

## (De)Constructing Black Girlhood(s)

My feminism will be  
intersectional  
or it will be bullshit  
-Flavia Dzodan

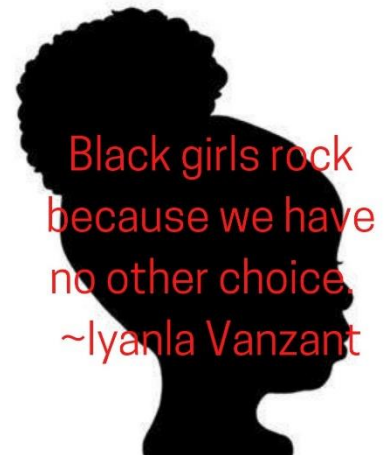
UED 71200 / WSCP 81000  
Fall 2020, Tuesdays 4:15-6:15 PM  
Synchronous Zoom Meetings  
Course Blackboard Site [linked here](#)

For the backstory of this quote: <https://www.vox.com/2016/8/12/12406648/flavia-dzodan-my-feminism-will-be-intersectional-merchandise>

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### Course Description

This course will examine the shifting constructions of Black girlhood(s) and the emerging field of Black girlhood studies, including theories derived from critical race and Black feminisms, methods, and analytical approaches to the study of Black girlhood. Further, the class will interrogate Black girlhood as a political category of identity and symbol of agency, addressing such topics as foundations of the field, utility of the categories of “girl” and “woman” and representation of Black girlhood in academic literature and popular culture. As such, we will consider the multiplicity of the Black *girlhoods* as embodied and experience through, for example, gender, sexuality, and geography. This course will aim to think through and embody theories and practices—emancipatory, humanizing, radical acts—as produced by Black girls, artists, and scholars. Class members will apply their theoretical understandings to final projects in which they either propose a research design informed by Black girlhood studies or conduct preliminary analysis of data drawing on related theories.



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### How to Contact Me

**Instructor:** Dr. Sherry Deckman  
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**Phone:** (718) 960-8701 (Lehman College office)  
(For fastest response, use email.)  
**E-mail:** [sherry.deckman@lehman.cuny.edu](mailto:sherry.deckman@lehman.cuny.edu)

**Office Hours:** Tuesdays 2:00-4:00 PM and Thursdays 3:30-5:30 PM.  
Other times available by request. Note, all office hours will be conducted by videoconference or phone. Therefore, advanced sign-up is preferred, posted [online](#). **Please meet with me!** You needn't have a “problem” or major issue to meet for office hours.



## Planning for Success in Our *Fully Online* Class

Carefully review the course calendar. Note that each week, we will engage in **synchronous** meetings, when we will meet online as a class during our designated class time, and **asynchronous** activities, when you do not have to be online at the same time as other class members. You should plan to spend approximately 2 hours engaged in weekly learning activities. Deadlines for completing assignments will be posted on Blackboard. You should also note that the 2 hours of online activities is ***in addition to the time you will need to spend offline reading/viewing course materials***. To be as successful as possible in the class, you should also check Blackboard and your email address that is associated with Blackboard regularly, as I will send announcements regularly via email.

- In doing the above, consider the political nature and politicization of these constructions and how this/these vary across time, place, and space, etc.
- Ground the above in Black feminist and anti-Blackness theoretical frameworks.

It is my hope that through this semester-long, joint exploration, you will be able to apply course concepts to work, research, and other contexts important to you and create final projects that are meaningful to the world beyond our virtual classroom.

“As a classroom community, our capacity to generate excitement is deeply affected by our interest in one another, in hearing one another’s voices, in recognizing one another’s presence” (p. 8).

“My commitment to engaged pedagogy is an expression of political activism. Given that our educational institutions are so deeply invested in a banking system, teachers are more rewarded when we do not teach against the grain...Occasionally students feel concerned when a class departs from the banking system. I remind them that they can have a lifetime of classes that reflect conventional norms” (p. 203).

