Women and the Media

V54.0503

Description:

Women & the Media is a collaborative seminar designed to examine the complex relationship (or different, contradictory relationships) between those humans we call “women” and those forms of discourse we call “media.” We will consider women both as subjects and objects, as artists and models, as creators of “media” in its many forms and as media’s creations. What does our culture’s “media” tell us about its ideas of gender? What, if anything, does our gender tell us about our readings of “media”? Student participation in this seminar is key: students are expected to attend all sessions, to complete all the reading (there’s lots of reading!), to participate actively in discussion, and to lead one of the class sessions themselves. Leading a class means opening the day’s conversation with a presentation, critiquing and elaborating on the assigned reading, bringing in additional relevant material, and suggesting questions or issues that seem particularly interesting or troublesome. The purpose of the course is to develop our critical and self-critical faculties as journalists, media critics, consumers of media, and women or men—to think clearly, challenge our pet assumptions, and have fun.

Along with attendance and informed class participation, students are required to conduct a mini-research project and present their findings to the class. I want you to pick a “women and media” topic that really interests you and then report the hell out of it. If you’re interested in the effect of music videos on teenage girls, for instance, you would first put together an extensive bibliography of what has already been written on the subject. You would figure out what the key questions in the field were: do media images affect teens’ behavior or not, and how can anyone tell? You might interview some of the leading researchers in the area and tell us what they say. You’ll certainly want to read the most important books/articles on your subject. A paper is not required; instead, students will present their findings to the class during our last three sessions.

Required Reading:

Susan Douglas, Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media
Naomi Wolf, The Beauty Myth
Helen Benedict, Virgin or Vamp: How the Press Covers Sex Crimes
Jill Nelson, Volunteer Slavery: My Authentic Negro Experience
Marlene Sanders & Marcia Rock, Waiting for Prime Time
Tania Modleski, Loving With a Vengeance: Mass-Produced Fantasies for Women
bell hooks, Black Looks: Race and Representation

In addition, a packet of readings will be available for xeroxing.
Syllabus:

Week 1  Introduction to the course.  (We'll read an excerpt from John Berger's *Ways of Seeing*, to be handed out in class.)

Week 2  Women consuming culture.  Read: *Where the Girls Are* (entire, except for Chapters 7, 10, and the Epilogue).

Week 3  Culture consuming women?  Read: *The Beauty Myth*. Also read and bring to class a selection of “women’s magazines.” **PROJECT PROPOSALS DUE.**


Week 7  Thinking about rape.  Read: *Virgin or Vamp* (entire), and Katha Pollitt, “Naming and Blaming: Media Goes Wilding in Palm Beach” (course packet). **BIBLIOGRAPHIES DUE.**

SPRING BREAK

Week 9  Case study: pop culture. Read: Loving With a Vengeance (chapters on Harlequin romances, gothic novels and soap operas) and Modleski, “Three Men and Baby M” (course packet).


Week 12  STUDENT PRESENTATIONS.

Week 13  STUDENT PRESENTATIONS.

Week 14  STUDENT PRESENTATIONS.