

The Department of Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies
Western University
GSWS 2167A: Queer(ing) Popular Culture
Summer 2026

Instructor: Dr. Amy Keating

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
- Consider pop culture through an intersectional and queer critical lens with attention to whose stories are prioritized
- Understand the significance of the socio-political context of the production and release of various forms and media
- Analyze the 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

Required Texts: Texts available via Brightspace. Most films and videos will be available via links on Brightspace. Others are available on streaming services and/or to rent/buy.

The Celluloid Closet (Rent or Buy on YouTube)
Hannah Gadsby's Gender Agenda (Netflix)

Evaluation:

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| 1. Weekly Engagement | 27% |
| 2. Midterm | 23% |
| 3. Assignment | 20% |
| 4. Exam (online synchronous) | 30% |

1. Weekly Engagement: Ongoing (9x3% = 27%)

Students are required to submit answers to **9 out of 11** weekly quizzes/surveys available on Brightspace to demonstrate engagement with the weekly content. More information will be available through the course website.

3. Midterm: June 8-12 (23%)

Students will complete an online midterm during this week to be submitted *no later than June 12th*. More information will be available through the course website

2. Assignment: July 6-10 (20%)

Students are required to submit a written assignment by **July 10**. More information will be available through the course website.

4. Exam (Online & synchronous): Final exam period July 26-30 (30%)

The final exam will take place online during a particular time determined by the registrar's office.

Course Website: All course information, including assignments

GSWS 2167A – Queer(ing) Popular Culture
Course Schedule (Summer 2026)

Week 1: May 4 - 8

Introduction to Queer(ing) Pop Culture

Week 2: May 11 - 15

Whose Stories Matter?: 2SLGBTQIA+ Identities in North American Pop Culture

Week 3: May 18 - 22

Queer Coding: Villains, Tragedies, Monsters

Week 4: May 25 - 29

HIV/AIDS Stigma and Media Representation

Week 5: June 1 - 5

Trans Identities in Pop Culture

Week 6: June 8 - 12. Midterm Test

Week 7: June 15 - 19.

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

Week 8: June 22 – June 26.

Femininomenon: Queer Pop Music and the Rise of the Sapphic Diva

Week 9: June 29 – July 3

The Butt of the Joke: Problems and Possibilities in Comedy

Week 10: July 6 - 10. Assignment Due

Representations of Queerness and Disability

Week 11: July 13 - 17.

The Almighty Pink Dollar: Queerness for Consumption

Week 12: July 20-24.

Queer Futures: Youth Media and Tomorrow's Pop Culture

Week 13: July 26 - 31. Exam