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Bodylore and Dress

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Abstract and Keywords

Bodylore includes the ways in which the body is used as a canvas for inherited and chosen identity. Bodylore considers the symbolic inventory of dress and hair, addressing a range of identities from conservative religious groups like the Amish and the Hasidim to edgy goth and punk devotees. The body is scripted in portrayals of race, ethnicity, gender, age, religion, and politics, including such topics as tattoos, piercing, scarification, hair covering and styling, traditional and folk dress, fashion, and body modification. The central bodylore questions are whether individuals choose consciously or subconsciously to engage with their performative body, as well as why the body is often overlooked as a text within academic studies. This essay identifies the body as a malleable folkloric space, allowing for its symbols to function in both personal and public ways.

Keywords: body art, bodylore, body modification, clothing, dress, ethnography, fashion, folklore, folk symbols, frame theory

The body—and the folklore surrounding it—arose as a concentrated field of study for folklorists during the 1980s. Although sociologists and anthropologists have had an interest in the role that the body plays culturally, folklorists who focus on the body especially consider the ways in which beliefs about and conceptualizations of the body are transmitted following traditions. In this essay, I introduce folkloristic approaches to bodylore, provide a background in the historiography of bodylore studies, and answer the question of how the body is scripted in portrayals of identity through dress, fashion, garb, body modification, gesture, movement, and posturing. I conclude with a proposal for the future of bodylore and the potential to interpret whether or not individuals consciously or subconsciously engage with their performative body. I argue that the body is a malleable folkloric space, which allows for symbols to function in both personal and public spaces all while scripted on or through the body.

Defining Bodylore: An Introduction to the Methodology

By the 1980s, folklorists recognized that studies of the body and dress warranted their own designation within the discipline. Although the body had found folkloristic voice in studies of material culture (Prown 1982), play (Dundes 1964), and gesture (Rose 1919), these analyses did not encompass the depth of how the body is used to communicate identity, as they scripted the body as a conduit of expression rather than the subject of the body as an object unto itself. That is not to say that the body was not considered. Important early folkloristic studies interpreting the expressive body beyond speech include Archer Taylor's *The Shanghai Gesture* (1956), Don Yoder's investigations on folk costuming (1972), and Leonard Clair and Alan Govenaar's work on tattoo artists (1981). Going back further, as early as 1893, American Folklore Society (AFS) president Alexander Francis Chamberlain, reflecting his field studies of the physiological basis of Native American linguistics, was trying to integrate gesture with speech in "Human Physiognomy and Physical Characteristics in Folk-Lore and Folk-Speech" in the *Journal of American Folklore*.

These studies of the body were woven throughout folkloristics without one central methodology that could draw attention to the centrality of the body and the process of embodiment in expressive culture. As a response for this need of a disciplinary home, Katharine Young coined the phrase "bodylore" when she organized a panel for the 1989 American Folklore Society meeting. In later defining the phrase, Young wrote, "Bodylore investigates a constellation of corporeal properties in order to illuminate a cluster of theoretical puzzles.... The panoply of possibilities of the body as a discursive focus discloses the underlying suppositions, concentrations, and insights of bodylore as a discourse. We are not in quest of bodies, a body, or *the* body, but of our holds on the notion of bodiliness, of what we invest in the body and what we get out of it" (Young 1994, 3). In her description, Young identifies the central tenet of bodylore: the body is its own text, one that warrants scholarly consideration, and one whose nuance and complexity are largely ignored by scholars. By bringing the body to the center of analysis, bodylore asks questions about how the body receives and transmits culture and tradition. How is the kinetic experience socialized? How are body posturing, gesture, movement, and voice culturally situated? How are dress and garb socialized, personalized, and symbolized beyond their creation as material culture items?

Bodylore highlights the body's role in communication, social meaning, identity, and social interactions in everyday life. That is to say, the body exists in a larger cultural context where it interacts with other individuals, but it also warrants investigation as its own independent space that is situated in a context of the self. This type of investigation recognizes that the body's text is shaped both by the situations that people navigate and negotiate, as both performer and audience. Individuals interact with their body in ways that reflect personal preferences, internalized (and often unrealized) socialization, and

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the context of the cultural situation. Bodylore, as a methodology, teases out how the body is performative, malleable, and carries and transmits markers of identities (e.g., gender, ethnicity, group affiliation, and race) (see Young 1995). From a physiological perspective, it also considers how the body experiences and processes sensation (see Bronner 1982; Classen 2012; Montagu 1971).

