FGSS310: Remaking Bodies, Rethinking Social Movements

**Semester:** Spring 2015  
**Schedule:** Tuesday 10:30-11:50 | Thursday 10:30-11:50  
**Room:** Allbritton, room 304  
**Course format:** Seminar

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**Email:** abaril@wesleyan.edu (or alexandrebaril@yahoo.ca)  
**Office:** Allbritton, room 214  
**Office Hours:** Tuesdays/Thursdays: 12:00-3:00 | Monday/Wednesday/Friday: by appointment

**Course Description**
This course examines bodily modifications/transitions/transformations and how these processes of remaking bodies profoundly impact on social movements of the last decades, be they feminist, antiracist, gay, lesbian, bisexual and queer, trans, intersex, disability, and fat movements, to name some. The bodily transformations covered in this course are very diverse, from more normalized ones, such as tattoos, piercings and cosmetic surgeries, to more uncommon and/or “extreme” ones, like gastric bypass surgeries, sex reassignment surgeries, ethnic surgeries, voluntary acquisition of a disability (blindness, paraplegia, amputation) and of HIV (called “bug chasing”). This course provides an overview of the key concepts, theories, and debates in a variety of fields of study that look at these bodily transformations and how they sometimes cause rifts, fraught discussions, and divisions amongst social movements and how they sometimes help to create solidarities and alliances between marginalized groups. It also explores these bodily transformations through intersectional analyses that show how they are intertwined with other components such as sex, gender identity, sexuality, class, race, (dis)ability, language, and so on. Topics will include identity and bodily transformations, the normative body, the social and cultural representations of non-normative bodies and modified bodies, the medicalization and pathologization of different bodies, and power relations between social movements.

Each week of this course focuses on specific body modifications. The first week introduces the field of body studies and its key concepts and theories, after which each week will be dedicated to one bodily transformation and its related social movement in a transnational context (e.g. thinness, fatness, and pro-ana versus fat movement; sex reassignment surgery and trans movements). The course progresses from more common, tolerated body modifications to more rare, under-theorized, and controversial ones. Readings on each of these bodily transformations represent not only a variety of approaches, methodologies, and disciplines, but also a range of arguments in order to present divergent points of view (e.g. for and against cosmetic surgeries) and more nuanced and complex reflections on each topic. This course invites us to question our principal assumptions, ideas, prejudices, and judgments regarding a selection of bodily practices considered “deviant”, “perverse”, “extreme”, “problematic”, or simply unthinkable, and aims to consider how sexist, racist, ableist, healthist, heteronormative, cisnormative, and other power relations influence “visceral”, negative reactions towards these bodily practices. This course also aims to deconstruct these reactions and encourage alliances and solidarities between diverse marginalized groups and social movements.
**Learning Goals**

This course will allow students to:

- Master key concepts used in the fields of feminist, gender, sexuality, queer, trans, disability, body, and health studies in order to look at body issues and bodily modifications in a transnational context;

- Identify and compare schools of thought, texts, theories, and authors on body issues and bodily modifications in these fields;

- Situate key debates on body issues and bodily modifications within social movements;

- Distinguish between the various approaches and methodologies used in these fields to look at body issues and bodily modifications;

- Use a multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, and intersectional perspective to theorize body issues and bodily modifications and the debates surrounding them in social movements;

- Develop a critical approach to research in these fields with regards to marginalized groups, their identities, bodies, bodily practices, and sexualities, as well as to the processes of pathologization, stigmatization, regulation, and criminalization that surround them;

- Develop a critical approach (based on perspectives that are feminist, anti-ableist, anti-racist, anti-colonialist, anti-capitalist, anti-cisgenderist, etc.) to dominant group privileges and their effect on marginalized people and on power relations in social movements;

- Deconstruct assumptions, ideas, and prejudices that influence strong, negative reactions toward “extreme” and controversial body issues and bodily modifications;

- Enhance reading, writing, and oral skills.

