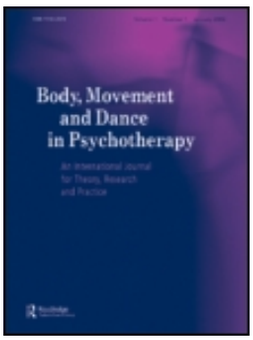

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Somatics: Investigating the common ground of western body–mind disciplines

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Western body–mind disciplines (known by the name of somatics) encompass ways of working with the body that are therapeutic, educational, creative and physically expressive. This literature review uses a 'bird's eye view' meant to provide a comprehensive synthesis of somatic theory. This brief analysis of somatic theory examines common principles behind somatic work rather than necessarily differentiating between the wide variety of available practices. This review aims to consolidate somatic theory by drawing from key theorists within the field of somatic movement education and therapy. In addition, this review also investigates an interdisciplinary approach exploring somatic work in relation to the fields of dance and body psychotherapy in an attempt to include related fields of knowledge. Furthermore, this review explores a new avenue of research looking at the historical roots of Western body–mind methods within the physical culture of the nineteenth century. Somatics and body psychotherapy have common ancestors although a great deal of further investigation remains for this type of historical analysis.

Keywords: somatics; body–mind disciplines; physical culture; body psychotherapy; somatic psychology; somatic movement education and therapy

Introduction to somatics

Western body–mind disciplines, also known as somatics (Mangione, 1993), encompass ways of working with the body that are therapeutic, educational, creative and physically expressive. Somatics historically developed out of experiential investigations into the body's transformative capabilities and natural healing potential. The earliest somatic work originated out of Europe and later America and Australia as a distinctly Western educational tradition and has been growing as a creative science for roughly 200 years. Contemporary somatic work has 'ties to Eastern mind–body traditions within India, China, and Japan' (Eddy, 2002, p. 47), and is presently linked to physical practices within 'mind-body medicine and philosophies of the East yet it is different in that it emerged from the West and often has either creative arts or bodily sciences as an integrated part of the underlying philosophy' M. Eddy (personal communication, 2010). The earliest somatic work is associated with nineteenth-century European physical culture, which in itself was inspired by Ancient Greek philosophies regarding the cultivation of body, mind and spirit.

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As both an art and a science, somatics is informed by a physiological understanding of the body yet taught in a manner which is creative and intuitive. This study will provide a brief overview of somatic theory and investigate the roots of physical culture as it is related to the evolution of somatics, body psychotherapy and even modern dance. In an attempt to synthesise somatic theory, this literature review in no manner intends to be completely definitive, but aims rather to give a brief and reasonable representation of common principles and ideas. This review is arranged in three parts: somatic theorists, transformative practices and common heritage.

Founders of somatic work have included scientists, physicists, doctors, educators, philosophers, psychologists, athletes and performing artists. The particular types of somatic work may be referred to as a discipline, practice, technique, method, system or 'process', all meaning to define the application of movement awareness 'exercises' or 'experiences' derived from a certain educational lineage. The term somatics is now 'generally used to describe a plethora of different bodily practices that attend to the body through first-person perspective, are interested in the tacit-knowledge that it encompasses, and regard the process of becoming aware of the body as a path towards change, enhanced bodily functioning, and self understanding' (Rouhianien, 2010, p. 58). In studying this wide expanse of somatic education, Eddy (2009) delineated three branches of somatics: somatic psychology, somatic bodywork and somatic movement. She clarifies:

> Most currently those somatic disciplines that involve movement as a keystone of the learning process are now identified as part of the field of Somatic Movement Education and Therapy whose scope is defined by (International Somatic Movement Education and Therapy Association/ISMETA). (2002, p. 47)

Some well-known somatic disciplines are Alexander Technique, Aston-Patterning®, Authentic Movement, Bartenieff Fundamentals, Body-Mind Centering®, Continuum, Eutony, Feldenkrais Method®, Hanna Somatic Education®, Ideokinesis, Integrated Movement, Kinetic Awareness, Pilates, ROM Dance, Sensory Awareness, Skinner Releasing Technique, Soma Neuromuscular Integration, Rosen Method, Tragerwork® and Topf Technique (Allison, 1999; Knaster, 1996).

