

FYS 017/6568 Fall 2019: Composing the Female Body in Literature and Popular Culture

Professor: Yasmina Madden

M/W: 12:30-1:45pm,

Office hours: Howard Hall, 321, T/R 1pm-3pm; W 3:30-4:30pm



Course Overview: Our culture has always celebrated, objectified, admired, legislated, revered, and shamed the female body. Whether the attention has been positive or negative, one thing is certain: The female body has always been scrutinized and very often in ways that male bodies are not. In this seminar, we will analyze the ways that contemporary literature and popular culture compose or construct the female body in particular ways, and what these various narratives and depictions reveal to us.

Course Objective:

In analyzing how short stories, personal essays, and media (advertising, tv/film, radio podcasts) construct female bodies, some of the questions we'll consider include: How do these compositions or constructions contribute to our culture's scrutiny of women's bodies? How do these narratives question, resist, or reject stereotypes, gender roles, and/or unrealistic expectations of women and their bodies? When considering literature, we might ask: How do women writers compose the female body? Male writers? Can writing by women about women "reclaim" the female body? Additionally, how do our cultural narratives of the female body differ from, or overlap with, narratives of the male body?

As a participant in this course you will be expected to fulfill frequent writing assignments; critically read and respond to numerous texts; and participate meaningfully in class discussions. Your objective will be to develop your critical reading, writing, and thinking skills by analyzing the various contemporary representations of women/the female body in literature and popular culture presented over the course of the semester.

Student Outcomes:

Students successfully completing this course will improve their academic competence in the following ways:

- They will become more effective speakers and participants in class discussions.
- They will become more competent critical, analytical readers.
- They will become more attuned to the nuances of writing and to the ways in which context, purpose, and genre affect the standards to which their writing aspires.
- They will learn to incorporate research into writing about personal experience.
- They will be able to situate their learning in the context of institutional (i.e. academic, school-related) expectations and of their long-term goals.
- They will have begun to develop the habits of mind and the self-discipline essential to success in college and beyond.

From Surviving to Thriving

One ongoing aim of our First-Year Seminar will be to foster participants' transformation from "survival mode" to thriving at Drake University. Every Monday, we will make time for "Campus Conversation" a fifteen-minute conversation at the beginning of the week where we can address

questions and topics essential to first-year students' becoming more at home with the independent, self-reliant context of a residential, four-year University. As your professor, I will initiate some discussions on topics such as advising, declaring majors, conflict resolution, locating appropriate support services and resources, life in Des Moines, and the like. But more frequently, I will ask you to bring your own questions and concerns to the table.

Required Textbooks:

Course Reader: These readers are available at Copy Cat, located near the corner of 31st and Forest (across from McDonald's). 3011 Forest Ave, Des Moines, IA 50311 [\(515\) 255-9284](tel:5152559284)

Course Activities:

A. Writing: You'll do two kinds of writing in this class:

- 5 relatively informal 1-2 page discussion briefs. These discussion briefs are designed to foster critical thinking about issues and topics we'll discuss in class. Discussion briefs are graded on completion and timeliness: Those completed according to the guidelines and turned in on time will receive full credit; all others (late, incomplete, obviously hurried or careless work) will receive partial or no credit. You must be present for the discussion for which these briefs are assigned to receive full credit. Discussion briefs must be submitted using our online Blackboard Discussion forum by **5 pm the day before class discussion. I will offer a prompt for each discussion brief.**
- 3 more formal essays of varying length. These assignments ask you to experiment with different perspectives on, and approaches to, reflecting on the same basic topic: How does our culture compose/construct the female body. You will be asked to adjust your take on this question with each essay you write, and to work within a different set of parameters and expectations with each essay assignment. Throughout the course, we will be using the term "essay" in its original, etymological sense, from the French word *assai*: An attempt, assay, or experiment. These essays will be graded according to the degree to which they fulfill pre-announced criteria. Their value is based on the degree of difficulty they present. You will receive an assignment sheet with guidelines for each essay.
- Group presentation that includes writing and research.

B. Class Participation: Throughout the semester, you will be asked to contribute to the learning environment of the classroom by sharing your insights, asking questions, and taking part in small-group and plenary discussions. You should consider each class meeting as an opportunity to contribute meaningfully to our discussions. This keeping up on the reading, coming to class prepared with your questions and comments about each text, and engaging thoughtfully with others in conversation about these readings. We will go over a separate handout regarding discussion participation.

