

SHELDON'S BODY TYPES VS SOCIOLOGY OF BODY: REVISITING SOMATOFORM THEORY THROUGH A SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONIST VIEW

S Jayaweera¹

Abstract

This research paper critically examines William H. Sheldon's somatotype theory through a social constructionist lens, addressing significant gaps in its understanding within contemporary sociological frameworks. Sheldon's theory, which categorizes individuals into ectomorphs, mesomorphs, and endomorphs, has been criticized for its methodological, scientific, and conceptual limitations. Despite extensive critique, the intersection of Sheldon's biologically deterministic approach with the sociology of the body remains underexplored. This research employs a desk research methodology, utilizing content and critical analysis to integrate existing criticisms with insights from feminist theory, cultural representation, phenomenology, and Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and field. The study explores four primary areas: historical evolution of body types, commercialization and body image, the "lived body" concept, and Bourdieu's habitus. It argues that social and political transformations throughout history have significantly influenced physical and behavioral characteristics, challenging the static nature of Sheldon's classifications. The commercialization of body image through media and advertising perpetuates narrow ideals of gender roles and sexual identities, questioning the relevance of Sheldon's somatotypes in modern consumer culture. The phenomenological perspective of the "lived body" emphasizes subjective experience and embodied consciousness, offering a more dynamic understanding of human behavior compared to Sheldon's fixed categories. Bourdieu's habitus and field concepts highlight the embodiment of social norms and the impact of social contexts on bodily practices, contrasting sharply with Sheldon's reductionist view. The findings underscore the importance of considering historical, social, and cultural factors in understanding body types and behaviors. By bridging Sheldon's theory with contemporary sociological perspectives, this research provides a nuanced critique that highlights the limitations of biological determinism and advocates for a more comprehensive, socially informed approach to studying body image and identity. This paper contributes to the broader discourse on the sociology of the body, emphasizing the need for interdisciplinary and dynamic frameworks in examining the complex interplay between biology and social construction.

Keywords: Somatotype Theory, Social Constructionism, Sociology of the Body, Body Image, Embodiment.

¹ Senior Lecturer, Department of Sociology, University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka

Email: jayaweera@kln.ac.lk



<https://orcid.org/0009-0009-6253-4060>



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Introduction

The classification of human physiques into distinct body types, known as somatotypes, was first introduced by William H. Sheldon in the early 20th century. Sheldon's somatotype theory categorizes individuals into three primary body types: ectomorph, mesomorph, and endomorph, each associated with specific personality traits and behavioral tendencies (Sheldon, 1940). While Sheldon's work garnered significant attention and influenced various fields, including psychology and physical education, it has also faced substantial criticism regarding its scientific validity and ethical implications (Carter & Heath, 1990; Richardson, 1991). In contrast, the concept of social bodies, rooted in social constructionist theory, posits that body image and identity are significantly shaped by cultural, social, and political factors (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). This paper aims to revisit Sheldon's somatotype theory through a social constructionist lens, exploring the intersections and divergences between biological determinism and the sociocultural construction of body types. By doing so, we seek to provide a nuanced understanding of how body image is perceived and constructed in contemporary society.

Diverse theoretical traditions have significantly influenced the understanding of the human body and its social and biological existence. Positivist criminology, for instance, has long sought to establish a core relationship between body shapes and criminality. Early criminologists like Cesare Lombroso, Enrico Ferri, and Raffaele Garofalo posited that certain physical characteristics were indicative of a predisposition to criminal behavior (Lombroso, 2006; Ferri, 2009). William H. Sheldon, a key figure of the late positivist tradition, extended this line of inquiry by associating body types with behavioral tendencies and deviance (Sheldon, 1949). His work on somatotypes suggested that mesomorphic individuals, characterized by muscular and athletic builds, were more prone to engage in delinquent behavior compared to their ectomorphic (thin) and endomorphic (round) counterparts (Sheldon, 1949). Despite Sheldon's significant contributions, his theories have faced considerable criticism for their deterministic approach and lack of empirical rigor (Carter & Heath, 1990; Richardson, 1991). Moreover, contemporary scholarship emphasizes the sociocultural dimensions of body image, arguing that societal norms and cultural contexts play a crucial role in shaping perceptions of the body (Gergen, 1999; Turner, 2008). This paper revisits Sheldon's somatotype theory through a social constructionist perspective, aiming to bridge the gap between biological determinism and the socially constructed nature of body types. By critically examining these paradigms, we seek to offer a comprehensive understanding of the interplay between biological attributes and social identities.

