

Chick Flicks and Macho Movies: Gender, Genre, and American Cinema
ENGL 245

Professor Rashna Richards

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Semester: Spring 2010

Class: TR 3:30-4:45

Room: 206 Palmer

Screening: W 7:00-9:30

Room: 34 Barret

Course Description



This course is about men, women, and the movies. Specifically, it offers an exploration of how contemporary genre films reinforce, challenge, and destabilize gender norms in American popular culture. We will consider whether genres are always already gendered, ready to activate deep-seated anxieties about sexual difference and gender politics; examine how specific genres have absorbed revisionist tendencies; and investigate how gender and genre intersect with other kinds of identity formations, including race, class, age, and sexuality. In Unit I, we will explore chick culture and its relationship to feminism and postfeminism. In Unit II, we will focus on American masculinity and its alleged state of crisis. In Unit III, we will problematize generic distinctions along gendered lines by exploring films that subvert traditional ideologies of masculinity/femininity. Overall, drawing on a range of critical tools and theoretical insights, from psychoanalysis to feminism to masculinity studies to postmodernism, we will assess the state of gender and genre in contemporary American cinema.

Standard of Work: This course expects students to interrogate films in relation to issues of gender and sexuality. It is not a course in film appreciation. Our primary focus will be on interpretation and analysis; we will not be making evaluative claims or trying to judge whether a film is "good" or "bad." The readings are intellectually challenging, as are the films. You will need to take careful notes on the films, readings, and in-class discussions. In addition, this is a rigorous writing course. Assignments will expect you to read significant cinematic details, use film terminology to analyze scenes, interpret a film's themes or motifs, and perform cultural

analysis. We will never write popular reviews or engage in a thumbs up-thumbs down appraisal of films. Therefore, you are encouraged to think seriously about your commitment to the course.

Course Policies

Attendance: You are required to attend all classes and screenings. You should not email me about your absences. If you miss a class, it is your responsibility to get information and/or handouts from a classmate. You are allowed two absences over the course of the semester, no questions asked, for extracurricular activities or medical/personal emergencies. After the second absence, each subsequent absence will result in a deduction of 20 points from your final course grade. After six absences, you will fail the course.

Tardiness: You are required to be on time. Habitual tardiness, even if it's only a couple of minutes, will hurt your participation/professionalism grade.

Late Work: I do not accept late work. If you do not plan on being here when an assignment is due, it must be in my mailbox before the deadline. You will receive a zero on an assignment if it is not turned in when it is due. Please note that you are required to complete all assignments in order to receive a passing grade.

Class Participation: You are required to come to class prepared with the assigned reading for that day. I expect constructive verbal contribution to each class meeting. A student who disrupts class, interrupts another student's presentation, or in any way creates a hostile environment will be subject to disciplinary action. A student who reads the newspaper, chats with a neighbor, or simply dozes off should expect a low participation grade even if they have contributed to class discussions on other occasions. I will likely say nothing at the time of the incident, but disruptive behavior will adversely affect your participation/professionalism grade.

Screenings: We will view a wide variety of films in class. You may find these films intellectually challenging or troubling. Learning how to watch and analyze them critically will be an important part of our discussions and assignments.

Electronic Devices: You should turn off all electronic devices before class begins. Do not allow cell phones, pagers, or any type of beepers to go off in class. You are expected to refrain from sending or receiving calls as well as text messaging. A laptop may be used for taking notes. However, instant messaging, gaming, or surfing the web is prohibited.

Food or Drink: I don't mind if you bring something to drink, but please avoid bringing any food into the classroom.

Consultation: I'll be happy to talk with you about any questions or concerns you have about the class. Feel free to stop by during my office hours. If those times don't work, I can make an appointment to meet with you at a time that is mutually convenient. If you have questions about an assignment, do not wait until the last minute. Remember, I want you to do well in the class and am always willing to work with you.

