

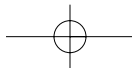


Introduction

It is claimed that the discipline of sociology has led the way in 'bringing the body (back) in' (Frank 19, 1990) to social and political analysis. John O'Neill's *Five Bodies* and Bryan S. Turner's *The Body and Society* offered distinct explanations for the body's neglect within sociological (and other social scientific) scholarship and social theory and presented sustained analyses of perspectives and approaches that could serve the aim of developing a sociological understanding of the human body. The body is now a central and distinct arena of theoretical debate and empirical research within sociology and is increasingly the focus of interdisciplinary scholarship across cultural studies and feminist theory. However, while cultural studies are more likely to engage with sociology, feminist theory has been more disinclined to do so. Moreover, feminists and non-feminists conducting empirical research on the human body within disciplinary boundaries (for instance, within sociology) and working across such boundaries habitually cite the work of feminists who are *known as* theorists, such as Judith Butler, Elizabeth Grosz, Moira Gatens and Luce Irigaray.

The theoretical insights produced by a relatively small group of women located within elite cultural Anglophone institutions has had immense impact on the direction and form of empirical research and more general scholarship concerning the body. Indeed, while there are now a considerable number of edited volumes that seek to bring together empirical feminist research on the body, e.g. judging by citation records, it would appear that feminist theories of the body are more likely to be accorded privilege within academic feminist communities. Yet empirical scholarship appears to have had little impact on the direction and form of feminist theories of the body, which *begin* from particular texts (Derrida's *On Grammatology*, Lacan's *Écrits*), interrogate and discuss those texts in meticulous and stylish detail and sustain a view of the body *as* text, despite claims to the contrary.

Embodying Gender thus explores a curious paradox. On the one hand, the development of the sociology of the body is informed by a commitment, however distinctly and variably interpreted, to the identification of the contexts, relations, practices and structures that shape human embodiment. WhilstWhile this scholarship has been variously accused of over-tending to the abstract, it no longer remains the case that sociological treat-

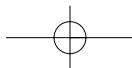
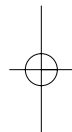
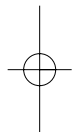


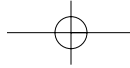
ments of the body are overly theoretical. There are now a number of studies from a range of perspectives available to the discipline that offer theoretically informed empirical investigations of various issues concerning the body, for instance in relation to disability (Dyck, 1996), reproduction (Martin, 1984), consumer culture (Featherstone, 1982), masculinity and femininity (Mansfield and McGinn 19, 1993), and health (Howson 19, 1999). These studies, many of which are engendered from within a feminist ethos, reflexively draw on theory and work through the implications of particular frameworks for making sense of the observations and data they generate. In particular, feminist empirical research typically has the challenge of engaging not only with the implications of social theory for addressing the body, but also with what Witz (2000) has termed new feminist theories of the body.

In contrast, new feminist theories of the body rarely engage with either feminist-inspired empirical scholarship or with sociological scholarship concerning the body. Hence, while sociologists routinely read and reflect on what feminist theorists have to say about the body, particularly feminists defined as theorists and who make a virtue of interdisciplinarity, feminist theorists seldom reflect on what sociologists have to say. This one-sided discourse has the effect of not only refusing the entry of empirical observations to the development of feminist theories, but also refuses the entry of feminist *sociological* theory to treatments of the body within both social and feminist theory. This state of affairs is not new, however, as social/sociological theory infrequently responds to feminist analyses.

This book begins from a conviction that embodiment lies at the heart of human experience and that both feminism and sociology have an interest in the integration of insights about feelings, emotion, sensations with insights about the impact and significance of rational thought, action and social structure on our lives. We all have bodies, but the trick that Western thought has played has been to allow men to think and live as though they did not have to attend to or labour over their bodies, to forget the body. Academic feminism, as an interdisciplinary endeavour, has tried to grapple with and explain this trick in ways that the social sciences and humanities have found useful, and in ways that increasingly seek to place the body at the centre of theory.

