
G310: Representation and the Body

Spring 2010

Course Syllabus

Tuesday/Thursday 2:30pm—3:45pm
Sycamore Hall, Room 103 (SY 103)

Instructor: Professor Aren Aizura
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Course Description

Everyone has a body. Bodies are a significant register of cultural fears and anxieties. They make us feel comfortable, uncomfortable, sublime, ridiculous. They provide the arena through which people enact ceremonial rites of passage. They tell the world if we are happy or sad, rich or poor, lazy or disciplined, healthy or sick—or so we believe. As much as we invest in a fantasy of what bodies should be like, we are often deceived by what our bodies mean, confused by how they operate, and frustrated by their recalcitrance. In this course we will examine bodies as enigmatic yet readable sites, discovering how the materiality of the body grounds our metaphors about identity. We examine representation as a field of contradictory ideas about bodies, asking how depictions of gendered bodies suture collective understandings of gender, sex, sexuality, race, and class. And yet, it is impossible to examine the imagined body without the flesh and blood and skin that give representation its saliency. In this course we shuttle between discussions of “real” bodies in anthropology, sociology, history and cultural studies, and artistic representations that imagine bodies, asking how representations structure the ways we know how bodies work.

Course Goals and Objectives

- Demonstrate an understanding of the importance of representations of the human body in relation to debates about sex, gender and sexuality
- Demonstrate a knowledge of key terms and concepts in discussing the body and representation: e.g. embodiment; discipline; techniques; inscription; passing; materiality; etc.
- Demonstrate an understanding of critical concepts relevant to the four key themes the course covers, e.g. race; whiteness; normativity; body modification; sexuality; heteronormativity, etc.
- Demonstrate skill in researching, planning and writing papers, incorporating an analytical understanding of key concepts in the course
- Demonstrate the ability to research and produce a creative response to a chosen topic, reflecting on the process in an oral presentation

- Demonstrate the ability to work collaboratively with fellow students and present material in class
- Be able to think critically about whether bodies are merely “natural”, are socially and textually constructed, or something else entirely

Required reading

The following texts will be available from Boxcar Books, 408 E. 6th St. Bloomington:

Donley, Carol and Buckley, Sheryl (eds). *The Tyranny of the Normal*. Kent State University Press, 1996.

Wann, Marilyn. *Fat!So?* Ten Speed Press, 1999.

Shildrick, Margot and Price, Janet (eds). *Feminist theory and the body: a reader*. Taylor and Francis, 1999.

Featherstone, Mike (ed). *Body modification*. Routledge, 2000.

If you can, please obtain the following text secondhand on Abebooks or Amazon:

Fusco, Coco (ed), *Only Skin Deep: Changing Visions of the American Self*. Harry Abrams, 2004.

The readings for each week are divided into essential and supplementary lists. Each week you are expected to read the articles on the Essential Reading list. Supplementary readings can be used to kickstart research or follow up on topics we talk about in class. The essential readings for each week are available as pdfs for download through Oncourse in the Resources folder.

Because it is important that we think about film, but this is not technically a film course, this class will have a special accommodation for film viewing. Once every six weeks I will arrange a film screening in place of class discussion. I will try to make films available through the media reserves in the basement of the main library.

Class Attendance and Late Assignments

In order to succeed in this course, you need to attend classes, complete assignments on time and keep up with the weekly readings. Part of your final grade will be based on your attendance in class (see below). As an instructor, it's my responsibility to offer interesting, fun and challenging teaching material. In return, I expect students to attend classes on time; to participate in group activities; to ask questions, pay attention and think critically.

Attendance Requirements: I will be taking an attendance roll for every class. If you need to miss a lecture for medical or personal reasons, please talk to me in advance or provide me with a medical certificate. You can miss three classes without providing a medical certificate or other form of excuse: after three, I will begin to dock your attendance mark.

Late Assignments: Assignments turned in after their deadlines will be marked down a ½ grade for each day late (e.g., A goes to A-) unless other arrangements have been made in advance or in instances of documented medical reason.

If you are having serious health problems or a personal emergency and fall behind, please come and see me as soon as possible. We may be able to arrange for you to catch up on missed work. I can also direct you to student services that may assist you if you're having difficulties. However, attending classes and completing assignments on time is the best way to keep up with the course.

