

# ***He, She, They, Them, Us: Teaching Gender Studies in a STEM Environment***

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## ***Course Description: Gender Studies at IMSA***

Gender Studies is an English elective at the Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy. Our syllabus reads: In this class we will analyze the causes and effects of sex differences in our society. We will begin with the essential debate: is biological difference or social modeling the principal factor in determining differences? Then, we will look more closely at the question through case studies. We will examine several readings that complicate the premises and assumptions of this debate. We also examine cultural modes that illuminate the context of this debate, including politics, cinematic and literary representations of the sexes, gender and finance, and questions of language use. The course catalyzes meaningful debate and calls on students to gather evidence and think about their own experiences with and beliefs about gender.

## ***NCSSS Session Description (November 7, 2019):***

In this session, we will share the importance of teaching Gender Studies as an English elective in a STEM school. We will introduce our curriculum, including biological and socially constructed theories of gender and how these inform gender-related legal and social challenges in our world. Areas of focus include the role of gender in: politics, sports, media, literature, and culture. Our aim is to share our experiences and course materials with other humanities teachers and discuss and strategize ways to eliminate gender bias in our own schools as well as prepare students for the post-secondary world.

## True/False Gender Quiz

*This is given the first week of class, since it touches on many of the areas of study that make up the Gender Studies curriculum.*

1. The 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, giving women the right to vote in America, was first proposed and rejected in 1878, then reintroduced every year for the next 41 years. In 1984, Mississippi became the last state to ratify it.
2. Approximately 1 million children in the U.S. are being raised by same-sex couples.
3. Feminists believe that women deserve more rights than men.
4. The women's suffrage movement sprung from the abolition movement.
5. In 1893, New Zealand became the first self-governing nation to give women a lasting right to vote. It did not, however, give women the right to hold office in Parliament.
6. Children who are raised by same-sex couples are more likely to be gay.
7. The first woman to run for the U.S. Presidency was did so before women could legally vote.
8. Until 1973, the American Psychiatric Association classified homosexuality as a mental disorder.
9. In countries around the world, women are more likely to be diagnosed with depression and to attempt suicide. However, men are 3.5 times more likely to die by suicide than women.
10. Wyoming was the first U.S. state to give women the right to vote. Women there had been voting since 1869 in Wyoming Territory, which only agreed to join the Union if this right was maintained. Congress threatened to deny statehood over the issue, but Wyoming wouldn't back down.
11. If someone is transgender, then they are also are gay.
12. The Harlem Renaissance was not only an important moment in African American history, but it also was a significant moment in the history of gay African Americans. Both black lesbians and gay men played a crucial role in the literary and musical renaissance that made Harlem famous in the 1920s.
13. Susan B. Anthony was the first American woman to ever appear on a U.S. postage stamp (1955).
14. In 1987, Delta Airlines apologized for arguing in plane crash litigation that it should pay less in compensation for the life of a gay passenger than for a heterosexual one because he may have had AIDS.
15. Women could not attend Harvard until 1977.
16. In 1933, President Franklin D. Roosevelt appointed the first female member of a presidential cabinet, Frances Perkins, as the Secretary of Labor.
17. In 1952, the United States Congress enacted a law banning lesbians and gay foreigners from entering the country. The law was on the books until it was repealed in 1990.
18. In 1963, the Equal Pay Act was signed prohibiting sex-based wage discrimination for both men and women.
19. Women were not permitted to enroll in U.S military academies until 1975.
20. For most of the twentieth century, many researchers associated homosexuality with upbringing. Freud, for example, postulated that overprotective mothers and distant fathers contributed to male homosexuality.
21. In the 1960s, a bank could refuse to issue a credit card to an unmarried woman; even if she was married, her husband was required to cosign. As recently as the 1970s, credit cards in many cases were issued with only a husband's signature.
22. It wasn't until 1973 that women could serve on juries in all 50 states.
23. Feminism has made women equal now, so there is no need for feminists or the current women's movement.

