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## Letter from the Chair

By Abigail Saguy  
University of California, Los Angeles

I recently returned from Rutgers University, where I delivered a Keynote address at a conference organized by the Rutgers Institute for Women's Leadership, entitled "The Body Mass Index: Myth or Reality? Health, Wellness and Self Esteem in Women." I delivered one of two keynote addresses. The second was given by *New York Times* columnist and author, Jane Brody, who writes about nutrition and weight control. Her talk was a curious mix of statements about the importance of self-esteem—even among women who weigh more than fashion or public health dictates—and disparaging comments about fat people. "I resent people who take up two seats in the subway," she told the audience, many members of whom were of the size to need two seats in a subway car. With indignation, she told us of the large woman who had the nerve to fall asleep next to her on an airplane, leaning into her and giving her a cramped neck. She did not reflect upon how uncomfortable it is to be



squeezed into a seat that is too small, to be made to feel ashamed that you cannot fit into the seat, or how body size is largely beyond individual control. She did not reflect upon her own "thin privilege" that allows her

to fit into seats on airplanes and subway, and into clothing in mainstream stores.

Two brave graduate students called out Brody during the Q + A. Unapologetically identifying themselves as fat, they asked whether Brody saw the contradiction between her calls for self-acceptance and statements like these that shame and blame

people for the size of their bodies. In the panels that followed, for which Brody unfortunately did not stay, several young scholars and artists talked about weight-based prejudice and the experience of living in a fat body. There were also more traditional discussions by medical researchers on "obesity" as a public health problem and how best to resolve it. Still, these conventional views were presented

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in a contested space, competing with a “fat studies” perspective.

Fat studies is just one of the interesting areas of research going on in Body and Embodiment. To take another example, in the week before my trip to Rutgers, Ashley Mears (Boston University) gave a fascinating talk at UCLA’s Gender Working Group about how male promoters and owners of high-end clubs convert fashion models’ embodied capital (i.e., their height, slenderness, and conventionally good looks) into “girl capital,” or a currency that they use for their own economic gain. Promoters are paid for their ability to convince 20+ young fashion models to sit at their tables from midnight to 3 AM, in exchange for free admission to a selective club, and free champagne and food. Club owners make even more, since it is largely the presence of these women that makes the club “cool” and attracts men willing and able to spend \$3000+ in a night on champagne service. This work complements research in fat studies, showing how women’s “embodied capital” (or “thin privilege”) can be converted into profits for men. This is a great example of the kind of cutting-edge work being done on bodies and embodiment, and points to how this work connects with a range of other sub-disciplines, including, in this case, gender and economic sociology.

This is an exciting time to be a student of Body and Embodiment. One of my goals as Chair of the section has been to energize our communications with our members, an effort that has been widely successful, thanks to our communications committee (Kristen Barber, Piper Coutinho-Sledge, Kjerstin Gruys, and Elise Paradis). In addition to this Newsletter, which I hope you enjoy, you can read our blog, back issues of our newsletter, articles about teaching, and find information about our section on our website. You can also exchange ideas and share relevant articles with section members on our Facebook page and Twitter account!

As great as social media are, however, they are no substitute for personal, embodied interaction. At the ASA meeting this summer, we have two regular sessions on Body and Embodiment, a shared session with the Sex and Gender Section on Bodies and Sports, and a great set of papers for our roundtable. Right after the roundtable, we will hold our business meeting, where you can volunteer for committees and applaud our prizewinners. On Saturday evening, we are hosting a reception in a cool bar/lounge/club near to the conference hotel. We’ll be serving delicious Mediterranean food and drinks on the house beginning at 6:30pm. At 8:30pm, we will shift from quiet conversation to dancing and a DJ, so we can have a full, embodied experience. It’s going

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to be a blast. Don't miss it and bring along a friend who you think should join our section! If you cannot make the meetings but want to get more involved in our section, please email me.

