

Popular Music, Gender, and Youth Culture
COM 305, Spring 2006
MW 3:00pm-5:30pm

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Course Overview

This course explores the cultural politics of popular music, gender and youth culture, with an emphasis on the relationship between musical meaning, cultural value, and social power.

Course readings are meant to challenge and familiarize students with a theoretical and practical understanding of the field of popular music and subcultural studies.

For instance, what set of criteria — aesthetic, ethical, political — should be used to evaluate popular music? Furthermore, what is popular music and how are relationships between the margins and the mainstream articulated? We will interrogate the social, cultural, and political significance of popular-music styles and subcultures such as punk, disco, and hip-hop. What is the relationship between music and style? In what ways does gender impact the development of and women's participation in subcultures and music-making? Lastly, we will examine the dynamic interplay between technology and popular-music production, distribution, and consumption.

Requirements

1. You are required to come to class having read the material on the syllabus for that day with textbooks in hand. Failure to do so will result in a failing participation grade.
2. You are required to complete all assignments on time. Assignments are due at the beginning of class on the assigned date. If you cannot meet a deadline please see me to discuss the issue BEFORE the due date.
3. You are required to participate in class by raising questions and engaging in thoughtful and respectful discussions with your classmates. This also includes being mindful and quiet while others are talking. I do not tolerate any talking while someone else has the floor. If you engage in this sort of behavior you will be asked to leave the class.
4. You are required to get to class on time. If you need to leave early please notify the instructor before or at the beginning of class on that day.
5. As far as email is concerned, you are required to correspond with the course instructor using only your wmich email address.

Required Course Textbooks

- Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin's *On Record* (OR)
- Timothy D. Taylor's *Strange Sounds: Music, Technology, and Culture* (SS)
- Jennifer Baumgardner, Amy Richards, Mina Carson, and Tisa Lewis *Girls Rock! Fifty years of women in rock*
- Course pack (available at WMU bookstore)

- In-class screenings and listenings

Accommodations

I would like to hear from anyone who has a disability which may require some modification of seating, testing, or other class requirements so that appropriate arrangements may be made. Please contact me PRIVATELY during my office hours.

Assignments and Expectations

Artifact Presentation and Paper (in groups of 3)	200 points
Daily Questions/Critiques	200 points
Midterm Exam	250 points
Final Exam	250 points
Participation (in class contributions and attendance)	100 points
TOTAL	1000 points

Course Breakdown

Artifact Presentation and Paper 20% (10% each)

Working in a group of three, you will give a 15-20 minute class presentation based on a song or album, video clip or World Wide Web site, newspaper/magazine article or image, music technology or musical instrument, article of clothing or fashion accessory, or other artifact related to popular music, gender, or youth culture. The bulk of your presentation should be devoted to explaining how your artifact illustrates, extends, or challenges the main concepts, claims, and conclusions expounded in a specific course reading. A five-page paper (typed, double-spaced, with a 10- or 12-point font and one-inch margins) that briefly summarizes the author’s argument, rationalizes your choice of artifact, and elucidates its connections with the reading is due on the day of your presentation. If you do not show up on the day of your presentation, you will *not* have the opportunity to give your presentation at a later date (a properly documented, university-approved absence being the one exception). Papers turned in late will be penalized one full grade per day (e.g., from B to C), including weekends. Unless I agree in advance to your extenuating circumstances, there will be no legitimate excuses for late work, including “printer trouble” or “disk errors.” I do not accept email attachments. Hard copies only.

Daily Questions/Critiques 20%

At the beginning of every class period you will turn in one of the following for **one** of the readings for that day: either 5 thought provoking questions or a 1-2 page critique of **one** of the articles. If your last name begins with A-M you will turn in questions on Monday and critiques on Wednesday of each week. If you last name begins with N-Z you will turn in questions on Wednesday and critiques on Monday.

How to Write Thoughtful Questions

Your questions should demonstrate and encourage critical thinking. Below are some suggestions for writing good questions. The list is merely a starting point, not definitive.

