

**COMS 310: Media and Feminist Studies**  
**Winter 2013**  
**Tues/Thurs 1:05-2:25 p.m.**  
**W-215 Arts Bldg.**

Prof. Carrie A. Rentschler  
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Office hours: Tuesdays, 11:00am - 12:30p.m.

Teaching Assistant: Li Cornfeld  
Office hours: will be held around major assignment due dates. Stay tuned for updates.

**Course Description:** COMS 310 exposes students to current and foundational scholarship in feminist studies of the media. Defined by its inter-disciplinary reach into Cultural Studies, film and television studies, political economy, literary studies, public sphere studies and sexuality studies, among other fields and subfields, Feminist Media Studies is a broad ranging and, at its best, deeply engaged and socially conscious area of inquiry. Over the semester, we will examine how feminist theories and research practices shape what constitutes the *feminist* nature of feminist media studies, their focus on particular objects of study (e.g. femininity and masculinity, racialized gender subjectivity, embodiment, power and agency) and the conceptual tools they use. While this course does not espouse a particular feminist politics or standpoint, part of our task is to openly and vigorously discuss the present, past and futures of feminisms and feminist research in their relation to gendered, sexed, raced, classed and otherwise socially differentiated relations of power. We'll do so in the course through modes of analysis that are focused on media practices and institutions, developing feminist methodological tools and criticism along the way. This semester's course pays particular attention to feminist critiques of post-feminism, the role of feminism in pop culture, the construction of racialized gender subjectivities, sexuality studies, and the possibilities for feminist and queer-identified media activism and world-making.

**Course Readings:** Except where noted as recommended, all readings for the course are required. In addition to the required book (see below), all readings are available on the course website, either in pdf form, or via a link to McGill's library copy. Books from which chapters are being read are also available on reserve in Redpath Library on 24-hour loan. Students are responsible for downloading and printing, or photocopying, the readings for the course. Students must bring a copy of the readings to class on the day for which they are assigned. Students can purchase the following required book at Paragraphe Bookstore:

Susan Douglas (1995). *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media*. New York: Random House.

To enable the proper citation of readings for the course, the reading schedule below contains full bibliographic information.

## **Assignments**



80-84%	= A-	55-59%	= C
75-79%	= B+	50-54%	= D (Conditional Pass)
70-74%	= B	0-49%	= F (Fail)
65-69%	= B-		

Grades are never given out over email or the telephone. Students can check their grades via the course website.

**Grade Appeals:** Assignments and quizzes are graded on performance, not effort. Grades are final, except where a mistake has been made in calculation. Here are the circumstances under which the professor would change a grade: (a) if an error has been made at the level of calculation, or (b) if you have not been held to the same standard as everyone else. If you seek clarification on a grade you have received, you should visit your professor during office hours, keeping in mind the criteria of evaluation on which your assignment was graded. The professor will neither defend nor contest the T.A.'s or grader's evaluation; she will instead discuss ways in which you can understand the evaluation and improve upon your performance.

In the event that you feel you received an undeserved grade and wish to dispute it, you must make your case **in writing** within one week (7 days) of receiving the grade. The case in writing must detail the grounds on which you are making an appeal, accompanied by the original assignment (make a photocopy for yourself). The letter must be typed, single-spaced and printed on paper; email submissions will not be accepted. Grade complaints will not be considered after the week deadline, or if they are not made in writing. If the professor agrees to review your assignment and re-evaluate its grade, keep in mind that your grade could remain the same, be elevated, or be reduced.

**Extensions:** Other than unannounced quizzes, all assignments are announced well in advance of their due-dates; which provides students with ample time to prepare and complete them. Thus, due-date extensions will not be considered except in cases of *documented* illness (see below).

**Illness:** You are responsible for all material covered in the course, including days you might miss due to illness. If you miss class, your professor and T.A. will not tell you what was covered. It is your responsibility to acquire class notes from another student in the course. Exams, quizzes, and other assignments will not be rescheduled and due-date extensions will not be considered except in cases of *documented* illness. No documentation, no extension. If you are unable to attend an examination or make an assignment deadline due to illness, you are expected to make every effort to contact the professor prior to the due date.

**Late Assignments:** Any assignment turned in late will be penalized. Late papers and exam assignments will be penalized 1/3 of a letter grade per day they are late, which includes weekends (e.g., a three-day late A- paper becomes a B- paper). Papers will be considered a day late if they are turned in at any time after the exact deadline on their due date. If an emergency situation occurs to you personally, and you are unable to turn in an assignment on time, the late assignment will only be excused once you have submitted: 1) a typed note explaining the reason for missing the deadline, and 2) formal written documentation of the emergency (e.g. a doctor's note on her/his official office letterhead). Requests for excused late assignments will only be accepted in writing, and not by email or in any other form.