Somatic work involves experiencing the mechanics of movement, system dynamics, and the 'cybernetics' of coordination. That is, through educated experience, the body learns as a system how to improve upon its own movement patterns and personal habits as a way of altering potential lived experience. Within somatic work, there is a distinction between body–mind and mind–body experience based on whether awareness is being directed by the 'mind' or whether awareness emerges from the body and is recognised by the cortex (Eddy, 2008). The difference is that instead of 'thinking' about the body, we 'notice' signals from the body through the experience of sensation. This may be taught in a number of different ways. Somatic work provides therapeutic and educational benefits through the use of systematic exercises, improvisational movement or by employing a 'combination of experiential movement awareness activities, verbal guidance, and guided touch' M. Eddy (personal communication, 2012). Whatever the movement orientation used, the somatic process involves 'sensing in' to the moment by moment

experience of the self in order for 'information' from the body to inform conscious awareness.

Somatic theorists

Two American philosophers in the 1970s, Thomas Hanna and Don Hanlon Johnson, were instrumental in creating a theoretical basis for somatic work (Hanna, 1970; Johnson, 1986; Mangione, 1993). Their scholarship in many ways set the foundation for later researchers including: Martha Eddy, Elizabeth Behnke, Sondra Horton Fraleigh, Jill Green, Robin Veder, Glenna Batson, Leena Rouhiainen, Olivia Cheever, Yvon Joly, Donna Dragon (among many others) discussing somatic work in relation to movement education, psychotherapy, dance, sports history, phenomenology and philosophy.

As an educated philosopher and theologian, Thomas Hanna found a 'resistance to the mind-body dualism infecting Western thought' including ideas from Freud, Piaget, Wilhelm Reich, Kierkegaard, Marx and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (Johnson, 2004a, p. 10). Consequently, Hanna became interested in movement practices that appeared to offer therapeutic benefits. Hanna called the work 'somatics', expanding on ideas generated by Edward Husserl (founder of phenomenology, which involves the study of consciousness as experienced from the first-person point of view) (Johnson, 2004b). Hanna visited Esalen Institute in California where he witnessed 'non-academic artisans actually doing existentialism and phenomenology in the flesh, without knowing much about the larger philosophical, historical, and cultural significance of what they were doing' (Johnson, 2004a, p. 10). These 'artisans' were using the body as a means of personal transformation.

Johnson (2004b) wrote,

> Thomas Hanna, like myself a recovering philosopher, succeeded in gaining broad acceptance for a name and theoretical umbrella to the many particular schools: he called the field "Somatics", inspired by Husserl's vision of a "somatology", a science that would unite a methodical knowledge of the body derived from experiential studies with the biological sciences. (p. 271)

Hanna (1995) wrote 'Somatics is the field which studies the *soma*: namely the body as perceived from within by first-person perception' (p. 341). The word '*soma*' derives from the ancient Greek description of a living body known to the self. Primary to its definition is the focus on *living*; once deceased, the soma no longer exists and the body itself remains. It is the living body that knows itself (Hanna, 1979). In a way, the idea of the soma is tied to personal consciousness in that it is not static but as dynamic as life itself.

Both Hanna and Johnson published numerous works on somatic theory and the psychotherapeutic benefits of somatic work. Hanna established an academic journal, and as an editor, Johnson (1995, 1997) brought together writings and interviews with somatic pioneers and their protégés and also explored benefits of body therapy in treating victims of trauma and shock (Johnson, 1998). These seminal books compiled a history of early somatic methods and describe their actual application in practice. Johnson (2004a) also founded the first Somatic Psychology graduate programme in the United States at the California Institute of Integral Studies in 1983. Prior to that he was a Jesuit seminarian who went to Yale where he was

educated as a phenomenologist. In the 1960s, Johnson took a theology course at Esalen where he met innovators of the somatic field there, and soon after became a somatic practitioner (Conrad, 2012). Through his training as a Jesuit and while at Esalen, Johnson explored a broad range of bodily transformative practices. While familiar with Eastern traditions and the universal physiological benefits of body–mind work, Johnson nevertheless assessed that the particular practices he found at Esalen were distinctly Western in educational heritage. In the *Handbook for Transpersonal Psychology*, Johnson (2013) concluded that:

