COMM 224: Gender, Communication, and Culture

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INTRODUCTION

Gender is both personal and social. It is personal because each of us is a gendered person whose thoughts, feelings, actions, goals, and experiences reflect and enact the gender identity that we individually adopt. Gender is also social, because the meanings of masculinity and femininity are socially constructed, reproduced, and changed. In this class we will explore both the personal and social dimensions of gender, communication, and culture, and how all three interact in our lives. We will also examine how culture shapes gender and communication; how gender shapes communication and culture; and how communication creates, reproduces, sustains, and sometimes challenges and changes the meaning of gender and, with that, cultural structures and practices.

This course requires your active involvement. You should come to the discussion forums ready to share ideas and questions, reflect on what others say, and discuss and extend readings. In addition, you should be willing to question what you believe, consider a range of experiences and points of view, and experience discomfort, which naturally accompanies serious consideration of the meaning of gender, communication, and culture. As a member of this class you are expected to be respectful of others and their views, even if those radically oppose
your own experiences and beliefs. If you are not willing to listen and respond respectfully to others, you should drop this course.

**COURSE OBJECTIVES**

By the end of this course you should be able to:

- describe the complex, mutually constitutive relationships between gender, communication, and culture
- illustrate how individuals and groups use communication to negotiate gender, using examples from your own experience and/or broader culture
- apply theoretical models to engage and analyze the role of gender in contemporary culture and individual life
- participate in the cultural conversation about gender in a thoughtful and self-reflexive manner.

**REQUIRED TEXTBOOK**

See the course description for the most up-to-date list of materials.

**THE VIRTUAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT**

My goal as your instructor is to facilitate your learning in a positive, supportive, and interactive online environment, one that will help you make the most out of your learning experience. Virtual settings provide some unique challenges to creating a rich and tight-knit community of learners, but with some clear expectations and rules in place, as well as electronic tools to keep us in touch with one another, we will fare just fine! We should all commit to participating fully in the readings and discussion board, and to creating a safe and supportive virtual environment, one that will facilitate personal growth and learning.

Because this course meets online, it is extra important that you read EVERY chapter assigned, every lesson note email sent out, and your peers’ comments on the discussion board. In the absence of an instructor-led, talking-based lecture to remind you of information you read a few days ago, thorough reading is key to your success in this course.

As students in the course, you should be aware of your responsibilities to one another and approach each other with care and respect. While the virtual format may feel less personal than a regular course, it is important to remember that words are powerful! Respond to one another in the discussion forum with no less respect and generosity than you might otherwise show in a face-to-face meeting.

Please feel free to contact me with your questions, concerns, and ideas, so that we can continue to improve the quality of learning in the course.

**RULES FOR EMAIL**

The most persistent problem in online classes is that instructors sometimes fail to receive student emails—including emailed assignments. Most often, it turns out that students have simply typed the email address incorrectly. If I were teaching this class in person, and if you were taking this class in person, we could take care of any communication glitches informally. But we cannot do this so easily in a cyberclass. We need a more
formal system to make certain we are communicating.

Therefore, I have developed the following "Rules for Email in COMM 224" that will help to make certain you receive full credit for all the work that you do.

1. **All email messages must include COMM 224 in the subject line**, otherwise they will not be routed to the correct mailbox and will be lost. (This should not be a problem with graded paper assignments, forum responses, or exams as they will all be submitted via the corresponding link in Sakai.)

2. **If you do not receive an exam/reflection grade from me**, I have not graded your work. Re-send it as a forwarded message, explaining that this is your second attempt! It is your responsibility to keep up with your own grade, letting me know of any issues immediately.

3. **Be proactive**. I should always respond to every email message within one to two business days (Note: I do not generally check or respond to my email on weekends). If I ever fail to respond to any email or paper you have sent me, it is almost certainly because I have not seen it. Don't hesitate for even a second to let me know that you are waiting for a response!

4. **Run a virus scan each week!**

5. **Arrange access to a back-up computer**. This is a computer-based class, so do not wait until the last moment. Back up your work and have a back-up plan if your computer fails. At no time whatsoever will I accept as a legitimate excuse the lack of a computer or a computer failure for late exams or discussion participation.

