

University of Massachusetts- Boston
Women's Studies
WOST G210: Gender & the Body
Fall 2007-Sections 1 & 2
Wheatley 1-48

Instructor: Chris Bobel, Ph.D.

Office: W-5-009

Phone: 617.287.6781 (with private voice mail)

Office Hours: 1:30-4:00 Mondays and by appointment

Email: chris.bobel@umb.edu (best way to reach me)

Teaching Assistants (TAs):

Carina Wine (SECTION 1: 11:30-12:20) email: defeat_ennui@hotmail.com

Carol Kautsire (SECTION 2: 12:30-1:20) email: shaguar_ace@yahoo.com

Course Description:

This course takes a critical look at human bodies, especially female ones, in social context. We begin with the premise that embodiment itself is a socially constructed phenomena rather than a fixed biological reality. Through the study of various texts, a few films, self-reflection and plenty of in-class discussion, we will explore how perceptions of our bodies are shaped by social processes and how these perceptions in turn shape human experience. We will not only attend particularly to how bodies are gendered (that is 'sorted' into over simplified and highly structured categories of either man or woman) but we will also address how bodies are also raced, classed, sexualized, thereby complicating and deepening the meaning and practice of embodied existence.

Course Goals:

In addition to stimulating thinking about course content, this INTERMEDIATE SEMINAR also sets out to achieve two interrelated goals:

1) To instruct and practice verbal reasoning (critical thinking & reading).

This means that we will challenge assumptions about gender, race, class, age and sexuality and other socially constructed categories in the interest of understanding embodied experience. To this end, we will not only *describe* phenomena, but we will also ask questions that require you to first, *critically*

address the material we read and second, formulate well- reasoned positions in both your verbal and written discourse.

2) To instruct and practice clear writing.

Three papers, a journal and a significant amount of in-class, on-the-spot writing will challenge you to hone your writing to be clearer and more effective. It is our (myself and your TA) job to provide you with constructive feedback that points out the strengths and weaknesses of your writing; it is your job to take the writing you do very seriously. You will have opportunities to make revisions, share your writing with others and of course, read and consider the work of accomplished writers. It is my hope that, together, we can begin to regard writing as not only a tool for expression but also a method for developing clarity in thinking and a powerful means to make connections between people.

All out of class written work must be:

- turned in on time (i.e., at the start of class on the due date) Late work will not be accepted. Be forewarned. I am very crabby about this.
- Typed and page numbered
- double spaced with 1" margins and 12 pt font
- written in scholarly form (proper and consistent use of a citation system. We will use MLA)

About the Intermediate Seminar Program:

Intermediate Seminars offer students with 30 or more credits the opportunity to work on essential university capabilities in small-sized courses that are often thematic or problem-oriented and interdisciplinary in nature. Designed in part to help students prepare for the Writing Proficiency Requirement, Intermediate Seminars put special emphasis on critical reading, thinking, and writing. They focus on other essential capabilities as appropriate to the course and might therefore include attention to library research and information technology, collaborative learning, oral presentation, and academic self-assessment. Students who practiced reading, writing, and critical thinking in a First Year Seminar at UMass Boston will practice them at a more advanced level in the Intermediate Seminar.

Only ONE Intermediate Seminar may be taken for credit. If you have taken another G200-level course in any department at UMB, you cannot receive credit for this one.

Prerequisites: English 101, English 102, First Year Seminar (or waiver), and 30 credits. The First Year Seminar is automatically waived for students who enter UMB with 30 or more transfer credits. Because these are intensive reading and writing courses, some students may find it helpful to enroll in CRW 221 to further develop their skills with college-level writing *before* taking an Intermediate Seminar. Discuss your situation with the instructor if you have any questions about these prerequisites or your readiness for the work in this course.

The Writing Proficiency Requirement: Students from the College of Liberal Arts, the College of Science and Mathematics, and the College of Nursing and Health Sciences complete the University's Writing Proficiency Requirement through the Writing Proficiency Evaluation (WPE). The Writing Proficiency Requirement is not the same as the writing placement test you may have taken when you entered UMass Boston. The WPE can be met through either an examination or a take-home essay submitted along with a portfolio of papers written for UMB courses. See the WPR website (www.umb.edu/academics/undergraduate/office/wpr/index.html) for more details about the exam and portfolio options and dates. Students who have not already satisfied the WPR should arrange to take the exam or submit a portfolio shortly after completing this course.

