

Editorials

The dance of the mind-body in psychology and counseling

The mind-body connection has been gaining growing attention in recent years in the field of psychology and counseling as well as in the field of physiology and neuroscience. Conscious experience, perceptions, and thoughts affect feelings and emotions, influence immunity and hormonal levels, and impact behaviors. The interaction between the mind and the body is never linear but with the complexity that we still far from understanding. Psychological reactions and mental problems of an individual are thus so complicated and yet still cannot be fully explained, not to mention the interaction between persons in a therapeutic relationship, or the cultural influence on behaviors of another culture. The three articles in this issue, attempting to understand consciousness, the client-therapist interaction, as well as the extent the women in an African country developed the eating disorders so prevalent in the more well-off western countries, reflect the different dimensions of this complex interaction between the mind and the body.

Qualia is about the subjective aspect of consciousness which may not be explainable. Although neuroscientists have been working hard on understanding the scientific workings of the mind and its impact on the body using functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI), Positron emission tomography (PET) scan or other objective research tools, there remains part of the mind that may not be objectively observable. Debates in the article on the problem of Qualia address this issue. As therapists or counselors, we have to be aware that subjective and objective experiences cannot always be clearly distinguished, especially when genuine attitude is emphasized in the therapeutic relationship. Openness and sensitivity to the needs and benefits of the clients thus become crucial.

Similar to the subjectivity and objectivity of consciousness, clients' reactions and attitudes to the therapist cannot be simply classified as positive or negative, or any point on the positive-negative continuum. The article on issues faced by counselors with visible disabilities discussed the transference, anxiety and the notion of otherness in the therapeutic relationship. Therapists with or without visible disabilities both have unique strengths and worth. Disability is only one of the characteristics of a person which may or may not limit his/her function and integration in a society. In some situations, disability may favor the development of excellence in other abilities. People with visual disability, for instance, may have shaper auditory senses or olfactory senses. Moreover, individuals who survived adversity can better feel for people who suffer. However, counselors with visible disabilities have to be mindful of the issues and the spectrum of reactions the client will have. This also applies to therapists without visible disabilities. Priority should always be given to the benefit and concern of the client in the therapeutic process.

Cultural and social norms influence behaviors. Developed countries in which food is overly supplied may be much more concerned about staying away from the temptation of food, especially when thinness is promoted by fashion industry and media as the ideal body figure. Struggles between food intake and body shape leading to the neglect of the basic needs of the body, and the mind losing control over eating behavior will lead to various eating disorders, which is an example of going to the opposite extreme of mind-body integration. How and to what extent does modernization or westernization in African country like Nigerian bring about changes in life style and original cultural value, subsequently leading to the development of eating disorders? The article "Anorexia and bulimia nervosa: the scenario among Nigerian female students" attempted to uncover the situation.

Mind-body integration is multi-leveled and embedded in the complexity of cultures across nations. Be it on the individual or interpersonal level, the mind-body connection resembles dancing between two persons. During the dance, there will be struggles between partners, or certain impacts on the process remain blurred, or there will be influences from the surroundings on single one or both dancers, but they all play a role in making the dance. The beautiful moment will happen when synchrony and union occur, and that is what psychologists and neuroscientists want to know more about and what counseling ultimately aims to achieve.

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