



FTVM 620: Seminar in Film or Electronic Digital Media – Mediating Sex

Fall 2026

T, 3:00-6:00PM

Syllabus Outline

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Instructor Information• Course Description• Learning Objectives• General Course Overview | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Grading Overview• Course Policies• Accommodations and Support• Course Schedule |
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Instructor and GSI Information

Instructor Information

Josef Nguyen (he/him/his) | josefn@umich.edu

Instructor office hours are by email appointment, with in-office and online options.

Contact Information

Please format and address all emails to the Instructor professionally, include the course information in the subject line, and allow up to 24 hours for responses (and longer for weekends).

Course Description

This course examines the mediation of and mediating force of “sex” as an act, as a concept, and as itself a form of technology. To do so, this course explores how ideas about and practices of sex are defined, represented, circulated, and contested through cultural, textual, discursive, and material forms—from mainstream films and mobile dating apps to medical categories and legal definitions. Additionally, this course interrogates how understandings of sex serve to mediate the development, adoption, use, regulation, rejection, and obsolescence of new and emerging media and technologies in their historic contexts.

Engaging with an interdisciplinary constellation of fields, this course draws on media studies, science and technology studies, feminist and queer theory, critical race and ethnic studies, disability studies, and performance studies, among others. Assigned readings and media texts may cover but are not limited to shifting scientific and popular discourses of sex and sexuality,

the monetization and commodification of sex, sex work and labor, reproduction and sexual healthcare, censorship and the pornographic, sex in public, the politics of embodiment and sexual pleasure, sex law and policy, sexual subcultures and sexual identities, and technological and consumer design for and about sex.

Learning Objectives

- Understand a range of theorizations and analyses of sex and of media as historically and culturally constructed and situated technologies, conventions, and practices
- Become familiar with critical and theoretical approaches to the relationship among media, sex, and power
- Integrate existing scholarship into original research with awareness of the concerns of academic publishing

General Course Overview

Required Texts and Materials

- Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: The Will to Knowledge* (1976/1978)
- Bo Ruberg, *Sex Dolls at Sea: Imagined Histories of Sexual Technologies* (2022)
- Lynn Comella, *Vibrator Nation: How Feminist Sex-Toy Stores Changed the Business of Pleasure* (2017)
- Ariane Cruz, *The Color of Kink: Black Women, BDSM, and Pornography* (2016)
- All other readings and materials are available for free in the Dropbox folder for the course or through the Swank streaming platform.

Grading Overview

Coursework will be graded per the following breakdown:

- Thoughtful Class Engagement – 50%
- Final Research Paper – 50%

Course Policies

Classroom Conduct

It is our responsibility to work together to produce a classroom environment where everyone can share, discuss, and question the materials at hand as well as contribute their own work respectfully and productively. Conflicting perspectives are unavoidable. To ensure that participants feel comfortable contributing a diverse set of thoughts, comments, and views, we will not use oppressive or harmful language nor tolerate harassment, personal attacks, and other actions or behaviors that unduly distract from the educational mission and that inflict emotional, physical, or psychological harm on those involved.

Part of the role of encouraging a diverse learning environment is acknowledging that individuals should feel safe and respected to contribute to the classroom in good faith. This involves not only allowing everyone opportunities to contribute their thoughts but to be mindful of how we recognize and address others. Do not assume things about others' identities, backgrounds, or experiences—whether that is age, race, gender, sexuality, ability, class, etc... Address people by their names, pronouns, and other identifiers that they disclose. Avoid insisting on imposing identity markers onto others. Allow people to self-identify as they feel comfortable.

What you share with and create for this class reflects not only you as both a student and a civic subject, but it also reflects on me as your instructor, the class as a learning community, and the University of Michigan as an academic institution.

Please discuss with me any concerns you have regarding an unsafe or hostile classroom environment, particularly if something arises that causes distress.