**Teaching Methods**

1. Lectures
2. Group discussion of lectures and readings
3. Small group discussion focused on specific questions
4. Short videos and documentaries
5. Practical exercises and activities
6. Guest lectures
7. Individual follow-up, if required

**Course Readings**

All readings will be available on Moodle (see the complete list under “Course Schedule”). Reading assignments must be completed before coming to class on the date indicated in the syllabus. Additional optional readings are available upon request.
Course Assignments

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<th>Item</th>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Due date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Attendance and participation</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>Entire semester</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Critical reading review (2 texts)</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>February 19</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Paper proposal with bibliography</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>March 5</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Peer evaluation</td>
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<td>April 16</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>In-class presentation</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>April 21-30</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Final paper</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>May 12</td>
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*Instructions, criteria, and grading guides for each evaluation will be provided on Moddle.

**Extra Credit**
Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at Wesleyan University will be hosting a series of events on the following theme: Social Death and Survival: Race/Sex/Class/Vulnerability.

**Thursday, February 26, 4:15-6:00**
Wesleyan faculty member presentations

**Thursday, March 26, 4:15-6:00**
Lecture by Lisa Marie Cacho  
Author of *Social Death: Racialized Rightlessness and the Criminalization of the Unprotected*

**Thursday, April 16, 4:15-6:00**
Lecture by Jasbir Puar  
Author of *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*

*For extra credit, you may attend one or more of these events and write a one-page summary (300-500 words) summarizing the main thesis and arguments of the lecture. For each one-page summary, evaluated as pass/fail, you will receive 1% extra credit on your final grade for the course, for a possible maximum of three points for three summaries.*

**1. Attendance and participation 10%**
Because this is a small seminar course, your active participation is crucial to its success. You must sign the attendance sheet during each class. Unexcused absences will be penalized according to the percentages below. Participation consists of making comments relevant to readings and material presented, asking relevant questions, respectfully interacting with your classmates, participating in group work, and taking notes. Your level of class participation will be considered in the 10% allotted to attendance and participation, and can either increase or decrease the total. If you have concerns about speaking in class, do not hesitate to contact me in order to identify alternative strategies that will permit you to participate and be more comfortable. It is important to be prepared for each class by reading the required texts.

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2. Critical reading review (2 texts) 15% (February 19)
The critical reading review consists of reviewing two texts and presenting positive and/or negative internal or external critiques about their theses and arguments. The two texts must be selected from the reading list (required readings only). Each critical reading review must contain between 800 and 1000 words (2 pages). This assignment is not only about summarizing the main ideas in these texts; it is also an opportunity to write your own critical reflections on them.

3. Paper proposal with bibliography 15% (March 5)
The paper proposal (400-500 words/1 page) outlines your research problem, research question, and the hypothesis or thesis you want to explore and defend. This assignment must also include a bibliography of at least fourteen sources that you have consulted, vetted, and chosen for their relevance to your chosen topic. Possible sources include: books, edited volumes, novels, book chapters, articles, websites, blogs, films, documentaries, etc. However, half of these sources (at least seven) must be academic sources (e.g. specialized monographs, articles in peer-reviewed journals, etc.). If you have concerns about appropriate sources, do not hesitate to contact me in order to identify them. I will mark and comment on your paper proposals and bibliographies in order to guide you in the writing of your final paper.

4. Peer evaluation 15% (April 16)
Using a random selection process, each student will evaluate the first draft of a colleague’s final paper. Each student must submit a first draft to the appropriate peer evaluator on April 9. I will provide the class with a grading guide. Peer evaluation consists of reading the paper, filling in the grading guide (the grade given by your colleague will not be included in your final grade), and producing a critique (400-500 words/1 page) discussing both the strengths and weaknesses of the paper and suggesting concrete ways to improve it (suggest theories, authors, links, clarification, etc.). When your colleague presents his or her final paper to the class (in-class presentations, April 21-30), you will briefly present your critique and discuss it (2-3 minutes).

5. In-class presentation 15% (April 21-30)
The in-class presentation consists of a solo presentation of the thesis, main arguments, and conclusions presented in the first draft of your final paper. You will lead the Q&A period and class discussion following the presentation of your paper. Plan to spend 15 minutes presenting your paper, 5 minutes listening and discussing some of the critiques made by your colleague in his or her peer evaluation, and 5 minutes for the Q&A period and discussion with the class, including questions from the professor.

