

Female Icons in Contemporary U.S. Culture  
WS 2080-80 Winter 2013-2014  
December 26, 2013 to January 11, 2014  
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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 (4-5 pages each) that respond to the course readings.

## Grading:

Grades will be weighted as follows:

Paper I	30% Due: Thursday, January 2, 2014
Paper II	30% Due: Saturday, January 10, 2014
Discussion Board Assignments	40% due dates indicated online

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**

#### **Introduction: Themes, Concepts, Definitions**

##### **Section 1- Introduction**

Susan Douglas, "Introduction." *Where the Girls Are: Growing up Female with the Mass Media* (1994).

Leoneda Inge-Barry, "Mirror, Mirror on the Wall." In *Adios Barbie: Young Women Write about Body Image and Identity*, edited by Ophira Edut (1998).

##### **Section 2-Sexual Politics**

Steven Hill, "To Choose or not to Choose: A Politics of Choice." *Humanist* 53, no. 3 (May 1993).

Elizabeth Bernstein and Janet R Jakobsen, "Sex, secularism, and religious influence in U.S. politics." [www.opendemocracy.net](http://www.opendemocracy.net).

Nancy Henley and Jo Freeman, "The Sexual Politics of Interpersonal Behavior."

<http://www.uic.edu/orgs/cwluherstory/jofreeman/womensociety/personal.htm#Top>

Kate Millett, "Sexual Politics." <http://www.marxists.org/subject/women/authors/millett-kate/sexual-politics.htm>

##### **Section 3- Icons of Female 'Beauty'**

Amelia Richards, "Body Image: Third Wave Feminism's Issue?" In *Adios, Barbie*.

Film: *Boy's Don't Cry*.

##### **Section 4- Iconography of Women Athletes and Warriors**

Leslie Heywood, "All-American Girls: Jock chick, body image, and sports." In *Adios Barbie*.

Pat Griffin, "Damaged Mothers, Muscle Molls, Mannish Lesbians, and Predatory Dykes: 100 Years of Scaring Women out of Sport." In *Strong Women, Deep Closets: Lesbians and Homophobia in Sport* (1998).

##### **Section 5- New Faces of Feminism, or an Antifeminist Seduction?**

Susie O'Brien, "Watch Out! Women and the Media." *Social Alternatives* 17, no. 4 (October 1998).

Susan Douglas, "I'm not a Feminist, But..." *Where the Girls are: Growing up Female with the Mass Media*.