



## *Wondrous Beginnings*



# **Prenatal and Perinatal Psychology: Rediscovering Our Primary Relationship of Self**

**By Wendy Anne McCarty, PhD, RN**

For over 30 years, the field of Prenatal and Perinatal Psychology (PPN) has taken the dynamic understanding of human development deeper by studying how babies' earliest experiences in the womb, during birth and bonding, and as newborns shape and set in motion fundamental life patterns. These core patterns may be life-enhancing or life-diminishing.

The findings from PPN revolutionize our notions of who babies are, who we are, what is going on during this primary period of human development, and how these very early experiences form babies' core foundations at every level—physical, emotional, mental, relational and spiritual. PPN offers a unique lens of exploring this developmental period from the baby's point of view.



**The field grew** out of therapists wanting to share and explore the implications of their clinical experiences with adult clients. In their search for the origin of current issues, therapists often unexpectedly found their clients revisiting difficult or traumatic experiences in the womb, during birth, and as a newborn. The field grew as PPN-oriented therapeutic work with adults, children and babies were developed to treat their current difficulties by recognizing and working with those early origins and their connections with current experiences.

**I discovered** this field in 1989 after working with families for 15 years as an OB nurse, an infant development specialist, and as a psychotherapist. I was captivated by this new PPN multidimensional landscape of early development that babies were showing us. I had a profound sense that I had found a larger truth about life and who we are. As I explored this new territory and listened deeply to what babies were teaching us, my vision of human potential and what is possible became more than I could have imagined.

**For the next decade** I worked with children, babies, and their families from a PPN orientation. Ray Castellino, D.C. and I co-founded BEBA, a PPN-oriented clinic to help families with babies and young children heal early trauma and relationship issues and to train professionals in the specialty. It was an amazing time as we discovered more and more of what babies were showing us that meaningfully reflected their earlier experiences, as well as demonstrated their capacity of comprehension, communication, and relationship that was beyond anything I had been taught in early mainstream training!

**Very young babies** showed us their already established beliefs held in

their subconscious and core structure and expressed through their ANS patterns, movements, gestures, voice, eye contact, emotions, intentions, and how they interacted with people and their environment. We were mapping out more about how the origins of current difficult patterns were often connected with earlier trauma, unmet needs, and problematic imprinted patterns of being from the prenatal and perinatal period. As we worked with these issues with the baby or child directly with their parent's participation, the whole family transformed (1).

**Then in 1999** Marti Glenn and I co-authored the first graduate degree programs in prenatal and perinatal psychology and opened the Santa Barbara Graduate Institute to train professionals in our specialty. I realized that although the field of PPN had accumulated thousands of clinical stories that portrayed the new multidimensional landscape from the baby's point of view, and I personally had gathered a wealth of clinical experience, evidence and wisdom, there was no early development model or theory that made sense of the findings.

**Mainstream models** did not address or reflect what we were learning from the baby's point of view. PPN needed a theory, a model. I decided to take that task on. I obtained an academic research grant and spent a year reviewing the PPN field's findings. I developed my consciousness-based *Integrated Model of Early Development* that reflected and incorporated PPN clinical findings and the baby's point of view. It became published as the text, *Welcoming Consciousness: Supporting Babies' Wholeness From the Beginning of Life—An Integrated Model of Early Development* (2).

**In building** the new model, I first examined the current mainstream early development theories and saw

how they were steeped in the modern -era Newtonian worldview that narrowed the focus of "science" to the physical plane of reality. Theories were derived from external observation of babies and study of the biological human being. Babies' abilities to develop conscious awareness and capacities, as well as a sense of personhood, were assumed to be dependent upon their brain and physical development. Most mainstream early development models and practices are still based upon these assumptions today.

**Yet the PPN findings** tell a very different story of who babies are and of early development. At the core of the divide between mainstream and PPN perspectives of early development is the question of our core nature. Are we first and foremost biological beings or nonphysical consciousness?

