SC505 Beauty Fictions: Women and the Body in Contemporary Society

Winter/Spring Term, 2008
TH 3–5:30
McGuinn 415

Professor Sharlene Hesse-Biber

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STRUCTURE OF THE COURSE:

Course Description.
We analyze how a range of “beauty fictions” that serve to socially construct the female body. In particular, we examine those fictions that incorporate race and class to construct “difference” in perceptions of women’s bodies. We evaluate and critique some of the major theoretical perspectives for understanding the body. We utilize memoirs, case studies as well as cutting edge research studies that examine the embodied experiences of women as this interacts with their race, class and sexual identities. While the primary course focus is on contemporary American society, we introduce the impact of globalization and post-colonialization on women’s bodies in an international context.

Attendance: Attendance is required. Lateness is something you need to avoid.

Turning in Work:
No work will be accepted via email or in my campus mailbox, unless you make some special arrangement with me. All work needs to be handed in during the class period it is due. You will receive a half grade deduction for each day your assignment is late.

Required Readings:


Plus: Additional Course Readings will be on WEBCT for this course.

Recommended:


(Take rape quiz)
**Course Schedule**

(Some readings and topics are subject to change throughout the semester—come to class to obtain updates)

**January 17th: Introduction and Course Organization**

**January 24th: The Body in Western Culture: Woman as Body? Man as Mind?**

Question: How can we explain Western dualistic theory that equals woman to body and man to mind?

Price and Shildrick, Feminist Theory and the Body, pp. 17-63,

Price and Shildrick 220-26, 235-257, 275-290


**January 31ST: The Female Body in the Scientific Discourse**


How should we theorize about the body? Is the body a natural entity or a socially constructed process? What do we mean by these two ways of thinking of the body? What is the Body? How do we reconcile the “physical body” with the “self”? What does it mean to be an individual? How has the discipline of sociology theorized the body and why has the body been mostly absent in sociological thinking?

**FEBRUARY 7th Embodying gender**

Bodies are socially constructed through the process of gendering—what it means to be a male and a female. How does this process happen? What theories serve to empower our understanding of this process?


Iris Marion Young. “Breasted Experience: The Look and the Feeling” In Rose Weitz, editor
The Politics of Women’s Bodies. New York: Oxford University Press, chapter Ten


**FEBRARY 14TH Challenging Binaries: Trans-gender, cross-dressing and other transgressions.**

How does trans-gender challenge the binary between male and female gay and straight? How do bodies transgress these neat divides? How do we understand the relation between our physical bodies and our gender and sexual identities?
How do bodies in general become classed? How does class position affect the embodied experience—how we speak, walk what we wear and how we in general feel about the body?


February 28TH: Racialised Bodies Part I.


March: 6th: Spring Break!!
MARCH 13TH: Racialized Bodies Part II


Shilling, C., (2003) The body and social theory (pp.49-53: 'dangerous others').


March 20TH: Easter Break

March 27TH: Racialized Bodies, Part III


April 3rd: Racialized Bodies Part IV: Beauty Fictions and the White Body

April 10th: Regulating and Resisting the Body? Bulimia & Anorexia and other beauty fictions.

Key Readings:


Marya Hornbacher, Wasted: A Memoir of Anorexia and Bulimia.

April 17th: The Altered Body


April 24th: Are bodies real? Technology, medical enhancements and the Cyber-body

In this final section of the course we look into the “futuristic” body. To what extent can and will technology literally transcend the “physical” boundaries of the body? What impact will Cyberspace and its new iterations (in WEB 3.0 for example) for the way(s) in which the body is linked to our identity? What are the boundaries between natural/social and cyber spaced bodies?

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Research Paper (40%)

You are required to write a research paper on a specific issue that pertains to Women and the Body in Contemporary Society.

I would like you to work with a research “buddy” as you progress with your paper. This buddy system is designed to motive you to keep on track with your paper. You are expected to check in with your “buddy” on the progress you have been making/not making.

The Paper:
Please frame a particular issue/problem that is of special interest to you that is taken in part from what you have studied in this course thus far.

