

Body Work: Youth, Gender and Health (Youth, Young Adulthood and Society)

By Julia Coffey

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The rise of the health, beauty and fitness industries in recent years has led to an increased focus on the body. Body image, gender and health are issues of long-standing concern in sociology and in youth studies, but a theoretical and empirical focus on the body has been largely missing from this field. This book explores young people's understandings of their bodies in the context of gender and health ideals, consumer culture, individualisation and image.

Body Work examines the body in youth studies. It explores paradoxical aspects of gendered body work practices, highlighting the contradiction in men's increased participation in these industries as consumers alongside the re-emphasis of their gendered difference. It explores the key ways in which the ideal body is currently achieved, via muscularising practices, slimming regimes and cosmetic procedures. Coffey investigates the concept of 'health' and how it is inextricably linked both to the bodily performance of gender ideals and an increased public emphasis on individual management and responsibility in the pursuit of a 'healthy' body.

This book's conceptual framework places it at the forefront of theoretical work concerning bodies, affect and images, particularly in its development of Deleuzian research. It will appeal to a wide range of scholars and students in fields of youth studies, education, sociology, gender studies, cultural studies, affect and body studies.

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Editorial Review

Review

"Accessible, lively and timely, this book makes bodies visible in youth sociology. Coffey's analysis of body work by young people draws effortlessly on the insights of Deleuze, Guattari and Spinoza to disrupt accepted understandings of youth. Using vivid examples, she shows how young people engaging in body work both produce and resist gendered inequalities and health risks. Coffey issues a challenge to 'embody' youth studies – and the broader field of sociology. Reading this book is a must."

?Professor Johanna Wyn, Director, Youth Research Centre, the University of Melbourne

"Julia Coffey's materialist approach places the body and its capacities at the forefront of analysis in youth studies research. It documents the body work of contemporary young people, ranging from cosmetic surgery and fitness classes to sexting, football and tattoos. A must-read book for youth work students and professionals alike!"

?Nick J. Fox, Professor of Sociology, University of Sheffield

"In this truly innovative and ground breaking contribution to the study of embodied experience Coffey invites us to rethink the role of the body in the study of youth. Drawing upon advancements in new materialist thought, a framework for understanding the body as a set of dynamic, relational processes and affective engagements is offered as a corrective to established approaches which cast the young body as a site where risk and social problems are managed. Throughout the analysis this reorientation makes way for more complex, contradictory and open ended explorations of the interconnections between bodies, gender, health and youth. This non-reductive reading of body work practices sets the tone for new research agendas and will surely inspire further theoretical and methodological advances in the study of embodied experience across a wide a variety social contexts."

?Shelley Budgeon, Senior Lecturer in Sociology, University of Birmingham

About the Author

Julia Coffey is a lecturer in the School of Humanities and Social Science at the University of Newcastle, Australia.

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