

**Running Head: Trauma & Civilization**

**Trauma & Civilization:  
The Relationship Between Personal Trauma, Social Oppression,  
and the Transformative Nature of Trauma Healing  
(A Biopsychosocial Approach)**

**Brad J Kammer  
Vermont College (of The Union Institute & University)  
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**Core Faculty Advisor: Margaret Blanchard, PhD  
Field Faculty Advisor: Eleanor Ott, PhD  
Field Faculty Advisor: Walter Zeichner, MA**

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## ABSTRACT

This study demonstrates how unresolved trauma affects individuals' capacity to create healthy, functional lives. It describes the foundational relationship between personal trauma and social oppression that creates a cycle of dependence on lower functioning physiological, psychological, and social mechanisms. This 'Cycle of Devolution' has its origin in humanity's disconnection from its greatest resources – including, basic life rhythms, mutually-enhancing relationships, sustainable communities, and ancestral wisdom. At the very roots of modern civilization, unresolved personal trauma has impacted the social systems that shape modern life – including, child-rearing, family, education, religion, and culture. However, this trauma-induced cycle shifts as individuals successfully renegotiate traumatic experiences, altering the way they relate to themselves, their families, and the world. This paper relies on the new science of Somatic (body-oriented) Psychology to unravel the mystery of trauma and oppression. Specifically, Peter Levine's model of Somatic Experiencing is explored in its use of healing trauma as a vehicle for personal and social transformation. Working with the thwarted physiological responses to trauma, this approach awakens individuals' creative impulses and self-regulatory functioning. In this way, healing from trauma provides an opportunity to reorganize personal and social life.

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To  
The Wildflower Land

**“Healing the universe is an inside job.”**

(Thomas, from the movie *Mindwalk*)

## PROLOGUE

When I was a child, I grew up in suburbia. It was a suburb of Cleveland, Ohio, but could have easily been a suburb of Chicago, Detroit, Denver, or Seattle. I enjoyed the comfort of my surroundings but longed for something more wild. I took refuge in the woods behind my home. Even though they were only a few acres of trees, shrubs and rocks, they were alive. Birds, squirrels, frogs, raccoons, even deer would pass through, and make this refuge their temporary home.

Most of my time was spent on concrete. Sidewalks, roads, parking lots, strip malls, schools, churches, and temples – suburbia is a concrete jungle, extending from the heart of the city. Next to my wooded refuge was an enormous parking lot for the Jewish temple that owned the wooded lot. Although my friends and I would ride our bikes and play ball here, we usually would end up under the covering of the trees.

Many times – waiting for my friends to arrive or during long conversations at dusk – I would sit on the sidewalk in youthful contemplation speculating on the curious growth between the slabs of sidewalk concrete (in which I would always surreptitiously carve my initials). Every summer there would be a wildflower poking desperately through the concrete expanse. It never made much sense to me, how in an area covered by layers of thick stone and concrete, vegetation could grow.

Even as a child, I wanted to know about life and how life survives even under the heaviest oppression. I did not spell it out so clearly at the time, but as I sat with the deformed wildflower reaching out towards life, I, myself, was reaching out towards life; even under some oppressive forces.

Years later I revisited this parking lot and its adjacent wooded acreage. Amidst heavy construction, I quickly realized that the woods had been torn down completely and

they were building an addendum complex to the Jewish temple. The enormous parking lot remained intact. Feeling nostalgic and sad, I sat for a moment and thought about how a piece of my childhood was torn down with those woods, never to be replaced.

Yet, I smiled as I remembered the wildflower reaching out towards life. I knew that even with a complex of concrete structures oppressing the soil of the earth, life would manage to grow. It might not be pretty, graceful or robust, but it will grow. I drove away feeling lighter, a little more hopeful, knowing that life finds a way to grow.

This paper is designed to answer my childhood question about how life continues to grow, even under the heaviest of oppression. This process took me into the deepest, darkest depths of humanity, and has brought me out the other end. It was necessary for me to traverse the agony and torment of humanity, to grasp our incredible resiliency. This process also took me into the deepest, darkest depths of my own being, and has brought me out the other end. It was also necessary for me to traverse the agony and torrent of my own being. Throughout this journey I was able to process my own emotional anguish, and reconnect to the life force within me that is reaching out towards life. This paper is an expression of my own resiliency and hope for our future.

## INTRODUCTION

### **‘MAN IS BORN FREE, AND EVERYWHERE HE IS IN CHAINS’**

**“It is possible to get out of a trap. However, in order to break out of a prison, one first must confess to being in a prison.” (Reich, 1973, p. 470)**

Several years ago, I had the opportunity to live and work among the Burmese exiled community on the Thailand-Burma border.<sup>1</sup> My wife, Sarah, and I went to Thailand without any agenda or plan of action, simply to help the Burmese people in any way we could. We had both been inspired by their mass movement for democracy, and outraged at their continued oppression by the Burmese military regime. We wanted to see if we could offer them support and assistance. We soon found a place – I was teaching English and Sarah was working in a clinic for refugees. Because we had gone independently, and we were not with any aid organization, we were able to get to know the people we worked with in an intimate way. For Sarah and me, we were not there for jobs or for income, we were there to get to know the Burmese people, to form relationships, and join them in their struggle.

Soon, we were invited into the Burmese exiled community. I would spend mornings in Burmese teashops and nights in someone’s home, talking politics, international affairs, poetry, art, and music. I traveled around the border area visiting the makeshift villages of refugees and migrant workers. I spent hours upon hours hearing about the diverse cultures of Burma, her distinguished history, the British colonial rule, the repressive 40-year Burmese military rule, the grass-roots democracy movement, and the mass Burmese exile into neighboring countries. I got to know the Burmese people, and listened to their cries of despair and hope. They are a proud people and were suffering the incredible indignities of being reduced to the impoverished conditions of refugees.

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<sup>1</sup> In a previous paper, *The Psychological Crisis of Western Humanitarian Aid* (2002), I have documented my experiences working as an international aid worker with Burmese exiles in Thailand.

They expressed their dream for a new Burma - one in which democracy rules, where human rights are championed, where ethnic and religious diversity is respected, where children are raised knowing that they have a future, where students have schools to attend, where adults can work and express their creativity openly and freely, and where Burma, once again, returns to her place as a vibrant culture with freedom and security for all.

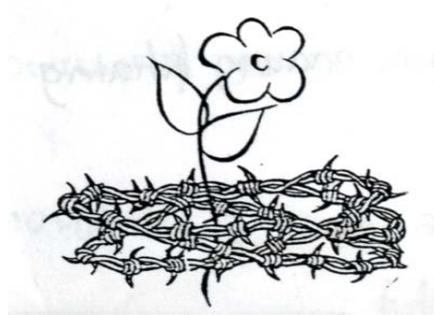
Presently, things are very different for the Burmese people. Burmese life had reached a point for so many individuals and families that they could not even live safely in their own homes anymore, and had to leave their homeland altogether. Stories of countless atrocities, at the hands of the Burmese military regime, were disturbing and haunting: burned villages, violent political and religious repression, mass arrest, lengthy prison sentences and horrific prison conditions, torture, slave and child labor, forced inscription of young boys and men, rape and sexual abuse - the list goes on and on. It seemed there was no end to the punishment inflicted upon the Burmese people, who simply attempted to live their lives. The Burmese I spent time with in Thailand huddled together in community and fought for their own existence and future, in a foreign country that did not want them, calling out for help from the international community that seemed to ignore them.

There came a point in my life with the Burmese exiled community in Thailand when I felt that what I was experiencing was too much for me to handle. I had no way to metabolize all the despair, the terror, and the hopelessness. What could I possibly do to help my friends? How could I possibly be of help to the Burmese people, when I, myself, felt so overwhelmed? How could I reconcile that at any moment, I could leave, with my American passport in hand, and go nearly anywhere I liked? How could I ever leave the people I had come to know so well, knowing that this treatment of human beings exists, at the hands of other human beings? How could I ever trust humankind again?

I did not know what to do, I had no way of figuring out how I could help. I began to suffer from anxiety, paranoia, nightmares, stomach pains, and alternating fits of rage and despair. I felt the oppression as emotional and physical symptoms, more directly than I ever had before. I had been touched by some of the powerlessness and helplessness that the Burmese people experience every day of their lives.

Then, something shifted. But not in me alone. Several of our closest Burmese friends had moved in with us, and every night we stayed up late - talking, playing guitar, singing, visiting with other friends, and simply being together. One evening, while sitting in a circle on the floor discussing the usual topics - global and Burmese politics, art, literature, music, and our dreams for a better world - the energy between us felt different. We were tuned in to each other in an indescribable way, and our conversation was building. We had no idea what was occurring at the time, but as each individual shared, *something* was happening. A vision was forming.

This vision was based on the overwhelming feelings that none of us knew how to metabolize. It seemed that there was no way to adequately process these feelings. But each one of us, on some level, felt compelled to respond to these feelings. The vision of the Wildflower Land was born that night. This vision was based on a metaphor I used at one point in the evening when I grabbed a pen and paper and drew a series of images, trying to convey what I was feeling. In the first image, I drew the globe of the Earth, covered fully with wildflowers. The second image was of an enormous hand coming down over the Earth and crushing all the wildflowers. The third image was the globe of the Earth, covered with countless, damaged wildflowers, some broken and many mangled and flattened. This sparked the conversation even more, as we talked about how to revitalize the wildflowers and realize a wildflower land, once again. One of our artist friends was also drawing as we talked, and soon flipped over the paper he was working on and showed us the following image:



Yes! This was it! A lone wildflower growing through barbed wire (although this can also be seen as a crown of thorns). This image was perfect, because indeed, the oppression leads to isolation, and the wildflower has to manage to grow on its own, and will do so, in whatever way it can. But the wildflower is leaning over, reaching out towards life and to others, calling out to a greater hope.

My study, *Trauma & Civilization*, emerged from this vision. I appreciate the enormity of this subject. I knew that it would be no simple task to facilitate the rebirth we envisioned together that night. It would require us to move ‘outside of the box,’ exploring possibilities that might otherwise be disregarded. It would require us to take risks that might put us face to face with our limitations and shortcomings. For me, this study reflects my movement outside the box, as well as my risk-taking. I had to take shortcuts, use generalizations, consider controversial theories, and employ my poetic license – in order to share my vision on paper.

From my early childhood, I have wondered why humans are not free; why minorities, women, and children are so often oppressed; why we suffer from war, violence, poverty, physical, emotional, and spiritual distress; why we are destroying our planet; and why we allow this all to continue? I have begged for the answer: *What is the key to getting out of this trap?*

This paper is my attempt to answer this burning question. This is my journey into the depths of humanity, into the depths of my own experience. I do not profess to know the truth or to declare that my way is the right way. I am simply attempting to respond to the suffering I experience as a human being on this planet, amidst such incredible pain and despair. I feel that I owe this to myself – to the child within me that has been oppressed and cries out to be heard – and to my family, to my child. And I feel that I owe this to the countless individuals throughout the world that are oppressed, and crying out to be heard. At the same time, my response empowers me to live life in a more grounded way, and give back to the world from this place. This journey is about healing.

During this process, through my own experiences and studies, I entered into the exciting discourse on psychological trauma. Trauma, manifesting as any experience that overwhelms an individual's capacity to deal effectively with the situation at hand, is currently a popular topic within the field of psychology. There are many definitions of trauma, and even more treatment approaches designed for the resolution of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). However, I soon gravitated to somatic approaches, and in particular Peter Levine's 'Somatic Experiencing.' I began training in this naturalistic method for healing trauma, and found myself transformed - as a therapist and an individual. Moreover, I was inspired by the work of Wilhelm Reich, who with his far-reaching and controversial studies laid the foundations for the development of somatic psychology.

I found that a biopsychosocial<sup>2</sup> approach – from the bottom-up – allowed me to uproot the mystery of oppression. Psychological trauma and social oppression are intimately related. Yet, this relationship is rarely described. In the process of exploring it, I found solid ground with which to approach the nagging question, "Why do we oppress each other?"

Acknowledging the trap we are in puts us in direct confrontation with a society organized around trauma. The collective distress and destruction we experience every day of our lives – in the form of violence, disease, war, poverty, famine, and other life-denying forces – challenges our most basic impulses of human connectedness: trust, empathy, compassion, mutual aid, and pleasure in life.

As I write, I feel an immense despair welling up within me. I also feel angry, frustrated, and still determined to find another way. What is it that makes human beings act to destroy life? These questions and their associated feelings are so overwhelming that it is easy to feel paralyzed, or trapped in an attempt to make sense of it all. I am writing this paper for all the people who have found themselves asking these complex ‘why’ questions about the state of our society, yet who have found no sufficient answers. I am writing this paper for all the people who feel disheartened, but dream of another way. This paper is written for the ‘we’ who are struggling to be better individuals, better parents, and live in a better world. For, as Reich wrote, “The first thing to do is to find the exit out of the trap” (Reich, 1973, p. 470).

This paper is designed to illuminate the intricate relationship between personal trauma, social oppression, and the transformative power of healing trauma. The first section, *The Cycle of Devolution*, documents the interdependent relationship between personal trauma and social oppression. The second section, *The Healing Crisis*, explores the transformational potential of healing trauma. The third section, *The Cycle of Evolution*, outlines a vision for a nourishing, sustainable, and life-affirming regeneration of human life.

Like the lone wildflower growing through barbed wire, we, too, can renegotiate the difficulties in life, and realize growth, pleasure, and peace. Understanding the effects of

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<sup>2</sup> Biological-Psychological-Social.

trauma – its life-denying and life-affirming capacities – enables us to chart a course for our potential evolution. We hold the seeds for our possible transformation within our bodies and minds. My hope is that each one of us can find the healing he or she needs to cultivate these seeds, and someday re-experience the deep pleasure of being alive.

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## SECTION I

### **The Cycle of Devolution: The Relationship Between Personal Trauma & Social Oppression**

## THE BIRTH OF CIVILIZATION

“I think it would be a good idea.”

(Mahatma Gandhi, when asked what he thought of Western Civilization)

Imagine a life where all people feel safe, secure, loved, and protected. In this world, there is no interpersonal violence, no child abuse, no sexual abuse, no crime, no corruption, no poverty, no famine, no chronic stress, and no war. Individuals do not have to pay for the right to live on a piece of land, do not have to pay for food to eat or water to drink, do not have to pay for health care, and do not have to work for their living. Individuals work a few hours each day to supply the basic necessities for living (i.e., hunting and gathering, constructing shelters), but most of their time is spent in relationship with others – preparing and eating food, telling stories, singing, dancing, playing, nurturing one another, and exploring the surroundings. Individuals do not have to worry that they will be harmed by other people, do not have to worry about breaking the law and going to prison, and do not have to worry about being denied their natural impulses. Individuals live together in small groups where everyone calls each other brother and sister, mother and father, uncle and aunt, grandmother and grandfather; there is no difference if you are blood related or not, the feeling of kinship is always present. Anywhere people go within a certain region, they are welcomed and celebrated. Diversity is accepted as individuals are expected to act according to their own prerogative. It is this quality that produces novelty, creativity, and merriment within the community. If there is any kind of disruption in the individual’s life, or in the life of the community, it is immediately tended to by the entire community. No one will ignore or invalidate the problem; it is everyone’s problem until it is solved. In this world, there is no fear – of oneself, of others, of the future, of the unknown – there is an implicit trust in life itself, and a continuum of life experience that has existed forever, and will continue to exist forever. The natural rhythms of life are adhered to within

every individual, within every community, and it is taken for granted that it will always be this way.

This is no utopian vision. As hard as this may be for us to believe, based on extensive research among many academic fields, this way of life is our ancestral heritage (DeMeo, 1998; Duffy, 1984; Eisler, 1987; Forbes, 1992; Liedloff, 1985; Shepard, 1973, 1998; Turnbull, 1972). For hundreds of thousands of years, humans, like other animals, lived simply, in relation to the rhythms of the planet. There were many great challenges in living so directly with the earth, but as we evolved, our internal systems (e.g., brain and nervous system) adapted to enhance our chances for survival. In fact, the human organism is constantly adapting itself to its environment, and new systems grow and develop while others are replaced and modified. Humans could not have survived for as long as we have if we were not constantly working in relationship with our environment.

Some 6,000 years ago or so, life was drastically altered for a small group of humans living in a region now called Saharasia, which stretches across North Africa, the Near East, and into Central Asia (DeMeo, 1998, p. 7). Could it be possible, James DeMeo (1998) asks in his seminal work *Saharasia*, that this alteration was the genesis of 'child abuse, sex repression, warfare, and social violence,' setting the human race on a course of devolution? The Old Testament narrates the 'original sin' story of Adam and Eve, and humanity's subsequent fall from grace. Similarly, the mythic quest for a lost paradise, with the hope for universal abundance, has motivated daring explorations with the hope of seeking a return to a connected state. Many other religions and philosophies throughout the world tell similar stories of humanity's disconnection from natural life. Could it be that these stories are mythological tales of a time in history when humanity lost its place in the world?

I contend that this split, which DeMeo so brilliantly documents, was the conception of civilization as we know it. The date of humanity's earliest development of civilization – as characterized by domestication, agriculture, permanent settlements, and conquest – is debated in academic circles, with estimates ranging from 14,000 to 2,000 BCE. I rely on DeMeo's hypothesized 4,000 BCE out of the necessity for simplification, and not anthropological accuracy. Furthermore, I will use the general terms of 'civilization' and 'tribal' life, as messy and controversial as these terms may be, to describe the differences between peoples' way of life. Other scholars have attempted to be more precise with differentiating between civilized and pre-civilized cosmologies (DeMeo, 1998; Eisler, 1987; Glendinning, 1994; Ingold, 2000; Liedloff, 1985; Shepard, 1973, 1998). I want to emphasize that I am using this simplistic dichotomy as a necessary generalization due to the scope of my study. When I use these terms, I am highlighting organizational differences between cultures. I intend to focus more generally on the way these opposing cultures affect individuals, and how the individuals living in these different cultures relate to and influence their own culture.

A people's way of perceiving and being in the world is at the root of the way they organize their society, the technologies they use, and the way they live in relation to the Earth. Although civilization and tribal life are generally differentiated according to their defining characteristics, at a deeper level, they stand as two very different cosmologies. The biological, emotional, psychological, and social functioning of individuals and groups adhering to these two different ways of being display marked differences. In the most simplistic terms, civilized ways rely on the domination and manipulation of natural life functions, whereas tribal ways rely on the dependence and reverence of natural life functions. Civilized peoples display distrust and fear towards the life process, whereas tribal peoples display trust in life.

Although there are a myriad of different cultures within a single civilization, for the purpose of this study, I will use 'civilization' to include all societies that live according

to certain shared cultural norms (e.g., nation-states, private property, law enforcement, and monetary medium of exchange) and technological methods (e.g., agriculture, husbandry, and irrigation). I will use 'tribal' people when referring to those communities whose lives are based primarily on hunting and gathering; who live in small clan groups and do not organize into cities or societies; who are generally nomadic peoples and not sedentary; who do not own land, food, or water; and for whom religion tends to be animist in nature. Tribal people are often referred to as being 'nature-based,' signifying "people who live, or have lived, in direct, unmediated participation with the forces and cycles of the natural world" (Glendinning, 1994, p. 9)..

Throughout this paper I use 'civilization' as a generalized term for the lifestyle that has been most notably demonstrated in Western, Euro-American countries over the past few hundred years. Specifically, I focused much of my research on American culture since I contend that the worldwide trend of 'globalization' (also known as 'Americanization' or 'McDonaldization') is in actuality a process of expanding American hegemony throughout the world. This trend towards increasing American influence around the world – as I have personally experienced in Asia, the Middle East, and Europe – is rapidly gobbling up local cultures and incorporating them within one standardized culture. Local cultures and peoples are under assault by a foreign web of power and control that is expanding at exponential proportions. Diversity is threatened as this dehumanizing culture incorporates others into its fold.

However, I will use the term 'civilization' to consolidate both Western and Eastern societies, for as vague and overarching a term it is, I intend to use it generally to signify those "'High Cultures,' which had developed agriculture, animal domestication, writing, monumental architecture, transportation methods, and technology" (DeMeo, 1998, p. 14). This embedded distinction leaves other cultures which did not develop into 'high cultures' (no matter if they are located in the West or the East), to be labeled 'uncivilized,' 'savage,' 'heathen' and/or 'pagan.' (DeMeo, 1998, p. 14). Although these

terms are rarely used anymore, and have been replaced by more neutral terms such as 'indigenous,' 'aboriginal,' 'native,' or 'tribal,' the connotation of a 'lower' society still exists: These tribal people did not *do anything* with the land they inhabited for thousands of years; they still lived in *primitive* conditions, and had not discovered how to manipulate the land for their benefit; they suffered long periods of scarce food and water, and were at the complete mercy of their environments; and they had no cities, and certainly no organized system of governance or law enforcement. These are just a few of the judgments that 'civilized' explorers, priests, and scholars made (and still make) about the 'primitive' people they encounter, teach, and study. Although there are certainly exceptions to the rule, our cultural conditioning indoctrinates us to think and feel that we, as civilized humans, are at the pinnacle of evolution.

'Civilization' is commonly defined as "nations and peoples that have reached advanced stages in social development" (Thorndike, 1951), "which implies civil behavior and peaceful social conduct" (DeMeo, 1998, p. 14). It would be disingenuous to apply this definition to the society we live in today. Or, to the society that has existed for the past few thousand years - which has given us bloody wars, holocausts, religious crusades, slavery, oppression, induced famine, population explosion, and environmental destruction. "Over and over again we see European writers ranking as 'high civilizations' societies with large slave populations, rigid social class systems, unethical or ruthless rulers, and aggressive, imperialistic foreign policies. Conversely, societies with no slaves, no distinct social classes, no rulers, and no imperialism are either regarded as insignificant (not worth mentioning) or primitive and uncivilized" (Forbes, 1992, p. 47). It seems like a case of mass 'projective identification,' where an entire society has been indoctrinated so as to defend against what is classically referred to as 'separation anxiety.'

Separation, at any developmental stage, brings with it corresponding emotional responses from the organism, individual, or group. If DeMeo's thesis is accurate, the

traumatized group living in Saharasia would have had to find some way to manage the overwhelming separation they so suddenly suffered from their established ways of being. Their radically altered relationship with the environment would necessitate a basic survival response. The individual (or group) is left utterly helpless but cannot tolerate the ensuing separateness – the fear is too great – so splitting and projective identification serve to generate a sense of trust “in the unconscious phantasy of omnipotent control of the object” (Jongsma-Tieleman, 1996). Projective identification is a process by which an individual (or group) splits off a part of oneself and projects this part onto another (person or object), and thus attributes one’s own characteristics to the projected object. The trust gained through an imagined control over the object allows the individual to manage the intolerable feelings which are now experienced outside of the individual, as a property of the projected object. This ‘omnipotent control’ allows for individuals (and societies) to manage the terror associated in being disconnected from a nurturing object. In individuals, this disconnection occurs with misattuned or abusive caretakers; in a society, this disconnection occurs with separation from the natural rhythms of the life process, most clearly experienced in direct relationship with the land.

The civilization we live in today clearly expresses itself as an omnipotent power over the life process. Life itself has become the object onto which humanity’s unconscious, overwhelming feelings are projected. In particular, ‘primitive’ people have suffered the wrath of ‘civilized’ people. The history of civilization demonstrates the brutal methods used as ‘civilized’ invaders dominated and subjugated whole nations of people. Trees, forests, soil, mountains, rivers, lakes, oceans, and every animal on Earth have also been an object of humanity’s projections. Our environmental crisis is a clear demonstration of how far humanity has gone to rid the planet of wild life. In science, genetic research has allowed human beings to genetically modify living organisms, even going so far as to clone animals. Throughout the course of the past 6,000 years, there has been a progressive development towards a more centralized hegemony over the world, even

venturing out into space. This process has deepened the perceived split between 'civilized' humans and 'nature', including the false dichotomy of mind and body (Shepard, 1973).

The guiding paradigm now suggests that humans can control anything and everything. We betray our animal origins by believing that we no longer are part of nature.

"Intelligence becomes severed from feeling, intuition, imagination. Work becomes disassociated from spontaneity, vitality, generativity" (Lorenz & Watkins, 2001). These disconnections, justified by our false belief in humans as holding dominion over the Earth, interrupts integrated functioning and sets up a top-down approach of authoritarian, dominating rule. Intelligence and work become tools of a disconnected people and culture. One of the first areas in which this altered relationship with life was observed was in civilization's dependence on domestication and husbandry. With our perceived ability to control life, we attempt to modify the environment for the betterment of human beings. We do this based on a fear that the environment is inadequate or aberrant in some respect. I contend that it is our disconnection from 'nature,' and inability to appropriately process our inner feelings, that causes such tremendous fear and need to control. Ironically, our attempt at calming our internal state of anxiety turns into a paranoid fear of attack. The aggressive impulses that civilized humans find intolerable, when projected, then animate these external objects with the threatening feelings that individuals once felt within themselves. What was an internal source of threat has now been externalized. This provides some relief in that there is now an illusion of control, but it also leads to an obsessive drive to eradicate all perceived threats, be they bears, wolves, bees, mosquitoes, rivers, black-skinned humans, animist villagers, fertile women, crying children – the list goes on and on.

Despite our semblance of control over life, with the 'progress of civilization' has come mental and emotional illness, an onslaught of disease, and the breakdown of our basic support systems, for no individual or group is capable of projecting all of one's

intolerable feelings onto external objects. Much of the unacknowledged overwhelming feelings which are not projected out are expressed as uncontrollable acts of violence and destruction upon other members within the same group, society, or species. This social implosion then serves to create the dangerous, threatening environment that was originally feared – the source of the intolerable feelings. Projective identification, in a sense, becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Similarly, instead of acting out, individuals may turn to using self-harm, addiction, and possibly suicide as means of controlling their feelings of overwhelm. Like the society in the midst of self-attack, individuals become exhausted from fighting and defending, which turns inevitably to depression, apathy, and self-loathing. Traumatologists have observed that people and groups mostly cycle between sudden phases of acting out their aggression, and periods of self-degradation (Ross, 2003).

What lies beneath this all, in individuals and groups, is a profound disconnection from the biological processes of relationship and growth. Thus there is little or no self-awareness, but a deep sense of inadequacy and shame. “The feeling of fraudulence as an adult person, the sexual impotence or pseudo-potency (excited by secret perverse phantasies), the inner loneliness and the basic confusion between good and bad, all create a life of tension and lack of satisfaction, bolstered, or rather compensated, only by the smugness and snobbery which are an inevitable accompaniment of the massive projective identification” (Metzner as cited in Young, 1998).

Using the concept of projective identification it becomes clearer that identifying our society as civilization, in the truest meaning of the word, is an act of psychosis. Instead, it looks more like civilization is “a desperate defence against schizophrenic breakdown” (Metzner as cited in Young, 1998). What we call civilization is not humanity at the pinnacle of evolution. Civilization is humanity struggling to survive after a genuine fall from grace – which a group of people might have experienced much like a

‘schizophrenic breakdown.’ This fall from grace was humanity’s disconnection from our ancestral ways of living in relationship with the world we inhabit.

DeMeo goes beyond detailing how civilization developed and what changed for humanity after civilization appeared, and asks *why did this disconnection from natural life occur at all?* He does not rest with the common explanations like overpopulation, technological advances, and the development of warrior castes, but goes on to demonstrate the underlying cause for these changes. If humanity was prospering so well for so many hundreds of thousands of years without crowding itself in or killing itself off, why, in a small period of time, would humans suddenly begin to do such things? “Nobody knows for certain how or why agriculture began,” writes Paul Shepard in his book *The Tender Carnivore and the Sacred Game*, but “from what evidence there is, it was neither a worldwide event nor a single event, but a shifting mixture of hunting, fishing, and planting, at first in a rather limited geographic area” (1973, p. 4) and then spreading out. Shepard does not venture into wondering why this “shifting” occurred, and rejects the “single event” hypothesis based on insufficient evidence. Yet, as the cliché goes, ‘if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it’: There had to be some influence that necessitated the human development of such ‘advancements,’ or adjustments to the environment. Something must have broke.

According to DeMeo’s (1998) thesis, some 6,000 years ago in the Saharasian region of the world, humanity experienced an overwhelming trauma, from which we never recovered. DeMeo hypothesizes that around 4,000 BCE this once fertile region – at least partly covered with grass and forests, as well as numerous streams, rivers, and lakes – experienced a significant drought which “would have been a major, and probably the only major mechanism which would lead to famine and starvation, given the normally self-reliant condition of early peoples” (DeMeo, 1998, p. 78). In a recent study done by the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), satellite images found that in the past thirty years, what was left of the remaining marshlands of the Fertile Crescent

region have desertified at an alarming rate, leaving only 10% of the original wetlands. “It is now mainly desert with large salt-encrusted patches” (National Geographic News, 2001). Although UNEP attributes the accelerated rate of desertification to damming and draining practices in the region, they acknowledge that it “is radically altering the way of life for people in the affected regions and threatening native wildlife” (National Geographic News, 2001). Thousands of indigenous Arabs in the region have had to flee their homes, and reportedly half a million Marsh Arabs alone have settled in refugee camps (National Geographic News, 2001). UNEP’s analysis highlights the disruption that a sudden shift in ecological balance can cause for a people.

6,000 years ago, there were less options for people facing crises. If a major drought occurred, many people would have died from famine; and many more would have been forced to flee their homelands in search for food, water, and safety. Children would have suffered famine-induced disease and many would have died.

Surviving children will not recover to full physical or emotional vigor once food supply is restored, and will suffer lifelong physical and emotional effects....As adults, these individuals who have suffered through severe famine during childhood will raise their own children differently from prior generations, even during times of plenty....This persistence of culture-shock takes place by virtue of *altered behavior and altered social institutions*, which adjust to the new drought-famine-starvation conditions....Under such conditions, many people die, family ties are shattered, and mass migrations take place. With so much death and displacement, family life is gradually or even radically diverted away from prior emotionally-rich and pleasure-oriented patterns; new patterns emerge, focused on basic survival, and with little or no emphasis upon pleasurable emotional bonding or social living. (DeMeo, 1998, pp. 6-7)

This major trauma of drought-induced famine might have been the impetus for civilization as we now know it. Sigmund Freud (1961) noted that civilization “must present the struggle between Eros and Death, between the instinct of life and the instinct of destruction, as it works itself out in the human species....And we may probably add more precisely, *a struggle for life in the shape it was bound to assume after a*

*certain event* [italics added] which still remains to be discovered" (p. 82). Freud did not accept his society's confidence in civilization as representing "civil behavior and peaceful social conduct" (DeMeo, 1998, p. 14). He experienced life during two major world wars, countless other social disturbances, and got close to thousands of individuals' internal agony. Freud thus considered civilization to be an expression of a post-traumatic struggle between the life force and the death instinct. However, I would restate this as a struggle between the *trust* in life and the *fear* of life. Trust, which is our birthright, has been challenged by a post-traumatic state which produces a basic anxiety about being a living organism.

The terror and helplessness associated with sudden famine and its aftereffects can cause a serious disruption in the internal systems of a human being. Moreover, as the human organism adapts to such a disruption, old relationships to life change into new patterns, based on fear for survival. In a haunting study of the Ik people in northeastern Africa, Colin Turnbull (1972) documented the devastating consequences when an entire group of people are ravaged by drought, famine, aggression, and forced displacement. "Under the stress to which this society was subject, all the trimmings were shed, everything that was not directly functional to the problem of [individual] survival was abandoned" (Turnbull, 1972, p. 178). This meant that even the most basic relationships between friends, family, husband and wife, and even mother and child, were shed, and the only bond which remained was based on the terror of not having enough nourishment to survive the day. This obligatory bond, 'nyot' in the Ik language, signified not friendship or mutual aid, but basic exchange. Thus, this society was held together by a collective anxiety for survival. Human values such as trust, cooperation, commitment, affection, and empathy were no longer 'functional to the problem of survival' and were thus discarded in favor of a hyperindividualism that spelled the end to their traditional tribal ways (DeMeo, 1998; Turnbull, 1972). Turnbull reflects that this hyperindividualism, as graphic and disturbing as it was for him, a westerner, to observe, reminded him of our civilization.

This reduction of human relationships among the Ik to the individual level puts the Ik one step ahead of civilization, in some respects. Our society has become increasingly individualistic. We even place a high value on individualism and admire someone who 'gets ahead in the world', tending to ignore the fact that this is usually at the expense of others. In our world, where the family has also lost much of its value as a social unit, and where religious belief and practice no longer bind us into communities of shared belief, we maintain order only through the existence of coercive power that is ready to uphold a rigid law, and by an equally rigid penal system. The Ik, however, have learned to do without coercion, either spiritual or physical. It seems that they have come to a recognition of what they accept as man's basic selfishness, of his natural determination to survive as an individual before all else. (1972, p. 182)

Turnbull's picture of the Ik, a horrific allusion of what our civilization could become, demonstrates that when fear replaces trust, every single human system can and will break down under the stress of basic survival. In particular, the indispensable sense of trust which humans experience in relationship with life is replaced by anxiety and the need to manipulate life experience. Egalitarian models of sharing and cooperation are replaced by authoritarian models of oppression and dominance (Eisler, 1987, pp. xvii-xx). Wildness becomes domesticated. When this first occurred thousands of years ago, this would have elicited changes in the way we secured food, from hunting-gathering to agriculture; the way we lived as community, from small clans and tribes to large villages and cities; the way we provided for ourselves, from self-sufficient communities to a specialized society; and the way we exchange resources, from sharing and bartering to monetary and capital transactions. Even more, there would have been an imperceptible movement away from the basic wisdoms of our ancestry, as leaders emerged and attempted to justify their hegemony over the people. The leaders needed the people's direct relationship with the earth severed so that they could gather power and control over the people's ways of life. Meanwhile, the people, afraid and longing desperately for some kind of security in their lives, and not remembering their ancestral ways, would surrender their autonomy to the 'chosen' leaders. They would give up, or be forced to give up, their indigenous ways to the promise that civilization would create

a greater solidarity of people, which would better all people's chances for survival and prosperity. Daniel Quinn calls this process the 'Great Forgetting,'

which, after all, is precisely a forgetting of the fact that we are exactly as much a part of the processes and phenomena of the world as any other creature...We are *unable* to alienate ourselves from Nature or to 'live against' it. We can no more alienate ourselves from Nature than we can alienate ourselves from entropy. We can no more live against Nature than we can live against gravity. On the contrary, what we're seeing here more and more clearly is that the processes and phenomena of the world are working on us in exactly the same way that they work on all other creatures. Our ['civilized'] lifestyle is evolutionary unstable. (1996, p. 181)

Thus, the altered internal landscape of individuals soon modifies the external landscape of social relations, leading us into even more dangerous territory.

As a top-down authoritarian model replaced more egalitarian ways of living, social institutions shifted from protecting and nurturing individuals to safeguarding their own continuation and domination. In so doing, these institutions serve to distance individuals from life itself and thus cause harm to individuals. Civilization can be said to be a process that actually dehumanizes the inherent 'civil' behaviors of humans, by creating life-denying systems which inhibit the full and free expression of individuals. "Directly, through personal coercion, and indirectly, through intermittent social shows of force such as public inquisitions and executions, behaviors, attitudes, and perceptions that did not conform to dominator norms were systematically discouraged. This fear conditioning became part of all aspects of daily life, permeating child rearing, laws, schools. And through these and all the other instruments of socialization, the kind of replicative information required to establish and maintain a dominator society was distributed throughout the social system" (Eisler, 1987, pp. 82-83).

Beginning with newborn infants, this process of 'socialization' is at work to assure that the new human being becomes a part of the ongoing juggernaut called civilization. This socialization process is at work not only via parenting norms of behavior, but also



## GHOSTS FROM OUR PAST

Men are not free to create any form of society or any kind of environment they choose; they are free only within the bounds shaped by the past which is present in them. (Shepard, 1973, p. 121)

All one has to do is read psychohistorian Lloyd deMause's *The History of Childhood* to acknowledge how "monotonously painful" (1975, p. viii) the history of childrearing has been for the children of our civilization. Although children have endured this brutal treatment for many generations now, it is rare that we read, hear, or speak of such suffering. Even in my psychotherapeutic work, it is indeed rare that clients will initially express anger or resentment or blame toward their parents. Although clients may convey a vague unhappiness from their childhood, exploring this in relationship to their parents or caretakers seems almost taboo. Yet, these same clients are eager to report the current status of their distressing symptoms and troubling relationships in order to find some peace and healing in their lives. "Maybe it is taboo," I considered one day driving home from a day of clinical work, "to link one's parents to present suffering". When I have heard myself, or others, imply this connection, I have witnessed quick reactions in defense of the parents. It is almost as if bad parenting is accepted to be 'good-enough'; as in the common phrases, 'nobody's perfect' and 'parents are people too.' Of course they are, and as people, parents are not perfect and make mistakes. It seems that nearly all parents intend to love and support their children, and that very few parents want to harm their own children. But this does not erase the suffering they may have created for their children, who are also people too. It is certainly not the children's responsibility to 'forget' or 'let go' of their painful pasts, simply because it implicates others. This unspoken taboo is part of the Great Forgetting that perpetuates a civilization that harms its own children, and therefore its own future.

This taboo never seemed right to me, and certainly does not make sense to me. In my life, my present experiences are built on the foundations of my past experiences – all of them, from birth to infancy to childhood to last night. Together, all experience

combines to create a context, or life process, that can be told like a story. How unusual it would be for a friend to begin telling a story a quarter-way into the tale. How frustrating it is to walk into a movie thirty minutes late. We spend the rest of our time trying to figure out what happened, and how this connects to what is happening now. Provided with such a context – from the beginning to the present – we can understand the movement and content of the story.

As emphasized in the Great Forgetting, we are a civilization with limited, or more accurately, distorted memory. The limitation and distortion of memory, for individuals as well as for groups of people, are aftereffects of post-traumatic stress (van der Kolk, 1994; 2002). So we are increasingly becoming a civilization that values newness, youth, progress, and the future. We are simultaneously losing our connection to tradition and culture, which has led to a standardization of culture. It can be argued that this process is the hotly debated phenomena we call globalization. During my stay on the Thailand-Burma border working with Burmese refugees, I discussed the globalization phenomenon with my Burmese friends. They expressed their anger and sadness over the loss of their ancestral ways, as western values and norms supplant their traditional Burmese (and ethnic Burmese) ways. One of my Burmese friends believed that the groundwork for this process was set in place during the years of British colonial rule. The colonial rulers inside Burma set up British-style schools, indoctrinated children to western cultural norms, and proselytized and converted some to Christianity. When the British were forced out at the end of World War II, the Burmese struggled to realize independence, politically, but also culturally. To this day, the diverse Burmese population struggles with this legacy, and the civil wars and forty-year authoritarian rule by the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) is a testament to the fundamental disruption of traditional Burmese culture.

With the loss of our traditional cultures and ways, most of us do not even know who our ancestors were or how they lived for generations. Ostensibly we are taught that

this is part of the democratization of the world, so that we can successfully progress unimpeded into the future, without the ethnic and religious conflicts, class struggles, and other ideological battles that have effected us for a few thousand years. However, there is a function in remembering history. It grounds us as a people, it binds us together as groups, it gives our culture roots, and creates a wider context for taking responsibility, making decisions, and understanding trends. And by so doing, our history links us to the collective well-being of our future.

In my birth country, the United States of America, we are taught a national history depicting our major achievements and battles; but the American people are all immigrants, displaced individuals searching for new identities in the New World of the Americas. We have created such noble ideals as The American Dream, the Melting Pot, 'One nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.' We have the opportunity to quit jobs, leave relationships, and move locations. We can change our names, our religions, our beliefs, our behaviors, and our physical appearances. But because we have forgotten our history and development, as an American people, we are lost. Even though we have elevated the material quality of our lives through such noble ideals and technological innovations, well into our third century as a nation we are facing an existence evermore endangered by violence, distrust, corruption, oppression, and ecological destruction<sup>3</sup>. Despite all the attempts to create an American identity full of integrity and strength, our identity is resting on the faulty foundations of this disconnection from the past.

Similarly, one can also perceive that individuals showing signs of illness are suffering at their foundations, and that their symptoms are expressions of their own systemic disconnection. Their foundations are rooted in the earliest moments of their history –

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<sup>3</sup> Refer to Sandra Bloom's *Creating Sanctuary* for an informative, yet haunting summary of the United States' statistics on violence towards children, women, men, at school, at work, using guns, with substance abuse, involved with pornography, in the media, in prisons, in economics, and in our environment (1997, pp. 195-208).

starting from their prenatal development to their birth to their infancy to their early childhood, and building continually from here up through their adulthood. When, at some point, their development is challenged by an inhibitive outside force, the human organism responds. Humans, like all living organisms, are programmed to respond to our environments in a delicate relationship of survival, growth, and development. Our survival is based on this ability to respond. If humans are threatened, we are unable to reach out to satisfy our basic needs and desires. The nature of an individual's response is central to our understanding of the relationship between personal trauma and social oppression.

How an individual responds is dependent on his environmental support. Inherently, as a living organism, an individual will respond by choosing the direction which goes towards life (DeMeo, 1998; Maslow, 1968; Reich, 1973). This means that living organisms nearly always make choices based on securing their own survival (an exception to this being when others, especially loved ones, are involved; the most prominent example being when a child is involved and the parents respond towards the child's safety first). If the organism experiences an outside threat and is able to securely respond to such a threat – as a skunk will respond to threat by spraying or a rabbit will respond to harm by running away – the organism will grow more resilient based on its own ability to respond to life experiences. It will integrate these experiences in promoting its own existence. If, on the other hand, the organism experiences an outside threat to its being and does not feel securely able to respond to such a threat – as a caged dog that is beaten when yelping or a child that is held down when harmed – it will have to find some way to protect itself from future threats.

A significant method for self-protection is the act of forgetting, repressing, and/or splitting off memories of traumatic events. In addition, an individual will constrict his range of life experience, or, as Levine calls it the 'range of resiliency' (Heller & Levine, 1997a), so that he feels secure enough within that safe range of sensations and feelings.

Meanwhile, any encounter outside that range of tolerable experience, either positive or negative, is registered as a direct threat (Heller & Levine, 1997a; Levine, 1997). These techniques, among others, are an individual's adaptive (self-preserving) response to what he recognizes as a life-denying force. In fact, most of the symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) can be understood as coping mechanisms for individuals living in an environment (either actual or perceived) of danger, harm, and/or neglect – in a world stripped of safety, order, and/or meaning.

During early stages of development, humans use coping responses like splitting, repressing, projecting, and dissociating as means to assure their survival. These mechanisms initially serve to protect the natural impulses of the child when an environment of safety is lacking. Eventually, however, survival and development become dependent on these protective mechanisms. Children require love, empathy, support, and nourishment – *based on their own requirements* – for their optimal development.<sup>4</sup> If a child is born into a denying, stifling, abusive and/or misattuned environment, he will contract away from the intolerable pain. If this contraction becomes a chronic response to his environment, then his development will be severely disturbed. How significantly the child's natural impulses are blocked and/or repressed from his environment will determine to what extent the protective mechanisms are used (DeMeo, 1998; Maslow, 1968; Miller, 1990a; Reich, 1961, 1973).

Thus, the individual pays a high price for the chronic repression of his natural impulses – over time his range of resiliency narrows, his access to his sensations and feelings is disturbed, and his ability to experience life diminishes. In addition, his mental acuity, relational flexibility, innate resiliency, and creative, spontaneous expression are all functionally disrupted. In other words, an individual's bioenergy (life energy) is channeled into resisting life, thereby sacrificing his natural expansion towards life. Therefore, under the threat of more danger, these survival techniques become the basis

for the adult personality. These protective mechanisms generate forgotten memories, unresolved traumas, and repressed emotional responses, which then become the building blocks of our 'character structures' – our way of experiencing and acting within ourselves and in the world.<sup>5</sup> These character structures, with their limited range of resiliency and inhibitive manner, create inflexible, fearful, disturbed, and often diseased human beings. When we go out into the world to study, to work, to marry, to parent, to manage – to live adult lives – we necessarily influence the social structure. More than that, individuals create and maintain the social structure of a given society. When these social institutions are also inflexible, fearful, disturbed, and often diseased – expressed as cultural norms – this will then further influence our personal character development (DeMeo, 1998; Reich, 1970).

As Sandra Bloom and Peter Reichert articulate in their book *Bearing Witness*,

We live in a society that is 'organized' around unresolved traumatic experience. By making this claim, we intend to show that the effects of multigenerational trauma lie like an iceberg in our social awareness. All we see is the tip of the iceberg that is above the surface – crime, community deterioration, family disintegration, ecological degradation. What lies below the surface of our social consciousness is the basis of the problem – the ways in which unhealed trauma and loss have infiltrated and helped determine every one of our social institutions. (1998, p. 9)

In essence, this is the cycle of devolution. The awareness of this cycle gives us the responsibility, as parents, educators, family, and friends – as a civilization – for safeguarding children's development and protecting them from the overwhelming stress, abuse, and violence resulting from trauma.

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<sup>4</sup> See Appendix A

<sup>5</sup> See 'Character Modes of Survival' chapter – 'Character structure' offers a more complete understanding of the human being than 'personality,' identifying the form and function of individual behavior, cognition, emotion, and physiology.

## THE MYTH OF SOCIALIZATION

All evil consists of self restraint or restraint of others. All evil acts are murderous. (William Blake as cited Pearce, 2002, p. 128)

The concept of *socialization* is a cultural remnant from tribal eras, when families lived together as clans, or in small, close-knit villages, and children played an important role in their community. The socializing tendency in human cultures, so vital when children played an integral role in the daily life of the community – e.g., taking care of younger siblings, helping gather and prepare food – has lost its original function in our mass, specialized, and technological civilization. Joseph Chilton Pearce suggests that humans have inherited a ‘herd instinct’ from our mammalian ancestors, which is the innate social impulse to commune together (2002). Yet, the biopsychosocial mechanism of socialization observed in our mammalian, and human (tribal) ancestors, has a different quality to it than what we now observe among modern, civilized humans. “The pleasure in gathering together with our own kind, found in most mammalian and avian life, is the source of community and fosters the model imperative; extended nurturing and care; mutual sharing of aesthetics, events, dreams, hopes, ideas, and ideals; mutual appreciation of works, skills, creativity, cooperative ventures; and the sharing of the higher, broader expanses of love – love of neighbor, self, and God....Socialization amounts to relationship and sharing, the very juice of life” (Pearce, 2002, p. 122). At one time we lived closer to our biological impulses, closer to animals than what we now think of as humans. At that time, the socialization of children was embedded in the continuity and natural rhythms of a particular, localized community.

