

MEDIA 371

INSTRUCTOR: DR. J. BATTIS / jbattis@gmail.com

Fall 2007/CUNY-Hunter College

Department of Film and Media Studies

Gender and the History of Television

This course will explore the development of gender and sexuality in American television from the post-war period to the present. What is the connection between *Leave it to Beaver* and *Desperate Housewives*? How did Claire Huxtable change the role of the working mother, and what types of programming might have paved the way for *Will & Grace*? Beginning with groundbreaking shows like *I Love Lucy* and *The Honeymooners*, we will trace the development of television broadcasting and cultural production alongside the evolving discourses of gender, sexuality, and family “management” that proliferated on the small screen from 1950-2005. Through a mixture of lecture and seminar discussion, we will address a variety of TV genres that have shaped our perception of gender within the United States and beyond, including: sitcom, solo performance, drama/dramedy, cartoon, teen television, gothic, western, and finally science-fiction. By applying the most current critical scholarship on television studies to each individual program, we will not only see unlikely connections between diverse shows (like *I Love Lucy* and *Six Feet Under*), but also learn to read and watch television critically. Although the focus of this course is primarily the study of gender roles in popular culture, students will also be exposed to a variety of methodologies, including post-structuralism, Marxism, queer theory, and fan cultures.

Required Texts

Custom Courseware Package, to be ordered from *Shakespeare & Co* (939 Lexington/69th).

Screenings

Television clips will be shown in lecture; television *episodes* will be screened separately, and students who cannot attend the screening times (tba) will be expected to watch the episodes on their own time.

All of these programs are available on both DVD and VHS, and can be purchased or rented from a variety of video stores.

Assignments

Given the considerable amount of visual content and the depth of the time period that we are covering in this course, **Media 371** will take a writing-intensive approach to assignments. There will be three assignments in total: a short paper, a slightly longer revision of this paper, and a final research paper that will be refined and developed from the previous two assignments. **In-Class Participation is worth 15% of your final grade.**

Essay 1

Length: 4-5 pgs

Due: Friday, September 25 / 15%

Write a critical review of a specific television show. Using **at least one and no more than three** scholarly sources (including, but not limited to, those in your courseware package), discuss the ways in which your chosen program addresses, challenges, redefines, or supports a particular aspect of **gender** and/or **sexuality**. How is *I Love Lucy* the product of 1950s gender roles, for instance? How does *Will & Grace* challenge the heterosexual norm of television? These are just examples. Your discussion should have a **central argument**, and refer to **scholarly research**. Say something provocative and interesting, but do it in a critical way. **Include at least two images** from your program, and be prepared to discuss why you chose them.

Essay 2 (Revision)

Length: 5-6 pgs

Due: Friday, October 19 / 25%

Revise your first essay using the comments that I provide you with, as well as what you learn from peer-editing and other close reading exercises in class. Add approximately a page worth of new material, and **one more** scholarly source.

Essay 3 (Final Paper)

Length: 8-10 pgs

Due: December 11 (Last day of classes) / 45%

Develop your revised discussion (it will probably change a bit as you write more) into a longer research paper, using **at least four** and **no more than eight** scholarly sources to aid in establishing your argument. **Add at least two more images.** Broaden your ideas, write about your chosen program in greater depth, but also be sure to **maintain an argument** about your source material. At this point, I am open to discussing the inclusion of some creative material as well, but **do not** fill your essay entirely with images—I expect to see solid academic writing.

*****There is NO EXAM for Media 371.*****

Regular class attendance. Because the learning process in this class will rely primarily on discussion of the television texts and on various in-class work assignments, your consistent attendance in class is mandatory for course credit. More than three absences will lower your final grade according to the following guidelines:

- 4 absences: lowered by 1/3 grade (i.e., C to C-)
- 5 absences: lowered by 1 grade (i.e., C to D)
- 6 absences: You will fail the course, via automatic WU.

A grade of WU, “Withdrew Unofficially,” is worse than failing, because it affects both your grade point average and your financial aid. Documented medical or emergency situations will be dealt with on a one-to-one basis. You must contact me via telephone at the onset of any certifiable attendance problem.

Late papers. Papers are due at the beginning of the class on the day for which they are assigned. Any paper received after the first 15 minutes of class will be marked as one day late. This means finishing, editing, and printing out your essay before class time! Late papers will have their grades lowered according to the following rules:

- 1 day late: -1/3 grade (i.e., B to B-)
- 2 days late: -1 grade (i.e., B to C)
- 3 days late: automatic F
- 4 days late: automatic zero—no credit

Note: The lateness penalties are calibrated on the basis of each day late, not each class late.

Academic Integrity. Plagiarism and cheating are extremely serious violations of academic behavior. Plagiarism and cheating will result in course failure. I will distribute a handout explaining plagiarism, and you should also see the Undergraduate Bulletin for an explanation of the institutional consequences of cheating. Please ask me if you have any questions about using and/or documenting outside research and secondary critical resources. Ignorance of what plagiarism is will not be accepted as an excuse. The only authorized writing help I will accept on student papers is from the Writing Center (a resource I very much encourage you to use).

