

From Body Composition to Body Revision in First-Year Composition Classrooms

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Martha Stoddard Holmes, who for many years found comfort in the perceived separation between mind and body, presents a common and problematic position in the academy:

For many years of teaching, Martha's overall, comforting premise was that she was a mind attached to an apparatus, the body, whose purpose was simply to transport her ideas and intelligence to the classroom. The body didn't matter except in service of this mind, the thing she had fallen back on all through her life when her body did not, for various reasons and in various contexts, suit. (Holmes and Freedman 4)

Many teachers imagine their bodies somehow exist outside of the classroom, as if their knowledge far surpasses the limitations of their bodies. Once Holmes realized the instability of this premise, she decided to explore constructs of the teacher's body and subsequently created the collection *The Teacher's Body: Embodiment, Authority, and Identity in the Academy* with co-editor Diane P. Freedman. The contributors, ranging from graduate students to full professors, reflect on the relationship between their identities and teaching. Many of the contributors, coming from various disciplines, describe difficulties negotiating their own identities¹ in the classroom and facing student resistance. A few of the contributing authors conclude they have mediated the tensions and stereotypes surrounding the bodies of teachers by engaging students in discussions and activities where the body itself serves as an analytic topic.

In the introduction to the anthology, Holmes and Freedman describe how the bodies of teachers are often overlooked, if not directly or indirectly insulted: "As we well know, student bodies often command most of the attention in the college classroom. Young or old, pierced or tattooed, sleeping or rapt, these bodies dominate the room and seem to justify its existence. The body of the often-parodied professor, in contrast, is (to the students and increasingly to administrators) both present and irrelevant" (7). Holmes and Freedman point out anxieties felt by many professors and instructors. The goal of the collection is to explore the often under-theorized body of the instructor and offer glimpses into the lived experiences of instructors in a class where their bodies are ignored or degraded.

Despite the important emphasis on the teacher's experience in the classroom, *The Teacher's Body* nevertheless presents a problematic binary between the bodies of students and teachers, one that has likely contributed to the difficulties with teaching identity and the body in the classroom in the first place. The risk is to assume that all students ignore or degrade the bodies of the instructors, and many of the contributors also fail to acknowledge the role of students' self-consciousness as a trigger for student reactions. In other words, to claim that the bodies of students have the power to

signify more than the bodies of professors, that only the *teacher's* body is "out of speech, sight, and investigation" (7), is to forget that the academy's intellectual tradition has emphasized the mind over the body in terms of teachers and students alike. In a Foucauldian formulation, the bodies of students are often only recognized in the classroom when they require discipline or cause disruption, often forcing into practice a disciplinary code of bodily control so that ideas remain at the center of the classroom.

Often, the presence of student bodies makes most teachers just as uncomfortable as they feel standing with their bodies exposed at the front of the classroom. The students themselves are often uncomfortable among their peers and professors. This discomfort on both sides of the student-teacher body relationship will come as no surprise to rhetoricians. The field of writing and rhetoric has, for a long time, been engaged in pedagogical practices that reject the ancient link between mind and body as a matter of legacy; even the terms writing and rhetoric are often, like mind and body, considered separate fields in the academy. Aristotelian approaches to teaching writing have long dominated composition studies, emphasizing linear but abstract logic that is often decontextualized and self-sustaining. In *Pedagogy and the Politics of the Body*, Sherry Shapiro highlights the failure of educators to make bodies a topic of discourse even in critical pedagogy curriculum: "As critical educators have immersed themselves in exposing the relationships between the dominant ideology and the corresponding educational system, they have fallen into their own ideological trap. The concentrated effort in critical pedagogy to make explicit the relationship of power to the dominant form of knowledge often ignores body knowledge" (22). She has successfully addressed the body as a theoretical category in her classroom, but she does so by including body theory texts and writing assignments in an otherwise traditional college dance class -- a class where the body is already the central subject. More recently, feminists have tried to draw direct attention to the body, but the body frequently emerges only as a secondary topic in their research and teaching, treated as one topic among many to examine under general categories of identity. That is, the relationship between the body and identity is often not fully articulated or the two terms are conflated.

These historical and theoretical trends might explain why a short article titled "Teaching the Body in Composition Class" by Kimberly Socha, whose research involves the body in literature and criticism, appears in a 2009 issue of *Radical Teacher*. The provocative journal advertises itself as an independent, "socialist, feminist, and anti-racist journal dedicated to the theory and practice of teaching" (Center for Critical Education). In her course description, Socha asks her students to write essays on a broad range of body topics: the bodies of political figures (including Barack Obama and John McCain), body modification, "marked" bodies, gendered bodies, and athletic bodies, among others. Her classroom topics and assignments are only modestly radical in terms of a larger social or cultural framework; why should this class be the domain of *Radical Teacher*? One might speculatively offer a few reasons why a body class might be considered "radical" by some administrators and instructors. Certainly Socha's pedagogical strategy to invite speakers to discuss their marked bodies with students and to assign readings in leftist body narrative and theory might constitute the cutting edge for some students, academics, and observers of the university. It also may be considered potentially difficult because a "body class" like this may lead students to expose highly personal

