

Embodied literacies: Learning to first acknowledge and then read the body in education

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ABSTRACT: American consumerism has historically taught women and girls – and now men and boys – how to live in what I refer to here as bodily-not-enoughness: the idea of not being enough of something in one’s body (not thin-enough, pretty-enough, feminine/masculine-enough, white-enough, middle-class-enough, straight-enough, and so on.). The bodily practices we learn in American popular and education culture teach us to keep our bodies under strict surveillance so we can locate these imperfections – both physically and lived – and improve them; they also teach us to read bodies as normal or deficient visual texts, as enough or not enough. In order to unlearn how we read each others’ bodies in education and teaching, I suggest here that we first have to acknowledge bodies in education and teaching so we can then have the conversations that will help us read each other’s bodies differently.

KEYWORDS: Embodied literacies, bodies, bodies in education, body image.

“But what do *bodies* have to do with education and teaching?” he asks with curious uncertainty.

I pause. *Good question.*

His curious uncertainty reverberates in my head as if the voice on the other end of the line decided a bullhorn would be most useful when asking a question to spark an insightful conversation about the intersections of my research and my teaching. My body tenses as I think about how I can best answer this professor-interviewer on the other end of the phone, who is wondering if and how my research with bodies and K-12 education will fit within the curriculum and instruction program at his higher education institution. And even though he is calling from a university near my own in the United States, I suddenly feel a global distance between us on the line. Countless years of reading and writing and questioning and theorising bodies run through my own body like an electric current, and I want to open my mouth and hear myself articulate the *worth* of doing work on/with/for bodies in education like it is a piece of beautiful (and reputable) literary prose.

I realise the irony of this moment, as I can physically *feel* the answer to his question: sitting in my office chair, forcing my body into its most upright position so the burning and throbbing in my neck and lower back might subside for just two minutes during this phone interview. My response is there, residing physically *on, in, and through* my body, a body wrecked with embodied mental, physical and spiritual aches due to my own doctoral education over the past five years. I know this example of how my corporeal body has gradually come to embody the pressures and stresses I have endured in academia will not suffice as an answer to his question of what bodies have to do with education and teaching; but it is *the body* that gives us a world in the

first place, according to Merleau-Ponty (1962/2002). It is through the body and bodily experiences that the surrounding world even becomes meaningful for us (Dahlberg, Dahlberg & Nystrom, 2008). And contrary to popular culture and educational Cartesian ways-of-being, we are all *sensing-bodies* living in the world: teaching, learning, living, and interacting with other sensing-bodies living in the world. We don't make contact with the world just by *thinking* about it; we experience the world with our sensing-bodies, "acting on it, in ways ranging from the most sophisticated technology to the most primitive unreflective movements, and having feelings about it, which again range in their complexity and subtlety" (Matthews, 2006, p. 89).

My thoughts shift from my current physical-bodily-pain to my past experiences of lived-bodily-pain that came from years of boys and girls, men and women, teachers, bosses, friends, parents and lovers, all reading and responding to my body in a certain way: *either as enough...or not*. I think about American consumerism and how it has historically taught women and girls – and now men and boys – how to live in what I refer to here as *bodily-not-enoughness* – the idea of not being enough *of something* in one's body, as a way-of-being, due to the seemingly implicit and indeed explicit bodily practices we learn, those which teach us – discipline us – to keep our bodies under strict surveillance so we can locate areas of imperfection, both physically and lived, and improve them (Bordo, 2003).

And these disciplining practices aren't just teaching us how to improve our own bodies in order to be enough; they are also teaching each of us how to *read the body as a visual text* (Hagood, 2005) – as enough or not enough. We read each other's bodies to try and understand each other; we read each other's bodies when we are making meaning, whether intentionally or intuitively, and because of the discursive mechanisms in popular and educational culture, we read each other's bodies as normal or deficient – as enough or not enough.

Would this professor-interviewer agree with me if I told him that bodies had *everything* to do with education and teaching because we are disciplined by discursive mechanisms in popular and educational culture to police and standardise our bodies, while we are simultaneously learning how to read bodies as normal or deficient visual texts? Perhaps he would not know whether to agree or disagree with me because he has not thought about bodies in education and teaching in this way. For those of us who do think about bodies in this way, though, for those of us who engage in subversive pedagogies and ways-of-being-in-the-world, working doggedly on ourselves and with our K-University students to look, listen, learn and think with a critical eye and ear, we constantly have to work against these discursive mechanisms that shape the ways in which we read and respond to our students' bodies, as well as how our students read and respond to our teacher-bodies. So where does one begin with a question like this?

I could describe the girls' forum I started when I was teaching middle school, because I was concerned that too many of the 7th and 8th grade girls were experimenting with cutting, bulimic and anorectic practices, and uneducated sexual exploration, and the affects of those behaviours that were at first slowly, and then with lightning speed, dominating their emotional and intellectual spaces in our language arts classroom. Or I could reference a young woman I taught for two years from that same middle school, who is currently taking a break from her college major (elementary education) to spend a second stint at an eating disorder clinic due to her excessive cutting,

bulimic and anorexic behaviours the past seven years. No, probably won't do, because those students and this girl were white and from upper-middle-class families – too passé.¹

What if I told him about the group of undergraduate pre-service students in the *Teaching Young Adolescents* course I taught in the fall semester of 2010 who, when asked to write about their cultural locations in the world, chose as one of their topics – every single one of them, male and female – the body pressures and/or body dissatisfaction they have lived with since elementary or middle school and are still experiencing today? Or the two other groups of undergraduate pre-service students in the *Introduction to Early Childhood* course I was teaching in the fall of 2009 and spring of 2010 with a professor who was, like me, interested in the absence of body-talk in teacher education and, when given the same cultural location writing assignment, also wrote about (and discussed often during class) the body pressures society puts on women and men, and their own body dissatisfaction they could not seem to shake as third-year, college students and future teachers of young children?

Or here's one: I could talk about the countless K-12 educators and teacher educators I have heard in casual conversation over the years (me included) who read and interpret K-12 girls' bodies and pre-service teachers' bodies, making assumptions about the *learning, living* or *teaching potential* they tie to those bodies, often revealing the implicit and explicit raced/classed/sexed/queered/(dis)abled/xenophobic (mis)perceptions that we are not spending any/enough time discussing in our classrooms. And when I refer to *teaching potential*, I mean those “social justice” teacher educators (again, me included), who have constructed the mostly white, middle-class, heterosexual, monolingual, and Christian pre-service teachers with whom we work as “problems” because of the categorical indicators just listed.² There is, of course, also the supplementary angst some of us experience when trying to bring bodies and body-talk into teacher education classrooms, due to the pressures we feel from the spectres of academic discourse (patriarchy, tenure and promotion, student evaluations, and so on) and the discursive histories that have shaped what is considered “acceptable” (or not) in university classrooms. Questioning what educational spaces allow for (or what they might now allow for), Jones (2011), for example, describes the pressures of student evaluations and promotion and tenure lingering in the back of her mind as she decided whether or not to have her pre-service students practice saying “vagina” and

¹ Although scholars have been trying to disrupt the normalised notion that body dissatisfaction resides only within a white, middle-to-upper-middle-class, and female discourse (see Bordo, 2003; Jones & Hughes-Decatur, forthcoming; Hughes, 2011; Love, 2010; Oliver & Lalik, 2000; Orbach, 2009), a majority of quantitative studies in psychology and sociology still report white, middle-class girls as the highest effected group by body dissatisfaction and eating disorders. Over a decade ago, Thompson (1994) reported that the literature on eating problems among African American, Latina, Asian American, and Native American women, as well as working-class women and lesbians, should cast doubt on the accuracy of the white, middle-class profile often presented in the literature. She argued instead that, rather than reflecting the actual prevalence of eating problems, the focus on white, middle-class females in the research literature more accurately reflected the populations of women that had been studied – or not studied. Consequently, Thompson's studies offered nuanced analyses of Latina and African American women who suffered from eating problems and “found that while many of them thought their culture *was supposed* to accept bigger or more curvaceous bodies, they did not believe their own ‘chunky’ bodies were accepted by family members or the broader society” (Jones & Hughes-Decatur, forthcoming, p. 12).

² For examples of scholars who have been writing about this, see Allen & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2004; Bridges-Rhoads, 2011; Conklin, 2008; Hughes, 2010, 2011; Jones & Enriquez, 2009.

“penis” out loud during class, so they could feel more comfortable talking to their own elementary students when the subject of bodies came up. That might be a good answer to give him.

What about the problematic and limited ways *some* bodies are written about as seemingly fixed categories in educational literature according to their race/ethnicity/social-class as probable liabilities – such as the “risk factors” African American and Latina youth possess that will “more than likely” lead them to becoming teen mothers “before their time” (Lesko, 2001); or presenting themselves as “too” promiscuous or “too” sexual?³ That might be a good example. Or hell, maybe I could jump right in and explain my white, middle-classed assumption-loaded surprise at the *surplus* of negative bodytalk that the seventh-grade girls who participated in my dissertation study engaged in every week (see Hughes, 2011). I could tell him about the pilot study-as-writing group I created in order to get to know the girls (and them me) so I could understand better how they lived in their bodies. And the beginning impressions I had that these African American, Mexican American, Peruvian American, and Puerto Rican American eleven-and-twelve-year-old girls had no concerns whatsoever about not-being-enough in/with their bodies because they never seemed to talk about their bodies; nor did they want to talk about their bodies when I asked, leading me to dolefully believe that all of the research I had read about white, middle-class girls being the leading contenders of body dissatisfaction was indeed warranted. But then I brought some random \$2 cookies one day and all of that changed.⁴

These are just a few of the scenarios I could give to the professor-interviewer as my answer during this phone interview that could be my future; but I will not give these scenarios as my answer because they alone will not speak to how my work and I intend on improving/changing/fixing the never-ending chasm of crises in our current education system – K-12 or teacher education, for that matter.

I sit erect in my computer chair and squeeze the yoga block that is situated between my knees to remind my body that this phone interview is not over – to propose to it that if I squeeze the yoga block a little harder and for just a little longer, its job is to then alleviate some of the current pain from the past five years of being a PhD student, and I can continue selling myself to this professor-interviewer.

