



CONTEMPORARY BRITISH FEMALE FILMMAKERS

IES Abroad: London

DESCRIPTION:

This course explores the contribution of female filmmakers in Britain in the twenty-first century. From the recent global successes of directors such as Emerald Fennell and Molly Manning Walker to the long-standing triumphs of producer Tessa Ross, women in the British Film industry exemplify the, often overlooked, significant contributions made to global film culture by women. It will also consider the critical acclaim of the television works of showrunners Phoebe Waller-Bridge and Micaela Coel, looking at race and class in the process. The intersectional identity markers of these various female filmmakers enables important discussions about what stories get made and whose stories are told and by whom.

CREDITS: 3 credits

CONTACT HOURS: 45 hours

LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION: English

PREREQUISITES: None

ADDITIONAL COST: In an era of digital viewing this course will cost approximately £20 per semester for each student (less if you share transactions). The easiest way to view films beyond class is to subscribe to a Video on Demand service such as Netflix or to rent on demand, from Amazon. Dedicated providers such as Curzon OnDemand, or BFI Player are also good sources.

METHOD OF PRESENTATION:

- Lectures
- Presentations
- Field Trips
- Film Screenings
- Course Readings

REQUIRED WORK AND FORM OF ASSESSMENT:

- Participation - 10%
- Midterm Paper -25%
- Group Project - 20%
- Annotated Bibliography - 10%
- Final Presentation -35%

Course Participation

Participation in class discussion including the preparation of reading and responses to course content

Midterm Assignment

This 1500 word essay will focus on the female gaze and how female filmmakers create alternative ways of looking for their protagonists. It requires the use of at least 3 academic sources.

Group Research Project

In small groups, students will research a British female film director. In doing so, they will investigate her career path, films and endeavors. They will also focus on any themes her films negotiate and how she is represented in the media.

Final Research Presentation



For their final research projects, students will create their own research question and thesis statement. This project can pertain to any element of the course as long as it considers gender in the process. All projects will be approved by the instructor. Students will be expected to include a 1000 word close textual analysis element with their presentation.

Annotated Bibliography

Includes at least five independently selected scholarly sources and use of reading list.

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- Develop media textual analysis skills, utilizing close textual analysis to find meaning in visual culture and media
- Apply relevant gender, queer and critical race theories to film and television analysis
- Critically engage with contemporary British film and television culture and how that culture is exported globally
- Understand the complexities of contemporary British identity politics, especially those relating to gender and intersectionality, and how they are represented on screen
- Examine the diversity of British female filmmakers, reflecting on the many social, institutional and systemic barriers challenging women in the creative industries today

ATTENDANCE POLICY:

Regular class attendance is mandatory. Irregular attendance may result in a lower grade in the course, and/or disciplinary action. The IES Abroad London class attendance policy does not allow for unexcused absences, and grades will be docked one-half letter grade for each such absence. Rare exceptions will be made for the following reasons:

- The student is too sick to attend class. In this instance, the student must call the IES Abroad Centre before class to notify any of the IES Abroad staff. It is not sufficient either to email, send a message with a friend or call the Centre after the class has started.
- A serious illness or death in the immediate family requiring a student to travel home. This requires written approval from the Centre Director before departure.

Arriving more than 10 minutes late to class may count as an unexcused absence. Immigration laws in the UK are extremely strict, and we jeopardize our legal status in hosting students who do not regularly attend class. Students who do not attend class regularly will be reported to the appropriate officials and risk dismissal from the program and deportation from the UK. If a student incurs absences representing 25% of the total class hours, they will be contacted by the Academic Programmes Manager (APM) and Centre Director (CD). If these absences are made up exclusively of unexcused non-attendance, this will trigger a disciplinary review. If these absences are made up of excused non-attendance, a meeting will be held to discuss the underlying reasons for lack of attendance, and to discuss ways it can be maintained for the duration of the term. If the 25% threshold is reached due to a mixture of excused and unexcused absences, students will also be asked to attend a meeting to discuss.