With communities now more like conglomerations of unrelated and unfamiliar individuals, the socialization process has remained, but as a distorted mechanism in organizing a child’s functioning within a given society. No longer are ancestral teachings passed down to children transgenerationally through their full participation within a society, where children learn the ways and wisdom of their culture from the

inside-out. Now, cultural norms are taught from the outside-in. Socialization has become an external mechanism of control due to our disconnection from the natural rhythms of life. As such, the socializing process is vulnerable to manipulation by powerful individuals or groups intent on manipulating society according to their own agendas. We have encountered such authoritarian rule throughout civilization, time and time again.

There is an interdependence between our individual character structures, our familial structures, and our social structures. We, as individuals, are responsible for our society; and conversely, we, as a society, are responsible for our individuals. Although theoretically this seems quite obvious to us, practically we live as though this were not true. Many of us sacrifice the well-being of our families and communities for our own self interests, though some attempt to rationalize their workaholic, consumerism, and hyperindividualism as being for the benefit of others. Similarly, the leaders of our society often sacrifice individuals, individual freedoms, and the greater social welfare to benefit their ruling agendas, though they may attempt to rationalize their greed, power, and aggression as being for the benefit of our nation. The failure to recognize this fundamental relationship leads to the inability to understand the biopsychosocial consequences of raising our children under authoritative rule.

Authoritative rule, as I use it, means obedience to authority rather than freedom to follow one's own self-regulatory process. The latter does not mean chaos and anarchy. Freedom, when used specifically in reference to the child-rearing process, means providing young, innocent, and vulnerable human beings with the safety and support necessary for them to act from their most basic, biological impulses of life, growth, and creativity. Mostly, we are not supported in our process of developing into emotionally, mentally, and spiritually capable human beings, but are taught to value the hard work of making it in the world. A socialization process relying on external authority, as commonly practiced in civilization, amounts to no less than the destruction of the

natural, organic, and biological impulses in the child. Among civilization, the child's innate sociality is rarely respected, and children are often treated as if they are unruly and deprived.

The historical account of child-rearing confirms that for several thousand years, children have been compliant to their parents, families, educators, priests, and the cultural norms of civilization (deMause, 1975, 2001; Miller, 1990a, 1990b). When compliance becomes a central tenet of the socialization process, acts of self-regulation look like disobedience, and disobedience warrants punishment. Alice Miller (1990a) quotes a 19<sup>th</sup> Century educator's counsel to a parent: "Such disobedience amounts to a declaration of war against you. Your son is trying to usurp your authority, and you are justified in answering force with force in order to assure his respect, without which you will be unable to train him" (as cited in Miller, 1990a, p. 1). Therefore, to adults molding compliant (inhibited) children, self-regulated children look deviant, unruly and wicked, unsocialized creatures driving us towards the moral decay of our civilization.

If this inhibitive child-rearing process is so deleterious, with such pernicious consequences, why is it that it has basically continued without interference for all these years? It can be "argued that parents and doctors, who themselves had suppressed various emotions related to their own childhood traumas, were incapable of either recognizing or sympathizing with the emotional traumas or needs of infants and children. [Wilhelm Reich] considered it axiomatic, that *a person cannot recognize in someone else an emotion which they have learned to repress, and can no longer feel themselves*" (deMeo, 1998, p. 33). We cannot possibly expect to trust much less recognize a child's self-regulatory process if we, in our own lives, have had it forcibly stripped away or denied by our parents and society.

Understandably then, such a notion as allowing children an opportunity to live their young lives according to their own interests and curiosities has been widely challenged. Only recently has the push for more child-centered ideologies resurfaced in the form of alternative schools, innovative pedagogical approaches, egalitarian models for living in families and communities, natural homebirth methods, and the holistic health field (Eisler, 2002; Freire, 1970; Hall, 2002, 2003; Maslow, 1968; Neill, 1962; Rogers, 1977). Gradually, some people are beginning to recognize and sympathize with the plight of children growing up in a world not meeting their most basic needs. What these people are waking up to is the reality that children are growing up in a troubled, violent world. Even more, stripped of their freedom to act responsibly according to their own instincts and best interest, they are left at the mercy of such threatening environmental stimuli. This is frightening when we consider that the majority of violence against children occurs in their homes, and even more frightening when we consider that only 5% of all domestic violence gets reported (Perry, 2001). Even within what is supposed to be a safe environment for children – their own homes, in addition to public life including schools and churches – the right to live authentically is stripped from them and seized by external agents often in violent and fear-inducing ways. Consequently, many children lose their secure place in the society. They lose their ability to live according to their natural functions, instincts, interests and feelings; they lose access to their humanity. Instead, their way of being in the world is organized around fulfilling external demands, usually accompanied by terror, abuse, and traumatic stress.

Alice Miller refers to such pedagogical philosophies and practices as ‘poisonous pedagogy.’ This approach to child-rearing consists of denying the life of the child in deference to parental and social authority. ‘Poisonous pedagogy’ is characterized by its sadistic, repressive, and brutal influencing in order to ‘teach’ or ‘train’ children, appearing variously as different religious, ideological, and pedagogical methods to meet the times. The cultural and ideological context, then, socially permitted and even

encouraged such widespread abuse. In the 1950s, the psychoanalyst Edward Glover wrote:

...in social terms we can say that the perfectly normal infant is almost completely egocentric, greedy, dirty, violent in temper, destructive in habit, profoundly sexual in purpose, aggrandizing in attitude, devoid of all but the most primitive reality sense, without conscience or moral feeling, whose attitude to society (as represented by the family) is opportunistic, inconsiderate, domineering and sadistic....In fact, judged by adult social standards the normal baby is for all practical purposes a born criminal. (cited in Miller, 1990b, p. 42).

In contrast to the concept of self-regulation, which “implies a belief in goodness of human nature; a belief that there is not, and never was, original sin” (Neill, 1962, p. 104), the basic foundation for such ‘poisonous’ philosophies is the long-standing belief that the child is born evil, sinful, wicked, willful, and/or a blank slate. Due to these demonstrable qualities, it is the parents’ duty to civilize, or socialize the child (deMause, 1974, 2001; DeMeo, 1998; Maslow, 1968; Miller, 1990a).

Although there is debate whether the treatment of children has evolved or devolved since pre-civilized times, there is little doubt that civilization’s treatment of its children has a horrific record (deMause, 1974; DeMeo, 1998; Jensen, 2000; Karr-Morse & Wiley, 1998; Miller, 1990a). Many of the same abhorrent practices still exist today, in one form or another; sometimes as simple as egocentric parents neglecting their children’s needs for attention and affection, and sometimes as complex as severely disturbed parents devastating their children’s lives through physical, emotional, and/or sexual torture. According to Bruce Perry, who studies the neurodevelopmental impact violence has on children, “intrafamilial abuse, neglect and domestic battery account for the majority of physical and emotional violence suffered by children in [the United States]” (Perry, 1997). The figures of *reported* violence on children are horrifying (to think of what goes *unreported!*): Hitting children, otherwise known as physical abuse, is virtually universal; 50% of all infants six months to a year are physically abused; only one state, Minnesota, has outlawed the parental right to corporal punishment of their children; beating

children in schools is still legal in twenty-three states; the number of abused and neglected children doubled from 1.4 million in 1986 to 2.8 million in 1993; during that same period, the number of children seriously injured quadrupled and the number of children sexually abused rose by 83%; 61% of all reported rape cases occurred to victims before the age of eighteen; 29% of all reported rape cases occurred to victims before the age of eleven (Bloom & Reichert, 1998; Hall, 2002). In addition, there are shocking figures of domestic violence, social violence, and self-inflicted violence (Bloom & Reichert, 1998). Tragically, these statistics seem to go on and on, endlessly, but the point is that child abuse – in the form of child-rearing or just plain victimization – produced, and continues to produce, dire consequences for our children, for our civilization, and for the world.

A.S. Neill, founder of Summerhill, a pioneering 'free school,' wrote: "The usual argument against freedom for children is this: Life is hard, and we must train the children so that they will fit into life later on. We must therefore discipline them. If we allow them to do what they like...how will they ever be able to exercise self discipline? People who protest the granting of freedom to children and use this argument do not realize that they start with an unfounded, unproved assumption – the assumption that a child will not grow or develop unless forced to do so" (Neill, 1962, p. 109). Neill demonstrated at his school, Summerhill, that in environments of freedom, understanding and acceptance, a child will organically mature into a place of self-regulation, capable and keen to take his or her place in society, without any external demands.

Similar to Neill's seemingly radical approach, tribal communities have historically valued and treated children as vital elements to the health of their society, trusting in their instinctive development towards life and creation. Jean Liedloff, who spent several years living among the Yequana Indians in the South American jungles, remarked that in traditional societies like the Yequana, "No orders are given a child that

run counter to his own inclinations as to how to play, how much to eat, when to sleep, and so on" (Liedloff, 1985, p. 90), yet these children do not become antisocial, violent adults. In fact, these traditional societies expected the exact opposite – that as adults, such children would be self-reliant, independent and productive, ensuring the well-being of their community (Liedloff, 1985).

In my own experience in various 'Third World' countries, I have been amazed at the responsibilities that young children perform in their communities. For example, when I spent time in an indigenous Lahu 'hill tribe' village in Thailand, I witnessed young children caring for their baby siblings, cooking, cleaning, assisting adults in various tasks, and participating in community rituals. There did not seem to be any clear demarcation between the child and the adult within the community, and although some may read this as a hard life for children, it did not strike me that this was the children's experience. It seemed to me that children enjoyed having responsibility in their community, but also enjoyed the ample time to play with other children. Although I know that these children suffer in their own ways and that as an outsider it is difficult to truly grasp the intricacies of another culture, seeing children assume such essential roles in their community was inspiring. I do not think that these children are unique, or in any way innately different than other children. Rather, they are born into and raised in a world which fundamentally trusts them. This "assumption of innate sociality is at direct odds with the fairly universal civilized belief that a child's impulses need to be curbed in order to make him social...If there is anything fundamentally foreign to us in continuum societies like the Yequana, it is this assumption of innate sociality" (Liedloff, 1985, p. 84).

Psychologist Abraham Maslow (1968) found the same truth in studying 'self-fulfilling' individuals. He recognized that such people acted from their 'intrinsic conscience,' an unconscious place within themselves that holds their true nature, capacities, and destiny. "Since this inner nature is good or neutral rather than bad, it is best to bring it

out and to encourage it rather than to suppress it. If it is permitted to guide our life, we grow healthy, fruitful, and happy” (Maslow, 1968, p. 4). Because the health and well-being of a society so obviously rests on the health and well-being of its children, traditional societies like the Yequana were structured to encourage the organic development of their children. They provided their children with environments rooted in freedom, tolerance, permissiveness, indulgence, physical affection and involvement in the decision-making process; absent were the strict rules, codes, disciplines, abuses, taboos and bodily mutilations that mark our ‘civilized’ societies. (DeMeo, 1998).

Our approach to child-rearing, revolving as it is around these rules, taboos and abuses, stigmatizes the young, innocent child, as if there was something wrong with him, as if he did something wrong. From this beginning, children are forced, out of necessity, to adapt to a world that is alien to their own wisdom and truth. In this way, it is not freedom that creates waywardness or insecurity in children, it is *not* allowing them this freedom that creates such distress. As Maslow (1968) observed, “Destructiveness, sadism, cruelty, malice, etc., seem so far to be not intrinsic but rather they seem to be violent reactions *against* frustration of our intrinsic needs, emotions and capacities” (p. 3). Socializing our children in a way that denies them of their innate curiosity and sociality isolates them from their people. It distances them from their ancestral wisdom. It separates them out from social life and designates them to ‘child play’ or in ‘child care.’ It disconnects them from their greater community, where they are socialized by being incorporated through their presence, observation, and when it is time, involvement, in the rhythms of their culture. A child “deprived of the experience necessary to give him the basis for full flowering of his innate potential will perhaps never know a moment of the sense of unconditional rightness that has been natural to his kind for 99.99 percent of its history. Deprivation...will be maintained indiscriminately as part of his development” (Liedloff, 1985, p. 48).

What is frightening to me is that we still continue to justify these child-denying behaviors without being aware of the consequences. Many of us have become desensitized to the pain, terror, and traumatic stress of the childhood experience. Moreover, we have been taught to believe that this experience is for our own good (Miller, 1990a). But is it really? Or, is it not about children at all, but about the anxiety parents, caretakers, and educators experience when facing such free impulses and emotional expressions – impulses and expressions that they as children were forced to repress? This might answer for the long list of child-rearing practices that to me, and others, seem like life-denying and traumatizing techniques.

Even today, such child-rearing practices are still employed by well-meaning parents: a harsh childbirth environment and experience; isolation at infancy; circumcision; denial of breastfeeding; withholding of food; timetable feeding; forced toilet training; swaddling; spanking; long separations; unfamiliar child care; and compulsory discipline. These practices are normal in our society and defining them as ‘abusive’ is highly controversial. Yet as children, to be denied our basic needs, to be neglected and removed from our caretakers, and to be made to conform to external demands, begs some consideration of exactly how it is that parents and other adults could inflict (what is generally unintentional) harm upon their own children. If we discount the belief that humans are basically evil or sinful – which goes against all intuitive and observable data – then there must be some force that affects us to the extent that we could harm our own kin. Since it is my contention that civilization is the disturbing force that oppresses our basic humanity – inhibiting our growth and development, and subsequently creating traumatic stress for individuals and groups – we must examine exactly how this process occurs if we ever hope to combat this destructive cycle of devolution.

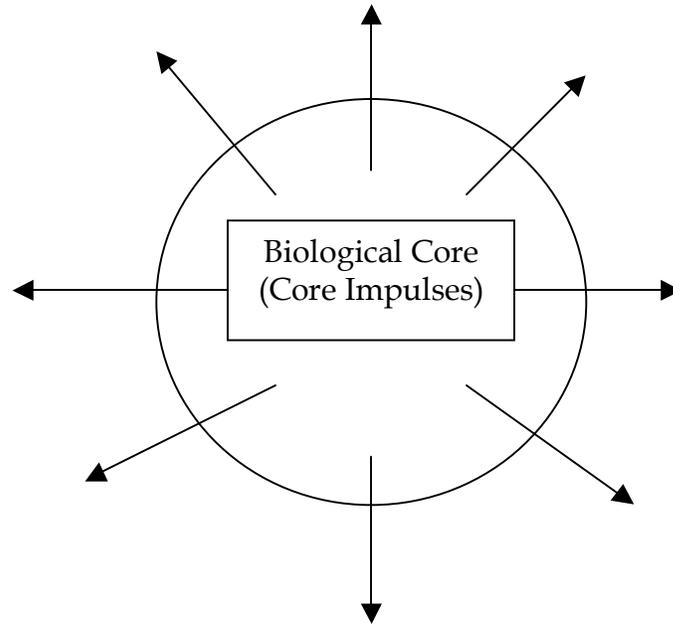
## THE SOCIAL PATHOLOGY OF NORMALCY

When we look at the mounting crisis in the lives of young people today – the crises in family, education, social structures, deteriorating health and well-being, increasing violence in all its forms – all spilling over into the adult world in ever greater quantities, we must factor in our long century of disruptions of natural process on every level, starting with childbirth, bonding, and early nurturing. (Pearce, 2002, p. 109)

Early in his career as a psychoanalyst, Wilhelm Reich (1970, 1971, 1972) formulated an understanding of the human character structure, which he maintained was also exhibited in the social structure of a given society. Based on his clinical and sociological observations, Reich (1971) concluded that the inhibitive process of civilization splits the integrity of the human organism into three layers: the core, secondary, and peripheral layers. The biological core is the center of an organism's being and functions like the sun for our planet [See Figure 2]. Like the sun, the biological core nurtures us, fuels us, supports us, and provides us the light from which we see. It is the source from which our primary drives originate, orienting us towards survival and growth. The core "impulses, which were exclusively of a pleasure-seeking, social, and nonviolent character....present in the infant from the start...also include the spontaneous reaching out to the world and trusting qualities often seen in small children" (DeMeo, 1998, p. 28). In other words, at our depths, the human animal is naturally loving, creative, and inclined to relationship.

Unlike previous ideologies that stressed these pessimistic views on humankind, Reich's perspective echoed a fundamentally positive view that had been passed down for millennia in the teachings and culture of tribal peoples throughout the world (Duffy, 1984; Liedloff, 1985; Malinowski, 1985; Turnbull, 1972; Wolff, 2001). This fundamental belief in the goodness of all life was most clearly expressed in their child-rearing practices and their freedom of expressing natural impulses.

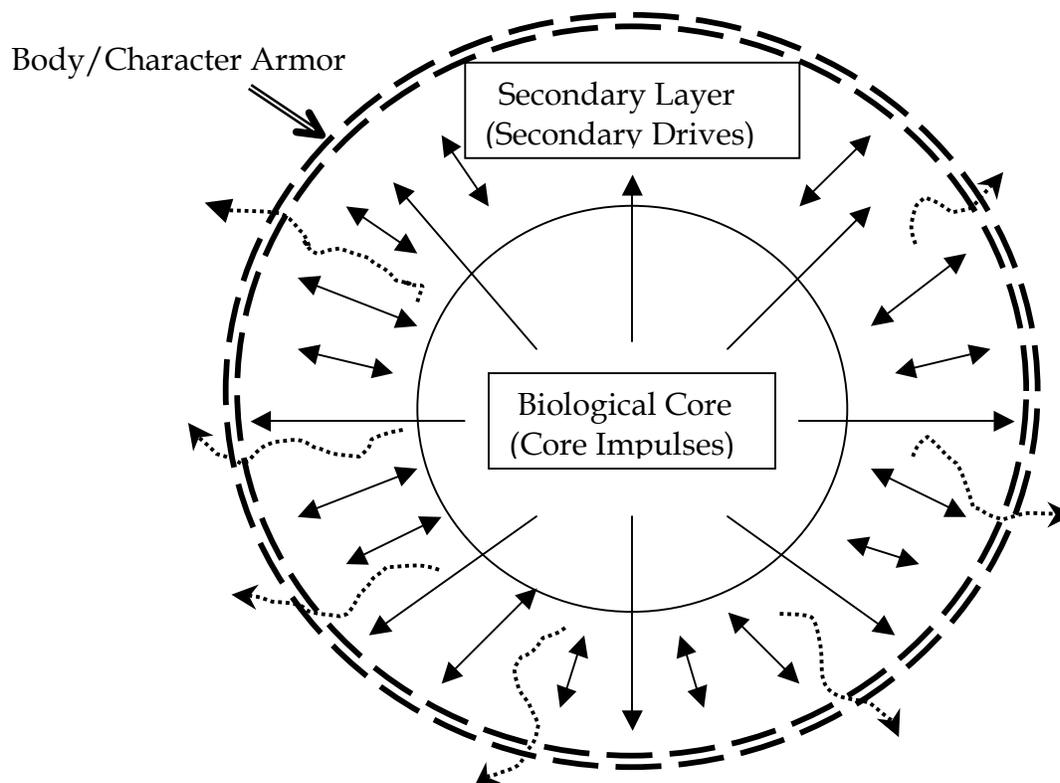
**Figure 2: Biological Core**  
(Reich, 1971)



Reich, recognizing the bioenergetic current within all life, including the human organism, demonstrated that if an outside force does disturb basic functioning, the organism becomes split. Within humans, this split occurs psychosomatically. Life energy ('orgone') becomes stuck and trapped in certain areas of the body which affects the mental and emotional functioning of the individual; and once the psychological function is disturbed, this perpetuates a physiological contraction. "The rigidity of the musculature is the somatic side of the process of repression, and the basis for its continued existence" (Reich, 1971, p. 269). This muscular rigidity Reich likened to armor, which manifested both characterologically (character armor) and physically (body armor) – different levels manifesting the same process of contraction. This overall contraction binds energy and thus inhibits the primary core impulses from their proper expression. A 'secondary layer' is thus created, which consists of all the repressed impulses that have become blocked and stuck, though which are still striving for expression [See Figure 3]. The impulses are eventually expressed, but no longer in their

original form – they become what Reich termed ‘secondary drives,’ consisting of “sadism, greediness, lasciviousness, envy, [and] perversions of all kinds” (Reich, 1961, p. 204). These “socially-dangerous secondary impulses” (DeMeo, 1998, p. 29) grow stronger the more we inhibit and repress our primary impulses as infants, children, and later as adults.

**Figure 3: Secondary Layer**  
(Reich, 1971)

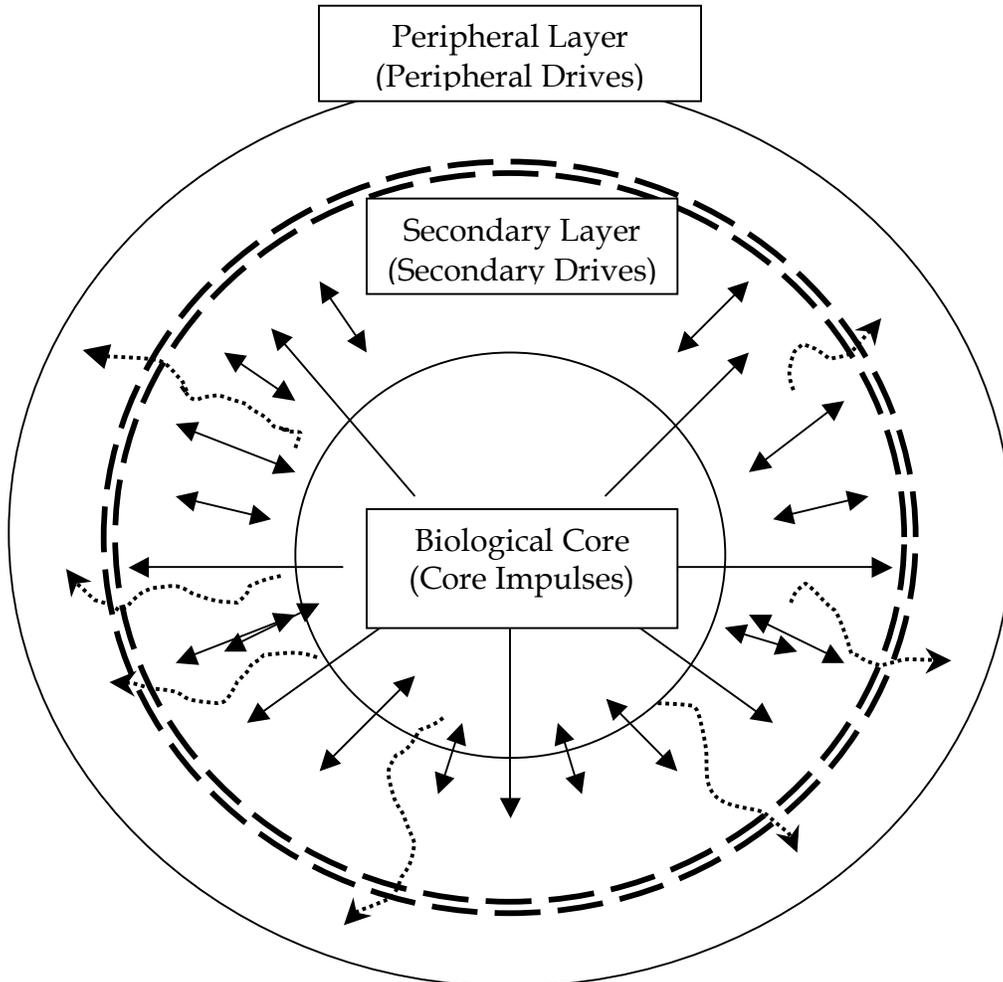


Therefore, the evil and sinful human nature that some people have referred to within our civilization more accurately reflects a distortion of our human process, and not an original state. Through the creation of these antisocial secondary drives, a society built on fear, denial, and abuse is established.

In order to fit into this civilized society, children are conditioned from birth not to reveal their underlying distress, and instead find ways to adapt to the familial and

cultural norms. Children learn to master the art of meeting external demands, thereby forming the socially-adjusted roles they are commanded to assume. They may look and act like 'good kids,' yet underneath the good kid - brewing, simmering, bubbling, seething, preparing to erupt - is the dis-ease and aggression that endangers us all. The compulsion to adapt creates more stress, and at the same time necessitates a peripheral, surface layer of behaving in order to contain the distress [See Figure 4]. It is unacceptable to disrupt the social norms within civilized society (i.e., 'rock the boat') without facing the punitive and merciless forces that require submission and conformism. Therefore, the peripheral layer appears as an "artificial mask of self-control, of compulsive, insincere politeness and of artificial sociality" (Reich, 1961, p. 204). This socially adjusted façade is used to cover up the middle layer of distorted, life-denying drives, thereby securing one's safe place within a society that does not understand these stress responses. This mechanism allows people to 'fit in,' despite the enormous personal (and social) costs of doing so. Although this surface layer is often unstable, for many people, this is our primary level of relating in the world. As I heard from other travelers throughout my travels around the world, Americans are notorious for this banality. This may explain the epidemic of loneliness and emptiness, or what many Americans experience as depression, in addition to the deep-seated rage that many Americans experience as violence. Rather than face the underlying dysfunction, huge resources go into treating and medicating people so that they will not feel what lies beneath. Because we have been indoctrinated that 'what lies beneath' is inherently bad, we are taught to manufacture 'good.' Just today, as I was sitting in the park, I heard a father say to his crying son several times, "don't throw a fit...be a *good boy*." No one has quite explained to me what makes sadness and anger 'bad,' and happiness and affection 'good' - these emotions all seem to be simply responses to life experience.

**Figure 4: Peripheral Layer**  
(Reich, 1971)



Thanks to our socially-adjusted peripheral drives, most of us go about our business as though everything is fine, although on some level, we know, feel and experience that it is not. We cannot help but recognize that so many individuals are lost, confused, blasé, apathetic, depressed, cynical, violent, perverse, and dangerous. Though civilization tends to treat individuals suffering from such symptoms with very little compassion – instead we tend to incarcerate, involuntarily hospitalize, medicate, or stigmatize such individuals – these symptoms stem from a fundamental dis-ease which can be identified and treated. These individuals are sick with an illness that permeates our culture, infecting children in epidemic proportions.

It is amazing, then, that in a world constantly threatened by war, violence, bigotry and ecological destruction, we can still get through our daily lives at all. Yet most of us do, or at least we try to with all our energy. Socialized into a world that forces us to inhibit and repress our basic physiological and emotional impulses – our core drives – we are forced to live according to our secondary and peripheral drives. The inability to access and live according to our primary drives, and our subsequent anxiety associated with such inability, lead us to displace

...previously softer and more pleasure-oriented forms of social living. As parents, such deprived humans would adopt or develop various forms of pedagogy designed, at the basic level, to deprive or deny their own children the physical body pleasures they themselves were denied, and could no longer experience due to chronic armoring. While parents, priests, shamans, and various obstetricians and 'mental health specialists' the world over give high-sounding excuses for inflicting pain and trauma on infants and children, and for crushing their sexuality, in reality they are all acting out disguised and rationalized feelings rooted in their own pleasure-deprived and frozen emotional structures. (DeMeo, 1998, p. 38).

As much as we try to live in defense of our normalcy and denial of our social distress, the increasing numbers of criminals, victims of violence, mentally and physically ill, and war-related casualties are the testimony to a diseased civilization (Bloom & Reichert, 1998; Hall, 2002; Karr-Morse & Wiley, 1997; Yablonsky, 1972). This transgenerational, worldwide phenomenon of trauma and violence is the modern era's greatest crisis.

Traumatologists use the term 'traumatogenic forces' to define the prevalence of secondary drives within civilized societies. Even more, some theorists contend that our civilization is organized around these life-denying forces.

In the jargon of trauma theory, traumatogenic forces are those social practices and trends that cause, or contribute to the generation of traumatic acts....[In] attachment theory, for example, certain conditions generate optimal infant development. In particular, nurturance from adult caregivers is critical for mental, emotional, and social development.

But in a culture where parenting is not an activity supported by the society, parents must do it as a hobby or a forced necessity and find time for nurturing only after basic bread and butter needs have been satisfied, if at all. When the culture fails to support the work of parents, a traumatogenic force is created that fosters the neglect of children's attachment needs. The organization of society may support or mitigate the individual's experience of crippling psychological trauma. (Bloom & Reichert, 1998, p. 18)

Such destructive social forces manifest directly from this secondary layer, where the impulses to nurture and care for infants and children become lost and distorted. An example of such distortion is the use of corporal punishment. When violence is modeled as the acceptable means to regulate the child or household environment, the child learns to do the same. 'Acting out' in school or social settings might be a child's cry for help, unable to properly regulate themselves due to "a faulty instruction book" (A. Kelly, personal communication, 2002). Instead of meeting force with force through punishment in school and more beatings at home, or medicating the child, understanding the immense harm done to children growing up amidst violence might help our society treat children without denying the reality of their abusive situations. In fact, such an understanding might validate the child's rational fear response and enable him to understand his place as an innocent victim of cruel treatment.

If we examine civilization through a trauma-sensitive lens, we see how embedded traumatogenic forces condoning the use of violence as a means for control are within our ideological, political, and religious social systems (Bloom & Reichert, 1998, p. 9). Establishing a society oriented around traumatogenic forces creates a hopeless and dangerous cycle of oppression. This cycle, with its power inequities and inherent brutality, has long been a cultural norm in our civilization. Traumatogenic forces "can have long-term organizing effects on personality and on attributional and relationship styles. They form the matrix for a powerful 'story' for the self and other, through enactments and re-enactments of the original experience" (Bentovim, 1992, p. 26). These life-denying dynamics profoundly effect the way we construct meaning and

reality, especially in relation to traumatic events (Bentovim, 1992). For instance, in American culture, we do not acknowledge let alone challenge the foundations of our 'American Dream' story based on the theft and ecological destruction of other people's lands, the genocide and slavery of Native Americans and Africans, the use of terrorism in the American Revolution and other conflicts, the support of violence through such means as the death penalty and easy access to guns and violent media, and child-rearing practices that permit and encourage harmful environments for our youth. American culture can be dissected in order to illuminate the myriad of life-denying forces which ultimately work *against* a society's best intentions for growth, prosperity and peace, and *for* a system which entitles a small minority of privileged people to a disproportionate share of the wealth, resources and security.

Though we are expected not to challenge these basic inequities, the effects of living in a trauma-based society are devastating. As we are witnessing in 21<sup>st</sup> Century America, this disorganized state threatens ecological disaster, geopolitical stability and even basic human survival. If one agrees with Reich that "state structure is determined by family structure" (DeMeo, 1998, p. 22), the tragedy of our social crisis makes more sense.

For American children, the gestation of violence takes root primarily in the home. When trauma or neglect happens early in life and is left untreated, the injuries sustained reverberate to all ensuing developmental stages....When we look closely at the families of violent children across classes and racial differences, we find an impoverishment of human connectedness, trust, support, and emotional nurturing. People feel angry and alienated – often for several generations. There is a sense of separateness; a chronic irritability; an absence of optimism, joy, and knowing how to laugh; and a need to numb against hopelessness. (Karr-Morse & Wiley, 1997, pp. 160-161; 271)

By contextualizing our social problems in this way, we might actually be able to treat the root issues instead of attending to never-ending symptoms.

The symptoms of our greater disease, though, are not to be ignored or belittled. These symptoms, including depression, eating disorders and even schizophrenia, are

exposing our dysregulated internal systems. They are the voices of our suffering, calling out to us to acknowledge the underlying disturbance (Allen, 1995; Bloom & Reichert, 1998; Maslow, 1968; et al.). Since most suffering individuals have long lost their ability to respond to pain, fear and discomfort, they are unable to ask for help, or even recognize they are in need. Thus, symptoms are the body's way of crying out for help.

It seems quite clear that personality problems may sometimes be loud protests against the crushing of one's psychological bones, of one's true inner nature. What is sick then is *not* to protest while this crime is being committed. And I am sorry to report my impression that most people do not protest under such treatment. They take it and pay years later, in neurotic and psychosomatic symptoms of various kinds, or perhaps in some cases never become aware that they are sick, that they have missed true happiness, true fulfillment of promise, a rich emotional life, and a serene, fruitful old age, that they have never known how wonderful it is to be creative, to react aesthetically, to find life thrilling. (Maslow, 1968, p. 8)

As implied above, symptoms are an individual's primary impulses striving towards creative expression. Just as a wildflower will make its appearance even through the tiniest of cracks in the thick concrete of the sidewalk, so too will organic life express and emote itself, however distorted, through the tiniest cracks in the thick armor of our characters. "All reactions to stress and trauma, including 'symptoms,' are best understood as adaptive efforts" (Allen, 1995, p. 25). The primary impulses of an organism are biologically oriented to grow towards life, and when thwarted from doing so, they will grow even still, yet distorted, as the secondary drives. Expressing one's self in this way is not a choice per se - most individuals are not malingering or looking for handouts (a perspective long held when treating distressed individuals which displays the secondary drive's use of rationalizations, denying the painful reality of human trauma and suffering) - but becomes a necessary ingredient for one's survival.

A session with a client suggests the pattern. Richard<sup>6</sup> comes from a working class, religious family. His mother “yells too much” and has extreme mood swings, while his father, a recovering alcoholic and retired policeman, isolates himself. As a mid-twenties college student, Richard has struggled with alcohol and drug abuse. He is presently struggling with anxiety, paranoia, low self-esteem, and depression. He has also suffered for years from obesity, diabetes, intestinal complaints, and learning disabilities. His five siblings struggle with these same issues. During one session, when discussing his family dynamics, I asked Richard if he was ever beaten or abused. “No,” he replied. Based on what Richard had already told me about the dynamics within his family, I had a hunch otherwise. Only a few minutes later, he began detailing for me the discipline and punishment methods in his family. He had a clear memory of a punishment routine: One of the children had done something “wrong,” and his angry father would command the accused child to lie down still on the bed, with his or her pants down. His father would make the slow walk over to his closet, pick a belt off a certain peg, and walk back to the awaiting child – to Richard, time crawled at a snail’s pace as his father made this journey. The father then proceeded to “hit” the child. When I asked Richard his feelings about this memory, he replied straightforwardly that “it helped put me on the straight and narrow” and that it “taught me discipline.” He added, “of course, it could turn out the other way, like it did for my twin sister”; the sister is now an alcoholic, in and out of jail, and has lost custody of her two young children. He then remembered that the other kids – the ones who were not being beaten – would cry, “Daddy, please don’t hit him. Please stop!” The father would not listen, and he would go on inflicting his punishment. Isn’t it strange, Richard pondered, that his father could go ahead with this punishment with these other kids crying for him to stop. “I couldn’t do that, I’m too weak.”

The content of this frightfully typical story is not why I chose to share this clinical experience, it is the fact that Richard neglected to call such treatment beating or abuse.

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<sup>6</sup> I do not use any of my clients’ real names in this paper.

Moreover, he determined that it was good for him, teaching him “discipline,” and putting him on the “straight and narrow.” Although he said he hopes he will not treat his children in the same way, he believes in the same kind of discipline. Yet, in his mid-twenties, Richard cannot relax, thinks badly of “unproductive” people, constantly feels overwhelmed and stressed-out, demands order in his environment, has trouble living in the present, organizes his life around future plans, and is terrified of “losing it” and “letting myself go.” Interestingly, Richard is trained in martial arts, is drawn to all kinds of dangerous situations, and is committed to becoming a policeman, just like his father.

Like Richard, we depend on our familial and social bonds for our very survival. We adhere to the conditions of external socialization without ever acknowledging the price we paid for the preservation of such bonds. According to Richard, his father’s ritualistic beatings were “good for me.” He has no reason to believe otherwise. Richard has long since lost direct contact with his bodily and emotional feelings and thus cannot understand all the debilitating symptoms he has been struggling with for so long. In some ways, even though he does acknowledge his struggle, it has been like this for so long that, in his own words, “it’s just the way I will always be.” This cognitive script does not emerge from a void. No matter how well Richard or other children justify their parents’ and/or society’s cruel treatment of them, such self-organizing principles are based on traumatic experiences that fundamentally denied the needs of children. Therefore, it is not necessarily a single or specific trauma that creates long-term debilitating effects for an individual, it is the entire environment (familial, social, global) which maintains the traumatogenic forces that abuse and repress children (Levine, 1997). This environment sends the message that children must be something different than they are, something better, and through such punitive measures, forces them to adapt to whatever this better is; although of course this ‘better’ is always impossible to achieve, since it is a concept divorced from the reality of the child and our world (P. Collins, personal communication, 2002).

Depending on the degree of such powerlessness, children, and later as adults, express their suffering in various ways. Unfortunately, not enough childhood trauma survivors recognize their suffering as being caused by trauma and begin their process of healing. Many childhood survivors grow up to be docile, obedient victims, vulnerable to other perpetrators of violence. Other childhood survivors grow up to be perpetrators themselves, emulating their parents' behaviors, acting out their shame, anger and violent revenge upon other individuals - usually not those who originally afflicted violence upon them - unable to understand the origins of such hatred (Hall, 2002, p. 9). Inevitably, this unconscious, compulsive pattern causes individuals to manifest symptoms either as helpless victims or threatening perpetrators. All around us, we see the evidence of this in the physical, emotional, mental, and social distress of individuals and our civilization. However, due to our inability to see the actual etiology and consequences of such distress, many believe our suffering is caused by genetic inheritance or sin.

The nature of our traumatogenic civilization has serious, far-reaching consequences on our human development. Although we are certainly not programmed to be evil, they cycle of individual and social distress may over time alter human neurodevelopment, which will inevitably affect all of our lives. "Perhaps the most disturbing implication from the research on the brain's adaptation to chronic fear and anger is the growing evidence that it may be altering the course of human evolution. Not only can the changes in hormone levels be permanent in an individual's lifetime, the altered chemical profile may actually become encoded in the genes and passed on to new generations, which may become successively more aggressive" (Karr-Morse & Wiley, 1997, pp. 174). Based on this alarming trend, if we wish to combat such scourges as violence, abuse, trauma, ecological destruction and war, we must acknowledge the traumatogenic environment we call civilization. "Increased rates of child abuse and other forms of unpredictable and uncontrollable trauma in our culture mean that more

and more children are having this experience. Dr. [Bruce] Perry calls this process, along with its growing social implications, 'devolution'" (Karr-Morse & Wiley, 1997, pp. 174). Unable to touch one another, contracted, isolated, afraid, and anxious of human relationships, we are passing down to succeeding generations a legacy of disconnection, destruction, and inevitably, devolution of the human race.

## DEVOLUTION

The rebellion of the masses may, in fact, be the transition to some new, unexampled organization of humanity, but it may also be a catastrophe of human destiny. There is no reason to deny the reality of progress, but there is to correct the notion that believes this progress secure. It is more in accordance with facts to hold that there is no certain progress, no evolution, without the threat of 'involution', of retrogression. (Gasset, 1951, p. 56)

Current research is illuminating the devastating effects of trauma on the developing child, in its various forms of abuse, neglect, and oppression. "A rapidly accumulating body of scientific knowledge now supports the reality of a self-perpetuating cycle of violence that originates in the hurts – great and small – that we inflict on each other from childhood, through adolescence, and into adult life. We are beginning to understand, in fact, that virtually all of our human systems are organized around trauma and the prolonged, transgenerational, and often permanent, effects of traumatic experience" (Bloom & Reichert, 1998, p. 2).

The first clear observations of the harmful effects trauma has on children<sup>7</sup>, and subsequently on society, came in the form of the infamous primate studies by Harry Harlow. In order to determine the significance of the mother-infant attachment, Harlow spent some twenty years experimenting with rhesus monkey infants. These monkey babies were routinely deprived of their mothers and isolated, and even abused and tortured. What he found was startling, and haunting. When the monkey babies were traumatized either through torture or isolation, their whole beings went into contraction, and all sorts of behavioral, emotional, physical, and sexual disturbances were observed. As adults, the abused and/or neglected rhesus monkeys displayed an

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<sup>7</sup> Sigmund Freud posited in 1896 "the thesis that at the bottom of every case of hysteria there are one or more occurrences of premature sexual experience, occurrences which belong to the earliest years of childhood"; however, less than a year later, he repudiated this thesis due to its radical social implications, abandoning trauma as the source of psychological disorders (Herman, 1992, pp. 11-12; Masson, 1992).

intolerance towards intimacy of any kind, especially pleasurable body contact (DeMeo, 1998, p. 82).

These monkey infants grew to be brutally violent, sadistic, masochistic, anxious, depressed and/or alienated adult monkeys. When placed with other monkeys, these traumatized adults could not function normally in relation to the others, including their mates and babies. Tragically, the effects of such deprivation and abuse were viciously transmitted onto their children. These findings provide important information in understanding the etiology of later-stage adult symptoms, which many trauma theorists, including myself, contend are nothing more than post-traumatic stress symptoms; or failed efforts to adapt to a traumatogenic environment.

This is more blatantly demonstrated when considering Harlow's experiments with what he referred to as 'monster mothers.' Harlow's own account of these experiments is chilling (and makes me wonder about his own childhood and traumatic history).

The first of these monsters was a cloth monkey who, upon schedule or demand would eject high pressure compressed air. It would blow the animal's skin practically off its body. What did the baby do? It simply clung tighter and tighter to its mother at all costs...We built another monster mother that would rock so violently that the baby's head and teeth would rattle. All the baby did was cling tighter and tighter to the surrogate. The third monster we built had an embedded wire frame within its body, which would spring forward and eject the infant from its ventral surface. The infant would pick itself off the floor, wait for the frame to return into the cloth body, then cling again to the surrogate. Finally we built our porcupine mother. This mother would eject sharp spikes...Although the infants were distressed by these pointed rebuffs, they simply waited until the spikes receded and then returned and clung to the mother. (Harlow as quoted <http://www.vegans.org.uk/viv-harlow.html>)

Even though these monkey mothers were cold, hard, inanimate, and severely punishing, the infants immediately responded by renewing close contact with their surrogate mothers. Similarly, a study with rat pups showed that when raised in

environments where their surrogate maternal contact came with electrical shocks, the rats continued to shock themselves, knowing this was the consequence of maintaining contact with their 'mothers.' Even more horrifying was that when these rat pups, who had been isolated in cages, had their cage doors opened and were free to leave, they remained, continuing to shock themselves in contact with their 'mothers.' When the rats were coerced by the clinicians to leave their cages, many died. Others displayed signs of severe physiological distress (Sapolsky, 1994, pp. 217-222).

These experiments show how essential it is for the survival and well-being of infants to have dependable, safe, and close contact from their caretakers. Even for infants that learned how harmful the effects of close contact with their 'mothers' was, having this contact was obviously worth suffering such consequences. For in reality, there is no choice. Prematurely separating from the mother means death, or at least extreme suffering and madness, and so infants justifiably choose life, in whatever difficult and harmful form it comes. This reflects the significance of the parent-child bond in humans. It also speaks to how we become 'trained' to maintain contact, without ever recognizing its dysfunction and harm, even when it is extremely damaging and leads to developmental dysfunction. Seen from a larger context, we can understand that living amongst destructive family environments creates the same options as living amongst a destructive culture. "The violence of civilization provides us with two options. We can distance ourselves from the world of experience, sense, and emotion, or we can die" (Jensen, 2000, p. 122).

A friend of mine adopted a boy when he was 3½ years old. Up to this point, the boy had spent the first years of his life in an orphanage. There were caretakers and nurses on duty, but at any one time there were hundreds of children to only several attendants. Despite how they felt about the children in their charge, there were simply not enough adults to tend to all the children. Infants spent days in their cribs, untouched. They were routinely fed, washed, and clothed, but there was absolutely minimal human

contact, and most likely no physical affection. When my friend went to meet her son for the first time, he suffered so terribly from eczema that he had leathery, reptile-like scales covering his entire body. As my friend put it, he had literally developed armor to protect him from the cold, uncaring world around him. While in the orphanage, his caretakers took aversion to his skin condition and left him alone and untouched even more. Although a protective mechanism for survival, the young child's armor also served to isolate him from the loving affection he so desperately needed; the lack of which caused the development of such severe eczema in the first place. As the boy grew up, my friend realized that her son was lost within that armor; that there seemed to be no way out, even among a loving family. The eczema cleared up, but emotionally he would not trust or open to another human being. During those most influential early years, the damage was done. My friend struggled to raise him in the best way she possibly could, but eventually, after years of difficulty in school, at home, with peers, and in most social settings, he was diagnosed with Attachment Disorder. At this point, the mental health industry will treat such an individual, but unfortunately for the individual, the family, and our society, such treatment is minimally successful.

Individuals suffering with Attachment Disorder, Borderline Personality Disorder, and other Axis II personality disorders often show little progress. Moreover, like the boy's eczema and the caretakers' subsequent aversion, these suffering individuals are frequently difficult clients for therapists which often recreates a harsh relationship within the therapeutic encounter, further reinforcing the client's belief in themselves as worthless and bad. As adults, they must suffer the indignities and struggles of being sick and troubled individuals, many believing they are this way due to chemical imbalances or hereditary abnormalities.

We need parents or caretakers to survive. In a bizarre application of this understanding, marketing consultant Faith Popcorn suggested that the toy industry design a doll that reminds children of their mothers. "We have so many latchkey children in search of human connection. They'll be able to carry their mother around in

doll form!" ("Tomorrow's Child," 1998, p. 54). Children do not just need parents or surrogates physically present, they need living, human beings that care for them and that are an active part of their growth process. Children require healthy, supportive relationships with their caretakers, from their earliest experiences. Imprinting, recognized as essential in animals, is just as essential in humans. We can look at the earliest years of our childhood in a similar way that we look at the first seconds in the life of a baby goose. Immediately after birth, the baby goose becomes imprinted on the first nearby object it recognizes, which is usually the mother. This initiates a relationship that entails the gosling following the mother everywhere in order to learn what it is to be a goose. Our human beginning is just the same:

The provision for this [imprinting] in the continuum of events is an essential prerequisite to the smooth succession of stimuli and responses that follows as mother and baby begin their life together. If the imprinting is prevented from taking place, if the baby is taken away when the mother is keyed to caress it, to bring it to her breast, into her arms and into her heart, or if the mother is too drugged to experience the bonding fully, what happens? (Liedloff, 1985, p. 59)

Without an adequately formed and integrated representation of what it means, feels, and looks like to be a human being, we will spend the rest of our lives struggling with the human experience. Unlike the gosling, in the developing child this imprinting process covers years and necessitates a more dedicated effort from the parents and society (Liedloff, 1985, pp. 58-60). As the research findings have so patently demonstrated, this foundational relationship – with such life-affirming qualities as parental bonding, touch, affection, empathy, trust – is essential for our health and well-being and has a long-term impact on our development (Bloom & Reichert, 1998; Briere, 1992; Karr-Morse & Wiley, 1997; Liedloff, 1985; Sapolsky, 1994). As illustrated by my friend's son, emotional malnourishment affects the entire organism, in often terrifying and harmful ways. "Separate a baby rat from its mother and its growth hormone levels plummet; growth stops. Allow it contact with its mother while she is anesthetized, and growth hormone is still low. Mimic active licking by the mother by stroking the rat pup in the proper pattern, and growth normalizes....The same seems to apply to humans"

(Sapolsky, 1994, pp. 95). When developing amidst environments of abuse, neglect and/or isolation, human children are chronically stressed, chronically unfulfilled, and prone to the same mental, physical, and sexual disturbances observed in the maternally-deprived monkey children. Neuropsychologist James Prescott (1975) proposes that there is a direct correlation between the deprivation of pleasure (particularly during early childhood) and the level of violence and warfare.

