Course description and outline

This course examines contemporary children’s media from social, cultural, and historical perspectives, with a focus on media in the United States produced by and for children ages 0–13. While teenagers’ media consumption is often seen as resistant or emancipatory, media by and for preadolescents is usually dismissed as trivial, immature, or unsophisticated. But in the last two decades the children’s media market has expanded rapidly to become a dominant and undeniable force in the industry: from superstar music acts like Hannah Montana and Justin Bieber, to globally ubiquitous brands like Pokémon, to giant corporations like Disney and Nickelodeon, to “educational” games and products like Baby Einstein. Video games, the internet, and emerging digital and portable technologies for communicating and consuming media are often tailored specifically to children, who, as “digital natives,” are increasingly early adopters of new technologies. This course asks how children’s media fits into contemporary debates about children’s role in families, schooling, and the public sphere. It will examine children’s own media practices to see how the industry responds to these traditions. The course will also treat children as media consumers, considering how commercial media products are taken up by children in their own lives, within their friendships and family relationships.

Texts

The following volumes are available at the NYU Bookstore, 726 Broadway, 212-998-4667. Other readings will be available electronically through Blackboard or as links from the syllabus. You should be sure to bring a hard copy of each day’s reading to class with you.

- David Buckingham, *After the Death of Childhood: Growing Up in the Age of Electronic Media* (Polity)
- Norma Pecora, *The Business of Children’s Entertainment* (Guilford)
Learning objectives:
Upon completion of the course, students will be knowledgeable about contemporary forms of children’s media, their social and cultural implications, and the cultural and political histories that gave rise to the current state of children’s media. They will be exposed to theories of childhood and methodological approaches from psychology, anthropology, sociology, media studies, cultural studies, and childhood studies. As they gain new critical tools for thinking about the diversity and complexity of the contemporary fields of popular culture and media, they will cultivate habits of mind that take children and childhood seriously in everyday life and in scholarly inquiry. In addition to written research, analysis, and argument, students will cultivate academic skills of conversation, collaboration, and presentation through assignments and class participation. Students will also develop basic skills in producing multimedia presentations, online publications, and a basic wiki.

Expectations:
First and foremost, you will be expected to participate actively in various collaborative projects undertaken by the class as a whole. I encourage you to add your voice to class discussions, and just as importantly, to listen respectfully and respond to classmates’ contributions. We will collaborate on producing a wiki about children’s media, and you will be expected take initiative and responsibility for keeping the site active, well-edited, and up-to-date.

To cultivate a habit of careful attention to children’s media, you will be asked to look to the world around you and “collect” instances of media by and for children. Early in the term you will write a short autobiographical account of media in your own childhood, reflecting on how issues of being represented and marketed to as “youthful” or “immature” may have continuing impact in you life. You should bring photographs, found objects, and recordings to class meetings to share for a regular “show and tell,” and you will collaborate on a wiki where the class will jointly “curate” this developing collection, posting multimedia and links to examples around the Internet, and providing discussion and explanatory notes. You will also prepare formal presentations to the class, which you will then format it to host on the wiki. By the end of the term the course wiki should be a comprehensive, collectively authored document exploring many facets of contemporary children’s media. We will revise the site together in preparation to host it publicly as a new and useful resource for scholars and others interested in children and media.

Availabiliy and office hours:
I will be available to meet with you at my office hours (sign up on Google Calendars, at http://bit.ly/Apl959) or at other times by appointment. It is important that you avail yourself of this opportunity regularly during the semester to discuss your progress individually, and so I can get feedback on how the course is going for each of you.
Websites:
I will post course information and readings to Blackboard. As a class we will maintain a wiki on NYU’s servers (https://wikis.nyu.edu/display/mccue1018/home), where you will post your presentations, show-and-tell items, and other materials.

Portable electronics:
Please turn off your mobile phones and other portable electronic devices while in class. If you use such devices during class you will be asked to leave and will be marked absent for that class. Please turn off the wireless link on computers and similar devices, which should be used only for taking notes or presenting multimedia materials.

SERVICES AND ACCOMMODATIONS:
You should be aware of the following support services and resources:

Writing center
http://www.nyu.edu/cas/ewp/html/writing_center.html
411 Lafayette, 3rd Floor, New York, NY 10003
212 998-8866
writingcenter@nyu.edu
Hours: Monday to Thursday, 10 am to 8 pm; Friday, 11 am to 4 pm
I strongly encourage everyone, no matter your writing ability, to make use of the Writing Center for your final projects. This resource is freely available and effective, and not making use of it will likely impact your writing and therefore your grade negatively. Plan ahead and use the Writing Center!

