

The Foundational Place of Prenatal and Perinatal Psychology in Somatic Psychotherapy



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How far back can we remember our beginnings? Prenatal and perinatal somatics guide us to the true origins of our developmental history, emphasizing the importance of the truth we know: that the shaping of our embodied selves begins not at birth, but long before – in the womb, through intergenerational imprints carried from conception, and through the earliest relational and physiological experiences of life.

In this issue, we invited Kate White to be our guest editor. Her approach to prenatal and perinatal somatics is not only courageous but also profoundly integrative. White stands at the intersection of multiple paradigms – body psychotherapy, trauma studies, attachment theory, energetic work, and perinatal psychology – bringing them into dialogue in ways that significantly reshape our understanding of early life experiences. In her editorial, *A Room of Our Own in the Somatics House*, she effectively claims space for prenatal and perinatal somatics within the broader somatic and body psychotherapy field. The metaphor of a “room” is fitting: it acknowledges both the historical exclusion of this work, and the necessity of its presence as a core element of the somatic field.

Pre- and perinatal somatics reminds us that our primary memories are bodily memories. The work of pioneers like Ray Castellino and William Emerson demonstrates that implicit, preverbal experiences are not only imprinted but also have a profound impact on health, self-regulation, and relational patterns throughout our lives. In this way, focusing on the pre- and perinatal realm is at the core of integral thinking in somatics. Therefore, the integration of perinatal psychology within somatics is not merely an “addition” to the field; it is an essential root system that nourishes and sustains our understanding of embodiment. Engaging in body psychotherapy without considering these earliest lay-

ers of experience is akin to starting the story in the middle, overlooking the foundational imprints that shape human resilience, adaptation, and suffering.

Perinatal psychology has often been marginalized in mainstream psychological discourse, not because its findings are weak but because they challenge deeply ingrained assumptions. The field dares to ask difficult questions: How do the experiences of gestation, birth, and early bonding impact psychological development? What is the role of transgenerational trauma in shaping our embodied selves? Can we access, integrate, and transform early life's nonverbal, preverbal, and implicit experiences?

Engaging with these questions requires more than intellectual curiosity – it calls for courage, patience, and a willingness to step into the unknown. Integrating prenatal and perinatal psychology into the broader landscape of psychology and psychotherapy means challenging long-standing paradigms and trusting in the wisdom of embodied experience – even when, or perhaps especially when, it defies conventional understanding. Exploring these earliest layers of human development demands boldness and persistence, as the truths uncovered here do not always reveal themselves quickly or easily.

Just as deep healing work requires attunement, time, and a capacity to tolerate uncertainty, so does bringing this field into wider recognition. In both cases, transformation is not immediate; it unfolds gradually, through sustained inquiry, openness, and a deep listening to what has long been overlooked. At first, what emerges may not resemble any answer one has encountered before, but that is not a reason to dismiss it. Instead, it is an invitation to listen more deeply, and to attune to a new language of knowing. And just as true healing involves integrating fragmented parts of the self, the integration of pre- and perinatal perspectives calls for weaving these foundational experiences back into the larger narrative of human development, restoring a sense of wholeness to our understanding of psychology and embodiment.

One critical aspect of this special issue is the recognition that prenatal and perinatal psychology is inherently a feminist issue. The erasure of the maternal and perinatal realms from psychology and medicine reflects broader patterns of devaluing reproductive labor, caregiving, and embodied maternal knowledge. Just as feminist critiques have challenged the exclusion of women's experiences from psychoanalysis, perinatal psychology challenges the exclusion of birth, gestation, and the maternal-infant dyad from our frameworks of mental and emotional health.

Kate White's editorial guidance highlights this erasure and offers a reparative vision – one in which the pre- and perinatal field is no longer sidelined, but fully integrated into somatic psychotherapy. This work is not only about honoring the experiences of birthing parents and infants; it is also about reclaiming a more complete and embodied understanding of human development.

To engage in this work is to stand in the discomfort of what has yet to be fully understood, and to remain steadfast in the search for answers.

In This Issue...

Our guest editor for this issue is Kate White, the Founding Director of Education at the Association for Prenatal and Perinatal Psychology and Health (APPPAH), and the Founder and Director of the Center for Prenatal and Perinatal Programs.

This issue's focus on prenatal and perinatal somatics makes clear that this area of somatics is not merely a niche within body psychotherapy; it serves as the foundation upon which all somatic inquiry is built. Prenatal and perinatal somatics is an emerging field that stems from the study of birth psychology. The articles in this issue reflect the richness and depth of contemporary perinatal psychology in the context of body psychotherapy. They provide both theoretical expansion and clinical application, demonstrating that engaging with the body involves connecting with the entire narrative of the body, from preconception to adulthood. Kate's guidance as guest editor embodies a courageous inquiry into our earliest imprints.

