

Black Masculinities: The Body and Performance

AFR 374F Unique#: 30500

WGS 340 Unique#: 47014

Spring 2012

University of Texas at Austin

Course Instructor: Dr. Mark Broomfield

Time and Place: TTH, 11-12:30, GAR 1.134

Office: JES A232A

Office Hours: TH 1-2pm and by appt.

Email: markbroomfield@austin.utexas.edu

Course Description:

This course explores the concept of masculinity in American and African American culture. Focusing on the black male body, we will examine the contested nature of black masculine representation, its performance, and perception in contemporary society and culture. This class bridges theoretical perspectives and lived experiences of black men to reveal the tensions between ideal notions of masculinity and their personal narratives.

Course Requirements:

Required Reading: *Masculinities in Theory: An Introduction* by Todd W. Reeser

Online Electronic Resource, UT Library

Course Packet (available at The Union)

Assignments:

Exams:

Two exams will be administered—a midterm and final. The midterm will be an in-class consisting of essay questions. No make-up exams will be given. The final will be a take home exam. Each will be worth 25%.

Class participation and Personal Artifact:

Each week a member of the class will be designated to lead a discussion of the week's readings. The leader is expected to prepare three questions for analysis and summarize the arguments presented in the readings.

Each week you will be responsible for bringing a personal artifact to class that links the theories/concepts/ideas discussed. These include, but are not limited to, a current event in a magazine or newspaper article, performance (e.g. gestures, body language, poetry), literature, memory, photo, artwork, etc. The personal artifact should connect the readings explored with your daily experiences of masculinity.
25%

Final Presentation:

You will design a final presentation that engages with the class material presented. Working in pairs, each presentation must have a performance component that clearly articulates theoretical and practical concerns relating to the black male body and black men in society and culture. Ideas for the group presentation must be cleared with the instructor for approval. Some questions to guide your project include: what would a visionary or new black masculinity look like? How can your choices and actions work to change the perception or representation of black masculinities? How can you develop new narratives of black masculinities? Your presentation should be 10 minutes in length and can take the form of spoken word, poetry, oral history, performance, narrative story, play excerpt, short film, or any combination of these. 25%

ATTENDANCE AND CLASS PARTICIPATION: The success of this course requires your consistent presence in class.

For this reason you are expected to attend every session. Moreover, lateness will not be tolerated. Late arriving students disrupt class. Beginning the second week of class, an attendance sheet will be available for you to sign in the front of the classroom. If you do not sign your name on the sheet within five minutes of the beginning of class time, you will be considered absent. Leaving class early will also constitute an absence. **After two (2) absences, you will be penalized a full letter grade for each additional absence thereafter. No exceptions.**

A Note on Electronics:

Please turn off your cell phone before you come to class.

Laptops/notebooks/i Pads are permitted ONLY IF you are using them to take notes for the class. If the temptation is too great to use them for other purposes during class (checking Facebook, Hulu, Twitter, etc), I reserve the right to ban them from class altogether. **Using electronics for non-course related purposes will result in a severe lowering of your class participation grade.**

Although the class is designed around some lecturing, it is also centered on discussion and group interaction. This means that prior to class *do the readings, think critically about them, and be ready to discuss them*. This advance preparation is *essential* to the success of this class. You will not be judged on whether or not your instructor or classmates agree with your ideas, but rather on how well you articulate them. This requires you to be open to new perspectives posed by the course and your fellow classmates, to reflect on them, and to come up with your own thoughts on the various topics we will explore this semester. **Please consult the Course Schedule below on a regular basis to ensure you are prepared for each class session.** Class Participation is worth 25% of your final grade. We will also use Blackboard to distribute assignments.

Grades will be determined as follows:

93-100=A

90-92=A-

87-89=B+

83-86=B

80-82=B-

77-79=C+

73-76=C

70-72=C-

67-69=D+

63-66=D

60-62=D-

00-59=F

POLICY ON INCOMPLETES:

Under no circumstances do I give incompletes. If you are finding that you are having difficulty keeping up with the work in class for whatever reason, please see me immediately.

PLAGIARISM AND ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:

All students are expected to adhere to UT's guidelines regarding plagiarism. Students who violate University rules on scholastic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and/or dismissal from the University. Since such dishonesty harms the individual, all students, and the integrity of the University, policies on scholastic dishonesty will be strictly enforced. Refer to the Student Judicial Services website for official University policies and procedures on scholastic dishonesty. Please see me if you have any further questions about plagiarism.

ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATIONS STATEMENT:

The University of Texas at Austin provides upon request appropriate academic accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. For more information, contact the Office of the Dean of Students at 471-6259, 471-4641 TTY.

Finally, some words about what you can expect of your instructor. As one who is concerned with the issues we are dealing with in this course, I am very invested in you finding this experience a satisfying one. For this reason, I have sought to provide you with the tools necessary to do well in this class, and more important, for you to walk away from this course thinking differently about the issues we will explore throughout the semester. You can expect from your instructor consistent feedback on your work and availability for any questions and concerns that you may have.

Course Schedule

Week 1: January 17 & 19

Introduction and Syllabus Overview

Defining Masculinities

What is masculinity? Why study gender? What is hegemonic masculinity? What is dominant masculinity? If dominant masculinity exists, what are subordinate and marginalized masculinities? What is the relationship between them?

Reading:

Reeser, Introduction, pp. 1-16

R. W. Connell, "The Social Organization of Masculinity," *Masculinities*, Ch. 3, pp. 67-86

Keith Nurse, "Masculinities in Transition: Gender and the Global Problematique," Chapter 1, pp. 3-37 *Interrogating Caribbean Masculinities*

Week 2: January 24 & 26

Race and Masculinity

How would you define black masculinity in American culture? What is the historical relationship of black masculinity to defining manhood? What is black male patriarchy? How has the black male body been historically constructed? What is the "problem" with black men? Why are black men always in crisis? Do all black men experience racism in the same way? What is black male privilege?

Reading:

Reeser, Ch. 7, pp. 144-170

Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Sexual Politics*, Ch. 6, pp. 181-212

Week 3: January 31 & February 2

Race and Masculinity (continued)

Reading:

bell hooks, *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity*, Ch. 1, pp. 1-14

Mark Anthony Neal, *New Black Man*, Ch. 1, pp. 1-30

Week 4: February 7 & 9

Masculinity and the Male Body

What is the relationship of men to their bodies? How is masculinity learned or inscribed on the body? What is the role of biology in defining masculinity? What are the arguments between nature vs. nurture?

What are the strongest arguments for and against the view that gender identity and gender development are biologically determined?

Reading:

Reeser, Ch. 4, pp. 91-118

Kobena Mercer, "Reading Racial Fetishism: The Photographs of Robert Mapplethorpe," *Welcome to the Jungle*, Chapter 6, pp. 171-219

Week 5: February 14 & 16

Masculinity and Sexuality

What are some stereotypes of black male sexuality? How do these stereotypes function? How do these stereotypical and mythic constructions deny black men their full humanity?

Reading:

Reeser, Ch., 3, pp. 72-90

bell hooks, *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity*, Ch. 5, pp. 67-84

James Baldwin, "Freaks and American Ideal of Manhood," *James Baldwin: Collected Essays*, pp. 814-829

Week 6: February 21 & 23

Masculinity and Sexuality (continued)

Reading:

Alan Bérubé, "How Gay Stays White and What Kind of White It Stays," *Privilege: A Reader*, Ch. 21, pp. 253-283

Dwight McBride, *Why I Hate Abercrombie and Fitch*, Chapter 3, pp. 88-131

Thaddeus Russell, "The Color of Discipline: Civil Rights and Black Sexuality," *American Quarterly*, pp. 101-128

Week 7: February 28 & March 1

Sexism and Homophobia

Are black men and women equal? What does gender equality look like between black men and women? What is the role of black feminist theory in reshaping our understanding of gender equality? How can it be achieved? Are African American communities more homophobic? What is the relationship of homophobia to defining heterosexual masculinity? Do definitions of black manhood include black gay men?

Reading:

Mark Anthony Neal, *New Black Man*, Ch. 3, Neal pp. 67-97

Audre Lorde, "Sexism: An American Disease in Blackface," *I Am Your Sister*, pp. 44-49

Exam 1

Week 8: March 6 & 8

Black Queer Masculinities

How is dominant black masculinity defined in relation to black sexual minorities? What performances of masculinity are celebrated? Which ones are punished? What

critiques of black heterosexual masculinity do black queer masculinities offer?
What are some ways of moving beyond the impasse of monolithic constructions of black masculinity?

