



Consuming Intimacies: Bodies, Labour, Care, and Social Justice – Guest Editors’ Introduction

ANDREA DOUCET
Brock University, Canada

ROBYN LEE
University of Alberta, Canada

ALANA CATTAPAN
Dalhousie University, Canada

LINDSEY MCKAY
Brock University, Canada

The lines between care, paid work, and consumption are increasingly blurring, both conceptually and in everyday practices. More and more people are paying others – often less advantaged persons – to perform personal, often deeply intimate labours that include caring for children, the elderly, and disabled persons; cleaning houses; acting as surrogates; and providing eggs, sperm, and breast milk to create and sustain families. In addition to the growing repertoire of intimate labours, the intimate exchange of body parts is also on the rise as bodily fluids, tissues, and organs are being transformed into consumer products through “body shopping” (Dickenson, 2008). These processes are simultaneously global and local, public and intimate, economic and affective, oppressive and empowering; they create new forms of intimacies but they also offer a great potential for exploitation and social injustice.

The title of this special issue, *Consuming Intimacies*, has a double meaning. Intimacies are “consuming” in that many people care deeply about connecting with and caring for others, yet, increasingly, intimate labours and exchanges are commodified and treated as consumer products. Moreover, there are wide disparities between the geographical location, gender, race, and class of those who provide and those who receive intimate labours, as well as between those whose bodies are commodified and those who can afford to purchase organs,

Correspondence Address: Andrea Doucet, Department of Sociology, Brock University, St. Catharines, ON, L2S 3A1; Email: adoucet@brocku.ca

ISSN: 1911-4788

tissues, and fluids.

This special issue is produced from a symposium of the same title that was held at Brock University in October 2015, which brought together 47 leading and emerging Canadian and international scholars and artists to present, debate, and explore a wide spectrum of 21st century intimate labours and their associated economies. The symposium was supported by and connected to the social justice objectives of the Social Justice Research Institute at Brock University. The symposium and outreach activities explored a broad range of critical questions and social justice issues that have arisen from interconnected concepts and practices of intimate labours and exchanges, care, social reproduction, bodies, consumption, and commodification. Symposium participants examined correspondences and divergences between movements and transactions of care work and reproductive labour, on the one hand, and the exchange and sale of body tissues, fluids, and organs, on the other. They explored ways to protect vulnerable individuals and populations from exploitation by asking, for example, when, where, and why forms of intimate labours and exchanges are contentious (Hoeyer, 2013), exploitative (Dickenson, 2013), or “bioviolent” (Moniruzzaman, 2012), who they affect, and in what ways.

The symposium featured three internationally renowned keynote speakers: *Donna Dickenson* (Emeritus Professor of Medical Ethics and Humanities at the University of London), *Monir Moniruzzaman* (Assistant Professor, Michigan State University), and *Rhacel Salazar Parreñas* (Professor, University of Southern California). All three have contributed to this special issue in *SSJ*'s themed sections: Dispatches and Creative Interventions. Dispatches provide reports and commentaries on social justice practice, discourse, and contestation while Creative Interventions reflect on social justice issues using an aesthetic mode. Two of the organizers of the symposium – Cattapan and Lee – produced Dispatches through interviews that they conducted with our keynote speakers. Cattapan's interview with Dickenson is captured by a co-authored Dispatch titled “On Bioethics and the Commodified Body: An Interview with Donna Dickenson” while Lee describes her experiences of engaging with and being inspired by the work of Rhacel Salazar Parreñas in a Dispatch based on their interview.

Moniruzzaman not only gave one of our keynote presentations, but also contributed to the production of a multimedia art exhibit, *Spare Parts*, which was displayed at the Rodman Hall Art Gallery in St. Catharines Ontario during the symposium. An online version of the exhibit is now posted at <http://www.spareparts.exchange>. Through this publicly accessible website, the spirit of the symposium lives on and reaches a wider audience. This special issue features a Creative Intervention (a regular feature of *SSJ*) entitled “*spareparts.exchange: Rahim and Robert, Stitched Together in Silence*,” by Monir Moniruzzaman, Camille Turner, Heather Dewey-Hagborg, and Jim Ruxton. This Creative Intervention highlights how artistic intervention brings together methodological innovation, critical reflection, artist-scholar

collaboration, and social justice aims and potential impacts. The authors write, “*Spare Parts* connects artists, academics, and activists who present an alternative platform where audiences can construct meaning and confront the ethical questions of organ shopping. This contribution illustrates how academic research can be translated into an art project” with both fields speaking against “violence, exploitation, and suffering.”

Like the symposium, this special issue addresses two distinct yet connected streams of scholarship and creative thinking. The first focuses on intimate labours as “work that involves embodied and affective interactions in the service of social reproduction” (Boris & Parreñas, 2010, p. 7) – interactions that entangle production, social reproduction, and consumption. This work comprises a wide array of paid and unpaid labours, including new and reconfigured forms of intimate and commodified labours, done mainly by women, but increasingly by men, which have arisen in contexts of neoliberal restructuring and within “global care chains” (Hochschild, 2000), “care diamond(s)” (Raghuram, 2012), and the “international division of reproductive labour” (Parreñas, 2000, 2012).