The body is in a constant state of invention and reinvention. Individuals make daily choices about how to dress, how to behave, and how to navigate their embodied identities in a corporeal world. These daily decisions can be temporary (makeup, hairstyle, clothing) or permanent (body modification), and they often change based on situated cultural scenes. Learning how to read these corporeal cues is part of cultural literacy. Bodylorists often rely on Erving Goffman's "frame analysis" based upon the theories of Gregory Bateson (1955) concerning play behavior to unpack these interactions (1974). Frame theory joins rhetorical criticism to sociological and ethnographic observation. In the case of bodylore, the text being read (in action, in social context) is the body; therefore, the communication frameworks analyzed are built both by the individual and the society, simultaneously scripting how the body is perceived and adapted (see Bronner 2010; Mechling 2008; Turner and Turner 1982).

Some cultural cues, like a woman wearing the hijab or the beard of an Amish man (indicating both his married status as well as, through the lack of mustache, his commitment to pacifism), have meaning to the wearer and simultaneously help outsiders recognize the individual's identity. The body can also be used to test community membership (e.g., the Masonic secret handshake or prolonged eye contact and a slight chin thrust as a greeting to test LGBTQ identity). Bodylore considers this type of double consciousness of meaning for members inside the group and those outside of it in three ways. First, it looks at the personal meaning that individuals achieve through their engagement with their bodies. For example, a woman may have *tā moko*, the permanent face marking of New Zealand's Māori, because she wants to honor her grandmother who had the same elegant design (Fox 2012). Second, bodylore considers the way their bodies are understood by those within their cultural framework. In the previous example, other Māori individuals will see her *tā moko* and know that it represents an important rite of passage between childhood and adulthood, associate it with narratives and beliefs that underscore its sacredness, and understand that it was likely performed in the context of other rituals (Robley 1998). Third, bodylore probes how individuals outside of a body's cultural scene understand the body (Schifko 2010). *Tā moko*, despite a recent resurgence in practice, is still largely misunderstood. Particularly when women make the choice to tattoo their faces, outsiders put pressure on conforming to Western beauty ideals and cultural assimilation, misconstruing the practice and its depth of meaning. An interesting twist for bodylorists, however, is the recent commodification of "tribal" tattoos. Seen for many years as "uncivilized," traditional designs, particularly those of Polynesian origin, are in the twenty-first century being tattooed on nonindigenous bodies who have little comprehension of the history and symbolism of the designs. This appropriation of design and practice is highly offensive, as it does not recognize the legacy of traditional design that weaves together ritual, rites of passage, genealogy, historic information, and

practice. As such, there has been a movement to differentiate between *Tā Moko* and *Kirituhi* (drawn skin), which is a design with “Māori flavor” and does not commodify or appropriate the traditional practice (Forsyth 2012).

Despite anthropological and sociological interest in non-Western body practices, the daily corporeal text of the body is often overlooked in scholarly discourse. This is likely because the body is so commonplace that it is dismissed as mundane or trivial. By expanding a collective knowledge of the body, bodylore study develops an understanding of both the organic and performative self. By shifting the focus away from the exoticization of the body, investigations of the politics around the body, how it is used in interactions, how it is policed by society, and how it is engaged as a cultural text provide a distinct vantage point for investigations of the ever-changing experiences of self and community.

Engaging the Body as a Text

The evaluation of the body as a narrative text or a locus of research is complicated in its simplicity. The familiarity of the body renders embodiment complex and difficult to study. Bodies are a space of internal and external discourse, where various identities (e.g., race, socioeconomics, age, religion, gender, sexuality) are mapped together with affiliations and preferences. Moreover, bodies exist concurrently in their appearance, performance, movement, and use. And all of this is further complicated by questions of how the body is understood by its inhabitant versus its viewer. The script of the body is simultaneously performed by the individual and perceived by the audience, allowing the body to take on meaning in both individual and group practice. In bodylore studies, folklorists ask how the body perceived by the person who embodies it in contrast to the audience who is viewing the body through their own understandings and identity lenses.

Bodylore primarily approaches body studies in three ways. First, the body can be written about by the individual embodying it. This auto-ethnographic approach and analysis considers the intention of individuals, allowing them to communicate it through self-analysis. Many bodylore studies rely on elements of ethnography, allowing individuals to explain in their own words why they make certain choices about their bodies. Auto-ethnographic approaches, when situated in analysis, utilize individuals’ voices to articulate the decisions they made and the intention behind how they have engaged their bodies. Likewise, it also allows the individual to describe sensations (e.g., tactile responses) and experiences (e.g., when an elevator becomes overly crowded) that might otherwise be overlooked by someone viewing a cultural scene. This type of analysis, particularly when coupled with other methodologies, provides a platform for meaningful synthesis. Although it is true that auto-ethnographic bodylore does not necessarily explore the ways in which external audiences may perceive or react to a body, it brings forward the lived corporeal experience of the individual (see Sklar 1994).