Grading

Your grade will be based on your performance, meeting assignment deadlines, regular and prompt attendance and class participation. The grade breakdown is as follows:

Grading Criteria

Grading from A through F will be based on the following categories:

Critical and thoughtful analysis
 Grasp of key term and concepts
 Initiative taken in researching and reading
 Written expression
 Structure (i.e., essay and exam have strong introduction, body and conclusion)
 Correct referencing and bibliography
 Presentation: assignments typed in 12 point font, double-spaced with wide margins

Assessment

Mid-term	30%
Final	20%
Body of Knowledge Project	30%
In Class Reading Presentations	10%
Attendance and Participation	10%

1. Mid-term Paper 30%

Due Monday March 1

The midterm paper will be a paper of 1500 words, answering *one* of six questions addressing key concepts about bodies and representation.

2. Final Exam 15%

Due Tuesday May 4

The final exam will test your knowledge of the course material we've covered across the semester. It will be sat in class. You will be advised about how to prepare later in semester.

3. Body of Knowledge Project 30%

The Body of Knowledge Project is a cumulative intellectual activity that will enable you to investigate a theme related to the body. The first step is to select a theme related to the body. Some suggestions include: disability, racial passing, whiteness, anorexia, body building, muscle dysmorphia, medicine, tattooing, cosmetic surgery, body image, BDSM, piercings, beauty work, pregnancy, transgender, transforming the body, etc. After you have selected your theme, the assignment has four parts, enumerated below:

Assessment includes: Annotated Bibliography
Written Artifact
Presentation
5-7 page rationale/explanation)

Annotated Bibliography **10% due: Thursday, January 28**

You will compile a bibliography of at least ten items with each entry including a paragraph in which you discuss the text under consideration. The bibliography should primarily contain academic materials, but you may also include two fictional works (either film or literature) and one non-academic website. More details forthcoming.

Artifact **5% due: Tuesday, April 20**

Using Marilyn Wann's *Fat!So?* as a guide, you (either individually or in teams of two or three) will create a comparable text on your chosen theme related to the body. Since you are allowed to team with other students, be sure that your respective themes work well with each other. Wann writes a fat-zine, and you are welcome to produce a similar artifact that is related to your theme. Or, if you'd rather, you can create a video, make an elaborate power point presentation, write a mini play. Basically, you will be transforming your body-based theme into an artistic product. Note: this activity is probably the most time and labor-intensive element of the exercise and yet it has a relatively low percentage point attached to it. There are several reasons for this. 1) By lowering the percentage score, I am hoping to heighten your willingness to take risks in what you produce. 2) By putting more weight on the guide than the artifact itself, I am suggesting to you that the meat of this assignment resides in how thoroughly you discuss your concept. 3) By allowing you to work in groups, I am hoping for creative cross-pollination but working to minimize the downsides of teams whose members aren't equally productive.

Rationale/Explanation Guide **10% due: Tuesday, April 20**

In a paper of 5-7 pages (individually written), discuss both the ideas contained in the annotated bibliography and your manifestation of those ideas in your created artifact. Since this is a course offered through the gender studies department, your paper should make claims for how your body-related theme and consequent research and creative project illuminate matters of gender and/or sexuality.

Presentation **5% due last two days of class, per sign up**

On the last two days of the semester, we will devote class time to presentations from the themes. These presentations should be equally balanced amongst team members and may involve a display of your artifact as well as a discussion on

your respective rationales. Please note that information contained in student presentations may be filtered into the final exam. Also, each student will be responsible for writing four responses (two on each day of presentations), and these responses will factor into your overall participation score for the class.

4. In Class Reading Presentations 10%

Each week on Thursdays, one student will introduce one of the essential readings assigned for the week and lead a discussion on it. You should prepare to give a short summary of the article, its main themes and arguments, as well as five or six questions to kick off discussion. You will then be responsible for facilitating discussion, keeping the class focused on the topic at hand. A reading schedule will be circulated in Week One so that each student can pick an article they'd like to present on.

5. Attendance and Participation 10%

An attendance roster will be taken for each lecture. 5% is for attendance. The other 5% of this mark is for in class participation: asking questions, offering your opinion or a discussion point, responding to questions, taking part in group activities etc. I particularly want to encourage you to help other students in understanding the material we are reading: we are reading some difficult stuff for this course, and we will need to help each other out. High participation marks will be awarded to people who engage constructively with other class members, not just me as the instructor.

Ethics

Students are expected to maintain high ethical standards. Any evidence of cheating or plagiarism will be handled according to University procedures.

Note: Please note that this class will sometimes be graphic in nature. We are talking about bodies; sometimes bodies can be confronting. The course content will include images of nudity, surgery, scarification, explicit sexual acts etc. If you are likely to be disturbed by such images, it is probably best that you not take this class. We may also disagree at times. I encourage lively debate and expect all students to behave with respect for others' differing opinions. We all come from a range of different backgrounds and social or political perspectives. Thus, we need to think carefully before we speak in class and not make assumptions about who we are speaking for or to. Hopefully this way we can all learn in a supportive and engaging atmosphere.

