



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](mailto: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:**

**Bobel, Chris and Kwan, Samantha. 2019. *Body Battlegrounds: Transgressions, Tensions, and Transformations*. Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press.**

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/](http://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/>

### **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:

- Miner, 1956. "Body Ritual Among the Nacirema." *American Anthropologist* 58(3):503-507.
- Weitz, 1998. "A History of Women's Bodies." In *The Politics of Women's Bodies* edited by Rose Weitz. New York: Oxford University Press. 3-11.

### **Week Two: Theorizing the Female/Feminine Body**

Tuesday 1/28:

Readings due:

- Bordo, 1993. "Introduction: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body." In *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Thursday 1/29:

Readings due:

- Bartky, Sandra 1988. "Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power." 93-109.
- Bordo, 1993. "The Body and the Reproduction of Femininity." In *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*. Berkeley: University of California Press. 165-184.

### **Week Three: Controlling "Othered" Bodies**

Tuesday 2/4: **Topical Body Politics 1 due, Student led discussion**

Readings Due:

- Schilt, Kristen and Westbrook, 2009. "Doing Gender, Doing Heteronormativity." *Gender and Society* 23(4): 440-464.
- Luce, Jacquelyne. 2004. "Imaging Bodies, Imagining Relations." *Journal of Medical Humanities* 25(1): 47-56.
- Calafell, Bernadette Marie. 2017. "Brown Queer Bodies." *Qualitative Inquiry* 23(7): 511-512.
- Sumerau, J.E. "Embodying Nonexistence." In *Body Battlegrounds*. 177-188.

Thursday 2/6:

Readings due:

- Riley, Taylor. "That Gentle Somebody: Re-thinking Black Female Same-Sex Practices and Heteronormativity in Contemporary South Africa." In *Body Battlegrounds*. 213 - 225.
- Collins, Patricia Hill. "The Politics of Black Feminist Thought." In *Black Feminist Thought*. New York: Routledge. 1-20.
- hooks, 1992. "Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance." In *Black Looks: Race and Representation*. Boston: South End Press. 366-380.

### **Week Four: Colorism and the Politics of Skin Tone**

Tuesday 2/11: **Student led discussion**

Readings Due:

- Hunter, 2007. "The Persistent Problem of Colorism: Skin Tone, Status, and Inequality." *Sociology Compass* 1/1:237-254.
- Quiros, and Dawson, B. A. 2013. "The Color Paradigm: The Impact of Colorism on the Racial Identity and Identification of Latinas." *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment* 23: 287-297.
- Landor et al. 2019. "Colorizing Self Esteem Among African American Young Women." *Journal of Child and Family Studies* 28(7): 1886 - 1898.

Thursday 2/13:

Readings Due:

- Nakano Glenn, 2008. "Yearning for Lightness: Transnational Circuits in the Marketing and Consumption of Skin Lighteners." *Gender and Society* 22(3): 281-302.
- Chen et al. 2018. "Egg White or Sun-Kissed: A Cross-Cultural Exploration of Skin Color and Women's Leisure Behavior." *Sex Roles* 78(3/4): 255-271.
- Lakshmanan, Praveena. "Pretty Brown." In *Body Battlegrounds*. 58-60.

### **Week Five: Does Size Matter?**

Tuesday 2/18: **Topical Body Politics 2 due, Student led discussion**

Readings Due:

- Murray, Samantha 2007. "Corporeal Knowledges and Deviant Bodies: Perceiving the Fat Body." *Social Semiotics* 17(3): 361-373.
- Erdman Farrell, Amy 2011. "Fat and the Uncivilized Body." In *Fat Shame* by A. Erdman Farrell. New York: New York University Press. 59-81.
- Vincent, 2016. "Fat in a Time of Slim: The Re-inscription of Race in the Framing of Fat Desirability in Post-Apartheid South Africa." *Sexualities* 19(8):914-925.

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

Readings Due:

- Kent, Le'a. "Fighting Abjection: Representing Fat Women." In *Bodies Out of Bounds: Fatness and Transgression* edited by J. Evans Braziel and K. LeBesco. Los Angeles: University of California Press. 131-145.
- Shaw, Andrea. 2005. "The Other Side of the Looking Glass: The Marginalization of Fatness and Blackness in the Construction of Gender Identity." *Social Semiotics* 15(2): 143-152.

### **Week Six: The Mother Body**

Tuesday 2/25: **Student led discussion**

Readings due:

- Parker, George and Pause, Cat. 2018. "I'm Just a Woman Having a Baby': Negotiating and Resisting the Problematization of Pregnancy Fatness." *Frontiers in Sociology* 3(5): 1-10.
- Reich, Jennifer. 2011. "Public Mothers and Private Practices." In *Embodied Resistance* edited by C. Bobel and S. Kwan. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press. 130-142.
- Basile, Monica. "Radical Doula, Childbirth Activism, and the Politics of Embodiment." In *Body Battlegrounds*. 23-37.

Thursday 2/27: **Lit Review Tutorial**

Readings Due:

- Greil, A. 2011. The Social Construction of Infertility. *Sociology Compass* 5/8 (2011): 736-746.
- Teman, 2010. "Introduction." In *Birthing a Mother: The Surrogate Body and the Pregnant Self*. Berkeley: University of California Press. 1-26.

