

Introduction

Why Talk Plainly? Do Words Really Matter That Much?

Have you ever tried to help someone and failed to reach them? Did you afterwards find yourself questioning the words you used? If so, know that folks who talk for a living often feel much the same way. I know. I am one of those folks. Perhaps this is why therapists tend to be a bit particular about the words they use. Especially when the person they're talking to is crying out for help. My point? The words we use matter just as much as the feelings we express. Moreover, words are a big part of what makes us feel what we feel. This then is where we will begin. With a few thoughts on the words we use and what makes them so important.

Therapists Who Write Books

Client: To begin with, I have a confession to make.

Therapist: *(Oh boy, he's not going to be one of those touchy feely clients, is he?)*

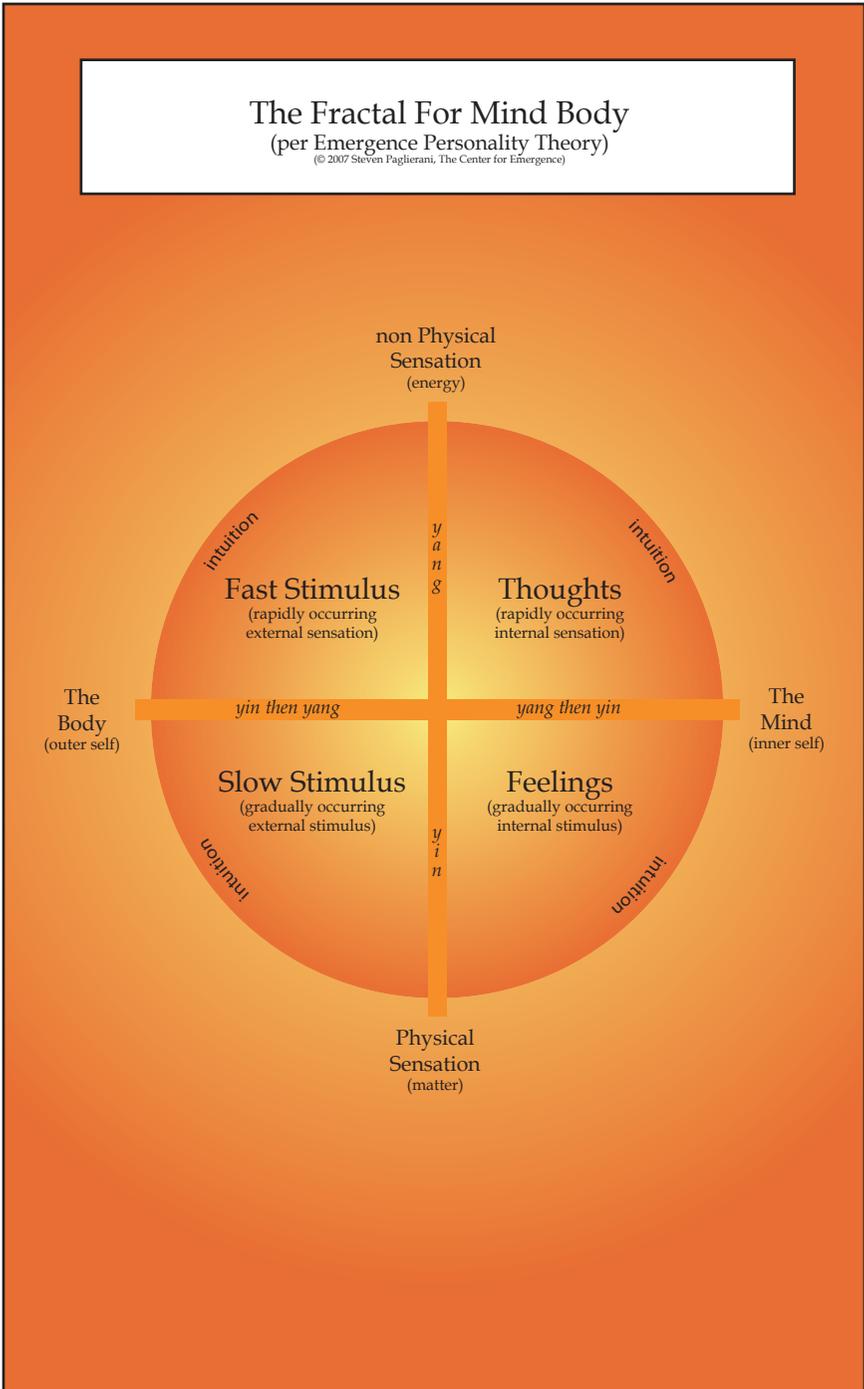
Client: I'm feeling a bit scared.