~ bell hooks (1994)

*Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*

## Commitment to Inclusion

*The technical jargon:* The Graduate Center is committed to providing access to all programs and curricula to all students. Students with disabilities who may need classroom accommodations are encouraged to reach out to the 504/ADA Compliance Coordinator. For more information, see the [Graduate Center Student Handbook](#), p. 28.

*Beyond the jargon:* If you need a reasonable (or even unreasonable) accommodation, please let me know and I'll try make it happen. It is never too late to request accommodations—our bodies and circumstances are continuously changing—in ways that may or may not be apparent/visible to others. In such cases, I will encourage you to make use of formal accessibility services on campus; however, I will not ask you to disclose personal medical information. Finally, if there are ways in which the overall structure of the course and general classroom interactions could be adapted to facilitate full participation, please do not hesitate to raise your ideas with me.

## Course Requirements and Expectations

Grades typically measure the instrumental value of knowledge. They can undermine alternative perspectives and, if we are not careful, punish non-normative behavior. I am more interested in the values associated with learning that cannot be graded. Authentic learning is an active process that requires deep, personal engagement with the material.

That said, officially, it is my duty to assess what you “accomplish” in this class. Structurally, the course grade will come from the assignments listed below. Nonetheless, I believe that no momentary display of excellence will prove that you have learned anything that is (personally) valuable and meaningful beyond our classroom.

Your grade for this course will be determined based on your engagement with the following:

<i>Category*</i>	<i>Percentage of Grade (Total=100%)</i>	<i>Due Date and Submission Format</i>
<b>Weekly Feedback</b>	10%	Ongoing
<b>Asynchronous Online Activities</b>	20%	Ongoing
<b>Reading Responses</b>	20%	Ongoing
<b>Session Facilitation</b> (includes assigning texts, session plan, and discussion facilitation)	25%	Varies based on in-class sign-ups

<b>Digital Course Project</b>	25%	11:59 PM on Tuesday, December 15 to Blackboard
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\*Directions will be handed out in class and posted on Blackboard in advance of major assignments; descriptions appear below.

Assignments will be assessed based on the accompanying scoring guidelines to be shared in class. Because I do not have the grading capacity, assignments may not be revised for resubmission after the due date. Therefore, I strongly recommend you meet with me in advance to receive feedback and additional guidance regarding progress on submissions. There are no extra credit assignments.

All assignments are due on the date specified on the calendar of assignments. Assignments will be considered turned in on time if they are submitted according to this schedule and by the means specified. Because of grading timelines and administrative requirements imposed on me by the University, **I cannot guarantee that late assignments will be accepted without advance arrangement or an unforeseen emergency.** Therefore, if you anticipate any challenges with deadlines, please speak with me well in advance of the due date or let me know as soon as possible following an emergency.

#### Assignment Descriptions

**Weekly Feedback:** I ask that you let me know (by responding to an online survey) what you're thinking about after each class. My expectation is that you will write only a couple of lines, although you are welcome to write more if you wish. You may mention a question that's on your mind; an issue you want to probe more deeply yourself or that you wished we had probed more deeply in class; an idea you are excited about; a frustration you had; something you're confused about; a suggestion; what you wish you had thought of and said in class; something someone said that offended or disturbed you; etc. Please plan to reply to the weekly poll by 9 AM each Friday so I have time to read responses before preparing for our subsequent in-person meeting. (Graded as complete/incomplete; 1 point/week for 10 weeks—i.e. you can miss two weeks without issue.)

**Asynchronous Online Activities:** In order to make our synchronous Zoom meetings more manageable (i.e. shorter and more meaningful), prior to those, you will be asked to complete some course engagement activities in the online environment. These may include Blackboard discussion board posts, shared textual annotation, etc. All asynchronous online activities will be clearly described on the course Blackboard site at least one week prior to the due date. (Graded as complete/incomplete; 2 points/week for 10 weeks—i.e. you can miss three weeks without issue.)

**Reading Responses:** Given my interest in and commitment to accessible scholarship and teaching and learning that challenges dominant norms, throughout the semester you will be invited to respond to the various class materials in different, sometimes unexpected ways, including graphically, etc. Guidance for each reading response will be clearly described on the course Blackboard site at least one week prior to the due date. Reading responses will be due by the start of class (synchronous meeting) for a given week. (Graded as complete/incomplete; 2 points/week for 10 weeks—i.e. you can miss three weeks without issue.)

