

**The Department of Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies
Western University
GSWS 2167: Queer(ing) Popular Culture
Winter Semester 2024**

Instructor: Amy Keating

Office Hours:

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Western University is situated on the traditional land of the Anishinaabeg, Haudenosaunee, Lenape and Attawandaron peoples who have longstanding relationships to the region of southwestern Ontario and the City of London. In close proximity to Western, there are 3 local First Nations communities: the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation, Oneida Nation of the Thames, and Munsee Delaware Nation. In the region of southwestern Ontario, there are 9 First Nations and a growing Indigenous urban population. Western recognizes the significant historical and contemporary contributions of local and regional First Nations and all of the Original peoples of Turtle Island (North America) to the development of Canada.

Course Description

How are queer people represented in popular culture? Images of 2SLGBTQ+ communities and identities in media produce particular ideas of queer identity and history. This course examines the historical and contemporary presence of queer folks and queerness within pop culture. Course materials consider 2SLGBTQ+ representations over the past century through an intersectional lens by exploring who has been left out, the burgeoning “mainstreaming” of queer representation, whose stories continue to be ignored, and the interplay between pop culture, societal understandings of identity, and cultural norms. The content explores common stereotypes as well as how representations have shifted over time for queer and trans people, with attention to the importance of considering historical context. Students will consider a wide variety of pop culture materials and are encouraged to seek representations beyond the course content for assignments and further thought. Content will span the genres of music, comedy, film, fashion, TV series, social media, YouTube videos, and podcasts.

Learning Objectives: Upon completion of the course, students will be able to:

- Demonstrate a breadth of knowledge and understanding of the history of queer and 2SLGBTQ+ identities in North American popular culture
- Comprehend the importance of studying pop culture and its relation to societal norms of gender and sexuality, and historical context
- Evaluate queer representations in historical and contemporary popular media through an intersectional and queer lens
- Analyze the dialogical relationships between media representations, social stigma, and systemic marginalization of 2SLGBTQ+ groups and persons
- Articulate thoughtful criticisms and potential for growth for queer pop culture in its past *and* present iterations
- Acknowledge the “mainstreaming” of queerness as a complex issue with positive and negative repercussions for 2SLGBTQ+ identities and rights

Required Texts: Texts available via course OWL site under “Course Readings.” Films and videos that will be shown during class time are available through various streaming platforms for review. Week 10 requires watching *Hannah Gadsby: Douglas* via Netflix.

Evaluation:

1. Reflection Posts	15%
2. Mid-Term	20%
3. Assignment	30%
4. Exam (Take home)	35%

1. Reflection Posts: Ongoing (5x3% = 15%)

Students are required to write five reflection posts on the assigned readings/media prior to lecture throughout the semester. Further information will be provided on the first day of class and will be available through OWL.

2. Midterm (In class): February 13 (20%)

3. Assignment: Due March 20 (30%)

Students will complete an assignment on a piece of 2SLGBTQIA+ pop culture of their choice. In-depth details for this assignment will be made available through OWL.

4. Exam (Take home): During the final exam period (35%)

***Note about class discussion: while participation in class is not necessarily required, it is highly encouraged. This course deeply values the knowledge explored and garnered through conversation between the students, TA(s), and instructor. As such, regular attendance in lecture is crucial to your success.**

Course Website: All course information, including assignments, will be posted on the course website through the Western OWL portal. Go to <https://owl.uwo.ca/portal>.

Course Policies

Formatting Policy: All written assignments must be formatted in a document (PDF or .docx) with 1-inch margins, in 12 point, Times New Roman Font, double-spaced. The date, your name, the course title, and instructor name must be visible on the first page.

Email Policy: The instructor will respond to any emails within 48 hours during regular business hours. Please be aware that emails sent after 5 pm on Friday might not receive a response until Monday at the earliest.

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 Counseling office of their home faculty and provide documentation. Academic accommodation cannot be granted by the instructor or department. For UWO Policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness see:

<http://www.westerncalendar.uwo.ca/2011/pg1117.html>

<http://studentservices.uwo.ca/secure/index.cfm>.

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of help options.

Turnitin: All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement currently between the University and Turnitin.com.

Academic 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>
<http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/exam/courseoutlines.pdf>

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. You may also contact ssd@uwo.ca to find out the full range of services available to you.

Late assignments: All assignments must be submitted through the appropriate assignment tab via the course website (OWL) by 11:30 pm on the due date. Hard copies are not required at this time. Late assignments without a valid reason will be deducted a 2% penalty per day (exclusive of weekends).

Missed assignments and academic accommodation: Academic Accommodation must be requested within 28 days of the missed assignment. Please consult your instructor if an assignment is missed.

Grading Policy: A grading rubric for the Gender, Sexualities, and Women's Studies department will be available on the course website. The instructor/grader will be happy to discuss any grading concerns. **However**, if you plan to reach out regarding your grade, please follow the **"24/7" rule**: review all comments provided and allow yourself a minimum of **24 hours** to digest this feedback before contacting the instructor/grader. Connect with the instructor/grader regarding any lingering concerns within **7 days** of receipt of the assignment grade.

