Sociology 190: Popular Culture: Bodies as Power, Oppression, and Resistance

Fall 2022

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Sign-up Office Hours: Mondays 4:00-5:00pm
Tuesdays and Thursdays 8:30-9:30am
Sign-up: https://calendly.com/bakehorn/office-hours

CLASS MEETING  Wednesdays 2:00pm-3:59pm
420 Social Sciences Building

Course Description

This course will explore how bodies are represented in popular culture, drawing upon theories in sociology, cultural studies, and feminist studies to make sense of these representations. A sociological perspective starts from the position that bodies, embodied experiences, and the meanings attached to bodies are socially constructed, not biologically determined. We will begin the course with an examination of the sociology of the body and feminist theoretical perspectives on the body.

Bodies are important as signifiers of identity and thus are sites of power, oppression, and resistance. We will be attending to differences in bodies: gender, gender presentation, ethnicity, race, class, age, ability, and size. What are the different meanings attached to different bodies, to different body parts?

We will also address the ways in which the body is a site of social control, coming under the purview of authorities like the church, medical practitioners, psychiatrists, media corporations, and the state. What types of bodies experience social control? What acts are restricted and which are permitted?
The ways in which bodies can be manipulated, molded, transformed, and modified will also be discussed. What types of value are placed on these modifications? How do we define healthy and unhealthy? Where is the line between exercise and dieting and a disorder, for instance? Beautification and mutilation? Medical necessity and elective enhancement?

We will analyze popular cultural representations from a range of genres that demonstrate oppression and domination of certain groups, as well as exploring examples of resistance.

This class will be challenging on a number of levels:
- You will be expected to keep up with a number of readings for each class meeting.
- These readings will be challenging not only in terms of their length and number, but also in terms of the subject matter presented and the complex theories proposed.
- We will be challenging common sense, taken-for-granted notions of bodies.
- We will be speaking frankly about issues of race, class, gender, and sexuality. Some topics may be challenging; you may find the subject matter embarrassing or difficult to discuss. Some of these topics will be graphic, controversial, or explicit. Frank discussions and presentation of material may include things that some find offensive or that differ greatly from your own experiences, preferences, and beliefs. It is important that we are non-judgmental.

This course challenges many taken-for-granted assumptions about the social world. Keep in mind that your personal experiences may not match the general sociological insights discussed in the course. This does not negate the insights. Ask yourself why this might be the case. You may not agree with everything we read and discuss, but I expect you to have an open mind and demonstrate your knowledge of the sociological perspective. Disagreements and debates are expected and welcome in this class, however, I will not tolerate personal attacks.

Course Goals
- Introduce you to theories of the body and embodiment
- Explore how gender, sexuality, race, ability, body size, and class are represented in popular culture
- Discuss how representations of bodies challenge and uphold hegemonic norms
- Create a safe space to discuss issues related to bodies in popular culture
- Provide opportunities for your own synthesis, analysis, and presentation of course materials
- Design a research project exploring the themes of the course
Learning Outcomes
By the end of the semester you should be able to:
❖ Synthesize theories and scholarship on bodies and embodiment
❖ Lead discussions in a productive and thoughtful way
❖ Research a topic of your choosing and write a research paper
❖ Engagingly present research findings

Required Texts
All course readings are available on bCourses; there are no books you need to buy.

Classroom Safety
Students must follow county and campus regulations regarding coronavirus safety protocols. Vaccinations are required to attend in-person classes. Even if not required by campus, consider wearing a face mask that covers both your nose and mouth while indoors to help protect yourself and those most vulnerable to severe illness. These protocols are in place to ensure the safety of everyone.

Assignments
Participation
This is a seminar course which means attendance and participation are important components. Come to each class having completed the readings and ready to discuss. I will help facilitate discussion, providing context and elaboration when needed, but the primary responsibility for discussion is on you, the students. Be ready with comments, interpretations, critiques, and questions for each class period. Everyone should be actively engaged in discussion during each class.

Active engagement includes being prepared to discuss, active listening, asking and answering questions, and sometimes being quiet to allow others a chance to participate.

We will work together to establish ground rules for frank, but respectful, discussions where everyone has space and feels safe to talk.

