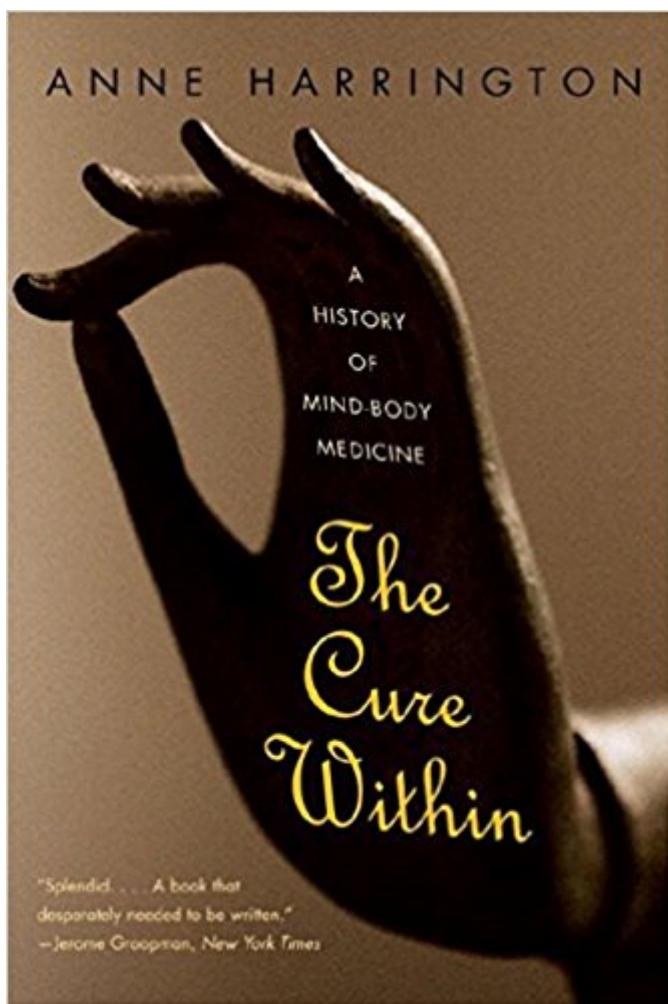


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# The Cure Within: A History Of Mind-Body Medicine



## Synopsis

"A splendid history of mind-body medicine...a book that desperately needed to be written." *Jerome Groopman, New York Times* Is stress a deadly disease on the rise in modern society? Can mind-body practices from the East help us become well? When it comes to healing, we believe we must look beyond doctors and drugs; we must look within ourselves. Faith, relationships, and attitude matter. But why do we believe such things? From psychoanalysis to the placebo effect to meditation, this vibrant cultural history describes mind-body healing as rooted in a patchwork of stories, allowing us to make new sense of our suffering and to rationalize new treatments and lifestyles. 36 illustrations

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Starred Review. Over the past several years, numerous medical reports have confirmed the connection between a positive mental attitude and good physical health. In this splendid book, Harrington (*The Placebo Effect*), chair of Harvard's history of science department, demonstrates that the belief in such a connection between mind and body is nothing new. She uses case studies and stories of healings to show how deeply embedded the idea of positive mental health is in the quest for physical health, as well as the ways that contemporary medicine has incorporated a focus on mind-body healing into its black bag. In her highly original analysis of this history from ancient times to the present, she discovers six different narratives about mind-body healing. These include the power of suggestion, the power of positive thinking and broken by modern life. In the body that speaks narrative, for instance, Harrington traces the idea that physical symptoms are the outward

expression of the mind's secrets, and that revealing those secrets can heal, whether the revelation takes place in the confession box or on the analyst's couch. Harrington's study offers a first-rate cultural history of an age-old but still much debated topic. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

“Harrington...has expertly mapped the transmission of mind-body ideas...showing us where they come from and why exactly they seem to have nine lives.” - Amanda Schaffer, *Slate*  
“This brilliant study concludes that 'mind-body medicine is a deeply storied world.'” - Barbara Fisher, *Boston Globe*  
“Splendid...Harrington's study offers a first-rate cultural history of an age-old but still much debated topic.” - Publishers Weekly, starred review

As a psychologist I found this book to be exceptionally informative and detailed regarding the historical roots of our current Western views of mind-body medicine. Despite other reviewers' comments stating that it was difficult to read or too heavy, I found the writing style to be exceptionally interesting, engaging, and sufficiently detailed to provide a very thorough history of the specific roots on which the author chose to focus. This is not the kind of subject that can be effectively covered in any less technical terms (I found very few overly technical terms myself) and with fewer "stories". It was well-organized and the history (despite being from disparate quadrants) flowed nicely. I thoroughly enjoyed it and learned a lot.

