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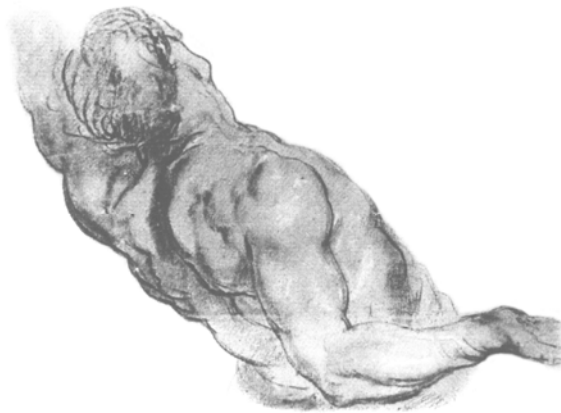


Volume 2 Number 2 2003

The Official Publication of
THE UNITED STATES ASSOCIATION FOR
BODY PSYCHOTHERAPY

Table of Contents

Editorial By Jacqueline Carleton, Ph.D.	2
Panic, Biology, and Reason: Giving the Body Its Due By Peter Levine, Ph.D.	5
Transference and Resistance: A Case Study in Bioenergetic Analysis By Elizabeth Rablen, M.D.	14
Shadows on the Moon: The Neglect of the Soul and the Feminine in Body-Psychotherapy By Katherine Brown, MA	22
Common Threads: Stories of Life After Trauma By Marcel A. Duclos, M.Th., M.Ed. and Connie Robillard, MA	29
Recent Body-Centered Publications Based on the Psychology of C. G. Jung By Aline LaPierre, Psy.D.	35
In Evan's Case: Reflections on the Different Bodies of Psychotherapy By Scott Baum, Ph.D.	42



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USABP Mission Statement

The USABP believes that integration of the body and mind is essential to effective psychotherapy, and to that end, its mission is to develop and advance the art, science, and practice of body psychotherapy in a professional, ethical, and caring manner in order to promote the health and welfare of humanity. (revised October 1999)

Common Threads: Stories of Life After Trauma

Marcel A. Duclos, M.Th., M.Ed. and Connie Robillard, MA

Abstract

In this article, a girl and a boy who grow up to become body-focused psychotherapists reveal the inner experience of their personal world. The common threads of trauma and recovery are woven into the ethics of self-care. The reader is first introduced to their adult voices, and is then led to reflect upon the implications of two of their respective childhood stories. Without the use of formal and clinical language, the article invites the reader to self-assess the implications of abuse and trauma in the conduct of body-psychotherapy.

Keywords

Common threads - Stories of life after trauma

The Weaving of Common Threads - The Authors Speak:

As therapists we look at clients from the outside. We note their movements, gestures, and stance. The body, the voice and breath are all-important pieces of the person. We listen and we observe as we are invited along on the client's unique journey. Over time the landscape of the inner world is revealed to us and to them.

We began work on a project about trauma's repetitive themes. Early on, we made a decision not to write about specific clients, other than to give tribute to their courage. The project became an ethical exercise and a practice in self-care. Much of this material came from our dreams and creativity and even more was stored in the body: noticed by way of sensory response to external stimuli, of static muscular contraction in spite of present safety, of manifest symptoms of anxiety, stress and depression. As we committed ourselves to the work, the images and words emerged from within each of us as creative energy unbinding fetters of old. We did the work that we ask of our clients. We documented dreams, journaled, painted pictures, monitored breath and musculature, and wrote poetry. From deep within us, words to express the inner stories of life after trauma seemed to flow and come together.

Between us we have over a half-century of experience as therapists who have worked in the field of trauma. During those years we also have been clients, supervisors, supervisees and educators. For more than a year, we observed our world from the inside and brought our findings into the open on paper. This is our inner world offered as phenomena from the soul. It is our belief that these writings have meaning beyond us as individuals because the common themes of life, trauma and healing speak to everybody. We bring our backgrounds in psychodynamic, relational, cognitive-behavioral, expressive, and somatic psychotherapy to our work with those who seek to create order out of the chaos of trauma. We also reveal and trace, in non-clinical language and imagery, the interplay of wounding and healing. In the first two brief vignettes, each introduced by a poem, we give witness to the common threads that weave in and out of the inner world of clients and therapists.