## Expectations and Other Business

Failure to follow the letter and spirit of university regulations and regulations for this course can result in the reduction of your final grade, failure of the course, and/or other penalties set by University policy.

**Course Website:** A course website has been established on McGill's "myCourses" web portal for course readings, handouts, the syllabus, and grading grids, which are used in the evaluation of your paper and exam assignments, and periodic announcements. You should regularly check the course website for any updates on the course or new documentation. To use the course website, login via your McGill account at: <http://www.mcgill.ca/mycourses/>

**Attendance and Late Arrivals:** Attendance is absolutely essential to this course and your success in it. Absences hurt your ability to learn and they hurt your grade. Similarly, late arrivals and early departures are highly disruptive to the whole class, and with even a little preparation, can be completely avoided. Signing up for this class indicates that you are committed to being here for the full class period each class meeting. If you miss class, you are responsible for getting materials covered in lecture that day from a classmate and for making sure you understand them (see above section on Illness). If you know you must leave early on a given day, let me know before class and sit near the door to make your exit as unobtrusive as possible.

**Personal Electronics and Social Networking Sites:** Cell phones, IM programs, Facebook, mp3 players and other appliances and networking sites that make noise and are otherwise aurally and/or visually distracting to the classroom setting are not welcome in this class. If you bring them with you, turn them off, put them away, and otherwise disengage from them. The professor reserves the right to take action against offending devices and their human users should the necessity arise. Laptops may be used for the purpose of note taking in class, but should not be used for gaming, facebooking, IM'ing, emailing, web-surfing, or any other non-classroom activities. These activities are distracting to the professor and to other students sitting around you – their point is to *be* distracting, after all.

**Accommodations:** If you require special testing accommodations or other classroom modifications, please notify your professor and the Office for Students with Disabilities by the end of the first week of class. The Office for Students with Disabilities is located in suite 3100 Brown Student Services Building (<http://www.mcgill.ca/osd>).

**Discussion Etiquette:** A large portion of the class is dedicated to discussion. Following a few basic discussion guidelines will help ensure that this time is productive, enlightening and fun.

1. Experience and anecdote do not constitute evidence in a scholarly argument. While you each bring interesting experiences to the classroom, **ONLY** bring up your personal experience when it is relevant to class discussion; think carefully about this before you speak about your experience. If you bring up your own experience in class, recognize that it becomes a public topic for discussion. Others may interpret your experience differently than you do, and they are free to respectfully disagree with your interpretation. Furthermore, ask yourself what point you seek to make by talking about yourself. Is it really relevant? Do you really want others to know this about you?
2. Work to create a shared climate of friendly and lively discussion. Avoid personal attacks, jabs, and grand standing behaviors as much as possible.

3. Disagreements are natural and welcome in scholarly discussion. So are arguments. But arguments are not contests. Grant your fellow course participants courtesy and respect, whether you agree with what they say or not. In arguments, you must make your case persuasively. Avoid attacking someone's character or person in the process.
4. As much as possible, avoid purely negative critique in your comments. Our goal in discussion is to understand the texts we read and how they might be useful to us – in addition to cultivating our skills in critique.
5. Wait your turn – do not interrupt others.
6. You do not have to express your own opinion on a subject. You are also free to change your mind on any topic at any time.

**Nondiscrimination Statement:** As a professor and teaching assistant at McGill University, we value equality of opportunity, human dignity, and racial, ethnic, sexual, physical, and cultural diversity. Be assured that we will promote a safe and conducive environment for learning. In accordance with University policy, we will not tolerate discrimination or harassment on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, ancestry, sex, age, civil status, familial status, sexual orientation, or disability. In addition to the University's policy, and within the bounds of the course, we do not discriminate on the basis of political creed. This means that you do not have to agree with us in order to do well in this course. So long as you demonstrate an understanding of the course material, you are under no obligation to agree with it. We will also make every effort to avoid discrimination on the basis of class or income. If there is something we can do to make the class more hospitable, please let us know.

**Academic Integrity:** We take academic integrity very seriously. Failure to follow procedures and direct requests from either your professor or T.A. during a quiz or exam can result in immediate failure of the assignment. You are forbidden from using any communication devices other than a pen or pencil during in-class quizzes and exams. Having at hand and/or using an electronic communication device (or talking) during a quiz or exam are considered cheating according to University policy.

Additionally, McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offenses under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see [www.mcgill.ca/integrity](http://www.mcgill.ca/integrity) for more information).