You are also required to attend the presentations at the end of the semester so you can provide feedback on everyone’s research project. Missing more than one class will negatively affect your grade.
Reading Reflections
To assist you in preparing for discussion, you will write 6 reflections/critiques of the week’s readings—you can choose which 6 weeks you want to cover. Do not simply summarize the readings, critically engage with them. Consider the following questions (you are not required to answer all of these—they are a possible starting point):
✴ How do the readings relate to one another? Are there points of disagreement? What are the connections to previous readings?
✴ Can you apply the readings to current events?
✴ How do the readings contribute to your understanding of the popular cultural representations of the body? What is left out or left unanswered?
✴ Include in your reflection any questions that arose for you while reading

Reflections should be two pages double-spaced and are due on Tuesdays (before the session they will be discussed) at 11:59pm. I will grade reflection papers on a scale of 1-5 with a 1 representing a paper that is primarily summary with little critical engagement to a 5 representing a paper that is thorough and thoughtful and engages critically with the materials. Be sure to engage with all of the assigned readings for that week.

Discussion Facilitation
Each week 3 students will be responsible for leading discussions on that week’s topic and readings. You are expected to provide a brief overview of the readings, being sure to tie the readings to one another. Come prepared with discussion questions. You may find that a handout is useful, but this is not required. (If you do decide to use a handout, e-mail it to me ahead of time so I can distribute them).

You are also free to use any media or additional information that you feel is relevant, including slide decks. Short video or audio clips, images, memes, etc. could really liven up the discussion and provide context. Be as creative as you like!

You will need to coordinate with one another about your presentation. Be sure to start this early. You may decide to split up the readings or present all the material together.

Make sure you do not simply review or summarize the texts. While it is important to identify major themes and concepts, a section by section summary of a reading is not particularly useful and it does not lead to a very engaging presentation or discussion. Instead, identify important arguments, connections between the week’s readings and those that have come before. What questions did the readings raise for you? What do you think would generate a lively debate or discussion?
Research Paper and Presentation

Your research paper assignment is to investigate a topic we have not covered during the semester, or to go into more depth with one that we have. Choose a topic related to the body, engage in academic research on the topic, and investigate the popular cultural representations by viewing movies, watching television, readings books, etc.

You are being asked to carefully examine popular cultural representations. You will be taking a common, often taken-for-granted, popular cultural text and viewing it with a sociological lens. How are bodies being represented? What stereotypes and controlling images are reproduced or challenged? What do these representations say about gender, sexuality, race, etc.? Provide an analysis of the popular media you chose using course materials and outside research. Whenever possible, include images and links to videos in your paper to illustrate your argument.

Your paper should be 12-15 pages, double-spaced.

You will submit a topic, a literature review, and an outline. You will also need to schedule time to meet with me to discuss your paper.

You will give a 15 minute presentation of your research during the last 4 weeks of the semester. This will give you an opportunity to present your findings and theoretical framework and receive constructive feedback before turning in your final paper.

Due dates:

- **Topic:** Monday, September 19
- **Literature Review:** Monday, October 17
- **Detailed Outline:** Monday, November 28
- **Presentation:** Wednesdays, November 2—November 30 in class
- **Final Paper:** Friday, December 16

Grade Breakdown

- Participation 20%
- Reading Reflections 20%
- Facilitation of Discussion 10%
- Paper Topic 5%
- Annotated Bibliography 5%
- Paper Outline 5%
- Paper Presentation 5%
- Final Paper 30%
Course Policies

Email: Clearly indicate to which class you are referring in your emails to me. I endeavor to respond to emails within 24 hours, but this is not always possible; please be patient. Please note that I will respond to emails during normal business hours.

Names and Pronouns: You have the right to be referred to by the name you prefer and with the correct gender pronouns. Because the name listed in University records may not correspond to your preferred name, please inform me of your name (and pronunciation) and your pronouns so that I can ensure you are properly recognized and respected.

You can refer to me as Prof. Bakehorn, Dr. Bakehorn, or Jill. My pronouns are she/they.

Grading Policies

Extensions are provided for those with this accommodation from DSP.

I will accept late work, but you will receive a 5% penalty for each day the paper is late (up to 7 days past due date). Please note that bCourses rounds up to the next whole number. For example, if you submit an assignment 1.3 days (32 hours) late, the late penalty will round up to 2 days. You do not need to contact me to turn in a paper late.

Life sometimes prevents us from meeting all of our obligations. I don’t think that one missed assignment should derail a student’s academic progress. If you do not turn in one of the graded assignments, you will receive a grade of 50. This will allow you to recover from this setback rather than tanking your grade for the class and potentially impacting your GPA. Any subsequent missing assignments will receive a 0.