experiences with their bodies, which, as it may mismatch the classroom as another avenue for the current culture of public confession, could understandably invite concern from parents liberal and conservative alike. But these thematic and administrative struggles mark many university courses in the humanities and social sciences. What about all the courses that address issues of identity and lived experience across disciplines without attracting attention or inciting negative reactions? Many courses across the university incorporate categories like race, class, gender, sexuality, and other considerations of identity as a continuation of a process of liberal education begun in public high schools. So what is so different about Socha's class from other classes that incorporate identity and the body, yet are not considered part of radical territory? Why should a short 750-word article on "teaching the body" be the domain of a journal for an audience comprised of self-identified "radical" teachers? It would seem that what makes Socha's course description radical is simply that it represents a rare discussion of the body as the central analytic subject of a freshman composition classroom. The body, because it becomes inscribed in language and subsequently marked in terms of identity, is a radical topic in political arenas and may be viewed as too risqué for a first-year introductory course. I would argue, however, that in composition class, where students are introduced to academic discourse, analysis, and research methods, the body can serve as a starting point for discussing various critical topics relevant to every student in the class.

Because I believe in the theoretical and practical benefits of a course like Socha's in regard to the writing and critical thinking of first-year composition students, I attempt to open a new conversation about these concerns in the sections that follow. I begin by examining feminist pedagogical theories and approaches to teaching the body in essays from disciplines other than rhetoric. Of interest to me are the theoretical foci, methodologies, and especially the many difficulties that emerge with body-related topics in the classes I analyze. Although these are specialized classes, they serve as effective models for helping feminist instructors of composition avoid some common pedagogical pitfalls. For instance, teaching with a student-based approach rather than a theory-based approach helps students engage controversial identity theories much more easily; in the context of this discussion, by theory-based I mean centered on specific content constructed solely by the instructor. Moreover, in the curricular space of a first-year composition class, instructors have the freedom to focus more generally on *bodies* as an analytic category instead of as highly specialized categories of identity, which serves as a less threatening and equally effective approach for many students. Bodies naturally initiate discussions of multiple identities, and a body-focused composition classroom enhances the freshman composition project of preparing students for the critical thinking and writing required by other disciplines. By pursuing a critique of existing specialized body-related courses, followed by a discussion of the strengths of Socha's approach to teaching the body in first-year composition, perhaps it is possible to carve out a more defined and articulated rationale for teaching the body in composition and to suggest additional pedagogical approaches.

Yet another anthology that addresses the experiences of teachers whose curriculum involves issues of identity and the body, *Feminist Pedagogy in the 21st Century* is a collection comprised of pedagogical reflections from traditionally specialized areas of study including history, sociology, foreign

languages, literature, and philosophy. This diverse set of essays, edited by Amie A. Macdonald and Susan Sanchez-Casal, discusses the tensions between bodies of students and teachers situated in the classroom, and assesses direct attempts by instructors to teach the body as a subject within a larger theoretical framework. All of the essays in the collection present the accounts of instructors who reflect on their pedagogical approaches in sometimes controversial courses. Although the introduction to the collection does not discuss materiality or the body as a specific subject of analytic inquiry, arguing rather that feminist pedagogy is devoted to politics of identity, both scholars included here engage body issues directly in their research or teaching even though their engagement falls under the purview of cultural theory. That is, in these courses regarding specialized categories of political or cultural identity, the body not surprisingly but sometimes unexpectedly becomes a subject of the curriculum or a concern of actual class dynamics. Two of these lucid accounts from *Feminist Pedagogy* serve as illuminating cases of this phenomenon before we return to look more closely at the compelling strategies offered by Socha, the "radical teacher."

Michiko Hase designed the course "Global Gender Issues" to "direct student attention to the responsibility of the United States -- the government, the military, its businesses -- and the agency and activism of third-world women" (87). Hase, a Japanese female instructor, explains in her *Feminist Pedagogy* account that students often preemptively judge her based on her language abilities, race, and nationality. As a result, they began this course with particular resistance, doubting her abilities. Throughout the course, Hase became increasingly frustrated that most students were only interested in the physical abuse and suffering of third-world women by people of the same culture and did not take notable interest in Third World women's activism. In fact, the favorite paper topic for students in the class was female genital surgeries (stereotypically referred to as "genital mutilation"). Their preference, according to Hase, revealed an underlying racism and imperialism that was also reflected in their reactions to the professor's body and performance in class. The student impulse was to feel sorry for the women and develop a sense of responsibility to change the culture or, as liberal, educated Americans, to help the disenfranchised women of other nations. On the other hand, students reacted with hostility, defensiveness, and resentment when Hase discussed the role of the US in the suffering of foreign individuals and even its own citizens. The students, in those cases, felt attacked and reacted with strongly nationalist remarks. In a class that was not explicitly dedicated to the body, yet which also engaged issues of women's legal rights, political freedoms, and national identity, the body became nevertheless the students' favorite subject.

