

The Body, Culture and Society

AHAN5007

Module Handbook



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CONTENT

‘Conceptions of the body are central not only to substantive work in medical anthropology, but also to the philosophical underpinnings of the entire discipline of anthropology, where Western assumptions about the mind and body, the individual and society, affect both theoretical viewpoints and research paradigms’ (Scheper-Hughes and Lock, 1987:6). This module enables students to explore critically different notions of ‘the body,’ both physical and metaphorical, and its relationship to other concepts such as the mind and spirit in cross-cultural perspectives on what makes us human. It will challenge images and ideals of the ‘good’ body and ‘healthy’ body. Anthropological perspectives on risk and pollution will be developed in order to discuss notions of disease and the vulnerability of the body. Social and political tensions are also expressed through bodies and our management (including monitoring and regulation) of them, whether individual or collective. Throughout the module, students will develop their theoretical understanding of material culture and political anthropology as applied to the body, considering examples from diverse cultural and historical contexts.

AIM(S)

- To develop students’ critical awareness of how the body is conceived and managed in different cultures.
- To examine the relationships between the social construction of the body, identity and power.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this module students should be able to:

- Critically discuss diverse ways of understanding ‘the body’ and its significance to the human person, using examples from a range of cultures and social contexts.
- Evaluate how power is expressed through the treatment or management of bodies.
- Critically examine notions of the ‘ideal’ or ‘healthy’ body.
- Evaluate how social tensions can be expressed through the body.

MODULE STRUCTURE

During the first half of this module, we will explore some of the key theoretical and methodological approaches to understanding bodies and their relationship to social and cultural worlds. To do so, we will focus on one or two key readings and critically examine them in-depth. **IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT YOU READ THESE!** Sessions will be primarily discussion, not lecture, based and your reading will form the basis of this discussion – the more you read, the more you will be able to contribute and take from the session. We then move onto study Foucault, who has been influential in understanding how power dynamics are played out through the body, in some depth before concluding the term by exploring ways the multiple concepts and approaches we have discussed can be applied to particular topics of body management.

Journal:

From the beginning of term you are encouraged to keep a journal of your thoughts, ideas, personal experiences and reading notes on your topic (and the body more widely). This will not be assessed and is for your personal use only, but it will help you in preparing your research ideas for the second assessment – and your presentation.

Academia.edu:

All students should subscribe to academia.edu. This is a key site for access to all sorts of articles and presentations from a range of academics, and is an excellent resource for researching work on your particular topic. A number of key readings for the module will be accessible through academia.edu.

Part 1:

The Body in Society: Key Concepts and Approaches

Week 1: The Body in Anthropology

Key Reading:

Lavis, A, Abbots, E-J and Attala, L. (2015) Reflecting on the Embodied Intersections of Eating and Caring, in *Careful Eating: Bodies, Food and Care*, pp 1-21

Scheper-Hughes, N. and Lock, M. (1987) The Mindful Body: A Prolegomenon to Future Work in Medical Anthropology. *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*. Volume 1, Issue 1, pp. 6–41.

Week 2: Bodies and Embodiment: The Body as Metaphor and as Lived Experience

Key Reading:

Csordas, Thomas J. (1994) 'Introduction' in *Embodiment and experience: the existential ground of culture and self*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Douglas, M. (1970) *Purity and danger: an analysis of concepts of pollution and taboo*. Middlesex: Penguin. Chapter 7, External Boundaries.

Week 3: Unbounded bodies, cyborgs and the body multiple

Key Readings

Haraway, D. (1990) 'A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s' *Feminism/Postmodernism*, L. Nicholson (ed.), New York: Routledge

Mol, A. (2002) *The Body Multiple: Ontology in Medical Practice*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press

Mol, A. (2008), 'I eat an apple: On theorizing subjectivities', *Subjectivity*, 22: 28-37.

Week 4: Researching and Theorising Bodies in Practice: The Self as Subject

Key Readings

Longhurst, R. (2012) 'Becoming Smaller: Autobiographical Spaces of Weight Loss' in *Antipode* 44(3): 871-888

Murray, S. (2009), 'Marked as 'pathological': 'Fat' bodies as virtual confessors', in J. Wright and V. Harwood (eds.), *Biopolitics and the 'Obesity Epidemic': Governing Bodies*. New York: Routledge, 78-90.

WEEK 5: READING WEEK

Part 2: Political Bodies and Foucault

Week 6: Political Bodies 1: Surveillance, Risk and Regulation

Key Readings

Heyes, C. (2006) 'Foucault Goes to Weight Watchers' *Hypatia* 21(2): 126-149

Rabinow, P. 'Introduction', *The Foucault Reader*, London: Penguin Books

Week 7: Political Bodies 2: Power, Resistance and Affect

Key Readings

Ong, A. (1988) 'The Production of Possession: Spirits and the Multinational Corporation in Malaysia', *American Ethnologist* 15(1):28-42

Rose, N (2001) The Politics of Life Itself, *Theory, Culture and Society* 18(6): 1-30

Part 3: Applying Concepts to Topics: Research Presentations

We will use the last two weeks before Easter for individual presentations. **These are not assessed.** Instead, it is an opportunity for you to present your ideas for your research report 'as work in progress', meaning that you can test ideas and solicit feedback from the group. Where possible, presentations will be grouped by topic.