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Second, and perhaps most commonly, bodylore studies investigate the body by quite literally viewing the bodies of others. This type of research is largely conducted through traditional ethnographic methods, including watching bodies in social scenes, making note of what the ethnographer perceives, and analyzing these findings. The ethnographer might also interview the research subjects, asking them to explain their bodies, allowing for their personal narratives to exist in tandem with the ethnographer's observations. Researchers also engage cultural situations as "participant observers" documenting the bodies but also taking part in activities within the scene of bodily action (Agar 2008; see also Obeyesekere 1984). Examples of this include events ranging from weddings, in which the researcher is a guest, to contra dance, in which the researcher takes part in the dancing (Hast 1993; Turner 1982). An example of why this hybrid approach is important can be seen in the experiences of Jewish women who wear yarmulkes in synagogues. This practice is observable in liberal congregations but not normative, and many women who cover their heads as part of their religious practice articulate that they do so for deep spiritual reasons. However, despite their personal intentions, their actions are often viewed as subversive and political by others in the synagogue. Without listening to the women's self-reflections on their practice, an outsider might misread their yarmulkes as a statement against religious patriarchy rather than as a message of their personal Jewishness (Milligan 2014).

Third, and less commonly, folklorists investigate the role of the body or body practices through the evaluation of photographic evidence, video footage, reading descriptive narrative (including diaries, jokes, and personal experience stories) (see Murphy 2001; Price 2008), analyzing literature (see Jorgensen 2014), or by viewing material culture items created for the body (see Calvert 1992). These methods must navigate the disengagement of the lived experience of the body from the text, object, or photograph. Joan Jacobs Brumberg's *The Body Project: An Intimate History of American Girls* (1998), for example, utilizes diaries as archival data to allow for a historical and longitudinal comparative investigation of changes in the cultural practices of girlhood and body dissatisfaction. Despite their disembodied entry into bodylore, these examples should not be overlooked. Particularly when considering historic or isolated practices, they are often the only evidence remaining of the body practices. When bodylore is investigated separately from the literal corpse, it can yield different results or bring to light practices that might have been overlooked. For example, Amanda Carson Banks investigates the body through analysis of the traditional home-birth chair (2012), discussing the appropriation of the female body by scientific medicine and the stigmatization of natural birth practices. Other examples include the analysis of the body through photographic evidence as exemplified by Jay Mechling's "Soldier Snaps" (2012), as well as Elizabeth Tucker's analysis (2014) of videographic evidence of choking games played by children where she questions why youth would risk bodily injury or death during play.

Symbolic Inventory of the Body and Dress

Although his work predates Young's 1989 coining of the term *bodylore*, sociologist Erving Goffman's studies of identity kits (1965), frame analysis (1974; see also Bateson 1955), and significant symbols (1961; see also Mead 1922) are key concepts for bodylore. Goffman proposes that individuals engage various identity kits, through which they are able to shape their presentation of self. These identity kits include both internal and external considerations, including how individuals view themselves, as well as how they wish to be perceived and simultaneously viewed by their "audience." A way that identity kits are engaged is through interactions with significant symbols. Among a host of symbols used in interpersonal communication, these symbols are intended to arouse responses in others the way that they do for the person, but they are couched in symbolism to make them less personal and to extend the symbol to the group or scene. For example, James Spradley and Brenda Mann describe in *The Cocktail Waitress* (1975) that buying a round of drinks became in the context of the college-town bar a significant symbol that expresses male bonding and authority, but the same actions would not be appropriate or symbolic in another scene. These symbols create meaning for the individual or the audience. Some significant symbols are familiar, like a queen wearing a crown. Others are more opaque, like an acronym tattooed across the knuckles. The understanding of symbols is culturally and socially situated, meaning that bodies and dress are read differently based on the spaces inhabited. Similarly, the externalization of the self is shaped in ways that allow individuals to "commute" between identities (for example, dressing one way to go to church and a different way to go to a nightclub) (see Schnoor 2006).

There are numerous examples of how the body and dress utilize symbolic inventory, including identity performance, gestures, facial expressions, posturing, body modification, and fashion. Moreover, these identity kits and symbols are in a constant state of flux, influenced by age, location, identity, and audience. Often individuals do not even realize the ways in which their bodily practices have been acculturated and internalized until they encounter a moment of dissonance, for example, bowing the head or shaking hands as a culturally appropriate greeting practice (see Goffman 1959). Bodylore study investigates these symbolic intersections using two primary lenses: emic/etic responses and community boundary maintenance.