However, academic feminism's contribution to this endeavour has occurred in ways that also forget the body as an experienced material and sensible medium. To some extent, this trick is a corollary of the way in which those who do theory, do so in contexts that foster a sense of isolation, individualism and disembodiment from social relationships and the physical environment. The modern Western university can be a soulless institution that places emphasis on autonomous output rather than on collectively produced scholarship. Consequently, not only can the process and experience of producing theory be characterized by bleakness and a





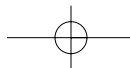
sense of separation from others, but also theory itself, in ways that forget that the body is the basis and medium through which we forge personal and social relationships and experience the physical world. *Embodying Gender* is an attempt to work through that bleakness and contribute to academic feminism and to sociology by trying to keep the body in mind as the basis of living and active relations with others.

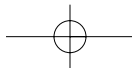
Though feminism has historically been exercised by the significance and importance of the particular – of women's unvoiced, invisible experiences – feminist theories of the body look increasingly to poststructuralist and psychoanalytic frameworks to establish a more generalized theory and politics of the particular. This produces a curious phenomenon: pursuit of the particular in feminism occurs via consideration of the abstract, for no conceptual framework can be more abstract than that informed by contemporary theoretical psychoanalysis. Indeed, I would argue that the body appears in much feminist theory as an ethereal presence, a fetishized concept that has become detached and totalizing for the interpretive communities it serves.

Thus, the book is concerned with the relation of body concepts to concepts of gender within sociology and feminism, and its aim is to trace the development, uses and articulation of such concepts. As some sociologists of the body have become increasingly exercised about addressing gender in their work, so feminists have considered the significance of the body for debates about gender and sexual difference. Yet sociologists and feminist theorists of the body rarely consult each other's work or address their concerns to each other. Instead, sociologists have attempted to gender the body and feminists have attempted to embody gender in relative isolation from each other. More recently, however, in considering ways to gender the body, male sociologists have turned to the work of feminist philosophers such as Elizabeth Grosz and Moira Gatens. Yet, feminist considerations of ways to embody gender largely look largely to continental philosophy and psychoanalysis rather than to feminist sociology. While there is sterling and erudite work here, the double marginalization of feminist sociology by sociologists and feminist theorists of the body needs some exploration. *Embodying Gender* traces the convergence of body concepts in feminism and at times in sociology on psychoanalytic concepts and deconstructive practices that have the potential to write the body out of the text. Writing the body back in points to the retrieval of feminist concepts informed by a sociological imagination that have the potential to contribute to both the process of embodying gender and gendering the body.

Localities, particularities and audiences

Following a tradition of reflexivity in sociology (Gouldner, 1970), recent

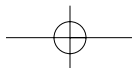
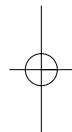
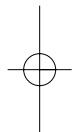


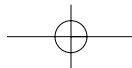


work by key body sociologists (Williams and Bendelow, 1998) has explicitly identified the necessity of an 'embodied sociology'. This concept not only insists on incorporating the lived body into substantive sociology but also invites the sociologist to write her own embodiment into that work in an effort to establish her relationship to the researched (which in this case is a body of theory). I have some reservations about how that might actually proceed and am aware of the difficulties of engaging in such a task (difficulties that are well documented in feminist geography, see Rose, 1997). Nonetheless, I share with these sociologists and with many feminists, the aspiration to situate my own practices of knowledge production and to situate that knowledge in ways that 'reanimate matter' (Gordon, 1994).

The book has been influenced by a number of things. Its starting point is not really an interest in the theoretical debates that have developed within both sociology and in feminism, although those debates necessarily frame my intellectual orientation to 'the body'. Rather, my starting point has been an abiding interest in the activities, practices and experiences of what some have come to term 'lived female embodiment', that is, the embodied experiences associated with, though not reduced to, being (a white, educated middle-class) female, and the labour required to maintain one's own and other bodies. Moreover, my experience attending to the bodies of others, as a nurse and as a mother of small children, offers a particular perspective on these labours. Such experiences necessarily involve close physical and sensuous proximity to the bodies of others in ways that cut against the particular challenges of the civilizing process (Elias, 1994) and the intriguing cerebral-ness that characterizes much academic life. The work of the nurse is at times intensely physical and material, involving acute sensory work (Lawler, 1991), and the proximity to and responsibility for the bodies of children typically push against the individualized detachment that informs a Westernized sensibility.

