Comm 395: Gender, Media and Communication
Fall 2018
M/W, 10-11:50am
ASC 231

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Course Description

In this upper-division theory course, we will interrogate and challenge dominant cultural notions of gender as a biologically fixed female/male binary. Together, we will examine how normative ideas about femininity and masculinity influence how individuals behave and communicate, and, not least, how media both construct and reflect cultural understandings of what it means to be ‘male or female.’ This course is deeply interdisciplinary: we will use theories from communication studies, cultural studies, film and media studies, gender studies, and queer studies to explore different processes and practices of gender, specifically in terms of media representations of femininity and masculinity. Rather than framing it as an isolated concept, we will approach gender intersectionally, i.e. in relation to other defining aspects of identity such as race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, and nationality. By examining how ongoing debates on gender construction characterize depictions of masculinity and femininity in media, we will consider gender’s crucial intersections with notions of power, identity, and voice; explore possibilities of challenging the conventional ways we imagine and perform gender; and envision the kinds of social and cultural shifts such transformations might bring.

Course Objectives

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

1. Analyze how media both construct and represent gender, particularly in relation to race, class, and sexuality
2. Critically examine the cultural, political, and institutional contexts for the production and consumption of media representations of gender
3. Think innovatively about how media might be used to challenge conventional understandings of what it means to be female or male

Course Readings

Please purchase Alison Bechdel’s Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic (Mariner Books, 2007, ISBN 978-0618871711) from a local bookstore, or from Amazon (if you must). Buy this book at the start of the term, to avoid any lame excuses later down the line.

All other course readings will be available as PDFs on Blackboard.

Finally, please obtain access to the streaming platforms necessary to view the assigned media content. At minimum, you’ll need access to Netflix and to be able to rent or buy individual films and TV episodes on Amazon.
Course Requirements

*Please note that further instructions on the below assignments will be provided in supplemental handouts.*

This is an upper-division theory course with a central emphasis on critical thinking and dialogue. There is a substantial reading and viewing load, which is accompanied by frequent writing assignments. **You are required to attend class regularly and punctually, to complete the weekly course readings and viewings by the start of each class session, to participate actively in class discussion, and to stay abreast of the course assignment schedule without my checking up on you.**

**Attendance (Mandatory):** Attendance will be taken at the beginning of each class. Since a significant amount of the material covered in my lectures is not in the readings, it is crucial that you attend class. You will be given **two free passes** in case you need a personal day. If you will be absent from class due to illness, a religious observance, or a university-sanctioned activity, I will require advance documentation to excuse your absence. Should an emergency situation arise that makes it impossible for you to attend class, I will require documentation after the fact to excuse your absence. All other absences will negatively impact your participation grade. Repeated lateness is disruptive to discussion and will negatively impact your participation grade. Missing more than seven classes without discussing the situation with me will result in a failing grade for the course.

**Participation (10%):** You must arrive to class on time and prepared to ask questions, speak about the assigned readings, and make insightful and substantive contributions to group discussion. Always show up having jotted down **at least three questions** from the reading(s) to be used to stimulate and enrich our conversation, as well as during informal in-class writing assignments and small group activities. The quality of your questions, contributions, in-class writing, and performance in group activities will all factor into your grade. Your mere presence in class does not count as participation. Poor attendance will adversely affect your participation grade. If you miss more than two classes, you will not receive the full participation grade.

**Critical Reading Responses (30%):** For the readings marked with a (CRR) on the syllabus, you will prepare a **one-page critical response**, and you will submit that response to Blackboard before the class period in which it is due. Your responses will be used to generate questions and ideas for class discussion, and to identify particular passages and issues that we want to address as a group. There are a total of **twelve responses for which you can receive credit** over the course of the semester. **Ten full-credit responses will be a 100%**. Thus, you can miss two responses and still receive full credit. You will need to keep track of your own progress on these, as I will not check in to tell you how many you have completed. Stay on top of your responses, since they are worth 30% of your course grade. Please note: you will not receive credit for a response if you are absent for the class meeting in which it is due, and you will not receive credit for a response submitted after the class meeting in which it was due. Further instructions for this assignment will be provided in a supplemental handout.

**Midterm Exam (25%):** You will complete a **midterm exam** in class on **Wednesday, October 17**. The exam will cover all the course materials assigned up until that point. Further details about the exam (question types, etc.) will be provided well in advance of the exam date.
Group Discussion-Leading Presentation (10%): Along with two or three of your classmates, you will be responsible for **leading the day’s discussion of the readings** once during the term. Your presentation will be based on several discussion-oriented questions that you and your group members have prepared prior to class, and will incorporate **one media example not assigned on the course syllabus**. Your presentation should not be a summary of the material in the readings, but should grapple with the implications of the concepts raised in the course texts and relate them to historical or contemporary media. Further instructions for this assignment will be provided in a supplemental handout.