24. Worldwide, of all the people living in poverty, 70% are women.
25. In 1960, the pill was approved for use as a contraceptive, but was illegal in some states and could be prescribed only to married women for purposes of family planning.
26. The early mainstream Women's Rights Movement fought for equality for middle and upper class white heterosexual women, excluding women of color and lesbians.
27. Before 1978, a woman could be fired from her workplace if she was pregnant.
28. An estimated 1 million lesbians and gays are military veterans.
29. 1 in 3 women have experienced physical or sexual violence at some point in their lifetime.
30. There are now more women getting Bachelor's and Master's degrees than men. However, there are still gender disparities when it comes to more advanced degrees, which leads to fewer than 30% of the world's researchers being female.
31. Only 6.6% of Fortune 500 CEOs are women.
32. The overwhelming majority of mass shootings are committed by men.
33. Women have been surpassing men when it comes to completing post-high school education in most countries (77%) since 1990.
34. Women and men have equal rights in American society today.
35. Women were not allowed to run in the Boston Marathon until 1972.
36. 56 out of 146 nations in the world (38%) have had a female head of the government for at least one year in the past half of a century. Currently there are only 27 female heads of state.
37. It did not become illegal for a husband to force sex upon/rape his wife in all 50 states until 1993.
38. In 2018, Illinois Senator Tammy Duckworth was the first U.S. Senator to give birth while in office. Because of her the law was changed to allow children under one in the Senate chamber so that she could breastfeed her infant without missing a Senate vote.
39. In June 2011, California became the first state to pass a bill requiring public schools to teach the historical accomplishments of gay men and lesbians.
40. One in 1,000 young black men face fatal police violence — a rate 2.5 times greater than that of white men.
41. In 1920, the socially accepted rule was that pink clothing was more appropriate for boys, and blue for girls.
42. Although studies have shown that women are more religious than men (more likely to believe in God, pray daily, and regularly fill the seats at religious services) many churches, including many of the largest denominations in the United States, such as the Roman Catholic Church, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) and the Southern Baptist Convention, do not allow women to be ordained or hold top church leadership positions.
43. 46% of American women aged 18-35 identify as feminists, while only 34% of women over the age of 35 identifying the same way.
44. The academic field of Gender Studies is solely focused on how men and women are different from one another.

## Units of Study and Sample Readings

### ***Gender Foundations (2 weeks)***

- “X: A Fabulous Child’s Story” by Lois Gould
- “A Social Construction of Gender” from Thinking about Women: Sociological Perspectives on Sex and Gender
- Documentary Film: *The Mask You Live In* (by The Representation Project), 2015.
- “Sex Differences in Mind: Keeping Science Distinct from Social Policy” by Simon Baron-Cohen.
- “My Brief Life as a Woman” by Dana Jennings. *New York Times*, 2009.
- “Essentialism vs. Social Constructionism in the Study of Human Sexuality” by John D. DeLamater and Janet Shibley Hyde. *The Journal of Sex Research*.
- “The Science of Gender” by Barbara J. King. NPR. 2017.

### ***Power, Privilege and Inequality (4 weeks)***

- “What is Feminism, and Why Do So Many Women and Men Hate It?” by Kathy Caprino, *Forbes*. 2017.
- “Gender Bias and Sexism in Language” by Michela Menegatti and Monica Rubini.
- “Bring on the Female Superheroes”: Ted Talk by Christopher Bell.
- “Intersectional Feminism, Not ‘White Feminism,’ Will Strengthen the Women’s Movement” by Emma Oxnevad, *Chicago Tribune*.
- *The Power* by Naomi Alderman. Novel, 2017.

### ***LGBTQIA+ Issues and Rights (2 weeks)***

- LGBT Movement Timeline: <https://www.cnn.com/2015/06/19/us/lgbt-rights-milestones-fast-facts/index.html>
- *Fun Home* by Alison Bechdel, 2006.
- “Becoming Mr. Cougar” from C.J. Pascoe’s *Dude, You’re a Fag*, 2011.
- “National Coming Out Day” Editorials: [https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/its-time-to-end-national-coming-out-day/2017/10/10/a9db94ec-ad2b-11e7-9e58-e6288544af98\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/its-time-to-end-national-coming-out-day/2017/10/10/a9db94ec-ad2b-11e7-9e58-e6288544af98_story.html) AND [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/matthew-birkhold-national-coming-out-day\\_n\\_59de3cd2e4b04fc4e1ea92f3?ncid=inbInkushpmsg00000009](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/matthew-birkhold-national-coming-out-day_n_59de3cd2e4b04fc4e1ea92f3?ncid=inbInkushpmsg00000009)
- When Love Isn’t Enough: LGBT Housing Discrimination, YouTube. (video - 9 minutes)
- LGBT Challenges at work – (video)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yaFLvIpgauE&list=PLTtFJqT0V0xnHHp8tZ9wyLOQWRNLcIgRL&index=25>
- Connections between the Civil Rights and LGBTQ Movements: (video -15 minutes)  
[https://www.ted.com/talks/yoruba\\_richen\\_what\\_the\\_gay\\_rights\\_movement\\_learned\\_from\\_the\\_civil\\_rights\\_movement/discussion](https://www.ted.com/talks/yoruba_richen_what_the_gay_rights_movement_learned_from_the_civil_rights_movement/discussion)

