined the interplay between conscious and unconscious aspects of movement. Within this framework, she discerned three distinct types of movement: intentional movements guided by the ego, unintentional movements stemming from the depths of the unconscious, and a unique form of movement arising from the Self, seamlessly blending both realms (Chodorow, 1991).

These groundbreaking ideas sparked a newfound sensitivity among practitioners and researchers, opening up fresh perspectives on the origins of movement within the human psyche. Whitehouse's contributions not only enriched the field of dance/movement therapy but also paved the way for a deeper understanding of the profound connections between body, mind, and the intricate workings of the unconscious (Chodorow, 1991).

Active Imagination and Authentic Movement

Whitehouse applied the Jungian technique of active imagination in the dance/movement therapy process to liberate associations, embracing all levels of consciousness and unconscious experiences (Whitehouse, 1979). By facilitating the emergence of polarities, the primary objective was to liberate unconscious emotions.

She embraced the concept of active imagination as a means to liberate suppressed unconscious thoughts by easing the ego's resistance to spontaneous expression. By engaging in this dynamic practice, Whitehouse proposed that individuals could tap into what Jung referred to as the "Self," ultimately experiencing a profound journey within themselves (Whitehouse, 1979).

For this essential journey to begin, Whitehouse saw Authentic Movement, also known as "Movement-in Depth" as a necessity (Whitehouse, 1979). Whitehouse drew a clear distinction

between authentic movement and its opposite, which she termed "invisible movement." Invisible movements are characterized by a lack of genuine emotional charge. The term "invisible" does not refer to the physical invisibility of the muscular action but rather to the absence of underlying emotions or thoughts that the movement fails to convey. Instead, these movements exhibit a stylized or rigid form (Whitehouse, 1979).

According to Whitehouse (1979), this fundamental difference in movement quality serves as a manifestation of polarities: one being the tendency to express oneself, and the other being the inclination to repress or conceal emotions. To articulate this contrast, she used the phrase "I am moved" to describe the experience of authentic or visible movement, while the expression "I move" for controlled or invisible movement (Whitehouse, 1979).

Moreover, Whitehouse emphasized that the state of "I am moved" involves surrendering oneself, allowing the Self to move the body freely. It is a process of letting go and allowing deeper emotions and thoughts to manifest through movement.

> *Self-revelation requires encounter*
>
> *between self and other:*
>
> *The revealer needs an other*
>
> *To whom to be revealed.*
>
> –Rabbi Arthur Green (Adler, 2002, p. 59)

Authentic Movement is also referred to as mindfulness, awareness or witnessing (Tantia, 2012). The process of Authentic Movement encompasses two essential roles: the *mover*, the active participant in motion, and the *witness*, a still and silent observer positioned at the room's periphery (Tantia, 2012). The witness is fully present and open-minded, offering nonjudgmental attention to the mover throughout their journey.

The mover's task is to shut their eyes and patiently await an impulse to move, arising from within their own body. This intentional act of closing one's eyes enables a profound inward focus, inviting a rich tapestry of experiences from other senses and memories to unfold (Stromsted & Haze, 2007, as cited in Tantia, 2012).

This deliberate withdrawal from external visual stimuli becomes a gateway to a profound sensing experience, eliciting imagery, emotions, bodily sensations, memories, and even dreams. The importance of this practice lies in its ability to delve into the depths of one's being, unearthing hidden facets of self-awareness and authenticity.

Discussion

Your hearts know in silence the secrets of the days and the nights.
But your ears thirst for the sound of your heart's knowledge.
You would know in words that which you have always known in thought.
You would touch with your fingers the naked body of your dreams.
And it is well you should.
The hidden well-spring of your soul must needs rise and run murmuring to the sea;
And the treasure of your infinite depths would be revealed to your eyes.
But let there be no scales to weigh your unknown treasure;
And seek not the depths of your knowledge with staff or sounding line.
For self is a sea boundless and measureless.