Final Research Paper (Proposal 5% + Paper 20% = 25%): For your final course assignment, you will conduct the necessary research for, and write, a **ten-page research paper** incorporating topics and theories you learned in class. This paper will be due at the end of the semester. Earlier in the semester, you will submit a **one-to-two-page proposal** that clearly explains your research topic, your research questions, and the methods you will use to answer those research questions. Your research topic must be approved by me in advance. Further instructions for this assignment will be provided in a supplemental handout.

Assignment Submission and Lateness: All written assignments for the course will be submitted through Blackboard (http://blackboard.usc.edu) via Turnitin. If you are, for any reason, technically unable to submit a given course assignment to Blackboard, please send it to me as an email attachment in advance of the deadline. Due to the fast pace of the course, late assignments will not be accepted. If an emergency arises, please provide documentation and contact me before the deadline if possible. If you are absent on your group discussion-leading presentation day without prior or emergency documentation (i.e. your absence is unexcused), I will be unable to give you credit for that assignment.

**Course Grading Policy**

You are responsible for the material covered in class and in the reading. You will be evaluated on the following:

1. The level of your engagement with the course materials (as evidenced by your class participation, written work, and presentation preparedness)
2. Your capacity to explain your ideas and analysis in articulate and well-written forms
3. Your ability to creatively explore the theories and methodologies raised by the course

All of your work will be graded on two primary evaluative scales:

1. How well it demonstrates an understanding of the course theories and methodologies
2. How well it articulates and structures its argument

Grades will be assigned as follows:

- **A** Outstanding, thoughtful and enthusiastic work
- **B+/B** Above average work, demonstrating good insight into assignment
- **B-/C+** Needs improvement on ideas, argument and follow-through
- **C and below** Fulfilling the bare minimum and showing little understanding of the material
Each assignment will be worth 100 points and will be converted to a percentage score depending upon the weight assigned to each. Your percentage scores on the assignments will be totaled and translated to a letter grade per the scale shown below:

A       = 100-94
A-      = 93-90
B+      = 89-87
B       = 86-84
B-      = 83-80
C+      = 79-77
C       = 76-74
C-      = 73-70
D+      = 69-67
D       = 66-64
D-      = 63-60
F       = 59-0

If you have concerns regarding a grade on a given assignment, you must appeal it in writing, stating the reasons why you feel the grade is inaccurate, within one week of receiving the graded assignment. No late appeals will be accepted for review.

Additional Course Policies and Statements

Email Policy: Please feel free to email me with any course-related questions or concerns you may have, provided these are not addressed or answered by the present course syllabus. Feel free, as well, to schedule an in-person meeting with me to discuss any issues related to the course. When you email me during the regular work week (M-F, 9am-5pm), I may take up to 24 hours to respond. If you email me over the weekend, I will typically not respond until Monday. You may send me a follow-up email if more than the allotted amount of response time has elapsed.

Technology Policy: Silence your phone and leave it in your bag for the duration of class. Unless you have an accommodation, you may only use your laptop for the purpose of referencing the readings from Blackboard. If you are able, you must take notes with pen and paper. If I see you on your laptop and disengaged from lecture or class discussion, I will ask you to print the readings from that point forward.

Statement on Participation: Obviously, I encourage you frequently participate and add value to our discussions. Feel free to raise your hand during lecture to ask questions, make comments, or to ask me to clarify any points you may not have understood. When you ask a question or make a comment, please speak up—even if I can hear you, your classmates need to be able to as well!

Statement on “Offensive Content”: All of the works we’ll be reading and viewing in the course are in some way about gender, sexuality, race, and class. Because gender, sexuality, race, and class are intertwined sociopolitical and personal issues, some of these texts deal with explicit sexuality, sexism, sexual violence, racism, racist language, racial oppression, and/or racial violence. You will be expected to discuss and present on these very sensitive issues in class and to write about them in your critical reading responses and final paper. As a group, we must all treat this content with a high level of self-awareness. Please be prepared to encounter some potentially uncomfortable material in the course readings, and be ready and willing to analyze and think critically about that material.

Safe Harbor Statement: I hereby express my willingness to act on behalf of students despite the risks involved in civil disobedience. As an instructor, I recognize the vulnerability for women, for lesbian, gay, and transgender people, for indigenous and native people, and for people of color, among all
too many others, that requires continuing and intensified efforts to address. In accordance with principles of academic freedom and orientation toward the public good, I am dedicated to providing resources and support regardless of immigration status, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, or any other category of socio-political identity, to those who teach and learn in and outside of formal educational institutions. If you need resources, please feel free to reach out. My office and classroom are safe harbor spaces.

