New York University
Department of Media, Culture, and Communication
Media and Identity
MCC-UE 1019

Course Description
This course draws upon diverse literatures to map the terrain of constructed identities. At issue is how distinctive identities (such as gender, sexuality, social class, occupation, race and nationality) are constructed and represented. We will engage with and expand on the following questions: How is identity formed, maintained, and represented? How can we better understand identity through an historical perspective? How do individuals use traditional and new media to reflect their identities? How does popular culture inform our personal displays of identity?

You will explore issues of identity as they intersect with media. Specifically, you will be evaluated based on your ability to demonstrate comprehension of the reading assignments by using the readings as a foundation to develop scholarly written and oral analysis regarding media representation and the construction of identity.

The course is divided into 4 sections:
1. Media Effects and Visual Culture: explores media and mass culture theories and offers an introduction to a critical analysis of visual culture; investigates the relationship between media and social behavior
2. Forms of Media: examines the historical, social, and cultural significance of specific media, including radio, print, telephones, photography, film, and television
4. Computers and the Internet: focuses on issues of on-line gaming, virtual worlds, and “second lives;” virtual social networking; and the effects of mixed media

Required Readings/Books [All books are available at NYU book store and throughout the city/online]:
- Course packet, available for purchase at East Side Copy (15 E. 13th St., between 5th and University Pl.)
- Articles, etc. posted on Blackboard
- Boellstorff, Tom. Coming of Age in the Second Life. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2008 [Required only for students focusing on a virtual world or gaming site for their final project.]

Recommended Books:
COURSEREQUIREMENTS

**Student assessment/Grades:**
1. Attendance, Participation, Media Presentation 25%
2. Journals 35%
3. Final Project & Presentation 40%

Schedule of Classes
(subject to change; various articles will be added, based on the weeks’ themes; some readings will be moved to “recommended” and/or specific excerpts from the text will be assigned)

Sept. 10  Overview and introduction

*(To read/watch PRIOR to the first class:)*


“Liking is for Cowards. Go for What Hurts.” by Jonathan Franzen


Sept. 17  Media Effects and Visual Culture

**Media Experiment #1:** Observe everyday media use/media-in-action; Abstain from as much technology as possible for as long as possible (i.e. 1 day without phone or computer). Please read [http://withoutmedia.wordpress.com/](http://withoutmedia.wordpress.com/) and use this study as a guide to your experiment; you may wish to explore [http://www.sabbathmanifesto.org/](http://www.sabbathmanifesto.org/) for inspiration, and please also read this article: “The Joy of Quiet”: [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/01/opinion/sunday/the-joy-of-quiet.html?pagewanted=all&_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/01/opinion/sunday/the-joy-of-quiet.html?pagewanted=all&_r=1)

**Part 1:**

**Recommended:**

[ON BLACKBOARD]

**Part 2:**
McLuhan, Marshall. *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man.* “Media Hot and Cold” p.22-
Recommended:

Sept. 24
Media Experiment #2: Compare and contrast your relationship and use patterns with at least 2 of the following media: radio/iPod, telephone, newspaper and print, photography

**Part1: Forms of Media: Radio**


http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2006/04/10/060410fa_fact?currentPage=all

**Part2: Forms of Media: Telephones**


**Recommended:**
Stone, Brad. “Breakfast Can Wait. The Day’s First Stop is Online.” NY Times. Aug. 9, 2009:


Oct. 1
**Part1: Forms of Media: Newspaper and Print**


**Part2: Forms of Media: Photography**


Recommended:

*Final project proposals due*

Oct. 8  Forms of Media: Film
Media Experiment #3: Examine your relationship and use patterns with film or television. Change the way you experience one or both of them and reflect on how that affects your engagement with the content.


Recommended:

Film Screening: We Live in Public

Oct. 22  Forms of Media: Television
Part 1:

Recommended:

Part 2:
Recommended:

*BBlog Journal 1 Due*

Oct. 29 CaseStudiesinMediaandRace

Media Experiment #4: Experiment with the representation of gender, sexuality, or race using using personal social media profiles, a Second Life avatar, or another personal media channel.

Means Coleman, Robert R. “Black Sitcom Portrayals.” Gender, Race, and Class in Media p.79-88.
Recommended:

Excerpts from “Twilight: Los Angeles”

Workshop final projects

Nov. 5 Film screening and discussion: Bamboozled.

Nov. 12 CaseStudiesinMedia.Gender andSexuality
Turkle, Sherry. Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet. Ch 8, “Tinysex and Gender Trouble.”

Recommended:
Ouellette, Laurie. “Inventing the Cosmo Girl: class Identity and Girl-Style American Dreams.” Gender, Race, and Class in Media. p.116-127
Crane, Diana. “Gender and Hegemony in Fashion Magazines.” Gender, Race, and Class in
“Straight Male Gamer” told to ‘get over it’ by BioWare: 

Film Screening: Tough Guise: Violence, Media, and the Crisis in Masculinity

Nov. 19 CaseStudiesintheMediatedBody
Media Experiment #5: Test the differences in communication when the body is present, versus when it is mediated. You may use any form of media to perform this task.