Therefore, the tactility of the bodies of others (albeit assigned meaning via disparate cultural, social and political frameworks) is something that is deeply implicated in my own position as both a sociologist and as a feminist. It is always already present in relations and contexts of care in ways that academic disciplines have been unable and/or reluctant to acknowledge until quite recently, no doubt because of its constitution as the focus for 'dirty work' (Lawton, 1998). That is, the body is ever present for me as the focus of self-discipline, management and care of both self and others. This orientation to the body has been reflected in my research on the body, gender and health (1999, 2001a, b, c, 2003) which is informed both by C. Wright Mills' concept of the sociological imagination and Michel Foucault's insistence on seeing discourse as the conditions of existence that allow things to be said and done in any particular epoch. However, my readings of body theory have often made me pause to think



*Introduction*

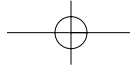
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about the ways in which bodies (my own and those of others) are objectified not only through embodied social practices but also through the conceptual frameworks – also social practices – that seek to elucidate them.

A second influence on this book is inevitably my academic training in the discipline of sociology, which I view as a critical discipline (Wright Mills, 1959) that grants epistemological privilege to the social in understanding and explaining the range of phenomena experienced by human beings. Wright Mills has been an especially apposite influence because of his own philosophical commitment to a pragmatic approach that allows for the significance of personal experience in the sociological analysis of phenomena, personal involvement in the production of such analysis and a focus on practical possibilities in the present. Wright Mills was interested in how social forces – the social origins of the thinker, the structure of the academic community and the requirements of a given social context – give rise to different intellectual styles. Though this book is neither a social analysis of the proponents and schools of body concepts nor a genealogical account of such concepts, nonetheless, my examination of body concepts and particularly their investment in text have pulled me in this direction. Pragmatism, whilstwhile latterly damned by its critics as acquiescence to the prevailing social order, offers, according to Wright Mills, a critical view of modern social life that begins from experience, rejects the idea of an overarching politics or theory and focuses on the ‘practical, immediate and reformable’.

Dorothy Smith qualifies the power of the sociological imagination in her critique of the way the practice of sociology has disembodied its practitioners. Her work has attracted less attention from feminists than it ought, given her contribution to epistemological debates within Anglo-American feminism in the 1970s and 1980s. The importance of her thinking lies in her attempt to develop a specifically feminist sociology, which begins from the material experiences and locations of women, including those of the sociologist and offers a productive means of embodying gender and gendering the body. One suspects that for Smith, as for Wright Mills, sociology loses its ‘promise’ and ‘hope’ as a critical discipline when it loses sight of the immediate experiences and issues concerning those on whom its gaze is turned and produces instead overarching programmatic statements. In this respect, Mills’ – and Smith’s – sociology resonates with a Foucauldian methodology that urges a detailed focus on practices and their location within the discourses that form ‘a central axis of social formation and domination’. Consequently, the exploration of body concepts offered here can be seen as an account of concepts that are themselves the effects of particular kinds of academic practices and discourses.

The third main set of influences on this book is feminism. My sociological interests have been shaped by an interest in gender: in the range of differences and inequalities between men and women and among women

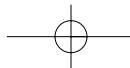


(for critical reviews of the multifaceted meanings of gender, see Morgan, 1989; Hawkesworth, 1997), and I have pursued research and teaching projects that seek to understand the relations and practices that give shape to women's lives and define, regulate and mediate bodily experiences. However, I see myself as a sociologist who is also a feminist rather than as an 'academic feminist'. By this I mean that while my political commitments might be broadly termed 'feminist' in ways that inform my research and teaching, my academic location is within the discipline of sociology. This location has two implications. The first is that whilst while I have contributed to interdisciplinary projects, particularly in teaching, the contribution I bring is a sociologically inflected consideration of social phenomena. Second, my primary identification with an academic discipline rather than with feminism more broadly places me 'outside' the practices associated with the forms of textual politics on which new feminist theories of the body are based. This means that the critical approach to body concepts offered here is one developed from both the inside out and from the outside in.