- * Questions that are open ended
- * Questions that dig for inconsistencies and contradictions
- * Questions that require breaking the whole into parts (analysis)

- * Questions that identify the biases of an author
- * Questions that require clarification, evidence, reasoning
- * Questions that require a fair and rational evaluation of another viewpoint
- * Questions that dig for inconsistencies and contradictions

How to Critique an Article

An analytic or critical review of an article is not primarily a summary; rather, it comments on and evaluates the work in the light of specific issues and theoretical concerns in a course. Thus, your article critiques will be graded based on your ability to answer the following questions:

1. Does the author state an explicit thesis? What argument is the article trying to make?
2. Identify key elements, concepts or ideas and discuss why they are important.
3. Critique any strengths or weaknesses in the article and state your reasons for this opinion.
4. What exactly does the work contribute to the overall topic of the course?

Attendance and Participation 10%

Do not take this portion of your grade lightly. In order to earn an A in this course, you must do all of the following on a regular basis.

- Complete all assigned readings prior to the class period in which they will be discussed.
- Prepare questions, viewpoints, or examples to contribute to the discussion.
- Participate fully in discussions, neither dominating nor allowing others to carry the intellectual load.
- Pay attention to what you hear/see about popular music in the media and share that information with the class.

There is a formal attendance policy for this class. Because of the compacted nature of a summer course it is very important that you attend every class. **One** class is equal to **one week** of class during the fall and winter semesters. As such, points will be deducted for every missed class.

Midterm Examination 25%

Final Examination 25%

Course Schedule and Readings

Week 1 **Unit I: Historical Context/Theoretical Approaches to Studying Popular Music**

May 8 Introductions; Reisman, Listening to Popular Music (OR)
 May 10 Hall & Whannel, The Young Audience (OR)
 Adorno, On Popular Music (OR)
 Willis, P. "The Golden Age" (OR)

Week 2 **Unit II: From Subcultural to Cultural Studies**

May 15 Hebdige, D. "Style as Homology and Signifying Practice" (OR)
 Hebdige, D. "Style as Intentional Communication", Ch. 7 in *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (course pack)

Clark, "Defending Ski-Jumpers: A critique of theories of youth subcultures"
(OR)

May 17 Straw, W. "Characterizing Rock Music Culture: The case of heavy metal" (OR)
Grossberg, L. "Is there rock after punk?" (OR)
McRobbie, "Settling Accounts with Subcultures" (OR)
Clark, D. The Death and Life of Punk: The last subculture (course pack)

Week 3

May 22 **Unit III: Music and Sexuality**

Dyer, "In Defense of Disco" (OR)
Straw, "The Case of Heavy Metal" (OR)
Frith & McRobbie, "Rock and Sexuality" (OR)

May 24 **midterm** (first half of class)

Second half: **Making It—women in the business**
Screenings—Life of a Hip Hop Dancer
Confessions of a Video Vixen (course pack)

Week 4

May 29 No Classes – Memorial Day

May 31 **UNIT IV: The Politics of Gender and Place/Space**

Hip Hop: Rose, "A Style Nobody Can Deal With" (course pack)
Gaunt, "Dancin' in the Street to a Black Girl's Beat" (course pack)
Lipsitz, "The Hip Hop Hearings" (course pack)

Week 5

June 5
Rock Bayton, How Women Become Musicians (OR)
Straw, W. Sizing up Record Collections (course pack)
Girls Rock!

June 7 Girls Rock!

Week 6

June 12 Girls Rock!
June 14 Girls Rock!

Week 7 **Unit VI: The Politics of Technology**

June 19 **Technologies/Techniques of Production and Consumption**
Taylor, "Music, Technology, Agency, and Practice" (SS)
Taylor, "Men, Machines, and Music in the Space-Age 1950s" (SS)
Listening: NPR's *TechnoPop* (parts 1-5)

June 21

Sampling at Home: Practices, policies and property

Goodwin, Sample and Hold (OR)

Negativland, "Fair Use" <http://www.negativland.com/fairuse.html>

Listening: NPR's *TechnoPop* (part 6), Beastie Boys, Negativland

Week 8

June 26

Sampling Afar

Taylor, "A Riddle Wrapped in a Mystery" (SS)

Taylor, "Music at Home, Politics Afar" (SS)

June 28

Final Exam