



University of Wisconsin-Madison

GWS 423: The Female Body in the World: Gender and Contemporary Body Politics in Cross Cultural Perspective

3 credit course

Fall 2020

Class Time: Mondays 2:30 -3:45, In-person instruction, 2650 Humanities (first in-person meeting will be *Monday, September 14th*)

All other instruction will take place asynchronous online

Hybrid face-to-face/online learning

Canvas URL:

<https://canvas.wisc.edu/courses/220981>

This class meets once a week for a 75-minute class period and otherwise will be asynchronous online learning. The course carries the expectation that students will work on course learning activities (reading, writing, studying, etc.) for about 4-6 hours a week.



← ME.

Instructor: Dr. Katherine Phelps (call me Dr. Kate)

University of Wisconsin – Madison, Gender and Women’s Studies

Email: kphelps@wisc.edu

Office Hours: By appointment - <https://katherine-7.youcanbook.me/>

Office: Virtual

Course Description

"I entered the classroom with the conviction that it was crucial for me and every other student to be an active participant, not a passive consumer . . . education as the practice of freedom . . . education that connects the will to know with the will to become. Learning is a place where paradise can be created. " -bell hooks

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:

Sophomore standing 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.
- Hopefully feel some joy, energy, and curiosity through the learning process!
- Understand the complexity and messiness of social movement and social justice work and recognize why we do it anyway.

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

Required Texts:

There are no required texts for this class. All course assigned readings and viewings will be available as PDFs and web links on our Canvas page.

Weekly Structure:

Weeks will run from TUESDAYS to MONDAYS.

Tuesdays – begin a new course topic/module

Fridays – initial discussion board posts due by midnight in Canvas group

Sundays – peer responses on Canvas discussion and other assignments due by midnight

Mondays – reflection on content for the week, in-person meeting to discuss and check in and reflect on what we learned

Assignments and Grading:

Participation (300 points - 30% 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. Anticipate between 60 to 80 pages of reading each week, sometimes more, sometimes less. I do not have an attendance policy for this class (because that's absurd in the era of COVID), but bear in mind that participation is a *substantial* part of your final grade, thus, you will be required to participate in class discussions. This is a discussion-based course; I want to hear what YOU have to say! You will be split into small groups on Canvas (of approximately 10 people) and there will be expectations for Canvas discussions weekly (a total of 15 weeks of discussion for the semester). I expect a substantial initial discussion board post (300 to 400 words) by Friday at midnight of each week that addresses the course readings and viewings and answers questions in the discussion prompts. At least three substantial peer responses (at least 100 words each) are due each week on discussion by Sundays at midnight. Each week of discussion is worth a total of 20 points.

Topical Body Politics (300 points - 30% of overall grade): In 6 response papers distributed over the course of the semester, you will choose an article, or website, or advertisement, or other piece of media relating to female body politics on the world stage that strikes your interest. You will include this media in the response via a web link, or pasting the image or ad in the response

directly. The responses should be 2-3 pg., double – spaced. What struck you about the media you chose? 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 (journal style, poetry, essay, etc.) 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 (at least one or two readings per response), as well as any other relevant external sources you use. Be sure to include in-text citations and references to any 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 be due approximately every two weeks and are worth up to 50 points each.

Paper Topic Selection and Three Sources (50 points – 5% of overall grade): In the first part of the semester, you will be asked to select a topic for your final paper or presentation and provide citations for three academic sources related to that topic. This assignment is to help jump start you for the final paper/presentation and to demonstrate your ability in seeking out academic literature related to a particular topic and providing formal citations for those sources. Please use ASA citation format for this assignment. Check out Purdue OWL for tips on ASA citation and reference format!

Final Term Paper or Presentation (250 points - 25% of overall grade): Towards the end of the semester, you will submit a paper OR presentation 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 or presentation **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 or presentation. Papers will be 7 to 9 pages (not including title or reference page) double-spaced, 1-inch margins, Times New Roman font, ASA citation format. Presentations should be at least 15 minutes long, presented as a YouTube video, Prezi video, or some other platform that allows for both slides and voice capability. Presentations must also include a bibliography listing sources used.