6. Final paper 30% (May 12)
The final assignment is your opportunity to draw on course materials, lectures, and class discussions to develop your own in-depth research project relating to your interests in body modifications and social movements. The format is open and creativity is encouraged. This paper must contain between 4000 and 6000 words (9-13 pages) and include a bibliography of at least fourteen sources (including a minimum of seven academic sources). Sources may come from the reading list or not.
Grading criteria
Instructions, criteria, and grading guides for each evaluation will be provided on Moddle throughout the semester. However, the following non-exhaustive list of grading criteria indicates the main principles guiding assignment evaluation.

• Specific assignment requirements are respected (including length and due date);
• Overall presentation is satisfactory (sections, sub-sections, methodology, etc.);
• Sources are relevant and correctly used (quotations, references, etc.);
• Connections are established with material covered in class and in the required readings;
• Content is relevant and clear (logical, coherent, etc.);
• Text demonstrates the ability to analyze and synthesize;
• Critiques and connections are relevant and original.

Policy on late assignments
Late assignments will not be accepted without prior approval from the professor and only in extraordinary circumstances (death in the family, health problems, etc.). If you need an extension, you must contact the professor at least two days before the due date. Extensions will not be negotiated after the due date, except in the above-mentioned extraordinary circumstances. The professor reserves the right to accept or reject your request if it is not an exceptional circumstance. Late papers will be penalized: each day of delay results in a penalty of 5%.

GUIDELINES FOR A POSITIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Technology
During class time, information and communication technologies must be used exclusively for learning purposes. The professor reserves the right to limit the use of certain technologies if they are not being used for educational reasons. Mobile phones must be turned off during class.

Punctuality
It is important to arrive on time for each class and stay until the end, barring exceptional circumstances. Arrivals and departures during class disrupt the classroom environment.

Interactions in class
This course addresses many difficult, delicate, controversial, and emotional questions surrounding marginalized identities, bodies, practices, and sexualities. Differences of opinion sometimes occur; in fact, they are an integral part of the learning process. When such theoretical conflicts arise, maintaining an open, attentive, and respectful attitude is essential.

Confidentiality
Because this course addresses issues related to marginalized identities and sexualities from a feminist, queer, and anti-oppression pedagogical perspective, the classroom environment sometimes lends itself to personal testimonials. No one is required to reveal personal information either in assignments or in class. However, if classmates share personal information with you in the context of this class, you are required to keep any such information confidential.
Other concerns: Talk to the professor
As your professor, I will do everything I can to encourage your learning and development in this course. If you have questions, concerns, critiques, or comments about course content, instructional material, teaching methods, or class dynamics, please come talk to me during my office hours or by appointment.

Disability Resources
I want to make this course as accessible as possible to students with disabilities or medical conditions that may affect any aspect of course assignments or participation. If you are a student with any kind of disability, do not hesitate to communicate with me so that we may implement measures and accommodations that will improve and promote your learning experience in the classroom and facilitate the completion of your assignments.

Wesleyan University is committed to ensuring that all qualified students with disabilities are afforded an equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from its programs and services. To receive accommodations, a student must have a documented disability as defined by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, and provide documentation of the disability. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact Disability Resources as soon as possible. If you believe that you need accommodations for a disability, please contact Dean Patey in Disability Resources, located in North College, Room 021, or call 860-685-5581 for an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations.

Honor Code
All forms of plagiarism will be penalized according to Wesleyan University’s official rules. All work must be done in compliance with the Honor Code. If you need help with proper citations, methodologies, writing skills, etc., or you have questions on how to avoid plagiarism, please contact me or the Writing Workshop: http://www.wesleyan.edu/writing/workshop/. Specifically, please consult the section on plagiarism: http://www.wesleyan.edu/studentaffairs/studenthandbook/standardsregulations/plagiarism.html.

