

Insubordinate Bodies
Curriculum for Workshop Series

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Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Pedagogy – EDU71012 MD01

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1. Course Description

This series of workshops is about gaining an in-depth understanding of how the history of food systems have come to shape our perceptions of food and embodiment and how this relates to social and ecological sustainability. The target audiences are individuals who have struggled with food and embodiment and eating disorder professionals, but an eating disorder diagnosis is not required to participate. Each week explores different themes relating to the history of food systems and power in order to learn about the stories we are a part of as a way to collaboratively begin to write and participate in the story of food systems that we want to be a part of moving forward. Amongst the themes found in the workshops are passages from and collaborative analyses of Maud Ellmann's book, *The Hunger Artists*.

****Link to slideshows for workshops:**

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/19dMIs4FeO6MRw1j-TFV4GTxQTzOquly2?usp=drive_link

2. Suggested Texts

There are no required texts for this course, but there are a few suggested readings:

Ellmann, M. (2013). *The Hunger Artists: Starving, Writing, and Imprisonment*. Harvard University Press.

Ko, A., & Ko, S. (2017). *Aphro-ism: Essays on Pop Culture, Feminism, and Black Veganism from Two Sisters*. Red Wheel/Weiser.

Kulick, D., & Meneley, A. (2005). *Fat: The Anthropology of an Obsession*. Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin.

Standage, T. (2009). *An Edible History of Humanity*. Bloomsbury Publishing USA.

Strings, S. (2019). *Fearing the Black Body: The Racial Origins of Fat Phobia*. NYU Press.

*Every book except for the Ellmann (2013) book will be assigned as optional readings for the class, and links to PDFs of the texts will be provided. The Ellmann book is brilliant, but potentially extremely triggering, and as such specific passages from it will be discussed in the workshops.

3. Course Learning Objectives

Collaborators will...

- a. Identify factors from history that have impacted their relationship with food and their bodies.
- b. Engage in meaningful, personal dialogue about their personal experiences with food and embodiment.
- c. Develop an individual plan and actionable goals for building a personally and ecologically sustainable relationship with food.
- d. Co-create a plan for sustainable and equitable food system change and body liberation.

4. Course Learning Outcomes

Collaborators will...

- a. Gain a sense of empowerment and increased bodily autonomy.
- b. Be confident when having conversations with others about food systems and embodiment.

5. Course Evaluation/Grading

- a. There will not be any set grades for this workshop series, but collaborators will be provided with personal feedback at the end of the workshop series.

6. Pedagogical Framework



This pedagogical framework holds significance in both the words and the design. It is shaped as a gingerroot because it incorporates Deleuze and Guattari's concept of Rhizomatic Learning. This concept is tied to the idea that learning is messy, nonlinear, fluid, and constantly evolving. The various portions of the rhizome are interconnected and constantly growing and changing form. Rhizomatic learning is nonhierarchical and community-oriented. The image is colorful and intentionally semi-abstract. At the heart of the rhizome it says "Student-centered" and other facets of the framework branch off from it. They are clearly interconnected elements, but some more directly branch off from others. The general structure is as follows:

- Student-centered
 - Anti-oppression
 - Centers autonomy
 - Of self
 - Of others
 - Value-driven
 - Relationship-oriented
 - Ecological
 - Social
 - Multispecies
 - Decolonial
 - Curiosity-based

This framework creates space for flexibility and constant change. It is about breaking outside of imposed boxes and allowing for true innovation amongst learners. All of the aspects listed above are essential to the whole, but it is always possible for new elements to emerge. This framework is culturally responsive, sustaining, and rooted in critical theory. It opposes all forms of oppression and it is fundamentally about putting liberation into practice through learning.

7. Course Outline:

- Introduction/Overview
- Agricultural Revolutions
- European Scientific Revolution
- Colonization
- White Supremacy
- Patriarchal Violence
- Human Supremacy
- Religion and Asceticism
- Collaborative Strategies towards Body Liberation
- Reflections on the Workshops

Topic	Assignments/Engagement
Week 1: Introduction	<p>Icebreaker and Introductions Overview of Workshop Series Share goals and interests in course Discussion: Why do we struggle with food and with our bodies? Discussion: How can we achieve body liberation? Discussion: How can we live in ways that are both ecologically sustainable and sustainable for our bodies? Activity: Two jamboards/visionboards: one describing how systems of power influence us to relate to our bodies and ecosystems, and the other describing what our hopes are for the future of food systems and sustainability. Homework: Write a brief personal story about your relationship with food and your body, and about what you want these dynamics to look like. Optional homework: Read chapter 1 of <i>An Edible History of Humanity</i>: “The Edible Foundations of Civilization”</p>
Week 2: Agricultural Revolutions	<p>Check-in Share homework responses Presentation on History of Agricultural Revolutions Share and discuss personal homework assignments</p>

