

WOMEN, GENDER, AND FILM: Gender Performance in Science Fiction

WGSS 2217

Fall 2023

M (Section 013)/W (Section 014) 5-8 PM

MCHU 302

Instructor: Davina Mae Barbee (she/her/hers)

Office: MAN 217 (no elevator) or online at <https://uconn-cmr.webex.com/meet/deb20010>

Office hours are by appointment.

Email: davina.barbee@uconn.edu (Please allow 24 hours for a response, excluding weekends and breaks.)

Course Description

“The only thing I do know is that we have to be kind. Please, be kind. Especially when we don’t know what’s going on.”

-Waymond Wang, *Everything Everywhere All At Once*

Gender is one of the most important social identifiers one can have. There are many identities that encompass gender, but at the end of the day one’s gender impacts so many outcomes and disparities in society. Gender is an important category of study and tells us a lot about not only gender studies, but also about identities, social organization, and human behavior. This course aims to analyze gender relations through the usage of film. Media depictions of gender heavily influence how gender is organized in society. For instance, when you look at advertisements for underwear brands, what do female bodies look like? What about male bodies? What are both men and women doing in these advertisements? Where do you think all of these depictions come from? This is just one example of how the media not only creates gender norms, but also reinforces gender relations. Film is an important media tool to help reinforce these ideas, and this course will look at using film to see how these relations are created as well as challenged.

This semester, we are specifically looking at how science fiction replicates gender norms and relations. Historically, science fiction has had an interesting relationship with gender. As a genre, it has not only introduced traditional understandings of gender, but it has also challenged these traditions. Science fiction allows for infinite possibilities for understanding gender identities, presentations, and relations. Yet, the representation of all genders has had a troubled history that modern science fiction movies are trying to correct. Why is this the case in a genre where there are no rules? What is the troubled past with science fiction? How has the genre evolved from problematic depictions of gender into the films we see today? And finally, what does science fiction have to say about how gender is organized in society? These are questions that this course is attempting to answer.

You may have preconceived ideas about how gender is organized in society. I encourage you to challenge these throughout the course. In doing so, I am not suggesting that this is the only acceptable way to understand how gender operates in society. This course is merely one interpretation of that. I encourage you to look beyond this course if you are intrigued about some of the ideas we discuss here. I am more than happy to provide recommendations for which direction to follow in your journey to understanding how gender relations operate in society. I’m excited to work with you, and welcome aboard!

Course Objectives

“Sex, yes; sexism, no.”

-Ira Levin, *The Stepford Wives*

This course satisfies Content Area 1 (Arts and Humanities) and Content Area 4 (Diversity and Multiculturalism) in the General Education Requirements. Information about CA 1 from the UConn Undergraduate Catalog is listed below:

“Arts and Humanities courses provide a broad vision of artistic and humanist themes. These courses enable students themselves to study and understand the artistic, cultural and historical processes of humanity. They encourage students to explore their own traditions and their places within the larger world so that they, as informed citizens, may participate more fully in the rich diversity of human languages and cultures.”

And information about CA 4 is listed below:

“In this interconnected global community, individuals of any profession need to be able to understand, appreciate, and function in cultures other than their own. Diversity and multiculturalism in the university curriculum contribute to this essential aspect of education by bringing to the fore the historical truths about different cultural perspectives, especially those of groups that traditionally have been under-represented. These groups might be characterized by such features as race, ethnicity, gender, sexual identities, political systems, or religious traditions, or by persons with disabilities. By studying the ideas, history, values, and creative expressions of diverse groups, students gain appreciation for differences as well as commonalities among people.”

In addition to achieving CA 1 & 4, by the end of this course students will be able to:

- Explain how gender relations are portrayed through film
- Identify key feminist themes as they play out in daily life through the context of film
- Exercise analytical awareness when analyzing gender relations through film
- Exhibit critical judgment when engaging with articles, news, and other information sources
- Provide critiques for how gender is organized in society and how this is portrayed through the usage of film

Course Grading

“Hope is like the sun. If you only believe it when you see it, you’ll never make it through the night.”

-Princess Leia, *Star Wars Episode VIII: The Last Jedi*

The table below reflects the letter grades possible in this course as well as the numeric grade required to obtain each letter grade:

A	93-100	C	73-76
A-	90-92	C-	70-72
B+	87-89	D+	67-69
B	83-86	D	63-66
B-	80-82	D-	60-62
C+	77-79	F	0-59

Note: I round all grades to the nearest whole number (either up or down).

