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Corpo-(un)reality; Embodied Specie-ous

Mary Gergen

Penn State University

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Plays with our status as embodied or corporeal beings. Bodiliness...
material corpus. Being real, getting real, ? as a body. Is what we speak
solid or-air-ity?

How we speak of the body as material, is not immaterial. For
some, formed by nature, in an unnamed state, it awaits inscription. Yet,
others argue that in its being, it has already been inscribed, among other
qualities-male and female - and, if this were not so, it couldn't be
known at all. This inscription pretends pre-description. This is the
sex-trick, we buy into.

Here we bring up that unquestionable. What is a body? Is it
sexed? Is it gendered? How is a body produced? Through eggs and sperm;
through hormones? through language? There are many options available to the
psychologist.

The Empiricist asks: What are the facts about a body? and tells us:
objective scientific methods allow us to track it down. Male vs. female
differences can be tested and resolved.

The standpoint psychologist: Truth depends on embodied knowlege ...
the essential link of woman to nature. Man is dis-figured by his loss of
nature, and his abstract relation to culture.

The postmodern psychologist divines the discourses of the body as
socially constructed, as deconstructed, as the body politic.

Bodies are known by the company they keep. For liberatory ends,
positioning and paradox are all.

Text:

(Stage directions: Two sites with lights on stage. One Stage L. a podium
on which a cowboy hat sits. The other an open space.) A table with other
hats is located to stage R.

A Woman wearing an academic hat begins to speak. During the performance

she changes hats.

B(e)aring Bodies: Conversation for a Quartet

I'll take the liberty of introducing myself first. I'm Postmodern Prin, The hat puts me in position, indicating my professional status, at the moment. My temporary, partial, and fragmented Being currently under construction in this reading reeks with the postmodern prose that has been fluxing and flushing down the halls of the academe of late, leaving behind quite a stink (in some people's opinions). I have written myself the starring role in this piece.

Of course, I have some stiff competition. The stiffest, in what might be considered a true-to-form resistance, is from my character, the GM, which stands for General Motors, of course, but in this Case for the General (Male) Mind. Being a mind, he is not sexed, in specifics, but the mind itself is definitely male. He set this whole dilemma up, you see: first carving out this mind/body dualism, and then taking the mind for his side, and leaving the body, not to mention all that went with it to the downside of the pairing -the womanly one.

GM's hat is on the podium, which is specifically designed to hide the speaker's body, while highlighting the significance of his words. Here it has not been necessary to cover the body, given he is without one. But he feels more comfortable at the podium all the same.

The other characters are constructed of feminist voices that are embodied, as I happen to be at this time. (You might even notice a rather striking resemblance, although the hats should make it clear who we are. Annie has never been much of a dresser. And Sandra prefers the natural look.)

First let me introduce Empirical Annie, a character who has the closest affinity with GM, but whose politics set her apart.

Empirical Annie: [shift to blue bowlet-type hat] "I follow the codes of the objective scientific road in psychology, and very careful to be unbiased in my research, hard headed-- some might say. I write for the mainstream statistical journals because its the power voice of the field. What I say gets referenced... at least, more than most psychologists who write on the topic of women.

(I'm a feminist in my off-hours, and frankly I'm rather fed up with harrangues from political radicals, who couldn't tell a meta-analysis

from a t-test if their life depended on it.) I have fought my entire career to refute sex difference research in which women get the short end of the stick.

PP: Annie has does a thorough job of discovering facts about sex and gender differences, and she is quite creative in inventing new statistical methods -- which sometimes throw a monkey wrench into the works: especially works that find women deficient in important intellectual, social and interpersonal skills.

PP: Standpoint Sandra has made a strong showing in the last fifteen years in psychology, especially the clinical, developmental, and educational sets. Her namesake is a well-known philosopher, Sandra Harding, who puts up with a world of problems in order to defend this position. Standpoint Sandy is not, however, a parody of Dr. Harding. Several others, perhaps, but not her.