**Session Facilitation:** Working in groups to be determined in class, you will sign-up to lead one weekly session. This includes assigning texts to the class, writing the session plan, and facilitating discussion. (Specific details will be shared in class.)

**Digital Course Project:** Students will develop an individual or collaborative digital course project that will be shared publically online. At their core, these projects will either comprise a research proposal design or preliminary data analysis or a teaching plan informed by Black girlhood studies and related theories. However, the presentation of these projects may be thought of as anything but a static, academic, traditional type of research proposal, data analysis, or teaching plan. Projects will be multimodal (i.e. incorporate more than just texts; think audio, video, graphics, photographs) and should endeavor to engage/speak to an audience beyond the “academy.” Interim deadlines and opportunities for feedback are built into the course calendar. (Additional, specific details will be shared in class.)

#### Checking Grade Progress and Grade Scale

Students may check their progress using “My Grades” which can be accessed via our course Blackboard site through the left-side menu. Though, *I encourage you to focus more on your learning than on your grades per se.*

Please note: After submitting each different type of assignment there may appear a different icon or none at all under My Grades. A green exclamation mark after submitting assignments just means your work has been submitted but not yet graded.

Letter grades will be assigned as such:

97-100 A+	83-86 B	67-72 C-
93-96 A	80-82 B-	<67 F
90-92 A-	77-79 C+	
87-89 B+	73-76 C	

Grades of WN and WU may be assigned in cases where a student never participated in any class learning activity or stopped participating at some point without officially withdrawing, respectively.

## Academic Integrity

(See the [Graduate Center Student Handbook](#), pp. 65-69)

Plagiarism is defined as “literary theft” and consists of the unattributed quotation of the exact words of a published text, or the unattributed borrowing of original ideas by paraphrase from a published text. On written papers for which the student employs information gathered from books, articles, or oral sources, each direct quotation, as well as ideas and facts that are not generally known to the public at large must be attributed to its author by means of the appropriate citation procedure. Plagiarism also consists of passing off as one’s own, segments or the total of another person’s work. Punishment for academic dishonesty will depend on the seriousness of the offense and may include receipt of an “F” with a numerical value of zero on the item submitted, and the “F” shall be used to determine the final course grade.

## Attendance Policy

The learning experience for this course is dependent on students’ attendance and participation in each class session. Most of each class meeting will be focused on student participation and collectively working to build understanding of assigned materials. Further, I see attendance as a symbol of consideration and respect for our classroom community. Therefore, while attendance is not officially part of the course grade, it is my hope and expectation that you will attend all synchronous sessions prepared to participate—barring any unforeseen emergencies or advance notification. You can expect that I will attend all sessions prepared, barring any unforeseen emergencies.

*Because I often plan learning experiences based on the students in a class, it would be helpful to me to have advance notification if you know you will be absent.* I will informally keep track of attendance and will follow up when a student misses class to be sure everything is okay and that they have what they need for future class meetings.

## Sustenance

Because this class occurs around dinnertime, you are welcome to have food and eat during class. Feel free to turn your webcam off as needed.

## **Course Readings, Technology, and Calendar\*\***

There is one required text for this course. All other materials will be posted on Blackboard in advance of course meetings. We will be using our Blackboard site for a number of the class activities. We will go over how to access the site and its organization during the first week of class.

### **Required Text**

Sharpe, C. (2016). *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*. Durham: Duke University Press. Paper ISBN: 978-0-8223-6294-4 [Price = \$24.95]

## Online Course Expectations / Use of Technology and Blackboard

As an online course, we will be using a Blackboard site and video conferencing tools for class activities. Blackboard can be accessed through the Graduate Center website at <https://www.gc.cuny.edu/GC-Header/GC-Portal>. IT help information is also available by visiting this same link. We may use additional freely available online learning tools (noted on Blackboard).

