

Comm. 229: Mediating Gender and Sexuality

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Course Summary

In this course we will examine and evaluate the construction and representation of gender and sexuality in contemporary American society. The class will draw on the interests and expertise of two professors who will co-teach the two sections of the class. Together, we will focus on a variety of cultural sites at which identity is constructed, including but not limited to television, magazines, advertising, music, memorials, the internet, and public spaces. Although gender is the primary identity construction examined in this course, we will also pay close attention to other aspects of identity such as ethnicity, class, and sexuality. We will investigate representational issues in relation to their political repercussions, and draw from a broad range of academic and popular literature.

Course Outcomes

- Explain and summarize modes of mediating gender and sexuality.
- Demonstrate an ability to apply and synthesize course materials to a variety of media forms and the "everyday."
- Develop observational and critical skills to examine the ways in which gender and sexuality are socially constructed (both historically and today), challenged, and complicated

Required Text

McLaughlin, L. (2008). *Cycler*. New York: Random House.

All other readings will be marked as either on electronic reserve (e-res) or on Blackboard (BB). E-res password = discourse.

Assignments

All assignments must be completed in order to pass the course. Late assignments will be penalized 1/2 grade per day (e.g. B+ to B).

Midterm Exam I & II: 25% each = 50%

Each Midterm Exam will cover readings, discussions, class content, and assignments leading up the exam date. Format will be announced prior to the exam.

Cycler Epilogue: 10%

After reading *Cycler*, you and a partner will write a short chapter that could be added to the book's ending. More information to follow.

Lead Class Discussion: 5%

At least once during the semester you and a couple of classmates will be responsible for leading the discussion for the day. Discussion Leader Groups will have approximately 5-10 minutes at the beginning of class to highlight key points from the assigned readings through presentations, role playing, engaging the class in activities, sharing appropriate media sources, and/or any other number of creative endeavors you can imagine.

Final Exam/Analysis Paper: 25%

Exam format to be announced closer to the end of the semester.

Participation: 10%

You are encouraged to bring questions about the readings to class and to provide answers to your colleagues' questions. Participation relies heavily on attendance so be sure to join the class and the discussion everyday. Other assessments of participation will include a variety of homework activities assigned throughout the semester and two (2) response papers. These should be short 2-page critiques examining one or more aspects of an assigned reading (not one for which you are leading discussion). Connections to other readings are encouraged. Response papers are due at the beginning of class on the day the reading is assigned.

Teaching Philosophies

His:

1. Every class is a skills class. Yes, I want you to learn "facts," but only insofar as those facts are prerequisites for developing skills of analysis and evaluation. This is not as easy as it sounds: it is a *huge* leap from seeing the world as "real" and "given" to seeing the world as "constructed" and "arbitrary," and another huge leap to imagine how that world might be constructed differently. It requires thinking in new ways about discourse, power (including your own power), social struggle, even the factuality of those facts you're learning.
2. Have fun. Laugh at each other's jokes. Build on each other's thoughts. Play with ideas. Relax. Be that student in the brochure who is amazed at how much there is to know and delights in his/her own intellectual journey.

Hers:

My background, as a scholar of communication and culture interested in performance studies, informs my understanding of human interaction such that I am concerned with the influences of both individual identity and institutional forces on a wide range of communicative events. This translates into a course that privileges a critical interrogation of those practices and ideals we label "the norm" and encourages thoughtful, creative reflection on what we experience with all five senses. In this vein, my goal is to cultivate a classroom climate in which we respectfully witness and truthfully share our observations with each other.

A note about your instructors' pet peeves:

His:

- 1) Lateness. Oh, how I hate me that lateness.
- 2) Not stapling multipage documents.
- 3) "Media" is the plural form of "medium." Examples: Radio is a *medium*. *The media* are responsible for everything. The one exception is if two people are conducting a séance, in which case you might have two mediums. With that distinction in mind, if you use "mediums" in a paper or exam, I will assume that you are discussing human conduits to the supernatural realm and evaluate your logic accordingly.

