



IDENTITY AND ETHICS IN POP

Seminar Leader: **Katherine Durand**

House Leader: **Kei Kato**

Course Description

Living in this fast-changing, responsive, and conscious global society, we can easily understand that those around us are not always the same as ourselves. We are growing to accept that the unfamiliar is not always something bad or something that should be avoided, but something that can bring depth and even fun to our lives. Gender Studies is one of those fields that has often been underrepresented in and sometimes completely overlooked by universities around the world, and is only now beginning to gain the recognition and student interest it deserves.

This course will take a gender studies approach to explaining the fascinating and fluid concept of *identity* and the many forms it takes in the pop culture we know and love. Together we will explore how we define ourselves and others, discuss our values (especially feelings of “right” vs. “wrong”), and look at how stereotypes, media representation, and even illegal activities related to pop culture influence our lives. As we experience this seminar together, both students and teachers should have an open mind, and try to see the world through many different eyes. We will also have the chance to share our favorite stories, songs, characters, and shows!

Schedule

Day 1: *Identity and Social Norms—What Defines Us?*

Silviu Copesescu says, “*Identity symbolizes my, your, our, their need for fulfillment as autonomous human beings/entities.*” On Day 1, we will compare the parts of our own lives that already seem fulfilled with the parts that still feel unfulfilled. We will talk about where we feel we belong (or not) in society and why. Come to class ready to introduce yourself, and to learn more about what “identity” really means. The 1st self-introduction can be quick and simple – we will just share what soon comes to mind!

Then, after discussing identity and social norms more carefully, we will watch and discuss some video clips from well-known anime and movies that showcase characters’ struggles with their identities. There will be an overall theme that links these videos, so please think about what that theme might be while watching. The final activity of the day will be a 2nd round of self-introductions, and reflection time. Let’s try to include what we learned about identity into our new self-introductions, and help each other learn more about who we are as individuals and why our individuality is important.

Day 2: *Gender and Sexuality—Pop Culture Icons, Fandoms, and Real Life*



The theme for the day is “Gendered Identities and Choice.” We will look at the controversial question of to what extent gender and sexuality are either *assigned* to us, or *designed* by us. After the lecture activities listed below, we will reflect on our own freedom to make choices about our gender and sexuality, and compare them to the world of pop culture. We will even take a look at how fandoms help define/redefine norms about gender and sexuality. Be ready to share any instances where pop culture has inspired, disappointed, or confused you, or made you think differently about the world.

Another theme to think about for Day 2 is “Real Life vs. Virtual Life.” Are we limited to being just one “self?” Or do we pursue multiple identities in different places to fulfill our needs as individuals? Think about your ideal life – what you wish you could do, where you most want to live, what kind of person you dream of being – and think about whether society makes it easier or harder for you to achieve those things.

Day 3: *Stereotypes, Ideals, and Representation*

For Day 3, we ask the question, “When, where, and how are people represented and misrepresented?” After a brief lecture and a discussion of our own experiences, we will discuss the root of the problem, “Why do we stereotype?” This is closely connected to our own sense of identity, which shapes the identities of others in both positive and negative ways. In an international context, we will also discuss what the boundary is between describing the characteristics of social norms in any given culture, and stereotyping. For the activities on Day 3, we should keep in mind the class goal of understanding our own identities and how the stereotyped, idealized, or real identities and representations of others affect our lives.

Day 4: *The Future of Pop & Brief Presentations*

On Day 4, we will review the previous topics and share our opinions on the future of pop and identity. As a class we will tie together what we have learned about gender, sexuality, representation, stereotypes, ideals, and pop culture’s influence on norms of identity. We will then discuss what we can do with this knowledge to make the world a more safe and comfortable place for every individual.

Final Exercise

Each student will prepare a brief 3-minute presentation. Students may choose from one of the prompts below, or ask the Seminar Leader and/or House Leader about a topic they propose.