## ASSIGNMENTS AND EVALUATION

Your work in this class is broken up into three categories:

- discussion forum participation (30 percent)
- exams (40 percent)
- reflection papers (30 percent).

### Discussion Forum (30 percent)

The discussion forum will be the place where your thoughts regarding the material will be of use to both your classmates—where they may answer your questions and then debate the answers—and ultimately, to yourself! The success of this course **depends** on your participation. Learning takes place best in dialogue with others and since this course takes place in cyberspace, we need this forum to replace all the ways in which students normally interact with each other. As individuals, you will draw different lessons from the readings, from my lesson notes, and from your discussion forums. You will invent interesting and memorable ways to think through and remember what we are learning. The entire class will benefit from your thoughts.

**Discussion Forum Grade**: Each lesson I will assign you a discussion forum grade, which will be based on the following criteria:

1. **You must participate three times each lesson on at least three separate days to receive a grade for that lesson**. You must start one conversation yourself, and you must respond to two other posts submitted by your classmates. This will ensure that the discussion forum remains interactive and that it is not inundated with contributions at the last minute on the last evening of the lesson period. You may post on the forum up until midnight for credit, but **please have your original thread up on the forum within**
the first four days of the start of a new lesson. This will help ensure that all students in the course will receive comments on their threads from peers.

2. **Participation is required each week.** You cannot make up for absences on the discussion forum by posting to forums for previous lessons.

3. **In your postings, use specific quotations and illustrations from the readings (show that you've done the reading).** Give page number citations in a parenthetical citation so the rest of the class can find where you got your ideas and quotations. Here is an example of a parenthetical citation: Some radical feminists used chips to equalize participation during consciousness-raising sessions (Wood, p. 74).

4. **See the grading rubric for other guidelines regarding post length requirements and what makes a quality post.**

**Definition of participation.** Participating in the discussion forum means that you are engaging thoughtfully and courteously in every lesson. In each lesson, you must participate at least three times on three different days. At least one of those times, you must start your own substantial thread (a thread is a question or comment that begins a new line of discussion that is unrelated to previously posted messages). For example, if another person started a thread about the gendered division of household chores in their childhood, please do not start another thread about your experience of the gendered division of household chores in your childhood. Contribute to their post! Then start a discussion about another topic covered in the lesson.

**Definition of engagement.** To engage means you must offer your own comments and insights and respond thoughtfully to others as well. To engage does not mean that you just agree with someone without putting any thought into it. It means to respond in a meaningful way—to make what you say valuable to the class. The discussion forum doesn't quite replace the easy give-and-take of the classroom setting, but it can get close to it. This sort of structured interaction is absolutely necessary if this class is to truly be the equivalent of three 50-minute class periods per week.

**Three engagements with each discussion forum are the minimum!** One of the benefits of the discussions is that you can begin posting before you finish reading, as questions or comments occur to you. Not all your postings must be somber and thoughtful. Sometimes, you might just ask a question and explain why you think it is important. Note something that stood out to you, and try to articulate why it stood out to you. Take advantage of the format. Assume that we will benefit from your reactions to the course material.

**It's your discussion forum.** The discussion forum is your forum, your space to air your thoughts and ideas. I will respond to questions and comments on your discussion forum once or twice a week.

**Discussion Forum Starter Questions.** Each lesson contains “Discussion Forum Starter Questions.” These are for you to use to get your ideas flowing or simply to get the conversation rolling. **You are not required to use these questions. In fact, some of the best posts each week are unique responses to the lesson and do not pertain to the starter questions at all.** You are challenged with furthering the discussion and bringing in new material; if you notice something in the media that pertains to the lesson, feel free to bring that in. If you notice that several people are all answering the same question, contribute something new!

**Discussion Forum Checklist:**

- Post original thread within the **first four days** of the start of a new lesson.
- Demonstrate that you've done your reading.
- Relate to course material using quotations or illustrations.
- Further the discussion in some way.
• Be thought provoking or provide new insight.
• Post is well written, free of spelling and grammatical errors, and does not include unnecessary information
• Original post is no more than 300 words and comments to peers are no more than 150.
• Comment to peers (at least) two other times.
• All posts occur on three different days.
• Do more in your comments than just agree with the person you are replying to.
• Accurately use terminology introduced in the course thus far within your forum post (for example: terms applying to sex, gender, transgendered people, and so on).

