

GSWS 1210: Gender & the Digital

“One of the most feared expressions in modern times is ‘The computer is down.’”

–Norman Ralph Augustine

Many scholars and online enthusiasts argue that digital discourse is a modern manifestation of our First Amendment rights, providing both voice and audience to anyone with an opinion. Championed as an open and democratized space of discourse and dissent, the internet is feasibly an open forum to cultivate and share knowledge, connect to others, and store information. Ideally, it is an ethical platform rooted in progress, community, and the computation of data. Yet online spaces are not free from influences of identity and culture, specifically gender. Globally, people routinely laud computer science and most recently “STEM” (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) careers as prestigious, well-paying, and much needed for the future. Yet, prestigious fields and digital spaces are often hegemonic and masculine. Therefore, interrogating narratives of “the digital” by invoking studies of gender, sexuality, and women’s studies is not only relevant, but a necessary complement to disembodied discussions of the digital.

Fall 2017 Syllabus

Instructor: Emily Deering Crosby, PhD
Course: GSWS 1210 – 1010 (#28888) Gender & the Digital
Class Meetings: T/Th 1-2:15pm
Office Hours: T/Th 2:20-3:20pm
Office Location: 401B CL
E-mail: emilydcrosby@pitt.edu

Required Reading (eBooks):

Adrienne Shaw (2014). *Gaming at the Edge: Sexuality and Gender at the Margins of Gamer Culture*. University of Minnesota Press.
Sherry Turkle (2011). *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*.
Nancy Baym (2010). *Personal Connections in the Digital Age: Digital Media and Society*.
Kim Toffoletti (2007). *Cyborgs and Barbie Dolls: Feminism, Popular Culture and the Posthuman Body*.
Ursula Thomas and Jill Drake (2016). *Critical Research on Sexism and Racism in the STEM Fields*.
Lisa Nakamura (2007) *Digitizing Race: Visual Cultures of the Internet*. University of Minnesota Press.
Peter Lunenfeld (1999). *The Digital Dialectic: New Essays on New Media*. MIT Press.

All other readings will be made available on our Courseweb site. EBooks available at no cost via Pittcat+

COURSE OBJECTIVES

- Demonstrate an elevated understanding of the field of gender, sexuality, and women’s studies, and utilize a range of interdisciplinary tools and methods for understanding and analyzing digital culture
- Identify and exercise theoretical concepts and critical methods in the field of digital media
- Develop a rich comprehension of both feminist, critical race, and queer approaches to analysis
- Enhance a critical understanding of intersectionality, including an awareness of gender and its complex intersections
- Cultivate a language framework for thoughtfully articulating the critical vocabulary of digital culture in relation to the field of gender, sexuality and women’s studies
- Develop and hone reading and writing skills through effective synthesis of written material. Practice conveying course concepts in a concise and clear manner both verbally and in writing in line with an upper level writing course
- Hone a critical scholar skillset that is interdisciplinary through the act of workshopping with peers

