

# Sociology of the Body

Sociology 444-001 (U/G) Online  
Fall 2020

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## About the Course

Why do we divide bodies into two and only two sexed categories, “male” and “female”? Should the pronounced bump of a “Jewish nose” be deemed a “malformation” by plastic surgeons? Why do we call some people “black” when their skin is lighter than that of many people called “white”? Are some physical statuses disabling in some cultures and not in others? When did women develop a “bikini area”? Can my body not be “me”?

In this course we will address the body from a sociological perspective, with some brief excursions into philosophy, as we try to address questions like these. We will look at the body, not as a presocial physical fact, but as produced through an interaction between biology and social forces, and perceived through the lens of culture. We will consider the relationship of the mind and the body from a variety of perspectives. We will examine the link between the body and personal identity, focusing on disability, race/ethnicity, and sex/gender, and considering how identity is enacted through bodily practices and manipulations such as hair pressing, exercise, and plastic surgery. We will also discuss the intensive focus on bodily projects in American society, and the implications of this bodily preoccupation for various social groups.

### **Course Texts**

This is an advanced-level, reading intensive course. There are four required books, listed below. I have tried to keep costs low in selecting course books. All of the books can be purchased from Amazon or your favorite bookseller, and one is available via free ebook access from the Library. I have listed the prices for purchasing the books in digital form from Amazon Kindle, but you can often get a lower price purchasing them as used physical books from the seller of your choice. In addition to these books, there will be additional articles and book excerpts available to you without charge on the course Canvas site.

Joan Jacobs Brumberg, *The Body Project: An Intimate History of American Girls* (Amazon Kindle, \$12)

Katrina Karkazis, *Fixing Sex: Intersex, Medical Authority, and Lived Experience* (Amazon Kindle, \$16)

Oliver Sacks, *Seeing Voices* (Amazon Kindle, \$15)

Julia Serano, *Whipping Girl* (online access via the UWM library)

The first book we will be reading is Brumberg's *The Body Project*. The cheapest option available to you is to purchase a used copy of the paperback version, but that requires early action in order to get the book on time. Digital access is only \$12, however, from Amazon.com. (You can read it online or download the Kindle app to access your copy.)

### **Course Philosophy and Assignments**

This course employs a collaborative learning model, in which you will learn from me, but we will also all learn from one another. Not only do I look upon the course as a collaboration between myself and you as students, I also hope to assist you in learning to rely upon one another as partners in learning.

Achieving a seminar-like experience in a class of 30 people meeting online is a challenge! A synchronous teleconference format is impracticable. Inevitably, some students will have access issues, others will forget to mute, there will be problems setting up small group in-class

discussions, a few students will wind up dominating discussions, and everyone will become frustrated.

Instead, we will achieve the high interactivity of the in-person version of this class through the intensive use of interactive exercises using the Canvas discussion board feature. We will do a two-part exercise for each unit that we cover, with students writing an initial post, and then a response post to a classmate. This will ensure that each student will have an equal ability to participate, share their ideas, and get feedback from others, as students apply course ideas creatively to real-world and hypothetical situations.

Lectures will be presented as enhanced PowerPoints.

There will be no quizzes or exams in the class. Students will demonstrate their understanding of course materials via the interactive exercises. Both the initial Part A post and the Part B response to a classmate will need to contain at least 2 citations to course materials (readings or lectures) for undergraduate students. Graduate student posts require at least 3 citations per post. Students will also complete a term paper, applying ideas from the class to the analysis of a cultural artifact: an item (or items) of consumer goods.

There will be a total of 24 exercises, two per standard week of class. This means a total of 48 posts, with four assigned per week. That's a substantial number of posts and a fairly intensive schedule—so I will allow students to skip a third of them. You may miss a total of 16 posts. You do not need to ask permission or give an excuse in order to employ these automatically-excused exercise skips. You are only required to make 32 out of 48 total posts. This allows you to skip 8 complete exercises. Alternatively, you can do the Part A initial post but skip the Part B reply post in a given exercise (or vice versa). This amount of flexibility should protect everyone when the inevitable bumps in the road of life arrive, which I know is important in a semester when the coronavirus pandemic presents multiple challenges.

You are welcome to do more than the 32 required total posts if you wish! You can get extra credit up to the maximum grade of 240 points.

This semester we have a part-time TA, Adam Loesch. Adam will grade 25% of the exercises: number 3, 7, 11, 15, 19 and 23.