	<p>Optional discussion about <i>An Edible History of Humanity</i></p> <p>Discussion: What were the consequences of the development of agriculture?</p> <p>Discussion: How did agriculture change multispecies relationships?</p> <p>Discussion: In what ways do agricultural systems make you feel connected or disconnected from your body?</p> <p>Activity: How can we mitigate the negative consequences of agriculture? Collaborative post.</p> <p>Homework: Learn about the native edible plants in your ecosystem and make a meal incorporating at least two foraged ingredients. Journal about this meal and how it made you feel.</p>
<p>Week 3: European Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment</p>	<p>Check-in</p> <p>Presentation on European Scientific Revolution, the Enlightenment and food systems</p> <p>Discussion: What values did the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment imbue?</p> <p>Discussion: How did these periods transform food systems and what were the sustainability consequences?</p> <p>Discussion: What do the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment period have to do with modern-day so-called eating disorders?</p> <p>Discussion: How has the thinking that stems from these eras impacted how you relate to food and to your body?</p> <p>Homework: Do something in the coming week to challenge the Eurocentric values that have impacted you. Write about it.</p> <p>Optional Homework: Read chapter 4 of <i>Aphro-ism</i>: “By ‘Human’, Everybody Just Means White”</p> <p>Read Chapter 1 of <i>Fat: The Anthropology of an Obsession</i>: “Ideal” and Chapter 3: “White”</p>
<p>Week 4: Colonization</p>	<p>Check-in</p> <p>Share about homework</p> <p>Presentation on colonization and the weaponization of food systems</p> <p>Optional discussion about <i>Aphro-ism</i> and <i>Fat: The Anthropology of an Obsession</i> readings</p>

	<p>Discussion: How has colonization impacted our collective realities relating to food and embodiment? How has it impacted your relationship with food, your body, and your environment personally?</p> <p>Discussion: How can we decolonize our relationships with food and our ecosystems?</p> <p>Activity:</p> <p>Homework: Sit outside in nature for 15 minutes and reflect on how our bodies connect to our ecosystems.</p> <p>Homework: Do something that makes you scared or uncomfortable or break a personal rule such as (but not necessarily) a food rule. Write a journal entry about this experience.</p> <p>Optional homework: Read the first 2 chapters of <i>Fearing the Black Body</i> by Sabrina Strings</p>
<p>Week 5: White Supremacy</p>	<p>Check-in</p> <p>Share responses to homework.</p> <p>Presentation on how White Supremacy has impacted embodiment</p> <p>Optional discussion of Sabrina Strings' <i>Fearing the Black Body</i></p> <p>Discussion: What is the relationship between white supremacy and fatphobia?</p> <p>Discussion: How do food systems disproportionately harm communities of color and how does this relate to sustainability?</p> <p>Discussion: How can we shape our relationships with food and our bodies in ways that counter white supremacy?</p> <p>Homework: Following a meal, journal about how your values impact how you eat and how you would like them to impact how you eat? How did you feel before and after the meal and why?</p>
<p>Week 6: Patriarchal Violence</p>	<p>Check-in</p> <p>Share responses to homework.</p> <p>Presentation on patriarchal violence and how it has impacted our relationships with food and our bodies</p> <p>Discussion: Why are eating disorders predominantly associated with women?</p> <p>Discussion: How has misogyny impacted your experience of your body?</p>

	<p>Discussion: How do we actively counter the negative impacts of patriarchal systems? Homework: Journal about how patriarchal systems have impacted how you relate to food and your body. Optional Homework: Read collectively selected chapter of <i>Aphro-ism</i></p>
<p>Week 7: Human Supremacy</p>	<p>Check-in Presentation on human supremacy and multispecies relationships Optional discussion about <i>Aphro-ism</i> Discussion: What can learning from other species teach us about our struggles with food and with our bodies? Discussion: In what ways are certain bodies animalized? What does it mean to be considered human? Discussion: How can show solidarity with other species through the ways in which we relate to food and embodiment? Homework: Have a meal with a member (or multiple members) of a different species, but make sure there are no other humans around. Pay attention to how you feel during this meal. Journal about the experience of eating a meal with this individual/these individuals and compare it to how you have felt eating meals in other contexts and social situations. Optional homework: Read chapter 6 of <i>Fat: The Anthropology of an Obsession</i>: “Heavenly”(Trigger warning for descriptions of self-starvation) and final chapter: “Pissed Off”</p>
<p>Week 8: Religion and Asceticism</p>	<p>Check-in Share responses to homework Discussion about <i>Fat: The Anthropology of an Obsession</i> Presentation on Religion and Asceticism Discussion: What values do major religions teach that impact how we relate to food and bodies? How do these values harm or help us. Discussion: Has religion impacted how you feel about your own body and about eating? If so, how? Discussion: How can we mitigate any of the harmful impacts of religious institutions while</p>

	<p>simultaneously respecting the value they hold in our lives and/or the lives of others? Homework: Journal about how religion and spirituality have shaped your experiences of food and your body. Optional Homework: Read collectively selected chapter of <i>Fat: The Anthropology of an Obsession</i></p>
<p>Week 9: Collaborative Strategies Towards Body Liberation: Conclusion/Reflections on the Workshop Series</p>	<p>Check-in Optional discussion about <i>Fat: The Anthropology of an Obsession</i> Discussion: What have you learned from this series of workshops? What are your biggest takeaways and favorite parts of the series? Discussion: How would you improve upon this workshop series? Discussion: What tools have you gained for improving how you relate to food and to your body? Discussion: What are your goals and/or intentions moving forward and how can you stay accountable to yourself and others?</p>

There is no grading structure for this workshop series, but the facilitator will be available for one-on-one discussions with participants.