C. Reading Quizzes: These are very straightforward multiple-choice short quizzes. If you have read carefully and completed readings, you will have no problem with these quizzes. They are merely meant to give you even more incentive to get your reading done so you can *be part of the conversation about our texts.*

GENERAL COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Classroom Etiquette and a Word on Tech: It's important that our classroom remains an open, respectful, and safe environment. You are free to hold whatever opinions you choose. However, you should express only those that are germane to our course content and goals during class-time. Please be prepared to explain the validity of your opinions and interpretations. It is possible that your opinion on a relevant topic may prove distasteful or even offensive to others; I ask that you take that possibility

into account and that you weigh your words carefully as you express your point of view. But please do not “censor” yourself if you have something relevant and insightful to add to the conversation.

I realize, of course, that many of you have relationships with one another outside of class. I appreciate the role friendship and personal acquaintance play in determining in-class dynamics. Accordingly, I invite you to maintain those personal relationships in class, to the extent that they do not interrupt class.

Lastly, please make sure you are **fully present** when you come to class! Cell phones should be out of sight and out of mind. If you use a laptop for notes, that’s fine. However, if you use your laptop to surf the web, answer email, or work on other assignments during our class time, I’ll ask that you stop bringing it to class. Finally, be respectful of your peers, yourself, and your professor during our class time by remaining focused on the class conversation, engaging in the class conversation, and keeping private conversations or napping (!) for outside of class.

Attendance Policy: To be successful in this course, you should attend every class meeting. Please arrive to class on time prepared to actively participate in discussion and group work, and with your reading and writing assignments completed.

Missing more than 2 class meetings will negatively affect your grade. Please inform me in advance of religious holidays or school/sports-related duties that require you to miss class. In the case of religious holiday or school/sports travel, it is required that you make arrangements to get your assignments in on time. *It is still required that you turn in assignments by the date they are due.*

Assignment Policy: All assignments are due on time. If you must be absent the day work is due, *your work is still due*—have a friend from class or a roommate turn it in, or email it to me by the beginning of class. *No late work is accepted and there is no extra-credit to make up for missed assignments.* Each student will get the opportunity to make-up one quiz at the end of the semester, if they have missed a quiz, or want to replace a low score.

Paper Format: Typed (12pt font, please), double-spaced. Please include name as well as assignment number.

Grading: There are **1000** total points possible for the semester, and your final grade will be the sum of the points you receive, converted to a letter grade. The point breakdown is as follows:

Graded Assignments	Points
Writing Assignment 1	50
Writing Assignment 2	100
Writing & Presentation Assignment 3	100
Writing Assignment 4 (Final Essay)	150
Discussion Briefs (5 in total)	200
Reading Quizzes (10 in total)	200
Class Participation	200

Total 1000

You will receive guidelines for each formal assignment and for discussion briefs.

Final letter grades correlate to 100-point increments: 900-1,000=A; 800-899=B; 700-799=C; and so on. +/- modifiers apply to the top 25 and lowest 25 points of each 100-point increment: Thus, 875-899 is a B+, 825-874 is a B, and 800-824 is a B-.

Office Hours and Email Protocol: Throughout the semester, I encourage you to visit me outside of class to discuss in depth questions or concerns you may have. I ask, however, that in order to avoid a pile up outside my office, you pre-arrange a time to meet with me during office hours. You may contact me by email, or even tell me in class if you wish to meet with me during my office hours, but you should do so early enough that I can respond in case we need to make alternate arrangements. It's best not to rely on email to pose lengthy questions or questions that require an in-depth response; for these types of questions see me during office hours. I do not check email after 8p.m.

Writing Workshop: Please be aware that tutoring services are available through the Writing Workshop. The Writing Workshop is located in Cowles Library. I suggest that you all take advantage of the Writing Workshop, however, I may require that some of you to make appointments with a tutor. If I require that you meet with a tutor for additional help with your writing, you must do so before you turn in the assignment.

HONOR CODE: DISHONESTY AND PLAGIARISM:

Academic dishonesty is an encompassing term involving any activity that seeks to gain credit for work one has not done or to deliberately damage or destroy the work of others. Plagiarism is the misrepresentation of another's ideas, phrases, discourse, or works as one's own whether by intention or by accident; it is not tolerated at Drake University. Failure to acknowledge a source of information is plagiarism. So is culling through your roommate's, friend's, fraternity's, or sorority's files for an appropriate assignment. So is having someone doctor your assignment. So is downloading an assignment from the web.

It is my policy that any instance of conscious plagiarism or academic dishonesty will result in your immediate failure in this course.

