Sociology of Gender
Sociology 138H
Fall 2016

The feminist task is neither to glorify nor discount the differences between men and women, but to challenge the adverse consequences of whatever differences there may be.
– Christine Littleton

Myra Marx Ferree
Email: mferree@ssc.wisc.edu

Office hours: Wednesdays 10-12
Office: 7103 Social Science

Our ideas about gender – about women, men, masculinity, femininity – organize our social life in important ways that we often do not even notice. These ideas, and the gendered dimensions of the institutions in which we live are largely invisible to us because we take them for granted as the “normal” way life works. Sociology asks us to investigate and expose the aspects of social life we take for granted. In this course, we will be critically examining the ways gender informs the social world in which we live.

My goals for this course are to:
1) reveal the “common-sense” world of gender around us;
2) consider how we learn to “do” gender as girls and boys (and women and men);
3) expose the workings of the institutions that shape our gendered lives; and
4) challenge common assumptions about women, men and gender relations.

Course Structure and Grading
The goals listed, you might notice, demand more of you than memorizing information for exams. The words I use – “reveal”, “consider”, “expose”, “challenge” – imply that I intend for you to engage in critical thinking rather than just passively absorbing facts. To develop a sociological imagination, which is the ability to understand human lives as shaped by historically conditioned social forces, you will need to think honestly and critically about your own experiences related to gender, and be open to new ideas about gender relations. Critical thinking depends on and builds from factual knowledge, so I also rely on your accumulation of new concepts and extended observations of empirical gender relations that go well beyond your own prior experience.

To reflect these goals, then, the grading system will assess your
1) regular completion of the reading so you can both ask and answer questions about the books and other assigned material you read in class (10%) and on-line in L@UW (also 10%). Some of these questions are “simple” (unconnected) facts, but others call for you making connections among concepts and observations, among different concepts, and between what you read and what you experience. I will be asking questions, but I also expect YOU to ask me and each other questions and to push for satisfying answers every week. Although both in-class and on-line engagement are given equal weight, my baseline assumption of your bare minimum of engagement differs: I do not expect more than 3 absences from class without explicit
permission or more than 4 weeks without significant on-line engagement; if you are disengaged, you can expect this portion of your grade to reflect that.

2) ability to identify, compare and contrast, apply and critique, and otherwise relate ideas and arguments. This means connecting class discussions and on-line q&a with readings, and is evidenced in quiz performance (20% = 10% each) and “grabbag” presentations and discussions (10% each = 20%).

3) ability to apply course concepts to understand actual social life in designing and conducting three group research projects, and your level of creative and conscientious participation in the group (30% -- 10% each project -- group based grade)

4) synthesis of ideas into thoughtful final exam essays, with essay prompts distributed in advance (10%).

How Assignments Work

1) Active inquiry – both on-line and in-class participation counts a lot because this is not a “lecture” course. My goal is for us to work together to unpack what the various readings offer, to distinguish between types of writing (scientific in journal articles, persuasive in opinion pieces, informational in journalism) and to read with curiosity and a critical consciousness. Your contributions in-class and on-line should be “engaged” – not long monologues, or single sentences, but thoughtful contributions to the common project of discovery of gender relations in everyday life. Grades for both class and on-line participation will be given at mid-semester (counting 5% each) and at the end of the semester (also counting 5% each).

2) Basic understanding – QUIZZES. Twice during the semester I will give a short-answer quiz on the concepts covered. Each quiz question is worth 10 points, with partial credit possible (40 points total for each quiz; each quiz counts 10% of final grade). These quizzes should be easy IF you prepare by asking about any concepts you are not sure you personally understand and paying attention to what you read.

3) Insight and higher level understanding: I have assembled a set of different topical “grabbags” of diverse readings and webpages to complement the core textbook and supplemental books that will be the mainstay of class and on-line discussions.

Each student is expected to pick TWO different “grabbags” to prepare thoughtfully for additional discussion. You are expected to read ALL the items in the grabbag you do. You should TURN IN (on-line, 9 am on the morning of class) a 1-2 page (about 300 word) “overview” of the main points you want to make from the diverse grab-bag material for which you are responsible.