This course is intentionally organic and emergent. All assignments and homework are optional and should be adjusted based on the interests and needs of the group. The facilitator should be fully responsive and paying attention to what material will most benefit co-learners at both the individual and group level. This workshop series will be informal, mutual aid-based, and largely self-directed.

Appendix A: Teaching Statement

What is your educational philosophy/teaching statement (from the heart)?

My educational philosophy has been inspired in part by my high school art teacher (who I'll just refer to as K here). Previously I had only taken art classes at school in which we were required to adhere to and replicate specific artistic styles, which of course were primarily of European origin. In contrast, K taught about a wide variety of artistic styles, but encouraged students to develop their own unique techniques and offered a lot of space for unique, personal expression. She did not grade based on how true to a given artistic school a student's art was, but instead on how much heart they put into it and how much they were progressing in their own way. K fostered each student's passions and interests rather than keeping them confined to a specific line of thought. Each week she would give students a long list of thirty minute drawing prompts, but when I came to her excitedly with an idea for a painting that was inspired by a dream I had or a project I was inspired to work on she encouraged me to run with it. Thanks to K, I had the confidence to become a freelance artist after graduating. My undergraduate studies in cultural anthropology highlighted to me that culture is a living, constantly evolving process that operates at every micro and macro level, from the individual to the global.

Culturally relevant pedagogy starts at the individual level since any given identity and even intersectionality cannot encapsulate or define any single person's complex internal world. Educating others requires meeting people where they're at and facilitating their ability to flourish. I believe in looking at a student's individual, internal lived experience along with the multitude of external social and environmental factors that have shaped them to better understand their needs and how they might best forge their own path forward. I also believe in learning from students and treating them as holding knowledge that is equally valuable to my own. Learning is a dynamic process of co-creation and is a way to connect with previously unknown worlds while expanding one's own. So many of the traditional education systems I've been exposed to are centered around memorizing Eurocentric knowledge and reinforcing white supremacist paradigms. Afrofuturist theorists and sisters, Aph and Syl Ko (2017), describe intersectional identities as roads seen from the perspective of a GPS. They explain that what we see on this GPS is limited to the road systems that have been prescribed or legitimized by Eurocentric frameworks. The mountains and forests, or the world beyond the colonial imagination, remains uncharted territory. As an educator my goal is to facilitate the exploration of those unexplored realms as part of a collaborative process to build a more beautiful and just world.

Paris & Alim (2014) illustrate the reality that students of color are enculturated into settings and institutions that require them to perform middle class whiteness as a marker of success. The dominant culture is always the standard to which other lived experiences are compared and inevitably deemed lesser than. So much of the world of education is centered around making students of color think like middle class white students, erasing and undermining their own lived experiences while promoting a single, oppressive lens. This deficit thinking is a direct, stark display of white supremacy. As Yosso (2006) describes, socially marginalized communities are a wealth of information. I love their concept of community cultural wealth as an

antidote to the pervasive deficit mindset. The way in which Yosso posits mutual aid societies as a form of community cultural wealth from a Critical Race Theory (CRT) perspective resonates with me deeply given that I have long valued and prioritized mutual aid as anticolonial praxis.

We cannot change our relative levels of power and privilege in society. I also appreciate Cabrera's (2017) statement that white privilege is not a backpack that one can take off in spite of the efforts of many white people to reject their racial privilege. I cannot adjust my privilege in society, but I can treat it as a responsibility to give those who have been screwed over by white supremacy platforms and opportunities that might have otherwise been granted to me by virtue of my identity. As an educator I must focus on amplifying the voices of people who have historically been marginalized and silenced to move beyond the white, Eurocentric imaginary. As Yosso (2006) describes, oppression is multilayered and by no means black and white. This is in part because culture is constantly shifting and dynamic (Paris & Alim, 2014). Culture and race have a very complex relationship and racism often exists under the guise of shared cultural values (Yosso, 2006). These readings truly highlighted the need for me, as a white educator, to be vigilant in identifying and combating white supremacy wherever it appears in my life and in the work that I do. It is essential for me to show up as a supporting presence in liberatory spaces rather than a central figure.

Works Cited:

Cabrera, N. L. (2017). White Immunity: Working Through Some of the Pedagogical Pitfalls of "Privilege". *Journal Committed to Social Change on Race and Ethnicity (JCSCORE)*, 3(1), 78-90.

