

SE 291- Social Justice and the Body

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Course Description

“No Justice of any kind is possible without the body”

- Rev. Angel Kyodo Williams

The lived experience of the human body forms in many ways the cornerstone of human identity. As we move throughout the social world and interact with various human groups, we see that our bodies create, maintain and perpetuate power dynamics. However, certain human bodies are disproportionately exposed to numerous forms of violence and inequalities.

In this course, we will explore and critically examine social justice movements from a body-centred perspective, as well as what bodies do in and how they affect such movements. Select case studies from various areas of the Global North and South and historical periods will assist us in this exploration. The goal here is to not only examine the interconnection between various forms of oppression such as colonialism, racism, environmental exploitation, militarised or police aggression, femicide etc., but also to understand the ways in which awareness of the body’s power and limitations (vulnerability or defiance) are experienced in relationship to participation in social justice movements.

Utilising an interdisciplinary and critical analytical approach to knowledge production; we will focus upon and interrogate why certain bodies are ascribed less value, considered to disrupt and question state sanctioned norms, and treated as readily disposable.

Course Objectives:

This course will be interactive and of a hands-on nature, therefore class attendance and participation in class discussions is mandatory. Your presence and active participation in the class will not only increase your ability to reflect on the issue of social justice, but also to foster the development of critical thinking and a contextual understanding of a variety of embodied experiences.

The course entails lectures, in class discussions and presentations, off-campus excursions (**dependent upon Berlin’s hygiene regulations and restrictions**), and guest lectures by local experts & scholars.

In addition, there are several primary questions that will accompany this course:

1. What is social justice exactly and what does it have to do with me?
2. What does it mean to go through life in a particular body?
3. How does the experience of injustice and systems of oppression manifest somatically?
4. How can we transform the embodied experience of oppression?
5. What does “Modernity” have to do with our embodied experiences?
6. How can we prevent the social diseases of racism, colonialism and other forms of toxic contagious divisions?

7. How can I become a political ally and use my privilege(s) to support and defend bodies that experience marginalisation and oppression.

Required Course Texts: These texts are available in the Bard College Berlin library:

1. Petersen, Anne Helen. (2016) *Too Fat, Too Slutty, Too Loud, The Rise and Reign of the Unruly Woman*, 2016. Plume.
2. Taylor, Sonya Renee. (2018) *The Body is Not an Apology: The Power of Radical Self-Love*. Berret-Koehler Publishers.
3. Vaid-Menon, Alok. (2020) *Beyond the Gender Binary*. Penguin Random House.

Additional required reading materials will be handed out as photocopies and/or will be available in class folder.

Academic Integrity

Bard College Berlin maintains the highest standards of academic integrity and expects students to adhere to these standards at all times. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section 14.3 (Academic Misconduct) in the Student Handbook.

Attendance

Attendance at all classes is a crucial part of the education offered by Bard College Berlin. To account for minor circumstances, two absences from twice-per-week courses or the equivalent (e.g. one absence from a once-per-week course) should not affect the participation grade or require documentation.

Class attendance is mandatory. Please note that any unexcused absences will have a negative impact on your participation grade, and having more than two unexcused absences- in this case missing two full sessions (**Mondays - 12:30h- 15.30h CET**) - for the semester will automatically reduce your final cumulative mark by one full letter grade. In addition, students must be aware that the Bard College Berlin attendance policy specifically stipulates that missing more than 30% (in this case, eight) of the required class meetings means that you cannot receive credit for the course; missed classes in first week of the semester count double. You should review the full Bard College Berlin attendance policy stated in the Student Handbook, which also outlines what does and does not count as an excused absence. For more detailed information regarding Bard College Berlin policies:

<http://www.berlin.bard.edu/for-students/student-handbook/academics/>

Bard College Berlin does not offer credit for any course in which a student has missed more than 30% of classes, regardless of the reasons for the absences. The full Bard College Berlin attendance policy can be found in the Student Handbook, Section 2.8.

Assessment

Writing Assignments

This course has homework assignments consisting of two pages or max. 800 words. It also has informal assignments, including giving short oral presentations on readings and or case studies within the course, and writing short responses to online guest lectures. Depending upon Covid-19 restrictions, as of the fall 2022, off-campus visits may or may not take place. This course requires active and informed participation. Student participation is a pertinent element of the course and will be graded!

You are expected to have all assignments (i.e. readings,) completed for each class. Please make every effort to contact and communicate with me if you are facing a challenging situation that hinders your ability to complete an assignment on time.

