Women & Popular Culture: Garbo to Gaga

Course Outline

How are women represented in popular culture? What messages do we receive about women in Hip Hop music videos? Disney films? Reality TV? YA fiction? And how do understandings of what it means to be feminine become wrapped up in the way women are represented within popular culture? What kind of impact might these messages have on us, as consumers? What impact might they have on young women, who perhaps have a less critical lens with which to view and understand the world?

This course explores a number of these key themes, and in particular, how they relate to ideas, representations, and experiences of women in popular culture. It will also focus on the specific intersections of class, race and sexuality – these recurring themes will help to show how differences in identity may shift the way women are represented and even valued within popular culture (and the broader social world!). While we explore historical and contemporary figures (for instance, Greta Garbo to Lady Gaga), the majority of the course will focus on contemporary themes like Beyoncé and celebrity feminism, the emergence of transgender characters of popular TV shows, the role of the romance narrative in teen/chick flicks, the female rebel in dystopian YA fiction – oh, the list goes on!

This course is also designed so that it becomes clear how various technologies (magazines, the internet, music videos, literature, reality TV, etc.) can play a direct role in how women are represented in popular culture and how we, as consumers, experience them through these technologies. As a result, this course hopes to gauge your interest when you are consuming pop culture inside as well as outside the classroom, where you perhaps become aware of some of the themes we’ve discussed when you’re Netflixing at home on a Saturday night.
Assessments

Participation in On-line Discussions (20%)

You will be expected to post comments or questions about the readings ten times during the course. You may feel free to continue posting after you have completed the minimum! Please put some thought and consideration into your contributions to these on-line discussions. Your posts must engage respectfully and intelligently – for instance, if there is a post you disagree with, please respond to the idea and not the person who wrote it. A grading rubric is provided on OWL.

In-Class Tests (20% each)

On Feb. 1st and March 7th you will write an in-class test lasting 1 ¼ hr in length. There will be a short break, followed by a 1 ¼ lecture. The format of the test may include T/F, multiple choice, short answer, fill in the blank, and short essay questions.

Final Examination (40%)

This will be scheduled during the official exam period and will last 2 ½ hours in length. The format will be similar to in-class tests, but will also include a longer essay question. A number of potential essay questions will be given out two weeks before the end of term – two of these questions will appear on the exam and you must answer one.

Course Requirements

This course involves reading, listening to lectures, watching films and other media, and participating in both in-class discussion (ungraded) and online discussion (graded). The lectures, films, and readings are intended to complement each other; they do not necessarily cover the same material nor do they cover it from the same perspective. There are a number of guest lecturers throughout the semester and we will all expect you to read and listen critically, be prepared to question certain conventions, and examine different points of view. Sometimes lecturers may choose a reading because we disagree with all or parts of it and because that disagreement helps to expose you to different aspects of, and perspectives on, the topic. Don’t assume that a reading is the ultimate authority on an issue – by all means, disagree with authors and ideas! Being a good thinker does not mean holding steadfast to initial opinions and theories, but rather, can be used as stepping stones to further and expand knowledge. If you want to learn from this (or any) course you will need to put in some consistent effort. Learning is not a spectator sport.

Attendance and participation: Because of the class size, attendance is not taken in this course. However, please note that students who participate regularly tend to have significantly higher grades at the end of the course. If you do attend, we expect you to be actively present, not disengaged and “multi-tasking.” Not being engaged with the material not only limits the extent to which you can learn, it is also disrespectful and rude, both to the instructor(s) and your fellow students. If you need to be in constant, uninterrupted contact with your friends, social media, and so on, there are better places for that than this class. We also ask that you not leave before the lecture ends; it, too, is disrespectful and can be very distracting for the lecturer. Repeated infractions of these policies may result in a course-wide laptop ban.

Use of mobile phones is not permitted under any circumstances; if you have a family or pet emergency, please speak to me or the guest lecturer before the class starts.
The Important Stuff...

Scholastic Offences: Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site: http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/scholoff.pdf
Simply put: do not cheat. It is unfair to other students who work hard to do assignments on their own and you will almost certainly be caught at some point.

Electronic devices in tests and exams: No electronic devices will be permitted during the in-class tests or the final exam. If you wish to check the time during a test or exam, please wear a watch.

Medical Policy: Students seeking academic accommodation on medical grounds for any missed tests, exams, participation components and/or assignments worth 10% or more of their final grade must apply to the Academic Counselling office of their home Faculty and provide documentation. Academic accommodation cannot be granted by the instructor or department. Requests for accommodation must be made within 28 calendar days of the missed assignment. For UWO Policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness see: http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/medical.pdf.

