

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

## Spring 2023

### INSTRUCTOR

Jill Bakehorn, Ph.D.

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**Office Hours:** Tuesdays 10:30-11:30am;

Wednesdays 9:00-10:00am; Thursdays, 4:00-5:00pm

**Sign-up:** <https://calendly.com/bakehorn/office-hours>

### CLASS MEETING

Tuesdays 2:00-3:59pm

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

**Course Reader:** Individual files are available digitally on bCourses and a reader is available from [Copy Central](#).

## Classroom Health Protocols

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, please 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. Please do not come to class if you are sick—especially if you are coughing, sneezing, or have a fever—to help protect the health of others.

## 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 Mondays (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 this 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 directly 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:

<a href="#">Topic:</a>	Monday, February 13
<a href="#">Literature Review:</a>	Monday, April 3
<a href="#">Detailed Outline:</a>	Monday, April 24
<a href="#">Presentation:</a>	Tuesdays April 4—April 25 in class
<a href="#">Final Paper:</a>	Friday, May 12

## Grade Breakdown

Participation	20%
Reading Reflections	20%
Facilitation of Discussion	10%
Paper Topic	5%
Literature Review	5%
Paper Outline	5%
Paper Presentation	5%
Final Paper	30%

## Course Format and Policies

**Readings:** Readings should be completed prior to class. You must keep up with the readings to participate in class discussions and complete assignments.

**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 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 0 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. I am happy to help.

## 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 the [Food Assistance Program](#). If you are in need of food immediately, please contact the UC Berkeley [Food Pantry](#). More information on resources 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](#) could be of help.

## Course Outline

Complete readings by the day listed below. Course schedule is subject to change.

### **Tuesday, 1/17**                      **Week One: Introductions**

### **Tuesday, 1/24**                      **Week Two: Theorizing Bodies**

Morris, Amelia. 2019. "The Dichotomy of Power: Feminist Debates on the Body." Pp 35-72 in *The Politics of Weight: Feminist Dichotomies of Power in Dieting*. London: Palgrave Macmillan

Harris-Perry, Melissa V. 2011. "Chapter Two: Myth." Pp 51-97 in *Sister Citizen: Shame, Stereotypes, and Black Women in America*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

### **Tuesday, 1/31**                      **Week Three: Gendered, Racialized, and Sexualized Bodies**

Guzman, Isabel Molina and Angharad N. Valdivia. 2010. "Disciplining the Ethnic Body: Latinidad, Hybridized Bodies and Transnational Identities." Pp 206-229 in *Governing the Female Body: Gender, Health, and Networks of Power*. Edited by Lori Reed and Paula Saukko. New York: State University of New York Press.

Shimizu, Celine Parreñas. 2007. "The Sexual Bonds of Racial Stardom: Asian American Femme Fatales in Hollywood." Pp 58-101 in *The Hypersexuality of Race: Performing Asian/American Women on Screen and Scene*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

### **Tuesday, 2/7**                      **Week Four: Drag: Performative Subversion?**

Butler, Judith. 2006. "Bodily Inscriptions, Performative Subversions." Pp 175-193 in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.

Upadhyay, Nishant. 2019. "'Can You Get More American than Native American?': Drag and Settler Colonialism in *Rupaul's Drag Race*." *Cultural Studies* 33 (3):480-501.

Piatkowski, Peter. 2021. "Where's the 'T'? *RuPaul's Drag Race* and Transgender In/Exclusion." Pp 69-81 in *Beyond Binaries: Trans Identities in Contemporary Culture*. Edited by Mike Perez et al. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.

Berbary, Lisbeth A. and Corey W. Johnson. 2017. "En/Activist Drag: Kings Reflect on Queerness, Queens, and Questionable Masculinities." *Leisure Sciences* 39 (4):305-318.

**Tuesday, 2/14**

**Week Five: Disciplining Asian Men's Gender/  
Sexuality**

Han, C. Winter. 2015. "Being an Oriental, I Could Never be Completely a Man: Gendering Asian Men." Pp 21-56 in *Geisha of a Different Kind: Race and Sexuality in Gaysian America*. New York: New York University Press.

—. "Asian Girls are Prettier: How Drag Queens Saved Us." Pp 127-155 in *Geisha of a Different Kind: Race and Sexuality in Gaysian America*. New York: New York University Press.