First, bodylore is attuned to the nuances and complexities of identity performance by allowing the body to serve both emic and etic functions (Dundes 1962). Emic responses include the categories ascribed by individuals to the body (for example, fat, skinny, pudgy, or athletic), whereas etic responses involve intellectually or commercially constructed characterizations of the body (for example, clothing sizes like small, medium, large, and plus sized). This framework considers the contrast of analytically derived categories of the body as opposed to culturally used terms (see Ben-Amos 1969).

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Emic and etic approaches do not negate each other, as they can work in tandem to highlight the intersection of the body and mind in different cultural situations. Folklorists often use a hybrid emic-etic approach to analyze the manifestations of behavior and belief of individuals (emic) in a way that probes their intentions that may be unrecognized by the individual because of their socialization (etic). For example, many contemporary American young women employ the linguistic “vocal fry,” particularly at the end of sentences (Wolk, Abdelli-Beruh, and Slavin 2012). This guttural growl formed in the back of the throat has been popularized by celebrities, and it joins several other spoken linguistic phenomena that typify young female voices, including run-on sentences, breathiness, uptalk (ending a statement sentence with a questioning tone) (Tomlinson and Fox Tree 2011), and verbal punctuation with particular words and phrases (e.g., I think, like, I was just going to say, I might be wrong but). An emic approach of asking the young woman about her own vocal and linguistic patterns would likely reveal that she is unaware of her vocal fry, or perhaps that she has even patterned herself on an admired celebrity or friend. For the individual, she likely considers her voice to be approachable, friendly, and warm. In contrast, etic approaches position the vocal fry in a cultural context, probing how it undercuts her authority in the workplace, making her seem more juvenile and less competent, and how it is situated in longstanding patriarchal speech patterns that American women have unknowingly assumed. When emic and etic approaches are utilized together, a study emerges that shows both the woman’s intention and self-perception while simultaneously situating it in a macro-analysis.

The scripted portrayals of identity can be complicated, necessitating both an emic and etic reading of their application. For example, if one were to encounter a man with a shaved head on the street, several etic assumptions could be made: he could be a member of the military but not wearing his uniform (see Berg 1951). He could be a skinhead or member of a white supremacist group; he could shave his head because of hair loss; he could be a swimmer or a strength athlete; he could be undergoing chemotherapy; or he could have lost a bet with his friends. The observer can read other clues to try to understand his shaved head: does he have posture or walk with a gait that might indicate that he is in the military? Does he have facial or arm tattoos that suggest gang affiliation or membership in a white nationalist group? Is he carrying an athletic bag? Does he appear to be sick? Still, without an emic analysis, the observer may never know the full story of the man’s shaved head. And while the emic response is necessary to have a full picture of his intentions, the etic response experienced by the viewer is still crucial. If the viewer perceives him as a white supremacist, even if he is not, the symbolism of his body shapes the whole interaction.

Second, the body also serves an important function in community boundary maintenance. Etienne Wenger (2011) identifies a “community of practice” as when people “engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain.” A way that communities maintain or create boundaries is through distinguishing themselves through expressions of insider knowledge as members of the group. By creating an insider/outsider dichotomy, a community establishes certain shared competences to delineate who is a member of the group, and cultural boundary maintenance is a daily occurrence (Wenger 1998). Common

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cultural examples include a perception of “personal space” between oneself and others, having a sense of appropriate eye contact, or knowing when to stand, sit, or kneel during a religious service. The act of kneeling became politicized when American football player Colin Kaepernick “took a knee” in 2016 during the national anthem. He claimed it was a gesture of prayer, but others viewed it as disrespect for the flag. Regardless of his intention, kneeling during the national anthem quickly became a statement of solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement and the protest of systemic racism and police brutality in the United States.

The maintenance of external community boundaries—that is, establishing or delineating who belongs to certain communities—relies heavily on the body, because the body is often the first point of contact when engaging with others, which takes on special meaning in contemporary urban spaces in which people are generally strangers to one another (Sennett 1996). To gain predictability, people in such spaces often make judgments on others based on their body shape and practices. These judgments range from assessing a person’s physical characteristics and clothes (Knapp, Hall, and Horgan 2013) to the “thin-obsessed” American gay cultural space of the “twink” and the subsequent creation of “bear” bars and social clubs for burly gay men (Whitesel 2014). Externalizations of identity encompass dress and fashion, including school uniforms, military rank lapel pins, sports team fan gear, or religious garb. Other corporeal community identity markers include scarification, tattoos, piercing, stylized or shaved hair, gestures, and posturing. Pregnancy also offers a good example of the temporary body changes encountered by women, which makes their impending motherhood visible. A time of great change and potential risk, pregnancy invites folkloric responses ranging from culturally learned African-derived beliefs about hot and cold bodies during pregnancy (Phillips 2005) to warnings and jokes about never asking a woman if she is pregnant until she discloses her status.

