

Sociology of the Body and Embodiment

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Letter from the Chair, Victoria Pitts-Taylor

It's incredibly exciting to be writing to you as the first elected Chair of the Section on the Body and Embodiment. I am struck by how slow are the workings of our institutions in catching up with our thinking, writing, and teaching. In the past few decades, 'body studies' – particularly but not exclusively from within sociology – have been incredibly important and influential in a number of fields. It seems difficult to imagine the past two decades of sociology, of feminism and queer theory, cultural studies, and even science studies, technology studies, and trans- and interdisciplinary scholarship without the many monographs, anthologies, conferences, undergraduate and graduate courses and journal issues foregrounding the body. Our first year as an official section is certainly cause for celebration. But in some ways it is also overdue. We enter this phase of our collective scholarship not as dilettantes, but as aficionados.

While our institutional legitimacy is brand new, we are already beyond the days when we dedicated the first few pages of any tome to justifying or explaining 'the sociology of the body.' Instead, we are well into a series of debates and shifts that reflect not only our diverse interests, but also our acknowledgment of the limits of our conceptual and methodological toolboxes. For example, social constructionism, so crucial to the development of social and cultural thinking about the body, is having to make some room for materialisms of varying stripes. Relatedly, we are facing the challenge of enflashing and embodying our body studies; we are listening to calls to take much more seriously the physical and phenomenological aspects of embodiment in body scholarship. We are also surrounded by a culture that keeps teaching us new lessons about what the body can do, mean, and experience. We have done so much work and we have so much work to do.

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Letter from the Chair, *continued from page 1*

At our meeting in August, now scheduled for August 20-23 in Las Vegas, we will be convening to strategize our continued development as a section. It probably goes without saying that Las Vegas, Sin City, is a symbolically loaded place for us to collectively take up our studies of the body and embodiment. I urge you to attend not only to enjoy the delicious symbolism of our meeting place, and perhaps to explore a new vice, but also so that you might help us make important decisions about where we go from here. The Section is also hosting a panel at the ASA, organized by Erynn Casanova, called Experts On/Of Bodies: Knowledges and Methodologies. The theme appropriately demands a reflective stance toward our own field while casting a critical eye outward at the measurement, regulation and governance of the body by others.

In closing, I want to acknowledge the hard work of people who decided to begin the process of gaining institutional legitimacy for our field of study. To those who started this process and served during the period of section-in-formation (especially our first chair of the section-in-formation, Salvador Vidal-Ortiz), I lift my hat. Institutional work often feels thankless, but many of us really appreciate the heavy lifting done by those who created this section.

Looking forward to seeing you in Sin City.

Victoria Pitts-Taylor
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Call for Submissions for the Next Newsletter

Look for the call for submissions for the next newsletter on the Body & Embodiment listserv. Please send all newsletter submissions to BodyNewsletter@gmail.com. If you have comments or ideas you would like to contribute, please feel free to contact us!

From the 2010-2011 Newsletter Editors: Thanks to all those who sent submissions for our section newsletter!
Carla A. Pfeffer, Purdue University North Central (cpfeffer@purdue.edu)
Shweta M. Adur, University of Connecticut (shweta.uconn@gmail.com)

Issue/Opinion:

Fat Bodies and Embodiment: Advancing Sociological Approaches

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Michaela A. Null, Purdue University (mnull@purdue.edu)

The formation of the new section on the Body and Embodiment encourages exciting new possibilities for expanding understandings of the body beyond the anatomical and medical and into the social and relational. Further, sociology of the body and embodiment also serves a critical role in production of scholarship that dares to critique existing medical models of the body which often assume an authoritarian presence in mainstream dialogues. Yet, it is often difficult to challenge prevailing understandings of the body when particular forms of understanding and discourse are hegemonic. Often resigned to the “health and society” or “deviance” sections of introductory sociology texts (if mentioned at all), fatness is a prime example of the difficulty of seeing outside of our own limited and limiting paradigms. Sociology has often been more complicit with (than critical of) understandings of fatness and fat people as primarily a “social problem” or population that needs “fixing” or rescuing. The implicit assumption underlying some of these approaches to fatness is that the elimination of social inequality would likely remedy “the problem of obesity” by rendering nonexistent an entire body type--the fat body. Fat Studies, a subfield garnering more attention both within sociology and across other disciplines, is characterized by critical attention to fatness as a social construct, a political and social justice issue, and as identity or lived experience. Fat studies is critical of obesity discourse and trends toward medicalizing the body, and also questions assumptions--both societal and within the academy--about fatness and fat people.

