GSWS 319-4: SPECIAL TOPICS: TRAIN WRECKS, GOLD DIGGERS, AND YUMMY Mummies: FEMINISM AND CONTEMPORARY CELEBRITY CULTURE

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Lecture: Thursdays 13:30 – 17:20; AQ 4150

Course Description:
Without question, celebrity culture is more pervasive than ever in North America, as it seems like anyone can become famous now. While celebrity and stardom has always been of interest to feminist media scholars, the so-called ‘democratization of celebrity’ cultural shift has sparked renewed interest in, and debate about what it means to be famous in contemporary society. Of particular concern is how these new formations of celebrity intersect with postfeminism and neoliberalism in ways that reproduce or reflect regressive beliefs about women and women’s roles in Western society. This course is concerned with exploring this fraught relationship between celebrity culture, women, and feminism. The concepts of postfeminism and neoliberalism will inform our approach to the material, as we seek to identify and understand how contemporary celebrity culture shapes both formations of femininity and feminism. We will explore such questions as: what do cultural narratives about celebrities tell us about what it means to be a woman now? How do these narratives shape our beliefs about selfhood and identity? What underpins the intensification of media coverage of the private lives of celebrities, and how does this reflect anxieties about the public lives of women? Drawing on the interdisciplines of cultural studies, media studies, gender studies, and celebrity studies, issues to be covered in this course include: celebrity bodies; cultural narratives of celebrity motherhood; gendered notions of work and talent; celebrity gossip as a gendered phenomenon; the idea of feminist celebrities; and surveillance of women and sexuality. These issues will be explored in relation to different formations of celebrity as well, such as film, television and social media.

(Please note that this course will be structured primarily as a seminar with some lecturing, and so active participation is a requirement of all students. This course is best suited to students who enjoy critically engaging with popular culture and media, and want to better understand or make sense of their own relationship to celebrity. Students who are not interested in the topic will find the course challenging, so consider this before enrolling or feel free to email me with questions.)

Educational Goals:
• To explore the power dynamics that underpin celebrity culture, and how they speak to broader cultural, economic, political and technological shifts in contemporary Western society
• Think critically about the relationship between feminism and celebrity culture, and the function of celebrity in our everyday lives
• Gain a deeper understanding of how culture shapes identities as it intersects with gender, race, class, sexuality
• Develop analytical skills and practice communicating ideas effectively

Prerequisite: 30 units including three units in GSWS or WS or GDST.
Course Texts and Courseware:
- Readings available online or electronically on Canvas.
- Some readings will also be put on course reserve at Bennett Library

Course Evaluation and Assignments:
Attendance & Participation (may include some online participation) – 20%
Seminar Presentation – 20%
Short Paper – 15%
Paper Proposal – 5%
Final Research Paper – 30%
Creative Paper Presentation – 10%