COURSE TITLE:

Professor(s): Isabelle Langrock

Title: Digital Feminisms: Theory and Activism Online

Academic Year 2023/2024: Spring semester

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Does gender matter on the Internet? How does patriarchy, misogyny, and racism get coded into our digital tools? Is a feminist Internet possible? This course examines these questions and more through engagement with feminist scholarship from sociology, communication, and technology studies. Students will engage with key theories about the relationship between technology, power, and gender and consider how they are applied to describe various digital pursuits –from Instagram influencer labor to Google searches to data visualizations. As a class, we will investigate how feminist theory makes sense of our digital and technologically mediated world. The last third of the course pivots to reviewing feminism put into practice by communities of technologists, designers, and data scientists. Students will have the option to write a final paper about similar initiatives or to make a feminist digital project of their own.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

- *Students will trace the debates within the feminist movement and their application to and relationship with digital technologies.*

- *Students will identify and analyze complex socio-technical systems from a variety of perspectives.*

- *Students will critically assess the design and functioning of technical systems, especially as they apply to fixing social problems.*

- *Students will engage with, respond to, and respect differing viewpoints.*

CLASS SESSIONS

Session 1: Class Intros & Intro to Feminism(s)

We will discuss class organization and set expectations for the summer together. There will be a brief lecture on the major trends in feminist thought and plenty of times for any questions.

Read:

Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (2018). [Conclusion: A Killjoy Survival Kit]

David Bertrand, *The Rapid Rise of Online Feminism: A symptom of the surfacing of a fourth wave?* (2018). [Link]

Session 2: Techno-feminism

What does the internet have to do with feminism? What does feminism have to do with the internet? We will consider and distinguish technofeminism, cyberfeminism, and digital feminism and the many variations that have been proposed, debated, and existed over the history of the Internet. This session will require more reading than most, please prepare accordingly.

Read:

Judy Wajcman, *Technofeminism (2004)* [Selections TBA]

Catherine Knight Steel, *Digital Black Feminism* (2021) [Introduction].

Faith Wilding, *Where is the Feminism in Cyberfeminism?* (1998). [link]

Session 3: Conceptualizing gender inequality online: Gaps, Pipelines, and Glass Ceilings

Feminism, across its many variations, is a movement towards gender equality. In this session we will consider the many ways that inequality within technology and the internet has been investigated. We will pay close attention to how inequality is depicted and what this reveal (and obscures) about the path towards equity.

Read:

Astra Taylor and Joanne McNeil, *The Dads of Tech* in the Baffler (2014). [link]

Heather Ford and Judy Wajcman, '*Anyone can Edit', not everyone does: Wikipedia's Infrastructure and the Gender Gap* (2017) [link]

Mar Hicks, *A Feature, Not a Bug* (2017) [link]

Session 4: #MeToo and feminist activism

#MeToo is at this point probably synonymous with online feminism. First used in 2006 by the activist Tarana Burke, #MeToo went viral in 2017 following revelations of decades of sexual assault against the Hollywood executive Harvey Weinstein (and many other cases followed). Women and nonbinary people across the world joined together to document the extent of the abuse they have faced and the rare consequences for abusers. What was the role and impact of this movement? Where has it led? In this session we will look at the evolution of the #MeToo movement and consider where it has left us.

Read:

Sarah Jackson, Moya Bailey, and Brooke Foucault Welles, *#hashtagactivism: Networks of Race and Gender Justice* (2020) [Selections TBA]

Kaitlynn Mendes, Jessica Ringrose, and Jessalyn Keller, *#MeToo and the promise and pitfalls of challenging rape culture through digital feminist activism* (2018) [link]

Skim:

Sarah Jaffe, *The Collective Power of #MeToo*, (2018) [link]

Due Dates: Project Proposals Due

Session 5: Housework, care work, influencer work

The particular forms of work of women, often unpaid and frequently overlooked, has been fruitful ground for feminist theory. In this session, we will draw on feminist theory to understand the impact of technology like smart phones and social media and systems and the rise of the gig economy and influencers. We will look at different types of work: fashion influencers and care workers.