Who, among body psychotherapy practitioners, will not recognize, as intimately familiar in their own consultation room, the voice of the adult survivor of childhood abuse in *Unspoken Words to the Therapist* and the *Musings of the Therapist in Next Week*? This is the prime material of the case conference, the consultation, and clinical supervision.

Without naming the dynamics, the character defenses, the family structures and systems, the cognitive and behavioral patterns, and the somatic markers, the reader will discern the tides that move the inner oceans of client and therapist to the shores of both their worlds.

The Girl's Adult Voice

SECRETS

The breeze whispers secrets in my hair
braiding darkness and light
weaving joy with sorrow
repeating patterns
chaining moments
securely knotting
common threads
into the fabric
of life

UNSPOKEN WORDS TO THE THERAPIST

It does not matter to me what college you graduated from, what grades you received or how many books you have read. Be on notice: your professors did not prepare you for this experience. I have no interest in where you have been, what you have done or who you know. Are you trustworthy? That matters. It does not matter to me if you are male, female, young or old. Are you able to listen and hear what I am saying? Are you able to hear the unspeakable? Are you able to hear what is not said? Are you able to bear witness to frozen, un-cried tears?

Can you find beauty in them as they melt and flood our space? Can you sit with me when I want to scream about the injustices in my life? Or will you cower and wilt into a corner? Do you have the stomach for horror? Are you able to believe the unbelievable? Or will your body shudder, turn in on itself and pull away? As I walk through the still-burning fires of my life, will you walk along side me? Or are you going to shrink back into cool safety and let me burn alone? My pain did not start yesterday. Therefore it is not going away tomorrow. Can you stay for the long haul or will you retreat and abandon me when it takes too long or the work gets too hard?

Once I dare to share my secrets, work respectfully and with kindness. After our hour together is over, remember that I take this pain home with me. Are you there for me between sessions or am I on my own, once the door shuts behind me? Even when I tell you I can do the work without you, do not believe it for a minute. Those are old defenses talking. You will become my lifeline and I will be too embarrassed to tell you. I will push you away and invite you too close. Do you have integrity? Eventually, I will love you. Can you handle it with grace or will you run to your place of psychological safety, hide behind a book on transference and quake in your shoes?

I do not want to sign on with a "head" person. I choose to work with a whole person, a person who is in touch with the feelings of body, mind and spirit. That is the type of guide I will need as I attempt to reconnect with myself. I do not want perfection. If you have cracks, wounds and tears inside you, maybe it will be easier for you to understand mine.

Think carefully before signing on for this trek. It is a long, rough road. We may have to handcraft tools in the valleys, rejoice together on the slopes. We may or may not reach the mountaintop. There are lessons that we will learn together. Can you humble yourself enough to admit your mistakes? Are you able to be the student as well as the teacher?

Are you able to learn and grow with me, or are you a "done deal?" This journey is not for the faint of heart. It takes strength, courage, commitment, resolution, ingenuity, and creativity; and, yes, it takes love. Do you have it?

The Boy's Adult Voice

ON YOUR MARK

how little in life
is planned
and yet
in the end
the story
appears

NEXT WEEK

"Same time next week?"

"Yes. I will be here," she whispers, wiping tears, gathering tissues together and emptying them into the basket by the door.

"Are you ok," I ask?

"Yes," she answers attempting a smile. Her eyes, swollen and red, barely meet mine as she reaches for the doorknob.

"Drive slowly. Please?"

Without acknowledging my words she closes the door behind her. I hear her steps fading down the stairs. The outside door bangs shut. Tonight she has had the courage to talk about the sexual torture that she experienced as a four-year-old. This is not the first time that she reveals her story of atrocious abuse. She speaks it. She writes it. She draws it. And the pain cries out from her body. In her dreams, she relives the horror. She screams at shadows that barely move within her mind. Her life is full of places where the man who

hurt her still holds her in his grip. She struggles to breathe; panics in the dark; fears being alone and avoids interactions with strangers. This is the reality of living with the aftermath of abuse, which until now has simmered away like a teakettle on a stove.

I purposely sit in the rocking chair where she sat. I feel my head touch its back. I slip off my shoes and loosen my tie. I take a deep cleansing breath and experience my own weariness. It has been a very long day.

'Oh, God, such a hard session.' I feel myself wince.

