

Intersession 2012

Variable Topics in Women's Studies

Women, Body Image, Distorted Eating: Changing Minds, Saving Lives

WS 3998, Section H12
Instructor: Jeanne Humphrey

Monday – Friday 1:00 – 4:15 pm
UConn West Hartford campus, HART 312

This class is a service learning class, which means that students will utilize both theory and practice as part of their learning activities. The perspective of the course is based on Feminist Theory and Feminist Activism as well as experiential learning. The course is based on educational outreach. Students will not only think about culture-based eating issues and media images, but apply critical thinking skills to their own beliefs about food and eating. At times, the material may seem contradictory to common knowledge about food and eating, but we will find that scientific research and cultural norms are very different perspectives.

First, and foremost, this class is facilitated from a feminist perspective. This course will move students toward taking an active role in changing the way they perceive themselves and the way they are perceived. Many forms of body image issues have to do with women paying a price because they have a female body. For women, body image is a relational sociological issue. Individuals cannot change their unrealistic expectations of their bodies until our cultural perceptions change, and cultural perceptions cannot change until individuals change. This is the Catch 22 of poor body image that contributes to the high rate eating disorders in the U.S. and other industrialized countries. Cutting edge research tells us that the body symbolizes and expresses our feelings and experiences. In this course we will explore the emerging fields of Somatic Psychology and Feminist Archetypal Psychology as well as feminist theories of Communications, Sociology, and Cultural Anthropology, in order to get a complete view of the manner in which body image issues are internalized by females within our culture.

Unless a student has been living in a cave on a small island off Greece, there is little chance that she has remained beyond the influence of mass media's idea of the ideal female body. *95% of females over the age of 18 do not come near that ideal.* We live in a country where diabetes and obesity have been termed "epidemic", where fast food is a regular substitute for healthy meals, and where nearly any fast food meal can be "super sized". Simultaneously, a significant portion of the population suffers from anorexia. 40% of anorexics will never recover. 18-20% will die within 20 years of contracting this "societal disease" which would otherwise be known as starvation. After years of studying women's issues from numerous perspectives, Dr. Humphrey contends that all U.S. women suffer from disordered eating patterns. For most, these patterns never spiral out of control, but the patterns diminish all of our lives. This class assumes that each female in the class (and perhaps some males) suffer from a disordered pattern of eating simply because they have been raised in this culture. So, as we forge forward, we will be doing various exercises and assignments geared toward healing the force that compels us—United States Culture in all of its materialistic consumer-driven madness.

Please contact the Women's Studies Program with any questions, wsinfo@uconn.edu.