Sheldon's Body types: Varieties of human physique

William H. Sheldon's seminal work, "The Varieties of Human Physique: An Introduction to Constitutional Psychology" (1940), introduces the concept of somatotypes, a classification system for human physiques. This theory categorizes individuals into three primary body types: ectomorph, mesomorph, and endomorph. Sheldon describes the ectomorph as "characterized by a delicate build, a lack of muscular development, and a linear, fragile appearance; the mesomorph, by a well-developed musculature and a large-boned, athletic physique; and the endomorph, by a soft, round body, with a tendency toward fat accumulation" (Sheldon, 1940, p. 23). Sheldon's somatotype theory forms the basis of what he calls constitutional psychology, which posits that an individual's physique is intimately linked to their temperament and behavior patterns. He asserts, "Constitutional psychology posits that the physique of an individual is not merely a physical entity but is intimately linked to temperament and behavior patterns" (Sheldon, 1940, p. 47). This perspective suggests a profound interconnection between body type and psychological traits, proposing that physical constitution can influence personality and behavior.

The methodology employed by Sheldon to categorize individuals into somatotypes involves a combination of photographic analysis and anthropometric measurements. He explains that "the somatotype ratings are derived from a combination of three independent ratings, each on a seven-point scale, that assess the extent to which an individual exhibits the characteristics of ectomorphy, mesomorphy, and endomorphy" (Sheldon, 1940, p. 102). This meticulous approach aims to provide a precise and objective assessment of an individual's body type.

In addition to defining these body types, Sheldon explores the psychological characteristics associated with each somatotype. He observes that "ectomorphs are often introspective and socially restrained, mesomorphs tend to be assertive and adventurous, while endomorphs are typically sociable and comfort-seeking" (Sheldon, 1940, p. 135). These correlations suggest that physical constitution may predispose individuals to certain temperaments and behavioral tendencies. The implications of Sheldon's somatotype theory extend to various fields, including education, criminology, and psychiatry. He suggests that "understanding the somatotypic constitution of individuals can provide valuable insights for educators, clinicians, and criminal justice professionals, aiding in the development of personalized interventions" (Sheldon, 1940, p. 190). By linking body types to personality traits, Sheldon's theory offers a framework for understanding individual differences and tailoring approaches to meet specific needs.

Criticisms of Sheldon's Somatotype Theory

William H. Sheldon's somatotype theory has faced considerable criticism over the years, primarily categorized under three main themes: methodological criticism, scientific criticism, and conceptual criticism. These critiques highlight significant issues in the theory's development and application.

Methodological Criticism

One of the primary criticisms of Sheldon's somatotype theory lies in its methodology. Critics argue that the techniques used to classify individuals into somatotypes are inherently flawed. The reliance on photographic analysis and subjective ratings has been questioned for its lack of objectivity and potential for bias.

Subjectivity and Bias: The somatotype ratings are based on visual assessments, which can be highly subjective. Carter and Heath (1990) point out that the ratings "are derived from a combination of three independent ratings, each on a seven-point scale," which introduces significant potential for observer bias (Carter & Heath, 1990, p. 102). Different observers might rate the same individual differently, leading to inconsistent classifications. Sutherland critiques the lack of standardized procedures in Sheldon's somatotype classification. He argues that the subjective nature of visual assessments and the absence of consistent measurement techniques undermine the reliability of the findings. "The reliance on subjective visual assessments without standardized procedures introduces a high degree of variability and potential bias in the classification of somatotypes" (Sutherland, 1951, p. 635).

Another methodological issue highlighted by Sutherland is the potential for sample selection bias. Sutherland notes that Sheldon's samples may not be representative of the broader population, thus limiting the generalizability of his conclusions. "The samples used in Sheldon's studies appear to be selectively biased, raising questions about the representativeness and generalizability of his findings" (Sutherland, 1951, p. 638).

Reliability and Validity: The reliability and validity of Sheldon's measurement techniques have also been challenged. Richardson (1991) notes that "the lack of standardized procedures for measuring and

categorizing somatotypes compromises the scientific rigor of the theory" (Richardson, 1991, p. 75). Without consistent and replicable methods, the findings and conclusions drawn from these measurements are questionable.

Scientific Criticism

Sheldon's theory has also faced scientific criticism, particularly regarding the lack of empirical evidence and the use of subjective observations to support his claims.

Lack of Empirical Evidence: One major scientific criticism is the insufficient empirical evidence to substantiate the correlation between body types and personality traits. Despite Sheldon's extensive data collection, subsequent research has failed to consistently replicate his findings. Parnell (1958) argues that "there is a paucity of robust empirical studies that confirm the associations posited by Sheldon between somatotypes and personality traits" (Parnell, 1958, p. 244).

