

The Handbook of Body Psychotherapy & Somatic Psychology

Edited by **Gustl Marlock** and **Halko Weiss**
with **Courtenay Young** and **Michael Soth**

Foreword by **Bessel van der Kolk**

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There's always this sense of anticipation when I read a book by editors and authors I personally know. My belly churns; there's an involuntarily pause before I exhale and my heart adds a beat to its rhythmic song; a resonance exists that translates from colleague to text. I hear their voice while reading as if we are together, in person, having an amicable chat.

When I heard that Halko, Courtenay and Michael were part of *The Handbook of Body Psychotherapy and Somatic Psychology*, when I heard that many colleagues had contributed chapters, I immediately had to read it and share my thoughts with SPT Magazine's readers.

I had no clue what I was in for!

When the box arrived, I thought someone had sent me quite a heavy gift. When the return address was from North Atlantic Books, I thought, *oh, no, they must have sent me multiple copies*. When I opened the box and saw one single book, well, I was amazed. This is a comprehensive textbook spanning not only eras of body psychotherapy but also modalities and schools of thought located throughout the world. The book has twelve sections with 94 chapters (read Table of Contents here). There are eighty-two contributors—nearly every major living figure in body psychotherapy is present, plus some who have recently died. Many are established authors, founders of schools, lecturers. They are trainers and supervisors in universities and post graduate training institutions.

Gustl and Halko (with Michael for Section VI) wrote Section introductions that offer an overview of each chapter and the content contributors covered. As well, they offer further reading if one's interest so desires. All citations are referenced, APA format, and when materials have been translated, as many chapters have, the translator is noted as well. The chapters are not overwhelming in length (5 to 15 pages, plus extensive and at times exhaustive reference lists) so you can sit down and read

a chapter at the end of a long work day without feeling overwhelmed; furthermore, the writing is such that it doesn't feel like you are reading a class assignment but rather exploring insights into our field of study and practice. The formality of APA in-text citations does signal this is a traditional textbook meant to be used as a standard selection for somatic psychology university courses, for trainees in body psychotherapy, and I would say as an essential read for most practicing psychotherapists regardless of their orientation or discipline. There is honestly no other book I know of that is this comprehensive and as inclusive of the diversity of approaches and schools within body psychotherapy. This book is clearly not meant to be read from cover to cover but rather to be read in sections with colleague discussion and/or classroom conversations guided by a qualified instructor.

The original textbook, entitled, *Handbuch der Körperpsychotherapie*, was commissioned in 2003 and published in German (Schattauer, 2006). The idea to translate the book into English and the 'stories' of how this Second Edition came about are discussed in-depth in the editor reflection pieces that follow this review. In short, this is not a simple translation of what came before. Some of the chapters, originally in German, French, Spanish, etc. have been translated into English, chapters originally written in English were updated and revised, and when authors were no longer available, new contributors were commissioned to write additional chapters. The entire Handbook is completely re-edited with many updates including recent references.

To be honest, I did not have time to read all 950 pages; okay the Index of Names goes from page 929 to page 938, and the Subject Index ends at page 950, so technically speaking it ends on page 928. I did read the Foreword by Bessel van der Kolk, the Introduction to the American-English Edition by Michael Soth and Courtenay Young, and the Preface: The Field



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of Body Psychotherapy by Gustl Marlock and Halko Weiss in full. I also read Section introductions and chapters that sparked an interest when I read the title. Thus, this review is based on a sampling of the book, not a thorough and complete read. As well, because much energy is pulsating in the environ—many are presenting and promoting this book—I will focus my short review on the overall intention—why this book, now.

“There is no such thing as a mind without a body” (pg. 21)

According to Bessel van der Kolk, *The Handbook of Body Psychotherapy and Somatic Psychology* “constitutes a critical attempt to begin the creation of some unified concepts and elements in a common language, issues essential for this field to emerge from its prescientific past”. It is an important step, he writes, toward facilitating unification of the fragmentation that exists in our field—there are an incredible number of methods, with each differentiated by language and approach. Each method, each school, each practitioner will gain when we increase awareness of and appreciation of our commonalities and stop the trajectory of tunnel vision, halt our sole focus to prove our way is the right way, that we are separate and unique and therefore in competition with one another for recognition and client care.