ASSIGNMENTS & EVALUATION

- **Participation & Professionalism (100 points):** This will be a discussion based course. Therefore, attendance and active participation is essential. Students will check Coursweb regularly for information on assignments.
- **Think Piece (3 at 50 points each = 150):** each week is comprised of a thematic unit. You will write a 3 page typed reading response on Tuesday (depending on your group assignment) that will allow you to explore facets of your final research topic based on the week's theme. You will print this and bring it to class on Tuesday. Based on class discussion on Tuesday, class workshops, and classmate feedback, you will revisit this response and turn in a strengthened 5-6 page paper on Friday at noon. A * is listed in the syllabus denoting this. Each week, a prompt will be provided on courseweb to get you thinking about how the reading(s) relate to your final research topic. You will turn in your final paper electronically on courseweb on Friday at noon. The goal of these think piece essays is to contribute to your final research paper, explore interdisciplinary methodology, and push you to develop rigorous academic inquiry into your topic of interest. These think pieces function as a sequence to build momentum to your final research paper and presentation and aim to improve your organization, argumentation, research skills, and style. *Your professor expects supported claims, critical perspectives, familiarity with the readings, concise writing style, and proofread college-level work.* Keep in mind: What is your argument? How are you supporting it? Could you make these same claims in fewer words?
- **Final Paper (250 points):** 12-15 pages; a minimum of five academic sources from outside course readings. You will explore a specific concept of digital culture more deeply using a critical theoretical lens. You may employ one of the methodological approaches we discuss in class.
- **“Conference” Presentations (100 points):** 6-7 minutes. Each student will give one polished oral presentation about their paper using a PowerPoint presentation. This will be timed and graded, but more importantly, it is a chance to share your project with your peers. This will act as a conference presentation preparing you for participation in the GSWS undergraduate conference in the spring or other academic outlets.
- **“Today in Digital Culture” (50 points):** Each student will prepare an informal yet polished 4-6 minute presentation that discusses a trend, person, artifact, meme, hashtag, timely news event etc. that relates to the day's theme. The student will make two connections to the readings for that day. The student will end their talk posing questions that will spur group discussion about the “real world” influence of digital culture.
- **Final Exam (150 points):** This exam will cover all readings and notes from the course to establish a vocabulary regarding gender and the digital and test your familiarity with course readings and concepts. Please note: *make-up exams are only given with written evidence from a doctor that the student was too ill to attend class on the day of the exam. If an issue arises, please contact your instructor. Make-up exams will be all essay.*
- **GSWS Event Reflection extra credit opportunity:** You may attend any GSWS Events and write about the event topic, speaker(s), and make two thoughtful and specific connections to class content in a 1 page reflection for +10 points each. A list of events is found here <http://www.gsws.pitt.edu/events> are, of course, encouraged to attend as many campus lectures/events as you would like!

Grading Breakdown:

		<u>Points</u>	<u>My scores</u>
Participation & Professionalism	100	_____	_____
“Today in Digital Culture”	50	_____	_____
Think Pieces (3 at 50 pts. each)	150	_____	_____
Final Paper	250	_____	_____
In-class “conference” presentation	100	_____	_____
Final Exam	150	_____	_____
Total points	850	_____	_____

Grade	% Limits
A+	98-100%
A	93-97%
A-	90-92%
B+	87-89%
B	83-86%
B-	80-82%
C+	77-79%
C	73-76%
C-	70-72%
D+	67-69%
D	60-66%
F	Below 60%

Attendance: Attendance is required. In order for this course to be effective, it is vital to create a supportive atmosphere, exchange information and opinions, and listen to each other. Missing class will negatively impact your grade.

- There is *two unexcused “freebie” absences* available in this course, no matter the reason. Use them wisely.
- Students who miss more than six classes should consider whether or not they will be able to complete course work successfully and should consider withdrawing.
- A student will be counted late if they arrive after attendance has been taken (generally in the first couple minutes of the class). If late due to another class/event, let the instructor know. *2 “late arrivals” = 1 absence.*
- Your participation grade is worth 100 points. Each student will have the opportunity to complete a self-evaluation of participation during the semester.

UNIVERSITY & COURSE POLICIES

- **Gender Inclusive Language:** Language is gender-inclusive and non-sexist when we use words that affirm and respect how people describe, express, and experience their gender. Gender-inclusive/non-sexist language acknowledges people of any gender (for example, first year student versus freshman, chair versus chairman, humankind versus mankind, etc.). It also affirms non-binary gender identifications, and recognizes the difference between biological sex and gender expression. Students may share their preferred pronouns and names, and these gender identities and gender expressions should be honored. For more information, visit: <http://www.gsws.pitt.edu/faculty/gender-inclusivenon-sexist-language-syllabi-statement>
- **Content Warning and Classroom Climate:** Our course readings and classroom discussions will often focus on mature, difficult, and potentially challenging topics. As with any course in the Gender, Sexuality, and Women’s Studies Program, course topics are often political *and* personal. Readings and discussions might trigger strong feelings—anger, discomfort, anxiety, confusion, excitement, and laughter. Some of us will have emotional responses to the readings; some of us will have emotional responses to our peers’ understanding of the readings; all of us should feel responsible for creating a space that is both intellectually rigorous and respectful. Above all, be respectful (even when you strongly disagree) and be mindful of the ways that our identities position us in the classroom. I expect everyone to come to class prepared to discuss the readings in a mature and respectful way. If you are struggling with the course materials, here are some tips: read the syllabus so that you are prepared in advance. You can approach your instructor ahead of time if you’d like more information about a topic or reading. If you think a particular reading or topic might be especially challenging or unsettling, you can arrive to class early and take a seat by the door so that you can easily exit the classroom as needed. If you need to leave or miss class, you are still responsible for the work you miss. If you are struggling to keep up with the work because of the course content or personal reason, you should speak with your instructor and/or seek help from the counseling center.
- **Disability Statement:** If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation, you are encouraged to contact both your instructor and Disability Resources and Services, 140 William Pitt Union, 412-648-7890 or 412-383-7355 (TTY) as early as possible in the term.
- **Academic Integrity:** Students in this course will be expected to comply with the University of Pittsburgh's Policy on Academic Integrity. Any student suspected of violating this obligation for any reason will be required to participate in the procedural process, initiated at the instructor level, as outlined in the University Guidelines on Academic Integrity. If you are caught cheating or plagiarizing, you will receive a zero and may be subjected to the proceedings outlined by the University of Pittsburgh academic integrity policy. To see the full list of violations: <http://www.as.pitt.edu/fac/policies/academic-integrity>

