

Book Reviews

Working With Parents and Infants: A Mind-Body Integration Approach by Antonella Sansone. 2007. London: H. Karnac Ltd. (www.karnacbooks.com). 111 pp. ISBN-10: 185575438X; ISBN-13: 978-1855754386.

Originally bearing the subtitle, “A Psyche-Soma Integration Approach,” the published subtitle of this new book teaches a quick translation of these Greek-derived technical words. Additionally, Sansone tells us that “soma” is a Greek word referring to “the living body in its wholeness.” She states, “Whatever we experience in and through the body forms our somatic reality... When any expressions of the living body are suppressed, the wholeness and harmony of our somatic reality is undermined. And so [too] is the psyche, as psyche and soma belong to each other.” This book gives clear exposition and understanding of the intertwining of psyche and soma (a relationship understood by the founders of the Santa Barbara Graduate Institute, who offer a program based on both psychology and soma studies).

A surprising bonus of this book is its easy sense of personal communication to readers, whether parents, practitioners, or anyone who has been born. It evolved from Sansone’s masters thesis, and we are treated to apt references from McDougall, Klein, Winnicott, Hegel, Heidegger, Likierman and Ferenczi. Most of Sansone’s background exposition relies on D.W. Winnicott, and we are treated to quotes from Sansone’s previous book, *Mothers, Babies and Their Body Language*, in which she argued a view of the inseparability between body and mental functions, calling for “psychophysical integration”:

“While thinking, speaking, dreaming, and interacting, there are changes in our breathing, muscle tone, posture, and facial expression.... They are powerful forms of non-verbal communication.” (Sansone, 2000, p. 51)

Sansone introduces her book with a nine-page summary of its ten chapters.

In Chapter 1, Sansone gives a history. The split between psyche and soma goes back to Descartes' (1644) philosophy of dualism.

Chapter 2 lays the foundation of Sansone's acknowledgments to Winnicott. Here too is our first introduction to the main case history, a new mother by the name of Andrea, whose unresolved dysattachment and unbondedness from her own mother resulted in mastitis, which gave her the perfect justification for not breastfeeding baby daughter Rosy.

In Chapter 3, Sansone explores mother-baby mirroring as a vital pathway for mother's integrated bodyself image to infuse baby with good self-image and self-confidence: "If this process does not take place, the infant may escape from frightening feelings and become unable to monitor them in later life."

In Chapter 4, Sansone explores the importance of touch and movement, particularly through infant massage, and the resulting benefits to mother as well as baby. From the author's experiences, infant massage classes are one of the most effective tools for healing mother and baby. And, apt attention is given to how therapists can work in triadic transferences and countertransferences among themselves, mother and baby.

In Chapter 5, we experience that case history is a most potent teaching tool. Sansone presents Andrea: from irrational screams while merely anticipating pangs of labor, to the almost total disconnect between this unattached and unbonded mother and her newborn Rosy. While medical staff treats mastitis as the problem, Sansone observes it as a symptom by which Andrea's body gives justification for not breastfeeding Rosy or in fact having any eye contact or physical proximity with her baby.

An interesting observation from the author is that "Talking in therapy can be a way of being in any other time and place except in the present one. Helpful listening is ... a form of meditation, which provides the therapist with a direct experience of the client. Being present leads to a unity of therapist and client."

Chapter 6 explores the author's foundation in meditation and yoga as well as Buddhist concepts that help facilitate psychotherapy. The author then relates these concepts to her work with mother Andrea and baby Rosy.

In Chapter 7, "Emotions and the Primal Brain," we are presented with important data on neurobiology and essential brain development and how these interact with emotional development.

In Chapter 8, Sansone clearly articulates her belief in the essential role of early intervention, to prevent psychopathology from “locking-in” to baby.

“I usually observe both parent and baby to see how they organize their emotional and muscular tension while interacting with each other. Psychotherapeutic work with parents and infants has to be addressed to rhythmic interaction and communication. I use the term Bow Method since rhythm, pace, tuning, and play are fundamental principles of primal interactions and thus social communication. As the musician needs to tune her/his instrument to produce the right notes, so the mother needs to play her own bodyself and body language to tune it to the prenatal and postnatal baby. To do so, her psychesoma has to be integrated and fluctuating to adjust continuously as pregnancy, labor and mothering progress and her infant’s need change. In a similar way, the therapist has to ‘feel the music’ between parent and infant and attune to their interactions and communications. By providing a ‘reflective’ or ‘mirroring’ space for the parents and infant, the therapist can encourage them to offer such a space to their infant, a space made of attuned communication.”