Abigail C. Saguy, Associate Professor of Sociology, UCLA  
[Saguy@soc.ucla.edu](mailto:Saguy@soc.ucla.edu)

## Embodied Globalization: The Intimate Realms of International Romance Tourism

By Julia Meszaros  
Florida International University

People often think of globalization as distant, abstract, and divorced from their daily lives. However, contrary to this popular belief global processes are in fact embodied, intimate, and a central component of everyday life. The commercial romance industry, for example, is an important industry that highlights the embodied nature of globalization. This industry caters to American men (as well as men from Canada, Australia, the UK, Germany) that are seeking to find a more "traditional" and feminine wife. Many of the men I met during my research on romance tours in Colombia, Ukraine, and the Philippines said that American women no longer embody or perform proper femininity. For these men,



embodying proper femininity requires maintaining an attractive physique and wardrobe. While men on tour characterized American women as overweight, ugly, and lazy, they imagine women in other countries to be thin, attractive, and well dressed. This image is supported by representations of female bodies that men come across on various international dating websites, which often feature female profiles in sexualized poses and outfits. In fact, the major romance tour provider, or international dating service, A Foreign Affair, has a weight limit of 55 kilograms (approximately 120 pounds) for women in the Philippines who want to create a profile.

The issue of body size was a hot-button issue for many of the men and

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women I interviewed who were signed up with A Foreign Affair, an international dating service. When most men discussed women from Ukraine, they commented on Ukrainian women's "supermodel" bodies: tall and thin. Men on tour in the Philippines focused on the fact that most women could be classified as petite. They considered women in countries such as Colombia to be "too curvy" or "too hippy." One sex tour blogger, Roosh V, commented on women in Colombia, saying that while thinner than the average American woman, they still have not adopted the culture of "working out" and so many are "chubby." American men's focus on the ways in which foreign women embody a superior form of femininity demonstrates the fact that global processes, such as romance tourism, are both deeply intimate and embodied.

American men are not the only people involved in this industry that highlight the importance of physical appearance. Women in Colombia, Ukraine, and the Philippines described the desirability of their potential American suitors in racially embodied terms. In all three countries, women desired men who resembled Brad Pitt: tall, not too old, blonde, and blue eyed. Many women I spoke with imagined Americans in terms of whiteness partly because white men statistically dominate the industry as 'tourists.' Yet, some men of African or Hispanic descent do

attend tours offered by A Foreign Affair. And the women sometimes exoticized these men; especially Ukrainian women who are not often previously exposed to people of African descent. A few women I interviewed mentioned that bringing home a nonwhite American man to the small rural villages their families live in could be quite problematic. Their families expected American men to be white, but also privileged whiteness as a preferable racial status.

American male tourists and local women in Colombia, Ukraine, and the Philippines expressed notions of desire that are clearly embodied—embodiments that help to reproduce racial, national, and gender hierarchies in the most intimate spaces of people's lives. While many people consider desire, romance, and sexuality to be personal and private things, neocolonial hierarchies of race influence people's perceptions of beauty and sexual attractiveness. A number of men on international romance tours did not want to meet women who were "too dark" or of African descent, for example, and men on tour in Ukraine often described wanting the Slavic or Nordic look, code for white, demonstrating the way global hierarchies are embodied by people in different global positions.

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## Interdisciplinary Approaches to Teaching About Bodies in Society

By Kjerstin Gruys  
University of California, Los Angeles

Our last newsletter launched a new regular column focused on pedagogy related to teaching about bodies and embodiment. Katherine Mason's inaugural essay ended asking: "How do you teach about bodies in society?"

Giving this a bit of thought, my answer came quickly: using interdisciplinary approaches.

Several years ago I served for the first time as a teaching fellow in UCLA's General Education Freshman Cluster Program, in a year-long course sequence titled "Sex: From Biology to Gendered Society." This course brought together four faculty members with widely different specializations relating to sex and gender, including a pediatric urologist and geneticist, a behavioral neuroscientist, an evolutionary psychologist, and a feminist sociologist (our current chair, Abigail Saguy!). I looked forward to helping my students view "science" as a method, rather than a topic.

I was as prepared as I could have been, having grown up with two scientist parents, one biological and the other

social. Yet I initially found myself barely a step ahead of my students when preparing lessons for my two sections. One week I'd speak with ease about historical understandings of body size. The next week I'd just as likely

find myself in a panic while trying to passably understand the genetic and epigenetic pathways leading to intersex conditions. I felt my brain creakily switching gears and joked to friends that I was actually teaching four different classes. And then, seemingly overnight, my brain got with the program. The hard edges

between disciplines softened, like a river frozen into chunks of ice, finally melting into a flowing stream.

As usual, I was barely a step ahead of my students, who quickly began to "go with the flow" of course material as well. I watched with pleasure as this process of interdisciplinary learning improved my students' critical thinking skills and their ability to synthesize new information; it increased their tolerance for ambiguity, and mine too. Working closely with my fabulous freshmen to integrate both biological and social explanations for sex



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difference rapidly expanded my own intellectual flexibility and passion for interdisciplinary research and teaching.