**When I reviewed** what babies were showing us, it was clear that PPN findings resonated with the nearly universal holistic wisdom that we are consciousness coming into human life with purpose and design. Our fundamental nature is as non-physical consciousness. Our human self is seen as a manifested expression of our more fundamental primary consciousness. What babies had been teaching us from their point of view revealed hidden treasures about that spiritual journey from spirit to human life and how their prenatal and perinatal experiences affected their embodiment process.

**For me,** the heart of these hidden treasures is the revelation that babies have two distinct levels of perception and capacity—a non-local transcendental level and a human level. In the Newtonian era, the transcendental perspective eluded recognition because it wasn't considered possible within the biology-first assumptions. As a PPN-oriented practitioner, suspending

those entrained assumptions and lens allowed me to have babies and children teach me directly about what was possible and to develop the new model from those direct experiences.

**As I reviewed** the PPN literature and my own clinical experiences, I appreciated how the discoveries of the transcendent perspective transforms the whole landscape of early development. Babies' transcendental perspective is present prior to conception forward. From this perspective, the incarnating consciousness already has a sense of personhood, a Self-I. "I know I am a person. I know you are a person. And, I am seeking connection. I am seeking relationship."

**The characteristics** of babies' transcendental Self-perspective are similar to the qualities expressed in near-death experiences. The vantage point is from outside the body. There is a mature sense of the larger picture, a lucid non-local perception and comprehension of events, people's thoughts, feelings, intentions, and accurate descriptions of situation and dynamics. There is non-local gestalt intuitive knowing about things of the past, present, and future. The transcendent Self seeks relationship and has the capacity of communication, telepathy, and meaningful interaction. There is access to and experience with both the spirit and physical realms.

**With conception**, the transcendental Self views the baby's developing body as a house, a vehicle they will inhabit for the life they are embarking upon. The human self vantage point, in contrast, is from within the body, with awareness through biological-based perceptions and senses. It is within time-space. The developing human self is instinctive, sensitive, responsive, adaptive, emotional, and at its core, relational. The human self has an innate intelligence of right relationship—what holds coherence,

harmony, and goodness and what doesn't and responds and adapts accordingly.

**Although I** talk about these perspectives separately, the beauty of our fuller understanding of babies and their prenatal and perinatal experience is held in the inseparable relationship between their transcendental Self and human self, in their synergistic relational whole. Holographic principles suggest that our three-dimensional reality is a product of the interaction of non-local and local experience. Both perspectives are necessary to create our reality. The dynamic interaction of the two perspectives creates a synergistic whole that is more than the sum of the parts. The whole created by these two perspectives is actually more than the sum of its parts and that functions to organize the parts. That is how I see our transcendental and human perspectives functioning.

**The transcendent** Self and human self form a synergistic whole Self that I call the *Integrated Self*. I describe the Integrated Self as a holonomic, holographic, self-organizing, dynamic self-system. This ever-evolving relationship is an intimate dance with each perspective informing and changing with experience of the other.

**I believe** our human potential lies in our ability to align our human self experience with our primary non-local transcendental consciousness to create the most coherent and clear channel between them. What babies show us reveals more about how the transcendent Self functions, its higher octave of being at that non-local level—a higher octave of awareness, knowing, and connection to source.

**Two books** published recently, *Dying to Be Me* by Anita Moorjani and *Proof of Heaven* by Dr. Eben Alexander, beautifully portray

The  
developing  
human self  
is instinctive,  
sensitive,  
responsive,  
adaptive,  
emotional,  
and  
at its core,  
relational.



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the authors' powerful transcendent experiences in the non-local spiritual realms during each of their near-death experiences. They both came back radically transformed by their experiences and remained more connected to those transcendent higher octaves of awareness, knowing, and being. They experienced profound healing with the direct experience of knowing they are loved unconditionally, they are LOVE, and experienced those higher octaves of oneness, joy, harmony, goodness, truth, beauty, and well-being. They returned more aligned with their transcendental Self and Source, seeing themselves and the world through a multidimensional lens. In *Proof of Heaven*, Dr. Alexander described his transformation as a metamorphosis, from caterpillar to butterfly. His direct transcendent experience changed the very nature of his being, as well as his core perceptive of himself and life.

