How do the institutions of mass culture construct the identities and subjectivities of women? How does popular culture's image of "woman" relate to real "women," who vary in race, ethnicity, age, class, sexual orientation or physical appearance and ability? Where is power exercised in the culture industries and how open are the institutions of mass culture to ideological challenges? Are spectators necessarily the dupes of mass culture's proposed ideology? What are the possibilities for women both as spectators and producers of images to control the images that define them? We will attempt to answer these questions by studying a variety of representations of women in popular culture and the ways that feminist theorists, critics and researchers have responded to these representations.

Cultural Studies is a vibrant field of study in which feminist approaches have had an impact. But how can this scholarship impact on the images themselves? The course will attempt to elaborate a model of knowledge capable of moving from, and back to, the larger community of women. Specifically, the organization of the course will be threefold: 1) In the first part of the course, we will gather the theoretical tools to analyze popular culture and its ideology, and examine its appeal for women (and men); 2) Simultaneously, we will begin to examine a wide selection of our society's popular culture products aimed particularly at women as case studies for our criticism. Examples may include fairy tales/children's books, fashion, music videos, sports, popular fiction and films, soaps and sitcoms, and web sites. Among these, we will examine historical and contemporary examples of resistance by women to popular culture; 3) In the final weeks of the course, groups of students who have been researching specific areas of popular culture will share the results and the methods of their research with the rest of the class. At all points in our study we will attempt to explore issues from positions of difference.

A number of film and video presentations will form part of the curriculum. It is advised, however, that students have access to a television and a VCR/DVD player for their research.

REQUIRED READINGS:


Course Reader.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Midterm (in class).................................30%

Group presentation.............................25%

Term project (8-10 pages)...................30%

Tutorial participation......................... 15%

Prerequisites: WS 101 or 102 (may be taken concurrently)

The Department of Women’s Studies encourages clarity of thought and expression and good writing. Students will be evaluated on these skills in all courses given by the Department.