Support services for Intermediate Seminar students: The Academic Support Office offers both individual tutoring and drop-in workshops for students who need help with the critical reading, thinking and writing skills necessary for success in General Education courses such as this one. More information on their programs is available online at www.academicsupport.umb.edu/rwsscenter.html, or at their Campus Center office (CC1-1300). The Ross Center for Disability Services (CC2-2010) provides accommodations and educational resources for students with demonstrated needs, as outlined on their website (www.rosscenter.umb.edu). Should you be eligible for these services, you should contact the Ross Center right away so that their staff can help you identify appropriate accommodations in this and other courses. Finally, if it appears that you

might not pass this Intermediate Seminar and if the instructor cannot figure out how to support your success in the course, the instructor might inform the Director of the Student Referral Program in the University Advising Center. This strictly confidential program is part of an early warning system designed to help students address personal and academic difficulties that may interfere with their progress in the University.

Assessment of these courses: Besides course evaluation forms that are routinely administered at the end of each course at UMass Boston, Intermediate Seminar students are asked to complete a self-assessment questionnaire addressing their progress as critical thinkers and writers. Additionally, each term an assessment committee will look at randomly chosen student writing from a small sample of Intermediate Seminars. Please save all your writing in this course so that, if you are chosen, you will have your work available. The purpose of this evaluation is to improve the program and to improve particular courses as necessary, not to evaluate individual students. You may remove your name from your papers if you prefer to submit them anonymously.

Student plagiarism: Students are expected to abide by the University's Code of Student Conduct in all their classes at UMass Boston (www.umb.edu/academics/undergraduate/office/wpr/index.html). Plagiarism is a particularly serious violation, as outlined in the Academic Honesty section of the code (section VI), and will not be tolerated. Below is the University Policy on Academic Standards and Cheating from UMB Undergraduate University Catalog. For further details, refer to the section on plagiarism. I adhere to this policy, so please take note.

"The first obligation of students is to pursue conscientiously the academic objective which they have determined for themselves. Students are expected to conform to all regulations of the University, of the College in which they are enrolled, and of the classes in which they are registered. It is further expected that all examinations, texts, written papers or other assignments completed as a part of academic programs are the product of the student's own work and effort.

This means that students may not solicit or use unauthorized material or assistance for their own benefit and may not offer or give such assistance to

another student. Every written report or similar class assignment must indicate fully the sources from which the information used is obtained, and any verbatim quotations or paraphrases must be clearly indicated as such and properly credited to the source from which they were extracted or adapted."

Course Policies:

Attendance:

Because this course is discussion-intensive, your ON TIME attendance and participation is essential. Students will be expected to attend each class and keep up with the weekly reading assignments so they've got something learned to say. While I don't formally take attendance, I do NOTICE who is here and who is not. Chronic absences will be considered when final grades are calculated. If you regularly attend, I may give you the point or 2 needed to boost you to the higher grade. If attendance was a problem for you, I will not give you this boost. **NOTE: I reserve the right to fail any student who fails to attend more than 25% of all scheduled classes. Please take note.**

I do not tolerate tardiness because late arrivals are unnecessarily disruptive to the classroom experience. **Please note the following policy: At 10 minutes after the start of class, I will shut the classroom door. If you arrive when the door is shut, you are not welcome to enter the classroom.** (We will synchronize our watches on the first day). This may seem a harsh policy, but I have found that it forces students to arrive on time and allows us to get to work without the distraction of late arrivals. Please plan accordingly.

Classroom participation:

As for classroom participation, I recognize that a number of factors make it difficult for students to speak up in class. And some of these factors, such as speaking English as a second language, can be daunting. But, I believe that we as community of learners, can take steps to make the classroom a relatively safe place for EVERYONE to speak up if they want to. We are all familiar with common obstacles to productive classroom dialogue: 1) coming to class unprepared and 2) fear of sounding stupid. But, both obstacles are

avoidable: the former if each student keeps up with the reading, the latter if we collectively agree to a few ground rules for democratic discussion.

The rules are as follows:

- No attacks based on individual or group characteristics such as gender, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, age or English language skills
- No esoteric terms or reference to materials unless they are known to all (or the speaker is equipped to define/explain their relevance).
- No individual or groups of individuals may dominate discussion. If you are talkative and notice that you are taking a lot of "floor time", pause before you speak up and watch to see if someone else might like a chance. It is my job to create balance in classroom discussion, so I will be helping out and encouraging our more quiet classmates to "find their voice."