I hear my professional-teacher-scholar voice droning on vaguely into the phone about how bodywork aligns nicely with the rest of my equity-oriented commitments in teacher education, and I am not impressed with what I hear; and from the silence and then (mis)understanding directed back toward me, I decide that I obviously need to craft an “elevator answer”⁵ that is both provocative and alluring to the importance of

³ See, for example, Guilamo-Ramos, Jaccard, Dittus, Gonzalez, & Bouris, 2008; Houlihan, et al., 2008

⁴ I understand that it probably was not the *cookies* that influenced the girls in my dissertation study to begin talking about bodies as much as the two months we all spent together getting to know one another as writing confidantes and trustworthy companions that created the spaces where the girls felt comfortable enough to enlist this discursive body-rhetoric they often engaged in, putting injurious language on one another’s bodies (“If you eat another cookie, it’s going straight to those thighs.”), or on their own bodies (“Look at my arms; they’re all flabby. I need to start working out again.”); because we ate plenty of chicken nuggets, lemon bars and brownies during those first two months and there was an absence of this negative bodytalk.

⁵ How we are trained as doctoral students to talk about our research in “just a few sentences” or “under a minute” so we can “show what we know” and not drone on.

bodies in education and teaching. Something, perhaps, about how both bodies and education are always in need of fixing, that both *never seem to be enough*.

Professor-Interviewer: So it's kind of like body image.

Me:

Professor-Interviewer: I mean I'm sure it's about other things too, but the main gist is body image...right?

Me:Sure.

It's 2:46 a.m. and I am lying in bed, staring at the make-shift constellation of stars on my ceiling as my mind is still working on the answer for the interviewer's question four days prior: What do bodies have to do with education and teaching? I have come to the conclusion on this third night of lying awake at 2:46 a.m. that there simply is no elevator answer I can give to this question.

Because, you see

BODIES

*are no
simple /subject
(nor is **education**)
both
under
construction,
in need of fixing
(for decades)*

*Neither **bodies***

*nor **education***

are ever

*good
"Enough!"
in America
they have been poked
and prodded,
ripped
apart
and put back together again*

*We must
catch up
work harder
move ahead
be **Better**
NO!
the Best*

*If we are not **the Best***

*we will
never
be
enough*

So here is my not-so-simple answer:

There is a relentless desire in American culture to reshape the body (Orbach, 2009). And it is not just a desire to reshape the *physical* body; it is also a constant reshaping of any kind of *meaning* tied to the dominant culture's body: white, middle-class, heterosexual, English-speaking, Christian and abled. We unconsciously and consciously learn *how* to reshape the physical and lived body through certain bodily practices; practices which discipline our bodies so that we can *be enough*. And in this disciplining of the body, we are taught that it is *our* responsibility to improve our own bodies, because the body is judged as our individual production (Bordo, 2003; Orbach, 2009). These bodily practices teach us daily that it is our job to display the evidence of the hard work we have done on our bodies, and if we do not, we are just proving that we have not "taken control", like the 2011 Nutrisystem campaign is asking us to do, or that we have not "made the choice", like the rest of the 60-billion-dollar diet industry reminds us to do on a daily basis. Bordo (2003) writes,

It's in our Sunday news, with our morning coffee. On the bus, in the airport, at the checkout line...It may be a 5 a.m. addiction to the glittering promises of the infomercial: the latest in fat-dissolving pills, miracle hair restoration, make-up secrets of the stars...A teen magazine: tips on how to dress, how to wear your hair, how to make him want you. The endless commercials and advertisements we believe we pay no attention to. Constant. Everywhere, no big deal. "Eye Candy" – a harmless indulgence. They go down so easily, in and out, digested and forgotten. Hardly able anymore to rouse our indignation. Just pictures. (p. xiii)

Pictures and videos and incessant chatter that have produced a new era of bodies, bodies which are unstable in the skin they reside in; bodies that, no matter what they do, are not enough. Bodily practices teaching us how to talk, walk, sit, stand, gesture, eat, *not eat*, pray, love, dress, laugh, muscle up, slim down, clear away: to be better, to be enough, so much so that our bodies have learned "what is 'inner' and what is 'outer', which gestures are forbidden and which required, how violable or inviolable are the boundaries of our bodies, how much space around the body may be claimed..." (Bordo, 2003, p. 16). And most, if not all, of these cultural practices that chip away at our bodies, working on, in, and through them, disciplining them to read our own and others' bodies accordingly, are transmitted through various popular culture mediums, teaching us all day, every day, that our bodies are broken and in need of repair in order to be more. So we can be...*happy*. It is our responsibility, our *choice*, to fix the broken body.⁶

⁶ These cultural practices are not limited to America, mind you. According to Orbach (2009), in Brazil, the government is willing to provide publicly funded breast enhancements to treat low self-esteem, considering it cheaper than psychotherapy. Meanwhile, one can peruse Western newspapers to purchase a holiday vacation that combines cosmetic surgery with trips to Singapore, Thailand, Hungary and Columbia. And as these practices become "ever more available and widespread, people will soon ask why you haven't remodeled your body, as though it were a shameful old kitchen" (Orbach, 2009, p. 103). Additionally, Bordo (2003) writes about the Fiji islands not having access to television until 1995, when a single station was introduced that broadcast programs from the US, Britain, and Australia. Until that time, according to Bordo and anthropologist Anne Becker, who reported in her study that most Fijian girls and women – no matter their body size – were comfortable with their bodies, Fiji had no reported cases of eating disorders. In 1998, just three years after the television

