

**ENG 334**  
**Transgender Film and Media Studies**  
Western Washington University • Spring 2017  
Class Meeting: MWF 2:30–3:50pm, Miller Hall 235  
Screening: Th 4:00–6:50pm, Bond Hall 109

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Over the last few years, largely non-phobic representations of transgender and gender-variant people and experiences have broken into the mainstream. In the summer of 2014, *Time* magazine put transgender actress and activist Laverne Cox on the cover next to the headline “The Transgender Tipping Point,” suggesting that after decades of struggle trans activism had achieved a critical breakthrough. That year, Cox was nominated for an Emmy for her portrayal of transgender inmate Sophia Bursett on the Netflix original television series *Orange Is the New Black*, and cisgender male actor Jared Leto won an Academy Award for his portrayal of transgender woman Rayon in the film *Dallas Buyers Club*. In 2015, Amazon’s *Transparent*, about a family grappling with a parent’s transition, won the Golden Globe for Best Comedy Series. That same year, Caitlyn Jenner led viewers on a mass-mediated, three-part coming-out journey: first an April interview with Diane Sawyer on *20/20* that was watched by 20.7 million viewers, then a cover story in *Vanity Fair* magazine with photographs by Annie Liebovitz, and finally the summer launch of her reality show *I Am Cait*.

This course investigates the form, history, and politics of transgender media: how trans and gender-variant people have represented themselves and how they have been represented by others. We will begin with a few weeks on trans history and politics and then explore Hollywood’s (pre-turning-point) history of trans representation. After that we will look in depth at a range of media forms: documentary, independent, experimental, and global cinemas, as well as television and video games.

Although a detailed schedule is provided below, course content may shift. Ample notice will be provided of any changes. Canvas is always the best place to look for the most up-to-date course schedule.

**Student Learning Objectives**

This course will help you achieve student-learning outcomes of the English Department:

1. Write effectively in a variety of genres using appropriate conventions.
2. Read accurately and critically in a variety of genres and media in relation to a variety of discourses, cultures, and historical periods.
3. Understand and apply a range of critical and cultural theories.

The course also satisfies the General University Requirement (GUR) for a Block B course in Comparative, Gender, and Multicultural Studies (BCGM), the goal of which is to provide an introduction to multicultural experience and gender studies with a primary emphasis on North America and/or Europe.

More specific course objectives include:

- Gain knowledge of transgender and gender-variant film history; major trans film and videomakers, actors, and performers; and significant trends in scholarship in the field
- Develop skills in using current research tools and resources (both print and digital) to pursue film-historical investigations
- Hone skills of critical thinking and reflection, media and visual literacy, and writing
- Develop skills for respectful engagement with the diversity of experiences and identifications around gender, sexuality, and embodiment at Western Washington University and beyond

### **Texts and Resources**

There are no books to purchase for the class. All readings will be made available on Canvas either as PDFs or links to online content. It is your responsibility to print each reading out and bring it to class when we are scheduled to discuss it.

### **Course Components**

#### **• Attendance and Participation (30%)**

The class requires diligent reading and viewing as well as active participation in group discussions. It is a collaborative project: in order to succeed, we must all come to every session prepared to actively, thoughtfully, and respectfully engage with one another. Arrive on time, having read the assigned material and completed any required assignments, and be ready to spend the next hour and a half participating in active discussion and exploration. Be prepared to contribute at least one thought or question to every class meeting. Always bring the day's reading assignment and your notes with you to class for reference.

Note that there are four special screenings, in weeks five, eight, nine, and ten. Put these in your calendar now! Also of interest, though not required for the course, is [QueerCon, a queer comics convention at Western on Saturday, April 29](#).