Subjective Observations: Sheldon's reliance on subjective observations rather than objective data further undermines the scientific credibility of his theory. Critics argue that the observational nature of his research introduces significant bias. Gould (1981) asserts that "Sheldon's conclusions are heavily influenced by his subjective interpretations, which lack the objectivity required for scientific inquiry" (Gould, 1981, p. 162).

Conceptual Criticism

Beyond methodological and scientific issues, Sheldon's theory has been conceptually criticized for its deterministic approach and oversimplification of the relationship between body types and personality.

Deterministic Approach: One major conceptual criticism is that Sheldon's theory adopts a deterministic view, suggesting that body type rigidly dictates personality and behavior. This perspective has been criticized for ignoring the complex interplay of genetic, environmental, and social factors that influence personality. For example, Schwartz and Graham (1977) argue that "the deterministic nature of somatotype theory fails to account for the multifaceted and dynamic nature of human personality development" (Schwartz & Graham, 1977, p.89). Sutherland argues that Sheldon's theory is overly deterministic, suggesting that body type rigidly determines personality and behavior. This perspective neglects the complex interplay of environmental, social, and genetic factors that shape human behavior. "The deterministic framework of Sheldon's somatotype theory fails to account for the multifaceted influences of environment, culture, and individual experiences on human behavior" (Sutherland, 1951, p. 645).

Oversimplification: The theory's classification into just three somatotypes has been criticized for oversimplifying human diversity. Critics argue that human bodies and personalities cannot be neatly categorized into such rigid types. Turner (2008) states that "the oversimplified typology of somatotypes does not capture the complexity and variability of human physiques and personalities" (Turner, 2008, p.114).

while Sheldon's somatotype theory has made significant contributions to the study of human physiques and their psychological implications, it has faced substantial criticism on methodological, scientific, and conceptual grounds. These critiques highlight the need for more rigorous, objective, and nuanced approaches to understanding the relationship between body types and personality traits

Sociological Critique: The Body as a Social Construction

Critics from the sociology of the body argue that Sheldon's theory fails to recognize the body as a social construct, influenced by cultural, social, and political contexts.

Cultural and Social Influences: The sociology of the body emphasizes that body image and identity are shaped by cultural and social factors, not merely by biological determinants. For instance, Ramachandran and Vertinsky (2022) highlight how societal changes and cultural narratives about the body can influence perceptions and behaviors. "Sheldon's insistence on an unchanging body type neglects the impact of social change and cultural narratives on body perception" (Ramachandran & Vertinsky, 2022, p.45).

Social Norms and Body Image: Sociologists argue that body types are often defined and valued according to social norms, which can vary across different societies and historical periods. Prescott (2002) discusses how the social construction of body types can influence individual identity and social interactions. "Social norms play a crucial role in shaping body image, and these norms are subject to change over time and across cultures" (Prescott, 2002, p.78).

Interdisciplinary Approaches: Integrating perspectives from sociology, anthropology, and cultural studies, critics call for a more interdisciplinary approach to studying the body. This approach recognizes the body as both a biological and a social entity, shaped by an interplay of genetic, environmental, and cultural factors. "A comprehensive understanding of body types requires an interdisciplinary approach that considers both biological and social dimensions" (Vertinsky, 2007, p. 291).

Research Problem:

While **William H. Sheldon's** somatotype theory has been widely criticized for its methodological, scientific, and conceptual limitations, there remains a significant gap in understanding how this theory intersects with the sociology of the body. Current literature predominantly critiques Sheldon's deterministic and reductionist approach but lacks a comprehensive analysis through the lens of social constructionism, particularly incorporating feminist theory, cultural representation, the "lived body," and embodiment theories. This research seeks to address this gap by exploring the relevance and implications of Sheldon's somatotype theory within contemporary sociological frameworks that emphasize the social, cultural, and embodied dimensions of human existence.

Research Questions

- (1) How have social and political transformations throughout history influenced the physical and behavioral characteristics of the body, and in what ways does this historical evolution challenge the static nature of Sheldon's somatotype theory?
- (2) How does the commercialization of body image, through advertising and media representations, shape contemporary gender roles and sexual identities, and what implications does this have for the validity and relevance of Sheldon's somatotype classifications?
- (3) How does the phenomenological concept of the "lived body," emphasizing subjective experience and embodied consciousness, provide a more comprehensive understanding of human behavior and identity compared to the biologically deterministic approach of Sheldon's somatotype theory?
- (4) In what ways do Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and field, particularly the embodiment of social norms through hexis, offer a dynamic and socially informed

perspective that contrasts with and critiques the static and biologically determined framework of Sheldon's somatotype theory?

Methodology

This research paper employs a desk research methodology, focusing exclusively on secondary data to provide a comprehensive critique of William H. Sheldon's somatotype theory. The primary aim is to build a robust critical argument by integrating relevant insights from the sociology of the body. The research process involved systematically identifying, reading, and examining related literature, guided by targeted searches and critical analysis.

