

Female Icons in Contemporary U.S. Culture
WGS 2080-80 - Winter 2018-2019
December 26, 2018 to January 14, 2019
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Description of Course:

This course examines female icons in a variety of contexts, focusing on popular culture and media representations. We will analyze the relationship between these female icons and ideas about women in the United States; we will also introduce some comparative material from other parts of the world. We consider how these different images of women -- from heroes to sex objects -- challenge and/or reinforce dominant gender norms. We will try to answer the following question: are female icons feminist?

Course material will include historical essays, scholarly and popular analyses of icons, Internet sources, film, and music videos. This course is designed to be shaped by the interests of the students; thus, each student is encouraged to find their own connections to contemporary icons and images of women.

Course Objectives:

The course will:

1. Examine female icons in relation to cultural, historical, and political systems of meaning.
2. Critically consider the connections between female icons and (1) gender ideologies and (2) the material conditions of women's lives.
3. Analyze the intersections of gender with categories such as race, class, and sexuality.
4. Investigate the technologies of representation and commodification that characterize the production of female icons.
5. Encourage students to work collaboratively with others.

Student Learning Outcomes:

Students will:

1. Learn how to analyze female icons in relation to cultural, historical, and political systems of meaning through completing the course reading and participating in class discussion.
2. Discuss and demonstrate the connections between female icons, gender ideologies, and women's lives through writing essays and giving in-class presentations.
3. Understand the intersections of gender with race, class and sexuality.
4. Demonstrate their understanding of technologies of representation and commodification by analyzing an icon as the final project.

Required Texts:

All readings will be provided to you either via online resources or an email containing file attachments with the materials.

Course Requirements:

Students will submit two papers (5 pages each) that respond to the course readings. The bulk of the work comes in the homework assignments which can be found in the Assignments and Discussion Board tabs in Blackboard. There are no quizzes and no exams for this course.

Grading:

Grades will be weighted as follows:

Paper I	30% Due: Saturday, January 6, 2019
Paper II	30% Due: Saturday, January 13, 2019
Discussion Board Assignments	40% Due: Various due dates (see schedule)

Grading Rubric to be used for all assignments:

-An "A" Grade: students fully analyze the material, pursue additional research when appropriate, and demonstrate comprehension of the subject matter. Ideas are original, insightful, and go beyond ideas raised in the material or discussion boards. Consideration is also given for writing ability and the quality of academic quality work submitted.

-A "B" Grade: students analyze the material and respond demonstrating an understanding of the reading, films, or discussions. Students develop their ideas beyond the surface of the issue at hand. Consideration is also given for writing ability and the quality of academic quality work submitted.

-A "C" Grade: students demonstrate a basic understanding of the concepts within the readings, films, or discussions. Students may not fully grasp the content or satisfy all of the requirements for the assignment.

-A "D" Grade: students produce an inadequate mastery of the course content; does not satisfy the requirements of the assignment; and does not grasp the key elements of the readings, films, or discussions.

-An "F" Grade: students fail to comprehend the readings or films; or, the student does not submit the assignment

Keys to success in this course: This course will present students with a wide variety of material to read and corresponding films, which continue the thematic content of the course. For all written work, students should present well-written, academically appropriate responses demonstrating a thorough analysis of the material under consideration.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF COURSE CONTENT:

Schedule of Assignments and Reading

12/26/2018: **Introduction Assignment-** You will receive several emails from me the day before class begins including an electronic copy of our course syllabus, which contains a general overview of the course. Please complete the first ungraded assignment on Blackboard under the tab labeled "Discussions." This assignment is all about introducing yourself to your fellow classmates, learning more about me, and then beginning to engage each other just like we would in an on-campus class. Finally, take a tour of our Blackboard course-shell to become familiar with all of its contents.

12/27/2018: Respond to the four introductory questions regarding feminism in Discussion Board Assignment 1 in Part 1.

Part 1: 1) When you first heard the term "feminism" what did you think it meant?

2) Since then, has your understanding or knowledge of feminism changed? If so, how and why?

3) Let's say you had to describe to a friend what a feminist looks like. What description would you provide them?

4) Are there misconceptions about feminists? If there are, please identify them. Next, what or who causes misconceptions, why are these misconceptions created, and how could they be eliminated if they exist?

Part 2: Watch the following video clip-

https://www.ted.com/talks/courtney_martin_reinventing_feminism

(Note: you may need to copy and paste the URL into a web browser)

1) Courtney Martin, the presenter, is about 10 years older than most college students. Were you able to relate to some of what she discussed? If yes, discuss how you were able to relate to the author and some of the main concepts you liked from the presentation. If not, discuss why you weren't able to relate to the presenter and/or the presentation.

