THE BODY POLITICS IN CONTEMPORARY CULTURE
SYLLABUS

Evgeniya Golman, Elena R. Iarskaia-Smirnova

The course is designed to provide brief but systematic exploration of key issues of the body politics and embodiment in contemporary culture for postgraduate students in sociology. Lectures and seminars of the course are organized around variety of social theories of the body, the body practices and the body politics, empiric researches of different aspects of embodiment and cases relevant to the topic. Preparation for each lecture and seminar requires reading of the core and supplementary course literature. At the end of the course student will write an essay on the topic related to the body politics theme.

During the course students will find out
• What is social about our embodiment and what are key issues of sociology of the body;
• How agents of socialization shape the way we use our body (move, see, hear etc) and act upon it through different practices in everyday life;
• How the body can be a site for political struggle, medical regulation and justification of social inequalities;
• In what way gender politics shapes scientific knowledge about sex and how gender can be inscribed on the surface of the body;
• How mass media images of the body reflect cultural values and influence the way we treat our bodies;
• Implications of recent innovative biotechnologies for cultural understanding of the human nature and borders of the body.

Key Topics of the Course

Topic 1. Social Theories of the Body and Embodiment

What is social about the body? The body in classical sociology. Naturalistic approaches and social constructivist view on the body. Sociology of the body as a field of sociological thought. Sociology of the body and ‘carnal’ sociology: main theoretical traditions. The body in integrative sociological theories (P. Bourdieu, A. Giddens). Corporeal realism as an attempt to transcend structure/agency dilemma in sociology of the body (C. Shilling). Embodiment in high modernity: the body project (C. Shilling) and reflexive body techniques (N. Crossley).
**Topic 2. The Body and Social Policy. Discipline and surveillance.**


**Topic 3. The Body Politics and Gender.**

Sex/gender distinction and its critique. Evolution of scientific knowledge about the sexed body: from ‘one sex’ model to the model of two sexes and hormonal bodies. Feminine and masculine bodies. Transgenderism. ‘Doing gender’ concept (C. West, D. Zimmerman) and the body: interrelation between the body, sex and gender.

**Topic 4. Ill body in culture. Sociology of health, illness and medicine. Social construction of disability.**

From medical sociology to sociology of health, illness and medicine. Medicalization and somatization of society. The ‘sick role’ (T. Parsons) and the consumption of health. Disability and chronic illnesses. Healthism (R. Crawford).

**Topic 5. Politics of appearance. Beautification and sexualization of the body. Age, weight and the body politics.**


**Topic 6. Race, ethnicity and class dimensions of the body politics.**

The body as a source and locus of inequality. Racialized bodies. Medicalization of the poverty, migration, racial and ethnic inequality.

**Topic 7. Biotechnologies and borders of the body. Alternative cultures and the body politics.**

After finishing the course students will

- know basic sociological approaches to analysis of the body and embodiment, be able to compare and integrate different theoretical perspectives;
- develop critical approach to mechanisms of the body politics related to social policy, medicine, culture industry, mass media and everyday practices;
- be able to reveal relations of power and domination, inequality and exclusion in mass media representations of the body;
- acquire skills to analyze role of gender, sexuality, race, disability in everyday life and life strategies of individuals;
- get sociologically funded understanding of the role of the body in social life and develop reflexive approach to personal politics of the body;
- improve their English in general and enhance reading, speaking and writing skills.

Selected Examples of Readings