Appeals: Discussions about graded assignments may not take place within 24 hours after the grade is posted or the assignment returned. Questions about grades will be entertained for the following three weeks.

Note for students with disabilities: Please contact ws-ugrad@uwo.ca if you require any information in plain text format, or if any other accommodation can make the course material and/or physical space accessible to you.
**Textbooks**

Course reader, available from UWO Bookstore. Additional material and online links will be provided on OWL throughout the semester.

**Course Objectives**

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Offer critical reflections of mainstream films and TV shows in a way that speaks to ongoing debates about gender, femininity, masculinity, and sexuality
- Identify how intersections of race, class and sexuality impact the way women are represented in popular culture, and as a result, the broader social world
- Construct an argument around the negative and positive ways women are represented in popular culture, including the development of stereotypes and the ways women can resist them
- Recognize the importance of changing technologies and how this has impacted understandings and representations of women in popular culture throughout history
- Become critical consumers of popular culture

Students will also develop their oral, written and critical thinking skills through the following means:

- By contributing to weekly on-line discussions, students will develop a coherent sense of how to respectfully and intelligently engage in discussions/debates with peers
- By participating in unassessed in-class discussions (in both large and small groups), students will become more confident speakers and develop some spontaneity
- Students will learn how to polish their study skills through the format of in-class tests, which promote the consolidation of course material and readings over a number of weeks
## Winter 2016 Schedule

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Lecturer</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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| Jan. 4   | N. Edwards | Introduction & Course Logistics  
Why Women? Why Popular culture? |
| Jan. 11  | N. Edwards | Film: *Queen Christina*  
20th Century Celebrity Culture |
| Jan. 18  | N. Edwards | Film: TBA  
Problematizing the Disney Princess |
| Jan. 25  | N. Edwards | Class, Gender, Sex, and Hip Hop Culture  
Rihanna and Chris Brown: A Case Study |
| Feb. 1   | N. Edwards | **IN-CLASS TEST**  
Trans is the New Black: Emerging Transgender Identities on TV |
| Feb. 8   | L. Cayan  | Film: *Killing Us Softly*  
Advertising and Magazine Culture |
| Feb. 15-19 | **READING WEEK** | **NO CLASS** |
| Feb. 22  | N. Edwards | All hail Queen B: Beyoncé & Celebrity Feminism |
| Feb. 29  | M. Green-Barteet, N. Edwards | Teenage Heroes and YA Fiction  
Feminine Hygiene: Shaming, Periods and Girls – oh my! |
| Mar. 7   | N. Edwards | **IN-CLASS TEST**  
Reality TV, Class and Femininity |
| Mar. 14  | N. Edwards | Film: *Tough Guise*  
‘Lad’ Magazines, Rape Culture and Hyper Masculinity |
| Mar. 21  | N. Edwards | Teen Flicks, ‘Chick Lit’ and the Heterosexual Romance Narrative |
| Mar. 28  | W. Pearson | Women and Sport |
| Apr. 4   | N. Edwards | The Sexualization Debate |

*You will find a more detailed schedule, including each week's corresponding reading(s) on the following pages...*
Detailed Schedule and Readings

• No readings for this week

Jan. 11th – N. Edwards – 20th Century Celebrity Culture

Jan. 18th – N. Edwards – Problematizing the Disney Princess

Jan. 25th – N. Edwards – Class, Gender, Sex and Hip Hop Culture

Jan. 25th – A. Allen – Chris Brown and Rihanna: A Case Study
• TBA

Feb. 1st – N. Edwards – Emerging Transgender Identities on TV
• TBA – will be made available online through OWL

Feb. 8th – L. Cayen – Advertising and Magazine Culture

Feb. 15th – 19th – READING WEEK
Feb. 22nd – N. Edwards – All Hail Queen B: Beyoncé and Celebrity Feminism


Feb. 29th – M. Green-Barteet – Teenage Heroes and YA Fiction


Feb 29th – N. Edwards – Feminine Hygiene: Shaming, Periods and Girls – Oh my!


Mar. 7th – N. Edwards – Reality TV, Class and Femininity


Mar. 14th – N. Edwards – ‘Lad’ Magazines, Rape Culture, and Hyper Masculinity

*Trigger Warning* - This reading deals with rape culture, sexual violence and uses language such as ‘predator/prey’


Mar. 21st – N. Edwards – Teen Flicks, ‘Chick Lit’ and the Romance Narrative

- TBA

Mar. 28th – W. Pearson – Women and Sport


Apr. 4th – N. Edwards – The Sexualization Debate