Fat bodies that need to be thinned; queer bodies that need to be straightened; dark bodies that need to be lightened and light bodies that need to be darkened. Some bodies are not American-looking enough, and other bodies aren't "American-speaking" enough. Some bodies need to be more feminine, and others more masculine. We have entered into what Orbach (2009) refers to as a new epoch of body destabilisation: an era of smoothing, sucking, strengthening, and slimming our bodies; of tattooing sleeves and piercing noses; of straightening hair or altering its colour. Some insert 24-carat gold teeth, while others insert \$2400 collagen. We have moved from long skirts, which reveal nothing more than the ankle, to mini-skirts, which almost reveal the soul. We have acquired the most indiscrete practices of painting our toenails so that they will look appealing in our new Monolo-Blancos, to the most outrageous practices of binding our feet so that they will fit into those Monolo-Blancos (Orbach, 2009). According to Bordo (2003) and Orbach (2009), these cultural bodily practices are often more powerful than the practices we learn consciously, "through explicit instruction concerning the appropriate behaviour for our gender, race and social class" (Bordo, 2003, p. 16). These are the discursive mechanisms policing and standardising our bodies that educators are up against every day; these are the cultural bodily practices teaching us how to read bodies.

Let me interject here that my goal in this bodily exploration is not to criticise those who have injections and/or plastic surgery, spend hundreds to thousands of dollars on diets/diet pills that continue to fail them, or those who spend the same amount on beauty products, because I would have to implicate myself in either yearning to participate or actually participating in all of these practices. It is, rather, to point to a discourse that has gradually changed our perceptions and experiences of our bodies – a discourse, according to Bordo (2003), that "encourages us to 'imagine the possibilities' and close our eyes to limits and consequences" (p. 39). I use *discourse* here rather than *ideology*, because a discourse theory view "characterises subjects as engaging in their own constitution, acquiescing with or contesting the roles to which they are assigned" (Mills, 2004, p. 41). That is, people are allowed some kind of agency in all of this – to resist *and* participate in the discursive body practices simultaneously and contradictorily, as I do when I write these pages trying to create some kind of change in education, before and after I go to the gym and take breaks from this writing to do squats and lunges. An ideological (Althusserian) view might instead see this dis-ease of not being enough in our bodies as a false consciousness, a way that people are called upon to see themselves as particular types of "fixed" bodied-subjects, as if they are taking up a position that is already established in culture and does not allow space to think about how it might be possible to intervene (Mills, 2004). But there *are* possibilities of intervention; there *are* ways in which we can learn to read bodies *as enough* in popular and educational culture: by acknowledging the body before it disappears.

Like the multiple and beautiful languages we continue to eradicate in America,⁷ we are also eliminating the variety of beautiful bodies. According to Orbach (2009), the standardised visual culture promoted by industries is dependent upon the breeding of body insecurity, which then creates beauty terror in millions of people. Literally millions of people struggle on a daily basis with not being enough in their bodies.

station began broadcasting, 11% of girls reported vomiting to control weight and 62% of the girls surveyed reported dieting during the previous months (Bordo, 2003, p. xvi).

⁷ For more on "English Only," see Alcott, 2009; Macedo, 2005.

While this body problem may at first seem like a simple issue of vanity for many, Bordo (2003) and Orbach (2009) strongly argue otherwise. According to Orbach,

It is far more serious than we first take it to be and it is only because it is now so ordinary to be distressed about our bodies or body parts that we dismiss the gravity of body problems, which constitute a hidden public health emergency – showing up only obliquely in the statistics on self-harm, obesity and anorexia – the most visible and obvious signs of a far wider-ranging body dis-ease. (2009, pp. 14-15)

FEMALE BODIES AND AMERICAN CONSUMERISM

What is considered an ideal body in American popular culture for girls and women today cannot be narrowed to just one bodily ideal, because of the multiple and somewhat contradictory ways in which female bodies are showcased as “normal” in varied contexts. For example, the underweight body or thin-body represented in fashion magazines, on television, and in Hollywood cinema, seems to be cloaked in a slenderness ideal – the idea that if one is to be enough in our society, then one’s body should be a certain clothes size (usually below zero). While some bodies in popular culture are depicted through a slenderness ideal, other bodies are being presented in more firm and contained ways. These bodies are teaching us to tone, shape and firm up our female “problem areas,” and they are reiterating the message that a *healthy* body equals a firmed, flabless body (Bordo, 2003). While a majority of these toned bodies represented in popular culture are mostly white, middle-class bodies (just like their skeletal counterparts) there are hints of slender and/or firm bodies of colour sprinkled here and there to remind those who are not in the norm that they too are under constant surveillance.

In 1993, Bordo was writing about how America saw bodies a decade before the 90s, writing, “As slenderness has consistently been visually glamourized, and as the ideal has grown thinner and thinner, bodies that a decade ago were considered slender have now come to seem fleshy” (Bordo, 2003, p. 57). In 2011, I would suggest this same thing is true for how we saw bodies in the 90s – those already-too-thinned bodies of the 90s are *now* the fleshy bodies that we are in need of “firming up” in the 2000s. Janet Jackson. Jennifer Hudson. Jessica Simpson. Britney Spears. Kirstie Alley. Queen Latifa. Oprah. Popular culture press has at one time or another during the past decade hounded all of these women (and hundreds more) because their bodies shifted in size, as if it was some conscious choice these women made to alter their bodies so they could incite media outrage.