**When I read** their accounts and saw the enormous receptivity for their message, I jumped up and down with joy. They received their gifts of transformation and metamorphosis through their near-death encounters by experiencing the more real spiritual realm through the eyes of their transcendent Self and returning to their embodied human self with that perspective more fully integrated into their human experience.

**PPN findings** show us that our spiritual connection, primary knowing, and transcendent Self-perspective are there from the beginning of life! We are consciousness coming into human life, and we are innately wired with the capacity of connection with our



Original artwork donated by Dr. Mauri-Lynnee Heller: [www.mlheller.net](http://www.mlheller.net)

transcendent Self and Source to be the embodied integrated spiritual-human being—the butterfly.

**When I speak** of supporting babies' wholeness from the beginning of life, I see this as our primary task in welcoming consciousness—to nurture and protect their primary relationship of Self. So much of infant development theory and practice is focused on the vital importance of infants having a positive secure attachment relationship with their parents. And that is very true. Infants truly need that to thrive. Yet, even more primary is the relationship of Self. How do we give babies the secure attachment AND support their innate attunement to their primary consciousness? How do we support babies to bring from spirit more of their natural endowments, such as the near-death experience brought the authors? I believe that is the new frontier of human potential.

**When our modern** era narrowed our lens to the seeing babies as biological beings first and foremost, we lost something very dear. We lost our inner knowing, our wisdom of how to meet and care for the incarnating spiritual being so as to support their natural integration of

their whole self into human life. Unfortunately, much of what PPN findings show us are the cascading life-diminishing effects of our modern-era misunderstanding of who babies are and what they are capable of, our missed opportunities for greater connection and relationship with them, and how many of our medical and care practices leave them with trauma, unmet needs, and life-diminishing imprinted patterns.

**When I first** started practicing from the PPN lens, this was disheartening to see. Over and over again, I saw the reality of these negative cascading effects and could see their underpinnings of clients of all ages searching for relief of their their pain, separation, and disharmony within themselves and their relationships. I could see how so many things we did contributed to the separation of Self and to diminishing or damaging their self-connection during the prenatal and perinatal period. And I had to come to terms with my participation as an OB nurse and “infant specialist” in creating some of those life-diminishing patterns. I had so much regret, yet I used that to fuel my motivation to learn how we can support babies multidimensional needs and potential.

As deeply disheartened as I was, I was even more awed, captivated, and found great beauty in learning from babies about their multidimensional world and how to consciously meet them there. As parents saw their babies' capacity for comprehension and meaningful communication, as well as their human sensitivity and vulnerability, as they saw their baby's emotional responses and desire for deeper connection, and felt that more whole self in the moment with them, parents were themselves transformed. They began entering that multidimensional world with their babies and children and relating and caring for them in ways that naturally supported their Self connection.

**PPN-oriented** therapeutic work with babies and young children demonstrates that when babies are related to, cared for, and met as sentient beings-sensitive human beings, and, when babies or children have the opportunity to have their unmet needs, trauma, or life-diminishing imprinted patterns from the prenatal and perinatal period healed, they naturally become more of their Integrated Self embodied. They become more grounded, aligned, connected, and balanced. They are naturally loving, empathetic, caring, and mutual in their relationships. They have greater capacity for seeing the larger picture as well as the current one and an innate sense of ethics, intuitive knowing, and connection to their inner guidance. They are creative and have a greater inner motivation for the intrinsic value of the joy found in the exploration their interests and gifts. They are teaching us more about our potential.

**What I have learned** from babies and children guides my work with clients of all ages. The Integrated Model lens informs my work and life. I see people as their Integrated Self, that holonomic, holographic whole multidimensional being. I believe all

healing is in service of realigning the human self and human experience within the embrace of their transcendental Self and Source. What has happened in their life that disrupted or damaged this alignment? I see disease, disharmony, pain, suffering, alienation and all of the somatic, emotional, physical and relational patterns held as expressions of separation with Self and Source. Thus, healing is intended to restore that connection, that alignment, and to reintegrate that aspect of self that has lost connection with their Self.

**In my experience**, many, if not

most of the current issues in our lives have a relationship with our experiences during our embodiment process and our prenatal and perinatal period. During the primary period, babies experience, learn, imprint, communicate, establish memory, and form their core foundation from their holographic multidimensional experiences (3).