Often when the body or dress is considered as a function of boundary maintenance, religious groups are used as exemplars. Groups like the Amish, Sikhs, and Hasidim distinguish themselves from other groups by their beards, hair covering, and, depending on the group, religious dress (Arthur and Lazaridis 1999; Hume 2013). Similarly, other subcultural groups, including biker, leather, goth, or punk communities, are exemplified by their intentional externalization of group identity through dress (Roberts, Livingstone, and Baxter-Wright 2017). These examples clearly show a full-body approach to boundary maintenance. However, there are other less overt examples that occur daily, including dressing infants in pink and blue, wearing a ribbon or plastic bracelet to support a cause, clipping a carabiner and keys to a belt loop (Cauterucci 2016), or donning a lapel pin featuring a collegiate mascot.

Individuals also engage with the body and dress in deliberate ways in order to mark their own cultural fluency or to cultivate a desired perception by observers. For example, a student might dress a certain way to appear “cool,” an emic term for being fashionable. A new employee might wear a suit to command respect; a gang recruit might get a tattoo to demonstrate toughness; or an individual might engage in any number of body alterations

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so as to embody youth (e.g., hair dyeing, belly button piercing, body hair removal, plastic surgery, dress). In one form or another, often without recognizing it, everyone engages in the traditional norms of community practice and in reading the identities of others.

Bodylore, unlike other fields of body studies, suggests questions of how the body functions privately with symbols that are largely culturally unread. One of the clearest examples of this is the hidden tattoo (Barretta 2017). If a tattoo is unseen by others, what is its function? For the individual, the hidden tattoo has personal meaning, both in its design and placement. Tattooing is an intentional act, unlike some other forms of subconscious body engagement, but what does it mean if the intentional act of tattooing remains unseen? This type of private engagement with the body indicates the deeply nuanced relationship individuals have with their bodies, which they shape and maintain in both permanent and transient ways. Less permanent examples of private body symbols include sporting lucky socks for a job interview, wearing the jewelry of a loved one to feel connected to her, or choosing a certain shade of lipstick to boost confidence. These symbols all have meaning for the individual but not necessarily for the observer. Similarly, movement also has private manifestations and meanings. A nervous individual might ritually clench her thumbs to calm herself; someone may slouch in order to detract attention; another person might cross her fingers when telling a lie; or an individual might deliberately always step forward with the right foot first to start off the day positively.

Applications of Bodylore

The methodological framework of bodylore can be applied to a number of distinct areas of body studies. These applications include dress, fashion, and garb; the literal physical body; movement, gesture, and posturing; and the role of the body in rites of passage.

Dress, Fashion, and Garb

Folklore's attention to dress, fashion, and garb explores the cultural and social practices of adorning the body. Although the terms are often used interchangeably, "dress" refers to the utility of clothing, "fashion" to the socially constructed commodification of style, and "garb" to the associated accessories. At its most fundamental utility, clothing protects the body; however, the stylization and purpose of dress signify its malleability. For example, various societies cover different parts of their body, ranging from fully covering all skin to leaving the genitals, breasts, or buttocks visible. Although dress often is assumed to have the primary purpose of covering the body, adornment with items like scarves, handbags, jewelry, and hats, and the stylization of items like shoes and eyeglasses demonstrate that garb and dress come together to articulate both personal preferences and cultural conventions.

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Dress, fashion, and garb perform a number of functions, including upholding codes of modesty, denoting social status, differentiating gender, and indicating age (Hagen and Giuntini 2007). They are also highly personalized, allowing the wearer a canvas of self-expression and a platform for individualization. In the United States, daily streetwear and clothing typically conform to social standards and fashion trends. This includes use of fabrics, colors, and designs that are currently considered in mode, as well as “classics” that are often featured in business attire (e.g., the suit and the little black dress) (Joselit 2001). Daily clothing can also be used to denote rank or status, including military uniforms, medical scrubs and coats, or even large accessories identified with the emic term of ostentatious “bling” to indicate socioeconomic status (see Welters and Lillethun 2011).

In addition to daily clothing, dress has a particular role in special occasions. In addition to its role in rites of passage (e.g., baptismal and wedding gowns), dress also features as a conduit for cultural heritage at important milestone events. For example, a man with Scottish heritage might choose to wear a kilt at his wedding, or someone with Korean heritage might wear a *Hanbok* (South Korea) or *Joseon-ot* (North Korea) as formalwear during important celebrations. Similarly, many non-Orthodox Jews wear yarmulkes when attending events at synagogues even though they do not wear them daily, the same way someone might wear a *Tupenu* (the Tongan wrapped garment) or a *Sari* (the Indian draped garment) when at a family, cultural, or community event (see Banerjee and Miller 2008).