Keep in mind that simply following directions and contributing what is required puts you at a grade of C (for average). To receive a discussion grade of B or higher requires you do all of the above well and to go above and beyond what is expected. That being said, this does not mean that you should simply write more. Being able to get your point across succinctly, tackling a difficult topic with grace, or presenting a nuanced argument are as or more important than the length of a post!

A grading rubric explicitly outlining what I am looking for in a quality post can be found in Resources (see link in navigation bar left).

Exams (40 percent)

Both the midterm and the final exam are worth 20 percent of your final grade, and will be primarily objective with some short essay items. All material from the book, lectures, and online discussions is fair game for the exams. You will take both of these exams online through the "Exams" area of this course. This is also where my feedback will be submitted once exams are graded. You will be given access to all correct answers for the multiple choice as well as comments from me regarding the written portions of the exam.

You will have three full days to complete midterm, and one day to complete the final exam (opens at 8 am and closes at 5 pm). Other than the time windows for completion, there is no time restriction placed on the exam once you begin it. So, you may log in, work on the exam, save your work, and finish it later. Any exam not submitted by the deadline will result in an automatic grade of 0—no exceptions. This means that you should NOT wait until the last possible minute to submit. No make-up exams will be given, so please plan accordingly.

Reflection Papers (30 percent)

You will write a reflection paper on two of the three topics described below. Each paper counts 15 percent of the course grade. Papers should apply theory and research to your experiences. Papers should be typed, double-spaced, and 750–1,000 words (no more). Proofread your paper carefully because it will be graded on writing as well as content. Please save your papers in a Word .doc or .docx format, and attach and upload under “Assignments.” All late papers are subject to a 10-point per day grade reduction. I will not accept papers that are more than 4 days late.

• Reflection 1. Drawing from personal experience, as well as the theories of gendered development discussed in class thus far, answer the question “What does it mean to be gendered today?” Your paper should describe how you personally understand and experience expectations or requirements for your gender, and how that is influenced by your race, class, and/or sexual identity. In addition, you should discuss your feelings about those expectations and requirements, their impact on your life, and ways you may embody and/or challenge them. You might use the Student Voices on pages 174–184 as prompts for
your thinking. As with the other two papers, make sure your paper is supported with the material from class or your text.

- **Reflection 2.** Violate one verbal or nonverbal prescription for your sex with both people who know you well and people who are strangers or casual acquaintances. In your paper: (1) explain what you did and how what you did violated expectations for your sex (one page); (2) describe how you felt when you violated expectations and how others responded (one page); and (3) critically analyze how your own response and others’ responses reflect, uphold, and/or challenge, the social construction of gender (one page). Keep in mind that parts 1 and 3 of this assignment will require you to provide support from the text or an outside source. Also, feel free (after your experiment is complete) to ask those whom you violated the norm in front of to describe their reactions further—this will provide you with additional insight for your paper.

Be sure to **challenge yourself** in this experiment and choose a violation likely to get a response. In other words, violations such a male expressing his feelings or a female trying not to smile are weak violations and will lose points for creativity. That said, the violation must be appropriate, should not be illegal, and should not harm you or anyone else in the process. You should stop the experiment if you or others become too uncomfortable. You may wish to check your violation with me if you are unsure of its impact. I welcome emails early-on to run ideas about this project past me. The more effective your experiment design, the easier it will be to write about your results.

- **Reflection 3.** Discuss one concrete way that you personally can reduce a specific type of gendered violence. Your paper should explain (1) the type of gendered violence you are addressing and why it is important to you (one page); (2) your plan for reducing violence (one page); (3) how you are particularly equipped to implement the action you identify (one-half page); and (4) how what you propose would **directly address** a contributor to the specific type of gendered violence you identify as your focus (one-half page). The idea you propose does not need to be (and should not be) huge; rather, it should focus on one tangible step that you can identify in your own life. You might use the following questions to prompt your writing (you do not need to answer them explicitly in your paper, but they may help you to develop a thoughtful response to gendered violence): **What has shaped your thinking and attitudes about gendered violence? What is unique about your social location? What talents or skills do you possess?** Be sure to connect to the material from class.

