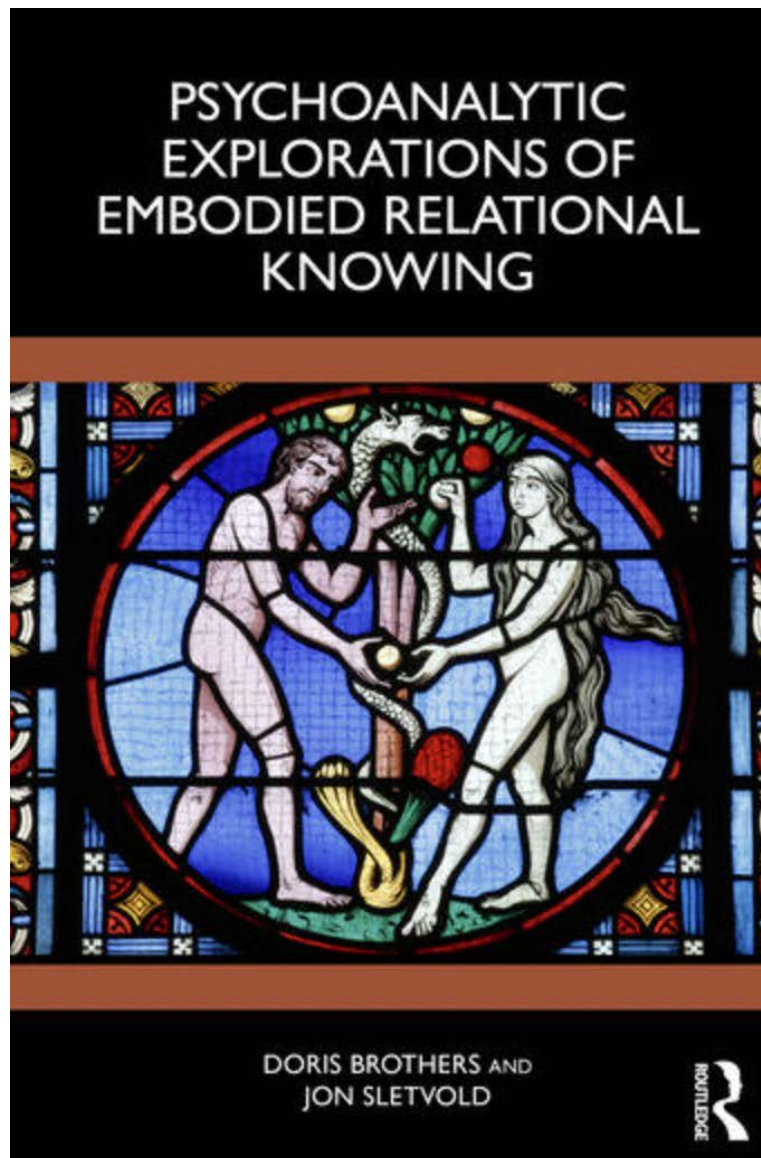


Psychoanalytic Explorations of Embodied Relational Knowing

Doris Brothers, Jon Sletvold



Release: September 21, 2026 by Routledge
Paperback: ISBN 9781032784380, 172 Pages
eBook: ISBN 9781003487883, 172 pages

Description

This book offers groundbreaking insights into relational theory, exploring the patient's and the analyst's longings to know, be known and not known in psychoanalytic relationships, and the embodied nature of the healing process.

Recognition of the patient's unknowable uniqueness, which is not fully accessible by means of empathy, is shown to promote more ethical therapeutic practices. Although few psychoanalytic books have highlighted the work of the philosopher Marcel Foucault, Brothers and Sletvold find much that is highly relevant in his work. They also demonstrate the powerful influence of culture, history, politics and world events on the therapeutic encounter.

With an informed and compassionate perspective, this book is essential reading for psychoanalysts and psychotherapists regardless of their theoretical orientation.

Author bios

Doris Brothers is a co-founder of the Training and Research in Intersubjective Self Psychology Foundation. She was a co-editor of *Psychoanalysis, Self and Context* with Roger Frie from 2015 to 2019 and is consulting editor of *Psychoanalytic Inquiry*. She has written four books including *Toward a Psychology of Uncertainty: Trauma-Centered Psychoanalysis* (2008) and many journal articles. She practices on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, New York, USA, and in Oslo, Norway.

Jon Sletvold is the founding board director of the Norwegian Character Analytic Institute. He has published books and articles on the role of the body in psychoanalysis and psychotherapy. He is the author of *The Embodied Analyst: From Freud and Reich to Relationality* (2014), winner of the Gradiva Award in 2015. Co-director with Doris Brothers of the Wilhelm Reich Center for the Study of Embodiment.

Reviews

'In this important and timely exploration of the nature of knowledge, Brothers and Sletvold address the heart of the therapeutic endeavor and the question of what it means to be human. They demonstrate unequivocally that knowing and understanding are never individual achievements, but fundamentally relational and embodied in nature, shaped by historical circumstances and our interactions with others. They invite us to learn from and live with uncertainty and thus to recognize that experience may be more or less known, formulated or unformulated, in any moment in time.'

