Recently, there has been a proliferation of popular films and TV programs that deal with the topic of reproduction. These range from the exploration of reproduction and the single woman (“Murphy Brown”) to technology (recent episodes of “Rosanne”), and from men reproducing (“Alien Nation”, “Junior” and “Mr. Mom”) to the absolute need to control women’s reproduction (“Species”). All this indicates a popularization of the debate over reproductive technology and women’s control over reproduction that simultaneously has been taking place in scientific circles and on the level of government commissions. The popular expression of reproduction thus exemplifies the problem posed in the analysis of women and popular culture: how do institutions of mass entertainment communicate ideology and the notion of “woman” (and does this notion vary with race, class, sexual orientation and physical appearance), how resistant is the spectator to these messages, and what are the points and means of resistance for women against images that define her. To approach this problem, the organization of the course will be threefold: 1) as a basis for our analysis, we will explore recent developments in reproductive technology and their sociological implications, 2) we will study theoretical tools enabling an analysis of popular culture and the notion of resistance, including genre studies, 3) we will study specific novels, television programs, and movies to determine what they are conveying ideologically. A number of film and video presentations will form part of the curriculum. However, students should have access to a television and a VCR for their research.

TEXTS


Readings will, additionally, consist of a binder of articles prepared by the instructor. As well, a selection of novels to be read by groups of students will be determined in consultation with class members.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING:

Oral presentation:
An oral presentation based on the week’s readings/subject matter. 15%

Midterm:
An in-class exam testing understanding of theoretical issues. 30%

Term paper:
A ten to twelve page analytical or research paper on a topic of the student’s choice, approved by the instructor, emphasizing aesthetic, ideological, or historical aspects. 40%

Lecture/tutorial participation:
Based on class attendance and on the quality of the student’s contributions to class discussions. 15%

*Note: Three or more unexcused absences may result in failure of the course.