Therapist: *(Oh, Lord, there he goes. Two sentences in and already he's acting crazy.)*

Client: Sort of like I felt on the first day of school. Have you ever felt this way?

Therapist: *(No. Why would I have felt like that?)*

Client: No? I thought not.



Therapist: (*Wait a minute. How did he know that? Is he some kind of a therapist maybe?*)

In all seriousness, I too have to admit I am a bit nervous. People tend to scrutinize therapists who write books. And while some therapists are eventually praised for what they say, far more are harshly criticized and worse, ridiculed, all because their observations on human nature differ from what the mainstream accepts.

Perhaps this is why so many therapists preface their first book with disclaimers or disguises. Or omit the source of their inspiration entirely. For instance, Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, author of the best selling *On Death and Dying* (1969), reveals only in a later book, *On Life After Death* (1991), the details of the spiritual experience that led her to write her first book.

Alice Miller, author of the best selling book, *Drama of the Gifted Child* (1979), admits only in a bravely rewritten preface added to the 1992 edition that she was the abused child she wrote about.

No less than Freud himself confessed to this in a letter he wrote in 1914 to the man credited with coining the phrase “lucid dreaming,” Fredrik van Eeden. In this letter, Freud writes, “*To your First Question: My ‘Interpretation of Dreams’ is not based on dreams by neurotics, but largely on my own dreams.*” His book had been published in November, 1899.

It would seem then that for therapists, plainly admitting one’s work has been inspired by one’s personal experiences can generate uneasiness and fear. And may lead to harsh criticisms and worse.

This said, I want you to know, right up front, that my work, too, has been inspired by my personal experiences. Including a life changing spiritual experience, my childhood abuse, and my own life and dreams.

Why begin a first book with personal admissions of this sort? Because I wish to practice here what I preach, by talking plainly, simply putting myself out there, and letting people draw their own conclusions.

In addition, controversial topics like the mind body connection themselves tend to provoke some rather pointed personal attacks. Especially from the intellectual mud slingers who defend the established views. In part, this may account for the normally stiff, formal, and careful nature of many talk therapy books. Me, I’d rather be a mud covered Tesla than a pigeon-dung covered statue any day.

My point is, I intend to speak to you here no differently than I do to my friends. In plain words. Mostly. About interesting ideas and warm-hearted stuff. My goal will be to challenge what you are certain you already know. Admittedly I may rile you up or make you cry at times, but I’ll always be up front about my ideas and use fancy words only when I have to.

What's wrong with using fancy words? There's nothing wrong per se. But this is a book about talk therapy, and talk therapies which float above clients on layers of jargon tend to demean people and push them away. Folks end up feeling less intelligent than the therapist or stupid for not knowing things. Some may even get pissed for being spoken down to. And yes, while being provoked can lead to breakthroughs at times, being demeaned by fancy words never helps.

On the other hand, sometimes fancy words are exactly the right words. I even fall in love with them at times. Words with a warm personal meaning, mostly, more so those with an interesting history.

For instance, in the opening chapter, we're going to look at the word *psychotherapy*, a word which has quite an interesting history. Including that hidden within this history is the underlying purpose and goal of all talk therapy. Interestingly enough, most therapists have never been taught what this word means. I'm not sure why. It's definitely worth the time.

Then there's that other monstrosity of a word I love, the word *psychophysical*. What's special about this word? Finding parallels between the laws of physics and the way people behave has led to some very unusual insights about human nature. In fact, before the watchdogs of modern science declared this idea off limits, therapists discovered all sorts of things this way.