Hers:

- 1) Please do not ask about class letting out early as we are scheduled for a mere 80 minutes; if everyone is actively participating the time will fly.
- 2) **There** is a difference between what **they're** doing and what **their** dog is doing. Also, **you're** in charge of **your** own destiny and having **your** papers proofread for spelling AND grammar.
- 3) Paragraphs with too many spaces between them (check double spacing) or that aren't indented.
- 5) Text messaging during class. It's just plain rude.
- 6) Gazing balls, plastic Christmas lawn ornaments, & concrete geese dressed up as per the weather and/or season (geese in bikinis aren't really that funny).

Policies and Expectations

Attendance: Your attendance and participation are integral to the success of the course as well as your own personal achievement. Daily attendance will be taken for each section, and missing class or failing to participate constructively will definitely impact your class participation grade.

Lateness: Be in your seat and ready to begin class at the scheduled start time. To encourage prompt arrival, each person arriving late will be required to sing a song of their choosing for all of us to enjoy. Additionally, each exam will include a bonus question. For each song we hear, one point will be deducted from the possible number of points the bonus question is worth. Midterm bonus questions start at 10 points each (only one question per exam) and 5 points for the Final Exam.

Preparation: Always bring that day's readings to class with you. The syllabus will always state clearly what you should read prior to each class, which assignments you should hand in, and what else you must do or bring for a given day. Late assignments will be penalized by a half-grade for each 24 hours of lateness (e.g. from B+ to B). If you know that you will have difficulty completing an assignment on time, let your assigned instructor know *before* the deadline and (s)he will try to work with you if possible.

Written Work: All written work must be typed (double-spaced), spellchecked, and proofread. Failure to run your work through a spellchecker (one more time before printing is a good idea) will automatically result in a 5% deduction from your grade for that assignment. Multiple-page documents must be stapled—we will not accept unstapled work (please note that paper clips and dog-ears are not staples). Please note also that we will not accept assignments by email under any circumstances—you must hand in a hard copy of the assignment on the due date in order to avoid a late penalty. Feel free to save a tree and print double-sided.

Grades: All assignments must be completed in order to receive a passing grade for the course. The calculation of your grade will be based on a 1,000-point scale, and the weight of each assignment is listed above. If you are concerned about your grade, come talk to your assigned instructor as early as possible.

Evaluation: Rubrics for each assignment will be disseminated well in advance of their due dates. Please feel free to use these as checklists while preparing your work and bring questions for clarification to class. We will discuss each assignment and I will be open to answering questions about assignments at the beginning and end of each class. If you wish to dispute a grade, attach a written explanation detailing how you feel the grade is inaccurate and return it to your assigned instructor after twenty-four (24) hours but within one (1) week of receiving the graded assignment. All grade disputes will be taken under consideration; however, a grade change is not guaranteed.

Email Policy: We will regularly use email to send out announcements, changes in the syllabus, reminders about tests or due dates, etc. It is your responsibility to check your email regularly to keep up-to-date with these announcements. We will use the email address you have listed with the university; therefore, please make sure that this is indeed the correct address. Our promise is to answer all email from students within 24 hours (36 hours on weekends) and we will hold you responsible for any announcements made via email within 24 hours of the announced change (36 hours on weekends). Neither of us will not accept assignments via email under any circumstances.

In-Class Behavior: You may not eat in class unless you bring enough for everyone (most days there will be 50 of us so keep that in mind when you do decide to bring snacks). Beverages are okay but you are responsible for cleaning up any spills that might occur. You may not use computers in class without prior approval. Your cell phone or PDA must be turned off and put away during class. Points will be deducted from your participation grade if your phone rings, or if you are observed using your cell phone or PDA during class (this includes text messaging). If you absolutely need to have your phone on during class, talk to one of us at the beginning of the semester.

As a common courtesy, we should leave the classrooms in better condition than when we found them. Often we will break into groups for discussion, which may include a portion of the class moving to Higley 117. Therefore, putting the desks in H117 back as they were before we met will be greatly appreciated.

Accessibility and Special Accommodations: It is important that the course be accessible to all students. If you need any alternative accommodations in the curriculum, instruction, or evaluation procedures in order for you to be able to participate fully in the course, or if there are any external issues that may affect your work in this course, please contact either of us privately as soon as possible to discuss your specific needs. We rely on the Academic Support & Enrichment Center in 102 Doane to verify the need for reasonable accommodations based on documentation on file in that office.

