

American Studies 413

The American Male

Spring 2010

Tuesday & Thursday 11:30am-12:45 pm

MH 514

Code: 15210

John Ibson

Office: UH 419

**Office Hours: TR 1:00-3:00 pm,
and by appointment**

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Required Reading

Thomas A. Foster: *Sex and the Eighteenth-Century Man: Massachusetts and the History of Sexuality in America* (2006)

Michael Kimmel, *Guyland: The Perilous World Where Boys Become Men* (2008)

Susan Bordo, *The Male Body: A New Look at Men in Public and Private* (1999)

Neil Chethik, *Fatherloss; How Sons of All Ages Come to Terms with the Deaths of Their Dads* (2001)

Ray González, *Muy Macho: Latino Men Confront Their Manhood* (1996)

John Ibson, "Lessons Learned on Brokeback Mountain: Expanding the Possibilities of American Manhood" (2007)

Books are all available at The Little Professor Book Center. I'll distribute the article 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 some films. 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.

The books assigned in this class aren't huge; there are nonetheless five of them, most to be read in their entirety. To give you time to get assigned portions of a book read carefully in preparation for our discussion of it, I've scheduled five one-week intervals, during which no reading will be assigned. During four of these intervals, we'll watch and talk about a film related to the topic of the book soon to be discussed. These films are also texts for this class. You should discuss them in the exam essays, along with the books. Additionally, our classroom discussions of these films, giving you experience in examining film as a cultural document, should be valuable preparation for the film project in the class.

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 Kimmel's *Guyland*, with the essay due two weeks after the conclusion of that discussion.

Additionally you must prepare a **critical review of a film** that is in a significant way about the cultural meaning of being a male. The review should be around 1,250 (1,750 for graduate students) words long. It is due no later than **Thursday, April 22**. I will provide a list of appropriate films, but you certainly may select a film that is not on this list. Your film may be recent, but it doesn't have to be. It may be a film made and/or set in the United States, but it does not have to be. For films made during or about an earlier time, you should explicitly address the issue of cultural change from then to now. And for films set outside the United States, you should explicitly address cross-cultural differences and similarities between there and here. Regardless of the film you are analyzing, it is essential that you get well beyond the film itself, that you put the film in cultural perspective, linking the film to the broader themes having to do with masculinity studied in this class. Considering the film's audience—through film reviews by professional critics or by amateurs on sites such as amazon.com—should be an important part of your review. 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 it in class once in a while.

The **final examination**, an essay around 2,500 words (3,000 for graduate students) prepared outside of class, is due no later than **Thursday, May 20, 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.

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

Grading

The midterm and the film review will each count 30% toward your overall grade for written work, the final will count 40%. After computing your grade for 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 your participation has not been noteworthy in either a positive or a negative way, your course grade will be entirely based on your written work.

Grading criteria for both the exams and the film review are: understanding (50%), originality (20%), evidence (10%), clarity (10%), organization (10%).

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.

COURSE OUTLINE

Because of the current state budget crisis, CSU faculty, like most state employees, have had their pay reduced by approximately 10%. To compensate for this reduction in salary, all faculty are required to take certain specific days as “furloughs,” and cannot meet their classes on those days. Each faculty member must also designate six additional days as “furlough” days; it’s left to an individual faculty member’s own discretion whether that additional time involves days when her or his classes would normally meet.

As you will note, we will not meet on *Tuesday, February 16*; that is a day that the university has declared must be a “furlough” day. I do not believe it is fair for students, already facing dramatically higher fees, to suffer further by having their instruction time reduced by faculty-designated “furloughs.” Consequently, I have designated days when I am not scheduled to teach as most of my remaining “furlough” days this semester.

To demonstrate to voters and the legislature what a “day without the CSU” would be like, however, the CSU statewide Academic Senate as well as the Senate at CSUF have urged all faculty to declare a specific day this semester—*Tuesday, March 2*—as a day of “furlough.” In union with my colleagues, and in the hope that widespread inactivity in the CSU on March 2 will make a point, I have designated that day as a “furlough” for me as well. Consequently, there will be no class on March 2, as well as on February 16. I deeply regret this disruption of all of our lives, and hope that things will be better in the fall and beyond.

