

Winter 2020
TOPICS IN POPULAR CULTURE: GENDER AND SEXUALITY ON TELEVISION
Dr. Maura Kelly
9:00-5:00 Saturday January 18

Course description

This one credit course focuses on depictions of gender and sexuality on television from a sociological perspective. We will seek to understand portrayals that reproduce oppressive ideologies and assess possibilities for portrayals that resist systems of oppression. This course will investigate depictions of gender, sexuality, and other identities in fictional television series, utilizing sociological theories and methods to better understand popular culture. Students will be required to complete assignments prior to class, participate in one Saturday class meeting, and write a final paper analyzing a television series of their choice. Soc 407 Topics in popular culture can be repeated for credit (also offered in Spring 2020).

Assignments

- 10% quiz: There will be one multiple choice quiz on the course readings. Due by midnight before the class meeting (January 17).
- 60% Four in-class assignments (each worth 15% of the course grade). Must be completed in class, no make-ups permitted.
- 5% Paper proposal. Due one week after the class meeting (January 25).
- 25% Final paper. Due four weeks after the class meeting (February 15).

Course readings

- Harvey, Allison. 2019. "Representing Gender" Pp 58-83 in *Feminist Media Studies* (available on reserve at the library)
- West, Isaac N. 2018. "Queer Perspectives in Communication Studies" *Oxford Research Encyclopedia* [LINK](#)
- Sink, Alexander and Dana Mastro. 2017. "Depictions of Gender on Primetime Television: A Quantitative Content Analysis" *Mass Communication & Society* 20(1):3-22. [LINK](#)

Class meeting outline

- 9:00-10:00 Lecture and discussion
- 10:00-10:50 Watch *Superstore* episode and analysis exercise
- 10:50-11 Break
- 11:00-12:30 Lecture and discussion
- 12:30-1:30 Lunch break
- 1:30-3:00 Watch *Killing Eve* episode and analysis exercise
- 3:00-3:10 Break
- 3:10-4:00 *TED Talk* and discussion
- 4:00-5:00 Preparation for writing the final paper

GUIDELINES FOR THE FINAL PAPER

TASK

For the final paper, you will first write a brief proposal (5% of course grade) and then write a 1200-1400 word paper (25% of course grade).

PAPER OPTIONS

1. Analysis of single television series
 - a. Your data will be ~120 minutes of a series. Choose the first three episodes of an “hour long” show or the first six episodes of a “half hour” show.
 - b. For this short paper, choose a fairly narrow topic. For example, you might assess how this series supports and/or challenges one or more oppressive ideologies (e.g. sexism, heterosexism, racism, classism).
2. Comparison of two television series
 - a. You will still include ~120 minutes of television, but split across two series.
 - b. Choose two shows that have something key in common (the reason for the comparison) but also some interesting differences (so you have something to write about). For this short paper, choose a fairly narrow topic.
 - c. In your paper, be sure to draw on lots quotes and examples to support your points.
3. Analysis of a topic (type of character, relationship, location, or issue) across more than two series
 - a. For this option, you will choose the relevant episodes (or parts of episodes) of relevant series to discuss (you determine how many series/episodes are needed).
 - b. For this short paper, choose a fairly narrow topic and don't try to integrate too many different series

GUIDELINES FOR FOCAL SERIES

Requirements for your focal television series:

- The episodes included in your analysis must have aired in the last ten years (since 2010)
- The series must have aired on “television” broadly defined
 - Included: Netflix, Hulu. Amazon Prime series
- The series must be for an adult audience
 - Included: Animated series for adults
- The series must be fictional (scripted)
 - Excluded: reality television, game shows, sports, news, documentary series, bio-pics, or series based on historical events
- The series must have storylines that continue over multiple episodes
 - Excluded: Series that have a different topic and cast each episode, made-for-tv movies, one time “television events”
- The series may NOT be one of the series we focused on in the course material (*Superstore* and *Killing Eve*)
- For students who took Soc 427 last spring, the series may not be *Billions* or the focal series from your course papers

Additional suggestions (not requirements) for your focal television series:

- It is easier to start with the **pilot** (first) episode of series so you don't have to provide background on past events.
- It is easier to do a **qualitative analysis** (presenting quotes and examples as data) than a quantitative analysis (numeric data is presented in the form of tables). It takes a long time to tally in quantitative content analysis and then there's not a lot to write about beyond describing the numbers in the table)
- It is easier to analyze a **drama** than a comedy
 - Consider that for a comedy, you need to not only discuss the content or text of a joke, but also the meaning(s) of that joke.
- It is easier to analyze a **contemporary** series, that is, one that takes place in the present time
 - Series set in the future can definitely be fun, but you will need to consider that this is a vision of the future told from the current moment (complicated)
 - For series set in the past, you will need to consider what it means to make a series about a past time, but from the perspective of the current moment (even more complicated)
- It is easier to analyze a series that is **set in the US** or a country you are familiar with.
- It is easier to analyze a series in **a language you speak** (even with subtitles, you will miss the subtleties the language). Note that if you are fluent in a language other than English, feel free to choose a non-English language series (you will need to translate the just quotes you use in your paper into English)