### **Week Seven: Bodies and Borders**

Tuesday 3/3: **Student led discussion**

Readings due:

- Beckmann Al Wazni, 2015. "Muslim Women in America and Hijab." *Social Work* 60(4): 325-

333.

- Rehman, Sara. "Showing Our Muslim." In *Body Battlegrounds*. 165-167.
- Sudbury, Julia. 2005. "Celling Black Bodies: Black Women in the Global Prison Industrial Complex." *Feminist Review* 80:162-179.

Thursday 3/5:

Readings Due:

- Anzaldúa, 1997. "La conciencia de la mestiza: Towards a New Consciousness." In *Writing on the Body* edited by K. Conboy, N. Medina, and S. Stanbury. New York: Columbia University Press.

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

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

Readings Due:

- Inahara, Minae. 2009. "The Body Which is Not One: The Body, Femininity, and Disability." *Body and Society* 15(1): 47-62.
- Wendell, Susan. "Feminism, Disability, and Transcendence of the Body." *Canadian Woman Studies*.
- Stran, Margaret. "Sitting and Resisting: How Using a Wheelchair Confronts Ideas of Normal." In *Body Battlegrounds*. 228-230.

Thursday 3/12:

Readings due:

- Tepper, Mitchell. 2000. "Sexuality and Disability: The Missing Discourse of Pleasure." *Sexuality and Disability* 18(4): 283-290.
- Anderson, Paul and Kitchin, Rob. 2000. "Disability, Space, and Sexuality: Access to Family Planning Services." *Social Science and Medicine* 51: 1163-1173.

### **Week Nine: SPRING BREAK**

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

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

Readings due:

- Sue Jackson & Tiina Vares. 2015. "'Perfect skin', 'pretty skinny': girls' embodied identities and post-feminist popular culture." *Journal of Gender Studies*, 24:3, 347-360.
- Burnette, C. et al. 2017. "I Don't Need People to Tell Me I'm Pretty on Social Media": A Qualitative Study of Social Media and Body Image in Early Adolescent Girls." *Body Image* 23: 114-125.

Thursday 3/26:

Readings due:

- Macia, Enguerran et al. 2015. "The Paradox of Impossible Beauty: Body Changes and Beauty Practices in Aging Women." *Journal of Women and Aging* 27:174-187.
- Montemurro, Beth and Gillen, Meghan. 2013. "Wrinkles and Sagging Flesh: Exploring

Transformations in Women's Sexual Body Image." *Journal of Women and Aging* 25(1): 3-23.  
- Baum, Faith and Petchers, Lori. "Old Bags Take a Stand." In *Body Battlegrounds*. 104-106.

### **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:

- Laine Talley, Heather. 2014. *Saving Face*. Chapter 5, pgs. 106-144.

### **Week Twelve: Working as Woman - Labor and the Body**

Tuesday 4/7: **Student led discussion**

Readings due:

- Fernandes, and Leite, R. 2016. "Embodied Women in the Work Context: The Case of Portuguese Businesswomen and Their Female Subordinates." *Women's Studies International Forum* 56: 45-55.

- Maben, Sharon and Grandy, 2016. "Women Elite Leaders Doing Respectable Business Femininity: How Privilege is Conferred, Contested and Defended Through the Body." *Gender, Work, and Organization* 23(4): 379-396.

Thursday 4/9: *Chain of Love* documentary

Readings due:

- Liu, 2015. "The embodied crises of neoliberal globalization: The lives and narratives of Filipina migrant domestic workers." *Women's Studies International Forum* 50: 80-88.

### **Week Thirteen: Female/Feminine Bodies and Violences**

Tuesday 4/14: **Student led discussion**

Readings Due:

- Kaye, Julie. 2016. "Reconciliation in the Context of Settler-Colonial Gender Violence." *Canadian Review of Sociology* 53(4): 461-467.

- Rodriguez-Madera, Sheilla et al. 2017. "Experiences of Violence Among Transgender Women in Puerto Rico: An Underestimated Problem." *Journal of Homosexuality* 64(2): 209-217.

- Katz, Sheila M. "What's Love Got to do With It? The Embodied Activism of Domestic Violence Survivors on Welfare." In *Body Battlegrounds*. 144-159.

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

Readings due:

- Sweet, Elizabeth and Escalante, Sara 2015. "Bringing Bodies Into Planning: Visceral Methods, Fear and Gender." *Urban Studies* 52(10): 1826-1845.

### **Week Fourteen: Movements and Resistance**

Tuesday 4/21: **Student led discussion**

Readings due:

- Weitz, 2001. "Women and Their Hair: Seeking Power through Resistance and

Accommodation.” *Gender and Society* 15(5): 667-686.

- Fahs, Breanne. “Body Hair Battlegrounds.” In *Body Battlegrounds*. 11-22.

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

Readings due:

- Reger, Jo. 2015. “Story of a Slut Walk. Sexuality, Race, and Generational Divisions in Contemporary Feminist Activism.” *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 44: 84-112.

**Week Fifteen: Body Politics Beyond...**

Tuesday 4/28: Readings due:

- Davis, Kathy. 2002. “Feminist Body/Politics as World Traveler: Translating *Our Bodies, Ourselves*.” *The European Journal of Women’s Studies* 9(3): 223-247.

- Taylor, Sonya Renee. “Bodies of Resistance.” In *Body Battlegrounds*. 237-238.

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