In Chapter 9, Sansone urges therapy built upon observation, especially of infants. She gives special attention as to how to handle emotions that might be stimulated in the observer. “The capacity to face the unknown with an ‘openness of heart’ is the basis for both genuine listening and creative thought.”

In Chapter 10, “Conclusions,” Sansone describes how she “explored the philosophical framework of dualism and its [influence].”

She emphasized the effectiveness of infant massage. And Sansone calls for “building a home” for clinical work with parents and infants:

- “It should be built on ... a vision of a unified psyche-soma....
- “It should focus equally on health and illness and acknowledge the continuum between health and illness....
- “It should be inspired by Eastern psychotherapeutic approaches..., which emphasize a larger kind of awareness, compassion, and equanimity, as a continuously available source of clarity and health. Building awareness of oneself through meditation is a potential basis for working with others.... By opening up and listening to inner feelings and emotions, the therapist offers a mirror to the client for opening more fully.”

Sansone concludes with a cogent examination of transference and countertransference, transference described as a re-enactment in the here-and-now of past experiences, bringing repressed patterns into consciousness in a safer setting. She describes countertransference as the therapist's response to the patient's presentation. In the context of the basic theme of this book, "the therapist's feelings induced by both the parents and the baby provide important insights, clues, and links, which guide understanding." But Sansone warns that these patterns may generate untoward feelings and reactions that must be resolved within the therapist.

This is a smallish book, huge in thought and insight, especially for those in prenatal and perinatal psychology opening gently to wisdom about the role of the body in psyche-soma events.

Working With Parents & Infants: A Mind-Body Integration Approach offers an evolutionary path in psychoanalytic theory, resolving and integrating Descartes' split, by a brilliant observer of mother-baby relationship dialog.

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Mindful Motherhood: Practical Ways for Staying Sane During Pregnancy and Your Child's First Year by Cassandra Vieten, PhD. Publication date: May 1, 2009. New Harbinger/Noetic Books. ISBN: 1572246294 200 pages. Price: \$16.95. On the web: www.mindfulmotherhood.org

A number of parenting books exist but few directly address the enormous psychological changes that happen to women during pregnancy and the adjustment needed in the first year of their baby's new life. "... From hormones to stretch marks, labor pains to diaper changes, motherhood is an adventure like none other. The rapid changes in your body, your lifestyle, and your very identity call for a certain mental and emotional agility. Mindfulness can help you meet the challenge and approach every experience with your new baby with open eyes and an open heart." So presents author Cassandra Vieten, PhD, a licensed clinical psychologist, and Director of Research at the Institute of Noetic Sciences. Also a co-director of the Mind Body Medicine Research Group at California Pacific Medical Center Research Institute in San Francisco, CA, and co-president of the Institute for Spirituality and Psychology, Dr. Vieten brings impressive

credentials to this effort. (Qualifications for mindful motherhood through on-the-job training too, as Cassandra is the mom of eight-year-old Indigo.)

Thus, *Mindful Motherhood* is unique in that it is all about increasing a mother's capacity for mindful awareness to enhance the quality of her new relationship with her baby. "Mindful motherhood, simply put, is being present, in your body, and connected with your baby no matter what is happening." And if the baby senses that he is safe, states Dr. Vieten, that the mother is solid, and that his own overwhelming experiences are not overwhelming the parent, that lays the groundwork for him developing a strong and secure sense of self.

Mindful Motherhood provides pregnant women and early moms with tools as well: (1) accessible information based on science and sound clinical theory, (2) practical tools for practicing mindfulness in everyday life, (3) stories and examples to inspire interest and clarify points, and (4) experiential exercises that will help readers integrate the information and experiences they have. *Mindful Motherhood* also offers current insights into the positive psychology of motherhood and mother-infant attachment, translating science and theory into jargon-free language and immediately applicable tools. This book is aimed specifically toward new moms, who would like to deal more effectively with stress and mood during pregnancy and postpartum, who are interested in being the best parent they can be, and who want to cultivate a deeper connection to themselves and their children. "The goal is to help women become the kind of present, authentic, connected, emotionally competent, psychologically-balanced, and loving mothers they want to be – not to mention enjoying the extraordinary experience of motherhood to its fullest extent." Dr. Vieten has accomplished all this along with many accolades from prominent authors and clinicians in the field, as evidenced by their affirming quotes in support of this text. Finally, take note of a number of social networking opportunities made available by the author.

Facebook: <http://tiny.cc/mindfulmotherhoodfacebook>

Twitter: <http://twitter.com/mindfulbookmom>

Twittermoms: www.twittermoms.com/profile/mindfulbookmom

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