SOURCES

The main sources of information for this assignment will be the television series. You should also include reference to assigned course readings, as relevant. In this course, I encourage you *not* to seek out new sources as I'm most interested in *your* ideas. When you draw ideas from course readings or other sources, you need to cite them in the text and include the full citation in a references section. For this course, appropriate citations are essential, but any style of citation is acceptable. Note that readings listed in the syllabus and the examples below use the American Sociological Association (ASA) style. More on ASA style here [LINK](#).

Defining plagiarism

According to the MLA Handbook (2009), plagiarism is "using another person's ideas, information or expressions without acknowledging that person's work."

How to avoid plagiarizing:

- Rule #1: If you use another person's ideas, you must cite your source in the text (author last name and year)
- Rule #2: If you use another person's exact words, you must put those words in quotation marks as well as cite your source in the text (author last name, year, and page number)

Examples of appropriate citations and plagiarism

Text from original source

- *Karen's transgressive campiness is also manifest in her flagrant sexuality.*

Appropriate citations

- *Karen's sexuality is transgressive and campy (Cooper 2003)*
- *The character of Karen shows "transgressive campiness" (Cooper 2003:519).*
- *Cooper stated, "Karen's transgressive campiness is also manifest in her flagrant sexuality" (2003:519).*

Plagiarism

- *Karen's transgressive campiness is also manifest in her flagrant sexuality.* [copy and paste, no quotation marks, no citation]
- *Karen's transgressive campiness is shown in her flagrant sexuality.* [almost identical language, no citation]

PAPER PROPOSAL

Identify the paper option you have chosen and provide details on your topic and focal series

1. Analysis of single television series: State the topic and focal series
2. Comparison of two television series: State the topic and two focal series
3. Analysis of a topic (type of character, relationship, location, or issue) across more than two series: State the topic and at least three series you will write about

No minimum or maximum word count. Submit via D2L by midnight on Saturday January 25. No late assignments accepted!

FINAL PAPER

- The paper should start with an introduction that describes the main argument of the paper and a brief description of the focal series and key characters.
- The bulk of the paper should be your original analysis of the series.
 - Draw on lots of quotes and examples from the series to support your points. Note any counter-examples that show variation from the overall trend.
 - Make sure to compare and contrast (characters and/or series) throughout the paper. Going one-by-one through characters or series will not be a successful strategy for this paper!
 - Draw on key concepts from the course
 - Keep the focus of the paper on the content of the series. You do not have the data to make arguments about how this may effect audiences. Your personal opinions are also not relevant here.
- Write a concluding paragraph briefly reiterating the main point of the essay. Then reflect on what you have observed and written means for gender and sexuality in pop culture and/ in society. Here you can feel free to go beyond the data.

- Include a references section in which you include the citations for the course readings cited, any additional readings cited (not recommended), and the focal series episodes referenced in the essay.

The final paper must be 1200-1400 words. Submit via D2L by midnight on Saturday February 15. No late assignments accepted!

FINAL PAPER RUBERIC

The final paper is graded out of 25 points

	A	B	C	D
Main argument	There is an interesting argument that is clearly stated and supported by examples and quotes	An interesting argument is present, but is underdeveloped, or not completely supported	Argument is present, but is not interesting or not successfully developed or supported	There is no argument
Examples and quotes	Examples and quotes are incorporated throughout the essay	Examples and quotes are occasionally incorporated into the essay	At least one example or quote is included	Examples and quotes are absent or inappropriately used
Comparisons	Compares and contrasts across characters and/or series throughout the essay	Occasionally compares and contrasts	At least one example of comparing or contrasting	Does not compare and contrast
Key terms	Introduces and define key terms where appropriate	Occasionally misses opportunity to introduce and define key terms	At least one introduction and definition of a key term	Does not introduce and define any key terms
Writing style	Writing is clear, grammatically correct, and organized	Writing is reasonably clear and has an overall structure	Style or organization sometimes inhibits understanding of the essay	Style or organization inhibits a basic understanding of the essay

Letter to points: A=23-25, B=20-22, C=18-19, D=15-17

- Subtract 1 point for every 200 words under 1200 or over 1400 words (e.g. 1000-1199 words = minus 1 point)
- Subtract 1 point if any citations of readings or episodes discussed in the text are missing from the references section (or if references section is missing).