Assignments will be checked by TurnItIn for plagiarism. Keep in mind, this program keeps a database of previously turned in papers as well as searching the internet.
Academic Dishonesty

The University defines academic misconduct as “any action or attempted action that may result in creating an unfair academic advantage for oneself or an unfair academic advantage or disadvantage for any other member or members of the academic community” (UC Berkeley Code of Student Conduct).

Academic dishonesty includes cheating and plagiarism. Cheating is collaboration with other students on papers and exams. Plagiarism includes turning in any work that is not your own as well as improper or missing citations of others’ works. As a student of the University of California, you are bound by the Code of Academic Conduct. Any cases of cheating or plagiarism will result in a referral to The Center for Student Conduct and a failing grade for that assignment.

Plagiarism is most likely to occur because students are unaware of how to cite sources or because they feel desperate. If you get to this point in your writing, contact me ASAP rather than doing something you’ll very likely regret.

Office Hours

Please see Page 1 or this link for information about my office hours. These office hours are specifically for you. We can discuss readings, assignments, post-college plans, existential dread, how to access resources, letters of recommendation, any issues you are having—doesn’t have to be related to this class, what is bringing you joy, whatever.

If you are having any difficulties with the material or assignments for the course or if you are having any personal problems that are affecting your ability to complete assignments on time, please take advantage of office hours—I am here to help!

Remember that office hours are an important resource if for no other reason than getting to know your instructors could help you in the future when you may need letters of recommendation. You do not need to be struggling or have course-specific questions to go to office hours.

All office hours will be via Zoom.
Student Support Services

Course Accessibility
This course is intended for all UC Berkeley students, including those with mental, emotional, physical, or cognitive disabilities, illnesses, injuries, impairments, or any other condition that can negatively impact equal access to education. If, at any point in the semester, you find yourself not able to fully access the space, content, and experience of this course, you are welcome (but not required) to contact me by email or during office hours to discuss your specific needs.

I also encourage you to contact the Disabled Students’ Program. If you have a diagnosis, DSP can help you document your needs and create an accommodation plan. By making a plan through DSP, you can ensure appropriate accommodations without disclosing your condition or diagnosis to course instructors.

Student Learning Center
“The primary academic support service for students at Berkeley, the SLC helps students transition to Cal; navigate the academic terrain; create networks of resources; and achieve academic, personal and professional goals.”

Sexual Harassment and Violence Support Services
To learn more about these issues, how to support survivors, or how to file a report and receive support services, start here: Survivor Support. Please note that I am not a confidential advocate; I am a mandated reporter. You can speak to a Confidential Care Advocate at the Path to Care Center.

Economic, Food, and Housing Support
If you are in need of economic, food, or housing support, you can find help at the Basic Needs Center. You may be eligible for money to buy groceries via CalFresh or our Food Assistance Program. If you are in need of food immediately, please contact our UC Berkeley Food Pantry. More information can be found here.

Mental Health Resources
All students — regardless of background or identity — may experience a range of issues that can become barriers to learning like strained relationships, anxiety, depression, alcohol and other drug problems, difficulties with concentration, sleep, and eating, and/or lack of motivation. UC Berkeley offers many services like Recalibrate and Student Mental Health.
Course Outline
Complete readings on the day listed below. Course schedule is subject to change.

Wednesday, 8/24  Week One: Introductions

Wednesday, 8/31  Week Two: Theorizing Bodies


Wednesday, 9/7  Week Three: Gendered, Racialized, and Sexualized Bodies


Wednesday, 9/14       Week Four: Drag: Performative Subversion?


Wednesday, 9/21       Week Five: Disciplining Asian Men’s Gender/Sexuality


Wednesday, 9/28   Week Six: Queer Bodies in Porn


Wednesday, 10/5   Week Seven: Transition Narratives, Cisnormativity, and “Authentic” Trans Bodies


Wednesday, 10/12  Week Eight: Constructing and Depicting Disability


Wednesday, 10/19  Week Nine: Research Paper Break—No Class

Wednesday, 10/26  Week Ten: Wellness, Self-Care, & Empowerment?


Wednesday, 11/2  Presentations
Wednesday, 11/9  Presentations
Wednesday, 11/16  Presentations
Wednesday, 11/23  HOLIDAY-NO CLASS
Wednesday, 11/30  Presentations