Email: It is always preferable to meet in person to discuss any questions or concerns, since the impersonal medium of electronic communication is a poor substitute for a genuine face-to-face conversation. However, I'm available by email for simple queries (expect a response during business hours: 9am-5pm Monday-Friday). Please regard email correspondence as formal communication. It is always best to ask specific rather than general questions in an email and abide by rules of professional etiquette. It is not advisable to email me the evening before an assignment is due asking for help because there is very little I can do at that point; besides, last-minute emails are very unprofessional. Email is absolutely not the medium for negotiating special requests, addressing grade concerns, or discussing ideas for assignments; those issues must be handled in person.

Format of Assignments: All written assignments need to be typed and double spaced, in 12 pt. font, using Times New Roman, with one-inch margins on all sides. The format and citations must conform to MLA specifications, or the assignment may not be accepted. You do not need a title page; instead, include your name, my name, course name/number, and date in the top left corner of the first page. Be sure to number and staple your pages; also, proofread your work before printing up the final draft. I do not accept any assignments via email. A paper copy is expected at the beginning of class on the day the assignment is due.

Intellectual Honesty: All work is assumed to be the student's own and produced exclusively for the course in which it is submitted. Papers written for one course, even if revised, are not to be submitted in another without prior approval. Borrowing of ideas or language from other sources (including published material, other student papers, the internet or other electronic resources, etc.) must be carefully documented. You are advised against posting your work on the internet, since doing so may lead to suspicion of plagiarism. You are also advised to save drafts of your work to verify its originality. Cases of suspected plagiarism will be referred to the Honor Council, and, if convicted, the student will receive an F in the course in addition to sanctions assigned by the Council. Carelessness in documenting sources, even if not technically plagiarism, will be penalized as appropriate. If you are uncertain about how or whether to document sources, please consult me.

Disability Issues: Students with documented disabilities may be entitled to specific accommodations. Please contact the office of Student Disability Services for more information. In every case, it is your responsibility to provide me with an official letter from SDS.

Course Evaluation

Grade Distribution

Participation/Professionalism	15%	150 points
Blogging	15%	150 points
Essay #1	20%	200 points
Essay #2	20%	200 points
Research Paper	30%	300 points
Total	100%	1000 points

Assignments (Additional guidelines will be provided when each assignment is introduced.)

Participation/Professionalism: You are required to contribute comments and questions that further class discussion. Simply agreeing or disagreeing with your classmates and/or the readings is not enough. You are expected to add thoughtful ideas to the debate by engaging with the texts in a sophisticated manner. Participation will be evaluated in terms of quantity and quality. Failure to follow any course policies or guidelines will hurt your professionalism grade.

Blogging: In an effort to continue the conversation outside the classroom, you will be blogging on specific topics related to the course at <http://chickflicksandmachomovies.wordpress.com/>. Your posts will be evaluated in terms of quantity and quality. You will write at least five new posts over the semester and comment on other posts weekly. Prompts will be provided, but you are free to use the site for any reflections on gender, genre, and American cinema.

Essay #1 (3-4 pages): The first essay will analyze some aspect of American chick culture in relation to one or more chick flicks.

Essay #2 (3-4 pages): The second essay will analyze some aspect of American masculinity in relation to one or more macho movies.

Research Paper (9-10 pages): The final project for the class is a research paper on some aspect of gender, genre, and American cinema. You will be given several prompts, which you will use to develop your own topic for the project. You will be required to research your topic comprehensively. Your paper will be evaluated on the originality of your critique, the rigor of your analysis, and the thoroughness of your research.

Grading Guidelines

A = 100-94; **A-** = 93-90

B+ = 89-87; **B** = 86-84; **B-** = 83-80

C+ = 79-77; **C** = 76-74; **C-** = 73-70

D+ = 69-67; **D** = 66-64; **D-** = 63-60

F < 60

A range (100-90): Excellent work; exemplary in argument and organization; professionally presented; free of mechanical errors.

B range (89-80): Good, solid work; substantive in argument and organization; meets all requirements, but needs some revisions; no more than five mechanical errors.

C range (79-70): Satisfactory work; addresses the assignment adequately, but requires some significant revisions of content and/or mechanics.