### ***Gender in the Workplace (2 weeks)***

- “Women At Ernst & Young Instructed On How To Dress, Act Nicely Around Men.” Huffington Post, 21 October 2019.
- “Artificial Intelligence Has a Gender Problem—just ask Siri” by <https://theconversation.com/artificial-intelligence-has-a-gender-bias-problem-just-ask-siri-123937>. 2019.
- “Who Maps the World” by Sarah Holder, Citylab.com, 2018.
- “Google’s Ideological Echo Chamber” by James Damore,
- “Mindy Kaling says the TV academy tried to strip her of producer credit on ‘The Office’” by Christi Carras, *Los Angeles Times*, 2019.
- “Let’s Not Wait for the Next World Cup to Score Equal Pay for Women” by Eric Bachman, *Forbes* magazine, 2019.
- “The More Gender Equality, the Fewer Women in STEM” by Olga Khazan, *The Atlantic*, 2018.
- “Why Aren’t Mothers Worth Anything to Venture Capitalists?” by Jessica Winter, *The New Yorker*. 2017.
- “Why Gendered Medicine Can Be Good Medicine” by Rena Xu, *The New Yorker*, 2017.

### ***Gender & Politics (2 weeks)***

- *Finding Gender in Election 2016: Lessons from Presidential Gender Watch*. [https://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/resources/presidential-gender-gap-report\\_final.pdf](https://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/resources/presidential-gender-gap-report_final.pdf)
- “Power, Conflict, and Community: How Gendered Views of Political Power Influence Women’s Political Ambition” from the Harvard Kennedy School—Women and Public Policy Program
- “On Being a Woman in Politics” by Hillary Clinton, from her book *What Happened*.
- “The Price of Power: Power Seeking and Backlash Against Female Politicians.” From the Harvard Kennedy School—Women and Public Policy Program.
- “‘A Woman, Just Not that Woman’: How Sexism Plays Out on the Trail” by Maggie Astor, *New York Times*.
- “For Men’s Rights Groups, Feminism Has Come at the Expense of Men.” NPR. 2014.

### ***Reproductive Rights & Sexual Violence (3.5 weeks)***

- *The Handmaid’s Tale* by Margaret Atwood
- “A Brief History of Sexual Harassment in America Before Anita Hill” by Sascha Cohen.
- “Boys Often Don’t Recognize When They’ve Been Sexually Assaulted” by Peggy Orenstein, *The Cut*, 2018.
- “This is How Victim-Blaming Logic Would Play Out in Everyday Scenarios.” Videos in the *Huffington Post*. [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/this-is-how-victim-blaming-logic-would-play-out-in-everyday-scenarios\\_n\\_59ca5988e4b06ddf45fb4594](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/this-is-how-victim-blaming-logic-would-play-out-in-everyday-scenarios_n_59ca5988e4b06ddf45fb4594)
- “Sex, Lies and Politics: He Said, She Said” by Jill Smolowe. *Time Magazine*, 1991.

## **Sample Assessments: Paper Prompts, Presentations, Projects, and the Podcast**

### **Paper Prompt: Consequences of Difference: An Analysis of Norm Violation**

Your task begins with identifying a gender norm of some kind. However, instead of articulating the principal explanations for the norm, in this paper you will analyze a violation (or series of violations) of the norm. Who is breaking the norm, and how? You can think about a historical figure, a celebrity, a friend, or even your own experience. Be specific in your description of how the standard was broken: give telling details rather than a vague claim (“My friend James wore some women’s clothes one night in our hall” – well, what exactly did he wear? was he wearing it authentically or ironically, as a joke? how did he act while wearing the clothes?). Most importantly, analyze the consequences of the violation carefully. Did others notice? If so, how did they react? Did they respond with quiet acceptance, jeers, congratulation, outrage, uncomfortable stares? How was the norm-breaker treated by others? Did anyone actually mention the norm itself, whether openly or implicitly? Did their discussion of it seem to give shape/coherence to the norm? How did people talk about it? Did anyone invoke the theories of essentialism or constructionism in talking about the episode of norm breaking? (and, unless they were students in this class, they probably didn’t use E/C explicitly, but very possibly might have done so without articulating the terms exactly.)