Teaching about bodies in society is especially fitted for interdisciplinary approaches. For better or worse, we are a fairly self-obsessed species, with dozens of academic disciplines well suited for understanding various aspects of the embodied human condition. In a freshmen seminar I've taught, "Gender, Appearance and Inequality," students must embrace the seemingly competing disciplines of gender studies, sociology, and evolutionary psychology. It starts from day one: the first three readings of the course are Naomi Wolf's *The Beauty Myth* followed by Ashley Mear's *Pricing Beauty*, and finally Nancy Etcoff's *Survival of the Prettiest*. Rather than asking students to decide which approach is better, their writing assignment requires them to discuss where each account excels, where it falls short, and how all three perspectives can be combined to provide a more nuanced and sophisticated understanding of social phenomena than either approach offers on its own.

Later in the course we dive into literary analysis by reading Sapphire's literary novel *Push*, on which the film *Precious* is based. *Push* helps students more empathetically consider how *body size* and *skin color* intersect with gender, race and class, while also providing a bridge for considering how bodies are represented through various forms of media. In the following week they

explore "beauty privilege" through a group activity in which students draw full-body self-portraits while building a list of all the parts of their body they feel positively about, along with one part of their body they feel negatively about. By sharing their portraits and narrating the logic of their lists with peers, students see that many physical traits are differently privileged in their peers' diverse cultural backgrounds and family experiences. This exercise illustrates the social construction of body image while vividly revealing how everyday interactions shape self-perception; after the exercise female students often remark with surprise that, for the first time in their lives, they had said and heard more positive things about women's bodies than negative.

The readings, exercises and assignments described above could not succeed in a sociological vacuum, and I'm okay with that. As much as I silently hope for my students to declare sociology as their majors by the end of class, I derive great satisfaction in knowing that wherever their paths may lead, students who experience interdisciplinary learning will bring their critical thinking skills and intellectual flexibility along with them.

#### References:

- Etcoff, Nancy. 2000. *Survival of the Prettiest: The Science of Beauty*. New York: Anchor.
- Mears, Ashley. 2011. *Pricing Beauty: The Making of a Fashion Model*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press.

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Sapphire. *Push*. 1996. New York, NY: Knopf.

Wolf, Naomi 1990. *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women*. New York, NY: Harper Perennial

## Articles and Books By Section Members

### Articles and Book Chapters

Griswold, Wendy; Gemma Mangione, and Terry McDonnell. 2013. "Objects, Words, and Bodies in Space: Bringing Materiality into Cultural Analysis." - *Qualitative Sociology*. 36(4): 343-364.

This article brings materiality and actor-network theory to bear on cultural sociology by looking at how the interaction of art objects, art labels, and the bodies of visitors in an art museum shape meaning-making. The theoretical argument is that the physical *position* of the body determines the possibilities of *location*, i.e., cognitive interpretation.

Stingl, Alexander I. and Sabrina Weiss. 2013. "ADHD and Its Ecologies and Agencies: Before and Beyond the Label." *Krankheitskonstruktionen&Krankheitstreiberei*. Dellwing, M., M. Harbusch, ed., Wiesbaden: Springer VS.

The authors present an account of ADHD that takes seriously the diagnosis conceptual and institutional history. Understanding the impact of attention as both a deficit that creates disorder with a prevalent diagnosis and a benchmark of performative participation in (post)industrial society, makes possible to unveil attention deficit as rooted in social pathology.

Stingl, Alexander I. and Sabrina M. Weiss. 2014. "Mindfulness as/is Care: Biopolitics, Narrative Empathy, techno-scientific Practices." In A. Ie, E. Langer, and C. Ngoumen eds. *Wiley -Blackwell Handbook of Mindfulness*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell.

An exploration of how mindfulness, sociologies of embodiment, and science studies can profit from an integrative interdisciplinary conversation.

Nordmarken, Sonny. 2014. "Becoming Ever More Monstrous: Feeling Transgender In-Betweeness." *Qualitative Inquiry* 20(1): 37-50.

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## Books

Boero, Natalie. *Killer Fat: Media, Medicine, and Morals in the American "Obesity Epidemic."*

In the past decade, obesity has emerged as a major public health concern in the United States and abroad. At the federal, state, and local level, policy makers have begun drafting a range of policies to fight a war against fat, including body-mass index (BMI) report cards, "snack taxes," and laws to control how fast food companies market to children. As an epidemic, obesity threatens to weaken the health, economy, and might of the most powerful nation in the world.