Ko, A., & Ko, S. (2017). *Aphro-ism: Essays on Pop Culture, Feminism, and Black Veganism from Two Sisters*. Red Wheel/Weiser.

Paris, D., & Alim, H. (2014). What Are We Seeking to Sustain Through Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy? A Loving Critique Forward. *Harvard Educational Review*, 84, 85-100.
<https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.84.1.9821873k2ht16m77>

Yosso, T. (2006). Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth. *Relevant Research and Articles*. <https://scholarworks.utrgv.edu/histamarticles/3>

Agricultural Revolutions



On forced sedentism, domestication, and their impacts
on our bodies

What is an Agricultural Revolution?

- Took place around the world at different periods starting in around 10,000 BCE
- Shift from hunting and gathering to farming
- Led to development of domestication
- One of the biggest fundamental shifts in how Homo sapiens relate to the land, to other species, and to each other
- Many different theories about why people made the shift to agriculture



Impacts

What consequences did the shift to agriculture have?

- Far less free time
 - More abundant food supply
 - Social Hierarchy
 - Patriarchy
 - Population increases
 - Quantification, legibility, and taxability as conditions for establishing control
 - Social Relationships akin to those of insects
-

General Shifts/Consequences

- Unpredictability → Routine
- Diversity → Uniformity
- Adaptability → Control
- Connection → Disconnection/Alienation
- Equilibrium → Destabilization
- Complex Relationality → Rigid Hierarchy

Are there any ways in which you see these patterns reflected in your life?

Excerpt from *The Hunger Artists*

by Maud Ellmann

Elaine Scarry, in *The Body in Pain*, argues that the founding trope of torture is to reduce the world "to a single room or set of rooms."
(p. 99)

What were your thoughts
on the chapter we read
from *An Edible History of
Humanity*?

**What are your thoughts on
the consequences of the
development of
agriculture?**

**How did agriculture change
multispecies relationships?**

...

**In what ways do agricultural systems
make you feel connected or
disconnected from your body?**

...

**How can we mitigate the
negative consequences of
agriculture in our lives?**

Homework

Learn about the native edible plants in your ecosystem and make a meal incorporating at least two foraged ingredients. Journal about this meal and how it made you feel.

A large red square with a white border, centered on a white background. Inside the square, the text "European Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment" is written in white, bold, sans-serif font, centered vertically and horizontally.

**European
Scientific
Revolution and
the
Enlightenment**

**What is the
European
Scientific
Revolution, and
What is the
Enlightenment?**

Please share your understanding of these terms and their meanings.

What does this Have to do with My Body?

- Rationalism and empiricism
- Reductionism
- Precision
- Perfectionism
- View of nature as machine
- Domination of the Earth instead of connection

Reflecting on the Homework

Talk about your experience of finding and utilizing foraged ingredients in a meal.

How did the Scientific Revolution and the advancement of chemistry change how we relate to food?

Compare and contrast your embodied experience of consuming foraged food versus a conventionally produced meal.

Passage from *The Hunger Artists* by Maud Ellmann

“Nonetheless, the very notion of the self, the unified integral individual, is founded on the model of incarceration. It was in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the age that Foucault calls the Great Confinement, that workhouses, asylums, and penitentiaries were built in order to conceal the criminal, the destitute, and the insane from public view; and it was also in this era that the modern conception of the individual was born. To be a person is to be a prison, this historical coincidence suggests; and in the keep of subjectivity, the solaces of privacy are always counterbalanced by the terrors of eternal Solitude.” (p. 94)

On Alchemy vs. Chemistry

What are the politics and significance behind these spheres?

Alchemy focused on understanding wholes and relationships - connection to the Earth.

Scientific Revolution led to colonization through justification of domination and expansion.

Shift from organic, complex worldview to mechanistic worldview.

Discussion: What values did the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment imbue?

Discussion: How did these periods transform food systems and what were the sustainability consequences?

Discussion: What do the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment period have to do with modern-day so-called eating disorders?

Discussion: How has the thinking that stems from these eras impacted how you relate to food and to your body?

Homework

Do something in the coming week to challenge the Eurocentric values that have impacted you. Write about it.

Optional: Read chapter 4 of Aphro-ism: “By ‘Human’, Everybody Just Means White”

Optional: Read Chapter 1 of Fat: The Anthropology of an Obsession: “Ideal” and Chapter 3: “White”