> as I pursued this journey into the direct experience of the body, I came to realize that my experience was not universal, but radically Western, rooted in the consciousness shaping forces of classical Greek philosophy, Christian theology, and modern Western philosophy. I came to realize that these seemingly abstract ideas were engraved in my neuromuscular pathways by living within the structures of classrooms, exercise, dance, medical practices, and sports, which were peculiar to Western Europe and the United States. (ibid, p. 3)

While contemporary somatic practices may draw many influences from a variety of Eastern approaches, the earlier educational heritage of somatics is primarily rooted in Western teachings. Moreover, Johnson found:

> Somatics developed from the "bottom up", from a wide range of experiential methods of manipulation, movement, and awareness outside of universities and clinics. These unconventional methods were typically developed in response to critical health problems that were unresponsive to existing medical and psychological treatments […] Because it can be applied to a wide range of conditions, Somatics is sometimes confused with other practices such as behavioral medicine, conventional physical therapy, chiropractic and massage. […] Such approaches differ greatly from the context typical of Somatics practitioners in which people are encouraged to "listen" to the messages of their flesh; to "embrace" their breathing patterns; to "follow" their styles of moving; and to pay attention to the insights which emerge within the movement itself. (1994, p. 2)

The quality of developing an inner authority by listening to the 'voice' of one's own body is central to somatic theory. It is only by becoming more 'in tune' with ourselves that we may develop our abilities for personal transformation. Somatic work ultimately supports the idea that by 'being engaged in attentive dialogue with one's bodily self we, as humans, can learn newly, become pain free, move more easily, do our life work more efficiently, and perform with greater vitality and expressiveness' (Eddy, 2009, p. 6).

Transformative practices: Psychophysical benefits of somatic work

Hanna (1979) theorised that somatic work included focusing on sensation within the 'living body' as a means towards transforming the physical self. He found that physical change was a result of sensory over motor skill acquisition rather than the force of will power or 'mind over matter'. He was inspired by the foundational work of Dr Moshe Feldenkrais, an established physicist, who theorised that 'throughout our entire lifespan, our brain has the capacity to modify its organization and responses through experience and learning' (Beringer, 2010). Focusing awareness on bodily sensation activates brain mechanisms, and the potential modification of sensory-motor functions is made possible, with the aim of 'psycho-physical

integration and functioning of the individual' (Rouhianien, 2010, p. 58). Feldenkrais found that movement learning reprogrammes the brain and significantly challenged the 'dominant scientific and academic model of the brain' at that time, demonstrating the concept of neuroplasticity before the term even existed (Beringer, 2010, p. 1). However, Feldenkrais was by no means the first to explore ideas about sensory-motor movement learning. Within the field of dance, there have been numerous innovators of somatic practices who organised methods for developing greater kinaesthetic-sensory acuity through the exploration of movement.

In 1937, Mabel Todd, a professor at Columbia University, wrote 'it is possible to bring the organic impressions [of the unconscious] and resulting movements into consciousness and thus to control the adjustments' (p. 31). Her work was supported by the latest science on the neuromuscular system and led to the later development of Ideokinesis (a body awareness practice) within the dance programme at Julliard. Her functional anatomy concepts influenced dance pedagogy thereafter (Eddy, 2009, p. 13). 'Somatic' innovators from the dance field include the likes of Mabel Todd, Lulu Sweigard, Irene Dowd, Emil-Jaques Dalcroze, Rudolph Laban, Irmgard Bartenieff, Mary Whitehouse, Elaine Summers, Joan Skinner and Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen (Dragon, 2008; Eddy, 2009). Within the dance field, somatic work has been used for such things as: better coordination, efficiency of movement, recovery from injury, greater physical expression, developing spatial awareness and refining sensory (proprioceptive) experience (Batson & Schwartz, 2007). However, sensory-motor learning is not exclusively a matter of movement education but is also an avenue towards 'moving' the emotional and spiritual energy of an individual from within. For example, within the field of dance therapy, psychotherapeutic benefits can be found through experiencing physical expression. Hanna (1979) credited dance therapy pioneer Marion Chace for discovering how movement offered enormous benefits for traumatised individuals.

