Duality To Unity:
A Heuristic Exploration
Of The Experience
Of Being The Other

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ABSTRACT

Centred in the afro-centric spiritual belief that relationship to the other is a path to wholeness my research asserts that we all have an experience of being other. Combining heuristic research methods with creative techniques common to Transpersonal psychotherapy, my belief is that by working with one's unconscious experience as the outsider metaphorically and symbolically it is possible to access spiritual wholeness. Following Moustakas' heuristic stages, this researcher therefore undertook a six-month study into his own experience as other. As well as the recording of dreams and creative exercises designed to access the deeper symbolic experience as other, this researcher also undertook 4 'self-interviews' designed to challenge his own resistance to entering the shadow. During the

interviews visualisations, bodywork and drawing were used to understand the internalised experience as other, whilst sand tray work, common to play therapy, utilised symbolism and metaphor to express the unconscious experience as other via projection. By observing the products of the interviews and the creative exercises through the lens of an alchemical process, it was found that working heuristically with one's experience as other is a route towards better relationship with self and others.

KEYWORDS
Transpersonal, difference, diversity, creativity, individuation

Introduction

As a black British, male psychotherapist, my sense of difference is with me all the time; for example from the moment I step into my place of work as a black man within the mainly white female world of psychotherapy in the UK. As part of a wider phenomenological study, a heuristic methodology was employed here as given that my belief was that we all have an experience as the other. It was also the best way to recognising one of the aims of my research which was to prove that working creatively with one's sense of difference was a means of reintegration and a path towards the Jungian ideal of individuation (Tyagi, 2008). It was important though that this research bring a relational perspective to understanding difference, acknowledging the more afrocentric idea that through the other I know myself (Mazama, 2003), an idea also posited form a more western perspective by Buber (2010).

Structure Of The Research

It is important here to outline the various stages of a heuristic process (Moustakas, 1990) before going into more depth as to how I covered each of these stages in turn for my own particular project. Briefly, these are;

- Initial Engagement – which occurs when one formulates ones question, inviting forward any and all material that relates to it;
- Immersion – where one is enveloped by the material pertaining to the research question;
- Incubation – the subtle letting go into the unconscious of all that has been discovered;

- Illumination – the sudden moments, or the rising up to consciousness, of an understanding of the phenomena;
- Explication – the refining and re-refining process of that previous understanding;
- Creative Synthesis – which is the bringing together of all that has been discovered so it can be disseminated.

To outline the heuristic process of data collection further, for this research the *Initial Engagement* stage involved the formulating and refining of the research question time and again allowing any and all material that might be pertinent to the research question to flow forth. I will argue here that this stage occurred from the minute this researcher was accepted for his Research Ph.D. with the writing of the first, very basic Research Proposal. This was the start point of a process that took many months of refining and re-refining my question, reading any and all material that might pertain to my topic, before then narrowing my focus to understand how my own research was different to that which has gone before, and what this research would require of myself in particular. The process then flowed into the *Immersion* stage where I sought out anything and everything that pertained to my topic, be they articles, books, YouTube clips, or any other type of interaction that it was felt was of use for this research. Also, for a period of six months I kept a weekly journal of notes of my thoughts and experiences of difference. This diary also included any dreams that had arisen from within my unconscious during this time, and any other incidents that might have occurred. During this period, I was also interviewed on four separate occasions about my experiences of difference, with my own interviewer using the same questions and techniques on myself of sand tray work and visualisations to, as outlined in the previous phenomenological section (Jung, 1971; Labovitz Boik & Anna Goodwin, 2000; Rowan, 1993; Turner, 2005) thereby allowing me to access my own unconscious experiences of being different. The aim of the self-interviews was to challenge myself researcher in uncovering his own deeper experience of difference, his own prejudices, and his own coping mechanisms with regards to being different. The self-interviews also helped to highlight how challenging it is to look at one's own sense of difference when encountering the other, and also how necessary this step is as well. On a personal level I found the immersion stage, including the self-interviews, to be extremely challenging, and I was

often very aware of my own defences when it came to pushing myself in my interviews or when it came to recording my thoughts, writing my diary, or recording my dreams. Sela-Smith (Sela-Smith, 2002) in her article on heuristic research suggested that one of the reasons for some of the resistance and ambivalence employed by heuristic researchers is that in the initial engagement phase the question has not fully formed from within and is in some ways incomplete. Although she makes a valid point, my view here is that this is incomplete. From a more psychotherapeutic perspective in order for personal transformation to occur within the heuristic researcher the ego of the researcher needs to at least be flexible enough to allow this to happen. The noticing and recording of any resistance and ambivalence was therefore an invaluable indicator towards the difficulties of conducting heuristic research, and raises to the surface from the unconscious just how challenging personal transformation through research actually is.