GSWS: Gender & the Digital

Please note: The day on which readings and assignments are listed is the day they are *due*. At each class meeting the instructor will update students about upcoming work; if changes occur students will be notified well in advance.
All readings will be available on Courseweb/PittCat+

Week One: Introductions

- T 8/29 Distribution of Syllabi
Introductions, Class Exercise
Explore possible topics of interest
- Th 8/31 Discuss: What is “the digital”?
Read: Howard, R.G. (2008). The vernacular web of participatory media. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 25, 490–513.
- Select “Today in Digital Culture” (TDC) schedule in class
 Discuss final research ideas that will shape your sequential think pieces

Week Two: Making New Media Make Sense

- T 9/5 Introduce yourself to the class on Courseweb by this date (see “Introductions” tab)
- Discuss: Why Media (and the Individual Medium) Matters; “The Medium *is* the Message”
Read: Michael Heim, “Cyberspace Dialectics” in *The Digital Dialectic*, 24-45
***Think Piece Essay Group A #1 (printed for class workshop)**
- Th 9/7 Discuss: How to engage New Media as a site of meaningful scholarship and “legitimate” culture
Read: Nancy Baym (2010) “Making New Media Make Sense” in *Personal Connections in the Digital Age*, Chapter 2
Improved Think Piece #1 turned in to instructor electronically

Week Three: Computers, Masculinity, and Tech Anxieties in the 1980s

- T 9/12 Discuss: “Technophobia” and the Cold War
Read: Susan Jeffords *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinities in the Reagan Era* chapter 5 “A Few Good White Men”; Douglas & Kellner “Technophobia”
*** Think Piece Essay Group B #1 (printed for class workshop)**
- Th 9/14 Discuss: Computers are for “geeks,” tensions of masculinity in the rise of online culture
Read: “‘White and Nerdy’: Computers, Race, and the Nerd Stereotype” *Journal of Popular Culture*; Nik Dickerson (2016)
“Constructing the Digitalized Sporting Body: Black and White Masculinity in NBA/NFL Internet Memes” *Communication & Sport*
- Watch: Depictions of nerds in contemporary media, and tropes of Asian Masculinity
Improved Think Piece Group B #1 turned in to instructor

Week Four: Women's Erasure in Digital Spaces – Protecting/Resisting “Male Domains”

T 9/19 Discuss: Enlightened Sexism, Feminine Clichés, and the pitfalls of “Girl Power”
Read: Shaw, Introduction. “Clichés versus Women: Moving beyond Sexy Sidekicks and Damsels in Distress”; Shaw, Chapter 2 “Does Anyone Really Identify with Lara Croft? Unpacking Identification in Video Games”

*** Think Piece Essay Group C #1 (printed for class workshop)**

Th 9/21 Discuss: Blogs, Women, Horizontal Hostility, and Consumer Culture
Read: Michelle Wright (2005) “Finding a Place in Cyberspace: Black Women, Technology, and Identity” *Frontiers* 48-59
 Lori Kido Lopez (2008), “The Radical Act of ‘Mommy Blogging’: Redefining Motherhood through the Blogosphere” *New Media & Society* 729-747.

