

PROMOTING HEALTH AND WELL-BEING THROUGH A SENSE OF CONNECTEDNESS

**C. Sperry Andrews, Adjunct Research Associate
Mind Science Foundation
San Antonio, TX**

The subjective experience of feeling consciously connected with others and with our environment or that which is larger than ourselves has been found to promote physical and mental health, or well-being.¹ Until recently, connectedness was considered unsuitable for scientific study. With improved instrumentation and new scientific interest, exploration has begun. So far, a sense of connectedness appears to be more fundamental than is commonly recognized.

Over the past thirty years a significant number of studies have documented some measures of connectedness and its effects. Noncontact therapeutic touch, which is now used in hospitals worldwide, has been well documented. This procedure involves moving one's hands close to a patient while maintaining a strong sense of connectedness and usually an intention to heal. It has been shown to reduce pain and anxiety and improve the rate of wound healing when patients could not have known when or even if they were receiving treatment.² The research evidence suggests a significant connectedness between participants.

Other controlled experiments have been conducted in which participants were isolated from one another such that no known means of sensory interaction between them was possible. Results have shown a wide variety of subtle communication anomalies. Consistent changes in EEG patterns have been recorded when distant persons attempted to remotely communicate with others.^{3,4,5} Some studies have measured congruent autonomic reactions between distant participants.⁶ Over forty studies have indicated that the prayers and meditations of widely separated individuals are significant in promoting health and beneficial behavior in and for others.⁷ The effect of remote attention on biological as well as electronic systems has proven significant in over five hundred studies.⁸ Participants isolated from one

another have shared their thoughts and experiences in controlled experiments, and a meta-analysis of 39 similar studies yielded a probability of these results occurring by chance alone of less than one part in a trillion.⁹

Selective attention may play a role in these findings. Studies in cognitive psychology suggest that attention provides the glue that integrates separate things into unities.¹⁰ Controversial neuroscience supports this, suggesting that consciousness may actually be constructed out of an attention-induced synchrony, causing the brain's perceptual centers to connect information that would otherwise remain disjointed.¹¹

Attention may thus serve as a connecting link for people conventionally shielded from one another. To this effect, a series of tests was conducted by the Mind Science Foundation yielding significant results.¹² The autonomic nervous system activity of one person was strongly correlated with the focused attention and intention of a conventionally isolated second person. A one-way closed circuit video system allowed for the periodic observation of a volunteer by an experimenter. A series of volunteers were monitored for autonomic nervous system reactions during both observation and non-observation (control) periods. Volunteers did not know when or for how long they were observed, and results remained undisclosed within automated computer memory until each stage of the study was complete ($p=0.018$, two-tailed).

In another group of studies, volunteers attempting to influence their own physiological activity were only somewhat more effective than experimenters, who, in a directly comparable test, attempted to influence a similar series of volunteers from a conventionally shielded and distant location. Both

(continued on page 19)

studies utilized identical techniques and a relatively large number of individuals. As remarkable as it may seem, a nonsignificant difference was found between remote and self-influence ($p=0.08$, two tailed). Overall, remote influence by a second participant was nearly as effective as self-influence.¹³ Not only do we seem to be connected with each other and our environment, but these results raise the larger question of whether humanity shares a common consciousness.

The scientific evidence suggests that we do share an interconnected rapport with others and our environment. However, this seems to contradict our everyday experience of separateness. One possible implication is that humanity may be suffering from a form of dissociation. This may even be purposeful. For instance, we might be maintaining a sense of separateness as protective camouflage to avoid conscious awareness of what may seem to be too self-effacing or too vast to assimilate as useful or meaningful. Could such self-limiting behavior be considered a form of denial, motivated by fear? In other words, are we attempting to control our fear and circumstances by limiting or denying what we can know in predetermined ways?

"Now the true and lawful goal of the science is none other than this: that human life be endowed with new discoveries and powers."

—Francis Bacon

If so, how did such self-limiting behavior originate? Perhaps it began with an evolutionary adaptation, one that has saved us in the past from treating other animals and plants as aspects of "ourselves." Such sympathy might have curtailed our lives because we would tend not to feed upon that which we perceived as ourselves. The nature of self-regulated organisms may have inherently demanded individualized psychophysiological terrains under most if not all circumstances. For these

reasons our psychic diversity may tend to eclipse our sense of unity.

