

ENGLISH 2593-1: Images of Women in Popular Culture

Instructor: Jennifer Ellis West · Louisiana State University · **Office:** Allen 43 · **Phone:** 578-6289 · **E-mail:** jwest22@lsu.edu · **Website:** <http://www.writingclassroom.com/>
Office Hours: Wednesdays, 10-11:30; additional hours available by appointment

Course Description

In this course, we will learn to analyze a variety of texts, paying particular attention to the ways that women have been represented in a wide array of popular media. Our goals are both to attain a working knowledge of common stereotypes, historical trends, and theoretical frameworks used to understand the ways women have been popularly imaged and to hone our analytical skills, carefully assessing the content of messages, their packaging, and the implicit assumptions that lurk beneath the surface. We will be concerned with print media, especially magazines, news, and advertisements; screen representations, television and film particularly; and digital media, especially websites aimed at girls or women. We will also engage with media that you think is important, entertaining, or popularly consumed by a particular group—I will often rely on you to produce examples of texts for us to analyze in class in addition to the ones listed on our course schedule. The class is designed as a workshop; as such, I will sometimes present information, but the majority of meaning-making will come from our discussions about the texts in question. Our primary question will be: what is our popular culture communicating about what it means to be female?

Service-Learning

The Service-Learning component of this course will enable us to engage with the construction of gender identity in a real-world context. We will work with sophomore girls at Lee High School as they participate in the school's new mentoring program. We will work together as a class and with the students at Lee to develop the specifics of our project, but basically, we will work towards developing some ways to teach them the kinds of media analysis skills we're learning in class and we will also work with them on a collaborative project to create a text (or texts) that speaks back to some of the issues of gendered representation that seem important to the group. I have some ideas about how this project could work, but we will spend some time in the first few weeks of class compiling your ideas and collaboratively defining the terms of our service. One thing you should know: some of you will need to go to the school to work with the students, but all of you will not need to. Service-learning will happen in groups, and we will work together to find the ways that each of you can contribute according to your strengths and to your schedules. We will operate under an equal division of labor model, working to ensure that everyone contributes to and benefits from the service aspect of the course. There will be some on-site work needed, but there will also be technological and hands-on components that can happen on your time. You will all have to be committed to the project, but the way you participate in it will vary; all I ask is that you be willing to do your part and to communicate what part best suits your particular personality, availability, and skill level.

Course Materials

1. Required texts for the course:
 - Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media* by Susan J. Douglas
 - Articles posted on the class website, to be printed on an as-needed basis
 - An assortment of popular magazines (we'll discuss which ones in class)
2. Internet access and access to a printer, either where you live, or in one of the campus computer labs
3. A PAWS account and email account that you check regularly.
4. Commitment to reading and writing, to participating in class and to working together as a class community to develop a meaningful service-learning experience.

Assignments and Evaluation

Reading Responses (25%): You will be responsible for responding to at least 6 blog posts over the course of the semester, 3 by midterm. I will post a question or series of questions each week, and you will

compose a response based on your reading and on our in-class discussions, and post it in the comments. Hard copies of responses will be due on Fridays. Responses must be posted before you come to class; the assigned reading you choose to write about and will often serve as discussion catalysts, so I encourage you to write about things you'd like us to cover in class. (You'll get a detailed assignment sheet before the first one is due).

Service Learning Group Project (10%): We will divide into groups at the beginning of the semester, and your group will be responsible for one part of our service project. You'll turn in whatever textual materials you use to complete that project, along with a written description of how you divided up the labor and how you thought your part came together.

Midterm and Final Exams (25% each): You will be expected to demonstrate both that you are absorbing the objective material (definitions, concepts, theoretical ideas, historical information) and that you are learning to apply the analytical tools we're learning to cultural texts.

Class Participation (15%): Quizzes, in-class writing, and being part of our class activities and discussions.

Notes on Evaluation: You *MUST* turn in the midterm and the final exams in order to receive course credit. The grading scale for this class is as follows: A - 91-100; B - 81-90; C - 71-80; D - 61-70; F - 60 and below.

What Other Things Do You Need to Know?

