

SOC287 SOCIOLOGY OF THE BODY
MTTH 11-11:50

SPRING 2008
MAXEY 202

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OFFICE HOURS: M 2-3, T 9:30-10:30, TH 9:30-10:30 and by appointment

Western civilization has had persistent trouble in honoring the dignity of the body and diversity of human bodies. -- Richard Sennett, *Flesh and Stone*, p. 15

Race and gender oppression may both revolve around the same axis of disdain for the body. -- Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, p. 171

What is a body, and what is its relationship to the self or the subject? How does it impact the sense of who one is? What are the social forces that shape human bodies and bodily experience? How do these forces vary in different societies and historical periods? How are different bodies perceived, valued and treated? In this course, we will examine the body not through the lens of the physical or biological sciences but as the product of complex social arrangements and processes. We will study the body as the material expression and horizon of the self, the object of social control, and the repository of shifting class, race and gender relations.

GOALS OF THE COURSE:

- To gain an understanding of the major intellectual debates which guide the study of the body and body-related processes in sociology and feminist scholarship.
- To apply the tools of sociological investigation toward researching the body in the everyday social world and examine the larger, oftentimes invisible or taken-for-granted social forces that shape it. This includes identifying sociological problems related to the body and implementing ways to write about them.
- To engage actively with specific body-related concerns in the college and local community.
- To gain a deeper understanding and more intimate relationship with our own bodies and bodily experience.
- To envision social institutions, policies, relations, ideologies and practices that foster the respect, health and enjoyment of diverse human bodies.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Howson, Alexandra. 2003. *The Body and Society: An Introduction*. New York: Polity Press. ISBN 0-745-62538 pbk

Roach, Mary. 2003. *Stiff: The Curious Lives of Human Cadavers*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company. ISBN 0-393-32482-6 pbk

Scheper-Hughes, Nancy and Loïc Wacquant (eds.). 2002. *Commodifying Bodies*. London: SAGE Publications. ISBN 0-7619-4034 0 pbk

Pitts, Victoria. 2003. *In The Flesh: The Cultural Politics of Body Modification*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. ISBN 0-312-29311-9 pbk

Moore, Judith. 2005. *Fat Girl: A True Story*. New York: Hudson Street Press. ISBN 1594630097 pbk

A few required readings will be handed out in class or placed on reserve at the circulation desk in Penrose Library (see schedule of readings)

Films: There are many wonderful films that deal with the subject of the body in society. I have scheduled a few of these films to begin at 11 am and they run through the noon hour (usually on Thursdays). Films that run past 1 pm will be completed in the following class period. All films will be screened in our regular classroom, Maxey 202, unless otherwise noted. I realize this may be an inconvenience for some students who have other obligations over the noon hour. If you are unable to stay the noon hour on a particular day a film is scheduled, please let me know in advance so I can make arrangements for you to view the film at another time. You are welcome to bring your lunch to these screenings.

EVALUATION:

TWO CRITICAL BOOK OR FILM REVIEWS (25% total, 12.5% each): 4-5 pages in length. These are reviews of books and films we use and discuss in this class, and you may write one of each.

When you are asked to write a critical review of a book, you will need not only to summarize the main argument(s) the author has presented, but evaluate them as well (e.g., the logic of the argument, its validity, its usefulness, clarity, consistency, originality, etc.). Reviews of the Howson book must address issues raised in at least three of the chapters. In the case of the Scheper-Hughes book, your review must touch on arguments raised by at least three of the essays in that collection, and in the case of Foucault, both of the assigned readings by him. You need not and should not attempt to address every issue raised in a particular book, but focus on the main idea or general thrust of an author's argument (e.g., how Howson defines and uses the concept of

embodiment, how Roach critiques our commonsense view of dead bodies). Your review must go beyond a simple reaction to the work (“I really liked or hated this book”) and should demonstrate your understanding of sociological perspectives about the human body we have discussed in class (e.g., its value as a commodity, the cultural stereotypes that surround it, its relation to problems of personal identity, social control, etc.). Make your critical position vis-a-vis the readings clear at the beginning of your review and in your concluding remarks. Again, remember that your goal should be to make one or two key arguments about the book or articles, not to discuss every issue the author touches upon.

