

COMM 374: Gender and Communication

Professor: Helen Sterk

Office Hours: by appointment over zoom

Email: Helen.sterk@wku.edu Cell: 616-780-0488

Text:

Foss, Karen A., Sonja K. Foss, and Alena Amato Ruggiero. *Feminism in Practice: Communication Strategies for Making Change*. Waveland Press, 2022.

Goals:

Women, men, and people who see themselves as neither completely one nor the other, share the world. Just what that means and how we should live out the sharing is up for argument. Some believe in divine creation of gender as a binary truth. Some believe humans evolved in ways that helped them to survive. Of those who believe in evolutionary gender differences, some claim men's aggressiveness serves the human race, while some argue women's care-giving has been the saving grace of humanity. Within humankind, there is both commonality (humanity) and distinction (gender). For the purposes of this class, no matter how we got here, we're here together, and together, we negotiate meaning and life choices.

Gender encompasses far more than masculinity and femininity, including sexual identity and orientation. While much of what we are may be biological givens, human beings construct gender through symbols and actions that translate into expectations. Gender communication does not entail the simple matter of learning the right role behavior and then acting it out, especially now, when concepts of gender encompass heterosexuality, homosexuality, bisexuality, pansexuality, and transgender. Some people think a person's anatomy straightforwardly determines gender. That's just not the case. Gender has always been enacted by individuals, and cultures have always suggested, more or less clearly, what is proper for people identified as women and men to do, and human beings have always lived in ways other than those seemingly determined for them.

This class will focus on gender relations and how communication practices shape those relations in 21st century America. We will look at how masculinity and femininity; heterosexuality, bisexuality, and homosexuality; identity and orientation, and other positions on the gender continuum have been defined and are played out in interpersonal relations, business settings, family life, differing race and class contexts, and in the media. We will see, too, how masculinity and femininity have become politically charged, leading to significant social and cultural disruption. In so doing, we will see communication plays a crucial role in suggesting and correcting gender relations and enactments.

My goals for you in this class are that you will be able:

- Name and explain communication aspects of cultural, physical, and social forces that influence gender relations
- Incorporate communication and gender theories to describe, explain, interpret and evaluate those forces
- Give evidence in speaking and writing of a well-informed, respectful, caring perspective on gender relations that you can use in your life.

Course Expectations:

My first and strongest expectation of you is that you will engage yourself fully in the course material. Our textbook is the necessary tip of the iceberg of what you will be reading, viewing and researching in this semester. I expect you to read and think through every chapter and assigned reading. As your read, take notes, argue out ideas with your friends and roommates, and have your own point of view ready to try out in your assignments.

Grading

Grading is based on:

Test One:	25 points
Test Two:	25 points
Book Review:	20 points
Film Review:	25 points

Book review:

The book review is a 750-1,000 word, double-spaced report and reflection on one of the books in the bibliography list found on the Content page of the Blackboard site. 250 words will summarize the book. The rest of the paper, 500-750 words will present what the book meant to you through explaining the difference its ideas make in how you frame gender and communication.

The sections of the paper are as follows:

First page, at the top, instead of a title, write the full APA citation of the book. Then,

- section one: start with a brief introduction;
- section two: present the report;
- section three: develop the reflection (make 3-4 substantive, well-developed points that develop your response to the book);
- section four: conclude by summarizing your position and answering “now what?”—what’s the difference that this book makes?

Any quotations can be internally cited by putting the page number in quotation marks: (12).

Film Review: For this assignment, watch one film from the following three lists and write a 750-1,000 word, double-spaced paper analyzing the film. Focus on showing how the film represents gendered life as a certain kind of story—what sort of world is presented in the film—full of opportunities or threats? What kind of people are the characters? What sort of ability to act in the world do these characters have? How does the plot show the way the world works? And does the plot suggest a better way for that world to work—if so, how?