Moses Center for Students with Disabilities
719 Broadway, 2nd Floor 212-998-4980
Please be aware that University policy requires students with physical or learning disabilities to register with the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities, and to present a letter from the Center to the instructor at the start of the semester in order to be considered for appropriate accommodation. I do aim to lead an inclusive and accommodating class, so if you have a disability please feel free to contact me however you prefer (by email or phone, at my office hours, or before or after class) if you would like to let me know about any accommodations you may require.

NYU Wellness Exchange
http://www.nyu.edu/999
212-443-9999
The Wellness Exchange is the constellation of the University's expanded and enhanced programs and services designed to address the overall health and mental health needs of our students. Students can access this service through a private hotline, available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, which will put them in touch with professionals who can help them address both day-to-day challenges as well as any other crises they may encounter, including depression, sexual assault, anxiety, alcohol and drug dependence, sexually transmitted infections, and eating disorders. The Wellness Exchange is also available for students who just need to talk or to call about a friend.

GRADING

Participation (including show-and-tell): 20%
Autobiographical paper: 10%
In-class presentation: 15%
Wiki contributions: 30%
Final project and presentation: 25%
Attendance: Lose 2 percentage points from the semester grade for each unexcused absence up to five; more than that and you can’t pass the course.

Evaluation

A = Excellent. Outstanding work in all respects. Demonstrates comprehensive and solid understanding of course material, and presents thoughtful interpretations, well focused and original insights, and well reasoned commentary and analysis. Includes skillful use of source materials, supporting evidence for all claims, illuminating examples and illustrations, fluent expression, and contains no grammatical or typographical errors. “A” work is coherent, fluent, thorough, and creative.

B = Good. This work demonstrates a complete and accurate understanding of course 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 and examples are used appropriately and articulation/writing is clear. Paper has been carefully proofread. “B” work is reasonable, clear, appropriate, and complete.

C = Adequate/fair. This work demonstrates understanding that covers most or some of the basics but which remains superficial, incomplete, or expresses some important errors or weaknesses. Source materials may be used inadequately or inappropriately, and arguments lack concrete, specific evidence and illustrations. Writing or articulation may be vague or hard to follow, and may have excessive typos and other technical errors.

D = Unsatisfactory: This work demonstrates a serious lack of understanding, and fails to express the most rudimentary aspects of the course. Sources may be used entirely inappropriately or not at all. The work may be inarticulate or extremely difficult to read.

F = Failed. Work not submitted or attempted.
Academic integrity
Don’t cheat. This course follows the policies on plagiarism, cheating, and other forms of academic dishonesty outlined in the Steinhardt Statement on Academic Integrity: http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/policies/academic_integrity
Instances of academic dishonesty will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis, but in general plagiarism, cheating, or other forms of dishonesty will result in failure of the course, not just the assignment.

Policy on extensions
Assignments are due on the dates stated on the syllabus. 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 me well before the due date of the assignment.

REQUIREMENTS AND ASSIGNMENTS
[Note: the scheduling of some of these assignments may need to change if enrollment increases substantially.]

Attendance:
This is a small class, involving a lot of collaboration, so it is important that you come to every class. There will be a penalty of 2 percentage points from your semester grade for each unexcused absence up to five; more than that and you can’t pass the course.
**If you find yourself having trouble coming to class or arriving on time, please contact me as early as possible to discuss any problems before they affect your grade. I am willing and happy to make reasonable accommodations or exceptions to these policies where appropriate.**

On occasion you may need to miss class with a valid excuse. To have an absence excused for non-religious reasons, you must have a letter from either a doctor or your advisor. To be excused for foreseeable absences (such as religious observances) please inform me in advance, in writing. You should submit a schedule of dates you anticipate missing by the third class meeting (Jan 31). If an excused absence could be scheduled ahead, coursework normally due on that day will still be due; you can send materials to me electronically if necessary. If a foreseeable absence lands on a day you are scheduled for a presentation or show-and-tell, but you do not address this ahead of time, you will not be able to make up that work.

Participation: 20%
This class is organized around student collaboration and participation. If you do not participate, you are missing a central feature of the course. This means that everyone needs to make an effort to express their ideas and questions aloud, but just as importantly it means that you are expected to listen attentively to your classmates and respond respectfully. You should make a particular effort to respond helpfully and substantively to others’ formal presentations and “show and tell” contributions. I understand that talking in class may be especially difficult for some, and I will consider individual dispositions and comfort levels in assessing this grade. If you find yourself
having difficulty or discomfort with class participation, please see me during my office hours as early as possible to consider alternative ways to fulfill this requirement. I encourage everyone to see me with any concerns about the conversation dynamic so that we can make adjustments to better accommodate those who have a hard time joining the conversation.

