

Editorial: Introduction to the Journal

Traditional healers often use techniques common to self-regulations strategies common to mind-body medicine. Rituals that facilitate access to unconscious processes and use hypnotic states of consciousness predate modern medicine and can be tracked to early shamanistic practice. However, modern Western medicine can reduce complex psycho-physiological processes to overly simple or concrete concepts. Worse, human suffering can be relegated to simple and materialistic definitions that ignore the complexity of human social context. The concepts may be flawed, but if the concepts gain political and economic strength, it will hold sway in the face of good science that proves it wrong. An example of this is the debate regarding the serotonergic theory of depression. Irving Kirsch conducted a meta-analysis of antidepressants using the freedom of information act to access buried data from pharmaceutical research. His findings question the effectiveness of antidepressants and question the use of “science” behind the multibillion-dollar industry.

Theories become popular and, often driven by sociological and economic forces, lead to obdurate scientific positions and perspectives. Often, these perspectives are not even supported by good science as is seen in recent criticism of the DSM-5. When we interpret traditional healing through the filter of Western science, there is always the danger of missing something essential and important that is provided by the indigenous perspective.

Science often advances by grappling with anomalies, that is, persistent experiences and observations that do not fit contemporary paradigms. It advances by scientists thinking outside the box, presenting more comprehensive theories and breaking beyond the limits of old theories. For example, Einstein's insights into physics did not dispose of Newton but rather contextualizes the old ideas in a broader framework.

We must be careful to try and look at the world with a fresh perspective. Personal experience is important; and a phenomenological approach to acquiring knowledge and developing new theories is paramount. To truly appreciate our

life, mental health, and our potential, we need to take a broad perspective that incorporates a variety of methods and scholarly thought. That's why other subjects like philosophy, religion and art are included in a liberal education. However, it is true that we can be duped by our senses. Luckily, science gives us a strong method to protect ourselves. Clear thinking is necessary in order to not jump to conclusions; clear thinking is also necessary to not miss what is right in front of our eyes. While science provides a systematic method to advance our knowledge of the world, we must remember that our assumptive worlds can blind us to reality.

Traditional views are often dismissed out of hand by modern medicine because they do not fit contemporary paradigms. Traditional views often involve magic, spirits and other religious phenomena that are assumed to have no room in our modern world. However, perhaps a respectful attention to traditional views can lead to new understanding. Careful analysis of cultural differences can offer challenges to our beliefs or they can just be dismissed. Sometimes, the dismissal of traditional views as barbaric, primitive, or silly is nothing more than the political prejudice inherent in Western colonial practices, the imposition of Western markets on Third World domains.

The purpose of this journal is to provide a forum for quality scientific papers and scholarly work. Also, its intention is to present traditional views as having something to offer. Perhaps considering the limitations of modern science and respectfully considering traditional views, not as primitive, barbaric or silly, but reasonable, will do us a favor.

This initial issue of *Traditional Healing and Critical Mental Health* presents three papers that look at traditional healing in a modern context. They are followed by a section called "Wisdom of the Elders." This will be a section dedicated to providing a voice for traditional healers themselves, as well as those who have dedicated their life to the study of traditional healing and global mental health.

The first article looks at "in-between healers," or healers that appropriate non-western practices in western healing contexts. By tracing the healer's cultural journey in

relationship to the culture of the healing art itself, the politics of authenticity, expropriation and belonging are examined as the paper describes cultural commonalities shared by these culturally “in-between” healers. The second article examines the value of a traditional, “animistic” worldview for psychological growth, exploring how a traditional perspective can counter limitations in medical materialism and can foster a view of the universe that promotes psychological wellness. The third article examines the popularity of mindfulness in modern medicine and suggests that its value as a therapeutic may be more robust if it is not extirpated from its traditional cultural context, that is, by re-integrating the key elements of the Buddhist path to well-being.

The final section of the journal is our “Wisdom of the Elders” section edited by Michel Ferrari. This issue offers four short pieces by preeminent scholars in the field. First we have Joseph E. Trimble (Connecting to the Spiritual and the Sacred Through the Straight Path), followed by Clemmont E. Vontress (Traditional Healing Research in West Africa). The third piece is by Uwe P. Gielen (Healers and Counselors in Buddhist Ladakh), followed by a piece by Suman Fernando (Some Thoughts and Reflections on Therapy and Healing Across Cultures). The section is completed by an interview on the nature of suffering with a Buddhist priest by Hyeyoung Bang (Buddhism and *Up* (Karma): A Buddhist Priest’s Wisdom to Help Suffering). Future issues plan on offering interviews and reflective pieces by scholars as well as individuals who promote traditional views of healing around the globe.

Our hope is to offer an open-handed and creative venue to examine traditional healing and its value for modern medicine. We would like to find a place for new ideas, challenges to scientific paradigms, and traditional paradigms alike, and advocate for mental and scientific rigour. We will gather contributions from a wide range of academic areas, including psychology, medicine, anthropology, philosophy, and comparative religion. Through critical thinking and phenomenological respectability, we might stimulate a synthesis of ideas. Perhaps in the tradition of Hegel, our future can

involve old and new ideas that come together and advance our concepts and practice of mental health on a global scale.