You will be asked to submit a possible topic by reading week. I will then group the various topics together in order that we can have a group discussion as part of the individual presentations.

ASSESSMENT

See Moodle for Deadlines

Assignment 1: Essay

Answer ONE of the following questions, illustrating it with at least two ethnographic examples (this does not mean use just two references!)

- In what ways can an anthropological study of the body illuminate social relations?
- How should anthropologists best investigate ‘the body’?
- To what extent are bodies governed?

Word count: 2500 words

Assignment 2: Research Report

Your task is to choose a topic relevant to the management of bodies by both self and others (for example, weight management, reproductive control, or managing disability), and to collect and analyse some data that will enable you to write a rich ethnographic description and analysis about your participants’ views and experiences of the chosen topic. Methods of data collection that you could use include:

- An in-depth interview.
- A journal in which you or another person record thoughts and experiences. (If using your own journal as data you should consult some literature on the methodology of auto-ethnography.)
- Analysis of a blog or website. (Note if you choose this option, you are analysing the blog for what it tells us about the author’s viewpoints or experiences, not as part of your literature review.)

Your write-up should include a description of the methods used (including any ethical considerations), relevant quotations from your sources that illustrate your arguments, and references to relevant literature and theories that will help you to make sense of your data. You will have the opportunity to present your ideas as work in progress towards the end of term. The presentation is not assessed.

Word count: 2,500 words

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Essential

Abbots, E-J, Lavis, A. and Attala, L (2015) *Careful Eating; Bodies, Food and Care*. Farnham: Ashgate

Csordas, Thomas J. (1994) *Embodiment and experience: the existential ground of culture and self*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Douglas, M. (1970) *Purity and danger: an analysis of concepts of pollution and taboo*. Middlesex: Penguin.

Rabinow, P. (Ed.) (1984) *The Foucault Reader: An Introduction to Foucault's Thought*. London: Penguin.

Scheper-Hughes, N. and Lock, M. (1987) The Mindful Body: A Prolegomenon to Future Work in Medical Anthropology. *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*. Volume 1, Issue 1, pp. 6–41.

Recommended

Boddy J. (1990) *Wombs and Alien Spirits: Women, Men and the Zar Cult in Northern Sudan*. U Wisconsin Press .

Brown, P. and Barrett, R. (2009) *Understanding and Applying Medical Anthropology*. (2nd ed.) McGraw Hill Higher Education.

Counihan, Carole. (1999) *The Anthropology of Food and the Body: Gender, Meaning and Power*. London: Routledge.

Guthman, J. (2011), *Weighing In: Obesity, Food Justice and the Limits of Capitalism*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Helman, C. *Culture, Health and Illness*. (5th ed.) Hodder Arnold, 2007.

Howson, A. (2013) *The Body in Society: An Introduction*. 2nd Ed. London: Sage.

Lock M, Farquhar J (Eds.) (2007) *Beyond the Body Proper: Reading the anthropology of material life*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Kulick, D. and Meneley, A. (Eds.) (2005) *Fat: Anthropology of an Obsession*. New York: Tarcher.

Kuwuhara, M. (2011) *Tattoo: An Anthropology*. Oxford: Berg.

Lawton J. (2000) *The Dying Process: Patients' Experiences of Palliative Care*. London: Routledge.

Lindenbaum, S. and Lock, M. (eds.) (1993) *Knowledge, Power and Practice: The Anthropology of Medicine and Everyday Life*. University of California Press.

Lock M. (1993) *Encounters with Ageing: Mythologies of Menopause in Japan and North America*. Berkeley: U California Press.

Lock, M. and Kaufert, P. (1998) *Pragmatic Women and Body Politics*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Lupton, D. (2003) *Medicine as Culture: Illness, Disease and the Body in Western Societies*. London: Sage.

Martin E. (1990) *The Woman in the Body: A Cultural Analysis of Reproduction*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Martin E. (1994) *Flexible Bodies: Tracking Immunity*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Mascia-Lees, F. (Ed.) (2011) *A Companion to the Anthropology of the Body and Embodiment*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

Mol, AM. (2002) *The body multiple: ontology in medical practice*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Petersen A & R Bunton (eds). (1997) *Foucault, Health and Medicine*. London & NY: Routledge.

Sargent, C. and Johnson, T. (1996) *Medical anthropology: contemporary theory and method*. Westport, CT: Praeger.

Shildrick, M. (2001) *Embodying the Monster: Encounters with the Vulnerable Self*. London: Sage.

Shildrick, M. (2012) *Dangerous Discourses of Disability, Subjectivity and Sexuality*. Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Singer, M and Baer, H. (2007) *Introducing Medical Anthropology: A Discipline in Action*. Plymouth: AltaMira Press.

Turner, B. (2008) *The Body and Society: Explorations in Social Theory*. 3rd Ed. London: Sage.

Winkelman, M. (2008) *Culture and Health: Applying Medical Anthropology*. Jossey-Bass.

Journals

Annual Review of Anthropology

Body and Society

Current Anthropology

Medical Anthropology Quarterly