Jessica Simpson created her own documentary, *The Price of Beauty*, in 2010, after being hammered by the media for deciding that the work she had to do in order to live in a size zero body was not for her anymore. After she was photographed singing in what the media coined as her “mom jeans” (which was offensive and problematic in its own right), Simpson used her documentary to resist or *talk-back-to* (Hughes, 2011) American popular culture by visiting a variety of countries around the globe to learn about other ideas of beauty and body rituals. Even more recently during an interview with Barbara Walters (December 2010), Oprah Winfrey declared a truce with her own body, explaining to Walters that she was tired of the emotional eating battle she has

had with her body her whole life: her new mission was no more dieting – just to *be enough* in the body she had while living a healthy life.⁸

When thinking about all of these bodies and all of the criticism that is poured onto them if they grow “too much” (and subsequently shrink too much due to the harassment from growing too much) it is sometimes difficult to envision that these were the bodies that were considered ideal in the 1950s and earlier. Bodies which were celebrated because of their fleshiness before I was born in the 70s are today categorised as the “full figure” or “plus size” bodies; and consequently, it seems as we move forward, American popular culture becomes even more worshipful of both extreme slenderness and finely tuned flableness. Bordo (2003) writes,

...any softness or bulge comes to be seen as unsightly – as disgusting, disorderly “fat,” which must be “eliminated” or “busted,” as popular exercise-equipment ads put it. Of course, the only bodies that do not transgress in this way are those that are tightly muscled or virtually skeletal. Short of meeting these standards, the slimmer the body, the more obtrusive will any lumps and bulges seem. Given this analysis, the anorectic does not “misperceive” her body; rather, she has learned all too well the dominant cultural standards of how to perceive. (p. 57)

BODIED-POPULAR CULTURE

Consumerism and its visual images began creeping up onto our bodies over 50 years ago, and those images have now exploded onto American culture, becoming one of the major mechanisms for standardising our bodies (Orbach, 2009). If you have the (monetary) access, just check your email and two ads will immediately pop up offering you the top three anti-wrinkle creams of 2011; another will pop up as you navigate away from your Gmail, revealing a “before” and “after” picture of some woman’s body in a bikini so you will buy the *new and improved*, ephedrine-free Hydroxycut©; and on closer look, you might see that the “before” body in the bikini doesn’t really look like it needed an “after”. When you decide that you’ve surfed the web long enough, turn on the television and you might hear Queen Latifa telling you that for her, it’s not about losing weight – it’s about being healthy, so you should pay the \$50-\$100 a week to Jenny Craig© and be more “healthy”...so you can lose weight and be happier...I mean healthier...like Queen Latifa is in her continuously-shrinking body. Or you might see Valerie Bertinelli sporting her new bikini body and praising herself on how she “took control of her life by joining Jenny Craig© and [she] lost 40 pounds,” so she can now wear sweaters, leggings and boots (when she’s not wearing her bikini) because they’re in style, as opposed to wearing sweaters to hide her girthy-feeling body like she used to.⁹

If you want to read about someone else who felt girthy in her (anorectic/bulimic) body, you can buy Portia de Rossi’s (2010) gripping memoir, *Unbearable Lightness: A Story of Loss and Gain*. According to one review, the actress writes “a candid account of the toll a tyrannical body image can exact” (Daunt, 2010, par 2).¹⁰ Oprah Winfrey invited de Rossi to talk about the book on the *Oprah Winfrey Show* in

⁸ <http://theview.abc.go.com/forum/barbara-walters-special-oprah-interview>

⁹ <http://www.jennycraig.com/successstories/blog/valerie>

¹⁰ <http://articles.latimes.com/2010/nov/02/entertainment/la-et-portia-de-rossi-20101102>

October 2010, and de Rossi read excerpts from her book and talked with Oprah about “moments that seem crazy now but normal then”. For example, she described how she ate 5-calorie sticks of gum as a substitute for food, and how one day she was so hungry she unconsciously allowed herself to eat 60 calories of gum; but when the actress snapped out of her voracious appetite for the gum, realising the damage she had done eating those 60 calories, she got out of her car – *wearing platform shoes* – and sprinted back and forth across the parking lot, dodging cars and people, to rid her body of those 60 calories. She also described moments where she did lunges across the room to the bathroom so she could purge whatever calories were in her body, the lunges benefiting her because they would burn calories on her way to purge. Another calorie-burner de Rossi discovered was when she was crying one day because she could not keep up with the body that people expected of her, but she felt better knowing she was crying because the act of crying burns around 10-15 calories.¹¹

