SC505 Beauty Fictions: Women and the Body in Contemporary Society

Fall Term, 2008
Tuesday 4:30 to 6:50pm
McGuinn 415

Professor Sharlene Hesse-Biber
SC505 BEAUTY FICTIONS: READING LIST AND COURSE SCHEDULE

STRUCTURE OF THE COURSE:

**Course Description:**
We analyze how a range of "beauty fictions" that serves 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 intersects 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-colonization women's bodies in an international context.

**Attendance:** Attendance is required. Please be on time.

**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:**


Recommended Only (Students often ask me for additional readings that I particularly like or find useful and those that are new arrivals)


Plus: Additional Course Readings will be on BLACKBOARD (FORMERLY WEBCT) for this course.

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

**September 2nd: Introduction and Course Organization**

**September 9th 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


**Sept. 16th: The Female Body in the Scientific Discourse**


*Questions:* 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 to 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?

**Sept 23rd Embodying gender**

*Questions:* 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?


**September 30th: Challenging Binaries: Trans-gender, cross-dressing and other transgressions.**

**Questions:** 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?

**Key Readings:**


---

**October 7th: The Classed Body: Social Class and Women’s Bodies.**

**Question:** 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?


---

**October 14th: Racialized Bodies Part I.**

**Question:** What are the Key questions contained in this Section?


October 21st: Racialized Bodies Part II

Question: What are the key questions contained in this section?


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


October 28th: Racialized Bodies, Part III

What are the key set of questions in this section?


November 4th.


What are the key set of questions in this section?
November 11th: Regulating and Resisting the Body? Bulimia & Anorexia and other beauty fictions. What are the key Questions?

Key Readings:


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

November 18th: The Altered Body

Kathy Davis: Reshaping the Female Body: The Dilemma of Cosmetic Surgery

What are they Key Questions?

November 25th: 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?


Shilling, C., (2005) The body in culture, technology and society (chapter 8: 'technologicalbodies').

Tuesday December 2nd, Class Presentations of Research Papers.
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 motivate 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 specify 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 so that I can put together an abstract booklet for all student presentations.

**Paper Deadlines:**

**October 14th:** 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.

**November 3rd** 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.

**November 18th** The First draft of your paper and abstract is due in class. You must hand in one copy to your research partner and he/she will deliver specific comments to you and a copy to me no later than one week later, that is November 25th. Abstracts should contain the paper W Title, author and no more than 150 word summary.
You must also give me a copy of your draft paper plus abstract on November 18th as well.

**Final Due Date for Paper is due December 9th** : Final paper is due class 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 5% of your grade for each additional absence.

YOU ARE EXPECTED TO BRING A 3 X 5 CARD WITH YOU TO CLASS. Please cite TWO SPECIFIC QUOTES (with quote, page number and article name). One quote you agreed with AND what quote you disagreed with. Be prepared to answer why you agreed/disagreed.

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 THREE 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 it 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?