

Winter 2019

## **WGS 255.01: Gender and Popular Culture**

**Meeting Time: MW 3:00-4:15**

**Location: 220 Honors**

Professor: Dr. Cáel M. Keegan

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Office hours: T 3:00 to 6:00, and by appointment

### **Course Overview:**

#### **Description:**

This interdisciplinary course is an introduction to historical and contemporary US popular and everyday culture, arts, and entertainment as mechanisms that produce and reinforce ideologies about gender, race, and sexuality. It analyzes formal elements and aesthetics of various popular arts, modes of production and distribution, and the role of popular arts in activism and resistance. In this course you will develop critical thinking skills by reading, writing, and participating in class discussions with the aim of strengthening your ability to analyze the various ways that gender is produced by and depicted in US popular culture. We will be examine popular and everyday arts, entertainment, rituals, sports, fashions, celebrities, as well as common values and beliefs. In particular, we will be analyzing how elements of popular culture serve to create and maintain interlocking systems of oppression.

#### **Main Goals and Objectives:**

At the end of the course, students will be able to:

1. Describe and analyze elements of popular culture using feminist, queer, and critical race theoretical perspectives.
2. Explain key terms and concepts central to the analysis of gender and popular culture.
3. Write and speak effectively about the role of popular culture in creating and maintaining the social constructions of gender, race, and sexuality.
4. Write effectively about the role of popular culture in creating and maintaining a common United States culture.

#### **General Education Objectives: Cultures – U.S. Diversity**

Teaching in the liberal tradition is at the heart of Grand Valley's identity, and this focus is critical in our General Education Program. Liberal education transcends the acquisition of information; it goes beyond the factual to ask important evaluative and philosophical questions. Liberal learning holds the fundamental principles and suppositions of a body of knowledge up to inquiry, question, and discussion. It helps a person recognize the assumptions under which he or she operates and encourages the examination and questioning of those assumptions. Liberal learning begins in the General Education Program and continues through the more specialized studies comprising each student's major and minor areas of study.

**WGS 255 is designed to help you learn:**

1. To examine the historical trajectories and consequences, world views, languages, and/or ways of life of diverse cultures within the United States.
2. To examine how social constructions of ethnicity/race and at least one of the following social attributes shape individual identities: gender, class, abilities, age, sexual orientation, religion, or common history.
3. **Information literacy** is the iterative process of identifying, accessing, evaluating, and synthesizing multiple forms of information. Students will:
  - Articulate the specific information needed.
  - Access information using appropriate search tools.
  - Evaluate the quality, usefulness, and relevance of the information.
  - Ethically communicate synthesized information.
4. **Ethical reasoning** is a decision-making process based on defining systems of value. Students will:
  - Recognize ethical issues when presented in a complex situation.
  - Demonstrate their understanding of key concepts and principles underlying various systems of reasoning.
  - Participate in activities that engage them in ethical reasoning.
  - Demonstrate the ability to deal constructively with ambiguity and disagreement.

**Required texts:**

You will need to be sure you have access to the following primary texts. Please look ahead in the course schedule and plan accordingly:

1. ***Bitch Planet Volume 1: Extraordinary Machine* (2015)**. Kelly Sue DeConnick and Valentine De Landro, Image Comics. This book is available from local seller Vault of Midnight and also online at Amazon: <https://amzn.to/2Fd90hA>

2. ***Gone Home* (2013)**. This PC game is available through direct sale or from STEAM: <https://gonehome.game> OR [http://store.steampowered.com/app/232430/Gone\\_Home/](http://store.steampowered.com/app/232430/Gone_Home/)

3. ***Wonder Woman* (2017)**, directed by Patty Jenkins, DC Studios. Available to stream from Amazon video: <https://amzn.to/2RerlC7>

4. ***Black Panther* (2018)**, directed by Ryan Coogler, Marvel Studios. Available to stream from Amazon video: <https://amzn.to/2Ry9e9G>

5. ***Get Out* (2017)**, directed by Jordan Peele, Universal Pictures. Available to stream from Amazon video: <https://amzn.to/2TyPgZE>

There will be additional texts posted on Blackboard, marked as **BB**.

Because this is a course in developing your analytic and interpretive skills, we will be engaging with a high number of primary texts. You will be responsible for engaging these main texts as well as other materials listed outside of class whenever noted as homework. I will share all media with you as much as is possible, given platform and copyright restraints.

