

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

## Spring 2025

### INSTRUCTOR

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**Office Hours:** Tuesdays + Thursdays 3:30-4:30pm on Zoom;  
Wednesdays 9:00-10:00am in person

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

### CLASS MEETING

Wednesdays 10:00-11:59am  
420 Social Sciences Building

## Course Description

This course will explore **how bodies are represented in popular culture**, drawing upon theories in sociology, cultural studies, feminist studies, and critical race theory 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 and critical race 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?

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**. What does resistance look like? How can resistance transform social structures? Can resistance inadvertently reinforce hegemonic norms?

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.

## 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 printed or digital reader is available from [Copy Central](#).

## 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 a group of 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? How does it connect to current issues, trends, or debates in popular culture?

## Research Paper and Presentation

Your 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, studying social media, etc.

You are being asked to carefully examine popular cultural representations. How are bodies represented? What stereotypes and controlling images are reproduced or challenged? What do these representations say about gender, sexuality, race, etc.? Provide an analysis using course materials and outside research. Whenever possible, include images and links to videos in your paper to illustrate your argument.

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 5 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:

<u>Topic:</u>	Friday, February 28
<u>Literature Review:</u>	Friday, April 11
<u>Detailed Outline:</u>	Friday, May 2
<u>Presentation:</u>	Wednesdays April 9—May 7 in class
<u>Final Paper:</u>	Friday, May 16

## Grade Breakdown

Reading Reflections	20%
Participation	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

Complete readings prior to class to better prepare you to participate in class discussions and complete assignments. You will get a lot more out of lecture if you come prepared and I am happy to answer any questions you have.

### Email

**Please put the class number/name in the subject of the email.** 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. Please inform me of your name (and pronunciation) and your pronouns so that I can ensure you are properly recognized and respected. You can update this information now via [CalCentral](#).

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

## Grading Policies

### Extensions

**Extensions are provided for those with this accommodation from DSP.** Please contact me prior to the due date for each assignment to discuss extensions.

If you become ill, have an emergency, caregiving responsibilities, or another circumstance beyond your control to plan for, reach out for an extension. I do not provide extensions simply because you have assignments due for other classes—this is something for which you can plan and prepare.

### TurnItIn

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.

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.

## Use of AI

Many uses of generative AI software or Large Language Models (LLMs), such as ChatGPT, Gemini, and Claude, fall under the umbrella of **academic misconduct** as it involves an “action or attempted action that may result in creating an unfair academic advantage” and is not a representation of your own thoughts, critical thinking, and work. Academic integrity is a critical component of being a member of the university community and our ability to evaluate your work. We are evaluating your ability to synthesize and apply sociological concepts, not how well AI does this.

The use of generative AI tools is permitted in this course for the following activities:

- Brainstorming and finding information on your topic
- Drafting an outline to organize your thoughts
- Checking grammar and style

**The use of generative AI tools is not permitted in this course for the following activities:**

- Writing a draft of an assignment
- Writing entire sentences, paragraphs, or papers to complete class assignments (for instance, you may not simply enter the essay prompt, hit generate, and turn in the work, in whole or in part, as your own)
- Generating or modifying content to evade plagiarism detection

I expect all work students submit for this course will be their own. I have carefully designed all assignments to support your learning. Doing your own work, without artificial intelligence assistance, is best for your achievement of the learning objectives.

Do not assume the information or analysis you receive via AI is accurate, unbiased, sufficient for the assignment, or meets the standards of the course, even if you only incorporate it partially and after substantial paraphrasing, modification and/or editing. AI-generated content may *not* provide appropriate or clear attribution to the author(s) of the original sources.

**Your use of AI tools must be properly documented and cited in order to stay within university policies on academic honesty.** For example, ideas generated using ChatGPT should include a citation such as:

“Describe the symbolism of the green light in the book *The Great Gatsby*” prompt.  
ChatGPT, 13 Feb. version, OpenAI, 8 Mar. 2023, chat.openai.com/chat.

Failure to acknowledge your use of AI text-generation tools is a violation of UC Berkeley's honor code. When in doubt about permitted usage, please ask for clarification.

## 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, 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.

## 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](#). 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](#) that could help.