Was I any help to her tonight? She still hurts after all these years. I am amazed at the shelf life of terror. She carries within her frozen images in the form of pictures, sounds, and smells that are as fresh as yesterday. She thinks she is crazy, but it is the body's reaction to trauma that she experiences. My eyes feel tired as if they want to shut with a tiredness that weighs down my mind and body.

Thoughts of my four-year-old daughter come to me in a daydream: the bedtime story she loved so much, Little Red Riding Hood. I told it to her hundreds of times. I knew all of the lines. I acted out the sound of the wolf, just to hear her laugh. I see her red hair sparkling on the pillow: the halo of an angel. I can't miss the smell of crisp sheets, the innocence of her pink room, her giggles and ploys to keep me with her longer. I hear her voice echo, bringing me back in time to her fourth birthday, long ago. It was I who had the privilege of tucking her into bed that night.

"Daddy, where was I before I was born?"

What is it that my daughter remembers that I have forgotten? How might I respond that would match her wisdom? She looks up at me, certain that her father knows the answer she holds behind her deep blue eyes.

"You were in the mind of God."

She smiles knowingly, "Yes, God, Daddy."

I kiss her forehead. "Good night four-year-old."

She snuggles into her blankets holding her favorite panda bear, her eyes half closed.

What a messenger of truth, I smile to myself as I head for the door.

She lifts her head. "Leave the light on Daddy."

"Yes, I will. Sweet dreams."

I leave the light on in the hall. I leave the door ajar. I want to be sure that she can see the sliver of light that reaches to the head of her bed.

Comfort. It belongs to grown-ups to comfort the children. Children do not belong to us. We belong to them.

In the distance, the sound of a train whistle brings me back to the present. My mind returns to the business of the therapy office and to the client who is driving home, alone, in the dark, early this winter evening.

How could anyone, let alone a relative, so hurt a child? Where inside a man does he find pleasurable the repeated sexual torture of a child? My teeth and fists clench. I feel and give vent to the anger that this patient has not yet been able to express. I do so with utmost consciousness.

Enough energy returns and I move to my desk to finish the paperwork, promising myself an end to this day. If I just get this done, I can go home. I write the note and close the file. I shut off each lamp, bundle myself into my coat and lock the office door behind me. Snow is falling, silently making a patchwork blanket of the parking lot. It spreads beneath my feet as I walk. A quick sweep of my arm clears the windshield. I drive home with the radio turned up loud enough to drown out the day's residual thoughts. I crack my window open and enjoy the cold air blowing on my face. I surprise myself by noticing that I look forward to a cup of hot Ovaltine before I go to sleep. I find my own four-year-old yearning for comfort.

Reflection

Sadly, abuse occurs in families and affects them into the next generations. Abuse perpetuates itself in secrecy and by untruths. Abuse is the fertile ground of false beliefs about self and others. It generates the chaos of a black hole, sucking the family's energy like a vampire. It is a tyrant that demands unwavering compliance of its subject. It is a jailer that chokes its prisoner into voiceless submission. It is a terrorist whose only identity is the domination of the other under the guise of some righteous privilege.

Years after the events, the residuals remain to be faced and metabolized, often into the adult years as portrayed above.

From the Children's World

In the following stories we witness the abusive experience, first, from the pre-school girl's, and then from the middle school boy's inner world. We observe their confusion and pain as they attempt to make meaning and survive in a violated body.

The Girl

THE RABBIT BARN

"Time for supper. Time for supper, where are you? Get in here!"

Time to go. Oh, no, it is time to go...

Mud clings to my hair. Wet, heavy, clumps hit my back as I walk slowly home. I feel the shivers in every step. One foot behind the other, I take tiny steps. I feel the tears cleaning the mud from my face as I try not to cry. Everything is dripping: my hair, my eyes, my nose. I wipe my face on my arm and pull my tears back inside me. My feet don't make any sound as I climb the steps to open the door without one bit of noise. "Be very quiet," I whisper. The dog wags her tail and leads me into the room.

People are sitting all around the table. Chowder for supper, hot soupy chowder. I choose a seat close to the door. I climb up the side of the chair. My feet dangle over the edge. I stretch them out until my toes touch the dog. I wiggle down to feel her head - sliding under the table to be with her. My dog is better than soup. Her fur feels good and I like the way she smells. Dogs are better than people.

"Sit up and eat. Get up off the floor. What is the matter with you?"