The research began with an extensive literature survey to collect existing criticisms and discussions surrounding Sheldon's somatotype theory. Sources were identified through academic databases such as JSTOR, Google Scholar, and institutional libraries. The search terms included "Sheldon's somatotype theory," "critique of somatotypes," "sociology of the body," "Merleau-Ponty lived body," and "Bourdieu habitus." Both seminal works and contemporary studies were included to ensure a thorough understanding of the historical and current perspectives. The inclusion and exclusion of sources were conducted manually to maintain high academic standards. Included sources had to be peer-reviewed articles, books, and credible academic materials published in English. Non-scholarly articles, opinion pieces, and sources lacking substantial academic merit were excluded. This process ensured the selection of high-quality and pertinent materials, providing a solid foundation for the analysis.

The methodology comprised two main analytical approaches: content analysis and critical analysis. This approach was used to systematically review and categorize the main themes and criticisms present in the existing literature on Sheldon's somatotype theory. The process involved coding the collected literature to identify recurring themes, arguments, and counterarguments. Key themes such as methodological flaws, scientific criticisms, and conceptual limitations were identified and categorized. Content analysis facilitated a structured overview of the literature, highlighting the predominant criticisms and discussions surrounding Sheldon's theory. Following content analysis, critical analysis was applied to examine these themes in relation to key concepts from the sociology of the body. This involved a detailed comparison of Sheldon's somatotype theory with Merleau-Ponty's concept of the "lived body" and Pierre Bourdieu's notions of habitus and field. The critical analysis aimed to contextualize Sheldon's theory within broader sociological and philosophical frameworks, providing a deeper understanding of its limitations and implications.

Comparative Analysis

A significant portion of the methodology focused on a critical comparison of Merleau-Ponty's "lived body" and Bourdieu's habitus with Sheldon's somatotype theory. This concept emphasizes the subjective experience and embodied consciousness, contrasting sharply with Sheldon's biologically deterministic approach. The analysis involved exploring how the "lived body" provides a more comprehensive understanding of human behavior and identity. Bourdieu's habitus and field concepts highlight the dynamic interplay between social structures, individual agency, and bodily practices. The methodology included examining how Bourdieu's ideas on social norms and the embodiment of social structures (hexis) offer a socially informed critique of Sheldon's static body types.

Synthesis and Interpretation

The final step in the methodology involved synthesizing the findings from content and critical analysis to construct a cohesive argument. This synthesis aimed to bridge the gap between Sheldon's somatotype theory and contemporary sociological perspectives, emphasizing the social construction of the body.

- **Integration of Findings:**
The integrated findings from the comparative analysis were used to develop a nuanced critique of Sheldon's theory.
This involved highlighting the limitations of a biologically deterministic view and advocating for a more dynamic, socially informed understanding of body types and behaviors.
- **Implications for Sociological Discourse:**
The synthesis also addressed the broader implications of the findings for the field of sociology, particularly in understanding the social construction of the body.
This approach underscored the need for interdisciplinary perspectives and the integration of sociological, philosophical, and cultural insights in critiquing and developing theories of the body.

This methodology provided a comprehensive framework for critiquing William H. Sheldon's somatotype theory through a desk research approach. By combining content and critical analysis, and integrating key sociological concepts, the research offers a nuanced and in-depth critique that situates Sheldon's theory within contemporary sociological discourse.

Discussion

Social Transformations and Their Impact on Body Types

This section explores how major social transformations such as industrialization, globalization, and changing cultural norms have influenced perceptions of body types and challenged the rigidity of Sheldon's somatotype theory. As societal structures evolve, so too do the ideals and expectations around body image, suggesting that body types are not fixed categories but are shaped by broader social and historical changes.

Historical and Evolutionary Perspective on the Body

The human body, throughout history, has been shaped and reshaped by social, political, and cultural transformations. These changes have influenced not only the physical appearance of the body but also its behavioral expressions. From the evolutionary standpoint, the body has adapted to various environmental, social, and cultural pressures, leading to significant variations in body types and behaviors across different civilizations and epochs.

The process of civilization has played a critical role in shaping the body. **Norbert Elias's** concept of the "civilizing process" highlights how societal norms and etiquettes have evolved, influencing the way individuals carry and present their bodies. This process involves the gradual refinement of behaviors and the internalization of social norms, which significantly impact physical appearance and comportment. "The civilizing process involves a long-term transformation in behavior and bodily presentation, driven by the internalization of social norms and etiquettes" (Elias, 1939).