With emotional trauma or physical strain, the body has neuromuscular protective responses that act on the body in reflexive, unconscious manners. Gerda Alexander (1995) created the somatic method Eutony (Greek for 'living in harmony') having found that reflexive muscular habits were a result of 'tonus adaptation' related to certain emotional states. People can have low muscular tonus in depressive states or high tonus in anxious states. Reflexive and unconscious physical habits can lead to inefficient functioning and muscular imbalances. Much physical pain is a result of not being attentive to signals from the body to the point that incapacitating conditions develop.

Hanna (1988) developed the term *sensory motor amnesia* to describe how involuntary and unconscious physical habits become physiologically ingrained in the sensory-motor system over time, leading to such things as stiff and limited movements, fatigue and chronic pain. Bodyworker Juhan (1987, p. xxiii) added that 'these stiffenings, shortenings, and thickenings' of tissues can be a result of surgery or any other trauma or from overuse of the body, disuse, injury or illness. Repeatedly triggered muscular reflexes and reactions to stresses create habitual muscular contractions, chronic tension and bodily pains. Stress or emotional strain can trigger the trauma reflex, a 'reaction of the sensory-motor system' in which muscles flinch and repeatedly cringe into 'stuck' positions leading to postural disorders (Hanna, 1988, p. 81). Because inefficient movement habits are largely

ingrained in the unconscious, somatic work aims to awaken awareness so that habits can be changed. This can be done by introducing new ideas that 'shake up the old order and allow for the experience of new movement potentials to emerge' (Batson, 2009, p. 3) Conscious movement learning does not mean thinking our way through sequences of actions or trying to direct actions in an analytical manner. Rather, through sensory exploration and physical practice, the body 'gets a feel for it' (Juhan, 1987, p. 290). Through gentle practice and experience, new body–mind connections are integrated moving from inefficiency and pain to restoring homeostasis and harmonious functioning. Somatic work therefore, is a form of sensory-motor learning in which experience can be altered as a result of the felt experience and increased awareness.

It is important to note that somatic movement explorations can access sensation and its related intelligence of the 'mind' of any system within the body in order to stimulate learning and healing processes (Cohen, Nelson, & Stark-Smith, 1993). Somatic work is not necessarily based solely on muscular experience. In addition to muscular senses (within our kinaesthetic and proprioceptive systems), our brain is fed sensorial information from the vestibular senses, visceral receptors and sensory neurons within our organs and blood vessels (Levine, 2010, p. 140). In Body-Mind Centering®, all bodily systems have been found to be accessible through movement explorations. Each system includes: skeletal, the endocrine system, nervous system, respiratory, circulatory, lymphatic, muscular and fascial tissue, fat and skin, cerebrospinal fluid and even cellular motion has its own expressive behaviour (Cohen et al., 1993). Movement practices influence the body in a sort of holistic cyclical loop.

Somatic work aims to bring an individual into embodied experience through experiential practices, 'enlivening consciousness through physical awareness' M. Eddy (personal communications, 2014). When we are 'disembodied', we lack a sense of well being. There are many reasons why we become 'disembodied' or separated from the body including:

> abuse and violence, dissociation, the perception of seeing the body as shameful, powerlessness, physical and emotional reactions to stress, trauma from accidents, war, death and loss, or any manner in which someone might become alienated from their own body losing contact with themselves as a whole. (Knaster, 1996, p. 28)

The development of somatic perception is vital, for as we learn to become centred within our bodily experience, we invite the possibility for personal change by sensing what the body needs. Ultimately, there is a shared philosophical assumption within somatic practice that this work 'is *transformative* in so far as it can produce "deep change" in our habitual style of embodiment (and thereby our corporeal and intercorporeal life as a whole)' (Behnke, 2008, p. 1). Positive inner change resulting from transformative practices can also bring about positive change in our relations with others.

In somatic psychology (also known as body psychotherapy), the experiential process of working with the body is used as part of the process of therapeutic discovery under the guidance of a professional psychologist. Victims of trauma and emotional abuse can greatly benefit from this sort of therapy. Body-oriented psychotherapeutic methods include that of: William Reich (Vegetotherapy),

Alexander Lowen and John Pierrakos (Bioenergetics), Stanley Keleman (Formative Psychology®), Ron Kurtz (Hakomi), Peter Levine (Somatic Experiencing®) and Ilana Rubenfeld (Rubenfeld Synergy Method®) according to the United States Association for Body Psychotherapy. Other systems include: Bodynamic Analysis (Lisbeth Marcher), Psychomotor Therapy (Albert Pesso and Diane Boydon Pesso), Focusing (Eugene Gendlin), Gestalt (Fritz and Laura Perls) and Biosynthesis (David Boadella) (Allison, 1999; Macnaughton, 2004).