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 1/26 Introductions: What We're Doing Here and Why We're Doing It

Th 1/28 The Problems and Potential American Manhood
 Film & discussion in class: “Boys Will Be Men: A Documentary about Growing Up Male in America” (2001)

I. GETTING PERSPECTIVE: MASCULINITY IN EARLIER SETTINGS

reading: Foster, *Sex and the Eighteenth-Century Man*

- Tu 2/2** Picturing Men: A Century of Male Relationships in Everyday
Th 2/4 American Photography (PowerPoint and discussion)
- Tu 2/9** Foster, Introduction, pp. ix-xx; Part I, *Household*, pp. 3-49.
- Th 2/11** Foster, Part II, *Community*, pp. 53-97.
- Tu 2/16** Furlough Day: No class meeting
- Th 2/18** Foster, Part III, *Sexualities*, pp. 101-179.

II. IN A WORLD OF THEIR OWN? BEING A MAN IN THE MAKING TODAY

reading: Kimmel, *Guyland*

- Tu 2/23** Film & discussion in class: "Superbad" (2007)
Th 2/25



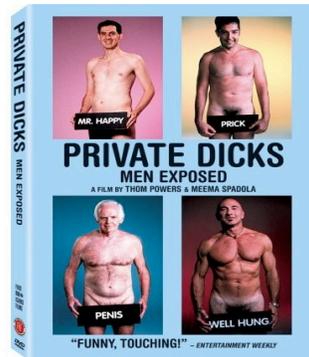
- Tu 3/2** Furlough Day: No class meeting
Th 3/5 Kimmel, Chapters 1-4, pp. 1-94.
Tu 3/9 Kimmel, Chapters 5-8, pp. 95-189.
Th 3/11 Kimmel, Chapters 9-12, pp. 190-289.

****Midterm Examination Covers Material to Here: Due Thursday, March 25****

III. LOOKING LIKE A MAN: AMERICAN CULTURE AND MEN'S BODIES

reading: from Bordo, *The Male Body*

Tu 3/16 Film & discussion in class: "Private Dicks: Men Exposed" (1999)
Th 3/18



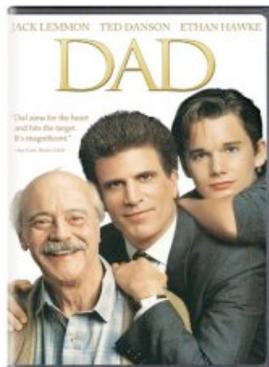
Tu 3/23 Bordo, pp. 3-104.
Th 3/25 Bordo, pp. 168-225.
*****Midterm Essay Due*****

SPRING RECESS

IV. PERFECT STORM? FATHERS AND SONS

reading: Chethik, *Fatherloss*

Tu 4/6 Film & discussion in class: "Dad." (1989)
Th 4/8



Tu 4/13 Chethik, Introduction-Chapter 4, pp. 1-106.

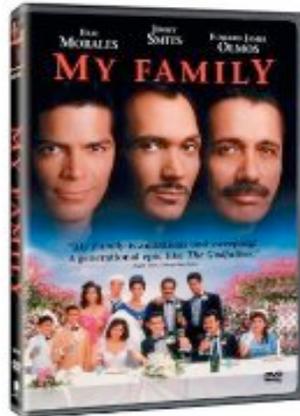
Th 4/15 Chethik, Chapters 5-10, pp. 109-231.

V. OTHER BROTHERS: GENDER AND RACE

reading: González, *Muy Macho*

Tu 4/20 Film & discussion in class: "My Family" (1995)

Th 4/22 *****Film Reviews Due*****



Tu 4/27 González, pp. xiii-xx; 1-56.

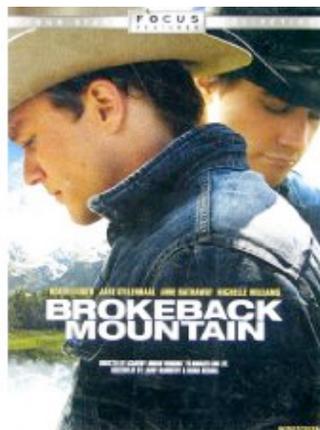
Th 4/29 González, pp. 57-110.

Tu 5/4 González, pp. 111-164.

Th 5/6 González, pp. 165-230.

V. MANHOOD NOWADAYS: MASCULINITY IN CRISIS OR IN TRANSITION?

reading: Ibson, "Lessons Learned on Brokeback Mountain" Before the discussion, you must have watched the film on your own sometime this semester.



Tu 5/11 Discussion of Ibsen, "Lessons Learned on Brokeback Mountain"

Th 5/13 Course Evaluations and Conclusions

Th 5/20 **FINAL EXAMINATION: DUE 12 Noon**