University of Wisconsin-Madison
GWS 320: The Female Body in the World: Gender and Contemporary Body Politics in Cross Cultural Perspective
3 credit course

Special Topics Course

Investigation of some specific topic in gender and women's studies related to gender, women and society. Subject differs each semester. Enroll Info: GEN&WS 101 or 102 & a course in a related discipline; or instructor consent.
Spring 2020
Class Time: Tuesday/Thursday 11:00 a.m. - 12:15 p.m.
Sterling 1333
Face-to-face instruction

Canvas URL:
https://canvas.wisc.edu/courses/187373

This class meets for two 75-minute class periods each week over the spring semester and carries the expectation that students will work on course learning activities (reading, writing, problem sets, studying, etc.) for about 3 hours out of classroom for every class period. The syllabus includes more information about meeting times and expectations for student work.

Instructor: Katherine Phelps, University of Wisconsin - Madison, Gender and Women’s Studies
Email: kphelps@wisc.edu
Office Hours: By appointment/virtual/phone (I have a newborn this semester so office hours will need to be flexible!)
Office: 3323 Sterling Hall

Course Description

How do bodies inform lived experience? How are bodies situated in matrices of privilege and oppression? What are the politics of the body? This course explores the social, cultural, and political construction of the female/feminine body. We consider specifically the bodies of women and girls, transgender women, non-binary people that embody the feminine, female masculinities, and bodies that identify and are identified as female, as bodies that have historically and traditionally been sites of political contention, of societal meaning making, of cultural symbolism, and active resistance.
In this course we seek to challenge what we *think we know* about bodies, challenging tacit knowledge and investigating how normative discourses of the female/feminine body are formed across cultures, around the world. We will consider the impacts of phenomena such as globalization, neoliberalism, “global” feminism, imperialism, capitalism, and human rights movements on cultural conceptions of health, ability, beauty, representation, and the “value” of female/feminine bodies.

**Requisites:**
GWS 101 or 102, a course in a related discipline; or instructor consent.

**Some Course Discussion Themes:**
Body politics theory
Privilege, power, and social capital
Oppression, disadvantage, and inequality
Race, ethnicity, borders, and nation
Biography and the uses of experience
Language, imagery, and meaning making of the body
Intersectionality/intersecting identities
Globalization and the body
Social movements, activism, and body resistance

**Learning Objectives:**
At the completion of this course you will be able to:

- Critically analyze and provide concrete examples of how bodies are socially constructed, and how the female/feminine body in particular is a site of political and cultural meaning making, contention, and resistance
- Articulate various theoretical frameworks (feminist theories, colorism, queer theory, disability studies, fat studies, etc.) as they relate to gender, embodiment, and the body, and use them in application of concrete ideas
- Think, observe, and write critically and analytically and engage thoughtfully in analytic (rather than simply opinionated!) discussions
- Understand and engage in the process of conducting a literature review and complete a clear, well organized, and thoughtful academic paper that explores a particular area of interest/scholarship

*Graduate students taking this course need to meet with me at the start of the semester to discuss expectations and adjusted course assignments/assessments.*

**Required Texts:**

Your required text is available to purchase at A Room of One’s Own at 315 W. Gorham St. Please support your local feminist bookstore by purchasing the book from them!
All other readings are available in PDF form on Canvas.

Assignments and Grading:

Participation (20% of overall grade): In this class, participation is crucial if you want to do well. That means accessing course readings, completing assigned readings on time, coming to class with questions and ideas related to the concepts we are discussing that day, and participating on Canvas discussions when they are assigned. Anticipate between 60 to 80 pages of reading each week, sometimes more, sometimes less. I do not have an attendance policy for this class, but bear in mind that participation is a substantial part of your final grade, thus, you will be required to be in class and required to participate during class discussions and activities. This is a discussion-based course; I want to hear what YOU have to say!

Topical Body Politics (20% of overall grade): In 4 short responses distributed over the course of the semester, you will submit an article, or website, or advertisement, or other piece of media relating to female body politics on the world stage that strikes your interest. This media will be posted to our course Canvas page along with a double-spaced, 2-3 pg. response of what struck you about it. What questions did it raise for you? I want to see you demonstrate critical thinking and observation of media that we might otherwise pass by. Have an adventure and explore what is out there! These are informal papers so write it in whatever way works best for you, but I do want to see you using concepts and ideas from our readings and class discussions. You should be citing readings from class in these responses, as well as any other relevant external sources you use. You can also share the media you chose for that week to the Canvas discussion forum so that your fellow students can see what you wrote about. Topical body politics assignments will always be due on Tuesdays and are each worth 5 points.

