

Saint Martin's University
WS 333/SOC 333 WOMEN, CULTURE, & SOCIETY
Spring 2007

Tuesdays & Thursdays
12:10 – 1:30PM

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Course Description

The course will examine women and gender issues in a cross-cultural perspective. Drawing primarily on anthropological and sociological approaches to women and gender studies, we will focus on such topics as the social construction of gender, divisions of labor and power within and outside the home, the body, sexuality and the politics of reproduction. We will devote ample attention to exploring patterns of continuity and change across cultures and societies.

Course Texts

Required:

Caroline B. Brettell and Carolyn F. eds. Gender in cross-cultural perspective Upper Saddle River, N.J. : Pearson Prentice Hall, 2005, 4th ed.
Jamaica Kinkaid, The Autobiography of My Mother. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1996.

Highly Recommended:

Joni Seager, The Penguin Atlas of Women in the World: Completely Revised and Updated. Canada: Penguin, 2003. 3rd Edition.

Course Expectations, Requirements, and Grading

The requirements and assignments are designed to maximize your learning. They will help you integrate theoretical concepts and reading material with your own thinking and life experiences. In addition to prompting you to think about certain issues and questions in preparation for in-class workshops or discussions, assignments were designed to improve your critical thinking, writing and research skills. Because of the volume of material covered, it is very important that you don't fall behind and submit ALL your assignments on time.

You will have the option to re-write ALL your assignments and re-submit them with your final portfolio.

▪ *Regular attendance & participation*

Because this class involves experiential learning in the classroom, which cannot be reproduced if missed, students are expected to attend ALL class sessions, arrive on-time and leave when class ends. You should notify me before class if an illness or emergency requires you to miss class. You should come to class prepared and bring with you notes you have taken while reading the assigned materials. Occasionally I will ask you to do a brief writing exercise at the beginning of class to get a sense of your reactions to the readings and enable students who are more

comfortable expressing themselves in writing to participate in that manner. These in-class assignments will not be graded but will be factored into your final grade.

▪ **Response Papers (30%)**

In order to stimulate class discussion and to facilitate synthesis and integration of the various readings on each topic, you are expected to write brief response papers, addressing key issues and questions raised by the readings. The response paper doesn't have to read like a synthesis paper. It could simply take the form of answers to the questions below.

1. What is the article's principle contribution to the examination of gender from a cross-cultural perspective?
2. List at least 3 new facts that you learned from the article
3. List at least one question that you are left with after reading the article?
4. Identify 1-2 key quotes in your opinion

These papers will not be graded but you will get full credit for turning them in.

Suggested length: 1-2 pages

Deadline: Every class

▪ **Autobiographical Essay (10%)**

Before delving into an examination of gender in other cultures and contexts, it is important that we reflect on our relationship with and ideas about gender and culture. You are expected to write a short essay addressing as many of the following questions as you find relevant to your experience. You are not expected to conduct research to answer these questions, just to formulate your answers based on what you know.

Format:

You should start by answering the questions (a short paragraph per question) and then focus on transitions.

Questions for reflection:

1. How is your daily life similar to and different from other women your age?
2. How is your life similar to and different than that of your mother's?
3. How is your mother's life similar to and different from that of her mother's?
4. How is your life similar to and different from that of women your age in other cultures and countries?
5. Imagine yourself 20 years from now. Where do you live? What is your marital status? Do you have children? Do you work outside the home? If so, what is your job/career? What is the division of labor in your home?

Length: 2-4 pages

Deadline: January 18

▪ **Magazine Comparison Paper (30%)**

This is your chance to examine the representations of gender in popular culture. You will have to compare a women's magazine and a feminist magazine (of the same month).

Choice of feminist Magazines: Bitch, Bust or Ms. (all could be found at Orca Books in downtown Olympia)

Choice of women's magazine: Cosmopolitan, O, Allure, Jane or Seventeen (usually to be found in all bookstores and grocery stores)

Where to begin?

Don't be daunted just because this is an unusual project. I will be holding your hands every step of the way.

You should start by acquiring the two magazines, reading them cover to cover, and looking very carefully at the ads as well as the articles. It would make a lot of sense to make lists of the topics of the articles and of the types of ads (what products advertised) in order to help yourself see patterns and perhaps to be able to cite these statistics in your paper. For example, "In the women's magazine, x percent of the ads were for beauty products, whereas in the feminist magazine, x percent of the ads were for ..." You should of course also focus on the "editorial

content" of the two magazines (meaning everything that's NOT ads, including letters to the editor), though you may choose one or the other area to focus on more strongly in the paper. In order to give a good overall picture of the magazines, try to achieve a balance between attention to ads and editorial content.

These are the central questions you should keep in mind as you read the magazines:

1. What are the major topics and preoccupations of each magazine?
2. What do the magazines show us about gender assumptions, stereotypes and roles in our society today?

Following are some more specific questions you may wish to address as well. These are merely suggestions. Please don't feel like you have to address them all.

--What do the covers tell us right off the bat about masculinity and femininity? Common sense tells us that the covers provide a high dosage of the ideology about men and women to be found inside the magazines.

--What are the articles about (both the regular columns and features)? What is the tone of the articles? What is the magazine's editorial voice?

