

American Studies 401
The Body and American Culture
Spring 2011
4:00-6:45 pm
H 413
Code: 10090

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11:15, 2:30-3:30
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Required Reading:

Jessica R. Johnston, editor, *The American Body in Context: An Anthology* (2001)

Victoria Pitts, *In the Flesh: The Cultural Politics of Body Modification* (2003)

David Serlin, *Replaceable You: Engineering the Body in Postwar American* (2004)

Christina Jarvis, *The Male Body at War: American Masculinity in World War II* (2004)

Joan Jacobs Brumberg, *The Body Project: An Intimate History of American Girls* (1997)

Welcome to American Studies 401! In this seminar we'll study various interactions between biology and culture, ways in which residents of the United States learn to see their own bodies and those of others, and the ways in which bodies become "texts" to convey cultural information and values.

Though we will to some extent explore how and why Americans' ways of seeing the body have changed, our focus will largely be on contemporary life. Our consideration of the body and American culture will pay particular attention to issues of race, social class, gender and sexuality, disability, and social control.

Course Requirements:

As befits a seminar, there will be no lectures or professor's monologues in this class. Instead, our class meetings will be

devoted to discussions of the reading that we'll do together and of the films that we will watch. It is essential that you read and carefully consider the material assigned for a particular session. To **each class session** that has reading assigned, you are to bring **a list of three questions** prompted by that week's reading. I will collect your questions and use them to enhance our discussion. The questions you devise, then, should be ones that you think would be good to talk about, not questions calling for a simple "yes" or "no" answer or questions that are merely inquiries about information.

Because a good seminar depends on widespread student involvement, **attendance at each class meeting is required.** If you must miss a class, please inform me, by email or in person, of the reason for your absence.

You must also conduct **independent research** for this class, culminating in a paper of at least 20 pages if you are an undergraduate or at least 25 pages if you are a graduate student. Your paper must in some fashion be related to the topic of the seminar and must be based on your research in primary cultural materials, "raw," unfiltered forms of cultural expression that you will interpret or analyze. You should also consult appropriate secondary materials (analyses or interpretations by other scholars) to help strengthen and deepen your own analysis.

Looking ahead through all of the books assigned for the class will give you some idea of the range of appropriate topics, and may also provide inspiration in coming up with a topic. Please see me in my office as often as you like throughout the semester to talk about your research. I also welcome your phone calls or e-mails.

You must have selected that research topic and have notified me of your choice in a **research proposal** no later than **Monday, February 28.** This proposal, around 4 pages long, should define your topic as narrowly and precisely as possible and must include a discussion of your planned

sources of cultural information, your procedures and goals for the work, and even a tentative title for your paper. You should be as specific as possible at that early stage of your research about the sources you will consult and base your paper upon; a preliminary bibliography must also accompany the proposal.

We'll devote our last three meetings to **presentations**, each lasting around 15 minutes, of your research projects. (Those who present earlier will, of course, not be expected to be as conclusive in their findings as those who present later on.) Your **paper's final version** is due on the day and hour set for a final exam for this class: **Monday, May 16, at 5:00 pm.** (There will be no actual final exam.)

Your paper must include a bibliography that lists all sources you consulted in your research, not just the sources that you actually cited in the text. (There is no need for an actual "works cited" section.) You may use either footnotes or endnotes, whichever you prefer. You may use any research paper format guide that you like; just be consistent in the way that you cite sources, etc. Dividing the paper into sections, each with its own title, might be quite helpful, for both you and your readers.

Grading:

The grade on your **research paper**—the paper itself, the presentation, and the research proposal—will constitute 50% of your course grade. The quality and extent of your **participation in our discussions**—including your attendance, your speaking and your listening in class, and the several lists of discussion questions you'll prepare—will constitute the other 50%. I use the university's plus/minus grading system.

Academic dishonesty, presenting someone else's work as your own, will, depending on the severity of the offense, result in a penalty ranging from a lowered grade on an assignment to failure in the course.

Working with the Office of Disabled Student Services, I'll make any necessary arrangements for the particular needs of **students with disabilities.**

COURSE OUTLINE

- 1/24** What We're Doing and Why We're Doing It
Video for class discussion: "Private Dicks" (2006).
- 1/31** Getting Started: The Beholder's Eye
Video for class discussion: "Sideshow"
Read: Johnston, Introduction, pp. xii-xix; "Minds and Bodies," pp. 1- 10.

I. THE BODY AS CULTURAL TERRITORY: GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 2/7** **Read:** In Johnston: Samantha Holland, "Descartes Goes to Hollywood: Mind, Body, and Gender in Contemporary Cyborg Cinema," pp. 11-30; S. Kay Toombs, "The Lived Experience of Disability," pp. 31-48; Mike Featherstone, "The Body in Consumer Culture," pp. 79-102; Mark E. Mishkind *et al.*, "The Embodiment of Masculinity: Cultural, Psychological, and Behavioral Dimensions," pp. 103-120; Susan Bordo, " 'Material Girl' : The Effacements of Postmodern Culture," pp. 121-143; Mary G. McDonald, "Michael Jordon's Family Values: Marketing, Meaning, and Post-Reagan America," pp. 145-174.
- 2/14** **Read:** In Johnston: "Disciplined Bodies," pp. 177-188; Norbert Elias, "On Blowing One's Nose," pp. 189-199; Irving Kenneth Zola, "Medicine as an Institution of Social Control," pp. 201- 220; Emily

Martin, "Body Narratives, Body Boundaries," pp. 257-271; Pirkko Markula, "Firm but Shapely, Fit but Sexy, Strong but Thin: The Postmodern Aerobocizing Female Bodies," pp. 273-309.

2/21 Presidents' Day: No Class Meeting

III. THE CULTURE OF THE MAKE-OVER: CONSUMER CULTURE AND THE MODIFIED OR REPLACEABLE BODY

***2/28 Read:** Pitts, entire book
***Research Proposals Due**

3/7 Read: Serlin, Introduction, Chapters One & Two. pp. 1- 110.

3/14 Read: Serlin, Chapters Three & Four, Epilogue, pp. 111-204

IV. THE GENDERED BODY: WOMEN, MEN, AND THEIR OWN BODIES

3/21 Read: Jarvis, Introduction, Chapters 1 & 2, pp. 3-85.

*****SPRING RECESS*****

4/4 Read: Jarvis, Chapters 3-5, Conclusion, pp. 86-191.

4/11 Read: Brumberg, Introduction, Chapters One-Three, pp. *xvii-xxxiii*; 3-94, plus imagery following p. 94.

4/18 Read: Brumberg, Chapters 4-6, pp. 95-214.

V. CONCLUDING THE SEMINAR: PRESENTING STUDENT RESEARCH**4/25** Student Presentations**5/2** Student Presentations**5/9** Student Presentations**5/16** **Research Papers Due at 5:00 pm.**