Your situations and the amounts of available information will be incredibly varied. Some of you will be able to draw on news stories or other texts for responses to a famous norm-bending incident; others may have to rely on personal memory or quickly gather up notes about an event as it unfolds in real-time. Whatever event you choose, make sure that you know enough details to assess (through research or from memory) the social response to it.

Of course, in writing up this essay, you should not merely provide answers to the questions listed above, but rather craft a coherent argument about the response to the violation. In other words, what does the response to the norm-breaking tell you about the gender norm itself, the people who note the violation, or our society at large? If the guy in the dress in the male hall meets with surprised laughter, does that response indicate that some norms are too strong to bear breaking? Or might it mean that most people react nervously to norm bendings, but that they will likely accept the variation soon? Your essay needs to make a claim of some significance using the particular responses as evidence.

### **Paper prompt: *The Handmaid’s Tale***

While Margaret Atwood’s novel *The Handmaid’s Tale* imagines a dystopian future that even the author doubts could ever truly happen, Atwood claims that nothing from her 1986 novel was invented—all the events in the novel are drawn from actual events which occurred across the world. Doing a quick google search with terms such as “Handmaid’s tale now” or “modern day Handmaid’s Tale” yields a plethora of articles and examples—both before and after the Hulu television series premiered.

For your second essay, you will take an issue/rule/regimented behavior from Atwood’s novel, and find its modern-day equivalent—sort of a reverse-backwards engineering what Atwood herself did originally—using research and secondary sources as support. While your paper will be driven by your research, you should also seek to make an original argument—of which you have rather free rein to develop. You should detail the issue/rule/behavior from the novel, but assume your readers (myself and your classmates) are familiar with the book, so there’s no need to story tell with plot points.

### Paper prompt: Literary Analysis: The Lens of Gender Studies

For this essay your task is to analyze a piece of literature with regard to its representations of gender (and sex). Your literary piece must be a short story, a novel, or a poem that we have not read and will not read in class. Your assignment is to **develop an argument** about how that literary example represents gender. Your argument can be related to a wide variety of topics: traditional or looser gender roles, masculinity and/or femininity, declared or hinted causes (ie, nature or nurture) for gender differences, gender as a performance, interesting plot lines, the power of media in shaping expectations, among others. Your account should **set your text in conversation with one of our class readings**; your text might exemplify, complicate, challenge, or serve as an analogy for the concept you draw from (with a choice quotation) the class reading. You do not need to continually refer to or engage with the class reading throughout your argument, though you may do so; you may use the course reading just as a starting place if you wish. Also, please do not feel compelled to discuss all the ways that your piece portrays gender; rather, you should focus on one particular element that you see at work within the text (and you can mention the other parts in passing if they are relevant).

Your main task is to stake a claim about the way the novel, story, or poem presents an aspect of gender/sex, and to **back that claim up with textual evidence**. In other words, you will need to draw quotations from your story, poem, or book to support your argument. Your thesis should establish not only a claim, but also indicate some effects or implications of that claim: the “so what”? Why does it matter that *Harry Potter* illustrates traditional gender roles, or that “Cinderella” ties female virtue to slavish, back-breaking housework? Does *HP* thus seem less magical? Are we forced to rethink our cultural interest in hard-working princesses? Your essay should at least point toward some larger value for your claim.

