

When the body takes on a life of its own: exploring the body-self dialectic

Elizabeth Challinor CRIA/UM

e.p.challinor@gmail.com

Short Abstract

When constraints originate from the body the immediacy between body and self is disrupted. The panel explores how this body-self dialectic plays out in contexts of illness, disability, aging and pregnancy and how different levels of power interact in their attempts to listen to, ignore or challenge the 'subject body'.

Long Abstract

When incapacity or constraint originate from a person's body the previously taken for granted experience of immediacy between body and self is disrupted. This occurs in illness, disability and aging. Although pregnancy is neither an illness nor a disability, the 'unbroken immediacy' between body and self is also interrupted as the body changes to accommodate new life. Inspired in the work of Sally Gadow (1982, 2000), the aim of this panel is to explore how the body is experienced as an object – not only to medical science and to the outside world – but also to the self.

Gadow argues that if the body is only viewed as an object then it becomes either an instrument or a burden to the self. The self may then try to master the body and with the help of medical science, experience it as the 'concrete otherness of the self'. However, if the body is viewed as a being in its own right, then a 'subject body' emerges that no longer struggles with the self, but establishes a new relation of intrasubjectivity in which the self does not subordinate the body to its own designs. Rather, the body becomes an object of concern and of aesthetic regard imbued with its own meanings and values.

The panel welcomes papers that explore how this body-self dialectic plays out in care-giving and care-receiving contexts of illness, disability, aging and pregnancy and how different levels of power (individual and institutional) interact or counteract in their attempts to listen to, ignore or challenge the 'subject body'.