Our class will meet through the Zoom online conference system. To be successful in the class, you will also need access to a **webcam and microphone**. Basic tools are likely available on your smartphone, if not on your computer. We will adopt the same rules and norms as in a physical classroom (take notes; participate by asking and answering questions; wear classroom-ready clothing). For everyone’s benefit, to the extent possible, join the course in a quiet place. Turn on your video whenever possible. Mute your microphone unless you are speaking. Close browser tabs not required for participating in class. Our success as an online class will depend on the same commitment we all bring to the physical classroom.

CLASS	DATE	TOPIC(S) and GUIDING QUESTIONS	ASSIGNMENT(S) DUE
1	9/1	<p><b><u>Course Introduction</u></b></p> <p><i>How will we work together this semester? What is “Black girlhood studies”? How is the field informed by the work of Black feminism(s)? What connections can you make between Black girlhood studies and the concept of “epistemic oppression”? How might this inform how we work together as a class community?</i></p>	<p>Texts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Owens, Callier, Robinson, &amp; Garner, “Towards an Interdisciplinary Field of Black Girlhood Studies”</li> <li>• Elucidations podcast, “Episode 92: Kristie Dotson Discusses Epistemic Oppression”</li> </ul> <p>Review syllabus prior to class.</p> <p>Post self-introduction to Blackboard.</p> <p>After class, complete feedback survey.</p>
2	9/8	<b><u>Intersectionality (Un)(Re)Done</u></b>	Texts (some divided):

		<p><i>What are critiques of the ways in which “intersectionality” has been taken up? How does the work of Black feminists inform these critiques? What does a Black feminist lens offer in terms of reconsidering intersectionality?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bilge, “Intersectionality Undone”</li> <li>• Choice materials on Blackboard</li> </ul> <p>Submit reading responses #1 and #2.</p> <p>Complete online activity.</p> <p>After class, complete feedback survey.</p>
3	9/15	<p><b><u>Theorizing Black Girlhood (Studies)</u></b></p> <p><i>What does Black girlhood (studies) encompass? How is it situated in and divergent from prior Black feminist work? What is the role of the body? Why do scholars and educators argue for the importance of studying/understanding Black girlhood apart from Black feminism? How is this related to the concept of intersectionality?</i></p>	<p>Texts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brown, <i>Hear Our Truths</i>, Introduction.</li> <li>• Hill, “Black Girl Pedagogies: Layered Lessons on Reliability”</li> </ul> <p>Be prepared to discuss session facilitation options and course project ideas.</p> <p>Submit reading response #3.</p> <p>Complete online activity.</p> <p>After class, complete feedback survey.</p>
4	9/22	<p><b><u>Being Black Being Human</u></b></p> <p><i>How can we understand constructions of Black being vis-à-vis constructions of human? How can we connect this to Black girls (and women) specifically?</i></p>	<p>Texts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sharpe, <i>In the Wake</i> (especially chs. 2 and 3)</li> </ul>



			<p>Be prepared to discuss session facilitation options and course project ideas.</p> <p>Submit reading response #4.</p> <p>Complete online activity.</p> <p>After class, complete feedback survey.</p>
<b>NO CLASS MEETINGS 9/29 = MONDAY SCHEDULE</b>			
5	10/6	<p><b><u>Critically Researching Black Girlhood: Methodology Interlude #1</u></b>  <i>How can critical theory be used to deepen analysis and complexify research involving Black girls/girlhood? How can one's identity as having been a Black girl be drawn on as an asset in such research?</i></p> <p><i>Dr. Terri Watson, City College, CUNY, will be a guest speaker.</i></p> <p><i>Note: Weeks 5 and 6 may be switched due to guest speaker schedule.</i></p>	<p>Texts (TBD):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Class members will choose from a variety of works authored and edited by Professor Terri Watson.</li> </ul> <p>Submit reading response #5.</p> <p>Complete online activity.</p> <p>After class, complete feedback survey.</p>
6	10/13	<p><b><u>Facilitation Group Collaboration</u></b></p> <p><i>Note: Weeks 5 and 6 may be switched due to guest speaker schedule.</i></p>	<p>See specific directions for session facilitation assignment.</p>
7	10/20	<p><b><u>Creatively Researching Black Girlhood: Methodology Interlude #2</u></b>  <i>How can Black feminist research methodologies be employed and deployed creatively to challenge traditional notions of research and to</i></p>	<p>Texts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ohito &amp; Nyachae, "Poetically Poking at Language and Power: Using Black</li> </ul>

