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Women on biotechnologies: feminist and scientific approaches

Area of discussion

Bodies, cultures and scientific metaphors

THE ORGANIZATIONAL CONSTRUCTION OF THE BODY  
IN THE ASSISTED REPRODUCTIVE TECHNOLOGIES

Silvia Gherardi ([silvia.gherardi@soc.unitn.it](mailto:silvia.gherardi@soc.unitn.it))

Dept. of Sociology and Social Research

Research Unit on Communication, Organizational Learning and Aesthetics

University of Trento - Italy

Manuela Perrotta ([manuela.perrotta@soc.unitn.it](mailto:manuela.perrotta@soc.unitn.it))

Dept. of Sociology and Social Research

Research Unit on Communication, Organizational Learning and Aesthetics

University of Trento - Italy

## THE ORGANIZATIONAL CONSTRUCTION OF THE BODY IN THE ASSISTED REPRODUCTIVE TECHNOLOGIES

Biotechnologies have been a matter of global discussion and the source of argument among diverse scientific communities, probably because of their particular epistemological status deriving from their position at the confluence of diverse biological and other areas of knowledge and technology. Although biotechnologies have produced innumerable discoveries, they raise not only ethical problems but also more general ones, especially in the cases of their application on human beings. Particularly in this paper we will try to explore the relation between biotechnologies and the body through the case of assisted reproduction. The choice of the empiric field is due to some distinctive characteristics of assisted reproductive technologies (ART). The first is the ethical and legislative context in which biotechnology is performed, especially in Italy, where the law regulating ART was debated for months and led to a public referendum (held in May 2005) on abrogation of certain of its provisions. The result of the referendum was declared void because voter turnout did not reach the necessary quorum, but the ethical debate is still heated. Secondly, ART working practices have the further interesting feature that two opposing reproductive techniques are used, without there being a 'scientific' reason for choice of one rather than the other. Finally, the case study allow to show how the organizational context interact in the practices of reproduction, which are constantly redefined and negotiated in the everyday work.

On the bases of ethnographic data collected doing research in an artificial reproductive technologies centre in Italy, in this paper we will try to explore how happens the organizational construction of the body. Under the influence of Foucault and feminist theory the study will investigate how the body is "liquid" and it is produced by material-discursive practices. Following the concept of posthumanist performativity (Barad, 2003) we will explore how bodies are subjected to a series of organizational practices whereby the organization inscribed them in its spaces and produced 'organizational bodies'; how happens the passage from body to fluids (follicular and seminal) in the laboratory practices; how gametes (oocytes and spermatozoa) are manipulated and 'transformed' into embryos; and how finally happens the return to the body.

The study, thus, allows to reflect on the complex relationships between the construction of the body and biotechnology, organization and institution, providing some instances and illustrations of work and organizing practices as a locus where this construction is materially performed.

## **References**

Barad K., Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol. 28, no. 3, 2003.

## **Biographies**

Silvia Gherardi is full professor at the Dipartimento di Sociologia e Ricerca Sociale of the University of Trento, where she teaches Sociology of Work. She is one of the founders and currently the responsible of the research unit RUCOLA (Research Unit on Communication, Organizational Learning, and Aesthetics) of the Department of Sociology and Social Research of the University of Trento. She published numerous articles on the following topics: organizational decision-making, organizational learning, temporal dimension in organization studies, organizational cultures and symbolism, female labor market, gender and organizational life. At present her research interest is centered around organizational learning, the social foundation of learning and the communities of practice.

Manuela Perrotta graduated in Communication at the University of Siena and is now a Ph.D candidate in the field of Information Systems and Organization at the Faculty of Sociology of the University of Trento. She is member of the Research Unit on Communication, Organizational Learning and Aesthetics (RUCOLA) at the University of Trento. Her current research examines the relationships among technologies, practices, and organizations in the field of Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ART).