**Course title and number:** Female Icons in Contemporary U.S. Culture  
WS 208  
3 Credits

**Course Description:**
This course examines female icons in a variety of contexts, focusing on popular culture and media representations. Analyzing the relationship between female icons and ideologies about women in the United States, the course considers how different images of women – from heroes to sex objects – challenge and/or reinforce dominant gender norms. American representations are contextualized within global flows of culture and media.

**Course Prerequisites**
None

**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 in writing an icon as the final project.
5. Rehearse group interaction skills by working with others.

**Topical Outline of the Course Content**

a. Introduction to gender and theories of representation
   Topics include:
   - Concepts of gender and patriarchy
   - Methods for analyzing media representations
   - Overview of dominant representations of women in mass media

b. Sexuality and the Female Body
   Topics include:
   - Representations of female sexuality in advertising and other mass media
● Feminist debates on pornography
● Lesbian sexuality and heterosexism

c. Icons of Female ‘Beauty’
Topics include:
● Commodification of female beauty in beauty pageants
● Race and representations of beauty
● Female body image and constructions of beauty

d. Iconography of Female Athletes and Warriors:
Topics include:
● Female athletes and athleticism
● Iconography of female strength
● Representations of the ‘woman warrior’ in popular culture

e. Women and Icons of Motherhood
Topics include:
● Representations of mothers and mothering in contemporary culture
● Feminism and motherhood

f. Icons of the ‘Third World Woman’
Topics include:
● Images of ‘Third World’ women vis-à-vis the West
● Orientalism, exoticism, and female sexuality

g. Feminism and the Female Icon
Topics include:
● The social, political, and ideological context of female icons
● Feminist challenges to dominant representations of women

Teaching Methods and Student Learning Activities
● Lectures
● Small group discussions
● Plenary discussions
● In-class presentations
● Essays (responses to the reading)
● Final project

Student Assessment
Students will be evaluated based upon the following:
● Attendance in class
● Participation in discussion
● Oral presentations on reading and research
● Written assignments (essays and final project)
Suggested Reading and Texts


Additional Bibliography


Preparer: Mytheli Srenivas

Original Department Approval Date: January 23, 2003

Reviser's name and date: Dr. Arlene Holpp Scala

Departmental revision approval date: December 1, 2004