- Pretend that you are the casting director for a future live action movie of your favorite manga, anime, or novel. Talk about who you would cast in the main roles, what those roles mean, and why you think the actors/actresses are well suited to the roles.
- Create a short outline of a story you would want to write if you were a famous author, screenplay writer, or mangaka. Explain the message you want your readers to learn from your story, or show what aspect of society you want to change or remark on.



- Share and discuss briefly a song that you like that has had an impact on your life, or that you can deeply identify with. Write an extra verse that conveys your identity and share it with the class.

Pre-Seminar Assignments and Readings

- **Day 1:** Required: “Defining Identity in the Context of Globalization” by Silviu Coposescu (6 pages)
<http://but.unitbv.ro/BU2009/BULETIN2009/Series%20VII/BULETIN%20VII%20PDF/009%20coposescu%20BUT%20>
- **Day 2:** Required: “AKB48 member’s ‘penance’ shows flaws in idol culture” by Ian Martin (3 pages)
<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/culture/2013/02/01/music/akb48-members-penance-shows-flaws-in-idol-culture/>
- **Day 3:** Optional: “Is Ghost in the Shell Career Suicide for Scarlett Johansson” by Eleanor Tremeer (approx. 3 pages)
<http://moviepilot.com/posts/3371984>
- **Day 4:** Optional: “Facebook and Twitter Really Are Where People Get Their News” by Julia Greenberg (approx. 2 pages)
<http://www.wired.com/2015/07/facebook-twitter-really-people-get-news/>
- **Other Requirements:**
 - If you have not already, please watch Disney’s “Frozen.” We will watch a few short scenes in class, so please be prepared.
 - You do not have to watch “Ghost in the Shell” but please try to familiarize yourself with the plot and the identity problems of the main character, Kusanagi Motoko.

Message from the House Leader

Hello, everyone! My name is Kei Kato (加藤慶) and I am a fifth year at ICU (International Christian University) in Tokyo. I just finished studying abroad in North Carolina, USA this May and, while I’m majoring in anthropology in ICU, I mostly studied photography and American history there. I am from Nagoya and had not lived abroad before, and my English is not great at all. To some of you who are nervous about your English skills, NO WORRIES!!!! I like discussing identity issues: race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality, and hope we can learn TOGETHER in this seminar through lots of interaction. Liberal arts education is not top-down education; I believe it’s called TRAINING. Since our seminar topic is about identities, our seminar may get very intense and personal. Thus, I expect you all to be open, respectful, and emotional. Some people say academics should not be emotional, but I do not think so; bring emotions from daily life, especially angers, to seminar discussion. My personal goal for this seminar is to provide new perspectives through which you can see the world, and that is liberal arts. I’m so excited to see you at KSS this summer!



Message from the Seminar Leader

Hi hi, everyone! My name is Katie Durand, and I am currently a first year Master's student in East Asian Studies at Cornell University in New York. My hometown is Omaha, Nebraska though, so if anyone is from Shizuoka we are from sister cities! I am so looking forward to our program this summer and I can't wait to meet you all! Since we will all be sharing our thoughts and having lots of discussions over some fun, important, and even a little controversial social topics, I hope we will be able to learn a lot about each other. So let's all come to KSS prepared to talk about our favorite movies, dramas, anime, manga and comics, video games, music, and most importantly OUR OWN opinions and experiences. While I personally enjoy Japanese manga and anime, Korean dramas and music, and indie films, I didn't realize until recently just how deeply being surrounded by these everyday hobbies could affect my environment, my outlook, and even my own sense of identity. Thanks to an intense gender studies class I took last semester, I came to understand more fully the surprising complexity of the concept of "Identity." So since then I have been excitedly trying to rediscover my favorite stories with this broader mindset and with the ability to consider the social conditions that make my favorite and most personally influential characters who they are. My personal goal for this seminar is to help all of us take a deeper look at our own identities, and discuss how our lives are affected when we consume pop culture, at home and around the world. By learning from each other in this way we can pursue our futures with a higher level of consciousness about ourselves and those around us. If you have any questions feel free to email me anytime See you soon!