Hase's frustration is understandable. Her pedagogical concerns are the product of the very subject her course sought to deconstruct: imperialism. The contradictions of the course were many. Precisely as students judged Hase based on her body, they took pity on the bodies of Third World women by refusing to acknowledge their country's discriminatory institutions. Hase taught as an activist, but she could not motivate her students to respond to the theme of activism in course readings. She blames these tensions on stubborn nationalism that makes it impossible for her to get through to the students. Given all of these problems, it would have been easy to give up early in the semester. But Hase persevered and explains how she managed to devise one creative activity that connected the students with the material because it was student-centered rather than theory-centered. This activity

required students to examine the clothes on their bodies and find out where the clothes were made. She describes the activity as a decidedly positive learning experience: "I have the students examine in which countries their clothes were made. First, I ask them if they know where the tops they have on were made. Typically no students do. Then, I have them form pairs and look at each other's labels on their garments. At this point, students usually become more curious about the topic" (99). Using this icebreaker, Hase successfully draws attention away from her own body as other and asks students to see their implication in and relationship to the subjects of nationalism and globalization. To prevent any potential resentment, embarrassment, or discomfort, Hase might also have asked for volunteers and brought sample clothing to class instead of requiring everyone to expose their clothing sources and sizes. The activity revealed nevertheless what she and the students have in common: they all own clothes bought in America but mostly created abroad, prompting inevitably a discussion of American labor issues in a global context. As an icebreaker, such an exercise directed at the "student body" could mediate instructor resentment early on in a highly political course.

Of course, this clothing activity is not necessarily about bodies, but our clothes serve as identifiers also; the clothing exercise presents Hase's methodological shift to avoid preemptively potential resistance to identity theories and the notion of otherness. The risk of a class based on larger categories of identity is that students may feel that they are not implicated in or responsible for discrimination, or they may imagine reverse discrimination in the class because they do not fit the identity that dominates the course thematically. But the true methodological advance present here, which is not fully articulated by Hase, is an increasing willingness on Hase's part to allow students to generate conclusions about global economies through inquiry. If a similar activity was offered in composition, the body could serve as a key topic to start the class in order to address these problems early in the course. For Hase, the clothing activity developed inductively, rather than deduced from the topic of American imperialism. But from her we obtain a narrative and a model for how teachers might reconsider the struggles of teaching global feminist issues when those issues bear on their own bodies.

In an essay in the same anthology, Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz describes a similar experience of student resentment when teaching queer theory to an entirely female class comprised mostly of lesbian and bisexual students. Rabinowitz, a straight and married woman, claims that some of the students in the class aggressively questioned her on the first day of the course on how someone like her (alluding to her sexuality and married status) could teach authentically a class on queer theory. The class continued to prove difficult throughout the term, largely because of the separation between lesbian, bisexual, and the few straight students in the class and her already suspect credibility as an illegitimate professor of their intellectual province. Rabinowitz found the lesbian students to be particularly aggressive and unwilling to consider her a credible instructor due to her identification as straight.

Rabinowitz noticed student resistance to her body and identity through her observations of physical and verbal reactions. For Rabinowitz, the effect was more powerful and paralyzing than it was for Hase. Perhaps this is because body language also indicated the divisions in the class based on power,

where lesbian and bisexual students apparently felt or performed superiority to everyone else in the class, including the professor. She writes, "Body language (glances, smiles) revealed that the political vanguard was constituting itself as an exclusive group in my class" (189). Despite these candid observations of the spatial divisions in the classroom, however, Rabinowitz does not sufficiently complicate her own readings of the students, which are not unlike their readings of her. How could this be? The separation between students and professor is two-sided, a point emphasized in Rabinowitz's own descriptions of the students' spatial organization and body language.

In the class, Rabinowitz depends on recognizing the students' bodies and her own body --including appearances, spatial groupings, and revealing body language -- as central to judging the success of the course. The clash between her judgment of students and her perception of student judgment proves that there is not one body that dominates in the classroom; the students are not the only body presence and they, too, feel the same judgment from instructors and depend on the same signifiers. Both teachers and students react to body signifiers related to identity and body language, even though the content of a course may be about discovering and appreciating that very difference. Rabinowitz nevertheless had success near the end of the course when the students were required to work as a single, large group and produce a critical film. The students, both straight and gay, were forced to work together in a common physical and intellectual space on which their success in the course depended. Rabinowitz explains, regretting that she did not assign the research project early in the course, that as a result they were much more generous and active in subsequent class discussions. Like Hase, Rabinowitz found student-based inquiry to be successful in mediating student resistance, which is clearly a move in the direction of the body.

The class dynamics in this case resulted in the same tension and resistance, but the power dynamics were somewhat inverted. In Rabinowitz's case, gay and bisexual students felt they knew more than the professor about the subject matter. In Hase's case, on the other hand, students questioned her teaching ability based on her knowledge of English but otherwise knew very little about the subject matter. Yet both instructors find themselves participating in the same methodological evolution in their respective articles, at once averting unwanted focus on their own bodies and engaging resistant students with inquiry-based activities. In Rabinowitz's class, a full-class research project taken on earlier in the term might have allowed students to share their experience and skills, and to build more trust in a professor who allows them to contribute. They would also need to negotiate their resistance in order to work with straight students in the class, a negotiation that might expand to include the professor. Both stories suggest, after all, that students must be physically and intellectually engaged in order for them to feel valued and heard, no matter what their position to course topics. These examples, describing classes based on feminist theory, reveal particular methodological considerations for teachers interested in identity.

