

## In the Theater of the Body

Helene Cæcilie Mørck\*

\*To whom correspondence should be addressed; tel: 45-20372555, e-mail: [helenemoerck3@hotmail.com](mailto:helenemoerck3@hotmail.com)

This article addresses the body in schizophrenia. I feel that it is an overlooked area. Some doctors approach the disease as an expression of a biological or chemical imbalance in the brain. There still seems to be a dualism between physical and mental illness prevalent in medical science. In medical interviews, the focus is on symptoms and how to fix the problem; maybe this is because psychiatrists rely so heavily on medication; what is missing is the more profound question about the body's response to the disease.

When a psychiatrist observes a patient's body, it is regarding behavior pattern, what you can see with the naked eye like gesture, posture, facial expressions, eye gaze, and movement. Still, they do not attend to what is happening inside the body, which creates an imbalance in the healing process.

In this article, I speak of the body. I have been an observer and participator of schizophrenia for many years. My background is as a professional dancer, and then I have schizophrenia.

I have always been deeply rooted in the body and trusted my kinesthetic awareness. I know from deep within that the body remembers emotional and physical stress. I have trusted the body more than my mind. I know that there is much to learn if we listen to the body. The bodily experience of having schizophrenia has its own rules. The question is. How do we cope with the body with a distorted mind? And further: How does the body change in that process when this strange state called schizophrenia takes over?

All the attention seems to go to the head. The energy transfers to the mind to handle all the chaos playing out there. What if we were to picture this and draw a mental image of the body? How would it look? The head would be enormous and rested on several crutches strategically placed at the forehead, neck, and chin since the head is too heavy to hold its weight. The head would make the shoulders hunch over, and arms, legs, and torso would

be skinny. The feet would be hovering slightly above the ground.

Often, patients with schizophrenia seem to forget or neglect their bodies. It becomes something they carry around like excess weight. They are out of sync—energy disrupts. Body sensations often heighten, but there is no free flow. Frequently there is a sense of body distortion. The different body parts seem to be out of place like someone has rearranged the body's structure. You can experience a kind of body dysmorphia where a body part can look morphed or displaced, blurry, and even enlarged. The manifestation of this sensation feels real.

When hospitalized, I have observed myself and other patients who have schizophrenia. The state of our bodies is heartbreaking. The body seems paralyzed, frozen, and quite stagnated. Our organism is traumatized. The brain appears to disconnect from the body, and muscular apathy occurs. Can we invoke the muscle memory to heal again, or are we paralyzed in this state?

The emotional memory of anxiety, sadness, and despair has manifested itself in the posture and expression of the body due to the long-term effect of schizophrenia. The body has become a storehouse of these traumatic memories. Trauma manifests itself as a construction in the body as a restriction of your present self, preventing the body from functioning freely and efficiently. When you experience trauma, you dissociate as a defense mechanism. You lose control and the agency of your body. The body overloads by remembering too much and enacts these patterns in different situations. The outward symptoms manifest as; tics, restlessness, shaking, and apathy. The inner symptoms could be muscular tension, headache, and elevated blood pressure.

Since I was eight, I have been dancing, and schizophrenia has followed me just as long. One of my most important coping mechanisms has been dancing. It has been possible to express all the different emotions I was going through and stay connected and grounded with

my body. Being creative and showing my world in choreography has helped me keep my sanity and made it possible to display my subjective world to an audience without words.

Dance has helped me manage schizophrenia on many different levels. The voices and thoughts had manifested as helpers when I was in the studio, improvising and finding movement. The voices helped me with a sense of direction in space and the different movements I tried out; they would guide me and tell stories from within. Even when hospitalized, I have used dance as a tool. If I have been too sick to dance, using different dance techniques to reconnect to my body has been helpful.

I feel that too much focus is on the mind in treating schizophrenia. I believe we can reclaim our physical and mental stability by working through and with the body. For many patients, it would be beneficial to relearn that they have a body, relearning not by visualization but by moving the physical body in space. Reengaging with the body will help make them aware of their mind-body connection, which has been lost.

Dance therapy would be a place to start this journey of awareness. Dance therapy can help restore body image and simultaneously gain insight into the pattern of the body and expand the movement vocabulary.

Movement is the language of the brain. It creates a new pathway and moves you forward. It is impossible to stagnate due to neuroplasticity, meaning the brain changes and adopts new patterns when you move. You will always move towards the future, not the past. Thereby movement is a perfect tool for changing your muscle memory, recoding your posture, and normalizing the body's function. Reconnecting and grounding your body will make connecting to the outside world more manageable.

Further, you will understand, feel, and be better at listening to your body. That will help you communicate emotions and find new ways of coping with problems. It will also ground you firmly in reality, a problem many patients with schizophrenia struggle with.

Many patients who have schizophrenia have bad body postures. They close themselves off to the world by folding their body inwards like a flower that closes for the evening. Still, the difference is that the flower will fold its petals out in the morning, whereas the person with schizophrenia will remain closed. Regaining body awareness and learning to embrace the space would benefit patients. They should empower themselves and understand that schizophrenia should not take over their bodies but that they are in command.