

Sociology of the Body and Embodiment

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Letter from the Chair, Lisa Jean Moore



For the past 15 years, I have had a very vexed relationship with the American Sociological Association. The dues were much too high. *ASR* and *AJS* didn't seem to publish articles I was at all interested in reading. The cost of attending the annual meeting couldn't be justified by the benefits.

At the meeting, if I wandered far enough down obscure corridors, away from the main action, I could usually stumble into small pockets of engaged people doing work I found smart and important. But—and this is certainly only my particular perspective—the sheer number of quantitative and positivist “suits” circulating through the lobbies and escalators of the mega chain hotels was invariably enervating. Returning home, I usually felt worse that I had ended up in the discipline of sociology, not better.

Instead, I conserved my scarce, public-university conference budget for more interdisciplinary meetings, such as the Society for the Social Studies of Science and the Social Science History Association. I would attend all sorts of themed gender studies conferences and the occasional invited speaking gig that offered opportunities to meet fascinating scholars, artists, activists, and students. But this type of patchwork conference-going takes its toll, too, and can make one feel like a wandering vagabond in search of intellectual community.

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Letter from the Chair, *continued from page 1*

And then it struck me: why not create a section of the ASA that might foster a community of scholars who are similarly situated? So Judith Lorber and I kicked the idea around over lunch one day and decided to draft a justification for the section on the Body and Embodiment. With the herculean assistance of several ASA members, most notably Salvador Vidal-Ortiz and Eve Shapiro, we gathered the signatures necessary and in 2009 became a section-in-formation. (This was the same year that my own body intervened and instead of attending the ASA meeting, I birthed my third daughter, took a back seat to section organizing, and a front seat to breastfeeding.)

Three and a half years later, we have grown and created quite an impressive group of bodily inspired sociologists. Indeed, this year's annual meeting in Denver promises to be a utopia of sorts for us. We have three sessions coordinated from the breadth of our section membership: 1. Sociology of Fatness and Fat Bodies; 2. Embodied Utopias? Human "Enhancement," Emerging Technologies, and the Future; and, 3. Embodying Masculinities. Plus we have Body and Embodiment Roundtables to feature all the innovative and significant scholarship in this valuable specialization. Finally, while not a section session per se, Carla A. Pfeffer has organized a regular session on sociology of the body titled "Theorizing the Body: Sociological Corporealities." Take a look at the end of the newsletter for a sneak preview of these sessions.

Personally, I can't wait to attend this year's meeting and walk through the halls of the hotel with genuine enthusiasm. The sensation of looking forward to hearing papers and seeing colleagues in action is not something I have previously associated with ASA, and I am thrilled to be part of a vibrant section. Plus, our joint 'cocktail hour' with the Science, Knowledge and Technology (SKAT) section, off site on Sunday evening, is NOT to be missed. There will be plenty of possibilities for scintillating conversation, intellectual promiscuity, and somatic engagements.

I look forward to seeing you in the Mile High City.

Lisa Jean Moore, PhD, MPH
Chair, Section on the Body and Embodiment
Professor of Sociology and Gender Studies
Purchase College, New York

Call for Submissions for the Next Newsletter

Look for the call for submissions for the next newsletter on the Body & Embodiment listserv. Please send all newsletter submissions to BodyNewsletter@gmail.com. If you have comments or ideas you would like to contribute, please feel free to contact us!

From the 2010-2012 Newsletter Editors: Thanks to all those who sent submissions for our section newsletter!
Carla A. Pfeffer, Purdue University-North Central (cpfeffer@purdue.edu)
Shweta M. Adur, University of Connecticut (shweta.uconn@gmail.com)

Issue/Opinion:

Is Being Fat Cool Yet? The Fat Body and Popular Culture

JoAnna R. Murphy (brinerjo@gmail.com)

The analysis of popular culture and how the fat body is produced and reproduced within popular culture is one that sociology should not ignore. Discourse analysis of popular culture through numerous theoretical frameworks from social constructionism to the carnality of the body, can help to shed light on the complex rhetoric that is taking place, and whether or not movements – whether feminist, pro-fat or social – are being recognized within popular culture.