Ma is mad. Tears come into my eyes. I don't want soup. I want my dog. I want to be down here with my dog and not up there with the people and the soup. I wipe my face on my dress so no one will see me cry. I feel my arm being pulled up by my mother and my bottom hits the chair seat hard. I check to see that my toes still touch my dog's head and wipe at the new tears.

I see my uncle's hand, big and heavy, lifting a soup spoon up and out of sight. He's here, he's here, don't look at him. His big hand lifting the soup spoon up and down is all I can see. I promise myself not to look at his face.

He is looking at me and he won't stop!

A lump, as big as a rock, comes into my throat. I can't breathe. I have got to get outside. Sliding down from the chair, I hear my feet hit the floor. I can't feel my feet walk to the door. Outside, the air is cool as I run up the stairs to the rabbit barn to be alone. In the dark, the floor creaks. I hear footsteps and I know he is already here.

"Do not scream," he whispers, "Do not make a sound or a move, you hear me?"

I am cold and shivering. I have no space to move. My body is being held down too tight. I shake my head "yes", just a tiny bit. I want him to know that I am being good.

"Please don't hurt me. I want my Mama." I say it nicely, so that maybe he will hear me and stop. He doesn't hear me. I wonder if I even said it. I shake from the cold and cannot stop. My teeth rattle with all my bones. I try to hold my body still and be good. When I feel so cold, it is hard to do. I try to be still. I move my knees up so my feet are flat on the floor, to try to stop my knees from shaking. It is the wrong thing to do and he slaps me on the leg and pushes my knees down with his body. He takes my face in one hand, squeezes it hard. He whispers loud like he is mad: "Stop it, you hear me?" He puts his face too close to mine. I feel the slime from the barn floor under my body. I smell his breath and I gag.

My body is going to throw up and I can't stop it from happening. He slaps me again and this time I can't remember feeling sick. The unlit light overhead sways back and forth. I hear it move in the dark. I feel like I am going to die. Pain rips through my body and roars in my ears. It takes away the smells, the swaying light and the sounds of him. I turn my head to find air, to look for someone to help me.

I see the rabbit cage. The rabbit's eyes glow in the dark. I look into the eyes of the big gray rabbit; find the center of her eye. Everything is black and moving backwards like I am in a tunnel. I fly away to a darkness that I know, a darkness where I don't feel anything.

Limp and dirty I wake up under the table with my dog. Someone must have brought me here. I am too tired to move. I just want to sleep. I pull my dress down over my feet to keep warm, curl up in a ball and drift away.

The Boy

BICYCLE

"Trouble with your bike?" Bailey's voice asks. Bailey, a six-foot two hundred pound hulk, stands behind me. We both stare at the broken bike.

"Yea. The chain is caught," I answer, embarrassed that, at nine years old, I am not able to fix it by myself.

"Looks like this bike went through a war," Bailey says, still staring down at the bike.

"It belonged to Jimmy. I bought it for ten bucks. Going to use it for my paper route."

Bailey walks up toward the porch and gives the bike a critical eye. The whole street knows he enlisted in the Marines the day after graduation from high school. I remember hearing a neighbor who fought in WW II say that he would make a nasty soldier. Silently, I agree with the neighbor. I once saw Bailey beat his dog until the dog threw up. Peter and I saw it through the trees in the woods at the edge of the field near Bailey's house. I wanted to throw up right along with the dog.

"Bring it over to my garage after lunch and I'll fix it for you," Bailey says, interrupting my thoughts.

I remember running away with Peter, as fast as we could, that afternoon. I felt so bad for the dog but we were too scared to show ourselves to a fellow who liked to shoot birds, squirrels and rabbits in the woods by the river, then throw them away and brag about it. Old Mr. Peterson, who lives next door, says no one had the right to shoot an animal if they did not intend to eat it.

"Did you hear what I said, kid?" Bailey asks as he walks away.

"Yea, I heard you," I reply, my thoughts safely tucked inside.

"Great. See you after lunch."

"OK."

I lean my bike against the fence. My two kid brothers are in the back yard feeding clover flowers to my two gray bunnies. I am proud of the cage that I built by myself. Both Mr. Peterson and my father said I did a good job with the second hand stuff I used.

"Come in for lunch, boys," Mom calls out the kitchen window. The afternoon ritual is always the same during the summer: naps for mother and the little boys and free time for me without the bothersome tag-a-longs.