Take the father of the talking cure, Freud himself. He used the parallels between the First Law of Thermodynamics and the human mind to postulate the existence of the unconscious. William Wundt, founder of the first Institute for Experimental Psychology, based his entire school on the idea that every physical event has a mental counterpart and visa versa. And William James, in his text on psychology (*Principles of Psychology*, 1870), advises us to continue exploring the mind psychophysically until the day in which things become "*more thoroughly thought out.*"

Physicists too once openly acknowledged the value in psychophysics. John von Neumann. Niels Bohr. Even Albert Einstein who, in 1922, in a letter to a Swiss journal, wrote that the doctrine of psychophysical parallelism, "*to be frank, satisfies me entirely.*"

What killed our belief in psychophysics? It seems we got lost in trying to fit the roundness of human nature into the square hole of statistics, the place in which many of today's therapies are stuck. Thus while statistics definitely has a place in the world of research, when it comes to the "humming buzzing confusion" of human nature, there is a far better way to describe who we are. Which brings us the next fancy word we'll be looking at, the word *fractility*.

What is *fractility*? It is the essence of the patterns found within all real world things, from snow flakes to oak leaves to what makes us laugh. As opposed to *linearity* which is the essence of the patterns found within all that is

real only on paper; squares, circles, straight lines and such. And statistical data about human nature.

So does the word *fractility* have a history?

Honestly, no, it doesn't, although its root word does. The word *fractal* was coined in 1975 by the father of fractal geometry, Benoit Mandelbrot, to refer to the geometry of hard to describe things. Non linear stuff like clouds and electrical static and coast lines, as opposed to linear stuff like classical geometry and inferential statistics.

This evolved into *fractility* when I accidentally discovered I could combine both geometries, linear and fractal, into drawings which represent the essence of whole aspects of human nature.

What makes these drawings special? They describe things which are one hundred percent true. As opposed to the things statistics describe which at best can be only partially true.

How can anything be one hundred percent true? Well think about it. How many oak leaves are not real oak leaves? Any? The fractility of human nature is similar.

For example, take the Birth Separation Moment, the natural pattern beneath of all wounding events great and small. Imagine knowing the pattern behind wounding itself? This idea alone could change the entire face of talk therapy, by clarifying what we're looking for and what we need to heal.

How about the pattern which distinguishes friendship from romance? The "he has everything I want in a man so why can't I feel like that about him" pattern. Imagine understanding what's behind this feeling? You can and fractility holds the key.

Of course the real value in fractility lies in what I first mentioned; in being able to discern an almost truth from a whole truth. Imagine having a test for truth itself? Know I'll be showing you this here as well, along with empirical evidence drawn from a decade of longitudinal case studies to back this up.

If true then surely fractility is one of the most exciting discoveries ever made, including that a therapy based on fractility would be a therapy rooted in scientific fact. This is but one of the promises fractility holds; that we can empirically describe the whole truth about aspects of human nature. Including our wounds.

Finally there's the other big topic I mentioned, the mind body connection. How did a book on talk therapy get involved in something as odd as this?

The truth? Like most great discoveries, it happened accidentally and involved other seemingly unrelated events. The first event concerned a world famous classical musician who had been struggling to keep time. The other, a woman with severe ADD whom I noticed drew driving directions oddly.

Don't we already understand though how the mind and body connect?

Actually, we don't, despite the claims we do. Thus if you were to read what experts say, you'd find they never actually mention the mechanism of this connection, only examples that it exists. As well as that if you want to be healthy, you must address both mind and body.

The thing is, health is not additive. It's holistic. Thus seeking health by addressing the concerns of the mind and body separately is like putting the ingredients for a cake into a bowl and then never baking it. Even the finest unbaked ingredients will never be a cake. Something similar is true for us as well.

In a way then, this book documents my discovery; the mechanism of what connects the mind and body. It also historically ties this discovery to the man who four centuries ago started it all. René Descartes. A fellow who also carefully prefaced a lot of what he said in his books. Including that he chose to not publish the big one; *Meditations*, until right before his death.

What was so controversial? The idea that two completely different substances, one physical and one non physical, could somehow interact. How can they if they are completely different substances?

The thing is, because his assertion is how we truly feel, four hundred years later, we're still arguing about it.

