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Abstract

Body Battlegrounds: Transgressions, Tensions, and Transformations offers a superb learning resource for exploring the body in social, emotional, cultural, and political contexts across many different career stages and disciplines. Edited by seasoned embodiment scholars Dr. Chris Bobel and Dr. Samantha Kwan, this new collection brings together 13 research reflections and 16 personal essays on different aspects of embodied resistance. It offers an expansive view of intersecting forms of body marginalization and ways to center these experiences in seeking embodiment justice. It also makes a superb resource for orienting learners at all career stages to embodied resistance and its crucial role in contemporary society. *Body Battlegrounds* is particularly useful for qualitative pedagogy because it presents diverse applications of qualitative methods in discovering patterns of embodied resistance.

Keywords

Body Battlegrounds, Embodied Resistance, Body Marginalization, Embodiment Justice, Qualitative Pedagogy

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Research, Reflections, and Resistance: A Review of *Body Battlegrounds: Transgressions, Tensions, and Transformations*

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Body Battlegrounds: Transgressions, Tensions, and Transformations offers a superb learning resource for exploring the body in social, emotional, cultural, and political contexts across many different career stages and disciplines. Edited by seasoned embodiment scholars Dr. Chris Bobel and Dr. Samantha Kwan, this new collection brings together 13 research reflections and 16 personal essays on different aspects of embodied resistance. It offers an expansive view of intersecting forms of body marginalization and ways to center these experiences in seeking embodiment justice. It also makes a superb resource for orienting learners at all career stages to embodied resistance and its crucial role in contemporary society. *Body Battlegrounds* is particularly useful for qualitative pedagogy because it presents diverse applications of qualitative methods in discovering patterns of embodied resistance. Keywords: *Body Battlegrounds, Embodied Resistance, Body Marginalization, Embodiment Justice, Qualitative Pedagogy*

In this age of marginalized people’s bodies coming explicitly under attack in the United States and elsewhere around the world, scholarship on embodied resistance continues to demonstrate both tremendous relevance and dire importance. *Body Battlegrounds: Transgressions, Tensions, and Transformations* (Bobel & Kwan, 2019) joins the call for inclusion and affirmation of diverse bodies and the people who occupy them. Edited by seasoned embodiment scholars Dr. Chris Bobel and Dr. Samantha Kwan, this new collection brings together 13 research reflections and 16 personal essays on different aspects of embodied resistance. It offers an expansive view of intersecting forms of body marginalization and ways to center these experiences in seeking embodiment justice. It also makes for compelling reading on an emotional and social level, pulling absolutely no punches in the raw candor of what its chapter authors share. The pathos of the narratives in this volume make it a superb resource for orienting learners at all career stages to embodied resistance and its crucial role in contemporary society.

Body Battlegrounds begins with a brief editorial introduction to embodied resistance concepts—their historical context, present dynamics, and growth potential. Bobel and Kwan then organize chapters from contributing authors into four content sections. Part I centers “Going Natural” as its core theme. These chapters explore notions of the body at baseline and the ways people change their bodies, and how others may respond to these changes for better or worse. Part II centers “Representing Resistance” as its core theme. These chapters explore acts of abstract and concrete embodied resistance, and how they become visible in public consciousness through various routes. Part III centers “Creating Community, Disrupting Assumptions” as its core theme. These chapters explore dynamics of group identity, and how these alignments may be misunderstood and stigmatized in society. Part IV centers “Transforming Institutions and Ideologies” as its core theme. These chapters explore elements of resistance that go beyond individual and group interactions, and directly target institutional and systems level change. Across each section, *Body Battlegrounds* aims to stimulate critical

engagement of readers' own experiences in learning from and responding to the content. The book then concludes with a poem summarizing many of its core themes through a lens of political empowerment.

Each of the research articles and narrative reflections in the book offers a compelling read that inspires critical thinking about embodied resistance in the learner's own life. *Body Battlegrounds* seems particularly useful as a tool for qualitative pedagogy and inquiry for several reasons. First, the text centers in glorious detail how the same person can harbor myriad identities within themselves without one coming at the expense of another. Contributing authors excel in their attention to intersectionality and nuance, avoiding reductionist identity politics in favor of painting subtle portraits of embodied experience. Second, the text embraces the idea that bodies are dynamic rather than static. Contributing authors offer insight into how changes in embodiment can themselves be transgressive, and how accepting those changes can itself become a form of resistance. Third, the text illuminates processes of exploration and the freedom people find within. Contributing authors center life as a process of becoming, and the discovery of new facets of the self as radical action. As a whole, *Body Battlegrounds* captures diverse applications of qualitative methods in discovering patterns of embodied resistance. Contributing authors engage their own experiences and standpoints in a variety of ways, showcasing the vast terrain of impactful qualitative inquiry on these topics. I offer some specific examples below.