This is a RESEARCH paper and will thus require you to work with primary documents/materials and/or articles published in scholarly journals/documents/scholarly research studies/books. You might also elect to do an empirical research paper and if so, you would need to specific both your research problem and specific method/s of data collection.

The paper must be 15 to 20 typed numbered pages, 12 pt. Font, 1 inch margins, double spaced, and typed according to APA or ASA format. You must document your work and use at least 8 to 10 documented references beyond those in our course readings.

Your paper must contain an ABSTRACT along with a complete bibliography as well as any source materials (in an appendix, clearly labeled).

You must send me a copy of your abstract by April 17th so that I can put together an abstract booklet for all student presentations.

Paper Deadlines:

May 1st: Class Presentations of Research Papers.
February 28th: Paper Outline due in class. You should come up with a specific research problem/issue.
• The outline should be 1-2 typed pages – clearly explicating the problem/issue you want to address.
• You must include a working bibliography and copies of three (3) articles you have relevant to your research topic and write a short annotated summary for these 3 articles.

March 27th: You will write up a one to two page progress report, telling me specifically where you are and what remains to be done with your paper.

April 10th: The First draft of Paper due. You must hand this to your research partner and he/she will deliver specific comments to you no later than one week. A copy of these comments should also be given to me.

Final Due Date for Paper is due April 24th: Final paper is due for Class Presentation of your work.

CLASS ATTENDANCE AND CLASSROOM DISCUSSION (15%) You are expected to attend each class. One unexcused absence is given. Only under emergency circumstances (documented) will I accept an additional absence. YOU WILL LOSE 3 POINTS FOR EACH CLASS MISSED if unexcused.

YOU ARE EXPECTED TO BRING A 3 X 5 CARD WITH YOU TO CLASS. YOU ARE TO COMMENT WHAT YOU FOUND PARTICULARLY INSIGHTFUL ABOUT A READING AND CITE A SPECIFIC QUOTE AND WHAT READING YOU PARTICULARLY DISAGREED WITH OR WANTED TO CRITIQUE WITH A SPECIFIC QUOTE (BE SURE TO CITE READING AND PAGE NUMBER OF YOUR QUOTES).

This is a seminar so that your grade is also based on how well you come to class prepared to discuss the readings—what is the quality of your contributions—what original ideas do you bring to bear on the course reading for that day? How well do
you listen to the comments of others and respond to these specific comments in a thoughtful manner?

How well do you listen across whatever differences you might have regarding what is being said by another? It is through our differences that we come to understand our own and other’s perspectives.

THREE POSITION PAPERS. (15% EACH)

You will be asked to write a total of THREE (3) position papers in this course. Each is worth 15 percent of your grade. (10 percent for the paper and 5% for how well you integrate your paper with class presentation).

You are responsible for leading class discussion 3 different weeks of classroom readings that you will integrate in a position paper. You should come to class prepared to discuss that week’s readings and come prepared to lead off classroom discussion on the readings for that week. BRING THREE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS WITH YOU.

YOUR Position PAPER WILL BE GRADED ON: THE QUALITY OF YOUR ESSAYS

THESIS/ARGUMENT
What is your argument/thesis?
Is it clearly stated?
Does your argument hang together (do you support your argument with evidence?) and is not just a summary, but analytical?

Here I look for WHAT evidence you bring to bear in your argument. What readings do you use (are they appropriate to this particular argument?) and how well do you use them to make an argument. Is your interpretation valid? Do you tend to go beyond the evidence such that you tend to overextend your argument? (making over-generalizations). Is something important left out?
What do you conclude and is your conclusion supported by your essay?

How well written is the essay? Is it organized? Too many quotes and not enough of the writer’s own synthesis of articles?
How well is the essay formatted?
References are correctly cited?
The paper has been proof-read for spelling grammatical errors.
The paper is correctly formatted and pages numbered?
Course Resources

The following reference citation styles are taken from the ASA Style Guide. You should cite your research as per these citation styles in references you papers.

ASA Reference Styles Examples:

Books


Chapters in an Edited Book


New York: Russell Sage Foundation.


Author's Name. Year the site created. "Title of the page in quotes." Title of the web site in italics. <URL of the page in brackets> (Date that you accessed/first read the page in parentheses).