This brings me to my final remark about my location and its bearing on the genesis and development of the book. Publishers like to know precisely how to pitch the books they commission and writers need to attend carefully to the issue of audience. It is commonplace to see written on book jackets the identities of those proposed audiences: students of sociology, women's studies, and so on. I hope this book will offer something of value for these communities of readers. However, academic books are also written to address scholars in a specified field or series of fields as a means of establishing the place of the writer in that field. I will later take up this issue as it applies to the current shape of the field of the body in feminism. My point for the moment is that the field I seek to address is less the field of feminist theory *per se*, which I view as synonymous with feminist philosophy and literary theory, than that of a feminism seeking to operate within the field of sociology as well as a sociology sensitive to corporeally inclined feminist issues.

The human body in the sociological field

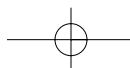
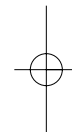
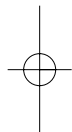
The human body has emerged as an object of substantial cross-disciplinary scrutiny in the past two decades and has achieved sub-disciplinary status in many social science disciplines, including sociology, anthropology and cultural studies, but both the sociology of the body and feminist considerations of the body have shifted from their initial focus. Early sociological approaches to the body relied on both sociological and non-sociological theory because of a limited range of concepts available for specifically sociological explanations about the social significance of the human body. As Blaikie et al. (2003) argue, the sociology of the body was initially

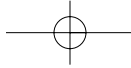
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inspired by philosophical, historical and anthropological treatments of the body which have been subsequently developed in sociologically relevant ways. Many introductory sociology texts now include a cursory section on the body in relation to issues of gender and sexuality; social theorists have addressed the implicit and explicit presence of the body in classical theory (Turner, 1984, 1996; Shilling, 1993); phenomenologists and philosophers have examined the extent to which the body grounds experience (Merleau-Ponty, 1962); and the legacy of Foucault continues to stimulate the scrutiny of practices of power that contribute to understandings of what the body is and how it is lived.

NPTo some extent, the body represents a conceptual space through which to redefine the sociological project in ways that attempt to transcend natural/social paradigms (Burkitt, 1999; Shilling, 1993, 2003; Burkitt, 1999) and address recurring binaries of structure/agency, material/discourse, and object/subject. A key characteristic of this developing field has been a debate about whether the sociology of the body should be regarded as a sub-discipline or, more radically, whether interest in body matters offers a means of (re-)embodying the sociological project (Scott and Morgan, 1993; Bury, 1995). One might, if one were so post-structurally inclined, characterize the field of the body as a 'field of discursivity' in which there is no fixed centre and a range of competing meanings and signs.

In a spirit of contextualization and reflection, many authors have sought to explain the emergence of a sociological gaze upon the human body with reference to the social context in which sociology operates. It has become commonplace to argue that demographic change, feminism, and technological progress have fuelled sociological interest in the body and forced the discipline to consider the body as both object and subject (for instance, Turner, 1984; Shilling, 1993; Lupton, 1994; Williams and Bendelow, 1998). The emergence then of 'somatic society' is one in which the major social and political problems of the time are expressed via the human body. These explanations for sociological interest in the body look outside the discipline and reinforce a view of sociology as responsive and reactive to social change, in keeping with its development as a revisionist discipline of inquiry which achieves its present by an ongoing assessment of the past (McCarthy, 1996: 106). Indeed, sociology is defined as a discipline by its ability to situate the ideas that it generates in a specific, living context and to develop a sure-footed reflexivity that enables its practitioners to draw attention to the part they play in their own process of inquiry. WhilstWhile the term reflexivity may generate multiple meanings (e.g. a feminist standpoint within sociology may define the idea of reflexivity rather more differently from sociologists of scientific knowledge), the point stands that a fundamental aspect of the disciplinary evolution of sociology has been a concern to reflect upon its means of knowledge making and its relation to the 'spirit of the times'.





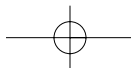
However, perhaps too much emphasis is placed on explaining sociology's focus on the body by reference to external changes and developments. Part of the explanation for sociology's expanding interest in the human body lies within the development of sociology itself and its relation to other forms of disciplinary inquiry. Sociology has at times been accused of seeking out and colonizing new areas of inquiry in ways that may contribute to 'second-birthings' (Haraway, 1991) of the discipline. However, in doing so, new areas of inquiry may be unsatisfactorily homogenized and transformed into objects of analysis that are reified and stripped of their 'magic'. In the case of the human body, many sociologists have struggled to develop perspectives that do not objectify the body and this issue has shaped much of the field's development, in particular, concerns for the significance of bodily experience and lived embodiment.

