

## Modified Bodies

**Office:** A large, sunny studio with lots of couches and coffee tables and a massage table.

**Class Meetings:** M/W from 9:30 to 11 am

**Office Hours:** T/Th mornings 9-11, F afternoon “walking conferences” (meaning we go on a walk in the park and talk about it).

### **Course Description:**

This course will employ a critical, sociological lens to examine several common forms of modifications to the human body. Bodies are the material point of connection between our inner selves and the world. Our bodies are the covers encasing our own personal narrative and they are the text, itself. Most of us automatically read and project assumptions of others’ histories and lives by reading bodies and corporal modes of self-expression. We also self-identify, express and celebrate our bodies by undergoing electing certain intentional modifications. In this course, we will learn to read the human body, in particular, those bodies which have sustained some form of modification, as texts that can tell us about our social histories and present realities.

We will analyze the (intentionally broad) term, “modified”. As a course that promotes consciousness of our embodiment, we will explore what it means to *be embodied beings intellectually* studying bodies. We will examine specific contemporary forms of bodily modifications, such as cosmetic surgery, eating disorders, body-building, “reconstructive” genital surgeries, tattooing, and piercing. We will deconstruct concepts of choice, freedom, right, and agency. We will explore modes of self-expression and self- and group-identification. We will explore some historical oppressions and restrictions bodies have endured, and manifestations of body oppression in our contemporary, globalizing world. We will explore fields of critical theory that employ strategic essentialism to make our intersectional framework manageable, particularly *feminist* theory. Recognizing our own investment in our communities and world, we will explore methods of transcending our theoretical context and cognitive processes to deploy our learning in our real and embodied, lives.

### **Course Objectives:**

- To analyze themes in body modifications as indicative (or symptomatic) of larger (often covert) social attitudes, histories and practices: to view the human body as a political text for the purpose of sociological investigation
- To develop the reasoning skills to critically read, deconstruct, and apply popular culture messages, rhetoric, and academic, theoretical, and scholarly thought
- To develop an intersectional, transnational, historical and self-reflexive paradigm for all our critical thought
- To develop a personal concept of praxis
- To endeavor to interact with our world conscious of our and others’ embodiment
- To recognize the limitations of classroom, theoretical learning and to respond to this by connecting to our course materials through our real-world experiences (and vice versa).

**Dis/Different Ability Statement:** The Disability and Learning Services Office strives to facilitate reasonable accommodations for those students with a qualifying disability or temporary medical condition and to provide academic assistance on an individual basis to any undergraduate or graduate student who requests it. Any student who requires these accommodations should contact the Disability and Learning Services Office directly at 503-370-6471. If there are any accommodations that you foresee being necessary for any of the class assignments, we will do our utmost to provide them upon your request. Assignments may be changed or modified with instructor’s approval to accommodate student’s dis/different abilities.

**Academic Integrity:** Cite your sources. Cheating, deception, and fraud have serious consequences. Be fair to the course and facilitator, your peers, and yourself. Learn as much as

you can—this is your course and your money. You will get out of this course what you put into it. The most important “end product” you will obtain in this course is a deepened investment in your own learning process.

***Challenging yourself, your peers, and the facilitator: Evaluations***

- *Challenging Yourself:* You will *evaluate yourself* on your attendance, your preparedness, your engagement, and how much you have challenged yourself in this course in mid- and end-of-semester evaluations. If your self-grading is *not* consistent with my perceptions, I will invite you to have a conversation with me about how we might collaborate to better enable you to engage in the course or where my perceptions are failing to recognize your effort and investment.
- *Challenging Your Peers:* Mutual accountability is important for this course to function because it relies upon discussion and there will be several group assignments. At two

- Weekly reading. Come prepared with questions or concepts from the reading you wish to discuss.
- Weekly WISE Posting:
  - Observations of Embodiment OR
  - Media Watch

Explanation: as we start to read human bodies as political texts, we will observe media, messages, and our own observation with a critical lens informed by course material. Please write about a paragraph about an observation that called to mind a concept of our course, or critique an advertisement or media story employing our course material.
- Presence on day of presentation:
  - Emergencies excluded, your presentation date is fixed. You must attend class and present on the date you are scheduled. Please notify me of foreseeable conflicts in advance.

***Assignment Punctuality:***

All assignments will be due at 9 o'clock p.m. on Friday. Please communicate with me if you will need more time to complete an assignment. After 9 pm on Friday, the assignment will lost 15 points for every day it is late.

***Assignments:***

One semester-long research study with a paper and presentation; one fiction-text critique and creative presentation; one collaborative applied learning activity (activism) and short write-up; one final paper (Autobiography of Embodiment).

**1. Research Study/Ethnography: Paper and Presentations**

Choose an area of modified embodiment that you could plausibly encounter in your daily life (i.e.

### **3. Applied learning activity (activism) and write-up: Collaborative Activity**

Designed to be an exercise in “praxis” learning, you may choose an applied learning activity to perform any time throughout the semester. You must submit a minimum 1-pg write-up of your applied action, in which you must indicate at least 1 “inspiring source” from our course material—and tell me why it was inspiring to you.

You are welcome to choose from these ideas, use them as guidelines, or reject them altogether:

1. Write Letter to the Editor/Editorial (of course-related content)
2. Hold a campus conversation or program
3. Coordinate a lecture or film screening
4. Anything more ambitious than a just purchasing choice and less ambitious than illegal activity (at least, I can't know about it—so you can't write it up to get credit).

### **2. Final Paper: Autobiography of Embodiment**

You will write a Biography of Your Body to include your body's history and the modifications it/you has sustained/chosen. You are invited to deeply explore your relationship to your body (and how your body-self relationship has evolved over time). You must apply at least 3 external sources in your analysis of your body's history. You may choose sources from the course or find sources that are relevant to the content of your individual paper.