Bodylore’s explorations of dress vary from other fashion studies in their focus on the transmission of culture and identity through garb. Whereas other studies might comment on the creation or design of fashion, bodylore delves into the identity politics of the garb. For example, whereas fashion studies have discussed the history of the headwrap in African American women’s dress as a symbolic statement of African heritage, bodylore studies analyze not only the wrap’s historic ties to slavery and social hierarchy, but also the transmission of culture, gender roles, and group identity. This bodylore analysis is done in questioning how women learn to tie the wraps, how the wraps are styled, who styles them, and by exploring variations in the practice, including consideration of French colonization and how the headwrap is constructed as an expression of Africanness in contemporary culture (see Griebel 1995). Moreover, bodylore is attuned to how the legacy of the headwrap continues to be transmitted within the contemporary African American community, questioning the narratives told to young girls about the practice and looking at contemporary stylizations and commodifications of traditional headwrapping, as well as the headwrap’s use in other rituals or in tandem with other bodily activities such as the “jumping the broom” ritual at a wedding.

Physical Body

The body, in its physicality, is a canvas. Bodylore is attuned to literal embodiment in two primary ways: the engagement with the flesh and the modification of skin.

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Individuals have no control over the genetic manifestation of their bodies, leaving them to consciously or subconsciously engage with something that seems to exist outside of their control. For example, the natural hair movement originating in the United States during the early twenty-first century encouraged men and women of African descent to embrace their “textured” hair. The movement pushes back against the white Western beauty ideal of straight, untextured, long hair, urging women to embrace their natural hair. This includes wearing hair in its natural, coiled, or curly state and eschewing chemical relaxers or straighteners. Folklorists question the ways in which the dreadlock, for example, has become political, to unpack marginalizing rhetoric (e.g., nappy or unprofessional hair), and to address how critiques of natural hair actually are an outgrowth of institutionalized racism coupled with internalized beauty ideals (Banks 2000; Byrd 2014; Prince 2010). The tools of bodylore afford a vantage point to discussions of beauty shop and barber culture and how natural hair is policed not only by outsiders but also within the social worlds that individuals inhabit, particularly the family. Bodylore offers tools to question how individuals feel about their own natural hair, as well as to analyze their daily grooming and styling practices (i.e., how they are implemented and how they are learned) (see Jackson 2006).

Engagement with the physical body extends beyond grooming and also includes individuals deliberately modifying their bodies such as circumcision, ritual hair cutting, and tattooing, as well as ways that individuals deliberately shape their bodies to achieve idealized beauty standards or as an act of self-expression. Beauty ideals are commodified and sold to consumers in numerous ways, including cosmetic surgery. Some nonpermanent body modifications include makeup, acrylic nails, hair extensions, eyebrow shaping, leg shaving, and hair dye. Other modifications are more permanent but no less commodified, including breast augmentation, pectoral implants, rib removal, toe removal, and ear piercing. American corporeal standards of beauty rely heavily on thinness for women and muscular strength for men. Many women and men have developed ritualized and disciplinary behaviors around achieving and maintaining these body types. For folklorists, all of these practices—from cosmetic surgery to body sculpting—are fertile ground for research as they represent the behavioral and idealized interactions that individuals have with their bodies. Although practices such as leg shaving may seem highly personal, for example, they represent the situated context of the body (i.e., Why is a woman shaving her leg? For whom? And who taught her how and when to do so?) as well as daily practice.

Other body modifications result as resistance to societal conformity or as a means of self-expression, including tattooing and various forms of “bod mod” or body modification. Some examples of modification include body piercing (e.g., ears, tongue, eyebrows, mouth, genitals, nipples, dermal), stretching (usually the ears, nasal septum, or lip), micro or transdermal implants, subdermal implants, corsetry, branding, scarification, tongue splitting, genital modification, eyeball tattooing, ear elfing, and tooth sharpening. Some of these practices have historic and cultural roots, but many have taken on new meaning in their contemporary American context. Separated from their origins, these practices often bridge the tension of individuals embracing their own self-expression

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while also countering society's view of beauty (see Thompson 2015). In particular, some practices, like tooth sharpening and tongue splitting, are considered subcultural, as these forms of "bod mod" are often viewed as extreme and subversive. Unlike other body modification, such as rhinoplasty and breast augmentation, which have entered the American mainstream (Essig 2011), "bod mod" tends to elicit critique and negative response, especially highlighting generational differences (Pitts 2003). For many bodylore-oriented folklorists, "bod mod" is the manifestation of the cultural tensions experienced by individuals. When the body is viewed as rebellious or having the potential to embody subversion, its important role in mediating identity is brought to the forefront (see Bobel and Kwan 2011). Folklorists are also interested in the performance of the bod mod (e.g., how one learns to tattoo or when bod mod is done for an audience), understanding that the process of body modification is often as important as the end result.