Why bring this up in book on talk therapy? Well consider this. When your family doctor prescribes Prozac for depression, he's assuming the body affects the mind. And when a minister or rabbi discusses lust, he's assuming the same thing; that the sins of the flesh corrupt ones eternal soul; that the body affects the mind.

At the same time, when a therapist tells you that negative thoughts are what is screwing up your sleep, she's assuming the mind affects the body. And when a high school coach tells the team they can win if they believe they can, he's saying the same thing. That the mind affects the body.

How can a physical thing affect a non physical thing? And why care anyway?

Why? Because whether what Descartes said interests you or not, we are all affected by this argument. *Thus even if you never give this argument a single thought*, our choices in life still rely on what we assume.

So okay. Knowing how the mind and body connect is important. What does this have to do with talk therapy?

For one thing, it holds the answers to some pretty important questions, some of which may send your children into therapy. For instance have you ever wondered how taking a drug which addicts and makes some people unable to focus can make other people focus better? What makes ADD medications work anyway and why don't these folks get addicted?

What about curing this condition? Can ADD ever be cured or must we resign ourselves to that our kids may need drugs for the rest of their lives? The truth? If you understand the mind and body connection, you'll have answers to these questions as well. Including the proof that ADD is not a disease.

What is it then? It's a condition of the mind and body similar to being left handed in a right handed world. Thus folks who have this condition can learn to focus without drugs and even have significant advantages over folks without ADD in some areas of life, including that at certain times of year, having ADD is a blessing. We'll look at all this as well.

Then there's the idea that we all have ADD, only some of us have it in our mind and some in our body. I, for instance, clearly have ADD in my body and if you saw me play sports, you'd definitely agree.

Have I confused you? Don't worry. None of this is actually that hard, given someone talks you through the philosophy, physics, fractal geometry, and talk therapy needed to reveal the ADD fractal. And no. Despite my practicing shamanism in my personal life, nothing I tell you will involve the waving of bones over peoples' heads nor chanting per se. However folks in pharmaceutical minded households may gnash their teeth a bit.

What else will we be looking at?

Overeating. God what a mystery this has been. And while many people believe the solution to lies mainly in how we eat and exercise, even if this were true, it doesn't do us much good if we cannot take this advice.

For instance what about the confusing things experts say about foods being bad for you. You know. Carbs are bad for you. Fat is bad for you. Sugar is bad for you. Meat too. What's left? Well if you're of Mediterranean descent like me, suicide, perhaps? You might as well. Life without good food is a pretty dull world.

Why is overeating so rampant? It's simple. If the body doesn't know it's eating, the mind cannot regulate what's happening. Fortunately the mind body connection gives us a way to change all this. A way which does include hard work but does not require an iron will. I promise.

So am I saying there a cure for overeating? For parts of it, yes, there is. We'll explore this during the book as well.

Then there's the other big mystery, the one we call *addiction*. The bane of banes for some folks. The living hell of living hells. The thing is, there's been a clue right in front of us all along with regard to what causes it. The essence of which lies in a simple question; if getting high, or getting numb, is why we get hooked, then what accounts for the differences between folks who prefer uppers and folks who prefer downers? And why do some folks prefer nothing at all.

The answer? The way our minds and bodies experience time determines

what we'll be vulnerable to, and this in turn reveals how the mind and body connect.

Curious what this could be? We'll explore this mystery at points in the book as well.

So ADD, overeating, and addiction. Anything else?

Yes, actually. In fact the last idea may be the biggest one of all. The idea? That we do not store our thoughts and feelings in memory. Rather we create them *on the fly*.

What do we store in memory then and where do thoughts and feelings come from?

Thoughts and feelings come from recalling what we've physically sensed in our bodies, as well as from mentally imagining these kinds of physical sensations which then creates even more sensations.

Thus it's physical sensation itself, when recalled, which creates our thoughts and feelings. Along with the feedback loop which exists between the mind and body.

Know this idea has a history as well, and has its roots in another old and famous theory, this time taken from the work of William James. The idea? That memory is not an organized cabinet of thoughts and feelings but rather our bodies store a "humming buzzing confusion."

