

Psychology of Women
Psychology 236

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Course Description and Objectives:

In this course we will discuss issues in the psychology of women from a developmental and topical perspective. The purpose of this course is to provide a general introduction to the psychology of women, in hopes of reaching some understanding of the ways in which men and women differ, the female experience, and why both men and women benefit from better understanding women's psychology. We will explore the meaning of gender, differences between men and women, women and achievement and work, women's development through the lifespan, women's relationships, and finally mental health and violence against women. Throughout the course, we will attempt to address both the similarities among and the differences between women, attending to the ways in which socioeconomic class, race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation impact on issues in the psychology of women.

Specific goals include developing analytical skills and critical thinking; understanding the impact of inequity on nondominant groups, as well as how this affects the dominant group; developing empathy for women; understanding the need for social change; developing the ability to see the larger context of women's lives; understanding that "woman" is a complex and multifaceted category.

This will be a seminar course with a strong emphasis on discussion and participation; not only content but also process and relevance of the information will be stressed.

This course rests on several philosophical foundations common to many psychology of women courses (based on Lord, 1982):

1. The course should be a laboratory of feminist principles.
2. Alternatives to the patriarchal teaching-learning model are needed and invaluable for the development of healthy men and women.
3. Every individual in the class is a potential teaching resource.
4. Integration is imperative: mind/body integration as well as the integration of ideas and behavior, thoughts and feelings.
5. Effective human behavior in social interactions and within social systems is related to understanding the relationship between the personal and the political.
6. A women's studies course should deal with women primarily and treat women as the norm.
7. The subjective, personal experience of women and men is valid and important.
8. The student should ultimately assume responsibility for her or his own learning and growth.
9. Cooperation in pursuing learning objectives creates a more positive climate than competition: cooperative learning is fostered through criterion-referenced as opposed to norm-referenced evaluation.

I hope to learn as much as you this semester, so please feel free to stop by and see me if I can be of any assistance, if you want to discuss some aspect of the class, or if you just want to chat.

Texts

Required Text: Crawford, M. & Unger, R. Women and Gender, A Feminist Psychology. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Plus additional readings on reserve

Course Requirements:

Presented below are the course requirements and my thinking about how they weigh into evaluation. These numbers are not necessarily absolutes and your own self-evaluation will contribute as well.

Attendance, class participation and preparation (reading journal): 10%

General: Attendance, preparation, and class participation is expected in terms of discussing readings and ideas, listening actively, sharing experiences, working cooperatively with classmates in large and small groups, and communicating regularly via email through your own internet service provider at home/work or through a UMass student account in the computer lab (Healey Library upper level - room 015).

Reading journal: This class is a seminar-type class with a focus on discussion, application, and critical analysis of material related to the psychology of women. Because there will rarely be lectures that review the readings and yet the readings are the foundation of discussion, it is imperative that you keep up with the reading and approach it in a thoughtful manner. The reading journal is a place to reflect on material, as well as an incentive to keep caught up with the reading. It is a place for you to think about the material and form opinions, make connections, and generate questions or criticisms.

For each reading, you should write an entry consisting of (a) a brief summary—this can be a couple of notes about the main points and any definitions that are central; (b) some of your own reflections, thoughts, responses, related experiences, etc; and (c) two open-ended questions that the readings led to for you. Notes may be handwritten or typed. Notes need not be more than 1/2 to 1 page long.

You should bring your notes to class every class period (I recommend getting a separate notebook or folder and keeping all of your reading notes in it). At several unscheduled points during the semester, I will collect all journals (and take them until the next class, so don't keep your notes in a notebook that you need every day!) and I will check off how many readings have been completed. When I check your notebooks, you will receive credit for the notes you have completed until that point. You will not have an opportunity to complete those notes later, so it is important to keep up. As long as you've received credit for 15 entries by the end of the semester, no adjustment to your grade will be made. However, for every note missing you will lose up to 1/2 a percentage point from your final semester grade. In other words, if you only complete 13 entries, your grade may be lowered a full percentage point. If you complete no entries at all, your grade may be lowered 7.5 percentage points (almost a full grade). If you are absent from class the day your journals are collected, you will have until the next class period to turn your journal in and still receive credit. If you are absent both days, you will have missed the opportunity for those points. This requirement means that repeated absences are likely to cost you quite a bit. If you are sick, you should contact me (email is preferable) and make arrangements to submit your journal if you have missed a day I collected them.

