CIEE Prague, Czech Republic

Course title: Media, Gender, and Identity
Course code: onijssen 5
Programs offering course: Summer Communications, New Media, and Journalism
Language of instruction: English
U.S. semester credits: 3
Contact hours: 45
Term: Summer Session II 2020

Course Description

In this course, students will apply a critical lens to representations of gender and identity in contemporary media. Taking gender and sexuality as a critical starting point, we will examine the construction of identities under the simultaneous influence of race, class, and nationality. By focusing on popular representations in both the US and the country where the course is taking place, we will gain a deeper understanding of identities as both culturally specific and influenced by global media. Instead of suggesting that contemporary identities are determined by what we see on TV screens, computers, and in local movie theaters, the course seeks to describe the complex interactions between national audiences and concrete media productions. It will analyze how different audiences reproduce or challenge traditional concepts and stereotypes of gender, race, sexuality, and class. By combining the study of theoretical texts with examples from the advertisement industry, television, movies, and other forms of contemporary cultural expression, it offers a comprehensive and thorough introduction to contemporary studies of the media and identity.

Learning Objectives

By completing this course, students will:

- Understand how gender is central to sexuality, class, and race operating in the wider socio-cultural context since the 19th century
- Develop and apply theories of articulation and hegemony, and apply to representations of gender and identity in popular culture
- Examine popular culture as a site of political and ideological struggle.
- Critically analyze classical theories and approaches to studying gender, sexuality and race, and apply them to case studies.
- Contextualize the links between popular culture and debates about “identity”.
- Evaluate how subjective understandings of gender, race and sexuality affect experiences of popular culture.

Course Prerequisites

An introductory-level communications or gender studies course is helpful but not required.

Methods of Instruction

The course follows largely a cultural studies approach to studying popular culture. Students will learn the different theoretical ideas underlying the study of representations of gender, sexuality, race, and class identity, and apply these concepts to case studies. The course hopes to equip students with the theoretical tools to conduct their own analysis of popular culture representations in the future.
Students will be encouraged to challenge pre-existing assumptions about gender, sexual and racial norms as they are represented in popular media. Through class discussions and debates, critical readings of key primary and secondary texts, and students’ written reactions, the students will enhance their ability to “read” popular media culturally and sociologically. Engaged student participation is crucial, and productive controversy will be encouraged.

**Assessment and Final Grade**

1. Critical Review of Popular Culture Forms (2) 20%
2. Phonography Presentations (2) 20%
3. Cultural Frames 15%
4. Comparative Analysis 25%
5. Participation 20%
TOTAL 100%

**Course Requirements**

**Critical Review of Popular Culture Forms (2)**

Each student is required to write TWO critical reviews each being 1100-words exactly making a total 2200 words for the complete assessment task. The first 1100-word review requires students to respond to a current Czech advertisement from the streets of Prague and compare it to one that was used in Czech Republic in the previous decade and one used in the 19th Century in Czech Republic. The second 1100-word review will respond to a current episode of a Czech reality television series comparing it to one that was popular in the previous decade of the host country and to how a film was used in Czech Republic in the 19th century to represent culture. Each critical review needs to address how gender, sexuality and ethnicity is being represented and how it has changed over time. In doing so, they will consider three overarching notions. The first will center around the characteristics and features of representation used as well as the devices and strategies used to portray culture, gender and sexuality such as irony, humour, gender transgression and shock tactics. The second notion will center around discussing the role/s that this popular cultural form plays as a socio-cultural influence. And the third notion will explore the intended audience/s for this cultural form. Students will be graded according to how successfully they support their comparative analyses around these notions using theory, the archives provided by the professor (such as Czech Screen / State Library / National Art Museum) and mandatory readings from the course to support their views.

**Phonography Presentations (2)**

Each student will make two 7-minute presentations for this course; once at the start and once at the end of the schedule. The overarching purpose of these presentations is for each student to compare their experience of gender and/or sexuality group against their first perceptions and experiences on arrival in the host country with their perceptions and experiences after an immersive course experience. In doing so they will critically review how experience and the projection of gender, race, class and sexuality contributes to and challenges pre-existing assumptions. Each presentation will use 10 photographic examples that have been taken by the student to create a digital photo album that effectively contributes to their presentations for illustrative purposes. The photos must be creative and inclusive considering multiple opportunities for the representation of cultural and identity by considering multiple media forms such as but not limited to movie theater and play line-ups,
advertisements, music used in stores and buskers’ music choices. Students will use a free digital album application such as Album App, Lifecake, Quickpic or similar to compose their digital album. This will be discussed further at the beginning of the course.