D range (69-60): Below average work; misses one or more central aspects of the assignment; inadequate focus and/or development; awkwardly written; requires extensive rewriting.

F range (< 60): Unacceptable work; fails to meet the requirements of the assignment; incomplete or irrelevant material; lack of focus or development.

Course Materials

- Ferriss, Suzanne and Mallory Young, eds., *Chick Flicks: Contemporary Women at the Movies*. New York: Routledge, 2008. (CF)
- Lehman, Peter, ed. *Masculinity: Bodies, Movies, Culture*. New York: Routledge, 2001. (M)
- Tasker, Yvonne, ed. *Action and Adventure Cinema*. New York: Routledge, 2004. (AA)
- Additional essays on film criticism--listed as handout in the schedule

Course Schedule (subject to change)

Week 1: Introduction

Thurs., Jan. 14 Introduction to the Course

Unit I: Women and Movies

Week 2: What Women Want: History and Theory

Tues., Jan. 19 Turim, "Women's Films" (CF 26-40)
Clips: Griffith, *The New York Hat* (1912); Cukor, *The Philadelphia Story* (1940); McCarey, *An Affair to Remember* (1957)

Screening Ephron, *You've Got Mail* (1998)

Thurs., Jan. 21 Ferriss & Young, "Chick Flicks and Chick Culture" (CF 1-17)
Clips: Chadha, *Bend It Like Beckham* (2002)

Week 3: Fashion, Femininity, and Post/Feminism

Tues., Jan. 26 Ferriss, "Fashioning Femininity in the Makeover Flick" (CF 41-57)
Clips: Donen, *Funny Face* (1957); Frankel, *The Devil Wears Prada* (2006)

Screening Luketic, *Legally Blonde* (2001)

Thurs., Jan. 28 Dole, "The Return of Pink" (CF 58-78)
Clips: Marshall, *Pretty Woman* (1990); McG, *Charlie's Angels* (2000)

Week 4: When Age Is Just a Number

Tues., Feb. 2 Abbott, "Prom-Coms" (handout)
Introduction to Essay #1
Clips: Gosnell, *Never Been Kissed* (1999); Winick, *13 Going on 30* (2004)

Screening Meyers, *Something's Gotta Give* (2003)

Thurs., Feb. 4 Tally, "Something's Gotta Give" (CF 119-31)
Clips: Wells, *Under the Tuscan Sun* (2003); Waters, *Freaky Friday* (2003)

Week 5: Homosocial Bonding, Homosexual Communities

Tues., Feb. 9 Barker, "The Southern-Fried Chick Flick" (CF 92-118)
Clips: Ross, *Steel Magnolias* (1989); Khouri, *Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood* (2002)

Screening Hogan, *My Best Friend's Wedding* (1997)

Thurs., Feb. 11 Aronson & Kimmel, "The Saviors and the Saved" (M 43-50)
Sullivan, "Chasing Fae" (handout)
Clips: Dunye, *The Watermelon Woman* (1996)

Week 6: The Other Chick

Tues., Feb. 16 Mendible, "Chica Flicks" (CF 158-74)
Clips: Wang, *Maid in Manhattan* (2002); Cardoso, *Real Women Have Curves* (2002)

No Screening

Thurs., Feb. 18 Essay #1 due

Unit II: Men and Movies**Week 7: What Men Want: History and Theory**

Tues., Feb. 23 Neale, "Action-Adventure as Hollywood Genre" (AA 71-83)
Clips: Porter, *The Great Train Robbery* (1903); Walsh, *The Thief of Baghdad* (1924); Ford, *The Searchers* (1956)

Screening de Bont, *Speed* (1994)

Thurs., Feb. 25 Flanagan, "Get Ready for Rush Hour" (AA 103-18)
Clips: McTiernan, *Die Hard* (1988)

Week 8: (White) Masculinity in Crisis

Tues., March 2 Robinson, "Emotional Constipation" (M 133-47)
Jeffords, "Breakdown" (AA 219-34)
Clips: Boorman, *Deliverance* (1972); Mostow, *Breakdown* (1997)

