COMM 3012

Media, Aging, and Adulthood in Modern America

Spring 2024
Monday/Wednesday 3:30pm-5:00pm

Instructor: Arthur Wang
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Description

This seminar course examines how mass media reflect and resist norms of adulthood and aging. Frequently defined as an endpoint -- a biological inevitability, a completion of development, an achievement of maturity -- adulthood is neither simple nor static. Media for children and adolescents, for example, often depict adulthood as a paradox: both exciting and boring; free of oversight and burdened by responsibility; the beginning of real life and a kind of death. Students will learn interdisciplinary and multimodal humanistic methods for understanding the mediated history of adulthood. Topics include the emergence of young adulthood as a life stage, a key demographic in consumer culture, and a popular genre; fantasies of nonlinear aging like intergenerational body-swaps, aging backward, and agelessness; quarter-life, midlife, and end-of-life crises; infantilization and other discriminatory exclusions from adulthood; gender and rhetorics of proper aging; and failures and refusals to age appropriately, from the man-child to the Golden Girls.

Assignments and Workload

Weekly reading and viewing: Expect 30–60 pages of scholarship (depending on difficulty and complexity) and primary texts, including films, TV episodes, advertisements, journalism, social media, trade publications, and literature (including short stories, creative nonfiction, and perhaps one or two novels). Thorough preparation and thoughtful participation in class are essential. Optional in-person screenings will be scheduled for any films or television episodes that aren't free and accessible online.

Graded assignments: Most likely one short paper and a final paper or project, along with several short assignments, potentially in the form of reading responses, critical media and discourse analysis, and exploratory data analysis (no prior data science experience necessary). No exams.