Colonization

—

The Weaponization of Food Systems

Join the Movement! #MyStoryMySuperPower

GRIT & Grace

GEORJA LUCAS
Founder, Nalgona Positivity Pride

Discussion of Homework

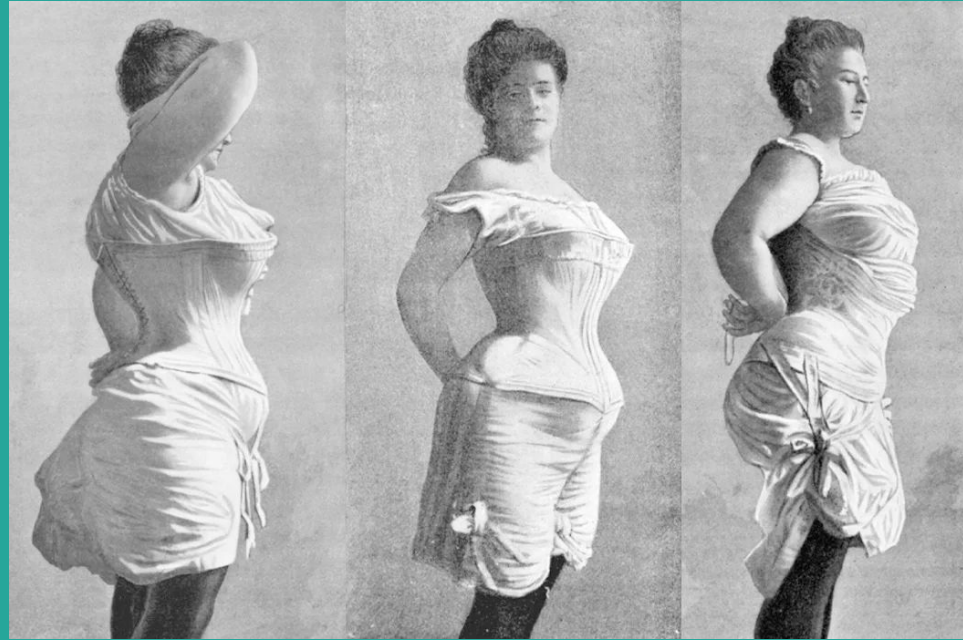
- What did you do to challenge the Eurocentric values that have impacted you this past week? How did you feel before and after doing this?
- What were your thoughts on Chapter 4 of *Aphro-ism*?
- What are your reflections on the chapters you read of *Fat: The Anthropology of an Obsession*? What do they have to do with how the lens of colonization has shaped our perceptions of our bodies?

Colonization and Embodiment

How a Eurocentric Lens has Driven Fatphobia

- European colonizers claimed that “uncivilized” African and Asian peoples revered fatness.
 - Eurocentric ideals associate fatness with laziness, weakness, and cowardice.
 - Europeans associated pastoral peoples with an “obesity of the mind” to describe their supposed disinterest in hard work.
-

- Colonization sets standards of “normalcy” and of who constitutes the default human.
- Women of Color were not allowed in “American” beauty pageants until the 1940’s
- Beauty is consistently associated with wealth, and thinness has become associated with affluence.



For the rhetoric of fitness resonates with disconcerting echoes of the war in Vietnam and suggests that the forbidden pleasures of American imperialism have resurfaced in the very discourse of their exorcism. For instance, the diet that Fonda recommends, "high-fiber, complex-carbohydrate, low-animal-protein, low fat," corresponds to that of the prewar Vietnamese peasant; as if we could atone for the defoliation of that country by stuffing our own bodies full of leaves. Similarly, the emphasis on "fiber" suggests that the failing moral fiber of America might be rescued by heroic mastication of the indigestible integuments of vegetables. Fiber, moreover, is cathartic, and like the food of angels it can be eaten without being absorbed: it leaves no fat, no guilt, no memory behind. Simone Weil has argued that to starve is to renounce the past, "the first of all renunciations," because it is to void the body of its stored anteriority. But in American mythology, it is fiber that becomes the magic agent of forgetfulness, because it liberates the body from the fat that represents its "frozen past," to borrow Weil's striking formulation. Homeopathically, fiber frees the nation from the shame of history, disburdening its conscience of the weight of that which was. Slimming, too, depends upon the same amnesia that sustains American utopianism—the next diet will produce the miracle; the next war will be victorious and just—and all the failures of the past are merely aberrations, hic-cups in our progress to beatitude. (Ellmann, 1993).

How has colonization impacted our collective realities relating to food and embodiment?

How has it impacted your relationship with food, your body, and your environment personally?

How can we best decolonize
our relationships with food
and our ecosystems?

—

Homework

- Sit outside in nature for 15 minutes and reflect on how our bodies connect to our ecosystems.
- Do something that makes you scared or uncomfortable, or break a personal rule such as (but not necessarily) a food rule. Write a journal entry about this experience.
- Optional: Read the first two chapters of *Fearing the Black Body* by Sabrina Strings.

White Supremacy

Racism and Fatphobia

Review of Homework

- Please feel free to share any insights you have from your experience of sitting in nature and reflecting on how our bodies connect to our ecosystems.
- What did you do that made you feel scared or uncomfortable? How did you feel before, during, and after this experience?
- What were your thoughts and feelings about Sabrina Strings' book, *Fearing the Black Body*?

White/Thin Supremacy

Understanding why
combating racism
also necessitates
fighting fatphobia



What is the
relationship between
white supremacy and
fatphobia?

**How do food systems
disproportionately harm
communities of color and how
does this relate to
sustainability?**

**How can we shape our relationships
with food and our bodies in ways
that counter white supremacy?**


Homework:

Following a meal, journal about how your values impact how you eat and how you would like them to impact how you eat?