Remember: A grade that is lower than you expected is an opportunity to reflect on how to improve. Your worth as a human being cannot be determined by a number! The capacity to learn and grow as a student cannot be quantified through a GPA. Be gentle with yourself and please seek help whenever needed.

Week 1: January 9, 2024.

Introduction to Queer(ing) Pop Culture

Week 2: January 16, 2024.

2SLGBTQIA+ Identities in North American Pop Culture

Jagose, A. (1996). *Queer theory: An introduction* (pp. 1-6). New York: New York University Press.

Lee, B. (2018). Pop Out! Mass media and popular culture. In M. J. Murphy & B. Bjorngaard (Eds.), *Living Out loud: An Introduction to LGBTQ history, society, and culture* (First, pp. 249–288). Routledge.

Week 3: January 23, 2024.

Queer Coding: Villains, Tragedies, Monsters

Baume, M. [Matt Baume]. (2021, June 20). *What makes Disney villains so gay?* YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G5WpUSEKSbk>

Benshoff, H. (2020). The Monster and the homosexual. In J. A. Weinstock (Ed.), *The Monster theory reader* (pp. 226–240). University of Minnesota Press.

Machado, C. M. (2020). Dream house as queer villainy. In *In the dream house: A memoir* (pp. 46–48). Graywolf Press.

Week 4: January 30, 2024.

HIV/AIDS Stigma and Media Representation

Calonico, S. (Director). (2015). *When Aids Was Funny* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yAzDn7tE1IU>

Clarke, J. N. (2006). Homophobia out of the closet in the media portrayal of HIV/AIDS 1991, 1996 and 2001: Celebrity, heterosexism and the silent victims. *Critical Public Health*, 16(4). <https://doi.org/10.1080/09581590601091620>

Week 5: February 6, 2024.

Trans Identities in Pop Culture

Coyote, I. E. (2019). Twelve: Remember that Song? In *Rebent Sinner* (pp. 174–179). Arsenal Pulp Press.

Zamantakis, A., & Sumerau, J. E. (2019). Streaming transgender: Visualizing continuity and change in transgender media representations. In A. Trier-Bieniek (Ed.), *Gender and pop culture* (pp. 25–42). BRILL. <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004411586>

Week 6: February 13, 2024. In-class Mid-term

Week 7: February 20, 2024. Reading break, no class

Week 8: February 27, 2024.

A Look into Drag's Past, Present, and Future

Feldman, Z., & Hakim, J. (2020). From *Paris is Burning* to #dragrace: social media and the celebration of drag culture. *Celebrity Studies*, 11(4), 386–401.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/19392397.2020.1765080>

Litwiller, F. (2020). Normative drag culture and the making of precarity. *Leisure Studies*, 39(4).
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02614367.2020.1800798>

Vox. (2022). *Drag Kings, explained by drag kings*. Youtube. <https://youtu.be/IXshUNU65wI>

Week 9: March 5, 2024.

Who Killed Disco? Race and Queerness in Mainstream Music

Gonick, M. (2010). The Teaches of Peaches: Performance, Hybridity and Resistance. *Girlhood Studies*, 2(2). <https://doi.org/10.3167/ghs.2009.020209>

Hobbes, M. & Marshall, S. (Hosts). (2020, August 3). Disco demolition night. [Audio podcast episode]. In *You're Wrong About*. <https://www.buzzsprout.com/1112270/4815227-disco-demolition-night>

Nyong'o, T. (2008). I feel love: Disco and its discontents. *Criticism*, 50(1), 101–112.
<https://doi.org/10.1353/crt.0.0053>

Week 10: March 12, 2024.

The Butt of the Joke: Problems and Possibilities in Comedy

Gadsby, H. (2020). *Hannah Gadsby: Douglas*. Netflix.

McKeown, L. (2022). The Joke's on Who?: The Performative Possibilities of Humour. *Nordic Wittgenstein Review*.

Week 11: March 19, 2024.

Representations of Queerness and Disability

Laskmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, L. L. (2019). Disability Justice/Stonewall's Legacy, or: Love Mad Trans Black Women When They Are Alive and Dead, Let Their Revolutions Teach Your Resistance All the Time. *QED: A Journal in GLBTQ Worldmaking*, 6(2).
<https://doi.org/10.14321/qed.6.2.0054>

Magnet, S. (2005). Erasing queerness/constraining disability: Filmic representations of queers with disabilities in *Frida* and *Double the Trouble, Twice the Fun*. *Canadian Woman Studies*, 24(2-3)

Week 12: March 26, 2024.

Queerbaiting and Mainstreaming Queerness

Whitney, E. (2006). Capitalizing on camp: Greed and the queer marketplace. *Text and Performance Quarterly*, 26(1), 36-46.

Woods, N., & Hardman, D. (2021). 'It's just absolutely everywhere': Understanding LGBTQ experiences of queerbaiting. *Psychology & Sexuality*, 1–13.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/19419899.2021.1892808>

Week 13: April 2, 2024.

Queer(ing) Futures: Youth Media and Contemporary Pop Culture