Commenting and contributing to others’ posts on the wiki is a central part of the participation expectations.

**Show-and-tell (part of participation grade)**

Due date: Tuesdays, several times during the semester, to be scheduled in class.

Objective: This assignment is designed to get you in the habit of paying attention to forms of kids media in the world around you, and to create opportunities for student-led discussion in class.

Description: Each Tuesday three or four students will bring in some item related to kids in media culture for “show and tell.” This is a short and informal presentation to the class, emphasizing conversation with your classmates about the item you bring in. Items for show-and-tell can be physical objects, photographs of physical objects (if you don’t want to buy something at a store, for instance), videos, sounds, or even the story of an experience you had related to kids in media culture that week. Show-and-tell items do not have to be directly related to the course materials for that day or week, but you should be prepared to explain in some basic ways how your item might be relevant to the course. Show-and-tell materials can come from your wiki posts for that week.

**Autobiographical paper: 10%**

Due date: Feb 7

Objective: This assignment is to encourage you to think carefully about the role of media in your own childhood and youth, and to explore the course materials may (or may not) be personally relevant.

Description: Early in the course you will write a 3–5 page autobiographical essay about media in your own childhood and youth, to be turned in and discussed informally in the third week of class. This does not have to be a comprehensive account of every piece of media you encountered while a child. It is better to focus in depth on some particular form of media that had special importance to you.

**Presentation: 15%**

Due date: Thursdays, to be scheduled in class.

Objective: This assignment is designed to develop analytical thinking, application of course materials to new, student-generated examples, oral presentation skills, multimedia techniques, and discussion-leading techniques.

Description: On Thursdays, one student will give a 20-minute presentations about specific examples of kids in media culture that they generate independently, as they relate to issues raised
in the readings. These presentations should not simply be summaries of the readings, but they may involve tracking down some media example mentioned in a text and revisiting it in light of the readings. Or they can be about newly developed examples that relate to the issues in the readings. Your presentation should include a discussion component, and you should think about questions that your presentation raises that might spark interesting class discussions. Presentations must include some audio-visual component, and should be formatted using presentation software like PowerPoint, Prezi, or Keynote.

After making the presentation, you should post an electronic version of your presentation, along with media examples, to the class wiki. You should post a written version of your presentation with media examples embedded in the text.

You will be graded on the thoughtfulness, creativity, and clarity of your presentation, as well as your success in engaging the class with questions and sparking discussion.

Once posted to the wiki, other students are encouraged to use the comment feature to comment on the presentation, make connections to other readings or other media examples, and otherwise extend the class conversation to the wiki. Online comments will count positively toward your participation grade.

Wiki: 30%

Due dates: At least one post and one comment/edit each week, starting the second week of class.

Objective: To encourage you independent exploration of kids and media, to get you in the habit of writing and thinking in dialogue with the course materials, to cultivate media analysis techniques, to provide opportunities for collaboration with other students, and to develop basic online publishing skills.

Description:

(Posts): Collecting items and curating the wiki will be the central task of the course, and your participation will be mandatory and graded. Each week you will create a new page on the wiki that links to or uploads at least one item (video/photograph/recording/text/etc), and you will add 200–500 words of accompanying explanation or discussion of the item you shared, especially in light of the themes of the class readings and discussion.

(Comments/edits): Each week you will also be asked to respond to, add to, or substantially edit at least one classmate’s contribution to the site. I will make time to discuss and work on the wiki in class.

My hope is that the wiki, which initially will have access limited to students enrolled in the class, will become a rich and multifaceted site that we can open to the public at the end of the semester as a useful resource for others studying kids in media culture.

Final project and presentation: 25%

Due dates:

Proposal: March 20
Thesis statement and outline: April 10
Presentations: April 26, May 1, May 3
10-page paper: May 3

Grading:
- Presentation: 10%
- 10-page paper: 15%

Objective: This assignment is designed to cultivate fundamental skills of research, analysis, and argument over an extended period of time in a substantial independent project.

Description: Your final project will be a semester-long study of some issue related to kids in media culture, through application of particular methods and theories we consider in this class. Your topic may be any form of media that interests you, contemporary or historical, such as a television show, a website, a series of print publications, an online community, an audio recording, a broadcast station, etc. You will have opportunities in class and in meetings with me to discuss topics, but the process of developing a topic based on your own interests is an important part of the exercise. The project will result in a presentation to the class as well as a 10-page paper, both of which should include visual or audio examples.

Proposal: One-page written description of the specific issue you will analyze.

