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SOCIOLOGY XXXX: SEMINAR ON THE BLACK BODY

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course overviews sociological, historical and cultural studies on the body, with a focus on Blackness from a critical and intersectional perspective. How is race embodied, and how are bodies racialized? How do gender, sexuality, size, and class mutually influence embodiment? The body is a “medium of culture,” the physical and symbolic form through which social hierarchies, control, and etiquette are played out (Bordo 1993). Dominant Western philosophies have constructed Black bodies as dangerously animalistic, less developed and morally inept. These have been used to justify Black people’s enslavement, sterilization, and societal marginalization over time. However, we will not just discuss what is frequently and has historically been done *to* Black bodies, but also the *subjective* experience of embodying our identities and the body as a site of resistance. We will attend to the latter through a series of reflective essays, wherein you will turn a critical eye to your own embodiment.

White supremacist patriarchy shapes the ways in which Black people experience the medical field, encounter gender-based violence, and engage in beauty work. For example, adherence to Eurocentric beauty ideals has often meant the chance of upward mobility via access to employment, social networks, and romantic relationships in a global society where Black women fit at the bottom of race, gender and often class hierarchies. Thus, we will not consider race as our sole axis of analysis, but as it interacts and intersects with other systems of social stratification.

Our specific goals in this course are:

- To identify and synthesize key arguments related to intersectionality and the body
- To become well versed in the main topics on race and embodiment, including violence, reproduction and health, beauty, and movement.
- To apply theoretical concepts to real-life examples.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Berry, Diana Ramey. 2017. *The Value of the Enslaved, from Womb to Grave, in the Building of a Nation*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Nelson, Alondra. 2011. *Body and Soul: The Black Panther Party and the Fight Against Medical Discrimination*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Roberts, Dorothy. 2016. *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty*. New York: Vintage Books.

Washington, Harriet. 2006. *Medical Apartheid*. New York: Anchor Books.

** Most of our readings are photocopied articles and chapters; on the first day of class we will discuss how to access them.

COURSE EXPECTATIONS:

Class Participation: You are expected not only to attend class regularly but to participate in class discussions. The more you talk about the material, the better you will understand it and your relationship to it. To gain practice in developing your sociological imagination, it is essential that you complete *all* of the assigned reading prior to class and come prepared for intellectual discussion.

Discussion Facilitator: You will select one week to present the readings to the class with a partner. There is no set structure you are expected to adhere to. However, the presentation should include a discussion of the readings historical context, summarize the main perspective, present critiques, and end with discussion questions. Your questions might deal with “comprehension,” pondering the significance of one passage or theme in the text. Or, your questions might be evaluative or comparative. You may use your classmates’ weekly memos as inspiration for your presentations.

Memo Blog Posts: Each week from weeks 2-13, you will write a short response to the readings for inclusion on our course blog, due Sunday by 5pm. Discussion facilitator pairs may use these response papers to develop their ideas and prepare questions for that week’s class.

Reflective Essays: You will write three, 5-6 page reflective essays on the real or symbolic ways in which race is embodied in everyday life and in various institutional settings. These essays can engage current events, auto-ethnography, or historical research based on the class themes. The goal of these essays is to attend to the relationship between race, the body, and society using academic resources. You will showcase your mastery of, and critical thinking about, sociological and critical race concepts about the body and embodiment.

Book Review (Undergraduate students): Undergraduate students will write a 5-6 page book review that critically engages a recent publication in the field. You will summarize the main arguments of the book, and note how it connects to, critiques, or expands the field of race and embodiment studies. I will supply a list of possible books, or you can pick an outside book that must be approved by me.

Final Paper (Graduate Students): Graduate students will write a 10-15 page paper that applies the insights of course readings to a phenomena of your choice. This paper should include an introduction to the topic, literature review (some of this should analyze assigned readings, but you will also draw upon outside scholarship as necessary), and how your proposed research contributes to a puzzle or gap in your field. If your dissertation considers bodies and embodiment, think of this paper as an opportunity to advance your future dissertation proposal.

GRADING BREAKDOWN

Participation (15%)

Memo Blog Posts (20%)

Discussion Facilitator (15%)

Reflective Essays (30%)

Book Review/ Final Paper (20%)

SCHEDULE:

Week 1: Introducing Ourselves

Crais, Clifton and Pamela Scully. 2009. "Introduction" and "Ghosts of Sara Baartman" in *Sara Baartman: A Ghost Story and a Biography*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Week 2: Black Bodies in Bondage

Berry, Diana Ramey. 2017. Introduction, Chapter 1, and Chapter 3 in *The Price for Their Pound of Flesh*. Boston: Beacon Press.

West, Emily and R.J. Knight. 2017. "Mother's Milk: Slavery, Wet-Nursing, and Black and White Women in the Antebellum South." *Journal of Southern History* 83(1): 37-68.

Week 3: Violence

Crenshaw, Kimberle. 1991. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color." *Stanford Law Review* 43(6):1241-99.

Yancey, George and Judith Butler. January 12, 2015. "What's Wrong with 'All Lives Matter'?" *The New York Times*. <https://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/01/12/whats-wrong-with-all-lives-matter/>

Young, Harvey. 2005. "The Black Body as Souvenir in American Lynching." *Theatre Journal* 57(4); 639-657.

***Reflective Paper 1 Due**

Week 4: Experimentation and the Black Body

Introduction and Chapter 1 in *Medical Apartheid* By Harriet Washington York: Anchor Books.

In Class Screening: *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*

Week 5: Medicine & Health: Examples in Resistance

Introduction, Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 in *Body and Soul* by Alondra Nelson

Week 6: Eugenics and Reproduction

Introduction and Chapter 1 in *Killing the Black Body* by Dorothy Roberts

Book Review Selection/Final Paper Topic Proposal Due

Week 7: Black Sexuality and the State

Chapters 4 and 5 in *Killing the Black Body* by Dorothy Roberts.

