

# THE NEW FUNCTIONAL IDENTITY: A BODY THAT THINKS, A MIND THAT FEELS - FRONTIERS AND UNEXPLORED TERRITORIES OF THE "BODY AND MIND ZONE"

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## SUMMARY

For a long time, terms like "mind" and "emotion" have rarely been taken into account, not even mentioned in the medical texts. The latest scientific researches, including the studies of Candace Pert, on the contrary, have emphasized that the entire body thinks, because every single cell hears, and feels emotions. The international researcher has discovered the endocrines and a vast number of neuropeptides, that work as an "information network" that interconnects the entire body, the "psychic" molecules are transmitted and travel, communicating information as in a circular and recursive body - mind mechanism. This is a sort of body and mind functional identity, which is different in each person, because each person is a unique universe, and the body is the place where mind and body meet in a unique and unrepeatable alchemy. So, if it is true that only in the body the secret of its potential for development and transformation is well hidden, it is also true that this secret is unique for each of us. Then, the strategic therapy becomes 'tailor-made', and the knowledge of the body component is essential to unlock behavior patterns and planning new ones, in order to improve relationships and the quality of life, and enhance the sense of well-being. People are not as simple containers which merely record external incitements, on the contrary, they are able to evaluate and weigh what happens around. Depending on the meaning attributed to each stimulus, a stress response of different magnitude and duration is activated, this can be considered functional or dysfunctional. Many recent studies, in fact, states that there is a significant correlation between the coping strategy chosen and the onset of a disease. According to the theory of 'psychogenic tumor', for example, anyone can potentially develop cancer, but only those who do not have the psychological strength to resist disease get sick. No matter what is the theoretical framework and the conclusion adopted, we go towards a consensus of considering body and mind as a part of a unique and complex functional identity. As a consequence of this completely new approach on how to consider the wellbeing and health, researchers suggest that the goal of a satisfactory physical and mental balance can be achieved through a transversal approach to the various disciplines (psychotherapy, surgical, nutritionist, medical aesthetics and medicine in general). According to this bio-psycho-social approach, each person should be approached in his entirety, bodily and psychological; each individual should be 'hosted' in a sort of 'Body and Mind' zone, where the entire body is able to think.

**Key words:** functional identity - body-mind - strategic therapy - body and mind - coping

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*"My body is not just a body, it's mine, because it is one with the subject that I am. My body is imbued with subjectivity, it is not just something I have"*

Sartre, in Petrini - Casadei, 2010

## BODY - MIND CIRCULARITY

The Cartesian distinction that considered body and soul as two distinct and autonomous entities, left space, gradually but irrevocably, to an idea of a body in which any mental activity is expressed through body components. The rediscovery of the body is strictly connected with the rediscovery of emotions, whose centrality is brought to the foreground by neuroscience; the emotions are the constituent nexus of consciousness instead of being considered a product of superior activities (Damasio 2000). Energy is the physical basis of matter, information is the intangible component of any cognitive process, everything is energy, all is information, consequently, the key aspect is to bring together the two dimensions: energy and information (Montecucco 2010).

With the aim of understanding the real essence of the matter, science has come to discover that subatomic

particles have an energetic nature, in other words we can affirm that every living entity is the consequence of what there is inside it. In this sense the body includes and embodies in its structure and shapes all the information: disease, suffering and trauma accumulated until a particular moment in life. So, we can clearly understand the "body and mind" circularity and recursivity, each experience of an individual leaves a mark on the body such as a wrinkle, a change in the physical and proxemics setting, as well as real changes in body chemistry. For this reason, a change of no matter what the nature on the body, such as surgery or medical treatment, will bring in some measure of consequence also on the dynamics and chemistry of mental processes. On the contrary, for the same reason, a psychotherapeutic intervention will have consequences on the dynamics of organic functionalities for sure. So, it is becoming more and more accepted by any professional that, in order to improve successfully the health and welfare of the individual, one should see the individual in a bio-psycho-social perspective, as a new functional identity, with a body able to think, and a mind able to feel.

Candace Pert, (1997) neurophysiologist, director of the brain biochemistry center of NIMH (National Institute for Mental Health) has given one of the main scientific contributions to the idea of reunification of the human dichotomy. The international researcher has discovered the endocrines and a vast number of neuropeptides, that work as an "information network" that interconnects the entire body, the "psychic" molecules are transmitted and travel, communicating information as in a circular and recursive body - mind mechanism that includes the nervous system, the blood, immune system and even the gut (Montecucco 2010). The revolutionary discoveries of this researcher led her to be nominated for a Nobel Prize. In particular, her studies are focused on the role of emotions and the influence of stress on the immune system, an argument particularly discussed by psychoneuroimmunology. This can be defined as a revolution because for a long time, terms like "mind" and "emotion" were rarely taken into account, not even mentioned in the medical texts. The most recent scientific research however, including Candace Pert's studies, have highlighted that the whole body thinks because every cell hears and feels emotions. There is an "information network", according to the definition of the researcher, that interconnects the entire body, the "psychic" molecules are transferred and travel, bringing with them information to broadcast (Montecucco 2010). During psychotherapy sessions the therapist should use different tools according to the diversity of each patient.