Sexual Misconduct

Title IX prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex, which includes sexual misconduct — including harassment, domestic and dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking. We understand that sexual violence can undermine students' academic success. We encourage anyone dealing with sexual misconduct to talk to someone about their experience, so they can get the support they need. Confidential support and academic advocacy can be found with the Sexual Assault Prevention and Awareness Center (SAPAC) on their 24-hour crisis line, 734.936.3333 and at sapac@umich.edu.

Alleged violations can be non-confidentially reported to the Equity, Civil Rights, and Title IX Office (ECRT) at ecrtooffice@umich.edu.

Class Attendance

Attend class regularly and in full to the best of your reasonable ability.

Severe Inclement Weather

In cases of severe inclement weather that may impede safe travel to campus, we may instead meet on Zoom. In such situations, I will do my best to notify the class by 8am the day of. For those already on campus or in Ann Arbor and who do not otherwise have a designated space to attend an online course meeting without disruption, our regular classroom will still be available during our scheduled meeting time for such purposes.

Please reach out with any concerns about access to appropriate computing equipment to attend any online class meetings.

Technology in the Classroom

Laptops, phones, tablets, and other computing devices can be used in the classroom specifically for purposes directly pertinent to the educational activities and discussions at-hand. Please avoid any technology use in the classroom that may be distracting you or others from the course during class meetings.

Classroom Recording

Unless specified in approved documented accommodations and with a completed Audio Recording agreement between student and instructor, students are prohibited from recording and distributing any part of this course. Any approved recordings may only be used for the student's own private use as relevant for the course.

Additional information regarding course recordings and privacy concerns can be found on the UM ITS Recording and Privacy Concerns webpage.

Late Work

If you need an extension on assignments, please let me know in advance as soon as possible so we can make appropriate arrangements.

Academic Misconduct

The University of Michigan community functions best when its members treat one another with honesty, fairness, respect, and trust. The college promotes the assumption of personal

responsibility and integrity and prohibits all forms of academic dishonesty and misconduct. All cases of academic misconduct will be referred to the LSA Office of Student Academic Affairs. Being found responsible for academic misconduct will usually result in a grade sanction, in addition to any sanction from the college. For more information, including examples of behaviors that are considered academic misconduct and potential sanctions, please see <https://lsa.umich.edu/lsa/academics/academic-integrity.html>.

Generative Artificial Intelligence (Gen AI)

Any potential use of generative AI tools (e.g. U-M GPT, ChatGPT, Dall-e, etc.) for work in this course should be done only in the interest of supporting the successful achievement of our student learning outcomes and assignment objectives and with a critical perspective on how such use contributes to learning and development. Major assignments for the course all include an accompanying critical reflection that asks students to discuss their process and experience for ideating and completing the assignment (e.g. original plans and goals, sources of inspiration, tools and skills used, encountered challenges, and self-assessment of the completed assignment). Please disclose and discuss any use of generative AI in the assignment's corresponding critical reflection to demonstrate thoughtful and critical use of such tools in supporting achievement of student learning outcomes and assignment objectives.

Accommodations and Support

Disability Accommodations

The University of Michigan recognizes disability as an integral part of diversity, equity, and inclusion; and is committed to creating as accessible educational environment for students with disabilities/disabled students as possible. Disability also includes mental health conditions, ADHD, learning disabilities, autism, chronic illness, physical conditions, sensory conditions, and more.

If you anticipate or are experiencing barriers based on disability or temporary injuries, Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) (<https://ssd.umich.edu>) is the office that students work with to explore reasonable accommodations, tools, and resources.

- If you are already connected with SSD and have approved accommodations, please share your letter through Accommodate as soon as possible so that we can discuss how your accommodations will be implemented in this course. The sooner I know about your disability access-needs, the more equipped I can be to facilitate accommodations.

