Call for papers: Bodies and intimate relations at work

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This Special Issue will focus on bodies and intimate relations in organisations and workplaces. This timely intervention will be the first *Gender, Work & Organization* Special Issue to focus on this theme. This Call for Papers originates with the stream of the same title organised for the recent 8th Biennial International Interdisciplinary Conference GWO 2014 and seeks further submissions addressing the aims of the Special Issue.

The aim of this Special Issue is to reignite research on the body and intimate relations in the workplace that is more concerned with the ethical dilemmas currently faced by organisations and less concerned with the reduction of the body to discourse and symbol, as is so frequently encountered. A shared theme in our renewed interest in ‘bodily matters’ concerns the forms of moral agency possible to the performance of organisations, not least in the context of rapid, controversial and ongoing reforms of a wide range of public institutions. We thus aim to produce a set of papers that recognises the existence of conflicts of interest over how to value human bodies, bodily differences, and their management in the workplace. In particular, it is important to unpack the systems that organisations develop to evade, deny, or render invisible the fleshy body and its vulnerabilities.

Since the publication of key texts such as Turner (1984), Shilling (1993) and Williams and Bendelow (1998) from the 1980s and onwards, body studies has grown into a strong research tradition that straddles different fields within the social sciences, including organisational studies and the sociology of work and employment. While the body has been an absent present in organisational research (Hassard et al., 2000; Valentine, 2002) for a long time, research on the relationship between the body, embodiment, and paid work is now increasingly recognised (Mik-Meyer, 2009; McDowell, 2009; Twigg et al., 2011; Wolkowit, 2006), especially its potential to address ethical and political issues, such as the inequality in current neoliberal reform initiatives in the public sector (Mik-Meyer & Villadsen, 2013) or bodily neglect in care practices (Mol, 2008). Research drawing attention to the embodiment of social relations has both theoretically and empirically enriched the understanding of gender, ethnic, and racialised hierarchies and interactions in organisations and workplaces. It has contributed to our understanding of similarities and differences in body management across both public and private sectors and between the manufacturing industry and, for instance, service sector employment. This current research has enriched our understanding of the body management of both service providers and service users, and has furthermore provided vivid and unique insights into embodied experiences of work and employment. Meanwhile, however, there has also been a tendency to escape the vulnerabilities, pain, and awkwardness of the body through abstraction and meta-theoretical thinking. We therefore strive to bring actual bodies back into the field of body studies.

This Special Issue seeks to continue and build upon the aforementioned contributions but also to provide scope for up-to-date theoretical and empirical papers that can illuminate what is at stake in the ways in which organisations and workplaces deal with the bodies of managers, employees, customers, patients, and clients, especially under the constraints they currently face. These include...
welfare austerity budgets, outsourcing and self-employed contractors, privatisation, and paid work in service users’ own homes, through for instance domiciliary care programmes and new forms of therapeutic authority. Differences in capacity to define, contain, and sustain bodies, intimacy, and intimate conduct have to be an important part of the analysis.

This Special Issue has the potential to promote the publication of new, theoretically informed research on why bodies matter – to reword Butler’s famous book title, Bodies that Matter – and to connect debates about bodily constructions and experiences with current political issues.

Firstly, we seek papers that explore how organisations make certain bodies more visible/invisible than others through e.g. classification and discipline (Haynes, 2012; Herman et al., 2013; Mcdonald, 2013). Such papers may explore the everyday interactions, practices, procedures, and relations that implicitly or explicitly differentiate bodies. These papers may involve the emergence of particular, even contradictory, ways of relating to the disabled, ageing, transsexual, stressed, chronically ill, dying or obese bodies that emerge in day-to-day practices and interactions.

Secondly, we seek papers that can identify new ways in which organisations and workplaces have come to regulate the bodies of workers (directly and indirectly, on and off-site) and the implications of this for the possibilities of developing new types of body politics. Nowadays, the management of a worker may not only include an interest in the person’s emotional response mechanisms (stress, dissatisfaction, distress) but also include an extended interest in the worker as a ‘whole person’, which includes their physical body and their private, personal well-being. Present day workers are hence managed according to both their psychological profile and their physical appearance. This Special Issue therefore welcomes papers that can provide up-to-date assessments of the extent of such managerial interest in emotional and personal attributes in organisational settings and examine its consequences, for instance the impact upon subjectivities (Knights & Surman, 2008; Swan, 2008) and forms of resistance to certain types of bodily interventions.

Thirdly, we seek papers that explore how intimate relations between bodies are rendered visible/invisible through discourses and practices, including intimate relations between colleagues, workmates, and consumers. We invite papers that deal with how organisational regulation and practices understand and make visible/invisible the tangible character of intimate body work. An example hereof could be the case of elder care and how mental or bodily impairments may be rendered visible/invisible through different kinds of clothing, care, or assistance. We also seek papers on how organisations and workplaces may make visible or seek to evade fears about potential bodily harm, including the question of which bodies are perceived as threatening and which are perceived as vulnerable.

More concrete topics and themes that papers may address include, but are not limited to, the following:

- How different types of bodies and intimacy in particular settings are made respectively visible/invisible in work organisations
- How work organisations deal with the materiality of bodily difference, including ageing, obesity, disability, illness, death, transsexuality, and other non-normative bodily expressions
- Metaphorical and practical techniques of emotional regulation and bodily surveillance in the workplace
- Ethical dilemmas in care work and other highly embodied work-based interactions
- New ways of theorising the relation between sexual identity/sexual relationships and organisation
Formal and informal ways of resisting the regulation of appearance and bodily demeanour
Neoliberal regimes of responsibilisation, surveillance, and ‘soft’ measures used to regulate the body
How intimacy and bodily messiness are rendered visible/invisible through workplace practices
The implications of competing models of disability

Submissions

- Articles should be no more than 9,000 words long and follow the Gender, Work & Organization guidelines for authors.
- Full Papers (not under review elsewhere) should be submitted through the journals online system, (http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/gwo), and clearly marked under manuscript type as ‘special issue’.
- The deadline for submissions is March 15 2015 (deadline date to be confirmed).
- All papers will be reviewed as per journal guidelines.
- Queries relating to the special issue should be directed to Prof. Nanna Mik-Meyer (nmm.ioa@cbs.dk), Dr. Anne Roelsgaard Obling (ar.ioa@cbs.dk), Dr. Carol Wolkowitz (C.wolkowitz@warwick.ac.uk).

References


