Media (Film and Television Studies)

Also relevant for Cultural Studies, Arts, Theatre Studies, Communication Studies

Course: Film and Television Studies, Media Sciences
Group of courses: Esthetics
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Last edit: Prof. Dr. Astrid Deuber-Mankowsky, Dr. Anja Michaelsen, July 2018

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Course objectives:

When studying gender from a media studies perspective, the main focus is on analyzing how gender is constituted and produced by the media and by public discourse. Students learn that the relationship of gender and media is one of interdependence, and they become familiar with key concepts of gender research in cultural studies (discourse, representation, performativity, historicity, nature vs. culture, affect, materiality), learning to place them in a media studies perspective. They explore the constitution of gender with respect to various technical media (especially film, television, and digital media/Internet), as well as with regard to questions that involve multiple types of media – for example, questions about the forms of knowledge production, the history of knowledge, perception processes, processes of subjectification and normalization, the relationship between the body and technology, as well as reproduction via the media and social reproduction. In times of growing digitalization and media convergence, media are increasingly considered in terms of how they overlap with each other, not just how they function on their own. Students explore the contexts of how different public spheres are produced, and they examine marginal and hegemonic discourses in which 'race', 'class', 'gender', 'sexuality', 'dis/ability' and other relevant categories (depending on the situation) come into play. In this context, the concept of intersectionality will be discussed as an analytical tool. Students strengthen their methodological competencies, especially in the areas of (historical) discourse analysis, image analysis, and film analysis, thereby learning to describe and interpret the interdependent relations of media, technology, and gender. Moreover, students learn that both gender and media are to be seen as epistemic entities whose interplay determines the way in which we perceive and act in social reality.

Teaching content/subject-specific gender studies content:

Description of specialist fields:

Media studies are an interdisciplinary field of study, drawing on concepts and methods from, among others, film and television studies, cultural studies, related languages and literatures, philosophy, and arts, but also from the history of technology and science. A wide-ranging understanding of the term "media" is used, including both technical media used for writing and visualization as well as complex media-technological dispositifs and assemblages. Media are not understood as neutral tools of communication, but as productive in terms of what they convey and store. In media studies gender research, these concepts and methods are supplemented with approaches from feminist critique, queer studies and critical race studies. Research revolves around the question of how gender is constituted and produced. This question is studied with respect to specific media dispositifs (concerning materiality, technology, structure of perception, institutions and economic aspects) and with regard to gender-related effects (concerning the production of difference and power relationships, normalization, as well as techniques of embodiment, reproduction, and variation of the social order). It also concerns the relationship between mass culture and subculture, nature and culture, public and private. Moreover, gender needs to be understood in its various contexts of meaning, including family, nation, and community. Additionally, research on the relationship of gender and media involves questions regarding the possibilities of affirmation and subversion, and regarding forms of empowerment and critique.

Methodological and theoretical approaches:

In the area of film, an influential tradition of feminist film studies has emerged since the 1970s, one that has focused its media analyses on the patriarchal construction and representation of femininity in classical Hollywood cinema, as well as on film genres that have been neglected by film studies until

then (e.g. pornography, melodrama and horror films). Psychoanalytical theories and semiotic approaches and their critical review are especially important here. Critical discussions about conceptions of the viewer developed by this theoretical paradigm (viewers as ahistorical subjects subordinating themselves to the gender positions presented by the media text) led to an understanding of film reception as an active process of producing meanings. As a result, and by including poststructuralist and deconstructivist theories, the question about construction and identification is expanded to include additional categories of difference, such as race and sexuality. Here, the combination of race and gender in the sense of critical race and whiteness studies, as well as questions about a specific emancipatory aesthetic of 'queer cinema' are important objects of analysis.

