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## **In Search of Somatic Therapy by Setsuko Tsuchiya (review)**

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## In Search of Somatic Therapy

Written By: Setsuko Tsuchiya

Edited By: David Shinsato

Publisher: (2016) Savant Books and Publications, 211 pages

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Somatic Therapy is a healing practice not widely understood or used. While it is an approach that has been incorporated in psychology and counseling approaches, allied helping professions (i.e. massage therapy, alternative healing methods), and sometimes in medicine particularly as an adjunctive approach, it is a therapy that is not universally defined or conceptualized. Somatic Therapy is not widely discussed within the rehabilitation profession as an approach to work with individuals with disabilities including people with severe conditions such as SCI, TBI, or other neurological conditions. In an effort to educate rehabilitation professionals about this approach, the following book was reviewed.

Somatic Therapy can be understood as a holistic approach to healing that involves one's mind, body, spirit, and emotions. Professionals who use this approach strive to help people make the connection between their thoughts, feelings, actions, and physiological experiences. Professionals who practice Somatic Therapy often claim that past events and traumatic experiences can become stored and locked in peoples' bodies and muscles, thus causing their physical health and functioning to sometimes be askew. One example raised by the author is the proposed connection between Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and the inability to move past or take action in addressing anxiety and fears. When people with PTSD undergo Somatic Therapy, the internal energy that was rigid and "blocked" becomes loosened to the point where they can begin to resolve "physical symptoms experienced and mental distress" (Tsuchiya, 2016). More

specifically, as people become attuned to their body and the reactions they are having from the traumatic event(s) they learn to focus on the bodily sensation experienced so they can “reawaken” that part from an immobile or “frozen” state. This movement of bodily energy may cause changes in one’s breathing, heartrate, bodily rhythms which then help them get in touch and access emotions.

Somatic Therapy consists of and draws from a number of techniques. Professionals may use “laying on of hands” which has been described as having the ability to “raise people’s feelings, and pent up muscular energy” so that bodily energy can be opened up and begin to flow (Tsuchiya, 2016). Many of the traditions used in Somatic Therapy are described as being a part of ancient cultures and practices. Examples may include meditation, yoga, acupressure, massage therapy, shiatsu, hypnotherapy, progressive relaxation, dance and dance movement therapy. Much of Somatic Therapy as explained by the author focus on dance movement and expression, and the use of human touch (i.e., massage, direct touch) to promote the “treatment of illness, injury, or disease.” (Tsuchiya, 2016).

In addition to the techniques and benefits of Somatic Therapy, the author discusses the role of dance and Dance Movement Therapy (DMT) as a part of her personal and professional journey. She starts with educating us on the fact that dance has multiple purposes and has been a part of societies and cultures for thousands of years (i.e., Buddhist, Greek and Romans). Dance has been used to celebrate, mourn, embrace cultures and spiritual experiences, communicate ideas and values, and to express oneself. In essence, dance was described as one of the oldest forms of Somatic Therapy.

Dance/Movement Therapy and yoga (components of Somatic Therapy) has been researched among survivors of sexual abuse and trauma, and individuals with PTSD, Parkinson’s

Disease, cancer, and severe mental illness. Findings from the research provide additional support for the use of Somatic Therapy as Dance Movement Therapy and yoga appear to help decrease anxiety, reduce stress, improve personal understanding of self and others, create healthier relationships (particularly as it relates to trust and personal space), promote feelings of support and connectedness, improve physical mobility, balance, and strength, and enhance cognitive functioning.

Tsuchiya provides the reader with a taste of the possible connection dance has with psychotherapy. In her work, the author discusses the exploration or use of body therapy and energy release, in early psychotherapeutic practices such as Psychoanalysis. Tsuchiya stresses that professionals who use more a talking-problem solving style of therapy may not view dance or Dance Movement Therapy in the same way as she attempts to explain it, but this does not mean they can't find a way to appreciate and integrate dance and DMT into their professional practice. Dance can be used to help people break the language barrier, express themselves, get in touch with what they are feeling and thinking, and help with bodily healing. For some, dance may be a medium to help people "recall, reenact, and re-experience" events and situations that might otherwise be challenging. Dance is also a means to help oneself in ways that are meaningful or acceptable based on one's culture and values; after all, talk and emotive therapeutic approaches are not openly encouraged within all groups.

As a whole, Tsuchiya's book can help readers learn more about dance, Dance Movement Therapy, its value in relation to the body and personal healing as a part of the therapeutic relationship. What is not clear how Dance Movement Therapy and Somatic Therapy techniques can be applied and considered among persons with severe physical disabilities (i.e., SCI, TBI, neurological conditions). My own exploration into the DMT research revealed that more work is

needed as it relates to research and real life application. Nonetheless, I learned that DMT can be used among people with a wide range of physical abilities when the proper support and environment is achieved. A key therapeutic function of DMT is to allow people to be free with their bodies, movements, sensations, and experiences and to express what they feel in whatever ways they can. Furthermore, I learned that research scholars want to explore ways to expand DMT to a wider and more diverse population which includes people with more severe disabilities.