Instructors often engage the analytic categories race, class, sexuality, and gender in the composition curriculum with the hope that students will develop apparatuses for thinking critically beyond the space of the classroom and in other disciplines. But the body is the central tie for these analytic categories, categories that serve as placeholders for various rhetorical constructions of bodies. The

difference between the body and these larger categories is simply a matter of language choice. By addressing the body as the focus of the course, a single body-related topic can elicit various discussions of identity and often relates to several important analytic lenses simultaneously. If the class were to study "the body and medicine" as a unit, for example, issues concerning race, class, sexuality, and gender could all become potential lenses. Students might be asked a variety of questions: what are the rhetorical stakes between a non-English speaker and a doctor who speaks English fluently? How are women constructed in pamphlets from various pregnancy clinics, especially concerning class issues? By further encouraging students to incorporate primary research as part of an inquiry-based methodology, a holistic, body-centered approach might help instructors accelerate the process of transmitting the skills necessary for twenty-first-century cultural analysis to even the most closed-minded of students.

Hase and Rabinowitz make interesting gestures in the direction of the student body as they become necessary and in order to intervene in pedagogical crises. Of the scholars examined here, only Kimberly Socha, as the writer of a short, "radical" article on a body curriculum with great potential, succeeds in engaging multiple analytic lenses and discussions of identity in each unit, sometimes simultaneously. The wide range of topics and analytic lenses incorporated by Socha increase the likelihood that students would connect to at least one of the class units. Socha concludes that students had positive reactions to her course; they were interested and invested in the body as an analytic subject. The positive reactions from Socha's students are not surprising given the relevance of the various topics to their own lives. They are already exposed to constructions of the body and related concerns. Most students are aware of new popular mediums and social practices that have the potential not only to glorify and enable the body, but also to expose and demean it. Among these are new media phenomena such as Facebook, MySpace, body-rating websites, photo sharing websites, YouTube videos, and cellular phone sexting, which have become popular in recent years alongside an increasing public acceptance of and participation in plastic and cosmetic surgery. Even if they have not thought about particular critical categories of the body, students are generally aware of topics and stories related to the body.

Socha was able to address many of the topics brought up in specialized courses and popular culture by shaping the course specifically around body topics rather than more specialized political or analytic categories. In doing so, she remained able to address crucial issues, moving from the body as a potential site for analysis to the analytic categories of identity under which the body might fall. Socha, teaching in the historical setting of the 2008 presidential election, began her class by examining the rhetorical significance of the bodies of Barack Obama and John McCain. She and her students dissected rhetoric related to the bodies of presidential candidates -- including references to their physical features and body language -- in order to analyze the scale of the investment of the public (and the media) in the candidates' appearances and potential stereotypes operating in those assessments. The purpose was to expose students to the range of factors that contribute to a candidate's success beyond his or her political positions and résumé. The students, by looking at various texts, were encouraged to arrive at their own conclusions. Socha does not address specifically the questions she asked students, but one can imagine the types of questions related to this

assignment. One might ask students: is this rhetoric merely a campaign strategy? Or is it a result of a media-driven market, a self-propagating system that often stresses attractiveness and sex appeal as selling points? Who, moreover, is the "speaker" in these texts? By answering these kinds of questions in student-based inquiry and reflective writing, students could develop critical lenses organically and as individuals. In a subsequent unit, Socha invited a local man with body modifications, including multiple tattoos and piercings, to speak to the class. Students' positions on this experience were varied: some students wanted or already had tattoos, while others admitted to having negative preconceptions of body modifications and other body markings. The guest spoke candidly to the students, answering questions regarding his employment options and common social challenges as a person who is body modified. The students expressed appreciation for seeing and hearing a local individual's experiences with body modifications, imagining the topic as part of a narrative rather than as a social category.

Because of the potentially controversial nature of body politics, inclusiveness becomes a paramount concern in the body classroom. Socha works to create a welcoming and considerate space. The involvement of a class speaker not only demonstrates Socha's positive reception of personal narrative but allows students to share their own experiences by responding to the speaker. At the same time, the narrative -- a story that is ultimately about someone else -- offers the students a chance for analytic introspection but does not necessarily prompt their personal confessions. Students were encouraged to consider their own bodies in relation to the speaker; most of them necessarily reflect on their own bodies in comparison, asking not only about their own preferences but about how those preferences have been shaped by social standards. One can imagine what might have been going through their minds: Would I do that to my body? If not, why not? One student in Socha's class shared her desire for a tattoo with the speaker and asked about his experience with tattoos in order to inform her decision. But the formality of a class-speaker scenario -- assuming, of course, the instructor provides guidance for behavior during presentations -- forces students to ask themselves these questions before noticeably reacting based on their stereotypes or responding with their own personal confessions.

Class readings also exposed the students to a range of topics including body modification, racial constructions of the body, and others. Socha further exemplifies her commitment to student-centered inquiry by explaining how she allowed students to choose their own topics for their final papers; Socha claims these were the best papers she has encountered in her teaching. The students, equipped with several analytic lenses for the body, chose unique paper topics like the rhetoric of sports and athleticism² and racial stereotyping in cartoons. The unit topics and analytic categories engaged in Socha's class also offer great potential for expansion.³ Because the body gives way naturally to other analytic categories with which students may have more familiarity, what could not be covered in a single unit could become one option on a list of potential paper topics for students or even a question for a single class discussion. All of Socha's course subjects described in the *Radical Teacher* essay elicit multiple approaches, which further validate her openness to and promotion of student-chosen topics for essay assignments.