Reading Assignments

Week One Introduction: Representing Whose Body? January 12 & 14

In this first week, we find out what studying the body means in Gender Studies. Then we move on to look at definitions of representation. What is the connection between representations as pictures, words or sounds and representation as something political or social, i.e. when we talk about how various kinds of people are represented? What does it mean to represent “the body”? When we talk about “the body”, whose body is represented? What kinds of bodies will we look at in this course, and how?

Reading:

Pilcher, Jane and Whelehan, Imelda. “Body.” *50 Key Concepts in Gender Studies*. London: SAGE, 2004: 6—10.

Pilcher, Jane and Whelehan, Imelda. “Representation.” *50 Key Concepts in Gender Studies*. London: SAGE, 2004: 135—140.

Week Two: Theorizing the Body January 19 & 21

What is the body? What can it do? This week we look at how bodies have been theorized across history, beginning with the mind/body dualism of Descartes. Are bodies simply organic matter, natural, the biological product of our ancestors’ genetic material? Or are they technologies, combinations of parts that are made and that we make? We examine two important contemporary theoretical concepts of the body: Foucault’s argument that bodies are formed through discipline, and Mauss’ idea that bodies are social, constructed through techniques: ways to move, function or feel. We also examine Bordo’s theorization of a feminist politics of the body.

Reading:

Michel Foucault, “Docile bodies.” In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. trans Alan Sheridan. New York: Random House, 1979.

Marcel Mauss, “Techniques of the Body.” *Economy and Society* 2: 1 (1973), 70—88.

Bordo, Susan. “Feminism, Foucault and the Politics of the Body.” In *Feminist Theory and the Body: A Reader*, pp. 246—257.

PART ONE: RACED BODIES

Week Three How do bodies come to be racialized? January 26 & 28

What is race? How do we “know” how to recognize raced bodies, and how do we “see” race? What bodies count as “raced” and which don’t? How do gender and sexuality affect representations of racialized embodiment? Reading a summary of critical theories

of race, as well as an essay on the representation of race in American photography, we examine how visual representations of race have worked to *construct* racial categories as natural and inborn, but in fact change dependent on time, place and context.

Reading:

Coco Fusco, “Racial Time, Racial Marks, Racial Metaphors.” In Coco Fusco and Brian Wallis (eds), *Only Skin Deep: Changing Visions of the American Self*.
 D. Soyini Madison, “Key Concepts In Theories of Difference: Race.” Pp. 73-76 in *Critical ethnography: method, ethics and performance*.

Week Four Whiteness and Stereotype **February 2 & 4**

How is whiteness represented? What does the “universal” or “ideal” body look like—is it white? What do white bodies look like? Do white bodies have a race? This week we examine the construction of whiteness as something unmarked and invisible. Alongside whiteness, we look at theories of colonial racial representation. We know that non-white bodies are “othered”, but how does this othering work? How do stereotypical representations of non-white others frame the other as an object both of desire and hostility?

Reading:

Richard Dyer, “Coloured white, not coloured,” Chapter Two in *White*. New York: Routledge, 1997: 41—81.
 Bhabha, Homi. “The Other Question: Stereotype and Colonial Discourse.” In Jessica Evans and Stuart Hall, *Visual Culture: the reader*. London: SAGE, 1999.

Film: *Birth of a Nation* (directed by D.W. Griffiths, 1932).

Week Five Passing Bodies **February 9 & 11**

The term “passing” refers to the situation when a person aims to achieve a preferred identity status that might otherwise be betrayed by this person’s markings of difference to a norm. It usually aims at fitting into social structures provided by dominant, mainstream culture. Forms of passing are often about the body: how one walks, speaks, dresses, does one’s hair or accounts for one’s bodily attributes. Sometimes we might need to pass in order to avoid violence or gain rights. However, the idea of passing also implies that bodies (and by extension, identities) are “performed” rather than natural. This week we look at passing, performing and resisting stereotypes of identity through intersections of ethnicity, class, sexuality and sex/gender.

Reading:

Davis, Kathy. “Surgical passing: Why Michael Jackson’s nose makes “us” uneasy.” In *Dubious Equalities and embodied differences: cultural studies on cosmetic surgery*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003.

Larsen, Nella. Excerpts from *Passing*.

