

**POPULAR CULTURE WOMEN:
GWSS 3306**

Spring 2007
Thurs, 6:20-8:50
FORD 130

Instructor: Dr. Sara L. Puotinen
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Course Blog: <http://blog.lib.umn.edu/puot0002/gwss3306>

Course Description:

Consider the following quotations:

One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature....

Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*

Long before it's time for Mom to help plan the wedding dress or Dad to give the bride away, it's time to be raising a future wife in your home. Because wives aren't born—they are made. Your daughter is born a female, but she has to learn how to be feminine.

Lynn Peril, *Pink Think: Becoming a Woman in Many Uneasy Lessons*

If, as both authors suggest, we are not born “women” but made into them, one powerful force that both reflects and shapes this process of becoming is the mainstream media. We learn how to dress, how to act, how to talk, how to have sex, how to be successful wives/mothers/career women, and even how (not) to eat, by watching television or movies, listening to music, surfing the net, and reading magazines.

In this course, we will explore the tremendous influence that popular culture, in the form of films, television, music, the internet, and magazines, has on how we become women. After spending a week on introductory texts, the course will be divided up into four main sections, each of which will address a different age within the life of a woman: (1) Kids; (2) Adolescents; (3) Adults and (4) Older Adults. In these different sections, we will critically explore how the media reflects and influences our attitudes about women and femininity and shapes our behavior and attitudes.

Throughout the semester, four sets of questions will be important for our discussion of women and popular culture. First, how do we become feminist cultural critics while still existing within the system we wish to critique? How do we function as consumers and critics of popular culture? How do we complicate our understanding of the mainstream media—to see both its negative and positive influences and to own up to the ways in which we can enjoy it even as we are critical of it?

Second, how has feminism inserted itself into the mainstream media and the media's representations of women? And, how do these insertions dismantle and/or reinforce

negative images of women? Finally, how has mainstream media's use of feminism (or feminism's use of mainstream media) changed since the 1970s?

Third, in what ways does the media positively and negatively influence our behavior and on how we understand what it is to be a woman and/or a feminist? And, what types of role models (feminist or not) do women have within popular culture to help guide them in their development? Are these positive or negative role models?

Fourth, who controls the images and sounds that we see and hear? What political agendas do those culture makers have in promoting certain images and sounds over others?

Course Expectations:

Attend Class Regularly. You are allowed to have one unexcused absence during this semester. You are responsible for contacting other students to get any notes, handouts or information on assignments that you might have missed.

Turn in assignments on time. All assignments must be handed in on the day that they are due. Exceptions will be granted *only* with a doctor's excuse or letter from the dean. Please report these exceptions as soon as possible. Without an official excuse, your grade will be lowered due to lateness. Note that a doctor's excuse must be an *excuse*—simply a receipt from a doctor's visit will not suffice.

Let me know if you have any problems. If at any point throughout the semester you have questions or concerns about this course, please know that you are more than welcome to visit my office hours and/or make an appointment to meet with me. If you would like to meet to discuss a grade that you received, please email me with your questions or concerns and return your graded assignment to me at least one day in advance of our meeting. This will enable me to give you the best possible feedback.

Be an active participant in the class. Remember that everyone helps to shape the class. Your participation does make a difference. To that end, you are responsible for coming to class fully prepared (with fully read texts in hand), actively and respectfully contributing to discussions, asking questions when you don't understand the material and giving feedback to me on what is working and not working in the class.

Do Your Own Work. You are expected to follow the Student Conduct Code. For more information on this, please see: <http://www.sja.umn.edu/conduct.html>

Readings:

Peril, Lynn. *Pink Think. Becoming a Woman in Many Uneasy Lessons.*

Jervis, Lisa and Andi Zeisler, eds. *bitchfest: Ten Years of Cultural Criticism from the Pages of Bitch Magazine.*

Selected Readings online and in course packet available soon at Paradigm Copies in the Dinkeydome.