Movement, Gesture, and Posturing

Just as the body is a canvas that individuals create for their own self-expression, it also moves and interacts with other bodies in ways that take on cultural and personal meaning, including movement, gesture, and posturing. The study of movement includes but is not limited to dance, gait, and the ways in which individuals move through space. Whether it is a distinct practice such as yoga, ballet, or kickboxing, or the more mundane encounters of walking or sharing space with others, movement (or the inability to move) shapes how individuals perceive their kinesthetic experience and spatial orientation. Bodylore studies of movement have investigated topics including children's play dynamics (Fournier 2009), walking and rhythm (Sklar 2005), and many forms of dance (Bosse 2007; Jorgensen 2012). Additionally, gendered performance also finds voice in movement studies, particularly in how space is shared by sexualized bodies (Sklar 2001). Religious and culturally based movement also has attracted body-oriented folklorists—the scope of which extends beyond spatial positioning to include the literal physical interaction of the bodies. For example, Deirde Sklar's (1994) work situates her body as part of the undulating movement of bodies in the women's section of an ultra-Orthodox synagogue during Purim, highlighting the kinetic and tactile experiences created through the movement of the bodies, which extends well beyond the initially perceived cultural scene of the Purimshpiel (Purim play) and assesses the roles that skin-to-skin contact, gender, and spatial perception have on a folk scene, arguing that the most fundamental understanding of an experience is through bodily encounters.

Much of early bodylore scholarship focused on gesture as a narrative. Gesture includes nonverbal communication, including movement of the hands, face, or body (Bremer and Roodenburg 1991; Rickford and Rickford 1976; Rose 1919; Taylor 1956; Young 2011). Humans evoke gesture in a number of ways, ranging from using the face to communicate emotion to proxemics (e.g., how close or far away one moves from something or someone). Body language and gesture are both unconscious and conscious and are intrinsically rooted in culture (Anderson 1920). That is to say, individuals learn and culturally inherit their repertoire of gestures, including play, and engage them both intentionally and outside of their awareness (Dundes 1964). Theoretical frameworks for studying gestures generally divide into informative and communicative gestures. Informative gestures are more passive and include behaviors that indicate something an individual is experiencing (e.g., an itch, drinking to quench thirst, nervousness). In contrast, communicative gesture is used to replace verbal cues (such as emphasis through the hand gestures, nodding, facial expression, and waving).

Although the lines between movement, gesture, and posturing are sometimes blurred, posturing retains its own importance within bodylore as the ways in which the body is held or occupies space, not necessarily with movement. Like movement and gesture, posturing is situated in culture and socialization. It includes how individuals sit, stand, and lean. Inviting analysis are the ways individuals hold their bodies to occupy more or less space (especially when related to gender, body size, and confidence), how children

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are socialized to sit in chairs or on the floor, and cultural differences in proximal space between strangers. An example of this type of posture study is the evaluation of “man-spreading,” in which men, especially when on public transit, spread their legs wide and occupy more space than their single seat allotment (Jane 2016). Although some scientists and many men are quick to ascribe the need for larger seats to men having larger pelvises, other studies suggest that this occupation of space is tied to public performance of maleness, especially when contrasted against women who “dare” to take up the same amount of seat space on a subway (Petter 2017).

The Body as a Rite of Passage

The body is simultaneously transient and permanent. Body-oriented folklorists, or bodylorists, are attuned to the constant changes bodies undergo and the ways in which these changes are navigated culturally. The text of the body drastically shifts from babyhood to childhood, pubescence, adulthood, and old age. Yet even with all of these changes, bodies retain a certain individuality and some corporeal decisions are permanent. Circumcision for Jewish boys, for example, is typically performed in infancy and yet remains a permanent marker of religion or culture. The body is used both formally and informally to folklorically demonstrate important rites of passage.

Folklorists have historically focused greater attention on formal rites of passage and how the body is altered or scripted in these events. Although it is true that bodylore analysis can be done at any life event, certain rites of passage use the body as the central focus of engagement. In these moments the body and its corporeal changes mark a shift in the status or identity of the individual. Examples of this for infants and children include baptism, circumcision, naming ceremonies, breeching (when boys are given their first pants) (Reinier 2004), ear piercing in infants or young girls, receiving communion, female genital mutilation, *upsherin* (Jewish haircutting at age 3) (Milligan 2017), first period parties, scarification or tattooing, the walkabout, a vision quest (Dugan 1985), diving for the cross in Orthodox churches, and *annaprashana* (a Hindu infant’s first intake of food other than milk).

