

WOM 203: Women in Popular Culture
Sample Syllabus
University of Wisconsin-Colleges

Course Description

In this course, we will examine ways women have been portrayed and are currently portrayed in the media, in television and movies, popular music, internet, print sources like magazines, popular fiction, and newspapers, and other cultural phenomena. With readings ranging from critical theory to popular fiction by and about women, we will speculate on the impact of and source for popular portrayals of women and what they might be telling us about women's roles in society. Issues of race, class, sexual orientation, age, and physical ability will be important as we explore and critically examine the forms and functions of women in popular culture.

Course Objectives

- *Define popular culture, and how it is written, talked about, and experienced
- *Critically analyze popular culture and its significance
- *Become familiar with how women have been represented in popular culture and how they have represented themselves
- *Understand the scholarly and theoretical conversations that have been and are currently happening about cultural studies and women's place within it
- *Examine the cultural construct of race, ethnicity, and other social categories in American popular culture

Required Texts and Materials

- Caputli, Jennifer. Goddesses and Monsters: Women, Myth, Power, and Popular Culture. Madison: University of WI Press, 2004.
- Hollows, Joanne, and Rachel Moseley, eds. Feminism in Popular Culture. New York: Berg, 2006.
- Inness, Sherrie A., ed. Tough Girls: Women Warriors and Wonder Women in Popular Culture. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1999.
- Walters, Suzanna Danuta. Material Girls: Making Sense of Feminist Cultural Theory. Berkeley: U of California P, 1995.
- Williamson, Judith. Consuming Passions: The Dynamics of Popular Culture. New York: Marion Boyards, 1985.
- A popular mystery/detective novel or romance (Harlequin or otherwise) novel of your choice
- An issue of a women's magazine of your choice
- A comic book of your choice (newly purchased or previously collected)
- Some dollars for copies of articles on reserve and copies of work for small group peer review
- A number of readings on electronic reserve.

Requirements

- **Response Journals/Quizzes 30%:** Two or three times a week, you will be responsible for a two page (at the minimum), typed, double-spaced reading/response journal about the assigned readings
- **Final Project and Presentation: 50%:** Students will work throughout the session on an 8-10 page research project on an issue related to women in popular culture. For this final paper/project, you will select a topic of your choice—and as you will come to understand, the choices are virtually limitless. Components of this project will include a topic/project proposal, an annotated bibliography, a rough draft and peer review, a final product, a presentation, and a handout to accompany the presentation. A separate handout will provide more details on this component of the course.
- **Participation/Citizenship (including a conference with me): 20%** Because this is a small, discussion-based class, and because most of the learning in this class will take place as a part of talking and writing together, your attentive and generous participation is crucial. This includes preparedness for class, completing reading and writing assignments in a timely manner, arriving to class regularly and promptly, refraining from disruptive or obnoxious behavior during class (interrupting, whispering, etc.), bringing copies on workshop days, etc. and participating in large and small group conversations.

Schedule

Week One: Introduction to the course

- What is popular culture? What is cultural studies? What is feminist criticism?
-Judith Williamson's Consuming Passions: The Dynamics of Popular Culture
-selections from Rosalind Coward's Female Desires: How They Are Sought, Bought, and Packaged
-selections from Suzanna Danuta Walters's Material Girls: Making Sense of Feminist Cultural Theory

Week Two, Three, and Four

- The Visual Spectacle: Television and Film
-Joke Hermes's "'Ally McBeal', 'Sex and the City' and the Tragic Success of Feminism" (in Hollows and Moseley)
-Charlotte Brunsdon's "The Feminist in the Kitchen: Martha, Martha and Nigella" (in Hollows and Moseley)
-Jennifer Caputli's Goddesses and Monsters: Women, Myth, Power and Popular Culture
-Sherrie Inness's Tough Girls: Women Warriors and Wonder Women in Popular Culture

Week Five and Six

- Popular Music and Music Culture
 - assorted essays from Gwendolyn Pough's Check It While I Wreck It: Black Womanhood, Hip-Hop Culture, and the Public Sphere and Dorothy Marcic's Respect: Women and Popular Music
 - Charla Ogaz's "Learning from B-Girls" (in Hollows and Moseley)
 - Susan Douglas's "Why the Shirelles Mattered"

Week Seven, Eight, Nine

- Print Media: Magazines, Fiction, Newspapers, Comic Books
 - Maureen Dowd's "Of Pussycats, Booty Calls, Road Beef, and Slump Busters"
 - Jeffrey Brown's "Gender, Sexuality, and Toughness: The Bad Girls of Action Film and Comic Books"
 - selections from Catherine Lutz and Jane Collins's Reading National Geographic

Week Ten and Eleven

- Material Culture (Toys, Games, Technology, and Other Consumables)
 - Sherrie Inness's "'It's a Girl Thing': Tough Female Action Figures in the Toy Store"
 - Helen Kennedy's "Illegitimate, Monstrous and Out There: Female Quake" (in Hollows and Moseley)
 - selections from Mary Rogers's Barbie Culture and Lucinda Ebersole and Richard Peabody's Mondo Barbie

Week Twelve and Thirteen

- Advertising and Marketing
 - selections from Wendy Chapkis's Beauty Secrets: Women and The Politics of Appearance
 - selections from Kathryn Weibel's Mirror, Mirror: Images of Women Reflected in Popular Culture

Week Fourteen and Fifteen

- Research Projects: Presentations and Discussion

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