Gender and Sexuality in Music

[syllabus for an undergraduate course for a mix of majors, Lucie Vágnerová]

COURSE DESCRIPTION
How do we talk about gender and sexuality in music and musical culture writ large? This course explores recent approaches to the study of gender and sexuality in music, introducing students to scholarship and media from various disciplines and publication platforms (academic writing from in and out of music studies, journalism, podcasts, documentary film, animation, poetry, and, of course, music). Taking an intersectional approach to gender and sexuality – not forgetting the work of race and other categories of social difference, the course largely draws on examples from popular music. Active class participation, short written responses to readings, a collaborative presentation, and a final paper make up the coursework.

The course does not require knowledge of music notation.

COURSE OBJECTIVES
The broad aim of this course is to develop the critical thinking (and listening) skills of students, such that they become sensitive to the work of gender and sexuality in music. Students will encounter a language and a vocabulary for speaking about gender and sexuality, and study music fundamentals (elements of rhythm, melody, timbre, texture, harmony, etc.) to be able to substantiate arguments with some level of musical detail. Drawing on the diverse approaches of authors on the syllabus, I encourage students to identify topics of interest to them, develop coursework on those topics, and cultivate their own writing style. Writing

COURSE POLICIES
Abide by the Academic Integrity Policy: "Academic dishonesty includes any act that is designed to obtain fraudulently, either for oneself or for someone else, academic credit, grades, or other recognition that is not properly earned or that adversely affects another's grade or misrepresents one's academic status."

Deadlines: All assignments will be announced well ahead of time; therefore, deadlines are fairly strict. I give extensions in cases of extenuating circumstances (e.g. extended illness, family emergency).

GRADING
25% Class participation
An “A” for class participation will be earned by a student who...
... always arrives on time having done the assigned listening and reading
... asks questions, debates other students, makes connections to material outside of the course
...acts respectfully towards other students and the instructor at all times.*

*The course requires discussion of gender, sexuality, race, class, etc. Hateful comments or verbal attacks will not be tolerated and will affect your grade.

If jumping into class discussion is difficult for you, show your commitment in other ways: you may volunteer to share your short response, engage with a peer’s response, or email me about an article/resource for the class. Depending on the liveliness of discussion, I may or may not call on students. Unannounced in-class writing assignments will also count towards the Class Participation grade.

15% Reading Responses
Short responses to readings submitted online a day ahead of class.

30% Collaborative Presentation
On a musical site viewed through the prism of gender and sexuality studies.

30% Essay
On a recorded piece of music, a music video, or a film scene featuring a piece of music.

Academic Support Services: You are invited to address anything (reading comprehension, listening strategies, writing tips, workload) in Office Hours with me. Equally, I highly encourage all students to take advantage of the Writing Center.

Weekly Schedule of Topics and Assignments

1 Introduction to the Course
HW: Write a one-page musical autobiography

2 Fundamentals of Music
Timbre, melody, rhythm, texture, harmony.

3-4 Fundamentals of Gender and Culture
Musical autobiography due
Raymond Williams, “Culture,” in Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture (1976)
Fred E. Maus, “Music, Gender, and Sexuality” (2011)

5 Music as Technology of Self
6 Voice and Gender
Clifford Naas and Scott Brave, *Wired For Speech: Activating the Human-Computer Relationship*, short excerpt on how we classify vocal gender

Susan McClary, “This is Not a Story My People Tell: Musical Time and Space According to Laurie Anderson,” in *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, Sexuality* (1991)


LISTEN: Laurie Anderson, selected music; Dolly Parton, “The Great Pretender”; John Oswald, “Pretender”

7 Black Women’s Voices

WATCH: Beyonce’s Superbowl halftime performance (2017),

8 Gaga Feminism
Jack Halberstam, “Preface” and “Gaga Feminism for Beginners,” in *Gaga Feminism: Sex, Gender, and the End of the Normal* (2012)

Jack Halberstam, "No Church in the Wild: Queer Anarchy and Gaga Feminism" (2013) 75 min lecture video.

WATCH: Lady Gaga, 2011 MTV VMAs performance as “Jo Calderone”

9 Performing Girlhood

WATCH in class: Irene Chagall, *Let’s Get the Rhythm* documentary

10 Kawaii


WATCH: Hatsune Miku “The World is Mine” music video

11 Sexual Politics
*Paragraph on presentation topic due (work in pairs)*


12 Sexual Politics 2


LISTEN: selection of Dominican and Cuban regeton; Luis Fonsi, “Despacito feat. Daddy Yankee”
**13 Memorials**
Paul Attinello, "Closeness and Distance: Songs about AIDS" (2006)
LISTEN: Bob Ostertag, *All the Rage* (1993); Klaus Nomi, *Death [Dido's Lament]* (1982);
Janelle Monae, "Hell You Talmbout [Say Her Name]" (2015)

**14 Queering Country**
Martha Mockus, “Queer Thoughts on Country Music and k.d. lang” (1994)
LISTEN: k.d. lang, selected music; Dolly Parton, “Jolene”

**15-16 Student Presentations**

**17 Afrofuturism and Subjectivity**
*Essay topics due*
August Brown, "'Hamilton' star Daveed Diggs bolts from the 'popular to the fringe' with experimental hip-hop act Clipping" (2016)
LISTEN: Clipping, “The Deep”
WATCH: DUST primer on Afrofuturism with Little Simz, Episodes 1, 3, 4, and 5 on Sun Ra, George Clinton, Jimmi Hendrix, and Missy Elliott on YouTube

**18 Afrofuturism and Subjectivity 2**
Daylanne K. English and Alvin Kim, “Now We Want Our Funk Cut: Janelle Monáe’s Neo-Afrofuturism” (2013)
LISTEN: Janelle Monae, selected music

**19 White Women and Black Expression**
Wesley Morris and Jenna Worthman, “‘Confederate,’ ‘Detroit’ and Who Owns Stories about Blackness,” *Still Processing* New York Times podcast
Brittney Cooper, “Iggy Azalea’s post-racial mess: America’s oldest race tale, remixed,” *Salon* (2014)
LISTEN: Madonna, “Like a Prayer” video

**20 Orientalism and Gender**
Hisama, “Postcolonialism on the Make: The Music of John Mellencamp, David Bowie, and John Zorn”
20 Orientalism and Gender (Cont’d.)
LISTEN: David Bowie, “China Girl”

21 Rock and Masculinity

22 Gender Inequity in Jazz

22 Sexual Assault
Matt Alt, “Pharrell Williams’s Lolicon Video,” The New Yorker (2014)
LISTEN: music examples in Keenan’s article; Pharrell Williams, “It Girl” video; Lady Gaga, “Til It Happens To You”

23 Review & Loose Ends
Essays Due