Course Requirements:

1. Participation (20%)

You are required to attend class regularly and contribute to class discussions. **More than one unexcused absence will lower your class participation grade.** For each class, you must be prepared, with fully read text in hand. Included in this grade are any in-class assignments (such as free-writing assignments, quizzes, film worksheets).

2. Blog Entries (20%)

You are required to post six entries on our course blog. The blog entry assignments are listed in the course schedule section of this syllabus and will be posted on the blog under the category section. You may post up to two more entries for extra credit.

3. Group Project (20%)

Your group (up to five members total) is required to do a research project and multimedia presentation on a specific popular culture individual or character. After choosing a figure from an approved list, you will critically explore the ways in which your chosen individual/character does and/or does not function as an effective feminist role model for women. In addition to offering research on your figure, your presentation should include some evidence from popular culture in the form of music videos, film or television clips or advertisements. Your presentation should be between 15-20 minutes long. A more detailed handout and sign-up sheet will be distributed in the second week of class. Some possible figures are: Oprah Winfrey, Madonna, Gwen Stefani, Tyra Banks, Ellen DeGeneres and Hilary Clinton.

4. Critical Analyses (20%)

You are required to complete four 2-3 page critical analyses of the mainstream media. Each analysis should address a different form of media: (1) music/music video; (2) film; (3) television and (4) print or television advertisement. A more detailed handout about this assignment will be distributed in the second week of class.

5. Media Notebook (20%)

You are required to create a media notebook in which you critically analyze at least eight images/songs/film or television clips. This notebook should be organized around a theme related to the class (e.g. beauty and woman, girls' toys) or in terms of an age group (e.g. babies, kids, teens). We will be discussing this project in greater detail in late March/early April and it will be due on April 26.

CLA Grading Criteria:

The University mandated “+” and “-” grading symbols will be used with the A-F grading system.

A – achievement *outstanding* relative to the level necessary to meet course requirements

B – achievement *significantly above* that level necessary to meet course requirements

C – achievement meeting the *basic* course requirements in every respect

D – achievement *worthy of credit* even though it does not meet the basic requirements

F – performance *failing* to meet the basic course requirements

S – equivalent to a grade of C or better

General Information:

Disability Services

Students with disabilities who require accommodations in meeting course requirements should meet with me as early as possible in the term. Class materials, including this syllabus, can be made available in alternative formats upon request. It is your responsibility to provide documentation from Disability Services to receive accommodations.

Non-native English Speakers and Writers

If you need some extra assistance with the reading and writing assignments, please contact me early in the term.

U of M Harassment Policy

The University of Minnesota is committed to the policy that all persons shall have equal access to its programs, facilities, and employment without regard to race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, age, marital status, disability, public assistance status, veteran status, or sexual orientation. For further information, call the University Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action, 418 Morrill Hall, 624-9547.

Note: This syllabus is subject to change at any point throughout the semester. Any amendments or alterations will be announced in class and posted on our website and blog.

Course Schedule:

INTRODUCTION

1/18 Distribute and discuss syllabus

FILM: Free to Be You and Me (48 minutes)

ASSIGNMENT: Blog Entry #1: Post an entry by Tuesday **1/23** in which you list two positive and two negative images of women within mainstream media.

1/25 How to be a cultural critic

READINGS:

1. Bordo, Susan. Excerpt from "Introduction" in *Twilight Zones: The Hidden Life of Cultural Images from Plato to O.J.*
2. Lorber, Judith. "Night to His Day"
http://www.meac.org/Resources/ed_services/SG_WEB/SeeingGender/PDFs/SocialConstructionOfGender.pdf
3. Peril, Lynn. "Pink Think 101: An Introduction" (PT, 3-24)
4. Kellner, Douglas. "Cultural Studies, Multiculturalism and Media Culture"
5. Pozner, Jennifer L. "How to Reclaim, Reframe and Reform the Media," (BF, 344-352)