2) After seeing this video, you might be thinking that feminism is powerful and positive. Would you consider yourself a feminist and what ways might you become active as you continue your education and embark on your future path as an educated person?

12/29/2018: Read, "Mirror, Mirror on the Wall" by Leoneda Inge-Barry and respond to Part 1 of the Discussion Board, which contains two questions; and, Part 2 of the Discussion Board, which requires you to interview two women and respond to two specific questions.

12/30/2018: Read the "Introduction" from [Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media](#) by Susan Douglas. Then complete the Discussion Board assignment:

1) Looking back at your life so far, have you been influenced by mass media? Give some examples and analyze whether or not your experience is positive or negative.

NEXT, DO THE FOLLOWING: Find a current magazine and look for an ad for alcohol, fashion (such as Dolce & Gabbana), perfume, a motorboat, or a luxury vehicle. Do you find anything troubling with the ads you are seeing? Please select one ad and analyze the content of the ad: what is depicted visually, what actions are taking place or implied, etc. If you can find the ad online, please provide a URL so that I can take a look at the ad myself.

2) What if advertisements and mass media were all subjected to a test of moral responsibility before being allowed to be used? I'm not suggesting we eliminate all creativity, but, should we see if a "reasonable person standard" would find ads to be offensive or inappropriate? Do you think we should have some control over mass media so that maybe we can avoid the negative influence mass media seems to force upon many today?

3) So, what has changed since 1994? There is some good news based on research done on how Social Media is helping. Click on this link and watch this short video (8:28 in length). Do you agree or disagree with Blakley? What were some of the key-takeaways from this presentation?

http://www.ted.com/talks/johanna_blakley_social_media_and_the_end_of_gender.html

01/02/2019: Read Amelia Richards, "Body Image: Third Wave Feminism." Provide your analysis of this article in at least 2 complete paragraphs. Cover the following questions in your work:

1) What new information did you learn from this article?

2) Do you agree with the author's message?

3) Describe what runs through your mind when you hear the word “radical.” Are you the type of person that will stand up to injustice, or, do you feel more comfortable sitting back and letting others speak-up? What ways could you voice your discontent today- including use of technology? Is it important to educate or enlighten others when it comes to their knowledge of women’s rights, equality for all, and rights of all oppressed people?

4) When it comes to progress made by feminists, do you think it is safe or must we keep fighting for equality within the US and how about across the globe? Do you read articles about events that impact women- both positively and negatively around the world? Describe.

Part Two: Watch the following video presentation:

https://www.ted.com/talks/madeleine_albright_on_being_a_woman_and_a_diplomat

- 1) What were some of the key take-a-ways from Madeleine Albright's speech?
- 2) It was quite interesting how she discussed women who are critical of other women. When you were listening to this, could you relate to it? Have you heard stories from family or friends dealing with this?

01/03/2019: Watch the film, “Real Women Have Curves” and respond to the five questions on the Discussion Board.

01/06/2019: **Paper 1 is DUE.** The first paper is to be 5 pages in length. This should be a persuasive paper with at least 3 outside resources (meaning, scholarly works, academic journals in addition to anything you’ve used for this class).

So far, you have visited some websites, read articles and watched some short video presentations. The videos have provided some interesting issues that are facing women, and more generally society as a whole, in the US today. The articles read all have different perspectives on women and how mass media impacts the lives of women. The websites have provided you with some current affairs, stories about women, stories about the world in which we live.

Your topic for this paper is as follows: We will focus on women in sports.

Possibilities include:

- 1) The Olympics, Summer 2018 or Winter 2016, how did mass media treat women athletes in comparison to male athletes?

Identify a female athlete and evaluate how she was treated by mass media during the Olympics. Your goal is to demonstrate how mass media handled its coverage of this woman compared to a male athlete: words used to describe them, stories shared about the athlete; etc. Be prepared to dig deep with this topic and go beyond the surface- don’t forget to consider the destructive tendencies of mass media.

- 2) Serena Williams was “brought into” some interesting dialog started by John McEnroe where he claimed she wouldn’t do well against male tennis players. First, I’m a huge fan of Serena Williams- her success on the court and off, in my opinion, make her a contemporary icon. Why do you think John McEnroe started this dialog which created some controversy? How was Williams treated while recently pregnant (she has since given birth to a baby girl!)? Analyze the various elements of her treatment as a modern sports icon.

OTHER options exist! If you have another idea, please present it to me via email for approval.

*Your outside resources must be academically appropriate material- journals, scholarly works, etc. Avoid Wikipedia and random blogs!

In your summary, please address the following:

What would you do to prevent this from happening again?? Be specific in what you see for the future based on historical and contemporary data.