According to Haley (1985) the strategic therapy is like a game chess between patient and therapist because, as in a real game, each move corresponds to another one. The game continues until one of the two participants win. In the strategic therapy, on the contrary, and this is the difference, there is an alliance between the two players, the patient and the therapist, and both of them win or lose together. Strategies are real moves, sewn and thought in the same way in which a dress would be sewed based on exact body measurements, different for each individual, taking into account that each person has his own way of being and perceiving himself and the world (Skorjanec 2000).

"Each person is a unique universe and the body is the place where mind and body meet in a unique and unrepeatable alchemy" (Spurio 2010). So it is also in the body, as well as in the mind, namely the entire functional unit of the individual, is which is well hidden the secret of its possibilities for development and transformation. An increasing number of students and researchers of different matters have begun to think of innovative projects which involve the whole person. Bioenergetics and psychosomatics try, with different approaches, to probe the secret, trying to interpret the inner languages and to observe how the mental, psychological and emotional aspects infiltrate the folds of physicality. In a strategic therapy the knowledge of

the bodily component is indispensable to unlock behavioral patterns and program new ones, to improve relationships or to improve their sense of well being and quality of life. Thus "healthy" could mean, in accordance with the vision of many authors such as Laborit (1976), to maintain balance within the body and with the environment; disease takes over when one feels that one cannot control the environment, or when the person is unable or fails to express oneself within its relationships and life size. When this balance is compromised, the system that regulates the activation or inhibition through neurotransmitters would be in crisis, and so would cause psychosomatic illnesses (Montecucco 2010). Some of the main neuro mediators are serotonin, dopamine, adrenaline, noradrenaline. Serotonin is the neurotransmitter that allows to experience pleasure and is involved in sexuality, mood, appetite, these being in the human vital activities. In many cases, where no positive emotions are processed, the negative course may involve dysfunctional behaviors, and one may even begin to use substances such as drugs or compulsive and disordered food intake in order to restore a state of well-being.

Relaxation and visualization techniques stimulate bodily sensations of pleasure, focusing on positive thoughts and images, there by generating emotions linked to well-being. Pleasure plays an important role in the body: it is the engine of vital behaviors for the individual, both about supply than sexuality. On the neurophysiological level it is based on "reward circuit" connected to the limbic system, (Esch e Stefano 2004) that would work together with the punishment circuit. Dopamine and endorphins are the mediators that contribute to the perception of pleasure, along with GABA and serotonin. The same mediators that are involved in the strong experience of pleasure would also be associated with the same effect caused by drugs such as cocaine and heroin, enough to be called endogenous opioids. The pleasure would be a global experience: these substances, which our body is naturally equipped, would not only affect the mind creating a pleasant state of well-being, but also the body, through a stimulation of the immune system (Esch e Stefano 2004). Emotions flow in the body and tell what happens in the inner world, behind the physical and respiratory blocks (Lowen 2009). The fears of feeling, or to hear oneself and one's needs, are hidden. To free the breath, as in many visualization techniques and control of emotions, allows one to control the vegetative functions and to alter and therapeutically intervene on emotional states. Taking "care" of a patient in the true sense of the word, therefore, means never forgetting the human complexity. The challenge for professionals who deal with health is to create and develop the innovative intervention protocols that take into consideration this complexity, thus both the psychological aspects and the physical ones are considered, never forgetting, even for a while, the Cartesian dichotomy.

## THE BODY AND MIND PROJECT (B & M): THE THEORETICAL ASSUMPTIONS

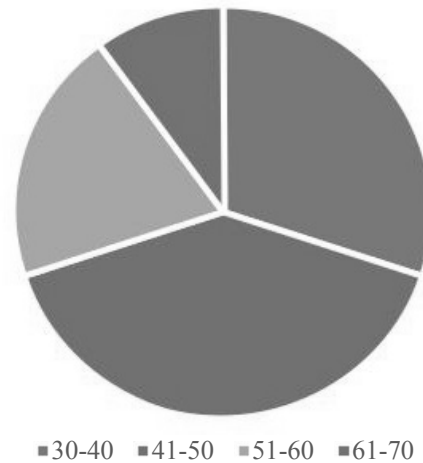
A greater number of researchers from different disciplines have begun to think of innovative projects where the whole person is involved.