In an article for The European Association of Body Psychotherapy, Young (n.d.) clarified that while there are differences between somatic work and body psychotherapy, including that of either a focus on behavioural and emotional disturbances (body psychotherapy) or the structural/functional approach of somatics, both share an 'overlap between the well-established traditions' as innovators in these fields share common influences and philosophies. In a way, somatic practitioners are trained in movement techniques to encourage physical harmony, while body psychotherapists help a client verbalise feelings that arise as a result of movement expression. In commonality, both fields of work share the intuitive skill of reading 'body language' in order to ascertain how to best approach working with the body as an avenue towards change. Johnson (2006) argued that by looking 'into not-yet verbalized bodily experience one can understand various methods of body practices and their impact on the understanding of psychotherapy and the education of psychotherapists' (p. 1). Our body communicates non-verbally, such as when we are sad, the chest might crumple inwards, head bows low and shoulders slump over. In extreme grief, often the chest looks crushed as if a real physical blow to the heart has occurred. These physical affects, while not entirely measurable, are quite evident.

Much of our life experiences inform our mental and physical attitudes giving us our own personality and body language. Mental states in and of themselves create muscular reactions in a kind of 'silent body language', showing personal tendencies manifested in habit and behaviour (Juhan, 1987, p. 232). Body psychotherapist Keleman (1985) created the term 'emotional anatomy' to describe how emotions are 'stored' in the body. Reich (1945) used the term 'character armor' to describe chronic self-protective body language.

Emotional distress can create inefficient movement habits and muscular tension which is energetically draining to the body. In addition, many traumatised individuals become frightened and overwhelmed by extreme feelings and sensations from their body and move between feeling shutdown and dissociated 'to a kind of "hyper-sensation" of nervous system arousal' (Levine, 2010, p. 113). Through somatic work, individuals are guided into a state of playful curiosity in which emerging bodily sensations or even the vacancy of feeling can be explored in a safe environment in a process of 'titration' (gradual access) to create new, balanced, body-oriented associations and consciousness (Levine, 2010). Somatic work and body psychotherapy both support the liberation of personal resources, as when our bodily systems are working in harmony, healing vital energy fills our being. Body-oriented techniques share the potential to create positive emotional and bodily changes as they move the individual from feelings of discomfort and irritation to that of pleasure and relief.

Common heritage of somatics, modern dance and body psychotherapy

Although relatively new as a field, somatic education is connected to the heritage of nineteenth century physical culture of Central and Northern Europe as well as the Eastern United States (Johnson, 1994, 1995). The term physical culture represents a collective incorporation of practices from a variety of educational lineages. Approximately 200 years ago, European physical culture introduced practices designed to develop individual well-being by either: increasing vitality and strength, generating greater mobility, agility, greater range of motion and enhanced capabilities for physical and emotional expression.

Physical culture practices introduced the term 'gymnastics' which was an all-inclusive word for many different systematic or exploratory physical exercises. While related to the growth of modern gymnastics, the word at that time simply meant a sort of exercise. For example, 'vocal gymnastics' included exercises used for elocution and oratory, which certainly had nothing to do with *acrobatics*!

Physical culture systems were arranged in four branches based on Ancient Greek divisions: Military, Medical, Pedagogical and Aesthetic Gymnastics. Systems were progressive and arranged in order from the simple to complex and according to ability; for the ill, the person of average abilities, children, the more advanced athlete and also for the more intensive military needs of men. Beginning in the early 1800s in Germany, Denmark and Sweden, educational systems were soon being promoted across Europe, America, India and Australia through schools, military academies and gymnasiums.

