MCC-UE 1408
QUEER IDENTITY AND POPULAR CULTURE

Course Description
In this course, we will explore queerness as identity, practice, theory, and politics, all through the lens of popular culture. Our approach will be grounded in theories, methods, and texts of communication and media studies, thus it will serve as a complement to other queer theory and culture courses offered across the university.

After a brief introduction to the concept of “queer,” we will cover four major themes in the relationship between queerness and popular culture: 1) media representation of queer people and desires; 2) queer consumption practices of media texts; 3) the formation of queer community through mediated communication; and 4) the construction of queer identity through popular discourse. Readings will include both theoretical texts and case studies both historical and contemporary. Students will complete the course with a critical understanding of what it means to be and “do” queer in contemporary culture. Students will also be equipped to bring queer analytical tools to their everyday and professional encounters with popular culture.

Course Objectives
Upon completion of the course, students will be able to
- Define queer and explain queer theory’s contributions to our understanding of gender, sexuality, and communication
- Recognize, interpret, and critique mediated representations of queer bodies and identities
- Perform queer readings of popular cultural texts and understand queer audiences’ motivations for doing so
- Explain the relationship between media texts and technologies and queer community formation
- Recognize ways in which identity is socially constructed and performed
- Question hegemonic understandings of normalness, gender, and sexuality

Required Texts
We will have in-class screenings of media texts nearly every day. You are responsible for making these up on your own time if you need to miss class.

Required books:
- Bornstein, K. *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women, and the Rest of Us.*
All other required readings will be provided as PDFs during the first week of the term.

The following books are suggested reading. You will need to purchase at least one of them to review for your first paper assignment. (We will be reading excerpts from all of them – the required excerpts will be provided as PDFs.)


Assignments
Blog Essays (20%)
Journal (10%)
Book Review (15%)
Second Paper/Project (30%)
Final Exam (15%)
Attendance/Participation (10%)

**Blog Essays:** There will be 4 required short essays distributed throughout the semester in which you are to respond to a prompt provided by the instructor and post to the class blog (the Home page) as a comment on the prompt. These will give you the opportunity to apply concepts and theories from the course to your everyday experience outside the classroom and to share your observations publicly. Your response should be at least 2 substantive paragraphs long. You are
encouraged to respond directly to your classmates' comments and to use the blog space to engage in productive dialogue outside the classroom.

**Journals:** Throughout the term I will ask you to write personal reflections on the material from the course. You will submit them privately via the form provided on the Home page. These reflections can be brief and informal – as long as you write a thoughtful response to the question you will receive full credit.

**Book Review:** You will write a 3-5 page book review based on your choice of book related to the course (suggested titles are listed on this syllabus). More details on the assignment will be announced in class.

**Second Paper/Project:** For your second assignment, you will have a choice from a variety of paper/project ideas, which we will discuss together. You will submit a proposal outlining your project, which you must receive approval on before submitting the final work. You are encouraged to approach the project creatively and to utilize multimedia formats in your work.

**Final Exam:** The final will be an essay-format, take-home exam. It will require you to demonstrate understanding of the readings and topics covered throughout the semester, and to synthesize ideas from across the course. Possible essay questions will be distributed on the last day of classes.

**Participation/Attendance:** All students are expected to actively participate in class sessions. This means coming to class prepared by having done all the readings, bringing assigned readings to class, paying attention during all lectures and screenings, asking thoughtful questions, and sharing personal insights when appropriate. Your participation grade is assessed above and beyond your attendance; just showing up to class will not earn you any participation points. Spending class time on your laptop or cell phone engaged in non-class activities will negatively affect your participation grade. You may think I don’t notice, but I do. You are encouraged to check in with me throughout the semester to find out how you are doing on participation, so that you are not surprised when your final grade comes. You are allowed 2 unexcused absences, no questions asked. After that, any absences without prior written approval will result in a one-percent reduction in your final grade (per absence).

**Course Policies**
Lateness is generally unacceptable, as it places extra burden on me to keep track of your assignments above and beyond what I do for the other students in the class. It is also unfair to the other students, who are each making their own sacrifices and commitments in order to complete work on time. If you have a true hardship in completing an assignment on time, you must seek written approval from me to extend the due date for a reduced grade. If you fail to turn in an assignment on the due date, and have not communicated with me in advance (this means you must receive a reply from me acknowledging that I have received your communication), you will receive a zero on the assignment.
Students with physical or learning disabilities are required to register with the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities, 726 Broadway, 2nd Floor, (212-998-4980) and are required to present a letter from the Center to the instructor at the start of the semester in order to be considered for appropriate accommodation.

**ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AND PLAGIARISM**
I take academic integrity extremely seriously. When you turn in work that is not your own, you communicate to me that you are not serious about this course and I will adjust your grade to reflect that. If I suspect that you have submitted dishonest work, you will receive a zero for the assignment. You may also fail the course and the case may be forwarded to department and university administrators. If you have any doubts as to whether work you plan to submit violates the standards of academic integrity, please ask me in advance. It is better to have an honest question cleared up before the fact than to risk failure and disciplinary action.

All students must be familiar with the NYU Steinhardt School definition of plagiarism and the policy on academic integrity. The NYU Steinhardt Statement on Academic Integrity is available at: http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/policies/academic_integrity
The Steinhardt School defines plagiarism as follows:
*Plagiarism, one of the gravest forms of academic dishonesty in university life, whether intended or not, is academic fraud. In a community of scholars, whose members are teaching, learning and discovering knowledge, plagiarism cannot be tolerated. Plagiarism is failure to properly assign authorship to a paper, a document, an oral presentation, a musical score and/or other materials, which are not your original work. You plagiarize when, without proper attribution, you do any of the following:*
  * Copy verbatim from a book, an article or other media;*
  * Download documents from the Internet;*
  * Purchase documents;*
  * Report from other's oral work;*
  * Paraphrase or restate someone else's facts, analysis and/or conclusions;*
  * Copy directly from a classmate or allow a classmate to copy from you.*

Evaluation Criteria
A = Excellent
This work demonstrates comprehensive and solid understanding of course material and presents thoughtful interpretations, well-focused and original insights, and well-reasoned analysis. “A” work includes skillful use of source materials and illuminating examples and illustrations. “A” work is fluent, thorough and shows some creative flair.
B = Good
This work demonstrates a complete and accurate understanding of course material, presenting a reasonable degree of insight and broad level of analysis. Work reflects competence, but stays at a general or predictable level of understanding. Source material, along with examples and illustrations, are used appropriately. “B” work is reasonable, clear, appropriate and complete.
C = Adequate/Fair
This work demonstrates a basic understanding of course material but remains incomplete, superficial or expresses some important errors or weaknesses. Source material may be used inadequately or somewhat inappropriately. The work may lack concrete, specific examples and illustrations and may be hard to follow or vague.

D = Unsatisfactory

This work demonstrates a serious lack of understanding and fails to demonstrate the most rudimentary elements of the course assignment. Sources may be used inappropriately or not at all. The work may be inarticulate or extremely difficult to read.

A = 94-100  A- = 90-93  B+ = 87-89  B = 84-86  B- = 80-83  C+ = 77-79
C = 74-76  C- = 70-73  D+ = 67-69  D = 64-66  F = 63 and below

Other Resources for Students

The Writing Center
http://www.nyu.edu/cas/eWP/html/writing_center.html
411 Lafayette, 3rd Floor, New York, NY 10003
212 998-8866
mailto:writingcenter@nyu.edu

Hours: Monday to Thursday, 10 am to 8 pm; Friday, 11 am to 4 pm

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.

Office of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Student Services
Kimmel Center for University Life
60 Washington Square South, Suite 602
212-998-4424

The Office of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Student Services at New York University exists to create campus environments that are inclusive and supportive of student diversity in the areas of sexual orientation and gender identity/expression. The LGBT office offers many programs in the areas of health and wellness, sponsoring/cosponsoring the LGBT Health Fair, AIDS Awareness Week, and self-defense workshops. Throughout the year, the office offers programs and discussions on topics such as relationships, parenting, marriage, safer sex, drugs and alcohol, stress management, body image, and dating.
Course Schedule

Week 1: Introduction/Defining “Queer”
1/23: No readings – introductions
1/25: Bornstein, excerpts from Gender Outlaw
   "Transgender Style" (3-4)
   "The Hard Part" (7-14)
   "The First Question" (101-111)
   "The Other Questions" (113-140)
Smith, "How I Became a Queer Heterosexual" http://www.culturalresearch.org/qhet.html
Journal 1 due by Sunday at 8pm

Week 2: Understanding Queer Theory
1/30: Jagose, excerpts from Queer Theory: An Introduction
   "Introduction" (1-6)
   "Queer" (72-100)
   "Afterword" (127-132)
2/1: Gauntlett, "Queer Theory and Fluid Identities" (145-163)
Suggested: Sedgwick, "Axiomatic" from Epistemology of the Closet (1-63)
           Butler, "Preface" and "Subjects of Sex/Gender Desire" from Gender Trouble (-33)
Blog 1 due Sunday at 8pm

Week 3: Representation: Queer Visibility
2/6: Gross, excerpts from Up from Invisibility
   "The Mediated Society" (1-20)
Suggested: "Hollywood's Gay Nineties" (156-183)
           "Beyond Prime Time" (184-207)
           "Morning Papers, Afternoon Soaps" (208-220)
2/8: Joyrich, "Epistemology of the Console" (15-47)

