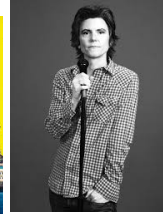
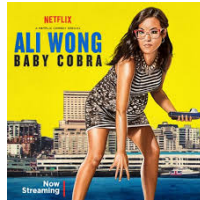


Syllabus Proposal: Gender and Stand-Up Comedy – 300/400 level

NOTE:

Weekly readings reflect not a finalized list, but an illustration of the areas that topic would cover. Reading lists would be streamlined and adjusted to reflect the course level and appropriate weekly course load and edited to include recent popular articles.



Course Description:

From minstrel shows, vaudeville, and public lectures, to radio, film and television to podcasting, Twitter, and Netflix specials, the history of comedy is a process of technological, cultural and social change. While many comics, fans, and critics often take for granted stand-up as an ahistorical, individualistic art form, it is in fact is a culturally and socially specific type of artistic performance.

This course seeks not only to interrogate stand-up comedy as a historically and culturally specific art form, but to interrogate the ways in which gender both informs and has been left out of discussion of what stand-up is and does. While comedy and humor have been studied across disciplines, this course draws specifically on feminist theory and media studies to explore how gender and women have been studied with regards to the production, performance, and reception of comedy within the entertainment industry.

To this end, we will be discussing the history of stand-up in America, the ways women are understood as comics and audiences and the categorization and various definitions of “women’s humor.” Because “woman” is of course an unstable category, we will not only be studying “women in comedy” but also questioning the category of “woman” and whether it is the most useful lens through which to understand the sociological aspects of comedy production and reception.

Throughout the course of the semester, students will not only read and discuss canonical works in the burgeoning field of comedy studies but also working on their own comedy projects. The class will culminate in either a stand-up routine or satiric video accompanied by a written analysis of your project drawing on course concepts. The best way to really understand comedy is to produce your own!

Grading Breakdown:

The grading for this course is as follows:

Attendance and Participation: 20%

You are expected to come to class having read the material and with items to discuss or questions that you wish to pose to the class. Your grade will be determined by your contributions to class discussion. Absences will result in loss of participation points unless you have documentation for a valid excuse.

Live Stand-up Reflection: 10%

We will be taking advantage of all the local stand-up scene has to offer! By the end of the semester, you will attend one stand-up performance---whether it be an amateur open mic or a touring comic featured at a local comedy club. You will then hand in proof of attendance (ticket stub, pictures, flyer) and a 2-3 page reflection paper on the experience analyzing how gender plays a role in some part of the event (audience, joke content, aspects of performance etc) using readings from the course.

Weekly Reading Summaries: 35%

Each week, you will turn in a 2- page double-spaced summary the weeks' readings main points or themes. These are not meant for you to give you own opinions or interpretations, those will be reserved for class discussion. These papers are designed to get you used to reading and summarizing arguments. You can't make a compelling argument yourself until you can articulate the arguments of others. You will also be able to draw on these summaries to start to write your final paper.

Final Comedic Performance and Paper: 35%

Your final project will consist of a comedic performance or project in the style of your choosing: 5-7 minute stand-up set or a 5-7 minute satiric video in the style of *Last Week Tonight* or *Full Frontal with Samantha Bee*. Your material can draw on anything from your own experiences to gender theory to your take on popular culture. In your accompanying paper, you will be analyzing your own work using class concepts, giving historical background of your form and influences and doing an auto-ethnography of your process.

Throughout the semester you will complete checkpoints including:

1. Choosing a style and topic
2. Writing a short proposal
3. Submitting an annotated bibliography of at least 5 sources
4. Submitting an outline including a rough intro and conclusion
5. Playing or performing a rough draft of your final performance or project for feedback

In the last week of class you will all present your work to each other for our class comedy festival and your final papers will be due during finals week.