Popular culture, particularly the incredibly successful television show *30 Rock* proves that it can be a cultural force for making society think about the fat female body. However, even when a more progressive show such as this addresses the fat body head on, as it does at the beginning of season two, does that mean it addresses it in a positive light? Or does it just produce and/or reproduce the cultural norms surrounding the fat body?

Recognition that the body is not only socially constructed but also carnal and fleshy, and has the ability to change and with change, new social biases and inequalities can emerge or be reinforced is important. Women's bodies everywhere have been shaped, molded, and disciplined into a certain image that has been constructed by society as acceptable/unacceptable. Because of dominant discourses surrounding the body – especially within popular culture – it has become extremely difficult to be accepted outside of those norms. Any additional social biases and inequalities should be critically viewed and analyzed. This will help to create responses to (whether for or against) these ever changing factors.

Foucault (1984) suggests that ideologies of the self-discipline are central to power in modernity. This notion of self-discipline is key to a specific scene in *30 Rock* when Jack Donaghy discovers Jenna has gained weight over the summer and says to lose 30 [pounds] or gain 60 [pounds] and there is no room in between in television. When told to “Lose 30” it suggests that Jenna must discipline, reduce the size of, and recognize the commercial objectification her body. Jenna is bullied by Jack, her white, male boss, who demands that she normalizes the size and shape of her body to meet societal standards of beauty. However when told to “...gain 60...” it involves more weight gain promoting becoming hyper-fat and therefore hyper-visible. If Jenna were to gain the weight she would be resisting dominant discourses surrounding the body, but at the same time disciplining her body to meet one man's patriarchal demands. Jack's comment that ‘there is no room for anything in between’ reveals that by being hyper-visible to millions on television Jenna (as an actress) cannot remain in this “abject” stage. The abject body is not acceptable because it does not fit into the socially constructed binary of thin/fat. In Jenna's case she would move beyond ‘fat’ into the realm of hyper-fat, therefore becoming a source of comedic humor, such as an object of mockery.

Jenna's changed perspective reiterates the point that the body is something that should not be reduced to only a social construction; embodiment plays an important role in how people do their fatness and experience their fat bodies. Sociology, in addition to other disciplines, should continually examine both the carnality of the body as well as the social constructions that are inscribed on it. By never reducing the body to one or the other, disciplines can find deeper, more personal meanings in how people do their bodies and apply that meaning to larger social constructions.

By combining multiple theoretical approaches, and applying discourse analysis, a more nuanced and sophisticated understanding of discourses about the fat body has emerged. These analyses may suggest that television and popular culture have never really accepted, let alone embraced, fatness. Television shows have a long history of subjugating fat people and in particular, fat women. Fat characters have historically been portrayed as having a lack of self-control; or being over-consuming, powerless, or dominated by others. Comedies have routinely made fun of weight gain. Another common cultural discourse asserts a connection between fatness and being unhealthy – one that has been consistently challenged by fat advocates. Other cultural discourses which are commonly produced and reproduced in television include the idealization of weight loss and the assumed rewards of weight loss. All of these analyses can help to reflect the ever changing sociological world that we live in, and allow for a more diverse and complex reflection of the portrayal, production, and reproduction of the fat body within popular culture.

References

- Foucault, M. (1984). *History of Sexuality, Volume 2*. United Kingdom: Travistock Publications.
Foucault, M. (1984). *History of Sexuality, Volume 3*. United Kingdom: Travistock Publication.

Members' News, Awards, and Announcements

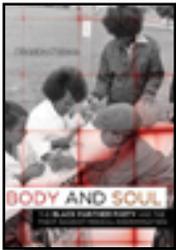
Barbara Sutton's *Bodies in Crisis: Culture, Violence, and Women's Resistance in Neoliberal Argentina* (Rutgers University Press, 2010) won the National Women's Studies Association 2011 Gloria E. Anzaldua book prize, awarded in "recognition for groundbreaking scholarship in women's studies that makes significant multicultural feminist contributions to women of color/transnational scholarship."

