Required Reading


Books are all available at The Little Professor Book Center. I’ll distribute the two articles in class. Additionally, you must watch “Brokeback Mountain” on your own before the last week of class.

Course Requirements

Welcome to American Studies 413! Though I’ll lecture from time to time, most of the class will be devoted to our discussions of the assigned reading and of some videos that I (and, I hope, some of you) will show. It’s essential that you attend regularly and keep up with the assignments. I hope that we’ll together create the sort of atmosphere in which all of you will feel comfortable participating verbally in our discussions, but it is possible to do well in the class without talking, by careful listening along with good written work. Discussing the class with me in my office or by email can be another valuable form of class participation.

At the time indicated on the course outline, we will have a midterm examination, an essay of around 2,000 words (2,500 for graduate students) prepared outside of class, its topic to be announced before we conclude our discussion of Way’s Deep Secrets, with the essay due on October 23, two weeks after the conclusion of that discussion.

Additionally you must prepare either a comparative review of two films that in a significant way are about the cultural meaning of being a male, or else a review of one book (apart from our assigned reading) on some aspect of maleness. Whether of one book or of two films, your review must be around 1,250 (1,750 for graduate students) words long. It is due no later than Thursday, November 20. I’ll post lengthy lists of appropriate films and books on our TITANium site, but your review does not have to deal only with movies or a book on these lists.

Your reviewed book or else one or both of your reviewed films may be recent in focus and origin, but they don’t have to be. If you decide to deal with films, one or both of yours may have been made and/or set in the United States, but they don’t have to be. Indeed selecting two somehow-
analogous films from different time periods should allow you to interestingly explore the issue of cultural change from one era to another. And if you select one film made and/or set here to compare to one made and/or set outside the United States, you should identify and analyze what you see as significant cross-cultural differences and similarities between maleness there and here. Regardless of the films you review, it is essential that you get well beyond the movies themselves, that you put the films in cultural perspective, linking the films to the broader themes having to do with masculinity studied in this class. Considering the film’s audience—through consulting film reviews by professional critics or by amateurs on sites such as amazon.com—should be an important part of your review.

If instead you decide to review a book that somehow explores masculinity nowadays or in the past, please keep in mind that I want a book review, not merely a book report. Strive to write an essay that analyzes, doesn’t just report on, the book, an essay that somehow links the book to themes discussed in our class, and evaluates the book regarding whether it challenges, supports, or refines how our class has addressed those themes. My own assigned essay on Deep Secrets should show you how an actual review differs from a mere report.

Although you don’t need my formal approval of your project’s subject, I encourage you to discuss this project with me during my office hours and/or in email as often as you like. We’ll also discuss your projects in class once in a while.

I will sometimes begin a class by having us view and then discuss a video, an activity that I believe will strengthen what we’re scheduled to discuss that day or is at least related somehow to the course’s overall consideration of being an American male. I hope that you’ll join me in this exercise, by showing us a video that you find interesting and then leading a brief discussion of what we’ve seen. On our TITANium site, I’ll post a list of videos, mostly from YouTube, from which you might choose, but you certainly don’t need to confine yourself to that list. As noted below, presenting a video and leading a discussion about it will provide extra credit for you when I determine grades. If possible, notify me before class by
email or in-person when you plan to present a video, but doing this isn’t essential.

The final examination, an essay around 2,500 words (3,000 for graduate students) prepared outside of class, is due no later than Tuesday, December 16, at 12 Noon. I’ll announce the topic of this essay at least two weeks before it’s due.

I will extend a deadline for any assignment without penalty only for a compelling reason, for which I may require documentation.

Grading

The midterm essay and the book review or comparative film review will each count 30% toward your overall grade for written work, the final essay will count 40%. After computing your grade for this written work I may then make adjustments up or down, as much as a full letter grade, for class participation: attendance and attentive listening as well as your active involvement in discussions. If you have presented one or more videos and then led a discussion during the semester, I will raise your grade as I think appropriate. If your participation in discussions has not been noteworthy in either a positive or a negative way, and/or if you have made no extra credit presentations, your course grade will be entirely based on your written work.

Grading criteria for both the essay exams and the review are: understanding (50%), originality (20%), evidence (10%), clarity (10%), organization (10%). If you present a video for extra credit, I’ll consider the imaginativeness of your selection and of how effectively you lead the discussion.