Please keep in mind that offensive and insulting behavior undermines the sense of community that the Intermediate Seminars strive to build. Class discussion can be productive only in a climate of respect for the opinions and beliefs of all. A healthy exchange about issues may include disagreement about ideas, but it must not demean the character or background of the individuals holding those ideas.

A FINAL NOTE: If you come to class ready to fully engage in active learning and you make your best attempt to express yourself in the classroom, you will write better papers and you will get more out of class.

Required Reading:

Available at University Bookstore:

- Fausto-Sterling, Anne (2000). *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics & the Construction of Sexuality*
- Mairs, Nancy. (1996). *Waist-High in the World*
- Bordo, Susan (1999). *The Male Body: A New Look at Men in Public and Private*
- Weitz, Rose (2003) *The Politics of Women's Bodies, 2e*

AND

- Selected pieces on eReserves

To retrieve material on eReserve, go to:
<http://docutek.lib.umb.edu/eres/courseindex.aspx?error=&page=search> and use the password GENDER.

Assignments:

Real Life Connection Journal Value: 25%

This journal challenges you to see and hear course concepts in your every day, outside-the-classroom life. Pay attention to examples of the issues we engage in class and document them in your journal. You will soon see that the topic of how (and why) bodies are gendered is ubiquitous, woven liberally throughout our lives. Think of it this way: there is an endless supply of data "out there" we can use to make our learning real. See a TV commercial? Read a news story? Notice a billboard? Overhear a conversation? Write about it and explain the connection to course material. Format is flexible, but you should push yourself to write at least 2 entries per week. Minimally, 1) Date your entry 2) Briefly explain the data (the show, ad, conversation, etc). Attach it to your journal if you can. 3) Explain the connection. What does this bit of data show? How does it confirm, extend, contradict and/or complicate what you are learning in class?

How much do I write?

You are expected to write no less than 2 entries a week, but you can write more. We will collect the journals 4 times throughout the semester. When they are returned the final time, you will be given a comprehensive grade in consideration of all entries. You are not expected to write when your journal is collected and in our possession. Consider this a needed break.

PAPER 1: Embodied Autobiography. 3 pages. Value 20%

Using Judith Ortiz Cofer's essay "The Story of My Body" as a guide and a model (but not a recipe!), write your own autobiography of your body situated in social context. You may approach this assignment in any number of ways, but be sure that you engage an honest and critical discussion that explores how your body is more than a strict biological "given" but a socially constructed and dynamic entity. Questions you might entertain include:

- At one point did you become aware that features of your body were different than the features of others' bodies?

- How has your assessment of your body changed over time and place? What factors and forces shaped that assessment?
- What sorts of measures, if any, have you taken to change your body in some way? Consider things like working out, dieting, plastic surgery, special haircuts, etc., etc. What motivated your decisions? What were the outcomes of your efforts?

It is your job to integrate relevant readings to extend your personal discussion. That is, you are expected to make connections between your story and the stories of others we are encountering (you may utilize ANY assigned reading and film but I expect you to focus on the reading up to the reading titled "Medicalization of Racial Features: Asian American Women and Cosmetic Surgery" by Kaw.)

A tip: In order to best prepare for this paper, BEGIN NOW. As you read the assigned reading and participate in class discussion, take note when something RESONATES for you personally. Listen to your self and record when you find a personal connection that helps you make sense of your own experience, such as:

- "Yeah. That happened to me."
- "I feel like that sometimes."
- "I wonder about that, too" "
- "Oh! That explains that experience/opinion/observation/concern I had."
- Hmm... that doesn't describe my experience at all. Ask yourself what might explain the difference?"

Now, when you write your autobiography of your body, pull in these references. Doing so will produce a richer, deeper paper that will begin with the personal AND transcend it to say something BEYOND yourself.

PAPER 2: Participant-Observation. 3 pages. Rough Draft: 5%; Peer Review 5%; Final Paper 15% (TOTAL VALUE: 25%)

This assignment requires you to select a heavily populated site, such as a mall, a busy street corner or a cafeteria, make astute observations and write a paper that applies course material to interpret these observations. More specifically:

- Approach this site and the people in it as if you were an alien who just landed on the planet. Assume nothing. Watch people and their actions with fresh, naïve eyes and record your observations as unobtrusively as possible.
- Take copious notes recording how people use their bodies to express their identity (including gender, age, race and/or ethnicity, sexuality, and more)
- Drawing on your notes, produce an essay that organizes and analyzes your observations. Find a way to categorize your observations that support an argument for "rules" or norms of body presentation. For instance, what is acceptable to do, to show, to flaunt, and to hide? And what are the rewards for following these rules and the penalties for breaking them?
- Integrate relevant course reading (and yes, you may surely read ahead if you like) to support, clarify, and deepen your analysis. I expect you to pull in the analyses we've read (that is, the explanations for why people deploy particular body displays; how the norms function and the consequences for violating them) to interpret what you've seen. Think of it this way: the observations provide the interesting examples to support some of the theories we are studying.