"The Cure Within: A History of Mind-Body Medicine" is a history of the narratives used to describe the mind-body healing connection. The five narratives are the power of suggestion, the body that speaks, the power of positive thinking, broken by modern life, healing ties, and eastward journeys. The chapter about the power of suggestion takes readers back to the beginning of this narrative, in which demonic possession needed to be cured by a priest's exorcism. Later, the religious nature was removed, and it was secularized into Mesmerism, the forerunner of hypnosis. Suggestion describes the healing wrought by an authority figure and accompanying rituals and theater. (Mesmerism used to take place in front of large public audiences...there wasn't TV back then, so it also functioned as entertainment.) The body that speaks is a common narrative. For example, say you have a patient who is stressed out all the time because of a busy schedule. The narrative goes that her body will become sick and develop a physical illness to force her to slow down. This narrative originated from religious confessions of sin in order to be forgiven. The body

must speak its truth and be acknowledged before healing can take place. This chapter also explored hysteria, in its original definition from the late 1800s as a female disorder, and shell shock/PTSD in men. In the 1970s, this narrative evolved into patients needing to trust their bodies and believe it if something was not right, even in the face of skeptical and uncaring doctors. The power of positive thinking originated from the Catholic shrine of Lourdes and harken back to Jesus's words of "you have been healed because of your faith" or a similar version. This narrative was also secularized and became popular due to Norman Cousin's healing through laughter, and the placebo effect is discussed here. A downside to this narrative is if you do not heal yourself, it is your fault, and thus places blame at the patient's feet. Broken by modern life describes how we are sicker today than ever before because of our hectic modern lives, and from here the term 'stress' was coined. Type A personalities and the risk of heart disease was discussed, and research began on the relationship between the immune & nervous systems. It began from stress making AIDS worse, and since AIDS is an immune condition, there must be some conversation somehow between the two systems, which were previously believed to exist completely separate. Healing ties describes the importance of social support, including stories about children in orphanages who failed to thrive and women with breast cancer seeming to live longer through social support. Eastward journeys takes readers into the exotic Eastern part of the world: China, Japan, and India. This narrative describes the importance of learning ancient wisdom from the East to heal ourselves in our modern dysfunctional lives. Also discussed are meditation, qi gong, and Buddhism (including the Dalai Lama) and how science is working to understand their benefits and learn how to apply the knowledge to the general population. As someone who studies complementary alternative medicine, I have heard all of these narratives and have even claimed one or two for myself to understand my own health experiences. I did not know that the mind-body narratives originated from Judeo-Christianity, and I did not know how recently the term 'mind-body medicine' was coined. I also did not know when or how Westerners began looking to the East for healing practices, since the peoples had been looked down upon as uncivilized and were patronized by colonizers. I had read about the women with breast cancer, Romanian orphans, and the benefits of meditation, but I did not know about the Pennsylvania village that once had low heart disease rates compared to nearby towns. While it took me some time to read this library book, it was good. I thought it was interesting and helpful to learn about the history and origins of mind-body medicine, and how it has shifted back and forth between science, laypeople, and popular culture throughout its history. I have a much better understanding of the mind-body medicine/holistic health narratives. I do not discount them because they help us draw meaning from our experiences, and ultimately I think they could be

cathartic and empowering. Just so long as we don't start victim-blaming patients for their illnesses, because germ theory is a thing, after all.

This is a marvelous overview of the history mind/body healing. It is fascinating to see how opinions and prevailing wisdom has changed over the years. Also inspiring to imagine the potential of the body to be healed by some mechanism of belief. Great read.

Not an easy book to read, *The Cure Within* is nonetheless the best summary of the state of mind-body medicine around. The author is a prodigious researcher, and brings the mind of a scientist and the heart of a historian to the subject matter; she reveals how we got to our present attitude toward mind-body medicine and in the process, connects the dots from ancient times to today. However, the book is so dense with information that after finishing it, I felt forced to read it through once more, and in doing so, picked up a great deal more than I had the first time. It's also written in a monotone, as though the author were delivering it in one long, record-breaking breath. And yet, perhaps, that might have been wise, as the style deflects any sense of sensationalism or silliness in a subject that often attracts just that from other writers. All in all, there are few books out there that display this kind of interdisciplinary wisdom and insightful commentary. However, as other reviewers have pointed out, she is careful to avoid a point of view; would she herself prefer acupuncture to anesthesia? Would she practice meditation or take a valium? You have to guess.

Harrington's book is well researched and provides a wealth of information. Her narrative approach to the history of mind-body issues works better in some places than others. I adopted this book for a senior seminar course on mind, body, health and medicine. The students found it to be a tough read and complained chapters contained too much information. Nevertheless, those who are interested in a historical view of mind-body approaches to healing will find this book a valuable resource.

This is one of the best researched books I have ever read and the writer needs to be congratulated on a job well done. I can see this book helping a lot of people in the future and look forward to her next publication. Roger

Loved it. It expanded my insights during important stages in the development of alternative health and all I do today. Thanks so much!

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