### Paper Prompt: *The Power* (Choose ONE of the following prompts ):

1. "In her article, “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House,” Audre Lorde states, “For the master’s tools will never dismantle the house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change. And this fact is only threatening to those women who still define the master’s house as their only source of support” (27). Read Audre Lorde’s four page article referenced (posted on our class webpage). How does Audre Lorde’s interpretation of power relate to how power is presented in Alderman’s novel “The Power,” and how it changes over time? According to Lorde and Alderman, who should have the power and how can they get it?
2. In reading *The Power*, Naomi Alderman was inspired by current global events of the treatment of women. Analyze one of these events in the book, and research current or historical events surrounding it in a given society and look at how the fictional events in *The Power* connect to OR mirror real-life events. Pick one specific thing to focus on and make a connection between events in the novel and events in society (example: examine how men’s intellectual work is “stolen” by women in the novel, and how it connects it to women’s intellectual work being stolen/published under male names in history). Do not just go with a broad assertion (“Women don’t have as many rights in real life as they do in the novel”), because it will be too much to prove in 4-5 pages.
3. Each of the narrators (Allie, Margot, Tunde and Roxy) represent four pillars of power in society: politics, media/historical storytelling, money/capitalism and religion. None of these are inherently bad, but each can be misused to gain power and control the powerless. Choose one of these narrators and the pillar she/he represents and make an argument connecting the damage that is done or witnessed by this person/ideology in *The Power* to a similar misuse of power in our society. The more focused you can make your argument, the better—comparing Allie/Eve to a specific religious leader in today’s society (comparing how each uses and/or abuses power), would be an example of how this essay could be framed.

## Paper Prompt: Influences on Gender Essay

Choose one of the essay prompts written below and write a 3-5 page essay:

**Prompt 1:** For this essay your task is to choose a gender norm and weigh the possible causes for it, both biological and social. Your norm may be broad (male aggressiveness) or narrow (female eyebrow care). You may not be able to find direct information on your norm in the readings we've done or the podcast or film that you viewed/listened to, but **you should use examples our course assignments to cite types of evidence that "constructionists" and "essentialists" would look to in order to account for the norm.** In other words, you should think through what would count as evidence for each side, even if we have not covered the **exact** evidence you're seeking. What are the strengths and limitations of the evidence brought forth by each side? Given both possible accounts, indicate which one, or what combination of the two, makes sense to you and why.

Remember to think about ultimate, not just proximate, causes: that is, in the case of eyebrow care, dig deeper than "Well, some women want their eyebrows to look thin" or "They want to look good" (proximate causes) to underlying causes, reasons that explain *why* they want to look good (whatever that means). These are the reasons up for debate. Looking good might be a hormonal imperative or a social necessity, for example.

These debates can be confusing, so write as clearly and simply as you can. The clearest papers will use the thesis to name and briefly define the competing explanations for a specific norm; these sketches should be brief but still specific (e.g., "testosterone levels and mate attraction" are clear mechanisms while "biological factors" are not). Your thesis should also note which explanation, or combination of each, makes most sense to you. Further, you should organize your essay in sensible paragraphs; it is probably easiest and clearest, for example, to split the competing explanations into separate paragraphs. These paragraphs need strong topic sentences, of course. Just as the best thesis names each side and its key points clearly, each topic sentence should both frame the account ("says who?") and specify its key points of explanation ("media representations and parental influence" rather than "social constructs").

**Prompt 2:** As our reading has argued, gender roles of males in our society are more rigidly defined than the roles of females. Choose one or two ways in which this can be damaging and/or restrictive to males (and, perhaps, to society at large), and support your argument/explanation with examples from both our class reading/viewing/listening assignments as well as from at least two other outside sources. Feel free to bounce ideas off of me as you are narrowing in on a specific male gender expectation that you'd like to explore in more depth. In addition, I have a DVD of *The Mask You Live In* if anyone would like to check it out overnight (one night only so that it is available to other students).

## Paper Prompt: Gender Representation in Literature and/or the Media

### PROMPT 1: Literary Analysis: The Lens of Gender Studies

For this essay your task is to analyze a piece of literature with regard to its representations of gender (and sex). Your literary piece must be a short story, a novel, or a poem that we have not read and will not read in class. Your assignment is to **develop an argument** about how that literary example represents gender. Your argument can be related to a wide variety of topics: traditional or looser gender roles, masculinity and/or femininity, declared or hinted causes (ie, nature or nurture) for gender differences, gender as a performance, interesting plot lines, the power of media in shaping expectations, among others. Your account should **set your text in conversation with one of our class readings**; your text might exemplify, complicate, challenge, or serve as an analogy for the concept you draw from (with a choice quotation) the class reading. You do not need to continually refer to or engage with the class reading throughout your argument, though you may do so; you may use the course reading just as a starting place if you wish. Also, please do not feel compelled to discuss all the ways that your piece portrays gender; rather, you should focus on one particular element that you see at work within the text (and you can mention the other parts in passing if they are relevant). If the text that you choose does not connect well to one of our class readings and you'd like to use another outside source/article for support, you may do so **only if you check with me in advance for approval on the outside source.**

Your main task is to stake a claim about the way the novel, story, or poem presents an aspect of gender/sex, and to **back that claim up with textual evidence.** In other words, you will need to draw quotations from your story, poem, or book to support your argument.

