

Advanced Topics in Feminist Philosophy: Women and Beauty (PHIL10210)

2022/2023 Semester 2

Course Organiser: Dr. Filipa Melo Lopes // Filipa.MeloLopes@ed.ac.uk
Office Hours: TBA please see Learn page.

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Course Description

Beauty is a double-edged sword in feminist thought. The idea of beauty as a feminine virtue has been debunked as degrading and subordinating by feminist philosophers. But seeing oneself as beautiful is a feminist achievement in a society that thrives on women's sense of insecurity in their own bodies. In this course, we will examine arguments that cast beauty as a control mechanism, as a source of power, as alienating, and as liberating. We will also look at more applied debates within feminist philosophy about several forms of 'beauty-work', such as make-up, fashion, and cosmetic surgery.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course students will be better able to:

- Effectively present close and critical analysis of a historical and contemporary texts covered in the course.
- Present and defend their own reasoned ideas about issues surrounding beauty in feminist philosophy.
- Demonstrate their capacity to articulate arguments succinctly and clearly in a written essay format.
- Critically evaluate gender dynamics and feminist politics in their own lives.

Format & Times

Seminar	Monday	14:10 - 16:00	DSB 1.17
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The course will be run as a discussion-based seminar. It is **crucial** that you do the required readings (including media content) in advance of the seminar. As you read,

you should take notes and bring those with you to class. All readings and course materials are available via the Learn page for the course.

Weekly Topics

Week 1 Introduction; Beauty as a Double-edged Sword

- Ann J. Cahill: “Feminist Pleasure and Feminine Beautification” (2003)

Week 2 Objectification and Alienation

- Simone de Beauvoir: *The Second Sex* (1949, digital ed.) – “Social Life” pp. 273-277 (until “However, social life ...”)
- Emily Ratajkowski: *My Body* (2021) – “Introduction”, “Blurred Lines”, “Bc Hello Halle Berry”, “Men Like You”
- Robin Thicke ft. T.I., Pharrell: [Blurred Lines](#) (2013); Cardi B ft. Megan Thee Stallion: [WAP](#) (2020)

Week 3 Power and the Femme Fatale

- *Femme Fatales 1860-1910* (2002): K. van Twist and P. Huvenne “Foreword”, Henk van Os “A Framing for the Femme Fatale”
- Simone de Beauvoir: *The Second Sex* (1949) – “Myths” pp. 89-90 (until “Man seeks the Other in woman as Nature”), 106-110 (from “There is another function...” to “encapsulating the inconstant yearnings of men.”)
- Camille Paglia: *Sexual Personae* (1990) pp. 12-17
- Mina Le: [In Defense of the Femme Fatale](#) (2021)

Week 4 Choice and Cosmetic Surgery

- Naomi Wolf: *The Beauty Myth* (1990) pp. 270-276, 290-291
- Clare Chambers: *Sex, Culture, and Justice* (2008) - “Introduction” pp. 1-7; “Creativity, Cultural Practice, and the Body”
- Kathy Davis: *Reshaping the Female Body* (1995) pp. 1-5, 159-181
- Sandra E. Garcia: [Butt Lifts Are Booming. Healing Is No Joke](#), *The New York Times* (2022)

Week 5 Pleasure and Narcissism

- Iris Marion Young: “Women Recovering Our Clothes” (2004)

- Sandra Lee Bartky: “Narcissism, Femininity and Alienation” (1982)
- Helena Radke: [The Jumpsuit That Will Replace All Clothes Forever](#), *Paris Review* (2018)

Week 6 **‘Beauty and Brains’**

- Caroline Reilly: [Hyperfemininity Isn’t A Trend – It’s A Movement](#), *Nylon* (2022)
- TikTok videos: [Reclaiming this](#); [Who is the Gen-Z Bimbo?](#); [Bimbo Manifesto](#)
- Plato: *Symposium* (4th c. BC) pp. 210a-212c
- Lucrezia Marinella: *The Nobility and Excellence of Women and the Defects and Vices of Men* (1600) pp. 55-70, 166-168
- Madeleine de Scudéry: The Twentieth Harangue from *Les Femmes Illustres, Ou, Les Harangues Héroïques* (1642) pp.137-144

Week 7 **Responsibility for Change**

- Heather Widdows: “Structural Injustice and the Requirements of Beauty” (2021)
- Heather Widdows: [“Wanting the ‘Love Island’ Body”](#) (2019)
- Sheila Jeffreys: *Beauty and Misogyny* (2005) pp.171-179

Week 8 **Body-positive Beauty**

- Susan Bordo: *Unbearable Weight* (1993) pp. xiii-xxiii, xxx-xxxiii, 185-212
- Rachel Tashjian: [Why Lizzo, Paragon of Body Positivity, Is Launching Shapewear](#), *Harper’s Bazaar* (2022)
- Heather Widdows: [“What’s Wrong With Body Positivity?”](#) (2019)
- Céline Leboeuf: [“Body positivity is fixated on beauty – here’s how to fix that”](#) (2022)

Week 9 **‘Black is Beautiful’**

- bell hooks: *Black Looks* (1992) pp. ix-xii, 1-4, 61-77
- Time Magazine covers: [Laverne Cox](#) (2014); [Beyoncé](#) (2014)
- Noel Siqi Duan: “Policing Beyoncé’s Body: ‘Whose Body Is This Anyway?’” (2016)
- Tina Turner: [What’s Love Got to Do With It](#) (1984); Beyoncé: [Superbowl Live Show](#) (2013)

Week 10 'Natural Beauty'

- Alicia Keys: ["Time to Uncover"](#) (2017)
- Andrea Dworkin: *Woman Hating* (1974) pp. 95-117
- NikkieTutorials: [The Power of MAKEUP!](#) (2015)
- Liz Frost: "'Doing Looks': Women, Appearance and Mental Health" (1999)
- Simone de Beauvoir: *The Second Sex* (1949) – "Myths" pp. 96-97 (from "But not just any woman can play the role..." to "field and pasture but also Babylonia.")

Week 11 The Beauty Pageant

- Documentary: [Miss World 1970: Beauty Queens and Bedlam](#) (2020)

Assessment

• Midterm Essay (1500 words)	40 %
DUE: Thursday 2 nd March, by 12 noon	
• Final Essay Proposal	55 %
DUE: Thursday 30 th March, by 12 noon	
• Final Essay (2500 words)	5%
DUE: Thursday 20 th April, by 12 noon	
• OR Coursework Dissertation	100%
DUE: Tuesday 20 th April, by 12 noon	

Note: Course work dissertations are not available to visiting students. You must notify the Teaching Office about your decision to do a course work dissertation in this course by Monday 27th February, by 12 noon.

Final Essay Proposal

Students will have the opportunity to develop their own final essay prompt, based on the topics we have covered. Students must submit an essay proposal in advance of (2 pages double space max.). This should include an essay topic, a thesis, an argument plan, and a preliminary bibliography. Detailed guidance will be given during the semester. Students will receive feedback on their proposal that they can use to write their final paper.

Students writing a coursework dissertation will also have the opportunity to submit an essay proposal and receive formative feedback on it.