Sheldon's somatotype theory, however, does not account for these historical and cultural shifts. By focusing on static body types, Sheldon overlooks the dynamic nature of the body, which continuously evolves in response to changing social and environmental contexts. The theory's deterministic approach fails to recognize that body types are not fixed but are shaped by ongoing societal transformations.

Martial Arts, Sports, and Dance: Cultural Training of the Body

Martial arts, sports, and dance are prime examples of how cultural practices shape the body. These activities involve rigorous physical training, discipline, and skill development, leading to specific

physical and behavioral traits. The bodies of athletes, dancers, and martial artists are sculpted through years of training and cultural conditioning, which significantly influences their body types and associated behaviors.

The practice of martial arts emphasizes strength, agility, and mental discipline. Martial artists develop specific physical traits, such as increased muscle mass and flexibility, which are the result of cultural practices rather than inherent body types. Athletes in different sports exhibit diverse body types based on the physical demands of their disciplines. For instance, long-distance runners often have lean, ectomorphic bodies, while weightlifters typically have more mesomorphic builds. These variations are cultivated through specialized training and diet, reflecting cultural practices.

Dancers, particularly in classical forms like ballet, develop distinct body shapes characterized by long limbs, flexibility, and strength. The aesthetic ideals of dance cultures influence these physical traits, demonstrating the role of cultural training in shaping the body.

Sheldon's theory, by rigidly categorizing body types, neglects the impact of these cultural practices. It fails to acknowledge that the physical traits associated with martial arts, sports, and dance are products of cultural conditioning and training, rather than inherent somatotypes.

"The bodies of athletes, dancers, and martial artists are sculpted through years of training and cultural conditioning, demonstrating that physical traits are shaped by cultural practices rather than inherent body types" (Vertinsky, 2007).

Social and political changes also play a crucial role in shaping body types and behaviors. Historical events, such as wars, revolutions, and social movements, influence societal norms and values, which in turn affect how bodies are perceived and treated. For example, the industrial revolution brought about significant changes in diet, labor, and lifestyle, leading to shifts in body types and health conditions.

Commercialization and the Construction of Body Image

This section examines how the commercialization of body image in contemporary society intersects with and challenges Sheldon's somatotype theory. The rise of consumer culture has transformed how bodies are perceived, marketed, and idealized, moving beyond Sheldon's biological determinism to a more fluid and socially constructed notion of the body. Commercial forces particularly advertising, media, and fashion—shape public perceptions of the "ideal" body, influencing individuals' self-concept and societal expectations. This section explores how the commodification of body image complicates the simplistic body type categories proposed by Sheldon, as it reflects a constant negotiation between societal ideals and personal embodiment.

The Commercialization of the Body

In contemporary society, bodies are increasingly constructed and commodified as consumer objects. The commercialization of body image involves the promotion and sale of idealized body shapes through various media and consumer products, which play a significant role in shaping gender roles and sexual identities. This aspect of modern culture is notably absent in William H. Sheldon's somatotype theory, which classifies individuals into ectomorphs, mesomorphs, and endomorphs based on their physical characteristics and associates these classifications with specific personality traits and behaviors.

Gender Roles and Commercialization

The commercialization of the body heavily influences gender roles. Advertising and media representations often perpetuate narrow ideals of femininity and masculinity, promoting specific body types as desirable and socially acceptable. These idealized body shapes are often unattainable for many people, leading to widespread body dissatisfaction and the pursuit of commercial solutions, such as diets, cosmetic surgery, and fitness regimes."Advertising and media representations perpetuate narrow ideals of femininity and masculinity, promoting specific body types as desirable and socially acceptable" (Kilbourne, 1999).

Sheldon's somatotype theory does not account for the powerful influence of consumer culture in shaping body image. By attributing fixed personality traits to body types, Sheldon's theory ignores the dynamic and socially constructed nature of body image, which is constantly being reshaped by commercial interests.

Sexual Identities and Consumerism

Sexual identities are also deeply influenced by the commercialization of the body. Consumer culture often links sexual desirability to certain body types, reinforcing stereotypes and creating pressure to conform to these ideals. For example, the idealized male body is often depicted as muscular and athletic, while the idealized female body is portrayed as slim and toned. These representations are not merely reflections of natural body types but are actively constructed and promoted by industries seeking to profit from body-related products and services."Consumer culture links sexual desirability to certain body types, reinforcing stereotypes and creating pressure to conform to these ideals" (Bordo, 1993).

Sheldon's theory fails to recognize how sexual identities are commodified and marketed, reducing the complexity of human identity to simplistic and biologically deterministic categories. This oversight ignores the significant role of commercial forces in shaping how individuals perceive and express their bodies.

