



WORKSHOP ABSTRACT

Suicide, exploitation, and pleasure in the cultural uses of self-inflicted bodily harm. Ethnographies and contemporary theories.

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Abstract: The body has been a classic theme in anthropology. Mauss, Douglas, Turner or Le Breton, among others, have addressed in depth how symbol and ritual shape the body and how these same bodies are the main element of the individual's relationship with the world. Likewise, "the other" is also a body, subject to our sensitive experiences, we can hear, feel, smell or see him, and from this field of bodily interaction we reflect on him, we imagine him, we prejudge him, we propose the codes with which we communicate and in a broader sense we build culture. Particularly the violence exercised on one's own body is not a new topic for ethnography, especially as far as the symbolic framework of ritual is concerned. However, inserted in the context of hypermodernity, there are cultural forms of self-inflicted harm that demand to be studied under the focus of new interpretative frameworks, where desire, performativity, hybridizations and the rupture with dualities and the introduction of epistemologies built from the margins allow us to have more fluid dialogues and deeper looks at these practices.

This Workshop aims to reflect on the meanings of those practices that stress bodies, take them to the extreme through pain or behaviors harmful to health from contemporary analysis. To this end, we propose the submission of papers that address a wide range of manifestations: mortification and sacrificial ideas in the religious sphere, extreme discipline and risky behaviors in gym culture, desire and BDSM practices, self-injurious behaviors and suicide, ideological expressions of protest with bodily harm -hunger strike, immolation-, behaviors associated with eating disorders, addiction to plastic surgeries, self-violence in the context of assisted reproduction, etc.

SESSION SCHEDULE

Thursday, September 24, 2024 | Slot 3 | Room 4

Diego Allen-perkins: Fitness influencers and risky body narratives: Discourses on the death of @villanofitness

Fernando Barcia Sánchez: The Other in the Flesh: The Invention of the Human Body in Amerindian Cultures

Jesús Castaño Trevín: HEROES COMMIT SUICIDE?

Andy Eric Castillo Patton: Is suicide a weapon? Rethinking the political meanings of self-inflicted deaths

Johanna Doppelbauer: Gender and Sexuality in a Queer Kink Community in Vienna: Queering Practices through Community

Luis López-Lago: Bodily Harm and Age in Rural Narratives of Suicide: Ethnographic Contributions

Thursday, September 24, 2024 | Slot 4 | Room 4

Extension of Slot 3 communications and discussion.

SESSION PAPERS

Fitness influencers and risky body narratives: Discourses on the death of @villanofitness

Diego Allen-perkins

Fitness influencers play a crucial role in shaping contemporary norms and perceptions of the body by establishing standards of health, beauty, and performance among their followers. These modes of representation have contributed to the increasing use of anabolic steroids, where the pursuit of greater muscle mass and enhanced performance is coupled with the risks associated with consuming substances that can cause severe, long-lasting, and in some cases, irreversible harm. With the aim of exploring the ways in which risk practices are constructed and perceived in gym culture, this communication presents the results of a virtual ethnography analyzing discourses on the death of Alfredo Martín (aka @villanofitness), a well-known bodybuilder and Spanish influencer famous for his use and advocacy of anabolic steroids. Through the characterization of comments on news articles following his death in mainstream media and specialized fitness forums, we examine how narratives about @villanofitness's death reinforce or challenge predominant beliefs about the body and normative modes of representation, thereby aiding in understanding how common categories in fitness narratives, such as 'sacrifice,' 'discipline,' and 'pushing limits,' are constructed.

The Other in the Flesh: The Invention of the Human Body in Amerindian Cultures

Fernando Barcia Sánchez

As the American anthropologist Roy Wagner found among the Daribi of New Guinea, there is a reversal in American Indian cultures of Western common sense about the domains of human experience that are given or innate (those over which humans have no control) and those that are artificial (those that must be constructed by humans). As counterintuitive as it may seem to us, the human body will be one of the elements in which this inversion of Western rationalism will be more evident; the human body will not be something given, but a human invention (to use Wagner's terms). Clothing, food,

language, and ritual activity (among other things) will be oriented toward the construction of an authentic human body. Thus, skull deformations, scarifications, tattoos, self-bleeding, etc., will be the manifestation of an intense commitment to the invention of the human, which will have different manifestations depending on the cultural area we are dealing with. However, those bodies on which human action cannot be guaranteed (the fetus during pregnancy, non-normative bodies, foreign bodies) will represent a manifestation of the other, of the non-human, and should therefore be approached with certain precautions.

HEROES COMMIT SUICIDE?

Jesús Castaño Trevín

The figure of the superman, as a transcendental concept of human being that challenges the traditional structure of values, shown by Nietzsche in his literary development, especially in the work "Thus Spoke Zarathustra", is challenged in our proposal to define the one who, in conflict, maintains the need for compliance with order and the controlled development of his individual freedom, and who is required to be a social model of established, moral and normative behavior.