Reading Schedule

Week 1: Introduction to comedy and humor studies

Mintz, Lawrence E. (2008) "Humor and Popular Culture." In *The Primer of Humor Research*, edited by Victor Raskin, 281-302.

Mintz, Lawrence E. (1985) "Standup Comedy as Social and Cultural Mediation." *American Quarterly*. 71-80.

Wagner, Kristen. (2011) "'Have Women a Sense of Humor?' Comedy and Femininity in Early Twentieth-Century Film." *The Velvet Light Trap* 68. 35-46.

Fraiberg, Alison. (1994). Between the laughter: Bridging feminist studies through women's stand-up comedy. *Look who's laughing: Gender and comedy*, 315-334.

Week 2: Antecedents to modern American stand-up

Introduction and Chapter 2 from:

Mahar, William John. (1999) *Behind the Burnt Cork Mask: Early Blackface Minstrelsy and Antebellum American Popular Culture*. University of Illinois Press.

Introduction and Chapter 2 from:

Kibler, M. Alison. (1999). *Rank Ladies: Gender and Cultural Hierarchy in American Vaudeville*. University of North Carolina Press.

Week 3: Women and the history of comedy

Chapter 1: "Theoretical Perspectives" and Chapter 5: "Making It Your Own: Women in the New Comic Traditions" from:

Gray, Frances. (1994). *Women and Laughter*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia.

Introduction and Preface from Dickinson, Peter, Anne Higgins, Paul Matthew St. Pierre, Diana Solomon, and Sean Zwagerman eds (2014). *Women and Comedy: History, Theory, Practice*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Week 4: Feminist and/or women's humor

Introduction and Chapter 5 "Feminist Humor" from:

Walker, Nancy A. *A Very Serious Thing: Women's Humor and American Culture*. Vol. 2. U of Minnesota Press, 1988.

Chapter 1: "Getting It" and Chapter 7: "How Many Feminists Does It Take to Change a Light Bulb?" from:

Barreca, Gina. *They Used to Call Me Snow White... but I Drifted: Women's Strategic Use of Humor*. Viking Penguin, 1991.

Leng, K. (2016). When Politics Were Fun: Recovering a History of Humour in US Feminism. *SYNOPTIQUE: An Online Journal of Film and Moving Image Studies*, 5(1), 1-21.

Russell, D. (2007). Self-deprecatory humour and the female comic. *Thirdspace: A Journal of Feminist Theory & Culture*, 2(1).

Week 5: Unruly women and excess

Introduction: "Feminist Film Theory and the Question of Laughter" and Chapter 2: "Roseanne: The Unruly Woman as Domestic Goddess" from:

Rowe, Kathleen (2011). *The Unruly Woman: Gender and the Genres of Laughter*. University of Texas Press.

Mizejewski, L. (2007). "Queen Latifah, unruly women, and the bodies of romantic comedy," *Genders*, (46).

Week 6: Body politics

Introduction, Chapter 4: "Margaret Cho is Beautiful" and Chapter 5 "Wanda Sykes's Black Looks" from:

Mizejewski, Linda. (2014). *Pretty/funny: Women Comedians and Body Politics*. University of Texas Press.

Johnston, Kirsty (2014). "Out of the Box: Comedy in Disability Theater by Canadian Women" in *Women and Comedy: History, Theory, Practice*. Rowman & Littlefield, 145-155.

Week 7: Marginal Humor

Introduction and Chapter 1: "Humor, Power, and Marginality" from:

Gilbert, Joanne (2004). *Performing Marginality: Humor, Gender, and Cultural Critique*. Wayne State University Press.

Schulman, N. (1994). The house that black built: Television stand-up comedy as minor discourse. *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, 22(3), 108-115.

Week 8: Cultural Capital and Comedy

Introduction and Chapter 4: When Women Perform Charged Humor: The (Gendered) Politics of Consumption from:

Krefting, Rebecca (2014). *All Joking Aside: American Humor and Its Discontents*. JHU Press.