Constructing Body Shapes as Consumer Objects

The construction of body shapes as consumer objects involves transforming bodies into products that can be modified, enhanced, and marketed. This process is driven by industries such as fashion, fitness, and beauty, which promote an endless pursuit of the 'ideal' body through consumption. The commodification of body shapes encourages individuals to continually invest in products and services that promise to help them achieve the culturally sanctioned ideal."The commodification of body shapes encourages individuals to continually invest in products and services that promise to help them achieve the culturally sanctioned ideal" (Featherstone, 2010).

Sheldon's somatotype theory, by categorizing body types into fixed categories, fails to account for the fluid and constructed nature of body image in consumer society. The theory overlooks how bodies are constantly being reshaped by market forces and the cultural messages they propagate.

Implications for Understanding Body Image

The commercial construction of body image has profound implications for understanding the body in contemporary society. It highlights the limitations of Sheldon's somatotype theory, which does not consider the socio-economic forces that shape body image and identity. By ignoring the role of commercialization, Sheldon's theory offers an incomplete and static view of the body, failing to address the complex and evolving nature of body image as influenced by consumer culture."Sheldon's theory

offers an incomplete and static view of the body, failing to address the complex and evolving nature of body image as influenced by consumer culture" (Gill, 2008).

In conclusion, Sheldon's somatotype theory is critically limited by its failure to consider the commercialization of the body and its impact on gender roles and sexual identities. The theory's biologically deterministic approach overlooks how consumer culture actively constructs and commodifies body shapes, perpetuating narrow ideals and fostering body dissatisfaction. By integrating insights from the sociology of the body and consumer culture, we can develop a more comprehensive understanding of body image that transcends the static and simplistic categorizations of Sheldon's theory.

The "Lived Body" Concept vs. Sheldon's Somatotype Theory

In this section, I shift focus to the philosophical and phenomenological critique of Sheldon's somatotype theory by engaging with the concept of the "lived body." Unlike Sheldon's biologically deterministic approach, the "lived body" acknowledges the subjective experience of embodiment, emphasizing the dynamic interplay between body, consciousness, and the world.

The Concept of the "Lived Body"

The concept of the "lived body," primarily developed by phenomenologists Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Edmund Husserl, provides a profound counterpoint to the static and reductionist nature of Sheldon's somatotype theory. The "lived body" refers to the body as experienced from the first-person perspective, emphasizing its role in perception, intentionality, and consciousness. Unlike the objective, external view of the body as a mere physical entity, the "lived body" underscores the intimate, subjective experience of being-in-the-world.

Merleau-Ponty emphasizes that the body is not merely an object among objects but the very medium through which we engage with the world. He argues that our bodily experiences are fundamental to our understanding of reality, shaping our perceptions and actions.

Quote: "The body is our general medium for having a world" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962).

Husserl on the "Lived Body":

Husserl's phenomenology also explores the dualism between the mind and the body, focusing on how the body is both subjectively experienced and objectively observed. He introduces the notion of the "body-subject," where the body is seen as both a physical entity and a center of experience and intentionality. "The body is not merely a physical thing, but the very condition of possibility for our experiences and actions" (Husserl, 1989).

Sheldon's somatotype theory categorizes individuals into three primary body types ectomorph, mesomorph, and endomorph and associates each type with specific personality traits and behavioral tendencies. This theory adopts a biologically deterministic approach, suggesting that physical body types inherently dictate personality and behavior.

Critical Comparison of Merleau-Ponty's Lived body with Sheldon's Somatotype theory

Subjective Experience vs. Objective Classification:

The phenomenological concept of the "lived body" emphasizes subjective experience and the inseparability of mind and body. It argues that the body is not merely a physical structure but a lived experience that shapes and is shaped by our interactions with the world. In contrast, Sheldon's somatotype theory views the body as an objective entity that can be classified and measured. It fails to

account for the subjective experience of the body, reducing individuals to rigid categories based on physical appearance.

Dynamic Interaction vs. Static Categories:

Merleau-Ponty and Husserl highlight the dynamic interaction between the body and the world, where the body is constantly engaging with and responding to its environment. This perspective sees the body as fluid and adaptable, shaped by experiences and contexts.

Sheldon: Sheldon's theory presents body types as static and unchanging, suggesting that individuals' physical forms and associated traits are fixed. This ignores the fluidity and adaptability of the body as emphasized by phenomenology.

Embodied Consciousness vs. Biological Determinism:

Phenomenologists argue that consciousness is embodied, meaning that our bodily experiences are integral to our thoughts, emotions, and actions. The mind and body are intertwined, with the body serving as the vehicle for our lived experiences. Sheldon's theory adopts a biologically deterministic approach, implying that physical characteristics determine psychological traits and behaviors. This separation of body and mind into distinct categories neglects the embodied nature of human experience.