Police officers come to assimilate death as an inherent part of their professional development, they live with it on many occasions, and they are able to see more than one side of it. They fraternize with it as if it were part of their daily routine, sometimes treating it with apparent disregard at absolute risk to their lives and physical integrity.

Police officers have one of the highest rates of physical accidents in the line of duty. They assume a state of "superhuman" when they put on their uniforms and equipment, seemingly creating within themselves powerful beings insensitive to pain and suffering. They assume the cost of injury or death because they have seen it happen close to them without consequence, and because they are confident in their physical abilities and professional preparation.

On the other hand, behind this imaginary story of heroes who accept physical and psychological harm, PAIN, as if they were really looking for it to satisfy their desire for affirmation, there are very high suicide figures among the population, especially those executed with one of the elements that constitute their condition of superheroes, their firearm.

We will attempt to address the multiple relationships between pain, the suffering of others, and our own suffering for the police officer, and deepen our knowledge of the dynamics of self-punishment and autolytic behavior.

Is suicide a weapon? Rethinking the political meanings of self-inflicted deaths

Andy Eric Castillo Patton

In Western countries and mentalities, suicide is often seen as a death that involves tragedy and/or horror. Attributed to mental illness, troublesome personal problems or terrible contexts, suicide has become a symbol of failure according to (post)modern values in contrast to other cultural beliefs and representations. Thus, what makes self-inflicted deaths a "tragedy" tends to be qualified by occurring in private or indoor settings. On the contrary, what makes suicide a "terrible" death is when it happens in public spaces, especially urban scenarios. Furthermore, suicide becomes even more

condemnable if it attracts some sort of explicit political claim and, the worst of all when it involves an act of terror. But then, suicide may be reconsidered a “success” or a “triumph” from a different point of view as it becomes politicised or is part of a certain ontology. These observations, which engage with Ian Hacking’s reflection on the bond between suicide and political violence, raise the question of how self-inflicted deaths are part of a (counter)weaponisation of the body. This indicates how, for example, psychiatric discourses tend to deactivate suicide as a weapon in opposition to instrumental or ritualistic self-inflicted deaths with political meanings. Therefore, this paper delves into the problematisation of divergent readings of suicide that take culture, context, and history as selective parts of a complex loom in which individual acts imply collective meanings.

Gender and Sexuality in a Queer Kink Community in Vienna: Queering Practices through Community

Johanna Doppelbauer

This research examines the influences of participating in a queer kink community on people’s understandings and experiences of gender and sexuality. BDSM and kink can provide dedicated spaces which allow for a negotiated experimentation with social norms and hierarchies, therefore carrying the potential of their subversion. This can be seen in the way in which gender and sexuality can become renegotiated through participation in queer kinky communities. Additionally, the definition of sexuality itself is broadened, as kink allows for sex and sexuality which does not involve genitals at all and the concept of sex itself comes into question and becomes malleable. Drawing from semi-structured interviews with members of a queer kink community in Vienna, I aim to examine, what properties of the community facilitate the shifts and changes of individuals’ understandings and expressions of their gender identity and sexuality.

Utilizing Queer Theory as the theoretical framework, this research challenges heteronormative constructs as well as naturalized binaries around gender and sexuality and explores the fluidity and social constructivism of gender and sexuality.

My preliminary outcomes show that shared community norms and values and an emphasis on consent practices allow for spaces in which identity does not need to be fixed or defined and therefore allows for a greater experimentation and freedom in expression and exploration. I argue that these spaces reframe gender and sexuality as acts rather than identities which allows for more fluidity and highlights the socially constructed nature of these categories. This talk aims to contribute to an understanding of the transformative potential of queer kink communities and to shed new insights on the role of kink in the broader context of Queer Theory.

Bodily Harm and Age in Rural Narratives of Suicide: Ethnographic Contributions

Luis López-Lago

Between July 2023 and January 2024, an ethnographic fieldwork study on suicide was conducted in a small locality in the rural surroundings of Extremadura, a region in the southwest of Spain.

The analysis of the narratives has revealed that age is a defining element of the categories of bodily harm in the process of committing suicide, including ideations and attempts. There appears to be a correlation between age and the tendency to consider or disregard practices associated with autolytic behaviors related to the body in suicide contexts. Thus, as the age of the informants increases, they configure the images of suicide from the perspective of consummation, where the methods involve the least painful practices. Dominating these is the idea of “efficacy,” understood as the choice that causes the least pain and is simultaneously the quickest method to die, combined with other notions such as opportunity and gender.

As the age of the informants decreases, narratives about suicide begin to incorporate ideas of bodily harm and pain. Self-harm that causes physical pain—cuts, burns, bruises—and the indulgence in suicidal thoughts that may entail pain, guilt, and mortification are intertwined with concepts such as pleasure, escape, or calm.

The hypothesis at play in this research is that the emergence of elements related to autolytic bodily practices in the narratives of younger informants is linked to the spread of symbolic frameworks where suicide and other forms of self-inflicted bodily harm are not as stigmatized as in the cultural environment of the older inhabitants of the locality.