How did you feel before and after the meal and why?

Patriarchal Violence

Male Supremacy and its impacts
on our minds and bodies



Reflections on the Homework

If you wish to, please feel free to share your responses to the homework:

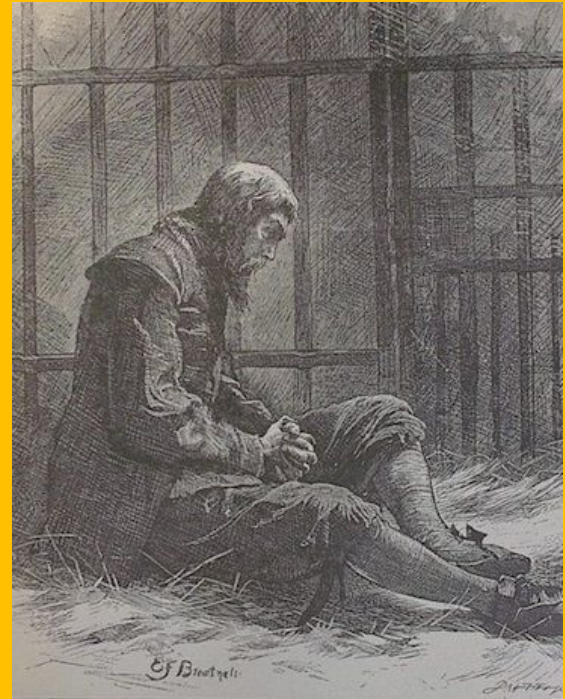
- Following a meal, journal about how your values impact how you eat and how you would like them to impact how you eat? How did you feel before and after the meal, and why?

A Hunger Artist by Franz Kafka

Famous modernist short story in which self-starvation is a form of spectacle.

Example of how a man who is starving himself is treated as a spectacle, but also as an anomalous protagonist with agency. Women doing the same are considered fragile and to be pitied.

Reminder that “eating disorder behaviors” are part of complex narratives, not statistics. Food and relationships with food always tell a story.



Gender and Self-Starvation from *The Hunger Artists*

“Or is it anorectic women who are really hunger strikers in disguise, and who are starving to defy the patriarchal values that confine their sex as rigidly as walls of stone or bars of iron? Since women succumb to anorexia more commonly than men, many feminists interpret the disorder as a symptom of the discontents of womankind. Anorexia, they argue, has now replaced hysteria as the illness that expresses women's rage against the circumscription of their lives. A self-defeating protest, since it is women who become the victims of their own revolt; and they collude in their oppression by relinquishing the perilous demands of freedom in favor of the cozy compensations of infantilism. Women get ill instead of getting organized: the anorectic turns her anger into hunger, and eats herself up lest she should be tempted to engorge the opportunities that she has been denied” (p. 2)

“If, as Horkheimer and Adorno argue, “the history of civilisation is the history of the introversion of the sacrifice,” slimmers are even more civilized than saints, because they internalize the rites of expiation that used to be regulated by the Church. Fasting and purging, they immolate their fat, blind to the social economics of their sacrifice. And when slimming crescendoes into anorexia, even the cosmetic pretexts founder: for it is clear that anorectics pursue hunger for its own sake, defying rationalizations. As opposed to female saints who fasted in an institution that controlled the meanings of their macerations, the modern anorectic starves at large, deliriously.” (p. 7)

It is clear from these examples that the practice of the hunger strike in Catholic Ireland has a very different history from the cult of dieting in Puritan America, and that their meanings are radically opposed. But both belong to an economy of sacrifice, and both are founded on the dream of a miraculous transfiguration, whereby the immolation of the flesh will be rewarded by its resurrection, in the body of a movie star in one case, or the body of an angel in the other. And these bodies are not so very different insofar as both are fashioned from a medium subtler than flesh, be it celluloid or heavenly light. So there are certain similarities between these rituals of self-starvation that override their geographical and cultural divergences, challenging traditional historicism. What is more, the hunger strikes stage-managed by the IRA un-settle chronological accounts of history because they represent what Seamus Heaney calls the "afterlife" of former protests, former macerations. By hungering, the protestors transform their bodies into the "quotations" of their forebears and reinscribe the cause of Irish nationalism in the spectacle of starving flesh. A nuanced analysis of hunger strikes must recognize these intertextual and even intergastrical allusions, accounting both for the immediate conditions of starvation and also for the ghosts of past and future fasts. It is true that hunger depends upon its context for its meaning, but it is also true that self-inflicted hunger is a struggle to release the body from all contexts, even from the context of embodiment itself. (pp. 13-14)

