

# COMS 310: Media and Feminist Studies

Fall 2023

Tu/Th 1:05pm-2:25pm

W-215 Arts Building

**\*If you are unwell, please wear a mask in class!\***

**(Better yet: stay home and recuperate)**

**Prof. Carrie A. Rentschler** (she/her)

Department of Art History and Communication Studies

W-115 Arts Building

\*Email: [carrie.rentschler@mcgill.ca](mailto:carrie.rentschler@mcgill.ca)

Office hours: Tuesdays 2:30-4:00pm in person and on Zoom. Sign-ups for Office Hours will be available via Google doc; a link will be provided in MyCourses. Additional hours will be held around major assignments.

**Teaching Assistant: Emma Blackett** (she/her, they/them), Ph.D. student

\*Email: [emma.blackett@mcgill.ca](mailto:emma.blackett@mcgill.ca)

TA Office hours: Scheduled around major assignment due dates. Stay tuned for updates.

**Communicating with your professor and T.A.:** Your professor and T.A. will primarily communicate with you via MyCourses announcements, Discussion Forum responses, in class Q&A, and via office hours. These are the preferred ways to communicate over the semester about COMS 310-related issues.

**\* We strongly encourage you to use the Discussion Forum in MyCourses to ask questions of your professor or T.A.** Email is for communicating something private to your professor or T.A. For anything requiring more discussion (such as asking about whether a topic will work for an assignment, requesting clarification on an idea discussed in lectures or readings, etc.), check in with the professor (or your T.A., around major assignment deadlines) during office hours or via the Discussion Forum dedicated to these kinds of questions. Remember that questions posted there will be viewable to other students. If you ever must email your prof or T.A. for a private reason, put "COMS 310" in the subject line.



(Image description: actress Margot Robbie performing in a dance routine in the film *Barbie*, asking the existential question, "do you guys ever think about dying?")

**Course Description:** “Media and Feminist Studies” examines contemporary feminist, queer and trans scholarship on popular culture, internet studies, new media, and techno-culture. Our course approaches media as systems, tools, technologies, infrastructures, codes, platforms, social practices, and genres of communication, in addition to representations (*of (fill in the blank) ....*). We will analyze how structures of power shape, script and condition media technologies and the social relationships of which they are part, engaging in debates about whiteness, intersectionality, the politics of representation, online oppression and resistance, the goal of critique, and other key issues in feminist theory and media studies. We will approach feminism as sets of ideas and forms of analysis, but also as movements and forms of activism. While the course and the professor do not espouse a particular feminist politics, part of our task is to openly, and vigorously, discuss feminist thinking, feminist research, and feminist movements in their relation to a range of intersectional, socially differentiated relations of power. *If you take this course, you need to be up for this kind of engagement.*

**Course Readings:** Except where noted as “for further reading,” all readings for the course are required. All readings are available in MyCourses, either in pdf, or via a link to the web. For articles published in open-access online journals, the link to these articles is provided in the schedule of readings included with this syllabus, and in the weekly units of content posted on MyCourses. To enable the proper citation of readings in essays and media critiques written for the course, the reading schedule below contains full bibliographic information.

**Learning Outcomes:** By taking this course, students will learn to:

**Explain and comprehend** key concepts in feminist media studies.

**Apply** feminist concepts to **interpret and analyze** contemporary media and feminism.

**Develop critical reading skills to assess** major texts and ideas in the field.

**Formulate** questions and comments to foster discussion and closely engage with course materials.

**Develop effective writing strategies** for constructing strong analytic essays.

**Work** collaboratively to problem solve.

**Weekly Schedule for COMS 310:** The following schedule demonstrates the work we will do in COMS 310 by day of the week.

**Tuesdays 1:05pm-2:25pm:** Lecture held in-person in room W-215 Arts. Come to the lecture having done the required reading(s). These sessions will be recorded and posted to MyCourses.

**Tuesdays by 5pm:** Students post questions to MyCourses discussion forum on the reading and/or lecture (from the same week).

**Thursdays 1:05pm-2:25pm:** Lecture and discussion held in-person in room W-215 Arts. Come to the session having done required reading(s). Two of our Thursday sessions will be partly dedicated to student reviews of Media Critiques, in preparation for the longer essays. These sessions (with lecture and discussion) will be recorded and posted to MyCourses.

**Thursdays-Fridays (open 34 hours, starting at 2:30pm Thursday Montreal time):** Students will be quizzed 6 times during the term. Students will have a 34-hour window in which to complete the one-question short-answer quiz (based on the reading for the week). The quiz will be timed for 45 minutes; the quiz will close 45 minutes after you open it.

**Fridays:** Fridays are when Media Critiques and Essay Assignments are due. Check the calendar, syllabus, and assignments tab in MyCourses for exact dates. Assignments can be turned in before these due dates.

## Assignments

The following explains the course assignments for the term. In addition to required course readings, participation in the class discussion forum, and attendance in class, they constitute the whole of required work for the course. However, in the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change. Students who require special assignment accommodations should notify the professor as soon as possible, well before any of the set deadlines.

**Weekly Discussion Posts [10%]:** Students will post a comment or question on the reading or lecture to the dedicated MyCourses Discussion forum for each week. Our TA will select a set of comments/questions for Prof. Rentschler to answer/address in-person during our Wednesday class session. Students are required to post a comment or question about the reading(s) each week. Discussion Posts will be graded as "1" or "0". A grade of "1" signals that the question or comment has been submitted and is appropriate to the assignment. A grade of "0" will be given for non-submission of questions or for questions that are not appropriate to the assignment. This assignment represents a base line form of student engagement with the course readings and lecture materials. **Questions must be posted by Tuesdays at 5pm** in the dedicated Discussion forum in MyCourses for the reading(s) and lecture that same week to receive credit. Posts that appear to be copied and pasted from others will receive no credit and will be reported under the academic dishonesty policy. Note: one post (with the lowest score) will be dropped from the final grade calculation.

