

## SE291- Social Justice and the Body

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Office Hours: By appointment via Zoom

*“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-centered perspective, as well as what bodies do in such movements, and how they affect them. 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, militarized 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.

Utilizing an interdisciplinary and critical analytical approach to knowledge production; we will focus on 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 includes lectures, in class discussions and presentations, off-campus excursions and guest lectures by local experts and 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 marginalization 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 available in the class folder.

### Attendance Policy

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) - 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 may mean that you cannot receive credit for the course. 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/>

### 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.

You are expected to have all assignments (e.g.; 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. You will be required to inform me of your condition in order to receive a make-up assignment.

In addition, a group analysis and 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. Group constellations and topics for the final project will be determined by (week 7 / Monday 16 October 2023).

The final 1500- word paper for the course is due Monday 18 December 2023 and may be a standard essay or the analysis of an 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!!*

Guidelines for class discussions, presentations, mid-term and final papers are to be found in the designated folder on Google Drive.

#### 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. /4 September  
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./11 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./ 18 September

12:30–15:30

Lecture: The Case of Emmett Till – (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-arrestafter-1955-warrant-is-found>

If available we will watch the film “Till” in class.

#### Week 4 - Food & the Body

Mon. 25 September

12:30-15:30

Reading: Harper, Breeze - Chapters 1-4 (Pdf. In class folder).

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

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

#### Week 5 – The Body is Unapologetic

Mon. 2 October 12:30-

15:30

Reading: Taylor, Sonya Renee – *The Body is Not an Apology: The Power of Radical Self-Love* (2018).

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.

Please watch: The Body is Not an Apology: Radical Transformation:

<https://youtu.be/Q9HVTLf3sj4> Sonya Renee Taylor TED Talk:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MWI9AZkuPVg>

A max. 600 word writing assignment (due 16 October) that engages the “Radical Reflections”. Please use the guidelines provided for writing papers.

#### Week 6 – Incarcerated Bodies

Mon. 9 October  
12:30-15:30

Reading: Alexander, Michelle – “The New Jim Crow. Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness” (chapter -1 The Rebirth of Caste”). (Pdf in class folder).

Reading: Davis, Angela – Freedom is a Constant Struggle (chapter -8)- “Feminism & Abolition: Theories and Practices for the Twenty-First Century.” (Pdf in class folder).

[Additional source](#)

Women in the Prison System in the US: “Life Inside America's Most Dangerous Women's Prison:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X0dkykb4Ngo>.

Week 7 – Genetics & The War on Women\* **Writing assignment due!**

Mon. 16 October  
12:30-15:30

Film: “A Dangerous Idea” Eugenics, Genetics and the American Dream:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RDzuq\\_hOYCQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RDzuq_hOYCQ)

Podcast: The Pussy Grabs Back:

<https://www.wnycstudios.org/podcasts/takeaway/segments/pussygrabs-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>).

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

Week 8 **FALL BREAK – NO CLASS!**

Mon. 23 October  
12:30 -15:30

Week 9 – Sentient Beings –**Onl'ne lecture!**

Mon. 30 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 (due 13 November) 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. The link will be provided

Week 10 – Queerness and the Body

Mon. 6 November

12:30-15:30

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

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. We will view this film in class.

Week 11 - Bodies in the Ballroom and on the Dance Floor-

Mon. 13 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](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=qF6wvS-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=F7yXQX8eYhI>

Week 12 – Bodies that are Too Much **Writing Assignment duell!**

Mon. 20 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).

Week 13 – Decolonising the Body & Yoga

Mon. 27 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).

Film clip: Pleasure Activism- Adrienne Maree Brown:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PT0BpVoZ4E>.

Week 14

Group project/presentations

Mon. 4 December

12:30 – 15:30

Groups to be defined

Week 15

Group project/presentations

Mon. 11 December

12:30 -15:30

Groups to be defined

Mon. 18 December - Final paper due!