## Course Outline

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

### **Wednesday, 1/22      Week One: Introductions**

Plagiarism Primer

### **Wednesday, 1/29      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.

Collins, Patricia Hill. 2000. "Mammies, Matriarchs, and Other Controlling Images." Pp 69-96 in *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge.

### **Wednesday, 2/5      Week Three: Gendered, Racialized, and Sexualized Bodies**

Guzmán, 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.

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.

## **Wednesday, 2/12                      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.

Gonsalez, Marcos. 2022. "Fantasies of Valentina: *RuPaul's Drag Race* and the Performance of Trans/Queer of Color Spectacular Obfuscation." *Transgender Studies Quarterly* 9(4):587-608.

## **Wednesday, 2/19                      Week Five: Lesbian (In)Visibility in Media**

Ciasullo, Ann M. 2001. "Making Her (In)Visible: Cultural Representations of Lesbianism and the Lesbian Body in the 1990s." *Feminist Studies* 27(3):577-608.

Annati, Arienne and Laura R. Ramsey. 2022. "Lesbian Perceptions of Stereotypical and Sexualized Media Portrayals." *Sexuality & Culture* 26:312-338.

Buckley, Chelsea. 2023. "Where are the On-screen Butch Lesbians? Navigating Constructive Lesbian Representations in Mass Media." *Tulips: The Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies Undergraduate Journal*.

Manders, Kerry. 2020. "The Renegades." *The New York Times*. April 13.

**Wednesday, 2/26                      Week Six: Transition Narratives, Cisnormativity,  
and “Authentic” Trans Bodies**

McLaren, Jackson Taylor, Susan Bryant, and Brian Brown. 2021. ““See me! Recognize me!”: An Analysis of Transgender Media Representation.” *Communication Quarterly* 69(2):172-191.

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.

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.

Tortajada, Iolanda, Cilia Willem, R. Lucas Platero Méndez, and Núria Araüna. 2021. “Lost in Transition? Digital Trans Activism on Youtube.” *Information, Communication & Society* 24(8):1091-1107.

**Wednesday, 3/5                      Week Seven: Literature Review Discussion**

**Wednesday, 3/12                      Week Eight: Resistive Bodies in Sports**

Andrews, Vernon L. 1996. “Black Bodies—White Control: The Contested Terrain of Sportsmanlike Conduct.” *Journal of African American Men* 2(1):33-59.

Marshall, Kayla, Kerry Chamberlain and Darrin Hodgetts. 2019. “Female Bodybuilders on Instagram: Negotiating an Empowered Femininity.” *Feminism & Psychology* 29(1):96-119.

Knott-Fayle, Gabriel, Elizabeth Peel and Gemma L. Witcomb. 2023. “(Anti-)Feminism and Cisgenderism in Sports Media.” *Feminist Media Studies* 23(3):1274-1291.

**Wednesday, 3/19                      Week Nine: Constructing and Depicting Disability**

Schalk, Sami. 2016. "Happily Ever After for Whom? Blackness and Disability in Romance Narratives." *The Journal of Popular Culture* 49(6):1241-1260.

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

Aspler, John, Kelly D. Harding, and M. Ariel Cascio. 2022. "Representation Matters: Race, Gender, Class, and Intersectional Representations of Autistic and Disabled Characters on Television." *Studies in Social Justice* 16(2):323-348.

**Wednesday, 3/26                      Spring Break: No Class**

**Wednesday, 4/2                      Week Eleven: Plastic Bodies & Queer Fat Activism**

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.

Beattie, Scott. 2014. "Bear Arts Naked: Queer Activism and the Fat Male Body." Pp 115-129 in *Queering Fat Embodiment*, edited by Cat Pausé, Jackie Wykes, and Samantha Murray. Burlington, VT: Ashgate.

Kristjansson, Margitte. 2014. "Fashion's 'Forgotten Woman': How Fat Bodies Queer Fashion and Consumption." Pp 131-146 in *Queering Fat Embodiment*, edited by Cat Pausé, Jackie Wykes, and Samantha Murray. Burlington, VT: Ashgate.

**Wednesday, 4/9                      Week 12: Presentations**

**Wednesday, 4/16                      Week 13: Presentations**

**Wednesday, 4/23                      Week 14: Presentations**

**Wednesday, 4/30                      Week 15: Presentations**

**Wednesday, 5/7                      RRR Week: Presentations**