- You should reach out to me as soon as possible so we can discuss how to meet your specific accommodation needs as they relate to this specific course. A letter from SSD alone is insufficient for us to address your individual needs in the context of this course, as accommodation letters only provide abstracted and general guidelines.
- If you have not connected with SSD and anticipate or are experiencing a disability-related barrier, and would like to discuss accommodations and/or resources, please contact SSD by completing their initial information form (<https://ssd.umich.edu/>).
- If you have a temporary medical injury/condition, such as a broken arm, I may be able to assist in minimizing classroom barriers. In situations where additional assistance is needed, you should contact the SSD as noted above.

For more information, call 734-763-3000 or email ssdoffice@umich.edu.

Health and Wellbeing

While regular attendance and engagement in class are important, it should not be done at the undue expense of student health and well-being. As such, please treat your health and well-being, as well as the health and well-being of others, as a priority, such as by focusing on resting and recovering when ill. It is also important to care for one's needs for rest outside of those concerns typically designated as valid medical illness and injury, such as during periods of high stress, menstruation, or fatigue.

Additionally, university students may experience stressors that can impact both their academic experience and their personal well-being. These may include academic pressures and challenges associated with relationships, mental health, alcohol or other drugs, identities, finances, etc.

If you are experiencing concerns, seeking help is a courageous thing to do for yourself and those who care about you. If the source of your stressors is academic, please contact me so that we can find solutions together. For personal concerns, U-M offers a variety of resources, many of which are listed on the Resources for Student Well-being webpage (<https://wellbeing.studentlife.umich.edu/resources-list>). You can also search for additional well-being resources on that website.

Student Parents and Caregivers

If you are pregnant, a parenting student, or primarily responsible for providing care for a loved one or family member, and you need any accommodations, please let me know as soon as possible. You may also reach out to <https://mcasp.org> and CEW+ (<https://cew.umich.edu/>) for resources and community support.

Writing Support

The Sweetland Center for Writing offers free one-to-one writing support to all U-M undergraduate and graduate students, regardless of assignment type or discipline. Sweetland faculty and peer writing consultants meet with student writers to help with any stage of the writing process, from initial brainstorming to final revisions. Learn more at <https://lsa.umich.edu/sweetland>.

Course Schedule

<u>Week 01:</u> <u>Getting Started</u>	Tuesday, 1 September 2026 <u>IN CLASS:</u> Syllabus Overview Class Introductions
<u>Week 02:</u> <u>The Meaning of Sex</u>	Tuesday, 8 September 2026 <u>BEFORE CLASS:</u> Gayle Rubin, "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality," <i>Deviations: A Gayle Rubin Reader</i> (2012 [1982/1984]) Carol J. Adams, "The Sexual Politics of Meat," <i>The Sexual Politics of Meat</i> (1990) Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, "Introduction," <i>Control and Freedom: Power and Paranoia in the Age of Fiber Optics</i> (2008)
<u>Week 03:</u> <u>History of Sexuality</u>	Tuesday, 15 September 2026 <u>BEFORE CLASS:</u> Michel Foucault, <i>The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: The Will to Knowledge</i> (1976/1978) [full book]

Table 1. Course schedule for Weeks 01-03

<u>Week 04:</u> <u>Case Study -</u> <u>Barbarella</u>	Tuesday, 22 September 2026 <u>BEFORE CLASS:</u> <i>Barbarella</i> (Roger Vadim, 1968) [available to stream through Swank] Linda Williams, "Make Love, Not War: Jane Fonda Comes Home (1968–1978)," <i>Screening Sex</i> (2008) Angela Jones, "'I Get Paid to Have Orgasms': Pleasure, Danger, and the Development of Resiliency," <i>Camming: Money, Power, and Pleasure in the Sex Work Industry</i> (2020)
<u>Week 05:</u> <u>Sex</u> <u>Technologies,</u> <u>Part I</u>	Tuesday, 29 September 2026 <u>BEFORE CLASS:</u> Bo Ruberg, <i>Sex Dolls at Sea: Imagined Histories of Sexual Technologies</i> (2022) [full book]
<u>Week 06:</u>	Tuesday, 6 October 2026 <u>NO CLASS MEETING</u>
<u>Week 07:</u> <u>Mediating</u> <u>Consent</u>	Tuesday, 13 October 2026 Rana M. Jaleel, "Two Title IXs: Empire and the Transnational Production of 'Welcomeness' on Campus," <i>The Work of Rape</i> (2021) Joseph J. Fischel, "#MeFirst--Undemocratic Hedonism," <i>Screw Consent: A Better Politics of Sexual Justice</i> (2019) Josef Nguyen, "Scripting Consenting Fictions in Sex Technology Imaginaries" (2023)
<u>Week 08:</u> <u>Fall Break</u>	Tuesday, 20 October 2026 <u>NO CLASS MEETING</u>

