

WGST 305 Q*
Gender, Sexuality, Race, and Class in Popular Culture
TTh 04:30PM - 05:45PM, Wall Rm 318
Fall 2017

Ina C. Seethaler, Ph.D.

Office: Kearns Hall 211G

Office Hours: MW 10-11am and R 2-3pm and by appointment when schedules conflict

E-mail: iseethale@coastal.edu (you can usually expect a response email from me within 24h)

Course Description and Goals

This class gives insight into the historical foundations, theoretical concepts, political manifestations, and social issues concerning feminist interpretations of popular culture. Students explore how popular culture generates and articulates understandings of gender and sexuality and their intersections with other identity markers such as race, class, and ability. Popular culture is never simply entertainment. It provides us with the stories, images, and scripts that enable us to imagine and practice femininities, masculinities, and sexualities. These, in turn, are imbued with class and racial values and characteristics. We absorb these norms in the ads we see, the movies/television we watch, and the music we listen to. The class focuses especially on how feminist concepts and theory provide the tools to become aware of issues of discrimination and oppression in pop culture, to discuss them effectively, and to promote social justice.

Objectives:

- ✓ Be able to discuss constructions of gender, including constructions of femininity, masculinity, and transgendered identities, within contemporary popular culture;
- ✓ Create ideas and share those ideas in class-discussions;
- ✓ Develop ability to use gender and sexuality as analytic categories;
- ✓ Learn how to assess feminist theory critically and make a connection between theory and practice;
- ✓ Acquire the ability to think critically, construct an argument, and write coherently.

Learning Outcomes:

- ✓ 1. Employ central concepts from Women's and Gender Studies to analyze how culture and social institutions shape possibilities for justice in everyday life.
- ✓ 2. Evaluate central questions, arguments, theories, and movements in connection to contemporary global feminist thought and activism.
- ✓ 3. Articulate how intersectionality facilitates an analysis of experiences and cultures and shapes feminist approaches to community action and service.
- ✓ 4. Apply research skills and methodologies shaped by the discipline of Women's and Gender Studies to undertake an original and substantial theoretical or empirical research project.
- ✓ 5. Explicate clearly how theoretically-informed civic engagement through an activist or service learning project intervenes in a current social justice issue pertaining to gender, race, or other forms of social inequality.
- ✓ 6. Students will demonstrate the knowledge and skills obtained through participation in experiential learning activities that are relevant/pertinent to their academic programs and/or career goals.
- ✓ 7. Students will demonstrate a high level of comprehension and skill in connecting theory with practice which is correlated to their level of participation in Experiential Learning activities.

Required Texts

Tina Fey. *Bossy Pants*. Reagan Arthur, 2013. ISBN: 978-0316056892.

A. Trier-Bieniek/P. Leavy. *Gender and Pop Culture. A Text Reader*. ISBN: 9789462095731 (GPC).

All other readings (including the book for our Title IX game) can be found in our class shell on **Moodle**. It is your responsibility to bring a **PRINTED copy** of each day's readings (EXCEPT for the *Penguin Atlas* scans) and/or detailed notes to class. No computers are allowed in the classroom.

Grading

✓ Participation	10%
✓ Class Blog	10%
✓ Show and Tell	10%
✓ Discussion Leading	10%
✓ Cultural Observation Essay	20%
✓ Reacting to the Past Game	40%
✓ 2 conferences with the instructor	
✓ Attend 1 WGS-related event	

The grading scale is:

(A) 90-100: Exceptional quality of work meets assignment requirements and demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of class concepts and arguments in the assigned texts. Regular attendance and actively engaged presence in the classroom.

(B+) 87-89; (B) 80-86: Very strong quality of work conforming to assignment requirements and demonstrating a solid grasp of class concepts and arguments in assigned readings, though there is room for improvement. Regular attendance and engaged presence in the classroom.

C+) 77-79; (C) 70-76: Work meets assignment requirements and demonstrates basic understanding of class concepts and assigned readings. Regular attendance though not fully engaged with class.

(D+) 67-69; (D) 60-66: Work does not meet assignment requirements or engage with class concepts or readings. Sporadic attendance with limited class engagement. Typically missing assignments.

(F) Below 60: Fails to meet minimum course requirements: i.e. does not attend class or submit assignments.

Note: Grades are not negotiable. I do NOT discuss grades over e-mail or discuss them until 24 hours have elapsed, which should give you ample time to reflect on my comments and to prepare specific questions.