Improved Think Piece Group C #1 turned in to instructor electronically

Week Five: Futurism, Fantasy, Fandom and Realms of Possibility

T 9/26 Discuss: AI, Sci Fi, and Disembodied Femininity
Read: Kim Toffoletti, (2007). *Cyborgs and Barbie Dolls: Feminism, Popular Culture and the Posthuman Body*. Chapter 1 “Feminism Technology and the Posthuman”; Liz Faber (2013) “From ‘Star Trek’ to Siri: (Dis)embodied gender and the acousmatic computer in science fiction film and television” (see dissertation excerpt on courseweb)

Watch: Clip from *Her* (2013)

*** Think Piece Essay Group A #2 (printed for class workshop)**

Th 9/28 Discuss: Gender, Race, and Fantasy Culture
Read: Fouché “Black Inventors: Racial Politics of Technology” 61-80
 Bennett (2016) “Afrofuturism” *Computer* 92-93

Improved Think Piece Group A #2 turned in to instructor electronically

Week Six: Online Hate, Backlash, and Identity

T 10/3 Discuss: “Hate Mail” and Resisting Violence against Women
Read: Dana Cloud, (2009) “Foiling the Intellectuals: Gender, Identity Framing, and the Rhetoric of the Kill in Conservative Hate Mail”
 Debra Ferreday, (2015) “Game of Thrones, Rape Culture, and Feminist Fandom” *Feminist Media Studies*

*** Think Piece Essay Group B #2 (printed for class workshop)**

- Midterm Study Guide Made Available on Courseweb

Th 10/5 Discuss: Whiteness as Americana, Miss America, and Racist Anxieties of the Alt-Right
Read: Cisneros & Nakayama (2015) “New Media, Old Racisms: Twitter, Miss America, and Cultural Logics of Race.” *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*
 McCoy (2017) “The Road to Hate” *Washington Post*
 Wilkinson, “Radicalization of Young White Men” *The Guardian*

- <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/nov/15/alt-right-manosphere-mainstream-politics-breitbart>

Improved Think Piece Group B #2 turned in to instructor electronically

Week Seven: Gamer Culture, “The Manosphere” and Online Violence

T 10/10 NO CLASS (Monday classes meet)

Th 10/12 Discuss: Gamergate and coalescing of “alt-right” white supremacists
Read: Adrienne Shaw, (2011) “Do You Identify as a Gamer?” *New Media & Society*, 28-44
 Jeremy Freed, (2017) “Gamergate, Violence and Video Games” *Media Report on Women*, 6-11
 Chess and Shaw, (2015) “#GamerGate and Hegemonic Masculinity” *Electronic Media*, 208-220

Week Eight: Digital Youth - Selfies, Sexting, Neoliberalism, and Likes

T 10/17 In class, watch documentary film *Generation Like* (2014)
Read: Sherry Turkle (2011) “Alone Together: Growing up Tethered,” Chapter 9
 Henry Giroux (2015) “Selfie Culture in the Age of Corporate and State Surveillance” *Third Text*
 * **Think Piece Essay Group C #2**

Th 10/19 Discuss the Film
Read: Julian Gill-Peterson (2015). “Sexting girls: technological sovereignty and the Digital” *Women & Performance*, 143-156
 Schott & Langan (2015), “Pro-anorexia/bulimia censorship and public service announcements: the price of controlling women” *Media, Culture & Society* 1158-1175
Improved Think Piece Group C#2 turned in to instructor electronically

- Final Paper Assignment Description Handed Out
- Discuss final paper assignment parameters – start thinking about topics that interest you

Week Nine: Play, Gender, and Digital Erotics

T 10/24 Discuss: Play, Instagram, and the rise of the Visual
Read: Tisha DeJmanee, (2016) “‘Food Porn’ as Postfeminist Play” *Television & New Media*
 Smith & Sanderson, (2015) “I’m going to Instagram it! Athlete Self Presentation” *Electronic Media*
 * **Think Piece Essay Group A #3**