Socha's brief course description offers provocative subjects and effective pedagogical approaches related to teaching the body. Could we add other analytic frames and activities related to the body that would incite critical thinking, reflective craft, dedicated revision -- skills that most composition studies programs hope to teach first-year students? I have taught a body-themed composition class and an introductory course in literary analysis that focused on body-themed novels and short stories. Based on my positive experience, I offer several new critical categories in the following sections that might shape a hypothetical composition class centered on rhetorical bodies -- the body and medicine, the body and disability, the body and masculinity, and the body and plastic surgery -- suggesting potential lessons, assignments, literature, and activities that might complement each respectively. Writing these class descriptions from a rhetorical position, I include a limited number of literary texts that would be useful in composition classes with literature emphases as well, knowing that a full inclusion of body-themed texts and literature would be exhaustive.

The Body and Medicine

Growth hormone therapy, gene splicing, cloning, ADD and ADHD, anxiety and depression, cancer, AIDS, birth control, sexually transmitted diseases, complications with aging, doctor-patient relationships, overmedicating: students see these medical topics and more in advertisements and in the news every day. American students born in the late 1980s and early 1990s have come into adulthood with the following phenomena: the rapid propagation of pharmaceutical advertisements; healthcare debates regarding Medicare and general health insurance that have raged since before the Clinton administration; and intense humanitarian efforts to fight AIDS and various cancers. Not only have these medical efforts and disputes emerged in the everyday lives of students, including within their families and in media, but fictional medical shows have become exceedingly popular since 1994, when *Chicago Hope* and *ER* aired for the first time. *Grey's Anatomy*, *Scrubs*, *House*, and several reality television spinoffs followed. The images of doctors have become increasingly provocative and popular. In order to build a bridge between students and medicine as a topic, a potential icebreaker question for the course might be the following: what are the reasons for the popularity of fictional medical shows, especially among college-aged students like you? Other analytic possibilities include discussions of power dynamics between doctors and patients as well as the power of medical language.

In terms of literature, Henry James introduces character Ralph Touchett in *The Portrait of a Lady*; Ralph is heiress Isabel Archer's tubercular confidante who emblemizes a common notion of illness in the nineteenth century. He eventually dies, but in his life he was Elizabeth's soul-mate and cousin. Both their familial relationship and his illness stand in the way of further intimacy. In *The Last Tycoon*, F. Scott Fitzgerald's protagonist Monroe Stahr has a heart condition, as did Fitzgerald himself. Fitzgerald died from his heart condition before the book was finished, precisely as he was writing about his character's illness, prompting potential classroom discussions of how writers imagine their own physical deterioration in their writing, however subconsciously.

Whether the effects of these messages in media and literature are subliminal or more apparent, people are increasingly putting their faith in medicine and the romantic vision of doctors as heroes,

healers, and even eccentric intellectuals. Carl Elliott, in his book that bears the title *Better Than Well: American Medicine Meets the American Dream*, covers a wide range of medical topics, claiming that "For doctors, the body and the mind are objects of control" (198). He argues that medications have become the treatment for universal human suffering. Standards for health become more rigid and a health economy has flourished with products, medications, and technologies that can make anyone better than well. One of the most popular medications is Ritalin, which treats attention-deficit or hyperactivity disorder. Elliott claims that by the late 1990s, "the United States was producing and consuming 90% of the world's supply of Ritalin" and that between 1900 and 1995, the annual U.S. production of Ritalin increased by 500%. 2.6 million Americans were taking Ritalin by 1995 (249). Attention-deficit or hyperactivity disorder is often discovered in school when students have a difficult time focusing on their studies. Attention and distraction are familiar terms for students by the time they reach college and, thanks to commercial advertising for drugs, they are aware of a million prescriptions for the problem of distraction as well as every other possible ailment. Assignments that push students to rhetorically analyze the language of pharmaceutical advertisements could help to uncover the rhetoric of a force that is often ignored and overlooked by those who do or do not suffer from these particular illnesses. More importantly, the unit could expand to larger questions of how this rhetoric produces a larger culture of body and health paranoia even if some messages do not relate specifically to particular students.