Chinn, Sarah E. "Fixing identity: reading skin, seeing race." In *Technology and the history of American racism: A Cultural History of the Body as Evidence*. London: Continuum, 2000: 53—92.

PART TWO: DESIRING BODIES

Week Six "Proper sex": gender and heteronormativity February 16 & 18

In this first week on representations of sexual and desiring bodies, we ask what it means to have "proper sex". We also examine what it means to have "improper" sex. Is the boundary between proper and improper a question of what is natural or normal, or is it socially defined? Is the boundary between proper and improper set in stone or does it change over time? How does it change for different genders? How have representations of sexuality changed over the last twenty years? In the reading for this week, Gayle Rubin argues that different sexual practices have hierarchical values in Western society, what she calls a "sexual value system": private, monogamous, heterosexual sex that reproduces gender norms is valued while other forms of sexual practices are subject to oppressive laws and prohibitions. We also examine how discourses of sexuality are inflected by race/ethnicity, and vice versa.

Essential reading:

Rubin, Gayle. "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality." In Carol Vance (ed), *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*. Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984: 267—319.

Hammonds, Evelyn. "Toward A Genealogy of Black Female Sexuality: The Problematic of Silence." In *Feminist Theory and the Body: A Reader*, 93—104.

Week Seven Pornography and representation February 23 & 25

Pornography, or the representation of sexuality on film for the explicit purpose of arousal, has a long history of debates surrounding it, both within feminism and in society as a whole. Arguing that pornographic images automatically demean women, some critics claim that *watching* representations of sexual violence lead to *perpetrating* sexual violence. Others claim that watchers of porn are liberal subjects who can choose not to subscribe to the attitudes present in porn; additionally, pro-porn feminists argue that women involved in making porn are autonomous subjects whose choice renders pornographic production morally acceptable. These debates don't tell us much about the structure and meaning of pornographic representations, however. Thus, this week we examine how porn works. How does it represent gendered and sexual bodies?

Reading:

Kipnis, Laura. "Clothes make the man," in *Bound and gagged: pornography and the politics of fantasy in America*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2004.

Anne McClintock, "Gonad the Barbarian and the Venus Flytrap: Portraying the male and

female orgasm.” In Lynne Segal and Mary McIntosh (eds), *Sex exposed: sexuality and the pornography debate*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 111—131.

Film: *The Girlfriend Experience* (directed by Steven Soderbergh, 2009).

Week 8 Bodies and Pleasures, Bodies Without Organs: BDSM
March 2 & 4
Mid-term papers due March 1

When most people think of “sex”, they think of something quite specific: a man and a woman, probably engaged in genital intercourse, possibly for the purpose of reproduction. These are the stereotypical representations of sexual bodies. However, if we accept Gayle Rubin’s argument that sexual practices are as diverse as they are socially constructed, we have to rethink our understanding of sexual representations accordingly. This week we look at BDSM (bondage/discipline/sadism/masochism) as an example of a subculture that represents the sexual body not in terms of reproduction but that theorizes the body’s surfaces as having the capacity for other kinds of pleasure.

Reading:

Halperin, David. Excerpts from *Saint Foucault: A Gay Hagiography*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995. Read pages 85—99.

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, “How Do You Make Yourself A Body Without Organs?” In *A Thousand Plateaus (Milles Plateaux): Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987, 149—166.

Film in class: *SICK: The Life and Death of Bob Flanagan, Supermasochist* (directed by Kirby Dick, 1997).

PART THREE: MODIFIED BODIES

Week 9 Making the body beautiful: cosmetic surgery
March 9 & 11

What are the ways in which we can modify our bodies? How are those modifications represented? Alongside the cyborg, the cosmetically “beautified” body is an extremely influential and anxiety-provoking representation of technologically modified corporeality. Feminist writers on the body have variously argued against cosmetic surgery because it reproduces an impossible ideal of (mostly feminine) beauty and argued that women who alter their bodies cosmetically feel empowered through the creation of new bodies and identities. But what is the ideal of feminine beauty at work in the cosmetic surgery industry? Is it always the same, or does it change according to geography or cultural context?

Reading:

Bordo, Susan. “Material girl?: The effacements of postmodern culture.” In *The gender/sexuality reader: culture, history, political economy*. New York: Routledge, 1997:

335—360.

Davis, Kathy. "My Body Is My Art: Cosmetic Surgery as Feminist Utopia", in *Feminist theory and the Body: A Reader*, 454—455.

Balsamo, Anne. "Forms of Technological Embodiment: Reading the Body in Contemporary Culture." In *Feminist Theory and the Body: A Reader*, 278—289.

