



The Emergence of Somatic Psychology and Bodymind Therapy

An interview with Barnaby B. Barratt PhD, DHS

By Nancy Eichhorn

It takes a lifetime of intimate, almost sacred personal and professional knowing to simply sit down and “quickly” write a comprehensive textbook that supports foundational structures of Body Psychotherapy, offers new terminology and controversial challenges for advancement in our field, and engages readers at an embodied level in less than 200 pages. Barnaby B. Barratt PhD, DHS, has achieved all this and more.

Based on his 35-year career as a healer contributing to psychodynamic philosophy, theory and practice, as well as on his work as a sexuality educator, sex therapist, psychoanalyst, somatic psychologist, and as a practitioner of Tantric meditation, Barratt knew enough to sit back and let his muse guide his writings. She had plenty of materials to draw from thanks to Barratt’s extensive background beginning with doctoral degrees in psychology and social relations from Harvard and in clinical and educational sexology from the Institute for Advanced Study of Human Sexuality, as well as his time teaching at Harvard University, the University of

Michigan, Santa Barbara Graduate Institute, and Wayne State University. He completed postdoctoral research at the University of Michigan’s Neuropsychiatric Institute, held the position of Professor of Family Medicine, Psychiatry and Behavioral Neurosciences for several years, and was elected to the Presidency of the American Association of Sexuality Educators, Counselors and Therapists. Barratt has also authored eight books and over seventy scientific and professional articles and reviews.

The breadth and depth of his knowing comes across when he speaks—a prevailing presence of gracious appreciation for what is and a curiosity infused with a touch of rebellious drive to see what will become embodies the conversation. His humility is apparent when he notes that he “almost accidentally stumbled into his career” when chosen to Chair the doctoral and masters programs in somatic and clinical psychology at the Santa Barbara Graduate Institute where he helped create the first North American program in the field—he

called it a “sheer blessing.”

“I wrote the book quite quickly,” Barratt said during a SKYPE interview from his home in South Africa. “It was written on the basis of what I know.”

“Looking at instructional materials from the point of view beginning students,” he continued, “I felt there was nothing out there. I did not know Michael Heller was writing his textbook (*Body Psychotherapy: History, Concepts, and Methods*), and I don’t want to say anything disrespectful of those who have written about Body Psychotherapy, but when I started to write my book, there was nothing out there that I knew that introduced students to the field of Body Psychotherapy. I wanted to write a textbook to stimulate, integrate, and motivate students to go out and learn more and discover facets within Body Psychotherapy to integrate the whole.”

According to Barratt, many students enter the field from specific traditions (or methodological orientations). For example, they have studied Hakomi and thus believe that

Hakomi is Body Psychotherapy. Or coming from the yoga healing movement, which is big internationally, they don't realize the connection yoga has to Body Psychotherapy.

“Body Psychotherapy felt like this discipline of enormous richness that lacked organization and was quite fragmented. We need people in the University to teach it rather than allow it to be relegated to training programs for specific methodologies. I attempted to offer students a view of an integrated discipline with a strong future in the healing arts,” Barratt said.

Historically, Body Psychotherapy has drawn from several fields and from all sorts of traditions, including and considered by some the most exciting, neuroscience. The last 20 years, strides have been made affirming that the mind and body are integrated. It's easy to overestimate the importance of these advances; and yet, there's no question that we shouldn't underestimate their import as well, Barratt said. Current neuroscience research has vindicated what Body Psychotherapists knew all along—“the body and mind are one and that healing is an integrated process using the body in healing mental production,” Barratt said.

Committed to body oriented practices and healing arts since his involvement in yoga during late adolescence, Barratt said that he started his personal healing process with psychoanalytic practices. He gained a strong understanding of the unconscious and the body's manifest expression of things repressed in the mind. In psychoanalysis, he learned how the conscious mind could lead him astray, and his understanding of the unconscious motives and fantasies opened a new vista for him. However, while psychoanalysis offered him deep and valuable work, it left him dissatisfied in the way the body was excluded. “Psychoanalysts

We are inclined to think that touch is out of the question, but there's a tremendous amount of healing power in touch.

all too often remain in the head, at an intellectual level, whereas my personal odyssey was very eclectic,” he said.

The body, as the human foundational experience, has always touched Barratt. His involvement deepened through his practice in Tantric Buddhism (also known by its indigenous name Vajrayana). Barratt explained that this form of meditation is intimately tied into the body including both physical and spiritual knowing and sensation. He hesitated to use the word Tantric saying it is often misunderstood in the Western world—it is often associated with sexual rites and rituals, which are one small part of the overall Tantric practice. “The Dali Lama (a tantric practitioner) never had sex in his life,” Barratt said.

The challenge in writing this book as well as in advancing the field of Body Psychotherapy rests in the discipline of the future—we need close ties to psychoanalysis and neuroscience and the spiritual traditions, Barratt said. So, just as he supports patients and students to understand with conscious awareness the challenges they face allowing more freedom and more empowered energy to address their personal issues, Barratt engages readers in an odyssey to confront current issues facing the field today that he believes need attention.

“It's not in my nature not to write what I think,” Barratt said, offering his reasoning for writing about two controversial topics—touch and sexuality.