Assignments

“‘You’d be amazed how much research you can get done when you have no life whatsoever. Twelve hours a day, seven days a week, is a lot of study time.’”

-Wade, Ready Player One

All assignments should generally be submitted by the due date. However, if an extension is needed, feel free to email me with the name of the assignment you need an extension for as well as the date you will be able to submit the assignment by. After that, I will expect the assignment to be submitted by the proposed deadline.

Please allow one week for grades to be input for the assignment, with extra time for those granted extensions. Assignments without an extension that are submitted one week after the deadline will not be accepted. Details about the assignments are listed below:

Weekly Discussion Posts (10%, due by 11:59 PM the night after class)

Each week, you will respond to the movie on the corresponding discussion board. Your job is to respond to the prompt in kind. Responses should be appropriate and engage in some type of discussion with everyone. The two (2) lowest discussion grades will be dropped. Responses are due the day after the movie viewing (Tuesday for section 13, Thursday for section 14). The guidelines for discussion posts are as follows:

- A clear, well-written 100-250 word response to the question.
- References to the course materials provided for the week.
- A general air of respect for classmates. No name-calling, instigating, or playing “devil’s advocate” in the discussion posts. These posts are meant to foster engaging discussion about the week’s topic.

- A response to another classmate's post consisting of at least 100 words that refers to at least one of the course materials that fosters a conversation with the poster. (I.e. don't just say "I agree" and move on.)

Weekly In-Class Activities (10%, due during class)

Each week, there will be an in-class activity that relates to the film. These will look differently each week. Some weeks will require you to work in groups. Other weeks will require you to respond to a prompt and share with the class. Sometimes you'll be creating something for the course. The goal of these in-class activities is to give you a deeper understanding of the weekly topic and connect back to the film in some way. Information on these activities will be provided at each class. The two (2) lowest grades in this category will be dropped.

Three Movie Reviews (30%, due at the end of each unit)

Throughout the course, you will produce three movie reviews that reflect on a movie. You'll analyze its themes, what it says about gender, and give a critique on what the movie could improve upon. Reviews should be organized as such:

- A short summary of the plot.
- A score from 1-5 stars for the movie and a justification for the score.
- An analysis of the themes presented in the movie.
- How the movie depicts gender relations. (You can combine this with the themes if applicable.)
- A critique of what the movie excels at and/or could improve upon.

You will provide one review for a movie in each unit, due at the end of said unit. So a review for a movie in Unit 1 would be due at the end of Unit 1, and so on. Each review should be 3-5 pages in length and have an appropriate amount of sources that connect back to the course. A rubric will be provided shortly before the first movie review is due.

Final Project (50%, due TBA)

This class does not have a final exam, but rather a final project you will compete for one movie we cover in this course. Because of the scope of this project, we will break this down into smaller parts, as broken down below. More details on each step will be provided.

1. Movie & Topic Selection (5%): A one-paragraph description of a topic you want to explore for the final project as well as the movie you would like to analyze. Due at the end of Unit 1.
2. Initial proposal (10%): A more formal proposal of what your project will entail. Maximum two pages. Due Week 8.
3. Project workshop (10%): An in-class workshop to work on your project and share ideas with other students, as well as seek insight from myself. Workshop will be on Week 13.
4. Final product (25%): The final product that you will submit to me. This will look different for everyone, and I will provide a general rubric to follow. Due date TBA.

University Writing Center

"You no trouble. Me, fifth element. Supreme being. Me protect you."

-Leeloo, *The Fifth Element*

All UConn students are invited to visit the University Writing Center for individualized tutorials. The Writing Center staff includes talented and welcoming graduate and undergraduate students from across the humanities, social sciences, and sciences. They work with writers at any stage of the writing process, from exploring ideas to polishing final drafts. Their first priority is guiding each student's revisions, so they frequently provide a sounding board for a writer's ideas, arguments, analytical moves, and uses of evidence. They can also work with you on sentence-level concerns, but please note that they will not proofread for you; instead, they will help you become a better editor of your own work. You should come with a copy of the assignment you are working on, a current draft (or notes if you are not yet at the draft stage), and ideas about what you want out of a session. Tutorials run 45 minutes and are free. You can drop in or make an appointment. For more information, please go to <https://writingcenter.uconn.edu>.

Academic Integrity

"Get away from her, you bitch!"