FILM: clips from bell hooks: cultural criticism & transformation

KIDS

2/1 Barbie versus Bratz

READING:

1. Dubin, Steven C. "Who's That Girl?" (CP)
2. duCille, Ann. "Barbie in Black and White" (CP)
3. Talbot, Margaret. "Little Hotties: Barbie's New Rivals" (CP)
4. Inness, Shari. "It's a Girl Thing! Tough Female Action Figures in the Toy Store" (CP)
5. Peril, Lynn. "Kiddie Pink," (PT, 25-42)

TELEVISION: *The Simpsons*, Season 5: "Lisa versus Malibu Stacy"

ASSIGNMENT: Check out and compare the Barbie and Bratz websites. How do they reinforce what it means to be a girl? In similar ways? In different ways?

Barbie site: <http://barbie.everythinggirl.com/>

Bratz site: www.bratz.com

2/8 The Disney Princess Phenomenon

READING:

1. Bird, S. Elizabeth. "Tales of Difference: Representations of American Indian Women in Popular Film and Television" (CP)
2. Henke, Jill Birnie and Dianne Zimmerman Umble. "And She Lived Happily Ever After...The Disney Myth in the Video Age" (CP)
3. Orenstein, Peggy. "What's Wrong With Cinderella?" in *New York Times Magazine* (CP)
4. Nguyen, Mimi. "Who's Your Heroine?" (online)
<http://www.poppolitics.com/articles/2001-01-05-mulan.shtml>

FILM: clips from *Pocahontas*, *Mulan*

TELEVISION: *Princess Peach* Commercial

ASSIGNMENT: **Blog Assignment #2:** Visit a toy store and observe how the toys are gendered. Think about these toys in relation to Peril's discussion of Pink Think and Orenstein's discussion of the princess phenomenon. Post a blog entry by **Tuesday 2/6** in which you critically reflect on your experience at the toy store and on how toys reinforce norms about what it means to be a girl. How do girls' toys differ from boys' toys? What kinds of images/ attitudes/ behaviors do girls' toys promote?

ADOLESCENTS

2/15 Acting Like a Lady: Decorum and "Proper" Behavior

READING:

1. Peril, Lynn. "Adolescence: The Magic Years of Pink" and "I Am Curious Pink: Teen Guides to Flinging the Woo" (43-102).
2. Hentges, Sarah. Excerpts from *Pictures of Girlhood* (CP)
3. Excerpt from *Female Chauvanist Pigs*.

FILM: clips from *Thirteen, But I'm a Cheerleader, Free to Be You and Me*

MUSIC: "Stupid Girls" (Pink)

2/22 Looking Like a Lady: Beauty and the Perfect Body

READING:

1. Peril, Lynn. "Pink-n-Pretty: The World of Charm and Beauty" (163-192).
2. Riley, Sirena J. "The Black Beauty Myth" in *Colonize This!* (CP)
3. Bordo, Susan. Excerpt from "Hunger as Ideology" in *Unbearable Weight* (CP)

FILM: *Killing Us Softly*

ASSIGNMENT: Blog Assignment #3: Search the web and find an image of a woman that speaks to the issues we are discussing this week in class. What is your reaction to this image? What types of norms does it reinforce? Is it a positive or negative image? Post the image and your response to these questions by Tuesday **2/20**.

