

**UHON 351 Section 001, Girls' Violence: Fact, Film, Fiction
Fall 2008
Syllabus**

Instructor: M. Joan McDermott, PhD
Director, Women's Studies

Offices: Women's Studies, 913 S Oakland, or Faner 4226

Contact: 453-5141 or joanmcd@siu.edu

Office hours: TBA

Day, time, place: Monday, 3:00 to 5:30 pm, location TBA

Course description:

Please note that while the subject of this course is girls' violence and aggression, the course is not just for women students. We actually spend much time talking about the ways we all – men and women -- perform both gender and violence in our daily lives. In addition, the course should be of interest to students in many majors because of its direct links to many life choices, whether the choices are in graduate or professional (e.g., law) study or choices in occupations.

This interdisciplinary seminar will examine the complexity of girls' violent and aggressive behavior, including questions of trends, the nature of girls' violence, the links between victimization and violence, and girls' experiences of the justice system. The course will include a look at depictions of girls' violence and aggression in fiction and film.

The content of the class will be fertile ground for discussions. Is girls' violence increasing? Or, is our social response to girls' violence changing? In what ways is violence by girls similar to violence by boys and in what ways is it different? What is the trajectory toward serious violent behavior in girls? How are our understandings of girls' violence and aggression shaped by our constructions of masculinity and femininity? When girls are violent are they "doing masculinity" – can that be? What about the "victimization model"? How closely does this fit the experiences of girls who are violent? What about girl fighting and relational aggression? Would some kind of developmental model work – is this aggression "just a phase"? Is it a precursor to more serious aggressive behavior? How does self-violence (cutting, eating disorders, etc.) fit in the lives of girls?

Student learning objectives:

Students who successfully complete this class will:

1. Understand the extent, nature, and trends in violence by girls and the difficulties in measuring girls' violence.
2. Understand the debates surrounding gender differences in aggression, with a special focus on alternative (e.g., social or relational) aggressions by girls.
3. Gain an appreciation for the difficulties of girls in trouble with the law, including matters of drugs, victimization, families, and sexuality.
4. Gain an appreciation for broad social and cultural trends that are reflected in the lives of girls, as well as the impact of race and class differences.
5. Be able to compare social science understandings of girls' violence with depictions of girls' violence in film and fiction.

Required readings: (Please note that these are tentative.)

Girls' violence: Myths and realities (2004), Edited by Christine Alder and Anne Worrall

Girls in trouble with the law (2006), Laurie Schaffner

Odd girl out: The hidden culture of aggression in girls (2002), Rachel Simmons

What night brings (2003), Carla Trujillo

The bitch posse (2006), Martha O'Connor

Required films: *Heathers*, *Boys don't cry*. You can rent these locally and view them on your own, or see them at the Women's Studies house on the Sunday before we discuss them (see Sundays in bold, below).

Course requirements and method of evaluation:

1. Class participation: As this is an Honors course, taking part in class discussions of readings and films is a significant part of the experience. I may ask you a week ahead of time to take the lead in discussing particular readings. Please always have readings completed by the date for which they are assigned. (30 percent of grade)
2. Short analysis papers. For discussion of the novel *The bitch posse* and the film *Heathers* you will be asked to write a short (4 to 5 page) paper. These papers will seek to integrate social science research and theory with the themes developed in the films or novels. (10 percent each, or 20 percent of grade).

3. Mid-term exam. The mid-term exam will be a preliminary assessment of your developing understanding of girls' violence. This will be an in-class essay exam. (20 percent of grade)

4. Final exam. The final exam will be a take-home essay exam and is intended to provide you with an opportunity to integrate ideas and to demonstrate your understandings of issues related to violence committed by girls. (30 percent of grade)

Topics and assignments:

Introductions, review of syllabus

View and discuss film by Liz Garbus, *Girlhood*

Is violence by girls a contemporary crisis? Looking at data, the question of trends in violence v. changes in social responses, questions of social construction, and the intersection of class and race

Read: Alder & Worrall: Chapters 1 through 4

Schaffner: Introduction and Chapter 1

Continuation of discussion from previous week, and consideration of context and "going gender"

Read: From Alder & Worrall: Chapters 7, 8, 9

Guest speakers: Luanne Brown, Director of Safety and Security at CCHS, and Cindy Huckabee, Jackson County Juvenile Probation Officer

Observations on girls' violence and aggression, national trends, and issues of causation.

Injury/victimization, sexuality, families, sexual solutions to non-sexual problems, and trouble

Read: Schaffner, Chapters 2 & 3

Trujillo – *What night brings*

Gender norms, violence, and trouble

Read: Schaffner, Chapter 4

O'Connor – *The bitch posse*

An examination of trajectories toward serious violence in girls

Readings – to be determined

Gender, corrections, and matters of policy: Corrections for girls

Read: Schaffner, Chapters 5 & 6

(Su) View *Heathers* at WMST at 1:00 pm

Girl fights and relational aggression

Read: Simmons – *Odd Girl Out*

View for this class: *Heathers*

(Su) View *Boys don't cry* at WMST at 1:00 pm

Lesbian, bisexual, queer and questioning girls: violence and victimization

View for this class *Boys don't cry*

Violence towards self: cutting, eating disorders, sexuality, and the lives of girls

Readings – to be determined