The bike is heavy. The rear wheel is stuck in place. I push and lift the bike down the driveway, across the street, and then hold it back as it slides on the sand by the side of the road all the way to Bailey's house and to the garage around the back, underneath the house. I stop for a minute. I can't see very well what's in the garage, because the door is in the shadow.

"So you came, kid," I hear Bailey say from somewhere in the garage. "Bring your bike in. Leave it by the work bench and come on back here first."

I can see the top of Bailey's head. He is sitting in a canvas lawn chair like the one my Aunt Celeste likes the best on the shade side of the farmhouse. It seems strange to me that the chair is not facing out to look at the fields, the woods and the river on such a bright sunny day.

"Get over here if you want me to fix your bike. I don't have all day."

As I step to the side of the chair, a hand flies out at me and grabs me by the shoulder and slams me to my knees.

"Suck this and I'll fix your bike."

At eye level, it is so big it reminds me of Uncle Frank's brown horse. When I was little, I was afraid of that horse but I used to look when the horse peed. He had such a big penis.

"Never saw anything like this before, did ya," he says pushing my chin down on his leg.

"Let go of me," I say, my words muffled behind clenched teeth, hardly able to breathe.

I feel like a little animal frozen in place by the stare of a serpent glistening before my eyes.

"I can't wait much longer," Bailey growls, running his fingers up and down this thing as big as my wrist. I can see what looks like hand lotion dripping from the one eyed monster.

"Put it in your mouth. Now."

"I don't want to." Fingers dig deeper into my shoulders and press my face down in the unbuttoned lap.

"Lick it."

"No! Let go of me." I say, tasting the salty tears at the corners of my mouth. I manage to free my arms and struggle to push away: one hand on Bailey's hip and the other blindly around the throbbing pole leaning against my forehead.

"Rub it up and down or I'll break your arm."

"No! Let go of me," I shout through my sobs.

Without warning, my hand and face are wet. Something else mingles with my tears. For an instant everything stops and then Bailey slumps in the chair and lets go of me. As if slapped in the face, I jump up and make for the open garage door.

"You tell anybody and guess what I'll do to your sister," Bailey yells after me.

Running at full speed, I jump the three-foot-high stone wall at the edge of the lawn. I don't know if I am making any sound crying my eyes out as I make it straight down the field, through the wood and to the river. I hate the smell and the mess in my hair, on my cheeks and on my hand. I can't get to the river fast enough. The sun is now over the treetops on the hill across the river. I take the long way back to my house by the hiking trail behind Mr. Patten's big house, all the way to the old train tracks, alongside Dad's garden in my back yard. I know I've been at the river for a while; but I can't seem to remember how long. On this hot summer day, I walk feeling the sun on my back. I'm not shivering anymore. I hold my wet tee shirt in my hand. It's a mess because I soaked it in the murky river water to wash my face and hands. I know Mom has been calling for me. She will want to

know why it took me so long to get my bike fixed. I know I kept my hand on it much longer because ... because I thought of the brown horse and ... and ... it felt like electricity was going right through me.

From the garden gate, I can see my bike in the driveway by my mother's flower garden.

"Where have you been and why did you leave your bike out front?" Mom asks out the kitchen window. She is as predictable as the chimes of grandma's clock on the quarter hour. "I've been worried. It's almost four-thirty."

"I went to the river to look for frogs for the street race on Saturday. I'm sorry I didn't wait to ask you."

"You disobeyed me. You know you are not to go to the river alone. Put away your bike. Then come in and go to your room until I call you for supper."

I'm glad to go to my room. I don't want to talk to anybody. I'm angry that he fixed my bike. I never want to see Bailey again. I don't want anybody to know what happened. Tomorrow is Saturday, the day to go to confession. How can I possibly tell Father Robert that I committed an impure touch like that? I knew Bailey was bad. I went to his house because I wanted to ride that stupid bike. I hate that bike. I'm never going to ride it again. I'm going to wreck it. I never want to touch it again. I want to tell Dad what happened, but Bailey is too big and too mean. He'll beat up Dad. Dad can't move his left arm because of his bursitis thing. That's not fair. And, besides, Bailey said he would hurt Tess. I hope Bailey gets killed in the war.

I kick the bedroom door shut, jump on my bed and pound the comforter with my fists.

"I don't care," I shout in the pillow.