Critical film reviews, like book reviews, must go beyond your personal reaction to the movie, and be more than an assessment of the movie’s “entertainment value” (i.e., thumbs up or down). Critical reviews, unlike entertainment reviews found online or in newspapers that usually focus on plot summary and employ pop cultural categories, rather concentrate on a specific conceptual aspect of a film (e.g., the body as a commodity in *Dirty Pretty Things*, as a site of social control and normalization in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*). They must analyze films within the socio-cultural, political, and theoretical context of the materials on the body we have been reading and discussing in class. Again, your goal is to make a clear stand throughout the review, and keep your paper focused on a specific sociological point made by the film. I will provide relevant examples of film and book reviews in class.

AUTOETHNOGRAPHY OF THE BODY (30%): 10-12 pages in length, including footnotes and properly formatted bibliography (ASA reference style: see below).

Autoethnography is a genre of writing and research that connects the personal to the cultural, placing the self within a social context. These texts are usually written in the first person and feature dialogue, emotion, and self-consciousness as relational and institutional stories affected by history, social structure, and culture. You are the subject of this research paper, and your place in the broader society. In this autoethnography you will write about your own body in relation to the social, cultural, economic and historical forces that have affected its performance, its functions, its powers, its health, its feelings, in short, its capacities for experience and expression. The autoethnography you write for this class will mix personal stories, critical reflections on texts, and other forms of knowledge (e.g., about historical events, society, popular culture, and so on).

Autoethnography can also use fiction and artwork in its accounts (illustrations, poetry, music, etc.), provided such use is justified from an intellectual point of view and relevant to the author's personal narrative. A good source of information on autoethnographic styles of writing can be found in Carolyn Ellis and Arthur Bochner, “Autoethnography, personal narrative, reflexivity: researcher as subject.” In *Handbook of Qualitative Research, 2nd Edition*, edited by Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2000), pp. 733-802. I will also provide in-class handouts of professional and student examples of autoethnographic writing to help acquaint you with this style.

As an aid to writing autoethnography, I invite you to keep a personal journal, and from time to time I will suggest various topics for you to reflect upon in it. Your journal is private and not a class requirement, so if you choose not to do one, that's OK. I will

consider work on journals as extra credit for the autoethnography portion of your grade. If you do decide to write a journal, you can be totally creative with it – poetry, artwork, newspaper and magazine clippings are all fine. If you like, I will be happy to read and respond to your journal at any time, however, I encourage you to use it primarily as a place to keep reflections about your own body as they are affected by our discussions of the materials we read, as an opportunity to bring what others have said about the body closer to your own experience.

You'll discover that regular writing in a journal also indirectly facilitates your class participation. In other words, keeping the journal will enrich your (and everyone's) engagement with the course in different ways and will be useful in the final construction of your autoethnography (although journals cannot substitute for the autoethnography).

A note on confidentiality: Autoethnographies and journals can contain information of a personal or sensitive nature, especially when they concern issues surrounding people's bodies. I will respect, and expect you to respect, rules of confidentiality that govern all personal information that is exchanged in this class. This includes passing stories or accounts of body experiences and practices of your classmates or teacher to others who are not attending this class. To feel free to discuss issues surrounding the body and social norms and values, maintaining such standards of confidentiality is absolutely essential.

DAILY QUESTIONS (25%):

There are daily questions or passages for interpretation assigned for each of the readings in the class schedule below. Occasionally, I will send out alternative questions or passages from the texts over the class listserve (soc287a_07sp@lists.whitman.edu). These will serve as entry points for our class discussions. Please bring your responses or reflections to these items to class on signed 3x5 cards, which I will collect at the beginning of each class period. Please use only 3x5 cards, which are available at the bookstore, and not other kinds of paper. You may use up to both sides of your card for your response. I grade responses on their consistent submission (in other words, don't miss turning them in) and evidence of care and thoughtfulness in their construction. All cards that satisfy these requirements will receive a "check". A "check plus" is given to responses that demonstrate exceptional insight. Daily questions help you prepare for and improve the quality of class discussions. I may call upon you to share your response verbally with the rest of the class.

