

Coming Home to the Embodied Self¹

Review of *The Psychophysiology of Self Awareness, Rediscovering the Lost Art of Body Sense*

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It is late afternoon, fall. It's foggy with a light breeze. Not too cold; good weather for kind of spacing out. I am riding my bike down at the Berkeley Marina; I am on a bike path so I can safely drift into mentally sifting through the contents and feelings of my day. I like to ride my bike while I process my rewarding moments and ponder the more difficult ones which have happened throughout my working day; or maybe chew on a particular thorny personal problem. I am in **conceptual self-awareness** in this moment. My legs are pedaling, my lungs and heart working hard, postural muscles are keeping me balanced, people are whizzing by, but I do not notice much of that. I am thinking.

Suddenly the sun bursts through the fog and the splash of light twinkles on the water; I feel the sun on my face. I am all here, feeling my whole embodied self. Happy. Soon I notice that I am sing-

ing "Here comes the sun". I feel the joy in my chest, my muscles hard at work, familiar discomfort of an old fracture in one knee and the sensation of momentary heat on my face. Now, I am in **embodied self awareness**. I notice the other riders and walkers and smile as they smile at me. I can feel myself breathing hard. Then, the fog rolls back over the face of the sun; the twinkle on the water disappears; the sensation on my face is cool again. My interest in the external dwindles. Hmmmm. I begin to think about writing this article. I am back in **conceptual self-awareness** and have, for the moment, lost consciousness of my bodily and emotional sensations.

Alan Fogel's newly published book *The Psychophysiology of Self Awareness: Rediscovering the Lost Art of Body Sense (2009)* is a wonderful journey through the processes by which we come and go from our embodied self and how, and the many reasons why, we may have become detached from or may not have developed it in the first place. Fogel is a Rosen Method bodywork practitioner, editor-in-

1. Jeanie Williams, Rosen Method bodywork practitioner and RMIJ Editorial Board member, served as acting editor for this article.

chief of this journal, and a long time developmental psychologist at the University of Utah. His original developmental research interests in mother infant dyadic and somatic relationships have informed his current clinical practice in Rosen Method bodywork.

Yet this book is about more than Rosen Method: it is about the elements which must be present in any type of healing practice which provide the specific environment for embodied healing to take place. He references many avenues of somatic and therapeutic practices which may facilitate that healing. These include somatic practices such as yoga and Feldenkrais, breathing practices and Rosen Method bodywork and movement; psychotherapy processes which include somatic awareness, and trauma treatments such as Somatic Experiencing. He takes us through the somatic, conceptual and emotional processes which, experienced and integrated slowly over time within a therapeutic relationship, can lead to a more complete and relaxed relationship within the self and with others. This book is a deep study in the human body, and the neuroanatomy and neurobiology of the conceptual, emotional, sensate and integrated processes of our beings. In the introduction, Fogel tells us that this book is about how the mind/body process works:

As infants, before we can speak and conceptualize, we learn to move toward what makes us feel good and move away from what makes us feel bad. Our ability to cultivate and enhance awareness of these body feelings is essential for learning how to successfully navigate in the physical and social world. . .(Fogel, 2009, p. vii)

Fogel tells us right away that movement and emotions are connected; we learn how to value what feels good and what doesn't at a very early age. How we feel is made possible by our biology. We are sensate beings from before birth and this is accomplished through the neuroanatomical and neurohormonal connections between the brain and the body, and the body and the brain. The mind/body is a two-way street; even more, it is a system of fluidity with specific currents flowing from local eddies which join with major streams heading for specific

locales. These primary initiations are in the periphery of the body connecting through skin, joint and muscle neurons and in the core of the body affecting the heart, lungs, intestines and sexual organs. These streams move towards the larger neural pathways of the spinal cord and autonomic nerves to many specific locations in the brain.

The actions in the different brain areas vary from primary survival functions in the brain stem to relay stations and emotional centers. The processing of sensation, action programs and memory processes is involved. Eventually functions of evaluation, planning and judgment in the frontal cortex are often included. Energetically the neurologic processes return again through specific pathways to connect with bodily components. Fogel describes these specific anatomical locations while underscoring their interactions *within* larger integrated networks, emphasizing patterns of multiple neurological functions rather than a single brain location approach.