Academic Honesty: You may not turn in substantially similar work to two classes without the express consent of both instructors. All sources in your written work must be properly cited; if you have any doubts about correct citation while writing your paper, contact the Writing Center or any of the many paper and online guides to academic citation. Plagiarism in any form will not be tolerated, and students found to have committed plagiarism, regardless of whether or not the plagiarism was committed intentionally and knowingly, will face severe grade penalties and will also be reported to the university to face further academic discipline. You are encouraged to use the resources available in the library system and the Writing Center to guide your research.

Daily Schedule

Readings should be completed by that day's class, and you should come prepared to discuss them. Please print your readings double-sided. On average each of you will be reading and printing 725 pages for the class. By printing double-sided, we can collectively make a smaller carbon footprint and it will save you money since that equates to \$21.75 at \$0.03 per double-sided page. (P.S. There was NO book we could find to offer you such a rich reading schedule at that price!)

Cycler is the only text you'll be required to purchase. All other readings will be marked as either on electronic reserve (e-res) or on Blackboard (BB). Every single thing on this syllabus is subject to change, so check your email or Blackboard for announcements and keep on your toes.

Unit One: Theoretical Perspectives

Jan. 19 **Foundations I**

Jan. 21 **Foundations II--The Social Construction of Reality**

READINGS:

Judith Lorber, "The Social Construction of Gender" (Handout)

Gloria Steinem, "If Men Could Menstruate" (Link on BB)

DUE:

Two Course Ideas—What should we be doing this semester?

Identity Questionnaire (Link on BB)

Jan. 26 **NO CLASS: Martin Luther King, Jr. Day**

Jan. 28 **Foundations III--Refuting Biology**

READINGS:

Katha Pollitt, "Why Boys Don't Play with Dolls" (Link on BB)

Fausto-Sterling, "The Five Sexes" (Link on BB)

Emily Martin, "The Egg & the Sperm" (Link on BB)

DUE: Example of attributing gender characteristics to biology

Feb. 2 **Foundations IV--Gender and Race**

READINGS:

Audre Lourde, "Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference" (E-Res)

Gail Dines, "King Kong and the White Woman" (E-Res)

DUE: Example of the intersection of gender and race

Feb. 4 **Foundations V--Gender and Class**

READINGS:

Laurie Ouellette, "Inventing the Cosmo Girl" (Link on BB)

Amy Best, "Romancing the Prom: Boyfriends, Girlfriends, and 'Just Friends'" (E-Res)

DUE: Example of the intersection of gender and class

Unit Two: Historicizing Gender Politics

Feb. 9 **History I—Victorian America and First-Wave Feminism**

READINGS:

Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood" (Link on BB)
Michael S. Kimmel, "Baseball and the Reconstitution of American Masculinity, 1880-1920" (E-res)

Feb. 11 **History II—The "Traditional" Gender Roles of the 1950s**

READINGS:

Elaine Tyler May, "Explosive Issues: Sex, Women, and the Bomb" (E-res)
Barbara Ehrenreich, "Breadwinners and Losers" (E-res)

Feb. 16 **History III—Second-Wave Feminism**

READINGS:

Betty Friedan, "The Problem that has No Name" (E-res)
NOW, "Statement of Purpose" and "Bill of Rights" (Links on BB)
Susan Faludi, "Blame It On Feminism" (E-res)

Feb. 18 **History IV—Fight Club, Grrrl Power, and Gender Roles Today**

READINGS:

Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards, "Girl, You'll be a Woman Soon" (E-res)
Lynn Ta, "Hurt So Good" (Link on BB)

Unit Three: Gender and the Nation

Feb. 23 **Nation I--Monuments & Memorials**

READINGS:

Dydia DeLyser, "Thus I Salute the Kentucky Daisey's Claim" (E-Res)

Feb. 25 **Nation II--Gender and the Nation**

READINGS:

Stacy Takacs, "Jessica Lynch and the Regeneration of American Identity and Power" (Link on BB)

Mar. 2 **MIDTERM I**

Unit Four: Gender and the Family

Mar. 4 **Family I**

READINGS:

Stephanie Coontz, "'Leave It to Beaver' and 'Ozzie and Harriet': American Families in the 1950s" (E-res)

Mar. 9 **Family II**

READINGS:

Susan Douglas, "The Mommy Myth" (E-res)

Mar. 11 **Family III**

READINGS:

Debra Smith, "Critiquing Reality-based Televisual Black Fatherhood: A Critical Analysis of Run's *House* and Snoop Dogg's *Father Hood*" (Link on BB)

SPRING BREAK, MAR. 13-MAR. 22

Unit Five: Sex and Pornography

Mar. 23 **Sex I: Porn Studies**

READINGS:

Linda Williams, "Porn Studies: Proliferating Pornography and On/Scene" (BB)

Anne McClintock, "'Gonad the Barbarian and the Venus Flytrap: Portraying the Female and Male Orgasm" (E-res)

Mar. 25 **Sex II: Issues in Contemporary Pornography**

READINGS—Choose **any two** of the following three articles:

Karen Pitcher, "The Staging of Agency in *Girls Gone Wild*" (Link on BB)

Shoshana Magnet, "Feminist Sexualities, Race, and the Internet: an Investigation of suicidegirls.com " (Link on BB)

Peter Lehman, "You and Voyeurweb: Illustrating the Shifting Representation of the Penis on the Internet with User-Generated Content" (Link on BB)

Mar. 30 **Sex & Place I**

READINGS:

Lauren Berlant & Michael Warner, "Sex in Public" (Link on BB)

Apr. 1 **Sex & Place II**

READINGS:

Joan Phillips, "Female Sex Tourism in Barbados" (Link on BB)

Unit Six: Liminalities

Apr. 6 **Liminalities I**

READINGS: Listen to WNYC radio show on intersexuality (link on BB under "WNYC")

Apr. 8 **Liminalities II**

READINGS:

Judith Halberstam, "An Introduction to Female Masculinity" (e-res)

DUE: *Cycler* chapters should be posted to BB by the end of the day on *Friday, Apr. 10*

Apr. 13 **Liminalities III**

READINGS:

Cycler chapters (BB)

DUE: *Cycler* analysis papers

Apr. 15 **MIDTERM II**

Unit Seven: Consumption & Consumer Culture

Apr. 20 **Consumption I**

READINGS:

Choose **either** Elana Levine, "Having a Female Body Doesn't Make You Feminine: Feminine Hygiene Advertising and 1970s Television" (Link on BB) or Kristin Swenson, "Capitalizing on Affect: Viagra (in)Action" (BB)

Apr. 22 **Consumption II**

READINGS:

Choose **either** Chrys Ingraham, "Lifting the Veil" (E-res) **or** Elana Levine, "Fractured Fairy Tales and Fragmented Markets: Disney's *Weddings of a Lifetime* and the Cultural Politics of Media Conglomeration" (Link on BB)

Apr. 27 **Consumption III**

READINGS:

Choose **either** Katherine Sender, "Neither Fish nor Fowl: Feminism, Desire, and the Lesbian Consumer Market" **or** Sender, "Queens for a Day" (Links on BB)

Unit Eight: Gender on Campus

Apr. 29 **Campus I**

READINGS:

B. Kirkpatrick, "It Beats Rocks and Tear Gas: Streaking and Cultural Politics in the Post-Vietnam Era" (BB)

May 4 **Campus II / Class Summary**

READINGS:

Tierney, "Building Academic Communities of Difference" (Link on BB)

Bibliographic Information for Major Readings:

- Berlant, Lauren and Michael Warner. "Sex in Public." *Critical Inquiry* 24 (Winter 1998): 547-566.
- Best, Amy. "Romancing the Prom: Boyfriends, Girlfriends, and 'Just Friends.'" *Prom Night: Youth, Schools and Popular Culture*. New York: Routledge, 2000. 63-96.
- Baumgardner, Jennifer and Amy Richards. "Girl, You'll be a Woman Soon." *Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism, and the Future*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000. 126-166.
- Coontz, Stephanie. "'Leave It to Beaver' and 'Ozzie and Harriet': American Families in the 1950s." *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap*. Basic Books, 1992. 23-41.
- DeLyser, Dydia. "'Thus I salute the Kentucky Daisey's claim': gender, social memory, and the mythic West at a proposed Oklahoma monument." *Cultural Geographies* 16 (2008): 63-94.
- Dines, Gail. "King Kong and the White Woman." *Violence Against Women* 4:3 (June 1998): 291-307.
- Douglas, Susan and Meredith Michaels. "Introduction: The New Momism." *The Mommy Myth: The Idealization of Motherhood and How It Has Undermined Women*. New York: Free Press, 2004.
- Ehrenreich, Barbara. "Breadwinners and Losers." *The Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Flight from Commitment*. New York: Anchor Press, 1983. 14-28.
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- Fausto-Sterling, Anne. "The Five Sexes: Why Male and Female Are Not Enough." *The Sciences* (March/April 1993): 20-25.
- Friedan, Betty. "The Problem that Has No Name." In *Women's America: Refocusing the Past*, edited by Linda K. Kerber and Jane Sherron De Hart. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- Halberstam, Judith. "An Introduction to Female Masculinity: Masculinity Without Men." *Female Masculinity*. London: Duke Press, 1998. 1-43.
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- Lehman, Peter. "You and Voyeurweb: Illustrating the Shifting Representation of the Penis on the Internet with User-Generated Content." *Cinema Journal* 46:4 (2006): 108-116.
- Levine, Elana. "Having a female body doesn't make you feminine: Feminine Hygiene Advertising and 1970s Television." *The Velvet Light Trap* 50 (2002): 36-47.
- Levine, Elana. "Fractured Fairy Tales and Fragmented Markets." *Television & New Media* 6:1 (2005): 71-88.
- Lorber, Judith. "Night to His Day: The Social Construction of Gender." *Paradoxes of Gender*. New Haven: Yale U.P., 1994.
- Lorde, Audre. "Age, Race, Class and Sex: Women Redefining Difference." In *Race, Class, and Gender in the United States: An Integrated Study* (4th ed.), edited by Paula S. Rothenberg. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2004. 533-539.
- Magnet, Shoshana. "Feminist Sexualities, Race, and the Internet: an Investigation of suicidegirls.com." *New Media & Society* 9:4 (2007): 577-602.
- Martin, Emily. "The Egg and the Sperm: How Science Has Constructed A Romance Based on Stereotypical Male-Female Roles." *Signs* 16 (1991): 485-501.
- May, Elaine Tyler. "Explosive Issues: Sex, Women and the Bomb." *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*. New York: Basic Books, 1988. 80-99.
- McClintock, Anne. "Gonad the Barbarian and Venus Flytrap: Portraying the Female and Male Orgasm." In *Sex Exposed: Sexuality and the Pornography Debate*, edited by Lynne Segal and Mary McIntosh. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1993. 111-31.
- Ouellette, Laurie. "Inventing the Cosmo Girl: Class Identity and Girl-Style American Dreams." *Media, Culture and Society* 21:3 (May 1999): 359-383.
- Phillips, Joan. "Female Sex Tourism in Barbados: A Postcolonial Perspective." *Brown Journal of World Affairs* 14:2 (2008): 1-12.
- Pitcher, Karen C. "The Staging of Agency in 'Girls Gone Wild.'" *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 23:3 (2006): 200-218.
- Pollitt, Katha. "Hers; Why Boys Don't Play With Dolls." *New York Times*, 8 October 1995.
- Sender, Katherine. "Queens for a Day: *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* and the Neoliberal Project." *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 23:2 (June 2006): 131-151.
- Katherine Sender, "Neither Fish nor Fowl: Feminism, Desire, and the Lesbian Consumer Market." *Communication Review* 7:4 (2004): 407-432,
- Smith, Debra. "Critiquing Reality-Based Televisual Black Fatherhood: A Critical Analysis of Run's *House* and Snoop Dogg's *Father Hood*." *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 25:4 (October 2008): 393-412.
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- Ta, Lynn M. "Hurt So Good: *Fight Club*, Masculine Violence, and the Crisis of Capitalism." *Journal of American Culture* 29:3 (September 2006): 265-277.
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