

Course Title and Number:

**MEDIA REPRESENTATION OF LESBIANS,
GAYS, BISEXUALS, AND TRANSGENDER
WS 340** **3 Credits**

DESCRIPTION OF COURSE:

Investigates the ideological functions of moving images (film/television/video), still images (photography/magazines), and aural images (music), of Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, and Transgender created by mass media institutions to legitimize discrimination and oppression in the United States. Explores images by independent producers/directors/artists to challenge and resist negative images and create transgressive images of Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, and Transgender. Employs critical and theoretical methods from feminist –gender, psychoanalytic, and semiotic-- theorists to interpret meaning in these representations.

COURSE PREREQUISITE: WS110 OR WS150 or AACS 150 or AACS 155.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

The representation of Gender and Sexuality –gender/sexuality difference and gender/sexuality identity–has been central to the definition of self and others. The representation of non-heterosexuals has met with stigmatization and intolerance by media institutions. The primary goal of this course is to investigate how the representations of lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgender are changing and increasing, and the ways these changes are connected to strategies of other civil rights movements. In addition the course will:

1. Investigate the ideological functions of moving images (film/television/video), still images (photography/magazines), and aural images (music) of Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, and the Transgender created (primarily) by mass media institutions to “legitimize” discrimination and oppression within the social and political landscape of the U.S.
2. Detail images by independent producers/directors/artists that challenge and resist negative images and create positive images of LGB&T.
3. Historically survey shifting representations of LGB&T in the media, the specific opposition and campaigns by social and political groups to images enhancing the rights and moral status of LGB&T, and the public discourse generated by the media.
4. Analyze the representation of women leaders and the “invisibility” of lesbianism in mass media representation.
5. Review the body of critical and analytical literature on LGB&T film and how it reflects society’s shifting social, cultural, and political views on homosexuality and transgenderism.
6. Review and apply critical and theoretical methods from feminist (gender, psychoanalytic, and semiotic) theorists to construct meaning in LGBT images.
7. Account for the recent production of Hollywood images and the academic interest in LGB&T visual texts in culture and society.
8. Compare and contrast representations of LGBT in the United States and foreign countries. Account for differences in these representations by looking at the social, cultural, and political history in these countries.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES:

After the successful completion of this course students accomplish the following:

1. Students write critical essays that address the connection between negative mass mediated images of women, lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgenderd and the prejudice and discrimination against other groups in the United States resulting from media representation.
2. Through the use of databases and quantitative analysis, students apply the research in the sciences, social sciences, and humanities on sex, sexuality and sexual orientations and the extent to which that research can be applied in pre and post-production of films by producers, writers, and directors.
3. In class presentations and discussions students articulate the underlying assumptions of the women's movement and its connection to the "gay rights movement." Students isolate how the struggles in each movement include power over representations.
4. By structuring film/video tape programs/series for use in universities and museums, students depict the historical progression in mass media representations of lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgender, and how the representations changed according to social, cultural, and political conditions in the U.S.
5. Through bibliographic research and filmographies, students will effectively mine and assimilate written and visual resources in libraries, research centers, archives, and the internet. Class presentations will address the ways this information impact the construction of mass media representations.
6. Demonstrate through multimedia presentations the intersection of LGB&T representations with changes in the social, cultural, and political conditions in the U.S., and the validity, credibility, and realism of these images. Each student must select an additional text that addresses this issue and provide a written and oral report.
7. Employing industry journals and trade magazines, students will connect the economic foundations of the mass media that circumscribe production policies and practices that generate cultural products, and how the entertainment industry has controlled representations of LGB&T.
8. By looking at the writings of critics, students will generate alternative ways of representing LGB&T with the goal to formulate more humanistic images and break down stereotypes. Short film treatments will construct these alternative views.
9. Isolate the productive ways that images of LGB&T in literature, drama, art, and music have influenced film and television representations.
10. In final projects students will report on the reception and the impact of LGB&T images on groups of people in the U.S., and determine with some reliability the extent that public attitudes and belief systems toward LGB&T are influenced by media representations.
11. In weekly logs, students will critically analyze the way documentary/nonfiction representations of LGB&T have been constructed, and offer alternative paradigms for historical re-constructions.
12. Schedule programs of films on LGB&T for museums, film societies, institutions of higher education, and community centers, and articulate the specific learning outcomes for these programs.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF COURSE CONTENT:

A. Images/Culture/Ideology. Analyze ways that mass media representations construct ideology and cultural boundaries, both wittingly and unwittingly.

