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.
- Study theories of articulation and hegemony, and apply them to representations of gender and identity in popular culture.
- Examine popular culture as a site of political and ideological struggle.
- 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 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 Cultural Forms (2) 20%
2. Photography Presentations (2) 20%
3. Cultural Frames 15%
4. Comparative Analysis 25%
Course Requirements

Critical Review of Popular Cultural 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 advertisement from the streets of their host city and compare it to one that was used in the host country in the previous decade and one used in the 19th century. The second 1100-word review will respond to a current episode of a reality television series produced in the country of study, comparing it to one that was popular in the previous decade of the host country and to a local-culture film from the early 20th century. Each critical review needs to address how gender, sexuality and ethnicity are being represented and how these representations have 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 pointed out by the professor and mandatory readings from the course to substantiate their views.

Photography Presentations (2)

Each student will prepare two 7-minute presentations for this course; one at the start and one at the end of the schedule. The overarching purpose of these presentations is for each student to compare their experience of gender and sexual identity 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 resorting to 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 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 the host country 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 a local museum. 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 analyze 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 analyzing lead news items on one particular day from different time slots and broadcasters. The framework will consider elements that provide opportunities to analyze the media in terms of how gender, class, race and sexuality are represented by the presenter; analyze the key news lead stories in terms of what and how it is reported; and consider 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-word 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 two major public broadcasting corporations, a commercial free-to-air evening news channel, and a free-to-air morning news program. 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 any required field placement. Students may not miss placement/work hours at an internship or service learning site unless approved in advance by the Academic Director and placement supervisor. All students must complete all of the requisite 100 minimum work hours on site at the internship or service learning placement to be eligible for academic credit.

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 for classes will lead to the following penalties:
Weekly Schedule

Week 1

Class: 1.1  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. The first session will also include a tour through the history of feminist movements in the host country and related debates about gender, race and sexuality from the 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

In this session we will direct our attention to the myriad of messages we receive, in fact cannot help receiving, from popular culture just by keeping our eyes open. By decoding selected examples, the group will enter into the theory and reflections of gender, race, class and sexuality. How the local host country society and culture attempts to approach equality – and how it relates to a US context will be debated. An introduction to host country feminist movements and public debates on gender, race and sexuality from 19th century to the 21st century will be part of the discussion.

Readings:
Week 2
Class:  2.1  Journalism and Bodies in the Political Arena

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

Readings:

Class:  2.2  Representations of Female Political Power in TV series

We will use this session to analyze and interpret representations of female politicians by looking at a selection of episodes from two popular television series. We will then look at a real-world example of a female politician treated by the media, namely Hillary Clinton as the Democratic candidate in the 2016 US presidential election. The day ends with a site visit to a prominent political women’s organization.

Readings:

Date Due for Submission of the Critical Review # 1

Week 3
Class:  3.1  Gender Theories – From Ideology to Psychoanalysis

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

Readings:

Class:  3.2  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:


Date Due for Submission of the Critical Review # 2

Week 4
Class:  4.1  Marginality and 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 theory on gender and sexuality. We will first discuss Butler’s critique of essentialism in mainstream gender discourse and her point that this kind of thinking marginalizes sexual minority groups.
Secondly, we will attempt to do a cost-and-benefit analysis of Butler's own approach and consider its wider cultural impacts.

Readings:


Class: 4.2 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

Week 5

Class: 5.1 Race – discussions in context (Part 1)

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

Readings:


Class: 5.2 Race – discussion in context (Part 2)

Beyond representations of race and ethnicity in Australia, 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

Week 6
Class: 6.1 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.

Readings:


Class: 6.2 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 Photography Presentation #2

Course Materials
Readings

Recommended Readings