**Short-Answer Quizzes [20%]:** Six weeks during the term, students will be quizzed about those week's course readings to demonstrate their knowledge of the material and their comprehension of its content. There will be one question on each quiz. The question will ask students to explain a key concept from the reading for that week. Quizzes will be administered using the quiz tool in MyCourses. **Quizzes can be completed within a 34-hour window starting Thursdays at 2:30pm Eastern time zone** (quizzes will close at midnight on Friday, e.g., 11:59pm). Once the quiz is opened, students have 45 minutes to finish writing their short answer. Quizzes will be graded according to the following scale: 90% (answered the question and completed the assignment correctly), 60% (did the reading and is familiar with the content but provided an answer that demonstrates a lack of comprehension), 10% (submitted the quiz), 0% (did not submit the quiz). Answers that appear to be copied and pasted from others will receive no credit and will be reported under the academic dishonesty policy.

**Two Short Media Critiques [10%]:** Students will write 2 short critiques over the term on media practices relevant to the course and course materials. Media critiques briefly analyse a current media artifact, example and/or practice. Writers must state the direct relevance of the example to the course through direct discussion of and citation of on key concept in the course up to the relevant due date.

Media Critiques are super short papers: 2 pages in length, double-spaced and use 12-pt font. You can choose any relevant media example on which to write a critique that is 12 months old or newer (nothing earlier will be accepted). Each critique will count for 5% of your semester grade and will be graded as 1 or 0 (Pass/Fail). A grade of "1" signals that the Media Critique is appropriate to the assignment and meets the requirements of the assignment. A grade of "0" will be given for non-submission or for Media Critiques that are not appropriate to the assignment and/or do not meet the requirements of the assignment.

You will submit your critiques via MyCourses and will receive peer reviews on the assignments as feedback in discussion sessions set aside for this purpose in the course. Your T.A. and professor will not be providing feedback on the critiques.

The first media critique is due by: **Friday September 29, 2023**

The second critique is due by: **Friday November 10, 2023**

We encourage students to use each Media Critique as preparation for the longer essay. Students may use topics that they have written about in their media critique for the graded essay assignments. Analytic Essay #1 can draw on ideas from your Media Critique #1; Analytic Essay #2 can draw on ideas from your Media Critique #2. Media Critiques #1 and #2 must address a different media example or artifact (you cannot write about the same thing more than once in your media critiques).

**Two Analytic Essays [each is worth 30% of your final grade, for a total of 60%]**: Students will write two 5-6 paged double-spaced essays over the course of the semester that draw on the concepts we use in the course to critically, and closely, analyze a current media example from a feminist media studies perspective. The media example must be no older than 12 months prior to the due date. Student can use the topic from their relevant Media Critique and develop it for their Analytic Essay. Students must write about different media examples for the two essays (the same media example cannot be used in two different graded essays). You must make an argument. Include a copy/image of the media example with your essay. More details on the assignment will be posted in MyCourses prior to the deadline. Prof. Rentschler will also share advice on writing in MyCourses and in her lectures.

**The first essay** must identify and use **two concepts** that we have read and discussed up to October 14th in the course. Essays are required to directly, and substantially, reference **two sources from our course readings**. For essay #1, this means required readings assigned from the start of the course to the due date. **First Essay Due Date: Friday October 13, 2023, by 5pm in MyCourses.**

**The second essay** must identify and use **two concepts** that we have read and discussed between October 16<sup>th</sup> and December 2<sup>nd</sup> in the course. Essays are required to directly, and substantially, reference **two sources from our course readings**. For essay #2, this means required readings that were assigned between October 13 and the end of the course. **Second Essay Due Date: Friday December 8, 2023, by 5pm in MyCourses.**

Essays will be graded with a rubric that will be posted to MyCourses. The highest possible grade a student can receive for an essay is 90, for truly exceptional work.

## Grading

As a student at McGill, you have the right to turn in work that is written in French. All lectures, class discussions, examinations and most in-class viewings will be conducted in English (examples used in lecture may include French-language media). Your final grade for the semester will be based on the strength, quality, and clarity of thought you demonstrate in your discussion posts, quizzes, critiques and essays, and the demonstration that you fully comprehend the course materials and concepts.

**How to Interpret Grades in this Course:** Prof. Rentschler and your T.A. are eager to help you do well on assignments before they are due. Please visit your professor during her office hours to ask questions about material for the course and assignments on which you are working. Your T.A. will also hold office hours around assignment deadlines for this purpose as well.

Grades are assigned based on the scale set out in the Arts and Sciences calendar. Grades in the “A” range are awarded only for superior work (and not merely sufficient performance). Grades in the “B” range are awarded for work that is above satisfactory. In the “C” range they are awarded for satisfactory/sufficient work. And in the “D” range, they signal unsatisfactory work.

Final grades will be based on the McGill University scale, reproduced here:

85-100%	= A	60-64%	= C+
80-84%	= A-	55-59%	= C
75-79%	= B+	50-54%	= D (Conditional Pass)
70-74%	= B	0-49%	= F (Fail)
65-69%	= B-		

Students can check their grades for assignments via the gradebook in MyCourses.

**Grade Appeals:** All assignments are graded on performance, not effort. Grades are final, except where a mistake has been made in calculation. The only circumstances under which the professor would change a grade are: (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 her 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 a grader’s evaluation; she will instead discuss ways in which you can understand the evaluation and improve upon your performance.

If your grade was miscalculated or if you feel your work was held to a different standard than everyone else, 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 (keep a copy for yourself). Grade complaints will not be considered after the 7-day 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 in-class activities, all other assignments are announced well in advance of their due dates. This provides students with ample time to prepare and complete them. The syllabus includes all the due dates for each of your assignments.

**Illness, Mental Health, and other Barriers:** If you are having difficulty and are unable to make an assignment deadline, contact the professor. All lectures are recorded and posted online. Class assignments are announced in advance. Quizzes can be completed within a 34-hour window. If you should need assistance, [Counseling Services](#) provides personal, academic, and career counseling to undergraduate and graduate students. They also offer workshops on study skills, multiple choice exams, test anxiety/stress management. Students can also visit the [Wellness Hub](#) for more information: 514-398-6017. For other resources available to students, see the section on Expectations, Resources and Other Business.

