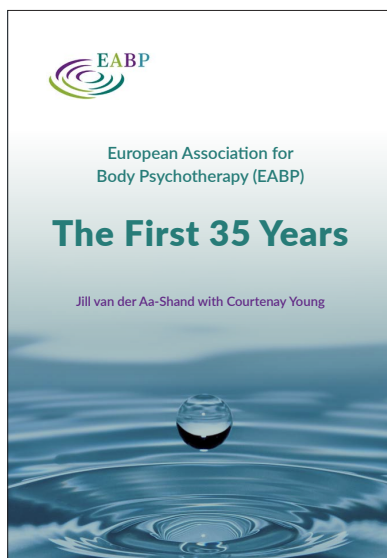


BOOK REVIEW

# EABP – The First 35 Years

by Jill van der Aa-Shand with Courtenay Young

Christina Bader Johansson



*“Love, work and knowledge are the wellsprings of our life.  
They should also govern it.”*

Wilhelm Reich

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his book, richly illustrated with photos, is an excellent description of the origin, history and structure of the European Association of Body Psychotherapy (EABP), and the place of Body Psychotherapy among other forms of psychotherapy, as well as its place in the social debate in different countries. Which therapies are based on science, and which can/should be paid for by health insurance systems? What difficulties have we faced during these 35 years? Are we still grounded in a holistic vision, although we have adopted a scientific perspective?

Body psychotherapy as such has been around for hundreds of years, but the first congress to bring together interested therapists was held in Davos, Switzerland in 1986. This event brought together different practitioners who all saw the body as essential to their work as psychotherapists. They saw a unity in body and mind, and were able to exchange

thoughts, knowledge, and experience, which sparked the formation of a community of like-minded people. Wilhelm Reich, together with Ola Raknes, had already developed vegetotherapy in Norway before Reich had to flee for his life to the United States at the start of World War II. They both emphasized the reaction of the vegetative nervous system to fear and terror, or love, calm and tranquility, which manifest themselves in the body. These bodily responses were seen as important information for the design of treatment, along with the client's own account of their problem. They recognized that an individual's health is influenced by the interaction between the whole person and society's support and demands, a concept now known as the biopsychosocial model of health and disease.

The book presents an overview of body psychotherapy pioneers with a concluding table-like overview, including Alexander Lowen, founder of Bioenergetics, who trained as a physician and studied with Wilhelm Reich; the Norwegian vegetotherapist Björn Blumenthal; the Norwegian physiotherapists Aadel Bülow-Hansen, Gerda Boyesen, Lille-mor Johnsen, and Berit Heir Bunkan; and David Boadella, founder of Biosynthesis, who studied with Ola Raknes, among others. Ola Raknes was followed by Chuck Kelly with Radix, Jay Statton with Unitive Body Psychotherapy, Katherine and Malcolm Brown with Organismic Psychotherapy, and Ron Kurtz with Hakomi, to name a few.

## **Structure – congresses, presidents, committees and finances**

At the second congress in Seefeld, Austria, held two years later in 1988, the EABP was founded based on a set of statutes, its Articles of Association. The purpose was “to bring together body psychotherapists from different disciplines working with the body in psychotherapy to support each other and find common ground.” David Boadella became the Association's first president, and it was then based in Switzerland. In 2016, it relocated to the Netherlands, which is part of the EU, with the Euro as its common currency. From 1988 to 2023, nine people have served as EABP presidents. Congresses have been held every two years in different countries in Europe. At the same time, the General Assembly (GA) has also been held, where reports from the board's work are discussed and voted on in the so-called grey book. It is worth noting that from the beginning, EABP was a top-down organization with the board at the top, while gradually more authority has been given to its various committees.

Early committees that formed were the Training Standards Committee, and the Congress and Ethics Committees. The FORUM was established in 1997 from training institute representatives who meet a couple of times a year, and have the mandate to accredit new training institutes. As an organizational member of the European Association of Psychotherapy (EAP), the EABP was required to answer the “15 questions” to demonstrate the scientific validity of its trainings, which also provided EABP with quality assurance. A COUNCIL was formed in 2006, which presidents of the national associations attended annually. FORUM and COUNCIL have conducted joint meetings since 2014 to discuss and propose to the GA issues shared by different countries related to training, accreditation, and other relevant topics. In 2010, the congress held a thematic half-day in Vienna on research in body psychotherapy, and the SRC (Science and Research Committee) was formed two years later, in Cambridge in 2012. Since then, the committee has presented different research methods, case studies, and results at the biennial congresses. A proposal drafted by Christina Bader Johansson and Courtenay Young for a science and research module in the training program remains a work in progress. A Think Tank convened by Lidy Evertsen has met regularly since the early 2010s to develop a more detailed description of body psychotherapy (BPT), based on modern theories and science. All this has led to more grassroots work where more voices can be heard in a bottom-up system.

