GSWS 205-3: Women and Popular Culture

Professor: Dr. Lucas Crawford
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Lecture: Tuesdays 14:30 – 17:20; SUR 3250

Course Description:
Facebook measures popularity by counting how many “Friends” we have and how often they “Like” what we say, yet what we say might just be an attempt to reject “the popular” – a sneer at Justin Bieber and his pet monkey, let’s say. Clearly, popularity can be regarded as a good thing, a bad thing, something to pursue, or something against which to define oneself. In this class, we will endeavor to avoid the pitfalls of either rejecting or exalting texts by virtue of their popularity. Instead, we will learn ways to understand popular texts in all of their ambiguity, mixed messaging, subtlety, and undeveloped potential. Students should expect to participate vigorously in classroom discussions and activities.

Through our watching of a dozen (mostly Hollywood-produced) films and shows of recent decades, we will ask: how have popular representations of gender changed from the 1980s to today? Is popular culture a place of innovation for gender or merely the de-politicized and corporatized afterlife of truly unusual disruptions to the gendered status quo? Can we conceive of differential gender treatment as itself a matter of aesthetic popularity? Are “freak” genders merely “unpopular” rather than in any way deficient? What is a bromance, a slut, a teenager, a hero, a villain, a bitch, a stud, a hipster, a psychopath, a freak, and a pervert?

Educational Goals:
- developed capacity for critical engagement of popular culture, gender, and sexuality
- improved ability to define, articulate, and advance a unique response to cultural texts
- increased curiosity and creativity as a reader, writer, speaker, and maker of culture

Course Texts and Courseware:
1. Readings distributed online
2. Avatar (I, A)
3. Don Jon (I)
4. Cruel Intentions (I, A, C, N)
5. Bend it Like Beckham (I, R)
6. Melancholia (I, A, R)
7. The Birds (I, A, C, R)
8. The Breakfast Club (I, A, C, R)
9. The Silence of the Lambs (I, A, R)
10. We Need to Talk About Kevin (I, A, R)
11. Y Tu Mama Tambien (I, A, R)
12. In class: Orange is the New Black

Notes on Locating the Films:
Eight of the ten films are available for rent for under $5 on iTunes. (Students who plan weekly screening parties can reduce the cost further.) In addition, the Vancouver Public Library has many copies of each film. Feel free to use other sources, or to watch the films in whatever edition and language you choose. (Classes and evaluations will each refer to the English editions.) Start gathering/downloading the films as early as possible.

Course Evaluation and Assignments:
Participation 10%  
Mid-Term 30%  
Writing Assignment, TBA 30%  
Final Exam 30%