Here are the steps you must follow:

- 1) Write a full rough draft of your paper. You will receive 5 points if you submit a complete rough draft.
- 2) Make two copies and bring them to class on October 26th
- 3) Give one copy to your TA
- 4) Exchange the other copy with a classmate
- 5) Using the sheet provided in class, list your name next to the name of the person you traded papers with
- 6) Using the rubric (i.e. evaluation criteria) provided, review your classmate's paper and bring it to class on October 31st.
- 7) During class, exchange papers (again) with your classmate and discuss the Peer Reviews. During this time, your TA will return her review of your paper to you as well. You will earn 5 points if you FULLY complete the Peer Review.
- 8) Revise your paper based on the feedback you received. Hand in the paper IN CLASS on November 9th. This paper is worth 15 points (15% of your total course grade).

Paper 3: Gendering Bodies. 6-8 pages. Value: 30% THIS PAPER IS APPROPRIATE FOR THE WRITING PROFICIENCY REQUIREMENT, so very thorough instructions follow.

In the Preface to *Sexing the Body*, Anne Fausto-Sterling asserts, ". . . feminist theorists view the body not as an essence, but as a bare scaffolding on which discourse and performance build a completely acculturated being (p. 6)." Select any two readings assigned this term and use them to support this claim.

Minimum requirements: In your essay, use specific examples from each reading to illustrate and develop your points. Include a few brief, exact quotations as well as appropriate summaries. Give credit to (i.e., cite) your sources, whenever you quote or paraphrase, with an "in-text" citation in parentheses (Author's last name, page number). Your paper should have a one-paragraph introduction and a one-paragraph conclusion. *Please plan to write (or re-write) the introduction and conclusion after you have finished the main body of the paper.*

Paper Format: Your paper should be between 6-8 pages long. It should be double-spaced throughout, with 1" margins all around, no extra space between paragraphs, and a header on each page after the first, using your name and incorporating the page number (e.g., "Bobel--page 2"). Please include a cover sheet with the paper title centered, and your name, my name, the course number, and the date.

Proofreading and Checking Spelling and Punctuation: PLEASE use a spell-checker and also proofread your paper for errors that the spell-checker may not catch. Papers that are full of errors may be returned to you as unsatisfactory, for correction and resubmission.

Grading criteria: Your score on the paper will be based in part on your attention to the question asked and your care in following instructions, and in part on your successful effort to think and write clearly, accurately and convincingly about the texts. Minor grammatical or punctuation problems will not interfere with your achieving a good grade on a thoughtful and otherwise clear paper. However, I will try to help you identify common patterns of error in order to be able to fix these yourself the next time around, and I

will expect that you will make progress between one paper and the next on these problems. (Remember that you are required to revise at least two papers this semester, following my feedback. So even if you do not receive as high a score as you want on this first paper, you have the opportunity to improve it and perhaps earn a higher score.)

You will submit a rough draft to us, I will read it carefully and comment and return it to you. (this draft is worth 5% of your course grade). Then, you will submit the final paper to me on the last day of class (worth 25% of your total course grade). **WARNING: ROUGH DRAFTS ARE NOT OPTIONAL. YOU MUST SUBMIT ONE. FAILURE TO DO MEANS EARNING ZERO CREDIT FOR THIS ASSIGNMENT** (that's a whopping 30% of your total course grade)

Grade Breakdown

| | |
|--|-----|
| Journals (turned in 4 times--culminating in 1 grade) | 25 |
| Paper 1: Embodied Autobiography | 20 |
| Paper 2: Participation Observation Draft | 5 |
| Peer Review | 5 |
| Final Paper | 15 |
| Paper 3: Gendering Bodies | 5 |
| Draft | 5 |
| Final Paper | 25 |
| <hr/> | |
| TOTAL | 100 |

(Tentative) Course Schedule:

Getting Established--Who is everybody?

