

**Shelley Z. Reuter, PhD**

#### ACADEMIC POSITIONS

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**Assistant Professor** (Tenure-track, 2003 – present; renewed December 2005)  
Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Concordia University

**Assistant Professor** (Tenure-track, 2002 – 2003)  
Department of Sociology, Memorial University of Newfoundland

**Assistant Professor** (One-year limited term appointment, 2001 – 2002)  
Department of Sociology, Queen's University

**Teaching Fellow** (2000 – 2001)  
Department of Sociology, Queen's University

#### ACADEMIC DEGREES

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**Ph.D. in Sociology** (2001, Queen's)  
*Thesis: "The 'very opposite of calm': A socio-cultural history of agoraphobia." (Supervisor: Roberta Hamilton)*

**M.A. in Sociology** (First Class, 1996, Queen's)  
*Thesis: "The Resonance of 'Separate Spheres': Rhetoric and Reality." (Supervisor: Roberta Hamilton)*

**B.A. (Hons.) in Sociology, B.A. Women's Studies** (Highest Distinction and Gold Medals, 1994, Winnipeg)

#### RESEARCH AREAS

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- disease and cultural classifications
- medical racialisation
- feminism
- academic women and motherhood
- contemporary theory
- historical sociology
- embodiment

### 1. Academic Women's Choices about Motherhood and Work

Project title: "Not 'Having it All': Single Canadian Academic Women and the Question of Motherhood"; Principal Investigator

The number of single mothers is growing in Canada, especially among women over 35. Interestingly, single motherhood appears less prevalent in academia, where nearly half of female faculty are single and almost as many do not have children (CFHSS, 2004). The choice not to have children, one of several legitimate reproductive choices, may partly account for academics' reduced fertility, but evidence from a pilot study reveals that unattached academic women who want but have not had children also contribute to this trend. Although women generally are increasingly obtaining secure, higher-paying jobs and relevant Canadian policies are among the more family-friendly, structural obstacles to having children persist. This qualitative study examines the specific obstacles to single motherhood posed by academia. Focusing on academics who feel that parenting alone is not a viable option, this study combines in-depth interviews with discourse analysis to: first, explore their experiences of the process of deciding whether or not to become single mothers; second, critically examine the discourse of "having it all"; and third, assess public and institutional policies with a view to making specific recommendations for change. This study is the first phase of a three-phase research program to be complemented in phase two by interviews with single and attached academic women who do not want children, attached women who have children, and unattached women who have become single mothers by choice or circumstance, and in phase three, by follow-up interviews with all willing participants.

### 2. The Historical Sociology of Tay-Sachs Disease

Tay-Sachs disease is a disorder classified from the outset of its history as prevalent in Jews of Ashkenazi descent and is one of several diseases (e.g., Thalassaemia, Sickle Cell Anaemia, Diabetes, Cystic Fibrosis) that have been constructed as specific to certain "races" and ethnicities. Indeed, while UNESCO and researchers have long declared that a biological concept of race has no scientific validity, racialist disease concepts, often mobilised as innocuous "population genetics," continue to be a powerful means of demarcating boundaries between human groups.

This research is comprised of two ongoing projects:

a) Project title: « La maladie de Tay-Sachs et la génétique d'appartenance » (FQRSC, 2006-8); Principal Investigator

This case study critically analyses the British discourse of Tay-Sachs disease from 1881, when the disease was first diagnosed, to post-war 1949, the year preceding UNESCO's 1950 "Statement on Race." While some early physicians acknowledged persecution and migration as a factor in Tay-Sachs, the discursive effects of this disease category have yet to be explored in terms of the issue of citizenship. Although some existing theories of citizenship do attend to matters of disease, difference, or both, they do not consider the "productive" relationship between medical discourses and discourses of inclusion and exclusion. Thus in particular, this research focuses on the discourse of Tay-Sachs in relation to the British Aliens Act, with a view to exploring the possibility of reading this medical discourse as a genealogy of citizenship and "belonging."

b) Project title: "Historicizing Tay-Sachs: Towards a Genealogy of Medical Racialism" (SSHRC, 2005-7); Principal Investigator

This study critically analyses the American discourse of Tay-Sachs since the disease was first diagnosed in 1881 to post-war 1949. Here, however, the focus is on the ways in which the disease was discursively constructed as exclusively Jewish. In particular, I focus on how Jews were racialised in and through this disease discourse, with a view to demonstrating that knowledge about Tay-Sachs (and other group-specific genetic diseases) needs to be examined in socio-cultural terms alongside existing biological accounts – in other words, that genetics has a sociology like anything else.

#### SELECTED RECENT PUBLICATIONS

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##### **Book:**

Reuter, S.Z. 2006 (in press). *Narrating Social Order: Agoraphobia and the Politics of Classification*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

##### **Journal issue:**

Reuter, S.Z. and K. Neves-Graça (Eds.) 2007 (forthcoming). "'Genes' and Society: Looking Back on the Future." Special issue of *Canadian Review of Sociology*, 44(2).

##### **Articles:**

Reuter, S.Z. 2007 (in press). "The Politics of 'Wrongful Life' Itself: Discursive (Mal)Practices and Tay-Sachs Disease." *Economy and Society*.

Reuter, S.Z. 2006. "The Genuine Jewish Type: Racial Ideology and Anti-Immigrationism in Early Medical Writing about Tay-Sachs Disease." *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, 31(3): 291-323.

Reuter, S.Z. 2006. "(Re)Gendering Panic: Towards a Critical Sociology of Agoraphobia." *Women's Health and Urban Life: An International and Interdisciplinary Journal*, 5(1): 48-74.

Reuter, S.Z. 2002. "Doing Agoraphobia(s): A Material-Discursive Understanding of Diseased Bodies." *Sociology of Health & Illness*, 24(6): 750-70.

##### **Book reviews:**

Reuter, S.Z. 2006. *Narrating the New Predictive Genetics: Ethics, Ethnography and Science* by Monica Konrad. *Canadian Journal of Sociology Online*. Available at <http://www.cjsonline.ca/reviews/index.html>.

Reuter, S.Z. 2005. *Baby's First Picture: Ultrasound and the Politics of Fetal Subjects* by Lisa M. Mitchell. *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology*. Available at <http://www.csa.ca/CRSA/BookReview/ReviewsList.htm>