

33 WUR 09

Course Proposal for Area Concentration
on Women

Our experience in teaching women's courses, both in comprehensive programs and at a departmental level, has shown the need for an introductory course. Such a course would provide a foundation for more specialized seminars related to women. It would introduce material on the situation of women in an interdisciplinary manner. Students could then synthesize their study of the sociology of the family, the psychology of roles, the economic history of women and women in other cultures.

Proposal: Women in Contemporary Society

The class will engage in a structural analysis of women's roles in contemporary society. We will primarily focus on the topics of sexuality, the family, socialization and work. Our approach will be interdisciplinary and will include a comparison among the different historical forms women's roles have taken. We will also consider the different sectors of women in the U.S. according to class, race and sexuality. Drawing from the experience of women in other countries, we will raise questions and criticisms with regard to the future development of the women's movement.

How the course will be taught

Our teaching methods will combine lecture and discussion with specific reading assignments. Small group discussions will be arranged in which students can further engage in tying their personal experience to their analytical perspective on the situation of women. Our educational approach will also help students formulate criticisms and questions with regard to current thought on women.

Each student will do a project of her choosing which will combine research with original work. Such projects might include: 1. oral histories (tapes, discussion projects), 2. analysis of the role of working women (through discussions with working women or personal experience in the work situation), or 3. family histories which record different work and personal experiences of mother, grandmothers and aunts.

Team teaching

The proposed course will involve two instructors. The general value of team teaching has been well established. This course in particular necessitates team teaching on two levels: 1. as a cross-disciplinary course it should involve instructors with complementary backgrounds both in formal education and in social experience. 2. As an introductory course with potentially large enrollment, team teaching will also allow us to have small group discussions in addition to the lecture presentations.

5/bis
P.13

Coordination

Along with students and interested faculty, we hope to develop a more coherent and integrated curriculum on women's studies at B.U. Establishing a core course is a first step in this direction. It will speak to the confusion among students as to how courses on women in different faculties are related to each other in a more analytical sense than simply sharing the topic women. It will provide the needed foundation for the more intensive courses on women, such as the accompanying proposal on Images of Women in Art. It will help open a dialogue between students and faculty on the future development of this area concentration.

In addition to teaching the core course, if resources are available we anticipate organizing a speakers program, open to the university community, on topics that would parallel our class discussion.

Date: May 8, 1972

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Women in Contemporary Society

The following is an outline of questions which might be raised in the proposed course.

- I. Introduction: why women's courses? The personal is political (troubles and issues). Women as a caste.
- II. On being female
 - A. Sexuality: birth control, women's biology, orgasm, the history of monogamy, the sexual revolution.
 - B. Roles: Inherent nature or cultural conditioning? Socialization of male and female roles in other cultures.
 - C. The family: In socializing individuals; in relation to the larger society; alternatives to the nuclear family; child care.
 - D. Other forms of socialization: religion, schools, the media.
- III. Who are the women of America? What work do they do?
 - A. The political economy of women's liberation: housework v. wage work; women on welfare; women as consumers.
 - B. Third world women: racism and the situation of women.
 - C. Gay women
 - D. Ethnic groups: immigration and the industrial revolution and their relationship to working women.
 - E. Women in the work force: What jobs do women do? Class, race and the U.S. economy. Professional women.
- IV. Women as a political force
 - A. History of American women's movements: 19th and 20th century.
 - B. Women in revolution: Cuban, Vietnamese, Chinese and Russian women.
 - C. Historical perspectives: past and future
 1. Engels, etc. on origins of women's oppression.
 2. Firestone: will technology transform sex roles?
 3. New issues and strategies for the women's movement.

Note: The above are tentative topics. Some would require a week, others more or less.

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INTRODUCTION

Despite increasing recognition of the importance of the new feminism, virtually no work has been done in the area of the visual arts. Thus, the two courses proposed below must necessarily be conducted in the experimental atmosphere of a seminar, rather than presented as lecture courses. The first course is essentially introductory; the second course is more specialized. The courses would be most successful if students bring to them both a serious involvement in art and a developed women's consciousness. The present lack at B.U. of a core course in women's studies means that students will have to provide such a foundation out of their own extra-curricular experience. Hopefully, in the future a core course can become the usual prerequisite to more advanced work in women's studies.

Students would participate in the organization of both the content and the structure of each course; methods of working collectively would be explored. (For a discussion of the theory behind the methods proposed, see the attached proposal for a core course in women's studies.)

IMAGES OF WOMEN IN ART

In this course we will investigate the way women and sexuality have been depicted in art: How has art defined "being female"? What has it seen as woman's role in society? To what extent and why has the image of women in art not reflected social reality? The image of "man" as the human norm. Further, we will ask whether there is a female point of view in the appreciation, interpretation, and creation of art. What then would be the "male" point of view? In what ways are these points of view "valid"? How would the making of art be affected by recognition of the female point of view? How would it change cultural criticism? The contribution of women artists. It is likely that once gender is examined as a variable point of view, race and class will also be discussed.

Certain recurring and overlapping subjects and patterns will be examined for their changing nature: women in domestic roles (mothers, wives, daughters); as sexual objects (Venus, courtesan, prostitute); as inanimate things (life-drawing studies? Degas dancers?); as workers (peasants, servants); as apparently powerful persons (portraits of ruling class women); as human beings (?). We will also consider art containing supposedly neutral subject matter (e.g. still life, abstraction), as well as the dualistic view of women as Virgin Mary or Eve, as innocent maiden or femme fatale. The course will focus on several key periods, beginning with an examination of French painting in the nineteenth century.

Students will participate in the organization of both the content and the structure of the course; methods of working collectively will be explored. Those wishing to take the course should bring to it some involvement in or experience with art, as well as a developing feminist consciousness.

SEXUALITY IN MODERN ART

A study of the depiction of sexuality in nineteenth and early twentieth century art: wives, daughters, courtesans, prostitutes, dancers, relevant narrative and mythological subjects, etc. What is the significance of the contradiction between the mythic role of sexuality in art and its real place in society? Sexuality as a political phenomenon.

The main focus will be on painting in France; we will also use some literary material. These will be examined against the background of the changing economic, political, social, and sexual situation of women in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Students will participate in the organization of both the content and the structure of the course; methods of working collectively will be explored. Those wishing to take the course should bring to it a competence in art history or nineteenth century culture, as well as a developing feminist consciousness.