

“Get your mind, body back together” from the Democrat and Chronicle, May 12, 1998

When I was very little, I drew the human figure as a large circle enclosing other circles, dots and lines representing eyes, nose and mouth. Perpendicular lines stuck out of the bottom of the large circle; these were legs. At that stage, I did not notice that there was no body.

Today, I see that as the perfect illustration of how most of us experience ourselves: ambulatory heads.

Your body is like your car, right? It gets you around; you don't notice it unless it needs fuel or starts bothering you with pain; then you go to the M.D. mechanic to fix it. It doesn't *know* anything. It isn't the container of your thoughts, feelings, memories, dreams—for *you*, right?

Eighteen years of doing therapeutic bodywork and my own struggle to inhabit my body teach me that the body-mind split is false. I've experienced touching a foot and having the client remember being in the incubator after birth, for that's the only place she was touched then. My hands on a back can feel when thoughts are dissociated and when they're connected.

I've come to the point where I'm amazed at the amazement with which people greet the notion that their bodies store memories and feelings and have something to say. We have a history, in both secular and religious philosophies, of discounting or vilifying the body. Elevating “mind” or “spirit” over body is so embedded in our culture that we are blind to how this affects our lives.

We're so divorced from ourselves that it's common for someone on my massage table to not know what they're feeling. I have to tell them that trembling and light sweat is fear, for instance, or that stopping breath is a way to stop feelings—a way not to notice that you have an experiencing body. Because the scientific model is part of my world view, I'm glad that science in the last two decades is coming to an explanation of the physiology of the “bodymind” connection.

Like I did, you probably learned about the nervous system as an electrical system consisting of brain and nerve cells which conducts messages to and from the body. Now new technologies are enabling scientists to discover a “second nervous system,” as Dr. Candace Pert (who was chief of brain biochemistry at the National Institutes of Health) puts it.

Every cell in our bodies is covered with protein molecules called receptors, to which floating information molecules (most of which are neuropeptides) attach, telling the cell what to do. Perhaps you've had direct experience with this type of interaction as an “endorphin high.”

What amazed scientists was the discovery that different body systems create and respond to each other's messengers. Immune system cells secrete endorphins and stress hormones, and have receptors for brain peptides. Did you ever have a “gut feeling” that turned out to be intelligent? Your intestines are dense with receptors and neuropeptides.

Did you ever “know something in your bones”? Your bone marrow produces white

blood cells covered with “every neuropeptide receptor we could find in the brain,” as Dr. Pert says. “The point I'm making is that your brain is extremely integrated with the rest of your body, at a molecular level, so much so that the term *mobile brain* is an apt description of the psychosomatic network through which intelligent information travels from one system to the other.”

For me the real gem of this research on neuropeptides is how they function to carry emotions and memory. Dr. Eric Kendall and his Columbia University research team have found that the basis for memory is a biochemical change at the receptor level, not only in the brain, but throughout the body, especially between nerves and ganglia. Ganglia are bundles of cell bodies distributed near the spinal cord, along pathways to internal organ's and to the skin's surface. This helps explain why, when I touch a client, an old memory or emotion may surface. As a matter of fact, Dr. Pert's book is entitled Molecules of Emotion. Because of her research, she concludes that the biochemicals of emotion exist throughout the body.

“The body is the unconscious mind!” she writes. “Repressed traumas caused by overwhelming emotion can be stored in a body part, thereafter affecting our ability to feel that part or even move it.”

Where we can't feel or move in our bodies indicates where we can't move in our lives. When we integrate the awareness that comes to what was unconscious, we get smarter, more creative, more empowered. We need the word “bodymind” to describe what we are so we can grow out of a three-year-old's drawing into full embodied human beings.