

*Introduction*

## **Embodied Action, Embodied Theory: Understanding the Body in Society**

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*Received: 27 June 2013 / Accepted: 16 July 2013 / Published: 23 July 2013*

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In 2010 Jacqueline Low was invited to become an editorial board member of the then new online open-access journal *Societies*. In that same year, Claudia Malacrida was approached to organize a session on the sociology of the body at the 2012 International Sociological Association (ISA) meetings in Buenos Aires. When the call came in 2011 from *Societies* for editorial board members to propose topics for special issues of the journal, it was a natural and fortuitous timing of events and we undertook to co-edit this special issue based, in part, on papers from the conference. Because of our shared history of writing about social aspects of the body, we were convinced that both the conference and the journal papers would produce interesting and important advancements in a sub-discipline that is making exciting contributions beyond its borders to social theory and empirical sociological work.

The call for papers for both venues invited scholars of the body to explore the inextricable connections between the lived body and the body as a set of social, historical and cultural experiences. Suggested topics included insights into the body as a site of social control, and examinations of the body as a vehicle for the expression and consumption of culture. The call for papers proved widely popular, reflective of the interest in and stature of the sub-discipline of the sociology of the body, and we had to turn down many excellent proposals. So many papers were submitted that we organized two sessions at the ISA conference in Buenos Aires: *The Body in Culture and Society: Embodiment and Practice* [1] and *The Body and Difference in Society: Embodiment, Theory and Social Control* [2]. Several scholars who presented at the conference became contributors to this special issue and the call for papers for this special issue attracted papers from other top scholars in the sociology of the body,

including an afterword contributed by Chris Shilling [3], one of the most significant theorists of the body.

Together, the papers reflect cutting edge research and theory that characterize the broad interests subsumed under sociological work on the body, ranging from examinations of bodily representations, perceptions of embodiment, and gendered forms of embodiment, to how bodies are produced and constrained as different or problematic, and finally, to how embodiment figures in economic, medical and institutional orders.

### The Contributors

Sean Brayton is an Associate Professor of Kinesiology and Physical Education at the University of Lethbridge. His research examines representations of race, ethnicity and labour in popular film and television and his work has appeared in the *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, *Science Fiction Studies*, *Social Identities* and *Social Semiotics*. He provides a class-based analysis of the male body as depicted in reality shows such as: “Ax Men, Black Gold, and Coal” [4].

Elizabeth DePoy is a Professor of Social Work, Interdisciplinary Disability Studies, and Cooperating Faculty in Mechanical Engineering at the University of Maine and a Senior Research Fellow at Ono Academic College, Ono, Israel. Her scholarship focuses on methods of inquiry, legitimacy and disjuncture theory, in addition to design and branding of humans as categories members. Stephen Gilson is Professor of Social Work and Interdisciplinary Disability Studies at the University of Maine and a Senior Research Fellow at Ono Academic College, Ono, Israel. He focuses his scholarly work on international policy, legitimacy and disjuncture theory, and design and branding of humans as categories members. In their article, DePoy and Gilson explore the social construct of disability and how it raises questions “about the criteria for human embodiment” [5].

Thomas P. Horejes, deaf since birth, is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at Gallaudet University. He has a Ph.D. in Justice Studies from Arizona State University and is author of *Social Constructions of Deafness: Examining Deaf Languacultures in Deaf Education* [6]. His research focuses on justice issues, including ideologies and identity formations. Christopher Jon Heuer is an Associate Professor of English at Gallaudet University. He has a Ph.D. in Adult Literacy from George Mason University and is the author of *Bug: Deaf Identity and Internal Revolution* [7] and *All Your Parts Intact: Poetry* [8]. Based on in-depth analysis of two case studies, Horejes and Heuer reflect on the embodied and social experiences of cochlear implants in their article [9].

Jacqueline Low is a Professor of Sociology at the University of New Brunswick. Along with the sociology of the body her areas of research specialization include: the sociology of health, chronic illness and disability, alternative and complementary therapies, deviant behaviour, social problems; and qualitative methods. She is first editor, along with co-editor Gary Bowden, of *The Chicago School Diaspora: Epistemology and Substance* (McGill-Queens University Press) [10]. Suzanne Dupuis-Blanchard is an Associate Professor at the School of Nursing and director of the Research Centre on Aging at the Université de Moncton in New Brunswick. Her research interests include aging at home, age friendly communities and normal aging transitions. Building on their complementary research interests, Low and Dupuis-Blanchard analyze binary images of aging bodies in the media in their contribution to this special issue [11].