Reading:

E. Patrick Johnson, *Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity*, Ch.2, pp. 48-75

Kobena Mercer and Isaac Julien, "True Confessions," *Black Male: Representations of Masculinity in Contemporary American Art*, pp. 191-200

Marlon Riggs, "Black Macho Revisited," *Brother to Brother: New Writings by Black Gay Men*, pp. 253-257

Spring Break March 12-17

Week 9: March 20 & 22

Performing Masculinities and Male (Re)presentations

Taking a look at popular culture, what dominant representations of black masculinity exist? What do these representations say about the value of masculinity? What representations resist stereotypical black masculine performances?

Reading:

Joe Wlodarz, "Beyond the Black Macho: Queer Blaxploitation," *The Velvet Light Trap*, pp.10-25

Margaret Hunter, "Shake it Baby, Shake It: Consumption and the New Gender Relation in Hip-Hop," *Sociological Perspectives*, pp. 15-36

Alan M. Klein, *Little Big Men*, Ch. 8, pp. 194-233

Week 10: March 27 & 29

Classed Masculinities

How does race and class impact gender? What opportunities exist for black men to pursue traditional notions of American manhood? Is the pursuit of the American masculine ideal a worthy goal? Do all black men have equal access to the American dream? What do black men's experiences tell us about the different ways masculinity is lived?

Reading:

bell hooks, *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity*, Ch. 2, 15-32; Ch. 6, pp.85-100

Shaun R. Harper, "The Measure of a Man: Conceptualizations of Masculinity Among High Achieving African American Male College Students," *Men's Lives*, pp. 134-146

Elizabeth Alexander, "We're Gonna Deconstruct Your Life!": The Making and Un-Making of the Black Bourgeois Patriarch in Ricochet, *Representing Black Men*, Ch. 8, pp. 157- 171

Week 11: April 3 & 5

Female Masculinity

Can masculinity be performed without male bodies? How does gender performance by the female body complicate traditional notions of masculinity? Is the freedom of expression protected for sexual and gender minorities? How is the freedom of expression tied to our democratic notions of individualism and citizenship?

Reading:

Diane Torr and Stephen Bottoms, *Sex, Drag, and Male Roles*, Ch. 1, pp. 1-34

Maite Escudero-Alías, "Ethics, Authorship, and the Representation of Drag Kings in Contemporary US Popular Culture," *The Journal of Popular Culture*, pp. 256-273

Week 12: April 10 & 12

Men and Violence

Are men naturally violent and aggressive? In what ways does society sanction male violence over nonviolence means? What does this violence look like in heterosexual relationships? What does this violence look like in other spheres?

Reading:

David Nimmons, "Our Peaceable Kingdom," *The Soul Beneath the Skin*, pp. 13-39

Film: *Tough Guise*

Week 13: April 17 & 19

Sports and Masculinity

In what ways does sports serve as a means of male initiation and male bonding? Are sports the only arena where male intimacy is allowed? How do competitive sports perpetuate dominant notions of masculinity?

Reading:

Ben Carrington, *Race, Sports and Politics*, Ch. 3, pp. 101-136

Abby L. Ferber, "The Construction of Black Masculinity: White Supremacy Now and Then," *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, pp. 11-24

Week 14: April 24 & 26

Cross-Cultural Black Masculinities

How is black masculinity experienced across different cultures? What do these cross-cultural experiences tell us about traditional definitions of masculinity, male identity, and manhood? How does context and culture shape masculinity?

Reading:

E. Antonio De Moya, "Power Games and Totalitarian Masculinity in the Dominican Republic," *Interrogating Caribbean Masculinities*, Chapter 3, pp. 68-102

Akosua Adomako Ampofo and John Boateng, "Multiple Meanings of Manhood Among Boys in Ghana," *African Sexualities*, Ch. 45, pp. 420-436 (UT online electronic resource)

Week 15: May 1 & 3

Progressive Masculinities

How would you define progressive black masculinities?

Reading:

Athena D. Mutua, "Theorizing Progressive Black Masculinities," *Progressive Black Masculinities*, Chapter 1, pp. 3-42

Rinaldo Walcott, "Reconstructing Manhood: or, The Drag of Black Masculinity," *Small Axe*, pp. 75-89

Take Home Exam Due Last Day of Class

Final Exam: Monday, May 14, 9am-12noon

Presentations