In a well-known story which grabbed media attention several years back, two premature infant twins, Brielle and Kyrie Jackson, each weighing two pounds at birth, were struggling for their lives in incubators in a Massachusetts hospital. Brielle's status was rapidly decreasing – she was unrelentingly crying, having difficulty breathing, and her skin color was alarmingly blue. A nurse, at her wits end, picked up Kyrie, whose health had stabilized, and put her into the incubator next to her twin sister Brielle. Kyrie snuggled up against her sister and put her tiny arm over her ailing sister's shoulder. Rapidly, Brielle's health stabilized – she stopped crying, her blood-oxygen saturation level increased, and her skin color returned to its normal pinkish hue. “We readily think of stressors as consisting of various unpleasant things that can be done to an organism. Sometimes a stressor can be the *failure* to provide something for an organism, and the absence of touch is seemingly one of the most marked of developmental stressors that we can suffer” (Sapolsky, 1994, p. 97). It is amazing how responsive and resilient individuals become when other human beings, or even animals, simply make physical contact.

The touching resilience of the Jackson sisters ushered in similar stories of families, especially parents, initiating close physical contact with their ailing infants and to their surprise, observing amazing recoveries. Susan Ludington, professor of maternal and child health nursing at the University of Maryland at Baltimore, claims that “everybody in the world knows you can take a crying baby and pick him up and he'll stop crying. You put him down he starts crying again. Babies, and they give us the message quite clearly, prefer to be held.

Now we're just finding out that when they are held, there are all these tremendous physiological benefits" (as quoted in <http://www.snopes.com/glurge/hug.htm>). Indeed, our children *do* give us their message quite clearly, but even with the enormous scientific evidence we have collected in order to understand the function of their screams and tears, many of us still *do not* respond appropriately.

In Derrick Jensen's book, *A Language Older Than Words*, he documents case after case of horrific things humans have done to other human beings, animals and the environment, in the name of knowledge, mastery, and domination. At one point, Jensen asks, "What does a person do with this kind of information? How do you grapple with the knowledge that, in the pursuit of data – and ultimately in an attempt to make ourselves 'lords and possessors of nature' – members of our culture will give electric shocks to kittens and will mercilessly torture dogs? It seems impossible to form an adequate response" (2000, p. 23). This is crucial in understanding our individual and social distress: we *cannot* form an "adequate response" because from our earliest experiences, we were coerced, threatened, and ultimately trained not to respond based on our primary feelings. As Julian Beck once said, "If we could really feel, the pain would be so great that we would stop all the suffering" (as cited in Bloom & Reichert, 1998, p. 31).

Through such 'learned helplessness,' we have lost our ability to use our sensory intelligence as a way of discerning and guiding our emotions, thoughts, and behaviors. We have lost our ability to respond to life suffering. Renowned traumatologist Bessel van der Kolk, observed, "The lack or loss of self-regulation is possibly the most far-reaching effect of psychological trauma in both children and adults" (1996, p. 187). One of the most significant outcomes of a loss of self-regulatory drives, and subsequent reliance on secondary drives, is that such individuals will establish a society organized against a human's natural instincts to grow and develop. This organization will set in place structures fundamentally operating in opposition to an individual's best interests,

thereby perpetuating patterns denying children access to their primary impulses. This is the downward spiral of violence and oppression: *the cycle of devolution* [See Figure 1].

## **“CIVILIZATION HAS NOT YET BEGUN”**

No society can possibly be built on a denial of individual freedom. It is contrary to the very nature of man. (Mahatma Gandhi)

From the earliest moments of our birth, even though we may live within a family surrounded by empathy and compassion, we experience a world that is fragmented and trauma-inducing. Living amidst such disconnection and violence, it is indeed tempting for us to write this off as ‘human nature’: Humans are born evil, or genetically predisposed to violence, and therefore we must live with the consequences; our best recourse is to develop pedagogical and rehabilitative methods which guarantee ‘law and order.’ This is what we have done. But by using religious, philosophical, ideological, and now psychological justifications to explain why humans are ill, deviant and/or destructive, we have separated ourselves from grasping the underlying dysfunction of our social structure. For example, by referring to an individual as ‘acting out’ or ‘socially disruptive,’ or diagnosing them with Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD), Oppositional Defiant Disorder, or Adjustment Disorder, we miss identifying the source of their problem – why is it that an individual might be acting-out in such a disruptive manner?

Within the American mental health field, it is common that individuals are diagnosed as suffering from a mental disorder due to a chemical imbalance or genetic irregularity. These individuals are then commonly treated with psychotropic medications. Moreover, changes in health care coverage limiting therapy to short-term treatment, along with the cognitive-behavioral thrust of the mental health field, have made it considerably more difficult for psychotherapy to go beneath the layer of symptoms, and search for the root causes of an individual’s dis-ease. Our culture is not organized in such a way that encourages and supports the challenging journey of personal healing. It is organized around traumatogenic forces which compel us to take the quick fix, bandage our wounds, and get on with our lives. These traumatogenic forces are obvious in the profiteering managed health care industry, the lack of adequate

preventative education and training programs, the lack of governmental funding for mental health services, the abysmal state of rehabilitation services, and most importantly in the general attitude which support these forces. This attitude can be observed in society's stigmatization of trauma victims. Trauma victims are threatening by the fact that many of them are survivors of abuse – abused by other individuals, many of whom hold more influential roles in the social hierarchy. The testimony of survivors opens wounds and creates moral dilemmas within society. This intolerance of victims,

rather than of the circumstances that lead to those traumas, is a function of a willingness to accept the seemingly inevitable conditions that lead to traumatization: crime, wars, poverty, and family violence. Ironically, the victims who refuse to acquiesce in what happened to them are the ones who seem to provoke the most intense opprobrium from their environment. They are the ones who seem to provoke the greatest need to control them, on the assumption that otherwise their insatiable demands will get out of hand. (van der Kolk, et al., 1996, p. 573)

The implication is that any acknowledgment of past trauma will shake the very foundations of a society organized around fundamental inequities and crimes. In fact, it does. We need look no further than the recent allegations of sexual abuse within the Catholic Church to see how challenging the trauma issue can be to our institutional structures.

Overlooking the source of individual illness or deviance leads us, through our various social institutions, to punish such individuals through incarceration, or rehabilitate them through hospitalization and/or medications; depending on what age, class, race, gender, sexual orientation, or social position they occupy. Although this form of social control has become necessary in a society overflowing with violence, often such treatments serve to perpetuate an individual's initial failure to self-regulate – leading to more powerlessness within society and increasing isolation from one's inner self – and does "little to resolve the compulsive quality of perpetration. Our efforts to gain a foothold on the problem of the spiral of violence and community deterioration must

begin with a more sophisticated appreciation for what makes some people hurt other people. Understanding that, we can take the next steps as a society to eliminating the conditions that produce these problems” (Bloom & Reichert, 1998, p. 14).<sup>8</sup>

Our institutional structures – including psychiatry, law enforcement, and politics – when pressed to identify the source of illness, ‘socially disruptive’ behaviors and social distress, tend to blame the individual’s inability to regulate herself, as if it were her conscious choice to become oriented towards illness or crime. This misconception works well as a justification for institutional structures which are used to maintain ‘law and order’ for the ruling minority, whose social, political, and economic privileges depend on a subjugated majority. Individuals come to accept the life-denying, authoritarian tenets of civilization because as human beings reared amidst traumatogenic forces, their basic feelings were rarely acknowledged; maybe even rarely felt! When they do surface, as in the case of my client Richard, they would be labeled “weak” or inappropriate.

Might does indeed make right when we are disconnected from our basic human instincts and therefore dysfunctionally structure our reality. This reality often finds individuals hopelessly obedient to a family, religious, state, and/or job structure that require obedience and subservience to an outside authority; with little or no awareness of the trap they are in. What message does it send that my own country, the United States, purports itself to be the champion of democracy and freedom throughout the world, while at the same time engaging in war – at home and abroad? No matter how grave the threats may be, the U.S. government’s unbalanced priorities speak to a system that is destabilizing the delicate relationships required for mutual growth and development. In 2001, *before* the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, or the ‘War on Terror,’ the U.S. government spent more on its military (\$396 billion) than the next 25 nations combined – no doubt that figure has significantly increased since then.

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<sup>8</sup> See Appendix C

Meanwhile, during the same year, the American government invested more money in its defense industry than in education (\$52 billion), health care (\$49 billion), housing assistance (\$29 billion), transportation (\$22 billion), social services (\$20 billion), and social security (\$8 billion) combined (Center for Defense Information, February 2002).

Traditionally, the reality of tribal societies, and the leaders who represented them, promoted the basic, self-preserving impulses of the individuals comprising their society (McLuhan, 1971). An example of this comes from Sa-go-ye-wat-ha, or Red Jacket, a Seneca Chief, who in 1805 encountered a missionary intending to bring the Seneca people into Christianity. In Red Jacket's reply, he makes it clear that although he and his people have welcomed and respected the visitor, they have no reason to change their way of life. They, too, he says, have a religion that has been handed down from their ancestors, which they follow in their lives. They only wish to enjoy their own way of life, and leave the Christians to their own. Red Jacket also expresses the distrust his people felt of the missionary's intentions, due to their troubled few hundred-year history with American settlers. Still, Red Jacket offers, "Brother, we have been told that you have been preaching to the white people in this place. These people are our neighbors: We are acquainted with them. We will wait a little while and see what effect your preaching has upon them. If we find it does them good, makes them honest and less disposed to cheat Indians, we will consider again of what you have said" (cited in McLuhan, 1971, p. 61). Most often, tribal communities that encountered civilized peoples were rapidly destroyed. Red Jacket's skepticism, therefore, was a rational response in the face of suspected danger.

Christian missions have often been the cover for a more deliberate conquest of a people's land, resources, and sovereignty. It is very possible that this missionary was sent by his authorities, who like many other leaders of civilized society, impose their secondary drives for power, greed, lust, bigotry, entitlement, and hegemony onto other people. Currently, we see less outright coercion from the religious authorities, and

more constant pressure from the western 'military-industrial complex' holding unprecedented power throughout the world. Their authoritative rule, debatably as violent and sadistic as past totalitarian regimes, is on course towards complete implosion. Yet, we are kept occupied by our conformity and the ideologies justifying oppression and worldwide domination. We are locked in a cycle of dangerous codependency with our civilized tenets, expounded by our 'elected' leaders. As A.S. Neill despairingly noted, "I tremble to think that our fate depends on men who must have been made anti-life in their cradles...Will no great statesman arise and shout: War is universal suicide; no one can win; all must lose" (Placzek, 1981, p. 390).

Yet, challenging the status quo often constitutes disloyalty to our familial and social structure, which often means punishment, stigmatization, and/or emotional exile, all extremely high prices to pay for authentically responding. A self-regulated human being could not tolerate being in a position of subjugation; nor could she support any system that would subjugate other human beings. Only an individual denied access to her primary impulses for feeling life, using life-denying justifications to avoid and/or resist life, would put herself under the authority of destructive social structures and leaders. However, within our modern civilization, individuals are pressured to sacrifice their inner longings (impulses) towards creativity and authenticity, and instead fall in line with the ruling agenda - even if it goes directly against their most basic feelings. The danger of this sacrifice is that it creates fertile soil for a brutally fascist, or totalitarian state to emerge. "After social conditions and changes have transmuted man's original biologic demands and made them a part of his character structure, the latter reproduces the social structure of society in the form of ideologies" (Reich, 1970, p. xii).

## AND BACK TO THE CRADLE

All [the child] found was barbed wire and walls on all sides, and he believed this to be the world. When he grew up he build gigantic worlds full of walls and barbed wires, or complicated philosophical and psychological systems, in the hope and expectation of receiving love in return, the love he never received from his parents...The so-called bad child becomes a bad adult and eventually creates a bad world. The loved child will create a different world, for it is our biological mandate to protect human life, not destroy it. It is not true that evil, destructiveness, and perversion inevitably form part of human existence, no matter how often this is maintained. But it is true that we are daily producing more evil and, with it, an ocean of suffering for millions that is absolutely avoidable. When one day the ignorance arising from childhood repression is eliminated and humanity has awakened, an end can be put to this production of evil. (Miller, 1990b, pp. 142-143)

According to the National Victim Center, five out of six people in the U.S. will be victims of violence at least once in their lifetime (Bloom & Reichert, 1998, p. 1). In 1992, the U.S. Justice Department reported that 1.3 million individuals were in prison – a 150 percent increase from 1980 and the largest population of inmates among all western nations (Bloom & Reichert, 1998, p. 14). American society now spends more money on its prisons than on schools (Hawken, 2002). Every minute, six children in the U.S. are reported abused or neglected (Hall, 2002, p. 9). The statistics of social and familial violence indicate a frightening direction American society is taking.

The direct result of such violence is the development of various post-traumatic stress reactions, including chronic fear, shame, dissociation, somatization, and a narrowed life experience. These reactions shape and form secondary drives and as such form the basis for the child's developing character structure. "When we accept the perspective that social conditions can either directly traumatize people or make it more likely that they will be traumatized, the organization of our society becomes a critical focus. In the folk saying, 'What goes around comes around,' we understand in a new way the relatedness of social justice, psychological trauma, and cultural habitability. In a very compelling way, being 'against' violence means that we must be 'for' the humane

treatment of all other human beings" (Bloom & Reichert, 1998, p. 18). But to be *for* the humane treatment of other human beings, we must first connect to our own treatment – as we were treated as children in our families and as we are now treated as adults in our society – and by so doing, find a way to respond to these conditions.

More and more, people are asking such questions as: "What happened to my child?" "What's wrong with our society?" "What's wrong with me?" More and more, people are desperately seeking answers. Formulating these questions, an individual admits that all is not OK, despite the superficial appearances within their society and even themselves maintaining an image otherwise. There is very little room within the rigidified social or familial structures of our present day to live as a self-regulating, feeling human being. The life-denying environment we call civilization, organized as it is around traumatogenic forces, perpetuates the gestation of violence with every new infant born. In order to ensure the familial and social status quo, these children will grow, like their parents, to deny the basic impulses of their children.

The sad paradox is that only when children "are encouraged to attend to their instinctual responses are [they] rewarded with a lifelong legacy of health and vigor" (Levine, 1997, p. 255). In fact, recent evidence demonstrates that a life-affirming, nurturing environment for infants stimulates the development of a healthy prefrontal cortex in adulthood, as well as the hormonal production required to regulate environmental interactions and emotional processing (Pearce, 2002, p. 147). Joseph Chilton Pearce (2002) writes, "We must show the folly in the assumption that 'socialization' at this early stage of development is necessary at all, much less beneficial. Make nurturing, care, love, and a buoyant, happy child the entire criteria of social success in parenting....[for] failure of nurturing has led to the rising inability of our young people to modify primitive impulses and behaviors" (Pearce, 2002, p. 147). Socialized according the norms of civilization, our children are rewarded with a lifelong legacy of distress and struggle. Although most people are certainly doing the best they

can under the circumstances, until we are able to safeguard the natural impulses of our children, and thereby guarantee safety, security and overall care for all individuals, we are facilitating devolution.<sup>9</sup>

Such innate human drives as feeling, trust, openness, compassion and creativity, when lacking, create empty and painful lives. However, children must deny these vital impulses in order to get the minimal nourishment they require to survive. Human contact, affection, empathy and love are essential for a healthy, functional developmental process. Of course, even provided the necessary ingredients for a healthy development, children will be hurt. It is the nature of life. This hurt can fester deep within us as a foundational wound – negatively affecting our developmental process – or it can be resolved and integrated in relationship to life experience. As parents and members of a society, it is our “primary function...to create a safe environment for the child to complete his/her natural responses to being hurt” (Levine, 1997, p. 252). Without this safety and support – without feelings of love – our children are in grave danger.

This is no small matter. Our children are our future. As parents and adults, suffering as we are from the trauma of our own upbringing, we face a crisis in our evolutionary development. In the words of A. S. Neill: “To be a free soul, happy in work, happy in friendship, and happy in love or to be a miserable bundle of conflicts, hating one’s self and hating humanity – one or the other is the legacy that parents and teachers give to every child” (1962, p. 297). One or the other is the legacy we will leave for our children. One or the other is the legacy that our children will then leave for their children. One or the other – to be free and happy, or to be miserable and hating – will determine if we will survive as a human race, or destroy each other. Faced with this, we have little choice but to respond.

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<sup>9</sup> See Appendix B

Buddhist philosophy revolves around principles that maintain that human beings *can* transcend their suffering by acknowledging the causes of suffering, and responding in ways oriented around 'right living.' In fact, Buddha means 'the awakened one.' Much of trauma theory revolves around the same notion: in our waking up to our denied, repressed, fragmented, dissociated and wounded selves, we can begin the journey of healing and integration. This is the journey from trauma victim oriented around fear, abuse, helplessness and/or neglect, to trauma survivor oriented around empowerment, hope, courage, and recovery. Without undergoing this process of waking up, we will never acknowledge the pain and fear we live with. We will never acknowledge how much this pain and fear impacts our daily lives. In not acknowledging our pain and fear, we are narrowing our life experience and isolating ourselves even further from the reality of life all around us.

The terrifying reality that our civilization is still so persistently denying is that we are on the brink of self-destruction. We are all victims and all perpetrators. Any attempt to right the wrongs of our civilized world necessarily begins within ourselves, where we are burdened with unresolved trauma and acts of violence. We cannot expect to radically shift civilization in a more sustainable, life-affirming direction without doing the same within ourselves. Within us all, there is a well-spring of love, compassion, and creativity that grows in this direction towards life. Yet we compulsively harm life. This paradox defines our present reality. We have yet to understand the full effects of the way we treat our children, the way we live our lives, and the way we leave this world for future generations. Until we are able to understand what we are doing to each other and ourselves, we are destined to perpetuate this cycle of violence, trauma, and oppression. We must find a way to get out of this trap.

The study of trauma challenges this transgenerational cycle of abuse and violence. It considers the way our personal lives and greater society are organized and structured.

It goes to the root of the suffering and does not accept, like most social institutions and ruling ideologies, that the status quo is to remain essentially unchallenged. It challenges the very foundation of our society which is based on basic inequities that allow for perpetrators and victims to continue the destructive dance of trauma and oppression. Without insight into the context and source of the suffering, we are left covering the leaky cracks of a bulging dam with Band-Aids. Those Band-Aids will help to provide temporary relief and comfort in containing the bursting dam, but it cannot be contained forever. Eventually, with the incredible force of the river behind it, it will explode.

**SECTION II**

**Healing Crisis:  
Trauma & its Transformative Potential**

## BODY & SOUL

So now I was forced to confront the possibility that my body was revealing through its form and flows my story, my history, my life. Apparently each curve and muscle told of a certain chapter and a certain constellation of relationships, the accumulation of which had become my self-image, had become 'me.' (Dychtwald, 1986, p. 8)

The development of psychology as a field has largely focused on human cognition. The study of the ways we perceive, think, and organize our abilities has allowed psychologists to construct a model of the human being, in the hopes that this model can facilitate enhanced treatment for 'mental health' conditions. Sigmund Freud, the father of psychotherapy, was responsible for a significant part of this development. Based on his clinical observations, Freud wrote numerous volumes on various aspects of the human process, and established the psychoanalytic approach for treating psychopathology. Freud did not, however, begin his career laying patients on a couch, analyzing their thought processes, interpreting their dreams, and exploring the inner reaches of their consciousnesses. He began as a physician, a neurologist, attempting to understand the body-mind basis for illness and disease. Freud had his limitations, but in the years of his prolific work, he outlined a revolutionary perspective for understanding humanity.

It was young Wilhelm Reich, one of Freud's promising students, who picked up one of Freud's areas of limitation and expanded it into a new way of viewing and treating patients. Unsatisfied with Freud's psychic libido theory, Reich set out to locate and measure the actual, biological libido within individuals. The discovery of the 'orgone' – a specific biological energy that "governs the entire organism...[as] expressed in the emotions as well as in the purely biophysical movements of the organs" (Reich, 1973b, p. 137) – served to quantify the 'psychic' energy that Freud had organized his psychoanalytic theory around. Wilhelm Reich (1971, 1973b) had proven and measured the energy of life, and identified that this bioenergetic quality ('orgone energy') is found

in all living things. Reich's unheralded finding was a major step for connecting psyche ('soul') and soma ('body').

Reich demonstrated that at our most elementary levels exists a process of unitary functioning – *we are energy* (Reich, 1973b). The disparate aspects of our being are in reality one wholly-functioning, bioenergetic organism. From the moment of conception, life energy moves and unfolds (in a way we still have yet to fully comprehend), developing a complex bodily system with a multitude of physiological structures, including a sophisticated mental apparatus. These systems manifest determined by function, in relationship with the movement of life (internally and externally), and are therefore part of an interconnected, interdependent greater whole. Therefore, these seemingly separate systems cannot be easily dissected. Humans are not merely rooted in nature, *we are nature*. As living organisms, we do not simply follow natural laws, *we live them*. This holistic perspective undermines the dichotomy within psychology of 'nature vs. nurture.' In fact, Reich soon found that viewing the life process as a movement of bioenergy challenges the most basic tenets of our modern civilization.

Working biopsychosocially, Reich explored the state of full functioning in the human organism (health), and wondered how disease set in. Reich, who always maintained that sexuality played the central role in regulation of the human energy system (through what he called the 'orgasm reflex'), examined 'the function of the orgasm' for clues to biological, psychological, and even social health (Reich, 1971). Basically, he found that due to life-denying familial and social forces, sexual discharge becomes disturbed, and thus energy gets trapped in our musculature. This stuck energy leads to the development of muscular armoring, which perpetuates habitual holding and constriction in certain areas of our body. This armor works on the biological level to suppress natural impulses, and also to defend against unwanted environmental stimuli. Although originally this armor served as a mechanism for survival against threatening

external conditions, over time, the biological organism rigidifies due to distorted and incomplete expression of life energy. In other words, one's life force becomes severely incapacitated. Reich, who recognized the union between our biological and psychological functioning, accordingly found that in all cases where psychological dysfunction was presented, biological functioning was disturbed. Therefore, the physiological phenomenon of 'muscular armor' simultaneously manifested in the psycho-emotional phenomenon of 'character armor' (better known as 'character structure').

This is where Reich broke from Freud and moved away from psychoanalysis, with its emphasis on intrapsychic conflicts and desires, and established character analysis (which later evolved into vegeto-therapy and orgone therapy)<sup>10</sup>, with its emphasis on the biological and characterological dysfunction of individuals. Those who followed Reich's analytic model found that identifying and understanding individual character structures plays an important role in the treatment of individuals [see 'Character Modes of Survival']. Simply put, Reich and his clinical successors saw the therapeutic technique as a process of identifying one's unique character armor, and from there, attacking and thereby melting the armor so that one's natural, biological impulses were free to move and express themselves in response to the environment. This would not only relieve physiological complaints, but mental and emotional disturbances as well (Reich, 1971). Reich sought to bring patients out of this contracted, shut-down state and back into the fully functioning state of 'self-regulation.'

Reich, early in his career as a psychoanalyst, became interested in society's influence on psychosomatic functioning. Whereas Freud had disavowed his early forays into environmental impacts upon psychological well-being (specifically, within the family, as observed in physical and sexual violations), Reich, now realizing the unity of body

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<sup>10</sup> Reich's therapeutic advances established the field we now refer to as 'body-mind,' 'body-centered,' or 'somatic' psychotherapy.

and mind, began to observe the social influence on basic human impulses. Fritz Perls, founder of Gestalt Therapy and a student of Reich, wrote, “there is no function of the organism that is not essentially an interacting in the organism/environment field” (1951, p. 400). Although neither Freud nor Reich (nor Perls, for that matter) specifically focused upon the nature of trauma, they both laid down the groundwork for a comprehensive understanding of the connection between the social and the personal, the body and the mind, and health and disease.

The foundation laid by Freud and Reich became extremely useful when traumatic stress and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) were brought under closer scrutiny in the mid-1970s, when Vietnam War veterans and the women’s movement forced western psychology to seriously consider the nature of trauma and PTSD. It was not until the late-1970s, however, that mainstream psychological assessment and treatment regimens began to integrate and apply the new understanding of post-traumatic states (Herman, 1992; Sykes Wylie, 2004). The importance of the shift in focus in understanding the human process – away from intrapsychic states and toward the individual/environment interaction – cannot be understated. As Reich wrote, we are interested in “the *living* organism itself. As we gradually learn to comprehend and influence the living organism, the purely psychological and physiological functions are automatically included in our work” (1973, p. 139). Reich, in many ways, verified our intuitive sense of the holistic nature of humans and life, and as such, left a therapeutic legacy of working with humanity’s basic life functioning. He found that at the root of human suffering, there is no distinction between biological and psychological dysfunction – they are functionally identical.

Psychotherapeutically, Reich set down a framework of identifying and working with the dysfunction of basic impulses of human life. His far-reaching discoveries went beyond psychotherapy and he eventually left the study of psychology and ventured further into his scientific exploration of the cosmic nature of orgone. By the time Reich

left the practice of psychotherapy, he had influenced hundreds of health practitioners who followed his therapeutic advances – including Ellsworth Baker, who continued to practice and teach Reich’s Medical Orgonomy; Fritz Perls, who founded Gestalt Therapy; Alexander Lowen, who founded Bioenergetics; David Boadella, who founded Biosynthesis; Ida Rolf, who developed Structural Integration (Rolfing); Ron Kurtz, who founded Hakomi; and many others. All of these theorists and therapists developed different techniques and expanded on Reich’s initial contributions, but all maintained allegiance to the bioenergetic model Reich documented and taught.

More recently, Peter Levine’s model for trauma healing, ‘Somatic Experiencing,’ has relied on this bioenergetic perspective. Through my clinical training and personal experience in Somatic Experiencing, I have come to believe that this body-centered approach best reflects the therapeutic direction Reich himself would have taken had he continued to develop his psychotherapeutic practice. Unfortunately, Somatic Experiencing is not yet widely recognized nor extensively researched<sup>11</sup>, but has begun to influence many traumatologists, psychotherapists, body workers, educators, and interested health consumers.

Of course, Somatic Psychology (or ‘Somatics’) encompasses many other schools and theorists than the ones mentioned above – including those involved with dance, movement, hands-on bodywork, breathing methods, and eastern disciplines. However, I choose to focus this study on a specific bioenergetic lineage (via Freud->Reich->Perls->Kepner->Levine) to provide a comprehensive and integrative illustration of the biopsychosocial unity of human life. In so doing, I argue that understanding the self-regulatory movement of the human organism can help us appreciate both the creative and destructive power of trauma.

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<sup>11</sup> According to several Somatic Experiencing teachers and practitioners, the lack of extensive research is not due to lack of desire, but due to the focus of financial endowments toward medical developments (i.e., new psychotropic medicines) and away from therapeutic advances

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(i.e., verification of specific treatment models) (Heller, 2003; L. Westenberger, Personal Communication, 2003).

## CYCLE OF EXPERIENCE

No organism is self-sufficient. It requires the world for the gratification of its needs. To consider an organism by itself amounts to looking upon it as an artificially isolated unit, whereas there is always an inter-dependency of the organism and the environment. The organism is a part of the world, but it can also experience the world as something apart from itself – as something as real as itself. (Perls, 1969, p. 38)

The impact of trauma depends on how an organism interacts with its environment, and how its environment effects the organism's development. No matter how much we attempt to control our environments (including our bodies), we remain forever dependent on them for survival. The quality of contact we make with life experience determines the quality of our lives. Trauma can and does disrupt our ability to make contact with life and can therefore severely undermine the quality of our lives. Levine defines stress "as a process whereby a stimulus elicits activation of the autonomic nervous system (ANS) to such a degree that return to the homeostatic balance can be interfered with....Dis-ease [is] a lessening in [the] capacity [to return to homeostasis]; and disease [is] the abrupt discontinuous changes in behavior and energy metabolism which characterize pathologic stress diseases" (Levine, 1996a). Health, on the other hand, is synonymous with "full autonomic range," implying a self-regulatory capacity that offers individuals the flexibility necessary to negotiate through the full spectrum of life experience and return to homeostatic balance.

James Kepner (1993) calls the organismic process of interaction with the environment "the cycle of experience" [see Figure 5]. The cycle that Kepner postulates in his book, *Body Process*, is derived from the work of Fritz Perls, founder of Gestalt Therapy. Perls (1951, 1969) expanded Reich's conceptualization of the bioenergetic nature of the human organism and of life itself. This conception begins with the most primitive movement of a single-cell organism as it expands outward towards its environment, contracts away from its environment, and expands and contacts again in a rhythmic process of biological completion. Under optimal conditions, the organism would

gradually develop and eventually reproduce, as observed in progressive cell division. “More than that, there would be no end to development. Work would take place within the framework of general biological activity, and not against it” (Reich, 1971, p. 247). Therefore, in order to understand the way in which traumatic experience inhibits the development of individuals and societies, and in order to learn to transform these traumas into an integrated part of our inherent growth processes, we must take a closer look at the cycle of experience in human life.

Reich dedicated his early years as a psychoanalyst to discovering the biological basis of psychological function and dysfunction. He found that human beings function in accordance with a four-beat rhythm of moving energy in and out, similar to a human heartbeat, and other basic bodily processes such as the respiratory and digestive systems. Moreover, like single-cell organisms, this rhythmic pulsation is the basis for an alternating expansion and contraction of the human organism (Reich, 1971). Reich found that unobstructed pulsation is experienced in humans as pleasure, while impaired pulsation is felt as anxiety (Buhl, 2001). Reich called this pulsation process ‘the orgasm formula,’ as he observed that in humans the process revolves around the orgasm.<sup>12</sup> Reich believed that the ‘orgasm formula’ is essential to living in all beings, as it “applies to every system, every organ, tissue, and to every single cell” (Perls, 1969, p. 45). He thus referred to it as “the life formula itself” (Reich, 1976, p. 235). Reich (1971) presented the orgasm formula in the following four-step model<sup>13</sup>:

Mechanical Tension → Bioenergetic Charge → Bioenergetic Discharge → Mechanical Relaxation

(Expansion)	(Contraction)
(Sympathetic)	(Parasympathetic)

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<sup>12</sup> Reich viewed the orgasm as more than simply sexual climax or ejaculation but rather as “an involuntary response of the total body, manifested in rhythmic, convulsive movements (Lowen, 1975, p. 22).

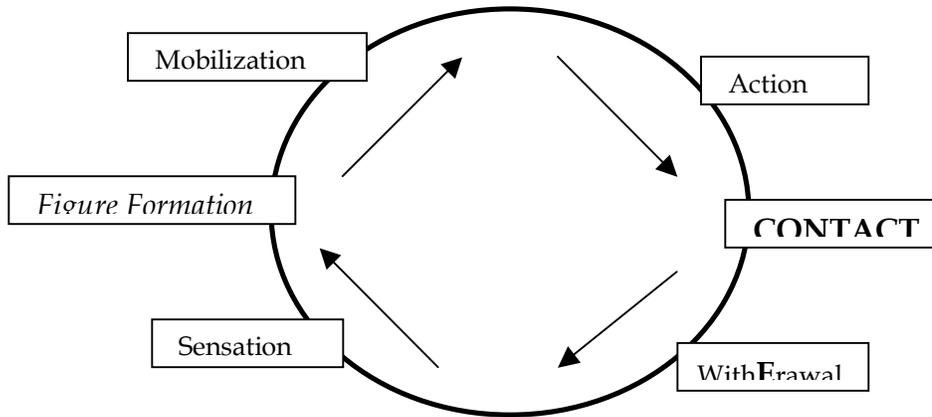
<sup>13</sup> Some theorists have disputed the order of the orgasm formula. Charles Kelly, founder of the Radix Institute, taught his students that excess energy builds up daily which becomes bound as tension. Accordingly, he ordered the orgasm formula: charge → tension → discharge → relaxation (Boadella, 1977, p. 252).

Reich found that from our inner core humans produce an energy that moves centrifugally to the periphery of our bodies, and that propels us to reach out to the world in order to meet our basic needs (Reich, 1971). This is followed by a movement back inward once our needs are met.

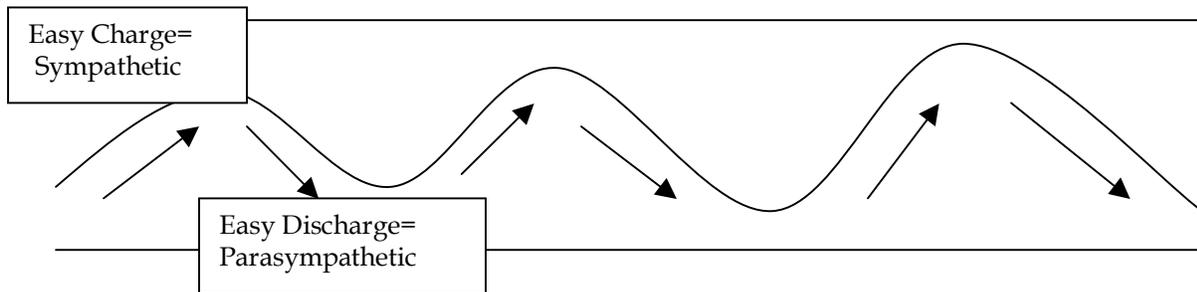
Reich's definition of health is based on a creature's ability for rhythmical oscillation between those modes, its contact with the environment and the focusing on the inner state of being. Reich calls this basic function 'Pulsation of the Living.' Thus, he does not define health as the absence of symptoms, disease or impairments, but rather as a function of the correlation between inner and outer world, an organism's ever-changing, pulsing confrontation with itself and its surrounding world..."If this biological state is disturbed in one or the other direction, that is, if either the function of expansion or that of contraction predominates, than a disturbance of the biological equilibrium in general is inevitable." (Buhl, 2001)

If there is a surplus of energy within the organism, it has an inherent self-regulatory response which discharges the excess energy through its various physical and emotional functions. This operates in order to maintain organismic balance and health. Reich detailed how the orgasm function serves as a self-regulatory response, but other such responses also occur through feces and urine elimination, emotional expression, human connection and even thought and language (Perls, 1969). The basic self-regulatory response also occurs with energy deficiencies; if the organism does not have enough energy, it must mobilize to receive it from the environment. An example is the sensation of hunger, which is registered as a deficit in the balance of the organism and which prompts the organism to mobilize in order to satisfy the need by obtaining food from the environment. "In the working of the organism, some happening tends to disturb its balance at every moment, and simultaneously a counter-tendency [such as a need or desire] arises to regain it" (Perls, 1969, p. 34). In this way, the organism continually self-regulates in order to maintain homeostasis.

**Figure 5: Cycle of Experience**  
(Kepner, 1997)



**Figure 6: Resilient Nervous System ('Range of Resiliency')**  
(Heller & Levine, 1997a)

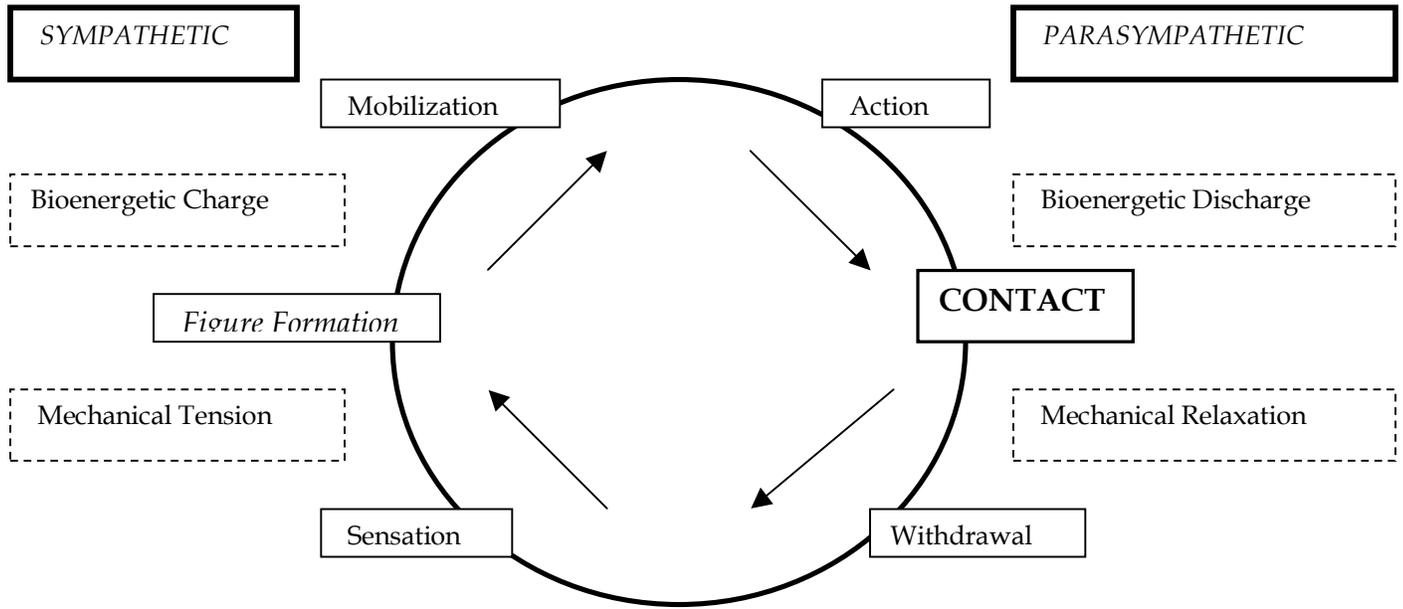


In terms of the cycle of experience, homeostasis occurs when a contact cycle is completed. This means that the organism has successfully allowed its “somatic and autonomic responses to emerge and fulfill their original function” (Heller & Levine, 1997a, p. 53). Levine refers to the successful negotiation of the cycle of experience as ‘biological completion’ (Heller & Levine, 1997a). The cycle of experience can be useful “as a generic map of any contact episode, that is, any sequence of perception and behavior geared towards the completion of an organism/environment interaction” (Kepner, 1993, pp. 90). Once completion occurs, the organism returns to a preparatory state: here, the organism is free to initiate the next cycle of identifying its emergent

need, acting to fulfill it, contacting the object, and satisfying the need. Then, once again, the organism returns to the preparatory orienting response, positioned to begin again.

Here we can see that Kepner's model of the cycle of experience and Reich's orgasm formula are truly one in the same. Kepner adds the behavioral and perceptive components to Reich's basic biological formula. In addition, I include Levine's (1997c) model of the five basic components that form the gestalt of human experience: Sensation, Imaging, Behavior, Affect, and Meaning (SIBAM). Levine, like Reich and Kepner, uses his model of SIBAM to detail the components of the organism/environment interaction and to locate which elements of the contact cycle become dissociated by trauma (Heller & Levine, 1997a; Rothschild, 2000). These five elements are encoded in each human experience and are essential elements of an integrated cycle of experience. The contacting process integrates "a cooperation of the sensory, muscular, and vegetative systems...to simplify the organization of the organism/environment field, to complete its unfinished situations" (Perls, et al., 1951, pp. 258-260). By merging these three closely related models, we acquire a useful map for understanding the "wholeness of fluid, continuous, coherent, responsive experience" (Heller & Levine, 1997c, p. 18). As Kepner reminds us, "Roughly the same process occurs in any experience cycle, whether one is concerned with contacting food, contacting disowned aspects of oneself, contacting other people, or contacting and working through a major developmental life theme" (Kepner, 1993, pp. 90-91). In other words, echoing Reich, this is a model for the basic life experience [see Figure 7].

**Figure 7:  
The Cycle of Experience Integrated**



The autonomic nervous system (ANS), a component of the central nervous system, regulates metabolic energy, which holds the key to understanding the cycle of experience and the importance of biological completion. In fact, the term autonomic “means self-regulating and this is a key principle of all body systems, which depend on constant feedback in order to maintain homeostasis” (Carroll, 2001). Traditionally, scientists believed that the autonomic nervous system consisted of two opposite, yet reciprocal branches: the sympathetic and the parasympathetic. The sympathetic branch governs arousal and emergency survival (‘fight or flight’) responses, and organizes these responses to realize the short-term objectives of the organism. The parasympathetic branch regulates relaxation, digestion, and regeneration, and invests energy into the long-term survival of the organism. However, as I will detail later [see ‘New Science of the Organism’], significant new scientific discoveries are challenging

this traditional view of the autonomic nervous system and its functioning, and have thus expanded our understanding of the human response to trauma.

In non-emergency experiences, the organism's sympathetic nervous system stimulates various parts of the body for the mobilization and action necessary for fulfilling the needs of the organism. In the example of a human sensing hunger and mobilizing to receive food from the environment, the sympathetic branch may activate the individual's mental focus on the ability of the environment to satisfy the need; initiate a quicker, stronger heartbeat to increase blood supply to the muscles; raise the blood-sugar level to increase energy; engage the muscles of the lower body to stand up and walk to a specific place; direct the muscles of the upper body to reach out to the desired food; and stimulate the salivary glands to produce the saliva necessary for adequate absorption. The parasympathetic branch would then come in play after the organism has taken such action. Following contact, which in this example is the intake of food, the parasympathetic branch would slow the heartbeat to lower the blood pressure; stimulate the digestive system for assimilation of the food into energy; produce hormones promoting rest and regeneration; engage the bowel and bladder for adequate elimination; relax muscles to decrease tension; and withdraw goal-oriented attention from the environment. At this point, as this cycle of experience is completed, the organism would return to homeostasis.

In emergency states, the sympathetic nervous system is activated and rapidly mobilizes for the anticipatory action that will protect the organism's integrity. Meanwhile, parasympathetic nervous system activities are lessened or suspended, until after the emergency passes. When danger threatens, the organism's autonomic nervous system is aroused and activates our defensive survival responses. These basic survival mechanisms are known as fight, flight, and freeze [more on this in 'Traumatic Processing']. On the cycle of experience, this emergency mode can be illustrated as when an organism senses danger and orients toward the environmental threat;

mobilizes its appropriate protective mechanism (though immobilization may be its chosen protective response); takes action – which may be to attack, flee, freeze, or return to the pre-arousal condition; and then withdraws into an undisturbed state.

Completion of such a cycle returns the organism to homeostasis.

For wild animals, the completion of these experience cycles reflects their normal, daily functioning (Levine, 1997). We can easily observe this on a hike in the Vermont woods, as we suddenly approach a grazing deer. Immediately upon sensing our presence, the deer orients toward us, her potential predator, and prepares to flee. If the deer senses danger, before we know it, she will mobilize her body and run away deep into the forest. If the deer does not sense danger, we may observe her ‘shake off’ the energy she mobilized to escape. This shaking, or energetic discharge, is the basic self-regulatory mechanism the deer uses to return to a relaxed state, and back to her feeding. This is an example of an optimal autonomic balance – after the sympathetic response relaxes, the parasympathetic engages. It is also a completed cycle of experience.

Unfortunately, for the human animal, the successful completion of the cycle of experience is all too rare. Roz Carroll (2001) presents an excellent example of how the human cycle of experience can be disrupted:

Suppose the client has an impulse to say something in a public setting which has a bit of charge – they gather up the energy. They say it, the effects of saying it sink in. That’s a cycle. Now suppose something interrupts this – they dismiss the impulse almost as soon as they’ve had it, or they allow the excitement and anxiety to build, but then they bail out at the last minute, or they say it and are so overwhelmed with having said it that they can’t follow through or take in the response. Or, they say it, start integrating, unwinding, but then are left with a remnant of anxiety so they can’t completely let it go. I’m sure all these patterns will be familiar – the point I’m making is that they have direct autonomic correlates. In standard physiology the autonomic nervous system is a closed system, where homeostatic balance is maintained by innate self-regulation. The parasympathetic will inhibit the sympathetic when it has reached a certain point, and vice versa. It’s what keeps us alive. But you will understand

that with emotional [and cognitive] process it can get a lot more complex, and small variations in function have a significant initially subtle effect. This is because the body is also a relational body which makes it an open system, subject to modification by the impact of events and processes and the external environment.

Carroll's description is profound as it illustrates the following three points: 1) an individual's energy can be inhibited at any point along the cycle of experience; 2) because humans are dependent upon contact with the environment in order to live and grow, and unlike wild animals have higher brain function (i.e., neo-cortex), external (and eventually internal) stimuli can detrimentally affect our self-regulatory process; and 3) although "a small variation in function" – a creative adjustment to threatening external stimuli – may be initially small, over time this adaptation might lead to difficulties in overall functioning; in other words, what originally served to protect integrity may actually begin to destroy it. I will discuss the first two points raised in Carroll's article in the rest of this section and will pick up his last point about creative adjustments having a significant effect on individuals in the following two sections ['Traumatic Processing' and 'Character Modes of Survival'].

As shown in Carroll's example of the client's process of expressing himself in public, we can see that depending on the circumstances of the individual and the environment, the cycle of experience can be disrupted at various places. In my clinical experience, I have seen clients stuck at the stages of sensation, mobilization, action, and withdrawal.

### *Sensation*

Often clients report little or no feeling – what may be referred to as 'depression,' 'dissociation,' or 'depersonalization' – which inhibits the cycle of experience as it begins. For instance, a client, Joseph, felt "dead" and "depressed," and often suicidal. Upon exploration, we discovered that he felt as if he was not really present. He reported a sense of depersonalized experience, and felt the world as if surreal, or unreal. When we explored his bodily experience, it became clear that he in fact was not present. Joseph had little or no awareness of bodily sensation, and therefore his ability to respond to

any situation, internal or external, was greatly inhibited. In terms of the cycle of experience, Joseph was stuck in a state between withdrawal and sensation, not able to open to new experience, but not peacefully at rest. He was stuck on 'off,' meaning that his parasympathetic branch was dominant, and thereby unable to yield to the sympathetic branch, when necessary.

My therapeutic work with Joseph became focused upon embodiment – a careful, slow process of inviting him into the here and now, using his body awareness and sensation. Then, he might slowly recover feeling and begin once again to appropriately respond to life experience. In these situations, the therapeutic process must go very slowly, as it is possible that such clients have deep fear and ambivalence towards feeling itself; it is fundamentally unsafe for them to feel. It seems that many individuals who are disconnected from their bodily experience have suffered early, debilitating traumas that have led them to use dissociation as a protective mechanism. If, at an early age, a child responds to hurt through crying or screaming, and if this response is then punished and suppressed, the feeling (i.e., hurt) itself becomes a danger to the child, and he will find a way not to experience the feeling itself. The child will split the part of him that feels hurt, scared, sad, or angry, and over time, he will lose connection to that feeling part of himself. Later in life, he may experience all kinds of life events without registering much feeling at all; he has become desensitized. In our culture, amidst such random violence and injustice, many children learn to cut off their feelings from an early age, and therefore lose access to these feelings. Here, we observe trauma as an obstacle to the life process, and we witness the vicious consequences that such unresolved event cycles can create. Yet, by locating the fixation along the cycle of experience, we are given a clue as to how we may work with a particular individual to rejuvenate their life cycle.