"I heard you slam that door," Mom says from the bottom of the stairs. "And what do you mean you don't care? I heard that. You are a bad example to your younger brothers. Open the door and keep it open."

I open the door.

"OK Mom," I sigh out loud.

Back on my bed, staring at the ceiling, I think, "I can never tell her. I can never tell anyone. ...except God. God knows everything. God knows everything even before it happens. Then, why did He let it happen?"

Reflection

Abuse, under all of its guises, is a demon intent on killing the individual and the creative life. As an expression of hate, it inflicts the wounds of trauma. Love, as a healing antidote, sutures the wounds and soothes the scars. Years after the traumatic events, the residuals of trauma continue to live within the body, stored and active in the hardwiring, reaching the far regions of the organism's boundaries, affecting thought, feeling and actions in everyday life. Body psychotherapy, in all of its incarnations, when practiced in the service of love, invites a fuller expression of the true self in psychosomatic fashion: revealing secrets, exposing pain, purging false beliefs, and daring self-directed creativity, thawing the frozen flesh, building flexible strength and paving the royal road to the whole story of the person.

As body psychotherapists, we know that it is inside the client's refined story, stored in and revealed by the body, that we are able to touch the pain in ways that return a measure of peace to the whole person. Without entry into the inner world, the client continues to repeat the patterns created by the effects of trauma and abuse. The gate to the inner story is at the intersection where the client and the therapist engage their creative selves, for the purpose of healing mind, body and spirit.

The gate is the full therapeutic engagement of the body, according to one's modality, with the body of the other who goes by the name of client, or patient, or consumer, who is actively committed to the quest of the incarnated Self.

This article contains excerpts from the forthcoming book, Common Threads: Stories of Life After Trauma, to be published by XLibris.

Biography

Connie Robillard, MA, NCC, CCMHC, is a nationally certified clinical mental health counselor and a licensed psychotherapist. She has taught at New Hampshire Technical Institute in Nashua, NH. She has worked as a counselor for local social service agencies in NH. Connie is in private practice in Londonderry, NH.

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USA BODY PSYCHOTHERAPY JOURNAL

The Official Publication of
United States Association for Body Psychotherapy
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The USABP believes that integration of the body and mind is essential to effective psychotherapy, and to that end, it's mission is to develop and advance the art, science, and practice of body psychotherapy in a professional, ethical, and caring manner in order to promote the health and welfare of humanity.

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VOLUME 2, NO. 2, 2003 Printed in the USA

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How does material in this manuscript inform the field and add to the body of knowledge? If it is a description of what we already know, is there some unique nugget or gem the reader can store away or hold onto? If it is a case study, is there a balance among the elements, i.e., back ground information, description of prescribed interventions and how they work, outcomes that add to our body of knowledge? If this is a reflective piece, does it tie together elements in the field to create a new perspective? Given that the field does not easily lend itself to controlled studies and statistics, if the manuscript submitted presents such, is the analysis forced or is it something other than it purports to be?

PURPOSE

This peer-reviewed journal seeks to support, promote and stimulate the exchange of ideas, scholarship and research within the field of body psychotherapy as well as an inter-disciplinary exchange with related fields of clinical practice and inquiry.

To ensure the confidentiality of any individuals who may be mentioned in case material, names and identifying information have been changed. It must be understood, however, that although articles must meet academic publishing guidelines, the accuracy or premises of articles printed does not necessarily represent the official beliefs of the USABP or its Board of Directors.

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SUBMISSION GUIDELINES AND SPECIFICATIONS

First consideration will be given to articles of original theory, qualitative and quantitative research, experiential data, case studies, as well as comparative analyses and literature reviews. Submission of an article to the *USA Body Psychotherapy Journal* represents certification on the part of the author that it has not been published or submitted for publication elsewhere.

Initial submission should be e-mailed to jacarletonphd@gmail.com as an attachment in Microsoft Word.

Manuscript should be double-spaced in 10pt. type, with at least a one inch margin on all four sides-please **include page numbers**, otherwise manuscript should be free of other formatting.

Title, full authorship, **abstract of about 100 words and 3-5 key words precede the text**. Please include an endnote with author's degrees, training, mailing address, e-mail fax, acknowledgement of research support, etc.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The editors are eager to receive letters, particularly communications commenting on and debating works already published in the journal, but also suggestions and requests for additional features or departments. They may be sent to the email address below. A selection of those received will be published in the next volume of the journal.

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