B. Spectator/Public reception and use of mass media representations. The processes by which different spectator “publics” appropriate images for personal, cultural, and ideological reasons. The forms and reasons for appropriation of representations in LGB&T communities.

C. Written histories of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender films and video: underlying assumptions and theoretical perspectives. Review the ways lesbian and gay historians and film critics account for the history of representations in Hollywood.

D. Barbara Hammer and Derek Jarman: using film and video as a tool to reconstruct history. Images, history, and memory: the role of film and video in determining “appropriate” knowledge.

E. Themes in early lesbian and gay film: psychodrama, forbidden love, narratives of lesbian and gay desire. Strategies to break traditional narrative paradigms.

F. Post-War LGB&T representations: Hollywood narrative strategies to normalize sexuality and love.

G. Theatre and lesbian and gay relationships: 1950 to the present.

H. The fractures within the lesbian community. Feminist conflicts with lesbian activist filmmakers. Lesbian resistance to feminist positions. Black lesbian filmmakers re-vision history.

I. The subversive still image in photography and advertisements. Gender and Advertising. Sexual Orientation and Advertising. The photographic contributions of Nan Goldin, Robert Mapplethorpe, and Lyle Ashton Harris.

J. International transgressive/activist LGB&T film/video – Germany and Spain. The contributions of R.W. Fassbinder and P. Almodovar.

K. International transgressive/activist LGB&T film/video – the struggle of lesbian and gay filmmakers in China and Japan.

L. Filmmakers confront AIDS. Video as a tool for social activism..

M. Fictional and non-fictional transgender representations—from independent films to Hollywood.

N. Challenges and problems in the historical representation of the LGB&T civil rights organizations and movements.

O. The impact of LGB&T representations on public and government attitudes and policy.

GUIDELINES/SUGGESTIONS FOR TEACHING METHODS AND STUDENT LEARNING ACTIVITIES:

Students must successfully demonstrate their understanding of course content in a variety of ways. Students will review with the instructor the alternative paths of analysis possible for their final projects, and apply research from the disciplines of Women’s Studies, Cultural Studies, Communication Studies, Psychology, and the field of human sexuality.

Students must be constantly aware of contemporary issues in media representations and write response logs that address these issues. The class will use primary and secondary documents, both print and visual. Students are required to utilize the internet to compile and assimilate information on filmmakers and the production of films and television programs. Students must participate on a regular basis in the criticism of images shown in class. Students are required to

see films and videos screened in class. Group discussions of these films will lead to various critical perspectives and reports. Besides lectures by the professor, guest speakers will address the class.

GUIDELINES/SUGGESTIONS FOR METHODS OF STUDENT ASSESSMENT (STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES):

Assessment of student learning will come from different ways to analyze and criticize these texts. Student learning outcomes will be assessed by one or more of the following:

- A. Written critical logs on each film screened in class.
- B. Students, in teams, will read and report on a different book that is not required, and relate the text to the appropriate issues in the class.
- C. Two short papers: one on a non-fictional film and one on a fictional film. The papers will analyze the films according to a course objective and student learning outcome.
- D. A final group project.
- E. Class participation.

SUGGESTED READINGS, TEXTS, OBJECTS OF STUDY:

- A. Videos – contemporary and historical films and television programs.
- B. Photographic texts dealing with specific issues addressed in class. Students will not be required to purchase these texts because of cost-- usually \$50 to \$125. Transparencies will be made.
- C. The internet. Many sites exist, but the most extensive on film exists in www.planetout.com
- D. Journals, such as *The Gay and Lesbian Review* (formerly *The Harvard Gay and Lesbian Review*); *Lambda Book Report*, and *A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*.
- E. Texts and essays assigned from the bibliography—see 10.
- F. Encyclopedias on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender history, such as *Completely Queer: The Gay and Lesbian Encyclopedia* by Steve Hogan and Lee Hudson; *Gay Lives: Homosexual Autobiography from John Addington Symonds to Paul Monette* by Paul Robinson.

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