Further: Your thesis should establish not only a claim, but also indicate some effects or implications of that claim: the "so what"? Why does it matter that *Harry Potter* illustrates traditional gender roles, or that "Cinderella" ties female virtue to slavish, back-breaking housework? Does *HP* thus seem less magical? Are we forced to rethink our cultural interest in hard-working princesses? Rather than simply state that "this is what I've noticed/discovered"--your essay should at least point toward some larger value for your claim.

To summarize, your essay should present:

- 1) an argument about a text
- 2) support in the form of quotations from your text
- 3) connections to a prior class reading/video/film/podcast that you quote; AND
- 4) a clear and well-thought out connection to the point you're making about this one text.

PROMPT 2: Media *Miss* Representation of Women

Unfortunately, “breaking news” this semester has cut into our time, so we don’t have time to watch the other documentary I had hoped to show you, *Miss Representation*. However, I think it would interest many of you, so I want to give you the option to focus on women in entertainment and media for the final essay. As we’ve discussed in class, **representation**—in politics, in academia, in the workplace, and in media—*matters*.

On Netflix you can find the documentary film *Miss Representation* (directed by Jennifer Newsom of The Representation Project—she also directed *The Mask You Live In*). This film focuses on depiction of women in the media and how these images and stereotypes of women can impact the treatment (and self-image) of women in American society. This film is 90 minutes long. It can also be rented through iTunes for \$3.99 and perhaps other streaming services as well.

If you don’t have access to Netflix, you could instead watch the following TED Talks:

*Bring on the Female Superheroes!* can be found here:

[https://www.ted.com/talks/christopher\\_bell\\_bring\\_on\\_the\\_female\\_superheroes#t-538116](https://www.ted.com/talks/christopher_bell_bring_on_the_female_superheroes#t-538116)

*What It’s Like to Be a Woman in Hollywood* can be found here:

[https://www.ted.com/talks/naomi\\_mcdougall\\_jones\\_what\\_it\\_s\\_like\\_to\\_be\\_a\\_woman\\_in\\_hollywood](https://www.ted.com/talks/naomi_mcdougall_jones_what_it_s_like_to_be_a_woman_in_hollywood)

*The Data Behind Hollywood’s Sexism* can be found here:

[https://www.ted.com/talks/stacy\\_smith\\_the\\_data\\_behind\\_hollywood\\_s\\_sexism](https://www.ted.com/talks/stacy_smith_the_data_behind_hollywood_s_sexism)

Using two, three or all four of these videos as a stepping off point, make an argument about the depiction of women in media and how it impacts a women in “real life.” You must narrow the topic so it is manageable in a 3-5 page essay, so you shouldn’t talk about women in ALL forms of media—pick a specific genre, like women in situation comedies on TV, or women in the news media, or women in action movies, etc. You could also *really* narrow it down by looking at black women in action films, etc.

If you choose this prompt you should use at least one of the film/videos noted here, as well as at least 2 other sources discussing women in the particular of media genre you are focusing on.

### Podcast Prompt: Living History: The Gender Studies Podcast

Your task in this assignment is to interview a family member or family friend about issues we've discussed in class and then synthesize the interview into an audio portrait – a podcast. Choose someone you want to learn more about, because you will be asking them some important and challenging questions. Your interviewee may be any age as long as the interview generates some productive material for you. I'm giving you this assignment over the Thanksgiving holiday in the hopes that you can stretch your interview subject net very widely—interview someone you don't see as frequently, and/or someone you think might provide interesting material, challenging replies, etc.

You can refer to any topics that we've covered so far; the most important thing is to keep the conversation going so that you can hear your interviewee's perspective. You might begin with an explanation of the interview, and a quick summary of the class and its topics/questions. Central questions might be along these lines (and, of course, these can provide a jumping off point):

- “What defines a man and a woman?”
- “Do you think people are born as men/women, or are taught to be that way? Why do you think so?”
- “In your opinion, how have gender roles changed within your lifetime?”
- “In your opinion, how are gender roles different according to varying cultural contexts?”
- “How do you conform to your gender role? Do you ever resist it?”
- “Have you ever known anyone who challenged your (or society's) conception of gender?”