Three times during the quarter, post a response of at least 300 words to the discussion tab on Canvas. These are not after-the-fact posts. They need to engage with the day's reading *before* we meet to discuss it. In fact, I will use these posts to kickstart our discussions in class. These posts *should not be summaries* but instead critical engagement with the points, ideas, and arguments from the readings that provoke or matter to you the most. Post by noon of the day we meet at the absolute latest, in order to give me and others time to look at your posts before class.

#### **• Midterm (20%)**

A midterm exam, combining multiple-choice, short answer, and essay questions, will take place during class time on Monday, April 24.

#### **• Group Presentation or Creative Project (25%)**

You have two options for this assignment. First, in a group of three or four, give a presentation on a topic pertaining to trans film and media studies that expands our collective knowledge of the field and takes us into new terrain. Second, work alone or with peers on a creative project relating to trans media. Both options require scholarly research. A detailed prompt for the assignment will be provided early in the term, a proposal will be due in week five, and the presentations will be scheduled during our final three weeks together.

#### **• Final Exam (25%)**

A final exam, combining multiple-choice, short answer, and essay questions, will take place Wednesday, June 7, from 3:30 to 5:30pm.

### **Other Important Information**

• **Attendance Policy:** If you need to miss a particular class or screening, contact me in advance to have it excused. Any unexcused absence will negatively affect your course grade. Three tardies constitute one unexcused absence. You are permitted to miss no more than three course sessions or screenings during the quarter (whether or not they are excused) and still pass the course. If you miss a class, it is your responsibility to get notes from a classmate. Make a friend early in the term for this purpose.

• **Late Work Policy:** Extensions on assignments must be requested at least 48 hours in advance. Work submitted late, without an extension, will be docked one-third of a grade step for each day late. In other words, a B paper becomes a B-, then a C+, then a C, etc.

• **No Screens Policy:** Computer screens and cell-phone screens are a distraction to yourself and to those around you who can see them. I ask that for both our class sessions and evening screenings all personal screens be turned off and stowed at your feet. There will be a few times during the term when I will allow them for in-class collaborative work, but these are special exceptions that I will announce. I'm not being curmudgeonly here. Studies have shown that students' grades go down both when they are multitasking online during classtime *and* even when they are not doing so themselves but can see and be distracted by the screens of others. See, for example, this report on a recent study: <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/life/parenting/back-to-school/laptops-in-class-lowers-students-grades-canadian-study/article13759430/>

• **Disability Accommodations:** Reasonable accommodation for persons with documented disabilities should be established before the end of the first week of the term and must be arranged through Disability Resources for Students: telephone 650-3083; email [drs@wwu.edu](mailto:drs@wwu.edu) ; and on the web at <http://www.wwu.edu/depts/drs/> After receiving an accommodation recommendation from DRS, it is crucial that you speak in person with me before the end of the second week of the quarter so that we can discuss the accommodation and be clear on its terms.

• **Inclement Weather Policy:** In case of inclement weather, please check our Canvas website for any class cancellation announcements. I will post announcements at least two hours prior to our class time. If you are ever unable to get to Western because of dangerous conditions, you may decide to remain home even if the university is open. Each decision is a personal one and should be made according to individual judgment.

• **Academic Integrity:** Western is committed to integrity in all aspects of academic and campus life. No student shall claim as their own the achievements, work, or arguments of others, nor shall they be a party to such claims. Plagiarism will result in a grade of F for the assignment and possibly an F for the course. For more information on Integrity and Academic honesty, visit the following websites:

- Integrity Web Site  
<http://www.wwu.edu/integrity/>
- Academic Honesty Policy and Procedure  
<http://catalog.wwu.edu/content.php?catoid=9&navoid=1521>

• **The Hacherl Research & Writing Studio and the Tutoring Center:** In addition to meeting with me during class and in office hours, you have available to you a number of support services through the library. Both the Hacherl Research & Writing Studio on the second floor of Haggard Hall (<https://library.wwu.edu/rws>) and the Tutoring Center in Wilson Library (<http://www.wwu.edu/tutoring/index.shtml>) are great resources. The Research & Writing Studio

is particularly recommended: no appointment is necessary; just drop in, start working, and someone will come around to help you with your work. The Studio's services are also available online.

