



## Remedyng the Neglect of the Body in Contemporary Psychotherapy

A Review of

*Minding the Body: The Body in Psychoanalysis and Beyond*

by Alessandra Lemma

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Over the last several decades, the practice of psychotherapy in the Western world has been focused upon the cognitive functioning of the patient's mind as the cause of psychological symptoms and psychopathology. Concern with the influence of the body on the mind has been neglected. Consequently, clinical methods to identify and modify cognitive phenomena have predominated (Mahoney, 1977) over forms of psychotherapeutic intervention which consider somatic experiences and symbolic meaning of these upon mental processes. The related trend towards evidence-based practices has made cognitive-behavioral psychotherapy the orientation of choice owing to its scientifically validated efficacy (e.g., Hofmann, Asnaani, Vonk, Sawyer, & Fang, 2012).

Medical practice—where the body is of primary concern—relies upon a biopsychosocial model which privileges conscious control and stress management. The use of cognitive-behavioral methods has hence become the primary approach in health-care settings where somatization, illness anxiety, body dysmorphism, poor outcomes to medical treatments, and unexplained medical symptoms are commonly observed. The unconscious basis and developmental influences of these somatic disturbances are not appreciated as relevant.

While the recent addition of mindfulness practices to these cognitive techniques has included consideration of the body, these approaches are invariably limited. The data substantiating cognitive therapies have methodological flaws which are rarely mentioned. Many clinical phenomena are difficult to measure due to the complex idiosyncrasies of human personality which includes mind/body interactions. As well, research exploring the benefits of these treatments compare treatment groups to nontreatment groups and do not usually compare different psychotherapy orientations (Holmes, 2002; Westen & Bradley, 2005).

Alessandra Lemma has remedied the neglect of the body in contemporary psychotherapy with her collection of thoughtful essays. Following the Foreword by British psychoanalyst Donald Campbell, the work consists of an introduction and nine chapters that investigate “individual body” related issues (cosmetic surgery, necrophilia, virtual reality, transsexuality, the meaning of hair, and the relation of the patient to the analyst’s toilet). Clinical material from psychoanalytic treatments provided by the author illuminates the material. A tenth essay considers “social body” related issues with discussion of the make-over phenomenon in reality television shows (Lemma has been a consultant to these programs).

The theoretical basis applied largely relies upon the thinking of Freud and the object relations of psychoanalytic theorists yet goes beyond psychoanalysis to include findings from neuroscience and sociology.

Lemma bases her insights upon four fundamental concepts. These are: (1) embodiment shapes the mind (mind and body are intricately connected); (2) the analytic therapist will have somatic countertransference to the patient’s clinical material—sensate and emotional experiences which are an essential aspect of the psychotherapeutic dynamic; (3) the patient and the analytic therapist function as visual objects for each other—there is a strong gazing relationship which is an important aspect of the psychotherapy, and (4) the relationship with the primordial maternal body is a determinant the patient’s body-self experience and separation difficulties from the mother’s body in early life contributes to psychological symptoms.

This book would be of considerable benefit to those involved in all aspects of mental health care delivery as well as those in the criminal justice and educational institutions. The work discusses how human development evolves from attachment-based interactions with caregivers that are sensorimotor in nature and thus shape the structure of the mind and its relationship to the body. These schemas are emotionally laden and if optimal adjustment to differentiation occurs this will promote body self-regulation and integration of the mind and the body. The inability to accede to living in reality creates fantasized mental structures which can corrupt the experience of the body. Failures of the maturation process due to misattuned attachment leads to failures in the mind/body interactions.

The author notes that the writings in this volume are situated in the particularities of the current sociohistorical period. Phenomena familiar to us all are considered such as cosmetic surgery, virtual reality, transsexuality and its medical treatment and reality television. As well, topics not usually included in discussions of psychotherapy are reflected upon—the body of the analyst, the analyst’s toilet (restroom used by the patient and/or the analyst), and the unconscious meaning of hair. These theoretical discussions are richly illuminated with clinical case material.

The essay on cosmetic surgery exemplifies the timeliness of the topics considered. Lemma cites the “staggering” worldwide increase in the number of cosmetic surgery procedures performed in the last several years. She points out that the mental state of the potential cosmetic surgery candidate and the unconscious meaning which such a medical procedure signifies is an essential data point which is crucial to assess prior to surgical intervention—many of these patients have significant psychological disturbances. The pursuit of body modification can serve a defensive function to escape from unremitting unconscious psychological conflicts and immature states of mind which cause intractable

psychic pain and for which no other solution can be found. While many patients benefit from cosmetic surgery, many might be better off with psychotherapy prior to such interventions. Although presurgical psychological screening for invasive medical procedures and psychotherapy referrals have as of late become prominent in medical settings (i.e., Block & Sarwer, 2013), the availability of these practices is not consistent.

The only limitation of this book is that there was no conclusion provided to the essays. It would have added to the work if the author had briefly summarized the issues considered. As well, future directions for understanding these clinical situations would have been of interest.

This collection is a much needed contribution to the psychotherapy literature. Lemma's work expands psychotherapy integration (Erskine & Moursund, 2011) to suggest that the optimal provision of psychotherapy requires that the subject of the body be given equal importance to that of the mind. Her book also explores the many possibilities inherent in the provision of psychoanalytic psychotherapy for body-related psychological issues.

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