WGS 166a: Gender, Sexuality, and Social Media

Instructor: Keridwen N. Luis
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Office Hours: Mon, Wed, 12-1:45, and by appointment
Office: Raab 106
Time: Mon/Wed 3:30-4:50
Location: Olin-Sang American Civ Ctr 104
Class Site: https://moodle2.brandeis.edu/course/view.php?id=18497

Course Description
This course asks how gender, sexuality, race, dis/ability, class, and other intersections of identity impact how we use and appear on social media. Early internet theorists imagined the World Wide Web as a "free" society, where "bodily" issues such as race, gender, and disability would somehow disappear. However, these identities have not vanished; in fact, we might argue that they remain even more potent in today's age of constant media connection. We will explore sociological and feminist theories of media, gender, sexuality, and race, as well as applying these theories to current events online. Students will explore the boundaries of digital activism, question the ways we continue to be embodied online, and consider power relations, discipline, and surveillance.

Required Readings:
There are NO Required Books for this course. All the readings are available either via reserve (at the library or on our course site) or online. Reserve and Online readings are essential and must be accessed and read prior to class.

Course Requirements:

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<th>Requirement</th>
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<td>Syllabus Quiz</td>
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<td>Attendance/Short Assignments</td>
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<td>Wiki Participation</td>
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<td>Short Essay</td>
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<td>Final Project</td>
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General Requirements: Class attendance and participation are both essential to this class. For this reason, unexcused absences will impact your grade; the discussion we do in class cannot be replicated by simply doing the reading. Also, this is a seminar class, and so it is necessary to do the reading beforehand to participate in the discussion. It also makes the class more engaging if we have things to talk about. Although this is not a writing intensive course, the papers are another vehicle for you to reflect on the reading topics and to introduce your own ideas; creativity, critical thinking, and good analysis are all highly encouraged. Please note that reading must be completed before class.

No cell phones, pagers, or other communication devices (including instant messaging via laptop) will be permitted in class, unless you are an EMT or other medical professional on call. Laptops will also not be permitted without my prior consent. Students observed using cell phones will be marked absent; this will have an effect on the final course grade. Laptops may be used during discussion to look up material relevant to the discussion only!
PLEASE NOTE: I do not use LATTE to calculate final grades, as it is inaccurate (the rounding does not agree with my grade schema) and does not take participation, presentations, or attendance into account. I strongly recommend that you ignore the website’s grade calculation.

Specific Assignments: Please note that more detailed assignment sheets will be available on our website in the folder marked "Class Assignments."

Syllabus Quiz: This will be accessible via Canvas and should be completed within the first two weeks of class.

Attendance/Short Assignments: Attendance will be taken for lecture and non-excused absences will impact your grade. There will be other short assignments, such as in-class writing exercises, out of class assignments (see "Take a Selfie") etc. Assignment sheets will be provided for out-of-class assignments.

Wiki Building: Students will define various terms pertinent to the class and help to build a class wiki which will provide useful definitions for jargon, slang, and cultural events pertinent to the class. Students will define terms, provide links and examples, and also edit the wiki entries of other students for credit.

Midterm Essay: Students will write a 1,000-1,250 word essay responding to a particular topic using some of the theoretical material we have been reading as a lens.

Final Research Project: Near the end of the semester, students will undertake an original research project on some aspect of social media they are interested in. This may take the form of a research paper or a multimedia presentation, and other forms will be considered if you consult me about them in advance.

IMPORTANT NOTE: These descriptions are for your information only. In all cases the assignment sheets will supersede the syllabus in matters of assignment detail. Be sure to read the assignment sheet before doing the assignment.

Email Policy: Emails will be answered within 24 hours, except for weekend days (when I cannot guarantee to check my email as regularly). I do not check email between the hours of 9 pm and 8 am. Please keep emails short and to the point; longer commentary may be better discussed during office hours.

Written Work: Assignment sheets will be made available on the class website, and due dates are specified in the syllabus. Written work submitted later than fifteen minutes after the beginning of class on the due date will be lowered by a third of a grade for each day late, except in cases of illness or emergency. All sources MUST be cited. Please use in-text citation. For example:

American teenage girls seem to be in a liminal state, for "as a society, we discarded the Victorian moral umbrella over girls before we agreed on useful strategies and programs--a kind of 'social Gore-Tex' to help them stay dry" (Brumberg 1997, 201).