“Kierkegaard is only one of many thinkers who implicate digestion in cognition, for the analogy between these processes is integral to Western thought. Indeed, it is ingrained into our very language. To "ruminate," for instance, means to think but also means to chew one's cud; we speak of "chewing over" an idea, of "devouring" a book, of "food for thought," and of "voracious reading." But the locus classicus of the analogy is Genesis, where man's first disobedience—or rather woman's—was to eat the apple of the tree of knowledge. One reason why the mystic anorectic Simone Weil resolved to starve herself to death was that she thought the human race was damned for woman's greed, and therefore that it might be saved by woman's abstinence. But if eating is the route to knowledge, as the story of Genesis implies, is it possible that anorexia bespeaks flight from knowledge masquerading as a flight from food? If so, the labor of starvation intimates a yearning to return to the ignorance before the Fall and to accede into the realm of the unnameable.” (pp. 29-30)

John Berger in his book *Ways of Seeing* has argued that "men act and women appear." 27 If this is true, the prisoners in Northern Ireland were feminized by their starvation in that their bodies were transformed into the images of meanings rather than the instruments of acts. Yet hunger also brings to light the fierce dissymmetries between the sexes. For the men imprisoned in the Kesh, hunger was a public and concerted enterprise, the corporeal expression of their five demands for special status as prisoners of war.²⁸ In their case word and flesh supported one another, parallel and complementary, because it was their verbal protest that conferred their wasting bodies with their eloquence. While the IRA starved publicly and clamorously, Clarissa, like the modern anorectic, starves in private; and although she indulges her taste for words as vigorously as she stints her taste for food, she never articulates the reasons for her hunger. Indeed, her body's protest wildly exceeds her speech, racked with meanings too ferocious to enunciate. Word and flesh consume each other in her long and complicated death, her inexorable quest for discamination. By disembodiment, she refuses even the somatic language of hysteria, where words that cannot surface in the form of speech find expression in the form of symptoms. For Clarissa wants to shut her body up, in every sense; and it is only in the coffin that its vengeful ambiguities can be contained. In Long Kesh, hunger had a fixed, contractual significance, even if the world misunderstood it, and even if its resonance exceeded the declared intentions of the protesters. But Clarissa cannot read her own starvation. Devouring meanings in default of food, her body has become too dense, too contradictory a sign. (pp. 71-72)

She starves in order to refuse all traffic with a world that threatens to invade her every orifice. (p. 81)

Discussion:

Why are eating disorders predominantly associated with women?

How has misogyny impacted your experience of your body?

How do we actively counter the negative impacts of patriarchal systems?

Homework:

Journal about how patriarchal systems have impacted how you relate to food and your body.

Optional Homework: Read collectively selected chapter of Aphro-ism

Human Supremacy

Multispecies Food System Alienation

What do we have in common with other species?

“A great white shark died from self-starvation just three days after being brought to a Japanese aquarium at the start of 2016. Great white sharks often refuse to eat in confinement and frequently die as a result of refusing food in these conditions (Hopkins, 2016). Significant numbers of gorillas and chimpanzees in zoos have been known to regurgitate their food and reingest it, which is a behavior that is unheard of in the wild (Langlois, 2018). Animals in captivity have also been known to eat items that are definitively not food, and sometimes have even eaten their own bodies, which is a behavior known as autophagy (Hediger, 1950). An isopod, which is usually an un-fussy, bottom-crawling, scavenger, also refused to eat after being brought to an aquarium. The creature, who was named No. 1, refused food for a total of 1,868 days and then finally died from starvation (Krulwich, 2014). Cases of animals in captivity overeating or undereating to a dangerous or even lethal extent are widespread and well-documented. Individuals kept in artificial conditions with imposed dietary structures understandably develop ways of eating that are unheard of in the wild. Dr. Laurel Braitman’s book, *Animal Madness: How Anxious Dogs, Compulsive Parrots, and Elephants in Recovery Help Us Understand Ourselves*, delves into mental illness diagnoses across animal species. Braitman describes the history of psychiatric drugs such as anti-psychotics, tranquilizers, and anti-anxiety medications. It turns out that many of the most popular psychopharmaceuticals were originally developed for nonhuman animals. Prozac for pets and other psychiatric medications for captive animals now comprise a massive, multi-billion dollar industry. As Braitman (2014) points out, for the most part humans are now treating other animal species for conditions that we are largely responsible for causing.”

If you want, share your journal about how patriarchal systems have impacted how you relate to food and your body.

What were your thoughts on the selected chapter of Aphro-ism?



cpfreeman

Racism as Zoological Witchcraft: Aph Ko on Multidimensional Liberation



What can learning from other species teach us about our struggles with food and with our bodies?

In what ways are certain bodies animalized?
What does it mean to be considered
human?

How can we show solidarity with other species through the ways in which we relate to food and embodiment?

Homework:

Have a meal with a member (or multiple members) of a different species, but make sure there are no other “humans” around. Pay attention to how you feel during this meal. Journal about the experience of eating a meal with this individual/these individuals and compare it to how you have felt eating meals in other contexts and social situations.

Optional homework: Read chapter 6 of *Fat: The Anthropology of an Obsession*: “Heavenly”(Trigger warning for descriptions of self-starvation) and final chapter: “Pissed Off”

Religion and Asceticism



The Complex Relationships between Religion, Food, and
Embodiment

“Holy Anorexia”



Describe your meal with a member of a different species and share anything you would like from your journal entry comparing it to how you have felt eating meals in other contexts and social situations.