In all weeks when you are NOT the grab bag discussion leader, you should choose TWO of the readings in the grab-bag (more if you wish and time allows) that arouse your interest/curiosity, about which you would like to comment in class or ask questions, challenge ideas or present alternatives. In other words, grab-bags are co-operative: if YOU are the responsible student you will appreciate your fellow students engaging with your material and you should give your fellow students similar respect and support when THEY are in charge.

Each grab-bag leader role is worth 40 points (10% of final grade) maximum, but extra points will be given to non-leaders to the extent they are regularly and actively engaged.
4) Applying course concepts in the real world: The practical part of the course involves THREE short empirical projects. The design of the question and the empirical work of finding some answers are assigned to randomly assembled teams. Team composition will therefore vary among the projects but within each project the grade is a collective one. Each team is responsible for preparing (a) an interesting and answerable question about the real world of gender in relation to the broad topic of our concern (this will be done in class); (b) a powerpoint presentation of evidence gathered and conclusions drawn that will be delivered in class (and placed in the L@UW dropbox the morning BEFORE the presentation); (c) the actual organized, thoughtful, shared ORAL presentation of the powerpoint in class; and (d) a 1-2 page (300 word) written outline of what work was done, how and by whom (placed in the appropriate L@UW Dropbox no later than the day after the presentation). The grade for the team presentation will be an AVERAGE of the grades for these four parts -- with potential loss or gain of points for individuals whom their team feels deserve more or less of the credit. Each project is worth 10% of final grade (40 points for A etc).

5) Synthesizing concepts and evidence. There will be a final exam, in the form of TWO short essays (from a list provided in advance to prepare) each worth 5 percent (overall exam is worth 10%). Essays will ask you to illustrate concepts with examples, compare and contrast ideas, or develop an argument.

Ground rules

There are 400 basic points to be assigned (on the basis of A= 40) in roughly 10% subunits. On this basis, an A+ is worth 43 points (3 “extra” above an A), A- is 37, AB is 35, B+ is 33 etc). Grades are assigned on a letter basis but can easily be converted into these percentage based points to see how your overall average is developing.

Anyone who needs accommodation for a disability should talk with me as soon as possible and be in direct contact with the McBurney Center as well.

Absences may in some cases be unavoidable, but anyone who needs to miss a class should attempt to excuse themselves in advance by email. Excessive absences (more than 3 in a semester) will be penalized in engagement category unless there is good reason as certified by the dean of students.

Good discussion demands respectful treatment of each other and each others’ views at all times. Respect includes asking for evidence and challenging claims or arguments, but excludes attacks on the motives or personal characteristics of another person (so-called ad hominem comments). A lot of students keep quiet because they are nervous about giving a wrong answer in front of their peers. I encourage you to answer even if what you say may be wrong. Your peers may have the same misconceptions or confusions as you do, and your answers will give us all an opportunity to talk about the material more in-depth! I will often challenge assertions by asking for more evidence and I strongly encourage you to challenge me in the same way -- and to develop a habit of looking for the evidence for and against any position taken in the readings, the lectures, the discussion and in everyday life.
Cheating of all kinds defeats the academic goals of the course and will be treated harshly. Borrowing other’s thoughts and arguments without attribution – whether from classmates or from written sources – is academic dishonesty. All forms of academic dishonesty will be reported to the Dean of Students and can be grounds for a failing grade. A clear definition of plagiarism as well as information about disciplinary sanctions for academic misconduct may be found at the Dean of Students web site: http://www.wisc.edu/students/UWS14.htm.
Knowledge of these rules is your responsibility, and lack of familiarity with the rules does not excuse misconduct.

Assign Readings

PLUS:
Emily Kane, *The Gender Trap: Parents and the Pitfalls of Raising Boys and Girls* (NYU Press 2012)
PLUS:
The “grabbag articles” (diverse short selections from research journals, newspapers, magazines and blogs) are available only on Learn@UW.

The books assigned have been ordered at A Room of One’s Own (East Johnson) a local bookstore – or can be bought online.