**Late Assignments:** COMS 310 has been designed to accommodate students as best as possible. That said, your professor and TA will evaluate and grade assignments according to the schedule that has been established. Assignments turned in late will be subject to penalty. Late papers and assignments can

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 are considered late if they are turned in after the due date deadline.

## Expectations, Resources 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.

**Attendance:** Attendance at every course meeting is required.

**Course Website:** A course website has been established on McGill's MyCourses web portal for the syllabus, course readings, lecture slides and recordings, handouts (for assignments), grading grids (which are used in the evaluation of student essays), and periodic announcements. Prof. Rentschler will record her lectures and they will be uploaded to MyCourses—they will be audio only, since that is what is available in our classroom. You should regularly check the course website for updates, announcements, and new materials for the course. Please make use of the dedicated Discussion Forum that has been created for questions you have about the course and assignments (that are not meant to be private): Prof. Rentschler or T.A. Emma Blackett will respond. To use the course website, login via your McGill account at: <https://mycourses2.mcgill.ca/>

**Technical Difficulties:** Your professor and T.A. will not be able to troubleshoot your computer, mobile, or internet connectivity problems or any systemic problems with MyCourses. If you have an IT issue, please contact [McGill IT support](#). If there are glitches with the technologies we use for the course, we will simply “roll with it.”

**Language:** The language of instruction in our course will be English. However, you can submit your work in French if you prefer. In discussions, Francophone students are welcome to use the French word if they can't think of the English word and we can work to help each other out across our linguistic differences. If French-speaking students and students of other linguistic groups would like to be grouped with other students who speak the same language for group discussions and/or peer reviews of Media Critiques, your professor will make that happen. Please let her know if you'd like to do this.

**Accommodations:** COMS 310 has been designed with student accessibility in mind, but students may have additional accessibility needs in the course. If so, please speak with the professor. In-person lectures will be recorded using the Lecture Recording System that is available in our classroom at McGill. Lecture recordings will be posted to MyCourses, and can be found under the “Lecture Recordings” tab. Your professor is learning to use image descriptions to textually describe what is depicted in visuals used to illustrate points in the course. If this is particularly helpful to you, please let her know! Prof. Rentschler will also use a microphone in the delivery of her lectures to make her more audible. If you are ill or unwell, please do not come to class; if you do come to class while unwell, **wear a mask** to protect others from airborne illnesses. Please be mindful of speaking clearly and with enough volume that others can hear you. We may need to ask each other to repeat ourselves if we have not been well-heard.

If you require other accommodations for your assignments or your access to the delivery of this course, please notify your professor and the Office for Students with Disabilities by the end of the first week of class, ideally. The [Office for Students with Disabilities](#) is in Suite 410 (4<sup>th</sup> floor) at 1010 Sherbrooke Street

West. To get in touch with the Office for Students with Disabilities, you can call (514) 398-6009, (514) 398-8198 (TDD) or email [disabilities.students@mcgill.ca](mailto:disabilities.students@mcgill.ca) to speak with an adviser there. Please note the above commitment to accommodation applies equally to survivors of sexual assault and/or harassment on or off campus. For information about accommodations available to those students who have experienced sexual violence, please see the [SSMU website](#) for more information. Your professor is committed to making this course as accessible as possible.

**Sexual Assault Survivor Support and Allyship:** Should you or someone you know need support as a survivor of sexual assault, harassment and/or discrimination on campus, please contact McGill's Sexual Violence Response Advisor, Émilie Marcotte, at 514-398-4486 or by email at: [osvrse@mcgill.ca](mailto:osvrse@mcgill.ca), situated in the new [Office for Sexual Violence Response, Support and Education](#) (located at 550 Sherbrooke, suite 585) for assistance. They also, normally, offer drop-in hours during the school year (the schedule is online). For more information on their office, sexual violence support and reporting options follow the link above. The [Sexual Assault Centre of the McGill Student's Society \(SACOMSS\)](#) offers peer counseling and support to students who have experienced sexual violence and their allies, as well as outreach and education. Their hotline number is: (514) 398-8500 and they normally offer drop-in hours as well (the schedule for which is online). The [SSMU website](#) also contains additional information on several resources available to survivors.

**Other Key Resources:** [The Writing Centre](#) offers individual consultation on all aspects of writing. Appointments are required. We highly recommend this university resource if you want to work on your writing (by phone, call 514-398-7109). [Queer McGill](#) provides social, political, and informational support for queer students by queer students (by phone, call 514-398-6913). [First People's House](#) provides a home away from home for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students, promoting academic success as well as community connection (by phone, call 514-398-3217). The [Black Students' Network](#) provides support for Black students, and also works to raise awareness at McGill of issues that Black individuals face; they also work to make the campus safer and more accessible for Black students. Additionally, the [McGill Office of Religious and Spiritual Life](#) is available as a nondenominational religious and spiritual hub on campus.

**Expectations for How We Interact:** COMS 310 is designed to be a space in which we can grow as scholars, critics, writers, analysts, and for some, advocates. In this space, we can try out ideas, even if we might abandon them later. In this course, one of our goals is to give ourselves and other people the space to transform their thinking and change their minds. We will not seek a purity of ideas, nor should we expect others' ideas to be "pure." Our thoughts and beliefs are contingent, often contradictory, mutable, and subject to change, partial, and sometimes uncertain. Amid all of this, clarity in what we say and write is especially valuable. **Respectful dialogue is expected of everyone.** And while disagreements are expected, they should not shut down dialogue. Learning is a process: we make mistakes; we change our minds; we sometimes even regret some things we've said earlier. Our aim is to work together to learn and *un-learn* some of the things we take for granted, and to sharpen our analytic skills in the process.

