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):

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
Grading Breakdown:

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<th>Assignment &amp; Evaluation</th>
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<tr>
<td>Participation &amp; Professionalism (100 points)</td>
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<td>“Today in Digital Culture” (50 points)</td>
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<td>Think Pieces (3 at 50 pts. each)</td>
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<td>Final Paper</td>
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<td>In-class “conference” presentation</td>
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<td>Final Exam</td>
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**Grade % Limits**

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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”?  

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

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

Th 9/21 Discuss: Blogs, Women, Horizontal Hostility, and Consumer Culture
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
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  

**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  
* **Think Piece Essay Group C #2**

Th 10/19  **Discuss**: the Film  
**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  
**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  
Journal of Computer Mediated Communication.  
**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  
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.  
**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  

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!