The first stream is represented in four articles, by Kendra Coulter, Rebecca Hall, Esther Ignagni and Ann Fudge Schormans, and Amanda Watson, as well as the Dispatch written by Lee. Coulter’s article entitled “Beyond Human to Humane: A Multispecies Analysis of Care Work, Its Repression, and Its Potential” focuses on interspecies solidarity as a form of care work, an ethical commitment, and a critical component in social justice theories and projects.

In “Caring Labours as Decolonizing Resistance,” Hall brings attention to the intimate labours of Canadian Indigenous women living in the Northwest Territories (NWT) and argues that these labours are sites of violence, creative resistance, and decolonization; her work contributes a decolonizing approach to social reproduction theories.

In “Reimagining Parenting Possibilities: Towards Intimate Justice,” Ignagni and Fudge Schormans describe the process of collaboratively creating a script and forum theater piece that they performed at the symposium. Their article grapples with the eugenic legacy that shapes the contexts and experiences of contemporary parenthood and highlights the connections between parenthood, labels, disability, and intimate justice.

Finally, Watson’s article entitled “Quelling Anxiety as Intimate Work: Maternal Responsibility to Alleviate Bad Feelings Emerging from Precarity” widens meanings and practices of the care labour by 21st century North American mothers to include their responsibility for anxieties that, while often misconstrued as private, are actually forms of public care labour. Through an analysis of popular editorial publications, she deepens interdisciplinary connections between affect theories and care theories.

The second stream of articles presented at the symposium, and explored here in this special issue, concentrates on intimate labours and their economies, including exchanges involving organs, body tissues, and body fluids (e.g., milk, sperm, blood, kidneys). These corporeal exchanges fuse

intimacies and economies, serving to both reify and contest notions of altruism, exploitation, and commodification (Dickenson, 2007). This stream interrogates how value is created in intimate labours and examines how these exchanges entail a “pushing back at the limits between production and social reproduction, production and consumption, production and circulation, to turn even the most intimate of bodily functions into exchangeable commodities and services” (Cooper & Waldby, 2014, p. 5). In this second stream we include journal articles by Carla Lam and Lindsey McKay; two Dispatches – one by Alana Cattapan and a second by Katayoun Chamany; and the Creative Intervention by Moniruzzaman, Turner, Dewey-Hagborg, and Ruxton.

Lam’s article entitled “Thinking Through Post-Constructionism – Reflections on (Reproductive) Disembodiment and Misfits” navigates feminist post-constructionist theories to explore the epistemological significance of technologically assisted (reproductive) gendered embodiment and disembodiment (i.e., *in vitro* fertilization, surrogacy, and egg donation), drawing connections between gendered and maternal embodiment, technoscience, ontologies, agency, inequality, power, and social justice.

In “Generating Ambivalence: Media Representations of Canadian Transplant Tourism” McKay writes about commodified corporeal exchange. Using a postcolonial theoretical lens, she shows how media accounts of transplant tourism generate ambivalence: a discourse not conducive to making what is unlawful at home unlawful abroad. Her findings point to new political directions for those seeking social justice, human rights, and health protection for organ providers.

Chamany’s Dispatch – “Critical Pedagogy: Stem Cell Research as it Relates to Bodies, Labor and Care” – is based on her presentations at the symposium, which demonstrated the social justice impact of transdisciplinary curriculum development connecting the biological and social sciences. Her contribution brings together an interdisciplinary team of scholars and activists and details their production of an open access educational resource, *Stem Cells Across the Curriculum (SCAC)*, that highlights the transactional nature of life science through an integrated framework fusing biological and social dimensions and social justice concerns.

It is our hope that this special issue on *Consuming Intimacies* engenders more debate, dialogue, conversation, and action on social justice issues around care, intimacy, embodied exchanges, social reproduction, consumption, and commodification.

References

- Boris, E., & Parreñas, R. S. (Eds.). (2010). *Intimate labors: Cultures, technologies, and the politics of care*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Cooper, M., & Waldby, C. (2014). *Clinical labor: Tissue donors and research subjects in the global bioeconomy*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press

- Dickenson, D. (2007). *Property in the body: Feminist perspectives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dickenson, D. (2008). *Body shopping: Converting body parts to profit*. Oxford: One world.
- Dickenson, D. (2013). Exploitation and choice in the global egg trade: Emotive terminology or necessary critique? In M. Goodwin (Ed.), *The global body market: Altruism's limits* (pp. 21-43). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Hochschild, A. R. (2000). Global care chains and emotional surplus value. In W. Hutton & A. Giddens (Eds.), *On the edge: Living with global capitalism* (pp. 14-38). London: Random House.
- Hoeyer, K. (2013). *Exchanging human bodily material: Rethinking bodies and markets*. Basel, Switzerland: Springer.
- Moniruzzaman, M. (2012). "Living cadavers" in Bangladesh: Bioviolence in the human organ bazar. *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, 26(1), 69-91.
- Raghuram, P. (2012). Global care, local configurations – Challenges to conceptualizations of care. *Global Networks*, 12(2), 155-174.
- Parreñas, R. S. (2000). Migrant Filipina domestic workers and the international division of reproductive labour. *Gender & Society*, 14(4), 560-580.
- Parreñas, R. S. (2012). The reproductive labour of migrant workers. *Global Networks*, 12(2), 269-275.