To this end, **please grant your fellow course participants courtesy and respect, whether you agree with what they say or not.** Avoid attacking someone's character or personhood if you disagree with something they have said: what someone thinks or says is not reducible to who they are. Our goal in using the discussion forum, talking in small groups, and participating in full-class discussion is to understand and interpret the texts we read, the concepts we use, and the media examples we

encounter, and how we can use them. As much as possible, work to avoid purely negative critique in comments and responses. Let's also extend the same consideration to classmates. Consider what other people say in their classroom comments and discussion forum posts and think about how you can build on them and respond as generously as possible.

While you each bring interesting experiences to the course, you should consider whether you really want to bring them up in discussion. If you do bring up your own experience, recognize that it becomes a topic for discussion. Ask yourself what point you want to make by talking about yourself. Do you want others to know this about you? You also 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 work to promote a safe and conducive environment for learning. In accordance with university policy, we will not tolerate discrimination or harassment based on race, color, religion, national origin, ancestry, sex, age, civil status, familial status, gender identity, sexual orientation, size, or disability. In addition to the University's policy, and within the bounds of the course, we do not discriminate based on political creed or belief. This means that you do not have to agree with us to do well in this course. So long as you demonstrate an understanding of the course material and an ability to work with it analytically, you are under no obligation to agree with it. We will also make every effort to avoid discrimination based on class or income. If there is something we can do to make the class more accessible and hospitable, please let us know.

**Academic Integrity:** We take academic integrity very seriously, as does the university. Failure to follow procedures and direct requests from your professor or T.A. during an assignment can result in immediate failure of the assignment. Presenting someone else's work (or the product of a generative AI system) as your own is plagiarism (academic dishonesty). 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 <https://www.mcgill.ca/deanofstudents/students/student-rights-responsibilities/code> for more information).

**Prohibition of Use of Generative AI, Large Language Models, and Programs such as ChatGPT:** Writing for the course that is created/prompted by ChatGPT or other large language models will not be accepted. ChatGPT and other large language models will also not be accepted for use as sources for assignments or any coursework in COMS 310. Anyone whose work is suspected of using a generative AI tool and any student presenting it as one's own work will be brought to the attention of the student disciplinary process.

**Special Required Emergency Clause:** In extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.

## Semester Schedule of Course Readings

**\*This schedule of readings is subject to change.**



The organization of the course creates a semester-long conversation aimed at making connections between ideas and illuminating dialogue and cross-citation in contemporary feminist media studies. The schedule starts with readings about teaching and learning media studies as a feminist practice. The order of readings in the course threads together concepts, feminist approaches, and feminist epistemological genealogies in the field, while providing useful concepts and analytic frameworks to analyze a range of media practices, especially (but not limited to) those that are online.

This schedule also lists the due dates for quizzes, Media Critiques and Analytic Essay assignments. It additionally includes information on talks that are being held over the Fall 2023 term that are directly relevant to the course. Check them out if you're interested! Registration for the talks is required, so if you plan to go, please signup ASAP. Links are provided in the schedule.

## **Let's Begin**

\*This first section of the course introduces our approach to the study of media and feminism, and some of the feminist principles and working assumptions that will support and guide our work in the course.

### **Thursday August 31, 2023: Welcome**

Content Note: Welcome to COMS 310! In today's session, we'll come up with some working definitions of feminism, introduce the field of inquiry in feminist media studies, and review and discuss the plan for this semester's course. Check out the syllabus prior to the start of class and come with any questions you might want to ask.

### **Tuesday September 5, 2023: Feminism as Practices of Feeling and Analysis (Part 1)**

Content Note: This lecture will examine and extrapolate from a chapter we are reading in Sara Ahmed's 2017 book *Living a Feminist Life*. The chapter "Feminism is Sensational" discusses the processes through which people develop a feminist analytic based in their own experiences and the structures of feeling and power in which we can examine and analyze them. Whether you are new to feminist thinking or not, this chapter opens some productive avenues for thinking about *how* you analyze things from feminist perspectives and *what* tunes you into them in the first place. Note: Ahmed discusses experiences of non-consensual touch, exposure, and harassment in the chapter, and feminist responses to them.

Required Reading: Ahmed, Sara (2017). *Feminism is sensational*. In *Living a feminist life*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 21-42.

### **Thursday September 7, 2023: Feminism as Practices of Feeling and Analysis (Part 2)**

Content Note: Today's session will address questions and prompts from the Discussion Forum about Ahmed's reading in addition to discussing two short pieces: Graff and Birkenstein's chapter on how to read academic texts for the conversation they are in, and Audre Lorde's classic Black feminist essay "Poetry is Not a Luxury."

Required Reading: Graff, Gerald, and Cathy Birkenstein (2021). What's motivating this writer? Reading for the conversation. In *They say, I say: The moves that matter in academic writing*. W.W. Norton, 187-202.

Lorde, Audre. (1984). Poetry is a not a luxury. In *Sister outsider: Essays and speeches*. Berkeley, CA: Crossings Press, 36-39.

### **Tuesday September 12, 2023: Content Notes and the Politics of Knowledge (Part 1)**

Content Note: The reading for this lecture discusses ways of approaching the different challenges we bring to our course work and lives based on our experiences and social positions. It also helps us think about what it is we search for and want in our media use and forms the basis for the use of content notes in the course. Lothian's text offers a queer feminist history of the development of content notes in fan fiction communities and their digital archives, examining how content notes make explicit some of the shared expectations of posting, circulating, and using media in community. Note that she discusses how content notes emerge from a context of concern for survivors of racism, gender violence, homophobia, and transphobia. In addition to the Lothian reading, the lecture will also draw from ideas in recommended readings by Roxane Gay (her feminist critique of safe spaces) and Angela Carter (on feminist pedagogy from a disability studies perspective).

Required Reading: Lothian, Alexis (2016). Choose not to warn. *Feminist Studies*, 42(3), 743-756.

For Further Reading (if interested, not required): Gay, Roxane (2014). The illusion of safety/The safety of illusion. In *Bad Feminist*. New York: Harper Collins, 147-153.