True, we need to clarify what is body work, what are body-oriented complementary therapies, and what is body psychotherapy. Without a clear understanding of how these differ, the “proliferation of supposedly theory-free body techniques being applied pragmatically and sometimes successfully without any awareness of the historical depth and clinical breadth of the field of body psychotherapy” (pg. 7) will continue to create confusion for outsiders—those not intimately engaged in our field of study and practice—as well as those encompassed within the field of body and therapy.

The editors acknowledge that body psychotherapy itself, as a theoretically and clinically unified field, actually does not



exist. It seems that our timeline includes different points of origination and different lineages of traditions; existing schools and approaches are widely divergent, with fiercely loyal followers. As each new method emerges on the timeline, the swath of my, me, mine continues to spread, leaving out us, we, community, and the power that comes with unity.

One intention for this book was to orchestrate consolidation. In this light, the editors structured the content according to “important general questions and essential focal areas, rather than according to particular schools, their founders, histories, proponents, or their specialties” (pg. 9). The how of classification, the what must be involved to be called body psychotherapy is discussed. Components include the integration of psyche, a focus on the psychological experience, and the client-therapist relationship—at the bare minimum, the approach must orient attention and awareness of both the client and the therapist toward the psychological experience and “attend to the structures, processes and developments of subjective experience and how it translates into the person’s being, doing and relating to life” (pg.11). As well, there must be an

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orientation toward systemic wholeness of our subjective experience where the psychic dimension of the human experience and the bodily dimensions of the lived experience are equally appreciated (pg. 11).

Bessel notes that a unifying concept within all therapeutic modalities is the fact that people need to have physical experiences that directly contradict or replace past feelings of hopelessness, frustration and terror in order to change. Four common foundations of body psychotherapy are noted on page 13. Citing current neuroscience studies, Bessel writes that research shows “little connection between various brain centers involved in understanding, planning and emotion. We simply are not capable of understanding our way out of our feelings—whether feelings of love, fear, deprivation or hate” (pg. xii). In order to heal, we must learn to pay closer attention to our “internal life, to the flow of physical sensations, feelings, internal images and patterns of thought” (p. xiii). When we learn how to work with our felt sense, we can make enormous changes in how we feel and act.

The concept of body psychotherapy as a unifying construct follows that when we learn and appreciate approaches/methods that emphasize and at times intensify our awareness of and our engagement “with our lived, felt, embodied, here-and-now subjective experiences” (p.31) we can decrease our polarization between the verbal-reflective-cognition notion of mind and an embodied, holistic understanding that is still pervasive in our field, which is a detriment to effective practice (pg.41).

The editors offer questions to highlight primary criteria for inclusion in the field of body psychotherapy:

- ◆ Does this school or approach make an important theoretical or technical contribution?
- ◆ Is it competent and qualified to represent the larger field?
- ◆ Can the founders/therapists expand beyond their own protective container and show yes this process works and yes it impacts all therapists in all genre of mental health (should they choose to learn the process)?

If this book can stimulate a far-reaching exchange, if it can stimulate dialogue that engenders mutual connections (and as necessary respectful collegial debates) as the editors intend, then we are well on our way. I agree with the editors that the time is now for we, as therapists immersed in our field of study and practice, to lend our efforts to validate the subject matter itself rather than struggle to prove ourselves, our platform, our school or strive to promote our practice, our book, our website. The more we support one another, the more body psychotherapy will reach out and touch the mental health field, and in turn, there will be enough time and space and energy for all to exist.

Is this a must read?

Yes.

There is something for everyone. And while reading this book, if concepts trigger a response, a rise, a question, an energetic impulse, I invite you to reach out and connect with the editors and/or contributors and start conversations that can foster resolution and connection.