

Gender and Sexuality in Comics
DePauw University
First-Year Seminar (S&A 197SB)
Fall 2014

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or by appointment

Course description:

Comic books have been a part of American culture for a century. As cultural artifacts, they tell us a great deal about what is important in our culture (and to whom it is important). The goal of this course is to examine the ways in which comic books and graphic novels portray gender and sexuality in contemporary and complex ways. We will pay attention to how gender, sexuality, race, and ethnicity are represented in comic books and are shaped by the historical context and personal experiences of the authors. We will be reading a range of comic books, graphic novels, and excerpts from popular press books.

A word on comic books: Comic books have a notorious reputation of being seen as “kids’ stuff” or “low art.” In this seminar we will take a serious, analytical look at comic books, examining them as social, historical, literary, and artistic texts that portray and critique very real and serious themes and events.

Course objectives:

- To learn and understand the language of comics.
- To understand the social and historical growth and variety of comics.
- To develop an awareness of the intersections of race, class, gender and sexuality in the comic art and stories.
- To examine and practice different types of academic writing.
- To develop and utilize critical writing, discussion, and analytical skills.
- To orient and assist in the transition to college-level work and academic life.

Required readings:

- Bechdel, Alison. 2006. *Fun Home: A Tragicomic*. New York: Mariner
- Brown, Chester. 2011. *Paying for It: A comic-strip memoir about being a john*. Drawn and Quarterly: Montreal, Quebec.
- Graff, Gerald and Cathy Birkenstein. 2010. *They Say, I Say*. (2nd edition). New York: W. W. Norton
- Kalesniko, Mark. 2001. *Mail Order Bride*. Seattle: Fantagraphics Books.
- McCloud, Scott. 1994. *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Satrapa, Marjane. 2003. *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood*. New York: Pantheon.
- Seagle, Steven and Teddy Kristiansen. 2004. *It's a Bird...* New York: DC Comics.
- Thompson, Craig. 2003. *Blankets*. Top Shelf.

Several readings for the course will be available in a Moodle site.

I will distribute single copies of comic books that pertain to different topics during the semester. These are from my personal collection, used for teaching purposes. Please do not lose or damage them.

Course requirements:

1. Daily Preparation, Attendance, and Participation (30 points): Class participation, which means active and thoughtful involvement in the class discussions and activities, is an important part of your grade. A seminar is a learning environment in which the priority is the discussion of course materials. While I will give some lecture during the semester, I see my primary role as the facilitator of class discussion. As members of a small seminar, the success of the class on any given day depends on the preparation of all members. Writing up your thoughts about the readings contributes to this process because you enter into the discussion with a clear idea of questions and comments. Therefore, you should be prepared to comment, critique, or raise questions about the readings. Your attendance is essential for this portion of your grade.

Like every first-year seminar, this course is the first tier of the writing curriculum at DePauw University. We will be deliberate in our attention to, and practice of, writing. To that end, we will spend time in and out of class discussing, revising, sharing, and strengthening your writing skills to prepare you for college-level expectations. Attentive and constructive participation in these activities constitutes part of your participation grade.

2. To aid in class discussion and group work, we will use the social bookmarking tool Diigo (10 points) to post, annotate, share and discuss online materials such as academic and pop culture articles, YouTube videos, cartoons, historical documents and more. Each student will be assigned to a group that is required to post materials to Diigo before 9pm the day before class (Sunday, Tuesday, Thursday). Each group member should post at least one item with relevant insights for their assignment. Class members should respond, comment or otherwise engage in dialogue about those posts. Everyone in the class is responsible for checking and responding thoughtfully to Diigo entries. Like Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest or Tumblr, checking Diigo should be easy to do. The minimum requirement for responding is once per week, although I would like to see more than that from each student. At the same time, one insightful post is better than several unrelated junky posts. I will announce Diigo discussion topics in class. These topics will serve as in-class activities or short homework assignments. Diigo participation and short writing assignments will be assessed on their critical insight and connection to course topics.

My goal is that class members will supply relevant, insightful research, information or examples that we can critique, connect and apply to the course and beyond. The larger goal is that we will create a learning community where we share information and resources—relevant tags (or keywords) will help us achieve this. This is a rubric for social bookmarking, for examining the process of recording and remembering key sites and URL's. The activity is in its simplest form at **remembering** level but as we add detail, explanations and structure it advances into **understanding**.