Carter, Angela (2015). Teaching with trauma: Trigger warnings, disability, and feminist pedagogy. *Disability Studies Quarterly* 35(2): n.p. Available online at <http://dsq-sds.org/article/view/4652/3935>

Ahmed, Sara (2015). Against students. *The New Inquiry*, June 29.  
<http://thenewinquiry.com/essays/against-students/>

Butler, Judith. (2017). Limits on free speech. *Academe Blog*, December 8.  
<https://academeblog.org/2017/12/07/free-expression-or-harassment/>

### **Thursday September 14, 2023: Content Notes and the Politics of Knowledge (Part 2)**

Content Note: Today's session will address questions and prompts from the Discussion Forum about Lothian's reading in addition to discussing examples of contemporary feminist knowledge seeking and the information politics of content warnings and notes.

Required: \*Bring in your own example of a content warning or note you have come across in your media use: Where do you see them? How are they used? What are people doing with them? How are folks responding (if they are)?

**\*Thursday-Friday September 14-15, 2023: Short QUIZ in MyCourses\***  
**(Quiz #1)**

## **Tuesday September 19, 2023: Feminist Curiosity and the Pleasures of Critique**

**Content Note:** The readings for this lecture focus on what it means, and is, to do feminist critique, and how we can use these practices to analyze media examples in COMS 310. Rather than a negative practice, the texts we read by Cynthia Enloe and Janice Loreck suggest that feminist critique is based in curiosity, pleasure, and exploration. We will talk about how this can shape our own analysis in COMS 310.

**Required Readings:** Enloe, Cynthia (2000). Introduction: Being curious about our lack of a feminist curiosity; and The surprised feminist. In *The Curious feminist: The search for women in a new age of empire*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1-18.

Loreck, Janice (2018). Pleasurable critiques: Feminist viewership and criticism in *Feminist Frequency, Jezebel, and Rosie Recaps*." *Feminist Media Studies*, 18(2), 264-277.

**For Further Reading (if interested, not required):** Harvey, Alison (2020). Feminist media critique. In *Feminist media studies*. Polity Press, 32-57.

Ahmed, Sara (2010). Feminist killjoys. In *The promise of happiness*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 50-87.

## **Thursday September 21, 2023: Extending Feminist Curiosity to Barbie**

**Content Note:** In today's class, we will address questions and prompts from the Discussion Forum about the Loreck and Enloe readings. Then we will use Loreck and Enloe's ideas about pleasurable criticism and feminist curiosity to assess four pieces of contemporary commentary on the 2023 summer blockbuster film *Barbie*. Students are required to read just **one** of the four readings (see below). The *New Yorker* and *New York Times Magazine* pieces hold onto some of the ambiguity and love/hate relationships with Barbie that have followed this doll and its cultural meanings for decades in relationship to 2023's summer blockbuster film *Barbie*. Feminist cinema scholar Lori Marso's piece examines the thesis on feelings presented by the film, and what it means to the film's engagement with feminism. Chavisa Woods' essay makes a harder line critique about the film as itself sexist while also acknowledging the film's pleasures (especially the Kens' dance scene). We will talk about the four articles both as cultural commentary *and* as objects of study in COMS 310, to think about how cultural sources can also become objects of analysis. If you haven't already, it would be helpful to see the movie before class (if you are able)!

**Required Readings:** read the one assigned to you by your last name.

### **People with last names starting with A-F read:**

Jamison, Leslie (2023). Why Barbie must be punished: Mothers, daughters, and an icon's existential crisis. *New Yorker*, July 29. <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/the-weekend-essay/why-barbie-must-be-punished>

### **People with last names starting with G-L read:**

Paskin, Willa (2023). Greta Gerwig's Barbie dream job. *New York Times Magazine*, July 11. <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/07/11/magazine/greta-gerwig-barbie.html?smid=nytcore-ios-share&referringSource=articleShare>

**People with last names starting M-S read:**

Marso, Lori (2023). Feeling like a Barbie: On Greta Gerwig and Chantal Ackerman. *Los Angeles Review of Books*, August 18. <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/feeling-like-a-barbie-on-greta-gerwig-and-chantal-akerman/>

**People with last names starting with T-Z read:**

Woods, Chavisa. (2023). The insidious faux-feminism of Barbie. *Full Stop*, August 7. <https://www.full-stop.net/2023/08/07/features/essays/chavisa-woods/the-insidious-faux-feminism-of-barbie/>



[Image description: a pink and pastel blue colored film still from the Kens' dance routine in the *Barbie* movie. Canadian actor Simu Liu strikes a pose at the front of the image.]

**\*Thursday-Friday September 21-22, 2023: Short QUIZ in MyCourses\*  
(Quiz #2)**

**Thursday September 21, 2023, 5-7pm: "Broken Machines: Toward a Techno-Feminist Refusal,"  
Talk by Dr. Sarah Sharma, Concordia University, EV 11.705 (EV Building, 11<sup>th</sup> floor, room 705).**

**Tuesday September 26, 2023: What is Objectification? (Part 1)**

Content Note: This week's readings unpack the concept of objectification to draw important analytic distinctions between sex and sexism in the media. We will read two chapters from the recent book *Objectification: On the Difference between Sex and Sexism* by co-authors Susanna Paasonen, Feona Attwood, Alan McKee, John Mercer and Clarissa Smith, a group of international scholars with expertise in feminist and queer analysis of sexuality and media. On Tuesday we will read one chapter, "What Counts as Objectification" and Thursday we will read the other, "Disturbingly Lively Objects." The goal of these readings is to trouble and refine some of the feminist claims that get made about objectification, and to clarify what "objectification" is and means.

Required Reading: Paasonen, Susanna et. al. (2020). What counts as objectification. In *Objectification: On the difference between sex and sexism*. Routledge Press.

## **Thursday September 28, 2023: What is Objectification? (Part 2)**

Content Note: Today's session will address questions and prompts from the Discussion Forum about the Paasonen et. al. chapter "What Counts as Objectification," then we will unpack and work with their chapter "Disturbingly Lively Objects," drawing on some contemporary media materials to do so.

