

# Emotion

## *A 21<sup>st</sup> Century Integrative Understanding*



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**I**n this issue, we explore the nature of emotional experience. Affects, emotions, feelings, sensations, though omnipresent in our experience, are hard to define, and seemingly even harder to understand. Words can lure us into a linear thinking that masks their multidimensionality, and imposes limits on our ability to work with them in the therapeutic context.

The articles in this issue present a 21<sup>st</sup> century integrative, interdisciplinary understanding of emotion. Drawing on the latest developments in embodied cognition, emotion, enactivism, and body psychotherapy, we offer a rich array of thoughtful directions that move the understanding of emotion beyond entrenched concepts towards new perspectives of the self as a developmental emergence, arising from the seamlessly integrated flow of emotional, cognitive, and behavioral processing systems.

In contemporary culture, emotions are often sensationalized and reduced to simplistic pop-scientific narratives, leaving a gap in our understanding of their true complexity. This gap is often further extended by another trait of today's culture – the notion that emotion and cognition are separate, and even mutually exclusive. The ensuing preference for cognitive reasoning over emotional experience at times borders on the renunciation of the emotional self. Our guest editor, Raja Selvam, aims to fill these gaps by bringing forward a timely, critical, and holistic exploration of emotion. This issue delves beyond the superficial portrayals of emotions to invite readers to engage from a body-informed perspective that acknowledges intricacy and depth.

Selvam's discussion with Giovanna Colombetti on the enactive approach to emotion provides a foundational understanding for this exploration. Challenging the traditional separation of emotion and cognition, Colombetti posits that cognition "is enacted or brought forth by the whole living organism in interaction with the environment" and that it is "inherently affective." She emphasizes that emotions are not separate psychological states, but are inherently intertwined with our cognitive and bodily processes. This dynamic view aligns with body psychotherapy's emphasis on emotions as processes

that unfold within the lived experience of the body, constantly interacting with cognitive and environmental factors.

The dialogue between Les Greenberg and Raja Selvam highlights the importance of integrating emotion into our understanding and treatment of the body. Selvam argues that emotions are deeply embodied experiences, stating that “if you don’t embody emotions or if the emotion is blocked in the body, the brain is not efficient at processing cognitions, behaviors, and emotions.” Greenberg in turn emphasizes the “primacy of emotion” and its role in driving not only cognition and behavior, but also in being the most effective pathway for change. He introduces a powerful metaphor, likening the affect system to the trunk of a tree, with categorical emotions such as anger and sadness as the main branches, and the more differentiated feelings as the leaves, thus illustrating the interconnectedness of our emotional experiences with their manifestation, meaning, and action potential.

The traditional view that emotion, cognition, and behavior are distinct and mutually exclusive is challenged by an integrative perspective that places them together within complex physiological and experiential networks. The denouncement of emotions in favor of cognitive reasoning, or the uncritical sidelining of cognitive reasoning that leads to succumbing to emotion, seem to arise from a failure to recognize their interconnectedness all aspects of our lived experience. Acknowledging that emotions are not only present but deeply intertwined with every part of ourselves can help both our clients and us engage with our emotional experiences more courageously and honestly. This acknowledgement allows us to create meaning by synthesizing all components of experience, making for a richly textured affective life. Patterns of interwoven emotions, beliefs, and purpose are repeatedly highlighted throughout the articles, revealing the dynamic, multifaceted nature of the fullness of emotional experience.

As you engage with the articles, we hope you will be inspired to reflect on how you conceptualize and work with emotions in your personal process and in your practice.

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## In This Issue...

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We launch with a fascinating conversation between *Les Greenberg* and *Raja Selvam*. In **The Future of Emotions**, Greenberg focuses on the transformation of emotions through the introduction of new emotional states, while Selvam emphasizes a gradual process of increasing emotional tolerance by expanding the capacity to bear emotions within the body. Both approaches offer valuable insights and practical applications for therapists, underscoring the richness and complexity of emotional work in psychotherapy.

**Science, Phenomenology, Body, and Emotion** is a conversation between *Giovanna Colombetti* and *Raja Selvam* on the enactive approach to cognition and emotion. They advocate a perspective that sees emotions as integral to our sense-making processes. Colombetti's enactive approach challenges the conventional view of emotions as static states, proposing that they should instead be understood as "dynamical configurations that emerge over time." Additionally, this conversation touches upon the radically different understanding of the body in Western and Eastern phenomenology and psychology.