Course Schedule

**Week 1 (9/6-8)** Introduction/Overview of Course
Tuesday: overview of course, mutual introductions
Thursday: Wade & Ferree, Chapter 1 and Kane, Introduction

**Week 2 (9/13-15)** The Gender Binary: Becoming gendered selves
Tuesday: Wade & Ferree, Chapter 2
Thursday: Kane, Chapters 1-3. Grabbag #1 gender as doing “difference”

**Week 3 (9/20-22)** Not only Pink and Blue? Resisting the gender binary
Tuesday: Kane, Chapters 4-7 (Tuesday)
Thursday: Kane, continued AND Planning first mini-project: institutions that contribute to gendering children and/or adults (media, products, etc.) and extent of de-gendered options for parents/kids to choose. Identifying a specific question to which you do NOT already know the answer, where there is uncertainty or the possibility for surprise.
(optional on L@UW: excerpts from McCaughey, *The Caveman Mystique*)
Week 4 (9/27-29)  Gendered bodies, gender differences?
Tuesday: Kane, wrap-up, Wade & Ferree, chapter 3
Thursday: Grabbag #2 gendered images and talk about adults

Week 5 (10/4-6)  Gendered rules, Intersectional situations
Tuesday: Wade and Ferree, Chapter 4;  Grabbag #3 femininity, fatness and fitness
Thursday: ORAL reports from the first miniprojects due (with powerpoint plus written outline/contribution summary); Grabbag #4 gender nonconformity and trans* experience

Week 6 (10/11-13)  Men and masculinities
Tuesday: Wade and Ferree, Chapter 5 Grabbag #5 intersections and racializations of gender
Thursday: Wade and Ferree Chapter 6 Grabbag #6 masculinities, authority and guns

Week 7 (10/18-20)  Policing Masculinity: violence and bullying
Tuesday: QUIZ 1. Pascoe, preface to 2012 edition and chapters 1-3
Thursday: Pascoe, Chapters 4-5, Grabbag #7 schools, sports and sexualities

Week 8 (10/25-27)  Femininities and inequalities
Tuesday: Pascoe, Ch, 6-7 and appendix.
Planning second mini-research project: accountability and policing in high school and college: interviewing fellow students about the shifts in rules and identities between these different but similar contexts. What specific institutional opportunities or obstacles encouraged change or continuity? How do different campus subcultures reflect or overcome high school social relations?
Thursday: Wade and Ferree Chapter 7; Grabbag #8 campus sexual assault

Week 9 (11/1-3)  Social structures, gendered institutions
Tuesday: Grabbag #9 toilet parity and panics
Thursday: Wade and Ferree, Chapter 8. Grabbag #10 gender segregation and discrimination

Week 10 (11/8-10)  Institutions: Partnerships, Pleasure and social change
Tuesday: Wade and Ferree Chapter 9; Grabbag #11 on marriage/partnership
Thursday: ORAL reports, second mini-project.

Week 11 (11/15-17)  Institutions: Paid and Unpaid Labor
Tues: Wade and Ferree, Chapter 10, Grabbag #12 on housework
Thurs: Grabbag #13 parenting as status work; Grabbag #14 parenting as social politics; playspent (L@UW game to try at home)

Week 12 (11/22)  Institutions: Families and family politics
Tuesday: QUIZ 2; Wade and Ferree Chapter 11

THANKSGIVING BREAK
Week 13 (11/29-Dec 1)  Institutions: Politics and making change
Tuesday: Reger, introduction and Chapters 1-3 (if possible, read whole book over break); final exam essay questions handed out
Thursday: Grabbag #15 – generational changes in feminism
Planning third mini research project. Making gender change via politics. What institutions do “young feminists” or “young anti-feminists” target for change and why? Choose one or two specific issues and compare their websites and other materials; construct your own “blog analysis” narrative about what is more or less important about gender for activists who vary by age, gender, race, class, nation or other social position? How do goals, strategies and political practices relate to “broader” political contexts (movements, parties, governments, elections) in which these issues are targeted?

Week 14 (12/6-8)  Institutions: inequality relations as political targets
Tuesday: Wade and Ferree Chapter 12. Grabbag #16 on class politics: wealth, earnings, inequalities
Thursday: Wade and Ferree Chapter 13. Reger, part 2 (chapters 4-6)

Week 15 (12/13-15) Political Strategies and Feminist Goals
Tuesday: ORAL REPORTS on 3rd mini-project

Final exam: Tuesday December 20, 5:05-7:05 pm