SPRING BREAK: March 13—March 21

Week 10 Trans bodies looking/looking at trans bodies March 23 & 25

Trans people often modify their bodies through surgery and hormone therapy, or by changing the way they move, speak or dress. No matter how a trans individual chooses to modify their body, however, the body's capacity to represent itself differently is central to transgender existence. Medicalized narratives about transsexuality frame it as an experience of being "born in the wrong body". But if this is so, what is the "right body"? How do transgender representations theorize the body's capacity for transformation? How do mainstream media (film; television; popular culture) represent transgender bodies, and how is this different from representations that issue from trans people themselves? What are the politics of transgender representation?

Reading:

Jay Prosser, "A Skin of One's Own: Towards A Theory Of Transsexual Embodiment." In *Second Skins: the body narratives of transsexuality*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999.

Judith Halberstam, "The Transgender Look." In *In A Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*. New York: NYU Press, 2005.

Week 11 Body modification March 30 & April 1

In this final week on modified bodies, we look at the practices most often recognized as "body modification": tattooing, piercing, cutting and other extreme forms of altering the skin and flesh. We look at body modification as part of a "subculture", but also as something mainstream that many of us engage in during our lives: piercing our ears, for example, or getting a tattoo. We examine how tattooing and piercing work as practices of consumption: of "other" cultures or traditional cultural rituals. We also look at the differences between forms of body modification that are associated with creativity and those are associated with depression or mental illness, such as self-harm. What differentiates one from the other?

Victoria Pitts, "Body Modification, Self Mutilation and Agency in Media Accounts of a Subculture." In Mike Featherstone (ed), *Body Modification*: 291—304.

Christian Klesse, "Modern Primitivism: Non-Mainstream Body Modification and Racialized Representation." In Mike Featherstone (ed), *Body Modification*: 15—38.

NORMALIZED BODIES

Week 12 **Disability and Representation** April 6 & 8

In “The Mountain,” Eli Clare demolishes the myth of the supercrip: someone with a disability who “overcomes” it, often through a superhuman feat, in the process becoming more valued by mainstream society than those who do not “achieve” or “overcome”. In the process of questioning this myth, Clare poses important questions about the representation of disabled bodies that we take up this week. How are disabled bodies differentiated from “normal” bodies? What does “normal” mean, body-wise? What effects does being labeled as disabled have on an individual’s life, choices and desires? What bodies and corporeal capacities are highly valued in the world we live in, and what bodies are seen as weak, freakish or strange?

Reading:

Eli Clare, “The Mountain,” *Exile and Pride: Disability, Queerness and Liberation* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1999: 1—13.

Davis, Lennard. “Visualizing the Disabled Body” in *The body: a reader*.

Flannery O’Connor, “Good Country People,” in Carol C. Donley and Sheryl Buckley (eds), *The Tyranny of the Normal*: 307—326.

Week 13 **Reclaiming Freakdom** April 13 & 15

The word “freak” has many meanings. Historically, the word “freak” comes from the circus, where people with “abnormal” bodies were paid (or not) to display their bodies in sideshows meant to titillate and fascinate the “public”. This week, we explore the relationship between this history of circus freak shows, and self-identification as a freak. Is it possible to reclaim the word “freak”? What might that involve?

Reading:

Fiedler, Leslie. “From Freaks: Myths and Images of the Secret Self.” In Carol C. Donley and Sheryl Buckley (eds), *The Tyranny of the Normal: An Anthology*: 11—26.

Clare, Eli. “Freaks and Queers” in *Exile and Pride: Disability, Queerness and Liberation* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1999: 67—103.

Film: *Freaks* (directed by Tod Browning, 1932).

Week 14 **Pathologizing and Reclaiming Fatness** April 20 & 22

In the final week on bodies and the concept of normality, we look at weight and fatness. Being fat is considered by many to be a choice, and to reflect moral degradation or low self-esteem. Obesity is considered to be one of the key signs of living an “unhealthy” life: millions of books tell us how to lose weight. How are fat bodies represented in culture?

But who gets to decide what a normal or healthy body looks like? And how do people who reclaim the label 'fat' resist the pathologization of their body shape or size?

Reading:

Samantha Murray, "The 'Normal' and the 'Pathological': Obesity and the 'Diseased' Fat Body." In *The 'Fat' Female Body*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008: 44—69.
Marilyn Wann, *Fat!So?*

**Week 15 Body of Knowledge Project Presentations and Exam Revision
April 27 and 29**

Week 16 Final due Tuesday May 4