CONTENT:

Choose an item	Content	Assignments
Week 1	Women and the British Film Industry This session offers an introduction to women in the British Film Industry. We will explore a historical overview of the contributions of women to the industry before focusing on the contemporary industry dynamics that create barriers for female creatives. We will explore how female filmmakers access funding, struggle within an opportunity system based on nepotism and ‘men’s clubs’, and yet, despite this, they find success, particularly in more independent film or television.	- Hockenhull, Stella. "Damsels in Distress: British Women Film Directors and British Cinema Funding Post Millennium." (2015). - Wing-Fai, Leung, Rosalind Gill, and Keith Randle. "Getting in, getting on, getting out? Women as career scramblers in the UK film and television industries." <i>The Sociological Review</i> 63.1_suppl (2015): 50-65.
Week 2	Women as Auteurs: Case Study - Andrea Arnold Traditionally, the label ‘auteur’ has carried masculine connotations. Yet, in recent years, many female filmmakers have emerged to claim the title. Through a case study exploration of director/auteur Andrea Arnold, this class will explore her cinematic style, the themes she addresses in her films (often exposing the struggles of working-class girls and women in Britain), and where the feminine auteur fits within the British film industry today.	- Goss, Brian Michael. "'What's your dream?' The films of femme auteur Andrea Arnold." <i>Studies in European Cinema</i> 21.1 (2024): 63-78. - Bolton, Lucy. "A phenomenology of girlhood: being Mia in Fish Tank (Andrea Arnold, 2009)." <i>International Cinema and the Girl: Local Issues, Transnational Contexts</i>. New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2016. 75-84. - Fish Tank (Andrea Arnold, 2009), Wuthering Heights (Andrea Arnold, 2011)
Week 3	Women Behind the Camera: The Female Gaze This session will consider then complicate Laura Mulvey’s seminal essay “Narrative Cinema and Visual Pleasure” by exploring how women behind the camera challenge the traditional assumption of male directors, writers, and, significant to this session particularly, cinematographers. Using bell hooks and other scholars, we will consider how female filmmakers can create an alternative, or even, ‘oppositional’ gaze. that places women as the subject of the narrative rather than the object.	- Dirse, Zoe. "Gender in cinematography: Female gaze (eye) behind the camera." <i>Journal of Research in Gender Studies</i> 3.1 (2013): 15-29. - Hooks, Bell. "The oppositional gaze: Black female spectators." <i>Black American Cinema</i>. Routledge, 2012. 288-302. - Queenie (Channel 4, 2024), Rocks (Sarah Gavron, 2020)

Choose an item	Content	Assignments
Week 4	Postfeminism, female authorship and the British 'Chick Flick' Popular culture of the noughties embodied many 'postfeminist' sensibilities. Through an exploration of this term, this class considers how female filmmakers more successfully critique the expectations and discourses of postfeminist media. While many films saw career women return to the home, choosing love over career, the case study of Bridget Jones' Diary takes a more complicated approach to these two desires.	- Ashby, Justine. "Postfeminism in the British frame." <i>Cinema Journal</i> 44.2 (2005): 127-133. - Cobb, Shelley. "Adaptable Bridget: Generic Intertextuality and Postfeminism in Bridget Jones's Diary." <i>Authorship in Film Adaptation</i>. University of Texas Press, 2008. 281-304. - Bridget Jones' Diary (Sharon Maguire, 2001)
Week 5	Girlhood, 'Girl Power' and Discourses of 'Belonging'/Gurinder Chadha and the South Asian Diaspora Gurinder Chadha is one of the most successful British female directors. Her film Bend it Like Beckham is the highest grossing football film in history. This session looks at notions of 'girl power' and girlhood, and how Chadha's film negotiates the cultural tensions felt by daughters of immigrants in London. In doing so, it asks students to consider the many contributions of diasporic cinema to British cinema.	- Berghahn, Daniela. "Coming of age in 'The Hood': The diasporic youth film and questions of genre." <i>European cinema in motion: migrant and diasporic film in contemporary Europe</i>. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2010. 235-255. - Lindner, Katharina. "'There is a reason why Sporty Spice is the only one of them without a fella...': the 'lesbian potential of Bend it Like Beckham.'" <i>New Review of Film and Television Studies</i> 9.02 (2011): 204-223. - Rings, Guido. "Questions of Identity: Cultural Encounters in Gurinder Chadha's Bend It Like Beckham." <i>Journal of Popular Film and Television</i> 39.3 (2011): 114-123. - Bend it Like Beckham (Gurinder Chadha, 2002)
Week 6	Group Presentations Students will share their small group projects on a British Female Filmmaker. Each presentation will conclude with two discussion questions for the class.	Films and readings relevant to your research project
Week 7	Cinema Field Trip We will be visiting one of the many local cinemas in London to view a film director by a British woman. The film will change termly based on what new releases are available in cinema.	TBD based on the available films of each semester

