

American Studies 450
Women in American Society
Fall 2004

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Course Description:

This course looks at women in American society by focusing on changing ideas of what it means to be an American woman. Throughout the semester, we will examine the relationship between particular representations of female identity and the lived experiences of diverse American women. To accomplish this, we will rely on a variety of historical sources that span various stages in the lives of diverse groups of American women. In this way, this course will not offer a chronological history of a universal “American woman” or “notable American women.” Rather, the readings and discussion will allow us to investigate how particular ideas of gender are played out in the lives of diverse women in different historical periods.

Course and General Education Objectives:

This class meets the Cultural Diversity and Life-long Learning General Education requirements at Cal State Fullerton. In addition, this course also meets the Cultural Diversity in the Social Sciences requirement for Multiple Subject Credential students. In order to meet the General Education learning goals, this course will therefore adopt the following learning objectives:

1. Recognize how ideas about sex and gender are socially constructed. (Cultural Diversity Goal 1).
2. Recognize our position as participants in-and not merely students of-issues that affect the lives of American women. (Lifelong Learning Goal 1)
3. Recognize how various socio-cultural influences inform the lives, experiences, and decisions of diverse American girls and women. (Lifelong Learning Goal 5, Cultural Diversity Goal 2).
4. Acknowledge a complexity of life experiences along such lines as gender, race, class, and sexual orientation. (Lifelong Learning Goal 3, Cultural Diversity Goal 2).
5. Practice a strategy of mindfulness regarding our relationship to socio-cultural practices, institutions, and individuals. (Cultural Diversity 4).
6. Expand course methods of problem posing to encourage affirming life experiences for all American women. (Lifelong Learning Goal 4)

Course Strategies:

In order for everyone to gain the most out of this course, we need to think critically using our own perspectives and experiences. We need to pose problems to what we learn and discuss in class by keeping an open mind for alternate perspectives. Since differing opinions enrich class discussion, this course encourages everyone to bring their own perspectives to class discussions according to the following strategies:

1. **Prepare for class.** Intelligent participation requires that we complete assignments prior to class meetings. Since we will use class time to think

critically about required readings, I find it helpful to direct a few questions at each assigned reading: What is the author's argument? What is unclear about the argument? What are its strengths and weaknesses? What in your experience supports or contradicts the perspective of the author?

2. **Actively contribute.** Each individual's perspective is unique and valued in this course. The class will always benefit from differing points of view, even if this leads to disagreement. I ask students for opinions on readings, films and other assignments not to check their knowledge of the "facts", but to learn from diverse interpretations. If you feel uncomfortable expressing your point of view, meet with me so we can work on strategies toward developing your class voice!

3. **Demonstrate respect.** Discussions require that we treat each other with respect. We should voice disagreements over *ideas* without attacking or belittling *individuals*. If you experience a lack of respect, let me know. Since learning occurs only out of the combined efforts of the class as a whole, it is important that we assume joint responsibility for creating a respectful class environment.

4. **Provide evidence.** It is always interesting to approach the social sciences from individual experience and observation. Ideally, our personal reflections should expand upon the details in the required readings. This semester we should always ask how our experience/background/knowledge informs given texts.

5. **Remain informed.** Regular class attendance is significant to ensure a diversity of voice in the classroom, and remain up to date on class objectives and assignments. I will also use the www.professorprimo.com website to post questions for assigned readings, raise additional food for thought, and keep you updated on any modifications to assignments, readings and/or meetings. To keep yourself informed, you should therefore join the message board and consult the site for your 450 section on a regular basis.

Required Texts:

(Available at the Little Professor Bookstore; 725 N. Placentia Avenue)

1. Atwood, Margaret, *The Handmaid's Tale*
2. Scholinski, Daphne, *The Last Time I Wore a Dress*

(Available at Copyco; 2438 Chapman, 714-680-9800)

1. *American Studies 450 Course Reader*

Course Format and Requirements:

Participation: (20%) Since this course will rely heavily on class discussions, class attendance and regular consultation of the course website is expected. Please note that discussions may also involve brief in-class writing exercises and/or group work to enhance critical thinking of required readings. You will **not** be able to re-take any in-class exercises **or** review any films if absent. As part of your participation grade and General Education requirement, you will also develop a *Group Presentation* and individually submit a *paper* related to your findings; I will provide detailed instructions regarding this component in class.

Midterm: (40%) The in-class midterm will be essay format.

Final: (40%) The in-class final will be essay format.

Note: I will *only* accept make-up exams in cases of verifiable health or personal emergencies. You should inform me *immediately* of any inability to complete an assignment or exam on the scheduled date. Incidents of academic dishonesty will result in a failing grade for the course.

Calendar of Class Meetings

The calendar approximates our progress for the course; I will provide reasonable notice regarding any possible changes on the class website. *Online* materials are available on the website under "Online Documents" at <http://www.professorprimo.com/onlineresources.htm>.