For the first presentation, each student will compare how they their perceived gender, class, race and sexuality would be represented in the host country prior to arriving and the real representations they noticed in their initial immersion week. The first presentation will also require students to draw comparisons and differences between their home and host environment. This first presentation does not require a theoretical framework, but is rather a reflexive exercise using existing vocabularies to unpack various concepts related to this course.

For the second presentation, each student will repeat as for presentation one, but reflect on how their cultural experiences in Czech Republic have impacted on their initial perceptions about gender, race, class and sexuality as well as their perceived ideas of how these would be represented in the host country. The photographic evidence MUST include various locations and subjects across inner city, metro or regional areas which will be discussed within the class prior to data collection. The second presentation should follow the same requirements as the first, but must now be supported with additional theoretical viewpoints and readings using the vocabulary provided during the course. This latter presentation will require a critical aspect that discusses how subjective understandings of gender, race and sexuality affect experiences of popular culture and how their experience has contributed to or challenged pre-existing assumptions.

Cultural Frames

In an essay of 1500-words, students will critically discuss the representation of either gender, sexuality, race or class in media displayed at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Prague. They will explore the projection of these notions in terms of the productive controversy that the artworks represent and the influence they may have on future popular culture representations. Students will include FIVE key art representations to support their discussion. A student’s work will be graded on their ability to apply readings and content discussed in class to critically analyse the underlying themes of the artwork selected and discuss the influence contemporary art forms have on current cultural identity, challenging cultural norms / limitations and as influences of future inclusive practices.

Comparative Analysis

This comparative analysis will focus on discussing how intended audiences, time and culture influences what and how gender, race, class and sexuality is depicted in lead news editorials in a cultural context. It has two parts. The first part requires students to work in groups equally contributing to the task (5%), and the second part is completed individually (20%). In the first part, students form groups of three, and compose a critical analysis framework that draws on the course content for analysing lead news items on one particular day from different timeslots, and broadcasters. The framework will consider elements that provide opportunities to analyze the media in terms of how gender, class, race and sexuality is represented by the presenter; the key news lead stories in terms of what and how it is reported and; the intended audience the news appears to be targeting and why. The framework will build on the three notions drawn on for assessment one and will provide opportunities to analyze what is shown and what seems to be invisible. It will be worth 5% of the total grade and be 500 words maximum.

The second part involves students individually applying the framework to analyze and compare how gender, class, race and sexuality is depicted across FOUR different television news programs. These
programs will include the state broadcaster, and a free to air morning news program such as morning television or similar. They will also draw on the mandatory course readings and content to analyze their findings and compare and contrast the findings across the cases.

**Participation**

 Participation is valued as meaningful contribution in the digital and tangible classroom, utilizing the resources and materials presented to students as part of the course. Meaningful contribution requires students to be prepared in advance of each class session and to have regular attendance. Students must clearly demonstrate they have engaged with the materials as directed, for example, through classroom discussions, online discussion boards, peer-to-peer feedback (after presentations), interaction with guest speakers, and attentiveness on co-curricular and outside-of-classroom activities.

**Attendance**

Regular class attendance is required throughout the program, and all absences will result in a lower participation grade for any affected CIEE course. Due to the intensive schedules for Open Campus and Short Term programs, absences that constitute more than 10% of the total course will result in a written warning.

Students who transfer from one CIEE class to another during the add/drop period will not be considered absent from the first session(s) of their new class, provided they were marked present for the first session(s) of their original class. Otherwise, the absence(s) from the original class carry over to the new class and count against the grade in that class.

For CIEE classes, excessively tardy (over 15 minutes late) students must be marked absent. Attendance policies also apply to any required co-curricular class excursion or event, as well as to Internship, Service Learning, or required field placement. Students who miss class for personal travel, including unforeseen delays that arise as a result of personal travel, will be marked as absent. No make-up or re-sit opportunity will be provided.

Attendance policies also apply to any required class excursion, with the exception that some class excursions cannot accommodate any tardiness, and students risk being marked as absent if they fail to be present at the appointed time.

Absences will lead to the following penalties:
Weekly Schedule

Week 1
Class 1.1 Orientation / Introduction

This week introduces the key terms and concepts that we will utilize throughout the course, such as practices of representation, popular culture and hegemony. Our main point of discussion is that representations of gender, race/ethnicity and sexuality connect meaning and language to culture and that there are numerous theoretical approaches to analyzing representations in popular culture. You will get a thorough introduction, a tour through the history of feminist movements in Czech Republic and related debates about gender equality, race and sexuality from 19th century up to the 21st Century. This introduction will give you a background for understanding how different the approaches have been at different times. We will also introduce the course assessments.