Table 2. Course schedule for Weeks 04-08

<u>Week 09:</u> <u>Sex Technologies, Part II</u>	Tuesday, 27 October 2026 <u>BEFORE CLASS:</u> Lynn Comella, <i>Vibrator Nation: How Feminist Sex-Toy Stores Changed America</i> (2017) [full book]
<u>Week 10:</u> <u>The Work of Pornography, Part I</u>	Tuesday, 3 November 2026 <u>BEFORE CLASS:</u> Heather Berg, "Porn Work Against Work," <i>Porn Work: Sex, Labor, and Late Capitalism</i> (2021) Jennifer C. Nash, "Race-Pleasures: <i>Sexworld</i> and the Ecstatic Black Female Body," <i>The Black Body in Ecstasy: Reading Race, Reading Pornography</i> (2014) Teddy Pozo, "Counter gaming's Porn Parodies, Hard-core and Soft," <i>Rated M for Mature: Sex and Sexuality in Video Games</i> (2015)
<u>Week 11:</u> <u>Regulating Sex</u>	Tuesday, 10 November 2026 <u>BEFORE CLASS:</u> Michele Meek, "Regulating Adolescent Sexuality in US Cinema: From Censorship to Child Pornography Laws," <i>Consent Culture and Teen Films: Adolescent Sexuality in US Movies</i> (2023) Cait McKinney, "Crisis Infrastructures: AIDS Activism Meets Internet Regulation," <i>AIDS and the Distribution of Crises</i> (eds. Jih-Fei Cheng, Alexandra Juhasz, and Nishant Shahani) (2020) Jean Ketterling, "Deplatforming Digital Sex: Self-Governing Sex in Video Games," <i>The Bloomsbury Handbook of Sex and Sexuality in Game Studies</i> (eds. Matthew Wysocki and Steffi Shock) (2025)
<u>Week 12:</u> <u>Research Paper Abstract Workshop</u>	Tuesday, 17 November 2026 <u>BEFORE CLASS:</u> Submit research paper abstract <u>IN CLASS:</u> Research paper abstract workshop

Table 3. Course schedule for Weeks 09-12

<u>Week 13:</u> <u>Thanksgiving</u> <u>Week</u>	Tuesday, 24 November 2026 <u>NO CLASS MEETING</u>
<u>Week 14:</u> <u>The Work of</u> <u>Pornography,</u> <u>Part II</u>	Tuesday, 1 December 2026 <u>BEFORE CLASS:</u> Ariane Cruz, <i>The Color of Kink: Black Women, BDSM, and Pornography</i> (2016) [full book]
<u>Week 15:</u> <u>Case Study –</u> <u>The Tearoom</u>	Tuesday, 8 December 2026 <u>BEFORE CLASS:</u> <i>The Tearoom</i> (Robert Yang, 2017) [game] Richard Dyer, “Idol Thoughts: Orgasm and Self-reflexivity in Gay Pornography,” <i>The Culture of Queers</i> (2002 [1994]) Shaka McGlotten, “Feeling Black and Blue,” <i>Virtual Intimacies: Media, Affect, and Queer Sociality</i> (2013)
<u>FINALS WEEK</u>	Final Research Paper due Monday, 21 December 2026 by 11:59PM

Table 4. Course schedule for Week 13-Finals

The descriptions and timelines in this syllabus are subject to change at the discretion of the Professor.