Say not, "I have found the truth," but rather, "I have found a truth."
Say not, "I have found the path of the soul." Say rather, "I have met the soul walking upon my path."
For the soul walks upon all paths.
The soul walks not upon a line, neither does it grow like a reed.
The soul unfolds itself, like a lotus of countless petals.

-Khalil Gibran, *The Prophet*

Gibran's words helped ignite the importance of recognizing and exploring the depths of Self while remaining open to the vastness of possibilities and multiple truths in life. It encourages embracing the ever-changing and expanding nature of the soul's journey towards self-knowledge and understanding.

Jung delved into the intricacies of the psyche, revealing the existence of a jungle of intertwined emotions, memories, fantasies, images, and ideas that reside in each and every one of us which make up our inner world. This intricate inner landscape forms the essence of our being as we strive to attain a state of wholeness. When we explore the relationship between wholeness and the outer world, we begin to comprehend the interconnectedness of everything and the profound implications this has on our lives.

The interconnection between our inner and outer worlds is evident, profoundly influencing how we experience, explore, and express our Self. To elaborate deeper into this concept, I believe that the outer world encompasses the cultural environment in which we are born that shapes our belief system and ego. I say ego, as I believe that we can often confuse the sense of our ego with our sense of Self.

Admitting my vulnerability, I must confess that I haven't shown much compassion towards my ego, feeling that it has been causing a disconnection from my Self. However, as I've stumbled upon more research on and expressions of the ego by Jung, I now have a better understanding. The ego seeks to preserve the body's well-being and safety, driven by its inherent connection to the Self, enabling us to connect, and experience life. However, an inherent conflict arises between the essence of our Self and the cultural norms prevalent in the Western world, making it challenging to navigate both aspects in perfect harmony.

We are neuro-biologically hardwired for connection. Our survival and evolution depended on the development of social bonding as a way of adapting to a new threat. Yet, I both witness within myself, and observe within my clients today, that we are forever unconsciously molding ourselves to keep connections in order to belong (which may actually in truth be 'to fit').

Living with the burden of unworthiness in various aspects of life can be overwhelming. We often feel inadequate in many ways, believing we are not good, smart, beautiful, lucky, loveable, rich, free, or creative enough – the list seems endless. This burden starts to shape our perception, heavily influenced by culture, leading to a disconnection rather than a sense of belonging.

Without even realizing it, we begin to compare ourselves to others incessantly, constantly measuring our worth against the carefully crafted and filtered representations we encounter on social media, in the news, and online platforms. Our immediate environment also plays a role in fostering these comparisons. This constant comparison intensifies the feeling of unworthiness, pushing us further away from our Self.

As a consequence, we find ourselves fixated on safety, connection, money, and resources. We become engrossed in calculating our possessions, shortcomings, and desires, all the while pondering what others have and need. This mindset stems from a sense of scarcity, heightened by our awareness of lack.

In this state, we lose touch with our Self and the inherent value we possess. Our focus shifts to what we lack, perpetuating a cycle of discontent and separation from who we truly are. To break free from this cycle, we must recognize the impact of external influences on our self-perception and consciously work towards embracing our uniqueness and worthiness.

Each of us have a set of needs, which can be both shared and individual. Maslow's concept of the hierarchy of needs suggests that people are driven to fulfill specific needs, and once these basic needs are satisfied, they strive to fulfill higher-level needs. Although I have reservations about the linearity of this progression–as not everyone adheres to it precisely, and individuals may prioritize their needs differently based on their unique circumstances, cultural influences, and personal differences–I do recognize the significance of safety throughout all the categories, ranging from physiological to self-actualization needs. Safety serves as a common thread that binds these needs together, providing a foundation for individuals to experience life with minimal harm and injuries (both physical and emotional) in their human existence. The ego, in this context, appears to act as a cohesive force, harmonizing various aspects of the psyche and the physical body to facilitate a more secure life experience. A falsified "secure" and "fulfilling" life experience that arises not from individual aspirations, but rather from the innate longing to forge meaningful connections, to embrace love and a sense of belonging. It involves adapting ourselves to meet the expectations of others and maintain this fundamental need for connection (attachment)- whether it aligns with our needs for self-actualization (authenticity) or not.

