

Dear S&S

How delighted I was to open my new *Self & Society* and to see the title 'Body Psychotherapy'. After beginning with Vedanta and Buddhism in the early Seventies, my own psychological searching led me first to Bio-Energetics, and then to Gestalt; next, Psychosynthesis took me to Systems theory, to the Post-Jungians and then to psychoanalysis, in the hope of finding a complete picture. Over recent years I have turned back to Body Psychotherapy, particularly in response to the ungrounded nature of some transpersonal work. Hence my personal excitement at this issue.

But I was disappointed to find that once again sexuality seems to be excluded from accounts of Body Psychotherapy. In sixteen pages there is only one tiny paragraph in which the word gets a mention – and in this holy space it shares the spot with spirituality!

In her *Personal Reflections*, Gill Westland, a 'BP' trainer, tells us about the beginnings of the movement and the influence of eastern thought, but she omits to mention that at the foundation of Freud's and Reich's works was the notion of a primal Life Energy which is *sexual* in nature. Call it libido, orgone, prana, kundilini, chi, quodoshka, or what you will, the understanding and direction of this energy is at the heart of both Body Psychotherapy, and much Oriental and indigenous philosophy and medicine. It was largely Reich's sexual energy studies that led to his persecution in 'God's Own Country' and to his consequent untimely death.

Gill does say: 'during the 1970s BP was somewhat preoccupied with sexuality in common with social interest at the time'. But she does not explain why it then disappeared from the agenda and has remained in the margins. Nor does she suggest that today, with the rise in awareness of sexual abuse, the phenomena of AIDS (which she mentions), the confusion over gender identity, the fascination with gender-crossing, the ubiquitous internet peep-show, the huge rise in sexual exploitation of refugees (which she does not), Body Psychotherapy has a vital and unique role to play to bring a proper awareness of sexuality back to the profession and to the public.

Happily she does hint that Body Psychotherapy has rediscovered relationship as a key to sexuality. Why not say more? In *Self & Society* June 2001 we suggested that religious and cultural history has caused our society to have an epidemic of shame which has over-stimulated our mental curiosity for sex due to its being made taboo. This means our minds are over-excited (on fire) and we no longer know to regulate (ground) our sexual energy because we have forgotten that sexuality needs to occur within in the catalysing context of relationship. Inter-psychically, such a context will lead us directly to the world of 'I/Thou', but intra-psychically it involves the psycho-historical relationship between an individual's major life-energy centres: the heart and genitals – another two words which do not get a mention.

In her brief references to burnout and 'unethical touch' Gill could have alluded to BP's ability to show the importance of therapists' sexuality being properly anchored and its capacity to effect an understanding of sexual counter-transference. Surely this is crucial knowledge for our profession? And it is precisely these things which can help us do far better work with our clients and can provide a self-evident ethical standpoint to avoid falling into the traps of sexual acting-out – whether as counsellors, therapists or training organisations.

I am left therefore with this question. Is it perhaps the fear of sexuality from within the discipline that has caused was Body Psychotherapy in Britain – as Gill says in her introduction – to be seen as "unknown, excluded and 'other'"? It is certainly not the case in Holland, Germany or Denmark.

For those who are interested in bringing sexuality back to Body Psychotherapy I suggest that looking beyond our own frontiers might help. For me, the recent work of Willem Poppeliers, based in the Netherlands and coming from a bio-energetic stable, has been an illumination. He will be speaking at EBP conference in Switzerland in June this year, and now has an international training programme. I can supply the interested with more information if they wish to contact me.

Yours sincerely,
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A reply from Gill Westland:

Dear Nick

Thank you for your comments, which give me an opportunity to elaborate on sexuality within Body Psychotherapy (BP).

Sexuality has 'not disappeared from the agenda' in BP and I am sorry if you got that impression. I have been a full member of the European Association of Body Psychotherapy (EABP) since 1992 and with others from the U.K. attended the 1997 Congress '100 years of Wilhelm Reich, Sexuality, Energy, Character and Society.'

However, it is true that sexuality has been deliberately downplayed. In the early 1980's when I began to talk somewhat naively with *friendly* 'other' professionals about BP, I was surprised by the comments I received. The following were typical: 'I wouldn't want to work with sex all day;' 'Aren't you frightened of being raped touching male clients;' 'And *is it permissible* in BP to have sex with clients - I know ethics are seen differently.' Some had seen the film 'The Function of the Orgasm' and were clearly alarmed. Lowen's book 'The Language of the Body' with the front cover depicting a nude woman, presumably to boost sales further confused.

So I learned to present my work in a more tactful way, which did not frighten, and gradually came to have more informed discussion. There is now genuine interest in the skills of BP and I feel **included**. Nowadays I see sexuality as much more integrated and ordinary within BP. It is part of the warp and weft interwoven into the fabric of BP rather than being elevated to a 'special' place,

Yes, BP does have particular skills and understanding about sexuality and sexual issues, some of which you mention, and BP is brave in its willingness to explore sexual energy in the consulting room without acting out or denial. BP sees sexuality as an energetic process mediated by the body and involving being present and aware to oneself. The task is to embrace the charge of aliveness, to expand and to contain the energies. Yes, this will involve heart and genitals, but also the pulsating cells in the total bodymind. This embodied sexual energy is what is taken ideally to any relationship with another. So sexuality becomes intimate, passionate, loving and sensual with whole body involvement. From an Eastern perspective sexuality becomes a spiritual awareness practice leading to development and moments of profound interconnectedness.

This BP view is in contrast to other modalities which see sexuality as only physiology, and technique and aim for a 'satisfactory' sexual life. Disassociated sexual fantasy is encouraged to heighten excitement at the expense of contact and the transpersonal realm is ignored altogether.

With regard to transference Downing (1996) has written about two transference fears, which need to be addressed and which are likely to arise when using physical interventions in BP. The first is that touch may lead to sexual contact; and the second is the longing for 'sexual wisdom' that clients have when more embodied and in a better relationship with sexuality, and the fantasy that the psychotherapist will initiate the client into sexual mysteries.

Obviously much more could be written for example about shame and guilt and sexuality; also when 'sexual issues' screen infant deprivation and need, or rage, or broken-heartedness or conflict about incarnation.

And finally my experience at EABP congresses suggests differences in different European countries with regard to how sexuality is viewed, but BP in continental Europe has to fight more vigorously for acceptance than in the U.K. and is currently engaged in showing BP is scientific.

Gill Westland

Dear S&S,

Alix Pirani's broadside against the Campaign for Real Psychotherapy contained the most extraordinary range of double messages and double binds - including one that amounts to: 'If you respond seriously to this letter you are showing yourselves to be humourless and self-important'. My friend Em Edmondson is amused to be described as a man. For what it's worth, about half of the current 60 signatories are women. Most importantly, though, why are the 'old battles' somehow no longer worth fighting? Sounds like New Labour to me. The battle for authentic, effective and humane psychotherapy may be old, but personally I still want to fight it. Why does this worry Alix so much that she has to put us down so venomously?

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