Not only could students recognize the rhetoric of the medicated body and the stigmatization of common human ailments and emotions, but they have likely been exposed to strong, potentially charged cancer rhetoric in the media. Recent large-scale movements to "fight" cancer are featured on commercials, through fundraisers, and in other media. Often, war metaphors dominate cancer rhetoric. The war on cancer has lasted as long as or longer than any war, and taken the lives of many "soldiers." Phrases that incorporate war imagery may help empower patients and loved ones, but students might explore how these and similar metaphors serve to turn sicknesses into disembodied "Others" who are not part of one's body or life narrative. The war metaphor personifies the enemy, representing cancer as an alien life-form. The enemy is not really part of the human body; however, it is something "out there," something trying to invade and kill the individual, and it must be stopped. The pink ribbon symbol for breast cancer, for example, serves to create solidarity among those supporting the fight. One end of the short ribbon crosses over the other, creating an oval of ribbon above the crossing ends. The ribbon has no loose ends and creates a complete closure -- a unified loop. The complete closure might symbolize the closure through beating cancer, or the unification of patients and supporters. One might pose the following questions to students: why do these particular metaphors and symbols exist for illnesses? For example, why is the historically masculine war metaphor used specifically for breast cancer, an illness that affects mostly women? What is obscured in these campaign messages? What is emphasized? Who is the speaker here? Is it patients, corporations, or organizations? Many of the same questions could be asked of Lance Armstrong's Livestrong Foundation's rhetoric and the choice of a wristband as the company's retail product and symbol.

As an assignment for this unit, instructors could ask students to choose one illness that has been a topic in media -- a specific type of cancer or degenerative disease, for example -- and to collect several texts (including excerpts) related to the illness found in newspapers, magazines, clinics, website pages, blogs, and other sources. Students can approach their analyses in different ways: choose texts generated by the medical field about the illness and analyze the power structures and assumptions about wellness operating in these texts; discuss texts only created by patients and analyze the constructions of illnesses by patients in terms of social standards and empowerment; or choose a few texts from both discourses to compare the language. This assignment asks students to consider multiple aspects of the rhetorical situation and find common trends in the language of illness.

The Body and Disability

Disability theorist Lennard Davis suggests that disability is a silent threat to most people, which "makes folks avoid the subject, act awkwardly around people with disabilities, and consequently avoid paying attention to the current backlash against disability rights" (4). One might imagine, then, that given students' general youth and vitality, they may not relate to disability theory as easily as broader medical theory. Despite these difficulties, Davis points out in the introduction to *Bending Over Backwards: Disability, Dismodernism, and Other Difficult Positions* that many Americans are facing disability if we include the disabilities of friends and family. Not only is there an imperative to study disability given its inevitable presence, but one of the many benefits of engaging disability studies in a composition class is teaching the rhetoric of space. Perhaps no other body topic engages discussions of space as thoroughly as disability studies given necessary considerations like accessibility, transportation, and segregation. Despite efforts by educational institutions to increase accessibility after the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 was passed, many campuses lag behind in their efforts.⁴

One assignment for a unit on disability might involve students studying the space of their campus in terms of accessibility, disability language, and segregation. Before studying the space of their campus, however, students should first become familiar with language surrounding disability. Several disability resource websites and other related media reveal problematic constructions of individuals with disabilities. The language in documents regarding accessibility requirements, both from governments and organizations requiring the accommodations and from educational institutions reacting to the requirements, are rich sources for rhetorical analysis. One example from a prominent university serves as a model for potential rhetorical analysis. The University of Michigan's Disability Resource Center (DRC) website includes an obvious disclaimer to protect the university from any potential problems or lawsuits: "The University will provide reasonable accommodation to qualified individuals with disabilities upon request, *unless the accommodation would impose an undue hardship* [emphasis added], in compliance with applicable federal and state laws that prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability" (*Information*). This statement gives the university administration the freedom to decide what constitutes "undue hardship." This is not an uncommon phrase in public statements; disability studies scholar Rod Michalko analyzes universities' accessibility rhetoric, arguing that "Accessibility for disabled persons to public buildings and services such as universities is legislatively provided unless, of course, it is unreasonable to do so. The

legislative notion of 'undue hardship' offers reasonable grounds for not providing accessibility" (209-210). Michalko is acknowledging the ambiguous nature of this language, especially duplicitous legal language that at once takes on the appearance of political correctness, and protects itself from inconvenient, but legitimate, expectations.

Fiction writers have incorporated disability in their work as a way of exploring stigma, psychological distress, and strained relationships through their characters. Ernest Hemingway's experiences as a soldier and medic, famously, are revealed through the fictional worlds in many of his short stories and novels. Narrator-protagonist Jake Barnes in *The Sun Also Rises*, notably, is impotent due to a war injury, which directly affects the way he perceives other characters and communicates, especially with the object of his desire Brett Ashley. In the short story "In Another Country," the characters are going through rehabilitation for war injuries using new medical machines. The machines become a symbol of hope and dismay; a major in the war who is in rehabilitation struggles between the reality that the machines are ineffective and the dream that they are not. Offering disability readings and examining these examples from literature and medical documents with students in the class could prepare them for a unique assignment: a written analysis of their campus's space in terms of disability.

Here is an example. In one public university I have visited, the Disability Resource Center is located in the Wellness Commons, along with the Campus Health Services where all students with colds, flu, and other illnesses go for cures. Disabilities and related resources are often conflated with illness, as revealed by the services offered in the Wellness Commons, including the Learning Center where learning disability testing, related literature, and tutoring are offered. Not only are these services placed in a "common" area, disability-related resource departments are denoted by a blue colored triangle on their doors, which is a different color than the red triangle on the doors of student health services. The writing assignment might include exploring the campus in terms of similar disability signifiers (on signs and documents) and spaces. An instructor might ask students to examine signs denoting accessibility, stereotypical symbols for disability (such as the wheelchair), and places where accessibility is effective or ineffective. The students could choose two or three spaces or texts to analyze from their campus exploration, incorporating disability theory from readings to help frame their analyses. Students could incorporate photographs or maps of the spaces, learning the proper format and citation of graphics in essays. Since students have and will inhabit many spaces on campus and beyond, to motivate them to think spatially, instructors will have tapped into a different intellectual and critical capacity for students in their classes.

