

Special Section



GUEST EDITORIAL

A Room of Our Own in the Somatics House

Prenatal and Perinatal Somatics



Kate White

Well-known writer Virginia Woolf published *A Room of One's Own* in 1929, the same year that the now-famous volume introducing birth psychology, *The Trauma of Birth* by Otto Rank, was published in English. In her book, Woolf argues that for women to achieve their full potential, they need “a room of one’s own.” Her metaphor meant that women needed financial independence, freedom, and a literal space to create written works of art. I now take this metaphor for the work of Prenatal and Perinatal Somatics introduced in this volume. I am setting about constructing a room in the house of Somatics, a field of practice with a long history but still building its presence in the therapeutic world. The United States Association of Body Psychotherapy (USABP) is welcoming practitioners of Prenatal and Perinatal Somatics to come and make themselves at home within the organization, and contribute to their “Somatics House.”

Prenatal and Perinatal Somatics is a term coined by Ray Castellino, RPP, BCST, DC, founder of the Castellino Training, a somatic practice that integrates the earliest layers of human experience beginning with preconception. His work was built on the pioneering efforts of many practitioner teachers such as William Emerson (1983; 2002), A.T. Still (2015), William Sutherland (1990), Franklyn Sills (1989/2002; 2011/2016; 2013/2016), and Randolph Stone (1986). This energetic, physiological, and spiritual practice welcomes spirit coming into form, and seeks to integrate early overwhelming experiences that create disruptions in humans at the beginning of life. Such experiences include

interventions, assaults, challenges, and disconnects that show up in the bodies, and therefore the minds, of developing humans, and extend to transgenerational and inter-generational traumas, conception dynamics, prenatal experiences that sometimes only the baby knows, birth dynamics of all kinds, early relational dynamics, and after-birth experiences.

Castellino described these earliest layers of experience as somatic because they are implicit, procedural, bodily felt memories laid down before cognition, which begins when language develops, or around 18 months to two years old. Therefore, they are not “psychological,” which, as a therapeutic discipline, addresses human emotional, mental, and psychological patterns. Prenatal and Perinatal Somatics lie solidly in the realm of the baby’s experience. Yet, for nearly the last 100 years, it has been described as “birth or prenatal psychology” (Gouni, Janus, Verny, Brekhman, Turner, Turner, Rakovic, Janov, Odent, & Sovilj, 2002). During that time, practitioners (Janov, 1970; Emerson, 2002; McCarty, 2018) described these earliest experiences as “primal” or “primary,” and in truth, they are! They lay the foundation for human life with what may be called the roots of health and disease. Essentially, our ancestral lines, how we are welcomed, the conditions in the womb, how we are birthed and received in relationship with our parents, families, society, and culture shape who we become, including everything that happens along the way.

It is time for those who practice integrating earliest life experiences to claim our own space. Somatics may describe our work, or the field of study that “is of or relating to or affecting the body” (‘Somatic,’ 2025) and its relationship with the mind, self, other people, and the wider world. Although “psychology,” which can be defined as “the scientific study of mind and behavior” (‘Psychology,’ 2024), may also include “faculties of reason, emotion and perception” (Oxford English Dictionary, 2024), tellingly, it does not include the body. I remember Ray Castellino passionately saying that understanding how these early experiences shape us is necessarily somatic and implicit because it occurs during the phase of our development when only the right brain is online. However, the autonomic nervous system is fully operational. Therefore, experiences become memories and are laid down in our bodies, which “keep the score” (van der Kolk, 2014), “remember” (Rothschild, 2000, 2017), and “bear the burden” (Scaer, 2001).

Over decades, Castellino developed tools for practitioners to address the earliest experiences somatically. In my training programs, I tell participants that earliest trauma shows up as a somatic pattern language. The body tells the story with posture, shape, gesture, and autonomic nervous system states. And, as Peter Levine (2014) explains, these implicit memories are powerfully compelling and ‘hot’ – they arise quickly. Students stud-

ying earliest trauma learned the patterns over many years of working with adults (White & Rhodes, 2014). All our most difficult autonomic nervous system states – horror, terror, survival, fear, and adaptative nervous system responses to shock and pain – originate in our early experiences. Ecstatic states also begin there, as well as feelings of power and mastery, and so much more.