ENGAGEMENT (10%):

This is a seminar class and the active engagement of everyone is required to make it work. Engagement in class means consistent verbal contributions that demonstrate you have read and understood the texts. It also means attentive listening and respect for the contributions of your classmates. I encourage all questions and criticism when these are about relevant points and advance our discussion of the readings.

You are also encouraged to use the class listserve (soc287a_08sp@lists.whitman.edu) to ask and respond to questions, initiate discussions, react to readings, or send out useful

information about the body and society to the rest of the class (e.g., interesting websites, books and articles, movies, etc.). Active use of the listserv is not required, but will count as extra credit for your class engagement grade. I will keep the class periodically informed throughout the semester about how I think discussions are going, and you are free to check your individual "engagement" status with me at any time.

Finally, at various points in the semester I will ask you to fill out and hand in short evaluations of the class and the readings. These "mid-sem" evaluations give me important feedback on the course and are one more indicator of your engagement with the course. They help me change course if some aspect of class is not working, and to make future courses better.

ATTENDANCE (10%):

I do take attendance in every class. Any absence with an excuse from the Dean of Students or the Health Center (or other appropriate source) is fine. Sorry, but I do not accept personal emails from students as excuses for absences. Any unexcused absence will result in losing this portion of your final grade, and excessive unexcused absences may result in failure of the course.

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES:

1/14 M Introduction – Social and Cultural Images of the Body

ORIENTING FRAMEWORKS

1/15 T Howson, pp. 1-38
Short video: **Bodyworks**
Handout on Autoethnography
Examples of student autoethnographies, reviews, and answers to daily questions

What is your favorite/least favorite body part? Why? What do bodies do that is cool? What do they do that is disgusting?

1/17 TH Howson, pp. 39-66

Howson writes on p. 41 that "...Western societies operate on the basis of binary opposites, or a dimorphic model of sex.... [the idea that] the human body is categorized into two distinct, mutually exclusive sexes."

On p. 42, she writes, "However, as historians have demonstrated, contemporary ideas about sex (or of the anatomical, biological body) as polarized opposites (male or female) may themselves be contingent on socio-historical processes and circumstances."

In a few sentences, which view do you subscribe to, and why?

1/22 T Howson, pp. 67-93

On p. 69, Howson writes, "People in Western societies have gradually but increasingly internalized shame and embarrassment as the most appropriate responses to uncontrolled body functions," and that a "significant part of child socialization is oriented towards helping children become aware of their own body and conceal its functions and substances."

Why do you think people in Western societies feel shame and embarrassment about the body?

1/24 TH Howson, pp. 93-119

How would you characterize the ideal female (or male) body in Western societies? Do you think this ideal is capable of changing? How?

Which of these two statements would you most agree with, and why?

1. Cosmetic surgery allows women or men to establish personal control over their bodies and identities.
2. Cosmetic surgery is evidence of conformity to or oppression by social norms of beauty.

1/28 M Howson, pp. 120-139

On p. 131 of the Howson book, there is an intriguing picture entitled "Your body is a battleground." Describe an important way your body is a battleground, and what are the forces that are opposed to each other on this battleground?

1/29 T Howson, pp. 140-164

How, according to Howson, do children's understandings and experiences of their own bodies differ from adult conceptions of children's bodies in Western society?

1/31 TH **Film – Invasion of the Body Snatchers**
11-1 Maxey 202

What fears about the body are expressed in this movie? Who are "the body snatchers" (literally and metaphorically) and what is their purpose? How does this film reflect dominant images of the body in post-WWII American society?