Works Cited:


NOTE. Proper anthropological citation utilizes the LAST NAME of the author, the YEAR of the publication date, and the PAGE number, in that order (Chicago in-text citation). I will also accept MLA and APA citation.

I will not accept footnote or endnote citation.
EVEN MORE IMPORTANT NOTE: NO FORM OF CITATION ALLOWS YOU TO OMIT PAGE NUMBERS ENTIRELY. PERIOD. If page numbers exist, you must include them for direct quotes and specific summary material.

Be sure to include the works cited page. All papers must be word-processed, spellchecked, double-spaced, and possess reasonable margins and page numbers. I highly encourage you to proofread as grammar and punctuation are essential parts of writing well, and writing is one of the main tools of the social sciences. Clear and readable prose is also highly esteemed! We will be using our course site to turn in papers this semester.

Important Policies on Written Work:
I will grade a paper down by an amount of my choosing for omitting any of the above (Works Cited page, name, title, etc.).

I will lower a grade by 4 points (from an A to an A-, and so on) for any paper that refers to men and women as “males” or “females” (noun use; of course it is okay to use “male” or “female” as an adjective!). It is objectifying and dehumanizing to refer to human beings this way and I will not encourage it. We are not lab rats.

Latedays/Extension Days: I use a system with my upper-level classes that works like this: You are granted one week (seven days) of extension at the beginning of the semester. You do not have to ask ahead of time to use these days, you may simply exercise this privilege of being a little flexible about due dates. You may divide them up however you wish -- turn one paper in a week late, or three papers in each two days late. Please note the following rules:

1. You may divide your days up however you wish.
2. When you turn in any paper that uses latedays/extension days, you MUST note at the top of the paper that "X extension days" or "Y latedays" were used. Otherwise I will mark your paper as late, assuming that you do NOT wish to use your latedays. You may not retroactively use latedays.
3. Papers must be turned in electronically to the class website; this will timestamp your papers automatically. Email may only be used in the event you cannot reach the class website.
4. Weekend days count. For example, if you turned your paper in on a Monday after it was due on a Tuesday, you would need to use six latedays, not four.

Rules for Papers:
All papers must be in PDF, RTF, or Microsoft Word (DOC or DOCX) format. No exceptions. I cannot accept links of any kind (to your work), nor will I follow them; I cannot look at GoogleDocs while they are on Google (you will need to export your document and upload it to our course site). This is for your legal protection as well as mine (regretfully). I cannot look at or share documents using any shared document platform (this is not because you and I do not understand the technical aspects thereof; it has to do with the problems of tracking document changes).

Papers must be turned into/posted to our course site, unless you have technical difficulties, in which case you may email them directly to me.

Academic course turnins tend to be very picky about time -- even if you are 30 seconds late, it will mark the paper late. I am less picky and capable of looking at the timestamp; DO NOT PANIC. If you turned in your paper within a reasonable timeframe, you are fine.

I am happy to look at and comment on no more than 2 paragraphs of your paper via email (you may also ask whatever specific questions you have!). If you would like to discuss a full draft
with me, please come to my office hours or make an appointment (I can give you more complete
advice; also comments on a whole draft via email are "pre-grading" which I feel is unfair to your
fellow students). You do not have to print out your paper to come to office hours unless you prefer
to work that way; I have a computer and you may bring one too if you wish.

Class Participation and Courtesy:

We require and expect all students to treat each other with courtesy. Courtesy includes being
prepared, being on time, and being respectful of the material and your colleagues’ work with it.
Honor the labor of the author and your colleagues, don’t just dismiss work; analysis before critique.

Harassment, whether physical, sexual, or verbal, will not be tolerated in this class. We
may be discussing some sensitive and sometimes upsetting topics; I expect this classroom to be a
space for growth for students to express their views.

Respect confidentiality, for both our discussion and your own experience. What we share in
this room is confidential. If you want to adduce examples which do not come from the texts, don’t
give names: we will be discussing sensitive subjects (this goes as well for your papers, if you are
giving personal experiences or doing fieldwork). A friend gave me this excellent advice for talking
about issues, and not individuals: "plots, not characters."

It is possible to disagree respectfully: rather than telling people that they are wrong, do what
is called "reflecting" before responding. For example, "You seem to be saying that X is Y," (reflection) "however, I have a different opinion, which is that X is Z, because of A." Also, be
sure not to disagree with people (i.e. "you are wrong,") but with their actual statements ("I do not
agree with X equalling Y").