Many of these early patterns are related to traumas and threats to human existence. Our field is full of near-death experiences and overwhelming sensations connected to interventions, chemicals, the stress states and habits of our parents and ancestors, and relational ruptures that can feel life-threatening to infants. Until now, practitioners of all kinds did not see infants as being capable of integrating traumas or even being able to register them at all. I credit Ray Castellino with developing ways of being with early overwhelming experiences that are softer, slower, and easier to integrate and make sense of in adults and families with babies. Castellino's methods included the Womb Surround™ method, facilitated movement with babies, children, and adults, and other therapeutic forms that helped practitioners and clients recognize and integrate these memories.

Castellino also emphasized the health of our system. This concept, borrowed from osteopathy (Still, 2015), has become known in PPN Somatic circles as “the Blueprint,” a term coined by Anna Chitty (Blueprint Resonance, 2024). A.T. Still (2015), the founder of osteopathy, famously said, “To find health should be the object of the doctor. Anyone can find disease” (p. 28). Castellino's colleague Anna Chitty, a Biodynamic Craniosacral Instructor, coined the phrase Somatic Blueprint to describe this foundational energetic and physiologic health in our system that is always there. Chitty has blended her understanding of our greater spiritual natures and energetic development with acknowledgment of our earliest trauma, so that when we integrate these early overwhelming states that may still be active in our bodies, we can also easily access our essential human qualities, like compassion, love, kindness, joy, delight, strength, clarity, and even power – a power that is more peaceful than forceful (Colorado School of Energy Studies, 2025). If we tend to these early experiences, humans begin their lives with greater ease. They can go on to live their purpose on planet Earth instead of wrestling with unintegrated early traumas that contribute to or even manifest as physical, psychological, mental, and spiritual disease in humans. The work can indeed bring truth to the saying that *Peace on Earth Begins Before Birth*.

Since its inception, birth psychology has worked towards being accepted in the science of psychology as an evidence-based approach. It has established peer-reviewed journals, such as the *Journal of Prenatal and Perinatal Psychology and Health* (JOPPAH). APPPAH's founders, Thomas Verny, MD, and David Chamberlain, PhD, MD, worked for decades to document the evidence that early experiences form a template that lasts a lifetime and is the genesis of illness and disease that can be averted if we see babies as sentient, aware, and having a fully human experience beginning with preconception (Verny & Kelly, 1981/1988; Verny, 2023; Chamberlain, 2013). Birth psychology also has European organizations and conferences that present the baby's experience, or earliest human development, as medical in nature, as witnessed in the presence and endurance of the International Society of Prenatal and Perinatal Medicine (ISPPM). In 2013, I founded and directed APPPAH's Department of Education, which I ran for six years. Over this time, I witnessed firsthand the challenges that Castellino had in asking that organization to include prenatal and perinatal experiences from the baby's perspective as somatic.

Other sciences have also developed theories and practices associated with earliest trauma experiences, such as Fetal Origins of Health and Disease (Barker, 1990). Exploring these research areas, one cannot help but notice that we have known for a long time that our earliest experiences in life create templates for health and disease. Current fetal

medicine research also supports how overwhelming experiences during the prenatal and perinatal period create neurodevelopmental markers in our genome that may not be expressed until later in life, especially as mental illnesses that cause a lifetime of suffering (see, for example, International Symposium on the Fetal Brain, 2019).

I have been a practitioner of Prenatal and Perinatal Somatics since 1999, when a client remembered her birth on my bodywork table, and have seen the growth of many fields of practice related to trauma and somatics over the past 26 years. The roots of my therapeutic practice lie in Biodynamic Craniosacral Therapy and then grew to include the Castellino training, Somatic Experiencing®, Advanced Family Training from a somatic perspective, Polarity and Polarity Life Coaching, multiple baby, pediatric, and infant courses, and many personal explorations of my early trauma so I could integrate and heal.

I believe it is now time for Prenatal and Perinatal Somatics to be a field unto itself, for us to have “A Room of Our Own,” as Virginia Woolf articulated nearly 100 years ago. This Room is the professional space to support the creation of Prenatal and Perinatal Somatics as a modality separate from psychology. Our Room is in the Somatics House, studying the body and its impact on the mind. We support the USABP’s vision to formalize the field of somatics, and we invite somatic practitioners of all kinds to join us.

Enjoy the papers in this volume. They are but a taste of things to come. Join us in establishing this field of practice to find fellowship and a container to support you on your professional journey.

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