Of course, you should adapt all questions to your own voice and style. And beware rote questioning: interviewees generally do not enjoy a mechanical litany of questions, one after the other, independent of their responses; they want to have a conversation. **You might keep a list of questions you want to ask handy, but the best interviews will run in relevant but unexpected directions; you can honor the course of the conversation by asking good follow-up questions and bringing the discussion back on track if necessary.** (A good interviewer knows the difference between digging a bit further for more information, especially when the subject seems inclined to share more, and hounding a subject with questions the subject doesn't like. Use your best judgment and pay attention to your subject's cues!)

This assignment will be presented in the form of a podcast. Please consider using Audacity for the assignment – it is free software, and very easy to use. You should use your computer microphone or, better yet, an external microphone if you have access to one. *Make sure before you begin that your interviewee consents to being recorded for the project. (If you cannot get consent for the recording, than either find another subject or jot down written notes during the interview.)*

After your interview is over, think about the central points you'd like to convey in your piece. How does your interviewee think about gender? What are the most important and compelling things you heard? Your challenge is to turn the interview into a compelling audio essay that captures some salient aspects of the interview. (You cannot capture everything, and even if you could, such an account would not make for a coherent piece.) **Your podcast should have a controlling idea about your interviewee's beliefs** – a point that you establish early on – and that point should be supported by evidence from the interview. Further, your structure should follow from your controlling idea. Resist the temptation to merely lead the reader through your interview, question by question, response by response; stronger podcasts will establish a main point and then present, in a logical, well-marked way, relevant topics and patterns of thinking.

- Remember to “frame” your claims clearly – not as floating, objective truths about gender, but as one person’s beliefs about gender.
- Focus on your interviewee’s thoughts, not the interview sequence (“The first question I asked was...”). Except for rare exceptions, comments about interview process are distracting and not important to the account.

For additional vividness, you might think about sharpening the portrait with little descriptive touches about the interview itself – where you were, your interviewee’s facial expressions, sound of younger kids playing in the background, etc. You might even include some of these sound cues in the podcast, whether as extras or within the interview audio file itself.

A note on the audio format: remember that quoting procedure will be a bit different than it would be if you were writing a paper or reciting their words with your own voice. When you give an aural quotation from your subject, there is less need to note for the reader that you are quoting them; the sound of their voice will be enough to let the listener know who is talking. Consider this example:

*[Standard paper]: Martin believes that there are three genders. He claimed, “Well, there are men, women, and children. I don’t think kids have true genders like adults do.”*

*[podcast]: Martin believes that there are three genders. “Well, there are men, women, and children. I don’t think kids have true genders like adults do.”*

You may, if you’d like, bring the critical readings into your essay very briefly, but there’s no requirement that you do this.

**Requirements:** Podcasts should be 9-11 minutes long. You want to honor your interview subject’s replies, and work you yourself have put in. This will worth 100 essay points (since it’s an audio essay).

*Final podcasts are due to me by email by **11:59 p.m. on Monday, December 9th**. You should share a link with me from your Google drive.*

**\*\*Some of you may be inclined to choose your interview subjects very carefully because you are worried about hearing uncomfortable, and perhaps even offensive, opinions from them. Feel free to exercise this caution on your own account, but you do not need to protect my ears and eyes. Let me be clear: I will not be judging you on the content your interviewee expresses! I’m looking for a cogent write-up that brings a controlling idea, paragraph structure, and points of evidence (ie; brief quotations from the interview) to the table. What’s important here is how you synthesize and analyze your interview subject’s ideas -- not the ideas themselves.\*\***

## Presentation: "Gender in the 2018 Midterms" Presentation

You will be selecting one major race in the 2018 midterm elections that features a man and woman running against one another. It needs to be a race for U.S. Congress, the U.S. Senate, or a race for Governor of a state—something that will receive statewide or national attention. Follow it over the course of the next four weeks, looking for answers to the following:

1. What was the primary election like for these candidates? Some of these races may have been a man defeating a number of women in the primary, or a woman that won as a primary challenger of a male incumbent who is quite popular in the district (like a female Democrat beating a male Democrat incumbent). This gives the class context to the general election race.
2. To additionally give context to this race, what other factors make it particularly interesting or historic (if any)? Is one of the candidates an LGBT candidate in a “red” state? Would one of these candidates be the first person of color to hold this office? Is this a particularly important/watched race nationally for some reason (is it the one that could “flip the senate” from Republican to Democrat? Your race may not have any of these particular features, but if it does and you explain it, it will help the class understand the implications of this particular race.
3. How is gender depicted in the advertisements for each candidate? Is it played up? Is it downplayed? Is gender specifically mentioned, or are gender issues simply *implied*? In what ways are gender stereotypes supported or defied?
4. How does the news media touch on gender in this race? Are they criticized or praised due to gender in any way (roles, appearance, background, expectations)? Be sure to look at a variety of sources and how they cover the race, since you may not know that state/region and whether a particular news outlet leans left or right.
5. What kind of endorsements have the candidates received in this race (support from current or former politicians, support from celebrities, support from political action groups [PACs] or organizations, such as Emily’s List or MoveOn, etc.)? Do these seem to be gender related?
6. How are the candidates depicted on social media (you’ll want to check out each candidate’s official Facebook and Twitter campaign accounts)? How do they demonstrate an awareness of their own gender as well as running against a candidate of the opposite gender? What kind of comments/reception are made on social media in response to the candidate’s posts in regards to gender?
7. Ultimately, in YOUR opinion, was/is gender an important factor in this race? Do you think it will impact the outcome in any way?

Presentations will be 4-5 minutes each and should contain a visual component of some kind (could be a short video clip from a commercial, screen shots of social media comments, clip from a radio ad, etc.) to help the class understand all of the info you’ve compiled on these candidates. I expect you to hit on each of the topics (#1-7) listed above. There is no essay accompanying this assignment, but on the day of the presentation I’d like a written list (Bibliography) of all of the sources you used when gathering information (social media pages, news sites, articles, etc.), using MLA format.

Presentations will take place either November 2 & 5 or Nov. 8 & 9, depending on the dates the class votes upon. This will be worth 100 project/presentation points for the presentation itself, and 25 homework points for the Bibliography in MLA format (all sources you referenced, even though you won’t specifically cite them in your presentation).

## **Presentation: Spotlight on a Gender Issue: Pair Presentation/Activity**

For this project, your task is to work with a partner to design an activity that will introduce a gender-related issue or topic to your classmates. Choose a reading (or a podcast) that you will assign to the class, and think hard about how to express some important element (whether stylistic, historical, social, interpretive, etc.) of it through a 20-25 minute class activity that you will lead. I stress the word *activity*; this presentation should be more than just a discussion or a set of questions from you. Of course, discussions can be very fruitful, but please try hard to get your fellow students actively *doing something* in advance of any discussion that you may lead. Some options:

- A class writing exercise
- A short debate
- A skit (put on by you or groups of your fellow students)
- A game, whether existing or designed by you
- An exercise of textual analysis
- Other plans that you come up with

What's most important is that your activity gets everyone thinking and talking about the reading in a non-trivial way. Hint: think about what you want the class to understand or experience, and then design an activity that catalyzes that understanding in them. That is, usually, for a class experiencing something > hearing about it.

You will be assessed based on your presentation's creativity, clarity of execution, and relevance to the day's reading. Please be organized: behind-hand whispers, uncertainty about the order of events, and shoddy materials are not convincing. Enjoy designing this activity if you can – have fun, take risks, encourage insight!

Please note: Students often come up with plans that run much longer than 20-25 minutes. If you anticipate that you will need the whole class period, let me know in advance and I will most likely be able to accommodate that.

Here are some topics we will be focusing on regarding gender this semester that may help spark ideas. I'll put a month next to each topic and you should propose a day/date that you'd like to present. We'll have 8 presentations over the course of the semester.

You and your partner need to meet with me at least two days prior to your presentation to go over your specific plan, but I'd like to know by Monday, Sept. 17<sup>th</sup> what the topic of your presentation will be. If you want suggestions or feedback, I can help. If will be presenting while we are reading *The Power, Fun Home* or *The Handmaid's Tale*, let me know and you can cover a section of the book (or pick a reading of your own that coordinates with our reading of these larger works).

Your activity will be worth 100 presentation points. Presentations make up 15% of your semester grade.

### **Questions? Feel free to reach out to us!**

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