• **Student Responsibilities and Expected Behaviors:** The classroom is a forum for open and respectful inquiry and exchange of ideas. All members of the class—students and professor alike—are expected to treat each other with respect. More broadly, the English Department fosters a learning community characterized by mutual respect and entirely free of harassment. Harassment is any improper and unwelcome conduct that might reasonably be expected or be perceived to cause offence or humiliation to another person. Harassment may take the form of words, gestures or actions which tend to alarm, abuse, demean, intimidate, belittle, humiliate or embarrass another or which create intimidating, hostile or offensive learning and classroom environments. If a student experiences harassment, whether sexual in nature or any other form, they should report the event as soon as possible to a faculty member, the department chair, and/or the Equal Opportunity Office.

• **A Note on Sensitive Materials:** This class is about media texts that relate primarily to transgender and gender-variant representation, expression, and experience. Be aware that trans media scholarship includes the analysis of transphobic media texts in addition to trans-affirming ones. Keep in mind that the classroom is a space for us to engage critically (meaning, analytically) with *every* media text we view. I will do my best to give a heads up when I am about to screen something that may be troubling for viewers, but what is troubling varies from person to person. Please take a careful look at the syllabus and if you think you may have trouble viewing anything, bring it to my attention early in the term so we can develop a plan to help you navigate the material. Note that week three is probably the most likely to disturb, because that week we will be exploring Hollywood's history of portraying trans people, including in cross-dressing comedies and horror films.

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## Course Schedule

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### Week One: Getting Started

W 3/29: Course Introduction

- In-class screening of [Toilet Training \(dir. Tara Mateik, 2003\)](#)

TH 3/30 Screening: *Screaming Queens: The Riot at Compton's Cafeteria* (dir. Victor Silverman and Susan Stryker, 2005, 57 min.)

F 3/31: Trans History and Terminology

- Stryker, "An Introduction to Transgender Terms and Concepts" [Canvas]
- ["GLAAD Media Reference Guide—Transgender Issues"](#) [Online]

### Week Two: Transgender Politics Today

M 4/3: Radical Trans Politics

- Spade, "Trans Law and Politics on a Neoliberal Landscape" [Canvas]

W 4/5: Bringing the Margins into the Mainstream

In-class screening of episode of *I Am Cait* (2015–16)

- Udy, ["Keeping It Real: Genre and Politics on \*I Am Cait\*"](#) [Online]

TH 4/6 Screening: *MAJOR!* (dir. Annalise Ophelian, 2015)

F 4/7: Discussion of *MAJOR!*

[Over the weekend, watch a temporary tranvestite film. A list will be provided in class.]

### **Week Three: Hollywood's History of Transgender Representation**

M 4/10: The Temporary Transvestite Film

- Straayer, "Redressing the 'Natural': The Temporary Transvestite Film" [Canvas]

W 4/12: Constructing and Performing Monstrosity

- Stryker, "My Words to Victor Frankenstein above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage" [Canvas]

TH 4/13 Screening: *The Silence of the Lambs* (dir. Jonathan Demme, 1991, 118 min.)

F 4/14: Discussion of *The Silence of the Lambs*

- On your own, explore online discussions of *The Silence of the Lambs*, particularly blog posts by trans writers at the time of the film's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary last year.

### **Week Four: Drag**

M 4/17: The History of Drag on Screen, from Divine to Hedwig

W 4/19: RuPaul and the "Trannygate" Controversy

In-class screening of episode of *RuPaul's Drag Race* (2009–)

- Goldmark, "National Drag: The Language of Inclusion in *RuPaul's Drag Race*" [Canvas]

TH 4/20 Screening: *Paris Is Burning* (dir. Jennie Livingston, 1990, 71 min.)