How do we discern our genuine needs in today's culture? Our bodies frequently signal our physiological requirements, whether we consciously perceive them or not. Yet, amid the constant pursuit of desires and necessities, how can we ascertain whether a particular need is truly essential or merely a fleeting trend that has swept us up in its current – whether of a scarcity mindset of heightened awareness of lack, or ideas around worth.

When a disconnect from the Self occurs, our deepest desires, needs, way of experiencing life, our intentions, and what fulfills us also gets distorted, topped with shame for either having or not having certain needs. Repeated emotional pain caused by shame is proven to diminish the

activation of our brain areas that recognize our sense of self. How, then, with muted activation of our senses, identification of our emotions, ability to access parts of the brain for decision making, can one determine for themselves what it is that they need, where they need to direct their attention at a given time of their lives, and what part of their lives work and what parts hurt?

When we disconnect from our Self, our fundamental desires, needs, and perception of life become distorted. Our intentions and sources of fulfillment also suffer from this disconnection, leading to feelings of shame associated with having or lacking certain needs. This repeated emotional pain, rooted in shame, has been scientifically shown to reduce the activation of brain areas responsible for self-awareness.

Consequently, the diminished activation of these neural pathways can hinder our ability to identify and process emotions, as well as access the parts of the brain crucial for making decisions. In such a state, it becomes challenging for individuals to discern their genuine needs, where they should direct their focus in life, and which aspects of their lives are nurturing or harmful. In other words, this disconnection creates difficulty in understanding our true needs and discerning what contributes positively or negatively to our lives.

In the complex world we live in that causes multiple inner injuries, numerous factors contribute to the disconnection experienced by individuals. While this paper's scope limits us to explore only a few aspects, the topic of disconnection brings to mind a crucial facet of modern culture. Take a moment to reflect on what comes to your mind when you contemplate disconnection, as it might signify an area of its cause.

While I recognize the impact of today's culture on our personal growth, I firmly believe in avoiding solely blaming external factors. Instead, I choose to bring awareness to our role in this process, approaching it with compassion. The present functioning of our culture and the

belief systems it has given rise to did not emerge suddenly, and their impact cannot be diminished overnight either. Nevertheless, acknowledging our multifaceted nature and recognizing that we possess only a fraction of the vast wisdom inherent in Nature can serve as a promising starting point for embarking on a journey of trial and error, also known as vulnerability, where we learn to embrace both polarities and dualities inherent within us and strive towards unifying them. For example, unifying our need for attachment and for authenticity.

An ongoing journey of inner conflict to awareness

At some indeterminate point in my life, I gradually embraced the notion of suppressing my Self to fit in, establish connections, and navigate life under the activation of my ego. Although I cannot precisely recall the specific age when this began, I do recollect having early thoughts about not measuring up, which likely contributed to this belief.

I found myself connected to Mother Nature without acknowledging the importance of being seen and heard– I was always seen and heard by Nature which is where I felt the most safest. The idea of a witness and a mover, the way I witnessed the movement of trees, of the ocean, and the process of inner witnessing through that connection was so alien to me and it came with its resistance.

Below is a journal entry after an Authentic Movement session where I was the mover and my supervisor was the witness:

The spine is fluid. Water is fluid. Water also holds memory. Does my spine hold memories? Speak to me with your alluring curvature, reminding me that life's movements are not always linear but circular in nature. Like a person dozing on and off during a subway ride, their head nodding and regaining control, I, too, found myself drifting in and out of wakefulness. Was

I apprehensive about what lay ahead? Do I ever allow myself to be weak? Why is trust so elusive? My inner voice urges me to embrace rituals prior to moving.