Sociologists have begun to study the ways in which fatness intersects with gender, race, sexuality, and disability, as well as how understandings of fatness differ by culture and perhaps even by geographic region. Fatness is a pervasive topic both in the media and in political and public policy discourse, with even the fatness of babies up for public and scientific debate (see Franklin 2006; Gillman 2008). Fat is also a structural and institutional issue, as anti-fat stigma and discrimination cut across the areas of health care, education, and employment (Puhl and Brownell 2001). Recent efforts have compelled more critical analyses of fatness in sociology. Papers in the area of fat studies were presented at The North Central Sociological Association as early as 2006, and Jason Whitesel organized two fat studies NCSA panels during the 2008 meeting. A special issue of the *Sociology of Sport Journal* on “The Social Construction of Fat” was published in 2008, and 2009 marked the publication of two anthologies featuring contributions by sociologists--*Fat Studies in the UK* and *The Fat Studies Reader*. In 2010, Charlotte Cooper’s “Fat Studies: Mapping the Field” was published in *Sociological Compass* and sociologist Abigail Saguy organized a fat studies-focused “Gender and Body Size” lecture series at the UCLA Center for the Study of Women. The 2010 ASA Meeting in Atlanta marked the first Fat Studies-specific roundtable, which was the most well-attended roundtable in the Body and Embodiment section. All of these recent developments are illustrative of growing interest in fat studies. Similar levels of interest can be found in other national interdisciplinary conferences, such as the National Women’s Studies Association conference and the Popular Culture Association/American Culture Association conference. And there is more in the works. February 15, 2011 marks the deadline for submissions for the upcoming “Fat Masculinities” special issue of *Men and Masculinities*.

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Fat Bodies and Embodiment: Advancing Sociological Approaches, *continued from page 3*

Envisioning a sociology of fatness and fat identity allows us to imagine social processes of the body and embodiment that have remained largely unexplored to date. For example, how might explorations of how fat people's bodies move and take up space in the world shape our theories of body comportment and social distancing? How might we conceive of fatness as a form of identity or social resistance and what are limits to such approaches? How might we study fatness to determine merely why people are fat, but in what ways living in a fat-averse society might convey systematic advantage or disadvantage for particular bodies across the contexts of health care, families and relationships, social well-being, and access to employment and housing? Are there ways in which a fat-averse society generates not only stigma against those who are fat, but unhealthy behaviors amongst all those who have ever feared becoming a member of this stigmatized group? To be sure, it is rarely those who are actually fat who are featured in the ubiquitous commercials for diet and weight-loss products. How might sociological empirical investigation of the multi-billion-dollar weight-loss industry, at the interstices of the medical and pharmaceutical industries, provide new insights into other relationships between consumerism and (fear of) fatness? We think these are important questions deserving closer attention and look forward to future contributions to studies of fatness as the genesis of our section catalyzes cutting-edge work on sociology of the body and embodiment.

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2010. "Fat Bodies: Discourses, Frames, and Inequalities." *Section on Body and Embodiment Roundtable at the Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association*. Atlanta, Georgia.
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Member News: Awards and Announcements

Danielle Bessett accepted a position in the Department of Sociology at the University of Cincinnati in Ohio.

A forthcoming book by Erynn Masi de Casanova, Assistant Professor of Sociology at University of Cincinnati, *Making Up the Difference: Women, Beauty, and Direct Selling in Ecuador* (University of Texas Press) was chosen to receive the 2010 Sara A. Whaley Book Prize from the National Women's Studies Association.

Patricia Leavy, Associate Professor of Sociology at Stonehill College, was named the New England Sociologist of the Year by the New England Sociological Association on November 6, 2010 at their annual conference at the University of New Hampshire. The award recognizes contributions to the discipline of sociology beyond the recipient's own institution.

Call for Nominations and Awards

Best Publication on the Body and Embodiment Award

The Body and Embodiment Section invites submissions for the Best Publication on the Body and Embodiment Award. The 2011 award will be for best article; essays must have been published between January 1, 2009 and December 31, 2010. Self-nominations are welcome as are co-authored works. To be considered for this competition, all nominees must have a Ph.D. in hand at the time of publication and be dues-paying members of the section (which requires ASA membership) for the year 2011. Only electronic submissions are accepted and should include a .PDF copy of the article, the author's name, title of the essay, date and place of publication, publisher, a brief comment highlighting the principal merits of the work and its scholarly contributions. Nominations are due May 15, 2011. Late submissions will not be accepted (no exceptions). Please send submissions to the chair of the Best Publication on the Body and Embodiment Award committee: Judith Lorber, Professor Emerita, Graduate Center and Brooklyn College, CUNY (jlorber@rcn.com)

Please Include:

- a .PDF copy of the article
- the name/s and contact information for all authors — be sure to include email address/es
- title of the essay
- date of publication
- place of publication
- confirmation of Ph.D. and 2011 Body Section membership for all authors
- a brief comment highlighting the principal merits of the work and its scholarly contributions

Recent Articles and Book Chapters of Interest*

Ethnographic field research photos taken by Corey M. Abramson:

“After the Ritual”



“Coach”



Abramson, Corey M. and Darren Modzelewski. 2011. “Caged Morality: Moral Worlds, Subculture, and Stratification among Middle-Class Cage-Fighters.” *Qualitative Sociology* 34(1):143-175.

