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

Fall 2017
Class Time: Tuesday/Thursday 9:30 – 10:45 a.m.
Instructor: Katherine Phelps, University of Wisconsin – Madison, Gender and Women’s Studies
Email: kphelps@wisc.edu
Office Hours: 8:15 a.m. – 9:15 a.m. Tues/Thurs and by appointment
Office: 3312 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 bodies of women and girls in global perspective. We consider specifically the bodies of women and girls, 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 body are formed across cultures, around the world. We will consider the impacts of phenomena such as globalization, neoliberalism, “global” feminism, imperialism, capitalism and other economic systems, and human rights movements, on cultural conceptions of health, ability, beauty, and the “value” of female bodies.

Some Course Discussion Themes:

Body politics theory
Privilege, power, and social capital
Oppression, disadvantage, and inequality
Race, ethnicity, 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

Required Texts:

- All other readings will be made available in PDF form as a course reader on Canvas.

Required texts can be purchased at A Room of One’s Own at 315 W. Gorham St.

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 body in particular is a site of political and cultural meaning making, contention, and resistance
- Articulate various theoretical frameworks (feminist theories, queer theory, Ethnic 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 research paper

Assignments and Grading

*Participation (18% 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, and coming to class with questions and ideas related to the concept we are discussing that day. 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 participate during in-class discussions and activities. This is a discussion-based course; I want to hear what YOU have to say!

*Topical Body Politics (12% of overall grade):* The discussion continues beyond the walls of the classroom! Every other week, 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, 1-2 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! We will talk about and engage with some of the things you find at the start of class each week. Topical body politics assignments will always be due on Tuesdays.

*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 one or two broad based questions on the readings for that week. The lowest quiz grade will be thrown out at the end of the semester.

*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! Students should plan to lead discussion for approximately half of the class period.

*Annotated Bibliography (10% of overall grade):* Partway through the semester you will be asked to submit an annotated bibliography that lists sources you plan to use in your final paper. These sources must be academic or scholarly sources, ideally from peer reviewed journals or published texts. You must give the proper ASA citation format for the source, provide a summary of the article/book, and then provide an explanation of how you plan to apply the source in your final paper analysis. I want to see you drawing connections between these sources and your paper topic and show me why they are relevant to your analysis/argument. This annotated bibliography should have a **minimum** of three sources from outside the class syllabus.

*Peer Review (10% of overall grade):* Towards the end of the semester we will have a peer review workshop on final paper drafts. You will work in pairs or small groups to read each other’s work, provide constructive feedback and offer suggestions. You must bring two copies of your working paper draft to class, and be prepared to submit one of these copies to me on that day. We will talk more about this peer review workshop during the semester.

*Final Term Paper (30% of overall grade):* At the end of the term, you will submit a paper on a topic of your choosing. 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 the analysis. Over the course of the semester, you will hit certain milestones that will help you lead up to the final product: a written summary of the paper topic, an annotated bibliography of relevant sources, and a partial draft for a peer review workshop. You must use relevant readings from the class for your analysis, and additionally cite at least **four** external academic sources in your paper. Papers will be 10 to 12 pages, double-spaced, 1-inch margins, Times New Roman font.

**Grading Scale:**

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**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 presentation at a different time, you must talk to me before the due date if that's possible.

**A Note on Academic Dishonesty:**

It’s simple: I will not tolerate plagiarism in this course. Any and all work that you do must be your work and yours alone. This means if you use a quotation or an idea from a reading or another outside source, you must properly cite it and give credit where credit is due. We will go
over citation expectations several times during this course. If you have questions about citing, or whether or not something is plagiarized, please, please, PLEASE ask me. I will never fault you for wanting clarity in pursuit of academic integrity. Learning the rules of citing and academic integrity now will be incredibly useful to you not only during the rest of your college career, but for the rest of your life. Take this seriously!

Check out the Purdue OWL website for great tips on references and citations!
For other questions, refer to the UW-Madison website on academic integrity: https://students.wisc.edu/student-conduct/academic-integrity/

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
Disability Resource Center - https://mcburney.wisc.edu/

Important Miscellaneous:

1. This syllabus is to act as a rough guide for the semester; it is not set in stone. The dates may shift a bit. Each group of students moves at a different pace and gets fascinated by certain topics. I will honor this and we may find ourselves spending more time on certain topics and less time on others. Having fun with this class requires flexibility! 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 it away. Phones are not allowed in this class. If you plan to take notes on your phone, please plan to use another 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.

3. 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.

A Final Thought:

This course is meant 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, or sexual orientation. 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 Gender and Body Politics**  
Thursday 9/7: Course introduction, syllabus overview, in-class exercise

**Week Two: Woman as Body**

Tuesday 9/12: **Sign up for leading class discussion**  
Readings due:

Thursday 9/14:  
Readings due:  

**Week Three: Constraining Bodies – Institutional Impacts**

Tuesday 9/19: **Topical Body Politics response due, Student led discussion**  
Readings Due:  

Thursday 9/21:  
Readings Due:  

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

Tuesday 9/26: **Student led discussion**  
Readings Due:  
Thursday 9/28:
Readings Due:

Week Five: Does Size Matter?

Tuesday 10/3: **Topical Body Politics response due, Student led discussion**
Readings Due:

Thursday 10/5: **Final paper topic summary due**
Readings Due:

Week Six: The Mother Body

Tuesday 10/10: **Student led discussion**
Readings due:

Thursday 10/12:
Readings Due:

Week Seven: Bodies and Borders

Tuesday 10/17: **Topical Body Politics response due, Student led discussion**
Readings due:


Thursday 10/19:
Readings Due:


**Week Eight: Working as Woman – Labor and the Body**

Tuesday 10/24: **Student led discussion**
Readings due:


Thursday 10/26: **Annotated Bibliography due**
Readings due:


**Week Nine: Representing Female Bodies**

Tuesday 10/31: **Topical Body Politics response due**
Thursday 11/2:
Readings due:

Week Ten: Gender and the Politics of Facial Appearance
Tuesday 11/7: Student led discussion
Readings due:

Thursday 11/9: Saving Face documentary
Week Eleven: The Face Continued
Tuesday 11/14: Topical Body Politics response due, Student led discussion
Readings due:

Thursday 11/16: Until the Violence Stops documentary

Week Twelve: Female/Feminine Bodies and Violence(s)

Tuesday 11/21: Student led discussion
Readings due:
Thursday 11/23: **THANKSGIVING – NO CLASS**

**Week Thirteen: The Aging Body – Assigning Value**

Tuesday 11/28: **Topical Body Politics response due, Student led discussion**

Readings due:

Thursday 11/30: **Peer review paper work shopping (have partial draft ready to share! Bring two copies!)**

**Week Fourteen: Bodies and Resistance – Corporeal Movements**

Tuesday 12/5: **Student led discussion**

Readings due:

Thursday 12/7:

Readings Due:

**Week Fifteen: The Body and the Uses of Experience – Theorizing the Future**

Tuesday 12/12: **Final Research Paper Due, Class reflections**

Readings due: