

2019 AALAC Workshop Proposal

Workshop Title: “Embodied Cognition: An Interdisciplinary Collaboration”

Embodied cognition is a growing field of interdisciplinary concern. Scholars in sociology, neuroscience, psychology, biology, and philosophy have all engaged in projects designed to unravel the mind-body problem in order to better understand the links between our minds, bodies, behaviors, and social interactions. Unfortunately, the outcomes of this research rarely circulate across disciplinary boundaries, resulting in major gaps in knowledge and incomplete disciplinary understandings of what embodied cognition means as well as the processes through which it occurs.

In order to help answer questions about how embodiment influences the scientific process, there is a growing literature in the philosophy of mind and philosophy of science concerning situated cognition, embodied cognition, and the role of embodiment in scientific observation. These philosophers have argued that standard theories of cognition need to incorporate physical states of the body and their role in cognition in order to understand the influence of human concepts, theories, and assumptions on observation. In addition to the theoretical investigations from philosophers, psychologists have also been collecting empirical evidence about how bodily states and emotions impact perception and cognition. What is more, Sociologists have taken up both theoretical and empirical projects regarding embodied cognition in order to better interrogate the meanings we assign to bodies and minds, the ways that these meanings in turn shape social action and the production of knowledge, and the ways in which embodied cognition shapes and is shaped by social structures.

This workshop will bring together AALAC faculty from a range of fields including sociology, philosophy, psychology, and cognitive science to explore the connections and disagreements concerning embodied cognition in our respective disciplines. This workshop will take place at Bryn Mawr College over two days in the Fall of 2019. We hope that the workshop will encourage interdisciplinary relationships among AALAC faculty that will later produce articles and teaching strategies that further the investigation of embodied cognition. The workshop will include opportunities for participants to present current research on topics relating to embodied cognition as well as working sessions to facilitate inter-institution and interdisciplinary collaborations on new projects. The proposed workshop will include three keynotes by experts in the Social Sciences, Humanities, and Physical Sciences. We will hold three thematic paper sessions, disciplinary and interdisciplinary breakout sessions, a collaborative writing workshop, and a syllabus workshop.

The central goals of this workshop are to establish research and teaching collaborations across the AALAC, create a conference website to share research and teaching materials, and to potentially produce an edited volume including both the talks given at the workshop and new collaborative research from participants. The collaborative goal will begin through the interdisciplinary break out sessions, paper writing workshop, and syllabus workshop. In these sessions participants will identify potential research collaborations, begin planning these projects, and work together on new syllabi. As a specific example, Piper Sledge and Collin Rice hope to use what they have learned from the workshop to teach a collection of courses on embodied cognition at Bryn Mawr and to complete their current work on an article concerning the role of embodiment in scientific inquiry. The goal of the workshop will be to encourage such interdisciplinary collaborations and hopefully establish those relationships across multiple members of the AALAC.

Following the workshop, we will create a conference website that will help to continue these collaborative efforts. On the website participants can post shareable syllabi, collaborate on a master syllabus (including readings, guest speakers, and innovative assignments that connect students across the AALAC), share and receive feedback on new research, and maintain a list of current and

upcoming courses. We hope to obtain additional funding to support an edited volume of papers comprised of both the conference proceedings and the new research initiated at the conference.

In order to evaluate the workshop's success, we will survey the participants to see what connections they made with other faculty during the workshop, what they will be incorporating into their classroom teaching, and what kinds of collaborations they would be interested in pursuing in the future. We also hope to establish a continuing reading group on the topic following the workshop that would encourage continued collaboration going forward.

Workshop Organizers

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