Thesis statement and outline: Develop a statement that clearly articulates your topic and approach. Every part of your project should contribute clearly to your thesis statement. A thesis statement does not need to be framed as taking a strong or definitive position in a debate; an effective thesis statement can present a difficulty of interpretation, a thorny historical problem, or some other unanswered—and perhaps unanswerable—question that the project will seek to untangle or explore to achieve greater understanding. Along with the thesis statement you will provide a detailed outline of the structure of the final paper, specifying the particular issues you will examine and the examples you will use as evidence.

Presentation: The final presentation should be a multi-media PowerPoint (or other format; Prezi is very nice) presentation that presents the topic and thesis, key examples, and your conclusions, in 10–15 minutes. It should incorporate relevant audio and visuals—especially those that are difficult to include in the final paper—and should not be simply a reading of the paper’s text. As with the media presentations during the semester, you will be graded on creativity, thoughtfulness, and clarity, professionalism, and success at sparking discussion.

Final submission: The final submitted version of the project will be a 10-page paper (double-spaced, Times New Roman 12pt, normal character spacing, 1-inch margins, please don’t play games with formatting), in addition to audio or visual media examples. You should turn in a printed version of the paper, but you are encouraged to produce an electronic version (which you may post to the wiki or a personal site, or simply email to me) that integrates the media with the text.

This submission will be graded on analytical rigor and clarity, effective use of examples and evidence to support your claims, creativity and interest of your approach, and a professional presentation (proofread!). The final project should be polished, as you will have months to work on it, and typos or other errors will impact your grade negatively.
SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

(1) Jan 24
Introductions, schedule presentations and show-and-tell, set up wiki access

(2) Jan 26—Thinking about childhood
Wiki basics in class
  Alan Prout and Allison James, “A New Paradigm for the Sociology of Childhood? Provenance, Promise, and Problems,” in Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood, pp. 7–33. (BLACKBOARD)

(3) Jan 31—Adult views of childhood
Show-and-tell begins; start posting to wiki this week; submit expected absences
  Viviana A. Zelizer, “From Useful to Useless: Moral Conflict over Child Labor,” in The Children’s Culture Reader, pp. 81–94 (BLACKBOARD)
Show-and-tell:

(4) Feb 2—Some media history
First presentation in class
Presentation:

(5) Feb 7—Buckingham, big ideas
Autobiographical essay due
  David Buckingham, After the Death of Childhood, ch 1–2, pp. 3–40
Show-and-tell:

(6) Feb 9—Buckingham, big ideas
  Buckingham, After the Death of Childhood, ch 3, 5, pp. 41–57, 80–102
  Presentation:

(7) Feb 14—Pecora, industry structure and history
  Norma Pecora, The Business of Children’s Entertainment, ch 1–3, pp. 7–59
Show-and-tell:
(8) Feb 16—Pecora, industry structure and history

Presentation:

(9) Feb 21—Advertising, children versus adults

Show-and-tell:

(10) Feb 23—Children’s culture, grossness and silliness
    Allison James, “Confections, Concoctions, and Conceptions,” in *The Children’s Culture Reader*, pp. 394–405 (BLACKBOARD)

Presentation:

(11) Feb 28—Nickelodeon, grossness, and children versus adults
    Sarah Banet-Weiser, *Kids Rule!* ch 3, pp. 69–103 (BLACKBOARD)

Show-and-tell:

(12) March 1—Tweens, gender, and clothing

Presentation:

(13) March 6—Tweens, music, and children versus adults

Show-and-tell:

(14) March 8—Case study: Disney

Presentation:

(break) March 12–16
(15) March 20—Case study: Disney

**Final project proposal due**

Henry Giroux, “Children’s Culture and Disney’s Animated Films,” in *The Mouse that Roared*, pp. 91–132 (BLACKBOARD)

Show-and-tell:

(16) March 22—Case study: Pokémon


Presentation:

(17) March 27—Case study—*Yu-Gi-Oh!* and media mixes


Show-and-tell:

(18) March 29—Video games and education


Presentation:

(19) April 3—Video games and adult anxiety


Show-and-tell:

(20) April 5—Video games and children’s lives


Presentation:
(21) April 10—“Digital Natives,” exoticizing discourses about children and technology

**Final project thesis and outline due**


Show-and-tell:

(22) April 12—Children and portable media


Presentation:

(23) April 17—Children and television


Show-and-tell:

(24) April 19—Concluding thoughts, child consumers, child citizens

Buckingham, *After the Death of Childhood*, ch 8–9, pp. 145–88

Presentation:

(25) April 24—Children’s media rights

Edit wiki in class

Buckingham, *After the Death of Childhood*, ch 10, pp. 193–207

(26) April 26

Presentations

(27) May 1

Presentations

(28) May 3

Presentations