Here again, we've had an obvious clue to this being true; the idea that we cannot recall the same thoughts and feelings twice *even if we try*. And yes, patterns in our minds and bodies do repeat. But never individual, minute by minute, psychological life events. Not ever. Not even once.

What's the big deal here? Well consider how this would affect talk therapy if it were true.

If, as we currently assume, we record our thoughts and feelings in memory, then being asked what we thought and felt about something makes perfect sense. But if we record only what we sense physically, then asking us to recall what we felt in a prior event is more akin to asking us to fabricate our thoughts and feelings than actually helping us to uncover any real historic truth.

Can this possibly be? Can we be fabricating what we think and feel in therapy? We'll explore this possibility as well. Along with how talk therapy would need to change if indeed this does turn out to be true.

So there you have it, a plethora of controversy. Have I at least stirred up your interest? How about curiosity or counter arguments? At the very least you know this book will not be dry and dull. Thus if I've aroused any interest at all in you, then please do join me in what is certain to stir up one heck of a brouhaha; my plainly spoken first book, Plain Talk about Talk Therapy.

Me and Talk Therapists

Being as this is a book about talk therapy, I should probably tell you a bit about myself. Including my own experiences with talk therapists.

To begin with you should know I've sat across from my share of therapists in my time. For the most part, these therapists have been very kind. At the same time, I have to admit, I've gained painfully little from my work with them. Most of them were too afraid to be wrong, too hard to get to know, too unwilling to risk a fight, and too much in their heads.

There have, of course, been exceptions.

One brilliant young family therapist openly risked losing her masters degree internship to tell me that my fiance, a profoundly mentally ill woman, would never get well. I can still picture her telling me this, tears and snot streaming down my face, my belly shaking as I sobbed. When I hung up the phone though, I was different inside. Stronger. More real. Permanently changed. And when I ask myself today why this affected me so, what feels closest to the truth is that she risked being wrong, risked being real, risked provoking a fight, and spoke totally from her body.

I have never forgotten her honesty, and courage, or her kindness. And in some strange way, as I begin to write this book, I sense that what I am about to write is indelibly tied to that single moment. Talk therapy at it's finest; plain words spoken from the heart and without apology.

Strangely I saw this therapist for only a few months. Yet she affected me so that within four years, I had begun working as a therapist myself, in part due to her suggesting it. That this happened still surprises me. The job I was hired for normally requires a masters degree and ten years experience. I had no formal training and an unfinished bachelors degree in an unrelated field.

Despite my lack of formal education, I got hired and within weeks I felt incredibly alive. So much so I told people it felt like I was wearing the first pair of shoes to ever fit me.

Obviously something unusual occurred here. Including that they entrusted me to do things most talk therapists never get asked to do. Over the next two years then, I treated close to seven hundred families. Not in fifty-minute-hour type sessions mind you, but for five to seven whole Saturdays each plus four straight days of multifamily groups.

Even these groups were unusual in that many included hour and a half long psychodramas which resulted in people having similar reactions to what I myself had experienced only four years prior. Complete with tears and snot streaming down their faces, sobbing bodies and bellies shaking. And leaving permanently changed.

Where did my training in psychodrama come from? My entire training

consisted of watching my supervisor, a wonderful little Irish elf of a woman, do it once in a multifamily group. Once. One time. After which, she told me to do my best, that I was on my own.

Can you imagine being told this? Despite this lack of training though, here again, I managed to thrive. So much so in fact that within a year therapists from other rehabs were coming to sit in and observe.

How could I have done this? God only knows. In part I think I was simply too naive to know I couldn't do it. In part I was so personally effected by the children's suffering that to not throw myself fully into each moment felt unthinkable. And in part, I simply did with my clients what my supervisor was doing with me; she not once interfered in what I did but rather repeatedly let me fail then asked me what I would do differently the next time.

I did very much the same thing with these kids and their families, and people repeatedly told me my plain words said from the heart had changed their lives.

Where Did These Skills Come From?

Where did I get my skills as a therapist?

I think like many brave souls from a century ago, my childhood reflects the tale. Thus similar to Jung whose minister father's loss of faith affected him for his whole life, my mother's religious zealism had a profound affect on me. I can in fact vividly picture myself at seven peering into her dimly lit bedroom to find her yet again on her knees. Which meant I couldn't, and shouldn't, under any circumstances, disturb her. Not if I wanted to stay in her good graces. A fragile condition at best.