Each of the chapters in *Body Battlegrounds* shows the multifaceted nature of identity. Mark Broomfield's "Doing Out" essay addresses negotiating gender norms in the Bronx. It explores nonbinary identity and multiethnic background, as well as a sense of being restricted by gendered social interpretations of individual behavior. The research article "Big Gay Men's Performative Protest against Body Shaming" by Jason Whitesel also illuminates nuances of intersecting identity as participants attempt to negotiate contested masculinity in the gay community. It explores the idea of "Girth and Mirth" as a means of both embracing fatness and refusing to be defined exclusively by it. "What's Love Got to Do with It" by Sheila M. Katz offers a scholarly perspective on embodied activism among domestic violence survivors receiving welfare support. This research article elegantly amplifies voices from women pushing back against notions of what poor people and their bodies should look like and highlights the diversity of people living at the intersection of poverty and abuse. Sarah Rehman's "Showing Our Muslim" likewise highlights a diverse population of marginalized women. She explores the complexities of *hijabi* identity before and after the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States. Another narrative reflection by Faith Baum and Lori Petchers, "Old Bags Take a Stand," also engages head coverings as a window into feminine embodiment. The authors describe an art project exploring older women's feelings about their bodies and rejecting the notion of age as erasure of other aspects of identity. Finally, Ryan Ambuter's "Showing Up as Myself" reflects on presenting authentic selfhood in gendered context. The author shares stories of engaging with students before and after top surgery, and the journey to sharing a coherent nonbinary self with the world. In different ways, these stories show how the intersections of who we are cannot be neatly described, and how in experiencing change we often illustrate our wholeness.

Chapters in the *Body Battlegrounds* collection also demonstrate the dynamic nature of bodies across time and context. "Sitting and Resisting" by Margaret Stran reflects on embracing wheelchair use as a new authentic embodiment state. The author rejects notions of being diminished by having a severed spinal cord and explores the unique possibilities of a chair as an extension of embodied self. Anthony Ryan Hatch's "Against Diabetic Numerology" also refutes excessive medicalization of diverse bodies. The author centers affect and experience as the most important goals of diabetes management. "A Cystor's Story" likewise examines chronic illness embodiment via author Ledah McKellor's experience with polycystic

ovary syndrome. This piece explores changing concepts of masculinity and femininity, and how chronic illness can influence the interplay of these constructs within the bodies. “Give Us a Twirl” by Trenton M. Haltom addresses similar issues through the example of athletic practice. It explores the experiences of male baton twirlers and how they use body language to affirm masculinity in a stereotypically feminine sport. In “That Gentle Somebody,” Taylor Riley amplifies the voices of Black females in same-sex relationships in South Africa. The author describes how authors’ understanding of their bodies as sexual beings changes as they move through life. And in “Everybody” by Cat Pausé, the idea that our feelings about our bodies evolve as we move through different social spaces likewise appears prominently. This essay explores target radio programming about fatness as a window into embracing what makes one’s body unique and special. Overall, these chapters illustrate dynamic processes of reckoning with how our bodies change, and how we allow ourselves to change in response.

Conscious exploration of the body’s ability to evolve and change constitutes another core theme of the *Body Battlegrounds* volume, both within itself and in its relationship to other elements of the social world. Attention to exploration and the freedom of life as a process of becoming, exploration of self as form of embodied resistance. “Making Up with My Body” by Haley Gentile examines cosmetic use as conscious reclamation of the body after sexual abuse. The author celebrates pushing embodiment to different limits and thus recapturing control of things previously stolen. Makeup appears in a different context in the “Caring for the Corpse” research article by Anna Escavoe. This piece explores social and cultural norms of appropriate presentation of dead bodies for viewing and memorial by others. And in “Am I Pretty Enough for You Yet?” author Katherine Phelps takes rejection of cultural norms to deliberate extremes. This research article explores conscious performance of defying beauty norms in online venues. “Body Hair Battlegrounds” by Breanne Fahs explores similar themes in research and pedagogy about personal grooming. The author describes student experimentation with nonnormative body hair practices and critical analysis of social responses to changes in hair maintenance. Finally, “Yelling and Pushing on the Bus” by Stephanie D. Sears and Maxine Leeds Craig explores notions of the unruly body in racial context. This research article describes how Black girls reckon with racial marginalization by testing boundaries on behavior. As a whole, these accounts demonstrate the varying ways in which people achieve mastery of self through exploration of body and its possibilities.

I find it difficult to critique this book as a whole because it aims to center individual experiences and perspectives rather than offer a global view of embodied resistance. This volume is also the second in a series, building on the contributions of the original *Embodied Resistance* (Bobel & Kwan, 2011) reader from the same editors. So, each edited volume should cover different constellations of experiences and biographies in addressing its unique focus areas within the general topic of embodied resistance. However, in that spirit I can offer a couple of brief prescriptions for enrichment in future volumes. *Body Battlegrounds* captures an impressively expansive array of cultural backgrounds and social locations in its contributed works. In many ways, it resembles the world as a whole. Yet I did notice while reading that no indigenous tribal, East Asian, or Pacific Islander voices appeared in either the research articles or narrative reflections. It would add substantial value to the series as a whole for voices from some of these broad communities—and the diasporas associated with them—to feature in future volumes.

Indeed, readers reflecting on where within the collection of research articles and narrative reflection we see elements of ourselves proves deeply valuable for qualitative pedagogy. I would absolutely use this reader to inspire critical self-analysis in a variety of different courses engaging concepts of embodiment. The weaving of shorter narrative reflection pieces together with longer methods intensive ones makes this book an ideal resource for learners at a variety of levels. I would use the narrative reflection pieces even with beginner

undergraduate groups and incorporate more of the methods articles for advanced topics courses at the undergraduate level. For graduate and professional courses, I would focus students more on the research chapters while still using the personal reflections to facilitate exploration of investigator standpoint. I would also heartily recommend this volume for colleagues looking to increase their critical engagement of embodied resistance and scholar standpoint concepts in research and practice. Overall, *Body Battlegrounds* offers a superb learning resource for exploring the body in social, emotional, cultural, and political context across many different career stages and disciplines.

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Author Note

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