Curiously, I observe the interplay between my body, mind, and spiritual connection. I am learning to surrender to the unique roles each aspect plays, just as I willingly entrust my organs with their respective duties. Yet, why do I resist surrendering to the enigmatic system at play? The brain, a storyteller, loves to think, while the body yearns to explore and experience—to move. I seek to build a bridge between these two aspects, witnessing their unity. If my role is to surrender and open myself to expanding my understanding of human potential, then so be it. May I be blessed with awareness– oh I pray for it wholeheartedly.

It's challenging to witness something when it remains incomprehensible. Yet, I trust the universe, and I seek connection with others who can share their own discoveries and allow me to share mine. I do not wish to be alone on this journey; I crave connection, the chance to breathe and grow. Mama universe, fill my cup to its capacity, not more, not less, for I am still growing, still learning, and forever seeking understanding.

I'd like to dive deeper into my journey of inner witnessing to complement my journal entry that offered profound insights into my experience. The movement experience took place in a studio at my college where I've had many of my classes. I was pretty familiar with the space yet I was about to enter a different experience. I rushed through my preparation to set up the space prior to my movement experience in order not to take up too much time. The premature preparation prior to my movement paved the path to my experience. I was focused on why we were there, the process of Authentic Movement where I was going to be witnessed. It was vulnerable for me to take my time.

I sat on the floor, closed my eyes, turned into my breath, and tried to settle into my body, and in time, I had an impulse to move. It felt like I was being moved. My neck and upper spine wanted to experiment with its natural curves. I noticed my neck giving into the weight of my head as I was leaning more and more forward towards the ground. I stayed in this position for a while. It felt natural. My hands were resting on my upper legs, palms touching my leggings and my fingers stretched out. Although I felt comfortable in this position, I also shifted from being moved to noticing how long I've been in this position, and my thoughts. I suddenly shifted my posture to an upright position. My thought that accompanied this shift was 'you're giving into the weight of your head, your shoulders are slouched in, you look weak, you don't want to look weak'.

I noticed my palms sweating as I was feeling the texture of my leggings. I felt an inner conflict between wanting to give into the weight of my head and manipulating my movement to stay in an upright position. I was trying to dismantle what I was feeling, thinking and sensing all together. I also felt the resistance. Though it was uncomfortable, I somehow wanted to lean into the resistance, whether I felt tired of the tension I was holding in my body or of repeating to myself 'What's the worst that could happen? Just give in'.

I took a deep breath, and waited for an impulse to take over. It took some time for me to relax, however, I was moved into a similar position where my head was weighing forward. This time, I didn't want to disconnect my thoughts from my feelings nor my senses. I heard the cue that the time was almost up, and I had to bring my movement to a close.

In the discussion part of the experience, my supervisor also expressed to have witnessed my sudden movement which brought me to tears. I thought I was a vulnerable person my whole life, but I noticed through this experience that I was terrified of showing vulnerability. I'd had a

long day and was already physically tired yet I didn't want to show weakness or lack of energy

in my movement, yet my efforts in trying to keep my spine upright was making me emotional.

Throughout the movement experience, just like a person dozing on and off on the subway, I was

in between surrender and control, connection and disconnection.

What truly captivated me throughout the entire experience was the revelation of yet

another gateway to explore my belief system. It brought to light the intricate role of my ego in

safeguarding me, while my true Self patiently awaited to be embraced. Moreover, I discovered

the significance of incorporating rituals into my life – a warm-up period that grants me time to

prepare mentally and emotionally. This process has proven to be deeply soothing, providing me

with the space to experiment and learn from any mistakes. Within this supportive environment, I

can take risks with a sense of safety, enabling the harmonious integration of my mind and body.

Movement of Unity

Authentic Movement is a practice with numerous benefits for those who are able to

access it. One compelling reason to consider doing Authentic Movement is the opportunity for

self-exploration and self-discovery. By delving into your inner experiences and expressing them

through movement, you can gain profound insights into your emotions, thoughts, unconscious

patterns, fantasies, images, and memories.