In addition, a group analysis & action plan project will constitute part of the course's final grade. Students will form groups, analyze a social justice case/movement and create an action plan for positive change based upon one of the course's topics, or a topic that has been discussed with the instructor. Group action plan presentations will take place during the course's last three sessions. Groups and topics for the action plan will be determined by (calendar week 42 / 10 October 2022).

The final 1500- word paper for the course is due 19 December 2022 and may be a standard essay or the analysis of a embodied social justice related case study from the student's respective countries or based upon the student's group action plan. The paper should reference at least three or more of the readings and at least three of the theoretical approaches to embodied social justice that we have discussed and examined during the course. Creative approaches and or interdisciplinary analysis are highly encouraged and welcomed.

Policy on Late Submission of Papers

All essays are to be submitted via the Bard College Berlin electronic collection system, and thus will receive a time stamp. Late essays that are up to 24 hours late will be downgraded one full grade.

Essays that are more than 24 hours late will also be downgraded one full grade and cannot earn a grade higher than a C. Essays that are more than 72 hours late will not be accepted.

Academic Integrity:

In this course, we aim to conduct ourselves as a community of scholars, recognizing that academic study is both an intellectual and ethical enterprise. You are encouraged to build on the ideas and texts of others; that is a vital part of academic life. However, you are also obligated to document every occasion when you use another's ideas, language, or syntax. When you use another's ideas or language—whether through direct quotation, summary, or paraphrase—you must formally acknowledge that debt by signaling it in the MLA parenthetical format (<http://www.mla.org/style>). Any incidents of academic dishonesty, be they, large or small, will not be tolerated and will be reported the Academic Administration and may result in failure for the entire course. The complete Bard College Berlin policy on academic integrity is detailed in the Student Handbook and can be read online: <http://www.berlin.bard.edu/for-students/student-handbook/>

Cellphones, Laptops & iPads: Cellphones should be switched off for the duration of class. Laptops & iPads are allowed only when necessary for class activities.

Please note that the following course outline is provisional. Changes to the assignment and seminar schedule will be communicated in class and via the Bard College Berlin email system. *It is your responsibility to remain up-to-date on course assignments and due dates!!*

Assignments

Writing Assignments

This course has homework assignments consisting of two pages or max. 700 words. It also has informal assignments, including giving short oral presentations on the case studies dealt within the course, and writing short responses to guest lectures and or off-campus visits. This course requires active and informed participation. Student participation is a pertinent element of the course and will be graded !

Policy on Late Submission of Papers

Essays that are up to 24 hours late can be downgraded up to one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where a professor agrees to accept a late assignment, it should be submitted by the new deadline agreed upon by both parties. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment. Grades and comments will be returned to students in a timely fashion. Students are also entitled to make an appointment to discuss essay assignments and feedback during instructors' office hours.

Students receive mid- and end-of-semester grades for their seminar work. Students are entitled to make an appointment with an instructor to discuss seminar participation, or may be asked to meet with the instructor at any stage in the semester regarding class progress.

Grade Breakdown

Class participation and attendance	30%
Short presentations	20%
Reading & written homework assignments	10%
Final paper & group action plan	40%

Class Schedule/tentative

Week 1 - Introduction

Mon. /29 August
12:30-15:30

Introduction: Attendance will be taken.
Explanation and discussion of the goals of the course, the syllabus, required readings, grading, and policies.

Week 2 – Theory & Concepts

Mon./ 5 September
12:30-15:30

Introduction: Social justice theory & the significance of the body
Lecture & discussion: We will explore the themes of oppression and embodiment.
Reading: Iris Marion Young: Five Faces of Oppression ([Pdf. in class folder](#)).
Reading: Adams et.al. Readings for Diversity and Social Justice ([Pdf. in class folder](#)).

Week 3 – Putting the Body on the Line

Mon./ 12 September
12:30–15:30

Lecture: The Case of Emmett Till – (**Disclaimer: There are disturbing images related to this story, which will not be shown in class!**)

Film clip - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fjr6XLcCXgU>

Text and radio clip: <https://www.npr.org/2022/06/29/1108806145/emmett-till-family-seeks-arrest-after-1955-warrant-is-found>

Discussion of song & lyrics “**Lockdown**” by Anderson Paak – (**Please omit the expletives that appear in the lyrics**) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TgltkJCm09c>

Week 4 - Food & the Body – The Body of of Earth

Mon. 19 September
12:30-15:30

Reading: Harper, Breeze – *Sistah Vegan* - Chapters 1-4 (Pdf. in class folder).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ndJ314WTEU>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ndJ314WTEU&t=176s>

Reading: Kimmerer Hall, Robin - *Braiding Sweetgrass* - Chapters: “Learning the Grammar of Animacy”, p. 48-59 & “Shkitgen: People of the Seventh Fire”, p. 360-373 (Pdf. in class folder).