Reading Quizzes (10% of overall grade): Over the course of the semester, you will be given 6 reading quizzes. These quizzes will be given at the beginning of class, but you will not know ahead of time when the quizzes will be. Each quiz will have two or three broad based questions on the readings for that week. You are allowed to use notes you have taken for these quizzes, but no readings, and NO LAPTOPS or OTHER DEVICES. At the end of the semester, I will drop your lowest quiz grade, so only 5 of the 6 quizzes will count towards your final grade. Each quiz is worth a total of 2 points, resulting in 10 points, or 10% of your overall grade in the class.

Leading Discussion (10% of overall grade): Each week, students will lead discussion for a portion of the class. In addition to providing basic summary and synthesis of the readings for that class session, students leading discussion will be responsible for collaborating and conceptualizing discussion questions and activities, and finding and incorporating any relevant media or additional sources/experiences to aid in discussion. I very much encourage creativity here! Students must send a brief outline of their plan for leading discussion to me at least two days prior to the class so I can read it over and provide any feedback or suggestions. This is an
opportunity to engage with each other, and design activities and incite discussion for topics that are particularly interesting to you! The ten points for leading discussion breaks down as: 3 points for preparedness and knowledge of the readings for that week, 3 points for organization and flow of the presentation, 3 points for participation and effective facilitation of class time, and 1 point for creative delivery of the material.

Final Term Paper (30% of overall grade): Towards the end of the semester, you will submit a paper on a topic of your choosing related to the politics of the female/feminine body. Perhaps you want to look at colorism and hierarchies of skin tone across cultures, a comparative study of female fatness and media representation, narratives of health and motherhood in a certain region, or femininity and embodiment in a context of physical labor. The paper must employ critical thinking and theoretical frameworks explored in class in your analysis. You must use at least three relevant readings from the class for your analysis, and additionally cite at least five external academic sources in your paper. Papers will be 10 to 12 pages, double-spaced, 1-inch margins, Times New Roman font, ASA citation format.

Reflective Statement (10% of overall grade): As a final writing assignment for the semester, I am asking you to write a double-spaced, 3-4 page reflection on the course and how you have come to identify, understand, and analyze the female/feminine body as a site of social, cultural, and political meaning making. How has your understanding of body politics developed? What theories or frameworks did you find most useful, and how might you continue to apply them in both your academic pursuits and daily life? What questions are you left with? And how did this class impact your understandings of your own body narrative? This reflection should demonstrate to me how you engaged with the class material (both our readings and media), as well as how you engaged with your peers. Be sure to cite and make reference to sources from the class in your reflection!

All written assignments will be submitted on Canvas with the exception of the reading quizzes, which will be taken in class.

Course Grading Scale:

A = 93-100
AB= 87-92
B = 83-86
BC = 77-82
C = 70-76
D = 60-69
F = below 60

Policy on Late or Missed Assignments:

For every week that an assignment is late, you will incur a penalty of 10% off your total grade for that assignment. If you have a valid reason to turn in an assignment late or do a quiz, you must talk to me before the due date if that’s possible. Assignments submitted more than two weeks past the original due date will be considered a zero. The final reflection statement
needs to be submitted on the last day of class - no late work will be considered past the last
day of the semester.

RULES, RIGHTS & RESPONSIBILITIES

- See the Guide’s to Rules, Rights and Responsibilities

Academic Integrity:

By enrolling in this course, each student assumes the responsibilities of an active participant
in UW-Madison’s community of scholars in which everyone’s academic work and behavior are
held to the highest academic integrity standards. Academic misconduct compromises the
integrity of the university. Cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, and
helping others commit these acts are examples of academic misconduct, which can result in
disciplinary action. This includes but is not limited to failure on the assignment/course,
disciplinary probation, or suspension. Substantial or repeated cases of misconduct will be
forwarded to the Office of Student Conduct & Community Standards for additional review. For
more information, refer to studentconduct.wiscweb.wisc.edu.academic-integrity/.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

McBurney Disability Resource Center syllabus statement: “The University of Wisconsin-
Madison supports the right of all enrolled students to a full and equal educational
opportunity. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Wisconsin State Statute (36.12), and
UW-Madison policy (Faculty Document 1071) require that students with disabilities be
reasonably accommodated in instruction and campus life. Reasonable accommodations for
students with disabilities are a shared faculty and student responsibility. Students are
expected to inform faculty [me] of their need for instructional accommodations by the end of
the third week of the semester, or as soon as possible after a disability has been incurred or
recognized. Faculty [I], will work either directly with the student [you] or in coordination
with the McBurney Center to identify and provide reasonable instructional accommodations.
Disability information, including instructional accommodations as part of a student’s
educational record, is confidential and protected under
FERPA.” http://mcburney.wisc.edu/facstaffother/faculty/syllabus.php

Resources for Academic Assistance:

- The UW Writing Center: http://writing.wisc.edu/Individual/index.html
- Tutoring and Learning Support Services - https://advising.wisc.edu/content/tutoring-
  learning- support-resources

Diversity and Inclusion

Institutional statement on diversity: “Diversity is a source of strength, creativity, and
innovation for UW-Madison. We value the contributions of each person and respect the
profound ways their identity, culture, background, experience, status, abilities, and opinion
enrich the university community. We commit ourselves to the pursuit of excellence in teaching, research, outreach, and diversity as inextricably linked goals.