I use the university’s system of plus-minus grading.

Academic dishonesty, the presentation of someone else’s work without attribution, as if it were one’s own, or doing work for someone else
to present as if it were his or her own, is a very serious offense. The penalty for such behavior will range from an F on an assignment to an F in this course. I may also report such behavior to the university for possible further penalty.

Working with the Office of Disabled Student Services, I will make necessary accommodations for students with disabilities.

**COURSE OUTLINE**

This course rests on an assumption that you must understand but not necessarily endorse: While actually being a male is a matter of biology, what being a male means at a particular moment in a particular locale is powerfully influenced by culture. While maleness involves testicles and testosterone, masculinity involves beliefs, symbols and values associated with maleness. According to this assumption, masculinity is not a fixed essence but is a cultural construction that changes over time and space. This course, then, is a study of the history and current state of various masculinities. Throughout the course, we will evaluate the very significance of gender, especially compared to social class, sexual orientation, and race.

**Tu 8/26** Introductions: What We're Doing Here and Why We're Doing It

**Th 8/28** The Problems and Potential of American Manhood

**Tu 9/2** Discussion, no reading assigned.

“The Mask You Live In”

“What Men Are Really Saying When Catcalling Women”

“Watch an Entire Team of Teenage Football Players Do Something Very Unexpected”

“Big Brother 16 Beauty Contest”

“19 Things Dads Do That You Won’t See in Popular Culture”

“The Hilarious Michael Sam Parody You Must Watch”

“Gender Roles—Interviews with Kids”
I. SITUATING OURSELVES: CHANGE AND CONTINUITY
IN BEING AN AMERICAN MALE

Michael Messner’s Boyhood as a Reference Point

Th 9/4    Messner, Prologue, Chapters 1-3, pp. 9-43.
Tu 9/9     Messner, Chapters 4-7, pp. 45-104.
Th 9/11    Messner, Chapters 8-10, Epilogue, pp. 105-152.

Shifting Space between Men: Male Relationships Then and Now

Tu 9/16   Picturing Men: A Century of Male Relationships in
Th 9/18   Everyday American Photography (PowerPoint and discussion)

Long Ago and Far Away? Male Friendship in
Colonial America

Th 9/25   Godbeer, pp. 119-197.

Boyz to Men: Losing Touch on the Way to Adulthood

Tu 9/30   Way, Chapters 1 & 2, pp. 1-88.
Th 10/2   Way, Chapters 3-5, pp. 91-180.
Tu 10/7   Way, Chapters 6 & 7, pp. 183-228.
Th 10/9   Way, Chapters 8 & 9, pp. 229-281.

Midterm Examination Covers Material to Here:
Due Thursday, October 23
II. YOUNG MALES ON THE MARGIN: MINORITY MASCULINITY IN CONTEMPORARY AMERICA

Tu 10/14   Rios, Preface, Chapters 1-4, pp. vii-xvi, 3-94.
Th 10/16   Rios, Chapters 5-7, Conclusion, pp. 97-167.

III. MANY WAYS TO BE A MAN? MASCULINITY PLURALIZED

*Th 10/23   Kimmel, Chapter 2, pp. 38-49.
*Midterm Essay Due in Class.

Tu 10/28   Kimmel, Chapters 3 & 4, pp. 50-91.
Th 10/30   Kimmel, Chapter 5, pp. 92-98.

Th 11/6   Kimmel, Chapter 8, pp. 143-162.

Tu 11/11  Veterans Day  No Class
Th 11/13   Kimmel, Chapter 9, pp. 163-172.

Tu 11/18   Kimmel, Chapter 10, pp. 173-196.
*Th 11/20   Kimmel, Chapter 11, pp. 197-206.
*Film or Book Review Due in Class.

Fall Recess

Tu 12/2   Kimmel, Chapter 12, pp. 207-219.
Th 12/4   Kimmel, Chapter 13, pp. 220-230.
V. MANHOOD NOWADAYS: MASCULINITY IN CRISIS OR IN TRANSITION?
Before the discussion, you must have watched Brokeback Mountain on your own sometime this semester.

Tu 12/9  Discussion of Ibson, “Lessons Learned on Brokeback Mountain”

Th 12/11  Course Evaluations and Conclusions

Tu 12/16  FINAL EXAMINATION: DUE 12 Noon