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**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course engages in significant debates about women and examines representations of gender—as well as sexuality, race, and class—through the lens of popular culture. Making use of our expertise as participants in popular culture, we will look critically at how images of gender and sexuality have been imagined, marketed, produced, consumed, and performed in film, advertising, popular music, stand-up comedy, and television, from the early 20th century to the present. We will look at the myriad ways that women have been both products and producers of popular culture, while learning key terms, concepts, and theories that can be used as a “tool kit” for analyzing representations of gender, sexuality, class, and race in various media. After laying some historical groundwork in early twentieth-century popular theatre and film, we will focus our attention on the post-WWII period, when popular culture became aligned with mass media and began marketing new images of (predominantly white) middle-class femininity in film, television, and advertising, images that became increasingly contested by second-wave feminism and problematized by considerations of
racial, sexual, and class difference. We will pay particular attention to the places where feminist theory intersects with cultural studies, critical race, and queer theories. Some questions we will consider are: How do the repeated images and narratives of popular culture reveal broader cultural concerns about women and gender? In what ways does popular culture blur the boundaries between the highbrow and the lowbrow? What kinds of fears or anxieties about women, gender, class, and race does popular culture elicit and how do we negotiate those anxieties? What role do we play as “users” of popular culture?

Along with weekly critical readings, we will also look at a variety of audio-visual materials, including popular music, advertisements, magazines, television shows, documentary films, and Hollywood movies. Most material will be viewed in class, with the exception of two films: *Imitation of Life* and *Twilight*. These will be screened at a collectively agreed upon time and day. For those who cannot make/do not want to attend the screening, the films will be left on 4-hour reserve in Bennett Library.

**COURSE OBJECTIVES**

In this course, you will:

- Define and critically analyze popular culture in a variety of forms and from a variety of disciplinary perspectives;
- Become familiar with how women have been represented and how they have represented themselves in popular culture throughout the twentieth century;
- Understand the scholarly and theoretical conversations, terms, and debates relevant to popular culture studies;
- Examine the interconnections among race, ethnicity, class, gender, and other social identities and become attentive to how they are negotiated, maintained, and contested in popular culture;
- Identify research topics that interest you and develop them in oral and written arguments.

**REQUIRED TEXT**

Gail Dines and Jean M. Humez, eds. *Gender, Race, Class in Media: A Critical Reader*, 3rd edition

ISBN: 978-1412974417

Supplementary readings will be made available on WebCT.

**REQUIRED VIEWING (unless otherwise noted, films are on reserve in the library)**


Catherine Hardwicke, *Twilight* (2009)

We will also watch scenes from *I’m No Angel, Ziegfeld Girl, Rear Window, Death Proof, Gentlemen Prefer Blondes, Psycho, Scream*, and *Tombraider: The Cradle of Life.*

**COURSE MARKS**

Film Analysis (3 pages): 15%

Group Presentation: 20%

Participation in class and online: 15%

Research Essay (6 pages): 25%

Final Exam: 25%
*Notes on Assignments:

**Film Analysis:** This assignment requires you to analyze one of the films viewed during the term. You can examine the film from the perspective of genre, character, or theme; you can analyze a single scene, applying gaze theory; or you can focus on the star, discussing her performance, her role, and her extra-filmic presence.

**Group Presentation:** Taking the weekly topics as your guide, choose any aspect of “woman and popular culture” that you find interesting and use the presentation as your chance to explore it in more depth. You can focus on one of the assigned readings, offering the class your opinion of its argument or perhaps structuring your presentation as a debate of opposing opinions. Or you can contribute another example that you think is relevant to the week’s topic, but that is not covered by the required readings. You can also use this assignment as the starting point for your research essay, which would develop and expand on the points raised in your presentation. The groups can be as small as two, but no larger than four.

**Participation:** Your active participation is one of the expectations of this course. Since everyone has different ways of participating, the marks allotted to participation will be divided between in-class participation (both verbal and non-verbal) and comments posted on the course discussion board on WebCT. Five online comments per student is the minimum requirement; there is no maximum. Postings can involve posing a question, initiating a discussion, or replying to a thread.