The Body and Masculinity

Chances are that studying the male body in a composition course would surprise some students. While women's bodies are the focus in many advertisements, men's bodies are rarely discussed in terms of social standards, though several standards exist for men as well as women. Consider some Calvin Klein advertisements that feature male models: the men wear only underwear, posed in a partially horizontal position, with their abs and arms flexed, and their eyes gazing seductively at the viewer. Not only are they a symbol of female desire, they are supposed to serve as inspiration for men

to become fit, buff, and desirable. These and similar images are setting the standard for male attractiveness.

Several male icons serve as objects of desire and are found on billboards, in advertisements, and on magazine covers. Contemporary icons include athlete David Beckham, Britain's soccer superstar, who poses semi-nude on advertisements and in photo shoots. The pictures present similar objectification and sexualization found in images of female models. Male celebrities have been sexualized and objectified in media as well: Brad Pitt, Johnny Depp, Will Smith, Bono of U2, Chris Martin of Coldplay, and John Mayer are examples of contemporary sexual icons. Sexualized American political figures, historical and present, include John Kennedy, Robert Kennedy, Barack Obama, and Los Angeles mayor Antonio Villaraigosa. Some might argue that all of these sexualized men are presented as having positions of power, but the rhetoric describing attractive male icons is eerily similar to rhetoric directed toward sexy and beautiful women. Students could analyze rhetoric related to male sex icons and compare it to the sexualized messages related to female icons. In literature, masculinity as a problematic category has been critiqued largely in novels and in terms of genre. Most students are aware of the general critique -- via feminist, postcolonial, and cultural studies -- of the traditional white, male canon. But many modern novelists participate in questioning this canon as well; Philip Roth's Zuckerman series, in particular -- especially in the novels *The Anatomy Lesson*, *The Human Stain*, and *Exit Ghost* -- subtly but shrewdly chronicle the illnesses of writer Nathan Zuckerman. Nathan addresses not only prostate cancer, but impotence and incontinence, raising questions about social stigmas and masculinity. Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* and Jeanette Winterson's *Written on the Body* include moreover narrators that remain ambiguous or shifting in terms of gender. These novels are unique compared to many other texts commenting on gender; that is, the authors demonstrate that the only way to avoid the trap of female victimization is to remove or fluctuate between gender markers in their representations of their protagonists.

Susan Bordo could offer a compelling critical lens for students that would help them read media and literature. Bordo, whose research is primarily on women and social constructions of beauty, takes on an equally critical position related to men's bodies and social standards in her book, *The Male Body: A New Look at Men in Public and in Private*. She describes the power of phallic metaphors and antithetical gender expectations as oppressive for both men and women. She calls these expectations part of a gendered "double bind": "The fact that these contradictory directives put a real person in a difficult (if not impossible) double bind gets masked by the fact that we've created numerous fictional heroes who successfully embody both requirements, who have the sexual charisma of an untamed beast and are unbeatable in battle, but are intelligent, erudite, and gentle with women" (242). Reemphasizing how constructions of men have oppressed women, Bordo also creates in her analysis a picture of male rhetoric that, if students were offered a passage from her book, could serve as examples of constructions that create terrifying pressure for some men.

In a class on the body, a unit on male rhetoric would engage the other side of the counteroffensive male-female binary. It is important for students to examine both sides of any binary to see how language has created the opposition. Students could observe a gendered space like the gym, a pool

hall, a bar, a stadium, a hair salon for men and women, and more. They would be asked to take notes and pictures to help them write their essays. Questions to consider might include the following: in what ways do these spaces rhetorically welcome or reject particular gender constructions? What happens when men inhabit stereotypically female spaces or women occupy spaces assumed to be male? Another option for the same essay could involve the media in any form, which would prompt additional critical questions to consider: how are "real men" rhetorically presented in media? How have feminine images and language embodying men challenged some of the viewers and consumers? What does this say about construction of women as well? In this unit, examining the dominant side of a common binary might help to complicate any reductive assumptions about gender constructions.

The Body and Plastic Surgery

While plastic surgery falls under the larger category of medicine, the proliferation of plastic surgery and cosmetic surgery texts and the popularity of plastic surgery have incited critical reading from various disciplines -- history, sociology, women's studies, psychology, and others -- and this interdisciplinary potential could lend to readings that extend past the medical field. These readings could include gender, technology, and politics, to name a few. The incredible growth of the industry and explosion of media surrounding it has presented, at least for me, a rhetorical gold mine. Clearly, plastic surgery media has the power to create new beauty standards unlike any in the past and to affect consumers enough that they would spend money -- often thousands of dollars -- on surgery. Current body rhetoric has been persuasive and exigent. If you have turned on the television or flipped through a popular magazine, you have likely come across some form of plastic surgery advertising or media. Television shows related to plastic and cosmetic surgery have multiplied since the first show on the subject, *Extreme Makeover* (on ABC), which aired in 2002. Not only have producers benefited from the popularity of plastic surgery, but magazines such as *US*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Vibe*, *New Beauty*, *TIME*, and many others have featured articles on and consumer advertisements for cosmetic surgery procedures.