Video-clip “Conversations around the Green Fire”: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2WRY3GoKYPc>

Week 5 – The Body is Unapologetic

Mon. 26 September

12:30-15:30

Reading: Taylor, Sonya Renee – *The Body is Not an Apology: The Power of Radical Self-Love*.

Chapter 1- pages 1-22 – Please read and answer the “Unapologetic Inquiries” (#3, #4, #5) included in the chapter and be prepared to discuss these in class.

A max. 700 word writing assignment that engages the “Radical Reflections” will be submitted by week 7 (10 October 2022)

Group project topics and compilation of groups will be decided during this session.

Week 6

Holiday „Tag der Deutschen Einheit “– NO CLASS!

Mon. 3 October

Week 7 – The Body & Reproductive Rights – Writing assignment due!

Mon. 10 October

12:30-15:30

Film: La Operación: <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/xpu79i> - **Disclaimer! This film depicts some graphic images of the female sterilization process.**

Podcast: The Pussy Grabs Back: <https://www.wnycstudios.org/podcasts/takeaway/segments/pussy-grabs-back-movement>

Reading: “Disaster Patriarchy: how the pandemic has unleashed a war on women” – (V. formerly Eve Ensler: <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2021/jun/01/disaster-patriarchy-how-the-pandemic-has-unleashed-a-war-on-women>).

Week 8 – Queerness and the Body

Mon. 17 October

12:30-15:30

Reading: Vaid-Menon, Alok “*Beyond the Gender Binary*” p. 1-36 (Pdf. in class folder)

Video clip: StyleLike U: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j7Gh2n9kPuA>

Film & Discussion: "MAJOR!" follows the life and campaigns of Miss Major Griffin-Gracy, a 73-year-old Black transgender woman who has been fighting for the rights of trans women of color for over 40 years. **Please watch the film before class!** Vimeo link will be provided.

Week 9

FALL BREAK – NO CLASS!

Mon. 24 October

12:30 -15:30

Week 10 – Sentient Beings –

Mon. 31 October

12:30-15.30

Guest lecture: Dr. Simona L. Brickers – “Chronically Touched and Untouched: The overlapping sensitivities between social theory and attachment theory fundamentally invites an exploration into the human body through the lens of chronically under and over touch. In this presentation, the focus will be on the “quantifiable phenomena of the sub-modalities: tactile acuity and discrimination of perceptual experiences of toughing or being touched, of an itch or a pin prick or the warmth of the sun” (Cascio, Moore, & McGlone, 2019, p. 5). Writing assignment of max. 700 words discussing the main points of the presentation and how it relates to what we have discussed and analysed thus far

Please note this lecture will take place via Zoom and not on campus!!. The link will be provided.

Week 11 - Bodies in the Ballroom and on the Dance Floor - Writing Assignment due!!!

Mon. 7 November

12:30-15:30

Reading: Baily, Marlon “Gender Racial Realness: Theorizing the Gender System in Ballroom Culture” (Pdf. in class folder)

Film: “Where Love Lives “- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VnP2_v6mhB4

Additional clips: Vogue Fem (Male Figures) at the Unification Ball: Please pay extra attention to the concept of gender roles!<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qF6wwS-ss2c>

Tag Team Performance: Please pay attention to the terms used here in this performance: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2L-dTjX0EOc>

Mother Amazon Leiomy: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F7yXOX8eYhI>

Week 12 – Bodies that are Too Much

Mon. 14 November

12:30 – 15:30

Reading: Peterson, Anne Helen: “*Too Fat, Too Slutty, Too Loud*” – Chapters 1 (Serena Williams, 2 (Melissa McCarthy, 4 (Nicki Minaj) & 5 (Madonna). (Pdf. in class folder)

Fat-friendly test. The test will be distributed to all in the class, and evaluated as a group activity.

Week 13 – Decolonising the Body & Yoga

Mon. 21 November

12:30-15:30

Reading: Berila, Beth et. al. – “*Yoga, The Body and Embodied Social Change*” – Chapters, 1, 9, & 11 (Pdf. in class folder).

Week 14

Group project/presentations

Mon. 28 November

12:30 – 15:30

Groups to be defined

Week 15 Group projects/presentations

Mon. 5 December

12:30 -15:30

Groups to be defined

Mon. 12 December - Final paper due!