Our term paper assignment involves analyzing a product (or bounded product category) related to the body. The page requirement for undergraduate students is 7-10 pages, and for grad students 10-15 pages. Undergraduates must cite at least 3 course readings and at least 3 course lectures. Graduate students must cite 4 readings, 4 lectures, and 6 outside sources. Students will be assigned an editing partner and will exchange drafts for a structured edit. The undergraduate papers will be graded by the TA and graduate papers by the professor.

I will seek to foster a sense of academic community in which you are all learning partners in and ask you to think of one another in this light. Another way I will encourage you to become

learning partners is by having you assist one another in editing and improving course papers. It is possible that this may be a novel experience for you, and may make you feel uncomfortable or vulnerable at first. Rest assured that you will learn a lot from the experience, and may even forge long-lasting academic partnerships.

In relating to the body, this course will cover materials that will at times necessarily feel personal. Please be respectful of this in yourself and others—but do always work to connect any personal feelings you have about the materials to the academic theories raised, as we are engaged in an intellectual rather than therapeutic exercise. Be aware that the materials we will cover involve social inequality related to race and color, sex and gender, body size, disability, beauty standards, eugenics, and other topics that may at times feel challenging to consider. Engaging with challenging materials can lead to great intellectual and personal rewards, but is more demanding than studying matters that you can approach with a detached lack of personal investment. If you find engaging with a particular topic is causing you serious distress, please exercise good self-care and at least take a break. If you find after that break that you still cannot engage with the topic without harm to your mental health, select that unit to be one that you skip.

### **Course Grading**

Your course grade will be calculated as follows:

The maximum discussion exercise grade is 32 posts x 6 points = 192 points

The paper is worth a total of 48 points

The total maximum number of points is  $192 + 48 = 240$  points

- A is 94-100% (226 points and up)
- A- is 90-93% (216-225 points)
- B+ is 87-89% (209-215 points)
- B is 83-86% (199-208 points)
- A- is 80-82% (192-198 points)
- C+ is 77-79% (185-191 points)
- C is 73-76% (175-184 points)
- B- is 70-72% (168-174 points)
- D+ is 67-69% (160-167 points)
- D is 63-66% (151-159 points)
- D- is 60-62% (144-150 points)
- Under 60% (under 150 points)

I have structured this course to give few opportunities for academic misconduct—but should plagiarism or other academic misconduct arise, be forewarned that it will be taken very seriously and will result in grade penalties up to and including failure of the course. Copying and

pasting text from any source, including web content of any kind, constitutes plagiarism unless a citation is included.

### **Credit Hours**

Sociology of the Body is a 3 credit course. This means that, on average, you will spend:

- 70 hours doing course readings
- 50 hours working on the 48 interactive discussion posts
- 35 hours working on the final project

### **Readings and Assignments**

#### **Introduction**

2 September:

Read “Introduction to the Course” lecture, the Plato & Descartes handout, the syllabus, and discussion guidelines.

3 September:

Complete introductory exercise 1A.

4 September:

Complete exercise 1B.  
Begin readings due Monday.

#### **Body Projects, Body Parts and Bodily History**

7 September:

Read Brumberg, Introduction and Chapter 3.  
Read On Skin lecture.  
Complete Exercise 2A [Reflect on the ideal of “good skin.”]

8 September:

Complete Exercise 2B.

10 September:

Read Brumberg, Chapters 1 and 2.  
Read the Commercialized Menstruation lecture.  
Complete Exercise 3A [Reflect on the cultural meaning of menstruation.]

- Graded by TA Adam

11 September:

Complete Exercise 3B.

14 September:

Read Brumberg Chapter 4, and examine the book illustrations.

Read the Body Projects lecture.

Complete Exercise 4A. [Reflect on bodily projects.]

15 September:

Complete Exercise 4B.

17 September:

Read scanned selections from Marilyn Yalom, *A History of the Breast*.

Read The Political Breast lecture.

Complete Exercise 5A [Reflect on the political meaning of the breast].

18 September:

Complete Exercise 5B.

21 September:

Read scanned selections from Linda Blum, *At the Breast*, and from Bernice Hausman, *Mother's Milk*.

Read Breastfeeding Imagined lecture.

Complete Exercise 6A [Reflect on contemporary ideologies of breastfeeding.]

22 September:

Complete Exercise 6B.

### **Physical Deviance: Abilities and Appearances**

24 September:

Read scan of Chapter 6 from Peter Freund and Meredith McGuire, *Health, Illness and the Social Body*, and Thomas DeGloma, chapter on the PTSD diagnosis.

Read The Sick Role lecture.

Complete Exercise 7A [Reflect on the "sick role" and the social nature of health and illness.]

- Graded by TA Adam

25 September:

Complete Exercise 7B

28 September:

Read scanned selections from Temple Grandin, *Thinking in Pictures and Other Reports from My Life with Autism* and O'Dell et al.'s "Critical Autism Studies."