In the area of television, there have been attempts to apply the above-mentioned questions and analytical methods of feminist film studies to television formats as well. Moreover, questions regarding the processes of gendered media use patterns in daily life have increasingly become a central concern. Drawing on cultural studies approaches, media scholars investigate gender representations in TV-specific formats and also analyse the conditions under which these formats are being produced and received by viewers (using the soap opera as the most frequent example). This is also where a gendered distinction between high-brow and low-brow culture comes into play. With regard to theorizing, the main interest is in conceptions of media and the viewer that do not have a universalizing effect, but do justice to a diversity of situations involving media reception. The transformation of the medium of television under the influence of digital media and globalized production is also taken into account here. Television is being analysed with a particular eye on its community-building aspects, which may result from its media-specific place in time and space. Furthermore, new forms of 'quality TV', in particular elaborately produced TV series, are subject of the analysis.

With regard to print media, the production of different public spheres (hegemonic and critical) is studied in conjunction with the media-specific production of gender. Gender theorists look at how print media function, and how their meaning has changed historically. Using methods of content and discourse analysis, they also examine the diverse forms of print media reception, especially how these forms of reception are integrated in people's daily lives. Another major research area in this context is the exploration of photography as a technology of gender, which is of particular importance in history of science contexts (e.g. the history of hysteria).

The area of digital media includes the Internet, but also computer games (online and offline), digital imaging methods and technologies in journalistic and (popular) academic contexts, as well as issues of media convergence (the combination of different media). With respect to the emergence of the Internet, various analyses deal with the changing concepts of the body and identity – changing as a result of the idea of virtual reality – and with the increasingly instable boundaries between the body and machines (nature and culture). The hope – frequently voiced in the early stages of these studies – that digital media, such as the Internet and computer games, may have an emancipatory effect (in the sense that they may lead to an erosion of the heteronormative gender order) has been giving way to more critical reflections. Moreover, the attention is on the (partial) public spheres and networks emerging on the Internet. Another area of inquiry is the discussion about the changing nature of the Internet ('Web 2.0') and the effects these changes may have on the relations between experts and users. Here, as in the analysis of gender representations in computer games, the focus is on the subject positions that are being produced, as well as on their gender definition. Another area of importance is the analysis of imaging methods as technologies of knowledge production, especially in contexts of war and the life sciences (X-ray technology, ultrasound, technical graphs and diagrams, or computer tomography), and their importance for representing and perceiving gendered bodies, life, and death. In this process, issues of standardization, abstraction, and of producing evidence of 'natural' facts come into play.

For all of these media, it may be said that the emergence of new technologies has caused the traditional understanding of individual media as being more or less separate from one another to give way to a hybrid conception of media. The relationship between technology, corporality, gender and materiality requires increasingly complex descriptions. New materialism and affect studies place the gendered body in its materialite and medial efficacy in the foreground. Gender research in the field of media studies now needs to explore the consequences this combination of different media may have for the constitution and production of gender. With respect to media convergence, the performative and discursive functioning of media needs to be revised. Gender, as a 'media effect', is produced in different ways, depending on the specific functioning of each medium; this needs to be accounted for when studying the introduction of 'new' media from a historical perspective.

Furthermore, the study of gender in the field of media studies involves an analysis of the relationship and the emergence of hegemonic and marginalized discourses, and of the concomitant restructuring of the public sphere (embedded nationally, internationally, historically, and culturally) in the context of gender construction.

Aspects of professionalism:

The interdisciplinary nature of media-related gender studies requires an epistemological critique of media studies approaches, which are lacking an analysis of social inequalities. This leads to the further development and a critical reflection of one's own epistemological prerequisites and approaches taking materialistic and affect theory interventions into account, followed by a discussion about methodology. Whereas quantitative surveys presuppose the existence of a stable concept of subject and identity, thereby reproducing the gender difference, gender research in the field of media studies, in combination with poststructuralist theories, puts its focus on gender itself as an epistemic category. As such, the gender difference is essential for the constitution of the media, and at the same time is itself a media effect.

Areas of practice:

Media-related gender studies provide students with analytical skills that are relevant for a broad professional spectrum. This applies in particular to the media as well as cultural and academic sectors. Like cultural studies degree courses in general, media-related gender studies do not prepare students for a clearly defined profession. Instead, students acquire analytical and critical thinking skills that qualify them for various professional fields.