In **Creative Agency: Changing Life Trajectories**, *Larry J. Green* shares the wisdom of his five decades as a therapist, during which he realized that many therapeutic projects only "tweak" the default network. He reveals how he guides clients to connect with their capacity to make an ordinary move that first disrupts, then replaces, the settings that govern the trajectory of their lives. *Leah Benson's Bioenergetic Psychoanalysis: Embodied Emotions as Seen Through a 21<sup>st</sup>-century Lens* is in alignment with the science of brain function and emotion presented by Greenberg, Selvam, and Colombetti, which posits that emotion and cognition are functionally indistinguishable, and arise from the brain's continuous process of interoception and categorization. In **Embracing Shame**, *Aline LaPierre* interviews *Bret Lyon* and *Sheila Rubin*, who share their work with the binding emotion of shame – work they have taught to thousands of therapists, coaches, and helping professionals worldwide. In **Somatic Shape and Emotions: Integrating Formative Psychology with Accelerated Experiential Dynamic Psychotherapy**, *John Cornelius* shows how the Formative Psychology of Stanley Kellerman and Diana Fosha's Accelerated Experiential Dynamic Psychotherapy can be brought together to improve clinical outcomes. *Katherine Young* in **Affecting Gestures** describes how gestures not only express emotional states but also generate them, illustrating an important dimension of somatic psychotherapy.

Closing the clinical section, *Marcel Duclos* underscores how emotional states are often best captured by poetry. He generously offers us personal poems that reflect his lived emotional experiences of advanced old age.

The RESEARCH section richly contributes to our somatic field's growing interest. *Courtenay Young* continues the essential work of delineating the role of psychotherapy and body psychotherapy and the science that informs them. Exploring what is appropriate research for the profession today, **A New Paradigm for Psychotherapy and Body Psychotherapy Research** completes Young's article on competencies published in our previous issue. In **Client Satisfaction in Somatic Experiencing: An Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis**, *Greg James* responds to the lack of client-centered research by looking at the lived experience of clients in SE therapy. He brings forth the factors that help and hinder therapeutic outcomes in order to reassess interventions, advance our understanding of therapeutic change, and gain insight into clients' hidden processes. Using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), **Translation, Cultural Adaptation, and CFA of Nepali Version of Somatic Symptoms Scale (N-SSS-8)** by *Yubaraj Adhikari* and *Birgit Senft* examines their translation of the Somatic Symptoms Scale (SSS) to assess its cultural validity and its reliability. **Water As Affective Medium** is an innovative approach in which

Elenore ten Thij, Moniek van Slagmaat, and Truus Scharstuhl explore the clinical observations that suggest that haptotherapy (touch) in water improves clients' capacity to experience positive affect. Their study constructs a method of using water to increase bodily awareness and affective capacity. In line with the full body-mind integration required to address the range of physiological responses and symptoms caused by interpersonal violence, **Polyvagal-Informed Therapeutic Drumming for Victims of Interpersonal Violence: A Feasibility Study** by Jessica Hogle, Debra Nelson-Gardell, Nancy Rubin speaks to the incorporation of rhythm and drumming, an emerging therapeutic tool that explores the different nervous system states through sound and rhythm.

Our BOOK REVIEW section first takes us on a journey through EABP history. **EABP—The First 35 Years** by Jill van der Aa with Courtenay Young, reviewed by Christina Bader Johanson, richly illustrates with photos the origin, history, and structure of the European Association of Body Psychotherapy (EABP), the place of Body Psychotherapy among other forms of psychotherapy, as well as its place in the social debate in different countries. Helena Vissing reviews Peter Levine's latest book, **An Autobiography of Trauma: A Healing Journey**. Levine, who has significantly influenced the understanding and treatment of trauma through his innovative Somatic Experiencing method, provides readers with a compelling narrative that intertwines an intimate exploration of his personal journey to heal his severe childhood trauma with the evolution of his therapeutic approach.

All communication, including speech, sign language, gestures, and writing, is mediated via the motor system. In other words, interconnectedness through movement is what makes us human. But what happens to our movements when we live with high levels of chronic stress, adverse experiences, or trauma – either developmental, relational, or shock? Christina Bogdanova reviews **Unleashing Your Potential: Body Psychotherapy Exercises to Enhance Presence, Contact and Energy Regulation**, a long-awaited book by some of our more seasoned body psychotherapists, Erik Jarlnaes, Joel Isaacs, Bo Bromberg, Ginger Clark. Presented through photographs, this book on movement brings together a considerable body of work on the importance of movement in somatic work. It is a most welcome addition to our somatic library.

Following Clover Southwell's death, we received several testimonials from friends and colleagues who expressed the profound appreciation for the life-changing influence she had in their lives. **In Memoriam** gathers these testimonials, and together with extracts from Clover's writings, we pay homage to the importance of her legacy.

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