Read The Embodied Roots of the Mind lecture.  
Complete Exercise 8A [Reflect on the mind and the body.]

29 September:

Complete Exercise 8B.

1 October:

Read pages 28-90 in Sacks.

Read the Embodied Politics lecture.

Complete Exercise 9A [Reflect on whether deafness is inherently disabling.]

2 October:

Complete Exercise 9B.

5 October:

Read scanned selections from Rebecca Mallett and Katherine Runswick-Cole, *Approaching Disability*, and Eli Clare, *Brilliant Imperfection: Grappling with Cure*.

Read Disability Rights lecture.

Complete Exercise 10A [Reflect on the social nature of disability.]

(Final paper to be discussed.)

6 October:

Complete Exercise 10B

8 October:

Read Wegenstein ch. 2 (and look at the pictures in ch. 1).

Read Beauty, Ugliness, Good and Evil lecture.

Complete Exercise 11A [Reflect on the meanings of beauty, ugliness, and beautification.]

- Graded by TA Adam

9 October:

Complete Exercise 11B

12 October:

Read Wegenstein pp. 109-136 and scanned excerpt from Heather Laine Talley, *Saving Face: Disfigurement and the Politics of Appearance*.

Read Plastic Surgery lecture.

Complete Exercise 12A [Reflect on why people get plastic surgery—and why doctors perform it.]

13 October:

Complete Exercise 12B

15 October:

Proposed cultural artifact to be discussed in final paper due.

16 October:

Feedback on cultural artifact choice

### **Identity and the Body: Sex and Gender, Race and Ethnicity**

19 October:

Read scanned selection from J. Eric Oliver, *Fat Politics: The Real Story Behind America's Obesity Epidemic* and Afful & Ricciardelli's "Shaping the Fat Acceptance Movement."

Read Big Fat Myths lecture

Complete Exercise 13 A [Reflect on the "meaning" of body fat.]

20 October:

Complete Exercise 13B

22 October:

Read Karkazis pp. 9-11 and Chapters 2 and 3.

Read lecture Intersex Introduced lecture

Complete Exercise 14A [Reflect on the medicalization of (inter)sex.]

23 October:

Complete Exercise 14B

26 October:

Read Karkazis Chapters 6 and 7.

Read Intersex "Management" lecture.

Complete Exercise 15A [Reflect on decisionmaking about physical difference.]

- Graded by TA Adam

27 October:

Complete Exercise 15B.

29 October:

Read Serano Chapters 1, 8 and 14.

Read Trans Bodies lecture

Complete Exercise 16A [Reflect on cis and trans gender identities, bodily sex and bias.]

30 October:

Complete Exercise 16B.

2 November:

Read scanned excerpt from C.J. Pascoe, *Dude, You're a Fag* and Miller's "Dude, Where's Your Face?"

Read Embodied Masculinity lecture

Complete Exercise 16A [Reflect on the gender policing of embodied masculinity.]

3 November:

Complete Exercise 17B

5 November:

Read scanned excerpts from my book *Professional Identity Crisis: Race, Class Gender and Success at Professional Schools*.

Read Habitus lecture

Complete Exercise 17 A [Reflect on habitus.]

6 November:

Complete Exercise 18B

9 November:

Read Gilman Chapters 2 and 3.

Read The Problematic Jewish Race lecture

Complete Exercise 18A [Reflect on ideas of the Jewish mind and body.]

- Graded by TA Adam

10 November:

Complete Exercise 19B

12 November:

Read Gilman Chapters 7 and 8.

Read Curing the Jew 2 lecture

Complete Exercise 19A [Reflect on "curing" the Jewish body and mind.]

13 November:

Complete Exercise 20B

16 November:

Read scanned selections by Hunter, and Ingrid Banks on African American history, the body, and hair.

Read Embodied American Racial History lecture

Complete Exercise 20A [Reflect on the origins and manifestations of embodied racism.]

17 November:

Complete Exercise 20B

19 November:

Read scanned selections by Keith and Taunya Lovell Banks on skin color, discrimination, and self-esteem.

Read Colorism lecture

Complete Exercise 21A [Reflect on colorism.]

20 November:

Complete Exercise 21 B

23 November:

Read scanned excerpts from Rebecca Chiyoko King-O'Riain, *Pure Beauty: Judging Race in Japanese American Beauty Pageants*.

Read Racialized Beauty lecture

Complete Exercise 22A [Reflect on "doing race."]

24 November:

Complete Exercise 22B

25-27 November:

**Thanksgiving break**

(A good time to work on your paper draft. . .)