Individual Variability vs. Typological Rigidness:

The phenomenological perspective recognizes individual variability and the uniqueness of each person's bodily experiences. It acknowledges that people experience and perceive their bodies in diverse ways, influenced by their histories, cultures, and contexts. Sheldon's somatotype theory imposes a rigid typology on individuals, categorizing them into three distinct body types without considering the variability and diversity of human bodies. This rigid classification overlooks the complex interplay of factors that shape body image and identity.

In the phenomenological concept of the "lived body" offers a rich and nuanced understanding of the body that contrasts sharply with Sheldon's somatotype theory. While phenomenology emphasizes the subjective, dynamic, and embodied nature of human experience, Sheldon's theory adopts a static, objective, and biologically deterministic view of the body. By incorporating the insights of Merleau-Ponty and Husserl, we can develop a more comprehensive and humanistic understanding of the body that transcends the limitations of Sheldon's typological approach.

Bourdieu's Habitus and Field vs. Sheldon's Somatotype Theory

In this section, I explore the theoretical tensions between Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of *habitus* and *field* and Sheldon's somatotype theory. While Sheldon's framework focuses heavily on biological determinism by linking body types to personality traits and social behavior, Bourdieu offers a more dynamic sociocultural perspective.

Bourdieu's Habitus and Field

Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and field offer a dynamic and sociologically rich framework for understanding human behavior and social structures. Habitus, refers to the deeply ingrained habits, skills, and dispositions that individuals acquire through their experiences in specific social contexts. It encompasses the ways individuals perceive the world, make decisions, and act, all of which are shaped by their social and economic conditions. "The habitus is a system of lasting, transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions" (Bourdieu, 1977).

A field is a social arena in which people compete for resources and influence. Each field has its own rules, structures, and power dynamics, which shape the behavior and strategies of individuals within it. "The field is a structured social space, a field of forces, a force field where the various actors struggle for the transformation and preservation of the field" (Bourdieu, 1993).

Hexis: A specific aspect of habitus, hexis refers to the physical embodiment of habitus, including posture, movement, and ways of carrying oneself, which are influenced by social norms and conditions.

Critical Comparison of Bourdieu's Habitus and Field with Sheldon's Body types

Bourdieu's concept of habitus is inherently dynamic, evolving through interactions within various social fields. It underscores the importance of social and cultural contexts in shaping behaviors and dispositions. In contrast, Sheldon's somatotype theory presents a static view, suggesting that body types and their associated traits are fixed and biologically determined. This theory does not account for the influence of social and cultural factors on behavior and identity, thereby presenting a more rigid and deterministic perspective.

Bourdieu's notion of hexis highlights the embodied nature of habitus, where physical comportment and bodily practices are shaped by social experiences and cultural norms. This perspective recognizes the body as both a physical and social construct. Conversely, Sheldon's theory reduces the body to a set of biological characteristics that are believed to determine personality and behavior. This reductionist view overlooks the role of social practices and cultural norms in shaping how individuals experience and utilize their bodies.

Bourdieu's field theory incorporates the social context in which individuals operate, acknowledging that behaviors and dispositions are influenced by the competition and power dynamics within these fields. Sheldon's theory, however, does not consider the social contexts and power relations that influence body types and behaviors. It fails to address how social structures and fields of power shape and are shaped by individuals' physical and psychological traits, thereby presenting a more limited understanding of human behavior.

Bourdieu's framework allows for a nuanced understanding of how individuals' behaviors and dispositions are influenced by their collective social experiences. It considers the interplay between individual agency and social structure, providing a comprehensive view of human behavior. In contrast, Sheldon's somatotype theory categorizes individuals into rigid types, neglecting the complexity of human behavior that arises from the interaction between individual agency and social structures. While Sheldon's theory views body types as purely biological, Bourdieu's concept of hexis highlights how body practices are socially constructed and influenced by cultural norms. For instance, an individual's posture, gait, and physical presence are shaped by their social environment and the expectations within their field, not just by their body type. "Hexis, as a component of habitus, represents the embodiment of social structures within the physical body, influenced by the cultural and social context in which one lives" (Bourdieu, 1977).

Habitus is adaptable and evolves with changing social contexts. This contrasts sharply with Sheldon's static categorization, suggesting a need for a more flexible understanding of how body types and behaviors can change over time. "The habitus is a product of history, and it produces individual and collective practices more history in accordance with the schemes engendered by history" (Bourdieu, 1990).