*Mobilization*

Clients also describe difficulty ‘getting their shit together.’ They seem to know what they want to do, but are unable to do it. I have found that these clients seem to respond to feeling, but old patterns and scripts, or environmental inhibitions, keep them from acting on their feeling. These clients often report feeling repeatedly stuck in life and unable to make decisions or take actions that would bring about a positive change.

Seth, a client, reported chronic frustration about feeling lonely, not finding a romantic partner, being left out of social situations, and “feeling like a nobody.” Frequently, he was more than frustrated; he was impatient, almost enraged. There was certainly no lack of feeling coming from him. However, Seth seemed constantly blocked when he attempted to make advances at meeting his needs. He reported anxiety as he imagined having a girlfriend or going to parties, which kept him alone in his room, listening to music and fantasizing about being elsewhere. When he considered acting on his love for music and taking up an instrument – which he thought would help him find friends by joining a band and playing out at gigs – he would resort to the “why even bother” script, since he “could not play anyway” and thus “would never make it as a musician.” Seth was rightfully frustrated and enraged, at himself, though it often came out in the form of an attack on his environment. Even more, his frustration and impatience kept him from connecting to his feelings for wanting to be a part of something warm and supportive, like a romantic relationship or a group of friends, since he distrusted that anyone could meet his needs. In terms of the cycle of experience, Seth was perpetually cycling back between sensation and withdrawal, the place along the cycle where his life energy was blocked and fixed. Without his vital energy, he was not able to find the means to mobilize for any substantial action. Thus, Seth struggled painfully, trying to make movement in his life.

Although I can imagine that many individuals stuck in mobilization would be attracted to cognitive-behavioral treatment that would help them alter their scripts and attend to their desired behaviors, I feel that it is only part of the process. I see a therapeutic

process attending to the client's feelings on a sensation level as foundational, as it will help shift the individual's organization from the bottom-up, and thereby free energy to organically complete a contact cycle. As it is, such clients seem to have a fear of failure overcoupled with an intense desire to connect. This overcoupling may not be a conscious thought, but it is registered in the individual's body process; Seth's anxiety spoke to this. As Reich put it, "to make expansion impossible while at the same time its inner production of energy would continue, [the individual] would experience constant anxiety, i.e., a feeling of oppression and constriction" (Reich, 1971, p. 249). Instead of relying on mental capacity to translate feelings into a chosen action, practice in allowing feelings to express themselves, in whichever way they will, goes a long way in freeing up stuck energy. This expression of feeling taps into our self-regulatory process, which is our deepest, most primal connection to ourselves and to life. It is also a place of trusting oneself to 'make it in life.'

### *Action*

Survivors of shock trauma and certain developmental traumas are most commonly stuck between mobilization and action, and therefore they are incapable of adequate energetic discharge. This is clearly observed in survivors of major shock traumas, like automobile accidents and sudden attacks. In these experiences, the nervous system is suddenly overwhelmed and the individual's whole being is instantaneously mobilized for survival. Therefore, if the organism registers the impossibility of fighting or fleeing – such as in a high-speed automobile accident – than the individual freezes. This freeze, or immobility response, which I detail in a following section ['Traumatic Processing'], is a primitive survival response in the face of overwhelming danger. In terms of the cycle of experience, individuals who freeze mobilize for responding to an event, but never complete the intended action. Therefore, these individuals do not make contact with the environment in order to satisfy their needs, and the contact cycle is aborted. Primed and charged for survival action, these individuals are left to cycle back to a high-arousal state of sensation, without discharge. This state of high arousal, without means for

discharge, so prevalent in our high-speed world, sets the stage for post-traumatic stress reactions (Levine, 1997).

I worked with a client, Sophie, who experienced severe developmental trauma, including physical, emotional, and sexual abuse by relatives, but who came to me after the death of her best friend. In her present life, she was heavily armored, as if ready for battle. Her body displayed rigidity and tension, while her personality mirrored similar traits. Sophie did not let anyone get close to her, besides her boyfriend, to whom she seemed to yield much power. She displayed a full range of post-traumatic stress reactions including isolation, limited affect, irritability, sleeping and eating difficulties, nightmares, flashbacks, memory lapses, avoidance behaviors, and certain forms of trauma reenactment. What struck me most about Sophie was her resistance to doing things she knew she needed to do, especially if it involved taking care of herself. It seemed as if she just did not want to do it, whatever it was. Although she was somewhat aware of her shut-down, though highly-charged state, she continued to avoid contact, as even the thought of contact triggered overwhelming feelings. Without discharge of Sophie's highly activated energy, she remains locked in a chronic post-traumatic stress state, as her only release of energy comes in the symptoms she manifests. Although emotional expression does serve to release bound energy, Sophie was very cautious about having any emotional response. Therefore, it seemed to me that taking a gentle, yet direct somatic approach might enable her to slowly release some of her stuck energy, and allow her to feel in control as the energy released [more on this in 'Trauma as Awakening']. Because Sophie and I had not contracted to do body-centered work, our therapy remained focused on her emotional responses and perceptions. At the closure of our work together, Sophie reluctantly reported feeling "better" simply by having someone to talk with; for some clients, this is a big first step in their healing process.

Working therapeutically with such clients is a complex undertaking. It seems to me that clients who are unable to make contact with their environmental needs – such as safety, security, and nourishment – often possess a complex interplay of various developmental and shock traumas. Although these clients may or may not be aware of the traumas they have encountered throughout their lives, their bodies know. Their physical and emotional symptoms speak to the survival energy stuck in their nervous systems. Their bodies remember every trauma on a cellular level and continue to respond in order to assure survival; although in most cases the danger has long since passed. These individuals have obviously survived their traumatic experiences, but some of their energy is still invested in saving themselves from past dangers, and they are therefore unable to mobilize their resources to make contact in the present. Therapeutically, the internal blocks of clients who are unable to translate their energy into action serve as clues to past traumas. It is not important for the client to remember the specific trauma associated with the block; it is important for the client to have a way to adequately discharge the trapped energy (Levine, 1997). Through energetic discharge, clients free locked resources and begin to use their fuller selves to establish contact with their environment, and satisfy their needs.

### *Withdrawal*

Common in the United States is the individual that is constantly ‘on-the-go.’ Such individuals are, as Benjamin Hoff (1983) writes in *The Tao of Pooh*, “always on the run, going somewhere, somewhere he hasn’t been. Anywhere but where he is” (p. 91). In order for the individual to be “where he is,” he would need to relax into the here and now of present experience. In terms of the cycle of experience, this would require that the individual move beyond action and into withdrawal. This involves discharge and completion upon fulfillment of one’s needs. Then the parasympathetic branch takes over and digests the experience. Withdrawal is a crucial phase in the cycle of experience. Remember, the four-step pulsatory process is dependent on discharge and relaxation so that expansion can occur once again. Without this movement through, the

organism is always stuck on 'on,' as the sympathetic branch continues to dominate and prohibits the necessary parasympathetic activity to take over.

Katie, a client, was always going. Every session, before she even hit the couch, she would speak a mile-a-minute, relating one story after another. It was hard to decipher which stories were essential for her and how she was feeling. Katie was so scattered that it was hard to follow her, and impossible to slow her down. She told me that her friends call her "hyper," her mother calls her "overly emotional," her ex-boyfriend calls her "hysterical," her psychiatrists say she is "bipolar" or "manic depressive," her teachers say she has "ADHD," and she herself is utterly confused. It's all a whirlwind. But when she is on, she is on. Katie manages two jobs; full-time classes at college; a fall, winter, and spring team sport; band practice and performances; parties and dating; and an occasional baby-sitting job on the side. She eats when she remembers and sleeps when she has time. Sitting with her for an hour session was emotionally exhausting for me, so I can only imagine what it was like for her, within her own skin. In fact, every once in a while, she would crash, and crash hard. Because Katie's parasympathetic branch was so compromised, she would get sick often. Without any long-term maintenance of her body or feelings, she would run out of steam and fall into depression and patterns of self-harm; however, in no time, she would be up and running again, full steam ahead. Katie, like many other Americans, did not have a problem getting things done, rather she always had "too many things to do." It never occurred to her that maybe she needed to cut her 'to-do' list in half and spend more time with herself, taking it easy. When I offered this suggestion, she considered it briefly and then responded that she did not have the time. In fact, Katie reported experiencing severe anxiety when she was alone and quiet. Her sympathetic branch was so highly activated that the energy running through her simply could not quiet down; it was always on the go, and propelled her in the same way. This, in part, produced Katie's constant level of anxiety, amplified in the brief moments of quiet she stumbled into.

Katie, and others like her, are constantly recycling from action to sensation, perpetually bypassing the essential withdrawal phase. 'Down time,' as some call it in our culture, is generally perceived as wasted time. Individuals who turn to certain religious and spiritual disciplines, hobbies, or sports, often use such activities to keep themselves busy, instead of using these opportunities to settle down. For such individuals, an optimal therapeutic environment offers them not merely a place to surrender their compulsion to move and act, but a way to energetically discharge the aroused energy fueling these compulsions. Traditional psychotherapeutic methods have often missed this essential step for grounding individuals in their selves, thereby allowing them to truly settle down and relax. More recent approaches using relaxation techniques, meditation, guided imagery, and somatic practices have moved us closer in the right direction, but often these approaches also fail to produce the physiological discharge necessary for completing a contact cycle. When biological discharge occurs – which are nervous systems are programmed to do after we mobilize energy and act – clients can finally relax into the satisfaction that comes from completing a contact cycle. This relaxation period allows their productive energy to return within, where it will be used by the parasympathetic system to facilitate a renewal of their resources. As rejuvenation occurs, individuals organically open to the next emerging cycle of experience. Their vital energy, strengthened upon completion of the previous cycle, becomes available for use in the next (sympathetic) movement outwards. Once again, the organism is able to reach out to the environment to meet its needs, establish contact, and grow, as energy builds.

In the course of a human life, it is unrealistic to expect all impulses to be satisfied. Therefore, we are left with the need to continually regulate the overabundance of energy, which brings us back to the self-regulatory process of discharging excess energy via various physiological, emotional, and behavioral means. However, when it is impossible for the organism to adequately contact the environment (e.g., supplies are

insufficient to meet the needs, there is an expected hostile response, or there is a delay of satisfaction), the discharge of energy is blocked, the needs remain unsatisfied, and the cycle of experience is left unfinished (Kepner, 1993). This sets in motion a dysregulated autonomic nervous system, and hence dysfunction in our lives. Yet, “the capacity to temporarily interrupt or ‘resist’ contact is useful and healthy as a creative adjustment to the vicissitudes of experience and environment. Difficulty arises when the cycle is habitually interrupted in a way that is out of our awareness so that our needs cannot find resolution. This incompleteness is manifest as organismic disturbance and dis-ease” (Kepner, 1993, p. 93).

According to Perls (1951), there are four possible outcomes of an organism/environment interaction: 1) *Completion*: If the contact cycle is easily completed, the organism returns effortlessly to equilibrium, and its self-regulatory process remains engaged; 2) *Expansion/Growth*: If the contact cycle is completed but involves heightened tension and energetic arousal corresponding to the energy involved in completion, the organism returns to equilibrium and enjoys deep satisfaction and harmonious balance; 3) *Blocking*: If the environment poses a threat to the organism’s safety and therefore inhibits completion of the contact cycle, protective measures are used at the cost of losing contact with the environment; and 4) *Yearning*: If the environment cannot respond in any way to the needs sought, frantic efforts to make contact are made at the cost of organismic integrity (Perls, et al., 1951). In the cases of blocking and yearning, efforts made to protect the organism compromise its functioning. As we will see in a following section [‘Character Modes of Survival’], when an individual is developmentally challenged by violation and/or neglect in the childhood environment, the blocking and yearning responses form the basis for habitual patterns of being, which become fixed in individuals as character structures. When the fluid, self-regulated organism/environment interaction (the cycle of experience) is interrupted, it inevitably leads to “organismic disturbance and dis-ease.”

However, we must keep in mind that these disturbed and dis-eased responses began as survival mechanisms in the face of dangerous or overwhelming environmental stimuli – which we generally refer to as trauma.

## TRAUMATIC PROCESSING

Trauma...is a fundamental fracture. It is about loss of connection – to ourselves, our families, and the world around us. This loss is often hard to recognize, because it happens slowly, over time. We adapt to these subtle changes; sometimes, without even noticing them. Trauma requires deeper investigation than does stress, and its healing leads to a far more meaningful, long-term transformation. Psychiatric medicine has chosen to view most long-term effects of trauma as incurable and only marginally controllable by drugs. Yet not only is trauma curable, the healing process can be a catalyst for profound awakening. (Levine, 1999, p. 4)

Even today, with our sophisticated understanding of the fluidity of the brain and the environmental effects on our basic physiology [see ‘New Science of the Organism’], many investigators spend enormous sums of money and countless hours of time searching for the genetic and chemical explanations for our overall dysfunction. Within psychiatry and psychotherapy, many researchers and clinicians still search intrapsychically for the causes of pathological functioning. Even the term ‘psychopathology,’ adopted straight from pathogenic biology, points to the individual as being ill or disturbed, without any direct mention of the environmental conditions of the individual. Although there has always been a current within the medical profession which understands the correlation between physiological, emotional, and psychological dysfunction, the general form of treatment “usually means the prescription of medication which either only battles the symptom, or which influences the autonomic nervous system artificially and, unfortunately, only temporarily without *restoring* natural pulsation” (Buhl, 2001).

Traditional psychotherapy has missed the bigger picture - our basic self-regulatory process as we make contact with life. The standard approach still stands which assesses, diagnoses, and treats patients according to a diagnostic code that de-emphasizes – or, more appropriately, de-contextualizes – individuals and their life experiences, and emphasizes individual dysfunction. This model de-emphasizes the patient’s developmental process and/or environmental interaction. Instead, this

approach relies on a symptomatic composite of what a specific disorder looks like, and ways to treat a patient suffering from a particular disorder(s). Yet, life is a fluid process, a relationship between a living organism and its environment. Individuals emerge into and withdraw from the environment continuously in order to live and grow. However, threatening and damaging events can severely disturb this basic life interaction, which can severely disturb an individual's life process. Traumatologists refer to these injurious incidents as 'trauma.' As Gestalt therapists have so clearly expounded, it is at the organism/environment boundary, the place where we initially became inhibited and blocked, where we can find the key to our suffering (Perls, 1951, 1969; Kepner, 1993). It is here where healing can occur.

With the addition to the DSM-III of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)<sup>14</sup>, a shift in paradigm occurred (Herman, 1997). "Prior to the acceptance of the concepts of psychopathology that underpin PTSD, clinical thinking was dominated by the exclusive attention to secondary psychic elaborations, at the expense of paying attention to the realities that contribute to drive these repetitions....The core issue is the inability to integrate the reality of particular experiences, and the resulting repetitive replaying of the trauma in images, behaviors, feelings, physiological states, and interpersonal relationships" (van der Kolk, et al., 1996, p. 7). The medical model was challenged by the possibility that individuals - psychologically, emotionally, behaviorally, and even physiologically - are directly affected by their environments. "PTSD, then, serves as a model for correcting the decontextualized aspects of today's taxonomic systems....[It] is thus a description of an illness process based not on the intrinsic nature of the person alone, but rather on the person's sociocultural interaction over time" (van der Kolk, et al., 1996, p. 399). This challenges helping professionals to approach their traumatized patients with a holistic framework, acknowledging that human beings live dynamic lives interconnected with the world in which they inhabit. Every individual possess a life history which includes their birth, childhood, family, relationships, religion, and

schooling - one's total life experience, inclusive of the empathic and loving moments as well as the brutal and disrupting violations. Although patients may focus on the symptoms that are presently affecting them, their histories provide clues as to why an individual suffers from these symptoms requiring clinical help; and also to the untapped healing resources within them.

Human beings, like all living organisms, constantly take in and discharge life energy. Implicitly, the individual is fundamentally a part of his environment, and any disturbance in the environment will necessarily affect the individual. The human organism consists of a complex interplay of various specialized parts and systems, including our digestive structures, respiratory apparatus, skeleto-muscular system, brain, and nervous system. However, at its core, the human animal is a pulsating, responsive organism that is nourished by the bioenergetic fuel of life, including air, water, food, and human contact. In this way, trauma can be understood as the violation of our organismic integrity by overwhelming environmental stimuli, which ruptures our personal boundaries and affects the intake and discharge of our energy, thereby disrupting our basic interaction with life. "An experience is traumatic if it...exceeds the individual's perceived ability to meet its demands" (McCann, L. as quoted in Heller & Heller, 2001 p. 18). In this sense, trauma is universal. We are all, as human beings, vulnerable and exposed to overwhelming life events at some point in our lives. How we respond to a specific event determines whether or not it becomes traumatic or not. As Levine states in *Waking the Tiger*, "people don't need a definition of trauma; we need an experiential sense of how it feels...People who have experienced trauma...really know what it is, and their responses to it are basic and primitive" (1997, pp. 24-25). Who in our culture does not know experientially how trauma feels?

Experiences in life that exceed our ability to meet their demands come in many shapes and sizes, but basically, there are two different types of traumatic experience: shock

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<sup>14</sup> See Appendix D

trauma and developmental trauma. Shock traumas, such as an automobile accident or a dog attack, occur suddenly, are non-normative, and overwhelm the individual's functioning. Shock traumas are random events that overwhelm our ability to cope with the situation at hand. Developmental traumas, on the other hand, are continual environmental assaults on the individual's integrity that become somewhat normal only because the individual adjusts to the violating stimuli in order to survive [more on this in 'Character Modes of Survival']. Such so-called 'ordinary' events are situations where children are chronically overwhelmed due to separation, loss, or unmet needs, even if adults do not recognize the harm (Weinhold, 2000). Most often, parents do not intend to inflict harm on their children, but because they have not received education concerning the "physical, emotional, mental, social and spiritual needs of infants and children...and because they did not get their own needs met as children, most adults are unable to effectively respond to the needs of their own children" (Weinhold, 2000). Most parents are simply unaware of the effect their actions have on their children.

A child's experiences of loss and not being responded to appropriately create feelings of fear and terror that are psychologically overwhelming....[This] impacts a whole range of core psychological functions, such as the regulation of feelings, the ability to store experiences as narrative memory and to have clear thoughts or memories about what happened in the past, the manner in which feelings are stored and expressed in the body and people's views of themselves, strangers and intimates. (Weinhold, 2000)

The effects are far-reaching and devastating for individuals and a culture. But instead of educating parents, our life-denying culture reinforces itself through the sanctioning of dysfunctional child-rearing practices, religious edicts, cultural customs, and taboos – all of which disrupt a child's healthy developmental process.

Shock traumas are necessarily processed within an individual's developmental context, meaning that individuals who have less developmental trauma are able to meet challenging life events with more confidence and security, and with greater access to their self-regulatory process. These individuals have had more of an opportunity to cultivate

the internal and external resources required to get through demanding life experiences. Although such individuals might still be affected by overwhelming experiences, they have less likelihood of being traumatized – as we observe with animals in the wild (Levine, 1997). For instance, studies have shown the high correlation between the onset of PTSD in rape and war survivors with a pre-trauma history of abuse and/or neglect (Department of Health and Human Services, 1999; Department of Veterans Affairs, 2002; Shalev, 2002). Therefore, individuals who have suffered developmental trauma are more vulnerable to the vicissitudes of everyday life.

It is extremely important that the field of psychology begins to recognize the long-lasting effects that developmental trauma has on individuals and to integrate this recognition into the treatment of shock traumas, and psychotherapy in general. Many questions can be answered when we use a specific shock trauma as a thread to open us up to our pasts – questions that nag at us but are beyond the grasp of our consciousness. This explains why clients often come in for help around a specific event which then opens a Pandora's Box inside of them. Recently, I had a client who came to me due to a failed relationship, which had only lasted several months. During our initial meetings, I was struck by a free-floating, intense rage that was overwhelming her. As we explored her feelings associated with this failed relationship, a developmental history emerged of neglect and abuse throughout her early childhood. This provided the context for why this breakup triggered such intense, overwhelming feelings. In this way, shock traumas provide us with an opening into our more foundational suffering – our disconnection from life.

When we lose something as precious as our connection “to ourselves, our families, and the world around us,” we know it. Our conscious minds often cannot grasp this loss all at once – we may never make sense of the full-range impact of trauma – yet we feel it on some level, even if through numbing and depersonalization. When we lose connection to ourselves, our communities, and life all around us, we find ourselves in a vulnerable position; it truly feels as ‘every man for himself.’ This ‘survival of the fittest’ mentality

is not our basic human nature, but it represents our disconnection from it. When we are connected to the natural rhythms of life, there are indeed times when we must temporarily disconnect from ourselves, our families, and our world, in order to survive circumstances that endanger us; however, when the threat of danger passes, we return to responsive functioning. Part of this responsive functioning is being attuned to ourselves and our environments and being able to discern when we must act to secure our own safety and when we are safe. Acting in response to danger when there is no present threat not only harms an individual's body process by overstimulating the autonomic nervous system, it also seriously undermines an individual's relations with family, friends, and community. Family, friends, and community seem to be essential elements in all animals' healing process; therefore, when we become disconnected from the safety and support of our most basic resources, we are vulnerable to isolation and further harm. As Derrick Jensen (2000) writes, "It is not possible to recover from atrocity in isolation. It is, in fact, precisely this isolation that induces the atrocities. If we wish to stop the atrocities, we need merely step away from the isolation" (p. 375).

In contrast to this disconnected state, animals in the wild are constantly self-regulating and therefore continually responding to their internal and external circumstances. It seems that when animals feel safe and secure, they are grounded in their own being and connected with their environments. Only when a threat arises, for instance as a predator moves in, do animals go into protective mode. In this state, animals disconnect from all impulses beside the ones that will guarantee survival: fight, flight, or freeze. When the threat passes, for instance after the predator departs, animals return to a grounded, connected state, and become in tune with and fully responsive to their inner impulses and environmental stimuli, once again.

What sets us apart from wild animals is the development of our higher brain structures (neo-cortex and prefrontal cortex), and the inhibitory norms and mores that come from them. "When confronted with a life-threatening situation, our rational brains may

become confused and override our instinctive impulses. Though this overriding may be done for a good reason, the confusion that accompanies it sets the stage for...trauma" (Levine, 1997, pp. 18-19). What gets overridden is our innate, self-regulatory process – the return to homeostasis of our sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous functions – which in the face of overwhelm is disrupted. It is therefore now understood that "Trauma is in the nervous system, not in the event" (Levine, 1997a, p. 6). Thus, understanding 'survival mode' and its long-term effects on our overall functioning is essential for healing post-traumatic stress reactions.

### 'SURVIVAL MODE'

As Levine describes it, "We enter this altered state – let us call it 'survival mode' – when we perceive that our lives are being threatened....This highly aroused state is designed solely to enable short-term defensive actions; but left untreated over time, it begins to form the symptoms of trauma" (Levine, 1999, p. 3). As humans, we have difficulty disengaging from this short-term protective mode, and get locked into a habitual simulation of survival. Ironically, this state is daily defeating our very survival by taxing our system with constant overload. Engaged habitually in fight, flight, and/or freeze, we are kept biologically overwhelmed, and, therefore, physiologically, emotionally, and psychologically depleted.

When *fight or flight* survival responses become locked in our systems, the sympathetic system is engaged continuously which eventually overloads the body with energetic activation. The nervous system cannot possibly continue to mobilize such massive amounts of survival energy without adequate discharge. Therefore, this persistently aroused state often leads to panic attacks, irritability, stimulus sensitivity, hypervigilance, hyperactivity, and insomnia (Heller & Levine, 1997; Heller & Heller, 2001; Scaer, 2001). Moreover, because sympathetic activation is intended for the short-term mobilization of resources, it acts as a catabolic mechanism that breaks down body substances for the production of energy. Over time, if this mechanism becomes chronic,

cellular damage can occur (Carroll, 2001). Reich postulated that such disruption of the organism's biological pulsation could even lead to the formation of cancer biopathy (Reich, 1973b). It has also been suggested that as the overactivated nervous system drives toward self-survival, attachment functions break down (Eckberg, 2000). This has long-range affects for individuals in terms of (mis-) attunement and (dis-) connection. As it is, trauma survivors often report feeling isolated and alienated as victims, which perpetuates their suffering and need for protection. Then, because their systems are producing increased hormones contingent on short-term survival responses, they are drawn to making contact dysfunctionally, a part of what traumatologists refer to as 'trauma reenactment.' To make matters even worse, it has been found that many trauma survivors pass down their unresolved post-traumatic stress reactions transgenerationally through their children, and their children's children, etc. (Bloom & Reichert, 1998). Although this area of research is still at the beginning, it is obvious that such transgenerational trauma implies grave consequences for us all. It helps us to understand "that all violence is interconnected and that there are identifiable cycles of violence that could be avoided, prevented, or circumvented" (Bloom & Reichert, 1998, p. 99).

With successful completion of appropriate protective reactions, individuals are able to discharge mobilized survival energy and return to homeostasis, a renewed state of creative orienting. In terms of the cycle of experience, this means that an individual, now satiated, returns to a restful state back within herself, with her energy free and intact. Thus, she is once again prepared to meet another contact cycle. This is biological completion. In our culture, however, biological completion is often impossible. Perls (1969) observed,

Moral regulation must lead to the accumulation of unfinished situations in our system and to interruption of the organismic circle. This interruption is achieved by means of muscular contraction and the production of anaesthesia [sic]. A person who has lost the 'feel' of himself, who, for instance, has deadened his palate, cannot feel whether he is hungry or not.

Therefore, he cannot expect his 'self-regulation' (appetite) to function properly, and he will stimulate his palate artificially. We may contrast such violations of the principle of healthy self-regulation with normal functions. In sex life, for instance, the production of hormones by the glands leads to an organismic surplus, the increased sexual tension creates an image, or selects in reality an object suitable for gratification of its needs for a restoration of the organismic balance. (p. 45)

Having lost our ability to respond to our basic impulses, we are left with the necessity to creatively, and often harmfully, artificially stimulate our appetites. We must force movement, rather than allow energy to move through us according to its own motility. This is quite literally a state of dis-ease, when people lose their grace and flow in life. This can be observed in individuals who are forced to artificially stimulate their energy levels, their sexuality, and/or their sleeping and eating patterns, through drugs or other measures, due to dysfunctional behavioral patterns. When there are numerous uncompleted cycles, the energy builds to such a tension that it must move, one way or another.

As living organisms, we must find some semblance of homeostasis in order to live, even if that balance is dysregulated in an overactivated state of nervous system arousal. Although this is the organism's way of adapting to its internal and external conditions, this dysregulated state can and will only lead to more individual dysfunction, as well as further social 'acting out.' With this, we have lost our connection to our own inner rhythms, to life all around us, and therefore our ability to participate with the world in creation and growth.

Another very important element of survival mode besides fight or flight is the least recognized survival response, known as the '*freeze*' response. This freeze, or immobility response, is a brilliant tactic when used sparingly under threat, when 'playing dead' works to save one's life. But 'playing dead' is not a conscious choice, it is the organism's involuntary, last-ditch effort to stay alive in the face of imminent death. It is a biologically controlled protective mechanism. Animals use this default response

when fight or flight are impossible, and inevitable defeat looms. Opossums, for example, are well-known for their survival response of 'playing dead.' Humans use this response as well. For instance, most children growing up in abusive homes have no recourse to fight back against their violators nor to flee from their homes, so their biological response is immobility. As witnessed in wild animals, the freeze response is in no way a lesser response than fighting or fleeing; though in humans this immobilized state often becomes overcoupled with feelings of weakness, failure, and shame (Levine, 1997; Heller & Heller, 2001). Although immobility often works well for animals, it does not work well for modern-day humans. Animals, upon coming out of this immobility state, literally shake off the tremendous energy which becomes trapped in their nervous system when they shut down (Levine, 1997). In humans, it often happens that the energy mobilizes for fight or flight, but upon recognizing the impossibility of these responses, the nervous system defaults to its immobility response. But, the highly mobilized energy does not go away. It is still engaged within the nervous system, managed temporarily by the shut-down freeze state. When this temporary freeze state becomes chronic, there is no opportunity for adequate discharge of the trapped energy. The discharge of survival energy maintains the self-regulatory process, and therefore, wild animals do not experience the same inability to realize equilibrium as humans.

Although immobility, or playing dead is often a life-saving response for wild animals, immobility in humans can lead to debilitating results, especially in children. When a child relies on the immobility response for survival, his development becomes locked in a state of overactivated nervous system function, incapable of completing a contact cycle. "The human immobility response does not easily resolve itself because the supercharged energy locked in the nervous system is imprisoned by the emotions of fear and terror. The result is that a vicious cycle of fear and immobility takes over, preventing the response from completing naturally" (Levine, 1997, p. 101). In humans who have used the freeze response in the face of threat, we see that even after the danger has passed, their sympathetic system remains on overdrive, with bound,

undischarged energy. Meanwhile, their parasympathetic system is engaged to combat the effects of this overactivated sympathetic state (Heller & Levine, 1997; Heller & Heller, 2001). These two systems, now both overactivated and entwined with one another, create an autonomic nervous system that is overwhelmed – which inevitably leads to dysregulation.

Physiologically, because our autonomic nervous system is overwhelmed, both our sympathetic and our parasympathetic systems are engaged full-throttle in an emergency managing of the energy balance, which in time causes both systems to malfunction. Simultaneously, we lose functional contact with our environment through debilitating sympathetic responses, such as hyperarousal, hypervigilance, and anxiety, as well as debilitating parasympathetic responses, such as disconnection, dissociation, and depression (Heller & Levine, 1997). At this point, we are stuck in a deeper state of immobility, due to a dysregulated system of an unbalanced internal/external relationship. Physiologically, our circuits have been blown and are down, unable to receive or give energy in a self-regulated way. They therefore must find other paths to regulate the overloaded energy.

Renowned traumatologist Bessel van der Kolk writes, “Trauma interferes with children’s capacity to regulate their arousal levels. This seems to be related to a wide spectrum of problems, from learning disabilities to aggression against self and others” (1996, p. 64). The undischarged energy within our bodies finds its way out through physical and emotional symptoms, which provide important clues to how we may heal the system itself. Reich, in his studies on cancer, realized that tumors are local manifestations of a contracted, and hence, dying organism. The presence of tumors indicates the underlying disturbance of the organism, and thus reveals opportunities for treating the entire system, as opposed to simply treating the symptoms, themselves (Reich, 1973b). “If energy cannot be freely discharged through pulsation, it can cause different kinds of ‘break-throughs’ (phases of exacerbation of illness) in the organism. If

even these break-throughs cannot happen any longer, the organism responds with resignation or shrinking. Considering this, the exacerbation of illnesses can represent a sub-optimal attempt of the body to maintain at least some kind of pulsation of the ANS. It is the best possible try under the present circumstances" (Buhl, 2001). Unfortunately, most health practitioners who adhere to the medical model do not focus their efforts on an understanding of "sub-optimal" attempts at pulsation or identifying the biopsychosocial disturbance within individuals, but continue to focus on treatment of the symptoms.

Levine, who developed 'Somatic Experiencing' as a method to restore the body's natural self-regulatory process by allowing excess ('survival mode') energy to slowly discharge, views symptoms differently than most healing professionals. He writes,

Regarding trauma, pathology can be thought of as the maladaptive use of any activity (physiological, behavioral, emotional, or mental) designed to help the nervous system regulate its activated energy. Pathology (i.e., symptoms) becomes, in a sense, the organism's safety valve. This valve lets off just enough pressure to keep the system running. In addition to its survival function and pain-killing effect, the immobility response is also a key part of the nervous system's circuit breaker. Without it, a human might not survive the intense activation of a serious inescapable situation without risking energetic overload. Indeed, even the symptoms that develop out of the freezing response can be viewed with a sense of appreciation and even gratitude if you consider what might happen if the system did not have this safety valve. (1997, p. 106)

Symptoms are the voices of our suffering. They are crying out to us after we have long ignored, suppressed, invalidated, and dissociated our awareness of our initial hurts.

In somatic based therapies, therapists often see symptoms move and shift as clients bring awareness to their specific pains. For instance, an individual with chronic tightness and soreness in her lower back, upon focusing on the sensations of this area, may feel a pulling from her upper back. Following this pulling, she may feel an

impulse to bring her head and torso over her chest, as in a collapsed position. Working through these sensations and impulses might bring up an emotional response of exhaustion and surrender, as the individual gives in to her body's impulse to collapse. Often, memories are associated with the sensations, impulses, and emotions that arise, as these are all interconnected in our brain and nervous systems. In this example, the individual may remember a childhood of constant belittlement and the need to 'stand tall' and 'keep it together' in the face of what seemed like constant adversity. Once the individual surrenders to the body's natural response of collapse, the body structure organization may shift, and although new symptoms, pains, and memories may emerge, oftentimes the initial symptom is resolved. In this case, the individual's lower back tightness and soreness might be considerably relieved (although, of course, it may take many therapeutic sessions for the organization to entirely shift and support a new way of being in the world). Due to our initial hurts,

We alienate our body from our sense of self, so that body process and our disowned contact functions become identical. Since these aspects continue to have relevance to our functioning, despite the fact that we disown them, they are constantly seeking expression....[and] can only communicate nonverbally about important things to a 'receiver' (the owned self), who would rather pretend that the sender is unimportant and not worth listening to. Is it any wonder that our body-self frequently has to do something drastic - migraines, disabling back pains, impotence, ulcers - to get our attention?...Much of our 'inexplicable' body processes can be usefully viewed as existential messages from disowned parts of self. (Kepner, 1993, p. 69)

In the example above, the individual's symptom of lower back discomfort was a clue to what the body was asking for and not getting. This back pain was the body's drastic attempt at getting the attention it needed from the individual. Had she treated the back troubles with medication or treatment that did not allow for the body's self-regulatory process to unfold, the deeper story of the individual may not have emerged, and more symptoms would have likely developed. Over time, a person like this might develop hip troubles, disc degeneration, or difficulties walking, for the entire system was unbalanced due to a deeper, foundational trouble.

In this way, symptoms notify us of our underlying suffering and dis-ease, whether we recognize it or not. As Levine writes,

Trauma is not a disease; it is a state of 'dis-ease.' Discomfort is a signal to us that something inside needs our attention. If these signals go unanswered, they eventually evolve into the symptoms of trauma....In every case, our bodies have retained the crucial information that links the symptoms to the original trauma. This is why it is essential that we learn to trust the messages our bodies are giving us. The symptoms of trauma are internal wake-up calls. If we learn how to listen to them, to increase both physical and mental awareness, we can begin to heal our traumas. (Levine, 1999, pp. 10-11)

Moreover, such symptoms are manifestations of a larger context in which we are working against the nature of life. Like the above individual, whose chronically contracted musculature denied the natural movement of the body, many of us are and have been running from pains suffered in life experiences. We have survived by dissociating from the experiences in various ways, on various levels. The ability to split off and avoid challenging life experiences maintains the organism's integrity in the face of perceived danger. As such, this 'sequestration,' as Reich called it, allows energy to remain intact, although split off from integral functioning (Reich, 1973b; Carroll, 2001). However, dissociating from the experience also means that part of our awareness and energy is not available to us during our present experiences, and our contact cycles remain forever incomplete. The energy is simply not present to complete cycles, or even begin new experiences, as it remains invested in the support of the splitting and/or avoidance of past disturbances.

One such way that our human system maintains such avoidance is through the creation of a 'false self,' similar to what psychoanalysts term a 'superego.' This false self forces us into various compulsory activities and positions that we do not feel in our hearts, bodies, or souls, but which we do because we 'should', 'oughta', or 'gotta.' When dissected in therapy, it often emerges that this false self is composed of a complex array

of parental introjections, or moral demands, which have ultimately replaced the child's self-regulatory manner of being in the world. Reich, and others, believed that this false self is functionally identical to the muscular contraction of the body (Kurtz, 1983; Lowen, 1958; Reich, 1971, 1972; Totton, 1988). This muscular contraction is the armor that Reich found in so many of his clients, and has its origin in early childhood trauma (developmental and shock). Reich observed that these muscular contractions inhibit sensations and feelings, and thereby condition such individuals to an inhibited, or even non-feeling state, "in complete accord with our impressions of inanimate matter" (Reich, 1973a, p. 54). In this sense, humans lose their ability to respond to life. For, as Reich reminds us, "Living nature, in contrast to the nonliving, responds to stimuli with 'movement,' or 'motion'" (Reich, 1973a, p. 54). Muscular and character armor, created to inhibit naturally-responding movement as a way of adapting to threatening external stimuli, is a hallmark of survival mode; our responses becomes habitually maintained to guarantee survival. These rigid modes of survival disturb our ability to move with life experiences, limiting the richness of our lives.

When stuck in survival mode – where our entire organism is dysregulated and overloaded – we lose our ability to connect with and express our core feelings and responses, and instead continually act to protect ourselves from a danger that has since passed. The frozen energy, which never finds adequate discharge or movement, becomes a precursor for a habitual mode of reacting to the environment. This occurs in the form of psychological, muscular, and even cellular contraction and rigidity. Immobility then becomes lack of responsiveness on all levels of functioning. In a real sense, we embody danger. This habitual mode of reacting becomes structured in our bodies and psyches, according to our developmental process and the specific environmental dangers we have encountered. The ability to identify and release these frozen structures are a major key to unlocking our suffering of trauma and our potential for healing and growth. "Thus, in dealing with traumatized people, it is crucial to

examine where they have become 'stuck' and around which specific traumatic event(s) they have built their secondary psychic elaborations" (van der Kolk, et al., 1996, p. 7).

Reich was the first to identify the function of these frozen structures, which he called 'character structures.' An understanding of the stereotypical character structures that humans embody provides somatic psychotherapists a map to use with individual clients. Character structures provide us the clues to understanding wounds from the past, present struggles, and the future evolution of the individual.

## CHARACTER MODES OF SURVIVAL

Outside the trap, right close by, is living Life, all around one, in everything the eye can see and the ear can hear and the nose can smell. To the victims within the trap it is eternal agony, a temptation as for Tantalus. You see it, you feel it, you smell it, you eternally long for it, yet you can never, never get through the exit of the trap. To get out of the trap simply has become an impossibility. It can only be had in dreams and in the poems and in great music and paintings, but it is no longer in your motility. The keys to the exit are cemented into your own character armor and into the mechanical rigidity of your body and soul. (Reich, 1969, p. 5)

As I look around, I see many people yearning for love and connection, while at the same time defending against these same yearnings. For indeed, these yearnings for love and connection require an openness that can be frightening, even terrifying, overcoupled as they may be with past abuse and/or neglect. Therefore, this drive to protect against fulfillment of our basic needs is based on a past rational response to a difficult environment; however, in the present, this blocking becomes a serious obstacle to our healthy development.

When we look at the ways in which individual character structures develop, we find that an individual's survival identity coalesces around protective blocking against threatening environmental stimuli, while simultaneously yearning for contact with the environment. If we were afforded a safe and secure environment from birth, we would find ourselves grounded in our self-regulatory processes and able to complete contact cycles in order to fulfill our basic needs, and grow. Because so many individuals have not been raised in a safe and secure environment, and have thus been developmentally inhibited, we have been wounded.

If the early environment – including the parents – is excessively frustrating, unresponsive, and distressing, the child will reach adulthood with habitual ways of acting and being that are essentially self-restricting. Indeed, such a person may at some level feel himself or herself to be trapped in a virtual prison of 'obsolete responses.' This prison, or trap, is the character structure of the individual. Ironically, the very character structure which has been formed as an optimal response to less than

satisfactory circumstances comes to represent the most significant obstacle to positive growth and personal development. (Lawson, 1991, p. 86)

We organize our lives around our deepest wounds. Therefore, we constantly yearn for the fulfillment of our basic needs while we simultaneously continue to protect ourselves from being hurt at this place again. This conflict speaks to much of the suffering we witness today.

It is a tribute to the wisdom of our human organism that we are able to satisfactorily defend against unwanted stimuli, while also finding a way to meet our basic needs. Yet, when individuals begin to organize their lives around survival, in perpetual 'survival mode', their basic life function is compromised. Their range of resiliency is reduced and the ability to meet their basic needs further compromised. Over time, this shutting down response becomes habitual, which severely inhibits an individual's ability to interact spontaneously with the world. Maryanna Eckberg writes, "A posttraumatic identity is very resistant to change, given that the defensive structure was laid down in life and death situations. Surrendering the new identity may result in a feeling of falling apart...However, for healing to occur the person must gradually let go of this survival identity" (2000, p. 23). Obviously, it is not so simple to just 'let go' of this survival identity. One of the keys to facilitating this gradual release is an understanding of the creative function of this survival identity, or character structure.

Character structures, which are chronically held survival identities (manifesting as physiological and psychological changes in the individual), can help us to understand where individuals were wounded, how they have protected themselves from future hurts, where they are now stuck, and how to mobilize the trapped energy and utilize it for growth and development. Of course, every individual is unique, and responds to life challenges in her own way. Yet, just as trauma is universal, so are there universal responses to trauma that humans share. We can reduce these responses to a basic

understanding in order to facilitate the healing relationship between client and therapist.

This model for the use of character structures in the healing process is somewhat different than the one that psychoanalysis has traditionally used. Although many psychologists have acknowledged the creative value of defensive structuring and understood how it served to maintain an individual's integrity, the treatment of character structures often falls back into the traditional mode of pathology. Often, when used in clinical treatment, labels such as 'resistant' or 'defensive' imply a problem with the client, especially in therapies still based on intrapsychic models. This approach tends to pathologize the client and reduce her to a sum of her symptoms.

"Psychoanalysis held that the essence of neurosis is the pathological persistence of defense mechanisms employed to ward off unacceptable unconscious wishes and impulses. Over time, the ego is 'hardened,' defenses are consolidated, and earlier conflict is transformed into chronic automatic modes of functioning...detached from the content of infantile conflict" (van der Kolk, et al., 1996, p. 7). This paradigm refers to an individual's defense against "unacceptable unconscious wishes and impulses" without making any reference to the genesis of such wishes and impulses. These wishes and impulses themselves are usually a primitive defensive reaction from intolerable feelings. It is essential to recognize that the creation of a defensive organization does not arise out of an individual alone, but emerges from a complex, dynamic relationship between the individual and her environment. Almost always the need to defend originated in some external violation suffered by the individual, not her own fantasy or wish.

Therapists are challenged to use their understanding of character structures in a way that is helpful for the client's growth process. Therapists must be sensitive during this process not to further strengthen these structures by allowing them to go unchecked in therapy. The healing experience necessitates that an individual owns, and inevitably

integrates their patterned-role in perpetuating their own dysfunction. Yet therapists must also be sensitive not to annihilate their clients' conditioned ways of being in the world, until they are ready on their own to do so. Any attempt to alter or disrupt this structure will be met with fierce resistance, which can be, in fact, anti-therapeutic (Heller, 2003). Ultimately, trust becomes a central factor in the relationship between therapist and client, much like the one between parent and child. Therapists must learn to trust in the healing process of their clients, and not to push them before their time. For character structures function as an individual's great resource.

Character structures are an individual's creative, adaptive responses to her environment. Although character structures create dysfunction within the individual, the mechanisms employed are, at root, protective in nature. Every animal has had to adapt itself to its specific conditions, but character structures are something more than a single adaptation. Character structures form when the environment prevents the individual from the full expression of her bioenergy in various ways, such as direct rejection (e.g., physical punishment) or indirect repression (e.g., religious dictates). When the environment denies the individual's free movement of energy over time, she must find some way to respond to life. Character structures, which are constructed basically of frozen life energy, are one way in which the individual learns to respond.

For example, imagine a young child growing up in a household where 'talking back' to her parents was fiercely denied. When the child did not feel comfortable with a demand made of her, she communicated her feelings; however, this response was met, time and time again, with severe punishment. The child was hit, threatened, and denied loving contact with her parents. Over time, the child would learn that if she did not submit to the parental demands, she would be hurt. To a young child, such hurt might feel like death. Therefore, the child submitted to the demands made of her, no matter how outrageous or overwhelming. Inevitably, she would lose contact with her self-regulatory process, including her own core feelings, as she was required to adapt to

meeting the expectations of her environment, at any cost. This loss of connection would most likely wreck havoc in her later life, generally manifesting as a complex of seemingly disparate symptoms. This example of developmental trauma and its impact on the young child illustrates how life energy becomes inhibited and bound within the individual. According to many circumstances – including the form and severity of the hurt, the age at which the wound was created, the child’s pre-trauma energy level, and the empathic quality of the environment – the child’s character structure could develop any of a variety of ways.

Although character structures are unique and specific to each individual, the process of development is the same in us all. Reich talked about muscular tension or armoring, which “relates to specific developmental conflicts around bonding, nurture, self-control, sexuality, etc.” (Carroll, 2001). Basic to Reich’s view on character structure, Conger writes:

Character...means a rigid, maladaptive, repetitious response to the world developed as a defensive action during an earlier life trauma, a response which inhibits our somatic and psychic repertoire, collecting debris on the psyche-soma levels like a log jam in a stream....Often in response to stress and trauma, our body tenses and muscles contract. We hold our breath in momentary fright, but afterward we do not always relax completely....The tight muscle aches initially until we replace the pain with numbness. With the loss of feeling, we lose critical somatic feedback, so that years later...we cannot feel the warning signs of pain. As a result, our body becomes less tolerant of high energy which would disturb contracted areas....Character armor is the way the body tolerates a contradiction in tissue, a lie in structure. Those of us who have suffered early trauma employ the most primitive defenses of denial, projection, introjection, and splitting. Our desperate rejection of feeling and our inability to integrate the shadow, our split away from dark rages and incestuous desires are facilitated by body numbness and our splitting off from bodily awareness. (1994, p. 92)

In this light, the life process is seriously compromised. If an individual’s way of protecting herself against the pain of trauma does not release, but ossifies, it winds up denying her growth process. She will be forced to organize herself as functionally as

possible according to her fear, overwhelm, and need for protection. In the body, this is often seen as constriction and tightness, though it may also appear flaccid and lifeless.

If a mobilization of energy is not adequately put into action and/or discharged, then this inhibition results in a truncated contact cycle resulting in repressed feeling and action. This uncompleted cycle thereby maintains and even strengthens the character structure with an increasing tension due to the increased activation of bioenergy. The individual becomes incapable of adequate discharge, hence perpetuating a vicious inner cycle of uncompleted biological responses. Sometimes, spontaneous responses occur through the normal routes of sexual discharge, emotional release, and need fulfillment, but just as often they occur in spontaneous reactions from our character structure, as in psychological and physical symptoms. This is the energy's indirect way of finding release. In the worse case scenario, we become more and more trapped within our character structures, our energy remains unavailable for discharge or even motility, and our system begins to shut down. Although initially serving survival, our character structure can actually expedite our own destruction.