Required Reading: Paasonen, Susanna et. al. (2020). Disturbingly lively objects. In *Objectification: On the difference between sex and sexism*. Routledge Press.

**\*NO QUIZ THIS WEEK\***

## **\*Friday September 29, 2023: Media Critique #1 Due, 5pm in MyCourses\***

### **The Personal is Political – An Intersectional, Systemic Analytic in Digital Culture**

\*This section of the course focuses on two key feminist analytics for studying digital culture: the personal is political and intersectionality, both with a focus on Black feminism.

## **Tuesday October 3, 2023: The Personal is Political**

Content Note: The readings for this lecture provide key feminist frameworks for understanding how political and social structures shape personal lives and individual experience, helping us to connect, *analytically*, the scale of personal experience to structures of power at the institutional level. We will examine both texts as: 1) primary source materials from the 1970s, and 2) key feminist conceptual texts.

Required Readings: Combahee River Collective (1977/1983). A Black feminist statement. In *Home girls: A Black feminist anthology*, ed. Barbara Smith. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 264-274. Note: this piece is co-authored by Barbara Smith, Beverly Smith, and Demita Frazier.  
Hanisch, Carol (1969/2000). The personal is political. In *Radical feminism: A documentary reader*, ed. Barbara Crow. New York University Press, 113-116 (published originally in *Notes from the Second Year: Women's Liberation in 1970*).

For Further Reading (if you are interested; not required): Freely, Maureen. (2010). When the personal became political: a reappraisal of the Women's Liberation Movement's radical idea. In *Sixties radicalism and social movement activism: Retreat or resurgence?* ed. Bryn Johnson and Mike O'Donnell. London: Anthem Press, 211-224.

Gay, Roxane (2014). Introduction: Feminism (n.) Plural; Feel me, see me, hear me, reach me; How to be friends with another woman; Bad feminist: Take one; and Bad feminist: Take two. In *Bad feminist*. New York: Harper Collins, ix-14, 47-50, 303-318.

hooks, bell (1989/2015). Feminist politicization: A comment. In *Talking back: Thinking feminist, thinking Black*. South End Press, 105-111.

Héberle, Renée (2016). The personal is political. In *Oxford handbook of feminist theory*.

**Thursday October 5, 2023: Q&A on the Personal is Political (40 minutes) and Peer Review of Media Critiques (40 minutes)**

Content Note: Today's session will review questions for clarification and discussion on the Combahee River Collective Statement and Carol Hanisch's "The Personal is Political"; the class also will conduct peer reviews of media critiques for development into Essay #1.

**\*NO QUIZ THIS WEEK\***

**\*Monday October 9-Wednesday October 11: FALL BREAK (no class)\***

**Thursday October 12, 2023: Writing in COMS 310 (final prep for Essay #1) and Q&A of course material so far.**

**\*FRIDAY October 13, 2023, by 5pm: ESSAY #1 DUE\***  
**(in MyCourses)**

**Tuesday October 17, 2023: Intersectionality in Black Feminist Media Studies**

Content Note: Today's readings help us conceptualize and further engage Black feminist frameworks for conducting feminist intersectional analysis of social media (and other media practices), with a particular focus on intersectionality as an analytic, and the work of community building and consciousness raising online. Jackson's reading situates Black feminist digital activism within larger structures of intersectionality and the social change imperatives of Black feminism. Jackson, Bailey, and Welles then deploy intersectional analysis in their study of the trans women of colour hashtag #GirlsLikeUs. The lecture will draw from the recommended reading by Brittney Cooper, which is a conceptually and analytically rich piece that looks at a range of feminist debates on what intersectionality is and means, and how it can be used as an analytic framework. Kimberlé Crenshaw's Ted Talk video represents the significance of addressing intersectionality in the context of contemporary police violence against racialized folks. Crenshaw coined the term intersectionality in 1989. Please note: the end of Crenshaw's video shows recordings of police violence against racialized women; if you do not wish to view this violence, stop the video early.

Required Readings: Jackson, Sarah (2016). Re-imagining intersectional democracy from Black feminism to hashtag activism. *Women's Studies in Communication*, 39(4), 375-379.

Jackson, Sarah, Bailey, Moya, and Brooke Foucault Welles (2018). #GirlsLikeUs: Trans advocacy and community building online. *New Media & Society*, 20(5), 1868-1888.

Video to watch (all are in MyCourses): Crenshaw, Kimberlé (2016). "The Urgency of Intersectionality," *Ted Talk*, October.

[https://www.ted.com/talks/kimberle\\_crenshaw\\_the\\_urgency\\_of\\_intersectionality](https://www.ted.com/talks/kimberle_crenshaw_the_urgency_of_intersectionality)

For Additional Reading or Viewing (if interested, not required): Cooper, Brittney (2016). Intersectionality. In *Oxford handbook of feminist theory (online)*, eds. Lisa Disch and Mary Hawkesworth. Oxford University Press, 23 pages.

Intersectional feminism | Living in colour. (2019) GlobalTV News, September 11.

<https://youtube/eT1EC51xgVw>

Blaque, Kat (2019). What is: Intersectionality. YouTube, January 9. [https://youtu.be/IEeP\\_3vmdBY](https://youtu.be/IEeP_3vmdBY)

### **Thursday October 19, 2023: Misogynoir and Digital Culture**

Content Note: Today's session will answer questions from the Discussion Forum about the readings and lecture on intersectional feminism in digital culture and will discuss Moya Bailey's reading about misogynoir as an analytic for studying the mutually constitutive oppression of anti-black misogyny in Black women's lives. The lecture will draw from Bailey's text *Misogynoir Transformed* where she defines the term along with Black women's digital alchemy, the digital work that Black cis and trans women and gender non-binary folks do to transform the world. The lecture will also draw from bell hooks' key essays "Eating the Other" and "Representations of Whiteness in the Black Imagination" to examine how Black women organize to speak back against misogynoir.