In *Killer Fat*, Natalie Boero examines how and why obesity emerged as a major public health concern and national obsession in recent years. Using primary sources and in-depth interviews, Boero enters the world of bariatric surgeries, Weight Watchers, and Overeaters Anonymous to show how common expectations of what bodies are supposed to look like help to determine what sorts of interventions and policies are considered urgent in containing this new kind of disease.

Boero argues that obesity, like the traditional epidemics of biological contagion and mass death, now incites panic, a doomsday scenario that must be confronted in a struggle for social stability. The "war" on obesity, she concludes, is a form of social control. *Killer Fat* ultimately offers an alternate framing of the nation's obesity problem based on the insights of the "Health at Every Size" movement.

Jafar, Afshan and Erynn Masi de Casanova eds. 2013. *Global Beauty, Local Bodies*. Palgrave.

What do the words global, transnational, national, and local mean when talking about beauty, which is simultaneously abstract and ephemeral, embodied and concrete? How do ideas and images of beauty circulate in a globalizing world, and how do people's bodily practices respond to them? Rather than simply examining how beauty is thought about and aspired to in international settings, this collection of original scholarly work and first-person accounts takes globalization processes and the transnational links these processes create as the jumping-off point for an examination of what it means to be, have, or aspire to a beautiful body.

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Craig, Maxine Leeds. 2013. *Sorry I Don't Dance: Why Men Refuse to Move*. Oxford University Press.

Why do so many men refuse to dance? The answer reveals a great deal about masculinity, sexuality, and race. Drawing on interviews, participant observation, and research in sources ranging from military planning documents to boys' fiction, Maxine Leeds Craig analyzes how dance has become associated with women rather than men, youths but not adults, and people of color but not whites. Craig traces the history of dancing men from 1900 when white upper class men were expected to be good dancers, through dance crazes of the 1910s, U.S.O.-sponsored dances during World War II, the stifling climate of the Cold War period, the exuberant release of the 1960s, and the racial fracturing of music and dance cultures of the 1970s. *Sorry I Don't Dance* reveals the recent origins of cultural assumptions regarding sex, race, and the capacity to dance. From the beginning of the twentieth century through the Swing Era young men of all races danced. But in the 1960s suburbanization, homophobia, and fragmentation of music cultures drove white men from the dance floor, and feminized, sexualized and racialized dance. In interviews men describe the excitement of being the center of attention in a b-boy battle, the dread of approaching a woman on the dance floor, and the thrill of experiencing intimacy and freedom through dance. Craig shows that the best way to learn about masculine embodiment is to look at what it seems to exclude.

Friedman, Asia. 2013. *Blind to Sameness: Sexpectations and the social construction of male and female bodies*. University of Chicago Press.

Hohle, Randolph. 2013. *Black Citizenship and Authenticity in the Civil Rights Movement*. Routledge.

Masi de Cassanova, Eryn and Afshan Jafar. 2013. *Bodies without Borders*. Palgrave

Globalization is often thought of as an abstract process that happens "out there" in the world. But people are ultimately the driving force of global change, and people have human bodies that are absent in current conversations about globalization. The original scholarly research and first-person accounts of embodiment in this volume explore the role of bodies in the flows of people, money, commodities, and ideas across borders. From Zumba fitness classes to martial arts to fashion blogs and the meanings of tattooing, the contributors examine migrating body practices and ideals that stretch across national boundaries.

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Weitz, Rose and Samantha Kwan, eds. 2014. *The Politics of Women's Bodies: Sexuality, Appearance, and Behavior*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Oxford University Press.

Decoteau, Claire. 2013. *Ancestors and Antiretrovirals: The Biopolitics of HIV/AIDS in Post-Apartheid South Africa*. University of Chicago Press.