Th 10/26 Discuss: Online dating, Pornography, and Identity
Read: Corinne Mason, (2017) “Tinder and humanitarian hook-ups: the erotics of social media racism.” *Feminist Media Studies*
 Steve Garlick (2010). “Taking Control of Sex: Hegemonic Masculinity, Technology, and Internet Pornography.” *Men & Masculinities*

Improved Think Piece Group A #3 turned in to instructor electronically

Week Ten: Online Activism and Queering Cyberspace

T 11/1 Discuss: #Hashtags and mobilizing protests online
 Read: Mark Orbe, (2015) “#AllLivesMatter as Post-Racial Rhetorical Strategy” *Journal of Contemporary Rhetoric*
 Sherri Williams (2016) “#SayHerName: Using digital activism to document violence against black women.” *Feminist Media Studies*
 * **Think Piece Essay Group B #3**

Th 11/2 Discuss: Negotiating “self” online
Read: Avi Marciano, (2014) “Living the VirtuReal: Negotiating Transgender Identity in Cyberspace” *Journal of Computer Mediated Communication*.
 Lisa Nakamura (2007) *Digitizing Race: Visual Cultures of the Internet*. “Avatars and the Visual Culture of Reproduction on the Web” Chapter 4
Improved Think Piece Group B #3 turned in to instructor electronically

Week Eleven: E-Bile, Trolls, and Outing Online Misogyny

T 11/7 Discuss: Hate Speech, Catfishing, and the perils of anonymity
Read: Emma Jane (2014) “Your [sic] a whorish slut”: Understanding E-Bile. *Feminist Media Studies*
 Frederick et al. (2014) “To invest in the invisible: A case study of Manti Te’o’s image repair strategies during the Katie Couric interview” *Public Relations Review* 780-788
 * **Think Piece Group C #3**

- Select final paper in-class presentation date

Th 11/9 Discuss: The strategies of trolls and the (un)surprising rise of the “Alt-Right”
Read: Phillips, *This is Why We Can’t Have Nice Things* ch. 7 “Cultural Logics of Trolling” 115-134;
 Phillips, ch. 9 “Where do we go from here?” 153-170.
 • <https://www.vox.com/2017/8/12/16138246/charlottesville-nazi-rally-right-uva>
Improved Think Piece Group C #3 turned in to instructor electronically

Week Twelve: Alone, Together: Isolation and Community in Digital Era

T 11/14 Discuss: FOMO/Fear of Missing Out and Social Media Addictions
Read: Jonathan Safran Foer (2013) “How Not to Be Alone” *NY Times*
 Sherry Turkle (2011) “Alone Together: Anxiety” Chapter 13
 Chris Colin, “Carpe FOMO” (2015) *Pacific Standard*, 23-24

Th 11/16 Professor Crosby at NCA Academic Conference – NO CLASS

In lieu of class:

- Narrow down final paper topic – has anyone else written on the topic? What is something new you can contribute by building on other scholarly works?
- Finalize topic – what are you analyzing? Using what theoretical concepts? Are you making a specific argument?
- Draft a thesis statement “In this paper, I argue/explore/interrogate....”
- Create preliminary bibliography of 3-5 academic sources
- Post topic, thesis, and preliminary bibliography to courseweb for in-class workshop and feedback

Week Thirteen: The Future of the Digital

T 11/21 Final Paper workshop – first half of class

Discuss: Looking Forward: Innovations, and benefits of the digital

Read: Sherry Turkle (2011) *Alone Together* “True Confessions” ch. 12, 229-240

Nancy Baym (2010) “Communities and Networks” Chapter 4, 72-97

Bring in an example, and background/context, of a benefit of “the digital”

- Final exam study guide made available to the class via Courseweb
- Brief public speaking tutorial for presentation (grading sheet review)

Th 11/24 Thanksgiving Break – NO CLASS

Week Fourteen: Presentations

T 11/29 **In class Final Exam**

Th 12/1 In class presentations on final paper: 6-7 minutes with PowerPoint/Prezi presentation

- **Presenters**

Week Fifteen: Conclusions

T 12/6 In class presentations on final paper: 6-7 minutes with PowerPoint/Prezi presentation

- **Presenters**

Th 12/8 In class presentations on final paper: 6-7 minutes with PowerPoint/Prezi presentation

- **Presenters**

W 12/13 **Final paper due via email**

Have a wonderful winter break!