### **Other Required Materials:**

Paper and pen/pencil for in-class writing  
 Copies of all electronically shared readings  
 Access to the internet  
 Access to Blackboard  
 Access to your GVSU email (you are required to check this daily)  
 Access to a laptop, PC desktop, or gaming console (XBox, PS4, Nintendo Switch)

### **Notes on Course Materials:**

1. This is a course on identities and their expressions by and through popular cultural forms. As participants in the course, we come from a wide spectrum of experiences. Your identity or background does not make you a more or less important contributor to this course, nor does it indicate a greater or lesser degree of familiarity with course materials.

2. Studying difference involves exposure to ideas and topics that are generally considered contentious. Some materials in this course represent violence and sexuality. If you are concerned about engaging intellectually with such materials, please familiarize yourself with the course content and let me know in advance via email or by discussing your concerns with me during my office hours. Please also seek support by accessing available resources on campus:

Counseling Center: <https://www.gvsu.edu/counsel/>  
 LGBT Resource Center: <http://www.gvsu.edu/lgbtrc/>  
 Office of Inclusion and Equity: <http://www.gvsu.edu/inclusion/>  
 Women's Center: [http://gvsu.edu/women\\_cen/](http://gvsu.edu/women_cen/)  
 Multicultural Affairs: <http://gvsu.edu/oma/>  
 Report a Bias Incident: [http://www.gvsu.edu/inclusion/bias\\_incidents.htm](http://www.gvsu.edu/inclusion/bias_incidents.htm)  
 Veterans Network: <http://www.gvsu.edu/veterans/>

3. This course is an attempt to represent some of the major ways in which gender has influenced/has been represented by the popular cultures of the United States over the last century. It is not intended to be comprehensive, and does not promise to cover the entirety of popular culture.

### **Course Policies:**

The following is a sample of the course policies that apply to this classroom. You can review the policies that apply to all GVSU courses here: <https://www.gvsu.edu/coursepolicies/>.

**Classroom Conduct:** Any speech or behavior that shows disrespect or intolerance toward other students in class or toward the professor is unacceptable. As college

students, you will be expected to participate in class discussions in ways that demonstrate maturity, civility, and open-mindedness with respect to our diversity (including but not limited to differences in educational and economic background, age, race, gender, sexuality, ability, politics, religion, etc.). This does not mean that you cannot disagree with me or your classmates—respectful and fair debate is the basis for a successful class. However, all debate/disagreement must be conducted within the spirit of tolerance and mutual respect that a college classroom requires.

I expect you to help ensure this class is a respectful and civil space. You are expected to respect others' identities and to use others' names-in-use and gender pronouns. Rigorous and respectful intellectual discussion and debate is required. Personal attacks, disruptive behavior, hate speech, slurs, stereotyping, distractions/interruptions, and aggressive domination of the classroom discussion are expressions of disrespect. Students who engage in disrespectful behaviors will be warned and may be asked to leave the classroom or to drop the course.

Please limit device use in class unless I direct you to use them for assignments. Please plan on staying in class for the whole class period unless it is urgent for you to leave or you have made arrangements with me ahead of time.

**Academic Honesty:**

Academic honesty is required, and academic dishonesty will be penalized. Plagiarism occurs when a student misrepresents the work of another as their own. Plagiarism may consist of using the ideas, sentences, paragraphs, or the whole text of another without appropriate acknowledgement, but it also includes employing or allowing another person to write or substantially alter work that a student then submits as their own. Any assignment found to be plagiarized will be given an "F" grade. All instances of plagiarism will be reported, and may result in course failure or even dismissal from GVSU. To see GVSU's official policy on plagiarism, please see the Student Code, section 223.00 (<https://www.gvsu.edu/studentcode/>). If you are unsure of how to properly cite material and fear that you might unintentionally plagiarize sources, please see me or contact the Writing Center (<http://www.gvsu.edu/wc/>) for help.

**Diversity Statement:**

GVSU is committed to an inclusive environment free from discrimination and conducive of open inquiry, a multiplicity of ideas, a liberal education, and a healthy community. Diversity is not only respected in our classrooms: It is supported.

**GVSU's Non-Discrimination Statement:**

Every aspect of University life should be free from discrimination because of age, color, disability, familial status, height, marital status, national origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sex/gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, veteran status, or weight. Student housing, organizations, athletics, classes and University community facilities should be open to all who desire to participate.

**Gender Expression and Identity:**

If your legal name does not match your name in use, it can be updated. Please refer to GVSU MyName here: <https://bit.ly/2PBt9R2>.

**Disability Accommodations:**

If you are a student with a disability for which you may need accommodations, you should contact Disability Support Services (616-331-2490) and then have a private discussion with me. Please also see me if you have concerns about evacuating the building during an emergency so we can develop a plan to assist you.