EMPOWERMENT RHETORIC LEAVES NO *BODY* OUT

If you grow weary with all of the people Oprah invites on her show to talk about their bodies, you can peruse one of the dozens of reality TV shows that are teaching us we can *create* the bodies we want for a happier, healthier life, if we choose to do so. *The Biggest Loser*, *Dance Your Ass Off*, *Celebrity Fit Club*, and *DietTribe* (to name only a smattering) educate our bodies how to shed the unwanted pounds we have been lugging around most of our ill-fated lives, reminding us, of course, that it has to begin with *me*. I am my own master of my new fate, as Jillian Michaels – “TV’s toughest fitness guru,” best-selling author and radio personality will scream over and over: YOU HAVE A CHOICE. YOU CAN QUIT LIKE YOU HAVE DONE YOUR WHOLE LIFE OR YOU CAN KEEP GOING AND HAVE A NEW LIFE! ONE WHERE YOU WILL BE HAPPY! (And thin, and ripped, and accepted by society, like Jillian, who was 5’2 and 175 pounds at the age of twelve, and is now 5’2, not 175 pounds, and allegedly worth 2 million dollars because of her “life coaching”.) During an interview with *Women’s Health Magazine*, Michaels expressed, “I want to empower people to find happiness via a healthy lifestyle. And when I say healthy, I don’t just mean diet and exercise. Those are just tools.” Tools, the magazine reports, that are helping Michaels build quite the empire:

Along with *The Biggest Loser*, she’s executive producing and starring in a new NBC series, *Losing It with Jillian*, set to begin airing this summer. She has two new books – *The Master Your Metabolism Cookbook* and *The Master Your Metabolism Calorie Counter*. Then there’s her blockbuster workout DVDs, a line of diet supplements, and games for Nintendo Wii, as well as discussion of her own daytime talk show next year. (Lee, 2010, par 4)

No time for television? No problem. Magazines have historically been doing plenty to remind us that we are not enough in our bodies. *Cosmopolitan*, one of the top-selling magazines in the nation, for example, seems to live in paradox: on the one hand, it tells women that we are not sexy enough, thin enough, feminine enough, beautiful enough, heterosexual enough, and, most importantly, according to its founding editor, Helen Gurley Brown, not having sex enough (with men, that is), with its continuous 2-to-69 (pun intended) ways to do everything differently than we used to, while it

¹¹ <http://www.oprah.com/oprahshow/Portia-de-Rossi-on-Her-Extreme-Exercise-Video>

simultaneously gives us the *choice* of agency we need in order to become enough. On the other paradoxical hand is the fact that what made this magazine so desirable in the 1960s was that Helen Gurley Brown rescued it from its lot in life as a “family magazine” and transformed it into a slinky, sexy, “soft feminist” magazine for “single, working women” – and what makes it so irresistible still, according to Brown, herself, “is that it outlined an American dream for single, working women. It provided them with a vision and detailed advice on how to live a better life – on their *own* terms” (Benjamin, n.d., par 9).

If you’re standing in a grocery store checkout line and happen upon *Cosmo* or one of its competitor magazines giving women (and men) advice on how to live a better life, you can see the visual aesthetics of those who *are* living better lives on the covers and throughout the magazines’ spread, as the models’ invented happiness has been airbrushed onto their bodies, reminding me still, that even those who stretch, lift, suck, inject, shrink and airbrush their bodies are not enough. As adults we are supposed to be “sophisticated enough” to recognise that these images are not “real”, that virtually every celebrity or non-celebrity image we see in the magazines, videos, and sometimes even the movies, have been digitally modified. Almost *every, single* image. This, of course, goes for K-12 school photographs now as well; the companies will ask you if you’d like them to remove a blemish from your little one’s face, so that your second-grader’s school picture can also be digitally modified. Let that thought sink in for a minute; don’t just skim over the text to the next paragraph, thinking, *Yeah, yeah, that’s just how it is*: let your mind actively receive it, so you can confront the implications. As Bordo (2003) reminds us, this is not just a simple matter of deception; this is the work of “perceptual pedagogy: *How to Interpret the Body 101*” (p. xviii). “These images are teaching us how to see. Filtered, smoothed, polished, softened, sharpened, re-arranged. And passing. Digital creations, visual cyborgs, teaching us what to expect from flesh and blood. Training our perception in what’s a defect and what is normal” (p. xviii). Training us to read each other’s and our own bodies as enough or not enough.

If adults can hardly resist these discursive mechanisms disciplining our bodies on a daily basis, what about our youth and the impact popular culture texts like teen and Tween magazines have on young adolescent girls and their bodies? From the helpless, innocent bodies displayed in *American Girl* to the sexy, slinky bodies in *J-14*, these magazines and many others act as apparatuses of regulation (Walkerdine, 1997) that limit the ways in which girls learn to read each others’ bodies as *being enough*; additionally, because of the limited physical and lived categories produced in the magazines depending on the girls’ age (for example, beginner-Tween mags: mostly white, middle-class, heterosexual, asexual and abled bodies; teen mags: mostly white, middle-class, heterosexual, sexualised/slenderised, and abled bodies), girls are left with very few options of how they can be enough in their own bodies, if they do not embody these categories. Bordo (2003) adds that the artfully arranged bodies represented in magazine ads, videos and other popular culture devices are powerful mechanisms teaching girls how to read their own and other girls’ bodies. They offer illusions of acceptance, safety, independence and immunity from being hurt or experiencing pain. These devices do not just teach girls how to become beautiful in order to be enough, they also teach them what the dominant culture admires, “how to be cool, how to ‘get it together.’” Bordo continues:

To girls who have been abused they may speak of transcendence or armouring of too-vulnerable female flesh. For racial and ethnic groups whose bodies have been marked as foreign, earthy and primitive, or considered unattractive by Anglo-Saxon norms, they may cast the lure of assimilation, of becoming (metaphorically speaking) “white”. (2003, pp. xxi-xxii)

Due to the wide-ranging options we are presented to fix the broken body, cosmetic surgery – for those who can afford it – has become normalised for girls as much as it has for women. According to Orbach (2009), the discursive empowerment rhetoric that circulates in modern American culture not only supports young girls’ desires to alter their bodies, it provokes them, suggesting that if they do not alter their bodies it would be a sign of self-neglect. This empowerment rhetoric is everywhere, yet its benefits might only be accessible to those who can come up with creative ways to pay for it; reminding us that at least the idea of fixing the broken body is no longer exclusive to a homogeneous group of bodies (white, upper-middle-class, females). *This* is how we are disciplined to read bodies, and that body pedagogy then infiltrates educational contexts where teachers and students are reading each other’s bodies.

THE EDUCATED-DISCIPLINE OF BODIES

The bodies of our youth are not only being taught how to fix their broken bodies and how to read others’ bodies by popular culture mediums, they are also learning how to live disciplined lives in our educational institutions. If you peer into the classrooms and hallways of many American schools today, you may be able to glimpse the contradictory ways in which all bodies are being disciplined:

You can’t do that here!...No hugging!...Grow up!...Ask to use the bathroom!...You’re acting like a child!...NO talking!...Walk the line in the hall...No loud voices...Raise your hand!...No touching!...Detention!...Follow directions!...Grow Up!...Walk slowly...You can’t say that here...You’re too young to understand that concept...Don’t run!...Raise your hand!...Be quiet!...You can’t think that here...Act your Age!...You’re not old enough to talk/think like that...*Grow Up!*

According to a multitude of scholars and theorists, some bodies are disciplined (and silenced) more than others in order to maintain the dominant discourse’s way-of-being.¹² Brown (2005), for example, argues that today’s public schools for working-class youth resemble prisons or military camps rather than spaces of learning and critical thought. “In these schools, replete with metal detectors, armed guards, and periodic searches, poor youth, especially African American and other youth of colour, are being subjected to increasing levels of physical and psychological surveillance, confinement and regimentation” (p. 271). These physical and psychological practices are also being supplemented with national policies and other practices in education: school uniforms, standardised rote and scripted curricula, and Junior Reserve Officers’ Training Corps (JROTC), all signifying the need for a disciplining obedience and conformity of working-class adolescent bodies of colour (Brown, 2005). Within these disciplining practices, how are teachers and students being taught

¹² See Bettie, 2002; Bourdieu, 1977; Brown, 2005; Ferguson, 2005; Fine, 1988, 1992; Fordham, 1996; Gay, 2000; Giroux, 1988; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Jones, 2003; Lesko, 1996, 2001; Pollock, 2004; Walkerdine, 1997; Youdell, 2006.

to read each other's bodies? Ferguson (2005) argues that these disciplined practices govern and regulate our youth's bodily, linguistic and emotional expression. "They are an essential element of the sorting and ranking technologies of an educational system that is organised around the search for and establishment of a ranked difference among children (p. 311). A system, Ferguson argues, designed to produce hierarchies.

Bourdieu (1977) wrote beautifully about how schools embody and reproduce the dominant culture's ideology through certain practices, and his well-referenced notion of (white, middle-class) cultural capital as a superior ideology in education is particularly helpful when trying to understand these disciplining practices that are imposed on some adolescent bodies and not others. By embodying these white, middle-class standards, Bourdieu purports that schools reproduce the idea that the ruling class reigns superior with its ideas of behaviour and lifestyle (Ferguson, 2005). "Politeness", that is, manners, style, body language and oral expressiveness, in Bourdieu's point of view, for example, "contains a politics, a practical immediate recognition of social classifications and of hierarchies between the sexes, the generations, the classes, etc." (Bourdieu, 1977 as cited in Ferguson, 2005, p. 312) – a politics, which according to Ferguson, "eventually comes to define and label African American students and condemn them to the bottom rung of the social order" (p. 312). Describing her work at an elementary school and how young bodies were regulated based on their gestures, for example, Ferguson (2005) observed that adults constantly monitored what the bodies of children were saying to them – they read their bodies – "using the grammar of demeanour, posture, proper gesture" (p. 315). The children had to embody a certain humility, submission and obeisance toward power for the adults at this school, so they could avoid getting in trouble, or at least receive the *minimum penalty*. Ferguson continues,

Movements of eyes, head, placement of arms, hands, and feet can be the cause of the escalation of trouble. Face to face with adult power, children's bodies should not jiggle, jounce, rock back and forth, twist, shout, slouch, shrug shoulders, or turn away. In interactions with school adults, children are expected to make eye contact. Looking away, down at the ground, or off in the distance is considered a sign of insubordination. Hands must be held at the side hanging down loosely, limply, not on hips (an expression of aggression) or in pockets (a sign of insolence or disrespect). (p. 315)