		<p><i>challenge the marginalization of Black girls' voices in said research?</i></p> <p><i>Dr. Esther Ohito, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, will be a guest speaker at 5 PM.</i></p>	<p>Feminist Poetry to Conduct Rigorous Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ohito, “The Creative Aspect Woke Me Up’: Awakening to Multimodal Essay Composition as a Fugitive Literacy Practice”</li> <li>• Ohito, “Some of Us Die: A Black Feminist Researcher’s Survival Method for Creatively Refusing Death and Decay in the Neoliberal Academy”</li> </ul> <p>Submit reading response #7.</p> <p>Complete online activity.</p> <p>After class, complete feedback survey.</p>
8	10/27	<p><b><u>Feeling Black and Human</u></b></p> <p><i>How can we understand constructions of Black being in terms of understandings of Black affect? What is the role of liberation and emancipation in these understandings?</i></p>	<p>Texts (divided):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hartman, <i>Scenes of Subjection</i>, ch. 4: “The Burdened Individuality of Freedom”</li> <li>• Wehilye, <i>Habeas Viscus</i>, intro and ch. 1: “Blackness: The Human”</li> <li>• Plamer, “What Feels More Than Feeling?’: Theorizing</li> </ul>

			<p>the Unthinkability of Black Affect”</p> <p>Submit reading response #6.</p> <p>Complete online activity.</p> <p>After class, complete feedback survey.</p>
9	11/3	<b><u>Student-led Session Facilitation</u></b>	<p>Texts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TBD</li> </ul> <p>Submit reading response #8.</p> <p>Complete online activity.</p> <p>After class, complete feedback survey.</p> <p><b>DUE:</b> See session facilitation assignment directions.</p>
10	11/10	<b><u>Student-led Session Facilitation</u></b>	<p>Texts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TBD</li> </ul> <p>Submit reading response #9.</p> <p>Complete online activity.</p> <p>After class, complete feedback survey.</p>

			<b>DUE:</b> See session facilitation assignment directions.
11	11/17	<b><u>Student-led Session Facilitation</u></b>	<p>Texts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TBD</li> </ul> <p>Submit reading response #10.</p> <p>Complete online activity.</p> <p>After class, complete feedback survey.</p> <p><b>DUE:</b> See session facilitation assignment directions.</p>
12	11/24	<b><u>Student-led Session Facilitation</u></b>	<p>Texts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TBD</li> </ul> <p>Submit reading response #11.</p> <p>Complete online activity.</p> <p>After class, complete feedback survey.</p> <p><b>DUE:</b> See session facilitation assignment directions.</p>
13	12/1	<b><u>Student-led Session Facilitation</u></b>	<p>Texts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TBD</li> </ul> <p>Submit reading response #12.</p>

			<p>Complete online activity.</p> <p>After class, complete feedback survey.</p> <p><b>DUE:</b> See session facilitation assignment directions.</p>
14	12/8	<b><u>Course Closing and Project Share</u></b>	<p>Texts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TBA</li> </ul> <p>Submit reading response #13.</p> <p>Complete online activity.</p>
15	12/15	<b><u>Final Exam Activity</u></b>	<p><b>DUE:</b> Course project to Blackboard by 11:59 PM, Tuesday, December 15.</p>

*\*\*Note: Required readings and topics may be changed to meet the needs of the class. Also, the views presented in the course materials are not necessarily ones with which I agree.*

**References:** Some of the framing language on this syllabus was inspired by/taken from Adam Heiderbrink-Bruno [here](#) and language on accessibility was inspired by/taken from Zoë Wool [here](#). Conceptualization for the course and assignments was also greatly influenced by the work of Dr. Carmen Kynard, for example see [here](#).