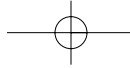
Part of this concern has been prompted by sensitivity to feminism, queer and disability studies, yet the feminism to which social/sociological theories of the body appeal is typically associated with the textual practices of literary theory and philosophy rather than feminist sociologies of the body. Nonetheless, concerns about the female body within feminism have helped to shape the development of the sociology of the body at least to the extent that most social/sociological theories of the body acknowledge the significance of feminism as a social movement in making the body visible as a substantive issue for academic scrutiny. Moreover, sociologists who have been instrumental in developing body concepts have increasingly looked to feminism for solutions to conceptual problems associated with Cartesian dichotomies between mind/body, culture/nature, subject/object, self/other, and male/female. Yet, while many current sociological projects address themselves to the 'problem' of the body, in fact, their substantive focus is on the body in social theory.

The female body in the field of feminism

In contrast, feminism has long addressed issues concerning the female body via issues such as medicalization, reproduction, pornography and violence, though the female body has occupied an awkward presence within feminism. While feminist activism in the 1960s and 1970s more willingly engaged with the body at the level of experience and body politics (for instance, in relation to women's health politics, pornography, or sexual violence), Anglo-American academic feminism, until the 1980s, did not generally theorize the subordination of women through attention to the body. While certain dimensions of female embodiment were central to radical feminist debates about women's subordination, female embodiment as a whole was marginal (though often implicit) to academic feminism.

Though the literature generated by feminist activism concerned itself



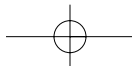
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primarily with explaining and challenging the daily oppressions and injustices directed towards the female body, the body has only recently emerged in the past decade as a *theoretical* focus for feminism in ways that have profound implications for the feminist project. Since the 1980s ushered in a new focus on sex and sexuality through deconstruction and psychoanalytic practices, feminist *theory* has reinstated the body as part of a wider project to bridge certain tensions and dualisms between the material and the discursive, the actual and the virtual. The availability of Foucault's work on the historical construction of sexed bodies fuelled scrutiny of the reproduction of femininity which was accompanied by an expanding interest in the significance of the body in social and political theory and, perhaps most prominently, in philosophy and literary theory through the work of Butler, Grosz and Gatens. Concepts have been developed with the specific aim of challenging malestream, abstract accounts of the body that have the effect of devaluing and subordinating women within both theory and academic disciplines. While some of the concepts developed within feminism in the late 1980s point to the significance of the specificity of lived bodily experience and are informed by scholarship that draws on experiential and phenomenological concerns, others are inspired largely by poststructuralist perspectives that pay particular attention to language, discourse and text. It is, therefore, somewhat paradoxical that as non-feminist social theorists have recuperated experience as a focus for theory, feminists have installed the body as a concept through which to develop theory. Indeed, the 'corporeal turn' within academic feminism is principally a turn to theory, which privileges the theme of sexual difference as the centrepiece of feminist scholarship.

Contemporary feminist approaches to the body increasingly focus on the generation and reformulation of theoretical frameworks informed by continental philosophy, phenomenology and psychoanalysis, though few feminists have been sympathetic to or fully taken up sociologically inflected claims associated with the sociological work of Norbert Elias or Pierre Bourdieu. Hence, the starting point for much sociological and feminist commentary about the human body is text rather than matter and accordingly, feminist solutions to problems of the body incorporated by sociologists, are not sociologically inflected. In fact, they are premised on feminist reworkings of continental philosophy and in particular, psychoanalysis, that have the potential to evacuate concepts of a concern with the social that sociologists might consider valuable.

The starting point matters. The data that form the focus for theorizing the contemporary body are primarily other texts that are used to reformulate, reconsider and revise prior claims about the body. Consequently, the body within both sociology and within feminism has become subject to more abstraction, not less. One effect of this trend is that the body increasingly becomes a conceptual space in which debate is undertaken,



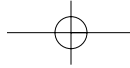
rather than a focus of substantive inquiry, in which key authors enter into a particular form of dialogue with each other. This dialogue serves a purpose. First, it enables (predominantly) male social theorists to reproduce and develop theoretical frameworks that partially acknowledge feminist voices. These voices are themselves theoretical and that may be why male theorists hear them in the first place. Second, the theoretical form this dialogue takes allocates particular positions to feminists who speak and write the language of theory. It grants a legitimate position in the academy to those feminists who are able to deploy and develop the insights and practices of philosophy, psychoanalysis and deconstruction.