Choose an item	Content	Assignments
Week 8	Female Sexuality on Screen: A Woman's Perspective This session explores the representation of female sexuality and sex on screen when authored by women. Revisiting ideas of 'the gaze', this week explores how women transitioned from objects of male desire in film and television to sexual agents, capable of sexual pleasure. This session also importantly considers elements related to the representation of issues surrounding female sexual health and fertility on screen.	- Allen, Louisa. "Young people and sexual pleasure in Netflix's Sex Education." <i>Sex Education</i> (2024): 1-15. - Liddy, Susan. "'Missing Persons'? Representations of Mature Female Sexuality in British and Irish Film 1998-2011." <i>Postgraduate Journal of Women, Ageing and Media</i> 1 (2014). - Sex Education (Netflix, 2019-2023), Only You (Harry Wootliff, 2018), How to Have Sex (Molly Manning Walker, 2023)
Week 9	Queer Female Filmmakers While queer women such as Jane Campion (New Zealand) or Celine Sciamma (France) have had global cinematic success, the contributions of queer British women to film remain lesser known. However, in recent years, a number of young queer directors such as Molly Manning-Walker, Georgia Oakley or Charlotte Wells have gained notoriety within the UK. This session explores the significance of queer stories for women and by women, and asks questions about authorship.	- Çakırlar, C., and G. Needham. "Queer relay in postmillennial British cinema (2000-2020)." in <i>Atlas of Contemporary Queer Cinema</i> (2023): 147-176. - Griffiths, Robin. "'A journey without direction': British Queer Cinema post-Jarman." <i>Journal of British Cinema and Television</i> 13.4 (2016): 590-609. - Blue Jean (Georgia Oakley, 2022)
Week 10	Race, Privilege and Female Television Showrunners Female television showrunners such as Phoebe Waller-Bridge and Emerald Fennell have had significant success since the #MeToo movement. However, this class reflects on the inherent privilege of these women as members of the British elite class. In contrast to the backgrounds of Fennell and Waller-Bridge, the highly successful Micaela Coel is the black daughter of Ghanaian immigrants. This session reflects on both institutional and industrial racism inherent to contemporary British creative industries. In doing so, students will discuss female authorship in relation to race and class.	- Bramwell, Richard. "Victim behaviour and trauma recovery: representing black British femininity through fantasy in Michaela Coel's I May Destroy You." <i>Critical Studies in Television</i> (2024): 17496020241298777. - Darling, Orlaith. "'The moment you realise someone wants your body: neoliberalism, mindfulness and female embodiment in Fleabag.'" <i>Feminist Media Studies</i> 22.1 (2022): 132-147. - Dove-Viebahn, Aviva. "Controlling the narrative, examining the self: the unruly femme subjectivity of Fleabag." <i>Sexualities</i> 27.8 (2024): 1401-1414. - Ullrich, Madeline. "The Feminist Refusal of I May Destroy You." <i>Camera Obscura</i> 39.1 (2024): 191-217. - Fleabag (BBC, 2016-2019), I May Destroy You (BBC, 2020)

Choose an item	Content	Assignments
Week 11	The Heritage Film and Women in History The heritage film has long been a hallmark of the British film industry, often commercially successful at home and abroad. Through a consideration of biopics directed by and about women, this session looks at how powerful British women are depicted for a global market. It also considers the local (UK) success of BBC's <i>Call the Midwife</i> and how it demonstrates the important (yet often overlooked) place women hold within British history.	- Fitzgerald, Louise. "Taking a pregnant pause: Interrogating the feminist potential of <i>Call the Midwife</i>." <i>Upstairs and Downstairs: British Costume Drama Television from The Forsyte Saga to Downton Abbey</i>. Rowman and Littlefield, 2015. 249-263. - Erhart, Julia. "Reclaiming Undeserving Women: Contemporary Female Biopics" in <i>Gendering history on screen: Women filmmakers and historical films</i>. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018.35-62 - The Iron Lady (Phyllida Lloyd, 2011), <i>Call the Midwife</i> (BBC, 2012-Present)
Week 12	Final Presentations Students will present their final research projects to the class. This project will be self-selected by the student (and approved by the instructor). It can relate to any thematic topics associated with the course. but must consider identity factors in the process. Students will then conduct roundtable discussions with one another, interrogating their research.	Films and readings relevant to your research project

COURSE-RELATED TRIPS:

- This course will include a trip to a local London cinema to see a film directed by a British woman.

RECOMMENDED READINGS:

- Bell, Melanie. *Movie workers: The women who made British Cinema*. Vol. 1. University of Illinois Press, 2021.
- Hill, Sarah. "Young Women, Girls and Postfeminism in Contemporary British Film." *Young Women, Girls and Postfeminism in Contemporary British Film* (2020): 1-256.
- Hockenhull, Stella. *British Women Film Directors in the New Millennium*. Springer, 2017.
- Holzberg, Billy, Jacqueline Gibbs, and Aura Lehtonen. *Bad Sex: Sexuality, Gender and Affect in Contemporary TV*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2025.