### **Theoretical Summation**

30 November:

Read Shilling Chapters 1 and 4. Reflect on the body, sociology, and social construction.

Read Theoretical Summation 1 lecture

Complete Exercise 23A

- Graded by TA Adam

1 December:

Complete Exercise 23B

3 December:

Read Shilling Chapter 5. Reflect on the body and inequality.

Read Theoretical Summation 2 lecture

Complete Exercise 24A

4 December:

Complete Exercise 24B

7 December:

Draft paper due for partner to edit.

8 December:

Work on editing partner's draft.

10 December:

Edits to partner's draft paper due.

11 December:

Incorporate edits and finalize your paper.

14 December:

Final paper due

#### UNIVERSITY AND SOCIOLOGY DEPARTMENT POLICIES

The Secretary of the University maintains a web page that contains university policies that affect the instructor and the students in this course, as well as essential information specific to conduct of the course. The link to that page is:

[http://www4.uwm.edu/secu/news\\_events/upload/Syllabus-Links.pdf](http://www4.uwm.edu/secu/news_events/upload/Syllabus-Links.pdf)

**Accommodations for Students with Disabilities.** In the pursuit of equal access and in compliance with state and federal laws, the University is required to provide accommodations to students with documented disabilities. It is expected that a statement be placed on your syllabus informing students to contact you to arrange needed accommodations. A sample syllabus statement can be found here: <https://uwm.edu/arc/wpcontent/uploads/sites/97/2015/08/Recommended-Syllabus-Statement.pdf>.

**Religious Observances.** Policies regarding accommodations for absences due to religious observance are found at the following: <http://www4.uwm.edu/secu/docs/other/S1.5.htm>

**Students called to active Military Duty.** Accommodations for absences due to call-up of reserves to active military duty are found at the following: <https://uwm.edu/active-duty-military/>

**Incompletes.** You may be given an incomplete if you have carried a course successfully until near the end of the semester but, because of illness or other unusual and substantiated cause beyond your control, have been unable to take or complete the final examination or to complete some limited amount of course work. An incomplete is not given unless you prove to the instructor that you were prevented from completing the course for just cause as indicated above. The conditions for awarding an incomplete to graduate and undergraduate students can be found at the following: [https://www4.uwm.edu/secu/docs/other/S\\_31\\_INCOMPLETE\\_GRADES.pdf](https://www4.uwm.edu/secu/docs/other/S_31_INCOMPLETE_GRADES.pdf)

**Discriminatory Conduct** (such as sexual harassment). Discriminatory conduct will not be tolerated by the University. It poisons the work and learning environment of the University and threatens the careers, educational experience and well-being of students, faculty and staff. Policies regarding discriminatory conduct can be found at: [https://www4.uwm.edu/secu/docs/other/S\\_47\\_Discrimina\\_duct\\_Policy.pdf](https://www4.uwm.edu/secu/docs/other/S_47_Discrimina_duct_Policy.pdf)

**Academic Misconduct.** Students are responsible for the honest completion and representation of their work, for the appropriate citation of sources, and for respect of others' academic endeavors. Policies for addressing students cheating on exams or plagiarism can be found at the following:

<https://uwm.edu/academicaffairs/facultystaff/policies/academic-misconduct/>

**Complaint Procedures.** Students may direct complaints to the Sociology Department Chair or the Associate Dean for Social Sciences in the College of Letters & Sciences. If the complaint allegedly violates a specific university policy, it may be directed to the Sociology Department Chair, the Associate Dean for Social Sciences in the College of Letters & Sciences, or to the appropriate university office responsible for enforcing the policy. Policies may be found at:

[https://www4.uwm.edu/secu/docs/other/S\\_47\\_Discrimina\\_duct\\_Policy.pdf](https://www4.uwm.edu/secu/docs/other/S_47_Discrimina_duct_Policy.pdf)

**Grade Appeal Procedures.** A student may appeal a grade on the grounds that it is based on a capricious or arbitrary decision of the course instructor. Such an appeal shall follow the established procedures adopted by the department, college, or school in which the course resides or in the case of graduate students, the Graduate School. These procedures are available in writing from the sociology department chairperson or the Academic Dean of the College of Letters & Science. Procedures for undergraduate student grade appeal can be found at:

<https://uwm.edu/letters-science/advising/answers-forms/policies/appeal-procedure-for-grades>

Procedures for graduate student grade appeal can be found at

<https://uwm.edu/graduateschool/appealing-academic-decisions/>

**Final Examination Policy.** Policies regarding final examinations can be found at the following:

<http://www4.uwm.edu/secu/docs/other/S22.htm>

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