SS: [switch to soft mantilla looking "hat"] I don't reject the body. We live in a material world. Let's not kid ourselves. But unlike Annie, who wants to keep her politics to herself in the psychology lab, I am my politics, and proud of it. I leave objectivity and the view from everywhere and nowhere, the old "god trick" as Donna Haraway called it, to the men, who invented it, some say, to disguise their own hand in the game. But I agree with her that feminists should seek for truth, and beware the postmodern wolves in sheepskin clothing who discredit that goal.

I bring politics into psychology, and I also bring my values, and feeling, empathy, intuition, subjectivity, self-awareness, sensitivity, subjectivity, kindness, tenderness, nurturance, motherhood, and apple pie to psychology. And why - and I quote so many of my sisters -- should we give up our own embodied truths, wrung from our own subjective experiences, when we've just now claimed it? Sandra Harding said it: "Should feminists be willing to give up the political benefits which can accrue from believing that we are producing a new, less biased, more accurate, social science? Perhaps only those who have had access to the benefits of the Enlightenment can "give up those benefits.":

Only those who have it can flaunt it, and then deconstruct it. Sometimes they make me so mad!

PP: Sandra, please, Your subject position is getting damp.

But, what to make of this Body...again I ponder, how should body be defined? The body as contested territory in the struggles of various camps to make it conform. Where is the body in the body of psychology?

Let us come together and give voice to our various views: What to make of this thing we call body, in an embodied voice.

Male: You can't see me over here. I am invisible. I like it that way. I am now in the ideal state of Mankind: The disembodied mind, here in essence, and full calculative power, as Stephen Tyler, might say, but without the usual Physical incumberences. I am, in some sense, the perfect interlocutor for an interchange such as this. Here, at a scientific conference, in which rationality, alone, can be allowed its full expression. A path to Truth, capital T, in its glorious, if invisible splendor.

I can clarify the nonsense that is bound to be incurred by this Chorus of Chatty Cathies. Pull her string, and a series of repetitive phrases are released from - I must say- a rather attractive plastic frame. Damn! mind over matter; mind over matter.

PP: (Academic hat) Is the problem of the body worth discussing? For me, yes, the question takes on a fiery tone. Why? because binaries are being deconstructed: male/female; nature/culture; mind/body. Straight/gay; the body- as a natural, sex as natural, woman as natural; all are coming under erasure, just as it was coming into fruition within the feminist fold. Bodies cannot escape the constructionist ax. And we all fall down.

In the postmodern stance, nothing precedes significations. How shall we wiggle out of this, without losing what we prize? What to do with these disconnections: accept, reject, affirm, deny, both/ and. If there no longer is woman, can there be feminism? How can one be, without being someone, and how can one be a someone if not embodied? And if embodied, how can sex not be significant?

But, some say, that's not just putting the cart before the horse, that's calling the cart the horse. Judith Butler has turned it around: "The deconstruction of identity is not the deconstruction of politics, rather, it establishes as political the very forms through which identity is articulated. :

G.M.: Bodies have their place - as topics of biology, neurology, artificial intelligence, etc. . Bodies connect man to beast. The mind, separates the two. And no need to mention the survival of the species and all that. Procreation, that's what bodies are for.

But Plato had it right: The body is a betrayer of the immortality of the soul; a prison for the mind.

You over there, in the body. Do not glorify the body; do not tie us down to this all too mundane flesh; do not instantiate the cognitive. The mind - in its rightful realm - ruling the body, overcoming its

constraints.

PP: The body is not so simple or so easy to escape. There are many definitions: As Peter McLaren has said: The "Body is a promiscuous term ... a warehouse of archaic instinctual drives, ... a cauldron of seething libidinal impulses, ... a phallogocentric economy waging war on women,... a lump of perishable matter,... a fiction of discourse." Peter McLaren, in Giroux. p.150.