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

Week 1: Tuesday, August 28

Readings: None

Lecture: Introduction; History of TV Broadcasting; Material Histories of TV; Clips

Week 1: Friday, August 31

Readings: “Television Production,” Ellis; “Reading Television,” Fiske

Lecture: The 1950s Television Family I; clips from *I Love Lucy* and *The Honeymooners*

Week 2: Tuesday, September 4

Readings: “Lucy and Desi: Sexuality, Ethnicity, and TV’s First Family,” Desjardins

Lecture: The 1950s Television Family II: clips from *Leave it to Beaver*, *Studio One*

Week 2: Friday, September 7

Readings: “Prime-Time *Bonanza!*: The Western on Television,” Yoggy

Lecture: The Family Front: Homes as Frontiers in the 1960s; clips from *Bonanza* and *Annie Oakley*

Week 3: Tuesday, September 11

Readings: “Television, the Housewife, and the Museum of Modern Art,” Spigel

Lecture: Domestic Dominatrixes: The Original Desperate Housewives of the 1960s; clips from *The Brady Bunch* and *Desperate Housewives*

Week 3: Friday, September 14
No Classes

Week 4: Tuesday, September 18

Readings: "Extra-Special Effects: Televisual Representation and the Claims of the 'Black Experience,'" Wilson

Lecture: Race and TV in the 1970s I; clips from *The Jeffersons*

Week 4: Friday, September 21
No Classes

Week 5: Tuesday, September 25 / Essay 1 Due

Readings: "Good Times in Race Relations?," Bodroghkozy

Lecture: Race and TV in the 1970s II; clips from *Good Times*

Week 5: Friday, September 28

Readings: "The Biggest Show in the World," Havens

Lecture: Claire Huxtable and *The Cosby Show*; clips from *The Cosby Show*

Week 6: Tuesday, October 2

Readings: "It's A Different World Where You Come From," Gray

Lecture: Adapting *The Cosby Show*; clips from *A Different World*

Week 6: Friday, October 5

Readings: "1970s Lifestyle Feminism and *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*," Dow

Lecture: Female Stars on Television I; clips from *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*

Week 7: Tuesday, October 9

Readings: "Designing Women As Consumers," Owen

Lecture: Female Stars on Television II; clips from *Designing Women*

Week 7: Friday, October 12

Readings: "Camp and Gender Construction in the American Animated Cartoon," Abel

Lecture: Gender in 1980s Cartoons I; clips from *He-Man* and *She-Ra*

Week 8: Tuesday, October 16

Readings: "Naked Barbies, Warrior Joes," Brodie

Lecture: Gender in 1980s Cartoons II; clips from *G.I. Joe* and *Jem*

Week 8: Friday, October 19 / Essay 2 Due

Readings: "The Search For Tomorrow in Today's Soap Operas," Modleski

Lecture: Soap Operas in the 1980s; clips from *All My Children* and *Dynasty*

Week 9: Tuesday, October 23

Readings: "From The Avengers To Miami Vice," Buxton

Lecture: Action Narratives: Soap Operas For Guys; clips from *Miami Vice*

Week 9: Friday, October 26

Readings: "Thirtysomething and the Contradictions of Gender," Heide

Lecture: Urban Kinship; clips from *Thirtysomething* and *Friends*

Week 10: Tuesday, October 30

Readings: "Madonna: Bawdy and Soul," Faith

Lecture: Madonna and MTV; clips from *Truth Or Dare* and other music videos

Week 10: Friday, November 2

Readings: "Reading *Sex and the City*," Akass

Lecture: Gender and the City; clips from *Sex and the City*

Week 11: Tuesday, November 6

Readings: "My So Called Queer," Battis

Lecture: High School TV I; clips from *My So Called Life*

Week 11: Friday, November 9

Readings: "*Why Buffy Matters*," Wilcox

Lecture: High School TV II, High School *Noir*; clips from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*

Week 12: Tuesday, November 13

Readings: "Embattled Sex: Rise of the Right and Victory of the Queer in *Queer As Folk*," Beirne

Lecture: I Want My Queer TV I; clips from *Will & Grace* and *Queer As Folk*

Week 12: Friday, November 16

Readings: "Reading *The L-Word*," Akass

Lecture: I Want My Queer TV II; clips from *The L-Word* and *Noah's Ark*

Week 13: No Classes on Nov 20 or Nov 23

Week 14: Tuesday, November 27

Readings: "Reading *Six Feet Under*," Akass

Lecture: Death and Gender I; clips from *Six Feet Under*

Week 14: Friday, November 30

Readings: "Reading *Six Feet Under*," Akass

Lecture: Death and Gender II; clips from *Six Feet Under*

Week 15: Tuesday, December 4

Readings: "Drones, Clones, and Alpha Babes," Relke

Lecture: Gender and Science Fiction I; clips from *Star Trek*

Week 15: Friday, December 7

Readings: "*Investigating Farscape*," Battis

Lecture: Gender and Science Fiction II; clips from *Farscape*

Week 16: Tuesday, December 11 / Essay 3 Due

Readings: None!

Lecture: Solo Performance; clips from *Margaret Cho* and *Greg Walloch*