THE DEAD BODY

2/4 M Roach. pp. 9-60

Would you leave your body to medical science after you die? All of it, or are some parts off limits? Why do some people (or cultures) reject dissecting or experimenting with the body after death?

2/5 T Roach. pp. 61-120

Roach talks about using dead bodies for things like human crash test dummies, or to gauge the effects on the body of bullets and bombs. Are these uses ethical? Where, if anywhere, would you draw the line on the uses of dead bodies in research?

In crash experiments designed to improve the safety of cars, which, if either, of the following practices do you find more justifiable, and why?

- Live animals used in the experiments.
- Human cadavers used in the experiments.

In dollar terms, how much would you say a human body is worth? Explain why. If you believe you can't measure the dollar worth of a human body, explain why.

2/7 TH Roach. pp. 121 -180

How would you explain the following contradiction?

Many researchers have observed that Americans prefer hide the dying process and do not like to talk directly about death. In America, people die in private, their suffering unseen by none but a few close friends and relatives. At the same time, American media is saturated with more images of death than ever, and on the news, dead bodies are more visible than at any time in our history.

2/11 M Roach. pp. 181-240

Roach talks about medical science's search for the human soul. If you believe in the soul, in what part of the body do you think it resides (alternately, what part of the body must die to be able to say one no longer has a soul, or one is no longer a person or human being)?

In these chapters, Roach writes about the almost unbelievable idea of whole body transplants, where a person with only a functioning brain (e.g., a severely injured quadriplegic) would receive the full body of someone else who had brain had died. Would such a person be the same person? Would such operations be ethical?

2/12 T Roach, pp. 241-292

In your opinion, what is the best way to dispose of a dead body?

2/14 TH **Film – Maria Full of Grace**

11-1 Maxey 202

2/18 M PRESIDENT'S DAY

THE BODY AS OBJECT OF KNOWLEDGE AND POWER

2/19 T Foucault, "Docile Bodies" (handout)

In the reading for Thursday, on p. 136, Foucault writes, "a body is docile that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved." He uses the example of a soldier. What's another example of a kind of person you would describe as a docile body? How does that person fit Foucault's definition?

2/21 TH Foucault, "Biopower" (handout)

Do you think medical institutions today (doctors, hospitals, insurance companies, etc.) have too much power? How have they changed the way we think about our bodies?

THE COMMODIFIED BODY

2/25 M **Film – Dirty Pretty Things**
11-1 Maxey 202

2/26 T Scheper-Hughes, pp. 1-30
First Book or Film Review Due in my office box at 4 pm.

What does Scheper-Hughes mean when she says body organs have become "fetishized" commodities? Do you think about her her assessment that the illicit trade in organs represents a kind of "body Apartheid"?

2/28 TH Scheper-Hughes, pp. 31-62

Both the film "Dirty Pretty Things" and Cohen's chapter "The Other Kidney" critically consider the claim that the traffic in kidneys between poor donors and wealthier but desperately needy recipients is a win-win situation for both sides: the poor receive money that benefits them and their families, and the lives of the buyers are saved.

Do you think this claim makes sense from an ethical point of view? From an economic or social point of view? Why or why not?

3/3 M Scheper-Hughes, pp. 63-92

The question that comes out of Monday's reading is pretty straightforward, and is another way of asking about the commodification of the body: Should cell lines (or other body tissue for that matter) be patentable by private corporations? Why or why not?

If you are interested in this subject from the point of view of indigenous people's and their resistance to the Human Genome Diversity Project, here are some useful websites

<http://www.native-net.org/archive/nl/hgdp.html>

<http://www.ankn.uaf.edu/IKS/declaration.html>

3/4 T Scheper-Hughes, pp. 93-120

The Weiss article on the Yemenite Children affair points out some social and cultural conflicts in the use of modern technologies of genetic identification (DNA analysis). What, in your opinion, constitutes a beneficial use of this technology? What would be a bad use, and why?