E. Annie: (blue hat) To me, this conversation is rather ridiculous. Bodies aren't erased, and sex comes with the entire biological package. As a psychological scientist, the body is Not a lump, but an elaborately constructed system of perishable matter, until, of course, it is invested with cultural components, which create among other things, one's gender, and perhaps one's sexual orientation. The biologists are still "out" on that one, and so with more research we should be able to give a definitive answer.

Standpoint Sandra: (scarf) I'm not an orthodox Jungian or a Freudian, although some of my very best friends are, (and, some of yours, Pryne, are Lacanians as well). But, I think there's more than that to say about a body. He has forgotten in his disreputable rollcall anything magical, powerful, praiseworthy. I do agree that women's bodies have been denigrated by phallogocentric hi-jinks, but that's no reason to throw the body out with the bath water. A woman's body, and I'm not going to bother with men's equipment, is a valued, even perhaps, a sacred, essence, a font for the creation of women's knowledge of the world, of her power, of the very nature of her being. Yes, affirm the body, in the body I am.

Sociologist, Nancy Hartsock has argued that bodies create the standpoint from which we know the world. Women's bodies can know it best:

Within the woman's world "the experience of continuity and relation - with others, with the natural world of mind with body - provides an ontological base for developing... the basis of a feminist science. "
(p.174)

SS: I am sorry to say, and I hesitate to bring this up here, that through our bodies, in the name of ourselves as bodies, we have mastered ways in which to mutilate, to wound, and to kill ourselves. Whether we are killed softly in the wars of advertisers for our very beings or slowly,

with the death by anorexia, there are many missing from the women's chorus, who send regrets. As Adrienne Rich has verified: "I know of no woman for whom her body is not a problem".

GMM: Melodramatics, just as I suspected. What you women don't seem to understand is that The body is not oneself. Far from it, as Augustine said, and I agree, "The body is the enemy. The home of a "slimy desires of the flesh". To control, and then to transcend one's body, there's the nobility of life.

SS: Our femininity makes us targets. We become obsessed with our embodiment. It takes us over, and yet, we struggle to regain control. When a woman buys into the notion that mind should control the body, we become victimized yet again. The body becomes a foreigner. Aligned with Plato and Augustine, taking on man's words, man's justice, man's truth, we become susceptible to two hostile forces mangling each other from within.

As Susan Bordo has argued: "Thinness represents a triumph of the will over the body, and the thin body (that is, the nonbody) is associated with absolute purity, hyperintellectuality and transcendence of the flesh."
p.95

PP: The man within the woman. The discourse of will, control, of hard, male, discipline. Woman as soft, polluted, desiring, weak, needy, secreting, make to disappear. Discourses eating away the flesh, worming into the core of the pulpy fruit. turning the pearly flesh to withering brown.

Yet, we can despise and resist this rhetoric. As Iris Marion Young has declared: "Discourse we use when we describe our experience is no more direct and unmediated than any other discourse. ... Often people seem to assume that if we express our authentic experience we will be free of ideology. Ideology operates at the most immediate level of naive experience. (1990, p. 12).

C. Empiricist Annie: Control is the issue here, and I ask, where would psychology be without the ability to manipulate and control. Let me test the nature of nature; reaching out with my invisible hands, I can wring the

secrets of the body from the bone. Each piece is prime for my analytic gaze, but any bite can be chewed and swallowed. That's my stand.

PP: Annie is in her vampire mode, the phantasmagoric bloodsucker, living off the flesh of others. She takes the body for granted. It is waiting, solid in space, to receive her inscriptions.

For Judith Butler: "The 'real' and the 'sexually factic' are phantasmatic constructions - illusions of substance- that bodies are compelled to approximate, but never can."(p.146)

Annie codifies these fantasies, these performances, but if gender is, as Butler argues, an 'act' ... that is open to ... self-parody, [and] self-criticisms, then Annie's "task demands a reconsideration of the figure of the body as mute, prior to culture, awaiting signification."

PP: With so much contention, how shall we go about it?