In *The Psychophysiology of Self-Awareness*, Fogel draws widely on multidimensional research from traditional psychotherapy and somatic clinical writing to complex double-blind scientific brain studies and recent imaging advances, all the while addressing these processes with great understanding and ease. As I was reading, I was surprised and pleased to discover explanations for many kinds of somatic phenomena that occur during Rosen sessions, somatic psychotherapy sessions and other types of healing work in which I have participated: things like yawning, twitching, and abdominal gurgles. Other phenomena like chronic muscle tension are linked physiologically with the concept of armor-ing and over-reactive emotional functions. An area of great interest to many clinicians, the therapeutic relational process, is attended to with great detail through discussions of how **coregulation** between client and practitioner facilitates the possibility of dwelling in the embodied self, for both.

This book, says Fogel, is for "anyone who engages in self-awareness practices and wants to know how and why he or she is helped in some way through that practice" (Fogel, 2009, p. viii). Touch-based bodyworkers, somatic therapists, teachers, dance and other movement therapists, health care practitioners, meditators and athletes can all benefit

in greater understanding of the linkages between what they see and/or experience and the neurobiology of their experience. That being said, Fogel allows for the divergence of readers who may come to the book by explaining that the book can be read in great and specific detail, or skimmed to skip some of the more scientific descriptions, focusing instead on case studies and personal descriptions.

The book is well laid out in eight chapters with a balance between scientific information, many varied case studies and multiple tables delineating such phenomena as the necessary components for healing to take place, characteristics of restorative embodied self-awareness and characteristics of different kinds of crying. Additionally there are graphs, pictures and self-revelations by the author. The important terms are printed in bold and defined in a glossary at the end of the book, making it possible to easily reference unknown terminology.

Embodied Self-Awareness, Emotional Armoring, and Rosen Work

The subtitle of this book is *Rediscovering the Lost Art of Body Sense*, and the theme of the book is the necessity of reclaiming this process in order to be a well functioning human being. As mentioned above, we are born with this innate biological ability to move towards what feels good and move away from what feels bad. In normal healthy development this ability grows and becomes a well integrated multifaceted process. Fogel calls this ability **embodied self awareness** and defines it as

“... the ability to pay attention to ourselves, to feel our sensations, emotions and movements online, in the present moment, without the mediating influence of judgmental thoughts. It is composed of sensations like warm, tingly, soft, nauseated, dizzy; emotions such as happy, sad, threatened; and body senses like feeling the coordination (or lack of coordination) between the arms and legs while swimming, or sensing our shape and size (fat or thin),

and sensing our location relative to objects and other people” (Fogel, 2009, p. 311).

This process exists prior to and continues without the need for language. It is creative, spontaneous, moment-to-moment. In order for this multifaceted process to work, it depends on the neurobiological felt sense processes of **interoception** and **body schema**, and the ability to be in the **subjective emotional present**. These three processes involve the ability to focus on what the body is telling you with regard to physical sensations, emotional feeling states and the position, action and relationship of the body to other beings and objects. Fogel uses diagrams (Figures 3.1 and 3.2) to show the brain functions involved in these three processes and how they interact with each other to become an integrated process.

In Rosen bodywork and movement, we are often working with people who have lost, or never developed, the completeness of **embodied self-awareness**. This happens for a variety of reasons ranging from lack of early attachment bonding and developmental disturbances to school and societal pressures to suppress aspects of the self, to more severe traumatic processes. This lack, depending on its severity, can result in a range of problems from mild anxiety and occasional muscle tension and pain and/or relationship problems, to more serious problems such as severe anxiety and depression, post traumatic stress disorder, addictions and eating disorders. All of these are **biobehavioral responses** to loss of safety and the presence of some degree of threat.

In Rosen and other therapeutic somatic practices, we work with muscle tension, chronic postures, breath, emotions and core beliefs. Fogel describes the connection between stress, muscle tension, emotions and posture using a term developed by Wilhelm Reich called **armoring**. “The way that emotion and stress affect muscle tension and tension in turn affects feelings of stress and emotional state(s) creates an **attractor** (*local neurological patterns attracted to each other which become stable over time, italicized definition added*) that can stabilize into each individual’s characteristic postural appearance and attitude” (Fogel, 2009, p. 196).