Integration of gender studies content into the curriculum:

It would be desirable to have a basic module on 'Gender and the Media' to address the ways in which gender is represented and produced by culture and the media and to introduce students to relevant aspects in the history of knowledge and to media and cultural studies methods. As outlined above, gender is a category that involves multiple types of media. As a result, this module may be combined with all disciplinary modules (film/cinema, radio, print media, digital media, etc.).

It would be helpful to connect this basic module to a module on 'Identity and Differences' for students to explore the concept of identity: its constitution, its power, and the current tendency to question and dissolve identities (e.g. through virtual identities or the erosion of national borders). The goal is to analyse the social positioning of identity formation and change by also considering other categories of

difference. By engaging with these issues, students become proficient in applying the interdisciplinary approach and enhance their methodological competence, especially with regard to qualitative and hermeneutical procedures.

Degree Stage:

The afore-mentioned systematic module on 'Gender Representation/Reception' should be an integral part of B.A. degree courses starting in the second semester. This is where questions and approaches from media studies with regard to gender may be refined and studied in greater depth. More in-depth studies, in the form of project modules, for example, are recommendable for the Master phase.

Basic Literature/Recommended Reading:

- Andrea Seier, Eva Warth: Perspektivverschiebungen. Zur Geschlechterdifferenz in Film- und Medienwissenschaft. In: Hadumod Bußmann, Renate Hof (ed.): Genus. Zur Geschlechterdifferenz in den Kultur- und Sozialwissenschaften. Stuttgart 2005, pp. 80-111.
- Kathrin Peters, Andrea Seier (eds.): Gender & Medien Reader. Zürich, Berlin 2016
- Laura Mulvey: Visuelle Lust und narratives Kino (org. 1973). In: Franz-Josef Albersmeier (ed.): Texte zur Theorie des Films. Stuttgart 2001, pp. 389-408.
- Stuart Hall: Das Spektakel des ‚Anderen'. In: Ideologie, Identität, Repräsentation. Ausgewählte Schriften 4. Hamburg 2004, pp. 108-166.
- Richard Dyer: Das Licht der Welt – Weiße Menschen und das Film-Bild. In: Marie-Luise Angerer (ed.): The Body of Gender: Körper, Geschlecht, Identitäten. Wien 1995, pp. 151-170.
- Astrid Deuber-Mankowsky: Lara Croft. Modell, Medium, Cyberheldin. Das virtuelle Geschlecht und seine metaphysischen Tücken. Frankfurt 2001.
- Judith Butler: Körper von Gewicht. Die diskursiven Grenzen des Geschlechts. Berlin 1997 (org. 1993).
- Donna J. Haraway: Ein Manifest fu?r Cyborgs. Feminismus im Streit mit den Technowissenschaften. In: Die Neuerfindung der Natur. Frankfurt am Main 1995, pp. 33-73.
- Karen Barad (2007): Real werden. Technowissenschaftliche Praktiken und die Materialisierung der Realität. In: Kathrin Peters, Andrea Seier (ed.): Gender & Medien Reader. Zürich, Berlin 2016, pp. 515-539.
- Susan Stryker: Transsexuality. The Postmodern Body and/as Technology. In: David Bell und Barbara Kennedy (ed.): The Cybercultures Reader. New York 2002, pp. 588–597.

Journals:

- Camera Obscura: Feminism, Culture, and Media Studies. | [Website](#)
- Feminist Media Studies. | [Website](#)
- Frauen und Film. | [Website](#)
- Die Philosophin – Forum für feministische Theorie und Philosophie. | [Website](#)
- Screen. | [Website](#)
- onlinejournal kultur & geschlecht. | [Website](#)
- ZfM Zeitschrift für Medienwissenschaft. | [Website](#)
- FKW Zeitschrift für Geschlechterforschung und visuelle Kultur. | [Website](#)