Feminist films: *Set It Off*, *Hidden Figures*, *Moana*, *Wild*, *A League of Their Own*, *The Joy Luck Club*, *Wonder Woman*, *Whale Rider*, or *Clueless* (you may propose another film)

LGBTQ films: *Happy Together*, *My Beautiful Laundrette*, *My Own Private Idaho*, *Tangerine*, *Tomboy*, *Call Me By Your Name*, *Love Simon*, *The Adventures of Priscilla Queen of the Desert*, *In and Out*, *Boy Erased* (you may propose another film)

Masculinity films: *Don Jon*, *The Wolf of Wall Street*, *Rocky*, *It's a Wonderful Life*, *The Equalizer*, *About a Boy*, *The Old Man and a Gun*, *Gran Torino* (you may propose another film)

Race and gender films: *Get Out*, *Moonlight*, any Spike Lee film, *12 Years a Slave*, *Boyz n the Hood*, *Mississippi Masala*, *Black Panther*, *The Color Purple*, *Harriet*, *Malcolm X*, *What's Love Got to Do With It?*, *Waiting to Exhale* (you may propose another film).

Honesty

I place a high premium on original work and academic honesty. Your learning and thinking is reflected in your words. Do your own thinking and your own work.

I expect you to cite all sources appropriately and to give credit where it's due. You are expected to use APA citation format and style. Consult with <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/> for advice on how to format your paper and sources appropriately.

You are expected to cite all the sources used in your bibliography. If a source is not cited, it should not appear in a bibliography. "Padding" is the term for having sources in your bibliography that you do not cite in a paper or oral presentation and is unethical.

If I find you have plagiarized any written material, have made up any sources, or copied other people's work, I will give you a **zero** for the assignment. Effectively, that will mean you could fail the class. I take cheating very seriously—it indicates you have not personally engaged with the material you read and do not trust yourself enough to speak your mind as you write. Further, it steals from another person one of the few things that humans actually own, our thoughts and the way we put them together. So, trust your own creativity and the intellectual property of others by practicing scrupulous scholarship.

General Policies:

Resolving Complaints about Grades

The first step in resolving a complaint about grades is for the student to attempt to resolve the problem directly with the course instructor. See the Student Handbook, available at <http://www.wku.edu/handbook/> for additional guidance.

Title IX Misconduct/Assault Statement

Western Kentucky University (WKU) is committed to supporting faculty, staff and students by upholding WKU's Title IX Sexual Misconduct/Assault Policy (#0.2070) at <https://wku.edu/eoo/documents/titleix/wkutitleixpolicyandgrievanceprocedure.pdf> and the Discrimination and Harassment Policy (#0.2040) at <https://www.wku.edu/policies/docs/251.pdf>.

Under these policies, discrimination, harassment and/or sexual misconduct based on sex/gender are prohibited. If you experience an incident of sex/gender-based discrimination, harassment and/or sexual misconduct, you are encouraged to report it to the Title IX Coordinator, Andrea Anderson, 270-745-5398 or Title IX Investigators, Michael Crowe, 270-745-5429 or Joshua Hayes, 270-745-5121.

Please note that while you may report an incident of sex/gender based discrimination, harassment and/or sexual misconduct to a faculty member, WKU faculty are "Responsible Employees" of the University and **MUST** report what you share to WKU's Title IX Coordinator or Title IX Investigator. If you would like to speak with someone who may be able to afford you confidentiality, you may contact WKU's Counseling and Testing Center at 270-745-3159.

ADA Accommodation Statement

In compliance with University policy, students with disabilities who require academic and/or auxiliary accommodations for this course must contact the Student Accessibility Resource Center located in Downing Student Union, 1074. SARC can be reached by phone number at 270-745-5004 [270-745-3030 TTY] or via email at sarc.connect@wku.edu. Please do not request accommodations directly from the professor or instructor without a faculty notification letter (FNL) from The Student Accessibility Resource Center.