Screening Scott, *Gladiator* (2000)

Thurs., March 4 Fradley, "Maximus Melodramaticus" (AA 235-51)
Clips: Schumacher, *Falling Down* (1993); Fincher, *Fight Club* (1999)

Week 9: Buddies, Bad Guys, and Racial Politics

Tues., March 9 Gabbard, "Someone Is Going to Pay" (M 7-23)
Clips: Howard, *Ransom* (1996); Scott, *The Taking of Pelham 123* (2009)

Screening Donner, *Lethal Weapon* (1987)

Thurs., March 11 Wood, "Lynching Photography and the 'Black Beast Rapist'" (M 193-211)
Gates, "Always a Partner in Crime" (handout)
Clips: Pakula, *The Pelican Brief* (1993); Fincher, *Se7en* (1995); Fuqua, *Training Day* (2001)

Week 10: Spring Recess

Tues., March 16 No Classes

Thurs., March 18 No Classes

Week 11: The Other White Men

Tues., March 23 Miller, "James Bond's Penis" (M 243-56)
Holmlund, "Europeans in Action!" (AA 284-96)
Introduction to Essay #2
Clips: Arnold, *Bloodsport* (1988); Cameron, *Terminator 2* (1991);
Campbell, *Casino Royale* (2006)

Screening Scorsese, *Goodfellas* (1990)

Thurs., March 25 Baker & Vitullo, "Screening the Italian-American Male" (M 213-26)
Clips: Scorsese, *Raging Bull* (1980); Kotcheff, *First Blood* (1982); Vitale, *Kiss Me Guido* (1997)

Week 12: Male Bonding and Clashing

Tues., March 30 Wyatt, "Identity, Queerness, and Homosocial Bonding" (M 51-65)
Clips: Liman, *Swingers* (1996); Hamburg, *I Love You, Man* (2009)

No Screening

Thurs., April 1 No Classes: Easter Recess

Unit III: Crossing Over

Week 13: Subverting Gender Norms

Tues., April 6 **Essay #2 due**
Introduction to Research Paper

Screening Scott, *G. I. Jane* (1997)

Thurs., April 8 Williams, "Ready for Action" (AA 169-85)
Grant, "Man's Favorite Sport?" (AA 371-84)
Clips: Bigelow, *Point Break* (1991); Reitman, *Junior* (1994)

Week 14: Subverting Genre Norms

Tues., April 13 Eraso, "*Thelma and Louise*" (handout)
Clips: Scott, *Thelma and Louise* (1991); Jordan, *The Brave One* (2007)

Screening Lee, *Brokeback Mountain* (2005)

Thurs., April 15 Li, "From 'Nature's Love' to Natural Love" (handout)
Chamberlain & Somogyi, "'You Know I Ain't Queer'" (handout)
Clips: Haynes, *Far from Heaven* (2002)

Week 15: Women in Action

Tues., April 20 Hassel, "The 'Babe Scientist' Phenomenon" (CF 190-203)
Clips: de Bont, *Twister* (1996); Proyas, *I, Robot* (2004)

Screening West, *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* (2001)

Thurs., April 22 Waites, "Babes in Boots" (CF 204-20)
O'Day, "Beauty in Motion" (AA 201-18)
Clips: Tarantino, *Kill Bill: Vol. 1* (2003); Liman, *Mr. & Mrs. Smith* (2005)

Week 16: Men in Love

Tues., April 27 McCabe, "Lost in Transition" (handout)
Clips: Allen, *Annie Hall* (1977); Coppola, *Lost in Translation* (2003)

Screening Dobkin, *Wedding Crashers* (2005)

Thurs., April 29 McDonald, "Homme-Com" (handout)
Clips: Apatow, *The 40-Year-Old Virgin* (2005); Apatow, *Knocked Up* (2007)

Week 17

Mon., May 3 **Research Paper due by noon (leave in box on my office door--308A Palmer)**