-Ellen Ripley, *Aliens*

In this course we aim to conduct ourselves as a community of scholars, recognizing that academic study is both an intellectual and ethical enterprise. You are encouraged to build on the ideas and texts of others; that is a vital part of academic life. You are also obligated to document every occasion when you use another's ideas, language, or syntax. You are encouraged to study together, discuss readings outside of class, share your drafts during peer review and outside of class, and go to the Writing Center with your drafts. In this course, those activities are well within the bounds of academic honesty. However, when you use another's ideas or language—whether through direct quotation, summary, or paraphrase—you must formally acknowledge that debt by signaling it with a standard form of academic citation. Even one occasion of academic dishonesty, large or small, on any assignment, large or small, will result in failure for the entire course and referral to Student Judicial Affairs. For University policies on academic honesty, please see UConn's Responsibilities of Community Life: The Student Code and the Office of Community Standards: <http://www.community.uconn.edu>

Students with Disabilities

"Unable to perceive the shape of you, I find you all around me. Your presence fills my eyes with your love. It humbles my heart, for you are everywhere."

-Giles, *The Shape of Water*

Students who need accommodations because of a disability are encouraged to meet with me privately early in the semester. Students should also contact the Center for Students with Disabilities as soon as possible to verify their eligibility for reasonable accommodations. For more information, please go to <http://www.csd.uconn.edu/>.

Course Outline

“Isn’t it strange, to create something that hates you?”
-Ava, *Ex Machina*

All course readings will be provided on HuskyCT and will be posted during the prior week’s course. Links to film trailers are embedded in the titles and any content warnings associated with each film are listed underneath the title. (Content warnings forthcoming after I watch each film.)

Date & Topic	Film	Assignment(s)
Unit 1: Defining Concepts, Early Representation & History		
Week 1 Introductions	None!	Read Syllabus Group Activity 1
Week 2 Gendered Beginnings	<i>Forbidden Planet</i> CW:	Discussion Post 1
Week 3 Early Gendered Depictions/Tropes	<i>Barbarella</i> CW:	Discussion Post 2
Week 4 Early Gendered Depictions/Tropes	<i>Star Wars: A New Hope</i> CW:	Discussion Post 3
Week 5 Early Female Action Heroes	<i>Aliens</i> CW:	Discussion Post 4 Unit 1 Movie Review Project Topic & Movie due
Unit 2: Contemporary Representations & Issues		
Week 6 Gendered Division of Labor	<i>The Stepford Wives (2004)</i> CW:	Discussion Post 5
Week 7 Gender Presentation	<i>The Fifth Element</i> CW:	Discussion Post 6
Week 8 Gender & Technology	<i>Ex Machina</i> CW:	Discussion Post 7 Initial Proposal due
Week 9 Fandom and Virtual Spaces	<i>Ready Player One</i> CW:	Discussion Post 8
Week 10 Deconstructing Gender Norms	<i>Max Max: Fury Road</i> CW:	Discussion Post 9 Unit 2 Movie Review
Unit 3: Intersectional Representations		
Week 11 Disability & Otherness	<i>The Shape of Water</i> CW:	Discussion Post 10

Week 12 Afrofuturism & Feminism	<i>Black Panther: Wakanda Forever</i> CW:	Discussion Post 11
Week 13: THANKSGIVING BREAK!!!		
Week 14 (De)Constructing Sexuality & Gender	<i>The Old Guard</i> CW:	Discussion Post 12 Project Workshop
Week 15 Asian-American Identities	<i>Everything Everywhere All at Once</i> CW:	Discussion Post 13 Unit 3 Movie Review
Final Project due TBA		

Extra Resources

"We don't get a say on how it ends, we never have. But we can control how we live."
-Andy, *The Old Guard*

[Purdue OWL MLA Citation Guide](#)

[How To Read a Scientific Paper](#)

[What is the purpose of science fiction stories?](#)

[From Boise State University: Why Study Gender](#)

[Transgender @ UConn: Display Names](#)

[UConn Policy Against Discrimination, Harassment, and Related Interpersonal Violence](#)

24-Hour Advice Nurse, 860-486-4700

Counseling & Mental Health Services Center, 234 Glenbrook Road, Unit 2011, 860-486-4705

Women's Clinic, Student Health Services, 234 Glenbrook Road, Unit 2011, 860-486-4837

Violence against Women Prevention Program (VAWPP), Women's Center, 4th Floor Student Union, 860-486-4738