Don’t be afraid to speak up, as everyone has something to contribute. We are all learning.
Not every student must volunteer an opinion in every class, but your opinions count -- be sure to
share them. As an adjunct to this, share the floor! Let others speak (and if you are afraid that you
will forget your point, write it down). We also don’t have to share our insights with the whole group
-- let’s also do smaller discussions in class, and one on one discussions as well. We can also use
the forum for discussion and students are welcome to email the professor with questions or discussion
points, even anonymously.

Use "I statements" for your opinions rather than assuming that what you think should be
universal. This can also be helpful for distinguishing between personal opinion and facts which can
be backed up by documented scholarly evidence.

Expressions of bias are hurtful even if unintended. Even if you did not mean to step on my
foot, it’s best if you move when I tell you that it hurts. Similarly, when someone says something that
another person finds biased and hurtful, it’s best to cease and apologize, even if that’s not what the
first person intended. Intent is not magic and will not prevent bias from happening; we all carry
around unconscious misogyny, transphobia, homophobia, ableism, racism, and a host of other
prejudices because of how society is. I encourage all students to try to be graceful about listening
when their bias is brought up (and I promise to do my best, myself).

If you have any problems or questions, I encourage you to bring them to me, or to the
Office of the Dean of Students.

These class courtesy rules were created with the help of my 2017 Graduate Feminist Theory class at
Brandeis University, and Hanne Blank.

Regrade Requests: In the event of a grade dispute, I will re-evaluate the entire work according to
my grading rubric. A higher grade is not guaranteed; a lower grade may result.

Academic Integrity: Academic integrity is expected of all students. All work turned in must be the
work of the student whose name appears at the top of the paper, except where you have specifically
requested and received permission for a collaborative effort. All students are expected to cite their sources fully (whether from texts, interviews, or online). If you have any questions on when or whether to cite, please do not hesitate to ask. You may not turn in work for this class which you have previously turned in for other classes; you may not turn in work which has been prepared for any other use. (If you wish to use some of your previous work, you may cite it.) Plagiarism will be dealt with according to the Academic Honesty Policy; plagiarized work will result in a failure of the class and further sanctions, at the discretion of Brandeis University, may result.

If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis University and wish to have accommodation made for you in this class, please see me immediately with your letter from the Accessible Education Office. All communications will be kept confidential.

Background Reading: For students interested in why I have made certain choices on this syllabus.

On Why There Are Trigger Warnings:

On the Laptop Rule:

On Emailing Your Professor Asking Whether You Missed Anything of Importance After You Missed Class for Whatever Reason:

On What Is Really Going On:

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Schedule of Readings and Due Dates

How to Use This Syllabus (PLEASE READ):
This syllabus is arranged with each week's reading starting with a theoretical/focus reading, and then the readings pertaining to that day's or week's topic. Readings are presented in order of topics and in order of importance; any readings after the first four can be skimmed. Please note that not all readings are the same length. If there ARE four readings listed, probably one or two of them are pretty short.

The section labeled Section reading should be completed in advance of your discussion section, whatever the date of your section is.

Readings marked RECOMMENDED do NOT need to be read but are included in case you want more resources on the topic (for writing papers or your own information).

So don't be intimidated by the length of the syllabus!

Weeks 1-2: Theoretical Perspectives on Gender, Sexuality, and Online Media

8/28 First Day of Class
    Introduction to course: A Brief History of the Internet, with Special Attention Paid to Social Interaction, Gender, and Race
No reading

9/4  Cyborgs in the Panopticon
    Joyce, Mary. 2/7/2012 "The Six Activist Functions of Technology." Meta-Activism (online
    media) [http://www.meta-activism.org/digital-activism-101-the-5-activist-functions-of-
    technology/] Online.

    Wired.com. [https://www.wired.com/story/is-big-tech-merging-with-big-brother-kinda-looks-like-it/]
    Online.

9/11  Warner, Michael. 1999. "What's Wrong With Normal?" The Trouble with Normal: Sex,
    Oxford University Press. Reserve.

Weeks 3-4: Gender, Sexuality, and Race Online: A Brief Introduction
Warnings:  descriptions of harassment, swearing: Gray.

