Human bodies are always performed, experienced and represented in global, national and local relations of power. These relations are connected to capitalism, imperialism, patriarchy, dominant sexuality discourses and many other social and cultural systems.

Much of the present research on “embodiment” draws on various disciplinary fields. These include feminist studies, media/cultural studies, psychology, philosophy and social anthropology. This course examines some important interdisciplinary theoretical approaches (exploring subjectivity, performance and identity; racial and gender discourses; and debates about individual agency), and prepares students to use particular tools and theories to “read” the body in different contexts. In developing their analytical skills, students are required to critically view and respond to narrative films and documentaries; engage actively with visual texts in lectures and tutorials; and participate actively in tutorials and group projects.

The course maps out recent constructionist exploration of gender, sexuality, race and embodiment in relation to the following case studies:

- cultural assumptions about race, gender and sexuality in the “marking” of women’s and men’s bodies
- the beauty and ‘body perfection’ industry, the “healthy” body and disability;
- the ambiguities of body performance with reference to dress, drag, fashion and self-styling
- heterosexuality, femininities and masculinities in media messages, especially advertising;
- medical discourses, particularly discourses of HIV/AIDS

Lecture Times and Venue: Monday, 3rd period, DL3
Consult Notice Board about Tutorials
Note: There are two sessions per week, 1 lecture and 1 tutorial. Students will need to make arrangements to watch films through their tutors. These film-viewings are compulsory. NB: Refer to separate outline for details about assignments and tutorials.
In order to develop analytical skills, students are required to **view and incorporate discussion of films and documentaries; engage with visual texts in lectures and tutorials; and participate actively in tutorials and group presentations.**

### Mark Allocation

- Essay 1: 20%
- Essay 2: 40%
- Group Project: 20%
- Tutorial Mark: 20%
- CWM Total: 100%

**Final Mark:**
- CWM: 60%
- Examination: 40%
- TOTAL: 100%

### Lecture Outline

**Lecture 1, 27 July**

*Introduction to course and course requirements.*

*Binary systems and Human Bodies*

Ensure that you register for a tutorial (indicated on list available in department’s tutors’ and postgraduates’ room)

**Lecture 2, 3 August**

*Socialization, social constructions and gendered bodies*

This lecture introduces students to the basics of feminist constructionist readings of gender with reference to dualisms such as mind-body, nature culture, public-private etc. By considering concrete examples, we will explore how social constructionism opens up ways of thinking through the various agents, geographical spaces and social circumstances that regulate human bodies and social subjectivities.

**Reading**


Documentary: Sistersong and Trust Black women (NGOs), We Always Resist.

Lecture 3, 10 August

Human bodies and the construction of gender, sex and sexuality. How have gendered bodies been defined according to binaries, dualisms and ostensibly objective “scientific” models? How can we use constructionist approaches to analyse conventional definitions of gender, sexuality, as well as the “neutral” notion of “sex”?

Reading

Lecture 4: 17 August

Raced bodies

Like gender, race functions as a langue for “scripting” bodies. How can we begin to explore how this “works”? And what are the similarities between gender and racial scripts? How have stereotypes about bodies (essentialist views) justified racial and gender hierarchies? Why is it important to develop a historical constructionist approach to questions of embodiment?

Reading


Lecture 5, 24 August:

Body Performance in Fashion and Self-styling

In view of the overwhelming ways in which bodies are regulated in society, how can we think about individuals or groups’ celebrating “agency” through their bodies? We shall explore the ambiguities of self-styling and performativity in considering how individuals use existing cultural resources to “reinvent” their bodies’ surfaces.
Reading


Vacation: 26 August - 5 September

Lecture 6, 7 September: Technologies of Globalization and Body Alteration

Continuing ideas raised in the previous lecture, this lecture focuses on body alteration practices in contemporary globalized societies. How have masculinities and femininities been shaped by a current obsession with bodily alteration and ‘perfection’? We will focus on ways in which commercial, racial as well as gendered factors explain the current obsession with “altering bodies”. We’ll also consider the usefulness - in view of the pressure to conform to social standards about desirable bodies - of the notion of “individual or personal choice”.

Reading


Lecture 7, 14 September: Race, orientalism and Embodiment: Developing ideas from previous weeks, this lecture deepens explorations of how essentialist ideas about race, especially at particular historical and political moments, have worked to define human bodies and subjectivities in relation to various discourses.


**Feature Film: Fabian, A. dir. Skin. 2008.**

**Lecture 8: 21 September :“Dis-abled” and Able Bodies:** This session deals with constructions of “disability” in relation to social invisibility and ideas about “abnormality” and “a-sexuality”. What are the foundations of ideas about “normal” and able bodies? How have the perspectives of radical disabled women challenged mainstream ideas about eroticism, sexual desire and pleasure, and intersected with feminist perspectives on women’s sexuality?

**Reading**

**Documentary: Shelley Barry, dir. 2003. Whole: A Trinity of Being.**

**Lecture 8: 28 September: Medical discourses and human bodies:** How has the legacy of Enlightenment cultural and philosophical ideas evident in in the way that raced and gendered bodies become objects for others’ commercial gain, knowledge production or experimentation? How do present-day popular and scientific ideas about diseased bodies, especially in relation to HIV/AIDS, reflect earlier power relations and social discourses?

**Reading**
• George Petros et al 2006 HIV/AIDS and ‘Othering’ in South Africa: the Blame goes on In Culture, Health and Sexuality, vol 8, no. 1

**Feature Film: Mereilles, F, dir. 2005. The Constant Gardener**
Lecture 9: 5 October: Represented bodies in the mass media: reading images
How has the media, especially advertising, represented gendered and sexualized bodies? We will explore topics including hegemonic masculinities, hyper-femininities, the male gaze, objectification, and ‘relations of looking and being looked at’ to examine how advertisements construct male and female bodies.

Reading

Documentary: Sunny Bergman, dir. 2007. Over the Hill

Lecture 12: 12 October

Reading sexed bodies in advertising: How is violent patriarchal heterosexuality inscribed into the saying that “sex sells”? How do advertisements construct heterosexist narratives around relationships between feminized (and also racialized) and masculinized bodies? By considering feminist views about pornography, this lecture explores ways in which heterosexuality, gender and race influence fantasy images of “desirable” bodies in the mass media, and also encourages students to reflect critically on how icons in the popular music industry have responded to dominant narratives and images.
- Desiree Lewis, South African Feminism, Lady Gaga and the Flight Towards queer Utopia, Los Angeles Review of Books,

Documentary Film: Jaen Caputi and Susan Rosenkrantz, 2007. The Pornography of Everyday Life

Lecture 13, 19 October: Revision and Course Evaluations