

Female Icons in Contemporary U.S. Culture  
WS 2080-80 Winter 2014-2015  
December 22, 2014 to January 11, 2015  
Professor L. Andrew Gill  
Email: [gill@wpunj.edu](mailto:gill@wpunj.edu) Phone: 973.477.4859  
Department Chairperson: Dr. Arlene Scala  
Secretary: Stephanie Quackenbush  
Office: Hunziker Hall 205A  
Phone 973.720.3547

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: Thursday, December 31, 2014
Paper II	30% Due: Saturday, January 10, 2015
Discussion Board Assignments	40% due dates indicated online

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**

**NOTE: The schedule below has some flexibility to it. Since our course straddles two holidays, it is understandable that holiday festivities may make adhering to this schedule difficult at times. The two dates for the papers need to remain fixed. The other dates are suggested to keep you on track for our time together. Should you have questions, please let me know!**

**12/22/2014:** Introduction Assignment- You will receive several emails from me the day before class begins including an electronic copy of our course syllabus; a student information sheet; and a general overview of the course. Please

complete the student information sheet electronically and return it to me on 12/22/2014. Next, take a tour of our Blackboard shell to become familiar with all of its contents.

**12/23/2014:** Respond to the four introductory Discussion Board questions regarding feminism. Also, you will need to view a video (11:26 long) from TEDWomen: <http://on.ted.com/c0F0A>  
Next, complete the two questions on the Discussion Board.

**12/24/2014:** 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.

**12/26/2014:** Read the "Introduction" from *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media* by Susan Douglas. Then, respond to the two questions on the Discussion Board. Finally, think about where we've come since Douglas wrote her book in 1994 by watching another video from TEDWomen by Johanna Blakley:  
[http://www.ted.com/talks/johanna\\_blakley\\_social\\_media\\_and\\_the\\_end\\_of\\_gender](http://www.ted.com/talks/johanna_blakley_social_media_and_the_end_of_gender)

**12/27/2014:** Read Amelia Richards, "*Body Image: Third Wave Feminism*" and respond to the four questions on the Discussion Board. Next, watch a video on Madeleine Albright, former US Secretary of State: <http://on.ted.com/b0FHA> and complete the two questions on the Discussion Board to conclude this assignment.

**12/29/2014:** Watch the film, "*Real Women Have Curves*" and respond to the five questions on the Discussion Board.

**12/31/2014: 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.

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 the 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 goal for this paper is as follows: **How has mass media impacted you as a woman so far in your life?** If you are a male student, you'll need to interview and work closely with a woman so that you can fully evaluate the issues of mass media and how it has impacted your subject. \*For male students, I would like you to submit some additional work (sorry!), but, it won't be too bad. Answer the following question: how has mass media impacted you as a male? No required length, but, please provide quality thoughts.

1) Identify a part of mass media that you feel needs to be changed and why. \*Don't select a "surface level issue!" Dig deep and think about the destructive tendencies of mass media on you and on society at large. You will conduct

research into this area that needs to be changed- 3 outside resources (NOT including course material).

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

2) What would happen if mass media were not changed? Be specific in what you see for the future based on historical and contemporary data.

3) Use at least 3 outside resources (in addition to the films and articles seen to date) and then write a persuasive paper about what needs to be changed with mass media today as it relates to the impact on women.

\*\*\* 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!)

Be specific! You've read articles and experienced mass media first-hand. This is your chance to make a difference. 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 as an email attachment to my WPU email address: gilll@wpunj.edu (there are 3 L's: G I L L L @wpunj.edu)

**01/02/2015:** Watch the film, "*Iron Jawed Angels*," and respond to the six questions on the Discussion Board.

**01/04/2015:** For today's assignment, you will need to do some online research to find a contemporary article (within the last 90 days) dealing with a contemporary female icon. They can represent the world of: sports, television, film, music, comedy, politics, education, health, business, etc. You are specifically looking for examples of how she is treated versus her male counterparts. See the Discussion Board for more information and specific elements that you will need to provide in your written summary. There is also another short video you need to view: <http://on.ted.com/iOHXK> and you will need to provide answers to two discussion board questions.

**01/06/2015:** 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 two questions on the Discussion Board. Next, watch an episode from a program called "In The Life" which is no longer on air. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xf18BSGguCE&index=23&list=UU95NZWEEe04v2Jvp8VP3Hzg>

Finally, respond to the one question at the end of the Discussion Board assignment.

**01/08/2015:** Watch the film, "*Boys Don't Cry*" and complete the Discussion Board assignment.

**01/10/2015:** Paper 2 is going to be a project involving research and writing.

Step 1: Think about the career choice that you are pursuing. For example, if you are a nursing major, more than likely you are on your way to becoming a nurse.

Or if you are a music major, possibly a performing artist. (Identify your career path under your name on your paper).

Step 2: Do some research to find women who are leaders within the industry you described in Step 1. (Identify your industry leader next to your chosen career path).

Step 3: Provide a one-page bio on this pioneer or icon.

Step 4: Do some research using at least 3 outside resources (academic quality journals, books, etc.) and find out some data about women in this career path.

What obstacles do they face, what is their pay in comparison to men in the same field, what percentage rise to leadership levels/ranks, etc.

Step 5: Present the research in Step 4 along with how you see your experience in this career path going, what changes would you make if you were to rise to a leadership role in the industry, etc. This should be 4-pages. (5 pages total: 1 from Step 3, 4 from Step 5). Submit this paper via email just like you did for Paper 1.

**01/11/2015:** For our final discussion board post, be creative and do some searching on the Internet or within print resources that you have available (magazines, etc.). Provide an example that represents the "old" and the "new" female icon. For the old: find an ad, article, song, etc, the represents the systems of oppression that have been plaguing women in the US (sexism, body image, etc). For the new: find an ad, article, song, etc. representing progress for the contemporary female icon. Select something that shows we have made improvements.

Finally, write a one-page analysis on the two examples and in conclusion identify three things that need to be done to continue progress for women in the US and three things that you will do personally on a day-to-day basis toward making progress a reality. Submit this as an attachment to an email sent to [gill@wpunj.edu](mailto:gill@wpunj.edu).