Required Readings: Bailey, Moya (2021). Introduction: What is misogynoir? In *Misogynoir transformed: Black women's digital resistance*. New York University Press, 1-34 (pay special attention to Bailey's explanation of misogynoir on pp. 1-6, and the discussion of Black women's digital alchemy pp. 20-25).

For Further Reading (if interested, not required): hooks, bell. (1992). Eating the other: Desire and resistance; and Representations of whiteness in the Black imagination. In *Black looks: Race and representation*. New York: Routledge, 23-34, 112-120.

Trudy. 2014. Explanation of misogynoir. *Gradient Lair*, April 28. <http://www.gradientlair.com/post/84107309247/define-misogynoir-anti-black-misogyny-moya-bailey-coined>.

Bailey, Moya, and Trudy (2018). On misogynoir: Citation, erasure, and plagiarism. *Feminist Media Studies*, 18(4), 762-768.

Jackson, Lauren Michelle (2017). We need to talk about blackface in digital reaction GIFs" *TeenVogue.com*, August 2. <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/digital-blackface-reaction-gifs>

**\*Thursday October 19-Friday October 20, 2023: short QUIZ in MyCourses\***  
**(Quiz #3)**

**Tuesday October 24, 2023: Black Beauty as Digital Alchemy**

Content Note: Today's lecture will revisit Moya Bailey's concept of "digital alchemy" in dialogue with Hobson's analysis of the significant work of self-representation and self-fashioning Black women do. The reading by Janell Hobson discusses how Instagram and the use of hashtags create crucial spaces of self-representation for Black women as a response to misogynoir.

Hobson, Janell (2016). Black beauty and digital spaces: The new visibility politics. *Ada: A Journal of Gender, New Media, and Technology*, No. 10. [doi:10.7264/N39C6VQK](https://doi.org/10.7264/N39C6VQK) [reading is online on the website of the journal]

### **Thursday October 26, 2023: Black Memes as Counterpoint to White Women's Racism**

Content Note: Today's session will briefly address questions from the Discussion Forum about the Hobson reading and discussion. We will then turn to Apryl Williams' analysis of memes that respond to white women's racism in the context of white women calling the police on Black individuals and families in their leisure time. Building from the Bailey, Jackson, and Hobson readings that we have already discussed, this text examines another set of practices Black individuals use to call out white racism using the tools, infrastructures and cultural repertoires of digital culture and social media.

Williams, Apryl (2020). Black memes matter: #LivingWhileBlack with Becky and Karen. *Social Media + Society*, October-December, 1-14.

**\*Thursday October 26-Friday October 27, 2023: short QUIZ in MyCourses\***  
**(Quiz #4)**

## **Feminist Analytics on the Paradoxes and Politics of Representation**

\*This section of the course focuses on feminist analysis of representation, where representation is not only an image or text but is also a set of proxy relations (of stand-ins, delegates, and others). In this context we will be critiquing the idea that visibility can guarantee social and political recognition and/or confer rights onto people – we will start with this in our reading and discussion of the paradox of trans visibility. We will also examine how the popularity of feminism exists alongside the popularity of misogyny, racism, and white supremacy.

### **Tuesday October 31, 2023: The Politics of Trans Visibility and "Bad" Trans Objects**

Content Note: The reading by Cael Keegan examines some of the possibilities that "bad trans objects" might have in media culture, turning to the films *Tootsie*, *It's Pat*, and *The Assignment* to examine the complexities that even "bad" trans characters and representations might culturally enable, including, for trans and gender non-binary folks, opening space to not have to be "good subjects." Keegan traces the problems that hyper-visibility can create for trans folks, including the anti-trans oppression that has been expanding internationally. Keegan's work, like some others in the field, disarticulates the relationship



between being visible and being free/liberated, helping us think about the limits to visibility as the means to social change.

Required Reading: Keegan, Cael (2022). On the necessity of bad trans objects. *Film Quarterly*, 75(3), 26-37.

For Viewing (if you can access it): *Disclosure* (2020), Netflix Documentary made by Sam Feder and Laverne Cox.

Recommended: Berberick, Stephanie (2018). The paradox of trans visibility: Interrogating the 'year of trans visibility.' *Journal of Media Critiques* 13: 123-144.

### **Thursday November 2, 2023: Discussion of the Politics of Trans Visibility**

Content Note: Today's class will be organized around answering questions and discussing comments from the Discussion Forum on the reading by Cael Keegan and Professor Rentschler's lecture. Students are required to bring to class a media example that centres trans perspectives on being trans.

Required: Identify and bring a link with to class of a media example that centres trans perspectives on being trans.

### **\*Thursday November 2-Friday November 3, 2023: short QUIZ in MyCourses\* (Quiz #5)**

### **Tuesday November 7, 2023: The Feminist Politics of Representation**

Content Note: Linda Alcoff's classic essay in feminist theory examines the relations of power that shape the act of speaking on behalf of, and representing, others. Alcoff lays out the problem of speaking for others and suggests ways in which the harms feminists (and others!) do to others can be reduced in relationship to acts of representation and related rituals of speaking. This is a substantial philosophy essay about issues of communication and representation: give yourself time to read it. The recommended reading by Daniel José Older is especially useful for students who want to reflect on how to speak from places of privilege, racial or otherwise.

Required Reading: Alcoff, Linda Martin (1991/2). The problem of speaking for others. *Cultural Critique*, 20, 5-32.

For Further Reading (if interested, not required): Adichie, Chimimanda Ngozi (2009). The danger of a single story, *TED Talk*, October.

Older, Daniel José (2014). 12 fundamentals of writing the other (and the self). *Buzzfeed*.

[https://www.buzzfeed.com/danieljoseolder/fundamentals-of-writing-the-other?utm\\_term=.yvYR4YY00#.jyMe7QQYY](https://www.buzzfeed.com/danieljoseolder/fundamentals-of-writing-the-other?utm_term=.yvYR4YY00#.jyMe7QQYY).

Disch, Lisa (2016). Representation. In *Oxford handbook of feminist theory*.