Being as this happened pretty much every night, it's not surprising I share a similar interest with Jung; the desire to understand the nature of religion.

My mother's mental condition too permanently affected me, creating an endless desire in me to understand human nature. As best as I can reconstruct then, she had both anorexia (from which she died at age 48) and a form of schizophrenia wherein her senses were like the bother and sister in Poe's book, *Fall of the House of Usher*. To wit, I grew up in a beautifully neat and perfectly clean but acoustically sterile home wherein neither my sister Teresa nor I were ever allowed to talk. Let alone to ask questions.

Little wonder I can so identify with Descartes and with the oppression he faced in his times. Or that I so feel urges to break this silence and encourage others to do the same.

This said, can you imagine how growing up in monastic silence affected me? I never quite learned to connect socially to others. Instead I learned to talk to nature itself and by five, had become a sort of shamanic talk therapist.

Including that talking to animals and flowers and trees had become entirely normal to me.

Not clear what I'm getting at? Try picturing the beautiful wooded hillside of a mountain overlooking the scenic Hudson. Now picture a five year old in his Sunday best shoes walking into a stream running down this mountain.

How did I come to be doing this? Somehow I became so entranced by what I saw that I literally walked into a stream, leaned over, and had a conversation with the little green moss people who lived under the water. What did I see? *Tiny single stemmed beings with little round heads.* What did I think? *A whole community of little people who can somehow breathe under water. How the heck can they be doing that?*

Of course, not being allowed to speak meant I never told anyone this. Until I grew up and began talking for a living.

Then there was how my father affected me. He was a hard working, rough handed truck driver / diesel mechanic whom I can still picture studying by the orangey light of a single floor lamp. Not books on human nature, of course. Rather they were exploded-views of gasoline engines and hunting rifles and such.

I, myself, have studied similarly all my life and while the books I've studied have not been about machinery per se, they have been about the machinery which exists inside us all. Peoples' cultures. Religion and philosophies. Human arts and frailties and such.

Why mention this about my father? Because what I saw him do by the light of that single lamp very much inspired me to become who I am. Especially in the way I've used books to teach myself so much of human nature.

In a way then, these few things were my basic training as a therapist; my conversations with nature, my desire to understand my mother's obsessive love of her religion, and my father's love of learning from books, which led to my studying the works of the great philosophers and spiritual teachers.

As for where my own ideas on human nature have come from, like Freud, who lived in times wherein being openly sexual was forbidden but discoveries in physics were openly worshiped, I am a product of my times. Reading James Gleick's book, *Chaos*, for instance, was for me like Freud reading the works of the Nineteenth Century physicists.

Of course, physics has changed a lot since the time Freud lived. Thus while he and I both share a love of psychophysics, the particulars of our conclusions are quite different.

For example, I so agree with Freud that energies created in a mind cannot simply "be destroyed." Thus I agree with him that there must be some kind of an unconscious. However, where he searched for linearity in the world of the

unconscious, I've sought the non linear, fractal essence.

Why all this focus on fractality? Because this is what makes people and their personalities infinitely beautiful. As well as all other natural things.

For instance, despite the fact that silk roses are made entirely from fractal parts, most people can tell the difference between a silk rose and a real one. I see attempts to know human nature by dissecting us similar to what we do to make a silk rose.

In other words, reducing people's lives to manageable chunks of data is as futile an endeavor as dissecting a butterfly to know its nature. Dissecting a butterfly destroys its nature. Dissecting peoples' lives does the same. Which leads me to the therapies which do the same thing.

I see therapies which seek to know people by intellectually dissecting them as futile and bordering on cruel. Am I being too harsh here? Perhaps. But people deserve more from therapy than cold hard logic. At the least, they deserve compassion with a goal of permanent change.

This then is the standard to which I'll hold myself in this book; at the least, compassion with a goal of permanent change. Know you deserve nothing less.

This Chapter's Session Notes

Okay. So what is this book about? Actually, it's about four things. The first one being some honest answers as to how talk therapy works. And doesn't work. Along with some new information about how wounds and healing occur.