Through years of study, theorists have narrowed the characteristics into several distinct types of individual character structures (Baker, 1967; Dychtwald, 1986; Heller, 2003; Johnson, 1994; Kurtz & Prester, 1976; Lowen, 1958; Reich, 1972; Totton, 1988).

Although different theorists use different categories and names, the character structures referred to are quite similar. For simplicity, I rely primarily on the model developed by my Somatic Experiencing instructor, Laurence Heller. Heller (2003), a teacher of developmental theory, postulates a composite model based on the five areas in the body where bioenergy becomes blocked – where chronic patterns of tension manifest. These areas correspond with the associated developmental phases that are disrupted.

Therefore, it is a bioenergetic model, in which the first character structure (contact/existence) contains the least amount of energetic charge, and is developmentally delayed at an earlier age than the last character structure

(love/sexuality), which contains more energetic charge and is developmentally delayed at a later age in life. When speaking of the different character structures, we must keep in mind that no individual fits any one structure precisely, but that each one of us falls somewhere along the spectrum. We must also keep in mind that there is no value judgment associated with where and how one's development is delayed. Being humans amidst civilization, we are all developmentally delayed and energetically blocked at various levels. Therefore, the model I put forward consists of stereotypical structures, and not literal personality types. It is not meant as a guide to classifying psychopathology, but is meant as a way of identifying bioenergetic development.

The power of this character structure model exists in providing us with an understanding of the various ways life energy becomes inhibited in humans, and ways in which therapists can assist clients at different developmental levels to release their blocked bioenergy, and facilitate growth and development. By understanding the developmental limitations of the individual, in connection with their major areas of trauma, the therapist can use the post-traumatic experience to help facilitate a reorganization within the organism into a more functional, self-regulated human being.

#### *Contact/Existence*<sup>15</sup>

The first character structure is the contact/existence structure. The development process of individuals who exhibit this structure was disrupted at a very early age – generally, from conception in utero up until one year old – by abuse or a neglectful holding environment. Since these individuals experienced this new life as dangerous and unwelcoming, most of their vital energy was not adequately developed, and therefore their growth process was hampered. Organisms with minimal energy levels exhibit severely limited adaptive capacities. Hence, when these individuals feel that they are not being nourished, filled up, or attended to by their environments, they resort to 'shutting down,' or dissociating, in order to displace the overwhelming

sensation of non-existence. Since infants are fully dependent on their environments for nourishment and energy, they do not have the ability to develop more creative coping responses.

Physically, this lack of energetic development is seen in their body structure. These individuals tend to be very thin, appear under-nourished and disjointed, and the flow of energy in their bodies seems disrupted. There is often a strong energetic block in the base of their skulls (occiput) where energy is cut off from the rest of the body and stuck in the head. This is a part of their dissociation, as these individuals are very often intelligent, using their minds as their main source of contact with their environments, for it is literally too overwhelming to feel anything directly. Their eyes may glow from this energetic charge in the head, while often their bodies are cold, signifying a low energetic charge at the body's periphery, which maintains the warmth of the body's core at the expense of its periphery. This low energy level and fragmented makeup cause these individuals difficulty generating and expressing emotion (which literally means 'to move out'). The limited movement of energy in the discharge of feeling and behavior, which are basic emotional responses, cause these individuals difficulty responding to life from their sensations. Many of these individuals therefore respond to life from an intellectual, removed place, and find it difficult to make intimate contact with other people.

With this short description, it is easy to infer the ways these individuals adapt to their environments. Due to their dependence on their rational, thinking minds, and their inability to respond with their bodily, emotional experiences, these individuals may ignore their own impulses, avoid intimacy, relate intellectually, gravitate to mental or spiritual pursuits, and look down on 'worldly' or 'touchy-feely' activities. They are often extremely creative thinkers who use their intelligence to protect themselves from

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<sup>15</sup> Traditionally identified as a 'schizoid' character.

encountering too much emotional warmth (energetic charge). In this way, they survive in a world that feels fundamentally unsafe and hostile.

We can deduce from this above description what will allow contact/existence individuals – based on their specific areas of physical, emotional, psychological, and behavioral blocks – to mobilize their energy and begin to re-connect the fragmented, undercharged parts of their organisms, and become a whole person again. The most important step towards recovery is making contact with other human beings, beginning in therapy with the therapist. This must be done carefully as these individuals are used to running away from close emotional contact. They may need to be engaged intellectually, distantly at first, until a bond of trust is obtained. Once the client feels somewhat secure in his relationship with the therapist, then the therapist can begin to inquire about the client's experience and feelings. Attending to the lonely and isolated experience of the contact/existence individual will help him to come out a bit more than ever before, 'to show up,' to trust that the shared space is safe to do so, and to begin to allow for some discharge of the great fear and distrust in doing so. Establishing contact with the therapist might be experienced as a profound sense of safety, or ground, a feeling the contact/existence individual is unfamiliar with. Significantly, this connection allows for the gradual awakening of the individual's own safety, or ground, within themselves, in their bodies. This takes time, but the experience of having a safe, holding environment in which to just be, can give the client a deep sense of relief and support. The ultimate healing comes when these individuals begin to associate with their own sense of existence – when they literally show up in the world and engage with their body process – establishing their own sense of support and safety within themselves. From here, these individuals can begin to make life-affirming contact with other people and their world.

*Nurture/Nourishment*<sup>16</sup>

The nurture/nourishment structure develops in individuals who, unlike contact/existence individuals, have made it into the world with their vital energy intact. Soon after arrival, however, they experience abandonment, loss, and great longing. Generally, this structure takes hold in individuals from nine months until two or three years old, a time when infants are reaching out to their caretakers for nourishment and support, and require reciprocation for appropriate development. When their needs are left unsatisfied, when they repeatedly do not receive the energy they require from their environments, these individuals eventually give up. This defeat devastates the entire organism. Their loss is registered as a persistent longing for the contact they once had, and an insatiable hunger replaces their basic drive for need fulfillment. Over time, their intense longing becomes their *modus operandi*, their way of adapting to a world that they feel does not support them. Tragically, the nurture/nourishment structure actually keeps fulfillment away by displacing the energy to make contact and be nourished by their environment into a constant longing for what they once had, or for what they believe they will one day find.

Physically, these individuals manifest their longing in their body structure. Although they contain more energy within their organism than the contact/existence structure, their body structures show marked signs of underdevelopment and weakness. For instance, these individuals may have thin lips, collapsed chests, flaccid bellies, and frail legs and feet. They usually have thin body types due to their difficulty metabolizing food, though they may also display oral consumption tendencies, some overeating when stressed, while others not eating at all under stress. Because of their weakness and underdevelopment, they can be sickly individuals; their sickness is yet another way in which their organisms call out for the support they so desperately need. The entire organism craves for attention and nourishment, though they struggle to express their basic needs. Their fear of disappointment and continued hunger holds them back from

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<sup>16</sup> Traditionally identified as an 'oral' character.

expressing aggression, anger, or independence. They tend to cling to relationships, and they crave for people to love them and take care of them. Because these individuals feel so empty and hungry inside, they are prone to fits of depression and despair.

The most pronounced way that nurture/nourishment individuals adapt to the world is by becoming people who are needed by others. They often assume occupations that reinforce this position. For example, such individuals may become therapists in order to maintain connection with people, but to avoid the vulnerability associated with mutually-intimate relationships. Indeed, due to their heightened sensitivity for more nourishing modes of being, they can tune into other people's needs and provide for them, making them excellent caretakers of all sorts. Their relationships easily turn into codependencies, wherein the nurture/nourishment individual is fed by providing for another person. However, if the relationship becomes too intimate (warmth and energetic charge increases), the nurture/nourishment individual will often disrupt the relationship. In doing so, the individual maintains her chronic hunger and loss, yet does so in relation to the external world, without coming into conflict with the state of deprivation within herself. This insures that the individual will continue to search for her return to contact and connection with others and the world, always longing, yet never being fulfilled. In this way, these individuals manage to survive a state of existence that feels fundamentally lacking and unavailable, for they believe that there is nourishment and love out there, somewhere, waiting for them to engage.

For the nurture/nourishment individual, the healing begins when she connects to her own body, her own grounding, and therefore her own sense of support and sustenance. The first step is for the individual to feel secure within the therapeutic relationship, to feel attended to, cared for, and nurtured. The individual can express her neediness freely and fully and feel assured that the therapist will be there, hold the space, and help her to find her way. The therapist thus helps these individuals to connect to their own strength by helping the individuals get to know their own deep sense of loss and

weakness, and begin to ask for what they need. In this way, these individuals are able to mobilize their energy to finally ask for and demand what they need for fulfillment from the world. Their ultimate healing comes when their impulses and needs are owned, so that they can meet their needs realistically, establishing mutually-reciprocal relationships where two individuals nourish and care for each other. Therefore, nurture/nourishment individuals can occupy their rightful place in the sustenance and development of themselves, as well as their greater communities.

### *Dependence/Trust<sup>17</sup>*

The dependence/trust structure manifests in individuals who grow up in an atmosphere of horror, where they witness, but do not necessarily experience trauma themselves. As a young child – this structure develops in children approximately from the age of two until five – witnessing or experiencing this traumatic experience engenders a deep sense of impotence, a feeling that there is nothing he can do. An internal script then becomes embedded within the individual that demands, “That will never happen to me, *never again!*” This ‘never again!’ manifests in complete disconnect from all vulnerability, and the overcompensation of a puffed-up feeling of strength, dominance, and imperviousness. The energy of these individuals, more vital than that of the previous two character structures, due to early contact and nourishment from the environment, is expended in the sustenance of this disconnected, overcompensatory response, and therefore it is not available for soft, warm, loving contact. These individuals are therefore drawn to wielding power and control throughout their lives. In fact, any intimate human contact, which they might regard as ‘dependency,’ triggers feelings of weakness, helplessness, and lack of control. These individuals strive to control everything around them in the attempt to protect themselves from the vulnerability within themselves. This behavior serves to keep them even further isolated from contact, which reinforces their basic feelings that no one is there for them, and they therefore have to do it all themselves.

Physically, dependence/trust characters are often 'puffed-up', as their upper bodies hold tremendous energy, while their lower bodies seem weak and underdeveloped. This way of holding energy expresses the compulsion of these individuals to rise above their vulnerability, and thereby displace energy up from their ground (lower body) into an area prepared for action and protection (upper body). Their respiratory patterns are locked on inhale, as the exhale itself feels like a deflation, and therefore weakness. This locked inhale generates the energy necessary to sustain the physical armor of the upper body, while denying the energy necessary to maintain connection to the softness and warmth of the rest of the organism. The inflation of their upper body often causes a corresponding inflated ego, where the individual feels superior or 'one-up' on others. This displacement of energy upwards in the body correlates with their ego functions, which help them reason through life experiences 'as if' they were living them, though they have dissociated from their emotional and physical responses. Again, this is due to the individual's inability to contact his own grounding and subsequent vulnerability as a human being in the world. They act 'as if' they were genuine, while manipulating their environments to avoid real contact with others. Emotionally, they may possess great rage at the world, which they generally express through attempts to command their environments. Obviously, they express very little sadness or tenderness, and any forays into the 'softer' places within themselves elicit great anxiety.

Dependence/trust individuals adapt to the world by ensuring that they will never be taken advantage of or harmed. Therefore, to keep challenges and violations from the environment at bay, they often rely on 'projective identification' as a mechanism to project their weakness and misery onto others. As discussed previously, this form of denial occurs when the individual evokes in others what he cannot tolerate within himself. Therefore, he may make others feel weak, insecure, and helpless, while his compensations are reinforced. These individuals can be remarkably seductive and

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<sup>17</sup> Traditionally identified as 'narcissistic' and 'psychopathic' structures.

cunning, as they try to get the upper hand in interactions. Yet, they also display flexibility in diverse situations, and can often meet many different people's needs. Their vibrant energy and charisma may be extremely attractive. Accordingly, if these individuals are able to acknowledge their disingenuous motivations, and eventually work beyond them to a more authentic way of being in relationship, they can become effective leaders, managers, and people with influence.

For the dependence/trust individuals, the ultimate healing comes when they are able to accept their feelings of weakness, helplessness, and failure. If they are able to identify their underlying anxiety, they can begin to form a new, more genuine relationship with themselves and their total life experience. Often, these individuals have run themselves into exhaustion by the time they come for help, as they continually deny any feedback from their bodies or others in their environment, as such feedback would be perceived as an attack on their strength. If these individuals are able to acknowledge their own responsibility for their exhaustion, and can allow themselves to invite another human being in the form of therapist or helper into their dark and scary places (places they probably still deny by the time they reach therapy), they will be able to move closer to their terror, and be attended to in a way that they did not experience as young children. They will be offered a place to surrender to their horror and can gradually relax their hypervigilant defensive posture against an external attack. Instead of facing everything within the world as an enemy to overcome – including their own bodies and emotions – they may begin to meet themselves and the world with childlike curiosity, a playful interest, a desire to know warmth and share themselves with others. Then, their gifts of leadership and prowess can be utilized for the common good, as opposed to protection from their own powerlessness and terror.

*Independence/Autonomy*<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Traditionally identified as a 'masochistic' character.

The independence/autonomy structure generally develops between the ages of two and four, when independence ('will') and learning to move freely in one's environment are central to the child's development. As the child explores her own self-regulatory impulses, if she is crushed or abandoned by a caretaker, she has no choice but to learn to get her needs met indirectly. This is the hallmark of the independence/autonomy character. Because of the inhibition and overly-conditioned love coming from her environment (based on, for example, eating habits, toilet training, and obedience), the child develops a script that warns, "If I tell them what I really want, how I really feel, they won't love me anymore." Therefore, the child learns either to submit to or rebel against authority. By sacrificing her self-regulatory impulses for external security, she loses her natural ease in the world – the characteristic flexibility, movement, and spontaneity often witnessed in infants and toddlers – and instead feels compelled to constantly meet the external demands on her proper behavior. Therefore, from a very early age, connection to others becomes linked with a sense of duty and responsibility, which creates difficulties for these individuals, especially within relationships.

The independence/autonomy individual learns early that the best way to counteract the environment's excessive demands, while still maintaining some semblance of integrity, is to withhold whatever the environment demands. Over time, their withholding becomes structured deeper physically, behaviorally and emotionally, as witnessed in the compressed, high-energy body structure, which is incapable of adequate discharge. Often, their inability to discharge manifests physically in constipation and sexual dysfunction. They often possess a thick, overdeveloped body, which correlates with their reactions to a tyrannical early environment; and a taut, constricted 'bull neck,' which reflects an effort to prohibit the mobilization of feelings from expression. As these individuals may be constantly triggered by outside influences that demand something of them, their energy builds and mobilizes for expression, yet without adequate discharge. This leads to another unsatisfied self-regulatory movement, which perpetuates the submission and dissatisfaction, expressed

in the body as a squeezing downward to bottle expression away, as though their body were saying, "No, leave me be" in its collapse. Meanwhile, their faces present a disarming, superficially sweet smile, masking the anger and resentment they are unable to express.

Behaviorally, the independence/trust individual might convey passive-aggressive tendencies in their interactions with others. For instance, there is a sense that when these individuals are asked to do something by authorities, they are quick to reply with a superficial "Sure," while their deeper resentments scream "No!" They turn their bitter impulses inward upon themselves, always making sure to appear compliant and trustworthy. They therefore often end up feeling the victim in many situations, even victimized by their own self-destructive tendencies. However, they often feel empowered in getting people to form expectations of them only to disappoint them. They have the ability to bring others down which helps them feel not completely overtaken and victimized by those with presumed power over them. Conversely, their cherished ability to meet expectations and do what they are told is the key to their survival. Amidst challenging environments these individuals have a remarkable ability to perceive what others want from them and to give it to them. They get others to trust them and rely on them for the fulfillment of important tasks. Because of their capacity for perseverance, dependability and loyalty, these individuals are generally well received by superiors. Through this they are able to maintain their dependence on external authority and thus avoid having to take responsibility in their lives. In the end, their ability to withhold and persevere saves them from coming into conflict with the deep ambivalence and self-hatred that is truly their own. Though they see expectations coming from everywhere, in truth, these projections are their own introjected feelings. For these individuals to feel them as their own means they would be challenged to accept responsibility and act on their own accord. As opposed to feeling like a victim, they would be challenged to establish their independence and demand change in their

environment. Their ability to establish freedom in their lives comes at the cost of lessening their dependence upon others.

Therefore, healing for the independence/trust individual comes when they can begin to self-regulate in their lives once again. With this, they find that they are not the repugnant, helpless, defeated person they always felt they were (conditioned through early training), but are in fact capable of great accomplishments on their own, and even more importantly, of great love for themselves and for others. Now, instead of accepting blindly other people's agendas for them, they begin to meet other people from their own ground; no longer do they feel so easily overtaken and defeated. The therapist can facilitate this process of acceptance and responsibility by encouraging the free movement and expression of their anger, resentment, and assertiveness. The therapist can help the client bring to awareness the patterns they use to reject these movements and sabotage their own process. For these individuals, it is essential that they feel deeply accepted in their work with their therapist, and that they are offered patience, commitment, and straightforwardness in their encounters. But the therapist must be cautious, since the fear of being swallowed up and defeated is so strong in independence/trust individuals that they will often attempt to externalize their frustration and rejection out onto the therapist. The therapist must therefore remain neutral and steer clear from intimating any kind of agenda for their client. The ultimate healing comes when these individuals are able to receive – from themselves most importantly – the message that “Whatever you do I will still love you.” In this way, they are able to meet others without the bevy of projected expectations and be open to more intimate, yet independent relationships. Ultimately, this process will allow them to free up their locked, self-destructive energy and mobilize it for creative, sharing functions within their world.

*Love/Sexuality*<sup>19</sup>

The last character structure is the love/sexuality structure, which develops in both sexes around the ages of three until six, and in girls, again during puberty, as they mature into full sexuality. This character structure develops around heartbreak. At these delicate ages when children are contacting their sexuality and gender differences, love/sexuality individuals meet an environment which ignores, denies, belittles, and/or attacks their tender, loving feelings. Many times parents feel threatened by their child's developing sexuality (girls especially) and assertiveness (boys especially), and therefore reject the child altogether, as it stirs up feelings within the parents that must be suppressed and rejected. Parents might require the child to meet certain conditions for them to receive love and are often pushed ahead out of their childhood into accepting grown-up responsibilities and manners. The child often feels frustrated having to meet these requirements and losing out on their childhood. The child many also feel unheard and unseen, even pushed away from their beloved families. This demanding, rejecting, and non-accepting environmental treatment is experienced as a tremendous loss. The child learns that "If I do not love and do not want, I won't be hurt; then I will be free." The paradox is that although all the child wants is love, receiving love is what they learn to deny most.

At this point in their development, all their energy goes into demanding love and attention from their environment, while at the same time constantly guarding against expressing love and warmth. This structure is the highest energy structure, visible in the excitement with which they meet the world. Because these individuals often felt crushed by their environment during childhood, they become highly achieving adults. They constantly strive for perfection and loathe failure, which they see as a state of vulnerability. Therefore, they stay compulsively active – in addition to being competitive, determined, and unable to relax or surrender. Their inability to surrender may be an obstacle in their way for receiving the warm, tender affection they so desire.

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<sup>19</sup> Traditionally identified as 'phallic' and 'hysteric' characters.

When they do not receive what they want, they can become easily angered, relying on rationality and 'reality' to defend their demands. In the end, they are emotionally unsatisfied, especially in sexuality where they may have frequent sexual encounters without satisfaction.

Physically, their yearning for and denial of affection can be observed in their body structures. Women often manifest seductive, very feminine physical features, with constriction and holding in their heart areas. Men often develop very manly, well-defined and athletic features, but generally seem rigid, tense and erect, as if preparing to defend against attack. Both men and women use their high energy level for actions to prepare themselves from being violated and to get what they want. Overall, energy does not flow freely within their organism but is prone to explosive, sudden outpourings. Their on-guard, determined approach to life is sculpted in their rigid, tense jaws and foreheads, as well in their fine facial features. They may hold their heads high and proud. They may also show much holding and tension in their chests. This overall physical rigidity is experienced as pride in not displaying their feelings or needs, while at the same time finding a way to meet their demands regardless.

Usually, however, they fail at meeting the demands of their inner selves. Because of their inability to surrender on any level, they cannot enjoy the state of receiving – with all the vulnerability and openness associated with it. Instead, they get things done, moving from one thing to another – even if that 'thing' is a partner in relationship – always something else to accomplish. Basically, they feel they must continue to achieve in order to be OK, to get the attention they require, and cannot stop striving for the 'thing' in the foreground of their desires. Often, they seem to live in 'crisis mode,' as sudden outbursts of panic overwhelms them and demands them to settle the task at hand (often triggered by a sense of failure or dead-end), only to be revived again by another crisis. In this way, they never fully complete any cycle. These behavioral mechanisms do not allow these individuals to settle into any one place for too long,

especially intimate, sexual relationships which require a level of openness, trust, and giving in to another person. Their high-energy state allows them to keep their achieving process going without the need to slow down or stop, which would elicit anxiety in the love/sexuality individual. Their compulsive search for intimacy and excessive demands upon partners insures that they maintain control in relationships, so that they will not be the ones pushed away.

Healing for love/sexuality individuals occurs when they connect into the soft, warm, vulnerable place of love for themselves and others. Instead of running away and bracing against expected violations, they can relax into feelings of safety and trust. The therapist can assist with this process by assuring the individual that they do not have to do or be anything to gain acceptance in therapy. No matter what, the therapist is on their side and will not push them away. The therapist can express this by inquiring about the individual's experience in an open, empathic manner, and attending to them completely. This entails holding the individual in their mistakes and failures, since this structure is based on a deep feeling of badness and/or ugliness – which is the belief they organized around since something within them surely had to cause the loved person to go away. An essential aspect of therapy with these individuals is allowing for thorough expression of their emotions and needs, especially their soft feelings like longing, crying, and caring. Some individuals may need support in expressing their assertiveness and aggression as well. The therapist will be challenged to slow the process of therapy down so that individuals get to know these emotions and learn gradually to tolerate them. In the end, they must find a way to integrate their basic feelings and needs instead of letting them overwhelm them or shutting them down. The ultimate healing comes when they begin to complete cycles and find ways to move with the difficult feelings that activate their protective mechanisms. They will then be able to establish and maintain close, intimate, and mutually-empathic relationships that are founded on trust and safety. This deep feeling of security and love will soften these

individuals and facilitate the expression of their warm, caring responses to themselves and others.

All character structures exhibit the same qualities of fixation at certain stages of development and the subsequent trapped bioenergy of those particular phases. This energy is expressed in basic life impulses – how we, as humans, develop, sense, feel, act, and grow. Without the free movement of our life energy, we remain stuck in old patterns and ways of being. We are also disposed for disease if our bodies develop around this trapped energy and therefore cannot respond naturally to life's movement. When we are able to mobilize our bioenergy in response to our life experiences, we tap into our most primal, basic qualities of our nature. As such, we are tapping into the core of life itself, within each one of us and within our world. This is when we feel most alive. We are not dulled by habits or pre-conceived responses, we are simply living life. John Conger writes,

When we can read the body's story, a history consciously unfolds which would not be available to us otherwise. The body as shadow includes the character we developed, the body manifestations of our inner yearnings, and the repressed and the unexplored unconscious....It is far easier to identify character than to identify our core nature. What is true about us is most illusive, most unique, and, in a fortunate therapy, is sensed and known in the intimacy between therapist and client....There is no technique, no clever use of words, and no substitute for the intuitive nature stepping forth as human soul. (1994, p. 90)

Once we are capable of acknowledging and integrating our character structures into our conscious life experience, we become conscious actors in bringing forth our greater selves. One of nature's greatest potential tools for waking us up out of this fixated state of character structure (and hence limited life force) is the transformative power of traumatic life events.

## TRAUMA HEALING

The treatment of PTSD has three principal components: 1) processing and coming to terms with the horrifying, overwhelming experience, 2) controlling and mastering physiological and biological stress reactions, 3) re-establishing secure social connections and interpersonal efficacy. (van der Kolk, et al., 1995).

Bessel van der Kolk presents us with a three-stage model in the treatment of trauma.<sup>20</sup> He continues by explaining that the aim of trauma therapy is “to help the traumatized individual to move from being dominated and haunted by the past to being present in the here and now, capable of responding to current exigencies with his or her fullest potential” (1995). The regained capacity for responding to life in the here and now is a result of reconnecting with our own process of self-regulation, and integrating this into our daily lives. Having access to our self-regulatory mechanisms once again brings us back into alignment, growing from the inside-out as we create from our deepest core out towards life, actualizing our “fullest potential.”

For the sake of clarity I would like to relate van der Kolk’s three principal components to what I have been outlining in this study. In regards to what I have been discussing, the three principal components for facilitating personal and social healing are: 1) cultivating an awareness of our situation, 2) integrating a therapeutic process into our lives, and 3) nurturing our interrelations with others, including our families, communities, our societies, and nature. Roughly following van der Kolk’s stages, the first section of this study focused on acknowledging and processing the crisis our civilization is facing. This second section has focused on understanding the intricate dynamics of this crisis, and applying a therapeutic perspective in considering effective ways of healing from our disconnection and pain. The third section will focus on ways we may respond towards healing and growth, specifically oriented around

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<sup>20</sup> Similarly, Judith Herman (1992) suggests that the recovery process follows three stages: 1) establishing safety, 2) remembering and mourning, and 3) reconnecting to life.

reconnecting to our greatest resources – ourselves, relationships, families, communities, natural life, and humanity’s evolutionary process.

Working with post-traumatic stress reactions, as we now so clearly see, is a complex, delicate endeavor. Because traumatic stress is the result of disruption on the physiological level, where defensive orienting responses are thwarted, effective therapies must in some way attend to this level (Levine, 1997; Ogden, & Minton, 2000; Sykes Wylie, 2004; van der Kolk, 1994, 2002). Cognitive models, which work from a top-down approach, propose that altering thought, behavioral, and emotional patterns will cause a shift in the lower brain patterns, home to underlying dysfunction. These ‘talk therapies’ are effective to a certain extent, but as van der Kolk has demonstrated, they do not move clients out of stage one from his three-stage model of trauma treatment (above) (Sykes Wylie, 2004). Van der Kolk completed a remarkable study using neuroimaging which revealed that the left frontal cortex – responsible for an individual’s ability to think and speak – shuts down with the remembering of traumatic experiences. Simultaneously, the right hemisphere – responsible for an individual’s emotional and sensory processing – becomes activated. This condition, sometimes clinically referred to as alexithymia, occurs when an individual may be physiologically aroused without the ability to intellectually or verbally communicate their internal experience. This happens quite often with trauma survivors. Therefore, Van der Kolk proposes that this state makes it extremely difficult for therapies that rely on an individual’s ability for insight and communication (Sykes Wylie, 2004).

Instead, a successful therapeutic approach must take into account the neurodevelopmental (‘phylogenetic’) layering of the brain and nervous system [see ‘New Science of the Organism’], with a specific sensitivity to the primal states of defense and orientation, which are so often disrupted in trauma. The brain and nervous system develop from the bottom-up, and act in a process of integrated functioning. As Levine writes, “we have tended, in the post-Cartesian view of the world, to identify so

much with the rational mind that the wider role of instinctive, bodily responses in orchestrating and propelling behavior and consciousness has been all but ignored” (1996b). What distinguishes humans’ propensity for trauma, while wild animals show none, is that we have higher brain systems that disrupt our instinctive, bodily responses. Animals maintain a state of flexible self-regulation, and do not suffer from chronic overactivation of their internal systems. Humans do, and this is caused by a top-down approach which dominates lower, ‘lesser’ systems. This approach is the mark of civilization.

Even though a remarkable shift is occurring in scientific understanding towards a more holistic sensitivity, in my research I was struck again and again with a subtle bias towards interpreting systems, including the brain, as the ‘higher,’ more complex systems controlling the lower. Van der Kolk reminds us that “we’re much less controlled by our conscious, cognitive appraisal than our psychological theories give us credit for” (Sykes Wylie, 2004). My experiences as a ‘client-centered’ therapist – using an inquiry-based approach rather than a manipulative approach – has led me to appreciate the creative unfolding process that occurs from a deeper level, when individuals are given adequate time and space to allow their organism to do what it needs to do (self-regulate). If individuals can give themselves the time and space to allow their organism to do what it needs to do, patterns gradually shift and change. In humans, these higher brain systems tend to get in the way of the basic, self-regulatory processing inherent within the organism. This top-heavy bias demonstrates an authoritarian regime within us all, which Freud called the superego. The superego is a legacy of our particular culture, and acts as an internalized conscience overriding our basic (id) impulses.

In traditional psychotherapy, there is more generally an emphasis on interpretation and problem-solving. Interpretation, a top-down approach, can be injurious to the individual by misidentifying survival responses as resistance, malingering, or an

organic mental disorder. It can also serve to disrupt the individual's sense of safety, as the patient may feel that the 'expert' doctor, while often taking notes and prescribing medications, is attempting to fix whatever is wrong with the individual. There is also the danger of an individual becoming identified as her diagnostic label, as commonly seen in psychological discourse with reference to 'borderline' clients. Besides its emphasis on illness and pathology, top-down approaches also leave little room for the individual's creative process of uncovering and embracing their own inherent resources to heal. Problem-solving, or coping, without a biopsychosocial perspective that perceives coping not as an act of will or foresight, but as a physiological survival response, may cover up certain vulnerabilities in a person's psyche, but will not heal the deeper level causing the vulnerability. At a deep level, the individual is dysfunctional, and until the deeper levels are reorganized, the individual's recovery efforts will at best be temporary. Coping seems to be a substitute response that individuals grasp onto when they have lost connection with their own internal process. Although coping is certainly a resource in times of trouble, as a psychotherapeutic focus, it is superficial.

With the emergence of a more detailed understanding of nervous system function – or dysfunction in the case of post-traumatic stress reactions – therapeutic models are being created and refined to work with trauma in a different way than top-down interventions have traditionally done. Reich, who still as a psychoanalyst upset some of his colleagues by turning to face his patients in therapy (as opposed to the standard behind-the-couch, distant observing therapist), began to inquire as to what was going on with the whole person. Without the extensive scientific research we now have at our disposal, Reich understood that civilization causes humans to repress and split from their biological cores, where their natural impulses are generated. These natural impulses, when not allowed free expression, become trapped and create the secondary layer of distorted life impulses, including violence, perversity, and terror. He viewed this layer, along with the peripheral layer of superficial behaviors, as creating a body armor which influenced the character of the individual (i.e., character structures). His

approach was to try and use breath and direct manipulation to break down the armor and thus allow for the free expression of our biological impulses. Reich was moving in the right direction with his grasp on the dangers of thwarted life energy, but his approach to working with the body might have been sub-optimal. Reich seemed to underestimate the necessity of the armor, specifically in its defense of keeping overwhelming stimuli out while also guarding against unregulated expression. Although he certainly acknowledged the terror associated with working on individuals' armor, he did not develop a more refined therapeutic approach to release the armor while sensitive to this state of overwhelming terror.

To the best of my knowledge, Reich never drew the connection between the creation of body armor with the failed attempts at orientation and defense against environmental stimuli. The function of these mechanisms is to keep us in rhythm with life around us, as seen in 'survivor mode' states and character structures. If we respond with biological appropriateness to our threat, then once the threat passes, we go back to normal functioning. When we do not respond appropriately, we are left in an overactivated state, with the mobilized energy still stuck within us. It is this unmetabolized energy that creates an overactivated nervous system, which then produces symptoms and misattuned behaviors. An essential factor then in healing trauma lies in our response to traumatic experiences. "In order to heal [i.e., alter or modify traumatic stress reactions], therapeutic interventions must activate those portions of the brain that have been altered by trauma" (Perry, 1998).

The most accessible way to work directly on brain and nervous system activation available to us now is through various somatic (body-oriented) approaches to trauma healing. Somatic psychotherapies engage the bodily systems, generally from a bottom-up approach. They work directly on the underlying brain and nervous system dysfunction, in order to re-organize these systems, which then alters cognitive, behavioral, and emotional patterns. An essential concept in somatic therapy is the

recognition of the body as ground for the experience of being human. Without our sensory functions, we would not be considered animate, living organisms. As embodied beings, we always have the opportunity to connect with the life process directly – not filtered through analysis, abstraction, or judgment – and our experiences in life provides us with essential sensory information with which we survive and grow. No matter if the approach is through dance, movement, bodywork, or body-centered talk therapy, somatic healing approaches view this sensate experience as vital information for our well-being.

When the body is attended to in therapy, there is no escaping the fact that overwhelming and terrorizing experiences still effect individuals at a deep level, even after the traumatic event is long past. As for somatic psychotherapeutic methods, Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) is most widely used as a technique for working on the physiologically-based information processing system, where unprocessed experiences can cause severe disruption. Francine Shapiro, who founded this approach in 1987, now refers to it as ‘Reprocessing Therapy.’ Although researchers are still attempting to figure out how this method exactly works, EMDR has become internationally recognized for treatment in trauma healing (Hume, 1999). Stephen Porges, psychophysiologicalist and director of the Brain-Body Center (in the College of Medicine at the University of Illinois at Chicago), has set up The Listening Project, a set of clinical interventions that use “acoustic stimulation to stimulate the neural regulation of the Social Engagement System....The theory predicts that once cortical regulation of the brainstem system is engaged, social behavior and communication will spontaneously occur” (Porges, 2002). Pat Ogden, who helped develop the Hakomi method back in the 1970s, has expanded her work and developed ‘Sensorimotor Psychotherapy.’ This somatic-based method connects sensorimotor (body-movement) experience with the emotional and cognitive levels, which often get disconnected in the aftermath of trauma. Lisbeth Marcher developed ‘Bodydynamic Analysis’ for working with psychomotor systems in individuals, and examines the

psychological content of each individual muscle for uncovering developmental disruptions (Bernhardt, 1991). From this, Marcher has created a character structure model based on the relationship between each muscle and developmental stage, which she calls 'bodymapping.'

In addition, there are numerous other somatic approaches that are demonstrating success in treating traumatic stress. Some of the more widely-known approaches include Gestalt Therapy, Hakomi Therapy, Process-Oriented Psychology, Pessio Boyden System Psychomotor, Sensory Awareness, Focusing, Body-Mind Centering, Rosen Method, Rubenfeld Synergy, Feldenkrais, Rolfing, CranioSacral Therapy, and Continuum. These, along with other therapeutic and non-therapeutic somatic models (e.g., dance and yoga), are changing the landscape of trauma therapy; and even psychology as a meta-field. These healing models are bringing a greater awareness to our holistic functioning and targeting those systems that become dissociated and dysfunctional.

Recently, so-called 'Power Therapies' have arrived which claim effective results in treating trauma. These approaches are attractive because they are short-term treatment models, which satisfy the health management and insurance companies' demands for immediate results from clinical interventions. "The compelling features of these therapies are that they all interrupt old habits and conditioned reflexes and provide new habits and conditioning.... It is proposed that they accomplish this end through working at the subcortical level of brain activity to interrupt the negative emotional responses elicited by the trauma stimuli" (Commons, 2000). Some of these methods include Traumatic Incident Reduction (TIR), Visual Kinesthetic Dissociation (VKD), Thought Field Therapy (TFT), Emotional Freedom Techniques (EFT), and EMDR. Many in the field of mental health are skeptical of these newer therapies, and although they are still on the margins of being accepted interventions, people are claiming good results in amazingly short periods of time (Commons, 2000). Indeed, much more

research is needed in the fields of Somatics and Somatic Psychology. While some of these therapies are more scientifically validated than others, and therefore more accepted than others, I believe there is an urgent need for funding and serious inquiry into all of the new approaches. Due to the advanced stage of civilization's crisis, we need to incorporate more effective interventions into individual and group treatment programs.

Based on the information we now have at our disposal, I have come to the conclusion that the field of Somatic Psychology, and Somatic Experiencing in particular, seem to be the most effective approaches in treating traumatic stress, which I believe is at the root of our civilization's crisis. I have traced the development in the field of psychology from Freud through Reich up until the present day, and find that Levine's work in Somatic Experiencing continues the development of an inclusive understanding of the biopsychosocial nature of the human experience [more on this in 'Trauma as Awakening']. It does so in parallel with the information I have gathered on the tribal worldview - ancient ways of living that helped humans survive for hundreds of thousands of years, before the arrival of civilization. It is my belief that in merging our ancestral wisdom with the current scientific research, we can cultivate a psychoeducational awareness, including effective tools for treating the underlying dysfunction of civilization, which can be applied as preventative measures to stop the cycle of devolution. It is what we do with traumatic experiences - how we respond to them, how we process them, and how we approach life after trauma - that provides us with a remarkable opportunity to alter habitual and chronic ways of domination and destruction, and shift into a new way of being in relationship with all living things, including our own selves. Therefore, understanding the dynamics of trauma and post-traumatic reactions offers us a roadmap to personal and social transformation.

## TRAUMA AS AWAKENING

Several Buddhist and Taoist traditions describe the four paths to awakening: sexual ecstasy, meditation, death and trauma. These are the ultimate catalysts for profound surrender and awakening. Unfortunately, most of us are not prepared to receive the opportunities offered by these powerful teachers...Trauma is the fourth pathway to awakening. In transforming trauma, we face an uncertain world. We must enter a reality stripped of the illusion of safety and learn an entirely new way of being, like a newborn child. In this new world, our instinctive energies are not limited to acts of flight or uncontrolled violence. Rather, they are our heroic energies – the wellspring of our creative, artistic, and poetic sensibilities. We can summon these instinctive forces to propel us into the wholeness of our intelligence...With mutual presence of mind and body, we can gain access to the source of our own energy and vitality. (Levine, 1999, p. 20)

The problems that we face provide us with an exciting opportunity for transformation. In understanding the way human beings are structured via life experience, we have the opportunity to use our 'healing crises'<sup>21</sup> to facilitate *breakthroughs*, as opposed to treating breakdowns (Levine, 1999). Literally, our traumatic experiences can offer us a window of opportunity to break-through the psychophysiological traps we are stuck in. Traumatic experiences by nature overwhelm our systems so that we are thrown into chaos and instability. Our once rigid standing in the world is shaken so profoundly that we have to find a way to reorganize ourselves, based on a new level of functioning. Obviously, if we are terrorized after trauma, our level of functioning will decrease as our internal systems stay overactivated and inevitably shut down. However, if we can move through trauma and find biological completion, our level of functioning will increase as our internal systems can tolerate more energy than ever before without being overwhelmed. Our range of resiliency will be expanded so that we can experience the world more openly, creatively, and with a sense of trust.

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<sup>21</sup> In Chinese script, the word 'crisis' can be read as danger or opportunity; hence implying that the seeds for both lie within crisis.

Transpersonal psychologists refer to this period of chaos and transition as 'spiritual emergencies,' which open up individuals to an entirely new level of reality never before experienced (Perry, 1999). Our culture's healers and practitioners act as if they have no conception of spiritual emergencies or healing crises, and tragically many individuals miss out on this tremendous opportunity for healing and growth. Typically, patients come for treatment when they are suffering. Their suffering is usually cause for external management and modification, and rarely do practitioners perceive the suffering as a process of transformation. If they did, the patient would play an integral role in her own healing process and external management and modification would be kept to a minimum. How health practitioners approach their patients, and more importantly, how they attend to them, influences the direction the individual's healing process will take. Somatic therapies - integrated with an understanding of the developmental nature of trauma and the possibilities of the human spirit - can assist suffering individuals by reawakening deadened impulses and thereby revitalizing one's life.

John Conger writes of somatic approaches to healing<sup>22</sup>,

There have been two paths in body therapy. In the first path the focus has been to identify and confront the defense structure or 'character' as Reich called it, to unblock the body structure so that the body's healthy rhythms can awaken or reassert themselves. In the second path, supportive attention calls forth the hidden resources of healthy functioning to throw off the body's unnecessary encumbrances. Following either path the therapist needs to see the client in his or her uniqueness, and facilitate a deepening dialogue with the inner self. It is this inner self that understands the meaning and direction of our health and illness. (1994, p. xvii)

The development of the first path in somatic psychotherapy began primarily with Reich's approach to working with character/muscular armor. Reich used the orgasm formula as the basis for his therapeutic model of directly affecting catharsis, as seen in physical shifts and emotional discharge, to restore an individual to healthy functioning.

The therapist affects catharsis by working directly on an individual's body armor, facilitating an energetic release similar to that of orgasm (Dillon, 2002). Reich and his followers believed that the inability to release sexually, as well as emotionally, physiologically, and psychologically, was the cause of an individual's dysfunction. Therefore, eliciting a full, pleasurable discharge through physical and emotional release loosened up the individual's character structure – which was formed through stagnant, fixated energetic charge. The individual could therefore return to a more dynamic way of living and interacting with the world. In Reichian lingo: Once the trap (armor) is broken, the core impulses are freed.

However, over time, many therapists and patients realized that with their newfound freedom often came frightening, debilitating consequences. Many Rolf patients – reflecting the extreme of those whose body armor was attacked without adequate support for their sudden awakening – struggled desperately to find a new way of relating with the world without their armoring that had protected them throughout their lives (Kepner, 1993). Reich himself, writes, “It is the sudden loss of control over the deep forces of the biosystem that constitutes the danger. It is furthermore, or rather first of all, the incapacity of the organism to deal with the full force of natural bio-energy that makes the situation in such cases so dangerous....Thus, the armor has a very important function to fulfill, as pathological as this function actually is” (1973a, p. 134). This function is to guard against the intense terror unlocked by an organism when that individual “comes into contact with his biological core” (Reich, 1973a, p. 133). The biological core, manifesting as it does through sensations and feelings, produces terror in individuals due to their unfamiliarity with such intense, albeit natural feelings. Moreover, the terror which seizes them so deeply is formed via their armoring – which was molded by past traumas and not responsive to present life experiences – so that any direct sensation and/or feeling will produce such incredible anxiety (Reich, 1973a).

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<sup>22</sup> Again, I am focusing here on somatic psychotherapeutic approaches, and not the general field of ‘Somatics.’

Many therapists who worked with the intention of melting the armor by manipulating their clients' bodies and characters observed that their patients often fell into severe depression or even psychotic episodes after their armor was opened (Bernhardt, 1991; Boadella, 1987; Heller, 2003; Reich, 1973a). "What organism could be expected to give up protection of its integrity, even when this is supposed to be 'good for it'?" (Kepner, 1993, p. 65).

David Boadella, who developed Biosynthesis after training in orgone therapy, writes:

The problem of therapy is not to cut the past away like dead wood but to re-work it, to regenerate it, so that the body can become charged with the significance of what it has truly lived. Reich used to say that character was frozen history; as the character softens, history melts and becomes fluid again; time past ceases to be a rut people are trapped in. Your experience is what you welcome into you; the rest is happenings. The more you have to shut out, the harder it is to hear the sound of your own voice. When every feeling is meaningful, and all meanings are fully felt, then the neurotic chain is broken that splits the body from the mind, and locks the inside within the outside. (1987, pp. 122-123)

Breaking down armor is only one part of the healing crisis. Dissolving the fixated, blocked, and resistant structure in individuals, according to Reich's view, would allow for the organism to reorganize itself, and inevitably, begin to self-regulate. However, this approach does not make room for understanding the defense of the armor "in its own terms" (Kepner, 1993, p. 68). Without such an understanding of the individual's "hidden resources of healthy functioning," certain individuals are prone to being re-traumatized in therapy; not to mention that the individual's deep wells of resiliency are often missed. As individuals' resistance (i.e., character structure) mobilizes within therapy, they might find themselves splitting, avoiding, projecting, or dissociating even more, since any challenge to their self is a perceived threat. They are still in survival mode, which necessitates defense at all costs, even if the threat comes from a loved or trusted companion. Perls writes, "Supposing that in sum there has been a gain, bound energy is released. Yet the patient has importantly lost his own weapons and his

orientation in the world; the new available energy cannot work and prove itself in experience" (1951, 285).

The bioenergy which is used for protection and growth ("weapons" and "orientation in the world"), must become freely available for individuals to heal and grow. Simply catharting trapped energy often overwhelms the individual's organization and instigates a protective mode of functioning. This, compounded with an already compromised self-regulatory process, makes it extremely difficult for individuals to integrate this suddenly released energy. In order to make this energy useful, therapists and clients must work according to each individual's unique process - generally, slowly and carefully - so released energy will be available for metabolization.

For instance, I observed a client in a therapy group whose family-of-origin dynamics were directly confronted by the other group members. He was challenged directly to look at his relationships with his father and mother, with whom he had always believed he shared a warm, safe, and loving connection. As his preconceived beliefs were contested, I noticed a 'deer in the headlight' look come over him. He was talking more quietly and less 'defensively' than before, but his words seemed to drift and fragment as he answered his challengers. Later, when I had a chance to speak with this client alone, he reported that at some point during the exchange, he felt disconnected from his body, like he was not fully there. Only after the topic had shifted away from him, did he recover and return to his ground, and even then, he felt shaky and confused. This client's state of uneasiness lasted for several days. To me, this seemed an example of dissociation and minor re-traumatization. The client did not seem ready to be challenged on a topic so integral to his adult functioning. Although he repeatedly assured the other group members that he did want to be challenged, his body spoke otherwise. In addition, behaviorally, he was acting 'defensive' and denying the challenges. When unsuccessful at protecting himself against a perceived assault - he could not mobilize the fight nor flight responses even in the 'safe' setting of group

therapy – he became immobile, and successfully protected against the attack by dissociating. “It is difficult to argue with the natural impulse to protect oneself from harm” (Kepner, 1993, p. 65). Depending on a person’s ego-strength, an individual may or may not be able to withstand such a direct assault. This client did rebound and reported that the experience had ‘challenged’ him greatly. However, I was left wondering whether a different approach to confronting this client’s protective structure might have been more useful.