Share Media Experiments

Nov. 26 ComputersandtheInternet: GamingandSecondLives
Media Experiment #6: Use a virtual world or gaming platform/MMORPG to explore one specific aspect of human interaction and relationships.

Part 1:

Recommended:


Film: Avatar

Part 2:
Dec. 3  ComputersandtheInternet: VirtualSocialNetworking  Meyrowitz, Joshua.  No Sense of Place.  Ch. 8, “New Group Identities.”  p.131-149.  Choose 3:

Recommended:
“Facebook and the Epiphanator: An End to Endings?” http://nymag.com/daily/intel/2011/07/paul_facebook_and_the_epiphanator_an_end_to_endings.html


*Blog Journal 2 Due*

Dec. 10  Final Presentations

Recommended:
Seiter, Ellen.  “Television and the Internet.”  Gender, Race, and Class in Media.  p.688-695
Augmented reality by Hitlab:  http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZKw_Mp5YkaE

Dec. 17*  Final Presentations  ** Final paper due **
DETAILED INFORMATION REGARDING ASSIGNMENTS/GRADING

You must complete ALL of these assignments in order to pass the class. Failure to complete one of them will result not only in an F for that assignment, but a failing grade in the course.

No late assignments accepted, except in extraordinary circumstances. No emailed assignments (no exceptions); hard copies only. There are no make-up presentations.

In-Class Contribution: 25%

I. Active and Meaningful Participation
Knowledge in the university environment is acquired through independent reading and writing followed by classroom discussion that is structured and moderated by the instructor. Your active participation is vital to this process. Active participation includes listening, building on what others say, asking questions, advancing reasoned arguments, identifying theories that are relevant to the discussion, and working collaboratively with others. Keeping up with the reading assignments is essential to your success in this course.

Regular and prompt attendance is required. You cannot participate if you do not attend class. Missing class and/or a record of lateness will negatively affect your grade. An absence will be excused only in case of a medical emergency (or other extraordinary circumstance) which is justified with appropriate documentation. If you miss more than 3 class meetings, you will fail the course (an absence is counted when a student misses more than half an hour of a class). Two late arrivals/early departures from class will count as an absence (students are marked late once attendance is taken). Lateness is extremely disruptive and should be kept to a minimum.

In-Class Expectations: Be present: on-time, awake, cell phones OFF (not on silent/vibrate), no computers (except for presentations), readings in-hand, notes/questions prepared, necessary materials printed, stomach full (no meals in class) -- respect for the sacred space that is the classroom. NOTE: If you text, check your email, or play with your phone during class, you will be asked to leave immediately and it will count as an unexcused absence. No exceptions, no discussion.

Teacher/Student Interaction: Please keep email correspondence to a minimum and allow up to 48 hrs for a response. Before emailing, answer these questions: 1) Can I answer it myself? 2) Can a peer help? 3) Can it wait until class? If the answer is “No” to all three, then please send an email. Office hours and before/after class are optimal times for communication; please feel free to send an email requesting an office hour appointment. If you are regularly unable to attend office hours due to a class or work conflict, please discuss setting up an alternative meeting time or a scheduled phone conversation.

II. Media Presentation:

Due: TBA

Objective: This assignment is designed to develop analytical thinking, associative learning and effective communication skills.

Process: As assigned, students will individually present to the class an example of mediated communication that relates to the topic of the day. Presentations should be around 15 minutes
long. **Donotsummarizethereadings.** The readings will be discussed in-depth during the first hour of class, so find a new angle for exploration. Students may select to present any form of mediated communication (e.g. video clip, audio-recording, art, advertisement, publication, video game, web page, etc) as long as it is discussed in terms of the day’s reading assignments/week’s themes. Students will be graded on the thoughtfulness, creativity, and clarity of their presentation, as well as their ability to engage the class with questions and spark discussion. Students need not address all of the day’s assigned readings in the presentation, and are best advised to narrow in on a small subtopic or theme.

**III. Journal**

*Due:* 2 times throughout the semester, as indicated above

**Grading:** 35% (An average of the 2 grades will be taken, with expectations of growth throughout the semester)

**Objective:** To foster lively and thoughtful discussions based on the student’s ongoing reflections on the readings and their practical, media-related applications.

**Process:** Read assigned texts and performed the assigned media experiments, as they relate to the various subtopics. Create an on-line blog where you can reflect on the theme and readings in relationship to your experiment. You may also bring in other specific media examples to further illustrate your point.

**Format:** Aside from the fact that it will be a live blog, you may experiment freely with the structure and format.

A few notes:
- You may use any blog server -- WordPress, Blogspot, or Tumblr are fine, or another of your choosing.
- Each of the 6 media experiments should be a separate entry, each of which should be at least 500-750 words
- You will be writing in the first person; each entry should be both personal and scholarly.
- Visuals, resource links, and multimedia such as video are encouraged
- Creative titles are encouraged
- Each of the 6 entries should include reference to at least 2 of the assigned texts (it’s fine to reference the recommended texts/films, as well, but only in addition to your exploration of the main texts); more sophisticated entries will use more texts and actively juxtapose authors and ideas.
- Textual citations (with proper MLA formatting) must be incorporated into each entry. References exclusively to passages pointed out in class by the instructor will not receive the highest grade possible. **Demonstrate that you are also reading the texts on your own.**
- Outside sources are encouraged
- Proofread! (Just because it’s a blog does not mean that spelling/punctuation/grammar/style are not important.)
- You will “turn in” your blog by posting a link to your site on the Blackboard discussion board no later than the beginning of class on the due date.