3/6 TH Scheper-Hughes, pp. 121-136

The title of one of the articles we are reading for Thursday is "Bodies That Don't Matter," an ironic twist on Bodies That Matter, a well-known book by the writer Judith Butler.

Describe an experience you have had when you felt your body "didn't matter," either to you or to someone else. Was it a positive or negative experience, and why? (As usual, all answers are kept confidential).

SPRING BREAK

3/24 M Sheper-Hughes, pp. 137-160

What are some of the social and economic differences between semen donation and egg donation? How does society treat sperm and egg donors differently, and why?

3/25 T Scheper-Hughes, pp. 161-194

What does the author of this chapter mean when she claims that the body is a site of "scarcity." What does it mean to say a body "lacks" something? Can you give an example?

3/27 TH **Film – The Pillow Book**
11-1 Maxey 202

THE EXPRESSIVE BODY

3/31 M Pitts, pp. 1-48

For class on Monday, come prepared to tell short story (two or three minutes) how he or

she, or someone he or she knows, has writing (written) on their body. Your story can be about yourself, a friend, a sibling or parent, an anonymous person, or even a fictional pseudo-self.

What is writing on the body? From my point of view, it is any body mark or modification that has a social or personal meaning. The Pillow Book in many ways is a profound film about the relation between bodies and texts, and it examines this relation from the point of view of sexuality and power. Some questions to consider about the film include: What is the significance of writing? Who controls its production and meaning? How is writing related to sexuality and erotics in the film? How is the body presented as an instrument or surface of expression, and what are the limits of that expression? Pitts book is also essentially about the body as an object or means of expression, the forces that both control and liberate that expression, and the politics surrounding how the body can express itself.

4/1 T Pitts, pp. 49-86

On p. 49, Pitts notes that some feminists consider non-mainstream body modification as "self-harming, 'mutilative,' and self-objectifying." They see these practices as unhealthy and reflective of patriarchal control of the body. Other feminists see radical modification as a form of resistance because it violates gender norms and asserts the individual's power over her (his) body. Where do you stand on this issue, and why?

4/3 TH Pitts, pp. 87-118

On p. 117, Pitts suggests that even as gay body modifiers affirm gender otherness in our society, they also reflect "the privileged position they share with all white Westerners and the dominant culture to define cultural and ethnic others." How do what start out as rebellious forms of body modification come to reflect power and privilege in our society?

4/7 M Pitts, pp. 119-150

On pp. 128-9, Pitts notes that "modern primitives" often see their practices as a political statement and as "an expression of cultural dissent" against dominant Western norms of appearance and identity. At the same time, she notes that modern primitivism can be criticized as a legacy of white colonialism that "mimics or appropriates the ethnic Other... and produces an ethnic difference that is idealized and essentialized." Where do you stand on this issue?

4/8 T Pitts, pp. 151-184

According to some cyber-body modifiers, almost everyone has had her or his body "improved" or "upgraded" by technology in some form or other. Do you think there are or should be any limits to the ways people can technologically upgrade their bodies?

Alternate question: Pitts suggests that cyberpunk body modifiers blur the distinction between the natural and the technologically altered body. Do you think this distinction can still be clearly drawn today, or do we live in a "post-human" society of cyborgs and hybrid bodies? Explain your position.

4/10 TH Pitts, pp. 185-end

Pitts (following Balsamo) suggests in the last chapter (p. 187), that women and men act and think differently when it comes to technologized body modification projects. She says "women are encouraged to see themselves and their bodies relationally, "in connection" to others, while male socialization has been profoundly more individualistic, and these differences influence the uses of, and ultimately the meanings of, technologies."

What do you think about this claim? Is there a gender difference in how men and women use body modification?

4/14 M **Film – Gattaca**
11-1 Maxey 202

THE SEXED BODY

4/15 No Class - Whitman Undergraduate Conference

4/17 TH Fausto-Sterling, pp. 1-29 (handout)

In the beginning of her book *Sexing the Body*, Fausto-Sterling will make the claim that biological sex is not a duality, but a continuum of differences that biological and medical science has divided in dualistic way (reflecting social and political assumptions about gender). What do you think of this view? How many sexes do you think exist among human beings?