Reflective Statement (100 points - 10% of overall grade): As a final writing assignment for the semester, I am asking you to write a double-spaced, 3-4 double spaced 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 in discussion. Be sure to cite and make reference to sources from the class in your reflection!

All assignments will be submitted on Canvas.

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, you must talk to me or your TA before the due date if that's possible. *Assignments submitted more than two weeks past the original due date will be considered a zero.* Discussion board posts *must* be submitted during the week they are due, or they will not be accepted for credit. The final paper or presentation must be submitted on the due date. *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.”

<https://mcburney.wisc.edu/>

Resources for Academic Assistance:

- The UW Writing Center: <https://writing.wisc.edu/>
- Tutoring and Learning Support Services – <https://newstudent.wisc.edu/academic-support/>
- <https://academicsupport.wisc.edu/>

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. Certain due dates for assignments may shift slightly – but I will do everything I can to make sure people are fully aware of changes well in advance. As such, by choosing to remain in this course, you agree to all of the addressed requirements and stipulations. ***I reserve the right to alter this syllabus at any time, but with fair and appropriate warning.***
2. I will attempt to respond to student emails as promptly as I am able. 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.

CONCERNING IN PERSON CLASS SESSIONS

As we all know...the situation is in flux. We will continue to monitor the situation and make adjustments to ensure folks' comfort and safety.

The plan as of now is to meet for in-person sessions on **Mondays only** from 2:30 to 3:45 p.m. Because the semester begins on a Wednesday and the following Monday is Labor Day, we will not be meeting in person until **MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 14TH.**

All other course work will occur asynchronously on Canvas. Our weeks will run



COVID-19 Information:

Students' Rules [Rights, & Responsibilities](#)

During the global COVID-10 pandemic, we must prioritize our collective health and safety to keep ourselves, our campus, and our community safe. As a university community, we must work together to prevent the spread of the virus and to promote the collective health and welfare of our campus and surrounding community.

UW-Madison [Badger Pledge](#)

UW-Madison [Face Covering Guidelines](#)

While on campus all employees and students are required to wear [appropriate and properly fitting face coverings](#) while present in any campus building unless working alone in a laboratory or office space.

Face Coverings During In-person Instruction Statement (COVID-19)



Individuals are expected to wear a face covering while inside any university building. Face

coverings must be [worn correctly](#) (i.e., covering both your mouth and nose) in the building if you are attending class in person. If any student is unable to wear a face-covering, an accommodation may be provided due to disability, medical condition, or other legitimate reason.

Students with disabilities or medical conditions who are unable to wear a face covering should contact the [McBurney Disability Resource Center](#) or their Access Consultant if they are already affiliated. Students requesting an accommodation unrelated to disability or medical condition, should contact the Dean of Students Office.

Students who choose not to wear a face covering may not attend in-person classes, unless they are approved for an accommodation or exemption. All other students not wearing a face covering will be asked to put one on or leave the classroom. Students who refuse to wear face coverings appropriately or adhere to other stated requirements will be reported to the [Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards](#) and will not be allowed to return to the classroom until they agree to comply with the face covering policy. An instructor may cancel or suspend a course in-person meeting if a person is in the classroom without an approved face covering in position over their nose and mouth and refuses to immediately comply.

Quarantine or Isolation Due to COVID-19

Students should continually monitor themselves for COVID-19 [symptoms](#) and [get tested for the virus](#) if they have symptoms or have been in close contact with someone with COVID-19. Students should reach out to instructors as soon as possible if they become ill or need to isolate or quarantine, in order to make alternate plans for how to proceed with the course. Students are strongly encouraged to communicate with their instructor concerning their illness and the anticipated extent of their absence from the course (either in-person or remote). The instructor will work with the student to provide alternative ways to complete the course work.

A Final Thought:

This class will be an open and affirming learning space for all students, regardless of age, race, ethnicity, citizenship status, gender, sex, sexual orientation, size, parental status, religion, ability, or socioeconomic status. As an instructor, I pledge to respect all students based upon these factors, including the use of preferred/correct names and pronouns. I encourage open communication among students and myself. Students are welcome and encouraged to share viewpoints relevant to course material, and respectful, relevant debate is encouraged.