**IV. Final project**
Grade: 40%

Objective: To apply the concepts and theories presented in-class to a specific issue that relates to media and identity, via in-depth scholarly research, cultural criticism, and direct media engagement.

Description: Your final project (I am purposefully calling it a project instead of a mere paper) will be a semester-long study of a virtual, immersive world or a multi-player on-line game or virtual social networking site (see hand-out for suggestions). If you choose a virtual world or MMPOROG, your project will be guided by your independent study of Tom Boellstorff’s Coming of Age in Second Life, Sherry Turkle’s Life on the Screen, and Edward Castranova’s Exodus to the Virtual World. We will not read Boellstorff in class, but rather you will read it independently and use it -- along with the other texts from the syllabus and outsides sources gathered from your research -- to analyze your on-line experience. If you choose to experiment with a virtual social networking site, you must find your at least 3 academic resources outside of the syllabus (though you are welcome to use resources on the syllabus additionally).

Process:
A. Proposal
A virtual field site will be chosen by the student and approved by the instructor. Proposals should consist of a 1 page description of the chosen virtual site and the questions related to media and identity that it raises and which you wish to explore in your experiment. Be specific! (i.e. Gender in Second Life is an ok starting point, but is not ultimately specific enough.)

B. Thesis Statement and Paper Outline (optional)
Develop a statement that clearly articulates your paper’s topic and the angle with which you’re approaching/analyzing your on-line experience. Outline each section of the paper in approximately 3 pages total. Include preliminary visuals/media in the outline.

C. Final Paper
The paper includes 12-14 pages of text (12 pt, Times New Roman, double-spaced), plus additional media images and excerpts. To be handed in during the last class, and uploaded to Blackboard.

D. Final Presentation
The final presentation should be a multi-media PowerPoint presentation that recaps and summarizes the project, including any findings or conclusions drawn from the research. It should also incorporate relevant media and visuals (particularly those that cannot be experienced in the final paper). It should NOT be an oral reading of the final paper.

Policy on Extensions
Assignments are due on the dates stipulated on the syllabus or in class. Late assignments will not be accepted. Absences are not an acceptable excuse for not having done the required work. In case of extenuating circumstances that will prevent you from meeting a deadline, you should discuss the matter with the instructor before the due date of the assignment. If you know you will not be in class on the day that an assignment is due, submit the work early or ask a peer to deliver the assignment.

Academic Honesty
Any breach of university policy on academic honesty, including plagiarism, submitting the same work for two courses, or other academic fraud or dishonesty is taken seriously. Plagiarism will normally result in failure in the course, not just the paper itself. Consult the Statement on Academic Integrity on Blackboard for guidelines.
Evaluation Standards

A = Outstanding. “A” students demonstrate commitment to class in attendance, participation, and preparation; this means virtually perfect attendance, reading assignments fully, and showing interest during class time. They ask questions, are able to connect past learning with the present, show initiative, and aren’t afraid to be creative. Written work demonstrates comprehensive and solid understanding of the material, and presents thoughtful interpretations, well-focused and original insights, and well-reasoned commentary and analysis. Students also demonstrate skillful use of source materials, illuminating examples and illustrations, fluent expression, and few grammatical errors.

B = Good. “B” students may miss class from time to time, but are generally prepared and try to participate. Their commitment to class may vary: at times they may seem bored or distracted, at other times engaged and involved. They have interest in the subject and have the ability to master scholarly material. Written work demonstrates an accurate understanding of the material, presents a reasonable degree of insight and broad levels of analysis. Work reflects competence, but stays at a general or predictable level of understanding. Source materials, examples, illustrations, are used appropriately and articulation/writing is clear. Papers have been carefully proofread.

C = Fair. “C” students miss class too frequently and show little interest in course readings and class discussion. They are not visibly committed to class and body language often expresses boredom. Written work is superficial, incomplete, or expresses some significant errors or weaknesses. Source materials may be used inadequately or inappropriately, and arguments lack concrete, specific examples and illustrations. Writing/articulation is vague, hard to follow, or cluttered with technical errors.

D = A student in difficulty. “D” students miss class frequently, participate rarely, show disinterest, and have generally misunderstood much of we have done, said, and/or read (if they prepared or read anything to begin with). Written work demonstrates serious errors in understanding, fails to express the most rudimentary aspects of the material, and may contain little logical development in its arguments. Sources may be used inappropriately or not at all, and writing/articulation appears deficient.

F = Failed. Work not submitted. This is also the grade for plagiarized work or work that breaches Steinhardt policy on academic honesty. [F = 63 and below]