1. **Plan to come every time, on time.** Your attendance is essential to your success in this class. Not only because you'll earn points when you're here (quizzes, in-class writing, points for group participation), but also because we will all be depending on each other to get the most out of our class discussions. If you aren't here, you miss valuable information, and we miss your perspective.
2. **Participation grades cannot be made up.** Quizzes and in-class writing will often happen at the beginning of class; if you aren't there, you don't take it. I will drop the lowest score in this category, and I will occasionally offer opportunities to earn extra points to make up for unavoidable absences (I know we all get sick). But for the most part, coming regularly and on time and being prepared are the best ways to do well in this class.
3. **You are responsible for keeping up with in-class and out-of-class assignments.** The schedule of due dates and homework assignments can be located on our class website. Announcements and new assignments will be regularly posted; you are responsible for checking it on a regular basis. From time to time, I will also send out email reminders; you should get in the habit of checking your email regularly as well.
4. **Screenings:** On occasion, a film or television show will be one of the texts we analyze. I will schedule out-of-class screenings after I see when the majority of you are free to attend. You will not be required to attend the screening (unless it happens during class time), but you will be required to view the text (just like it was a reading). If you can't come to the screening, it will be your responsibility to find a way to watch the show on your own time.
5. **Plagiarism:** Academic honesty is required in all courses at Louisiana State University. Plagiarism cases are reported to the Dean of Students for action. The punishment for a plagiarism at Louisiana State University is given in the Code of Student Conduct, Section 5.1. Students should acquaint themselves with the Code of Student Conduct. Plagiarism can result in dismissal from the university or a failing grade in the course. If you have questions about using borrowed material in an essay or how to properly acknowledge sources, please check with me before the essay is submitted.
6. **All work must be completed and submitted on time.** If you turn in a paper after it's due, it will earn only 80% of the grade it would have earned otherwise. All work must be submitted **no later than December 5** to earn any credit at all.

7. **Be polite!** Text-messaging, newspaper-reading, and acting otherwise uninterested in what is happening in class are all inconsiderate of me and of your classmates. I reserve the right to revoke your participation points for the day, ask you to leave, or throw very mean looks in your direction if you engage in rude behavior. Please don't make me do any of those things.

Where Can You Get Help?

1. My office! I am available to look at drafts or to discuss any issues you're having with class, service, or your reading. I am in my office on Mondays and Wednesdays from 10 until 11:30, but I'm also happy to meet with you other times; all you have to do is email me. Especially if you're having trouble, come sooner rather than later.
2. The LSU Writing Center is an excellent resource that offers free, individual peer-writing tutorials for all LSU students. It is located in Coates B-31; online information is available at [The Writing Center](#).
3. If you feel technically challenged or would like to brush up on your computer skills, START offers many free workshops for students. The schedule is posted on their website.
4. The University is dedicated to making reasonable accommodations for all students with documented disabilities. Students should notice the Office of Disability Services located in 112 Johnson Hall and their instructors of any special needs.

Why Is This Class Set Up This Way?

LSU's Commitment to Community:

Louisiana State University is an interactive community in which students, faculty, and staff together strive to pursue truth, advance learning, and uphold the highest standards of performance in an academic and social environment.

It is a community that fosters individual development and the creation of bonds that transcend the time spent within its gates.

To demonstrate my pride in LSU, as a member of its community, I will:

- accept responsibility for my actions;
- hold myself and others to the highest standards of academic, personal, and social integrity;
- practice justice, equality, and compassion in human relations;
- respect the dignity of all persons and accept individual differences;
- respect the environment and the rights and property of others and the University;
- contribute positively to the life of the campus and surrounding community;
- and use my LSU experience to be an active citizen in an international and interdependent world.

The continued success of LSU depends on the faithful commitment by each community member to these, our basic principles.

--Adopted as a "Statement of University Position" on behalf of the Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College community on the fifth of May in the year 1995.

Our Class Statement of Respect:

We will work together to draft a statement we all agree to that articulates a commitment to making our classroom a safe space for anyone, regardless of racial or ethnic identity, gender, sexuality, age, or religious or political beliefs.