In Rosen bodywork and movement, we specifically address this process. **Armoring**, “the experience dependent development of a protective shell of muscle tension grown over time in response to a history of threat, anxiety, and trauma,” (Fogel, 2009, p.307) is what we have our hands on, or facilitate people to more consciously experience, through touch, words and movement. We work towards increasing awareness, “making the unconscious, conscious,” of these long-held muscular, emotional, postural states. Fogel describes a case by Marion Rosen to bring the habitual posture of a man with rounded shoulders and forward head to increased consciousness through interoceptive touch and words; memories of how and when he began to hide himself in his teenaged years in response to threats and fear of being attacked were recalled. The posture continued into adulthood, despite the actual threats being long past.

Just how do these divergent processes come together in our beings? Fogel gives us the neurological and physiological answers in wonderful detail, from touch receptors in the skin to joint proprioception functions, muscle belly and tendon properties, to connections to both autonomic and voluntary nervous systems, autobiographical and procedural memory systems, and to the limbic system, the link to emotions. Neuroemotional/muscular patterns for postures of stress, fear and anger are described as well as joy, happiness and relaxation.

Attachment, Coregulation, Resonance, and Therapeutic Healing

Attachment, coregulation and resonance are all terms used by Fogel to discuss our dependence on others -- both as infants and throughout our lifetime -- for healthy functioning of **embodied self awareness**. Psychotherapeutic disciplines use terms like intersubjectivity, therapeutic alliance, self-in-relation, and mutuality to describe processes more classically referred to as transference and countertransference (Jordan, Kaplan, Miller, Stiver, & Surrey, 1991; Stolorow, Brandchart & Atwood, 1987). These concepts are not all synonymous, but have overlapping features. Fogel defines the first three:

Attachment – The long-term emotional tie between two individuals

based on the urge to find safety with each other, the need for coregulatory communication of movement and touch for close proximity, and the resulting resonant states of emotion for and with the other person (p.308).

Coregulation – Monitoring autonomic arousal and relaxation and helping the person to maintain homeostasis by shifting intensity, speeding up or slowing down, helping the person to come back to resources when needed; pointing out when the person leaves or comes back to the subjective emotional present (as a component of Basic Principles for Treatment, p. 23).

Resonance – The amplification of shared emotion in coregulated encounters (p. 317).

The more psychotherapeutic terms are used by that field to describe what happens in a psychotherapy situation when one person is coming to another person for professional help. Across all these terms is the commonality that from infancy there is a process in which mammalian beings are psychologically involved in an open system with regard to many of our physiological and psychological functions (Lewis, Amini, & Lannon, 2001). Historically, this was theorized by Freud to be a psychological process between a mother and a child. John Bowlby brought Attachment Theory alive with an understanding of often disastrous psychological and physiological results for babies and children abandoned at early ages (Lewis et al., 2001; Holmes, 1993). Others doing research with animals found striking physiological changes in the autonomic nervous systems and behaviors of abandoned animal infants, as well as greater understanding of the healthy biological effects of the normal maternal infant dyad through touch, nutrition, and warmth (Lewis et al., 2001).

In the human nervous system, according to Allan Schore (1994) and others, this process takes place in the infant through the developing auto-

onomic nervous system. The parasympathetic system in the infant is not yet well developed and needs the soothing regulation of the adult parasympathetic nervous system. Facial recognition by the infant, motherese speech, and emotional regulation by the adult comprise right brain to right brain **coregulation between adult and infant** (Bourque, 2008).

Fogel brings our attention to Attachment Theory, well-known in developmental psychology, and adds to our understanding by addressing the physiology of each attachment classification category. The attachment classifications of Mary Ainsworth and later Mary Main and Judith Solomon (Siegel, 1999) involve four types. Fogel delves into neurological research of the Secure, two different Insecures, and the disorganized/disoriented childhood attachment categories. Measurement of the neurophysiology of the different attachment styles during a time of relational challenge (The Strange Situation) reveals fluctuations of the autonomic nervous system (ventral vagal, sympathetic and/or dorsal vagal): excitement and calmness, fight or flight, and freeze. The observable results of these physiological activities are varying **biobehavioral response patterns** of reunion and play, mobilization and immobilization.

There are many scientific theories as well as case examples in this book for how the therapeutic relationship is actually part of the healing process of bringing a person into **embodied self awareness**. Mirror neurons which are activated in one person when another displays emotion, moves, or comes into contact is one avenue Fogel explores, and he does this citing developmental and adult research. He also describes a term used by psychoanalysts over many years: **intersubjectivity** - "the nonverbal sense of 'being with' another person (is) a direct result of the interpersonal **resonance** that occurs during **coregulation** of movements and sensations and emotions" (Fogel, 2009, pp. 223-224).