I will always provide you with extensive feedback on papers. In your submitted Word document I will make comments in track changes throughout and write a summary paragraph at the end of your discussion with my general impression. I will explain areas you did well and areas to improve on. You can access this document that I return to you via the assignments tab (where you submitted it). **Please do read through all of my comments as I spend a great deal of time trying to help you more fully understand the material and better your writing.** I hope you can even take some of my comments and apply them to your writing in other classes—I’m very invested in building you as a scholar.

**HINTS FOR SUCCESS**

- **Read each lesson carefully.** In each lesson, I will provide a short introduction to the topics, highlighting some of the main themes you will want to consider while reading the texts. The lessons will also contain questions to help guide your reading. Please do not answer these questions in a formal fashion (that is,
don't send me your answers). However, you may certainly bring them up in the discussion forum if you like. These questions are there for you to ponder if you choose to—and if you find them helpful.

- **Read actively, not passively.** Think about the discussion and reading questions as you go along—and take notes! You will be reading a lot of different materials in this course. You may want to keep a notebook to write down your thoughts and ideas and to note important passages (and page numbers) that you may want to include in your discussions or exams. In this vein, I would also recommend downloading and printing the extra reading materials that are posted on ereserves and in the Resources folder. That way you can also write notes in the margins and highlight important passages.

- **Look ahead.** Some lessons require substantially more reading/writing than others. Plan your time accordingly.

- **Participation in the discussion forum is required.** Keep the discussion in mind as you read so that you will easily come up with a contribution that will be useful to yourself and to the rest of the class.

- **Check the schedule weekly!** The forum posting schedule will change most weeks due to assignment deadlines and exam times. Don't let a deadline sneak up on you!

- **Visit the UNC Writing Center's website** and read their suggestions thoroughly. Do not fail to do this! It will make your life easier.

## ACADEMIC POLICIES

By enrolling as a student in this course, you agree to abide by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill policies related to the acceptable use of online resources. Please consult the Acceptable Use Policy on topics such as copyright, net-etiquette, and privacy protection.

As part of this course, you may be asked to participate in online discussions or other online activities that may include personal information about you or other students in the course. Please be respectful of the rights and protection of other participants under the UNC-Chapel Hill Information Security Policies when participating in online classes.

When using online resources offered by organizations not affiliated with UNC-Chapel Hill, such as Google or YouTube, please note that the terms and conditions of these companies and not the University’s Terms and Conditions apply. These third parties may offer different degrees of privacy protection and access rights to online content. You should be well aware of this when posting content to sites not managed by UNC-Chapel Hill.

When links to sites outside of the unc.edu domain are inserted in class discussions, please be mindful that clicking on sites not affiliated with UNC-Chapel Hill may pose a risk for your computer due to the possible presence of malware on such sites.

### Honor Code

You are expected to adhere to the requirements of the UNC Honor Code. In this class, adhering to the Honor Code means making your own original posts, being honest in any communication related to the course, authoring your own papers, and completing the exams without the assistance of another person or material other than your own book and notes. All other general expectations of the Honor Code apply as well. If you are unsure of your responsibilities under the Honor Code, please visit the UNC Honor System website. Simply being unaware of the requirements of the Honor Code does not remove you from responsibility to adhere to it. Violations of the Honor Code will be reported to the Honor Court.
**Office of Accessibility/Special Accommodations**

If you are a student with a documented disability, you can receive services through Accessibility Resources & Service. You must self-identify through Accessibility Resources to receive services or accommodation from either of these offices. Accessibility Resources works closely with programs, offices, and departments throughout the University to help create an accessible environment.

The office is located in Suite 2126 of the Student Academic Services Building (SASB), 450 Ridge Road, Chapel Hill, NC, and is open from 8 am to 5 pm Monday through Friday. You can contact them by phone at 919-962-8300 or 711 (NC-RELAY), or by email at accessibility@unc.edu.

**LESSONS**

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