“Touch: we have to debate its use in healing more honestly,” he continued. “We live in a culture with an enormous amount of abuse. Parents abusing children, caretakers

abusing those in their care, educators, priests, therapists abusing their patients. We are inclined to think that touch is out of the question, but there's a tremendous amount of healing power in touch. How you approach it, engage touch is a major challenge in our field. It is complicated and I do not believe I have the answers, but we can't simply leave it out; it is a betrayal to our field and all who came before.”

“I hope to bring to the fore more discussions about touch and sexuality. We can't behave as if sexuality is not part of the human experience. It is a valuable part of healing, and if we ignore it, deny it, repress it, suppress it, we create more problems and it works against healing. What is the place of sexuality in Body Psychotherapy? At one point, it was strong in the works of Alexander Lowen and Reich; they came to it with a strong foundation (as opposed to Masters and Johnsons who created a mechanistic approach). Today, (in our current schooling and professional practice), there is little or no discussion of the pelvis or genitals or how we express who we are through our sexual nature. We are healers, and we must adhere to the spiritual and ethical principles of our time and culture. We must be concerned about abuse, but we can't constrict our work to the social mores of our time. We can't let culture dictate healing,” he said.

“We live in a very screwed up culture in terms of touch and sexuality and our spiritual values. We have to be brave about this. We can't go along with the prevailing mores; we have to hold the ethics of what it means to be healer—we can't simply dismiss topics because we are afraid of being criticized. We have to hold onto our healing ethics. We cannot

Continued on page 34

say 'no touch' because it's what society wants. Healers have to hold their values. We live in a horribly abusive world. We need to work these issues out; we can't pretend that they are not there," Barratt added.

Barratt offered an anecdote based on his training in Thailand to highlight his position. While training in Thai Massage and Energetic Healing, Barratt noticed that the



energetic flow through the body were quite detailed in terms of the upper body (from the head down to the navel) and up from the feet through the calves and thighs. But there the depiction stopped, as if there is no energy flow between the naval and the thigh.

"I said to the instructor, 'The energetic channels don't disappear at the pelvis, how come the charts are like that?'"

"She said, 'We can't talk about that.'"

"What does that mean?" Barratt said emphasizing the importance of silence, the impact of gaps in our training programs.

"I think the story is a good analogy to what Body Psychotherapy training programs are doing. The genitals are the root of our central energies, the first and second chakras are located there; and yet, they are not discussed. How we hold our sexuality reflects how we hold our life. How are we training students to be healers? We can't leave out our realities as sexual beings. We are short changing ourselves as healers. It is challenging, and it needs to be addressed."

Barratt then posed a potent question based on his own years of study and practice: What in life are we most frightened of?

The answer?

"Sexuality, death (the abyss that faces us), **and madness** (some sort of disconnect socially thus falling into another sort of abyss). Every Body Psychotherapy session deals with these three topics in some fashion Barratt said, adding that issues in these areas are how we, as people, get

screwed up. "We need a clear vision in terms of approach because the cause of our suffering lies in these

areas," he said.

Barratt's vision for the book is that it will resolve some of the fragmentation in the field reducing the very real parochialism and fractures he sees in his teachings and in discourse with colleagues. He noted that it was sad that different methodological orientations appear to lack intimate knowledge of other processes. There is just too much fragmentation, and it's time to create a unified, diverse whole, he said.

Barnaby B. Barratt PhD, DHS is currently practicing in South Africa. He is a Senior Research Fellow at the University of Cape Town, and a visiting professor at the University of Witwatersrand. Most recently, Barratt was Provost (Chief Academic Officer) and Professor of Psychology at Northcentral University. He is past President of the American Association of Sexuality Educators, Counselors and Therapists; a Fellow of the American Psychological Association, and a diplomat of the American Board of Professional Psychology. He is an active member of several national committees of professional organizations and has served on the Editorial Boards of a dozen national and international, scientific and professional journals. Barratt has authored eight books: most recently *What is Psychoanalysis? 100 Years after Freud's 'Secret Committee'* (2013). He is currently working on a book about the nature of freedom.

Schroth continued from page 11

References

- Chamberlain, D.B. (1994/2011). The sentient prenatate: What every parent should know. *Journal of Prenatal and Perinatal Psychology and Health* 9(1)+26(1).
- Chamberlain, D.B. (2003). Communicating with the mind of a prenatate: Guidelines for parents and birth professionals. *Journal of Prenatal and Perinatal Psychology and Health* 18(2).
- Eichhorn, N. (2012). Maternal fetal attachment: Can acceptance

of fetal sentience impact the maternal-fetal attachment relationship? *Journal of Prenatal and Perinatal Psychology and Health* 27(1).

Emerson, W. (1996). The vulnerable prenatate. *Journal of Prenatal and Perinatal Psychology and Health* 10(3).

O'Leary, J. et al. (2001). Prenatal Parenthood. *The Journal of Perinatal Education* 20(4).

Schroth, G. (2010). Prenatal Bonding (BA): A method for encountering the unborn - Introduction and Case study. *Journal of Prenatal and Perinatal Psychology and Health* 25(1).

Verny, T. (1981). *The secret life of the unborn child*. NY: Dell.