

The Body in Context: Social, Cultural, Historical and Political Perspectives

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Although there are times when I suspect that I am invisible, due to being ignored, it is most evident that the physiological part of our being is the most easily identified. And unfortunately this apparently most evident element of our existence is very likely the least valuable; value in my estimation being focused on the big-picture, long-haul rather than what I can get out of it on face value or whether I can look great on the red carpet. Worse yet, what I see is not always what I get. A xenophobic reaction to one who is different from me might cause me to run away from the one who would be my best friend. And yet we waste so much of all that we have and are on this complex arrangement of dirt and water which will one day cease to exist. One would think that we were all still teenagers in high school.

Why this inordinate preoccupation with our temporal habitation? Perhaps it is because we feel that it is all we have and when we lose it we will have nothing.

Of course there is no problem with taking care of this body of mine. And knowing it well is a step in the proper direction. Young's (2005) treatise on hers has me thinking differently about my own. She makes me wish there were such a tome from the male perspective. Perhaps that is for me or my cohorts to endeavor.

Having been a bit of jock in my teens I understand completely the throwing like a girl phenomenon. I recall watching the various Major League baseball pitchers go through their windup, delivery and follow through. In that day there was no Youtube.com and we were too poor to have anything but a nineteen-inch black and white TV. So, I had to rely on the network to give me the replay and occasionally a slow-motion to see how they did it. Luis Tiant seem to wink at the batter over his right shoulder and then come

whirling around almost 360 degrees. Talk about the soma! He used his whole body to throw. And this is what I emulated.

As boys we were mostly utilitarian about our bodies. When puberty set in we dwelt upon who had to shave; who had pubic hair. But most important, of course, as everybody knows, size is all that matters...when you're playing basketball or football that is. We never discussed feelings of course since this was not a manly thing to do. If anybody else had nocturnal emissions I'm sure they wouldn't talk openly about it. The whole point of the changes we were experiencing seemed to focus on somehow talking a girl into having sex. Most of the talk was from quite a distance from the particular girl who was the topic of discussion such that I am confident most of my male classmates graduated high school as virgins. And I think this was a good thing; everybody having sex with anybody else like dogs seems to have made our society no better than the polar opposite found in the Victorian age.

Though there are plenty of differences between a male and a female of the human species. Yet there are mostly commonalities. And in reality, every male, during gestation, was at one time very much a female. So, perhaps at the very least this can help men grasp the intricacies introduced by Young (2005) with respect to our bodies. The basic reproductive components are the only places where we differ. I too have mammary glands, though not so prominent. And I never worried about how they looked when (or if) I wore a sweater or T-shirt. I remember my sister showing me the exercises they did in girls PE; while standing they would thrust their hands out and pull them back in much the same motion of a pushup, mainly working the pectoral muscles. While they did this she said the teacher would have them chant: "we must, we must, we must

improve our bust; the bigger the better, the tighter the sweater; we must improve our bust". This seem hilarious to me as a budding pre-teen. It wasn't long after this that I began to appreciate the positive affect of Mrs. Coultas' regimen for the girls.

And now my sister is diagnosed with breast cancer. Reading Young (2005) I am much more in tune to her pain and frustration. It's bad enough to have a surgeon want to remove a part of your body; but to cut off that which is the most evident part of a woman is most gut wrenching. The closest I could come to feeling her pain would to have my testicles and/or penis removed. But this is hidden, and can go unnoticed. Still, deep inside, the soma knows that much is missing and not like it was meant to be. The utilitarian functions are of no consequence compared to the internal machinations which have been disrupted but the sudden absence of a part of the whole.

This part of our being which many, if not most, are oblivious to, is injured in ways that cannot be easily diagnosed much less healed. Berman quotes Masters (1989) speaking of that body within, whether it is awakened or not, it is no less impacted. And this is how a weary race of humanity continues to trudge along, barely alive in the evident part of their lives. Not knowing that they have an existence unseen by physical eyes, which, unbeknownst to them, they carry with them, like a long funeral procession. If they could but acknowledge and know this part of who they are they might have that life more abundant (Jesus, 30 BCE).

As my sister deals with her condition I am happy to see that she continues to engage in her Yogic exercises though she has admitted to not having much of an appetite. My hope is that she will keep her regimen of Yoga and a well-balanced diet.

The human body has been used and abused through the ages; human trafficking, sexual slavery, advertising which objectifies the body have all been used in most all cultures throughout history. Politicians sending the young to fight, be maimed and die could easily be deemed an exploitation of the highest order. All these perpetrated with little if any regard for the evident body and absolutely none for the whole person.

Unfortunately religion, as a component of some specific cultures, has also abused humanity. From virgin sacrifices (always a girl) to heavily clothing and cloistering away from the public, these practices are foisted upon ignorant people apparently for no other purpose but to satisfy a perverse and sadistic leader. In most cases this is seen by the outsider as the emblem of that way of faith such that the broader group is thought to be just like this aberration. From huckster televangelists to murderous mullahs, these fringe adherents cast a pall upon the majority. And then the idea of the laity versus the cleric as if we were not all of the same substance and endowed with the same possibilities. It all seems to be about one person or a small group controlling everybody else.

Happily there are a few places and peoples who strive to elevate humanity to the level which we deserve. My final reference may require a Facebook account to see. But it is worth the effort. Here you have a man working a miracle; and he is just giving a haircut and a shave. If he were in my neighborhood, I would be getting a haircut more often. I believe he is using his own higher self to reach out to awaken that of his customer. If only we might enliven each other so.

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