Some time ago, in my own therapy group, I was challenged in a similar way. I also had the experience of being confronted, which I registered as an attack, in reference to what other group members reported as my ‘defensiveness’ and unwillingness to see a perspective other than my own. I felt that I was already in a vulnerable state, expressing my feelings around a sensitive issue, when several individuals pointed out my ‘defensive’ behavior and ‘distorted’ perspective. Similar to a way that I have felt traumatized throughout my life, I felt emotionally attacked by someone else’s interpretation of me. What they saw as distorted and defensive – my character structure – I experienced as an essential tool for my survival. Even though I knew intellectually that these other men cared for me and would not intentionally hurt me, my body was in defense mode. Therefore, feeling unsafe, I did what felt safe to me in light of an external assault: protect and fight back. This only made some group members more frustrated and impatient with my ‘defensive’ reactions. Meanwhile, I was left feeling misunderstood, unsupported, and alone in my feelings – the basic wound I have repeatedly suffered in my life. This is not to say that I did not benefit at all from this clinical experience, I just felt that in my process of opening up I was inhibited by such reaction, as opposed to encouraged to continue this frightening journey. Because I did not experience this situation as safe, the energy my body mobilized for defense was not able to adequately discharge, and I was left feeling angry, tense, and shaky. After the group, I felt even more resistant to what these group members were saying, and I used my knowledge of other therapeutic approaches to

justify my feelings. [This section of the paper might very well be a continuation of that justification.] Had the other group members provided space for my process to unfold and develop, by attending to me as opposed to interpreting me, their challenges may have been answered in time. I trust in the basic self-regulation of the organism, myself included. Because these other group members interfered with this inherent process, I fell back on my old protective structures, further reinforcing my feelings of isolation and lack of support. An opportunity for energetic discharge and biological completion instead became yet another reaction from survival mode.

Through my experience as well as my studies, I have come to believe that somatic therapies, based on inquiry rather than manipulation, are more conducive to meeting clients in their creative process. These creative processes are, in fact, a mode of survival, and therefore figuring out what the client's whole being is doing in order to maintain its survival is essential to its present and future functioning and development (Boadella, 1987; Heller, 2003; Kepner, 1997; Kurtz, 1983; Levine, 1999; Totton, 1988). "In the end, by going slowly, respectfully honoring the organic wisdom behind the arising of the defense, and not requiring anything particular to change or to happen, the process often resolves quickly and easily....For the therapist, all this is a matter of not passively withdrawing, but of consciously not performing any unnatural actions, of moving in accordance with what is taking place" (Johanson & Kurtz, 1991, p. 46). This is the basis for an inquiry-based model. Central to this model is the relationship between therapist and client. The therapist meets the client each session with an overview of the individual's process, but without an agenda for 'healing' or 'cure.' This is not to say that the therapist does not use the skills he or she possesses, but that each session the therapist attempts to meet the client anew, and let the process unfold as it will, while encouraging, facilitating, and supporting this process. In this way, therapy becomes an ongoing dance, where therapist and client move with each other, without interfering in their mutual process. John Conger writes,

In body therapy we seek to support the body in its natural function and core signature. We do not support “correct” movement. Everything living has a twist to it. Something is always a little out of sync, a something unique to our spontaneous expression....So, we are working to interrupt body rigidities that bend us over and twist us into immobility. We are realigning ourselves to create increased flexibility rather than to fit into a superimposed model of straight and tall. Our essential nature does not need fixing. Our beauty is not a possession but the life that flows through us. (1994, p. 46)

The therapist and client are then working together to strengthen the client’s ‘self’ – that unique and idiosyncratic process – while simultaneously dissolving the protective structure which inhibits the movement and process of ‘self.’ Only when the client does not need his protective character structure will he not use it anymore. Attempts to dissolve this structure directly through foreign efforts (e.g., invasive body-work or interpretation) may serve to perpetuate the individual’s rational defense against external attack. Even though there may not be an external attack in the present, this defensive structure protects them as it did when it developed as young children, and which they have depended upon all of their lives. Truly, “resistance is not [merely] a mechanism or tool of the self; it is seen as the self *itself* in action....To break down or eliminate resistance would be the same as breaking down and eliminating a capacity of the self. Resistance, in this view, is an expression of the self” (Kepner, 1993, p. 65).

Inquiry-based somatic approaches, such as Somatic Experiencing, Hakomi Therapy or Bodydynamic Analysis, focus on eliciting the “hidden resources of healthy functioning” by allowing the individual time to broaden his way of being, while maintaining continuity of the self, including the individual’s particular protective structure. This continuity of self is precisely what gets fractured in traumatic experiences. As Bill Bowen writes, founder of Psycho-Physical Therapy, “resources are defined as those actions, awarenesses, and abilities that support a person in maintaining a sense of self and a feeling of competency” (<http://www.psychophysicaltherapy.com/>). Often, survivors report that after traumatic events time stands still, and post-trauma reality is skewed. Self-esteem may be compromised and feelings of competency may seem

inaccessible. The trauma becomes foreground and everything else in the individual's life revolves around this experience. For example, I had one client who referred to her past as "B.A." and to her present as "A.A.", meaning "before accident" and "after accident." Post-traumatic identity ("A.A." for my client) is survival mode. Survival mode has to do with creating resources out of a skewed reality and based on a dysregulated nervous system, so individuals are forced to adjust to a compromised way of living. This is precisely how character structures developed in the first place, and further traumatic experiences can serve to strengthen one's rigidity even more.

As Reich demonstrated, civilization has demanded that we repress, invalidate, and ignore so many of our basic instincts that we have lost part of our humanity. We have lost access to our greatest resources – those biological impulses that belong to our being an organism in the natural world – particularly our orientation and defensive responses. Having lost our access to these resources, when we experience overwhelming or stressful situations, we are unable to negotiate through them, back to a self-regulated state. This causes us to grow even more distant from our orientation and defensive resources, and we inevitably lose our ground in relationship to life experience. Trust in the life process, within ourselves and in the world, is gradually replaced by fear. Having no confidence in our ability to cope with challenging situations, we become easy victims to terror. Leaving one's house can produce terror. Getting lost can produce terror. Talking to a stranger can produce terror. Facing an unknown future can produce terror. Our biological competency is greatly compromised and in its place is terror. We become afraid of life and its movement.

However, traumatic experiences can also serve to disrupt an individual's character structure and provide an opening into one's inner process. Over time, as the internal and external resources develop and expand, individuals are able to successfully renegotiate their overactivated and/or shut-down state, by mobilizing their bioenergy

for responsive action and biological completion. Thus, individuals can merge back into engagement with their inner life processes and its basic expression.

The model of 'Somatic Experiencing' is based on facilitating biological completion of an unresolved experience. Biological competency is established when our orientation and defensive responses are more or less intact, and we act in situations according to these instinctive mechanisms (Levine, 1996b). These produce a fluid continuum experience of the self in relation to life, as opposed to a fragmented, disjointed experience of the self when constantly feeling afraid. Somatic Experiencing attempts to renegotiate traumatic experiences which were left unresolved, thereby disrupting our bodily systems. The process of de-structuring the thwarted orientation and defensive responses, and the prevailing overactivated state, helps to discharge the trapped energy that gets registered as anxiety, terror, and rage. It does so by slowly working with bodily sensations towards the discharge of overactivated energy, and the restoration of our survival responses (generally fight or flight). "When orienting and defensive behaviors are carried out smoothly and effectively, anxiety is not generated. Instead there is the complex and fluid sensate experience perceived as curiosity, attraction, or avoidance. It is only when these instinctive orientation and defensive resources are interfered with ('thwarted') that the experience of anxiety is generated: I am not afraid of snakes or spiders, but of my ability to respond effectively to these creatures. Ultimately, we have only one fear, the fear of not being able to cope, of our own un-copability. Without active, available, defensive responses, we are unable to deal effectively with danger and so we are, proportionately, anxious." (Levine, 1996b).

In the brainstem (reptilian brain), the logical sequence of preparation, defense, and orientation must be restored to reestablish flow in life, as experienced as a greater range of resiliency in one's life (Levine, 1996b). This process entails reconnecting to bodily experience in a safe and sensitive manner. Traumatic memories are not the central focus of this work, the overactivated nervous system is. In Somatic Experiencing,

therapy works primarily on the brainstem level, where narratives and memories are not cognitively stored. Instead of diving into the trauma memories or symptoms, this approach helps clients to get in touch with their bodily sensations and reestablishes resources that were lost in overwhelming experience. Resources are essential in restoring a safe ground for clients to gradually move deeper into their overactivated state where traumatic material is stored. This is important, for so many psychotherapeutic approaches have emphasized interpretive or cathartic approaches to dealing with trauma, where clients must tell their story again and again. This often leads to retraumatization, as every time individuals tell their story they become more and more overactivated, and to regulate this overactivation may dissociate, have more symptoms, and/or act-out. Somatic Experiencing, through tracking one's body sensations and discharging the sensory overload, allows for the renegotiation of a traumatic experience. To this end, the work proceeds slowly to allow the nervous system the time it needs to reorganize itself, based on a different sensory experience of life. Establishing resources provides that this new sensory experience will not be a trauma-induced, overwhelmed state, but a process in which the individual is in control and able to regulate their arousal more and more. This allows for biological completion and a return to homeostatic, self-regulated baseline functioning. In this way, building resources becomes a vital part of the therapeutic practice, as opposed to relying on regression, desensitization, cognitive change, and/or directive emotional catharsis, all of which may overwhelm individuals and lead them to fall back into a fixated state (Bernhardt, 1991; Eckberg, 2000; Johanson & Kurtz, 1991; Levine, 1997; Ross, 2003; Rothschild, 1995, 2000).

Levine describes a resource as "anything that helps a person maintain a sense of self and inner integrity in the face of disruption. Resource is generated by self regulatory capacity" (Heller & Levine, 1997, p. 43). Therefore, a resource can be "any positive memory, person, place, action, or personal capacity that creates a soothing feeling in your body" (Heller & Heller, 2001, p. 63). This soothing feeling is the way we

experience the stabilization within our nervous system (Ross, 2003). In Somatic Experiencing, we use the 'felt sense' to track our sensations, both pleasurable and unpleasurable, so that we learn to experience what happens within our bodies as we relate to both pleasurable (resources) and unpleasurable (traumatic) stimuli. The felt sense, a tool of inquiry, is similar to mindfulness that many eastern disciplines cultivate through meditation and yoga. It is the simple process of bringing awareness to our bodily experience, and being with it as it moves (or doesn't move). Though this sounds like a simple technique, it is tremendously powerful. In our civilization of intellectual stimulation and hyper-desensitization, we have lost our innate ability to sense our moment-to-moment experience. We have tuned out our own inner voice. Thus, cultivating the felt sense can link our "our 'highest' and 'lowest' functions, our most elaborate, socialized self and our instinctual self" (Ross, 2003, p, 170). The felt sense, then, can bring us back into communication with our most basic instincts and impulses, and bring them back into awareness (much like Freud attempted to do one-hundred years ago through psychoanalytic techniques).

The felt sense allows us to identify our resources in life: How do you know that you like a warm bath? As you imagine yourself in a warm bath, what are you noticing in your body? Where do you feel that 'liking' in your body? Likewise, the felt sense allows us to identify our physical activation: How do you know you are nervous about your test? As you imagine yourself preparing for the test, what are you noticing in your body? Where do you feel that 'nervousness' in your body? The felt sense provides us with essential information that our minds often overlook or invalidate. These basic sensations are the key to knowing ourselves in a primal way, in direct relationship with our inner knowing. Thus, the felt sense returns us to the self-regulatory feedback loop missing in civilized peoples. This feedback loop allows us to respond appropriately to life experience. When this is overwhelmed and shut-down, we are in danger of responding inappropriately, or not at all, to threatening situations. Using the felt sense in a therapeutic setting, "individuals are guided into the body's instinctive survival

energies, previously locked in the neuromuscular and central nervous systems, so these can then be discharged and completed. The 'felt sense' ...is the tool that allows humans to do what animals do: complete our innate biological processes" (Ross, 2003, p. 170).

The felt sense supports our ability to identify and expand resources. The power of resources is that each individual has her own unique strengths, skills, and experiences, which are always present; sometimes, it just takes time for an individual to locate them. The felt sense is our tool for locating them. The process of inquiring about, and identifying one's own resources is itself a resource, in the sense that an individual is given an opportunity to scan what is right with her, as opposed to what is wrong with her, as in most traditional therapeutic models (based on pathology). What happens when the felt sense is being constantly guided to uncover anxiety and terror, instead of being encouraged to cultivate calm and strength? This subtle shift in perspective is profound, for when individuals are offered the time and space to get to know what experiences make them feel good, and help their organisms survive, a deep sense of trust and confidence is engaged.

Two experiences which took place while I was in Thailand are good examples of both internal and external resources. I experienced the first, an external resource, after I was involved in a bus accident in Bangkok and had to be rushed to the hospital. I was suffering from an injury to my head, in a foreign country where I did not speak the language, and in one of the largest cities in the world. To make matters even worse, our bus driver fled the scene, so a group of western tourists I was with sat and waited for nearly an hour for the police or an ambulance to arrive. None did. All the while, my good friend Jeroen, with whom I was traveling, remained by my side. Finally, he threw us into a taxi and instructed the driver to take us to a local hospital, so I could receive medical care (he was not injured). Throughout the entire drive to the hospital, Jeroen held my hand. I, meanwhile, was experiencing a racing heart, full-body trembling, and obsessive thoughts about my impending death. Yet, the felt sense of his hand holding

mine was the ground to which I could return, whenever I broke from focusing on my terror. He became my ground and helped me regulate what I had difficulty experiencing. When we got to the hospital, Jeroen took care of all the arrangements so I could receive treatment. He was by my side at all times, ready to provide me with anything I needed. Eventually, I made it out of the hospital and returned to a hotel room Jeroen had secured for us. I had survived and was physically fine. I did experience some aftereffects of this traumatic experience, but Jeroen's presence and care allowed me to feel supported and relatively safe, which helped me to manage this difficult episode and its aftermath.

Some time later, I was on a bus to Bangkok to take a flight back to my home in the U.S. I was leaving my good friends in Thailand, who are refugees and live a tragic life away from their Burmese homeland. I had spent the past nine months with them in Thailand, and I was sad to leave. As soon as I boarded the bus, I felt uncomfortable. I did not connect this bus ride to the one in which I was injured a few years prior, but looking back, I am sure that some of my anxiety was due to the unresolved effects of that traumatic bus ride. I had eight long hours ahead of me, and from the outset, I was anxious. I could not sleep. The bus was hot, stuffy, loud, and overcrowded, but I could not get off the bus, or I would miss my flight in Bangkok. As my panic soared and my heart raced, I spontaneously began imagining my friend Heath. Heath was on an 8,000-mile bicycle journey from Colorado to Tajikistan, raising money for Dushanbe orphans. His strength and courage has always inspired me. I could so easily imagine Heath's long, tall body as he strode on his bike across mountain ranges, and his bright, eager smile as he waved hello to all the local villagers he would pass. As I focused on Heath's image – which I had initially berated myself weak for needing – I felt myself relax. I had a felt sense experience of the constriction in my chest releasing, after which I could breathe more freely. I shifted in my seat. I began to look around and see the other people on the bus. I opened a window slightly to get some fresh air. And I continued to work with Heath's image in my consciousness as we made our way to Bangkok,

unaware that what I was doing was using my felt sense experience of this resource (Heath) to regulate my own arousal. Eventually, I calmed down and even fell asleep, and we soon arrived safely in Bangkok. The image of my friend Heath tapped me into my felt sense of strength and courage, which was so very different from my felt sense of panic and discomfort, and it allowed me to work with the external challenges as well as with my own internal limitations.

Both Jeroen and the image of Heath worked as resources for me in difficult times, but the resource strength was and is within me. It was a matter of becoming familiar with my felt sense of strength and depending on it as I struggled. Resources provide us with a direct link to our biological core, through the felt sense. This is not a new realization. In fact, as I will detail later, this understanding shaped tribal societies for millennia, before humanity disconnected from natural life and formed civilization. The worldview of tribal peoples was founded on their felt sense connection to the unique resources which made up their environment, culture, and ways of life. With the rise of civilization these resources have been eroded by traumatic events, and now, a traumatogenic-based society ('the Great Forgetting'). Without our ability to resource and come back into connection with our life-giving forces, we are left at the mercy of our internal systems - if they are activated and overwhelmed, we experience life from this place. As I found out through my own traumatic experiences, and later in my studies and clinical practice, developing resources is a major step in negotiating and eventually healing trauma - for individuals as well as for societies.

In *Waking the Tiger*, Peter Levine writes of the renegotiation of traumas. A 'healing crisis' occurs when we are threatened by a traumatic experience or overwhelmed by post-traumatic reactions, engulfed in what Levine calls a 'trauma vortex,' and have to negotiate this current of destructive forces according to our own survival mechanisms. This trauma vortex sucks one's vital energy back into the traumatic experience (via reenactment, flashbacks, and hyperarousal), or propels individuals to avoid certain

situations reminiscent of the traumatic event (via phobias, constriction, and dissociation). However, “nature responds, thank goodness, by immediately creating a counter-vortex – a healing vortex – to balance the force of the trauma vortex....With the creation of this healing vortex, our choices are no longer limited to either reliving our traumas or avoiding them....By beginning with the healing vortex, we pick up the support and resources needed to successfully negotiate the trauma vortex” (Levine, 1997, p. 199). This allows individuals to slowly discharge some of the bound energy in a manageable way, ‘in its own terms.’ Levine compares this process to a physician who applies a cast for a broken bone: the cast does not heal the broken bone, “it provides the physical mechanism of support that allows the bone to initiate and complete its own intelligent healing processes” (1997, p. 197). In the same way, resources provide the organism the support it requires to negotiate a trauma according to its own strengths and limitations, and thereby tap into its own self-regulatory impulses. This, in essence, is the healing vortex: identifying, developing, and ultimately integrating resources brings to consciousness the individual’s innate self-regulatory process, which works to heal old wounds. Successful renegotiation of inhibited impulses reconnects us to our core feeling states, and accordingly restores our basic life functions.

At a certain point, the organism either discharges the trapped energy and reorganizes as a more flexible, fluid individual, or remains inhibited and stuck by blocked energy. If the individual is capable of discharging the mobilized energy, it is possible he will be able to realize completion of the traumatic event. Completion occurs when an individual is able to pass through the ‘cycle of experience’ and after adequate discharge and relaxation, move into the next phase of the cycle. Levine describes it as a return to the fluid, moment-by-moment response to one’s ever-changing environment. This ‘exploratory orienting response’ is an instinctive way of meeting and responding to one’s fluctuating environment (Levine, 1997). The individual makes contact with himself again, with his world, and re-engages in the rhythm of life. This is the essence of renegotiating trauma. However, if the individual is not capable of discharging the

mobilized energy, then he falls back within the trauma vortex, spinning once again in the cycle of post-traumatic reactions. Stuck in his 'defensive orienting responses,' which are charged by energy trapped in the nervous system, he is conditioned to protect himself from possible attacks. These individuals sacrifice the vital energy necessary for personal growth and development to the maintenance of these subconscious, debilitating character structures. Yet, at some point, given sufficient support and resources, a future trauma may help him *breakthrough* his fixated structure, and reconnect with his overbound energy mobilizing for release. With the gradual release of this energy, individuals can in fact mobilize towards health. Levine writes, "Trauma, like labor, can serve as a final instinctive push – the inner shaking and trembling, or the 'kick in the butt' that awakens us to a new life and leads us home" (1999, p. 11).

When individuals return to a place of increased resiliency and empowerment – based on their biological capacity to regulate their arousal – experiences that produced terror in the past, like leaving the house or talking to a stranger, may become less terrorizing, and even enjoyable. Gradually, individuals can come out of being terrorized as they restore their basic instinctive resources. This naturally leads to feeling confident in meeting life experience and individuals remarkably begin to trust in life again. No longer will individuals be looking for when the next shoe will drop; they will be able to engage more in the here and now, as life moves on into the future (from out of the traumatic past). Finally, people can truly 'get over it' and 'move on' in their lives as the underlying overactivation that kept their nervous system overwhelmed begins to reorganize itself back into a fully-functioning, self-regulating state.

Life will look and feel very different to these individuals, living as they now are with more energy available to them and a widened sense of reality, and therefore possibility. This revitalization process, however, is not as dramatic as it reads. In fact, it is like a journey home to the natural, innocent, open, and child-like experience of a self-

regulating human animal. This way of being might not realistically be attainable for any one of us, but simply engaging in this process, and connecting into moments of the natural rhythms of life, is empowering.

When we realize biological completion, and successfully discharge the trapped energy so characteristic of post-traumatic stress reactions, humans, as well as animals, often have an extraordinary felt sense experience of empowerment. For instance, watching a rabbit successfully outrun her predator, we may observe a heightened state of excitement visible in the exuberant strides the rabbit uses as she runs, once she realizes she is safe. Ethologists call this heightened state 'pronking.' But humans also experience this elated state of biological completion. Although it is rare in daily life, I have been fortunate to observe it numerous times in the course of my training in Somatic Experiencing, and have also experienced it within my own process of trauma healing. Unlike our animal relatives, this satisfied state of biological completion is generally not expressed behaviorally (though under certain conditions it can be), but emotionally and psychologically. It is common to see a client who has renegotiated a particular trauma to express deep gratitude towards people that have helped her, including her therapist. Along with gratitude, individuals also feel a deep sense of joy, pleasure, serenity, exuberance, and aliveness. An individual's expression of these feelings is a sign of an increasing flow of bioenergy, an expanding range of resiliency, and an overall thawing out and reawakening of core impulses. Then, once again, individuals can easily access their feelings of love, compassion, empathy, and trust – and remember what it feels like to be alive.

**SECTION III**

**The Cycle of Evolution:**

**Revitalizing our Primal Roots**

### The Paradox of Personal (and Social) Change

If the world is saved, it will not be saved by people with the old vision and new programs. If the world is saved, it will be saved by people with a new vision and no programs. This is because vision propagates itself and needs no programs. (Quinn, 1996, p. 155)

At this delicate time in the history of humanity, we are faced with a very challenging dilemma: do we continue to invest our vital energy into upholding this civilization despite the collateral damage along the way; or, do we face up to the damage we have caused to ourselves and to our planet in such a short period of time, and look for alternative ways to survive and prosper? It is not an easy dilemma, for everything in our modern lives is geared towards the preservation of civilization, with little regard to the consequences of such a commitment. To make any kind of fundamental change away from our dependence on civilization puts us into contact with our deepest disconnection from life.

I have found repeatedly that most scholars, authors, politicians, religious and social leaders, when discussing this delicate time in our history, put forth ideas that may help us make changes geared towards alternative means for survival, but are missing a central element. It took me some time to come to this realization, for the suggestions these scholars and visionaries put forth are often quite profound. During the course of my thesis studies, for example, I read fellow-Vermonters Thom Hartman's far-reaching book *The Last Hours of Ancient Sunlight*. In the third section of this book, Hartman proposes various means to "wake up to personal and global transformation" (1999). In answer to the rhetorical question, 'What can we do about it?', he proposes the following suggestions to change the world: create new stories; create a new science; touch the sacred; learn to create awareness; re-empower women; respect other cultures and communities; renounce war against any living thing; change the focus of how we use technology; turn off the TV; and reinvent our daily life and rituals (1999). In addition to Hartman's suggestions, other learned individuals provide guidance on meditation,

altered states of consciousness, cognitive change, body awareness, child-rearing, education, relationships, communication, social activism, and my personal favorite one, how to 'just let go.' When I read or hear about any of these paths to personal and social change, my immediate reaction is "yes!" It speaks to my eagerness to heal my own wounds and make the world a more healthy and safe place. Yet, time and time again, I find that despite the brilliance of the ideas and concepts presented, and despite my initial enthusiasm, when I contemplate what these changes entail I realize that what they are missing is the spontaneous, unfurling process that I believe creates real change. What I mean by this is that in contrast to these ideas, which are coming from outside, from someone else, based on ideals, intellect and reason, fundamental shifts in personal organization can only occur at the foundational level. As opposed to a top-down, outside-in approach of learning, this approach is bottom-up, or inside-out. Change occurs first inside an organism, which then allows for a re-organization of the internal systems from where new ideas and concepts can emerge and take hold.

I am not trying to say that we must give up completely, stop reading and listening to others' ideas, and not try and make changes in ourselves and our world. I wholeheartedly believe in many of these suggestions, and myself practice several of them in my life. My concern with such suggestions is that if we ingest them because of a sense of duty or obligation to ourselves, others or the world, they can rob us of our own vitality, our own inner wisdom, our own self-regulatory movement. These external ideas can become so dominant that they obscure the internal process that is unfolding and emerging every day of our lives. Ultimately, then, a new box is created which further entraps us, further inhibiting our direct, spontaneous life movement.

Socially, we have witnessed this phenomenon with the rise and fall of countless empires, religions, movements, philosophies, and political ideologies promising us a better way of life. All have seemingly failed. I believe that revolutions and advances have failed to liberate us from the trap because there has not been a corresponding

revolution or advancement from our own individual 'traps.' It is not merely the social structure that needs to be liberated – it begins within each one of us. *We must liberate from the inside-out.* It is our own characterological structures which must be transformed before we can hope to make any substantial change in the social structure of our civilization.

I observed this process in action during my time working with Burmese exiles on the Thailand-Burma border. Many of my Burmese friends there were revolutionary, democracy activists who were forced to flee from Burma under the threat of lengthy prison sentences if caught demonstrating (or even professing alternative models of government or simply criticizing governmental officials) against the Burmese military regime. They were involved with a revolutionary movement that espoused democratic ideals and were so dedicated to this cause that they risked imprisonment, torture, and even execution. Yet being inculcated for their entire lives under such a repressive, life-denying regime, it was not so easy for them to throw off the yoke of authoritative rule. This was evident in several of the democratic groups that were headquartered on the border where I lived. There were groups who were working hard for the democratic principles the Burmese populace so desperately wanted, while at the same time running their own groups authoritatively. After much head scratching, what I realized was that the entire Burmese exile population amongst which I lived was suffering from post-traumatic stress reactions. The entire Burmese society, in fact, had been traumatized for many, many years (dating back at least to the British conquest of Burma in the mid-1800s). No matter how pure the ideals they try to apply to their lives, there is an underlying dysfunction that needs healing. The Burmese people, like all civilized peoples, cannot hope to find the solution to their pain through policies or even institutional reformation – though these can be significant steps – they require trauma healing. If they continue to apply external ideals to a dysfunctional system, they will get more and more dysfunction. For true social and political change to occur, the

internal structure of the individuals in the society must shift; as lasting change cannot come from outside ideals.

This internal process has its own wisdom and movement, and it is this process that we need to embrace first and foremost so that any external ideas we consider will be reviewed in the context of this internal movement. Taking responsibility – the ability to form a response – is a central component of our nature. It is the basic function of our organisms, moving through life in order to survive and grow. Once we are connected to our ability to respond to life, we will not require all the external material to give our life meaning and purpose. Meaning and purpose are by-products of being engaged with one's own self-actualizing process, in relation to other living beings.

The paradox of personal (and social) change is that it is necessary for us to follow some vision for healing ourselves and creating a healthier world, but such necessary change is dependent on altering the paradigm of how we live. For us as individuals, that means altering our biological, emotional, cognitive, and spiritual patterns to sustain and nourish a more primal, integrated personal organization. For us as a society, that means connecting healthier individuals together based on mutual attraction, and allowing these relationships to gradually alter the social landscape. That might not seem like an urgent enough call in the midst of such social chaos, but any other claim, I believe, might actually serve to perpetuate our dysfunctional relations and social chaos. It also does not mean that we must sit in personal therapy all day working towards making fundamental shifts in ourselves. Therapy<sup>23</sup> – individual, relational, familial,

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<sup>23</sup> When I refer to therapy, I am referring to therapy that is growth-oriented, not pathology-oriented. It seems to me that many people are still wary of entering therapy (seeing a 'shrink') because therapy has traditionally been for 'crazy' or 'ill' people. While severely disturbed people require more intensive, possibly in-patient treatment regimens, the majority of individuals could benefit from a psychotherapeutic process that is more like an educational process. Just as we learn literature, science, and mathematics to develop our mental faculties, so too could we learn more about ourselves to develop our physical, emotional, and spiritual faculties. Cultivating a therapeutic culture would be a major step towards re-integrating those aspects of our lives that have been fragmented by a life-denying society, in the service of personal and social healing.

and group – is an important aspect of altering our dysfunctional patterns, but it is not the only way to do so. Here is where the paradox gets tricky. Because other ways might include those suggestions I discussed above. Countless individuals have reported remarkable changes through their use of meditation, body awareness, cognitive change, and social activism. I have heard several individuals claim that one book or one discussion has altered the way they live and perceive the world. So it is not that these suggestions cannot help us, it is that we must help ourselves. The wisdom is within us, it is a matter of how we connect to its unfolding process.

Freud wrote that the healing power of psychoanalysis was in bringing unconscious conflicts to a conscious level. By doing so, instead of the painful material manifesting on an unconscious level in our psyches, our bodies, and/or our dreams, our eyes are opened to these deep wounds and the pain they are causing us. With this awareness, we may begin to put some of the fragmented pieces back together again. This process, then, is about integration, wholeness, and healing. It requires patience and sensitivity. A client, Phillip, struggled with failed relationships throughout his adult life. Over and over again, his relationships would fail, and over and over again, he would alternate between hostile attacks on his partners, and intense self-deprecation. At one session, Phillip remarked he had no “reference point” for a healthy, functional relationship. He was so used to relationships being insecure and belligerent that he had not consciously known that he was missing something greater. He was so engaged with either attacking his partner or himself that he failed to get to know this relational pattern on a deeper level. Once Phillip began to release the painful, hurt feelings that were remnants of his childhood relationship with his family, he realized that his adult relational pattern served to cover these deep feelings.

Like Phillip, many of us have fragmented, denied, and repressed our wounds because originally the pain was so overwhelming. We were forced (not chose!) to live as pieces instead of a whole because it was the safest way to survive; it served as a major

resource. For many of us living amidst violence, abuse and dysfunction, it still is. Yet, although a resource, living as fragments within a box perpetuates our isolation and pain, while strengthening the social dysfunction of civilization. The paradox deepens here in that we must change to confront our individual wounds and social ills, but we are in the world as we are due to our need for protection and safety from a scary world. Moreover, in applying methods of change we may be further adjusting to living within the trap of maladjusted civilization. We need to find ways to survive within the reality of our world without sacrificing our inherent self-actualization process – while encouraging this process to unfold in relation to life experience – but while also challenging those forces within civilization that serve to disrupt, inhibit, oppress, and/or murder our primal life impulses.

Following Freud's lead, Riane Eisler (2002) writes that we must confront the basic organization of civilization, that being a dominator model of relationships with ourselves, each other, and planet Earth. However, due to our successful socialization, we have been shaped into believing and acting from a certain cultural paradigm which is based on the unconscious domination of life.

Once we become aware of what we carry unconsciously, we can change. Change involves two things: awareness and action. As we become more aware of what is really behind our problems, we can begin changing what we do and how we do it. But this is a two-way street....As our personal relationships move toward partnership, the beliefs that guide our behavior change. As our beliefs start to support partnership rather than dominator relations, we begin to change the rules for relationships. This in turn helps us build more partnership-oriented families, workplaces, and communities. We then begin to change the rules for the wider web of relationships, including economic and political relations as well as our relationship with our Mother Earth. These rules, in their turn, support partnership relations all across the board, so that the upward spiral is given yet another boost. (p. xix)

This "upward spiral" is the cycle of evolution, a process by which we find ways to protect those repressed, dissociated fragments of ourselves while working gradually to bring them back into wholeness. Instead of further resisting and banishing them from

consciousness, we invite them into our awareness, slowly, gradually, as partners towards our greater evolution.

Often, this integration process is initiated by individuals who have suffered from trauma. Individuals find that these disturbing experiences have so shaken them that they can no longer hold it all together. These dissociated fragments often come whirling at them and are calling out to be noticed through the pain, confusion, rage, terror, anxiety, and depression. These individuals, as frightened and lost as they feel they are, desperately want something more. They want their lives back. Oftentimes what these individuals do not know is that this frightening journey inwards is in actuality a cultivation of a deeper sense of self. Individuals reconnect with their core selves, which has inspired and moved them, however unconsciously, as they struggled throughout life. It is a place so many of us do not know, yet somehow vaguely fear. This sentiment is beautifully expressed in the oft-quoted speech Nelson Mandela gave at his 1994 Presidential inauguration:

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you *not* to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It is not just in some of us; it is in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others. (Williamson, 1992)

The best answer to the paradox of change I can find is that we must start by safeguarding the natural functions of life, within ourselves and the world. With awareness of our dysfunction as a potential vehicle for our transformation, we might not be so eager to change it - to dampen our feelings or dull our awareness, to project our perception onto the world or further inhibit our life functions. We may need to reconsider our great urgency to change, and how we may cultivate a sensitive, attuned

awareness of our dysfunction. (And, once again, the paradox of change.) This is reflected in the mantra my mentor recites, “Acceptance precedes change” (P. Collins, Personal Communication, 2003).

I wish I could offer a clearer vision than this, but succumbing to the desire to provide answers would be disingenuous. The world, amuck with the traumatogenic forces of civilization, has become way too complex for simple answers. It is indeed necessary that we heal ourselves so as we are able to respond to the disease in the world. But in order to heal ourselves we need safety and security in this process. This requires a support system in the world, consisting of such valuable resources such as a therapist, friend, partner, community, special spot in the woods, art, exercise, dance, meaningful book – it requires us to take responsibility for creating this support system. With such environmental support, it is safer for us to live according to our impulses and feelings, and to share these with others. The paradox of change requires us to engage with our own inner knowing, and from here, realize our own process in living the life we are inspired to live.

In order for us to get to a place where we can engage with our inner process, and facilitate personal and social healing, we must acknowledge both the cycle of devolution which causes suffering and inhibits our growth, and the cycle of evolution which offers us the potential for healing and growth. By understanding the biopsychosocial dimensions of the cycle of devolution, we can see that our obsession to change and progress has to do with our fear, which is a by-product of overwhelmed internal systems that cannot return to rest. Many of us have such overactivated internal systems that even relaxation can elicit arousal and anxiety. In order to live on a daily basis, we have to constantly control our overwhelmed internal systems. So we manipulate life experience to maintain some semblance of safety, usually narrowing our range of life experience even more. Within this narrowed range of resiliency, we feel safe; and we are, on one level. But on another level, we are missing the full spectrum of

life experience. We are unable to respond to basic life experiences and therefore perpetuate thwarted cycles of experience. These impulses, not afforded an opportunity for expression and discharge, are pent-up inside of us. Our internal physiological systems are not given an opportunity to rest and rejuvenate; they know no sense of safety and are constantly alert, in survival mode. This relentless state of alert, with no ability for adequate discharge, is the perception of fear (Levine, 1996a).

Instead of understanding this biopsychosocial process, we have justified our fear, and its secondary drives for completion (e.g., individualism, competition, theft, deception, violence), as an evolutionary process of humankind. Civilization's obsession-compulsion for achievement and progress has been justified by religious, moral, and legal edicts. I have detailed one such example, socialization, where parents and educators act as if they know what is best for their children, even if it goes directly against the child's self-regulatory process. Parents and educators are working on an assumption that if the children do not do follow their instruction, the children will somehow fail. This belief is so prevalent, and it is based on a deep fear and distrust of life itself.

Although we have a deep-seated fear that if we do not act from our conscious will than we will fail, when we understand the complex networks of the human organism, we know that this is not true. Our organisms are organized to work in relationship, without domination by any one system. The human animal is programmed to act in response to his or her needs and desires, and this process of satisfying one's primal impulses is what assures survival and growth. For millennia, individuals, like other animals, lived in communities that were organized around this primal way of living. That connection has been broken. Now, our higher brain function has adapted itself towards a dominating approach to life. Our cortical brain structures, expressed as will and reason, have inhibited the full-functioning of the myriad of relationships within the human organism. Integrity has been disrupted. Yet, because of our ancestral history,

because of our inner wisdom, because we belong to the biosphere, we can return to balance. We need to reeducate ourselves, reprogram our civilization, and return to a direct relationship with the life forces within and around us all.

### **New Science of the Organism**

In the ordinary practice of civilized life, modern man feels compelled to confine himself largely to the stimuli that are germane to his purpose of controlling the environment. By using his consciousness to avoid the impact of many stimuli that stream out of total reality he certainly simplifies his life and increases his efficiency, but at the cost of much impoverishment...many young people are aware of the impoverishment of physical and emotional life that results from the atrophy of sense perceptions brought about by present-day existence. They are probably right in believing...that 'the resurrection of the body' is an essential condition of mental sanity. (Dubos, 1968, p. 113)

Psychology has always trodden a fine line between science and philosophy, while psychotherapy has always trodden a fine line between healing and art. Throughout its development, psychology has attempted to bridge various (seeming) dichotomies including nature and nurture, objective and subjective, rational and emotional, and consciousness and unconsciousness. As psychology grew as a field during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, various schools attempted to use scientific analysis in order to better understand the intricacies of the human being, and why therapy works. Increasingly, despite movements toward more humanistic and transpersonal approaches, psychology has moved even further deeper into the scientific arena.

It was just a matter of time (and technology) until the scientific research started returning evidence of what many visionaries had been saying for millennia – that mind and body are one. In addition, current research is proving that the fundamental separation between nature and nurture, which has riddled psychology for so many years, is a false dichotomy. The individual organism consisting of mind and body, of internal and external processes, is in fact in relationship with a greater whole – our planetary organism. This is what some refer to as a field as 'Ecopsychology' (Roszak, 1992). The development of such holistic fields rests on the perspective that the relationship and interdependence between different parts of a whole is more important than the isolated parts in and of themselves. Moreover, these parts are not easily

distinguishable, as they are constantly being altered during interactions with other parts, and their environment. This is the essence of systems theory, a scientific movement studying organizational unity, and rejecting reductionism. Systems theory emphasizes “that real systems are open to, and interact with, their environments, and that they can acquire qualitatively new properties through emergence, resulting in continual evolution. Rather than reducing an entity (e.g. the human body) to the properties of its parts or elements (e.g. organs or cells), systems theory focuses on the arrangement of and relations between the parts which connect them into a whole (cf. holism). This particular organization determines a system” (Heylighen & Joslyn, 1992). This theory brings relationship and animation back to the study of systems, as in ‘living systems.’ It debunks the top-down approach of civilization by reassociating our scientific thinking to our most basic, primal instincts. It reminds us that all living things are forever dependent on each other for life. No matter how much we try to separate ourselves from other living systems (including people), no matter how isolated we feel we have become, we are still in relation to those systems, just by being alive. We can abstractly separate components and functions with our intellect, but that is as far as it goes; that paradigm is not based on living reality.

The significance of these new movements in science, and the research they are producing, is that they not only prove to us that these dichotomies can be unified, but they provide us with a greater understanding of the human organism as a whole – its development, function, and form – thereby allowing us to chart new maps towards grasping health and well-being. Whereas before psychology relied on metaphor, anecdotal evidence, and various threads of scientific research to forward its claims, the new science is bringing the metaphor, the personal, and the scientific together through its dynamic findings.

While it is beyond the scope of my study to present the extensive neurobiological, biochemical, and genetic research that is forming a ground for this new science, I

believe that a more complete understanding of the human animal is essential for the field of trauma theory and therapy. I will therefore give a brief summary of several current threads of research which may help us further appreciate the role trauma plays in psychiatric disorders and social distress; as well as in personal healing and social transformation.

All living organisms are perpetually in relationship with their environment, and these relationships affect fundamental changes in humans, not merely on an intellectual or emotional level, but on a neurobiological level. On this level of neurobiology, the nervous system and brain work in conjunction in coordinating human response to life experience, as well as in adapting their own function (and form) based on these responses and experiences. “The single most significant distinguishing feature of all nervous tissue – of neurons – is that they are designed to change in response to external signals. Those molecular changes permit the storage of information by neurons and neural systems. Indeed it is this capacity which allows the brain to be responsive to the environment (external and internal) to allow survival of the organism” (Perry, et al., 1995). No longer can we separate humans from their environment, for we now can observe how much experience acts as a modifier of human behavior (Perry, 1997). Although we have tendencies to act based on transgenerational genetic traits, experience in life is what causes us to develop or inhibit these inherent tendencies. Childhood trauma specialist Bruce Perry (1995) writes about how ‘states become traits’ according to human adaptation and use-dependent interaction with our environment. It is a process of devolution that leads to the dependence on lower functioning adaptive responses, and subsequently to lower brain and nervous system capacity. But there is another direction – evolving and expanding brain and nervous system capacity towards a more responsive overall functioning.

According to the neurodevelopmental perspectives of Bruce Perry (1995) and Stephen Porges (2001), the brain and nervous system develop ‘phylogenetically,’ meaning that

they have evolved according to a hierarchal, sequential fashion. This has important implications for clinical theory since it “provides an organizing principle to interpret the adaptive significance of physiological responses in promoting social behavior” (Porges, 2001). Like rings on a tree, our neuroanatomy is layered developmentally, from oldest and most primitive, to newest and most complex. These layers unfold on top of each other into more efficient systems of responsive functioning. However, they work as a unit, and depend on each other for healthy, full functioning of the organism. If there is a dysfunction in a more basic mechanism of the lower brain, it will seriously affect the development and function of the higher brain structures (Pearce, 2002; Perry, 1995). A way of thinking about this is to imagine an individual learning how to dance. First, she learns the basic steps. Next, she learns to put the steps together into a rhythm (i.e., “one-two-three-four, one-two-three-four...”). Then, she learns to incorporate different rhythms into one flowing dance. Once the dance is learned, the steps become automatic. Yet, if the individual initially learned faulty steps, the rhythm and entire dance would be affected.

A basic illustration of the anatomy of the brain is that it develops from the least complex brainstem (reptilian brain) to the more complex limbic (mammalian) and neocortical structures. Recent studies are also looking into a fourth, newest and most complex prefrontal cortical structure that may be linked with our ‘heart brain’ (Pearce, 2002). Although the prefrontal cortex, as Pearce (2002) articulates, may be the key to our ‘transcendence’ and evolution, what is happening is that due to abnormalities in development, we continue to respond to experience primarily out of lower brain functions. In most humans, the development of our higher brain functions have been compromised due to the environments that we were raised in. “This process - development - can proceed in an optimal fashion when the presentation of new stimuli is safe, nurturing, predictable, repetitive, gradual and attuned to the infant or child’s developmental state. When new experience is chaotic, extreme, or mismatched to developmental stage, development is disrupted” (Perry, 1998). Accordingly, the

potential for our evolution is greatly compromised when our basic needs are unmet, and instead we are faced with overwhelming, abusive, or misattuned environments.

Pearce (2002) hypothesizes the importance of the 'heart brain' in facilitating attunement to one's environment:

Our heart maintains an intricate dialogue with our brain, body, and world at large and selects from the hierarchy of em fields the information appropriate to our particular experience. The heart also translates back into that hierarchy of fields our individual response to the reality we experience. This dynamic feedback influences and modifies the very fields of energy from which we spring. We enter into as well as draw from these fields, which are apparently aggregates or resonant groupings of information and/or intelligence. (p. 60)

Neurocardiology is an emerging field which explores the neural connections of brain and heart. Porges' Polyvagal Theory also validates the brain-heart connection in terms of autonomic nervous system functioning (1997). He shows how not only does the brain and heart work together to modulate arousal "to match environmental challenges...[But also the] somatomotor fibers originating in these cranial nerves control the branchiomeric muscles including facial muscles, muscles of mastication, neck muscles, larynx, pharynx, esophagus, and middle ear muscles. Visceromotor efferent fibers control salivary and lacrimal glands, as well as the heart and bronchi" (Porges, 1997). These scientific discoveries are establishing the basis for our understanding how there are countless relationships between different systems within us, and within each system countless relationships of the components of the system, and on and on, and that although the brain may work to coordinate the various relationships, it does not act alone. If the brain tries to act on its own accord, without acknowledging the feedback it receives from the rest of the body, systems can be seriously disrupted. The onset of post-traumatic stress reactions is a prime example of what happens when the brain attempts to dominate the systems of natural impulses which respond "to match environmental challenges."

Based on the scientific evidence, then, “there is no more specific ‘biological’ determinant” for health or for dysfunction than relationships (Perry, 1997). Therefore, depending on our upbringing, along with genetic tendencies and other developmental factors, humans become predisposed to cooperation and a life-affirming approach to life, or to violence and a life-denying approach to life. As infants and children, if we feel constantly under threat, our energy becomes locked up in basic survival responses and is not available for the development of higher functioning. The more developed, human responses never become fully functioning. We are left in a perpetual state of survival mode. “The development and organization of functionally important neural networks (systems) is ‘use-dependent’....In a very concrete sense, the experiences of early childhood create patterns of neuronal activity that become the template neural networks and patterns (homeostasis) against which all future experience will be sensed, processed and internalized” (Perry, 1998). This ‘template’ signifies that indeed these temporary, ‘use-dependent’ states become hard-wired and permanent, thereby altering our inherent propensity to develop and grow.

Perry (1995) focuses on how such use-dependent states inhibit child development. He demonstrates that despite common assurances that children are hardy and will ‘get over it,’ they are not; what they are is malleable, according to their environment. “It is an ultimate irony that at the time when the human is most vulnerable to the effects of trauma – during infancy and childhood – adults generally presume the most resilience....In the process of getting over it, elements of their true emotional, behavioral, cognitive and social potential are diminished – some percentage of capacity is lost, a piece of the child is lost forever” (Perry, et al., 1995). What often looks like compliance or resiliency in children is often a deep state of immobilization caused by the inadequate development of higher-functioning adaptive stress responses. ‘Normal’ things that American parents do *for* their children like immunization shots, circumcision, scheduled feeding, and leaving infants to cry themselves to sleep in their

own room, might actually affect child development more than we previously believed. Instead of helping, parents may actually be inflicting great harm on their children.

The loss of a child's potential may begin with some unrecognized trauma, but will extend throughout the individual's life, as the child's incomplete responses to trauma form a basis for all future development. We, as adults, parents, educators, helpers, must understand that every experience profoundly affects the child's neurobiological development. "Children *become* resilient if they build a responsive stress response neurobiology, mirroring their experiences of a predictable and nurturing early caregiving" (Perry, 1998). This does not mean that children will never experience overwhelming and even terrorizing situations in their upbringing, but it does suggest a more sensitive and appropriate socializing process of children. Perry's 'neuroarchaeological' perspective reminds us, "early life experience determines core neurobiology" (Perry, 1997). If we are to encourage a shift away from the cycle of devolution and toward a cycle of evolution, we need an understanding that enables us to support children's development of their self-regulated responses. We also must mirror nurturing relationships with one another, especially within the family. This calls for prevention models that will facilitate pro-social development.