**Course Schedule**

*Please note that the below schedule is subject to change at my discretion.*

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**Week 1: Thinking Gender**

**M 8/20**  
Course & Syllabus Overview

**W 8/22**  
-- Judith Lorber, “Believing is Seeing: Biology as Ideology” *(Gender & Society, 1993, pp. 568-581)*  

**Week 2: Intersectionality**

**M 8/27**  
-- Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, “Beyond Racism and Misogyny: Black Feminism and 2 Live Crew” *(Feminist Social Thought: A Reader, 1997, pp. 246-263) (CRR 1)*  
-- Bim Adewunmi, “*Kimberlé Crenshaw on intersectionality: “I wanted to come up with an everyday metaphor that anyone could use”* (New Statesman, 2014)

**W 8/29**  

**Week 3: Gender Roles**

**M 9/3**  
**No Class—Labor Day**

**W 9/5**  
-- *Tiny Shoulders: Rethinking Barbie* (2018, Netflix)

**Week 4: Gendered Performance**

**M 9/10**  
-- Kimberly Chrisman-Campbell, “*A Brief History of Unisex Fashion*” *(The Atlantic, 2015)*

**W 9/12**  
-- *RuPaul’s Drag Race* (2009-present, available on Amazon, episode TBD)  

**Group Presentation 1**
Week 5: Foucault & Feminism


Group Presentation 2

Week 6: Seeing Gender

M 9/24  -- Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (Film Theory and Criticism, 1975, pp. 833-844)

Group Presentation 3

Week 7: Hearing Gender

M 10/1  -- Christine Ehrick, “At the Intersection of Gender Studies and Sound Studies” (Sounding Out!, 2015)
-- Liana M. Silva, “As Loud As I Want To Be: Gender, Loudness, and Respectability Politics” (Sounding Out!, 2015) (CRR 6—Ehrick, Silva, or both)
-- Terry Gross, “From Upspeak to Vocal Fry: Are We ‘Policing’ Young Women’s Voices?” (NPR, 2015)

W 10/3  -- Art Blake, “Finding My Voice While Listening to John Cage” (Sounding Out!, 2015)
-- Regina Bradley, “The Hell, the High Water, and the Funk of It All: Sounding Power in Scandal” (Sounding Out!, 2015)
Group Presentation 4

Week 8: Working Girls & Single Women

M 10/8  -- The Mary Tyler Moore Show (1970-1977, available on Amazon, episode TBD)
-- Kristal Brent Zook, “*Living Single* and the ‘Fight for Mr. Right’: Latifah Don’t Play” (*Gender, Race, and Class in Media: A Text-Reader*, 2003, pp. 129-135)
-- *Girls* (2012-2017, free with Amazon Prime subscription, episode TBD)

Week 9: Branding Empowerment


W 10/17  Midterm Exam

Week 10: Post-Feminist Media


-- Hadley Freeman, “From Shopping to Naked Selfies: How ‘Empowerment’ Lost its Meaning” (*The Guardian*, 2016)

Group Presentation 5
Final Paper Proposal Due

Week 11: Masculinities


-- Jada Yuan, “In Its First Season, Crazy Ex-Girlfriend’s Greatest Legacy is (Finally) Bringing the Asian Bro to Television” (*Vulture*, 2016)

Group Presentation 6
Week 12: Queer Media


         -- *Queer Eye* (2018-present, Netflix, episode TBD)
         -- Stefanie Duguay, “‘Queer Eye’ and the Myth of the Self-Made Man” (*The Conversation*, 2018)

 **Group Presentation 7**

Week 13: Trans(media)

M 11/12 -- Kimberly Pierce, *Boys Don’t Cry* (1999, available on Amazon)
          -- J. Jack Halberstam, “The Transgender Look” (*In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*, 2005, pp. 76-96) (CRR 11)

          -- *Pose* (2018-present, available on Amazon, episode TBD)

 **Group Presentation 8**

Week 14: Genderqueer and Nonbinary Representation

M 11/19 -- Michel Beauchemin, Lori Levy, and Gretchen Vogel, “Two Spirit People” (Frameline, 1991)

W 11/21  **No Class—Thanksgiving**

Week 15: Online Misogyny & Feminist Activism

          -- Lindy West, “Ask Not For Whom The Bell Trolls; It Trolls for Thee” (*This American Life*, 2015)
          -- Kelefa Sanneh and Zoe Chace, “Video Killed the Video Star” (*This American Life*, 2018)
Official University Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Conduct:
Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in SCampus in Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards” policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in SCampus and university policies on scientific misconduct, http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct.

Support Systems:
Student Counseling Services (SCS) – (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call
Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention. engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline – 1 (800) 273-8255
Provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) – (213) 740-4900 – 24/7 on call
Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm. engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp

Sexual Assault Resource Center
For more information about how to get help or help a survivor, rights, reporting options, and additional resources, visit the website: sarc.usc.edu

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)/Title IX Compliance – (213) 740-5086
Works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class. equity.usc.edu

Bias Assessment Response and Support
Incidents of bias, hate crimes and microaggressions need to be reported allowing for appropriate investigation and response. studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support
The Office of Disability Services and Programs
Provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange relevant accommodations. dsp.usc.edu

Student Support and Advocacy – (213) 821-4710
Assists students and families in resolving complex issues adversely affecting their success as a student EX: personal, financial, and academic. studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa

Diversity at USC
Information on events, programs and training, the Diversity Task Force (including representatives for each school), chronology, participation, and various resources for students. diversity.usc.edu

USC Emergency Information
Provides safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible. emergency.usc.edu

USC Department of Public Safety – UPC: (213) 740-4321 – HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24-hour emergency or to report a crime.
Provides overall safety to USC community. dps.usc.edu