9/16  The Online "Game" of Race and Gender
    Syme, Rachel. 11/20/2015. "SELFIE: The Revolutionary Potential of Your Own Face, in
    Seven Chapters." Medium.com (online) [https://medium.com/matter/selfie-fe945dcba6b0#.
    3rfj4h4nev] Online.
    De Ridder, Sander. 2013. "Commenting on pictures: Teens negotiating gender and
    Van Doorn, Niels. 2011. "Digital spaces, material traces: How matter comes to matter in
    online performances of gender, sexuality and embodiment." Media, culture, and society 33(4): 531.
    Reserve.
    DUE: Post a Selfie on our Forum (see assignment sheet for details)

    Experiences in MMORPGs," in Social Exclusion, Power, and Video Game Play: New Research in Digital
    Media and Technology, David G. Embrick, J. Talmadge Wright, and Andras Lukacs. New York:
    An Ethnographic Analysis of Women of Color in Xbox Live." Ada: A Journal of Gender, New Media,
    and Technology 2 [http://adanewmedia.org/2013/06/issue2-gray/] Online.
    Recommended: Behnke, Kara A. 2012. “Ladies of Warcraft: Changing Perceptions of
    Women and Technology Through Productive Play.” Proceedings of the International Conference on the
    DUE: First Wiki Entry Should Be Started (Suggested Due Date)
9/23  Social Media Platforms, Youth Engagement, and Social Identity


Weeks 5-6: #BlackLivesMatter, Black Twitter, and CyberRacism
   Warnings: Graphic descriptions of police violence: all readings this week. Descriptions of rape: Williams, Brown. SPECIAL WARNING: In-class viewing of poetry that discusses police violence.


   Williams, Rachel Marie-Crane. Police Violence Zine. Download here: [https://policeviolence.wordpress.com/zine/] Online.
10/7  **CyberRacism**


**DUE: Second Wiki Entry Due (Suggested Due Date)**

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**Week 7: Politics, Epistemology, and the Internet**


DUE: Wikipedia Assignment

**Week 8: Activism: Moving Between the Digital and Solid-World**

*Warnings:* Graphic & violent hate speech: Chastain (if you go to "You Can Read My Hate Mail")


Chastain, Ragan. 3/28/2013. "FAQ" *Dances With Fat* (blog). [http://danceswithfatwordpress.com/faqs/] Online. Please feel free to skim through the rest of her blog, it is highly recommended -- particularly the link (look on the right) to "You Can Read My Hate Mail."


**Midterm Essay Due**


**Weeks 9-10: Online Violence and Harassment & Activist Response**

*Warnings:* hate speech, racism, sexism, homophobia, depictions of violence, discussions of suicide & murder: all readings.

10/28 **Defining Online Violence**


10/30 Gendertrolling and Online Fear


Bennett, Roxanna. 5/26/2014. "Yes, All Women." GenderFocus (online media) [http://www.gender-focus.com/2014/05/26/yes-all-women/] Online.


Recommended: Harris-Perry. Melissa. 2/2/2016. "Of Teachers and Students." Anna Julia Cooper Center Blog (online). [http://ajccenter.wfu.edu/2016/02/02/5756/]

Research Proposal Due

11/4 Cyberbullying and Youth


11/6 Gamergate & Its Legacy


11/6 Gamergate & Its Legacy


**Recommended:** Lees, Matt. 12/1/2016. “What Gamergate should have taught us about the 'alt-right.'” *The Guardian.com* (online news) [https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2016/dec/01/gamergate-alt-right-hate-trump](https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2016/dec/01/gamergate-alt-right-hate-trump) Online.


*Final Wiki Entry Due; Wiki Closed to Further Editing*

**Week 11: Work and the Digital Divide — Time Online in Two Perspectives**


**Week 11.5: Fake Week, Fake News! Misinformation, Algorithms, and Other GIGO Problems**


**Week 13: Love and Sex: Is the Internet for Porn?**


**Recommended (a small part will be used in lecture):** Peter, Jochen & Patti M. Valkenburg. 2011. “The Use of Sexually Explicit Internet Material and Its Antecedents: A Longitudinal Comparison of Adolescents and Adults.” *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 40:1015–1025. DOI 10.1007/s10508-010-9644-x Reserve.


**Week 14: Topic Chosen By Class**

12/4  Readings TBD

12/9  Readings TBD

12/13  **Final Papers Due (no class)**