Course Requirements (cont.):Debate presentation with annotated bibliography: 10%

6 groups of 5-6 people each will choose a controversy within one of the broader topics we are addressing. You will present your research about this controversy in class as a group. You are expected to hand out an outline of your presentation (including the main arguments for each side) as well as an annotated bibliography of your readings (bibliography with brief description of each article).

One-half of your grade on this project (5% of your total grade) will be based on the group's presentation as a whole. The other one-half of your grade on this project will be based on your individual contribution to the presentation (as it is seen in class) and your and your group's self-evaluations of individual contributions. See assignment below for more details.

Essays: 50% total

Two essays will be due at varying points during the semester (see Essay assignment handout). Each essay will be worth 25% of your final grade each. See assignment below for more details.

Character analysis: 30%

For this assignment, you will choose a media character from a novel or drama (play, movie, or television show, but it must be a drama, not a comedy). Novels and dramas should be approved by me. The paper requires you to describe and analyze 2-3 major issues in the psychology of women that a major woman character in your novel or drama has experienced. See assignment sheet for more details.

Grading and late assignments:

Grades on all written assignments will be based primarily on originality, intellectual sophistication, reflection and insight, and integration and application of theory and research--this latter is crucial as papers in this class will be your primary means of demonstrating your knowledge of the subject and ability to integrate it. Style and written communication skill will also count, but to a much lesser degree.

Assignments are due at the *beginning* of class on the date listed. Assignments turned in later that same day will be considered one day late. While it is important for both of us that assignments are on time, I know that sometimes my schedule doesn't work optimally for you, and sometimes other things need to be prioritized in your life. Thus, you will be given three "late days" to use as you need. Each time you turn in an assignment after the due date, you will use one of your late days for each day that the assignment is late (if the assignment is due Monday and you turn it in on Tuesday, it will cost you one late day--note: weekends count and turning it in after the beginning of class but on the same day is still one day penalty!). Obviously, late days can NOT be used for the debate presentation assignment. Once you have used up your late days, subsequent assignments that are late will be penalized 5% of the total assignment per day. Papers received more than 10 days late will receive an F and will not be read (but you do need to turn them in or you will receive a 0). Under extenuating circumstances, of course, late assignments may be accepted but this must be discussed ahead of time with me.

Please come and talk with me as soon as possible if you are experiencing difficulties fulfilling the requirements of the course (completing any assignments, attending class, etc.). I want all of you to succeed and problems can more easily be resolved earlier, rather than later when the effects have multiplied.

Resources and Support Services at UMass

The **library** is a great resource, not just for papers but for understanding. Additional books and multiple journals have more information than you (or I) can possibly take in. The library staff can also help you with research techniques and library use. Part of the job of reference librarians is to help you find what you need, so don't be afraid to ask for help!

The **CAS Reading, Writing, & Study Skills Center** can help with study skills (notetaking, time management, etc.), research assignments (preparation and organization) and writing skills (organization, grammar/language, analysis, etc.). They can be most helpful if you develop an ongoing relationship to work on improvement over time. They will not respond well to last minute panics or "one-shot quick fixes." The Center is located in M-3-415. You will need to schedule and confirm an appointment: 287-6560 or 287-6550.

If you have a disability and feel you will need accommodations (e.g. sign language interpreting, readers, testing accommodations) in order to be successful in this course, please contact the **Ross Center for Disability Services** (M-1-401) at 287-7430. Please also let me know, as well.

Counseling Services through **Health Services** can help with stress, difficulties in relationships, confusion or uncertainty about goals, substance abuse, sexuality or other concerns. These difficulties can affect your academic performance as well as your health and happiness. Psychotherapy, counseling and psychiatric consultation is provided to students including individual, group and couples therapy, as well as personal growth counseling, crisis intervention, walk-in emergency service, workshops, consultation, information and referral services. Counseling services is part of health services located in Q-2-039 (phone 287-5690). They are open M-F 8:30-4:30 and evenings by appointment.

Health Services also provides the **Health Promotion Program**, which can help us keep balanced and energized. Programs include Tai Chi, Yoga, meditation, and stress reduction. Contact the program to find out what's being offered this semester: M-1-613, 287-5685.

Academic Dishonesty

The various forms of academic dishonesty and consequences are described in the sections on Academic Standards, Cheating, and Plagiarism (pg. 44, 45), sections II and IV, and V of the Code of Student Conduct (pg. 48-52) in the University Undergraduate Catalog 2000-2001. If you still have questions about Academic Honesty or expectations in this course see me well prior to the due date of any assignment.

