

American Studies 401	John Ibson
The Body and American Culture	Office UH 419
Fall 2012	Office Hours: TuTh 10:15-11:15, 1:15-2:15
TuTh 2:30-3:45	email: jibson@fullerton.edu
UH 240	voice mail: 657.278.3345
Code: 10108	Department website: http://hss.fullerton.edu/amstud/
	Professor Ibson's website: http://hss.fullerton.edu/amstud/faculty/j_ibson.asp

Required Reading:

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

Kathy Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture* (1999,2011)

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

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

Carolyn de la Peña, *Empty Pleasures: The Story of Artificial Sweeteners from Saccharin to Splenda* (2010)

All books are available at The Little Professor Book Center.

Welcome to American Studies 401! In this seminar we will 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" that 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. On **each Tuesday** of a week 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. Failure to do so will hurt the large portion of your grade for class participation

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).

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. I will not assign research topics; you must select yours yourself, but I'll be happy to help you make your choice.

You must have selected that research topic and have notified me of your choice in a **research proposal** no later than **Thursday, September 27**. This notification, which should be around 3 pages long, should clearly define your topic and must include a discussion of your planned procedures and goals for the work along with 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 will base your paper upon; a tentative, a preliminary bibliography must accompany the proposal. The quality of this proposal will be part of your grade on the paper itself.

We won't have regular class meetings during the week of November 13 and 15, the week before the fall recess, to give you extra time to work on your research papers. I'll be available, with additional office hours that week, to consult with you about your research. We'll then devote our last three weeks to **presentations**, each lasting 10-15 minutes, of these student 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 set for a final exam for this class: **Thursday, December 20, at 3:00 pm**.

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. 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.

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 notification(s) to me regarding your absence(s), 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. Additionally, if I believe the offense warrants it, I will notify the Dean of Students Office of the offense.

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

COURSE OUTLINE

Tu 8/28 What We're Doing and Why We're Doing It

Th 8/30 Getting Started: Size Matters?
Video for class discussion: "Private Dicks"

I. THE CULTURE OF THE MAKE-OVER: CONSUMER CULTURE AND THE REPLACEABLE BODY

Tu 9/4 **Read for the week:** Serlin, Introduction-Chapter

Th 9/6 Two, pp. 1-110.

Tu 9/11 **Read for the week:** Serlin, Chapter Three-Epilogue,

Th 9/13 pp. 111-200.

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

A. American Women and the Culture of Beauty

Tu 9/18 **Read for the week:** Peiss, Introduction-Chapter 4,

Th 9/20 pp. 3-133.

Tu 9/25 **Read for the Week:** Peiss, Chapters 5-8, pp. 134-

Th 9/27 270

*******Research Proposals Due on Thursday*******

B. Looking Like a Man in Modern America

Tu 10/2 Read for the Week: Jarvis Introduction, Chapters 1
Th 10/4 & 2, pp. 3-85.

Tu 10/9 Read for the Week: Jarvis, Chapters 3-5,
Th 10/11 Conclusion, pp. 86-191.

**III. INK AND MORE: THE MEANING OF TATTOOS AND
 OTHER TYPES OF BODY MODIFICATION**

Tu 10/16 Read for the Week: Pitts, pp. 1-118.
Th 10/18

Tu 10/23 Read for the Week: Pitts, pp. 119-197.
Th 10/25

**IV. THE REAL THING: THE ECONOMICS AND CULTURAL
 MEANINGS OF WHAT WE PUT IN OUR BODIES**

Tu 10/30 Read for the Week: de la Peña, pp. 1-139.
Th 11/1 .

Tu 11/6 Read for the Week: de la Peña, pp. 141-227.
Th 11/8

Tu 11/13 Research Week: No Class Meetings,
Th 11/15 Individual Appointments as Necessary

******Fall Recess******

V. CONCLUDING THE SEMINAR: PRESENTING STUDENT RESEARCH

Tu 11/27 Presentations of Student Research

Th 11/29 Presentations of Student Research

Tu 12/4 Presentations of Student Research

Th 12/6 Presentations of Student Research

Tu 12/11 Presentations of Student Research

Th 12/13 Presentations of Student Research

Tu 12/20 **Research Papers Due, 3:00 pm.**