Unit 1: Lessons in Womanhood

Week 1: Boy or Girl?

Monday, August 23	Course Overview
Wednesday, August 25	In-class film: "Is it a Boy or a Girl?"
Friday, August 27	Coventry, "The Tyranny of the Esthetic," <i>Course Reader (CR)</i> Fausto-Sterling, "Two Sexes Are Not Enough," <i>online</i>

Week 2: Gender Lessons

Monday, August 30	Norton, "Searchers Again Assembled," <i>CR</i>
Wednesday, September 1	Diedrich, "The Native American Berdache," <i>online</i>
Friday, September 3	Brumberg, "The American Way to Menstruate," <i>CR</i>

Weeks 3: Sanitizing Puberty

Monday, September 6	Holiday
Wednesday, September 8	Diamant, "The Red Tent," <i>CR</i> In-class film: "Carrie"
Friday, September 10	Sasser-Coen, "Intricate Relationships," <i>CR</i>

Week 4: Training Bodies

Monday, September 13	Buskirk, "No Flow," <i>online</i> Museum of Menstruation, "Would you stop (responses)" <i>online</i>
Wednesday, September 15	Pollack, "The Thin Preference Begins," <i>CR</i>
Friday, September 17	Hesse-Biber, "There's No Business like the Body..." <i>CR</i>

Week 5: Beauty Secrets

Monday, September 20	Halprin, "Ugliness and Cultural Stereotypes," <i>CR</i> Harris, "Prison of Color," <i>CR</i>
Wednesday, September 22	In-class film: "Imitation of Life"
Friday, September 24	Etcoff, "Survival of the Prettiest," (excerpts) <i>CR</i>

Week 6: Cosmetic Corrections

Monday, September 27	Haiken, "The Michael Jackson Factor," <i>CR</i>
Wednesday, September 29	In-class film: "Western Eyes"
Friday, October 1	Inoue, "Roundabout Looks," <i>online</i> Valhouli, "Asian Eyes," <i>online</i>

Week 7: Disciplining Delinquency

Monday, October 4	Scholinski, <i>Last Time I Wore a Dress</i>
Wednesday, October 6	Scholinski, <i>Last Time I Wore a Dress</i>
Friday, October 8	Scholinski, <i>Last Time I Wore a Dress</i>

Week 8: Media Messages

Monday, October 11	<i>Group Presentations</i>
Wednesday, October 13	<i>Group Presentations</i>
Friday, October 15	Midterm Review

Unit 2: Practices in Womanhood

Week 9: Virtue and Vulnerability

Monday, October 18	Midterm
Wednesday, October 20	Jacobs, "The Trials of Girlhood" <i>CR</i>
Friday, October 22	Alcott, "The Young Woman's Book of Health," <i>CR</i> Brumberg, "The Disappearance of Virginity," <i>CR</i>

Week 10: Sexual Revolutions

Monday, October 25	Meyerowitz, "Sexual Geography and Gender Economy" <i>CR</i>
Wednesday, October 27	In-class film: "Splendor in the Grass"
Friday, October 29	Hinckley, "Subversive Virginity," <i>online</i> Leibovich, "The Modesty Debate," <i>online</i>

Week 11: Domestic Bliss and Imprisonment

Monday, November 1	Lieberman, "Some Day My Prince Will Come," <i>CR</i>
Wednesday, November 3	In-class film: "Stepford Wives"
Friday, November 5	Friedan, "The Problem that has no Name," <i>online</i> Sherman, "Refuting Stepford Wives," <i>online</i>

Week 12: Reproductive Freedoms

Monday, November 8	Dayton, "Taking the Trade" <i>CR</i>
Wednesday, November 10	In-class film: "Leona's Sister Gerri"
Friday, November 12	Sanger, "No Gods, No Masters" <i>online</i> Sanger, "Women Plead for Contraception" <i>online</i>

Week 13: Reproductive Oppressions

Monday, November 15	Humphries, "The News about Crack Mothers," <i>CR</i> "Project Prevention" website at www.cashforbirthcontrol.com
Wednesday, November 17	In-class film: "Making Perfect Babies"
Friday, November 19	Hershey, "Choosing Disability," <i>CR</i>

Week 14: Holiday Recess

Week 15: Reproductive Utopia or Dystopia?

Monday, November 29	Atwood, <i>The Handmaid's Tale</i>
Wednesday, December 1	Atwood, <i>The Handmaid's Tale</i>
Friday, December 3	Atwood, <i>The Handmaid's Tale</i>

Week 16: Media Messages

Monday, December 6	<i>Group Presentations</i>
Wednesday, December 8	<i>Group Presentations</i>
Friday, December 10	Final Review

Week 17: Finals Week

Wednesday, December 15	Final; See website calendar for time
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