

E D I T O R I A L

DECADE OF THE PERSON

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Approximately one decade ago, based on the writings of consumers and the research of Harding and her colleagues, I suggested in an editorial in the *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal* that the 1990s should be the decade of recovery. Someone recently asked me what this decade should be. I suggest that it be called “the decade of the person.”

Creating positive psychosocial experiences and reframing negative life experiences remain the staple of psychiatric rehabilitation practice and research. The person is the critical player when it comes to interpreting one’s own life experiences, and rehabilitation concepts such as readiness, goal setting, implementing goals, collaboration, support, acting in one’s own interest, and hope speak to the province of the person. Also, processes of the person’s mind, such as thinking, perceiving, willing, judging, and reasoning, play an important role in achieving rehabilitation outcomes. It is these concepts of the person as a whole that lead toward outcomes such as self-efficacy and empowerment.

Psychiatric rehabilitation deals with the person in an environmental context. The focus of change is as much or more on the environment than it is on the person. Unfortunately, however, when the person with a psychiatric disability is engaged in our practice and research, that person is viewed too often as primarily a product

of their biology, rather than as a person who can influence their biology as well as their environment.

Our noble pursuit to understand the functioning of the brain must not divert our attention from the equally important task of understanding the workings of the person as a whole. When the appeal of studying brain-behavior relationships becomes too reductionistic and singular in its petition to scientific objectivity, it seems in more ways than one a mindless pursuit. We seem to have forgotten the power of the person to impact not only his or her brain but also his or her ability to learn, develop, and recover. One of the great modern physicists of all time warned us years ago of the past dangers of relying solely on scientific objectivity:

It was difficult to find a place for many concepts of our language that had always belonged to its very substance, for instance, the concepts of mind, of the human soul or of life...life was to be explained as a physical and chemical process, governed by natural laws, completely determined by causality...Confidence in the scientific method and in rational thinking replaced all other safeguards of the human mind. (Heisenberg, 1958, p. 197–198)

When the field treats its consumers as if they are not people but primarily dysfunctional brains then we are promoting the absence of meaningful options and

self-determination and the presence of force and involuntary procedures. When the field recognizes the power of the person then its emphasis correctly reverts to how we can help that person change his or her life (and even his or her brain).

In the late 20th century we as a field “lost the person.” As we enter the new century it is time to regain our focus and help to unlock the full and unitive mysteries of the person.