Read:

Julia Ticona and Alexandra Mateescu, *Trusted Strangers: Carework platforms' cultural entrepreneurship in the on-demand economy* (2018). [link]

Brooke Erin Duffy and Emily Hund, *"Having it all" on social media: Entrepreneurial femininity and self-branding among fashion bloggers* (2015) [link]

Tressie McMillan Cottom, *The Enduring, Invisible Power of Blond* (2023) in the New York Times Opinion Section [link]

Plus:

Bring in a post from social media (any platform, but it must be from a public "influencer's" account) that you think connects with this week's readings.

Session 6: Gender & Sex Online

Feminism has always been intimately concerned with the relationships between men and women, at both the macro social and institutional level but also in the personal. Yet the internet increasingly mediates our most intimate lives including who we meet and how we hook-up. In this session we will review the major "Porn Wars" of feminism from the 70s and 80s and how the Internet makes the same unresolved tensions within feminism more critical than ever while also offering new ways to explore, play with, and understand sex and sexuality.

Rena Bivens, *The gender binary will not be deprogrammed: Ten years of coding gender on Facebook* (2015) [link]

Catherine Barwulor, Allison McDonald, Eszter Hargittai, and Elissa M. Redmiles, *"Disadvantaged in the American-dominated Internet": Sex, Work, and Technology* (2021) [link]

Amia Srinivasian, *Talking to My students about Porn* in <u>The Right to Sex</u> (2022)

Session 7: The Backlash: Online Misogyny and Misogynoir

The Feminist movement remains a highly contested social movement, as do its digital variations. In this session we will consider the backlash against the rise of feminism online and how it has produced digitally mediated forms of patriarchy and misogyny. We will root our investigation of this in the case of Gamergate so please carefully review the background pieces below.

Sarah Banet Weiser, <u>Empowered</u> (2018) [selections TBA]

Adrienne Massanari, *#Gamergate and the Fappening: How Reddit's Algorithm, governance, and culture support toxic technocultures* (2016) [link]

Joseph Reagle, *Free as in sexist? Free Culture and the gender gap* (2012) [link]

Session 8: Artificial intelligence and algorithmic harms

AI systems are becoming more integrated into digital habits and the hype around AI becomes increasingly more encompassing. Like all technologies it enacts a politics through its design and use. Here we will consider the very real harms already existing in AI systems towards women and people of color and what this portends for the future of a feminist internet.

Read:

Joy Buolamwini and Timnit Gebru, *Gender Shades: Intersectional Accuracy Disparities in Commercial Gender Classification* (2018) [link]

Safiya Noble, *Algorithms of Oppression (*Introduction)

Skim:

Madalina Vlasceanu and David Amodia, *Propagation of societal gender inequality by internet search algorithms* (2022)

Tolga Bolukbasi et al., *Man is to Computer Programmer as Woman is to Homemaker? Debiasing Word Embeddingsi* (2016)

Due Dates: Annotated Bibliography Due.

Session 9: Design and the Feminist Future

For the last three sessions we turn towards what it might mean to build feminist digital technologies. For the first session, we consider design. We will look at how people have critiqued existing digital designs around gender and equality and the new practices being proposed.

Sasha Costanza-Chock, _Design Justice: Community Led Practices to Build the Worlds we Need_ (2020) [Chapter: Directions for Future Work: From #TechWontBuildIt to #DesignJustice]

Casey Fiesler, Shannon Morrison, Amy Bruckman, _An Archive of their Own: A Case Study of Feminist HCI and Values in Design_ (2016) [link]

Session 10: Data and the Feminist Future

For the second session of the future of feminist technologies, we consider how values become encoded in our data.

Read:

Catherine D'Ignazio and Lauren Klein, _Data Feminism_ (2020) [Selections TBA]

Marika Cifor, Patricia Garcia, TL Cowan, Jasmine Rault, Anita Say Chan, Jennifer Rode, Anna Lauren Hoffmann, Niloufar Salehi, and Lisa Nakamura. (2019) Feminist Data Manifest-NO [link]

ME Luka and Mélanie Millette, _(Re)Framing Big Data: Activating Situated Knowledges and a Feminist Ethics of Care in Social Media Research_ (2018) [link]

Look at, interact with, and otherwise examine:

Data visualizations by Mona Chalabi, The Pudding, etc (More TBA)

Session 11: Conclusion: A Feminist internet

Finally, for the third feminist future session we will turn to the classic, infinitely provocative essay, The Cyborg Manifesto, by Donna Haraway. We will consider the possible and radical utures of the internet and digital technologies that center the values of feminism.