One could conclude that these texts represent a small population of people who can afford and who desire plastic surgery. One could also argue that the popularity of plastic surgery media is due to the hyperbolic rhetoric and emphasis on extreme cases. However, both the increased number of surgeries available and the added convenience of some procedures have proven to contribute to the industry's growing success, drawing more clients every year.⁵ Plastic surgery is sought by men and women, people of all races, and increasingly younger clients, serving as another body topic that engages multiple analytic categories. This unit overlaps with the rhetoric of medicine and disability as well, where cosmetic and reconstructive surgeries are defined by the subtle and blurry definitions in insurance documents. The language in plastic surgery advertisements asserts even more pressure on consumers to seek perfection now that technology and medicine make it possible. Plastic and cosmetic surgeries, which are forms of revision for the body, moreover pose critical questions regarding identity and performance. What is the relationship between body revision and essay revision? Do both relate to posed identities and decisions to change particular identities based on the needs of audiences, issues of authenticity, and constructed standards? When is a body of work

finished? When is it perfect? Analogies like these may be interesting to explore in the context of composing and revising bodies of work in the composition classroom.

* * *

The themes I have traced above constitute just a few of the many potential subjects that instructors could include in a body rhetoric class without implicating the actual bodies of students as the explicit focus of a curriculum. As we have seen, Michiko Hase had great success with her clothing manufacturing inquiry with students in her class. If an activity like this were not organized carefully and offered as a voluntary opportunity, however, it could potentially become uncomfortable and even competitive for certain individuals. To emphasize bodies as a subject is not necessarily to promote embarrassment or a culture of confession as some instructors might fear, but to help students both engage and connect to topics frequently constricted by polemical debates. One factor is that the chosen topics are local, starting with single cases rather than framing the course with a deductive argument regarding power followed by examples (as in some of the courses discussed). Though the cases covered in Socha's course and the suggested expansions are local and specific enough to allow students to read inductively and more likely connect the cases with their own situated frameworks.

Radical as it might seem, the body as subject presents several benefits for the writing class. The body is interdisciplinary. The body represents multiple and overlapping considerations of identity. The body is always exigent, kairotic, and changing. I am not suggesting that all composition curricula should transform to focus solely on the body. But for instructors interested in engaging body topics, many possibilities exist. If risks are mediated the payoff can be robust. At least it is clear, from the pedagogical lessons offered by instructors and professors in other fields to the reflections of an instructor teaching the body explicitly in a composition classroom, the body -- the student's body, the teacher's body, the social body, and more -- demands reading and inspires writing quite on its own.

Notes

¹ In this collection, identity and the body are intertwined in a cyclical relationship; that is, a teacher's identity is a shifting construct that moves between the teacher's performance and self-perception, and the perceived reactions from students. Those reactions are based not only on that performance, but a reaction to physical markers of ethnicity, sexuality, gender, and other politicized categories. The body is part of that performance, and while some physical attributes can be obscured or revised in a performance, others cannot.

² Particular stereotypes regarding athletes were also addressed in Socha's class, and to a similar effect. Student athletes are often enrolled in several sections of composition, a required course in most universities. Instructors and students alike often assume that athletes are remedial given that many

universities offer special programs and academic counseling for athletes. Analyzing athletes in the media and in theoretical readings offered the chance for students, both athletes and non-athletes, to engage in critical discourse about their college and university peers.

³ As an example of potential expansion to her current topics, the political body could also incorporate the rhetorical constructions of black voters during particular elections in the news, such as the 2000 and 2008 elections. Students could analyze the public reactions to the introduction of potential female presidential or vice-presidential candidates, Hillary Clinton and Sarah Palin. Students could also consider the rhetorical constructions of First Ladies' bodies throughout history, such as the popular First Ladies Eleanor Roosevelt, Jacqueline Kennedy, Hillary Clinton, and Michelle Obama. This intersection of gender and politics offers a new realm of analysis. Several questions come to mind. What happens to stereotypical constructions of women when women of interest are in a position of power? Given rhetoric regarding First Ladies, do these women undermine or support our assumptions about valued traits for women?

⁴ In "Putting Disability in Its Place: It's Not a Joking Matter" Rod Michalko and Tanya Titchkosky discuss their difficulties advocating improved accessibility in a university where they were hired. They experienced discrimination and challenges to their proposals by a faculty member assigned to meet Rod, who is blind, and Tanya, who is dyslexic. The faculty member claimed the improvements are expensive and timely, and he advises disabled students to attend a more accessible university.

⁵ According to the American Society of Plastic Surgeons website, cosmetic plastic surgery increased 48% from 2000 to 2006, with a total of 11 million cosmetic procedures in 2006. The American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery website reports that nearly 11.7 million cosmetic surgical and nonsurgical procedures were performed in 2007, according to statistics released in February 2008. The organization claims the overall number of cosmetic procedures has increased 457% since the collection of the statistics first began in 1997.

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