**Student Basic Needs:**

Any student who faces challenges securing food or housing and believes this may affect their performance in this course is urged to contact the Dean of Students Office at (616)331-3585 or [dso@gvsu.edu](mailto:dso@gvsu.edu) for support. Please also notify me if you are comfortable doing so. This will enable me to connect you with any resources of which I am aware.

**Attendance and Participation Policy:**

You are permitted **2 absences** from this course (a full week). Unexcused absences over this number may affect your grade. Excessive lateness also disrupts the class community, so please notify me if you are going to have trouble making it to class exactly on time. It is the student's responsibility to make up all information on their own if absences become necessary. If you know now that you will need to miss a class meeting, please notify me and plan ahead to meet course requirements.

**Course Assignments:**

Showing Up	140 points
Analysis blogs and threads	250 points (50 points each, 5 total)
Exams (2)	300 points (150 points each)
Cultural Analysis Project	
-Proposal	60 points
-Research Bibliography	100 points
-Critical Essay	<u>150 points</u>
	1000 total points offered

**Requirements for Assignments:**

In-class and out-of-class work will be assigned throughout the course. Assignments are due **by class time** on the day listed, unless otherwise indicated. No late work is accepted. **Short extensions on major assignments may be granted if a student asks well in advance (a week) and has a demonstrated conflict or need.** If you know you are going to miss a class, you may turn work in early with the professor's permission. There is no makeup opportunity if you miss an assignment without asking for an extension. Assignments that are turned in under length will be returned to the student and considered incomplete until they are rewritten to meet requirements.

Printing difficulties are not acceptable excuses for late work: Plan ahead! It is not okay to submit work for this class that has been submitted to another class for academic credit.

**Showing Up (in class and online):**

Here are five basic qualities I look for from students in my courses: Together, they constitute ***showing up***:

1. Investment—Demonstrating that you value the course, your classmates, and me.
2. Preparation—Being ready to talk, think, and be in community with people different from you.
3. Openness—Showing us who you are and what you care about.
4. Risk-taking—Willingness to be vulnerable/try and fail in order to expand your skills and thinking.
5. Integrity—Honesty in your behavior and in your work.

***Showing up for this class is more than just physically attending.*** It is being present, being real, and contributing sincerely the class community. It is demonstrating that you have come to class not just prepared, but invested in some way that you have figured out for yourself. It is showing that you value other students by offering your thoughts/feelings and responding respectfully to theirs. It is being able to risk disclosure or disagreement while still practicing empathy toward others. I expect you to be in class, on time, and focused, yes—but you can do all that and still not be fully *showing up*. Showing up means recognizing that you are a resource to everyone else in the room and attending class with that presence.

**Analysis Entries and Threads (submitted on Blackboard):**

Over the course of the semester, you will prepare five analysis entries (250 words each) in response to the primary course materials prior to specific classes. Your entries will be individually written, but assigned in the course schedule based on group. They will be evaluated on 1. the clarity of your writing 2. your ability to demonstrate understanding and integration of the course materials 3. your ability to produce creative, original analyses of the course's primary texts by applying course concepts and theories 4. your ability to prompt valuable ethical discussion and debate. **All entries are due by 5:00 pm on the day BEFORE the class for which they are assigned (check syllabus).**

Students who are not in the group preparing an entry for that class meeting are required to review all entries and to **comment productively on at least ONE by class time**, showing you have engaged the assigned material and responding to the entry's ideas.

Students who are assigned an entry on a specific date are also responsible for leading thoughtful discussion of the material on those days.

**Midterm and Final Exams (online):**

These two open-book exams will be based upon content from the readings, lectures, videos, in-class activities, and class discussions. More information about the exams will be discussed in class and posted on Blackboard.

**Cultural Analysis Project (3 components, submitted on Blackboard):**

For this assignment you will select a popular culture artifact to analyze. You will apply the theories and concepts from this course to analyze the construction of gender, sexuality, and race within your popular culture artifact. There are three components to this assignment. Additional details about each assignment will be discussed in class and posted on Blackboard.

**1. Proposal:**

Provide details about the artifact and how you will access it. Write a paragraph that describes the artifact and explains why this is an important artifact to examine using course concepts. Include a brief explanation of the components of gender, sexuality, and race are you going to analyze.

**2 .Research Bibliography:**

You will find scholarly and popular sources valuable for analyzing your artifact and write a critical assessment of each source (i.e. an “annotation”). For each source, you will include traditional bibliographic information and an approximately 200 word annotation. We will have an informational session to get you started with this assignment.