Roger Frie, Professor of Psychoanalysis and Education, University of Vienna, Austria

'Psychoanalytic Explorations of Embodied Relational Knowing is a unique, and fascinating work, which probes the nature of knowledge in clinical and cultural contexts. Drawing on philosophy and psychoanalytic theory, the authors explore the way that traumatic knowledge is inscribed on the body. The body's truths are in perpetual tension with the human desire to not know. This tension—between knowing and not-knowing—is present in clinical process, and it has diverse

meanings. It is also fundamental to the authoritarian turn that we see throughout the globe. In its examination, this book spans the personal, the historical and the political.'

Sue Grand, PhD, Author, *The Reproduction of Evil: A Clinical and Cultural Perspective*

'Doris Brothers and Jon Sletvold's title *Psychoanalytic Explorations of Embodied Relational Knowing* concentrates in three words a wealth of clinical experience concerning the limits of psychoanalysis. It is when we are confronted with the inadequacy of speech and experience—the total loneliness at the outer edges of relationships—that the impasse created by the conflict between "the need to know and to be known" and "not to know and not to be known" is overcome by "embodied relational knowing." The authors are supported by philosophers and authors whom Freud claims, in the *Gradiva*, to be his "precious allies." By drawing on examples from their clinical practices, they provide a source of great learning and hope for their readers.'

Françoise Davoine, PhD, Author, *Wittgenstein's Folly*

'Doris Brothers' and Jon Sletvold's exploration of "embodied relational knowing" does well to advance our understanding of what transpires not only in the context of therapeutic dialogue but in our ongoing engagement with the world. For Brothers and Sletvold, the world is inscribed within us; it is embedded and embodied, in ways both known and unknown. There can thus be no illusions of fully containing who and what we—and others—are. That's not what we seek in any case. For the desire to know and be known cannot ever be teased apart from the desire not to know and not to be known. Whether what's being explored is traumatic dissociation or madness or silence in the face of patent evil, this thoughtful, wise, humane book shows that the need to know and not know is carried forth pervasively and, often, surreptitiously, in the very flesh of our being and the very fabric of our relationships.'

Mark Freeman, PhD, Distinguished Professor of Ethics and Society Emeritus, College of the Holy Cross, and Senior Fellow, Center for Psychological Humanities and Ethics, Boston College, author of *Toward the Psychological Humanities: A Modest Manifesto for the Future of Psychology*

'This is a book about the human need to know—and not to know. Brothers and Sletvold look to the body to better understand our instinct to seek knowledge about ourselves and our world, foregrounding how emotion, perception and sensory-motor processes go into what we can know about our patients and their situations. This is a sophisticated boundary-pushing book set forth in unpretentious, conversational prose.'

Daniel Goldin, PsyD, Editor, *Psychoanalytic Inquiry*

Author contact

Doris Brothers, dorisbrothers@mac.com

Jon Sletvold, j-sle@online.no

Request a free press copy

<https://secure.taylorfrancis.com/book-copy-request/?type=media-review-copy>

Purchase link

<https://www.routledge.com/Psychoanalytic-Explorations-of-Embodied-Relational-Knowing/Brothers-Sletvold/p/book/9781032784380>

Excerpt from the Introduction

"It might be said that we analysts are in the business of knowing. Most of us work hard at knowing all that we can about ourselves and our patients. But how well we know depends, to some extent, on what we have learned. We need to have learned which theories best guide our work and how they might apply to each patient's particular concerns. We need to have learned something of history, culture, science, the arts and world events to enrich and complexify our therapeutic encounters. We need to have learned how to attend to our bodily reactions and to those of our patients if we are to understand the vast array of emotional experiences that cannot be expressed verbally. But perhaps most importantly, we need to learn the limits of what we can know about ourselves and our patients. We also need to learn how to reach beyond these limits.

Our concept of embodied relational knowing is based on the idea that limitations in our ability to know ourselves and others often give rise to needs (sometimes experienced as longings) to be known by others--known for all our weaknesses and strengths, our pains and our pleasures, our shameful failings and our proud accomplishments--and to know others as deeply and completely. The impossibility of the complete fulfillment of these needs does not preclude our strivings.

Embodied relational knowing also includes our needs not to be known and not to know others. While these needs become apparent within the context of traumatic dissociation, we view them as pervasive aspects of everyday life.

There are times when the needs to know and be known seem to intertwine with the needs not to know or not to be known. This happens in various ways. For example, we may not be able to integrate what our bodies know--what is nonverbal and implicit--with our conscious cognitive knowing. This experiential discrepancy, we believe, is involved in many challenging therapeutic encounters. It figures importantly in considering what is available to consciousness and what is not in situations involving traumatic dissociation. We believe that it is likely to be particularly marked in certain experiences of madness and when hatred develops between analysts and patients. We call attention to the curious linking of knowing and not knowing in our discussion of dreams and their simultaneous collision at times of societal upheaval in a chapter on knowing the world.

We want to make it clear that we are not endorsing a Cartesian split between mind and body and a valuing of the thinking mind over feelings and bodily sensations. Rather, for us, cognitive knowing is as completely and inescapably embodied as what is experienced on a bodily level. Moreover, nothing that is known in either realm is infallible."