**Tuesday, 2/21**

**Week Six: Queer Bodies in Porn**

Butler, Heather. 2004. "What Do You Call a Lesbian with Long Fingers? The Development of Lesbian and Dyke Pornography." Pp 167-197 in *Porn Studies*. Edited by Linda Williams. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Barriault, Marcel. 2016. "Bucking Heteronormativity: Buck Angel as Porn Performer, Producer and Pedagogue." *Porn Studies* 3 (2):133-146.

Hill-Meyer, Tobi. 2013. "Where the Trans Women Aren't: The Slow Inclusion of Trans Women in Feminist and Queer Porn." Pp 155-163 in *The Feminist Porn Book*. Edited by Taormino et al. New York: The Feminist Press.

Jones, Angela. 2020. "Cumming to a Screen Near You: Transmasculine and Non-Binary People in the Camming Industry." *Porn Studies* 8 (2):239-254.

**Tuesday, 2/28**

**Week Seven: Accessing Library Resources**

Sociology Librarian Ann Glusker: Presentation on utilizing library resources

**Tuesday, 3/7**

**Week Eight: Transition Narratives,  
Cisnormativity, and “Authentic” Trans Bodies**

Lovelock, Michael. 2017. “Call Me Caitlyn: Making and Making Over the ‘Authentic’ Transgender Body in Anglo-American Popular Culture.” *Journal of Gender Studies* 26 (6):675-687.

Ryan, J. Michael. 2021. “TransForming Society? Examining the Pros and Cons of the Trans Celebrity Spokesperson.” Pp 1-15 in *Beyond Binaries: Trans Identities in Contemporary Culture*. Edited by Mike Perez et al. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.

Mozer, G.M. 2021. “Popular vs. Personal: Transgender Narratives in Public Media Culture.” Pp 17-31 in *Beyond Binaries: Trans Identities in Contemporary Culture*. Edited by Mike Perez et al. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.

Wilcox, Annabelle. 2003. “Branding Teena: (Mis)Representations in the Media.” *Sexualities* 6 (3-4):407-425.

Abbott, Traci. 2021. “The Trans Baby Boom: Framing Male Pregnancy on Television.” Pp 51-68 in *Beyond Binaries: Trans Identities in Contemporary Culture*. Edited by Mike Perez et al. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.

**Tuesday, 3/14**

**Week Nine: Constructing and Depicting  
Disability**

Ellis, Kate. 2015. “Contemporary Beauty-ism.” Pp 35-55 in *Disability and Popular Culture: Focusing Passion, Creating Community and Expressing Defiance*. London: Routledge.

Wälivaara, Josefine. 2018. “Blind Warriors, Supercrrips, and Techno- Marvels: Challenging Depictions of Disability in Star Wars.” *The Journal of Popular Culture* 51 (4):1036-1056.

Barounis, Cynthia. 2009. “Crippling Heterosexuality, Queering Able-Bodiedness: *Murderball*, *Brokeback Mountain* and the Contested Masculine Body.” *Journal of Visual Culture* 8 (1):54-75.

Rubin, Henry Alex, Dana Adam Shapiro, Jeffrey Mandel, Keith Cavill, Andy Cohn, Scott Hogsett, Christopher Igoe, Bob Lujano, Joe Soares, and Mark Zupan. 2005. *Murderball*. United States: Lions Gate Home Entertainment.

**Tuesday, 3/21**

**Week Ten: Wellness, Self-Care, & Empowerment?**

Bordo, Susan. 2003. "'Material Girl': The Effacements of Postmodern Culture." Pp 245-275 in *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*. Berkeley, CA: University of California, Press.

Neil, Latisha and Afiya Mbilishaka. 2019. "'Hey Curlfriends!': Hair Care and Self-Care Messaging on YouTube by Black Women Natural Hair Vloggers." *Journal of Black Studies* 50 (2):156-177.

Zavarrato, Staci M. 2020. "Taking the Social Justice Fight to the Cloud: Social Media and Body Positivity." *Public Integrity* DOI: 10.1080/10999922.2020.1782104

**Tuesday, 3/28**

**Spring Break—No Class**

**Tuesday, 4/4**

**Presentations**

**Tuesday, 4/11**

**Presentations**

**Tuesday, 4/18**

**Presentations**

**Tuesday, 4/25**

**Presentations**