At times this semester we will be discussing historical events that may be disturbing, even traumatizing, to some students. If you ever feel the need to refrain from engaging with the material during one of these discussions, you may always do so without academic penalty. However, you must make me aware of the circumstances. And you will be responsible for any material you miss. If you ever wish to discuss your personal reactions to this material, either with the class or with me, I welcome such discussion as an appropriate part of our coursework.

I want to challenge us to remember that we are not the measure of all things. I absolutely encourage the use of experience and personal perspective in framing how we talk about the material, but the goal of the course is to think beyond those experiences and perspectives, and engage in thinking critically about the social, cultural, and political realities of various groups, identities, and social structures.

The success of this class is a community effort!

Class Readings and Viewings Weekly Schedule

Week One: Introducing Body Politics

Readings and Viewings:

- Miner, 1956. "Body Ritual Among the Nacirema." *American Anthropologist* 58(3):503-507. (reading)
- 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. (reading)
- The Urgency of Intersectionality – Kimberle Crenshaw (video)
- Bodies as Resistance – Sonya Renee Taylor (video)

Week Two: Theorizing the Female/Feminine Body

Readings and Viewings:

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

Week Three: Controlling "Othered" Bodies

Readings and Viewings:

- Schilt and Westbrook, 2015. "Bathroom Battlegrounds and Penis Panics." (reading)
- Luce, Jacquelyne. 2004. "Imaging Bodies, Imagining Relations." *Journal of Medical Humanities* 25(1): 47-56. (reading)
- Calafell, Bernadette Marie. 2017. "Brown Queer Bodies." *Qualitative Inquiry* 23(7): 511-512. (reading)
- Collins, Patricia Hill. "The Politics of Black Feminist Thought." In *Black Feminist Thought*. New York: Routledge. 1-20. (reading)
- hooks, 1992. "Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance." In *Black Looks: Race and Representation*. Boston: South End Press. 366-380. (reading)
- Beyonce – Formation (video)

Week Four: Colorism and the Politics of Skin Tone

Readings and Viewings:

- Hunter, 2007. "The Persistent Problem of Colorism: Skin Tone, Status, and Inequality." *Sociology Compass* 1/1:237-254. (reading)
- 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. (reading)

- Nakano Glenn, 2008. "Yearning for Lightness: Transnational Circuits in the Marketing and Consumption of Skin Lighteners." *Gender and Society* 22(3): 281-302. (reading)
- Hollywood's Colorism Problem ICYMI (video)
- Why the Market for Skin Whitening is Growing – VOX (video)
- Dark Skinned Girls (video)

Week Five: Does Size Matter?

Readings and Viewings:

- Murray, Samantha 2007. "Corporeal Knowledges and Deviant Bodies: Perceiving the Fat Body." *Social Semiotics* 17(3): 361-373. (reading)
- Erdman Farrell, Amy 2011. "Fat and the Uncivilized Body." In *Fat Shame* by A. Erdman Farrell. New York: New York University Press. 59-81. (reading)
- Strings, Sabrina. 2020. It's Not Obesity Killing Black People – It's Slavery. (reading)
- Dionne, Here's What Fat Acceptance Is and What It Isn't (reading)
- Rachel Wiley – The Fat Joke (video)
- Gardiner, "Fatphobia, Ableism, and the Covid-19 Pandemic" (reading)

Week Six: The Mother Body

Readings and Viewings:

- 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. (reading)
- Basile, Monica. "Radical Doula, Childbirth Activism, and the Politics of Embodiment." In *Body Battlegrounds*. 23-37. (reading)
- Greil, A. 2011. The Social Construction of Infertility. *Sociology Compass* 5/8 (2011): 736–746. (reading)
- Villarosa, "Why America's Black Mothers and Babies are in a Life or Death Crisis", *New York Times* (reading)
- *Romper's Doula Diaries - Natural Birth Seemed Impossible* (video)

Week Seven: Bodies and Borders

Readings and Viewings:

- Beckmann Al Wazni, 2015. "Muslim Women in America and Hijab." *Social Work* 60(4): 325-333. (reading)
- Muslim Girls Get Real About the Hijab – Teen Vogue (video)
- Sudbury, Julia. 2005. "Celling Black Bodies: Black Women in the Global Prison Industrial Complex." *Feminist Review* 80:162-179. (reading)
- 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. (reading)
- Melissa Lozada Oliva – My Spanish (video)
- To Live in the Borderlands – Anzaldúa (reading)

Week Eight: Female/Feminine Bodies and Disabilities

Readings and Viewings:

- Inahara, Minae. 2009. "The Body Which is Not One: The Body, Femininity, and Disability." *Body and Society* 15(1): 47-62. (reading)
- Wendell, Susan. "Feminism, Disability, and Transcendence of the Body." *Canadian Woman Studies*. (reading)
- Stran, Margaret. "Sitting and Resisting: How Using a Wheelchair Confronts Ideas of Normal." In *Body Battlegrounds*. 228-230. (reading)
- Tepper, Mitchell. 2000. "Sexuality and Disability: The Missing Discourse of Pleasure." *Sexuality and Disability* 18(4): 283-290. (reading)
- Disability Visibility Project website (explore)
- *Inside the Controversial World of Medically Assisted Sex*, VICE (video)

Week Nine: Girlhood Embodied

Readings and Viewings:

- Shasparay – Black Girl Magic (video)
- What Young Women Believe About Their Own Sexual Pleasure – TED talk (video)
- 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.
- Nunn, Nia Michelle. 2016. "Super-Girl: Strength and Sadness in Black Girlhood."
- Sisterhood Album – Action – Girls Who Code (video)
- Hosking, Taylor. 2017. Why Do the Boy Scouts Want to Include Girls? (reading)

Week Ten: Rest and Reflection

No readings and viewings due

Week Eleven: Politics of the Face

Readings and Viewings:

- Laine Talley, Heather. 2014. *Saving Face*. Chapters 1, 3, and 5, pgs. 7-23, 47-75, and 106-144.
- Saving Face documentary short (video)
- Face Equality International website (explore)
- Changing Faces website (explore)

Week Twelve: Working as Woman – Labor and the Body

Readings and Viewings:

- 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. (reading)
- Maven, 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. (reading)
- *Chain of Love* documentary – Access through UW Madison Library (video)
 - AOC Beauty Routine (video)

Week Thirteen: Female/Feminine Bodies and Violences

Readings and Viewings:

- Kaye, Julie. 2016. “Reconciliation in the Context of Settler-Colonial Gender Violence.” *Canadian Review of Sociology* 53(4): 461-467. (reading)
- Sweet, Elizabeth and Escalante, Sara 2015. “Bringing Bodies Into Planning: Visceral Methods, Fear and Gender.” *Urban Studies* 52(10): 1826-1845. (reading)
- The Link Between Natural Disasters and Domestic Abuse - O’Neil (reading)
- Sexual and Gender Based Violence During Covid-19: Lessons from Ebola - Onyango (reading)
- Why Violence Against Transgender Americans is a Crisis that’s Underreported (video)
 - Coalition to Stop Violence Against Native Women (explore)

Week Fourteen: Movements and Resistance

Readings and Viewings:

- Weitz, 2001. “Women and Their Hair: Seeking Power through Resistance and Accommodation.” *Gender and Society* 15(5): 667-686. (reading)
- Fahs, Breanne. “Body Hair Battlegrounds.” In *Body Battlegrounds*. 11-22. (reading)
- Reger, Jo. 2015. “Story of a Slut Walk. Sexuality, Race, and Generational Divisions in Contemporary Feminist Activism.” *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 44: 84-112. (reading)
- An Interview with the Founders of Black Lives Matter (video)
- Slut Walk images (explore)

Week Fifteen: Body Politics Beyond...

Readings and Viewings:

- Sonya Renee Taylor – The Body is Not An Apology (reading)
- Sonya Renee Taylor – The Body is Not An Apology (video)