SPSSI Teaching Resources Award Submission

Title of Activity
A Heterosexual Diary

Purpose
This defamiliarization assignment aims to increase students’ observational skills and critical awareness of heteronormativity (i.e., the ideology and way of organizing social relations that privileges heterosexuality casting it as normal, natural, and desirable).

Description
This individual assignment is an active learning exercise that asks students to keep, for seven days, a daily journal of observations, experiences, and encounters related to heterosexuality — images, representations, symbols, conversations, norms, assumptions, artifacts, etc., of male-female modes of intimacy and relationships across private and public spheres of life.

Materials Needed
None

Task Instructions
1. Present the idea of daily diary-keeping as a traditional means to collect observations, experiences, and thoughts. This assignment, however, is not an ordinary diary or journal task, because it will require students to “defamiliarize” themselves with respect to a phenomenon that many may take for granted — heterosexuality. The idea of “asking fish to think about water” may be used as a helpful analogy here.
2. Instruct students to keep a daily journal, for seven days, of their observations, experiences, and encounters related to heterosexuality — images, representations, symbols, conversations, norms, assumptions, artifacts, etc., of intimacy and relationships that center around male-female pairings, other-sex attraction, and man-woman/boy-girl relations. Examples can include: advertisements, displays of heterosexual affection in public, songs and other forms of popular culture that celebrate heterosexuality, and verbal interactions with others that presume heterosexuality.
3. Each daily entry should be at the minimum 300 words. Diaries are confidential and not to be submitted.
4. After the seven days, students will write a short reflection paper (one to two pages) on the assignment, including a table that lists their daily word count for the diary period.

In-Class Processing & Assessment
Aside from the reflection papers, students may be asked to share in class about the experience of doing a heterosexual diary — how easy or difficult was it? What were their realizations about heterosexuality’s place in their life-worlds? Which forms of heterosexuality was particularly dominant? How is heterosexuality constructed as normal, natural, desirable, and even “compulsory” in their own life-worlds?

Instructor & Institution
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