Maintaining control of the financial framework, with different membership fees for different member countries and membership status, became increasingly demanding over time. Rob van Schaik, a former banker, took responsibility for the finances in 2014, and with the help of modern digital technology, relevant software, regular business plans, and solid knowledge, he, together with Thomas Riepenhausen and Vladimir Pozharashki, among others, got the organization's finances in order.

## Making BPT better known

In parallel with persistent efforts to make BPT more credible in the eyes of authorities, there are also efforts to make BPT better known to colleagues with a different psychotherapy focus, and to the general public. In 1998, Courtenay Young had already created the EABP Bibliography of Body Psychotherapy, with an expanded version in 2007 containing over 3,000 publications. Young has also been instrumental in developing greater collaboration with our North American sister organization, the USABP.

After considerable criticism that English was the only EABP common language, many congresses now present with simultaneous translations into at least two other languages, and the *International Body Psychotherapy Journal (IBPJ)*, now has abstracts in several languages.

David Boadella understood early on the importance of joint publications to spread the knowledge of body and mind interaction. *Energy and Character* began in 1970, and was published in English and German versions, followed by a series of journals – *Bioenergetic Analysis*, *Body, Movement and Dance in Psychotherapy*, *Körper-tanz-bewegung*, and *Somatic Psychotherapy Today*, edited by Nancy Eichhorn in the US. And our own journal, the *International Body Psychotherapy Journal (IBPJ)*, is published in cooperation with the USABP. In this way, the EABP has evolved to include so many more countries outside Europe, which is also reflected in the participants at the congresses.

Since the early 2000s, numerous books, journals, and articles have been written, and many videos have been produced. Among these are (in German) *Handbuch der Körperpsychotherapie*, (in English) *Handbook of Body Psychotherapy and Somatic Psychotherapy*, with a variety of authors, edited by Gustl Marlock and Halko Weiss, *Body Psychotherapy: History, Concepts and Methods* by Michel Heller, *Körperpsychotherapie* by Ulfried Geuter – published in English as *Body Psychotherapy*, Kathrin Stauffer's *Anatomy & Physiology for Psychotherapists: Connecting Body & Soul*, and *Contemporary Body Psychotherapy* by Linda Hartley. Sheila Butler has produced a video introduction to body psychotherapy, which is featured on the website.

## Good memories

The main purpose of the congresses is to present new theories, practical application of research findings, innovative ideas, and method development through numerous workshops. And the social function of the congresses has proven to be at least as important, with dancing, humor, singing, meeting friends to have fun, and being able to meet on a deeper level within the same frame of reference, giving meaning to the profession, and building strength for everyday life at home.

In short, as Jill van der Aa-Shand puts it, “So much positive and meaningful exchange between human beings has taken place, forming a different family, a collegial body.” The gala dinner held in the magnificent King's College Hall in Cambridge is difficult to forget. The southern Europeans and their spontaneous gatherings were filled with warmth and humor, as in Lisbon, when we all got coffee before we could check in for the congress. For

many years, The Howling Shrinks were also a highlight – a little rock band playing and singing “Are you ready Eddie?”

In the book, three members describe why they value their EABP membership so highly. All three emphasize friendship across borders, respect for diversity, and a sense of purpose in the work they do.

## Challenges over the years

Over the 35 years of its lifespan, EABP has developed a strong organizational structure. The financial administration is stable, communication between different parts of the association is maintained, and the association has a code of ethics with an ethics committee as quality assurance for clients. BPT has been seen as a mainstream in the EAP; we have sufficient research that proves its reliability as a treatment method. We can lean on modern theories that support the body’s important role in treatment, and we affirm versatility. Despite all this, in most countries we have not yet been able to obtain coverage through health insurance, and have not yet made ourselves known and seen as a therapeutic approach for a number of different conditions. Perhaps this also says something about the health care system, and the perception of what can contribute to human recovery from disease.

This book reflects the first 35 years, where at least the initial 25–30 years were very much about different people who shaped the organization. Only in the last five years have theories and research results come more to the fore of the organization’s profile. Increased cooperation with Stephen Porges, professor and developer of the Polyvagal theory, has contributed to this shift.

Could we succeed in combining spirituality, body, and mind with the influence of social conditions in a theory of our profession? I suggest that we should rather lean towards not Newtonian physics, with its part + part that always remains the same whole, but instead towards quantum physics, which says we are part of the same wave function in constant change influenced by its observer. The future will show how this can succeed.

As Carmen Joanne Ablack, President until 2023, points out, by understanding our history, we can discern our direction into the future. This is a book that should be found in every training institute, and read by every board and committee member, and by all members interested in the history of the EABP. I am feeling a smile on my face as the book describes people and events that have warmed my heart with priceless memories, and made me feel a love for my profession.



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