Course Schedule
*This schedule is subject to change based on the group’s rhythm.*

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<th>Week 1: Introduction</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Tuesday, January 22</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Syllabus presentation</td>
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<td>• Knowledge and expectations questionnaire; icebreakers</td>
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<td>• Course content and material overview</td>
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<tr>
<td>• No readings</td>
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Week 2: A variety of theories on and approaches to body issues and transformations

Tuesday, January 27 (73 pages)

Thursday, January 29 (48 pages)

Optional readings

Week 3: Thinness, fatness, diet practices, and gastric bypass surgeries

Tuesday, February 3 (56 pages)
Thursday, February 5 (57 pages)


Optional readings


Week 4: Yoga, sports, and bodybuilding practices

Tuesday, February 10 (69 pages)


Thursday, February 12 (26 pages)

Guest lecture: Stephanie Lemyre
Yoga teacher at Downward Dog Yoga Centre, Toronto


Optional readings

Week 5: Aesthetic and cosmetic surgeries

Tuesday, February 17 (33 pages)
Guest lecture: Victoria Pitts-Taylor
Author of Surgery Junkies: Wellness and Pathology in Cosmetic Culture


Thursday, February 19 (67 pages)

*Due: Critical reading review
Optional readings


Week 6: Ethnic and species transformations

**Tuesday, February 24 (42 pages)**


**Thursday, February 26 (63 pages)**


*Extra Credit*

FGSS Series: Social Death and Survival: Race/Sex/Class/Vulnerability

**Thursday, February 26, 4:15-6:00**

Lectures by Wesleyan faculty members including:
Alexandre Baril: *The Unthinkable Disability of Transness: Social Death in Social Movements and Strategies of Symbolic Survival*

Optional readings


**Week 7: Posthumanist transformations: Prostheses, cyborgs, and technologies**

**Tuesday, March 3 (43 pages)**

**Thursday, March 5 (47 pages)**

* Due: Paper proposal with bibliography

**Optional readings**
Weeks 8 and 9: Spring break

Tuesday, March 10/Thursday, March 12/Tuesday, March 17/Thursday, March 19: no class

Week 10: Sex/gender identity and trans surgeries

Tuesday, March 24 (47 pages)

Thursday, March 26 (51 pages)

*Extra Credit*
FGSS Series: Social Death and Survival: Race/Sex/Class/Vulnerability

Thursday, March 26, 4:15-6:00
Lecture by Lisa Marie Cacho
Author of *Social Death: Racialized Rightlessness and the Criminalization of the Unprotected*

Optional readings

Week 11: Dis/ability and voluntary disability acquisition (transability)

Tuesday, March 31 (42 pages)


**Thursday, April 2 (66 pages)**


**Optional readings**


• Baril, Alexandre. 2015, forthcoming. "How Dare You Pretend to Be Disabled?" The Discounting of Transabled People and Their Claims in Disability Movements and Studies." *Disability & Society*. https://wesleyan.academia.edu/AlexandreBaril


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**Week 12: HIV/AIDS and voluntary HIV acquisition (bug chasing)**

**Tuesday, April 7 (56 pages)**


**Thursday, April 9 (58 pages)**


*Due: First draft of your final paper for peer evaluation*
Optional readings


Week 13: Self-injury, suicide, and death

**Tuesday, April 14** (52 pages)

**Thursday, April 16** (43 pages)

* Due: Peer evaluation

*Extra Credit

FGSS Series: Social Death and Survival: Race/Sex/Class/Vulnerability

**Thursday, April 16, 4:15-6:00**
Lecture by Jasbir Puar
Author of *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*

Optional readings


Week 14: In-class presentations and discussions

Tuesday, April 21
• Three student presentations and discussions

Thursday, April 23
• Three student presentations and discussions
• No readings

Week 15: In-class presentations and discussions

Tuesday, April 28
• Three student presentations and discussions

Thursday, April 30
• Three student presentations and discussions
• No readings

Week 16: Conclusion: Intersectionality, body modifications, and social movements

Tuesday, May 5
• Semester overview: content, key concepts, ideas, and debates
• Discussion: social movements and the reproduction of forms of exclusion and violence
• Conclusion and professor evaluation: your critiques and suggestions are welcome!
• Last class: no readings

Food for thought:

*Final paper due: May 12 by 5 pm. Please submit your paper at my office, Allbriton Rm 214.