The move to a theoretical mode of production is seen most clearly in relation to the body in the field of psychoanalysis and its influence on the sociology of the body and feminist approaches to the body. I am particularly interested in the claims to truth made within these fields and, in particular, the ways in which psychoanalysis has become increasingly vital for the production of theories of the body. Although at times there has been a degree of feminist disquiet with psychoanalysis, there has also been a focused salvage of Lacan's psychoanalysis in the past 20 years. This project is particularly associated with the French school of feminism, which, although a disparate entity, is most closely identified by Anglophile readers with the work of Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva. Their work has been developed in the context of a feminist project of theorizing the body (particularly by Judith Butler, Elizabeth Grosz and Moira Gatens) and in turn, this work has influenced debate within the sociology of the body.

About this book

Embodying Gender traces body concepts in sociology and in feminism, examines their convergence on psychoanalytic concepts and deconstructive practices and questions the translatability of concepts across disciplinary boundaries. Concepts themselves are discursively constituted yet are presented in the literature as authoritative statements about the body that are increasingly treated as grand theory. In order to address the implications of particular concepts, I choose to read them in terms of the claims being made, by whom they are made and for what purpose. In this way, I hope to approach the texts presented here in an open-ended sense that is sensitive to issues of interpretation and that foregrounds the relationship between the contexts in which they were produced and the contexts in which they are read.

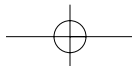
The central claim of this book is that in writing about the body and about the significance of the 'particular', particular stories and experiences that are part of embodiment get written out. That is, the process of textual production within an academic mode has the potential to efface the body's



materiality. Sociological and feminist analysis of the human body is pursued via concepts that could and perhaps should be able to help us locate the significance of embodiment in the twenty-first century. Yet, increasingly, concepts are the focus of text, rather than what the concepts tell us about the significance of the body in people's lives and how the body is lived. For philosophy, perhaps textual (re)production is sufficient unto itself, but such a strategy impoverishes the promise and hope of sociology, especially a feminist sociology of the body. An (over-)emphasis on text, either as a tactic for bringing (some)body into view or as the focus of analysis, incurs a loss for the sociological imagination and collapses a disciplinary boundary that is in some way important. In short, the book examines the difficulty of reconciling sociology's ways of seeing and remits to invoke the richness of social life with the flattened, abstract categories of philosophical analysis. While the development of theory is an important task for both sociology and feminism, an over-emphasis on explanation before the fact diverts our attention from the significance of the body in people's lives. Hence, one of the aims of this book is to re-emphasize the importance of substantive research that is both sociological and feminist: research that moves beyond social knowledge that asserts the centrality of the body to social existence but is unable to explain this centrality and which contributes to a reinvigoration of a politics of embodiment and perhaps, of experience.

My argument is that while new feminist theories of the body claim to be retrieving the body, they do so via a version of psychoanalysis heavily invested in text and are ultimately unable to specify which/whose body is being retrieved. This creates a paradox for a feminism trying to move towards specificity because the claims that are made about the body tend towards the general and create precisely the kind of master narrative that feminism has latterly sought to avoid. This paradox may be a corollary of the habitus of those making the claims – new feminist theorists of the body tend to be feminists in disciplines such as literary theory/rhetoric/philosophy in ('elite' institutions which place a premium on the production of particular kinds of text: that are stamped with 'erudition' and 'eloquence' and internal logic rather than those created from or in dialogue with substantive or pragmatic inquiry. The latter absence is important because academic feminists on the whole continue to claim to 'be about' some notion of political engagement but increasingly conduct that engagement within the narrow confines of textual production, which secures a position in the academy for feminism as a credible intellectual endeavour in an 'economy' of textual production.