(Note: “External sources”, in this case, can be defined flexibly. For example, you may cite a film or advertisement that holds significance in your personal history of embodiment. Come talk to me if you have doubts about the validity of a source, i.e. if it is a personal correspondence, a conversation you once had, etc.) You will be welcome to share your paper and your experience writing it with the class at our end-of-semester party.

#### ***Score Criteria:***

1. Attendance and engagement: 280 points possible
2. Assignments:
  - Research Study: 150 points possible
  - Fiction-text critique and presentation: 50 points possible





*Style and Status: Selling Beauty to African American Women, 1920-1975.* By Susanna Walker. U Press of Kentucky, 2007.

"Why Hair is Political" (Ch 1), "Beauty Services Offered from Head to Toe: Promoting Beauty to African American Women in the 1940s, 1950s" (P. 115), "All Hair is Good Hair: Integrating Beauty in the 1960s and 1970s." (p. 143).

*Idea for further investigation: sun tanning, history of "tan aesthetic", wealth and class*

### **UNIT III: Sized and Shaped Bodies**

- **Week 5 & 6: Weight**

\*Selections from Brumberg, Joan Jacobs. *The Body Project: an intimate history of American girls.* Random House Inc., New York, 1997

- *Think about fashions and trends in female body shape from corseting to dieting and how fashion has dictated the shapes of women's bodies...*

\*Women and Size: Sociologists for Women in Society Fact Sheet by Samantha Kwan and Jennifer Fackler, University of Houston, April 2008.

From *Many Mirrors: Body Image and Social Relations*. Edited by Nicole Sault, Rutgers U Press, New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1994.

\*"The Cultural Anatomy of Co



*Sisterhood: Disputing U.S. Polemics* edited by Stanlie M. James and Claire C. Robertson,



**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES AND READING...you may check these out as you look for more sources for your research and assignments...**

The Politics of Women's Bodies: Sexuality, Appearance, and Behavior. Edited by Rose Weitz. Oxford U Press, NY, 1998.

p 82. Menarche and the (Hetero)sexuality of the Female Body (Janet Lee)

p 100: Young Women and their Dream Lovers: Sexuality in Adolescent Fiction (Linda K Christian-Smith)

Body/embodyment: symbolic interaction and sociology of the body. edited by Dennis Waskul and Phillip Vannini. Aldershot, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006.

The addict's body: embodiment, drug use, and representation (Richard Huggins)

Body/embodyment: symbolic interaction and sociology of the body. edited by Dennis Waskul and Phillip Vannini. Aldershot, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006.

Claiming the bodies of exotic dancers: the problematic discourse of commodification. Carol Rambo, Sara Renée Presley, Don Mynatt)

more on cosmetic foot surgery: <http://www.geocities.com/jjleganeur/cossurg.html>

The pregnant/birthing body: negotiations of personal autonomy by Rachel Westfall

Manno, Karen. Service: four one0act plays, N: S. French, 2000

The spiritual pursuit of cosmetic surgery—Domestic blitz—Over-eating, and the disappearing nanny syndrome—With a side of Sabotage.

Ussher, Jane, ed. *Body Talk: The Material and Discursive Regulation of Sexuality, madness and Reproduction*. NY: Routledge, 1997. Wilson and Laennec, ed. *Bodily Discursions: Gender, Representations, Technologies*.

Susan Bordo: "Can a Woman Harass A Man? Toward a Cultural Understanding of Bodies and Power." *Philosophy Today* 41 (Spring 1997): 51-66.

Rutgers U Press, New Brunswick, New Jersey Many Mirrors: Body Image and Social Relations. Edited by Nicole Sault:

Introduction: The Human Mirror by Nicole Sault

Grosz, Elizabeth. *Space, Time and Perversion. Essays on the Politics of Bodies*. Routledge, New York; and Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1995.

Grosz, Elizabeth. *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*. Indiana Univ. Press, 1994.

The Politics of Women's Bodies: Sexuality, Appearance, and Behavior. Edited by Rose Weitz. Oxford U Press, NY, 1998.

112: Selling Hot Pussy" Representations of Black Female Sexuality in the Cultural Marketplace (bell hooks)

"Fat Talk: What Girls and their Parents Say about Dieting" by Mimi Nichter

Denfeld, Rene. *Kill the Body the Head Will Fall: A Closer Look at Women, Violence and Aggression*. Vintage, 1997.

*Body Betrayed: A Deeper Understanding of Women, Eating Disorders, and Treatment*

Author: Kathryn J. Zerbe, M.D.

Heywood, Leslie. *Dedication to Hunger: The Anorexic Aesthetic in Modern Culture*. California, 1996.

Lowe, Maria R. *Women of Steel: Female Body Builders and the Struggle for Self-Definition*. New York University Press, 1998.

Ryan, Joan. *Little Girls in Pretty Boxes: The Making and Breaking of Elite Gymnasts and Figure Skaters*. Doubleday, 1995.

Scraton, Sheila. *Shaping Up to Womanhood: Gender and Girls' Physical Education*. Open University Press, 1992.

Selections from: Griffin, Pat. *Strong Women, Deep Closets: Lesbians and Homophobia in Sport*. Champaign IL: Human Kinetics. 1998.

from *Feminist Theory Reader* edited by Wendy K Kolar and Frances Bartkowski.

Making Gender Visible in the Pursuit of Nature's Secrets (1993), Evelyn Fox Keller (515)

Thone, Ruth Raymond. *Fat -- A Fate Worse Than Death? Women, Weight and Appearance*. Haworth Press, 1997.