## Semester Schedule of Course Readings

### I. Introducing Feminist Media Studies and Feminism

#### **Tuesday January 8: Welcome to Media and Feminist Studies**

Introduction: Why study media in relation to feminist thought? What makes media studies *feminist*? What defines *feminist* inquiry, exactly? Why does this all matter now, in an age increasingly being defined as post-feminist, and which is said to accompany an end to sexual difference, the categories of “men” and “women” and feminist terms of debate?

#### **Thursday January 10: Feminism and Pop Culture I**

Andi Ziesler (2008). “Prologue,” “Pop and Circumstance: Why Pop Culture Matters” and “Women Under the Influence: Pop Culture Now and Beyond” in *Feminism and Pop Culture* (pp. 1-22, 121-148). Berkeley, CA: Seal Press.

### **Tuesday January 15: Fantasies of Power and the Profits of Anti-Feminism**

Susan Douglas (2010). "Introduction: Fantasies of Power" in *Enlightened Sexism: The Seductive Message that Feminism's Work is Done* (1-22). New York: Times Books.

Pozner, Jennifer (2003). "The 'Big Lie': False Feminist Death Syndrome, Profit, and the Media." *Catching a wave: Reclaiming feminism for the 21st century* (pp. 31-56).

### **Thursday January 17-Tuesday January 22: Feminism and Pop Culture II**

Susan Douglas (1995). *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media*. New York: Random House.

### **Thursday January 24: Post-Feminism Defined**

Angela McRobbie (2004). "Post-feminism and Popular Culture" *Feminist Media Studies* 4(3): 255-264.

### **Tuesday January 29: Post-feminist Media Culture (lecture by Li Cornfeld)**

Rosalind Gill (2007) "Postfeminist Media Culture?" in *Gender and the Media*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 249-271.

## **II: Intersectionality---Mediating Sexuality, Race and Gender**

### **Thursday January 31: Intersectional Thinking in Feminist Media Studies**

Vivian May (2012). "Intersectionality" in Catherine Orr, Ann Braithwaite and Diane Lichtenstein, eds. *Rethinking Women's and Gender Studies*. Routledge, 155-172.

\*Vanessa Au (2011). "My Day of Fame on Digg. Com: Race, Representation and Resistance in Web 2.0" in Ted Gornelios and David Gunkel, eds. *Transgression 2.0: Media, Culture, and the Politics of a Digital Age* (pp. 191-211). London: Continuum.

\*[Originally published as "Digg, Flickr and the Colonizing of Bridging Texts" *Flow TV* in 2009 at <http://flowtv.org/2010/03/flow-favorites-digg-flickr-and-the-colonizing-of-bridging-texts-vanessa-au-university-of-washington/>

### **Tuesday February 5: Images of Racialized Female Sexuality**

Kimberly Springer (2008). "Divas, Evil Black Bitches, and Bitter Black Women: African-American Women in Post-Civil Rights Popular Culture" in Charlotte Brunson and Lynn Spigel, eds. *Feminist Television Criticism: A Reader* (pp. 72-92). Berkshire, UK: Open University Press.

Recommended: Patricia Hill Collins (2004). "Get Your Freak On: Sex, Babies, and Images of Black Femininity" *Black Sexual Politics* (pp. 119-148). New York: Routledge.

### **Thursday February 7: Responding to the Sexualization Thesis**

Rosalind Gill (2009). "Beyond the 'Sexualization of Culture' Thesis: An Intersectional Analysis of 'Sixpacks', 'Midriffs' and 'Hot Lesbians' in Advertising" *Sexualities* 12: 137-160.

Recommended: Feona Attwood (2006). "Sexed Up: Theorizing the Sexuality of Culture" *Sexualities* 9(1): 77-94.

### **Tuesday February 12: Girls Gone Wild**

Vicki Mayer (2005). "Soft-Core in TV Time: The Political Economy of a 'Cultural Trend'" *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 22:4, 302-320.

**Thursday February 14: Sexting and the Media Production Model of Sexualization  
(Guest Lecture by Dr. Amy Hasinoff)**

Amy Hasinoff (2012). "Sexting as Media Production: Rethinking Social Media and Sexuality" *New Media & Society*: 1-17.

**III. Gendered Embodiment and Feminist Critiques of Media  
Commodification**

**Tuesday February 19: Fat Embodiment**

Sujata Moorti and Karen Ross (2005) – "Gender and the Plus Size Body" Commentary and Criticism Section, *Feminist Media Studies*, 5(2): 237-260.

**Thursday February 21: Historicizing Feminism and Fatness**

Amy Erdman Farrell (2010). "Fat and the Uncivilized Body" and "Feminism, Citizenship and Fat Stigma" in *Fat Shame: Stigma and the Fat Body in American Culture* (pp. 59-116). New York University Press.