SCHEDULE OF ASSIGNMENTS:

Week One The Female Body in Creative Nonfiction, Critical Theory, and the Media

M 8/26 Class intros and expectations

W 8/28 Due: *Introduction (1-5); Beauty Sick Intro & Ch. 1 Just Like a Woman*, Renee Engeln (27-39). Begin viewing Miss Representation. **For Weds 9/4, choose an adv that does not include TEXT, and come to class prepared to share a list of ten analytical points regarding the advertisement for the class. You will turn in your ad and list of ten analyses to me. Your ad should include a female body.**

Week Two:

M 9/2 **Labor Day—University does not hold classes.**

W 9/4 Finish viewing Miss Representation, discussion of doc and discussion of your ads. **Receive Discussion Brief 1 assignment. Post to BB by Sunday, 4pm at the latest.**

Week Three

- M 9/9 Due: Discussion of the Brief 1 (I supplied ad, different women) and Miss Representation.
- W 9/11 Due: When Your (Brown) Body is a (White) Wonderland, Tressie McMillan Cottom; *It Will Look Like a Sunset*, Kelly Sunderburg (69-77);

Week Four

- M 9/16 Due: Cixous, The Laugh of the Medusa
Strayhorn, Exploring a Corporeal Writing
- W 9/18 Due: *Hunger: A Memoir*, Roxane Gay (6-26); *Shunned*, Meredith Hall(40-50)
ASSIGN DISC BRIEF 2

Week Five

- M 9/23 Due: *Straightening Our Hair*, Bell Hooks (51-55); *Transcript*, Anuradha Bhowmik (56-61).
- W 9/25 *Why I Let Him Touch My Hair*, Tyrese Coleman (78-80).

Week Six

- M 9/30 *Mirrorings*, Lucy Grealy (81-86)
- W 10/2 Due: *Things People Said: An Essay in Seven Steps*, Sejal Shah (87-88); *Bruised*, Sasha Bonet (89-92); *Cut*, Natasha Singh (108-111)

Week Seven

- M 10/7 *Move Around*, Casey Plett (101-107)
- W 10/9 Due: *Longing for the Male Gaze* by Jennifer Bartlett (93-96); In-class *Fresh Air Podcast: Molly McCully Brown*.

Week Eight

- M 10/14 Fall Break—University does not hold classes
- W 10/16 Due: *Grand Unified Theory of Female Pain*, Leslie Jamison (129-146).
I Feel Bad About My Neck, Nora Ephron, (123-128).

Week Nine

The Female Body in Short Fiction, Film, Critical Essays

M 10/21 Due: *The Fat Girl*, Andre Dubus and *Missing Women*, June Spence
Discuss Group Presentations.

Tuesday 5:30pm Denice Frohman Spoken Word opportunity

W 10/23 In-class Film Viewing of *Thelma and Louise* **finish viewing on your own for Monday**

Week Ten

M 10/28 **Library Visit Rm 45**

W 10/30 Due: *Skin*, *Corona Queens*, *August 1983*, Bushra Rehman
Cat Person, Kristen Roupenian
What It Felt Like When Cat Person Went Viral, KrisenRopenian

Week Eleven

M 11/4 Due: *Naked*, Joyce Carol Oates (177-185)

W 11/6 Due: “*This Is What You Deserve*”: *Rape as a Rite of Passage in Joyce Carol Oates’s “Naked,”* Christine E. Atkins (186-197) ****You might want to reread the short story *Naked* before you read the critical essay due today.**
Why is Your Writing So Violent, Joyce Carol Oates (200-202)

Week Twelve

M 11/11 In-class viewing and discussion of an excerpt of *The Bachelor and The Bacholorette*.

W 11/13 Class time reserved for work on presentations.

Student Presentations

Week Thirteen:

M 11/18 Group 1 presentation

W 11/20 Group 2 presentation

Week Fourteen

M 11/25 Thanksgiving –Day off

W 11/27 Thanksgiving—University does not hold classes.

Week Fifteen

M 12/2 Group 3 presentation/Evals

Finals Week: Final essay due by last day of finals (Dec 13) 1pm. Can be dropped off early in my Howard Hall Mailbox (Rm 325).

Class Discussion Participation Criteria:

Our FYS is a discussion-based English course, and as such my expectations for active and frequent participation are high. Your participation in class discussion includes more than simply showing up and paying attention. While doing so is essential, earning credit for participation means doing one or more of the following several times per class meeting.

- Asking questions about how to interpret, understand, or clarify a text or a concept during discussion of flash essays, craft essays, and peer manuscripts (workshop)
- Responding to another student's questions
- Answering questions posed by the professor.
- Making interpretive remarks supported by a careful reading of the text.
- Elaborating on another student's remarks by:
 - Agreeing and then adding supportive detail from the text.
 - Disagreeing and defending your position with details from the text.
 - Suggesting an alternative (though not necessarily contradictory) interpretation and supporting it with detail from the text.