F 4/21: The Debates around *Paris Is Burning*

- Hilderbrand, "Love Hangover (Debates)" [Canvas]
- hooks, "Is Paris Burning?" [Canvas]

### **Week Five: Trans Experimental Cinema**

M 4/24: Midterm Review

W 4/26: In-class **MIDTERM**

Optional Event at 4pm on Wednesday: Bradford Nordeen Curator Talk in Fine Arts 238

**TH 4/27 Special Screening:** Bradford Nordeen and the Dirty Looks Roadshow present "Hardcore Home Movies," 6:30pm at the Pickford Film Center downtown (This is in lieu of our usual 4pm screening this day.)

F 4/28: Discussion of trans experimental cinema and art practices

- Reading TBA

**DUE:** Proposal for group presentation or creative project.

[Before our class on Monday, May 1, watch *Boys Don't Cry* (dir. Kimberly Peirce, 1999).]

### **Week Six: The Transgender Gaze**

M 5/1: *Boys Don't Cry* in 1999 and in 2016

- Halberstam, "The Transgender Gaze in *Boys Don't Cry*" [Canvas]
- Halberstam, "[Hiding the Tears in My Eyes—Boys Don't Cry—A Legacy](#)" [Online]

W 5/3: Trans

- Keegan, "Revisitation: A Trans Phenomenology of the Media Image" [Canvas]

**NO CLASS MEETINGS ON THURSDAY AND FRIDAY THIS WEEK**

### **Week Seven: Trans Television**

M 5/8: In-class screening of episode of *Transparent* (2014–)

- [Morse, "Seeing Double: Visibility, Temporality, and Transfeminine History in \*Transparent\*"](#) [Online]

W 5/10: Trans on YouTube

- Horak, "Trans on YouTube: Intimacy, Visibility, Temporality" [Canvas]

TH 5/11: Screening: Episodes of *Sense8* (2015–)

F 5/12: Discussion of *Sense8*

- Keegan, "Tongues without Bodies: The Wachowski's *Sense8*" [Canvas]

**Week Eight: Video Games / Presentations Begin this Week**

M 5/15: Gender, Avatars, and Play in Video Games

- Shaw, excerpt from *Gaming at the Edge: Sexuality and Gender at the Margins of Gaming Culture* [Canvas]

W 5/17: Trans Gamers

- Cárdenas, "[Dilating Destiny: Writing the Transreal Body through Game Design](#)" [Online]

**TH 5/18 Special Screening:** a selection of short works by Seattle-based artist Clyde Petersen, 6:30pm at the Pickford Film Center downtown (This is in lieu of our usual 4pm screening this day.)

F 5/19: Discussion of Clyde Petersen screening

- Reading TBA

[Over the weekend, watch a trans film from outside the US and Europe. A list will be provided in class.]

**Week Nine: Global Trans Cinema / Presentations Continue**

M 5/22: Overview of Global Trans Cinema

- Reading TBA

W 5/24: What Gets Lost in Translation

- Leung, "Always in Translation: Trans Cinema across Languages" [Canvas]

**Special Wednesday Evening Screening:** *Tchindas* (dir. Pablo García Pérez de Lara, Marc Serena, 2015) as part of the Reel World film series on campus: 6pm in Miller Hall 138  
Because of the Wednesday special screening, our usual Thursday screening is cancelled.

F 5/26: Discussion of *Tchindas*

**Week Ten: Wrapping Things Up! / Final Presentations**

NO CLASS ON MONDAY THIS WEEK: MEMORIAL DAY HOLIDAY

W 5/31: TBA

**TH 6/1 Special Screening:** *Real Boy* (dir. Shaleece Haas, 2016) at the Pickford Film Center downtown (This is in lieu of our usual 4pm screening this day.)

F 6/2: TBA

**Final Exam on Wednesday, June 7, from 3:30–5:30pm.**