Participation (10%): This class cannot work without you **actively participating regularly** during in-class discussions. To show that you have actively engaged with the reading materials, you will post on our Moodle discussion board **3 reactions to each essay** before class on the day that essay is assigned. These can be in bullet point format. You can either post comments on what stood out to you, what confused/surprised/etc. you, what you still have questions about, or any other reactions you might have that show you actually read the materials. You may skip two reading reflections over the course of the semester. **For each additional one missed, your participation grade will go down 3 points.**

Class Blog (10%): In order to continue our discussion outside of the regular classroom, I have created a class blog for us (you will receive an invitation to join this blog from Blogger). On this blog we will all share our reactions to the readings and discussions in class. You will post **a blog entry once a week** (no matter what day of the week, but the cut-off is Sunday at midnight). Additionally, you will **comment on 2 entries**

by your fellow students. This medium should be a carefree but respectful environment in which we can share our ideas on an informal, yet appropriate level.

Show & Tell (10%): To personalize our classroom setting, I ask you to bring an item for “show and tell” **two (2) times** over the course of the semester. You can “show” or “tell” anything you want, as long as it concerns women, Women’s Studies, or our week’s discussion. At the beginning of our class periods, we will have time for “show and tell” before discussion of the day’s readings. This should be fun and exciting. Bring a picture of your grandma, a song with a feminist theme, an article from the newspaper, a YouTube video you found provocative, etc., and talk about why you brought it in.

Discussion Leading/Reading Presentation (10%): Once during the semester, you will lead class discussion on one of the readings for the week. You will summarize and present the readings(s) and initiate the conversation with some questions. You’ll choose from a list of topics during the first week of class. You’ll be given 20 minutes, which you are expected to use.

Cultural Observation Reflection (20%): As we will discuss, gender is a pervasive element in all aspects of our lives. For this assignment, you will seek out a place of cultural production and reflect on how you see gender at work. You could go to an art museum (we have one on campus!) and write about how many male and female artists/characters you see and why that matters. You could go to the beach and observe how men and women dress and act differently and why you think that is. You could write about having dinner at a restaurant and your observations about interactions based on gender, race, class, etc. there. The possibilities are endless, but please **check with me** to see if you are on the right track. Based on your observations, you will write a 3-4 page (double-spaced, 12 pt. TNR font, 1 inch margins) essay. In your paper, you will cite ONE reading from class and engage with the concept of gender and ONE additional class concept. The due date for this assignment is **October 5**. Please make sure to leave room in your calendars to accommodate it.

Reacting to the Past Gameplay and Reflection (40%): To understand the connections between feminist theory about popular culture and people’s lived experiences, we will engage in a Reacting to the Past Game that captures historical discussions about the passing of Title IX in 1972, which guarantees equal access to education for all sexes. For 3 consecutive weeks out of the semester, you will assume the role of a historical figure or stakeholder, learn about their perspectives on the issues at hand, give speeches/write news articles in your roles, and, finally, submit a reflection paper to me at the end of the game.

GUIDELINES AND GROUND RULES

1. Attendance and Participation

Attendance and participation are required. You may miss 3 class sessions without any questions asked. **Each additional unexcused absence will move your final grade down by 1%.** If you are absent for more than 25% of the scheduled class sessions (11 absences) you will automatically fail this class per CCU policy. If you have to miss a class, it is your responsibility to talk with a classmate and share notes. You will be able to find all assignments that are given out in class on Blackboard. I only accept late work that has received my prior approval. **Work that is handed in late** will have **1/3 of a letter** deducted for each day that it is late. If you must miss a class on a day that an assignment is due, please send your assignment to me as an email attachment or make arrangements to send your work with a classmate.

I expect you to prepare for and to participate in discussions. **We all share the responsibility of making this class interesting and engaging.** Everyone reads differently and will have something different to say about a subject. Your comments help others to see topics in a different light. Individual **conferences** with me count as regular class meetings; missing a conference is like missing a class. Individual conferences will not act as make-up sessions for missed classes; if you want to know what happened in the class you missed, please come to my office hours.

2. Time

All of our time is valuable. I expect you to come to class on time – to be here and ready to start class by 1 p.m. **Excessive or continuous lateness will not be tolerated**; if you are more than 15 minutes late on three separate occasions, I will count them as one absence.

3. Academic Integrity and Honesty

Plagiarism or cheating will not be tolerated and will be reported to the Academic Integrity Office. The penalty for academic dishonesty will be automatic failure for the assignment and possibly immediate failure of the class. Examples of plagiarism and cheating include:

- Using sources without proper citations
- Submitting another person's work as your own
- Copying another student's quiz, exam, or worksheet
- Submitting the same assignment for multiple classes.