In short, if these 6-to-10-year-old bodies disciplined and regulated themselves while they were in the presence of adult-bodies so they could be read as submissive and docile, they could (hopefully) remain in their classrooms to "learn", a notion similar to that of Foucault's in *Discipline and Punish*. In his genealogy of the prison system, Foucault (1977) wrote about the history of bodies-as-objects and targets of power beginning as early as ancient Greece; bodies that could be manipulated, shaped and trained; bodies that obey and respond (p. 136). A docile body for Foucault was one that may be "subjected, used, transformed and improved" (p. 136); and historically, what was formed were policies of coercions that acted upon the body – calculated manipulations of the body's elements, how it gestured, how it behaved. Fast forward to 2011: bodies in some American elementary and middle schools. Lines painted on the hallway floors that bodies must follow as they exit one classroom and enter the next, always, of course, turning right when leaving *any* classroom, even if one has to go left, and following those painted lines until the end of the hall. The body then

makes a left turn and follows that painted line in order to eventually end up at its new destination. No breaks, limited recess, no art, no physical education. Why? No time. Lunch? 15 minutes in some schools; 20 minutes in others. Bodies herded like cattle from one location to the next and during that process, they must obey the rules so they are not misread as insolent.

NEVER “MIND” THOSE (MIS)PERCEIVED BODIES

Taking those bodies out of the classroom and into the literature, the subject of bodies seems to be either under-examined, or examined to the point of needing no further explanation. The literature around adolescent girls’ bodies seems expansive as it focuses on body image (Ata, Ludden & Lally, 2007; Durkin, Paxton & Sorbello, 2007), sexual practices (Guilamo-Ramos et al., 2008; Houlihan et al., 2008) and dietary practices (Jones, Vigfusdottir & Lee, 2004; Knauss, Paxton & Alsaker, 2007; Rodgers, Paxton & Chabrol, 2009). The literature provides a plethora of psychological and sociological models and analyses of the ways in which certain adolescent girls perceive their bodies, and it speculates on the actions of their bodies; however, the literature is limited in the ways in which it constructs a totalising view of girls’ bodies according to the categories of race/ethnicity, social class and gender.

My thoughts are that the subject of bodies might be under-researched in education, specifically, because it has already been methodologically addressed in these large, generalised, psychological and sociological quantitative studies and seems like it needs no further exploration. It reminds me of what Heidegger (1962/2002) proposed: sometimes a phenomenon gets buried-over; meaning, “it has at some time been discovered but has deteriorated to the point of getting covered-up again. This covering-up can become complete” (p. 285); or it may still be visible, but only as a semblance.

This kind of covering-up as a “disguising”, wrote Heidegger, is “both the most frequent and the most dangerous, for here the possibilities of deceiving and misleading are especially stubborn” (p. 285). Or, sometimes, phenomena are bound up so constructively within different structures that they present themselves as something “clear”, as requiring no further justification (p. 285). Maybe this is what has happened to bodies in educational research; they have been bound up so constructively within the sociological and the psychological literature *as* this way or that, that the conclusions present themselves as clear and in need of no further investigation. Or perhaps the subject of bodies has been considered in such limited ways in education because as educators, we are supposed to be brains on sticks, teaching brains on sticks; meaning, we are still plagued with the mind/body dualism that continues to permeate educational discourse. Education and teaching have historically been perceived (dating all the way back to Descartes and the Enlightenment) in the general sense through a Cartesian mind/body duality. You know the mantra, right? *The job of teachers is to educate MINDS!* It is the teacher’s job to educate the student-mind so the body then becomes some detached biological object that can be moved around the classroom like furniture. Even in the talk about failing test scores, failing schools, and leaving no children behind, the actual children-bodies are never really present in the conversations: they are data, they are categories, and they are demographics.

As for the teacher-body in education, there is practically no *body* at all. The teacher-body is supposed to be some nondescript docile body: asexual and undesirable, another object to be moved around the classroom like furniture. This mind/body duality “dictates that instruction should take place solely between minds, which leaves no place for acknowledgement of the body’s role in teaching and learning” (Johnson, 2005a, p. 15). These mind/body dualist practices also work on teacher and student bodies as disciplining codes, if you will, so that there is no room beyond reading the body as an object. Grosz (1995) writes that bodies can speak without having to actually talk, because “they become coded with and as signs. They speak social codes. They become intextuated, narrativised; simultaneously, social codes, laws, norms and ideals become incarnated” (p. 35). All bodies in education have been historically narrativised as a “problem” or a “sin” rather than a “treasure” (Estola & Elbaz-Luwisch, 2003; Johnson, 2005a, 2005b), so any kind of embodied learning or living cannot be *thought* in educational discourse, leaving little room for anyone to acknowledge she/he even has a body in the classroom, much less talk about anything related to bodies. If the discourse in education shifted from a mind/body dualism to living and learning as sensing, meaning-making bodies, what might that kind of education look like?

So the questions I am left with are: how do we uncover/dig up this phenomenon of bodies in education that has been buried over for so long? How do we *unlearn* these disciplined body practices that continue to permeate the structures of popular and educational culture so that we can learn to read bodies *differently* in education? And how do we even begin having conversations in classrooms around the body, so when I say *I’m interested in bodywork*, people will not ask me what *bodies have to do with education and teaching*?

I wonder if I can call that professor-interviewer back and give him this answer instead...

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