**Research Essay:** Topics can include (but are not limited to): examining a particular female stereotype—the gold digger or femme fatale, for example—and tracing its variations across time periods, genres, and/or media; analyzing the transformations of a particular genre, such as the romance/romantic comedy; exploring representations of women and femininity in non-western popular cultures, such as Bollywood or shōjo manga. I encourage you to meet with me to discuss possible topics and directions for your essay.

**Final Exam:** The structure and expectations of the final exam will be made clear toward the end of term.

**COURSE OUTLINE (subject to minor changes):**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week One: Introduction: history, key terms, and outline</th>
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<tr>
<td>Why study women and popular culture?</td>
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<td>Defining “the popular,” gender, and other key terms</td>
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<td>Some historical background: Early 20th-century popular culture: vaudeville, burlesque, musical revues, and early film</td>
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<td>Screening (in class): Opening scene from Mae West’s I’m No Angel and clips from Ziegfeld Girl</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Readings:</strong> Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”; hooks, “Oppositional Gaze” (pdfs will be put on WebCT); Lull, “Hegemony” (33) in Gender, Race, Class in Media (hereafter GRCM).</td>
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### Week Two: Looking (at) Women

Theorizing “the gaze”: ways of looking at/as women

John Berger, “Ways of Seeing”

Clips from David Lynch’s *Blue Velvet* ([http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fQA0OWJiios](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fQA0OWJiios)) and Tarantino’s *Death Proof* ([http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PfXtmnxhTY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PfXtmnxhTY))

Screening (in class): beginning of Hitchcock’s *Rear Window*

#### Group presentations!

**Readings:** Berlant, excerpts from *The Female Complaint* (pdf); Radway, “Women Read the Romance: The Interaction of Text and Context” (45) (GRCM)

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### Week Three: Women in Film, Part I: Fantasy and the Female Star

The enduring iconicity of Marilyn Monroe

Scenes from *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953)

Melodrama: the love plot and “intimate publics”

Screening: *Imitation of Life*

#### Group presentations!

**Readings:** Williams, “Film Bodies” (pdf); Caputi, “The Pornography of Everyday Life” (307); Attwood, “No Money Shot? Commerce, Pornography, and New Sex Taste Cultures” (283) (GCRM)

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### Week Four: Women in Film, Part II: Gender and Genre

Body Genres: Melodrama, Horror, and Pornography

Horror – Sexuality, Violence, and the Body in Fright

*Psycho* (1960) [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0WtDmbr9xyY&feature=fvwrel](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0WtDmbr9xyY&feature=fvwrel)

*Halloween* (1978) [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vmbvdeG49MI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vmbvdeG49MI)

*Scream* (1996) [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mvLpbHKV1_8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mvLpbHKV1_8)

Pornography and the proliferation of fantasies, images, and clichés

Annie Sprinkle


#### Group Presentations!

**Readings:** Peck, “The Anxieties of the Enterprising Self and the Limits of Mind Cure in the Age of Oprah” (497); Joseph, “‘Tyra Banks is Fat’: Reading (Post-) Racism and (Post-) Feminism in the New Millennium” (519); Moore, “Revisiting, Reiterating, and Dancing Through: The Swinging Closet Doors of Ellen Degeneres’s Televised Personalities” (531) (GRCM)

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### Week Five: Women on T.V., Part I: The Family Sitcom and Women’s Talk Shows

Female confessions, female bonding: Oprah, Martha, Rosie, Ellen, and Chelsea Lately

Motherhood, race, and class: Joan Cleaver, Claire Huxtable, and Roseanne

Screening (in class): clips from *Leave it to Beaver* and *Roseanne*

#### Group Presentations!

**Readings:** Cuklanz and Moorti, “Television’s ‘New’ Feminism: Prime-Time Representations of Women and Victimization” (115); Gerhard, *Sex and the City*: Carrie Bradshaw’s Queer Postfeminism” (75); Merskin, “Three Faces of Eva: Perpetuation of the Hot-Latina Stereotype in *Desperate Housewives*” (327) (GRCM)
**Week Six: Women on T.V., Part II: Single Women, Criminal Women, and Retro Femininity**