Stephen Porges has offered us an innovative perspective on our potential higher social functioning through what he calls the Polyvagal theory. The Polyvagal theory, also referred to as the 'Triune Autonomic System' (Chitty, 2003), expands our previous understanding of the two-branch autonomic nervous system by including the 'Social Nervous System' as a third branch along with the sympathetic and parasympathetic branches<sup>24</sup> (Porges, 2001, 2002). This social nervous system, a more recent neurodevelopment seen in humans and primates, is an important ingredient in the

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<sup>24</sup> Porges (2001) has actually shown the social nervous system to be a subset of the parasympathetic nervous system. Along with the parasympathetic nervous system's more primitive component, the unmyelinated, or dorsal vagus, this social engagement system (also referred to as the myelinated, or ventral vagus) is a more complex, highly developed system.

healthy development of higher brain functioning in humans. As a social engagement system, it can be demonstrated in the “tools that bond a newborn to the mother” (Chitty, 2003). These “tools” are the ways in which newborns respond to their caretakers; for example, visual contact, hearing, facial and vocal expression. The function of the newborns’ responses is that it ultimately induces pleasurable sensations in the caregiver, thereby securing protection and nurturance for the newborn; which inevitably induces pleasurable sensations in the infant. Parental love, therefore, can be seen as a process of emotional bonding which sets up the environment for healthy development. If this emotional bonding, or parental love, is absent, the newborn registers a life-threatening situation and will rely on less complex protective functions – namely, their sympathetic and lower parasympathetic (dorsal vagus) functions. Porges found that these autonomic nervous functions are sequential, not reciprocal as previously believed. Therefore, adults under stress will first respond by attempting to establish contact using our social and relational engagement system. If that fails, we then rely on our mobilization or immobilization responses to protect ourselves from harm (Chitty, 2003; Porges, 2002).

If, as children, we were afforded a safe enough environment in which to develop functionally – with some amount of nurturance and freedom of self-regulation – as adults we will respond to stress according to the level of threat we perceive. There will be flexibility in which adaptive responses we choose. In other words, we will not be tethered to the default response of immobilization. In the face of danger, especially as infants and children, fight, flight, and freeze will be used if relational connection cannot be established. Particularly human-related traumas, as opposed to non-human assaults such as animal attacks and natural disasters, will elicit first a relational response. If the social engagement response fails, then the mobilization and possibly immobilization responses will be used.

If the social engagement response is appropriate, there are several, what I call 'secondary survival strategies' that may be employed. Secondary survival strategies are components of the social engagement system which are available for use at this level of meeting life experience. For example, attachment, rescue, assertiveness, and cooperation are all strategies employed by humans when facing life challenges (Valent, 1998). As a child, I was part of an experiment on the rescue response of young children. A few other children and I were led into a room with a table, some puzzles and games, and left there. The researchers said that they would return in a few minutes, but until that time, we were to hang out and play. As a child of five years old, I did not comprehend I was part of an experiment. I was there to hang out and play. After a few minutes of playing, we heard a baby crying and screaming from another room. The sounds rapidly grew louder and more intense. There were two doors in the room we were in - one that we used to enter, and another one which seemed to lead to the sounds of the crying baby. I remember feeling terrified, and looking to the older kids to see what we should do. I also remember feeling worried about what was happening to the baby in the other room. We sat there for some time, and eventually went for the door and opened it. The researchers who had left us were sitting at a table in this room with a tape recorder playing the sounds of a crying and screaming baby girl. They were timing us and said we had done well.

This experience had haunted me as a child. It might have touched the helplessness that young children (and all humans) experience in the face of danger. I remember feeling afraid that I could be harmed with no help in sight. Now, looking back, I understand that the researchers were testing our basic rescue response, evident even in young children. For humans will not always respond to danger based on their own survival. There are times that we will sacrifice ourselves for others. During this experience, we easily could have fled the room or been frozen, not knowing what to do or how to act, but instead, we acted in the best interest of the unknown baby, even if we might have encountered danger in the other room.

Such secondary survival strategies expand the notion of 'survival mode' and offer us a larger perspective of understanding human response to traumatic stress. Significantly, these strategies extend beyond a purely defensive orientation by expressing our basic impulses towards actualization and fulfillment. All survival strategies are evolutionary mechanisms operating to enhance survival – they offer adaptive biological, psychological, and social responses in the face of overwhelm – and although they can be disrupted, there are times that humans engage “adaptive contentment and satisfaction responses” (Valent, 1998, p. 42) upon survival of a traumatic encounter. The development of these secondary survival strategies offer us a possibility of more fully human responsiveness to life challenge. These resources are part of our greater evolution as the human animal. Once our basic survival is secured, energy naturally flows into the development of more complex systems [see 'Helping Relationships,' 'Primal Connections,' and 'Civilization of Wild' sections].

The 'higher human virtues' such as love, compassion, empathy, understanding and creativity, are thought to originate in the most recent development in human brain structure, the prefrontal cortex (Pearce, 2002). Pearce suggests that the prefrontal cortex appears even more experience-dependent than the lower brain structures. The prefrontal brain, then, requires appropriate stimuli from its environment to evolve. Pearce (2002) argues in his book *The Biology of Transcendence* that this essential neurodevelopment has been inhibited due to the traumatogenic forces in our society. The brain function has seemingly stopped evolving and is instead devolving – shifting its center to lower levels where more emphasis is on defense and protection rather than on growth and creativity. Pearce confronts civilization's enculturation process as the genesis of violence and therefore the cause of our devolution (2002). Although we are biologically geared towards growth and transcendence, civilization requires us to remain stagnant, even relying on lower levels of our functioning. According to Pearce,

our brain, which has inherently adapted and evolved in relationship with life experience for millennia, is still adapting, but no longer evolving.

Humans in civilization rely on more and more stimuli to activate our nervous systems, but the stimuli we crave in the form of constant stimulation via electronic entertainment, intrusive images and sound, and busy-ness, does not serve to nurture and encourage brain development. It serves to deaden our impulses and desensitize us to the subtle energy in living organisms. Van der Kolk (2002) demonstrates that in individuals who have been exposed to traumatic stress, central components of the brain, including the amygdala, hippocampus, thalamus, and cingulate are damaged, and their ability to appropriately appraise and respond to incoming stimuli is deactivated. These areas of the brain operate through “sensory and emotional” processing, and seem to be inaccessible to reason or intellect (van der Kolk, 2002). We are therefore challenged not only to develop therapeutic models, but social relations which encourage optimal stimulation and functional integrity of the brain and nervous system – and therefore the organism as a whole. Rene Dubos writes, “A new kind of knowledge is needed to unravel the nature of the cohesive forces that maintain man in an integrated state, physically, psychologically, and socially, and enable him to relate successfully to his surroundings” (1968, p. 219). I certainly agree with Dubos’ vision for a more holistic approach to scientific endeavors, but I disagree that this knowledge is ‘new.’ This knowledge, in the form of bodily and traditional wisdom, has been our ancestral legacy as a human animal. By exploring our past, and understanding the natural processes that enabled us to survive and grow, despite the many limitations along our way, we may be able to cultivate healing models based on this primal wisdom.

## Healing Relationships

It comes from my belief that our basic drive is toward being connected to other people, what I have called the drive toward mutual connection. This means that people who come to me are ultimately struggling to be in relationship. Opening relationships is the essence of therapy, and of life...I can't separate my understanding of relationship from the body and body awareness. It is through body awareness that we sense ourselves in relation to the other. The more body awareness we can attain – which includes an awareness of sensation, energy and emotion – the more we are able to establish deep connections to others. (Marcher as cited in Bernhardt, 1991)

For millennia, humans followed “our innate sense of what is best for us” and did not need a field of science to prove that this sense was accurate or effective; our ancestors knew that it was by their own experiences (Liedloff, 1985, p. 21). They expected the human life process to continue as it always had, and that their needs would be met as they always had been. In *The Continuum Concept*, Jean Liedloff (1985) details how this transgenerational expectation to perpetuate the human process manifests as a deep sense of trust and safety, a feeling of being home in the world from birth. There is a fundamental connection to one's family, people, and land, beginning with a child-centered birth process and continuing throughout the newborn's development into a self-regulated child and adult. Only in the past few thousands years, with the development of civilization, have we strayed from this transgenerational expectation of trust and safety. Intuitively, many individuals have a sense that the bureaucratic, corporate, hierarchical, hyper-technological, and hyper-individualized society we live in goes against our basic human nature. But without a family or community to provide us with an alternative model for living – reflecting and nourishing our basic human nature – we have had to adjust to the realities of our present experience, as best we could. As Liedloff writes, an individual's “expectations are mingling with actuality, and the innate, ancestral expectations are being overlaid (not altered or replaced) by those based upon his own experience” (1985, p. 32). This overlay creates a conflict

within individuals who have to sacrifice their own life-affirming impulses to survive in the world.

The plethora of literature emerging from the field of neuroscience is providing us with the scientific evidence to back up our intuitive “sense of what is best for us.” Whereas Harry Harlow and others like him focused on the pathological organization abuse and neglect produces in infant neurodevelopment, neuroscientists, trauma theorists, and educators are focused on the preventative and rehabilitative opportunities. They are demonstrating through their research what most of us have intuited for many years. For example, I recently visited friends in the hospital who had just given birth to a pre-term baby boy. While there I listened as the nurses explained the practice of ‘Kangaroo Care,’ a method of skin-to-skin contact between the mother or father and their newborn baby. The nurses articulated that this method has been shown to stabilize and even promote pre-term infants’ health. I later read that this method was improvised by nurses and physicians in lesser developed countries who do not have the technological resources that industrial intensive care facilities have. They found that placing premature and often ill babies directly on their parents’ bodies (just as kangaroos place their newborns into their pouches), as opposed to isolating them in incubators or cribs, produced often dramatic results.

As I sat there and listened to the nurse at this state-of-the-art facility I thought back to the birth of my son, in the primitive setting of our family room. We choose to have a home birth, facilitated by a midwife, so as to make it as comfortable an experience as possible for us all. Moreover, despite not having the technology around us, we felt safer. We did not feel like patients who were in need of medical attention, but individuals (and a family) embarking on an incredible, life-altering initiation rite. We were bringing a new life into this world. I had never heard nor read of Kangaroo Care, but instinctively knew that holding this new life to us was what we needed to do. As soon as I helped my son from his mother’s body, I brought him up to her, and together,

the three of us embraced, amongst tears, sweat, blood, and in ecstasy. In that moment, no one could have possibly taken him away from us.

Listening to the nurse, I also thought back to my experience working with an elderly man, Irv, who used to tell me stories of how in the 1940s, obstetricians discouraged breastfeeding of children. When his children were born, although Irv and his wife felt that there was something off about it, they were educated on the benefits of scheduled, bottle-feeding. During their third child's infancy, the newborn (Andy) experienced severe colic. Irv reminisced of the countless hours him and his wife walked around the house with the crying baby, holding him close to them, trying to get little Andy to fall asleep. Irv would always end this story with a chuckle, and say, "That's probably why Andy has such a good disposition."

Irv was no scientist, and had little reason to doubt trained medical professionals, but there was something that felt 'off' to him about their child-rearing instruction, enough for him years later to connect those hours of human-to-human contact with his son's engaging disposition. How many parents have experienced this same inner knowing, only to be discouraged by professional or social opinion? Kangaroo Care is a hopeful sign that the treatment of our children, our health, and individuals in society is changing under pressure from mounting evidence of our relationship as malleable organisms with our world. The new science provides us with essential information to debunk traumatogenic social norms and re-educate ourselves based on our inner knowing. Kangaroo Care is just one such example from within the field of pre- and peri-natal psychology. Up until recent times, "modern anti-bonding hospital practices often felt wrong to lay people and some primary care professionals, but lacked sufficient identification of the specific damage. Now, it can be clearly stated that such practices defeat the babies' best stress response resource and force devolution to a sympathetic (hyper-) or parasympathetic (hypo-) strategy, imprinting the amygdala to forever expect betrayal in intimacy situations, a potentially devastating event for the

ANS and quality of life" (Chitty, 2003). In stark contrast to tribal societies such as the Yequana whose newborns are imprinted with the expectation for trust and safety in intimacy situations – engaging the social nervous system – our civilization imprints children with the expectation of fear and loneliness (Liedloff, 1985).

But this lack of safety in connection is not just a problem in childhood – this is just the beginning. It continues into adulthood, as our civilization experiences an increase in failed marriages, fragmented families, and isolated, lonely individuals. It also manifests in the dysfunction of organizations, groups, teams, neighborhoods, and governments. People are having a more difficult time cooperating and getting along (which may be part of the reason we see a rise in competition and competitive forces within our society, justified as they are socially, economically, philosophically, and politically). Yet, the irony is that relationships, in and of themselves, are a form of healing. Judith Herman writes, "The core experiences of psychological trauma are disempowerment and disconnection from others. Recovery, therefore, is based upon the empowerment of the survivor and the creation of new connections. Recovery can take place only within the context of relationships; it cannot occur in isolation" (1992, p. 133). We need only to view post-traumatic events where groups of people bond as survivors, like the atmosphere immediately after the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Centers in New York City, communities devastated by natural disasters, or hostages. In New York City, for instance, a metropolis characterized by anonymity, crime, and ethnic tension, people came together to help one another through their time of crisis. There are countless touching stories of strangers helping strangers, of heroic efforts not only from firemen and policemen, but also from bystanders, and of the outflow of volunteerism that characterized the city for days after.

Recently, here in Vermont, we have experienced extreme winter temperatures falling all the way to -40 degrees (Fahrenheit). The weather obviously created many difficulties for Vermonters. One day, as I was driving on the highway, I saw several cars off the

side of the road flipped upside down on their roofs. These accidents must have just happened since the emergency crew had not yet arrived, but already, there were ten, maybe twenty vehicles stopped on the side of the road. I slowed down to stop myself, and observed people rushing about, helping the drivers out of their cars, bringing them blankets, and calling on their cell phones for help. For the next few days, the newspaper ran several letters to the editor from drivers of these car accidents. One man wrote that despite his “frightening experience...there were some wonderful people who came to my aid to make sure that I did not suffer any serious injuries...I am extremely grateful for all your caring. I wish the people who covered my legs with robes would contact me so I can return your generosity” (McAllister, 2004). These ‘random acts of kindness’ are not as random as we might imagine. Russian philosopher Peter Kropotkin writes of an instinctive moral sense of social behavior he calls “mutual aid” (1955). He argues that so-called moral ideals have been imposed upon us by authority in order to manipulate the masses, but that humanity is based on a unified sense of belongingness that ensures our survival.

It is not love to my neighbor – whom I often do not know at all – which induces me to seize a pail of water and to rush towards his house when I see it on fire; it is a far wider, even though more vague feeling or instinct of human solidarity and socialibility which moves me. So it is also with animals. It is not love, and not even sympathy...It is a feeling infinitely wider than love or personal sympathy – an instinct that has been slowly developed among animals and men in the course of an extremely long evolution, and which has taught animals and men alike the force they can borrow from the practice of mutual aid and support, and the joys they can find in social life. (Kropotkin, 1955, pp. xiii-xvi)

An instinctive sense of mutual connection is at the core of our human experience. Our core impulses reach out to the world with love, compassion, empathy, and an expectation to connect. We are social animals, and are not meant to fend for ourselves. Nowadays, it often takes traumatic encounters like the ones above to remind us how important human relationships are in our lives. Often, when we are ill or in danger, we want our loved ones close by. Kropotkin (1955) reminds us that this inherent bonding feeling has allowed humanity to survive for millions of years, despite the countless

dangers and traumas we have faced along the way. Moreover, he suggests that this tendency towards mutual aid has historically been the inspiration for survival and periods of social development. We can thus see that in periods of human crisis, when individuals come together to cooperate and make it through difficult times, a developmental thrust is possible, due to the trust and affinity established in these experiences.

Individuals and groups who were in conflict relied on their social engagement system to deal with the stress they encountered. It has been observed that tribal societies used games, play, story-telling, and dance rituals as means for discharging group stress. They also practiced close physical contact and affection. These activities allowed individuals to come together and process the overbound stress that might have been the result of hunting expeditions, internal quarrels, inter-group conflicts, or natural disasters. These activities also allow for group bonding and the strengthening of relationships. Modern projects like Outward Bound and team sports provide a similar function.

I feel that the healing quality of relationships based on mutual aid is what we have come to know as trust. Trust is a biopsychosocial phenomenon, beginning with an organism's ability to feel its own bioenergetic movement and biorhythmic cycles, and respond accordingly. Anthropologists have described trust as being a byproduct of humanity's connection to 'nature' (Duffy, 1984; Liedloff, 1985; Malinowski, 1987; Shepard, 1973, 1998; Turnbull, 1972). In that sense, trust signifies a state of connection to the rhythms and cycles of natural life. It also manifests as an internal representation, or expectation in the future sustenance of life. Glendinning calls this trusting expectation our "primal matrix," which is "the state of a healthy, wholly functioning psyche in full-bodied participation with a healthy, wholly functioning Earth. This is the *animal mundi* which resides both within us and all around us....Our primal matrix grew from the Earth, is inherently part of the Earth, and is built to thrive in intimacy with the

Earth" (1994, pp. 5-16). This relationship ensures in humans "*the ability to feel connected and secure*" (Glendinning, 1994, p. 22).

Hypothetically, if we are in an intimate relationship with others (or the Earth), we experience a deep feeling of safety and security. I can remember several times in my life that I have felt a 'oneness' with life, precipitated by a communion with nature, close friends, or my lover. Stephen Porges' Polyvagal Theory posits that "social behavior is limited by physiological state" (2002). If our internal systems are overactivated and/or shut-down, it is difficult to form intimate relationships. I can also remember many times that I have felt alienated from people and experiences in my life, though I desperately longed for connection. Relationships function as an arena for healing from dysregulated physiological states. Being in relationship helps regulate the underlying dysfunction. If we are unable to be in intimate relationship due to an internally disorganized state, there is still tremendous benefit in simply being around other people, or in the natural environment. Joseph Chilton Pearce writes,

We extracted a cell from a live rodent's heart, put it in vitro, and examined it through a microscope. That lonely cell continued to pulse evenly for some time but then fibrillated (pulsed spasmodically) and died. We could take two live heart cells, keep them separated on the slide, and, when fibrillation began, bring them closer together. At some magical point of spatial proximity they would stop fibrillating and resume their regular pulsing in synchrony with each other - a microscopic heart. (2002, p. 55)

This experiment sounds remarkably like the story of young Brielle and Kyrie Jackson. Pearce's experiment demonstrates that there is an energetic component to our connection with other living beings. He refers to the connective force as electromagnetic fields, but we could just as easily refer to it as love or faith. The healing process is mysterious, and has not yet been fully understood (and possibly never will be). But in these stories of relationship and healing (remember the stories of my own resources, my two close friends Jeroen and Heath), a nurturing capacity is established. It may take years to develop, but this sense of nurturing and connection offers us a felt sense experience of not being alone in this world.

During the preparation for writing this thesis, I went to Northampton, Massachusetts to visit Windhorse Associates, a community-based alternative treatment facility for individuals experiencing serious psychiatric disorders. At Windhorse, the clinicians engage in a different kind of relationship with their patients than many other treatment centers employ. The patients, most of whom are coming out of hospitalized settings, are slowly integrated back into the community through a team approach which ensures that they are thoroughly supported in all aspects of their lives. A team consists of clinicians and other medical professionals, but also includes family members, friends, and a roommate, who is part of the Windhorse staff. The center is a non-residential facility, so that Windhorse clients live in a therapeutic household within the Northampton community, where most of their time is spent practicing “basic attendance,” in their homes and in the community, as well as in therapy. The Windhorse treatment model is based on this approach they call basic attendance, “which is used to focus awareness on the immediate needs of the moment. Basic Attendance has the integrative effect of gently grounding attention in physical reality and strengthening the empathic bond between client and staff” (<http://www.windhorseassociates.org/index.php?id=11>). Like the felt sense, which is used in several body-oriented therapies, basic attendance functions as a bridge from the conscious to the unconscious, or, from mental constructs to more basic awareness (i.e., sensations and feelings).

The Windhorse model also stresses the relational aspect of this tool of awareness, since humans live within a community, and are thus relationship-oriented. When basic attendance is used in relating with others, much like the felt sense is used in relating to one’s own experience, “friendly feelings develop...[which] is related to appreciating another person’s quality of energy, to enjoying being with them, to having mutual concerns, and to doing things together” (Podvoll, 2003, p. 277). It is a practice of bringing awareness to our basic experience of being human beings in mutual connection with other human beings, and with life itself. Through this sense of ground, individuals

realize security within themselves and their world, and trust that with the help from others, they will make it through their difficult times. “The practice of Basic Attendance cultivates the moments of clarity, humor, and relaxation found in even the most confused state. These “islands of clarity,” when recognized and valued, become the seeds of recovery” (<http://www.windhorseassociates.org/index.php?id=11>). With help from others, these ‘islands of clarity’ can be developed into valuable resources which help us to heal. Moreover, having the enveloping external support allows individuals to reconnect to their own, internal nurturing capacity.

This self-nurturing capacity, which I refer to in this paper as our self-regulatory process, was supported (or disturbed) by the imprinting infants received during their development. If individuals are unable to self-regulate, they must rely on external authority to help them manage life experience. If this external authority failed them in some way, these individuals, who have lost their autonomy, become defenseless to life experience. This existentially vulnerable state dramatically alters the way these individuals experience relationships – from those being based on mutual connection to those being based on domination, dependency, and competition.

Kropotkin (1955) rejects the notion that humanity evolved based on mutual struggle, like social Darwinists proposed during his life. “Those species which best know how to combine, and to avoid competition, have the best chances of survival and of a further progressive development. They prosper, while the unsociable species decay. It is evident that it would be quite contrary to all that we know of nature if men were an exception to so general a rule: if a creature so defenceless as man was at his beginnings should have found his protection and his way to progress, not in mutual support, like other animals, but in a reckless competition for personal advantages, with no regard to the interests of the species” (Kropotkin, 1955, p. 76). It might only be the past 6,000 years or so that mutual struggle characterizes humanity. Before this, for millennia, humans came together not based on moral ideals, a sense of obligation, or out of

anxious desperation, but simply because we needed each other to survive. This need is similar to the need that infants have for their mothers. Without the nurturance and support from their caretakers, infants would die. Similarly, without the nurturance and support from fellow humans, we would not survive. Moreover, there is great pleasure in these deep connections.

Leading female scholars such as Carol Gilligan (1993), Jean Baker Miller (1986), and Riane Eisler (1987, 2002), have used feminist perspectives (including the central role of motherhood in human development) to advance the position that humanity requires relationships based on affiliation rather than domination in order to survive. They argue that male-dominated, hierarchical systems are the driving force beneath the cultural deterioration we now face. These systems are fundamentally based on inequality and oppression, and therefore inculcate individuals with fear-based, defensive orientations. Riane Eisler, championing an alternative social organization, writes that "'development proceeds *only* by means of affiliation'...human beings have a higher level of 'growth' or 'actualization' needs that distinguish us from other animals. This shift from defense needs to actualization needs is an important key to the transformation from a dominator to a partnership society" (Eisler, 1987, p. 190). Yet, daily, our network of relationships are being eroded by the oppressive, traumatogenic forces of civilization. Loneliness is epidemic. And mutual struggle may be the single most defining characteristic of civilization.

The reality is that for many of us, relationships are the source of much pain and betrayal. We therefore keep our distance out of fear and protection. Based on early conditioning of abuse and neglect, so many adults are frightened of intimacy. Much of the demand for psychotherapy comes out of our existential loneliness, relationships concerns, and lack of supportive relationships. However, even the psychotherapeutic relationship can perpetuate fear and alienation. The traumatogenic, hierarchical state of our civilization encourages these fundamentally unequal power dynamics, whether it is

between a therapist and her client, a parent and his child, a teacher and her student, or a manager and his employee.

On the other end of this relationship, clients often surrender their own authority in deference to the presumed authority of the therapist. As a therapist myself<sup>25</sup>, I have encountered many clients who expect to be pathologized. It is a strange phenomenon but these individuals seem to want to be diagnosed with a disease or disorder so that they can organize their suffering around something. A diagnostic label offers them a way to handle their own impotence and terror by identifying with their illness, as if what was once out of their control now seems more manageable. This way, they can give themselves the hope of being fixed by an expert, or increasingly, prescribed medications. This is a fear-based perspective, based on the overwhelming symptoms produced by a basic disconnection from one's internal biorhythms.

All our lives, we have been conditioned and taught to learn from others, often having our own knowing invalidated. Acknowledging our own inner process is essential for healing. Self-regulated healing, unlike the expert's cure, is based on trust – trust in our organismic capacity to heal. When clients come in to see a health practitioner from this perspective, they are doing so from a different paradigm. They are asking for some support and guidance to help them re-regulate their lives, usually both internally and externally. Even if they are not as clear as this, these individuals know that their suffering is in their way of living their full potential and therefore want to find a way to heal from whatever it is that is creating the disturbance. These individuals go to health practitioners as partners in their journey towards health. When I was working in the alternative health field with herbs, vitamins, and natural supplements, I met many informed and sensitive health consumers who were frustrated by what felt to them like dismissive treatment by medical health professionals. As one woman said to me, “the

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<sup>25</sup> I have written elsewhere two papers regarding my own experiences and perspective of the psychotherapeutic alliance: *Therapist as Artist* (2002) and *The Therapeutic Magic of Wu-Wei* (2003).

doctor never once asked me what I thought about my [disease]...I didn't feel like he took me seriously." She decided to do her own research until she found someone who would take her "seriously."

In the early 1950s, psychologist Carl Rogers paved the way for a leveling of these unequal power dynamics within the psychotherapeutic alliance through his revolutionary 'client-centered' approach. Although others health practitioners had certainly worked outside the standard model, Rogers brought the concept and possibility into the mainstream. Still to this day, some fifty years after Rogers wrote *Client-Centered Therapy*, many therapists in the United States consider themselves 'client-centered' or 'humanistic.' What this means is that they are not aligning themselves as the authority over the individual's process, but are aligning their awareness in collaboration with the client's own unique process. Although humanistic psychologists do have advanced professional skills, and use them when appropriate, they do not overly-interpret or manipulate their clients' own process. The therapist's main goal is to offer the client an experience of genuineness, empathy, and unconditional positive regard. Empathy alone can be healing to individuals that have rarely felt connected to or cared for by another human being. Rogers (1977) demonstrated that not only was it acceptable for a therapist to get down to the patient's level and share what is happening with them in their process, it was necessary for healing to occur.

Lisbeth Marcher, founder of Bodydynamic Analysis, demonstrates that through body awareness, we are able to sense mutual connection with others. In other words, mutual connection is "the capacity to experience ourselves in relation to others" (Bernhardt, 1991). Marcher affirms that "there is no time in our lives when the experience of connectedness is not a crucial aspect" (Bernhardt, 1991). On some level, we all know this to be true. But our civilization goes on as if relationships were expendable, and in many ways works to destabilize our connections. I believe the trauma-organized world

we live in now will continue this destructive process, unless we are able to bring awareness to it within our own lives and within the world. Without the ability to experience connection there is little hope in humanity's capacity to heal.

Somatic-based therapies help individuals reestablish their body awareness, and by so doing, begin the slow rebuilding process from the bottom-up. This process occurs due partly to the inquiry-based, client-centered style which most somatic approaches offer. Somatic therapists are attending to their clients in a different way than other therapists have historically done. Somatic therapists are listening not only to one's story and emotional expression, but also the individual's deeper expressions - seen in the subtle bodily cues always present. Civilized humans, disconnected as we have become from our most primal sensations and impulses, have relied on our higher brain capacity to manage our intolerable sensations and unacceptable impulses, and have subsequently developed an amazing intellectual prowess. Our mental ability, which has been one of our most consistent survival resources, has also led us into imbalance. Through our dependence on higher thinking, we have become capable of avoiding or distorting our most basic sensations. Somatic therapy, then, allows therapists to bypass the mental distractions and tune into the deeper layers of a person's experience, where our basic sensations and impulses live. These layers so desperately need expression, but due to our disconnection and ensuing distrust, our primal experience remains obscured.

Body awareness enables individuals to get reacquainted with their internal movements and rhythms, to use them as essential feedback cues, and to begin to do what their bodies are needing to do. As this process unfolds, individuals may discharge overactivated energy, and/or revitalize dissociated, immobilized energy in their bodies. As their internal systems regulate themselves back to homeostasis, emotional, psychological, and spiritual states often change. Trauma or fear-based constructs dissipate, gradually replaced by a profound sense of trust. Relationships become

essential, as we move beyond our fear of intimacy and sharing. We realize our need for other human beings and for natural life. And, we experience our desire to give back.

For millennia, as tribal peoples, this mutuality in relationship was central to our human evolution. “Each person’s role in the tribe is to support every other person. Instead of producing the wealth of goods, the tribe produces for its members the wealth of security, safety, and a context for touching the sacred” (Hartman, 1999, p. 254). Thom Hartman uses an apt phrase with “touching the sacred”, for indeed it all begins with our ability to touch life, and experience ourselves as part of the greater movement of life – not abstractly or intellectually, but viscerally. This does not imply that we have to return to some primordial state, it means that we have to return to our own sense of being, as human beings. As Paul Shephard so eloquently states, “The truth is that we cannot go back to what we never left. Our home is the earth...The past is the formula for our being. Cynegetic [tribal-based] man is us. The attempt to revive our humanity and recover values and behavior does not mean giving up science, art, medicine, law, machines, music, or anything else” (1973, p. 260). It means remembering who we are.

### Primal Connections

The more we know about how people lived before ten thousand years ago and the way some small-scale societies still live, the clearer idea we have for a model with which to reorganize our own culture and our own society. The objection that you can't go back, which I've been hearing for twenty-five years, is the bigotry of history, merely an excuse not to look at the possibilities. (Shepard as cited in Jensen, 1995)

We can never escape our past. "The past, having shaped our species, holds the clues to normal function. The cell, individual, and society all tend to create and adapt to the kind of environment in which they work" (Shepard, 1973, p. 121). No matter how resourceful we are, our past is imprinted within us. Traumatologists have observed this clearly in individuals with post-traumatic reactions. Even many years after one's traumatic incident, individuals hold their unfinished biological responses in their bodies. Memories, too, become dismembered and years later may be recalled by some triggering event. People have not necessarily forgotten or repressed these memories or responses on purpose, it is that their reaction to the original experience initiated a split and fragmentation. So even though these individuals do not have conscious access to their memories and reactions, these memories and reactions still live within their internal systems, and still affect their present lives.

Recently, the study of genomics has identified and mapped the human genome, which is the full DNA sequence of an organism, present in each of our cells. On a genetic level, our past is imprinted within us as well. This past extends back for humans at least 500,000 years to when we first emerged as Homo Sapiens in the Pleistocene age, but in reality, "our genome is as old as life itself....The source of this genetic material has been passed on to us not only through our parents and generations of humans, but from archaic ancestors: primate, mammalian, reptilian, amphibian, ichtylian, and down to bacterial forebears of life on earth" (Shepard, 1998, p. 19). Our greater understanding of the human genome confirms Porges' phylogenetic hypothesis about how our internal systems developed. A phylogenetic approach is used in science to describe the

evolutionary development which has led to the distribution and diversity of living organisms. This approach offers us incredible insight into the myriad of complex genetic and biological clues we now have gathered. We are thus able to construct a model for the “evolutionary interrelationships of living things...[and] the way in which life has diversified and changed over time” (Speer, 1996). With this model, we may be able to approach humanity’s present crisis from a more informed, sensitive understanding of our collective dysfunction, and the potential for individual and collective healing.

While scientists explore the genetic and biological remnants of our ancestral heritage, anthropologists and other social scientists study the cultural remnants of our human evolution. These scholars have been re-examining the history of tribal peoples, without the cultural bias that has said that these people were ‘heathens’ or ‘savages.’ Although this approach, beginning with Jean-Jacques Rousseau, has invited scorn from those who say that such study is backward-looking nostalgia, or some romantic fantasy, there is merit in understanding and connecting with our roots; just as there is merit in scientists examining our biological and genetic roots. “As anthropologist Stanley Diamond has said, ‘The longing for a primitive mode of existence is no mere fantasy or sentimental whim, it is consonant with fundamental human needs’ ....As fate would have it, the psychic qualities [the healing] process requires and engenders are precisely those of the hunter-gatherer....We need to be psychologically open, to attune ourselves to the flow of the world around us and the flow of feelings and images within us” (Glendinning, 1994, p. 131). If nothing else, being open to traditional ways of being reminds us that we do indeed have roots, dating back much farther than civilized history suggests (remember the Great Forgetting), and that we are part of this greater evolution.

Moreover, the increasing separations between academic fields and disciplines leaves scholars like myself in a vulnerable position. Like Rosseau, nearly three centuries earlier, I, too, have invited scorn from individuals who express skepticism at my use of

ancient cultures in studying the psychological tenets of civilization. I have been told that my ventures into the fields of anthropology and sociology have left me relying on generalizations and stereotypes. I answer this concern with, "Maybe so." I cannot argue that the research and anecdotal accounts on which I base my thesis is absolute proof. However, I cannot accept the arbitrary divisions and increasing specialization within academic circles that restrains the freedoms and flexibility of students like myself. I believe that biological, emotional, psychological, and social processes are interconnected, and thus cannot be separated or easily distinguished. Moreover, to find a way out of this trap of traumatogenic civilization, we must be willing to take risks. For me, a major risk is venturing out of my comfort zone of traditional psychology and bringing the voices from our past into the fold. For the healing process is a mysterious, non-linear process, one in which science will have a difficult time fully grasping on its own. To this end, we can learn much from studying tribal, nature-based cultures, whose lives might have been based more on the mystery and unknown in life. By respecting our primal roots, we may revitalize ancient resources presently inaccessible to us, which will provide us with a more accurate sense of how to heal the traumatic split within each one of us, and our world.

Like biologists studying the phylogenetic development of our nervous systems, and like somatic psychologists focusing on the physiological development of our organism, analyzing tribal life initiates a bottom-up approach, from (presumably) more 'simpler' systems to more 'advanced.' However, we must discard the moral values that go along with 'simple' and 'advanced,' with 'lower' and 'higher,' with 'primitive' and 'civilized' – for they are mental constructs distracting us from comprehending and connecting with our basic life experience. "Intriguing to our human aspirations is that the essential nature of any older system, when integrated into a newer one, retains its integrity while playing its new, expanded role" (Pearce, 2002, p. 29).

Modern civilization has not integrated older systems, but has instead dissociated and repressed our older, ancestral ways. Therefore, our integrity is greatly compromised. The traumatogenic forces of civilization have denigrated what's left of these older systems while extolling newer systems. In the United States, for example, our history books begin with Columbus' great discovery of the Americas, and goes from there. Very little is taught about pre-Columbian America, or indigenous life in general. When tribal life is taught, there is often little context for understanding how our lives are any more connected to theirs than say, zebras or ivy. They might as well be clumped in with prehistoric tales of dinosaurs, the Ice Age, and the Big Bang. Or worse even still, is the lingering 'Cowboys and Indians' mythology that lives within us, at least in North America, that pegs the wild Indian as our dangerous enemy. What does this treatment of tribal peoples tell children about our past? That we glorify violence, through conquest and domination, while we malign nonviolence, through relationships and collaboration? Mostly, it seems that what schoolchildren come away with is a sense that indigenous people were uncivilized (with a silent, yet implicit teaching that the existing indigenous people have no influence in our modern culture either), implying that they live closer to animals than humans.

It is a mistake to think of small-scale societies as 'primitive' or 'simple', however simple they may appear on the surface....What is true, perhaps, is that the result of a typical hunting-and-gathering social organization is a simple and effective system of human relationships, and this is what so strongly appeals to many of those who have worked with them. If we can learn about the nature of society from a study of small-scale societies, we can also learn about human relationships, and that seems fully as valuable and valid....The result, which appears so deceptively simple, is that hunters frequently display those characteristics that we find so admirable in man: kindness, generosity, consideration, affection, honesty, hospitality, compassion, charity and others. This sounds like a formidable list of virtues, and so it would be if they were virtues, but for the hunter they are not. For the hunter in his tiny, close-knit society, these are necessities for survival; without them society would collapse. (Turnbull, 1972, p. 31)

Maybe there is something of value in living more closely connected with our animal heritage. If it is accurate that nature-based peoples demonstrated those characteristics we hold up as virtues, it would be educational for us to focus on what they shared as peoples. For the most part, tribal societies have collapsed – could it be that as these people were forced from living their ancestral ways, these qualities too became extinct? It would seem, then, that mutual connection, or, in Porges’ model, ‘social nervous system’ functioning, is the key ingredient to survival within communities.

Whereas tribal, nature-based cultures relied on directly relating with one another, we have substituted direct relationships for bureaucratic and top-down organizing structures. We create mega-communities where neighbors do not know one another. We work jobs in enormous corporations where we are encouraged to act ‘professional’ and conform. We surrender to governmental structures that allow for almost no direct involvement, instead offering us impersonal representation. “Democracy is automatically abrogated when any gathering of people becomes too numerous for the continuous involvement of each member” (Glendinning, 1994, p. 40). Size becomes an important component of our modern alienation. Colin Turnbull, who spent years studying African tribal peoples, writes that “the smaller the society, the less emphasis there is on the formal system, and the more there is on inter-personal and inter-group relations, to which the system is subordinated. Security is seen in terms of these relationships, and so is survival” (1972, p. 31). There is little hope that individual concerns will be heard in our modern, depersonalized social systems.

Paul Shepard suggests we replace such dehumanizing structures with “face-to-face small group decision making” (as cited in Jensen, 1995), or what some refer to as the “twelve-adult group....This is the optimal size for making decisions, protecting people from authoritarian individuals, and allowing everyone to participate” (Shepard as cited in Jensen, 1995). Such a model for group process allows for the diversity of individuals to be expressed and shared, without pressure from above. Every voice is heard and

honored, and consensus is a by-product of the close interaction. Lame Deer spoke of the indigenous way, “we believe that it is up to every one of us to help each other” (as cited in Forbes, 1992, p. 154). This is not realistic in extremely large groups. When we are in intimate relation with one another, when we actually hear each other’s direct expression, we can then experience the mutual connection that unites us all.

I have friends involved in cohousing and intentional communities in the United States and Europe, and I know that the safety and closer relations are what have drawn them to such experiments in living. I recently visited my friends who live in the EcoVillage cohousing community in Ithaca, New York, and was touched by their intention to return to lost ways of living together in community. I sat in a community meeting where people had the opportunity to talk decisions through, and come to consensus on all group decisions. On the Sunday afternoon of my visit, I walked by a vacant house that a family was moving into the next morning. I was touched to see hanging on the door a cluster of hand-made welcome signs from children in the neighborhood. This family was moving into a community that recognized them, wanted them, and respected them as an important piece of their home.

Some years ago, I lived on a Kibbutz in northern Israel. It was a similar experience in living. Neighbors commingled and shared resources – including child-care and help with everyday tasks. Extended families lived in close proximity to one another and were all involved in the raising of the children. Meetings and councils occurred that most, if not all members of the community attended, since every little decision affected the entire community in a direct way. And since conflicts were unavoidable, relationships were challenged to go beyond the superficial layer of life in separation and isolation. I cannot judge if the community members were any happier than those in the suburban neighborhood I grew up in, but I did sense that they felt more at home, and therefore a closer connection to their identity as Israeli Kibbutzniks.

I cannot within the scope of this paper present a thorough depiction of what tribal life meant for individuals and their society, for there are numerous, fascinating studies about the intricacies of such cultures. I also cannot possibly present a vision for an optimal, alternative model of living could be in our highly civilized society. Yet, to better understand our potential evolution, it helps to have a context of humanity's development. Until very recently, humans lived as nature-based, tribal peoples. Therefore, we need at least a basic understanding of what it means to live tribally:

Cynegetic men, being small in population – hence [now] a rare species – have highly personalized lives. Living in small groups, each person becomes fully matured as an individual and uniquely valuable to the group. Cynegetic people are leisured, generous, hospitable. They do not stockpile possessions or children. Their only private property is personality. Among them, social reciprocity and sharing are normal events, not a charity. The aged are active, reserved members of society. Their world philosophy is polemical, conservative, and normative, not opportunistic, progressive, or existential. The men are deeply attached to place and home, yet are mobile and free of defensive boundary fixations. Among them leadership is advisory rather than executive. Action is taken by consent. Their populations are not expansive. Group aggression, plunder, slavery, do not exist. There is no political machinery, little feuding, and no war....The past and future are not sources of anxiety because of the stability of the natural environment and because the rate of cultural change is small. The concept of time is that of simultaneity, which engages every individual and all of the past in complete attention to the present. (Shepard, 1973, pp. 145-146)

Only in a place of security and safety can individuals attend to the present. In a society where individuals expect life to support them, and their community and relationships to nurture and love them, they can actualize their higher potentials for establishing healthy relationships, families, and communities, and developing their personal creativity, intuition, and spirit. Shepard continues, “in his relationship to other individuals, and in his ecological relationship to the whole of his environment, man the hunter and gatherer has a great advantage in that the social and environmental perceptions necessary for his way of life are similar to those in which man evolved, so that his life style is the normal expression of his psychology and physiology. His

humanity is therefore more fully achieved, and his community more durable and beautiful" (1973, p. 146). Humans have survived and evolved in relationship with the land, weather, other animals, and each other. As we have broken from these relationships, we have lost access to our 'normal expression' – which is based on our self-regulatory internal systems, hard-wired with our primal knowing. Our lifestyle does not accurately reflect our psycho-physiological makeup, and in fact, works against its healthy functioning. If we cannot listen to the cries of protest from our primal knowing, all we need to do is acknowledge the structure of our modern societies for this to become blatantly obvious.

I had an enlightening experience at a 'Spiritual Unity Gathering' held right off the Pine Ridge Reservation, in southwestern South Dakota. The gathering was sponsored and organized by a group of Native American elders and activists, who invite people from all nations and backgrounds to attend. On the first day of the gathering, I had the opportunity to observe a Native-style council, where a group of elders met to discuss the week-long gathering. I observed as each individual spoke, slowly and articulately, while others sat quietly and listened. While an elder was speaking, he or she had the floor. No one else interrupted or interjected any opinions or comments, other than a nod of agreement or an occasional "ho!" (signifying consent). The elders spoke simply and directly, and their sharings were not linear like one would imagine at a business meeting or planning committee, where there are projects to be accomplished. Here, there was a sense of freedom and openness as each individual spoke. Oftentimes, I had no idea what their 'point' was, as they wove through tales and remembrances – expressing emotions, and using allegories, metaphors, and sparkling images; finally arriving in silence. After some time in silence, someone would spontaneously begin speaking, while the others attended to this new speaker. There was no one competing for time, for they knew that they would have all the time they needed. Similarly, there was no one manipulating the process, since they knew that whatever was decided would reflect the best interests of the entire group, themselves included. There were

items that day for the council to deliberate upon, but there did not seem to be any deliberation. As best I could see, they were simply sharing and listening.

As I observed this council, I was experiencing a mixture of exhilaration and confusion. I was excited because I knew this was right and good. The way they sat together in circle felt so close to my heart. It was not that there were no disagreements or conflicting opinions; there were. It was that this was not the main focus of the council. The main focus of the council was to give every individual the time and space to share. There was no greater agenda than that. I was confused because I had never observed a meeting like this before and was having a difficult time accepting the authenticity of their behavior. They were not getting enraged by or discounting other people's opinions. This does not imply that they were not experiencing anger, frustration, or confusion themselves, but that they were not acting it out onto anyone else. They seemed to be engaged in the present moment, as each person shared. Somehow, this seemed to regulate their shifting emotional responses, though even to this day I do not know exactly how.

An interesting thing happened about an hour into the council (it lasted well over two hours). A Caucasian woman standing next to me, also observing the council, became enraged, and stormed away muttering, "These Indians, they never get anything done!" I felt myself contract first in fear, then in embarrassment and shame. She obviously could not recognize the natural rhythms being shared and instead reacted to her own anxiety about not getting "anything" accomplished. The funny thing was, by the end, although they had not directly discussed many of the issues raised, they had been resolved; and while some had been left unresolved, I felt that there was an unmistakable sense of resolution within the group. This woman might have been unable to see that this process was allowing for group consensus, by offering every individual a full, participatory part. There were no flip-charts and notes taken, no issues to be debated and voted upon, there was simply sharing and reflection. There

was trust that the process would work itself out if given the appropriate time, space, and presence; and this was enough to set the tone for a peaceful, nourishing gathering.

When we are not born into a community that expects us to be a part of that community, nurtured and strengthened by our relationships with others in our group, we are forced to rely on our own autonomy; we are conditioned to be alone. In fact, we find being in close contact with other human beings can trigger our fears and wounds. It is no wonder that in our society intimate relationships are so difficult to maintain. We have no greater reality to rely on than our own beliefs and ideas, many of which are used to manage our inner fear and physiological overwhelm. Robert Wolff, an American man who experienced life with an indigenous tribe in Malaysia, writes in his book *Original Wisdom*,

My reality is made in my head; I create roles for myself, I create a structure that requires certain activities and prohibits others. I live in time; I have an agenda. Their existence had no reality until they lived it...Each day a blank page, to be written as one lives it. I tried to imagine what it would be like to listen to my intuition, inspiration, whatever one calls that inner voice. In my world that is almost impossible to do. We live by schedules, appointments. We eat when the clock says it is time to eat. We go to sleep after the news, which comes on at 10 PM, or elsewhere at 11 PM. In my world we cannot live another way. From earliest childhood we are told to plan, to think about the future. We impress upon children how important it is to know what they want. And from the first day of life we are also told that some things are real. Everything else is imagination. (2001, p. 121)

When Wolff attempted to 'let go' of his agenda, "my mind raced all day. I could not stop thinking" (2001, p. 121). Without our agendas, we are vulnerable to our underlying state of overactivated internal systems. These agendas, beliefs, and formal modes of behaving have become resources to individuals and groups living detached from their direct relationship to life. 'Reality' is taught to us by social authorities, namely our parents, educators, religious teachers, and cultural leaders. To become a part of the group, we must be obedient – we follow laws, pass tests, and recite vows, regardless if we they make sense or not, or whether we connect to them or not. There is

no felt sense of what reality means to us as individuals, in relation to the natural life we are a part of. The reality we are taught is based on individualism, disconnection from natural life, and fear. Tribal communities did not need to rely on formalized rules for individual behavior since their behaviors were tied directly to the cycles of their community. Living in relation to the other was their reality.

My experience at the Spiritual Unity gathering, and specifically after the council meeting, lead me to intense feelings of isolation and loneliness. Upon returning to my home and everyday life, I realized that in nearly all the interactions I had, it felt like 'every man for himself' – a stark contrast from Lame Deer's vision of mutual aid. It makes me think of Freud's conception of the ego: "Originally the ego includes everything, later it separates off an external world from itself. Our present ego-feeling is, therefore, only a shrunken residue of a much more inclusive – indeed, an all-embracing – feeling which corresponded to a more intimate bond between the ego and the world about it" (1961, 15).

