The ‘lived body’ of a physiotherapist: A qualitative research exploring the construct and meaning of body awareness for a physiotherapist

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**Background**

In a therapeutic setting, the body of the physiotherapist plays an important role in constructing the therapeutic identity. Taking into account the holistic approach, this body should be seen as one that is influenced by interaction with the mind and the surrounding world. Dehaan\(^1\) speaks of a body that transcends the physical, because it is being lived and experienced. Instead of the conventional way of seeing it as ‘an object’, it is now more considered to be ‘a subject’. The aim of this study was to deepen the knowledge concerning the body experience of a physiotherapist. The incentive for the study was a curiosity about this phenomenon and a need for understanding.

**Results**

The findings consisted of four dimensions, each divide into different themes and respectively subthemes, as seen in figure 1. The first Dimension was ‘the construct of body awareness’ in which the different aspects regarding the bodily experience of the therapeutic population became clear. The dimension ‘Importance of body awareness’ explains why having an amount of body awareness is meaningful. The third dimension elaborates on influencing factors on body awareness. The last dimension ‘unawareness of body’ indicates that a physiotherapist not always pays attention to his body.

![Figure 1: The dimensions of ‘body awareness of a physiotherapist’ with main- and subthemes.](image)

**Method**

A qualitative research method was used for the research. Six physiotherapists, three holistic physiotherapists and three biomechanical physiotherapists, were selected and agreed to participate to the study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gauge the bodily experience of the physiotherapists. Each interview was audiotaped and transcribed ad verbatim. The data was analyzed using a modified version of the interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) divided in four steps.

**Conclusion**

This study gave rise to the discovery of bodily experiences that were important for a physiotherapist. Also became clear why an amount of awareness of the body proves necessary for both the therapist and the patient. For the future it is advisable to further explore the concept.

**References**