The second thing we'll look at then is the mechanism which connects the mind and body; our two perceptions of time, our body's sense and our mind's. Here, you'll look over my shoulder as I document my discovery, and psychophysically back it up. As well as exploring the further implications of this discovery, meaning how we might use it solve a myriad of problems, addictions to ADD, overeating to broken hearts.

Third we'll explore an all but forgotten idea from the nineteenth century; the idea of *psychophysics*; that we can know human nature by looking for parallels in the world of physics. Here we'll explore what has to be one of the best ways to uncover the our nature. Physically and psychologically.

Fourth, we'll look at something taken from Chaos Theory, the idea that *fractality* is the only way to measure real world truths. Including the truths in what I'm about to tell you, the truths in my discoveries. Unlike the statistics commonly used to prove theories then, fractal outcomes must test true one hundred percent of the time. If not, they remain untrue which makes fractality a higher standard to be sure.

Why another book on talk therapy? Because some of us still struggle to see the good in therapy. The nice way to say this is that talk therapy is a "soft

science.” The mean spirited way is to say it’s a waste of money and time.

At the same time, these critics have a point. Much of what we do in talk therapy more resembles a master chef’s “a pinch of this” than a formal science. Enough of these vague assertions already. Let’s make therapy a real science.

Finally to whom am I writing this book? To four groups really. To the folks who are currently in therapy, of course. To the folks who are currently considering entering therapy. To those who think that therapy is complete nonsense. And to the brave hearted therapists who have yet to find their voice.

What can you expect to get out of reading this book? The short list?

A sure and certain way to measure progress in talk therapy. Or the lack thereof. Here, by progress, I mean authentic inner changes rather than merely making people feel better.

Why doesn’t making people feel better count for much? Because drugs can make you feel better. Temporarily. Don’t you want to change the parts of you that cause the pain?

So okay. A way to gauge your progress. What else?

How to know if your therapist is a good one. Along with better ways to define your issues and know when you are done with them.

Then there’s the issues themselves. Including clues to the cure for ADD and what kills children’s love of learning. As well as a starting point from which to end the overeating part of being over weight. Along with a real explanation for what is behind our desire to get high which forever explains away the will power myth.

Whom am I to be making these claims? In the context of this book, I am a throwback to a time when talk therapists were also personality theorists, philosophers, therapists, and scientists. In simple terms then, I’m a generalist; meaning, I love to learn about everything and how it all connects. People to flowers. Smiles to hearts.

In a way then, I’m more like an inquisitive little kid who asks too many questions than a scientifically accepted table of non human evidence.

People. History. Science. Philosophy. I simply love it all. And can’t seem to get enough time to take it all in. Why not? Perhaps because I’m usually too busy trying to help people. This is what drives me in my daily life anyway.

In the larger more personal sense of me though, I aspire to leave this world a better place. Especially for children. Thus in a way I’m writing this book for the curious child who lives in all of us, the one who still believes he or she should be more than just seen and not heard.

How have I laid the book out?

I’ve divided it into three parts.

Part One is titled *Talk Therapy Truths*. Why go to talk therapy? What makes

a good therapist “good”? What actually wounds us? And what changes in us when we heal?

Part Two is titled *Mind Body Truths*. What actually connects the mind and body. Philosophically and scientifically. As well as how you can use this knowledge to change your relationships and your life.

Part Three is titled *Issues as Seen From the Mind and Body*. Here we address hollowness in relationships. And everywhere else. Overeating. Drug addiction. Trouble with learning and so on. As well as new discoveries regarding why reporting thoughts and feelings in talk therapy may be less valuable than previously thought.

Last but not least is my hope for you.

We haven't met. And we may never meet. Even so, I hope this book will touch your life.

I also hope that it raises more questions in you than it answers. Would that feel unsettling? Maybe so. But isn't that what a good book is all about. And a good talk therapy as well?

Where will we begin? With defining talk therapy. What is talk therapy anyway and why should you care? I so hope you'll join me then in this, the opening chapter of my first book; *Plain Talk about Talk Therapy*.

Until then.

I hope you are well,

Steven