Morgan, Abbey. (2016) "'No Damn Mammy, Mom!' Rhetorical Re-invention in the Stand-up Comedy of Jackie 'Moms' Mabley," in *Standing Up, Speaking Out: Stand-Up Comedy and the Rhetoric of Social Change*.

Selections from: Watkins, M. (1999). *On the real side: A history of African American comedy*. Chicago Review Press.

Week 9: Irony, Gender, and Post-Feminism

Colletta, Lisa (2014). Postmodernity and the Gendered Uses of Political Satire" in *Women and Comedy: History, Theory, Practice*. 207-218.

Shouse, E., & Oppliger, P. (2012). Sarah is magic: The (post-gendered?) comedy of Sarah Silverman. *Comedy Studies*, 3(2), 201-216.

Goltz, D. B. (2015). Ironic Performativity: Amy Schumer's Big (White) Balls. *Text and Performance Quarterly*, 35(4), 266-285.

Week 10: Sexuality and Blurring Boundaries

Lockyer, S. (2011). From toothpick legs to dropping vaginas: Gender and sexuality in Joan Rivers' stand-up comedy performance. *Comedy Studies*, 2(2), 113-123.

Gilbert, Christopher. (2016). "If Looks Could Kill: Eddie Izzard and the Queer Art of Comedy," in *Standing Up, Speaking Out: Stand-Up Comedy and the Rhetoric of Social Change*.

Chapter 5: "Robin Tyler, Still Working the Crowd" from Krefting, Rebecca (2014). *All Joking Aside: American Humor and Its Discontents*. JHU Press.

Week 11: Gender and comedic media industries

Marx, Nick. (2015). "Expanding the Brand Race, Gender, and the Post-politics of Representation on Comedy Central." *Television & New Media*.

Henderson, F. D. (2011). "The Culture Behind Closed Doors: Issues of Gender and Race in the Writers' Room. *Cinema Journal*, 50(2), 145-152.

Chapter 4: "Crossover Diva: Whoopi Goldberg and Persona Politics" from: Haggins, Bambi. *Laughing Mad: The Black Comic Persona in Post-Soul America*. Rutgers University Press, 2007.

Week 12: Comedy Audiences

Gilbert, Joanne (2015). "Members of the Tribe: Marginal Identities and The Female Comedy Fan Community." In *Fan Girls and the Media: Creating Characters, Consuming Culture* edited by Adrienne Trier-Bieniek, 57- 70.

Wanzo, R. (2015). African American acafandom and other strangers: New genealogies of fan studies. *Transformative Works and Cultures*, 20.

Bore, I. L. K. (2010). (Un) funny women: TV comedy audiences and the Gendering of Humour. *European journal of cultural studies*, 13(2), 139-154.

Week 13: The rape joke debate

Kramer, Elise. "The playful is Political: The Metapragmatics of Internet Rape-Joke Arguments." *Language in Society* 40, no. 02 (2011): 137-168.

Cox, L. (2015). Standing Up against the Rape Joke: Irony and Its Vicissitudes. *Signs*, 40(4), 963-984.

Wagg, Stephen, ed. (1998). "Gender, Ethnicity, and Political Correctness I Comedy," *Because I Tell a Joke or Two: Comedy, Politics, and Social Difference*, 291.

West, Lindy (2012). "How To Make a Rape Joke." *Jezebel*.
<http://jezebel.com/5925186/how-to-make-a-rape-joke>

Week 14: Internet Humor and "Trolling"

Krefting, Rebecca, and Rebecca Baruc. "A New Economy of Jokes?: #socialmedia #comedy." *Comedy Studies* 6, no. 2 (2015): 129-140.

Section 1: "Subcultural Origins 2003-2007" and Chapter 5 "LOLing at Tragedy":
Phillips, W. (2015). *This is Why We Can't Have Nice Things: Mapping the relationship between online trolling and mainstream culture*. MIT Press.

Week 15: Comedy Festival / Wrap-Up