B & M project has started with the objective of evaluating the role that a synergistic body and mind action can play in improving the perception of wellness and health state of a person. Some psychotherapeutic techniques, which do not obtuse the attention, such as deep relaxation techniques, guided fantasies, regressive therapies, non-deep hypnosis, potentiate the attention, in fact, as a result, there is a greater control of neuro-endocrine circuits, in particular the stress ones, besides an increased brain coherence, a better communication between the two hemispheres and greater adaptability (Bottaccioli 2005). In B & M project, according with the type of treated disease, specific body shiatsu stimulation have been associated with psychological techniques, guided fantasies and regressive hypnosis techniques.

These mental techniques have been used in order to focus the thought on specific inner images appropriate to the situation of the treated patient and to generate consequently positive emotions connected. In this way it was possible to make a synergistic activation and stimulation attached to the body and mind, resulting in regularization of sleep patterns, lowering the hormonal imbalances and heightening the immune system, with the specific objective of increasing the level of excellence of perceived well-being.

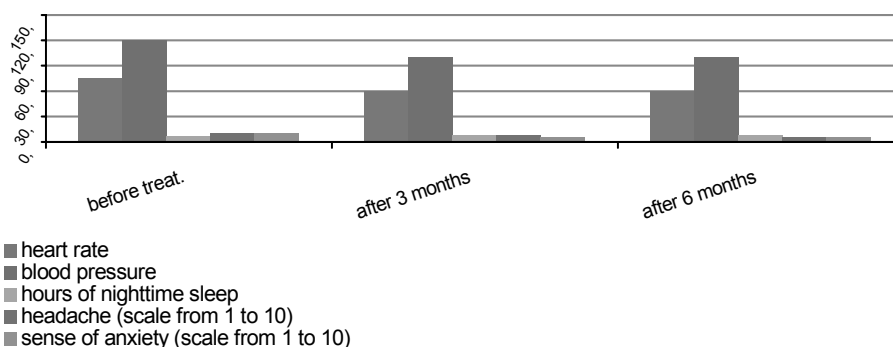
## B & M PROJECT – RESEARCH TECHNIQUES

The 'Body and Mind' project (B & M), coordinated by the writer assisted by a team (dr. Alessia Ceresoni, Marilena Pomante, Alessandro Raiola, Daniele Fiorenza) of professionals with different preparations integrated in a holistic view, contemplates the global care of the person. Within this project, a study has been carried out in January - June 2015 in the sites of Rome and Teramo. The 'B&M' research project moves from the conditions mentioned above, namely an uncomfortable emotional situation can turn into a physical discomfort.



**Figure 1.** Classification by age of the sample of research project

Through specific and focused body manipulation the target organs are stimulated, at the same time the patient receives a psychological and emotional stimulation. As regards the body stimulation we have chosen the discipline of Shiatsu, a manual practice that has its roots in ancient Eastern cultures, in Chinese medicine. Through precise pressure sequences on the body, typical of this discipline, the organ most involved in a situation of disease is stimulated and involved. The body manipulation techniques have been combined with psychological stimulations (relaxation, guided fantasies, hypnosis). The aim was to create the right mind and body synergies in order to restore energy and wellness. The research project involved a controlled sample of 100 people (Figure 1), aged between 30 to 70, 50% males and 50% females, of different education and profession. At the beginning of the research, the people involved were given short questionnaires with a Likert scale of three steps, the purpose of filling in the questionnaire, was to allow those involved in the research, and also the researchers, to test their sense of psychophysical adequacy perceived at the beginning, in particular on 3 different areas: A) perception of their physical appearance and its current impact on quality of life; B) perception of their psychological aspect and its current impact on the quality of life; C) perception of a specific difficulty, freely identified by the person.



**Figure 2.** Health improvement after the treatments

After, 6 treatments per person took place, divided into 4 phases. In phase number 1 the subjects has been offered a welcome ritual of introduction for the subsequent 3 phases. In phase number 2, the application of bodily manipulative techniques have allowed an intervention on the physical discomfort of the situations to be treated. Phase 3 was effected by psychological interventions: hypnosis, guided fantasies, relaxation therapies and regressive. For each individual a personalized intervention protocol has been applied. In stage 4, participants had the opportunity to have a personalized space of time during which to share their feelings. The 6 treatments were divided in time into 3 times, each lasting 2 days, with a temporal distance of 3 months. So, the reference period was of 6 months, and after that a 3-month follow up took place: all those involved in the research were invited for a two days long monitoring meeting, with the same 4 stages, and the questionnaire was delivered to them again to enable a re-assessment of the first three points.