4/21 M Fausto-Sterling, pp. 30-77 (handout)

For women: What do you think it means to "feel" like a man? (I.e., in physical or body terms: drives, pleasures and pains, emotions)

For men: What does it mean to feel like a woman? (ditto)

Do you think gendered feelings are biologically determined or learned, or some combination of these?

How do the problems of determining whether an intersexed body is male or female described by Fausto-Sterling (e.g., the size of genitalia, hormone levels. etc.) reflect cultural beliefs about how it's supposed to feel to be a man or a woman?

4/22 T Fausto-Sterling, pp. 78-114 (handout)

No 3x5 today. Rather, here are some quotes from Fausto-Sterling (with page #'s) to think about for class, plus a question of my own.

If cultural genitals counted for more than physical genitals dilemmas just described (e.g., whether intersexed persons can marry) could easily be resolved (113).

Physical genitals are a poor basis for deciding rights of citizenship. It is social gender that we see and read. In the future, hearing a birth announced as "boy" or "girl" might enable new parents to envision for their child a range of possibilities, especially if their baby were among the few with unusual genitals. Perhaps we will come to view such children as especially lucky or blessed (113).

Scientists do not simply read nature to find truths to apply in the social world. Instead, they use truths taken from our social relationships to structure, read, and interpret the natural (114).

Here's a question of my own: Where is sex "located"? Why do we, as a culture, try to locate it in the body? If we can't locate it, does it exist?

4/24 TH Film – Venusz Boys
11-1 Maxey 202

THE (IM)PERFECT BODY

4/28 M Moore, pp. 1-64

In American culture, how fat is too fat? Do you think obesity, in our culture, is more of a women's than a men's issue? Why or why not? Do men and women look at body weight differently? How?

4/29 T Moore, pp. 65-124

Moore sometimes describes herself as both craving attention and trying to be invisible. How does this cause problems for her, and how does it affect how she sees herself in relation to others?

5/1 TH Moore, pp. 125-end

Do you find Moore's book affirmative or negative in its judgment of the obese body? Explain why.

5/5 M Open Class for Student Presentations/Projects
Second Book or Film Review Due in my office box at 4 p.m.

**AUTOETHNOGRAPHERS DUE IN MY OFFICE BOX AT THE END OF THE
TIME SCHEDULED FOR THE FINAL EXAM IN THIS COURSE**

The following are styles taken from the ASA Style Guide that you should use to cite your research and reference sources on your papers.

Book

Berlin, Gordon and Andrew Sum. 1988. *Toward a More Perfect Union: Basic Skills, Poor Families, and Our Economic Future*. New York: Ford Foundation.

Mason, Karen O. 1994. *Women's Labor Force Participation and Fertility*. Research Triangle Park, NC: National Institutes of Health.

Chapters in Edited Books

Alba, Richard and Victor Nee. 1999. "Rethinking Assimilation Theory for a New Era of Immigration." Pp. 202-226 in *The Handbook of International Migration: The American Experience*, edited by C. Hirschman, P. Kasinitz, and J. DeWind. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Articles in Academic Journals

Horton, Hayward D., Beverly Lundy Allen, Cedric Herring, and Melvin Thomas. 2000. "Lost in the Storm: The Sociology of the Black Working Class, 1850 to 1990." *American Sociological Review* 65:128-37.

Articles from Newspapers and Magazines

Pan, Esther with Lynette Clemetson. 2000. "Why Asian Guys Are on a Roll." *Newsweek*, February 21, pp. 12-13.

Articles from the Internet

Author's Name. Year the site created. "Title of the page in quotes." *Title of the web site in italics*. <URL of the page in brackets> (Date that you accessed/first read the page in parentheses).

For example: Le, C.N. 2001. "Multiracial and Adopted Asians." *Asian-Nation*.

<<http://www.asian-nation.org/issues9.html>> (September 4, 2002).