*** There are multiple angles you can take with this topic- from issues of sexism, racism, classism, heterosexism... all of which would have to be specifically focused on the impact it has on women in America today.

*** William Paterson students can conduct research using available on-line resources (the WPU Library provides you with the opportunity to search academic databases from the convenience of your own home) on the topic of mass media. Visit with or contact the resource librarians on campus for assistance (they won't do your work for you though!)

As with any work in this class, if you have questions or would like further clarification, please do not hesitate to contact me. Submit Paper 1: 5 pages, double-spaced, and include a Works Cited/Reference page. The paper is to be emailed to: gill@wpunj.edu an attachment (gill@wpunj.edu- there are 3 L's: G I L L L @wpunj.edu).

*Be certain to put your name on your paper, have a title, and a Works Cited page!

01/08/2019: Watch the film, "Iron Jawed Angels," and respond to the six questions on the Discussion Board.

01/10/2019: Read Pat Griffin's, "Damaged Mothers, Muscle Molls, Mannish Lesbians, and Predatory Dykes: 100 Years of Scaring Women out of Sport" and then respond to the Discussion Board. You will also be watching a brief video that aired on a program that was called, "In the Life."

Part 1: Tell me your thoughts about this article. Then, draw connections to things in your personal experience- make specific connections to Griffin's article and be certain to provide thoughtful analysis. If you know of other connections to the reading (friends, relatives, etc, you can talk about them- just change their names to maintain their anonymity).

Part 2: Answer the following question: As of today, do you think we have made progress and do you see limitations on girls and women when it comes to pursuing sports?

Part 3: Check out this excellent episode of "In The Life."

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xf18BSGguCE>

What do you think of this short episode of "In the Life?" Have you ever thought of how society makes people who are "different" feel and how they are treated is often different than those who society considers/deems "mainstream?" Discuss.

01/13/2019: **Paper 2** is going to be a project involving research and writing:

Step 1: Harvey Weinstein- 2017. The alleged actions/behaviors of Harvey Weinstein started a really fascinating movement here in the United States, and probably elsewhere, where those who have been the victim of assault, rape, inappropriate touching, or abuse in a workplace setting are speaking-up. The ultimate hope is to prevent this type of thing from happening again.

Watch these video clips:

<https://youtu.be/AErFZBjwUDg> (I apologize for the computer-voice narration)

<https://youtu.be/7gdHwcfcyQ>

https://youtu.be/XV_W6kPqR9U

The first clip gives a general overview of two important elements with this story:

- 1) Harvey Weinstein has been accused of sexual harassment
- 2) Donna Karan suggests “women are asking for it based on the clothes they wear!”

The second clip gives you Megyn Kelly’s take on the situation and the third is a clip of Actress Emma Thompson and her perspective.

Step 2: Respond to the following questions:

Question 1- Have you ever heard someone talk about a person being harassed or raped and then the conversation turns to: “what were they wearing? Were they dressed in a provocative manner? Did they ‘ask for it’ based on their clothing choices?” If yes, discuss. If not, how do you feel about Donna Karan’s words as she herself expressed in clip 2?

Question 2- What do you think of Donna Karan’s initial support of Weinstein? Would you continue to buy her clothing? Was her “apology” simply a Public Relations Director’s attempt on “damage control?”

Question 3- Do you think Megyn Kelly’s mannerisms represent a place of learning and positive change or are they too confrontational? When you think of growth and the evolution of change among people, is it more likely to happen in a space where people talk freely, without judgement, while arriving at “truths” or a space where people are hostile and pointing fingers? Support your response with an example you’ve experienced.

Question 4- Emma Thompson had a powerful message. Free-form your response to the clip, were there any “ah-ha” moments or key take-a-ways for you?

Step 3: Find an additional article relating to this topic which was reported AFTER the Weinstein allegations were brought to light. Read the article and analyze it in relation to the larger context of the “Me Too” movement. Include 3 outside resources/research relating to the topic.

***If you would like, you can incorporate the events of Fall 2018 with the Supreme Court hearings for Brett Kavanaugh into the paper as well. How was Dr. Christine Blasey Ford treated by mass media and by members of society? Have men experienced similar events like what Dr. Ford has gone through and if so, how were they treated by mass media and society?**

If you have questions or would like further clarification, please do not hesitate to contact me. **Submit Paper 2** include: your name, paper title, 5 pages, double-spaced, and include a Works Cited/Reference page for the article you find and the additional research sources used. The paper is to be emailed to: gjill@wpunj.edu an attachment (gjill@wpunj.edu- there are 3 L's: G I L L @wpunj.edu).