Bourdieu's field theory emphasizes the role of power dynamics and social structures in shaping behavior, which is absent in Sheldon's theory. Understanding body types within the context of social fields provides a more comprehensive view of how power and social hierarchies influence physical and behavioral traits. Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field, and hexis offer a dynamic, socially informed framework that contrasts with Sheldon's static and biologically deterministic somatotype theory. By incorporating the insights of Bourdieu, we can better understand the complex interplay between body types, social contexts, and cultural practices, providing a richer and more nuanced perspective on human behavior and identity.

Main Findings:

- Historical and social transformations have significantly influenced physical and behavioral characteristics, challenging the static and biologically deterministic nature of Sheldon's somatotype theory. These transformations illustrate that body types are not fixed but are shaped by evolving social, political, and cultural contexts. For example, the civilization process, changes in diet and lifestyle during the industrial revolution, and the impact of wars and social movements have all contributed to shifts in body types and behaviors.
- The commercialization of body image through advertising and media representations has profoundly shaped contemporary gender roles and sexual identities. This commercialization promotes specific body ideals, leading to body dissatisfaction and the pursuit of commercially-driven body modifications. Advertisements and media portrayals of idealized body shapes reinforce narrow definitions of beauty and desirability, pressuring individuals to conform to these standards through diets, cosmetic surgery, and fitness regimes.
- The phenomenological concept of the "lived body" provides a more comprehensive understanding of human behavior and identity by emphasizing subjective experience and embodied consciousness. This perspective contrasts sharply with Sheldon's biologically deterministic approach, highlighting the limitations of reducing personality and behavior to fixed body types. The "lived body" perspective accounts for the dynamic and interactive nature of human experience, where the body is seen as both a physical entity and a medium through which individuals engage with the world.
- Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and field, particularly the embodiment of social norms through hexis, offer a dynamic and socially informed perspective that critiques Sheldon's static and biologically determined framework. Bourdieu's theory emphasizes how social contexts and power dynamics shape behaviors and dispositions. The concept of habitus illustrates how deeply ingrained social norms and cultural practices influence physical comportment and bodily practices, demonstrating that body types are not merely biological but are significantly shaped by social experiences.

Conclusion

The critical examination of William H. Sheldon's somatotype theory through the lens of contemporary sociological frameworks reveals significant limitations and gaps in understanding human body types and behaviors. Sheldon's biologically deterministic approach, which categorizes individuals into rigid somatotypes -ectomorphs, mesomorphs, and endomorphs-and associates each with specific personality traits and behaviors, fails to account for the complex interplay of social, cultural, and historical factors that shape the human body and identity.

Historical and social transformations have played a crucial role in shaping physical and behavioral characteristics, challenging the static nature of Sheldon's somatotype theory. The commercialization of body image through advertising and media representations has significantly influenced contemporary gender roles and sexual identities. This commercialization promotes specific body ideals, often unattainable for many, leading to widespread body dissatisfaction and the pursuit of commercially-driven body modifications. The phenomenological concept of the "lived body," as articulated by Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Edmund Husserl, provides a more comprehensive understanding of human behavior and identity by emphasizing subjective experience and embodied consciousness. Unlike Sheldon's theory, which views body types as static and biologically determined, the "lived body" perspective highlights the dynamic and interactive nature of human experience. This perspective sees the body as both a physical entity and a medium through which individuals engage with the world, incorporating the lived experiences, perceptions, and intentionality that shape behavior and identity.

Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and field, particularly the embodiment of social norms through hexis, offer a dynamic and socially informed perspective that critiques Sheldon's static and biologically determined framework. Habitus refers to the deeply ingrained habits, skills, and dispositions that individuals acquire through their experiences in specific social contexts, while field represents the social arenas where individuals compete for resources and influence. Hexis, as a specific aspect of habitus, highlights how physical comportment and bodily practices are shaped by social norms and conditions. Bourdieu's theory emphasizes how social contexts and power dynamics influence behaviors and dispositions, demonstrating that body types are not merely biological but are significantly shaped by social experiences. This perspective underscores the importance of considering the dynamic interplay between individual agency, social structures, and cultural practices in understanding body types and behaviors.

The findings from this research have significant scholarly implications for the study of body types and human behavior. By integrating insights from the sociology of the body, including feminist theory, cultural representation, the "lived body," and Bourdieu's habitus and field, this research provides a more nuanced and dynamic understanding of the body and its social construction. It challenges the reductionist and deterministic approach of Sheldon's somatotype theory and highlights the need for more comprehensive and interdisciplinary approaches to studying body image and identity. This research contributes to the broader field of sociology by demonstrating the importance of considering historical, social, and cultural factors in understanding physical characteristics and behaviors. It also underscores the role of consumer culture in shaping body image and the significance of embodied experiences in shaping human behavior and identity. Future research should continue to explore these intersections, incorporating diverse perspectives and methodologies to deepen our understanding of the complex and dynamic nature of the human body and its social construction.

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