Blending scientific and deeply humanistic sensitivity, Kate has invited contributors who look at the complexities of early trauma, the medicalization of birth, and the profound ways in which social structures shape perinatal experiences. She introduces our pre- and perinatal exploration with a moving editorial, ***A Room of One's Own in the Somatics House***, along with a description of the emergence of prenatal and perinatal somatics as a field of practice, titled ***Prenatal and Perinatal Somatics: Eight Practice Principles and New Horizons for Integrating Earliest Trauma***. In this work, she suggests new possibilities for supporting the vital and vulnerable prenatal and perinatal periods. ***The Origins and Growth of Prenatal and Perinatal Psychology in North America: A Conversation with Thomas Verny*** offers a warm, inspirational introduction for readers new to the subject, as well as a homecoming for experienced enthusiasts of healing early trauma. This piece covers a broad range of topics, from the early days of prenatal and perinatal psychology in North America and the publication of *The Secret Life of the Unborn Child* to discussions about cellular consciousness and Verny's most recent book, *The Embodied Mind*.

Nesting as Imprint of Bonding and Attachment: A Phenomenological Exploration of Healing Gestures in Prenatal and Birth Process by Jaap van der Wal and Kate White examines the phenomenology of the human embryo's nesting within the uterine lining, analyzing this gesture both morphologically and embryologically. Kate adds a focus on how practitioners can utilize nesting to address earliest trauma.

Womb Shadows: Shining Light on Our Forgotten Prenatal Experience by Cherionna Menzam-Sills reviews prenatal awareness and memory, as well as the potential for providing therapy for what Little Ones needed in the womb. She proposes that the experiences of babies in the womb are so overlooked that parenting is often believed to begin at birth, which leads to a rarely acknowledged prenatal experience that tends to become unconscious shadow material.

In ***Trauma, Memory, and Perception***, John Wilks explores the significance of sensory experiences in babies and prenates, challenging the assumption that their limited experiences render them incapable of interpreting and contextualizing sensations. The article argues that even seemingly simple sensory inputs can hold profound meanings, influencing an infant's stress response and their relationship to trauma later in life. ***The Role of Connective Tissue in Early Disturbances*** by Gloria Quattrini reviews the work of Functional Analysis developed by Will Davis, which combines gentle touch with verbal communication. Because a fetus relies exclusively on connective tissue for protection during the first months of development, Functional Analysis emphasizes connective tissue dysfunction as the organism's primary response to stress.

Pre- and Perinatal Influences on Adult Sexual Intimacy: How the Birth Process Shapes Our Sexual Self by Sarah Dorothee Theismann posits that the pre- and perinatal phases of life serve as a relationship learning lab. Her paper explores the potential influences of the birth process on the development of the sexual self, beginning with a discussion of the similarities between birth and sexuality. It examines how birth may shape our access to sexuality as a natural force, and how various interventions can influence our sexual response cycle and the states of consciousness we experience during sexual encounters.

The article by Klaus Evertz, ***Feeling the World Anew: Transgenerational Systemic and Prenatal Integrative Art and Body Psychotherapy***, builds on the understanding that psychological and somatic illnesses in childhood, adolescence, and adulthood can increasingly be attributed, etiologically, to epigenetics and the psychological circumstances of pregnancy. This insight forms the basis for a bio-psycho-social medicine of the future, and thus establishes a new theoretical foundation for comprehensive psychosomatics.

In our RESEARCH section, ***The Relationship Between Perinatal Stress and Newborn Food Allergy: A Somatic Experiencing Perspective*** by Sinem Özen Canbolat, İlayda Ulubaş, and Ezgi Yıldız is a pioneering effort to clarify the largely uncharted specific mechanisms by which maternal prenatal stress contributes to food allergies in newborns. It builds on the premise that many women experience pre-birth anxiety during pregnancy, especially during their first pregnancy, because so much remains unknown. ***Utilizing Advanced Integrative Therapy to Treat Anxiety and PTSD in a Pregnant Woman: A Single Design Case Report*** is a case study by Elizabeth Pace that explores the efficacy of Advanced Integrative Therapy in reducing anxiety symptoms in a woman carrying her first pregnancy.

Our CLINICAL PRACTICE section deepens the understanding of the significance of therapeutic presence in healing earliest trauma. ***The Therapist's Role in the Developmentally Sensitive Reparative Process: Providing a Corrective Emotional Experience*** by Elya Steinberg explores Biodynamic's approach to regression, illustrating practical ways biodynamic psychotherapists can become a "good enough" presence while considering how regression influences the re-establishment of bio-psycho-social functions. ***Do Babies Need Psychotherapy? An Introduction to Integrative Baby Therapy*** presents Matthew Appleton's embodied relational short-term crisis intervention designed to support parents of distressed babies and young children. He examines two key interventions: Baby Body Language and Memory Crying. ***Polyvagal Theory for Perinatal Trauma: A Mother-Son Somatic Case Study*** by Karen Roller presents a mother-child case study using three frameworks – Judith Herman's tri-phasic model, Stephen Porges's Polyvagal Theory, and Daniel Siegel's interpersonal neurobiology – to address thwarted survival reactions and enhance needed safety and connection.

Ellen Gayda's ***Her Body Cannot Tell A Lie: Experiencing Emotional Somatic Awareness Through The Arts*** is a creative work that articulates the diverse emotional experiences stored in the feminine body, examined through the lens of somatic psychology and body psychotherapy, and expressed through verse, movement, and music.

Our BOOK REVIEW section features Anne Matthews' account of her book, *What is My Child Telling Me, That I'm Not Getting ... Yet?* along with Kate White's review of ***The Prenatal Shadow*** by Cherionna Menzam-Sills.

  