

# Deconstructing the Language of Wellness

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# Confucius 孔夫子

- Chap. XXXVIII. The Master said, 'In teaching there should be no distinction of classes.'
- Chap. XXXIX. The Master said, 'Those whose courses are different cannot lay plans for one another.'
- Chap. XL. The Master said, 'In language it is simply required that it convey the meaning.'

*-Analects, 4<sup>th</sup> Century BCE*



# Wittgenstein

The appeal to the ordinary uses of language is an act of reminding us of how some term or expression is used *anyway* – to *show* its meaning rather than explain it.

What we say tells a lot about what we think.

<http://www.iep.utm.edu/ord-lang/>



# Arthur Kleinman

Illness does not exist apart from our understanding of it.



# Arthur Kleinman

*The Pain of Vulnerability and the Vulnerability of Pain*

*Howie's story*  
*(The Vulnerable Police Lieutenant)*



# Arthur Kleinman

*We are unwilling to take the meanings of pain as seriously as we take its biology.*

*-The Illness Narratives, p. 73*

# 3 Perspectives on the Body

- Individual Body – “lived experiences of the body-self”
- Social Body – “a natural symbol with which to think about nature, society, and culture”
- Body Politic -- “regulation, surveillance, and control of bodies (individual and collective) in reproduction and sexuality, in work and leisure, in sickness and other forms of deviance and human difference.”

Scheper-Hughes, Nancy and Margaret M. Lock 1987 The mindful body: A prolegomenon to future work in medical anthropology. *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 1(1): 6-14.



# Metaphor, Embodiment, and the Body Politic

- Bodies are more than biological entities
  - Carry social meaning
- Bodies are indicators of social inequality
- Embodiment – process by which we “literally incorporate biologically, the social and material world in which we live.”
  - How do social influences impact the physical body?

Horton, Sarah B. and Judith C. Barker 2010 Stigmatized Biologies: Examining Oral Health Disparities for Mexican American Farmworker Children and their Cumulative Effects. *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 24 (2).



# Example: Musculoskeletal Disorders

- **STUDY DESIGN:** Cross-national comparison of workers' compensation claims for back pain in Japan and the United States (US).
- **OBJECTIVES:** Why are back pain claim rates in Japan and the United States so disparate?
- **RESULTS:** The back pain claim rate in 1999 was 60 times higher in Washington state than in Japan. The disparity in rates for the other years in the study (1995-1998) was similar.
- **CONCLUSION:** Back pain is common among workers both in Japan and the United States, but there is no simple or necessary relationship between that symptom and how it manifests itself in one country or another. Rather, the symptom is protean in its social manifestations. As for what shapes those manifestations-or, more specifically, what causes the startling disparity in back pain claim rates between Japan and the United States-that is a puzzle. Various solutions to the puzzle are discussed, but it remains essentially unsolved.

Volinn E, Nishikitani M, Volinn W, Nakamura Y, Yano E., Back Pain Claim Rates in Japan and the United States: framing the puzzle, Spine (Phila Pa 1976). 2005 Mar 15;30(6):697-704.



# Back Metaphors

- Atlas: carried the world on his shoulders
- What does it mean to be “spineless”?
- “Out of sight, out of mind”
- Watch my/your back
- Stability, strength



# Other Body Metaphors

- Heart
- Lungs
- Brain
- Skin tone



# Table Talk

Four kinds of validity are at stake here: correspondence to reality, coherence, usefulness in the context of a person's problem, and aesthetic value. Each can take us in a different direction. For the clinician the third is what counts. An interpretation is valid if it is useful in the treatment of the patient to diminish disability and suffering. For the researcher the others may be equally or even more important.

*-Kleinman, The Illness Narratives, p. 74*



# Table Talk

- Correspondence to reality
- Coherence
- Usefulness in the context of a person's problem
- Aesthetic value

*Which of these validity tests will you consider in your work? Why?*



# Discussion



# Atticus Finch

*"First of all," he said, "if you can learn a simple trick, Scout, you'll get along a lot better with all kinds of folks. You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view [...] until you climb into his skin and walk around in it."*

*Harper Lee, To Kill a Mockingbird(3.85-87)*



# Thank you!

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