**Tuesday February 26: Discourses of Women's Eating Disorders**

**\*\* PAPER DUE AT BEGINNING OF CLASS: Do not interrupt class to hand in paper. \*\***  
Abigail Bray (1996). "The Anorexic Body: Reading Disorders" *Cultural Studies* 10(3): 413-429.

**Thursday February 28: Eating the Other (lecture by Li Cornfeld)**

bell hooks (2006/1992). "Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance" In Gigi Durham Meenakshi and Douglas Kellner, eds. *Media and Cultural Studies: Key Works*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, pp. 366-380.

**Tuesday March 4-8: Reading Week**

**Tuesday March 12: The Currency of Girls' Self-Esteem**

Sarah Banet-Weiser (2012). "Free Self-Esteem Tools? Brand Culture, Gender, and the Dove Real Beauty Campaign" in Roopali Mukherjee and Sarah Banet-Weiser, eds. *Commodity Activism: Cultural Resistance in Neoliberal Times* (pp. 39-56). New York University Press.

Recommended: Lauren Collins (2008). "Pixel Perfect" *New Yorker*, May 12.

**Thursday March 14: The Gendered Politics of Positive Thinking**

Barbara Ehrenreich (2009). "Smile or Die: The Bright Side of Cancer" in *Bright-Sided: How the Relentless Promotion of Positive Thinking has Undermined America* (pp. 15-44). New York Metropolitan Books.

**IV: Media and Violence Against Women**

**Tuesday March 19: Media Spectacles of Battered Women**

Sarah Projansky (2010). "Rihanna's Closed Eyes" *The Velvet Light Trap* 65: 71-73.

David J. Leonard (3 December 2012) "Kassandra Michelle Perkins: We Must Say her Name" *Feminist Wire* online at <http://thefeministwire.com/2012/12/kassandra-michelle-perkins/>

Media Examples: The Crystal's "He Hit Me and it Felt like a Kiss," Hole's "He Hit Me and it Felt Like a Kiss," Grizzly Bear's "He Hit Me and it Felt Like a Kiss," Eminem and Rihanna's

“Love The Way You Lie,” U.K. Women’s Aid Keira Knightley video “Can Someone Call Cut?”

#### **Thursday March 21: Missing and Murdered Women in Canada**

Yasmin Jiwani and Mary Young (2006). “Missing and Murdered Women: Reproducing Marginality in News Discourse” *Canadian Journal of Communication* 31: 895-917.

#### **Tuesday March 26: Violence and the Gendered Spaces of Exception**

Radha Hedge (2011). “Spaces of Exception: Violence, Technology, and the Transgressive Gendered Body in India’s Global Call Centers” in Radha Hedge, ed. *Circuits of Visibility: Gender and Transnational Media Cultures* (pp. 178-195). New York University Press.

### **IV: Transnational Diasporic Feminist Media Studies**

#### **Thursday March 28: Music and Transnational Queer Identification**

Gayatri Gopinath (2005). “Communities of Sound: Queering South Asian Popular Music in Diaspora” in *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures*. Duke UP.

#### **Tuesday April 2: Beauty Commoditized**

Radhika Parameswaran (2011). “E-Racing Color: Gender and Transnational Visual Economies of Beauty in India” in Radha Hedge, ed. *Circuits of Visibility: Gender and Transnational Media Cultures*. New York University Press, 68-88.

### **V: Feminist Techné and World-Making**

#### **Thursday April 4: Feminist Print Cultures (Guest Lecture by Dr. Liz Groeneveld)**

Elizabeth Groeneveld (2009). “Be a Feminist or Just Dress Like One’: BUST, Fashion and Feminism as Life Style” *Journal of Gender Studies* 18(2): 179-190.

Recommended: Emily Nussbaum (2011). “The Rebirth of the Feminist Manifesto” *New York Magazine*, October 30, 7 pages.

#### **Tuesday April 9: Technologies of Recent Feminisms**

Ednie Kaeh Garrison (Spring 2000). “U.S. Feminism-Grrrl Style! Youth (Sub)Cultures and the Technologies of the Third Wave” *Feminist Studies* 26:1, 141-170.

Tracy Kennedy (2007). “The Personal is Political: Feminist Blogging and Virtual Consciousness Raising” in *Scholar and Feminist Online* 5(2) on online at:  
[http://sfonline.barnard.edu/blogs/kennedy\\_01.htm](http://sfonline.barnard.edu/blogs/kennedy_01.htm)

Media Example: *Hollaback!*

#### **Thursday April 11: Gendering Facebook**

Rebecca Brown and Melissa Gregg (2012). “Pedagogy of Regret: Facebook, Binge Drinking and Young Women” *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 26(3): 357-369.

#### **Wednesday April 17: Final Take-Home Assignment Due**