These rites of passage do not end with childhood. Adults experience corporeal rites of passage often in conjunction with identity formation or career accomplishments. Examples include blood wings (when parachutists’ badges are pinned onto a graduate by slamming it into the chest), line crossing ceremonies (when sailors cross the equator for the first time), white coat rituals for physicians, hand washing events for nurses, *amrit sanchar* (Sikh ceremony of initiation), and black-belt ceremonies for martial artists.

Perhaps even more than children, adults use dress and garb to demonstrate rites of passage or shifts in identity. Dressing up for a *quinceañera* or a prom marks a transition from teenage years to young adulthood. Graduation attire, including its stylization for degree achieved, indicates a major life event. Similarly, the dress of a bride and groom

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signifies their change in relationship status. Dress can also mark a change in rank, as is seen in military uniforms, or in articulation of life commitments, such as the occasions when women begin wearing the hijab, monks are tonsured, or priests take on vestments.

These public rites of passage that are marked externally on the body can eclipse more private and personal moments of identity transformation. Bodylorists also cover noninstitutionalized and private interactions with the body as a text. The body can be manipulated by the individual in ways that are undetected or misunderstood by others. A woman might drastically cut her hair after a breakup; a person may tattoo a tribute onto his body after the death of a friend; or a person might not shave his face while a sports team is playing championship games. Although these articulations of the self may be unrecognized by audiences, they are no less significant for individuals and how they embody their lived experience.

Prospects and Trajectories for Bodylore

As bodylore continues to evolve as a methodological framework, it changes alongside contemporary understandings of the body. In a culture that is just beginning to address the experiences of intersex individuals, the transgender community, and those who identify outside of the problematic binaries of gender identity, gender performance, and assigned sex, contemporary understandings of the body are shifting for a new generation. How does this reconceptualization of the body or the physical altering of the body invite adoption, adaptation, or invention of new folklore (e.g., the creation of new religious liturgy to affirm name changes or bodily changes as part of the gender transitioning process)?

Bodylore, with its attention on lore and the transmission of culture through folklore, centers the text of the body in a narrative in ways that other sociological and anthropological approaches do not. As bodylore study continues to evolve, it asks questions about the transmission of body narratives, and probes questions of how identity and community are substantiated. For too long, studies of the body have predicated ablebodiedness. Alongside the emergence of disability studies as an interdiscipline, the bodylore of differently abled bodies finds voice in explorations of identity-based communities and the narratives they navigate (for example, the reality of the lived experience of a little person in contrast to superstitions and the offensive media exploitation of those of short stature).

Furthermore, with the advent of the digital age as well as a service and information economy, how has the digital age affected the ways that bodies are understood? Investigations of the digital body include how the Internet offers instruction (e.g., how to braid hair, bind breasts, apply makeup, lose weight), how it polices and legislates the

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body (through trolling and social media body shaming), and how digital forums allow for disembodiment and a dissociation from the physical body.

The ability in virtual or digital reality to exist outside of the body allows for a malleability of self through which individuals can create or reshape their own identities. Especially in games like *Second Life* and *SIMS*, whole worlds are created by users who interact with others in a digital reality they shape and control, one which often is markedly different than their actual daily lives. Although folkloristic ritual studies has long grappled with the question of rational/irrational conscious/subconscious practices, bodylorists can take the initiative to explore the tension created when the body exists as a disembodied portion of the self.

Even when digital representations of the body are not fantasy, social media platforms and photo editing encode digital bodies and shape them in ways that the literal physical body cannot be altered. Whether it is the “selfie,” using filters to change one’s appearance, online shopping, smart devices worn on the body, or cultivating a social media presence that highlights only certain aspects of one’s life, the digitization of bodies has changed how individuals understand themselves and interact with their bodies. Not only are individuals able to critique their own bodies online, but they also are invited to evaluate the bodies of others through apps such as *Hot or Not* or by using hashtags to assess bodily aspects like “the thigh gap” (in which the top of the inner thighs does not touch when the feet are touching).

In the end, the practice of the body, its analysis, and the transmission of corporealism (the ways in which embodiment is learned) forms the corpus of bodylore studies. Folklore gives voice to the lived and created experiences of the people, and bodylore, as an extension, centers the body as the malleable folkloric space of the self. In both personal and public ways, the body is scripted, utilizing permanent and transient symbols, and creates meaning for both the audience and the individual.

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