All four of the interviews were recorded and transcribed, alongside the diary, and as stated this section of the research in all took six months to complete. It was also important to place a boundary on the end of this period to give myself time and space to separate from the difficult experience of working on one's own sense of difference before the next stages, *Incubation* and *Illumination*, began. In drawing these two sections together what I am aiming to show within this research project is just how close these two stages actually are. The Incubation process itself then lasted another six months into early 2014 where all the interviews and the diary entries were set aside. This part of the process allowed myself as the researcher time to carry out other areas of research within this project, taking myself away from my own process only to allow myself the chance to look at my own material with fresher eyes on my return. This did not mean that moments of illumination, where ideas about my own process intuitively arose out of my unconscious, did not occur. To the contrary, additional notes were made of realisations around the nature of my difference, many of which would then become the bedrock of my later results sections. The illumination stage for this project, also included the transcribing and reading through of the self-interview transcripts several times in order to ascertain and fully understand my own process, and bringing this stage in line with the phenomenological reduction stage of my participants. The dreams were also analysed for patterns, symbols, and themes to aid understanding the more unconscious elements of my own

process, with my hope being that all the data derived throughout the 6 months would present a comprehensive picture of my own experience of being the other. To complete this stage fully, a draft textual and structural analysis of the experience of being different and also what the other actually was, was completed.

At the completion of this process, the process then moved onto Moustakas' *explication* stage which meant that this researcher was then forced to review, reconsider and re-examine all of the varying levels of understanding that the previous stages had uncovered. This section required an additional level of soul-searching, or refining, of the knowledge previously gleaned in order to build a composite picture of my own experience of difference and a consideration of how this process has changed myself the researcher. For Moustakas, when this process is complete it should then flow into the *creative synthesis* stage, which for him involves the presentation of a story or a poem, or the writing of a song, or some other creative means by which the journey of the researcher could be expressed.

Results Example: Inauthenticity Of The Other

Where post-structuralism speaks of a the ability of the signified to be identified by its relationship to the signifier, from a transpersonal perspective it is important to understand that the absolute cannot exist without the nothingness separate to it, and vice versa (Belsey, 2002; Carter, 2013; Villet, 2011). Yet this example theme presented as part of this heuristic exploration brought my intrapersonal other into focus for the first time, and with it an understanding of the inauthenticity that goes with being the compliant other in relationship to the absolute. This theme is also personally important as heuristic work should challenge the researcher to change themselves in the service of science, but as is often the case with heuristic research there is often resistance to such deep change (Johnson, 1993; Sela-Smith, 2002). As stated above, visualizations and drawings were used to facilitate the emergence and understanding of my unconscious other. Within this theme the depths of this self-disempowerment was highlighted further in astonishing fashion via the lens of the sand tray exercise that was conducted in this interview. For myself I chose a white man, for my interviewer I selected a tall black woman, and for the relationship I selected a pterodactyl. When asked to select items by the interviewer and to explain why I had selected a pterodactyl I offered the following explanation:

> *Pterodactyl is about to take off and that's the only thing I can say – although he is partly buried in the sand... When I first put him in there he was a lot deeper in the sand. Uhm... Not sure, just... Hmmmm... Actually he looks slightly fearful. Intimidated slightly. I don't know... Yeah. We'll go with that – intimidated.*

We then went on to discuss the symbol of the white man:

> *Yeah, a bit of fear or holding back in some way. I think there is some fear. There is some holding back in that figure. I actually want to say as well. This, his right hand looks like it wants to lash out at someone, like he is preparing to slap something. Which probably emanates back to our Rottweiler from earlier on.*

This statement speaks of the anger of the other with my inauthentic self as the other having to witness my own power displayed before me, power I had denied myself of by adopting the role of the submissive other. In an attempt to get me to access that power temporarily, I was then invited to speak as the black woman:

> DT: *How interesting. I am a tall elegant powerful black woman. I do my job every day. I am very in touch with the land around me. I am very loyal to my family and to my culture, to my tribe. Why me? I want to say. Hmmm.*
>
> I: *Tell me about your power.*
>
> DT: *It's simple really. I am it. I am that power. I don't have to try too hard. What I do and how connected I am to the world around me is my power. I get power from the water I drink and I give back power in praise and thanks.*

The importance of the three symbols together are these also explore my inauthenticity in the face of the majority through the suppression of my black identity and 'making myself white' in the process, an idea echoed by Davids (2012), who although he doesn't utilise creative means to understand this process acknowledges its presence. It is also important here to notice the projection of the contra-sexual other onto my interviewer in this exercise,

an idea posited within Jungian psychology and sand tray work (Castellana & Donfrancesco, 2005) and that speaks here of the need to work through the honest shadow my own incongruity before coming face to face with what I will term my cultural anima. In this context, the images here of the dinosaur and the projection of power onto the black woman tie in with the earlier realisation of powerless against the subject. The pterodactyl/ relationship though is probably the most important symbol of all as it speaks of just how early this split occurred within me echoing, Turner who states "the prominent presence of dinosaurs may allude to a long family legacy of hurt and dysfunction" (2005, p. 158), and speaking of the earliest of repressions and something most probably passed along the generations. It was also present in some of the early sand play exercises presented in chapter 5, and this symbol then links itself to my earlier statement of the boy who in childhood had learnt to be compliant to fit in and survive. On reflection, I presented other dinosaur symbols in my co-researcher sand trays at this early point of my heuristic study, highlighting the importance of acknowledging repressed aspects of the self when working with the other.

Conclusion

What this brief example helps to show is that working heuristically and creatively with one's sense of otherness can be an intrapsychic and interpersonal route towards recognising the unconscious splits within us. When these splits are then challenged and reintegrated, one then has the opportunity for greater spiritual growth and individuation. This then echoes the African (Nussbaum, 2003) perspective on being with the other where only by relating to the other, the other in this case being my internalised other, can I truly know myself.

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