3/1 Girl Power! Girls Who Kick Ass

READING:

1. Inness, Sherrie A. "Boxing Gloves and Bustiers': New Images of Tough Women" in *Tough Chicks* (CP)
2. Fudge, Rachel. "Girl, Unreconstructed: Why Girl Power is Bad for Feminism," (BF, 155-161).
3. Womack, Whitney. "Reevaluating 'Jiggle TV': *Charlie's Angels* at Twenty-Five" in *Disco Divas* (CP)
4. Dunn, Jancee. "The secret life of teenage girls" in *Rolling Stone* (online)
<http://web.ebscohost.com.floyd.lib.umn.edu/ehost/detail?vid=5&hid=13&sid=ed0f7451-5972-4eee-aae1-b148ae3e6081%40sessionmgr3>

FILM: clips from *Charlie's Angels* (2000)

TELEVISION: clips from *Charlie's Angels* (1975)

MUSIC: "Independent Woman" (Destiny's Child), Rebel Girl (Bikini Kill), "Wonder Woman" (Theme Song)

3/8 Too Much Girl Power? Mean Girls

READING:

1. Brown, Lyn Mikel. Excerpts from *Girlfighting: Betrayal and Rejection* (CP)
2. Simmons, Rachel. "She's All That" in *Odd Girl Out* (CP)
3. Moss, Gabrielle. "Teen Mean Fighting Machine: Why Does the Media Love Mean Girls?" (BF, 43-48)

FILM: *Mean Girls* (97 minutes)

ASSIGNMENT: Blog Assignment #4: Write a response to *Mean Girls*.

3/15 SPRING BREAK

WOMEN

3/22 Sex and the Single Girl

READING:

1. Peril, Lynn. "Something Old, Something New, Something Borrowed, Something...Pink: Weddings, Marriage, and, Heaven Forbid, the Single Girl" (PT, 103-132)
2. Wood, Summer. "On Language: Choice" (BF, 144-147)
3. Scholar and the Feminist Online, Special Section on *Sex and the City* (online)
<http://www.barnard.columbia.edu/sfonline/hbo/index.htm>

note: please read all four articles about *Sex and the City*

TELEVISION: *30 Rock*, Season 1: "The Mommy Show" and clips from *Sex and the City*

ASSIGNMENT: Blog Assignment #5: Post a response by Tuesday **3/27** to the following questions: How have women used comedy to subvert and/or redefine norms? Is comedy a useful tool? Who is your favorite female comedian and why?

3/29 Working Nine to Five and Living in the Pink-Collar Ghetto

READING:

1. Peril, Lynn. "Working Girl's Pink" (PT, 193-211).
2. Zeisler, Andi. "Laugh Riot: Feminism and the Problem of Women's Comedy" (BF, 158-154)
3. Slingo, Carol. "9 to 5: Blondie Gets the Boss" (online)
<http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/onlinessays/JC24-25folder/9to5.html>

FILM: Clips from *Nine to Five* and *Norma Rae*

TELEVISION: commercial for Enjoli

MUSIC: "Nine to Five" (Dolly Parton)

4/5 The Price of Feminism in the 1970s: Stepford Wives, Part I

READING:

1. Helford, Elyce Rae. "It's a Rip-Off of the Women's Movement': Second-Wave Feminism and *The Stepford Wives*" in *Disco Divas* (CP)
2. Friedan, Betty. "The Problem That Has No Name" in *The Feminine Mystique* (CP)

FILM: *Stepford Wives*, 1975 version (115 minutes)

4/12 Becoming the Perfect Mother/Wife/21st century Woman: Stepford Wives, Part II

READING:

TBA

FILM: *Stepford Wives*, 2004 version (93 minutes)

OLDER WOMEN

4/19 Hilary Clinton and Nancy Pelosi as Feminist Role Models?

READING:
TBA

ASSIGNMENT: Blog Assignment #6: Post a response to the following questions by Tuesday **4/24**: How are women politicians represented in the popular media (nationally and/or locally)? How does race, class, ethnicity, or sexual preference determine those representations?

4/26 Sex and the Older Woman

READING:
Smith, Dinita. "Post-Salad-Days Women Agree: They Want 'What She's Having'."
<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/13/books/13sex.html?ei=5090&en=eb1284b256379cfc&ex=1294808400&partner=rssuserland&emc=rss&pagewanted=all&position=>

FILM: Clips from *Something's Gotta Give*, *Calendar Girls*

5/3 LAST DAY