## **Thursday November 9, 2023: “Mansplaining” and the Gendered Credibility Gap**

Content Note: Today’s session will address questions raised in the Discussion Forum about the Linda Alcoff reading and lecture. We will also discuss a piece by Rebecca Solnit that inspired the term “mansplaining” to conceptualize the systems of gendered power through which the knowledge of women-identified folks is undermined and deemed to be less credible than that of cis-men. Solnit links mansplaining to structures of gendered oppression, including sexualized violence. As she puts it: “Credibility is a basic survival tool.” Her 2023 opinion piece in the *Guardian* responds to the ways that term has lost its critical analytic edge in contemporary popular discourse.

Required Readings: Solnit, Rebecca (2014). Men explain things to me. In *Men explain things to me*. Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 1-16. Republished at *Guernica* here:

<https://www.guernicamag.com/rebecca-solnit-men-explain-things-to-me/>

Solnit, Rebecca (2023). The serious side of mansplaining has been lost. *The Guardian*, February 9.

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/feb/09/mansplaining-word-problem-rebecca-solnit>

For Further Reading (not required): Harrison, Maggie (2023). ChatGPT is just an automated, mansplaining machine. *Futurism*, February 8. <https://futurism.com/artificial-intelligence-automated-mansplaining-machine>

**\*NO QUIZ THIS WEEK\***

## **\*Friday November 10: Media Critique #2 Due, 5pm in MyCourses\***

### **Tuesday November 14, 2023: Feminist Analysis of the Politics of Google Search**

Content Note: Safiya Noble’s book offers a critical analysis of the ways in which algorithms reproduce and participate in systems of oppression. The reading for this session situates her approach to and definition of algorithmic oppression and how Google search algorithms shape the ways in which we see and experience the world as gendered, raced, and classed. The chapter we are reading focuses on the algorithmic oppression visible in Google searches for Black girls in the mid 2010s. The lecture will draw on other parts of Noble’s book to contextualize how Google search engines function as the main source of information for most people (rather than, say, public libraries or other sources), and the ways this shapes people’s ideas of what constitutes credible and authoritative knowledge.

Noble, Safiya Umoja (2018). Searching for Black girls. In *Algorithms of oppression: How search engines reinforce racism*. New York University Press, 64-109.

For Further Reading (if interested, not required): Noble, Safiya Umoja (2018). A society, searching. In *Algorithms of oppression: How search engines reinforce racism*. New York University Press, 15-63.

West, Sarah Myers, Whittaker, Meredith, and Kate Crawford. (2019). *Discriminating systems: Gender, race, and power in AI*. New York, NY: AI Now Institute. Retrieved from

<https://ainowinstitute.org/discriminatingystems.html>

Bivens, Rena (2017). The gender binary will not be de-programmed: Ten years of coding gender on Facebook. *New Media & Society*, 19(6), 880-898.  
Friz, Anna, and Robert W. Gehl (2016). Pinning the feminine user: Gender scripts in Pinterest's sign-up user interface. *Media, Culture & Society*, 38(5), 686-703.

**Thursday November 16, 2023: Q&A on the Politics of Search (40 minutes) and Peer Review of Media Critiques (40 minutes)**

Content Note: Today's session will review questions for clarification and discussion on the Safiya Noble reading and we will conduct peer reviews of media critiques for development into Essay #2.

**\*Thursday November 16-Friday November 17, 2023, short QUIZ in MyCourses\*  
(Quiz #6 – last one)**

**Thursday November 16: IGSF event with Professors Jessalyn Keller (U-Calgary) and Jessa Lingel (U-Penn), moderated by Professor Rentschler. More information forthcoming!**  
(We are reading a piece by Jessalyn Keller on November 28<sup>th</sup>)

## **Popular Feminist Technics**

\*This final section of the course engages with contemporary feminist work on feminist AI systems and popular feminisms in *Teen Vogue magazine*, both as examples of feminist media making and technographics.

**Tuesday November 21, 2023: Feminist AI? (Part 1)**

Content Note: Building from Noble's analysis of algorithmic oppression, today's reading and lecture will discuss feminist designs for artificial intelligence. Dr. Sophie Toupin, a feminist hacker scholar, presents an overview of feminist efforts to design and build feminist AI, to move beyond critique to different kinds of AI and machine learning systems.

Toupin, Sophie (2023). Shaping feminist artificial intelligence. *New Media & Society*, ahead of print version, <https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448221150776>

**Thursday November 23, 2023: Feminist AI? (Part 2)**

Content Note: Today's session will review questions for clarification and discussion on the Sophie Toupin reading and lecture from Tuesday. We will also discuss another feminist piece on AI, with a focus on meaningful consent in automated systems and whether that is even possible.

Varon, Joana; Peña, Paz (2021). Artificial intelligence and consent: A feminist anti-colonial critique, *Internet Policy Review*, ISSN 2197-6775, Alexander von Humboldt Institute for Internet and Society, Berlin, 10 (4), 1-25. <https://doi.org/10.14763/2021.4.1602>

**\*NO QUIZ THIS WEEK\***

**Tuesday November 28, 2023: The Feminist Snap in Popular Media**

Content Note: Jessalyn Keller's article on *Teen Vogue's* popular intersectional feminist interventions returns to some of the issues with we started our course: the pleasures of popular feminism, the intersectionality of feminist media studies, and the ability to make change in the process of making media. Note that Keller will be at McGill on November 16<sup>th</sup> for an event at the IGSF! Check it out!

Keller, Jessalynn (2020). A politics of snap: *Teen Vogue's* public feminism. *Signs*, 45(4), 817-843.

**Thursday November 30, 2023: This day follows a Monday schedule. COMS 310 will not meet today.**

**\*NO QUIZ THIS WEEK\***

**Tuesday December 5, 2023: (Last Day of Class) Advice on Writing the Final Essay and Final Q&A on material from the course (ask your prof anything about COMS 310)**



**\*Friday December 8, 2023: Essay #2 DUE, 5pm My Courses\***