
BOOK REVIEW

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Monica J. Casper & Lisa Jean Moore. 2009. *Missing Bodies: The Politics of Visibility*. New York: New York University Press. 223 pp.

In *Missing Bodies: The Politics of Visibility*, Monica J. Casper and Lisa Jean Moore set out to explore “how certain places, spaces, policies, and practices...exhibit and celebrate some bodies while erasing and denying others (3).” While many scholars have focused on the politics and meaning of bodies in space, Casper and Moore take a different—and much needed—approach to embodiment theory. In an effort to change the way we examine social bodies around the world, Casper and Moore—with relative consistency—purposefully set out to focus on those bodies that scholars and global politics have ignored. While some chapters more strongly support their overall argument than others, the brilliance of this book is realized immediately in Chapter 2, with their first case study.

In Chapter 2, Casper and Moore explore the difficult world of child sexuality. While there is a marked and problematic absence of Freud in their discussion of children’s sexuality, they manage to effectively illustrate that “[w]hat we are missing from the literature on childhood sexuality are

the real, lived voices and experiences of children” (29). Indeed, these experiences are missing from the academic literature for a number of reasons—most of which Casper and Moore cogently examine in their text. I found their discussion of the politics of the IRB process to be the most compelling and problematic reason as to why children’s voices are missing from scholarship on children’s sexuality. They rather strongly express their frustration—a frustration many of us who have had to apply for IRB approval from our universities surely share—by saying, “It is remarkable to us that IRBs will approve experimentally cutting into a woman and her fetus or placing a monkey heart into a human but will not approve research asking a child about a ‘fact of life’ book which is seen as ‘too risky’” (34). In addition to many IRBs’ unwillingness to allow qualitative research on the subject, the authors also explain the absence of children’s voices from scholarship on child sexuality as related to the ways that Westerners have normatively constructed childhood as a period of “innocence.” To admit to the existence of a child’s sexual being is to disavow their socially ascribed innocence—hence the absence of their voices from the literature on sexuality.

The power of Chapter 2 still lingers in my mind. I found it to be strong, compelling, and well argued. However, the strength of the book wanes from this point onward. Nevertheless, convincing political arguments punctuated the less compelling parts of the text. Perhaps one of the more convincing points is found in the beginning of Part II—Exposed. Here, Casper and Moore argue, “Becoming a visible body, a body that counts and is taken seriously, involves the experience of being seen by a critical mass of people with power and institutions of power” (79). This is a theme that I would have liked to have seen highlighted throughout the text. The process of becoming “visible” seems to be very important to their argument but is not given enough space.

In Chapter 4, “Biodisaster,” the authors tackle the complicated and messy task of HIV/AIDS visibility. While I found this chapter relatively strong—and a *must-read* for anyone interested in the politics of disease labeling and transmission—I would have found the chapter more convincing (and perhaps more broadly useful to a wider number of students) had the discussion been more focused on the complicated politics of HIV/AIDS labeling. In their discussion, Casper and Moore point out that there is a diminishing concern in the United States about becoming infected with HIV/AIDS that has been met with an increasing fear of “terrorism.”

However, they fail to analyze in any detail the politics of visibility within the HIV/AIDS community. A discussion focusing on the complicated and political reasons why, for example, white, middle-class women who are HIV-positive are missing from the public discourse surrounding HIV/AIDS, while the experiences of those men who have sex with men still saturate the public's imagination, might have added the increased depth to their argument that I found lacking.

Another chapter of great interest is Chapter 6, "They Used Me': Manufacturing Heroes in Wartime." In this chapter, Casper and Moore discuss the politics surrounding the processes by which female soldiers in the United States military become "heroes." Along with Chapter 2, I found this chapter to be one of their strongest. Pointing out that "[d]olls based on Jessica Lynch, and other women in the military, are not found on the shelves at Wal-Mart or Target—but their babies are" (141), they are able to highlight the marked absence of women's voices in the military—where female soldiers such as Jessica Lynch become "damsels in distress," with "American masculinity and military prowess" their protector (154). While women's voices are undoubtedly squelched, they are also often greatly distorted. Indeed, Casper and Moore reference this when they cite Spc. Mickiela Montoya of the National Guard astutely saying, "[t]here are only three kinds of female the men let you be in the military: a bitch, a ho, or a dyke" (143). Although, I found this chapter one of the book's strongest in the way it supports the authors' overall argument, in the end I also found it one of the most disappointing. I can't help but wonder what a chapter about the missing voices of LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender) soldiers would have looked like. In today's political climate, where the Clinton "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" military policy has been frequently discussed by both conservative and liberal political commentators over the years, the marked absence of LGBT voices serving in the military is frustrating. Moreover, attention to these voices might have added appeal of the book to general readers beyond scholars and students.

Despite the above critiques, *Missing Bodies: The Politics of Visibility* may well become a "must read" for scholars who work on questions of "visibility," embodiment, and the politics of power. The writing is clear and therefore accessible to undergraduate audiences, yet sophisticated enough to capture the attention of graduate students and researchers. The scope of the work is also far-reaching—making it of interest to anthropologists, sociologists, and psychologists alike. Finally, works such as this often lay the

stepping-stones for future scholars to use and expand on their ideas. My desire to see the work expanded to accommodate issues of interest to scholars of queer theory should not be seen as a critique of Casper and Moore so much as a bow to the brilliance and timeliness of their work.

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