Course Schedule

	Introduction and Research Methods
Week 1	Introduction, overview <i>U&C 1, Hyde 1, McHugh et al Appendix A</i>
	Meanings and Enactments
Week 2	Images of Women <i>U&C 2, Readings on reserve</i> <u><i>Bring advertisement or media example to class</i></u>
Week 3	Doing Gender <i>U&C 3, Readings on reserve</i>
Week 4	The Meanings of Difference <i>U&C 4, Readings on reserve</i>
Week 5	Multiple Oppressions <i>Readings on reserve</i>
Week 6	Sex and Gender: Biological Aspects <i>U&C 5, Readings on reserve</i>
	Childhood and Adolescence
Week 7	Childhood <i>U&C 6, Readings on reserve</i>
Week 8	Debate: Raising gender free children
	Adolescence <i>U&C 7, Readings on reserve</i>
Week 9	Debate: Sex education in schools
	Relationships and Contexts
Week 10	Sex, Love and Romance <i>U&C 8, U&C pp. 491-504, Readings on reserve.</i>
	Debate: Rape and Battering
Week 11	Commitments: women and long term relationships <i>U&C 9, U&C 510-519, on reserve</i>
Week 12	Mothering <i>U&C 10, Readings on reserve</i>
	Debate: careers and mothering

Week 13	Work and Achievement: <i>U&C 11, U&C pp. 504-510, Optional Readings on reserve</i> Midlife and Beyond: <i>U&C 12, Optional Readings on reserve</i>
	Mental Health and Therapy
Week 14	Mental and Physical Health <i>U&C 14, Readings 197-206, Optional Readings, 209-228</i>
	Debate: mental health
Week 15	Creating Change <i>U&C 15</i> <i>Character analysis due 5/15</i>

DEBATE PRESENTATION WITH ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Your group of 6 people will choose a controversy within one of the broader topics we are addressing. You must let me know at least two weeks ahead what your specific topic will be. Please also feel welcome to stop by and discuss possibilities or articles, etc. with me.

As a group, you are responsible for finding and reading a minimum of 3 articles for EACH side of the controversy (6 articles total). You should have at least 2 primary (i.e. original research or first person theory, not summaries or reviews of other work) articles for each side--if you are uncertain about primary vs. secondary sources, please see me. All of your articles should be from scholarly (vs. popular) sources.

For your actual presentation, your group will hand out an **outline** of your presentation (including the main arguments for each side) as well as an **annotated bibliography** of your readings (bibliography with brief description of each article). You are also expected to hand in a copy of your full articles to me (which I will keep). Your group grade will be affected by the quality of these handouts.

The group will then present the controversy to the class: describe the controversy; give evidence (theoretical or empirical--be sure you communicate which) to support each side, addressing why each side comes to the conclusion it does; discuss the complexities of the issue; facilitate a class discussion on which side is more believable and why; and express any conclusions you as a group have come to.

This is expected to be a group presentation, not a series of individual ones, so you must build in time outside class to meet or communicate with the group. One-half of your grade on this project (5% of your total grade) will be based on the group's presentation as a whole. The other one-half of your grade on this project will be based on your individual contribution to the presentation (as it is seen in class) and your and your group's self-evaluations of individual contributions.

Psychology of Women: Suggested Debate Topics

Difference and Doing Gender

Do media images contribute to psychopathology and/or poor self-esteem in women?

Do men and women have different moralities?

Do men and women learn differently?

Are gender differences in cognitive abilities (spatial tasks and math, verbal tasks) "hard wired?"

Do women really have less power than men?

Are gender differences really power (or status) differences?

Is feminism a white middle class movement?

What is the most important biological determinant of sex? Or What is necessary to be male or female?

What does it mean to be a man or a woman? (is it biology, socialization, identity, something else?) Is there anything essential to maleness or femaleness?

Are transgendered people mentally disturbed?

Suggested debate topics, continued**Childhood and Adolescence: Developmental Issues**

- Should sex education be taught in schools?
- Is PMS a valid construct? Is it a pathology?
- Is it possible to raise a child "gender-free"?
- Are boys more aggressive than girls?
- Do computer games (or television) foster gender typing in children?
- Are teenage girls "silenced"?
- Should boys and girls be separated in school?
- Is child sexual abuse inherently harmful long-term to all survivors?

Relationships and Contexts**Relationships**

- Are there still relationship/sexual scripts?
- Do men and women experience or express love differently?
- Is lesbianism a sickness?
- Are heterosexual relationships inherently damaging to women?
- Is marriage a good thing for women?
- Is female "circumcision" child abuse?
- Do romantic scripts contribute to sexual dysfunction?
- Are interracial marriages more problematic?
- Do women contribute to violence in their relationships?
- Do women contribute to being raped?
- Is "battered woman's syndrome" a valid defense for assault or murder?
- Is pornography harmful to women?