Nominations Committee Member **Dan Morrison** will join the faculty of Pepperdine University this fall as an Assistant Professor of Sociology.

Members' Recent Books



Gerber, Lynne. 2011. *Seeking the Straight and Narrow: Weight Loss and Sexual Reorientation in Evangelical America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.



Nelson, Alondra. 2011. *Body and Soul: The Black Panther Party and the Fight against Medical Discrimination*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Members' Recent Articles and Book Chapters

Costello, Cary Gabriel. 2011. "The Real Me: Selfhood in the Virtual World," Pp. 187-203 in Bob Batchelor, Ed., *Cult Pop Culture: How the Fringe Became Mainstream*, V. 3. Westport, CT: Praeger.

Erickson, Julia A. 2012. "Dancing the Body Beautiful." *Contexts* 11(2).

Graves, Jennifer, and Samantha Kwan. 2012. "Is There Really 'More to Love?': Gender, Body, and Relationship Scripts in Reality Television." *Fat Studies: A Journal of Research* 1(1): 47-60.

Members' Blogs

Costello, Cary Gabriel "the Intersex Roadshow on sex variance" (<http://intersexroadshow.blogspot.com/>)

Costello, Cary Gabriel "TransFusion on trans issues" (<http://trans-fusion.blogspot.com/>).

Call for Nominations and Awards

Best Publication on the Body and Embodiment

The section on Body and Embodiment invites submissions for the Best Publication on the Body and Embodiment Award. The 2012 award will be for best book; books must have been published between January 1, 2009 and December 31, 2011. Self-nominations are welcome as are co-authored works. To be considered for this competition, all nominees must be dues-paying members of the section (which requires ASA membership) for the year 2012. All section members are eligible. Electronic submissions are strongly preferred; they should include a .PDF copy of the book (or a hard copy by regular mail if PDF is not available), the author's name, date of publication, publisher, and a brief comment highlighting the principal merits of the work and its scholarly contributions. Please send submissions to the chair of the Best Publication on the Body and Embodiment Award committee: Victoria Pitts-Taylor, Graduate Center and Queens College, CUNY, 365 5th Ave Room 5116, NY NY 10016. Email: (vpitts@gc.cuny.edu). Nominations must be received by the prize committee's chair no later than May 15, 2012. Late submissions will not be accepted (no exceptions). Individuals may submit to one award only (Best Publication Award or Graduate Student Best Paper Award), not both.

Graduate Student - Best Paper Award

In line with the section's mission statement, nominations for this competition include scholarly papers (research based or theoretical) pertaining to any aspect of Body/Embodiment for any graduate student within the last year (2011). For the graduate student best paper award, only submissions of work completed/published within the last year will be accepted. We seek to support graduate students' original and best work, thus, we will consider co-authored (including those with faculty), unpublished works or articles published in any journal, or chapters published in recent books. Self-nominations are welcome. To be considered for this competition, all nominees (including co-authors) must be dues-paying members of the section (which requires ASA membership) for the year 2012. Only scholarly essays completed/published between January 1, 2011 and December 31, 2011 will be considered for awards made in August 2012. Graduate Student Best Paper nominations are due May 11, 2012. Late submissions will not be accepted (no exceptions). The recipient(s) of the award will receive a cash award. Only electronic submissions are accepted and should include a PDF copy of the article, author's name, institutional affiliation and address, telephone number, and email address. Please send submissions to the chair of the Graduate Student Best Paper Award committee: Michelle Newton-Francis, Assistant Professor of Sociology at American University (mnewtonf@american.edu). Individuals may submit to one award only (Best Publication Award or Graduate Student Best Paper Award), not both.

