WOMEN'S STUDIES PROGRAM

SPRING 1992
HARBOUR CENTRE/DAYTIME

W.S. 205-3

WOMEN AND POPULAR CULTURE:
WOMEN AND COMEDY

JACQUELINE LEVITIN
Lec. Thurs. 13:30-15:20
Tut. Thurs. 15:30-16:20

What can we learn about women from sitcoms? What are the women standup comedians saying about themselves and us? What do women find funny? What are they poking at?

Women and Comedy is a course that analyses film and the various media to find out how women use and are used by comedy. The perspective is partly historical: We will trace the careers of early women comic actors, the partners and "straight women" of Chaplin and Keaton and others, follow the burlesque to screen career of Mae West, study the early women radio comedians and the first TV comics and the development of the contemporary sitcom. In part as well, the course is issue-oriented: Perspectives from feminist film and social theory, and comic theory itself will be used to investigate such questions as the meaning of cross-dressing in comedy, the role of comedy in communicating any radical message such as feminism, and the possibility of communicating that message in today's media.

The course will include a number of film, video and audio presentations.

REQUIRED READING

Sochen, June (ed.) Women's Comic Visions. Wayne State Univ. Press.

In addition, a binder of selected articles will be available on reserve in the library and, if possible, for purchase by students at cost.

RECOMMENDED READING (on reserve in the Library)

Andrews, Bart. Lucy and Ricky and Fred and Ethel: The Story of "I Love Lucy"
Banks, Morwenna and Amanda Swift. The Jokes on Us: Women in Comedy from Music Hall to the Present Day
Barreca, Regina. They use to call me Snow White...But I Drifted: Women's Strategic Use of Humor

(over)
Borns, Betsy. *Comic Lives: Inside the World of American Stand-up Comedy*
Frangen, Monika and Nancy Ethiel. *Make Way: Two Hundred Years of American Women in Cartoons*
Freud, Sigmund. *Jokes and their Relationship to the Unconscious*
Kaufman, Gloria and Mary Kay Blakely, (eds.). *Pulling our Own Strings: Feminist Humour and Satire*
Koestler, Arthur. *The Act of Creation*
Marc, David. *Comic Visions: Television Comedy and American Culture*
Martin, Linda and Kerry Segrave. *Women in Comedy*
Mast, Gerald. *The Comic Mind*
Neale, Steve and Frank Krutnik. *Popular Film and Television Comedy*
Walker, Nancy. *A Very Serious Thing: Women’s Humor and American Culture*

Additional recommended readings may be added at a later date.

**ASSIGNMENTS**

* 40%  Oral/Written Presentation
** 45%  Term Paper
*** 15%  Lecture/Tutorial Participation

* An oral (30-40 minute), or occasionally written, research presentation based on the week’s topics of discussion to be chosen in conjunction with the instructor and completed by two of three students per topic.

** A 10-15 page analytical or research paper inspired by the issues raised in class, emphasizing aesthetic, ideological, or historical aspects. For this assignment, students may further research or develop their oral/written presentation. Because the question of Women and Comedy is still a new area of studies, the student will often by conducting original research for these assignments.

*** The grade for this aspect will be based on attendance in class and on the quality of the student’s contributions to class discussions.

NOTE: A detailed course plan will be distributed to all students in the first week of classes.

**THIS COURSE MAY BE APPLIED TO THE CERTIFICATE IN LIBERAL ARTS**

**THIS COURSE MAY BE USED AS 3 LOWER DIVISION CREDITS IN COMMUNICATION**