Week 8: Black Health in a Neoliberal Era

Krupar, Shiloh and Nadine Ehlers. 2017. "Biofutures: Race and the Governance of Health." *Society and Space* 35(2) 222:240.

Benjamin, Ruha. 2014. "Race for Cures: Rethinking the Racial Logics of 'Trust' in Biomedicine." *Sociology Compass* 8(6): 755-769.

Roberts, Dorothy. 2009. "Race, Gender, and Genetic Technologies; A New Reproductive Dystopia?" *Signs* 43(4): 783-804.

Week 9: Black Beauty Politics

- Craig, Maxine. 2006. "Race, Beauty, and the Tangled Knot of a Guilty Pleasure." *Feminist Theory* 7(2): 159-177.
- Hunter, Margaret. 2007. "The Persistent Problem of Colorism: Skin Tone, Status, and Inequality." *Sociology Compass* 1(1): 237-254.
- Hunter, Margaret. 2011. "Buying Racial Capital: Skin Bleaching and Cosmetic Surgery in a Globalized World." *Journal of Pan African Studies* 4(4): 142-164.
- In Class Screening:** *Dark Girls* (Duke and Berry 2012)

***Reflective Paper 2 Due**

Week 10: Black Hairstyling

- Mercer, Kobena. 1994. "Chapter 4: Black Hair Style/Politics." In *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies*. New York: Routledge.
- Saro-Wiwa, Zina. 2012. "Black Women's Transitions to Natural Hair." *The New York Times*. Retrieved May 4, 2014. (<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/01/opinion/black-women-and-natural-hair.html>)
- Johnson, Chelsea. October 6, 2016. "Kinky, Curly Hair: A Tool of Resistance Across the African Diaspora." *The Conversation*. (<https://theconversation.com/kinky-curly-hair-a-tool-of-resistance-across-the-african-diaspora-65692>)
- In Class Screening:** *Good Hair* (Stilson 2009)

Week 11: Political Bodies

- Gill, Tiffany M. 2010. "Introduction: Finding Politics in Unexpected Places: The Matrix of Beauty, Business and Activism." In *Beauty Shop Politics: African American Women's Activism in the Beauty Industry*. Champagne: University of Illinois Press.
- Ford, Tanisha. 2015. Introduction and Chapter 1 in *Liberated Threads: Black Women, Style, and the Global Politics of Soul*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Davis, Angela. 1994. "Afro Images: Politics, Fashion, and Nostalgia." *Critical Inquiry* 21(1): 37-45.
- Browne, Simone. 2015. Section 1 of "'What Did TSA Find in Solange's Fro?': Security Theater at the Airport." Pp. 131-145 in *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness*. Raleigh: Duke University Press.

Week 12: Culture, Context and (Shifting) Aesthetics

- Balogun, Oluwakemi. 2012 "Cultural and Cosmopolitan: Idealized Femininity and Embodied Nationalism in Nigerian Beauty Pageants" *Gender & Society* 26(3): 357-381.
- Caldwell, Kia. 2003. "'Look at Her Hair': The Body Politics of Black Womanhood in Brazil." *Transforming Anthropology* 11(2), 18-29.
- Figueiredo, Angela. 2015. "Letter to Judith Butler from an Ex Mulatto Woman." *The Angela Davis Collective*.
- Tate, Shirley. 2007. "Black Beauty: Shade, Hair and Anti-Racist Aesthetics." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 30(2): 300-319.

Week 13: Fitness, Fatness, and Politicizing Size

- Lau, Kimberly. 2011. "Chapter 4: New Bodies of Knowledge." Pp. 107-142 in *Body Language: Sisters in Shape, Black Women's Fitness, and Feminist Identity Politics*. Philadelphia:

Temple University Press.

Shaw, Andrea Elizabeth. 2006. "Fatness and Blackness: A Compelling History of Erasure" and "Chapter 1: Reshaping Identity." In *The Embodiment of Disobedience: Fat Black Women's Unruly Political Bodies*. Lanham: Lexington Books.

Bonus Reading to Consider for Reflective and Autobiographical Writing about the Body:
Gay, Roxane. 2017. *Hunger: A Memoir of (My) Body*. New York: Harper Collins.

***Reflective Paper 3 Due**

Week 14: Sexuality, Performance and Style

Miller, Monica. 2003. "W. E. B. Du Bois and the Dandy as a Diasporic Race Man." *Callaloo: A Journal of African American Arts and Letters*. 26(3): 738-765.
Moore, Mignon. 2006. "Lipstick or Timberlands: Meanings of Gender Presentation in Black Lesbian Communities." *Signs* 32(1): 113-140.

Week 15: Black Bodies in Motion: Race, Gender and Sports

Johnson, Chelsea. 2015. "'Just Because I Dance Like a Ho I'm Not a Ho': Cheerleading at the Intersection of Race, Class and Gender." *Sociology of Sport Journal* 32(4):377-394.
Bailey, Moya. 2016. "Misogynoir in Medical Media: On Caster Semenya and R. Kelly." *Catalyst: Feminism, Theory, Technoscience*, 2(2): 1-31.
Carrington, Ben. 1998. "Sport, Masculinity, and Black Cultural Resistance." *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 22(3): 275-298.
Griffin, Rachel Alicia and Bernadette Marie Calafell. 2011. "Control, Discipline and Punish: Black Masculinity and (In)visible Whiteness in the NBA." Pp. 117 -136 in *Critical Rhetorics of Race*, edited by Michael G. Lacy. New York: NYU Press.

***Book Review or Final Paper Due**