Aiba, Keiko. 2011. “Japanese Women Professional Wrestlers and Body Image.” Pp. 268-283 in *Transforming Japan: How Feminism and Diversity Are Making a Difference*, edited by Kumiko Fujimura-Fanselow. New York: Feminist Press.

Bessett, Danielle. 2010. “Negotiating Normalization: The Perils of Producing Pregnancy Symptoms in Prenatal Care.” *Social Science & Medicine* 71(2): 370-377.

Blum, Linda M. 2011. “A Symposium on Susan Markens’s Surrogate Motherhood and the Politics of Reproduction.” *Sociological Forum* 26(1): 194-196.

Casper, Monica J. and Daniel R. Morrison. 2010. “Medical Sociology and Technology: Critical Engagements.” *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 51: S120-S132.

Craig, Maxine Leeds. 2010. “Bodies, Beauty, and Fashion.” Pp. 243-251 in *Handbook of Cultural Sociology*, edited by John R. Hall, Laura Grindstaff, and Ming-Cheng Lo. New York: Routledge.

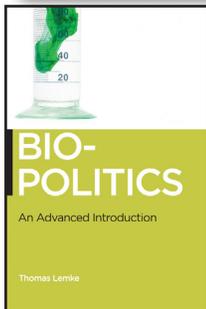
Morrison, Daniel R. and Mark J. Bliton. 2011. “Exploring Layers of Meaning with Deep Brain Stimulation Patients.” *American Journal of Bioethics Neuroscience* 2: 26-28.

**We thank the section members who brought these articles and chapters to our attention for this newsletter and we encourage you to continue sending us your submissions at BodyNewsletter@gmail.com.*

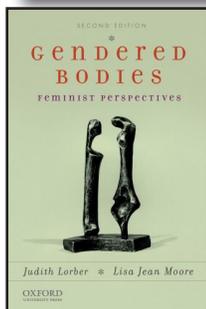
Recent Books of Interest



de Casanova, Erynn Masi. 2011. *Making up the Difference: Women, Beauty, and Direct Selling in Ecuador*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.



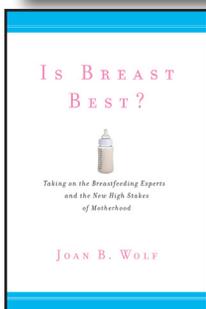
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Lorber, Judith and Lisa Jean Moore, eds. 2011. *Gendered Bodies: Feminist Perspectives*. New York: Oxford University Press.



Metzl, Jonathan and Anna Kirkland, eds. 2010. *Against Health: How Health Became the New Morality*. New York: New York University Press.



Wolf, Joan B. 2010. *Is Breast Best? Taking on the Breastfeeding Experts and the New High Stakes of Motherhood*. New York: New York University Press.

*We thank the section members who brought these books to our attention for this newsletter and we encourage you to continue sending us your submissions at BodyNewsletter@gmail.com.

Call for Book Proposals

Biopolitics: Medicine, Technoscience and Health in the Twenty-First Century (NYU Press).

Series Editors Monica J. Casper and Lisa Jean Moore are actively seeking book projects from both senior and junior scholars in fields including body studies, medical sociology, medical anthropology, science and technology studies, bioethics, gender and sexuality studies, disability studies, and others. We are especially interested in projects that offer new theoretical insights about biopolitics, analyze health- and body-related topics in fresh ways, or take up an intellectual problem in relation to biopolitics.

Submissions should take the form of a 3-5 page proposal outlining the intent and scope of the project, its merits in comparison to existing texts, and the audience it is designed to reach. You should also include a detailed Table of Contents, two-three sample chapters, a timeline, and a current copy of your curriculum vitae.

Please feel free to email us at monica.casper@asu.edu or lisa-jean.moore@purchase.edu with questions or to learn more about the series.

Conferences

International Sociology of Sport Association (ISSA) World Congress 2011

The ISSA World Congress 2011, "Sport & the Winds of Change," is being held in Havana, Cuba during the week of July 10-17th 2011 with the Scientific Programme (including all conference presentations, general meetings, and ISSA organised social events) operating July 12-15th.

Optional self-organised, self-funded workshops, educational and cultural sessions will be held on July 10-11th & 16-17th. Please note that these activities are organised independent of the Scientific Programme.

For ISSA members in Category A countries, registration rates are 450 Euros. Please note that registration rates are significantly higher for non-members of ISSA (for Category A non-members the rate is 550 Euros). Membership details may be found at: <http://www.uk.sagepub.com/journals/Journal200937>

In response to several requests from members, we have agreed to bring forward the abstract submission deadline in order to allow earlier confirmation of the conference programme. We encourage you to submit your abstracts as early as possible, and they will be reviewed and a decision made within approximately 10 days following receipt. The final abstract submission deadline is now April 01, 2011.

For further details, please see the conference website at <http://www.issa-cuba2011.com>.

If you have any queries, or if I can assist in any way with your membership of ISSA, please do not hesitate to contact me. I very much look forward to seeing many of you in Havana!

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