After 6 months and 6 treatments, the subjects were asked to comment on their level of treatment and satisfaction, the improvement perceived of their quality of life, especially with reference to the main aspect considered, and perception of the level of self-knowledge. In an evaluation scale ranging from 'not at all satisfied', 'adequately satisfied', to 'very satisfied', 75% were 'very satisfied', and the remaining 25% amounted to a 'sufficiently fulfilled'. Interestingly, however, all the participants in the research found a general health improvement. This improvement was evaluated and compared to data expressed by measurement heart rate, blood pressure, and also the organic pain reported by the subject (detriment of the skull stretch - sacral, headaches and travail direction, as showed in the graphic above) (Figure 2). The 90% of the 25% who declared to be adequately satisfied, expressed the intention to repeat the experience. This research can not be considered exhaustive in its field, on the contrary it has a preliminary character, with results that can be used just as the first step for further studies on field.

However, a significant improvement in perceived wellbeing has been recorded, as well as the capacity of facing events evaluated stressful by the subject.

As to the question 'I think that the difficulty which I consider to have is...', and in relation to which it was necessary to choose between physical and psychological, it has been possible, after the talks of phase number 4 of treatment, to add levels of analysis and organize the 100 responses in 5 types of different comprehension of discomfort in relation to which all participants were asked to look at themselves in a scale of three levels, low, medium and high: ability to present oneself adequately eg: Job interview, relationships with partners, quarrels, misunderstandings, assimilation in a large group of people, liking of ones physical appearance, various performances (dance, sports, movement activities in general). In relation to these, the results of the 3 measurements are expressed in the graphics (Figures 3, 4, 5).

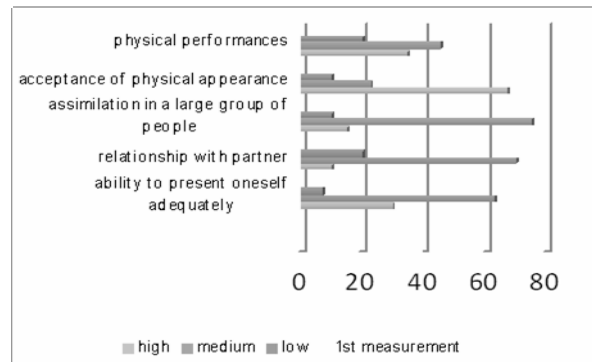


Figure 3. Result of 1<sup>st</sup> measurement

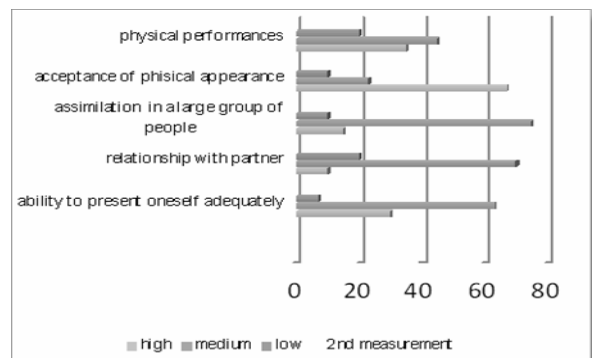


Figure 4. Result of 2<sup>nd</sup> measurement

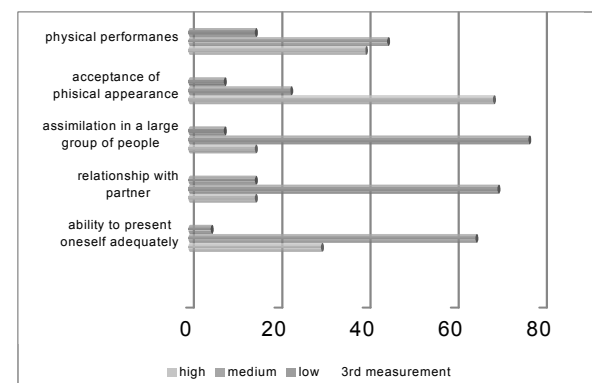


Figure 5. Result of 3<sup>rd</sup> measurement

## CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions of this work, preliminary but at the same time promising, however, merit further examination. They confirm the importance of teaching the adoption of an alternative way of coping, which allows the client to responsibly deal with an issue of life without having to turn to the use of methods which are harmful to health. It would seem therefore appropriate that a helping relationship, psycho-physical well-being oriented, should at least take account of neuropsychological and strategic dynamics linked to neural processes which give the base for individual or collective learning mechanisms and empathy that can be appropriately stimulated. The functional identity of the body that thinks and the mind that feels, "Body and Mind zones", is circular, recursive, but at the same time unique

for each individual. As mentioned in the introduction, "each person is a unique universe and the body is the place where mind and body meet in a unique and unrepeatable alchemy" (Spurio 2011, 2015). The fascinating exploratory trip throughout the borders and territories of the mind and the body is just getting started.

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