- September 5: Course Overview & Introductions all around
- September 7: Film: Worried Well: Body Dysmorphic Disorder (15 mins).
- September 10: Women's Bodies (Weitz)

Seeing Bodies/"Reading Bodies"

- September 12: Berger: Ways of Seeing (ER)

September 14 Lorber: Believing is Seeing: Biology as Ideology (Weitz)

The Beauty Ideal and its Consequences

September 17: Bartky: Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power (Weitz)

September 19 Film: The Size of It (30 mins)
JOURNALS DUE

September 21 Ortiz Cofer "The Story of My Body" (ER)

September 24 hooks Selling Hot Pussy: Representations of Black Female Sexuality in the Cultural Marketplace (Weitz)
Class Taught by TA Carol Kautsire

September 26 Gillespie: Mirror Mirror (Weitz)
JOURNALS RETURNED

September 28 Kaw: Medicalization of Racial Feature: Asian-American Women & Cosmetic Surgery (Weitz)

October 1 In Class Discussion: What makes a good paper good?

October 3 Film: Perfect Image? (30 mins)
EMBODIED AUTOBIOGRAPHY DUE

October 5 Film: Western Eyes (40 mins)

October 8 HOLIDAY---NO CLASS

Menstruation & the Culture of Concealment

October 10 Brumberg "Sanitizing Puberty: The American Way to Menstruate" (ER)

October 12 Lee "Menarche and the (Hetero) Sexualization of the Female Body (Weitz)
EMBODIED AUTOBIOGRAPHY PAPERS RETURNED

MID TERM EVALUATIONS

October 15 Houppert: Pulling The Plug On The Sanitary Protection Industry
Grab it at <http://www.spotsite.org/village.html>

October 17 Film: Period Piece (30 mins)
JOURNALS DUE

October 19 Film: Menstruation: Breaking the Silence (57 minutes)

October 22 Bobel "Our Revolution Has Style: Menstrual Activists Doing Feminism in the Third Wave" (ER)

Breasts, Breastfeeding & Breast Cancer

October 24 Young "Breasted Experience: The Look & the Feeling" (Weitz)
JOURNALS RETURNED

October 26 Film: Body Beautiful (23 mins)
Participant Observation Draft Due-2 Copies

October 29 Four Fact Sheets on Breast Cancer & Women of Color (ER)
Arditti: Breast Cancer: The Environmental Connection (ER)

October 31 In Class Workshop dedicated to discussing reviews and strategizing revisions
Peer Reviews of Participant Observation Drafts Due IN CLASS

November 2 Guest Speaker: Erin Boles, Mass Breast Cancer Coalition

November 5 Palmer "Why Breastfeeding is Political" (ER)

November 7 Guest Speaker: Ann Marie Lindquist, La Leche League Leader

The DisABLED Body

November 9 Film: Without Pity (56 mins)
 Participation Observation Papers Due

November 12 HOLIDAY—NO CLASS

November 14 Mairs pp. 3-86
 JOURNALS DUE

November 16 Mairs pp. 87-145 and 190-209

The Male Body

November 19 Bordo, pp. 3-106
 Film: Body Image for Boys (18 mins)
 Class taught by TA Carina Wine
 Participation Observation Papers Returned

November 21 Bordo, pp. 107-228
 Film Clips: A Streetcar Named Desire
 JOURNALS RETURNED

November 23 HOLIDAY-NO CLASS

November 26 Bordo, pp. 229-332

Bodies, Binaries and Ambiguity

November 28 Fausto Sterling, pp. 1-77 (*FOCUSED* reading: 45-77)

November 30 Film: Hermaphrodites Speak!
 Gendering Bodies Outline DUE

December 3 Guest Speaker: Ester Morris, Intersex Activist
 READ "The Self I Will Never Know" (grab it at
 www.mrkh.org)

December 5 Fausto Sterling, pp. 78-114

- December 7 Film Clips: Venus Boyz
- December 10 Guest Speaker: Representative/s from SPEAK OUT!
LOCATION TBA
Gendering Bodies OUTLINES RETURNED
JOURNALS [including all make up entries] DUE
(FINAL TIME—NO EXCEPTIONS!!!!)
- December 12 Fausto Sterling, pp. 115-145
Film clips: Sugar & Spice
- December 14 LAST CLASS
Evaluations, Congratulations and Celebrations
POTLUCK LUNCH
JOURNALS RETURNED
- December 17 **Gendering Bodies Paper Due**
in my WOST mailbox (5th Floor, Wheatley Hall) by
NOON