GM: If we must, let us do it dispassionately. Let us look for evidence to support our hypotheses. What does the body mean to us after all? At best, a motor of our wills, at worst, a treacherous companion that lets us down, either, through its passions, or even worse, by breaking down altogether.... heart attacks, strokes, all the other evils that the body can provoke us with.

Annie: We must watch for the biases that the GMM can inflict upon us. Where would we be without Bem, Deaux, Eagly, Hollingsworth, Hyde, Jacklin & Maccoby, Sherif, and the rest fighting male biases in research.

Standpoint Sandra: Annie misses the point. You cannot, as Audrey Lorde has said, dismantle the master's house with the master's tools. Giving psychometric tests, multivariate statistical analyses, standardized interviews. The researcher a neutral stranger to the subject. There can be no Truth found through this enterprise.

The researcher must be involved. Sharing the same skin, the same subjective space. There must be empathy. Reaching into the depths of one's own experience to meet the voices of others; herein lies the heart of the psychological truth speaking in one's own voice. As Carol Gilligan has described it: In my interviews, I'll go after that. I'll say to somebody, "But where are you? or "Do you believe that?" .p. 412-415)

PP: Standpoint psychologists' discourses of truth can sometimes smother as well as liberate. They have been accused of making Truth, the truth of the white academic woman. This has led to a serious philosophical muddle, but good at housewifery, they have swept it under the rug. And despite the good intentions of diverse groups to live with a lump in the middle of the room, some have begun to address the "lump".

bell hooks, for one: "The critique of essentialism encouraged by postmodernist thought is useful for African-Americans concerned with reformulating outmoded notions of identity. We have too long had imposed upon us from both the outside and the inside a narrow, constricting notion of blackness." p. 28. "When black folks critique essentialism, we are empowered to recognize multiple experiences of black identity that are the lived conditions which make diverse cultural productions possible".p. 29

Annie: Constructionism can only go so far. Some facts are intractable. Bodies die after all. That's hardly ideology, socially constructed or negotiated.

PP: I'll take you up on that. What does it mean to die? Do you mean the brain, or the heart, or the will, or the soul, perhaps? What is your dependent measure? What about those 27% of adults in the U.S. who presumably believe in reincarnation? Are you so certain they are wrong? What about living on in the minds of those who know you, or living on through the books you have written, or through financial estates, or in video tapes? Or through the children who take your genetic materials one generation further? Or on the other hand, what about the walking dead, those whose lives lost meaning many years before their breathing ceased?

It is not so simple after all. Death requires a community to say when, and if, it occurs. Even suicides demand a tribunal. as Garfinkel stressed decades ago.

PP: Let me raise this last question? What if the body is not real? sex is not real, gender is not real, desire is not real? Where are the politics? Do our feminisms also go? Does the study of gender disappear? Does psychology disappear? I'll let all my friends have the last words this time.

Gilligan: I think that's a dangerous thing for feminist to be saying."

"Rich: "We must touch the unity and resonance of our physicality, our bond with the natural order, the corporeal ground of our intelligence." 1976, p.11)

Celia Kitzinger: the social world constructs who I am, including my sense of myself as having an inner, private, core. I hear myself always speaking in the language that the culture teaches me, or in opposition to it, which is nonetheless centrally defined by it.

Elizabeth Grosz: " Women can no longer take on the function of being the body for men.... The body must be regarded as a site of social, political, cultural, and geographical inscriptions, production , or constitution. The body is not opposed to culture, a resistant throwback to a natural past; it is itself a cultural, the cultural, product " (p.21-24).

Jeanne Marecek: Lets think of our embodiment "as a recurring personal and cultural accomplishment produced by a complex of social processes- interpersonal , representational, discursive, and institutional." (p.162).

"My goal is ... to invite [others] to join in ongoing multidisciplinary conversations about the multiple and conflicting meanings of gender." (p.163)

GMM: I'm being shut out of this conversation.