

Women & Popular Culture: Garbo to Gaga



Women's Studies & Feminist Research

WS2161A - Fall 2018

Wednesdays 4:30-7:30

Room AHB 1R40



Course Outline

How is gender represented in popular culture? What messages do we receive about women from Reality TV? Disney films? Hip Hop culture? How do cultural understandings of what it means to be feminine become entangled in the way women are represented within popular culture? What kind of impact might these messages have on us, as consumers?

This course explores a number of the aforementioned themes, and in particular, how they relate to ideas, representations, and experiences of women in popular culture. Taught through an intersectional lens, this course focuses on elements of class, race and sexuality *alongside* gender. In doing so, students will be offered a nuanced understanding of the way in which women are represented, and valued, within popular culture (and the broader social world)! While we explore historical *and* contemporary figures, the majority of the course will focus on contemporary themes like the evolution of Beyoncé's feminism, the emergence of transgender folks in the media, the role of gendered violence in Marvel's *Jessica Jones*, and representations of femininity in a variety of reality TV genres – to name a few.

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.



On-line Discussion Posts (15%)

Three times throughout the semester, you will complete a 600-800 word online discussion post based on the assigned reading. The due dates can be found on the following pages, and details on how to complete the posts will be outlined at the start of the semester. A *very* detailed FAQ is also available under the Resources tab. Please read this in detail before writing your first post. **Each post is worth 5% of your overall grade.**

TV Assignment (15%)

You must watch 1 hour of one of the TV shows listed on a document you will find on OWL (Resources tab). The aim of the assignment is to examine the representation(s) of gender and gender issues within the episode(s) you watch. Your assignment should be approx. 1000 words. Some of the questions you may want to consider for your analysis are outlined in detail on OWL. Please read before completing the assignment.

Midterm (30%)

The in-class midterm will last 2 hrs in length. The format of the test will include T/F, multiple choice, fill in the blank, short answer, and essay questions.



Final Examination (40%)

This will be scheduled during the official exam period and will be 3 hours in length. The format is the same as the midterm.

Course Requirements

This course involves reading, listening to lectures, watching films, and participating in both in-class discussion (ungraded) and online discussion (graded). 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. 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. However, students who attend and participate regularly tend to have significantly higher grades. I expect you to be **actively present** when attending class. Not engaging and/or 'multi-tasking' not only limits the extent to which you can learn, it is also disrespectful and rude. **If you need to be in constant, uninterrupted contact with your friends, social media, and so on, there are much better places for doing that.**

Yes, this is a big class - but trust me when I say that it is obvious and distracting (for the instructor and students) when someone is not paying attention. Don't be Marcus Stroman on the day David Price first pitched for the Jays.  
(Yes, I am obsessed with baseball.)

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.