Single women: Mary Tyler Moore, Murphy Brown, Bridget Jones, and Carrie Bradshaw

Criminal Women: from *Basic Instinct* to *Law & Order*

Nostalgic genders: *Mad Men* and retro gender

Screening (in class): *Mad Men* episode

**Group Presentations!**

**Readings:** Steinem, “Sex Lies, and Advertising” (235); Gill, “Supersexualize Me!: Advertising and the ‘Midriffs’”; Ouellette, “Inventing the Cosmo Girl: Class Identity and Girl-Style American Dreams” (221); Jhally, “Image-Based Culture: Advertising and Popular Culture” (199) (GCRM)

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**Week Seven: Advertising and the Marketing of Identities**

***FILM ANALYSES DUE***

Selling fantasy, marketing “real” women: ad campaigns from Maidenform to Dove


Screening (in class): Jhally’s *The Codes of Gender: Identity and Performance in Pop Culture*

**Group Presentations!**


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**Week Eight: Race, Ethnicity, and Multiculturalism in Media**

Representations of black femininities

Stereotypes of Asian femininities

The glorification/degradation of white femininity: Paris, Lindsay, Britney

Screening (in class): Michelle Obama and the “angry black woman” stereotype – [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9a5DBDHQmtQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9a5DBDHQmtQ) ; Orientalism then and now – [http://youtube.com/watch?v=N3Ka_xIPsHE](http://youtube.com/watch?v=N3Ka_xIPsHE) ; [http://youtube.com/watch?v=tFP5oH0aZIE](http://youtube.com/watch?v=tFP5oH0aZIE)

**Readings:** Padva, “Educating *The Simpsons*: Teaching Queer Representations in Contemporary Visual Media” (155); Pratt, “‘This is the Way We Live … and Love!’: Feeding on and Still Hungering for Lesbian Representation in *The L Word*” (337) (GCRM)

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**Week Nine: Representing and Performing Queerness**

*The L Word*, Ellen, Rachel Maddow, and Glee

Screening (in class): *L Word*, episode 12, season 5: “Loyal and True”

**Group Presentations!**


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**Week Ten: Super Women, Funny Women**

*Wonder Woman, I Dream of Jeannie, Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Lara Croft*

The stand-up comedy of Margaret Cho, Sandra Bernhard, and Wanda Sykes
### Screening (in class): Margaret Cho’s Beautiful

#### Group Presentations!

**Readings:** Rose, “There are Bitches and Hoes” (321); Azikwe, “More than Baby Mamas: Black Mothers and Hip-Hop Feminism” (137) (GCRM); Read, “Britney, Beyonce, and Me”; Owens, “Limited by Stereotypes: Gender Bias in Stephanie Meyer’s Twilight Series” (pdfs)

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### Week Eleven: Pop Singers & Youth Culture

From the Shirelles and Doris Day to Joan Jett and Blondie to Beyonce and Lady Gaga

**Screening:** Twilight

**Group Presentations!**

**Readings:** Jordan, “Marketing ‘Reality’ to the World: Survivor, Post-Fordism, and Reality Television” (459); Sharp, “Disciplining the Housewife in Desperate Housewives and Domestic Reality Television” (481); boyd, “Why Youth (Heart) Social Network Sites: The Role of Networked Publics in Teenage Social Life” (409) (GRCM)

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### Week Twelve: Reality T.V. & Social Media

***RESEARCH ESSAYS DUE***

Reality television: competition and survival in an age of excess

“Real” Families: *Wife Swap, Real Housewives of …, Here Comes Honey Boo Boo*

Competing for Gender: Top Model, Toddlers and Tiaras, and The Bachelor

Creating virtual identities and social media spaces

**Screening (in class): clips from Real Housewives of Vancouver**

**Group Presentations!**

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### RECOMMENDED READING

Lauren Berlant, *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture*;

