

FEMINISM & THE MEDIA Summer 2020

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Feminism & the Media is a collaborative seminar designed to examine the complex relationship (or different, contradictory relationships) between those humans we call “women” and those forms of discourse we call “media.” We will consider women both as subjects and objects, as artists and models, as creators of “media” in its many forms and as media’s creations. What does our culture’s “media” tell us about its ideas of gender? What, if anything, does our gender tell us about our readings of “media”? What is feminism anyway? What does it mean in 2020? Student participation in this seminar is key: students are expected to attend all sessions, to complete all the reading (there's *lots* of reading!), to participate actively in discussion, and to lead one of the class sessions themselves. Leading a class means opening the day’s conversation with a presentation, critiquing and elaborating on the assigned reading, bringing in additional relevant material, and suggesting questions or issues that seem particularly interesting or troublesome. The purpose of the course is to develop our critical and self-critical faculties as journalists, media critics, consumers of media, and women or men—to think clearly, challenge our pet assumptions, and **have fun**.

Along with attendance and *informed* class participation, students are required to conduct a mini-research project and present their findings to the class. I want you to pick a “women and media” topic that really interests you and then report the hell out of it. If you’re interested in the portrayal of teen sex on TV, for instance, you would first put together an extensive bibliography of what has already been written on the subject. You would figure out what the key questions in the field were: have these portrayals changed over the last few decades? Do these representations reflect—or lead—changes in the wider society? You might interview some of the leading researchers in the area and tell us what they say. You’ll certainly want to read the most important books/articles on your subject. A paper is not required; instead, students will present their findings to the class.

Required Reading

Susan Douglas, *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media*

Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth*

Helen Benedict, *Virgin or Vamp: How the Press Covers Sex Crimes*

Additional readings will be posted on NYU Classes.

Syllabus

- 7/7 Introduction to the course.
- 7/9 Women consuming culture. Read: *Where the Girls Are* (entire, except the Epilogue). Listen to music and watch TV!
- 7/14 Culture consuming women? Read: *The Beauty Myth*. Also read Kasey Edwards, "The Best Ice-breakers for Girls"; Seth Stephens-Davidowitz, "Google, Tell Me, Is My Son a Genius?"; and Amanda Hess, "'I Feel Pretty' and the Rise of Beauty Standard Denialism" (all on NYU Classes, in *Beauty* folder). And please read and bring to class a selection of "women's magazines." **PROJECT PROPOSALS DUE.**
- 7/16 Women do journalism/Journalism does women. Read: Nan Robertson, "The Girls in the Balcony"; Lynn Povich, "The Good Girls Revolt"; Amy Wallace, "Life as a Female Journalist: Hot or Not?"; Susan Antilla, "Why Do Women Still Lag in Journalism?"; Jessica Bennett and Jesse Ellison, "Are We There Yet?"; Erin LaRosa, "8 Stories of Everyday Sexism, As Told By Female Journalists"; and Hillary Rosner, "Their So-Called Journalism, Or What I Saw at the Women's Mags" (all in *Women Do Journalism* folder); AND selections from Caryl Rivers, *Slick Spins & Fractured Facts* ("Totem and Taboo," "Put the Blame on Eve, Boys,"); Susan Faludi, *Backlash* ("Introduction: Blame It on Feminism," "Man Shortages and Barren Wombs"); Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards, *Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism, and the Future* ("Feminists Want to Know: Is the Media Dead?"); Amanda Hess, "Time Magazine Turns Hillary Clinton Into a Pointy Heel Trampling an Emasculated Dude"; Justin Wolfers, "Even Famous Female Economists Get No Respect" (all in *Journalism Does Women* folder). OPTIONAL READING: For examples of how journalism has covered the work/motherhood story/backlash, see Louise Story, "Many Women at Elite Colleges Set Career Path to Motherhood"; Katha Pollitt, "Desperate Housewives of the Ivy League"; Stephanie Coontz, "The M.R.S. and the Ph.D."; Lisa Belkin, "The Opt-Out

Revolution”; Judith Warner, “The Opt-Out Generation Wants Back In”; and *Newsweek*, “Rethinking the Marriage Crunch” (all in *Journalism Does Women* folder).

7/21

Thinking about girls. Read: “Epilogue,” *Where the Girls Are*; Katha Pollitt, “The Smurfette Principle”; Kiku Adatto, “Trigger-Happy Birthday”; Ellen Seiter, “Toy-Based Video for Girls”; Sara Voorhees, “Where Are All the Girl Ninjas?”; J.C. Herz, “Girls Just Want to Have Fun”; Belinda Luscomb, “The Truth About Teen Girls”; Emily Rosenbaum, “Loving Pink for Boys, Hating It for Girls”; Juniper Russo, “Disney’s Most Racist Films”; Peggy Orenstein, “What’s Wrong with Cinderella?” and “Should the World of Toys Be Gender Free?”; Linda Holmes, “A Girl, A Shoe, a Prince: The Endlessly Evolving Cinderella”; Natalie Wilson, “Third Time Still Not the Charm for Toy Story’s Female Characters”; Children Now, “Boys to Men: Media Messages about Masculinity”; “Sexism in Video Games”; and selections from Media Awareness Network (“From Sidekick to Superwoman: TV’s Feminine Mystique,” “Too Few Animated Women Break the Disney Mold,” “Media and Girls,” and “How Seventeen Undermines Young Women”), all in *Kids’ Media* folder.