Indeed, it feels to me like what I am experiencing with people, and myself, is only a "shrunken residue" of a wider reality. We have clearly lost touch with that reality and act based on how we have been taught to act. I understand that we are all doing the best we can with the resources available to us. Unlike the Native American council meeting, we are not provided safe space to share our insight and feelings, and on a daily basis, must get by without feeling attended to on a deeper level (i.e., our sensory, emotional, psychological, and spiritual processes). This perpetuates our alienation and makes it difficult for us to get out of our survival mode of functioning. When there is no one there to hold us on a foundational level – partners, friends, families, communities – we must rely on ourselves. In tribal life, "it's simply a given that every person is as secure and safe as the entire tribe is, and that the tribe therefore works daily to ensure the safety and security of every person: young and old, feeble or strong, healthy or ill" (Hartman, 1999, 255). Safety and security in relationships, and

particularly in community, has enabled us to survive and grow for thousands and thousands of years, and now, we are faced with the erosion of our greatest resources.

With this erosion, the shrunken residue can be observed in our civilized perception of self. For most of us, self is experienced as an individualistic, intrapsychic phenomenon, mostly disassociated from our environments and relationships. We know 'who we are' by our personal beliefs, feelings, and historical experience. "The focus on the self-contained individual is accompanied by a cultural overemphasis on rational thought to the exclusion of emotional responsiveness, so that pain, or indeed emotional experience of any kind, also tends to be pathologized or truncated rather than validated, encouraged, and fully felt. The tendency to pathologize deep emotions about the world may result in hurrying the client through the pain rather than encouraging her or him to enter fully into the experience" (Roszak, 1995, p. 163). Our feelings are an essential part of our self-regulatory feedback loop, which allows us to respond appropriately to environmental stimuli. This avoidance of experiencing our feelings is an aspect of our immobilization, and therefore perpetuates our limited capacity to engage with life experience. If we were supported and encouraged to experience our feelings, the 'self' ('shrunken residue') might expand, and connect back into the world to which it belongs. "When we are able to experience this interconnectedness, we need no moral exhortation to adjust our behaviors and our policies in the direction of ecological responsibility. As Naess points out, if we 'broaden and deepen' our sense of self, then the Earth flows through us and we act naturally to care for it" (Roszak, 1995, p. 164).

In the same way, the Ojibwa culture recognizes the self as relational. "If we were to ask where [the self] is, the answer would not be 'inside the head rather than out there in the world.' For the self exists, or rather becomes, in the unfolding of those very relations that are set up by virtue of a being's positioning in the world, reaching out and into the environment - and connecting with other selves" (Ingold, 2000, p. 103). What does this mean for our culture that has eroded our primary relationships to ourselves, others, and

the world? 'Identity crisis' is a phrase used regularly to describe such a state. This means that we have lost our identity – our “global positioning system” – for identity is rooted in a social context (Pipher, 2002). “Living in the community of life did give [tribal peoples] something we've lost, which is a complete understanding of where we come from” (Quinn, 1996, p. 181).

We are who we are – for better or worse – due to our relationships and experiences. We cannot avoid this, for it is encoded in our genes (Shepard, 1998). We are encoded with an expectation of how our lives will function, based on transgenerational adaptations and growth. “Because of our evolutionary past and the extraordinary way life has shaped our mind and bodies, we are required by the genome to proceed along the path of roles, perceptions, performances, understandings, and needs, none of which is specifically detailed by the genome but must be presented by culture” (Shepard, 1998, p. 39). When our organisms are not being met with appropriate cultural stimuli, our growth and development is inhibited. For example, tribal peoples were primarily nomadic, meaning that they were organized as a group to move accordingly in order to secure their food. Agriculturalists, on the other hand, are by the very nature of their lifestyle, tethered to a specific area, and do not have similar flexibility to move according to environmental cues. While hunter-gatherers can mobilize for action in meeting their needs, agriculturalists are greatly immobilized. Agriculturalists are much more vulnerable to their environments, without having the same response-ability as hunter-gatherers. If we extend this process further, we can see how agriculturalists could easily become fear-based, future-oriented, superstitious, territorial, exploitive, and surrender their own authority or resources away to meet their basic needs. The way they structure reality is then founded on their basic anxiety for survival. For hunter-gatherers, like the Ojibwa, “it is not by representing it in the mind that they get to know the world, but rather by moving around in their environment...by watching, listening and feeling, actively seeking out signs by which it is revealed. Experience, here, amounts to a kind of sensory participation, a coupling of the movement of one's

own awareness to the movement of aspects of the world. And the kind of knowledge it yields is not propositional, in the form of hypothetical statements or 'beliefs' about the nature of reality, but personal – consisting of an intimate sensitivity to other ways of being, to the particular movements, habits and temperaments that reveal each for what it is" (Ingold, 2000, p. 99). It is not that we must return to being nomadic, hunter-gatherers, for even if we wanted to, it would be impractical (if not impossible); it is that we need to revitalize the basic qualities inherent in this primal lifestyle, and allow them to seed in our present lives. This is not impossible, and certainly not impractical.

Chellis Glendinning writes, "The psychological qualities we so painstakingly aim for with our therapy sessions and spiritual practices are the very qualities indigenous people have always assumed. The social attributes we struggle to attain with our social-justice movements are the very ones that defined nature-based cultures for 99 percent of our existence as human beings" (Glendinning, 1994, p. 137). Paul Shepard also contends that there are similarities between tribal and civilized peoples, especially amidst the thrust of globalization. "We live with the possibility of primal closure. All around us aspects of the modern world – diet, exercise, medicine, art, work, family, philosophy, economics, ecology, psychology – have begun a long circle back toward their former coherence" (1998, p. 170). For example, due to the increasing displacement of humans over the past few hundred years, modern humans have become refashioned nomads. Refugee and immigrant populations demonstrate a return to the small, kin-group communities. Likewise, experiments with alternative housing and intentional communities show our desire to live among familiarity and safety. New scientific research is prompting us to perceive the world differently, ironically nearing the animist worldview of indigenous people. Dissatisfaction with religious and cultural systems have inspired many individuals to seek other teachings on which to base their lives, many of which are indigenous-based. And throughout the world, bottom-up ('grassroots') organizations are challenging the hegemony of a small number of authoritarian systems, which revolve around money, domination, and war.

In *Coming Home to the Pleistocene*, completed shortly before his death in 1996, Shepard takes us on a “journey to our primal world” in order to inform us of our basic, ancestral ways (1998, p. 170). These psychological qualities and behavioral traits – which Shepard calls “aspects of a Pleistocene Paradigm”<sup>26</sup> – will help facilitate the shaping of our future, because they are part of our lost heritage (1998, p. 171). As Shepard writes, “Through understanding ourselves the future can be shaped without revolution” (Shepard, 1973, pp. 277-278). Uncovering our primal needs and revitalizing our primal impulses can gradually shift the life-denying structure of our civilization, and regenerate it through these life-affirming measures. It is basically a model for restoring aspects of our own wildness back into our daily lives. Primal closure is possible if we personally experience biological completion. In order to embody these traits, we need to regain access to our self-regulatory processing. Therefore, on both a personal and social level, it is essential that we remember *who we are*.

Returning to the Ik people of northeastern Africa, we see a group of people who, in a dramatic fashion, were removed from their natural ways of hunting-gathering and forced to adopt an agricultural lifestyle. In only a few generations, they lost connection to the basic relationships that made them who they were and had always been. The cultural destruction of the Ik people, because it happened so dramatically, provides us with a warning sign for our own future process. Like the Ik, who surrendered to the vicissitudes of authoritarian rule and biopsychosocial instability, we are experiencing great loss and cultural decay. “Yet the world itself was beautiful as it had always been. It had lost the beauty for the Ik because they had lost their freedom to be one with it, moving according to its own known rhythm and free to escape its whims and move elsewhere....Wherever they were was beauty, for...there would always be enough. But when they were imprisoned in one tiny corner, the world became something cruel and hostile, and in their lives cruelty took the place of love” (Turnbull, 1972, p. 259).

Traditionally, tribal peoples would not get to this point of being imprisoned in one tiny corner – figuratively or literally. The cultural expectation would guarantee that this psychic severance be mended, and would rely on ancestral teachings, rituals, and healing rites to reconnect one with the whole (Glendinning, 1994).

This basic relationship between an individual and her unique environment suggests the unfolding process which the Ojibwa perceived as ‘self.’ This “ecological self” reflects an integrated worldview where the human being is a part of the ecological whole, and at all times, in mutual relationship with the biosphere (Roszak, 1995). This entails a biopsychosocial dynamic in which the ‘self’ can unfold in one of two ways: either defend against a hostile environment, or engage in a greater expansion (Pearce, 2002). In studying the Cycle of Devolution, we saw what it looks like to be in chronic survival mode, protecting ourselves from danger. But civilization has no clear vision for what it would look like for human beings to engage in an unfolding process supported by a social context engaged in the same. What would the world look like if we initiated a Cycle of Evolution on the planet? Many people throughout the years have imagined what this unfolding process would look like, some even claiming that we are already in the process, but on a collective level, we have no practical understanding for what this would really mean for the human race. Maybe this is how it must be. For indeed, judging from the history of humanity, when humans are offered relative safety and peace, they will instinctively create safe and healthy cultures. Therefore, we will not know what this healthier world looks like until it is in the process of becoming.

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<sup>26</sup> See Appendix E

### A Civilization of Wild

It is time to confront the division between man and the rest of nature, between ourselves as animals and as humans, not by the destruction of nature or by a return to some dream of the past, but by creating a new civilization. (Shepard, 1973, pp. 277-278)

This is so big. *Civilization!* Even that word fills me with a sense of enormity, bewilderment, and outright confusion – and I’ve been intently studying it for several years now. With all the structures in place, the very institutions that define our lives, can we really think about ushering in a *new civilization*? We are so conditioned by and committed to the old one, despite its dysfunction. How can we possibly consider surrendering what we are dependent on? And if we cannot transform civilization through programs, but only through vision, how does this work? What is this vision?

The vision I put forth is based primarily on trauma healing. I contend that as we move closer to our inherent, self-regulatory processing, our culture will necessarily change. Freud once asked, “Why do our relatives, the animals, not exhibit any such cultural struggle?” (1961, p. 83). Peter Levine asked the same question, and after years of observation and study, came up with his Somatic Experiencing approach. He discovered that wild animals respond to life experience with their natural impulses. Moreover, these impulses, as free and uncultivated as they may seem, have an experiential intelligence that works in synchrony with the rhythms of natural life. As we have gathered with tribal peoples, mutual connection with others and the world generates a deep sense of trust in life (Duffy, 1984; Ingold, 2000; Liedloff, 1985; Malinowski, 1987; Shepard, 1973, 1998; Turnbull, 1972). This expectation of trust is virtually non-existent among civilization. Robert Wolff writes of his own experience traversing between civilized and tribal cultures:

I was told to be in charge of my life, rather than live it. I must fight to survive, they assured me. They said the world is a jungle – but when I again knew the jungle, I knew that the jungle of wild Life is not at all like the jungle of Western civilization, and certainly not as dangerous. For

many years I had to work so hard to do the things I was supposed to do that I became deaf and blind to what is important inside me. My luck was to find people who were human in an ancient way. My luck was to recognize and reclaim a humanity rooted in the earth. All who are in touch with the natural world can sense energies, emotions, and intentions of people and animals. If we listen, we can know – all we need to do is give up being in charge....The connection [with All-That-Is] is within us. (2001, p. 197)

As outlined in this study, returning to a self-regulatory state is a difficult process. We cannot expect to give up our authoritarian ways until we are biologically capable of living life in a more integrated way. Self-regulation, like love or relationships, is not a method we can simply apply to our lives today in order to find the solutions to our problems. It is a bottom-up, comprehensive reorganization our organism. It requires a biopsychosocial approach, in which our thwarted impulses are offered expression in a safe and protected way. The bioenergy that has affected us without our conscious knowing is discharged, and a greater flow is opened up within our organism. This allows for a gradual reorganization within us – as we are able to receive and tolerate more energy from our environment than before – and often leads to emotional, cognitive, and spiritual growth. It also can lead to deep gratitude, joy, and peacefulness. A shift occurs not only within ourselves, but also in relation to our place in relationships, communities, and the world.

That is the vision. But in no way is it as neat and standardized as this. What deep healing initiates is a return to our primal roots, where, as bioenergetic beings, we are in mutual relation with the cosmos. The creativity with which this relationship is expressed, is diverse and often magnificent. One need only look to music, art, and literature to find aspects of our great longing for connection and renewal. As a teenager growing up in the suburbs, I must have listened to Bruce Springsteen's song 'Born To Run' thousands of times, and sang along with the lyrics every time. Something about that song touched me, as it did for so many other people. Now, as I look back at the lyrics of the song, I read of one man's romantic yearning for something greater.

In the day we sweat it out in the streets of a runaway American dream  
 At night we ride through mansions of glory in suicide machines  
 Sprung from cages out on highway 9,  
 Chrome wheeled, fuel injected and steppin' out over the line  
 Baby this town rips the bones from your back  
 It's a death trap, it's a suicide rap  
 We gotta get out while we're young  
 'Cause tramps like us, baby we were born to run...

The highway's jammed with broken heroes on a last chance power drive  
 Everybody's out on the run tonight but there's no place left to hide  
 Together Wendy we'll live with the sadness  
 I'll love you with all the madness in my soul  
 Someday girl I don't know when we're gonna get to that place  
 Where we really want to go and we'll walk in the sun  
 But till then tramps like us baby we were born to run (Springsteen, 1975)

The “madness” in our souls is often channeled into romantic relationships, one arena in which our culture allows for freer expression of our pulsating energy. Certain religious settings have also been acceptable forums for humans to express the full intensity of their passion. William Blake, in his startling imagery both in writing and painting, illustrated the human hunger for realizing liberation, and reconnecting with divinity. In his painting ‘Albion Rose’<sup>27</sup>, Blake creates a personification of both humanity and Britain, evoked in the lines he engraved below the image: “Albion rose from where he labourd at the Mill with Slaves / Giving himself for the Nations he danc'd the dance of Eternal Death” (Compass Project Team, 2002). Albion, a ‘universal man,’ represents divinity in the form of man, rising up and “freeing himself from the shackles of materialism” (Compass Project Team, 2002).

Nearly 200 years later, social activist Feral Faun provides us an autobiographical sketch with a similar motif. In his essay entitled *Feral Revolution*, Faun expresses his rapture in seeking the “intense pleasure and vital energy” he experienced as a child:

I was born a free, wild being in the midst of a society based upon domestication. There was no way that I could escape being domesticated

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<sup>27</sup> See Appendix F

myself. Civilization will not tolerate what is wild in its midst. But I never forgot the intensity that life could be. I never forgot the vital energy that had surged through me. My existence since I first began to notice that this vitality was being drained away has been a warfare between the needs of civilized survival and the need to break loose and experience the full intensity of life unbound. I want to experience this vital energy again. I want to know the free-spirited wildness of my unrepressed desires realizing themselves in festive play. I want to smash down every wall that stands between me and the intense, passionate life untamed freedom that I want. The sum of these walls is everything we call civilization, everything that comes between us and direct, participatory experience of the wild world. (1988)

Returning to this place of flowing energy, expressive impulses, intense emotions, responsive behaviors, intuitive thinking, and connected spirit, we become reintegrated into the natural world. Nature, as we know it through our senses, is untamed; it is wild. Since we can no more separate ourselves from nature than we can separate our heads from our bodies (funny, though, how we perceive this same split), we are a part of this wildness. Despite our pretenses as civilized human beings, at our roots, we, too, are wild beings. And as Henry David Thoreau reminds us, "In short, all good things are wild and free" (as cited in Glendinning, 1994, p. 3).

The wild within us demands respect, and it demands expression. How can we live based on our primal impulses amidst the life-denying societies we have created? The last thing we need to do is to create more ideals or moral constructs for us to be boxed into. This will only perpetuate our entrapment as civilized human beings – the shrunken residue restricted to a tiny corner. The yearning so many great artists have expressed throughout the history of civilization speaks to humanity's desire for a return to our 'lost paradise' – signifying a harmonious relationship with life once again. There is a deep hunger for breaking free from this trap we know as civilization. I have chosen to emphasize our pre-civilization, tribal heritage because, as Wolff writes, "aboriginal people are [perhaps] the only remaining wild humans" (2001, pp. 113-114). The process of civilization – using tools of domestication, oppression, and colonialization – has attempted to conquer and tame the wild nature of life. The free spirit we are born with

is enslaved by the demands of the world we are born into. We lose access to our wildness, to our freedom, to our sense of the sacred in life, and become prisoners in our own cages (of character and social structures). We lose access to our place in the natural world.

Our ancestors warned us of the danger of losing our direct connection with natural life. They “knew that man’s heart, away from nature, becomes hard; [they] knew that lack of respect for growing, living things soon led to lack of respect for humans too” (Forbes, 1992, pp. 81-82). Their forewarning was accurate. Civilization has lost respect for natural life, humans included. In this great loss we have relied on a fraction of our greater potential in order to survive. We have surrendered the wild within us for the supposed security of a deadened life. “The most important part of personal transformation – leading to planetary transformation and/or sowing the seeds for a brighter future – is to become fully alive, alert, aware, conscious of our surroundings and the divinity everywhere...from a view of the sacred nature of all creation” (Hartman, 1999, p. 201).

The divinity which William Blake envisioned was grounded in the human ability to awaken to his deepest potential. Blake understood that this actualization process could only be achieved from the bottom-up. In his poem *Jersuaalem*, he writes, “For all Men are in Eternity...In your own Bosom you bear your Heaven and Earth & all you behold; tho’ it appears Without, it is Within” (Mason, 1994). Blake, who is considered by many in our culture to be a mystic and prophet, suggests nothing original. His words and vision aptly reflect the cosmology that tribal peoples have followed since time immemorial. Tribal cultures recognized humanity as part of the natural world. As such, humans adhered to their natural functions and rhythms, identical to the natural world of which we belong. The experience of divinity, or sacredness, is a function of being connected to the biorhythms of life, and having the capacity to express the life force (bioenergy) within us freely. We have disconnected from this sense of the sacred,

from our connection to the core impulses which propel life. Personal and global transformation depend on our ability to reawaken these impulses, to bring about an actualization process that reconnects us to our direct experiencing of the world. As Black Elk articulated, "Peace...comes within the souls of men when they realize their relationship, their oneness, with the universe and all its powers, and when they realize that at the center of the Universe dwells Wankan-Tanka, and that this center is everywhere, it is within each of us" (as cited in Forbes, 1992, p. 152).

I have touched the sacred in my own life at times, and it is like a returning home. Experiencing the free flow of energy within me, and my direct participation with the world around me, has been inspiring. I remember the first time I experienced a Native American sweatlodge ('Inipi'). I had no idea what to expect. I had never been particularly religious, and although I felt vaguely connected to my 'spirit,' I had never experienced such a direct connection as I did within moments of entering lodge. There was something so special about sitting on the ground, in direct contact with the earth, held within a womb-like structure, in the dark, that aroused my sensory experience. Then came the intense heat from the hot rocks, and the burning steam from the water poured over those rocks. Although I sensed anxiety rising up within me, I also felt open to the movement of energy which surrounded me. I breathed it all in, and out. I let the energy, the heat, the anxiety, the flood of emotions and thoughts and prayers rush within me, and rush out. The chants, songs, prayers, offerings, stories, and silence all took me to a place that was not extraordinary, but was familiar. It was a place within me that I knew. It was a place of connection, empathy, gratitude, contentment, and love. I thought of my old friends and family, of the pain in the world, and I wished everyone could experience the magnificent simplicity of being in direct contact with life, as I did in those moments. This purification ritual has been around for many thousand years, and as I sat within the lodge, I felt a spontaneous surge of deep reverence for those who came before me, and deep hope for those who will come after. Ever since that first time in lodge, I have lived in closer proximity to my own ability to access my

humanness, which in the course of everyday living, is pushed aside or held back. But it is there, within me at all times and connected with all other living things. The sweatlodge offered me the gift of remembering that I could always return, for it is always here.

I have experienced a similar process unfold as I sit with clients, particularly in my work with Somatic Experiencing. Due to the deeply client-centered, bottom-up approach of the work, my role as therapist is mainly to facilitate an unfolding process. In every session, I have no idea what this unfolding process will look like. I may come with an idea based on what the client presents, or during the session may come up with a hypothesis or hunch, but time and time again, I find that I cannot fully grasp the creative, unfolding process of the human organism. If I stay attached to a specific agenda or plan, it only gets in the way of the client's movement. I can only participate as a partner in the healing process. This means that although ideas are certainly useful, I am attending to the client from a more integrated place. My role is to help the client to call "forth the hidden resources of healthy functioning [so as] to throw off the body's unnecessary encumbrances" (Conger, 1994, p. xvii). We have joined together to free the shackles of inhibition, to complete unresolved experiences, and to return to a more fully-functioning state. The goal is to return home to one's own bodily experience, so as to once again experience our basic humanity.

Teilhard de Chardin referred to this biopsychosocial process as *unfurling*, which signifies the "infinitely slow spasmodic movement towards the unity of mankind" (as cited in Pipher, 2002, p. 23). We have no idea what this unfurling process will look like once engaged, but considering my experience working with Somatic Experiencing, I assume it will be one in which individuals do what they need to do. When individuals are able to access their self-regulatory functioning, their organism does what it needs to do to live in balance and harmony. If we return to Systems Theory, we find the foundational concept of 'self-organization.' Self-organization indicates a creative

function that initiates a spontaneous development within the organism. It is an evolutionary process that enables the organism to function at an increased level. As the organism develops, it increases its ability to utilize external challenges for moving to even higher states of functioning. External stimuli which might have previously led to an organism resisting and/or shutting-down, may now inspire a creative unfolding from within, which generates the solutions necessary for innovation, and hence development.

The fear that self-regulation will lead individuals to hurt one another and/or the planet is accurate in the sense that being granted freedom instantaneously can be overwhelming and may not be integrated successfully into a system based on survival mode; which may then instigate acting-out and violence. As we reviewed with somatic approaches based on manipulation, when our base is taken from us too quickly, our reorganization process is handicapped. Each one of us has to work at our own pace. The process demands that we simultaneously discharge our trapped energy while we build our creative resources. This means that until our secondary drives no longer need expression, they will continue to distort our primary impulses. While we successfully release our dependence on these secondary drives, our core impulses will be exposed and expressed.

Feral Faun reminds us that each one of us has the responsibility to awaken the deadened impulses which once roamed free.

Each of us has experienced the processes of domestication, and this experience can give us knowledge we need to undermine civilization and transform our lives. Our distrust of our own experience is probably what keeps us from rebelling as freely and actively as we'd like. We're afraid of fucking up, we're afraid of our own ignorance. But this distrust and fear have been instilled in us by authority. It keeps us from really growing and learning....We have been conditioned not to trust ourselves, not to feel completely, not to experience life intensely....We have been conditioned to expect disappointment, to see it as normal, not to question

it. We have been conditioned to accept the tedium of civilized survival rather than breaking free and really living. We need to explore ways of breaking down this conditioning, of getting as free of our domestication as we can now....Feral revolution is an adventure. It is the daring exploration of going wild. It takes us into unknown territories for which no maps exist. We can only come to know these territories if we dare to explore them actively. We must dare to destroy whatever destroys our wildness and to act our instincts and desires. We must dare to trust in ourselves, our experiences and our passions. Then we will not let ourselves be chained or penned in. We will not allow ourselves to be tamed. Our feral energy will rip civilization to shreds and create a life of wild freedom and intense pleasure. (1988)

The bioenergy surging through us demands release. This is what we are witnessing with the symptoms of our present suffering. Despite our terror of our own 'wildness,' it is not our inner feelings that we fear, but the secondary drives which have distorted and overlaid our core impulses.

"Original wisdom," as Wolff refers to it in his book of the same title, is our ancestral heritage - not only human, but the animal within us as well. It is the wisdom based on our primal impulses and self-regulatory functioning. Being responsive to one's own core impulses - which are inherently geared towards pleasure, fulfillment, and mutual connection - individuals are moved to join together to secure a safe and fulfilling life. This is what wildness is all about. It is the ability to directly experience our humanity, in connection with all other living things. "As long as there is respect and acknowledgment of connections, things continue working. When that stops, we all die" (Joy Harjo as cited in Pipher, 2002, p. xiv).

## CONCLUSION

I can indicate no royal road for bringing about a social revolution except that we should represent it in every detail of our lives.  
(Mahatma Gandhi)

After all, it seems quite simple. Without the concrete of the sidewalk, the wildflower will grow. Without the inhibitive forces of civilization, humans will grow. If given the opportunity, "life feels itself!" (Cohen & Capra, 1990). But in actuality, it is not so simple.

There are now layers upon layers of concrete on the sidewalk. Likewise, there are layers upon layers of inhibitive forces of civilization. Life still grows, but often turned against itself. We were not taught or raised to be connected to our basic life impulses, yet these impulses continue to pulsate and move towards expression. What we are looking for is a way to express our creative movement, and to grow freely once again. As Feral Faun (1998) expressed it, "We need to learn to trust and act upon our own feelings and experiences, if we are ever to be free."

I have observed the accuracy of Faun's statement in my clinical and personal experiences, working with Somatic Experiencing. Even individuals who once felt that they had lost their lives to a past trauma, found that in learning to reconnect to their own feelings in a safe, contained manner, they could recover their lives. Their healing process involved relearning how their organism responds to basic life experience, and, from there, learning how to renegotiate a past trauma that still lives within their bodies. We no longer need to live in the prison cell of our own bodies. I have found great hope in that I have observed men, women, and children revitalize their lives through the somatic process. As one client exclaimed, "It was like I was coming home...to myself!"

I, myself, have experienced this return to my deeper self. When I began the Somatic Experiencing training program, I did not yet know how dissociated and tense I was. I

could not pinpoint any single trauma that was disrupting my life. I knew that I often struggled against life, that I was prone to feeling angry and sometimes depressed, and that I occasionally experienced anxiety. But I did not realize how deeply organized around fear and disconnection I truly was. I probably could have spent many years talking about my life, but still never getting a felt sense for what was going on deep within me. My intellect was my greatest resource for getting me through life. I did not need to understand myself on this level anymore - I needed a bodily sense of how I was being in the world. But I did not yet know it.

From my first introduction to the work, the animal-based model of Somatic Experiencing attracted me. Moreover, it made so much sense to me, as I intuitively trusted in the wisdom of natural life. As I became more familiar with the Somatic Experiencing model, I, too, experienced a returning home. As I have discharged my own underlying stress and empowered my internal systems to re-regulate themselves, I have experienced an entirely new way of relating with the world. As a therapist, a scholar, a friend, a husband, and a father, I am becoming more capable of being present with and sharing my feelings. I am therefore becoming a healthier human being, less engaged with my own defense mechanisms, and more engaged with the unfurling process we call life.

This study was a major part of my process, as were my psychotherapeutic experiences as a therapist and client. I now understand my process more clearly. I connect more intimately with my inner knowing, respect it, and begin to accept it as it moves me in my life. I could not simply study and intellectualize my way out of my suffering. Part of the responsibility of being a healer (and a human being) is that I must experience my own suffering. And, I have to experience my own healing process. I spend many pages here detailing the theory and case histories of trauma healing, but my own experience has been my true learning. I know that trauma is a vehicle for transformation - I have experienced the awakening and revitalization of my own impulses towards life.

I am at a turning point in my own development. It is not merely transitioning from a student into a professional, but more about my own unfolding process. I am now engaging with my community, in the world, as a healer. This is a wonderful privilege and also a tremendous responsibility. I embarked on this study after returning from my time with the Burmese refugees in Thailand. At that time, I felt overwhelmed, panicky, scared, and powerless. I was confused and unsettled. I felt defeated. I knew I had much to offer, but I was unsure of how to offer it. I felt like the world was too overpowering in its destructive force, that no amount of goodwill could save us from this doom. Yet, there was a force within me that was not destructive, that wanted to reach out to the world in pleasure and peace. These impulses would not remain silent, and to this day, they speak to me loud and clear.

As I was leaving my friends on the Thai-Burma border, one friend, Min Zaw, said to me, "Brad, please remember us." I knew that what he meant by this was more than a reminder to a friend to keep in touch. The tragedy in our lifetime is that traditional cultures are dying out, as rapidly as the endangered animals that are vanishing into extinction. Once they are dead and gone, they are lost forever. We can never replace what we have lost. But we can remember.

Some years ago, Sarah and I were camping in British Columbia, Canada, on land that was part of a Native American (First Nations) reservation. One afternoon, we met Lazar Whiskeyjack. He liked us, and invited us back to the village to meet his friends. As they toured us around the third-world like conditions of the tribal village, Lazar told us about his people. We walked by the nicest house on the reservation – a bright, white Catholic Church – and he asked us if we wanted to go inside. We all went in together and I experienced a major culture shock between the church, with its quiet solemnity, and the world right outside these walls, with its barking dogs, running kids, and dirt roads. All of a sudden, his buddy Butch went into a shock reaction. He needed to leave

the church. I went outside with him and he pulled up his sleeve, exposing dozens of scars from lit cigarettes that had been extinguished on his arm. Butch told me that nuns and priests had done this to him, in the mission school he was sent to after being taken from his home at four years old. His head was shaven, his name was changed, and his language and native ways were strictly forbidden. He had suffered incredible trauma at the hands of his Christian custodians. He eventually escaped, with rage for the “white world.” He spent his late-teens, twenties and thirties, in and out of jail, drunk, and struggling to stay alive. At some point in his downward spiral, Butch met Lazar – and his life changed. Lazar helped him remember.

Lazar, too, had suffered severe trauma, and he had spent his own time struggling with himself and society. Then Lazar rediscovered his heritage. He went to his elders and asked for their guidance. He relearned his language. He relearned his ceremonies. He spent countless hours observing the native ways that remained. He journeyed into the depths of his emotional torment, and found the strength and courage to resurface. Although Lazar seemed like any normal guy, he is what we would call an indigenous holy man (shaman). He now spends his life traveling throughout western Canada (and the United States as well) performing healing rituals for “my people.” Like my friend Min Zaw, he was helping his people remember.

At the pace civilization is going, it will not be long until these ancestral ways are gone from our planet. That loss will be devastating. Yet as living organisms, we know what life needs to survive. We live that knowledge every single moment, and need only to reconnect to this wisdom. To this end, I hope to continue my study of the naturalistic healing methods that help us revitalize our basic life impulses, and that help us to experience joy, pleasure, and love, alongside despair, pain, and sorrow – so that we remember what it feels like to be truly alive.

The next step for me in the development of this topic will be to go beyond civilization and to look more closely at tribal cultures' healing ways, and how they relate to the somatic approaches I discuss in this paper. I am interested in the various shamanic methods and their similarities and differences to a method like Somatic Experiencing. I hope to merge the scientific prowess of psychology with the creative insight of nature-based healing - for my hunch is that we can tap into a deeper well of healing resources by integrating modern science and indigenous healing. These ancient healing methods are our heritage, and essential for humanity's possible evolution.

Going beyond civilization does not mean abandoning what we have, it means reintegrating what we have lost. It means creating anew, on the ground of the old. As Subcommandante Marcos so eloquently spoke, "We the indigenous are not part of yesterday; we are part of tomorrow" (Subcommandante Marcos as cited in Starhawk, 2002, p. 261). The voices are speaking through us of which way to go, it is time for us to listen.

## EPILOGUE

I lie in bed, my child is breathing deep – from his pelvis into his chest, and back again, as in waves – next to me as I watch him. He has his arms outstretched, his legs spread, his face is relaxed, his skin shines. His breathing is effortless, rhythmic. He sleeps sound, until at some point in the night, he begins to wake, turning, searching for his mother’s breast. He never fully awakes – he just turns to her, as she half-awake exposes her breast, and as he suckles, they both fall back asleep. I observe, and snuggle closer to them.

Within me I feel love, as it wells up like sadness in my chest. Tears could come, but probably they won’t. I will watch for a minute or two more, then I will blow out the candle, and go to sleep. My child will remain sleeping peacefully snuggled closely between his mother and his father.

I wake up in the morning and turn on the radio to Pacifica Network’s ‘Democracy Now!’ I listen to the atrocities, the crimes, the ecological destruction; I experience the horror of our society. A young Palestinian child, just about the same age as my son, is murdered by Israeli soldiers firing U.S. manufactured missiles. Across the Green Line, a young Israeli child, just about the same age as my son and his Palestinian counterpart, is murdered in a Hamas suicide bus attack outside of Jerusalem. My son is chirping, “Pa...Pa, Pa...Pa,” smiling, waiting for me to chase him, catch him, and hold him tight, kissing him on the backside of his neck.

Soon, he will be able to understand Amy Goodman’s words on Democracy Now!, and he will ask me questions. How will I answer? What will I say? What will he reply? How will he respond?

One day, he may read this paper. He already knows all this – everything I have written – that which took me years to understand.

I caught him as my wife delivered him in a small tub, in our bedroom. He laid on me – his sweet-smelling skin pressed close to my chest – for hours as my wife recuperated from the birth. That night, and for many nights after that, he slept on me this same way – his sweet-smelling skin pressed close to my chest. At some point, he began sleeping on his own, rolling off of me during the night, and resting between his mama and papa. He reached out to his mother’s breast when he was hungry, he cried out to us when he was wet or angry or sad or bored. Now, he does the same, but in gestures, in word. He grabs my index finger with his hand and pulls me towards the door. “Outside?” I ask, “YA!” he replies, “Lesgo!”

We will walk slowly, meandering into town, as he will visit every puddle – at least twice – ask to inspect all the berries off the trees, bark “woof, woof” to every dog he sees, and scream for joy as I chase him around the library – “Shh!” I will say, and another scream for joy.

My friend says: When you live in a world of bent-over people, the one standing upright looks strange. My son will look strange in this world – as his papa and his mama look strange. He is likely to experience loneliness, sadness, fear, anger, confusion, and self-doubt. My hope is that he experiences the entire spectrum of emotional experience – from raging anger to blissed-out ecstasy – and that he allows these experiences to guide him on his way.

My greatest hope as his father is that we will offer him an environment where he feels safe, free, held, trusted, cared for and loved, so that he may develop according to his own creative impulses. This is my most significant political action, my most philanthropic gift, my most moving poem, my highest spiritual achievement. I have

given him life through the conception of love, and now, I respect as this life grows; as the wildflower grows.

My son is *living LIFE*, like the wildflower lives hers. I am here to facilitate the living - bringing him into this world, snuggling with him in bed, being tugged for a walk into town - and to share in this process of life living life.

'Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains.'

My son was born free. I, too, was born free. And now - faced with such violence, such overwhelming destruction - we are shackled to our traumatic past, our social oppression, until something fundamentally shifts, one way or another. Will we emancipate ourselves from bondage? Will we find the exit out of the trap? Will we live or will we die?

We were born free - my son and I - and we will live free.

'Every journey begins with a single step,' and continues, one step at a time.

## APPENDIX A

### 'Afterword to the Second Edition'<sup>28</sup>

(an excerpt)

by Alice Miller

For some years now, there has been proof that the devastating effects of the traumatization of children take their inevitable toll on society – a fact that we are still forbidden to recognize. This knowledge concerns every single one of us, and – if disseminated widely enough – should lead to fundamental changes in society; above all, to a halt in the blind escalation of violence. The following points are intended to amplify my meaning:

1. All children are born to grow, to develop, to live, to love, and to articulate their needs and feelings for their self-protection.
2. For their development, children need the respect and protection of adults who take them seriously, love them, and honestly help them to become oriented in the world.
3. When these vital needs are frustrated and children are, instead, abused for the sake of adults' needs by being exploited, beaten, punished, taken advantage of, manipulated, neglected, or deceived without the intervention of any witness, then their integrity will be lastingly impaired.
4. The normal reactions to such injury should be anger and pain. Since children in this hurtful kind of environment are forbidden to express their anger, however, and since it would be unbearable to experience their pain all alone, they are compelled to suppress their feelings, repress all memory of the trauma, and idealize those guilty of the abuse. Later they will have no memory of what was done to them.

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<sup>28</sup> Miller, 1990a, pp. 283-284.

5. Dissociated from the original cause, their feelings of anger, helplessness, despair, longing, anxiety, and pain will find expression in destructive acts against others (criminal behavior, mass murder) or against themselves (drug addiction, alcoholism, prostitution, psychic disorders, suicide).
6. If these people become parents, they will then often direct acts of revenge for their mistreatment in childhood against their own children, whom they use as scapegoats. Child abuse is still sanctioned – indeed, held in high regard – in our society as long as it is defined as child-rearing. It is a tragic fact that parents beat their children in order to escape the emotions stemming from how they were treated by their own parents.
7. If mistreated children are not to become criminals or mentally ill, it is essential that at least once in their life they come in contact with a person who knows without any doubt that the environment, not the helpless, battered child, is at fault. In this regard, knowledge or ignorance on the part of society can be instrumental in either saving or destroying a life. Here lies the great opportunity for relatives, social workers, therapists, teachers, doctors, psychiatrists, officials, and nurses to support the child and to believe her or him.
8. Till now, society has protected the adult and blamed the victim. It has been abetted in its blindness by theories, still in keeping with the pedagogical principles of our great-grandparents, according to which children are viewed as crafty creatures, dominated by wicked drives, who invent stories and attack their innocent parents or desire them sexually. In reality, children tend to blame themselves for their parents' cruelty and to absolve the parents, whom they invariably love, of all responsibility.
9. For some years now, it has been possible to prove, through new therapeutic methods, that repressed traumatic experiences of childhood are stored up in the body and, though unconscious, exert an influence even in adulthood. In addition, electronic testing of the fetus has revealed a fact

previously unknown to most adults – that *a child responds to and learns both tenderness and cruelty from the very beginning.*

10. In the light of this new knowledge, even the most absurd behavior reveals its formerly hidden logic once the traumatic experiences of childhood need no longer remain shrouded in darkness.

11. Our sensitization to the cruelty with which children are treated, until now commonly denied, and to the consequences of such treatment will as a matter of course bring to an end the perpetuation of violence from generation to generation.

12. People whose integrity has not been damaged in childhood, who were protected, respected, and treated with honesty by their parents, will be – both in their youth and in adulthood – intelligent, responsive, empathic, and highly sensitive. They will take pleasure in life and will not feel any need to kill or even hurt others or themselves. They will use their power to defend themselves, not to attack others. They will not be able to do otherwise than respect and protect those weaker than themselves, including their children, because this is what they have learned from their own experience, and because it is this knowledge (and not the experience of cruelty) that has been stored up inside them from the beginning. It will be inconceivable to such people that earlier generations had to build up a gigantic war industry in order to feel comfortable and safe in this world. Since it will not be their unconscious drive in life to ward off intimidation experienced at a very early age, they will be able to deal with attempts at intimidation in their adult life more rationally and more creatively.

**APPENDIX B****'On Laws Needed for the Protection of Life in Newborns and of Truth'<sup>29</sup>****(an excerpt)****by Wilhelm Reich**

It is obvious that the future of the USA and the world at large depends on the rational upbringing of the newborns in each generation which will enable them to make rational decisions as grown-ups. There do not exist any laws as yet to protect newborns against harm inflicted upon them by emotionally sick mothers and other sick individuals. However, there are many old laws rendered obsolete long ago by progress in the understanding of the biology of man, which threaten progressive educators with extinction if they transgress technically these old laws. These facts, together with the operation on the social scene of emotionally sick individuals, block progress and the search for better ways in medicine and education. Although laws which are serving the welfare of people at large can never accomplish factual changes, life affirmative laws can protect those who strive practically for betterment of the fate of humanity. Therefore, two laws, one to protect LIFE IN NEWBORNS, and a second to protect TRUTH against underhanded attacks (beyond the scope of libel laws which are not suited for this purpose), should be studied and formulated by legislatures, institutions of learning and foundations whose work is primarily devoted to securing human welfare and happiness.

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<sup>29</sup> Reich, 1974, pp. 163-164.

**Wilhelm Reich - 'Harbors'**



APPENDIX C

**'Can't Blame the Youth'**

**by Peter Tosh**

You can't blame the youths, you can't fool the youths.  
You can't blame the youths of today, you can't fool the youths.

You teaching youths to learn in school  
that the cow jumped over the moon.  
Teaching youths to learn in school  
that the dishes run away with spoon.

So you can't blame the youths when they don't learn, you can't fool the youths.  
You can't blame the youths of today, you can't fool the youths.

You teach the youths about Christopher Columbus  
and you said he was a very great man.  
You teach the youths about Marco Polo  
and you said he was a very great man.  
You teach the youths about the Pirate Hawkins  
and you said he was a very great man.  
You teach the youths about the Pirate Morgan  
and you said he was a very great man.

So you can't blame the youths of today, you can't fool the youths.  
You can't blame the youths, you can't fool the youths.

All these great men were doing, robbing, raping, kidnapping, and killing.  
So called great men were doing, robbing, raping, kidnapping.

So you can't blame the youths, you can't fool the youths.  
You can't blame the youths none at all, you can't fool the youths.

When every Christmas comes, you buy the youths a pretty toy gun.  
When every Christmas comes, you buy the youths a fancy toy gun.

So you can't blame the youths, you can't fool the youths.  
You can't blame the youths, you can't fool the youths.

What was hidden from the wise and the prudent,

is now revealed to the babes and the suckling.  
What was hidden from the wise and the prudent,  
is now revealed to the babes and the suckling.  
Lord call upon the youth, cause he know the youth is strong  
Jah-Jah call upon the youth, cause he know the youth is strong.

So you can't blame the youths, you can't fool the youths.  
You can't blame the youths of today, save the children, you can't fool the youths.

Don't blame them, it's not their fault.

## APPENDIX D

**309.81 DSM-IV Criteria for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)<sup>30</sup>**

A. The person has been exposed to a traumatic event in which both of the following have been present:

- (1) the person experienced, witnessed, or was confronted with an event or events that involved actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of self or others
- (2) the person's response involved intense fear, helplessness, or horror.  
Note: In children, this may be expressed instead by disorganized or agitated behavior.

B. The traumatic event is persistently reexperienced in one (or more) of the following ways:

- (1) recurrent and intrusive distressing recollections of the event, including images, thoughts, or perceptions. Note: In young children, repetitive play may occur in which themes or aspects of the trauma are expressed.
- (2) recurrent distressing dreams of the event. Note: In children, there may be frightening dreams without recognizable content.
- (3) acting or feeling as if the traumatic event were recurring (includes a sense of reliving the experience, illusions, hallucinations, and dissociative flashback episodes, including those that occur upon awakening or when intoxicated). Note: In young children, trauma-specific reenactment may occur.
- (4) intense psychological distress at exposure to internal or external cues that symbolize or resemble an aspect of the traumatic event.
- (5) physiological reactivity on exposure to internal or external cues that symbolize or resemble an aspect of the traumatic event.

C. Persistent avoidance of stimuli associated with the trauma and numbing of general responsiveness (not present before the trauma), as indicated by three (or more) of the following:

- (1) efforts to avoid thoughts, feelings, or conversations associated with the trauma
- (2) efforts to avoid activities, places, or people that arouse recollections of the trauma
- (3) inability to recall an important aspect of the trauma
- (4) markedly diminished interest or participation in significant activities

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<sup>30</sup> American Psychiatric Association, 1994, pp. 427-429.

- (5) feeling of detachment or estrangement from others
- (6) restricted range of affect (e.g., unable to have loving feelings)
- (7) sense of a foreshortened future (e.g., does not expect to have a career, marriage, children, or a normal life span)

D. Persistent symptoms of increased arousal (not present before the trauma), as indicated by two (or more) of the following:

- (1) difficulty falling or staying asleep
- (2) irritability or outbursts of anger
- (3) difficulty concentrating
- (4) hypervigilance
- (5) exaggerated startle response

E. Duration of the disturbance (symptoms in Criteria B, C, and D) is more than one month.

F. The disturbance causes clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning.

*Specify if:*

Acute: if duration of symptoms is less than 3 months

Chronic: if duration of symptoms is 3 months or more

*Specify if:*

With Delayed Onset: if onset of symptoms is at least 6 months after the stressor

## APPENDIX E

### 'Aspects of a Pleistocene Paradigm'<sup>31</sup>

#### Ontogenic

1. Formal recognition of stages in the whole life cycle
2. The progressive dynamics of bonding and separation
3. Earth-crawling freedom by 18 months
4. Richly textures play space
5. No reading prior to "symbolic" age (about 12 years)
6. All-age access to butchering scenes
7. All-age access to birth, copulation, death scenes
8. Few toys
9. Early access via speech to rich species taxonomy
10. Formal celebration of life-stage passages such as initiation
11. Rich animal-mimic play and other introjective processes
12. Non-peer-group play
13. Parturition and neonate "soft" environment
14. Access to named places in connection with mythology
15. Extended family or dense social structure
16. Extended lactation
17. Play as the internal prediction of the living world
18. Little storage, accumulation, or provision
19. Diversity of "work"
20. Handmade tools and other objects
21. No monoculture
22. Independent family subsistence plus customary sharing
23. Ecotypic community – keyed to place
24. No landownership in the sense of "fee simple"

25. Little absolute territoriality
26. No fossil fuel use
27. Minimal housekeeping
28. No domestic plants or animals

Social

29. Prestige based on demonstrated integrity
30. Little or no heritable rank
31. Size of genetic/marriage/linguistic group or tribe: 500-3000
32. Clan and other membership giving progressive identity with age
33. Limited exposure to strangers
34. Hospitality to outsiders
35. Functional roles of aunts and uncles
36. Postreproductive advisory functions such as grandparental roles
37. Size of fire-circle group: 10 adults (council of the whole)
38. Occasional larger congregations
39. Emphasis on mnemonics with its generational repository
40. Participant politics vs. representational or authoritarian
41. Vernacular gender and age functions
42. Totemic analogical thought of eco-predicated logos
43. Dynamic, emergent, and dispersed leadership
44. Decentralized power
45. Intertribal tension-reduction rites (song duels, peacepipe)
46. Cosmologically rather than sociohierarchically focused ritual

Other

47. Periodic mobility, no sedentism
48. Conceptual notion of spirit in all life, numinous otherness
49. Centrality of narrative, routine recall and story
50. Dietary omnivory

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<sup>31</sup> Shepard, 1998, pp. 171-172.

51. Rare-species demography
52. Subordination of art to cosmology
53. Participatory rather than audience-focused music
54. Sensual science (“science of the concrete”) vs. intangible science
55. Celebration of social and cosmological function of meat eating
56. Religious regulation of the special effects of plant substances
57. Extensive foot travel
58. Only organic medicine
59. Regular dialogue on dream experience
60. The “game” approach – to love, not hate, the opponent
61. Attention to listening, to the sound environment as voice
62. Running
63. Attention to kinship and the “presence” of ancestors
64. Attunement to the daily cycle and seasonality
65. No radical intervention on fetal genetic malformations
66. Immediate access to the wild, wilderness, solitude
67. Nonlinear time and space – no history, progress, or destiny
68. Sacramental (not sacrificial) trophism
69. Formal recognition of a gifted subsistence
70. Participation in hunting and gathering
71. Freedom – to come and go, to choose skills, to marry or not, etc.

APPENDIX E

'Albion Rose'  
by William Blake



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