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 European 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, and analyzes 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, the 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 the end of this course, students will be in able to:

- Understand how gender is central to sexuality, class, and race operating in the wider socio-cultural context since the 19th century
- Develop and acquire knowledge of theories of articulation and hegemony, and apply to representations of gender and identity in popular culture
- Examine popular culture as a site of struggle and contestations, seeing representations, for example, as attempts to stabilize social meanings and subject to socio-historical change.
- 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
None. 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**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Critical response to popular cultural forms (X2)</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Presentation</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Midterm essay</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Essay</td>
<td>25%</td>
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**Course Requirements**

**Group Presentation [15%]:**

Each group of students will present on the relationship between two British popular cultural forms and the course themes. Eg. Television, film, radio, internet memes and blogs, photography, music, magazines, pantomime, theatre and literature. Students can choose any two popular cultural forms but their presentation must link to at least two of the course themes: Comedy and stereotypes as central devices in British pantomime, British theatre, popular music etc., the ‘low’ status of popular culture as central to how it is simultaneously produced and consumed, and the role of the audience in popular culture.

**Critical Response to Popular Cultural form x 2 [10% and 10%]:**
Each student is required to write two critical engagements:

1. A 500 word response to a British public service announcement:
   (Links to an external site.)
2. A 500 word response to two AIDS posters (one from Britain and one from elsewhere) from The Wellcome Collection’s online archive:
   http://wellcomecollection.org/aids-posters-0 (Links to an external site.)

Each Critical Engagement needs to address the following 3 questions:

Q1): How are gender, sexuality and ethnicity being represented? [ie. What are the characteristics, or features, of representation? Are certain devices, or strategies used? Such as irony, humour, stereotypes, gender transgression, shock tactics etc.]

Q2): What is the role of this popular cultural form? [NB: There can be more than one role]

Q3): Who is the intended audience? [NB: There can be more than one audience. For example, public service announcements can be pitched to more than one audience]

Students will be graded according to how successfully they support their analyses of their chosen popular cultural forms.

Essays x 2 [20% and 25%]:

Each of the two essays (Midterm: 1500 words; Final: 1500 words) will analyse the role of British popular culture. Suggested essay titles are provided but students are allowed to design their own titles. But if students decide to write their own titles, they must get their titles approved with the instructor before they submit the final copy.

Participation [20%]:

All students are expected to participate in class by showing willingness to participate in the discussion around the issues raised at the beginning of each session and an interest in producing, reflecting and commenting classroom activities. Similarly, each participant is expected to do his/her part to collaborate with other members of the course to reach the best possible learning environment. Debates, discussions, text and audiovisual analysis, social dynamics – these activities will be both individual and collective. They will be assessed based on the student’s ability to compose texts and reflect on the composed texts and personal progress in the construction and reflection of those texts.

Attendance Policy

Regular class attendance is required throughout the program, and all unexcused 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, unexcused 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 and unexcused. 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.

Unexcused absences will lead to the following penalties:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of Total Course Hours Missed</th>
<th>Equivalent Number of Open Campus Semester classes</th>
<th>Minimum Penalty</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Up to 10%</td>
<td>1 content classes, or up to 2 language classes</td>
<td>Participation graded as per class requirements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 – 20%</td>
<td>2 content classes, or 3-4 language classes</td>
<td>Participation graded as per class requirements; written warning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 20%</td>
<td>3 content classes, or 5 language classes</td>
<td>Automatic course failure, and possible expulsion</td>
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**Weekly Schedule**

NOTE: this schedule is subject to change at the discretion of the instructor to take advantage of current experiential learning opportunities.

**Week 1**

**Class 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. Our main point of discussion is that representations of gender, race and sexuality connect meaning and language to culture and that there are numerous theoretical approaches to analyzing representations in
popular culture. We also discuss how the emergence of Cultural Studies in Britain during the late 1960s challenged prevailing ideas of popular culture as an inherently ‘low’ cultural form because Cultural Studies as a theory and practice, through people like Stuart Hall, questioned the simplistic opposition between ‘high’ literary culture versus ‘low’ popular culture. Thus Cultural Studies legitimized popular culture as an academic topic. We will also discuss how British Cultural Studies continues to evolve in response to popular culture.

Readings:
Hall – The work of representation (1997)
Secondary readings: TBA

**Week 2**

**Class 2.1**

Popular Culture and Issues of Class and National Identity
This week, we elaborate on the main analytical concepts underpinning the course, namely articulation and hegemony. Using these concepts, we discuss the question: What is the ‘British’ in British popular culture, or the ‘German’ in German popular culture?

Readings:
Hall – Notes on Deconstructing ‘the Popular’

**Class 2.2**

Starting with the issue of class, which has been the focus of Cultural Studies since its early days, we analyze representations of class and its links to ‘national character’ or ‘mentality’ in popular culture.

Readings:
Fiske – Popular Discrimination;
Assignment: Critical Response 1

**Week 3**

**Class 3.1**

Gender theories – From Ideology to Psychoanalysis
In this class 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.

Readings:
Gauntlett – Chapter 2

**Class 3.2**

We will be applying gender theories to case studies, we critically assess their value and limitations. While feminist critics largely spearheaded analyses of representations of gender, we will also study the representations of men and masculinity in the class. Our analyses will be situated within larger social and historical trends in Europe. 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:
Mulvey – Visual pleasure and narrative cinema

Assignment: Group Presentation

**Week 4**

**Class 4.1**
**Marginality and Sexuality – Problems of Essentialism**
In this class we will expand on the previous week’s discussions and complicates these discussions with issues of sexuality as intertwined with representations of gender norms. Through a critical reading of Butler’s theories on gender and sexuality, we will question the underlying problems of essentialism in mainstream gender discourse and consider how these are used to marginalize sexual minority groups.

Reading:
Butler – Imitation and gender insubordination

Assignment: Critical Response 2

**Class 4.2**
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.

Reading:
Butler – Gender performance: An interview with Judith Butler;

Assignment: Midterm

**Week 5**

**Class 5.1**
**What is ‘Race’?**
Together with theories of gender and sexuality emerging from feminist studies, attention on racial representations expanded the focus of Cultural Studies beyond class issues. We will discuss representations of ethnic minorities in European popular cultures. In a vein similar to that of previous weeks, we challenge race as an essential category and critically analyze the representations of the different races – or the lack of it – in popular culture.

Reading:
Hall – What is the ‘Black’ in Black Popular Culture?

**Class 5.5**
Beyond representations of black culture, we will also look at how other minority races are portrayed. This involves both how mainstream media portray ethnic minorities as the ‘other’ and how minority races represent themselves. Ultimately, we consider how representations of race, gender, sexuality and class are intimately linked and cannot be analyzed separately.
**Week 6**
**Class 6.1**

**Moving forward – Challenges, Summary, and Discussion**

In this final week, we will have a guest lecturer who will talk to us about coming-of-age films. Her work will place the main issues we have looked at in the course, namely class, gender, sexuality and race, in 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 as integral to everyday life. Time permitting, we will read a piece by the African-American critic Henry Louis Gates Jr. where he relates his experiences of living in Europe during the late 1980s.

Assignment: Final essay due

**Readings**

Each week’s core readings will come from the course’s main textbook and one or two other articles that will be available on Canvas. These core readings are compulsory and the reading, understanding and analysis of them constitute a major part of the course’s assessment. There will also be a list of supplementary readings for students to use on their coursework (essays and presentations).

**Course textbook**


**Other core readings**


**Supplementary readings**


