

"*Shameful Bodies* offers an insightful analysis of the way religious thought shapes popular discourse about bodies, gender, and disability, from fitness culture to the regimes of self-improvement. This is a smart, engaging, and above all accessible book – a must for the classroom."

JULIA WATTS BELSER, Associate Professor, Georgetown University, USA

"*Shameful Bodies* takes us on a wonderful journey of renewed understanding of the traps of our dominant culture regarding our bodies. It opens a new creative understanding based on freedom and mutual respect."

IVONE GEBARA, Brazilian Sister of Our Lady, Canonesses of St Augustine, and independent scholar, Brazil

"This excellent exploration is of interest not only to readers in Religious Studies, but also in Disability, Postcolonial and Feminist Studies. I highly recommend this exceptional work."

ELISABETH SCHÜSSLER FIORENZA, Krister Stendahl Professor, Harvard University, USA

WHAT happens when your body doesn't look how it's supposed to look, or feel how it's supposed to feel, or do what it's supposed to do? WHO or WHAT defines the ideals behind these expectations? HOW can we challenge them and live more peacefully in our bodies?

*Shameful Bodies: Religion and the Culture of Physical Improvement* explores these questions by examining how traditional religious narratives and modern philosophical assumptions come together in the construction and pursuit of a better body in contemporary western societies. Drawing on examples from popular culture such as self-help books, magazines, and advertisements, Michelle Mary Lelwica shows how these narratives and assumptions encourage us to go to war against our bodies—to fight fat, triumph over disability, conquer chronic pain and illness, and defy aging. Through an ethic of conquest and conformity, the culture of physical improvement trains us not only to believe that all bodily processes are under our control, but to feel ashamed about those parts of our flesh that refuse to comply with the cultural ideal. Lelwica argues that such shame is not a natural response to being fat, physically impaired, chronically sick, or old. Rather, body shame is a religiously and culturally conditioned reaction to a commercially-fabricated fantasy of physical perfection.

MICHELLE MARY LELWICA is Professor of Religion at Concordia College, USA. She is the author of *The Religion of Thinness* (2009) and *Starving for Salvation* (1999).