Military gymnastics included intensive group conditioning for men. In comparison, medical gymnastics were adapted to the individual. They were designed for the ill and weak or for those with nervous disorders or structural alignment problems. Methods included subtle movement exercises aided by the guided touch of a practitioner and massage techniques used to nourish diseased parts of the body, and as a result, it came to be known as the 'movement cure'. In many ways, medical gymnastics shares much in common with somatic work in its view that movement is curative. Medical gymnastics were thought to cure diseased parts by bringing circulation, purity of the blood and oxidation of tissue, easing congestion through 'tissue metamorphosis', strengthening weak and imbalanced muscles, influencing direct and reflex action of the nervous system by diminishing excitability and irritability of nerves and helping with lymphatic drainage and overall 'nutrition' within the body (Taylor, 1861, p. 31). Once strong enough, patients would start light pedagogical gymnastics involving whole body range of motion exercises practiced with breath regulation.

One of the most influential innovators of medical and pedagogical gymnastics was Pehr Ling, the founder of Swedish gymnastics. While Ling did not write extensively of his methods, it in no way means his impact was negligible. Ling fully developed his work over 25 years, and the verity of his methods can be found in the writings of his son and many other accomplished students.

For his medical gymnastic efforts, Ling became an elected member of the Swedish Medical Association (Hartwell, 1896). Some dismiss Ling for having also created a military gymnastic system; others link him with Turkish arts (Heller, 2007, 2012, p. 291) or Chinese massage, although this reviewer has found no evidence

after reading volumes of historical material. If anything, he is associated with the art of fencing and the gymnasiarchs Franz Nachtegall and Johann GutsMuths. In an 1896 article on Ling by the President of the American Association for the Advancement of Physical Education, it was argued that

> it matters little whence or from whom Ling derived his first impulse. He was soon able to make free and original use of the material … and finally evolved a system of gymnastics unlike any that had been devised in any country. (Hartwell, p. 6)

In 1813, Ling founded the Royal Gymnastiska Central Institutet with teacher training programmes and a medical gymnastics treatment centre for the ill. After Ling died in 1839, his systems continued to evolve according to his principles with his son and daughters, the directors of his institute and the numerous institutions and schools across Europe and America who taught his methods. By the late 1800s, Swedish pedagogical gymnastics became popular as a system that disciplined both body and mind through training muscular and neurological systems and involving coordinated functional activity of the whole body (Verbrugge, 1988).

The most renowned innovators in the aesthetic gymnastics branch of physical culture can be attributed to François Delsarte, Steele Mackeye and Genevieve Stebbins. Aesthetic gymnastics were forms of training 'through which a person endeavors to give bodily expression to his inner being, thoughts, or impressions' (Hartwell, 1896, p. 8). Delsarte meticulously codified gestures, bodily postures and expressions of the face to teach the ability to use nonverbal language. His students included actors, orators, painters, singers, members of royalty and high society who wanted to learn how to bring more emotional depth to their speeches or artistic presentations. His sole American student Steele Mackeye integrated these ideas into a form of physical training for orators and actors. Actress, scholar, educator and dance artist Genevieve Stebbins trained with Mackeye and later created a new system of aesthetic gymnastics based on Ling and Delsartian ideas and her own personal innovations (Ruyter, 1973/2011). Stebbins published five lengthy books on Delsarte expression and her physical culture methods, and taught students at her School of Expression founded in 1893 at Carnegie Hall, New York City.

Historian Nancy Lee Chalfa Ruyter meticulously explored the 'cultivation of body and mind' in American Delsartism over a 30-year period of research publications and argued that Genevieve Stebbins appears to be the first American to have developed a body–mind method as she created actual movement practices and 'mindfulness' methods which were passed down by future generations of dancers and somatic practitioners. Stebbins (1913) realised that 'the effect of the emotions and the body upon each other is reciprocal', and she devised methods for individual development built on sound 'harmonial' philosophies (involving body, mind and spirit) (p. 25). The enormous relevance of her work has been lost, in many ways because she had numerous imitators teaching watered-down ideas from her books in what became a Delsarte craze across America, so at first glance, that entire era seems facile. Stebbins (1888) wrote: 'No exercise is practiced simply for the physical result, but for the purpose of developing body, mind and soul, and harmonizing their reciprocal relations, influences and effects' (p. 117).