Some students think that participation in classroom discussion is overemphasized in grading and evaluation. Many of those students think that participation should be entirely voluntary because “*some people are just shy*” or “*some people don't have anything to say.*” But can you imagine applying the same viewpoint to writing assignments or reading? “*Some people are just slow readers and shouldn't have to read X amount of pages in X amount of time,*” one might argue. Or, “*I don't have anything to write about for the assignment, so I'm just going to sit this one out.*”

A biology student who decides that the lab portion of the class is not for them would probably not fare well in class. So, consider classroom participation the “lab” portion of our FYS course, where we experiment with OUR ideas about, and interpretations of the texts.

Please keep in mind that there is a reason why I want to hear from you. Participation, as a learning strategy, has several key functions in the classroom.

- In my experience, students who put thought and effort into their classroom participation understand and retain material much more efficiently and effectively than those who do not
- Participating in class discussion means that you are shaping the direction of the course and the topics and issues we confront. You help ensure that the course addresses your issues and concerns, and you refine your own views of the issues that concern you.
- By participating—even when you might not be completely sure of your comment—you alert your professor to how and what you're thinking. He or she can then alter the course, revisit material, or tailor assignments to accommodate your learning process.
- Learning, like every other important human activity, is social and collaborative. Making yourself comfortable with interaction now will mean that you become more comfortable in the company of your peers as you pursue social, career, or advanced educational goals. Participation, in this case is not just a means to an end; it is an end in itself, too.

If you find verbal participation daunting, I suggest you try some of the following:

- **Read actively:** Make margin notes of particular elements of the text as you read it. Highlight moments in the text that you have a question about and, if it helps, write out exactly what you'd like to ask your professor and peers during class discussion.
- **Write out a specific comment** on one element of the text (the protagonist's adherence to traditional gender roles, for example) at the end of the essay. Share this comment, which you've already written, and feel comfortable with, during our discussion.
- **Try to get in on the discussion early**, rather than waiting and feeling as if all of your points have been 'taken.' Do keep in mind, however, that it is absolutely fine to share a reading/viewpoint of a text with a fellow critic and to voice that in discussion. You might challenge yourself to add something else to your peer's reading of the text.
- **Always remember that the point of discussion is to learn with and from one another. It's not about whether your comment is "right," it's about developing our critical thinking skills and the practice of literary interpretation through discussion with your peers and professor.**

STATEMENT ON SENSITIVE CLASSROOM MATERIALS:

It is always my goal to make my classroom an open, respectful environment, and safe environment. Any materials that are assigned in this class are meant to help us learn, question, and grow as scholars.

This course includes some narratives that deal with subject matter that some may find uncomfortable to negotiate. These subjects may include: sexuality, gender, and race; violence, sexual violence, racial violence; addiction and mental illness.

Literature represents the full spectrum of human experience and no subject matter is off-limits in a literature or writing course. I, and all of my English Faculty colleagues, strive to create a classroom environment in which potentially volatile material can be viewed, read, discussed and written about in a thoughtful and mature manner and in which the perspectives of all participants are listened to and respected. Students may expect to experience a certain amount of productive discomfort when confronting uncomfortable topics. It is my hope that our classroom is a space in which we support each other in confronting difficult texts and subjects.

It should be noted that it is my policy not to use racist, sexist, homophobic, or transphobic language in my classroom. While texts that we read might use such language, we read and discuss these texts in an effort to understand the way language can be weaponized, and to understand the way that language has been used historically and to what effect. I choose not to verbalize racist, sexist, or homophobic language and I ask that you do the same.

If you have been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder and know that specific subjects elicit an uncontrollable emotional response, and you want advance warning about classroom material, please contact Michelle Laughlin, Student Disability Services coordinator, who will

work with you to make your instructor aware of your request. Your instructor will then work with you to determine what the appropriate accommodation might be.

If you have not been diagnosed but find a certain topic so distressing that you are unable to perform academically, we encourage you to consult Ms. Laughlin; her office can refer you to the appropriate resource. 281-1835; michelle.laughlin@drake.edu

STUDENT DISABILITY SERVICES

If you have a disability and will require academic accommodations in this course, I would be happy to discuss your needs. Accommodations are coordinated through Student Disability Services. Please contact Michelle Laughlin, Director of Student Disability Services, at 281-1835 or michelle.laughlin@drake.edu.

Title IX SEXUAL HARRASSMENT AND ASSAULT

The University has resources available for students who have experienced sexual or interpersonal misconduct, which can include sexual harassment, sexual assault, dating violence, and stalking, for example. University contacts:

- Resources and reporting options can be found on the Title IX webpage at <https://www.drake.edu/titleix/>
- Violence Intervention Partner (V.I.P.) provides peer-based 24/7 confidential support and advocacy services. To access a V.I.P. advocate call or text 515-512-2972.
- Katie Overberg, Title IX Coordinator: 271 -2982 or titleix@drake.edu