Week 4: Representation: Queer Visibility
2/13: Gamson, excerpts from Freaks Talk Back
   "Why I Love Trash" (2-27)
   "Truths Told in Lies" (66-105)
2/15: Sender, "Queens for a Day" (131-151)
      Ron Becker, "Guy Love: A Queer Straight Masculinity for a Post-Closet Era?" (121-140)
Journal 2 due by Sunday at 8pm

Week 5: Representation: Narratives of Queer Identity
2/20: No class
2/22: Halberstam, “An Introduction to Female Masculinity: Masculinity without Men” from Female Masculinity (1-43)
      Portwood-Stacer, "Queering the Trans Narrative on Television" (1-15)
Blog 2 due Sunday at 8pm
Week 6: Representation/Consumption: Targeting Queer Audiences
2/27: Gross, "A Niche of Our Own" from Up From Invisibility (233-251)
Suggested: Sender, “Selling America’s Most Affluent Minority” from Business Not Politics (139-173)
2/29: Clark, “Commodity Lesbianism” (181-201)
Hennessey, “Queer Visibility in Commodity Culture” (31-76)
Journal 3 due by Sunday at 8pm

Week 7: Consumption: Queering the Straight Text
3/5: Doty, excerpts from Making Things Perfectly Queer
   “What Makes Queerness Most” (xi-xix)
   “There’s Something Queer Here” (1-16)
   “I Love Laverne and Shirley” (39-62)
Lipton, “Queer Readings of Popular Culture”, in Queer Youth Cultures (163-179)
3/7: Miller, "Masculinity and Male Intimacy in Nineties Sitcoms: Seinfeld and the Ironic Dismissal" (147-159)
Book Review 1 due

Spring Recess 3/12-3/17

Week 8: Consumption/Community: Queer Fandom
3/19: Driver, Queer Youth Cultures (read any 3 essays except those by Lipton and Ritchie)
3/21: TBA
Journal 4 due by Sunday at 8pm

Week 9: Community: Queer Space
3/26: Chauncey, “Introduction” from Gay New York (1-29)
   D’Emilio, “Capitalism and Gay Identity” (467-476)
3/28: Polchin, “Having Something to Wear: The Landscape of Identity on Christopher Street” (381-390)
   Suggested: Tongson, "Relocations: Queer Suburban Imaginaries" (1-27)
   Gray, "From Wal-Mart to Websites: Out in Public" (87-118)
Second Paper/Project Assigned

Week 10: Community: Queer Publics
4/2: Berlant and Freeman, “Queer Nationality” (193-229)
   Sycamore, “Gay Shame” (268-295)
   Suggested: Berlant and Warner, “Sex in Public” (547-566)
4/4: Warner, “What’s Wrong With Normal?” from The Trouble with Normal (41-80)
   Rodriguez, excerpts from Queer Latinidad
   “Divas, Atrevidas, y Entendidas: An Introduction to Identities (5-36, focus on 23-31)
   “’Welcome to the Global Stage’: Confessions of a Latina Cyber-Slut” (114-152)
Blog 3 due Sunday at 8pm
Week 11: Community/Identity: Queer Subcultures
4/9: Manalansan, excerpts from *Global Divas*
    "Introduction: Points of Departure" (1-20)
    "Out There: The Topography of Race and Desire in the Global City" (62-88)
        *Journal 5 (Paper/Project proposal) due by Sunday at 8pm*

Week 12: Identity: Performing Queerness
4/16: Williams, "Gay by Design, Or a Lifestyle Choice?" (1-3)
        Bennett, "In Defense of Gaydar" (408-425)
        Piontek, “Queer Alternatives to Men and Women” from *Queering Gay and Lesbian Studies* (67-80)
4/18: Garber, "Clothes Make the Man" from *Vested Interests* (1-17)

Week 13: Identity: Practicing Queerness
4/23: Piontek, “Redrawing the Map of the Gender-and-Sex Landscape” from *Queering Gay and Lesbian Studies* (81-94)
        Suggested: Rubin, "Thinking Sex" (143-178)
4/25: Ritchie, "Principles of Engagement" (261-278)
        Portwood-Stacer, "Constructing Anarchist Sexuality" (479-493)
        *Second Paper/Project due*

Week 14: Identity: Making Trouble?
4/30: Seidman, “Identity and politics in a ‘postmodern’ gay culture” (105-42)
        Jakobsen, “Queer Is? Queer Does?” (511-536)
5/2: Davis, “Situating ‘Fluidity’” (97-130)
        Schlichter, “Queer at last?” (543-564)
        *Blog 4 due Sunday at 8pm*

Week 15: Wrap-up
5/7: Catch up on all readings for final exam review
        *Final Exam questions distributed in class*

5/9: Final Exam due at 4pm