--Does the magazine assume a particular socio-economic level, race, sexuality, education level on the part of its readers? How do you see this borne out in the magazine? Why is this important or interesting?

--Do the magazines present information that is genuinely useful? Does the magazine present evidence to support its assertions? Is there misinformation?

--Pay attention to the photographs of people and the attitudes toward bodies, looks, fitness suggested by them. (We all know that very thin women are the norm in most magazines for women, so instead of stopping at that observation, look deeper for more details. Think about how the people appear in the images, what they are doing, etc. Pay attention to age, race, class, etc. as well as body size.)

--What are the attitudes on sexuality, dating, marriage, family that are presented in the magazines?

--What are the attitudes toward men and relationships between women and men?

--Is there evidence of non-heterosexual people or behavior in one or both magazines?

--Is there a mention of sexism and/or other systems of oppression, domination, or power inequality?

--Is any other political consciousness evident, and if so, what does it consist of? Are economic or world issues covered, and if so, what kind of things are considered of interest? What is considered "news"?

PLEASE NOTE: IT IS A **PRESUMPTION** OF THE ASSIGNMENT THAT THE MAGAZINES TEACH FEMININITY, MASCULINITY AND GENDER ROLES AND RELATIONS. YOU NEED A MORE **INVOLVED** MAIN IDEA (THESIS) THAN THAT--INVESTIGATE WHAT THEY PORTRAY AS THE IDEAL WOMAN OR MAN? IS THERE ANY REFERENCE TO GENDER IN A CROSS CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE?

Format

It is important, when you make reference to images of any type from the magazines, to cut them out and include them in your paper so that I can SEE what you are talking about! It will probably be most convenient to put the paper and magazine clippings into some type of lightweight folder.

Length: 6-8 pages

Deadline: March 20

▪ **Group projects & presentations (30%)**

With the help of 2-3 of your classmates, you will have the opportunity to conduct field research in your community. You should formulate 2 central research questions, find "data" to help you

formulate an answer and write up your tentative conclusions. This assignment is designed to provide you with some hands-on experience of what sociological and anthropological field research involve. You are not expected to write an in-depth research paper, just to pay close attention and document your observations.

Proposed topics:

- Boys and Girls at play: Toy store inventory
- Gender and culture in sports (observation of a college sports team, local gym/exercise club etc.)
- Gender and culture at the movies (what's playing at the local movie theater? What ideas and images about masculinity and femininity are advanced in the films? You can also examine a large video store)
- Gender and culture on campus

Length of project write up: 3-5 pages (one paper per group)

Length of group presentation: 10 minutes per group

Deadlines:

Topic & Research questions – February 1

Project outline—March 6

Paper and presentation --May 1

Course Outline

Week 1 Introduction: Situated selves; Situated knowledge

1/16

1/18

Due: Autobiographical essay

Week 2 Gender, Culture, and Change

1/23

Read:

Jamaica Kinkaid, pp. 3-83

1/25

Read: Jamaica Kinkaid, pp. 87--end

Week 3 Biology, Gender, and Human Evolution

1/30

Read: Brettell & Sargent, pp. 7-30

2/1

Read: Brettell & Sargent, pp. 31-48

2/1

Due: Group project

Week 4 Gender and Prehistory

2/6

Read: Brettell & Sargent, pp. 49--62

2/8

Read: Brettell & Sargent, pp. 63--80

Week 5 Domestic Worlds and Public Worlds

2/13

Read: Brettell & Sargent, pp.81--105

2/15

Read: Brettell & Sargent, pp.105—133

Week 6 Equality and Inequality: The Sexual Division of Labor and Gender Stratification

2/20

Read: Brettell & Sargent, pp. 135--155

2/22

Read: Brettell & Sargent, pp. 155—169

Week 7 Anthropology in our own backyard: Research on Gender & Culture

2/27

No class. Work on group projects

3/1

No class. Work on group projects

Week 8 The Cultural Construction of Gender and Personhood

3/6

Read: Brettell & Sargent, pp. 190—219

Due: Group project outline

3/8 International Women's Day

Read: Brettell & Sargent, pp.219—240

March 10-18 Spring Break

Week 9 Culture, Sexuality, and the Body

3/20

Read: Brettell & Sargent, pp.241—267

Due: Magazines paper

3/22

Read: Brettell & Sargent, pp.268--298

Week 10 Gender, Property, and the State

3/27

Read: Brettell & Sargent, pp. 299--319

3/29

Read: Brettell & Sargent, pp.320--348

Week 11 Gender, Household, and Kinship

4/3

Read: Brettell & Sargent, pp.349--372

4/5

Read: Brettell & Sargent, pp. 372—389

Week 12 Gender, Ritual, and Religion

4/10

Read: Brettell & Sargent, pp. 391--421

4/12

Read: Brettell & Sargent, pp. 421--442

Week 13 Gender, Politics, and Reproduction

4/17

Read: Brettell & Sargent, pp.443--471

4/19

Read: Brettell & Sargent, pp.471--494

Week 14 Culture Contact, Development, and the Global Economy

4/24

Read: Brettell & Sargent, pp.495--522

4/26

Read: Brettell & Sargent, pp.522--564

Week 15 Gender and Culture: Group project presentations & Course Evaluation

5/1

Due: Group project write-up