

The mindful body essay



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In the article, Scheper-Hughes and Lock examine the western beliefs associated with the mind and the body. In doing so they present three ways the body can be viewed, there is the individual body, social body and the political body. The individual body is the one that we all use in order to distinguish our individual self from others in society. The social body refers to how the body is represented as a symbol in order to think about nature, society and its cultures.

The political body is the one that refers to the group of people that make up a politically organized nation or state and the control of bodies in this group as a whole and as individuals. Concerning the individual body, the western belief is one that the mind and the body are separate entities and never considered as one, as shown by the dilemma of the medical students when it came to diagnosing the sick woman. Yet, even in psychoanalytically informed psychiatry and in psychosomatic medicine there is a tendency to categorize and treat human afflictions as if they were either wholly organic or wholly psychological in origin: "it" is in the body, or "it" is in the mind". When going to the doctor there are different ways to treat ailments depending on the symptoms. If I was to tell a medical professional that I was hearing voices and suffered of hallucinations and delusions I would be sent to a psychiatric doctor.

Depending on what is affecting the body in what way, it is treated differently. Although the mind is part of the body as a whole, it gets treated as two separate entities, but the majority of the time treatments include medications. Today, modern society seems to use medication to solve any ailment of the body even those that have to do with the mind. For example,

children who are unable to concentrate and are constantly in motion are diagnosed with ADHD and given medication to help.

We separate these two aspects that make up our body but still use terms as “ I”, differentiating ourselves from someone else in society. Sheper-Hughes and Lock provide many different examples of cosmology that contradicts the western thinking that the body is separate from the mind. For example, they mention the Buddhist cosmology that involves one emerging their body and mind with the universe, which can be done through meditation. It is evident that in the western cosmology people have a clear self-awareness that separates them from other people.

Most often, people think about themselves and their own interests instead of that of others in society. With that in mind, the cosmology of Japan is presented as one where the people believe that the family is the essential unit of society and comes before the individual. When it comes to the social body, people use the body to justify social values and arrangements. Some cultures point the finger at social tensions when it comes to sickness. Scheper-Hughes and lock state that the body politic is about the relationship between power and control.

The number of social constructs that are placed in order to manage the boundaries controls the body politic. The body politic is also used as a metaphor to refer to the government and how it functions like the human body. “ The body politic under threat of attack is cast as vulnerable, leading to purges of traitors and social deviants, while individual hygiene may focus

on the maintenance of ritual purity or on fears of losing blood, semen, tears, or milk”.

The body politic tries to protect its “ body”, all the individuals that make up the society, by getting rid of anything that puts in danger the stability of the society. For example, after the horrific incident of 9/11 the United States was desperately in the search for terrorists or anything that put the state in that dangerous position again. This shows how the government is acting like a body, using that metaphor of the body engaging in rituals to remain pure and clean.