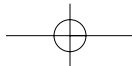
Embodying Gender is structured as follows. First, Chapter 1 outlines body concepts within the sociological field and traces the development of that field. In particular, the chapter examines how sociological focus on the body has engaged with feminist debates concerning gender differentiation

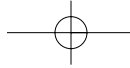


and the ways in which such debates have been incorporated within the sociological field. WhilstWhile sociology has begun to consider the social processes through which bodies are socially marked out in specific ways (in terms of gender, ethnicity, disability), it wrestles with the status of embodied experiences within these processes and continues to focus on the 'object-body'. Indeed, the development of the sociology of the body has tended to conflate the body and embodied experience, in part because of the inter-changeability and unstipulated nature of notions such as 'corporeality', 'materiality' and 'embodiment'. The chapter examines the boundaries between such concepts in order to address the distinctiveness of the insights provided by the sociology of the body and their potential for both (re)embodying the sociological project and gendering the body within sociology. The chapter suggests that a vital weakness in the development of the sociological field is the way in which, whilstwhile this field has engaged with feminist theories of the body that are informed by post-structuralist perspectives, they have failed to consider feminist perspectives that are informed by sociologically materialist approaches. This has had the effect of shifting the sociological field too far in the direction of considering text without context.

In contrast, the body has been central to second-wave feminism although, as many feminists point out, it has often been approached obliquely rather than head-on (Bordo, 1993). Nevertheless, if sociological argument suffers from an over-emphasis on the general and has been unable to adequately identify the specificities of embodiment, feminist argument must be viewed as a statement of gendered embodiment. Hence, Chapter 2 examines the contributions of feminism to understandings of embodiment and its significance in the production of gender. In particular, the chapter turns to the development of feminist treatments of the body and traces the move towards the body as part of a wider project to reconsider gender across a range of disciplines. The chapter outlines feminist scholarship within sociology, history, geography and anthropology that has contributed to debates about the relation between the body and gender and which is part of a broader corporeal turn within academic feminism, in order to argue that, as with sociology, there persists an unresolved conflation between the body and embodied experience. On the one hand, the body has been viewed as a source of 'trouble' and liberal feminist perspectives in particular have implicitly effaced the significance of embodied experience (Hughes and Witz, 1997). On the other, radical feminist perspectives have foregrounded embodied experience as a source of knowledge and as a means of transcendence, but have done so in ways that have been open to criticism for their essentialist implications. In both broad trajectories, gender as bodily property rather than the social and political effect of differentiating processes is called into question.

Answers to emerging questions about the properties of gender are



*Introduction*

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associated with the corporeal turn. Chapter 3 examines how the corporeal turn is associated with a shift in the body as a medium of experience to an object theory through the influence of Foucault's scholarship and the work of key feminist philosophers who have become key referents for feminist theories of the body. In this work, the body begins to be written in a language of sexual difference informed by poststructuralist frameworks. WhilstWhile there is much to commend in this body of work, the chapter seeks to show the limits of these approaches for both sociology and for feminism, and, in particular, the ways in which the over-textualization of the body opens up a conceptual elusiveness and ambivalence that have implications for a feminist politics of the body and for the conceptual utility of gender.

Chapter 4 examines the implications of Lacanian psychoanalytic categories and the effects of deploying such categories across a range of feminist texts. In particular, the chapter seeks to show how the body is troped in these categories in ways that disavow material/ity. The potential for scholarship grounded on experience is taken up in Chapter 5, which places current feminist theories in the context of inter-disciplinarity and argues for an understanding of embodiment as the condition and constituent of agency (Howson, 1996; Witz, 2000). In particular, the chapter re-examines the work of Dorothy Smith and her development of a materialist-phenomenological perspective as a necessary corrective to the over-textualization of the body.

Embodying Gender argues that in order to move beyond the prevalent ambivalence in many contemporary feminist theories of the body, to enable feminism to embody gender and sociology to gender the body, conceptual clarity is required and in particular, distinctions are made between the body as an object of theory and embodied experience derived from and contributing to difference. The chapter revisits material/ity and experience as concepts that might be re-integrated into sociological and feminist argument in order to assess how best to move forward with the task of embodying gender and gendering the body. Chapter 6 provides a conclusion to move forward with the task of embodying gender and gendering the body.