Stebbins (1892) related aesthetic gymnastics to exercises of the ancients and strove to stir indwelling 'vital activity' and 'soul-force' in order to elevate the

individual to their greatest natural abilities. Stebbins was deeply spiritual, interested in sacred dance and the power of movement. Although she identified with being Christian, she was also drawn to the metaphysical and was well studied in world religions. Her methods included movement exercises and dynamic breath work as a means of

> rejuvenating the exhausted brain with a new life-force, of inflating the lungs with a lighter air, of vivifying the blood with a finer fire, of energizing the entire nervous system with a strong exhilarating electricity, and of endowing the whole organic being with a grander dynamic potentiality. (1892, p. 54)

While she believed that self-actualisation was the higher goal of personal culture, she also encouraged simple awareness exercises for use in everyday life such as: 'When you go to bed, try to lie heavily, for, strange as it may seem, many sleep tensely all night' (1913, p. 35).

In addition to her work as an educator, Stebbins was also as a dance artist whose writings and performances inspired Isadora Duncan and Ruth St. Denis. Stebbins should properly be credited for the birth of American modern dance (Jowitt, 1988; Ruyter, 1973/2011). Futhermore, Stebbins inspired the birth of somatic work through two of her students, Hede Kallmeyer and Bess Mensendieck, who brought her work to Germany where they created schools of their own (Johnson, 1995; Roche, 1978). Kallmeyer introduced Stebbins methods of 'harmonic education' at her school where the somatic pioneer Elsa Gindler studied.

Gindler is commonly credited for being the earliest originator of somatics (Eddy, 2009; Geuter, Weaver, & Heller, 2010; Hanna, 1979; Johnson, 1995; Murphy, 1992).

Gindler's earliest work was an outgrowth of the Stebbins–Kallmeyer system (Speads, 1978). Gindler began teaching in 1915 and by 1918 was leading teacher training programmes. As late as 1926 in an article by Gindler (Roche, 1978, p. 38), the influence of Stebbins' work was still evident. Gindler used the same anecdotal stories about restorative relaxation and the connection between breathing and movement (without quotes) from Stebbins' 1892 book *Dynamic Breathing and Harmonic Gymnastics* (pp. 68–80). One of her students wrote that much of what Stebbins and Gindler describe in speaking of 'relaxation' might today be called 'meditation' (Roche, 1978, p. 3).

Most of Gindler's teacher trainees left Germany with the rise of Nazism while Gindler remained and never ceased to help others in the face of the worst fears imaginable. Through her many students, her work continued to evolve. Charlotte Selver, brought Gindler's style of working to New York and to Esalen Institute in California, where it later became known as Sensory Awareness. The 'Father' of Body Psychotherapy, Wilhem Reich is thought to have started working with the body as a result of an intimate relationship with a student of Elsa Gindler's, and it is through this influence, that his methods of incorporating the body in therapy emerged (Geuter et al., 2010; Young, 2010).

Final thoughts

There are many gaps in the interrelated history of Western body–mind disciplines. It is only newly being recognised that there has been a growth of 200 years behind

somatics, and 150 behind the growth of body psychotherapy (Young, 2006). Recommended future areas of study include researching in detail the evolution from physical culture to contemporary body–mind practices. In so doing, it could serve to create a paradigm shift reframing the notion that Western physical education practices were solely mechanical, and not designed for holistic purposes. There is much evidence to support the idea that the medical, pedagogical and aesthetic gymnastics of physical culture evolved into what we now know as somatics, modern dance (and its related movement therapies) and body psychotherapy. While the approaches evolved and changed over time, the underlying philosophy has continually supported the 'whole person' as an integral being able to self-actualise. This self-actualisation is dependent on the direct bodily experience of therapeutic and educational movement and available practices are a result of the evolution of somatics.

Notes on contributor

Kelly Jean Mullan (MA, B.Sc., RYT) is an independent scholar. Formerly a professional dancer, physical theater artist and vocalist (1992-2004) Kelly had over 500 performances in 22 countries. Her Masters thesis at Skidmore College, *The Art and Science of Somatics: Theory, History and Scientific Foundations*, was completed under the mentorship of Dr Martha Eddy, with whom she also completed phase two of Dynamic Embodiment Somatic Movement Therapy Training (DE-SMTT). Kelly is presently preparing a manuscript on the history of physical culture in relation to the evolution of somatics and will have a chapter published in an upcoming book with Martha Eddy.

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