Sociology of the Body and Embodiment at ASA in Denver: A Sneak Preview

Join Us for the Section Reception at ASA in Denver

Please plan on attending the joint Section on Sociology of the Body and Embodiment and Section on Science, Knowledge and Technology (SKAT) Reception at ASA in Denver. There will be light appetizers and wine and beer available at the event.

The reception will be held on Sunday August 19th from 6:30-8:00 pm at The Corner Office.

The Corner Office is located at 1401 Curtis Street in Denver.

<http://www.thecornerofficedenver.com/>

Section Session: Embodying Masculinities

Organized by:

Tristan Bridges (University of Virginia);

Elroi J. Windsor (Salem College)

“Accessing Masculinity: The Challenges Posed by IRBs to a Study of Men and Medicine”

*Liberty E. Walther, University of California-San Diego

“The Gendered Expression and Experience of Anxiety”

*Jennifer Jean Esala, University Of New Hampshire

“Yoga as an Embodied Practice: Rejecting Masculinized Orientations Towards the Body”

*Kari Ann Levine, Florida State University

“Production and Performance: Masculinity in a Gay Male Leather Bar”

*Justin Grant Louie, Northwestern University

“Boots, Bras, and ‘Butch’: Lesbians Negotiating Masculinities”

*Alyssa Richman, Temple University

Section Session: Sociology of Fatness and Fat Bodies

Organized by:

Carla A. Pfeffer (Purdue University-North Central);

Mary Nell Trautner (State University of New York-Buffalo)

“Big Black Mamas: The Intersection of Race, Gender, and Weight”

*Celeste Atkins, Cochise Community College

“Gendered Self-Evaluation of Weight Differences in Ratings of Financial Situation”

*Valerie Kim Bonner, Temple University

“New Ways of Being: Fat Women Re-Envision the Body”

*Michaela A. Null, Purdue University

“Opposite Ends of the ‘Healthy’ Size Spectrum: Rhetoric in Fat Acceptance and Pro-Eating Disorder Blogs”

*Amanda E. Fehlbaum, University of Oklahoma

**Section Session: Embodied Utopias? Human Enhancement, Emerging Technologies, and the Future
Organized by Karl Bryant (State University of New York-New Paltz)**

“Enhancing Selves through Gendered Bodies: Surgical Body Modifications among Transgender and Cisgender Consumers”
*Elroi J. Windsor, Salem College

“Fashion Modeling in the Regime of the Blink”
*Elizabeth A. Wissinger, City University of New York/BMCC

“Intersex Pregnancy: Contested Identities and the Ideology of ‘Correct Sex’”
*Cary Gabriel Costello, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

“Neoliberal Bodies, Subjectivity, and the State: Nourishing Citizens in the Women, Infants, and Children Program”
*Kate Abigail Mason, University of California-Berkeley

“Ordinary People, Extraordinary Prosthetics? The Everyday Acceptance of Prosthetic Legs as Legitimate Body Parts”
*Cynthia Elizabeth Schairer, University of California-San Diego

**Regular Session on “Sociology of the Body”: Theorizing the Body: Sociological Corporealities
Organized by Carla A. Pfeffer (Purdue University North Central)
Discussant: Eve Shapiro (Westfield State University)**

“Fat as a Status Characteristic: An Intersectional Analysis”
*Mary Nell Trautner, University at Buffalo-SUNY;
*Samantha Kwan, University of Houston;
*Scott Savage, University of Arizona

“Living Mannequins: How Fit Models Accomplish Aesthetic Labor Through Bodily Capital and Embodied Cultural Capital”
*Kjerstin Gruys, University of California-Los Angeles

“Reconstructing the Neurally-Disrupted Self: Brain, Self, and Society in the Attribution of Emotional Disturbance”
*Jorie Hofstra, Rutgers

“The Case of the Missing Countertenor: Cultivating the Masculine Voice in the 19th Century”
*Peter M. Hennen, Ohio State University-Newark