For more information, please see the Student Code of Conduct:
<http://www.coastal.edu/deanofstudents/codeofconduct.pdf>

4. Electronic Devices

Please turn off (NOT on vibrate) all cell phones, laptops, iPods, and other annoying electronic devices before class. **Texting in class will not be tolerated as it shows disrespect to your instructor and your classmates.**

5. Students with Special Needs and Disability Services

In recognition that people learn in a variety of ways and that learning is influenced by multiple factors (e.g., prior experience, study skills, learning disability), resources to support student success are available on campus. Students who think they might benefit from these resources can find out more by contacting the Office of Accessibility and Disability Services at (843) 349-2341. If you have other personal, health, or family issues/needs that could affect your performance in class, please also see me at the beginning of the semester so that we are in communication about these issues before adverse circumstances arise.

8. Course Content Disclaimer

In this course, students may be required to read texts or view materials that they may consider offensive. All ideas are to be examined in the context of intellectual inquiry of the sort encountered at the university level. Arrangements may be made to substitute certain works if students contact the instructor prior to the assignment. The ideas expressed in any assigned text or viewing material do not necessarily represent the views of the instructor, Women's Studies Program, or Saint Louis University. Course materials are selected for their relevance to Women's Studies.

9. Feedback

I am very interested in hearing from you throughout the semester. Please don't hesitate to e-mail me, leave a note in my box, or see me during office hours to talk about what works and what doesn't in the course. **The ultimate goal of good writing is good communication**, and I hope you will communicate with me whenever you have any frustrations or concerns.

A Note on Reading:

Active reading is essential to your success (and enjoyment) in this course. **You should be reading with a pen in hand, taking notes in the margins and underlining words as you read.** Your comments will provide you with a record of your own initial response to the reading, which is invaluable as you prepare for discussion and to write your essays. Be sure to read when your concentration is at its peak. Read and re-read: read for pleasure and initial comprehension first, and then read again for increased understanding and analysis. Take note of any phrases/passages that confused you – chances are that if you didn't understand, someone else in the class didn't, either! So **don't be shy about asking for help.**

Specific Assignments Schedule

(Note: This schedule is preliminary and may be subject to modifications)

T 08/22: Introduction—Why does popular culture matter?

PICK: Reading to lead

Th 08/24: Allen Johnson, “Patriarchy, the System” (Moodle)

Production

T 08/29: GPC, Chapter 1: “Introduction”

Th 08/31: Gender in Disney movies: SCREENING excerpts of *Brave*, *Frozen*, and *Mickey Mouse Monopoly*
Orenstein, “What’s Wrong with Cinderella” (Moodle)

T 09/05: GPC, Chapter 2: “Blurred Lines”

Th 09/07: SCREENING of *Dreamworlds 3*

T 09/12: Mulvey, “Woman as Image, Man as Bearer of the Look” (Moodle)
In-class discussion of *Dreamworlds 3*

Th 09/14: Zeisler, Excerpt *We Were Feminists Once* (Moodle)

T 09/19: GPC, Chapter 5: “As Seen on TV”

Th 09/21: Guest Lecture on cat calling

Representation

T 09/26: *Bossy Pants*, ch. 1-13
SCREENING: Feminist Comedians

Th 09/28: *Bossy Pants*, ch. 14-26
In-class exercise: The Bechdel Test

T 10/03: GPC, Chapter 3: “Gender and Advertising”
SCREENING: excerpts of *Killing us Softly*

Th 10/05: Martin, “Perfect Girls, Starving Daughters” (Moodle)
CULTURAL OBSERVATION ESSAY DUE

T 10/10: Gender and Music
GPC, Chapter 4: “From Lady Gaga to Consciousness Rap”
SIGN-UP: Midterm conferences

Th 10/12: Guest lecture on protest songs
Midterm Evaluations

T 10/17: Neale, “Masculinity as Spectacle: Reflections on Men and Mainstream Cinema” (Moodle)
SCREENING and discussion of *Tough Guise*

Th 10/19: GPC, Chapter 6: “Popular Movies That Teach”

T 10/24: SCREENING and discussion of *MissRepresentation*

Th 10/26: Davis, “Visualizing the Disabled Body” (Moodle)

T 10/31: GPC, Chapter 8: “Gender and Technology”
Feminist Podcasts: Stuff Mom Never Told You; Fully Engaged Feminism

Th 11/2: GPC, Chapter 7: “Gender, Sport and Popular Culture”

T 11/07: GAME PLAY 1

Th 11/09: GAME PLAY 2
SIGN-UP: End-of-year conferences

T 11/14: GAME PLAY 3

Th 11/16: GAME PLAY 4

T 11/21 + 11/23: **Thanksgiving Break**

T 11/28: GAME PLAY 5

Th 11/30: GAME PLAY 6

T 12/5: Last Day of Class: Course wrap-up
GPC, Chapter 9: “Using the Lessons outside of the Classroom”

Final Exam Day: PROCESS PAPER DUE