Readings:


Class 1.2 Popular Culture Messages

Together the messages we receive from popular culture in Czech Republic by using our eyes 24/7 will be discussed and the group will enter into the theory and reflections of gender, race, class and sexuality. How Czech society and culture attempts to approach equality – and how it relates to a US context will be debated. An introduction to Czech feminist movements and public debates on gender, race and sexuality from 19th Century to the 21st Century will be part of the discussion.

Readings:


Due Date for Submission of the Phonography Presentation #1

Week 2

Class 2.1 Journalism & Bodies in the Political Arena

This week we discuss various approaches to the study of representations of bodies in the political arena in Czech and American journalism, and the impact on democracy.

Readings:


Class 2.2 Female Political Power

Discussion of the female politicians in “At Home with Julia” and “Secret City” and the last election in US. The day ends with a visit to the Parramatta Female Factory (http://www.parragirls.org.au) (TBC).

Readings:


Date Due for Submission of the Critical Review #1

Class 2.3  Gender Theories - From Ideology to Psychoanalysis

This week we discuss various approaches to studying representations of gender in popular culture, including treating representations as reflective of dominant social ideologies and as manifestations of underlying psychoanalytical tendencies. Implicated in these are different ways of imagining the subject and audiences. By applying these theories to case studies, we critically assess their value and limitations.

Readings:


Class 2.4  Men Versus Women in Representation

While feminist critics largely spearheaded analyses of representations of gender, we will also study the representations of men and masculinity in movies. We will also question whether representations of gender are intertwined with other themes and discuss the limitations of focusing solely on issues of gender.

Readings:


Due Date for Submission of the Critical Review # 2

Week 3

Class 3.1  Marginality & Sexuality - Problems of Essentialism

This week expands upon and completes the previous week’s discussions by exploring issues of sexuality as intertwined with representations of gender norms through a critical reading of Butler’s theories on gender and sexuality. On one hand underlying
problems of essentialism in mainstream gender discourse will be questioned and on
the other hand how these are used to marginalize sexual minority groups will be
discussed.

Readings:


Class 3.2 Performing Gender

We will attempt to rethink gender and sexuality as performance. By applying these ideas to case studies in popular media, we will consider how heterosexuality and sexual minority identities are performed, and look at how the performances may differ according to the performer and ideas about audiences. We will question underlying assumptions about how the sexuality of performers affects their representations of sexuality.

Readings:


Due Date for the Submission of the Cultural Frames Assessment

Class Race - Czech Republic's Trouble History (Part 1) 3.3

Together with theories of gender and sexuality emerging from feminist studies, attention on racial expanded the focus of Cultural Studies beyond class issues. This week we discuss representation: ethnicities and race in popular cultures. In a vein similar to that of previous weeks, we challenge racism as an essential category and critically analyse the representations of the different races – in popular culture.

Readings:


Week 4

Class 4.1 Race - Czech Republic’s Troubled History (Part 2)

Beyond representations of race and ethnicity in Czech Republic, we will also look at how other minority communities are portrayed. This involves both how mainstream media portray ethnic minorities as the ‘other’ and how minority groups represent themselves. Ultimately, we consider how representations of race, gender, sexuality and class are intimately linked and cannot be analysed separately.

Readings:


Due Date for the Submission of the Comparative Analysis Assessment

Class 4.2 Moving Forward - Challenges, Summary, and Discussion

In this final week, we will consider the course topics from the millennium perspective drawing on Queer theory and the concept of fluidity in terms of gender, sexuality, and cultural and ethnic identities. Adding to and informing the discussion will be the context of generation and age. We will also consider how the role of popular culture has changed since the rise of the Internet and mobile technology and as these have become more integral to everyday life. An introduction to Tilly Lawless, a writer and activist who is challenging the stigma around the sex work industry. She is a powerful voice for sex worker rights and has spoken at TEDxYouth Prague on why the mainstream feminist movement needs to support and embrace sex worker rights. Tilly has also featured on the ABC iView series You Can’t Ask That - tackling age-old stereotypes around the industry.

Readings:


Class 4.3 Shared Knowledge
The group will present their digital albums and also discuss their immersive experiences and reflections between each presentation.

**Due Date for the Submission of the Phonography Presentation #2**

**Course Materials**

**Readings**


**Recommended Readings**