Read:

Donna Haraway, _A Cyborg Manifesto_ (1985)

Ruha Benjamin, _Race after Technology: Abolitionist Tools for the New Jim Code_ (2019). [Selections TBD]

Session 12: Student Presentations

COURSE VALIDATION

The class will be graded based on the following :

- **Participation (10%)**

- o Due throughout class. This class will feature class discussion. This requires you to come to class prepared : having done the reading and participate in class discussions or group work.
- o Students should pay careful attention to the syllabus and note when extra materials are required for class (e.g. session 3 and session 5)
- o Students are expected to meet with me (either during office hours or scheduled at a different time as needed) at least once during weeks 1-4. This will count towards participation. My office hours can be booked here: https://isabellelangrock.youcanbook.me/

- **Project Proposal (10%)**
  - o A 1 page description of your final project. This should include:
    - ▪ Research Question or topic of investigation
    - ▪ At least 3 core academic citations
    - ▪ A brief description of your argument (paper) or project objective (project)
  - o Due at the beginning of Session 4
- **Annotated Bibliography/Synopsis (20%)**
  - o Identify and select at least 8 academic texts (books, peer reviewed articles, reports) that will be central to your final paper or project. These can include the 3 identified in your project proposal. Provide a brief summary of each text and description of how it informs your project (250 words max per text).
  - o Due at the beginning of Session 8
- **Presentation (20%)**
  - o Due at the beginning of session 12
- **Final Project (40%)**
  - o Students have two options, but are encouraged to be creative regardless of which final project they pick!
    - ▪ Approx. 3,000 word essay that examines and critiques a digital artifact, problem, or interest from the perspective of the theories and concepts we discuss in class.
    - ▪ A project that engages with both technology and feminist theory to investigate the relationship between the two. Perhaps a zine, perhaps a website, perhaps the (re)design of an existing object from a Data Feminist or Design Justice lens. Students are particularly encouraged to engage with the readings from session 9 and 10 in advance.
  - o Both final project options should be approved in advance, ideally during the project proposal stage where I will provide feedback and recommendations. If you change

topics or formats after the proposal stage, you must schedule a time to meet during office hours to discuss the change.

- o Due May 3rd (Tentative)

All four assignments will be reviewed more thoroughly during class session 1 and the weeks before each due date. Questions can be posed in class or anytime via email.

Late work, delivered after the deadline, will be penalized for every day it is late. If you need additional time to fulfill an assignment, please reach out to me before the deadline.

DISABILITY ACCOMMODATIONS

To benefit from Disability Accommodations and obtain an accommodation letter, please contact Sciences Po's Disability Services promptly at pole.handicap@sciencespo.fr. Accommodations are not retroactive. If you wish to receive accommodations in this class, you will need to provide me with the accommodation letter from Sciences Po's Disability Services. We will then discuss specifically how to meet your needs. Letters received with too short notice prior to an assessment do not guarantee you access to your accommodations.

ABSENCES

Attendance is mandatory and it is taken on a factual basis, in accordance with Science Po's Academic Rules and Regulations. If you are absent, you should inform me, but professors do not excuse absences. All absences, including those at rescheduled sessions, need to be justified with your academic office within 5 days of your absence with a medical note or equivalent official document from the date of your absence (backdated documents cannot be accepted). Extracurricular activities (work, conferences, internships, interviews, family celebrations, travel etc.) are not considered valid reasons to miss a session.

Students are required to be available for rescheduled sessions and assessments throughout the semester and until the last official day of the semester.

Academic Integrity

It is vital that all the oral and written work you hand in and complete in class be your own and produced for this course only. Cheating and plagiarism are serious offenses that will not be tolerated. If you have any questions or concerns about what cheating and plagiarism comprise, recheck the online Academic Integrity Module, all documents related to Academic Integrity provided by Sciences Po and in particular, the Academic Integrity Charter. Please see me as well if you need to clarify how it applies to this course and our assignments.

All written work needs to be submitted to my Urkund address (or via Moodle).

The use of Artificial Intelligence is not allowed in this class unless it is the subject of your final project. If this is the case, you should be prepared to note exactly how you will use and critique computer-generated work and you must receive approval of the professor.

Please use APA style citations for all assessments.