Level	Bookmarking
1	The user adds site to Bookmarks (Firefox, Chrome) or adds URL to social bookmarking site. The user does not add tags (keywords) or comments. These locally stored bookmarks lack structure or organization.
2	The user adds a site to the Bookmarks. The bookmarks are organized into appropriately-named folders. Or the user adds the URL to social bookmarking site. The user sometimes adds either tags or comments. The resources are added regardless of their validity or connection to course content or topics.
3	The user adds URL to a social bookmarking site. The student adds tags or comments. Tags are mostly well-constructed and suitable keywords. There is some shared/common use of tags (e.g. singular and plural keywords). There is some limited filtering on basis of validity to the course and unique disciplinary background (attempts validation). The comments or notes are simple. The user shares the bookmark with all members of their network
4	The user adds URL to a social bookmarking site and adds detailed, insightful comments and appropriate tags. The comments summarize the resource well and there is consistent use of shared/common tags with solid connection and validity to the course content and disciplinary background. The student shares the bookmark with appropriate members of their network.

2. Essays (30 points each, plus presentation 10 points): During the semester we will write three formal essays. The first essay will address “Why the world doesn’t need Superman.” The second essay will examine different perspectives on prostitution and sex work. Students will be assigned a perspective on this topic and critique Chester Brown’s arguments for the legalization of prostitution in *Paying for It*. For the third essay, we will examine the themes of childhood/adolescence or identity development through graphic novels and social science research. I will distribute instructions for these assignments in class.

3. Midterm Take-Home Exam (30 points): There will be a take-home midterm exam that covers significant concepts and ideas from the first half of the semester.

4. Final Project (50 points): You will be required to complete a final project related to the course content. The format and topic of the final project will be fairly open and creative, ranging from a standard research paper to the detailed conceptualization of your own comic book. I will hand out instructions for this assignment in class.

Add it up:	Daily Participation and Preparation	30 points
	Diigo	10 points
	Why the World Doesn’t Need Superman	30 points
	Prostitution/Sex Work essay and group presentation	40 points
	Childhood and Adolescence essay	30 points
	Midterm Take-Home Exam	30 points
	Final Project	50 points
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	Total:	220 points

Grading scale:

94-100% = A	80-83 = B-	67-69 = D+
90-93 = A-	77-79 = C+	64-66 = D
87-89 = B+	74-76 = C	60-63 = D-
84-86 = B	70-73 = C-	0-59 = F

Grading criteria:

These criteria apply to all writing assignments and correspond to the percentages above.

A- to A: means that the piece successfully captured the main points of the readings and that they were connected to the assignment. The paper illustrates clear and relevant insights and understanding and shows that the writer thought carefully about what he or she was going to write. The paper is exceptionally thought-provoking, original, and lucid in content and organization. The paper has something to say, and says it clearly and gracefully to an appropriate audience; it is supported fully by sources and appropriate examples. This grade also indicates exceptional writing skills in terms of clarity, grammar, and punctuation.

B- to B+: means that the piece accurately captured the main points of the readings and that they were connected to the assignment. The paper illustrates that the writer thought about the readings (and what they meant) and that he or she made an attempt to connect it to course concepts and issues. The paper is solid and well-organized but not striking; the writer has a definite point to make and makes it in an organized and competent way. This grade also demonstrates good writing skills in terms of clarity, grammar, and punctuation.

C- to C+: means that the piece did not quite capture the main points of the readings accurately and/or didn’t attend carefully to the requirements of the assignment. It seems from the piece that the writer did not understand the readings and/or think carefully about linking it to course concepts and issues. The content and organization is weak, fuzzy, or illogical. Examples are given for their own sake or to demonstrate that the writer read the text, not to make a point. This grade may also indicate writing problems in terms of clarity, grammar, and punctuation.

D- to D+: means that the paper shows blatant inaccuracies regarding the readings, the writer did not complete part of the assignment, and/or that writing problems impede my ability to understand the piece. The paper is much shorter than the assigned length and appears as though there isn't a point to the paper. This grade may also indicate serious writing problems in terms of clarity, grammar, and punctuation.

F: means that the paper is plagiarized in part or as a whole (see Academic Integrity Policy below), or it shows general weaknesses even graver than those of a D paper.

Course policies:

Consistent tardiness and unexcused absences will negatively affect your final grade. Excused absences must be discussed with me in advance, and that does not guarantee your absence will be excused.

All writing assignments must be sent/turned in on their announced due dates. Without a reasonable excuse discussed with me in advance, failure to turn in assignments on time will result in a three-point reduction in the score per class day late. I will not accept late overnight, take-home assignments.

You are responsible for material discussed and/or assigned when you are absent. If you are absent, contact a classmate to double check reading or homework assignments.