Share any reflections you have on the two chapters of *Fat: The Anthropology of an Obsession* that were suggested readings this past week.

More Passages from *The Hunger Artists*

“Deleuze and Guattari connect the carceral motif in Kafka's fiction to the "cramped space" of German-speaking Jews in Prague; it is possible that the motif of self-starvation in his writing stems from the same source. Kafka's hunger artists, who reject all food, resemble their creator, who rejects all words but those of his deracinated enclave. The isolation of the faster in his stories also seems to stand for the seclusion of the writer, incarcerated in the chambers of the night. The burrow, for example, which imprisons its own artificer, provides a mirror image of the catacombs of texts in which the author undergoes a living burial. While Kafka's stories tend to take the point of view of the builders or inhabitants of hideaways who usually fail to keep intruders out, his novels take the point of view of outsiders who think that they are trying to get in, only to discover that they have been interpolated in the structure all along. The law of writing, similarly, is to be inside out and outside in, the prisoner of apertures and pervious enclosures; as Kafka writes, "How can a wall protect if it is not a continuous structure?" (23\$). The same question could be asked of the fasting body; "this shattered prison," as Catherine describes her starving flesh in *Wuthering Heights* (chap. 15). The body also fails to insulate the self against the world because it is "not a continuous structure"; and the gaps in its integument imply that it is constantly invaded by the flesh and words and influence of others.” (P. 94)

“This tradition found its way into Christianity: there are legends in which the patron saint of Ireland, St. Patrick, hunger strikes against God. God always relents, because capitulation in the face of such self-sacrifice was regarded by early Christians as a mark of holiness. In a seventeenth-century account of the life of Patrick, the saint ascends the Holy Mount to seek favors from the Lord only to be scolded by an angel for having asked too much. Patrick promptly embarks on a hunger and thirst strike lasting forty-five days, after which God gives In. These legends suggest that religious abstinence may have originated in the civil practice of fasting with a hostile purpose against an enemy, although these traditions later grew apart. Indeed, F. N. Robinson proposes that the notion of compulsion exercised on a divinity represents a fundamental element in fasting and in other phases of religious asceticism; and what appears to the modern Christian as a form of sacrifice and humiliation may once have been, in some of its aspects, a way of taking the kingdom of heaven by violence.” (pp. 12-13)

“To write, for Rimbaud, is to hunger, and it is only through a diet of stone-crop that the poet can accede to the inhuman solitude of art. This visionary hunger also resembles the miraculous abstinence of the medieval saints, for whom to fast was not to overcome the flesh so much as to explore the limits of corporeality, where humanity surrenders to a bodiliness so extreme that it coalesces with the bestial or divine.”
(p. 13)

“The medieval historians Rudolph Bell and Caroline Bynum both contend that the holy women of the Middle Ages fasted for very different purposes from those of anorectic adolescents in the 1980s, and both scholars insist that these cultural discrepancies are insurmountable. Yet it is striking how often anorectics appropriate the discourse of religious abstinence to justify their own voluptuous austerities. The psychoanalyst Hilde Bruch reports a conversation with an anorectic girl who claimed that she had starved herself to learn “what happens in the afterlife”. Abstinence was just in preparation for special revelations; it was like the things the saints and mystics had done.” On the other hand, an anorectic woman once informed me that self-starvation was a “quest for immortality.” She meant “immortality,” of course, and yet the slip reveals the strange affinity between askesis and excess: the quest for bodilessness—“immortality”—masks a darker quest for bodiliness—“immortality”—and for the most ecstatic surrender to the flesh” (pp. 14-15)

Fasting Across Religions

Fasting has played a role in Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Christianity, and other faiths.

Buddhism: Purification, defying attachment and desire, cleansing body and mind.

Hinduism: purification, surrender, checking emotions, repenting for sins, sacrifice.

Islam: Brings one closer to God and is a way to empathize with those less fortunate.

Jainism: Controlling one's destiny, self-control, clearing one's mind, repentance, self-liberation from cycle of life and death.

Judaism: Cleansing oneself, reflecting, repenting, expressing sorrow, and getting closer to G-d.

Christianity: Repentance, return to God, humility before God, overcome temptation, express grief, seek guidance, strengthen prayer.

***Sikhism is one of the few major religions that does not value fasting. They view the body as God's present to humans and ask humans to maintain their bodies in good condition.**

Discussion Questions

What values do major religions teach that impact how we relate to food and bodies? How do these values harm or help us?

Has religion impacted how you feel about your own body and about eating? If so, how?

How can we mitigate any of the harmful impacts of religious institutions while simultaneously respecting the value they hold in our lives and/or the lives of others?

Homework

Journal about how religion and spirituality have shaped your experiences of food and your body.

Optional Homework: Read collectively selected chapter of *Fat: The Anthropology of an Obsession*