**3. Critical essay:**

In a 5-7 page essay, you will apply the theories and concepts from the course readings and from your additional research to analyze the components of gender, sexuality, and race in your artifact. More directions for this part of the assignment will be shared later in class.

**Additional Assignments:**

There will be a number of smaller assignments that are to be completed as part of your active participation in the course. Completion of these will count toward your “showing up” score.

**My Grading Practice:**

This is a course in developing your analytic and interpretive skills. Active reading and viewing of/listening to the materials, as well as in-class participation, are baseline expectations for success in the course. Beyond your demonstration of these basic expectations, my grading practice will be focused on your ability to successfully apply key concepts and theories we are learning, to make convincing interpretive arguments about the artifacts we are examining, to anticipate and ethically weigh counterarguments or competing perspectives, and to develop original ideas about gender, sexuality, and race in popular culture.

It is crucial to understand that analysis and critique are not simply the stating of opinions: They are the ability to make and justify claims about an artifact's meaning or utility by grasping its multidimensional historical, political, cultural, and ethical contexts. An opinion is, by contrast, simply a judgement about something that is not necessarily based in fact or shared knowledge. It is my goal to have you each come out of this class holding fewer opinions and engaging in more analysis and critique, and my grading practice will reflect that aim.

**Course Schedule:**

Schedule is subject to change. All materials and assignments are due on date listed. (BB=Blackboard, \* indicates major assignment due)

**Unit 1: Foundations: Reading Gender in/as Popular Culture**

M 1.07      **Why Study Pop Culture?**  
Introduction to course, learning community, major concepts

**Week 1****The Ethical and Political Values of Cultural Analysis**

W 1.09      Read: Course syllabus  
Read: Sellnow, "What is Popular Culture; Why Study It?" and "Ideology and Hegemony" from *The Rhetorical Power of Popular Culture* (BB)  
Read: Hall, "Decoding Cultural Oppression" (BB)

**Week 2****How to Read Culture: Analyzing Gender, Sexuality, and Race**

M 1.14      Read: Aulette and Winter, "The Overarching Theory of Intersectionality" from *Gendered Worlds* (BB)  
Read: Zisler, "Pop and Circumstance: Why Pop Culture Matters" from *Feminism and Pop Culture* (BB)

W 1.16      Read: Excerpts from Sellnow, "Feminist Perspectives" and "Visual Perspectives" from *The Rhetorical Power of Popular Culture* (BB)  
Read: Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" from *The Gender and Media Reader* (BB)



**Week 3**

M 1.21 No class—MLK Jr. Day recess  
 W 1.23 Read: Hooks, “The Oppositional Gaze” from *Black Looks* (BB)

**Week 4**

M 1.28 Read: Doty, “There’s Something Queer Here” from *Making Things Perfectly Queer: Interpreting Mass Culture* (BB)

**Unit 2: Gender and Popular Forms****Serial and Sequential Forms (Comics, Soaps, and Web Series)**

W 1.30 Read: Chute, “Women, Comics, and the Risk of Representation” from *Graphic Women: Life Narrative and Contemporary Comics* (BB)

**Week 5**

S 2.03 **Group 1 Entry 1 due by 5:00 (BB)**  
 M 2.04 Read: *Bitch Planet Volume 1: Extraordinary Machine*  
 W 2.06 Read: Gledhill, “Speculations on the Relationship Between Soap Opera and Melodrama” (BB)

**Week 6**

S 2.10 **Group 2 Entry 1 due by 5:00 (BB)**  
 M 2.11 Read: Halperin, “Gender and Genre” from *How to Be Gay* (BB)  
 Watch: *Brujos* (BB)

**Ludic Forms (Games)**

W 2.13 Read: Royse et al., “Women and Games: Technologies of the Gendered Self” from *The Gender and Media Reader* (BB)

**Week 7**

S 2.17 **Group 3 Entry 1 due by 5:00 (BB)**  
 M 2.18 Read: Shaw and Friesam, “Where is the Queerness in Games?” from *International Journal of Communication* (BB)  
 Play through: *Dys4ria* here: <https://freegames.org/dys4ia/#play-game>  
 Play through: *With Those We Love Alive* here: <http://slimeddaughter.com/games/twine/wtwla/>  
 Play through: *Queers in Love at the End of the World* here: <https://w.itch.io/end-of-the-world>  
 T 2.19 **Group 1 Entry 2 due by 5:00 (BB)**  
 \*W 2.20 Play through: *Gone Home* (2-4 hours to complete)  
**Research proposals due by class time (BB)**