Claudia Malacrida is a Professor in Sociology at the University of Lethbridge in Canada. She is the author of several books on disability/body issues: *Mourning the Dreams* [12], which examines social aspects of miscarriage and stillbirth; *Sociology of the Body: a Reader* [13], co-edited with Jacqueline Low; and *Cold Comfort* [14], a comparative study of the experiences of mothers of ADHD children in Canada and the UK. She has published extensively on eugenics and institutionalization, and has recently completed a book on the history of eugenics in Alberta. Using Foucauldian theory on docile bodies and Mary Douglas's work on matter out of place, her article outlines how the body can be controlled through dehumanization [15].

Christine Mallozzi is an Assistant Professor of Literacy Education in the Curriculum and Instruction Department at the University of Kentucky, USA. Her research interests include gender and teacher education, middle grades reading education, feminist theories, and discourse analysis. Her article focuses on the meaning tattoos have for identity and narratives of self among secondary school teachers [16].

Barb Marshall is Professor of Sociology at Trent University in Peterborough, Canada. She has published widely in the areas of feminist theory, gender, sexuality and ageing. Her most recent book is a collection co-edited with Antje Kampf and Alan Petersen entitled: *Ageing Men, Masculinities and Modern Medicine* [17]. Stephen Katz is a Professor of Sociology at Trent University, Peterborough, Canada. He is author of *Disciplining Old Age: The Formation of Gerontological Knowledge* [18] and *Cultural Aging* [19], and several book chapters and articles on critical gerontology and the aging body. Currently he is working on the cultural aspects of aging memory and cognitive impairment. In their contribution to this special issue, Marshall and Katz address the contradiction between the current rhetoric of anti-ageing and a renewed essentialism in how the aging body is constructed in society [20].

Maricel Oró Piqueras is a Lecturer in the Department of English and Linguistics at the University of Lleida in Lleida, Spain. Her areas of research interest include contemporary English literature, utopian fiction, cultural studies, and ageing in literature. She is author of *Ageing Corporealities in Contemporary English Fiction* [21]. She analyzes the presentation of the "Dys-Appearing" body of aging women in the novels of Doris Lessing in her article for this special issue [22].

Chris Shilling is a Professor of Sociology at the University of Kent's School of Social Policy, Sociology and Social Research (SSPSSR). He is among the foremost of theorists of the body and is one of the main figures in the establishment of the interdisciplinary field of body studies and is author of *The Body and Social Theory* [23], which has been translated widely and is in its third edition. Among his other important books are: *The Body in Culture, Technology and Society* [24], *Changing Bodies. Habit, Crisis and Creativity* [25], and he is Editor of *Embodying Sociology* [26]. His afterword for this special issue contextualizes the contributions within the wider field of the sociology of the body [3].

Jenny Slater is a Lecturer in Education and Disability Studies at Sheffield Hallam University. Her doctoral work with young disabled people drew on critical disability studies frameworks to consider cultural constructions of 'youth' and 'disability'. Her research interests include how youth and disability 'play out' with other intersectional identities, particularly gender and sexuality. In her contribution to this special issue she addresses the youthful body as a project within the context of the disabled body [27].

Karen Soldatic is a researcher at the University of New South Wales, Sydney Australia. Karen's main area of research traverses critical issues of social categorization and practices of value-oriented

identity formation, as well as the ways in which social actors collectively mobilize to resist, confront, and transform these processes and mechanisms. Helen Meekosha is an Associate Professor in the School of Social Sciences at the University of New South Wales. Her major research area is critical disability studies and covers intersectionality, gender, the global South, indigenous experiences of disability and the politics of care. Her work in in these areas has broken new ground in setting disability in a context of neoliberalism and globalization, in particular arguing the case for an examination of global North/South relations that affect the incidence and production of disability. In this special issue Soldatic and Meekosha look at “respectable and unruly corporeality” and the impact of those labels within the context of workfare programs [28].

### Acknowledgments

Our sincere thanks to the anonymous reviewers and to *Societies* editorial team for their hard work on this special issue.

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