Mothering

- Is mothering sex-specific?
- Should women stay home with their children?
- Is there a mothering mandate?
- Do children of lesbians have more problems?
- Does abortion cause psychological harm to women?

Work and Achievement

- Are women discriminated against in hiring, promotion, and salary?
- Are differences in motivation, achievement, and work choice related to sex or gender?
- Should companies and work sites accommodate family and parenting needs more?
- Is achievement and advancement based on merit or is it affected unfairly by sex and gender?

Midlife

- Is midlife and menopause a time of loss?

Mental Health and Therapy

- Are women more mentally ill than men?
- Why do women have higher rates of depression than men?
- Does sexism contribute to mental illness (choose a specific illness) in women? Why or why not?
- Is feminist therapy an imposition of the political view of the therapist?

Essay Assignments

The following are a list of paper topics for you to choose from. You must complete 3 papers and you cannot write more than one on any specific topic area. If you have an idea for a paper that integrates the research and theory and encourages integration and critical thinking, feel free to talk with me about it. Finally--a friendly aside--we'll both be happier if you space out your assignments. At least one of your papers **must** be turned in by April 3. I'd recommend reviewing all the possibilities and marking 5-7 that you are especially interested in, then doing 3 of those that fit best into your schedule. Read each assignment carefully, as your grade will reflect the fulfillment of the assignment.

Assignments are due the Tuesday following the completion of the topic, unless a specific date is noted. For example, we will be covering images of women during week 2 (2/6 and 2/8), therefore the paper on images of women is due 2/13.

NOTE: Please turn in your "data" for these assignments—i.e. your interview or observation notes, your interview questions, your reflection journal, plot summary, etc. (depending on the assignment). These should be separate from the paper itself. Your paper should reflect on the data you have gathered by integrating the research and theory from readings and class.

Images of women

Gather at least 10 images of women from magazines, television or movies (in the latter 2 cases, you can print a still or describe the image). Discuss these images of women in relation to theory and research from class. Reflect on how they affect you personally and how they might affect people similar to or different from you. Be sure to integrate information and insights from the readings and class.

Sex and gender:

Briefly interview at least 2 men and 2 women, focusing on their understandings of the mean and impacts of gender and of sex. Consider their answers in relation to the questions: Are gender categories valid? How does biology determine or support gender? What does sex and gender mean to most people and how does it affect their lives? Relate your discussion to theory and research from readings and in class and reflect on how these issues have shaped you as well.

Women of Color

Interview at least 2 minority woman different than yourself, designing your interview questions to focus on her experiences as a minority woman and to integrate issues from class. Discuss how their experiences are similar to or different from the experience of minorities as discussed in the reading and in class. Discuss your experiences in comparison or contrast to theirs, related to your minority or majority status, using one or two specific examples. Briefly discuss what you learned through the interview and reflection process.

Childhood

Go to an elementary school classroom or observe a playgroup (at least 4) of elementary aged children (make sure you get permission!). Observe the children. In your paper, discuss your observations in terms of themes and issues discussed in the reading and in class. Briefly discuss your own responses to being there and any connections to your own experiences.

PAPER TOPICS (CONT.)**Childhood**

Develop some ideas about how you might raise a gender-neutral child, addressing issues such as clothing, toys, play, media, and peers. Use the readings and class discussions to support your choices. Write these up as the first part of your paper. Then, share your ideas with a primary care taker of young children. Describe his or her views of your ideas and your view of their responses. Discuss the challenges of attempting this and whether you think it may or may not be possible/successful.

Adolescence: Design a sex education program for teens. What would you include about women (to be taught to boys, girls or both), about physiology, dating, commitments, relationships, socialization, etc.? Are these things currently taught? Why would you include these things? Support your design with research, theory and personal experience. Write these up as the first part of your paper. Then, share your ideas with at least 1 adolescent girl. Describe her views of your ideas. Discuss your view of her responses.

Adolescence

Meet and talk with a group of adolescent girls (at least 3). Design your discussion questions to focus on their experience related to the themes and issues discussed in the reading and in class. In your paper, discuss their experiences in light of the research and theory you are familiar with. Briefly discuss your own responses speaking with them and any connections to your own experiences.

Sex, love, and romance

Romance novel critique: Read a Harlequin Romance (or equivalent). Analyze it in terms of the relationships it portrays, expectations it creates, etc., in light of topics regarding intimate relationships covered in class.