**The prenatal** and perinatal period is *the* most intense learning period of our lives. Babies are learning about being human, living in a three-dimensional world, living within a certain culture and family. They build



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their core being in relationship to their world accordingly. By the time they are a newborn, their core beliefs and patterns are set in motion. Yet these understandings are not the cultural consensus understandings and all too often babies are left with unmet needs, trauma, and life-diminishing patterns that cascade into more challenges as they live their lives.

**I find** a real elegance in healing work at any age that brings attention to the relationship between prenatal and perinatal experiences and current issues. No matter the client's age, as we listen and reconnect with that multidimensional being at the beginning of life, we honor and repair that separated adapted self who presents with symptoms and life-diminishing patterns, and we help heal their primary relationship of Self. During this process, they have the opportunity to organically reorganize their alignment creating a more coherent right relationship with their transcendent Self and symptoms resolve. I know this is too simplistic, yet it is a core thread within our healing intentions. I teach parents how to do this with their children by recognizing that what happened during their prenatal and perinatal experience may be connected to their challenges now and how to approach the current problems from this vantage point.

**I will end with a story** I share in *Welcoming Consciousness* that portrays an elegant healing moment between a mother and her three-year-old son:

*After hearing a PPN talk about how conscious babies are at birth, Rachel decided to talk to her three-year-old son about his birth, their separation after birth, and why that separation had occurred. As she began telling him about the separation, he chimed in, "Yeah, I didn't like that. I didn't think you were going to come back. I*

*didn't know if you were going to come back."*

*In this conversation, Vinnie very spontaneously and in a matter-of-fact way revealed that he clearly had a sense of himself and of his mother as being a separate person he was in relationship with as a newborn... This three-year-old child's comments demonstrated he had known his mother was gone, that they were separated, he expressed the emotional tones associated with missing her, AND wondered if she was coming back in the future—all as a newborn!*

*At the time of this conversation, Vinnie had been having very uncharacteristically intense "meltdowns" when his mother began leaving him at preschool, his first experience of being separated from her and left in a group situation. What were the words he would say to her in the midst of this? "But, I'll never see you again. You may never come back." It appeared that being left at this group preschool had triggered a traumatic memory from being separated at his birth. After this conversation acknowledging what happened at his birth and his feelings about it, his current separation anxiety response dissipated without further intervention ( pp. 24-25).*

**I am writing** this article as we near Valentine's Day. My heart-day wish is for every baby, child and adult to experience falling into love with their Self and feeling the loving embrace of their transcendental Self.

**Dr. Wendy Anne McCarty** is a world-leader of prenatal and perinatal psychology. Author of *Welcoming Consciousness*, an innovative consciousness-based early development model, now available in English, German, Portuguese, and Spanish. Co-

founder/author/associate faculty chair and faculty of the first graduate degree programs in prenatal and perinatal psychology at the Santa Barbara Graduate Institute. Her leading-edge work brings together prenatal and perinatal psychology, a multidimensional early development lens, consciousness studies, energy psychology healing modalities, holistic nursing, and her intuitive perception. As an international presenter, educator and consultant, she guides professionals and organizations to incorporate these pioneering findings, principles and practices. She brings expertise from her 40 years of professional work with individuals and families as an obstetrical nurse, childbirth educator, marriage and family therapist, prenatal and birth therapist working with babies, children and families, as well as her current holistic consultation practice for families, professionals, and organizations. Dr. McCarty also co-founded BEBA, a non-profit clinic providing prenatal and birth oriented therapeutic support for babies and parents, and was the director of Natural Family Living~Right From the Start, an organizational community to support human potential from the beginning of life. Her email address is [drwmccarty@gmail.com](mailto:drwmccarty@gmail.com) and website is [www.wondrousbeginnings.com](http://www.wondrousbeginnings.com).

#### Endnotes:

1. McCarty, W. A. (2012). *Welcoming consciousness: Supporting babies' wholeness from the beginning of life—An integrated model of early development*. Santa Barbara, CA: Wondrous Beginnings Publishing.
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