We will use laptop computers almost daily for in-class discussions and activities. Please bring it to class. If there is no obvious reason for you to be using your laptop, resist the temptation: keep it closed. I can tell when students are reading email or dinking around. I will call you out.

Academic accommodations:

DePauw University is committed to providing equal access to academic programs and university administered activities with reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities, in compliance with the Americans With Disabilities Act and Amendments (ADAAA). If you feel need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability or learning challenge is encouraged to contact Pamela Roberts, Director of Student Disability Services and ADA Compliance for further information on how to receive accommodations and support. Student Disability Services is located at 408 S. Locust Street, suite 200, in The Memorial Student Union Building ([765-658-6267](tel:765-658-6267)).

Academic integrity:

I will not tolerate academic dishonesty (and you shouldn't either). Cheating, plagiarism, presenting another person's work as your own, etc. violates DePauw University's policy on academic integrity and will result in penalties ranging from a zero on the assignment to course failure or expulsion. Presenting your own work as something new (i.e., "recycling" a paper from another course) is also unacceptable. See the policy and discussion of students' obligations and rights in the Student Handbook. Be sure to follow guidelines for proper citation of sources in your writing. If you are unsure what constitutes plagiarism, representing another's work as your own, "recycling," etc., see me.

Course Schedule (tentative)

Aug. 27	Introductions and Course Overview Introduction to Diigo
Aug. 29	<i>They Say/I Say</i> , Preface and Introduction, Ch. 12 Comic book autobiography – typed and bring it to class.
Sept. 1	<i>Understanding Comics</i> McCloud: Introduction, Chap. 1 <i>They Say/I Say</i> , Ch. 1
Sept. 3	McCloud Chap 2
Sept. 5	McCloud Chaps. 3-4
Sept. 8	Kalesniko, <i>Mail Order Bride</i> , pp. 1-50
Sept. 10	McCloud Chaps. 5-6
Sept. 12	Kalesniko, pp. 51-146
Sept. 15	McCloud Chaps. 7-end <i>They Say/I Say</i> , Ch. 2 Summarizing
Sept. 17	Kalesniko, pp. 148-end
Sept. 19/22 (Moodle)	Gershick and Miller, “Coming to Terms: Masculinity and Physical Disability” <i>They Say/I Say</i> , Ch. 3 Quoting
Sept. 24/26	Seagle and Kristiansen. <i>It’s a Bird...</i> (Focus on Steven Seagle’s story)
Sept. 29- Oct. 1	Seagle and Kristiansen. <i>It’s a Bird...</i> (Focus on the stories about Superman) Lane, “Why the World doesn’t Need Superman” (Moodle) <i>They Say/I Say</i> , Ch. 4 Three Ways to Respond
Oct. 2	Final draft of essay due to peer reviewers by noon
Oct. 3	In-Class Peer Editing Reading assignment: classmates’ essays.
Oct. 6	Why the World Doesn’t Need Superman Due
Oct. 8/10/13	<i>Prostitution and Sex Work</i> Weitzer, “The Sociology of Sex Work” Lutnick and Cohan, “Criminalization, Legalization, and Decriminalization of Sex Work”
Oct. 15/17 (Moodle)	Hough, “Sodomy and Prostitution: Laws Protecting the ‘Fabric of Society’”

(Moodle) Ferguson, "Sex War: The Debate between Radical and Libertarian Feminism"
They Say/I Say, Ch. 5, 6

Take-home Midterm Due (Oct. 17)

Oct. 20-24 Fall Break

Oct. 27/29/31 Brown, *Paying for It*
They Say/I Say, Ch. 7
Youtube video: Brown reading and interview – all parts.
Last day to withdraw from a class with grade of W (Oct. 31)

Nov. 3/5 **In-Class Group Presentations**
They Say/I Say, Ch. 8, 9, 10

Nov. 7 Creating Comics Workshop: Troy Cummings
Position Paper Due

Nov. 10/12/14 Satrapi, *Persepolis*
They Say/I Say, Chap. 17, Writing in the Social Sciences
Merten. "The Meaning of Meanness: Popularity, Competition, and Conflict among Junior High School Girls." (Moodle)

Nov. 17 – 24 Gardiner. "Queering Genre: Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home*." (Moodle)
Bechdel, *Fun Home*

Nov. 26/28 No class. Thanksgiving

Dec. 1/3/5 Thompson, *Blankets*

Dec. 8/10 *They Say/I Say*, Chap. 16, Writing in the Sciences
Loyd, et. al. "Quantifying free-roaming domestic cat predation..."
(Distribute in class)

Dec. 12 Wrap up and Conclusions
Adolescent Identities in Comics Essay Due

Dec. 18 **Final Project Due Noon**