Coregulation between two people also builds over time: "... each round of successful communication creates an emotional attunement in which positive ... expressions ... amplify feelings of interpersonal connection, mutual affirmation, safety in being able to 'let go' into the softness and vulnerability of the other. ..." (Fogel, 2009, p. 174). A case

study by a somatic psychotherapist reveals the step-by-step somatic attunement, **evocative language** and **coregulation** of the therapist in a session.

Listening touch and **evocative language** are primary elements of Rosen Method bodywork which happens in the context of a dyadic relationship. Rosen Movement classes are always held with several people and the social relationships are a very important component of the process as shown in a case study by Jacqueline Fogel of a Rosen Movement class. Fogel also describes key neurohormonal secretions such as oxytocin, serotonin and dopamine, which are activated with intimate touch and/or positive emotional states achieved through successful attunement, demonstrating additional effects of relationships on healing.

Elements for Regaining and Recognizing Embodied Self-Awareness

Two tables of concepts Fogel puts forth in this book are very helpful as guideposts for noticing what is actually going on in our Rosen sessions. Rosen bodywork and movement practitioners can track the success of a particular intervention – touch, evocative language, movement or somatic attunement -- by utilizing the eight principles in Table 1.1, Basic Principles for the Treatment of Lost Embodied Self-Awareness. These eight elements (well-defined in the table) include resourcing, slowing down, co-regulating, verbalizing, clarifying links and boundaries, attending to self-regulation, reengaging with embodied self-awareness, and letting go. In each of the many case studies in the book, Fogel describes how these principles are applied to evaluate what occurred in the sessions. Another Table I found quite inspiring and useful is called Characteristics of Restorative Embodied Self-Awareness, Table 8.1. This table gives us markers to evaluate where our client is on the continuum of reengaging with **embodied self-awareness**, including such phenomena as openness, trust, balancing, and willingness to be in a process.

Conclusion

This book is one in The Norton Series on Interpersonal Neurobiology whose editors are Allan N. Schore, PhD, Series Editor and Daniel J. Siegel,

MD, Founding Editor. The purpose of this series is to “provide cutting edge, multidisciplinary views that further our understanding of the complex neurobiology of the human mind” while contributing to the understanding of human emotional relationships (Fogel, 2009, title face page). *The Psychophysiology of Self-Awareness* clearly fits in with these goals.

However, Fogel goes further than understanding the complex neurobiology of the human mind by bringing a wealth of information and understanding to the neurobiology of the body and its interconnectedness with the mind. He skillfully shifts the domain of conversation from processes of the mind/brain to the felt sense of the lived somatic experience.

This book is especially helpful for Rosen practitioners of bodywork and movement for the many reasons cited above. It also provides language for much of what we do as a professional discipline, something that is often difficult to generate when describing the how and why of Rosen Method. Having the science of the neurobiology of relationship, touch, voice and movement will bring more credibility to our work. As well, we can point to the processes through many of the case studies, particularly Fogel’s Rosen bodywork sessions where we recognize what we do in our own clinical practice. We see the slow unfolding over time of a healing process. We also see the results of the conscious patience that is so essential to this work, letting his client come and go from treatment as she integrates the somatic processes, memories, and new ways of being with still unresolved mindbody issues remaining for her. Additionally, we hear the descriptions through Fogel’s cases and others, of the somatic **coregulation** of the practitioner. And finally, the examples of **evocative language** coming from the **embodied self awareness** of the practitioner, which is so key in Rosen sessions, is evident through case studies and personal descriptions.

In an earlier paper, Fogel describes what it is to be a “participant observer” as a useful process to develop for writing about clinical cases. “A participant observer is a person who develops skills to observe and to write about his or her own and others’ experiences without being emotionally detached from them. . . Participant observation seeks

to communicate the compassion, authenticity, and aliveness of the process so that readers feel as if they were actually present” (Fogel, 2003, p.1). I often felt Alan Fogel’s presence as I was reading this book. His compassion for the reader and the authenticity of his own processes as researcher, clinician and writer were very alive and they were communicated through the complexity of the subject matter while at the same time advancing the understanding of divergent therapeutic healing processes.

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