The University of Wisconsin-Madison fulfills its public mission by creating a welcoming and inclusive community for people from every background - people who as students, faculty, and staff serve Wisconsin and the world.” [https://diversity.wisc.edu/](https://diversity.wisc.edu/)

**Important Notes:**

1. This syllabus is to act as a rough guide for the semester; it is not set in stone. Each group of students moves at a different pace and gets fascinated by certain topics. I will try to honor this and we may find ourselves spending more time on certain topics and less time on others. As such, by choosing to remain in this course, you agree to all of the above requirements and stipulations. **I reserve the right to alter this syllabus at any time, but with fair and appropriate warning.**

2. You may use laptops for note taking in class, but if these become a distraction or a problem, you will be asked to put them away. I respectfully ask you to please put your phones away during class. If you plan to take notes on your phone, please plan to use an alternative device or get a notebook. If I see you answering your phone or text messaging, you will be asked to put it away. If it is a recurring problem, I will ask you to leave the classroom. Thank you!

3. I will attempt to respond to student emails as promptly as I am I will generally check and respond to email between the hours of 8 a.m. and 8 p.m. I will always try to get you a response within 24 hours. Also, please send me emails from either your student email address, or another email address that readily identifies you.

**A Final Thought:**

This course is designed to be interactive, fun, and open. All of you bring your own unique perspectives and experiences to this material, and I absolutely encourage that. That said, many of the topics we will cover and explore can become personal, and at times, difficult. You will never be required to share something you are not comfortable sharing. However, this does not mean you are exempt from participation. You must find ways to make your voice heard. I want you to feel safe in this classroom to discuss experiences and opinions on any and all topics we cover. Whatever is said or written in this class stays in this class. No one should feel oppressed or stifled because of gender, race, creed, class, ability, size, sexual orientation, or citizenship status. The success of this class is a community effort!

**Class/Reading Schedule**

*(Listed readings and assignments are due THAT DAY for class!)*

**Week One: Introducing Body Politics**

Tuesday 1/21: Course introduction, syllabus overview

Thursday 1/23:

Readings due:

**Week Two: Theorizing the Female/Feminine Body**
Tuesday 1/28:
Readings due:

Thursday 1/29:
Readings due:

**Week Three: Controlling “Othered” Bodies**
Tuesday 2/4: Topical Body Politics 1 due, Student led discussion
Readings Due:
- Sumerau, J.E. “Embodying Nonexistence.” In *Body Battlegrounds*. 177-188.

Thursday 2/6:
Readings due:

**Week Four: Colorism and the Politics of Skin Tone**
Tuesday 2/11: Student led discussion
Readings Due:
Thursday 2/13:
Readings Due:

Week Five: Does Size Matter?
Tuesday 2/18: Topical Body Politics 2 due, Student led discussion
Readings Due:

Thursday 2/20: Final Paper Topic Summary Due (optional)
Readings Due:

Week Six: The Mother Body
Tuesday 2/25: Student led discussion
Readings due:

Thursday 2/27: Lit Review Tutorial
Readings Due:

Week Seven: Bodies and Borders
Tuesday 3/3: Student led discussion
Readings due:
Thursday 3/5:
Readings Due:

**Week Eight: Female/Feminine Bodies and Disabilities**

**Tuesday 3/10:** Topical body politics 3 due, Student led discussion
Readings Due:

Thursday 3/12:
Readings due:

**Week Nine: SPRING BREAK**

**Week Ten: Girlhood Embodied and the Aging Body**

**Tuesday 3/24:** Student led discussion
Readings due:

Thursday 3/26:
Readings due:

Week Eleven: Politics of the Face
Tuesday 3/31: **Topical Body Politics** 4 due, Student led discussion
Readings due:
- Laine Talley, Heather. 2014. *Saving Face*. Chapters 1 and 3, pgs. 7-23 and 47-75

Thursday 4/2:
Readings due:

Week Twelve: Working as Woman – Labor and the Body
Tuesday 4/7: **Student led discussion**
Readings due:

Thursday 4/9: **Chain of Love documentary**
Readings due:

Week Thirteen: Female/Feminine Bodies and Violences
Tuesday 4/14: **Student led discussion**
Readings Due:

Thursday 4/16: **In-Class Body Mapping Exercise**
Readings due:

Week Fourteen: Movements and Resistance
Tuesday 4/21: **Student led discussion**
Readings due:

**Thursday 4/23: Final Paper Due on Canvas by midnight**
Readings due:

**Week Fifteen: Body Politics Beyond...**
**Tuesday 4/28: Readings due:**

**Thursday 4/30: Final class reflections, Reflective Statement due on Canvas by midnight**