Another significant advantage is the emotional release that comes with movement.

Authentic Movement allows you to physically express and process emotions, providing a

therapeutic and cathartic outlet for pent-up feelings and stress. Moreover, engaging in Authentic

Movement cultivates body awareness, making you more attuned to your body and its sensations.

This heightened awareness fosters better self-understanding and a stronger mind-body

connection.

The practice takes place in a non-judgmental and supportive environment, creating a safe space for exploration and expression without fear of criticism or evaluation. This encourages participants to freely embrace their Self. It also enhances creativity and imagination. By tapping into your creative potential through movement, you may discover newfound creativity in various aspects of your life, beyond just dance or physical expression.

Authentic Movement also offers a unique way to practice mindfulness through the body and movement, adding a more embodied dimension to the experience, in addition to traditional meditation.

As participants explore and express themselves authentically, they often experience a boost in self-confidence and self-esteem, which can positively impact other areas of their lives. For some individuals, Authentic Movement becomes a part of their healing journey, enabling them to accept and embrace their Self, fostering self-compassion and acceptance.

When practiced in a group setting, Authentic Movement fosters a sense of connection with others. Sharing the experience of movement in a supportive environment creates a deeper sense of community and belonging. Nevertheless, it is essential to remember that Authentic Movement is a personal and subjective experience, and its benefits may vary from person to person.

Embracing Wholeness

In a world where conformity often overshadows individuality, there exists a path less traveled, a journey of self-discovery. It begins with nurturing authenticity, where the essence of who you are is celebrated, shielded from the judgments of others. In this voyage, self-compassion becomes your guiding light, urging you to embrace imperfections and relinquish the shackles of unrealistic standards.

Life's trials and tribulations await, but with resilience as your ally, you rise above the numbing shadows and break free from the clutches of powerlessness. Gratitude and joy become your armor, dispelling the haunting fears of scarcity and lighting up the darkest corners within. As you tread through the uncertainty of existence, trusting your intuition and having faith become the beacons that guide your way.

The journey takes a creative turn, leading you to unleash the dormant brilliance within. You learn to embrace your unique path, forsaking the trap of comparison that once confined your spirit. The pursuit of productivity as a measure of self-worth loses its hold, and you embrace the liberating beauty of play and rest.

Amid the chaos of a fast-paced world, you discover the sanctuary of calm and stillness. Anxiety, once a lifestyle, surrenders its dominion to the serenity that now dwells in your heart. Work transforms from a source of self-doubt into a meaningful expression of your passion and purpose.

And as you travel further, you find yourself shedding the weight of coolness and control, embracing the healing power of laughter, song, and dance. No longer driven by the need to be in charge, you find freedom in embracing the spontaneity of life.

This journey is not without its challenges, but with each step, you learn to embrace the fullness of your being. The world may push against your resolve, but armed with authenticity, compassion, resilience, gratitude, intuition, and creativity, you have discovered the keys to unlock the gate to true liberation and self-fulfillment. As you stand on the precipice of endless

possibilities, you are a testament to the strength of the human spirit and the boundless beauty of

embracing all that you are.

And, finally, I'd like to plant a seed towards self-actualization on the quest for Self to not

only survive but thrive in this journey called life with a poem that I wrote:

In the pursuit of Self, a cherished poem I find,

A journey to uncover, seeking truths aligned.

With hopeful hearts, we yearn for that 'aha' embrace,

Believing we've unraveled life's enigmatic grace.

But as time's river flows, revelations shift,

A fraction of the puzzle, a glimmer of the gift.

In moments of certainty, we feel so alive,

Yet humbled by life's vastness, our notions must revive.

For the Self is a tapestry, woven and bright,

Its threads of complexity, a riddle of light.

With each step we take, knowledge expands,

Infinite paths ahead, as destiny commands.

So cherish the journey, embrace the unknown,

Discovering facets, till our wisdom has grown.

Though we may not grasp the whole truth, in entirety,

The quest for Self endures, an eternal serenity.

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