Sex, love, and romance:

Consider your ideal relationship in terms of the issues discussed in the sections on sex, love, and romance, and long-term commitments, as well as the likelihood of achieving this relationship and things you could do to maximize success. Interview 2 women who you see as very different than yourself about their ideal relationship. Discuss their responses and compare and contrast with your own. Be sure to integrate reflection and connections to theory and research from class.

Sex, love, and romance

Do you think that pornography promotes violence against women in any way? Support your answer, integrating research, theory, and your own experiences/observations. Interview 2 women who you see as very different than yourself about their views on pornography. Discuss their responses and compare and contrast with your own. Be sure to integrate reflection and connections to theory and research from class.

Commitments: Develop some recommendations for interventions (personal, institutional, social) to combat heterosexism in our views of lesbian relationships and families. Support your recommendations through your interview data, your own experience, and the readings and class discussions. Discuss why these interventions may be successful or more difficult to enact. Write these up as the first part of your paper. Then, share your ideas with at least 1 woman in a lesbian relationship. Describe her views of your ideas. Discuss your view of their responses.

PAPER TOPICS (CONT.)**Commitments:**

Contact an organization that works to combat violence against women. Visit the organization, examine their literature and, if possible, talk to someone who works there. Using this knowledge, and the readings and class discussions, suggest some interventions (personal, institutional, structural, social) to combat violence against women. Be as creative as possible, including interventions that may not currently be possible. Discuss why your recommended interventions may be successful or more difficult to enact.

Commitments

Interview at least 2 women with a different sexual orientation from yourself, focusing on themes related to sex, love, romance, commitments from class. In your paper, discuss her experiences in light of the research and theory you are familiar with. Briefly discuss your own responses speaking with her and any connections to your own experiences.

Mothering

Interview two women who have made different choices about having children than you have made (or intend to make). Design your interview to focus on issues discussed in readings and class focusing on mothering, work and achievement, and reproductive choices. In your paper, discuss their experiences in light of the research and theory you are familiar with. Briefly discuss your own responses speaking with her and any connections to your own experiences.

Work and Achievement:

Interview at least 2 women in different kinds of jobs—try to be as varied as possible. Then, develop your theory of the ideal work environment for women. Discuss why it is ideal, being sure to integrate the responses of your interviews and the theory and research discussed in the text and in class. Briefly discuss the feasibility of this environment.

Midlife and beyond

Interview an older (post-menopausal) woman who is not related to you, designing your interview questions to integrate material from the text and from class, focusing on how life has changed due to aging and experience, including some of: your view of yourself, your relationships, how others treat you, your roles, the challenges and rewards you face. Write a paper reflecting on how this woman's experience is similar to or different from the theory and research we have reviewed. If you are a post-menopausal woman, discuss your experiences in comparison or contrast with your interviewee, using one or two specific examples and relating these to the theory and research we have read. If you are not a post-menopausal woman, imagine that you are. Be sure to integrate material from the reading and class.

Meanings and encatiments/Relationships and contexts generally

Spend a 24 hour period imaging yourself as the other sex. Structure this so that you are actively considering different interactions and experiences at different points during the day (e.g. have an alarm go off every 3 hours and journal about what you are doing and how it would be different if you were the opposite sex/gender). Turn in your journal with your paper (not counted as part of the page limit). In your paper, discuss in what ways, if any, might your behaviors/actions, relationships/interactions. expectations of self/others change? Discuss the significance of these in light of themes covered in class.

Mental health and therapy

Interview a therapist who works with women. Design your interview questions to reflect issues discussed in your reading and in class pertaining to women's mental health and feminist therapy. Discuss with them how treating women is different than treating men and how this affects their thinking and practical approach. Write up your paper based on the interview, integrating material from readings and class discussions. Briefly discuss what you learned as well.

PSYCHOLOGY OF WOMAN FINAL PAPER: CHARACTER ANALYSIS
8-10 pages

For this assignment, you will choose a female character from a novel or drama (play, movie, or television show, but it must be a drama, not a comedy). Dramas should be full length productions or ongoing television series. Novels and dramas should be approved by me before 3/8. The assignment requests that you read or see a new story or actively re-read or re-view one you have seen before, so that the story may be seen through the lens you are developing in class. An example of this assignment is on reserve in the library

For your paper, describe and analyze 2-3 major issues in the psychology of women that a primary woman character in your novel or drama has experienced. Provide a separate and brief plot summary describing the story and the character's experience. Focus your paper on applying class concepts to your understanding and exploring the interactions between issues and experiences we've discussed. Comment on the universality or uniqueness of these experiences, and on their political implications in terms of the need for social change and the effect on both the dominant and nondominant groups in society.