**DIY Forms (Zines, YouTube)****Week 8**

- S 2.24      **Group 2 Entry 2 due by 5:00 (BB)**  
 M 2.25      Read: Schilt, "'I'll Resist with Every Breath': Girls and Zine Making as a Form of Resistance" from *The Gender and Media Reader* (BB).  
 Digitally tour the Lesbian Activism Zine exhibit at Barnard here: <http://bcrw.barnard.edu/archive/lesbian.htm> (click on and read at least "Coming Out," "Tales of the Closet," and "The Lesbian Avengers' Dyke Manifesto")
- T 2.26      **Group 3 Entry 2 due by 5:00 (BB)**  
 W 2.27      Read: Horak, "Trans on YouTube" (BB)  
 Watch YouTube playlist here: <http://bit.ly/2yu8RQz>

**Week 9**

- M 3.04      No class—Spring break  
 W 3.08      No class—Spring break

**Unit 3: Gender and Popular Bodies****Body Genres****Week 10**

- \*S 3.10      **Midterms due on BB by 11:59 pm**  
 M 3.11      Read: Williams, "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess" from *The Gender and Media Reader* (BB)  
**In-class research session**
- T 3.12      **Group 1 Entry 3 due by 5:00 (BB)**  
 W 3.13      **Alternative session— Class Visit from Professor Todd Kaneko**  
 Read: Jenkins, "Never Trust a Snake: WWF Wrestling as Masculine Melodrama" from *The Gender and Media Reader* (BB).  
 Watch: TBA

**Week 11**

- S 3.17      **Group 2 Entry 3 due by 5:00 (BB)**  
 M 3.18      Watch: *Get Out*, directed by Jordan Peele  
 Read: Madison, "*Get Out* Understands the Black Body" (BB)

**Super Genders**

W 3.20 Read: Fawaz, "From American Marvels to the Mutant Generation: Reinventing the Superhero" from *The New Mutants: Superheroes and the Radical Imagination of American Comics* (BB)

**Week 12**

S 3.24 **Group 3 Entry 3 due by 5:00 (BB)**  
 M 3.25 Watch: *Wonder Woman*, directed by Patty Jenkins  
 Read: Fawaz, "Notes on *Wonder Woman*" (BB)

W 3.27 Read: Halberstam, "Suffering Sappho!" (BB)  
 Th 3.28 **Recommended event: Transgender Day of Visibility, guest speaker micha cárdenas**

**Week 13**

S 3.31 **Group 1 Entry 4 due by 5:00 (BB)**  
 \*M 4.01 Read: Womack, Excerpts from *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture* (BB)  
 Watch: *Black Panther*  
**Annotated bibliography due by class (BB)**

**Animating Gender**

T 4.02 **Group 2 Entry 4 due by 5:00 (BB)**  
 W 4.03 Watch: *Steven Universe*, "Tiger Millionaire," "Alone Together," and "Jailbreak"  
 Read: Dunn, "Steven Universe, Fusion Magic, and the Queer Cartoon Carnavalesque" from *Gender Forum* (BB)

**Sensing Gender****Week 14**

S 4.07 **Group 3 Entry 4 due by 5:00 (BB)**  
 M 4.08 Watch: *Sense8*, "I am Also a We," "Demons," and "Death Doesn't Let You Say Goodbye" on Netflix  
 Read: Keegan, "Tongues Without Bodies" (BB)

**Unit 4: Gender and Popular Performance****When Gender is a Ball****Week 15**

T 4.09 **Group 1 Entry 5 due by 5:00 (BB)**  
 W 4.10 Read: Ng, "A Post-Gay Era? Media Gaystreaming, Homonormativity, and the Politics of LGBT Integration" (BB)  
 Watch: *Pose*, Season 1, episode 1

S 4.14      **Group 2 Entry 5 due by 5:00 (BB)**  
\*M 4.15      Watch: *Paris is Burning* (BB)  
                 **Analysis essay due by class (BB)**

**When Genders Come to Slay**

**Week 16**

T 4.16      **Group 3 Entry 5 due by 5:00 (BB)**

W 4.17      Watch: "Formation" here:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WDZJPJV\\_bQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WDZJPJV_bQ)

Read: Bey, "Beyoncé's Black (Ab)Normal: Baaad Insurgency and the Queerness of Slaying" from *Black Camera* (BB)

**\*TBA                      Final exam due on BB by final exam session**  
**In-session presentations of research**