7/23

Thinking about rape. Read: *Virgin or Vamp* (entire), and Katha Pollitt, “Naming and Blaming: Media Goes Wilding in Palm Beach”; Soraya Chemaly, “Facts About Rape”; Julianne Ross, “If We Gave Men the Same Rape Advice We Give Women, Here’s How Absurd It Would Sound”; Emily Yoffe, “College Women: Stop Getting Drunk”; Charles Clymer, “Emily Yoffe Joins ‘Don’t Drink and Vagina’ Campaign”; “Just Bad Sex? A Collection of Links”; and Jia Tolentino, “Is There a Smarter Way to Think About Sexual Assault on Campus?” (all in *Rape/Sex Crimes* folder).

7/28

Thinking about race. Read: bell hooks, excerpts from *Black Looks*; Peggy McIntosh, “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack”; Naomi Wolf, “The Racism of Well-Meaning White People”; selections from *Identity Politics in the Women’s Movement*, edited by Barbara Ryan (Audre Lorde, “Our Difference Is Our Strength,” Minnie Bruce Pratt, “Who Am I If I’m Not My Father’s Daughter?,”); selections from *Feminist Theory Reader*, edited by Carole McCann and Seung-Kyung Kim (Mitsuye Yamada, “Invisibility Is an Unnatural Disaster: Reflections of an Asian-American Woman,” Gloria Anzaldúa, “La Conciencia de la Mestiza: Towards a New Consciousness,”); Letty Cottin Pogrebin, “Anti-Semitism and the Women’s Movement” and “Zionism, Meet Feminism”; Rafia Zakaria, “Sex and the Muslim Feminist”; Tyler Bishop, “Being Muslim on Campus”; Tanzina Vega, “Colorblind Notions Aside, Colleges Grapple With Racial Tension”; Manicpixiedreammama, “A Mother’s White Privilege”; Nicholas Kristof, “When Whites Just Don’t Get It”; Jelani Cobb, “Black

Like Her”; Tamara Winfrey Harris, “Black Like Who?”; and Gabriela Thorne, “For Students of Color, Ivy League Schools Have a Long Way to Go” (all in *Race/Ethnicity* folder).

BIBLIOGRAPHIES DUE.

7/30 Case study: pop culture. Read: Tania Modleski, *Loving with a Vengeance* and “Three Men and Baby M” (all in *Pop Culture* folder).

8/4 Case study: pornography. Read: selections from Feminist Anti-Censorship Task Force, *Caught Looking* (Introduction, Ann Snitow, “Retrenchment vs. Transformation,” Paula Webster, “Pornography and Pleasure,” Ellen Willis, “Feminism, Moralism & Pornography,”); from Laura Lederer, *Take Back the Night* (Susan Brownmiller, excerpt from *Against Our Will*, Gloria Steinem, “Erotica and Pornography: A Clear and Present Difference,” Robin Morgan, “Theory and Practice: Pornography and Rape,” Andrea Dworkin, “For Men, Freedom of Speech; for Women, Silence Please,” and Adrienne Rich, “Afterword”); from Ariel Levy, *Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture*; Maggie Jones, “What Teenagers Are Learning from Online Porn”; and David Amsden, “Not Tonight Honey, I’m Logging On” (all in *Pornography* folder).

8/6 Case study: transgender/transcending gender? Read: Hanna Rosin, “A Boy’s Life”; Kay Siebler, “Transgender Transitions”; Margaret Talbot, “About a Boy”; Jennifer Finney Boylan and Helen Boyd, “About ‘Transgendered’: Some History and Grammar”; Elinor Burkett, “What Makes a Woman?”; Katha Pollitt, “Who Has Abortions?”; Michelle Goldberg, “What Is a Woman?”; Jennifer Finney Boylan, “A Response to Leelah Alcorn’s Suicide Note”; Jennifer Finney Boylan, “Trans Deaths, White Privilege”; Vanessa Vitiello Urquhart, “It Isn’t Crazy to Compare Rachel Dolezal With Caitlyn Jenner”; and Zeba Blay, “Why Comparing Rachel Dolezal to Caitlyn Jenner is Detrimental to both Trans and Racial Progress” (all in *Transgressions* folder).

8/11 **STUDENT PRESENTATIONS**

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Learning Objectives

In this course, students will:

- Demonstrate critical thinking, independence, and creativity appropriate to the role of journalism in a democratic society
- Interview subjects, conduct research, and evaluate information
- Work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness, and diverse perspectives
- Use technological tools and apply quantitative concepts as appropriate

A Word About Grading

This class is a seminar, which means that student engagement is key. Your grade will be based on participation in our discussions, your reading presentation, and of course your final research project. This grading rubric is not applied rigidly and there is room for flexibility, but in general, your final grade will be calculated roughly as follows: discussion and participation, 25%; reading presentation, 25%; and final research project/presentation, 50%.

Accommodations

Students with disabilities that necessitate accommodations should contact and register with New York University's Moses Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD) at [212-998-4980](tel:212-998-4980) or mosescsd@nyu.edu. Information about the Moses Center can be found at www.nyu.edu/csd. The Moses Center is located at 726 Broadway on the 2nd floor.

Diversity & Inclusion

The Arthur L. Carter Journalism Institute is committed to creating an inclusive learning environment. The Institute embraces a notion of intellectual community enriched and enhanced by diversity along a number of dimensions.