*Ancestors and Antiretrovirals* complicates the normative history of AIDS treatment in South Africa by arguing that HIV/AIDS has consistently been the venue through which the South African government has attempted to balance the contradictory demands of post-colonial nation-building – forced, on the one hand, to satisfy the requirements of neoliberal global capital *and* on the other, meet the needs of its most desperately impoverished population. Decoteau argues that the colonial tropes of ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’ are resignified and redeployed to manage this ‘postcolonial paradox.’ As such, the book traces the historical shifts in health policy after apartheid and describes their effects, thus illustrating the complicated way in which global processes get translated into national policies and local practices. It tells this story from the perspective of those living at the margins of South African society, detailing what it is like to live with and die of AIDS in South Africa’s squatter camps. As such, the book links an analysis of the shifting contours of the South African social body with an analysis of the corporeal effects of living with HIV/AIDS and poverty. It also analyzes the complex processes of interpellation and inscription which the state, biomedicine and various social movements employ in their response to the epidemic and how these policies and practices are domesticated, embodied, but also sometimes reconfigured by subjects traversing the landscape of the post-apartheid health system. Overall, the book traces the biopolitics of AIDS from 1994 through 2010 analyzing: the political economy of the post-apartheid health system, the shifting symbolic struggles over the signification of HIV/AIDS, and the ways in which communities affected by the epidemic incorporate culturally hybrid subjectivities, informed by both indigenous and biomedical healing paradigms.

Saguy, Abigail. 2013. *What's Wrong With Fat?* Oxford University Press.

In recent years, the “obesity epidemic” has emerged as a top public health concern in the United States and abroad. Scholars, journalists, and politicians alike are scrambling to find answers. What or who is responsible for this crisis and what can be done to stop it? In contrast, *What's Wrong with Fat?* (2013, Oxford University Press) argues that these fraught debates obscure more important sociological questions:

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How has fatness come to be understood as a public health crisis at all? Why has the view of fatness as a medical problem and public health crisis come to dominate more positive framings of weight – as consistent with health, beauty, or a legitimate rights claim—in public discourse? Why are heavy individuals singled out for blame? And what are the consequences of understanding weight in these ways?

Moore, Lisa Jean and Mary Kosut. 2013. *Buzz: Urban Beekeeping and the Power of the Bee*. New York University Press.

Bees are essential for human survival—one-third of all food on American dining tables depends on the labor of bees. Beyond pollination, the very idea of the bee is ubiquitous in our culture: we can feel buzzed; we can create buzz; we have worker bees, drones, and Queen bees; we establish collectives and even have communities that share a hive-mind. In *Buzz*, authors Lisa Jean Moore and Mary Kosut convincingly argue that the power of bees goes beyond the food cycle, bees are our mascots, our models, and, unlike any other insect, are both feared and revered. In this fascinating account, Moore and Kosut travel into the land of urban beekeeping in New York City, where raising bees has become all the rage. We follow them as they climb up on rooftops, attend beekeeping workshops and honey festivals, and even put on full-body beekeeping suits and open up the hives. In the process, we meet a passionate, dedicated, and eclectic group of urban beekeepers who tend to their brood with an emotional and ecological connection that many find restorative and empowering. Kosut and Moore also interview professional beekeepers and many others who tend to their bees for their all-important production of a food staple: honey. The artisanal food shops that are so popular in Brooklyn are a perfect place to sell not just honey, but all manner of goods: soaps, candles, beeswax, beauty products, and even bee pollen.

*Buzz* also examines media representations of bees, such as children's books, films, and consumer culture, bringing to light the reciprocal way in which the bee and our idea of the bee inform one another. Partly an ethnographic investigation and partly a meditation on the very nature of human/insect relations, Moore and Kosut argue that how we define, visualize, and interact with bees clearly reflects our changing social and ecological landscape, pointing to how we conceive of and create culture, and how, in essence, we create ourselves.

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Weiss, Sabrina M., Sal Restivo, Alexander I. Stigl. 2014. *Worlds of ScienceCraft. New Horizons in Philosophy, Sociology, Science Studies*. Surrey/ London: Ashgate.

A response to complex problems spanning disciplinary boundaries, *Worlds of ScienceCraft* offers bold new ways of conceptualizing ideas of science, sociology, and philosophy. Beginning with the historical foundations of civilization and progress, assumptions about the categories we use to talk about minds, identities, and bodies are challenged through case studies from mathematics, social cognition, and medical ethics. Offering innovative approaches to these issues, such as an integrated social brain-mind-body model and a critique of divisions between the natural and technological, this book provides novel conceptions of self, society and an emerging 'cyborg' generation. From the micro level of brains and expanding all the way out to biopolitical civics, disciplinary boundaries are made permeable, emphasizing the increased need for interdisciplinary scholarship. By rejecting outdated and restrictive categories and classifications, new horizons in studies of science, technology, and medicine can be explored through the incorporation of feminist, international, and postmodern perspectives. A truly interdisciplinary examination of science and technology as cultural phenomena, *Worlds of ScienceCraft* will appeal to scholars and students of science and technology studies, as well as philosophers, historians, and sociologists of science, technology, and medic

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