

# Integrative Mental Health: Mind-Body-Spirit and Beyond

Holistic medicine has long touted the “mind-body-spirit” philosophy as the supreme method of understanding and treating various troubles, from physical sickness to emotional disturbance. To be fair, this is a very good maxim by which we can understand and address a variety of human struggles. Numerous people have found profound change with this focus, and attended to aspects of their lives that they never knew were connected to the whole of their being, and their happiness. However, there are other aspects of human existence that are relevant to the field of integrative mental health care, if not healthcare in general. The “mind-body-spirit” idea fails to incorporate, or adequately address, several other factors involved in the pantheon of human endeavors and experience.

Simply stated, the “mind-body-spirit” view takes into consideration the interrelationships between our mental state (emotional, cognitive), our physical state, and our spiritual selves (to include religion, connection to a higher power or force, purpose and meaning). This approach has been seen in various ancient cultures, from ancient China, Greece, and Native American culture, to a plethora of new age information and practices. Traditional practices such as yoga and meditation, as well as acupuncture demonstrate this practice very well, as who hasn't felt in a better mental and emotional state when having a massage? Meditation, ever increasingly, has been found to be a clinically significant treatment for stress and emotional disorder. Spirituality, in some form, has been around about as long as humans and their ancestors have existed. Connection to that which is larger than us has guided human beings into unbelievable achievement and growth. Out of this comes religion, which becomes the organized form of spirituality. Ancient philosophers lauded the power of the mind to create realities and alter the experiences we have in our day to day lives, to turn something mundane into the profound. The events we experience become less important when our perception and beliefs about the event is taken into consideration. This ancient advice became Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy.

As previously stated, our mental, physical, and spiritual selves are only part of our being. Culture has, and always will, play a profound role in shaping who we are, what we do, and what we care about. Culture, as it relates to mental health, is a permeating factor in how we perceive the world, the behaviors we engage in, and our expression of ourselves in society. Culture also plays a major role in our development, our story. The far reaching impact of culture must be considered in terms of our humanness and being. Culture in this case could be regional, subgroup culture, or a culture long abandoned or disintegrated.

We are born into nature, and thus we will be returned. This phrase, and its many iterations, demonstrates the fact that we are creatures of nature, and that we have a special place among all of nature's creations. Take our relationship with animals. Animals bring extraordinary love

and companionship to the lives of human beings, and have been with us along every step of our common journey. It has been proven, again multiple ways, that engagement in nature and with nature has exceptional benefits for emotional and mental stability and growth. It's no accident that indigenous cultures, the happiest cultures on the planet, spend much time and have much devotion for the land.

Mind-Body-Spirit does not capture the extremely high importance placed on social relationships. We are formed through our social interactions, first with our parents and caregivers, and then into the relationships we choose and nurture, and into the families we create. Our social self is perhaps one of the most important aspects of our being. Consider the research available on how those that are lonely tend to live shorter, and certainly less happy, lives. We cannot survive without adequate social interactions, and being part of a group of people. Consider the new technologies for a moment. This has proven to add a different, previously unknown, to our day to day lives. We now carry two social selves, one of the physical world, and one of the online world. How do these two interact? Are they different or the same?

There are many ways that one could dissect and separate the "mind-body-spirit" idea. As we discover the various levels of consciousness, and the power of substances and practices to bring us into new depths of mental activity, can we call this part of the "mind," or do we have something completely different here? We constantly interact with multiple systems throughout the day, from our larger society to our family system. These systems have very important interrelationships and affects on the person. How are we to understand these in terms of health and wellness?

True integrative mental health care addresses all these topics, and more, depending on the individual. This implies that good, holistic care involves looking at the whole person, and everything that they bring to their life and the lives of others. One doesn't have to be a scholar to understand that traditional methods of mental health care are inadequate. More and more people suffer from clinical emotional disorders. More and more people find themselves unhappy with their life, living with a persistent sense of dissatisfaction and disillusionment. The task for a practitioner, of any kind, is to believe that we are whole people, and that all of us, every self we carry, is just as important as the others.

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### Summary

Holistic and integrative care has long touted "Mind-Body-Spirit" as the gateway to happiness and well being. Although not wrong, there is increasing literature and evidence that there are more factors to consider. Elements of human existence such as culture, consciousness, nature, relationship, and systems are just as worthy of consideration and conversation. True integrative

mental health care must have these elements for holistic assessment and treatment in order to give clients the best care.

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#### References

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