Whatever the case, a sense of connectedness has been shown to improve individual health and well-being.¹ Others have gone further by asking whether meditators practicing a sense of connectedness could promote global health and well-being. To date, over 40 studies conducted within a period of 14 years by 42 psychologists, statisticians, and physicists at Maharishi International University in Fairfield, Iowa, have affirmed this to be a strong probability.¹⁴

Socially and internationally, humanity may be maintaining a dissociative disorder analogous to the multiple personality disorder (MPD) of psychiatry. Bennett Braun, M.D., director of Associated Mental Health Services in Chicago and author of one of few authoritative texts on MPD¹⁵ recognizes two principle causes in individuals: an inborn biological-psychological capacity to dissociate that is usually identified by an excellent responsiveness to hypnosis; and repeated exposure to an inconsistently stressful environment, in which one receives love and abuse for the same behavior at unpredictable times. The result is that many poorly related personality structures develop that are characterized as defensively autonomous and symbolically "two-dimensional". Remarkably, the various personality structures carry distinct, measurably different physiological and medical predispositions. Often they draw upon unique knowledge bases, while there is usually one personality overseeing or caretaking the others. Ultimately, they all seem to fear integration as it connotes loss and death instead of enrichment. Such knowledge of MPD at the individual level raises issues that may pertain to a possible greater human dissociative disorder.

Global stability may depend upon humanity as a whole confronting what may be a dissociated state. Ironically, strong cooperative and collaborative efforts are needed now to solve our severe global problems. Perhaps, if we innately possess an integrative synergy, it may now be awakening to these challenges as they are brought to our joint "attention" through the world press. Finally, it may be possible to encourage the vitality of a collective consciousness and survival instinct, should they exist, by responsibly focussing public awareness. For example, an international television documentary designed to

(continued on page 20)

Promoting Health and Well-Being through a Sense of Connectedness

(continued from page 19)

explore the evidence for a global consciousness might help achieve this. Since healing has proved to be most effective when the healer, the patient, and the environment are experienced as "fundamentally one",¹⁶ can we promote global health and well-being by individually developing a sense of connectedness?

References

1. Ornish, D., Brown, S.E., Scherwitz, L.W., Billings, J.H., Armstrong, W.T., Ports, T.A., McLanahan, S.M., Kirkeeide, R.L., Brand, R.J., and Gould, K.L. (1990). Can lifestyle changes reverse coronary heart disease? *Lancet*, 336, 129-33.
2. Wirth, D.P. (1989). Unorthodox healing: The effect of noncontact therapeutic touch on the healing rate of full thickness dermal wounds. *Proceedings of Presented Papers: 32nd Annual Parapsychological Association Convention*. Durham, N.C.: Parapsychological Association, 251-268.
3. Hearne, K.M.T. (1977). Visually evoked responses and ESP, *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*, 49, 648-657.
4. May, E.C., Luke, W.W., Trask, V.V., & Frivold, T.J. (1990). Observation of neuromagnetic fields in response to remote stimuli, *Proceedings of Presented Papers: 33rd Annual Parapsychological Association Convention*, Washington, D.C. 168-185.
5. Orme-Johnson, D., Dillbeck, M.C., Wallace, R.D., & Landrith III, G.S. (1982). Intersubject EEG coherence: Is consciousness a field? *International Journal of Neuroscience*, 16, 203-209.
6. Braud, W.G. & Schlitz, M. (1989). A methodology for the objective study of transpersonal imagery. *Journal of Scientific Exploration*, 3(1), 43-63.
7. Byrd, R.C. (1988). Positive therapeutic effects of intercessory prayer in a coronary care unit population. *Southern Medical Journal*, 81(7), 826-29.
8. Radin, D.I., & Nelson, R.D. (1989). Evidence for consciousness-related anomalies in random physical systems. *Foundations of Physics*, 20(1), 1499-1514.
9. Honorton, C., Berger, R.E., Varvoglis, M.P., Quant, M., Derr, P., Hansen, G.P., Schechter, E., & Ferrari, D.C. (1989). Psi Gansfield experiments using an automated testing system: An update and comparison with a meta-analysis of earlier studies. *Proceedings of Presented Papers: 32nd Annual Parapsychological Association Convention*, San Diego, CA.
10. Treisman, A., & Gelade, G. (1980). A feature integration theory of attention, *Cognitive Psychology*, 12, 97-136.
11. Barinaga, M. (1990). The mind revealed? *Science* 249, 856-858.
12. Braud, W.G., Shafer, D., & Andrews, C.S. (1990). Electrodermal correlates of remote attention: Autonomic reactions to an unseen gaze. *Proceedings of Presented Papers: 33rd Annual Parapsychology Association Convention*, Washington, D.C.
13. Braud, W.G. & Schlitz, M. (1983). Psychokinetic influence on electrodermal activity. *Journal of Parapsychology*, 47(2), 95-119.
14. Orme-Johnson, D.W., Dillbeck, M.C., Alexander, C.N., Chandler, H.M., & Cranson, R.W. (1989). Time series impact assessment analysis of reduced international conflict and terrorism: Effects of large assemblies of participants in the transcendental meditation and TM-sidhi program. *Proceedings of the American Political Science Association*, Atlanta, August, 2-40.
15. Braun, B. G. (1986) *Treatment of Multiple Personality Disorder*. Washington, D.C.: American Psychiatric Press.
16. Goodrich, J. (1976). Studies of paranormal healing. *New Horizons*, 2(2), 21-24.♦