

**“For Your Viewing Pleasure:
Gender and Sexuality in Contemporary American
Theatre, Film, and Popular Culture”**

*[Note: This syllabus is subject to change,
depending on reading load
and events that come up in pop culture throughout the semester]*

**Prof. Jill Dolan
Spring 2013, GSS403
Monday, 1:30 – 4:20
Marx 101**

Office Hours: Tuesdays, 2-4 and by appointment

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“For Your Viewing Pleasure” considers what it means to be an ideologically invested spectator of theatre, film, television, and popular culture in the contemporary U.S. Popular culture both reflects and shapes who we are as citizens. Contrary to common presumptions, the course argues that viewers can consider gender, sexuality, race, and other identities in their entertainment and still enjoy themselves, as analysis and pleasure are not mutually exclusive. The course will sharpen students’ instincts as fans and spectators, and provide tools to deepen the analytic skills they bring to their cultural consumption.

Course Outline

(Key: BB/CM = Blackboard, Course Materials; ER = Electronic Reserve; LA = Labyrinth)

Monday, February 4th: Preliminary ideas and reading around:

Feminist and Queer Spectatorship and Critical Literacy (all urls are posted on Blackboard)

- The Bechdel test; <http://bechdeltest.com/> (scan, to discuss in class)
- Emily Nussbaum, “The Rebirth of the Feminist Manifesto: Come for the Lady Gaga, Stay for the Empowerment,” *New York Magazine*, 30 October 2011; <http://nymag.com/news/features/feminist-blogs-2011-11/>.
- Mary Kearney, “Feminist Media Manifesto,” 2012 (BB/CM)
- Stacy Wolf, “Why we Love *Les Mis*, Despite its Miserable Gender Stereotypes,” *Washington Post Opinion*, 28 December 2012, http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2012-12-28/opinions/36071808_1_pop-culture-gender-les-miz.
- Jess Cagle, “Tracy Morgan and Hollywood’s Nasty Comedy Habit,” *Entertainment Weekly*, June 24, 2011, 7 <http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,,20503264,00.html>.
- Christy Wampole, “How to Live Without Irony,” *New York Times*, 17 November 2012; <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/11/17/how-to-live-without-irony/>.
- First episode of *Girls* (view together in class and discuss from various critical angles: the story, structure; camera angles; characters; feminist; casting; queer)

#2 Monday, February 11th: Some History and Key Terms (89 pp.)

- Daniel Horowitz, *Consuming Pleasures: Intellectuals and Popular Culture in the Postwar World* (Philadelphia: U of Penn P, 2012). "Introduction," 1-18. (BB/CM; ER)
- Kate Milestone and Anneke Meyer, *Gender and Popular Culture* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2012). "Introduction," 1-29; Chapter Six, "Consuming Popular Culture: The Role of Gender," 151-183. (BB/CM; ER)
- Tania Modleski, ed., *Studies in Entertainment: Critical Approaches to Mass Culture* (Bloomington, IN: U of Indiana P, 1986). "Introduction," ix-xix. (BB/CM; ER)
- Application provided by JD.

#3 Monday, February 18th: The Gaze and Feminist Spectatorship (68 pp.)

- E. Deidre Pribram, "Introduction," in E. Deidre Pribram, ed., *Female Spectators: Looking at Film and Television* (UK: Verso, 1988), 1-11. (ER)
- Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1989). "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975), 14-26. . (ER)
- Suzanna Danuta Walters, *Material Girls: Making Sense of Feminist Cultural Theory* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1995). Chapter Two, "Visual Pressures: On Gender and Looking," 50-66; and Chapter Four, "You Looking at Me? Seeing Beyond the 'Gaze,'" 86-115. (ER)
- Application #1

See Prof. Anne-Marie Slaughter in conversation with President Shirley Tilghman, Friday, February 22nd, 4:30, McCosh 50. Tickets are required or watch the simulcast.

#4 Monday, February 25th: After Mulvey: The Gaze II (96 pp.)

- Stacy Wolf, *Changed for Good: A Feminist History of the Broadway Musical* (New York: Oxford UP, 2011), chapter on *Wicked*, 197-218. (ER)
- Alexander Doty, *Making Things Perfectly Queer: Interpreting Mass Culture* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1993). "Introduction, "What Makes Queerness Most?" xi-xix; Chapter One, "There's Something Queer Here," 1-16; and Chapter Two, "Whose Text is it Anyway? Queer Cultures, Queer Auteurs, and Queer Authorship," 17-34. (ER)
- José Estaban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1999). "Introduction: Performing Disidentifications," 1-34. (ER)
- Application #2

#5 Monday, March 4th: "Third Wave" Feminism and Popular Culture

- Lisa Jarvis and Andi Zeisler, eds., *Bitchfest* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 2006). Margaret Cho, "Forward," xv-xviii; "Introduction," xix-xxiii; "The F Word," 106-110; "Laugh Riot," 148-154; "Mother Inferior," 240-246; "Hoovers and Shakers," 247-251; "Beauty Myths and Body Projects," 252-255; "Vulva Goldmine," 261-266; "Confronting the Mainstream," 281-284; "Talking Back: Activism and Popular Culture," 328-330; "How

to Reclaim, Reframe, and Reform the Media: A Feminist Advocacy Guide,” 344-352. (47) (ER)

- Andi Zeisler, *Feminism and Popular Culture* excerpts TK
- Application #3

#6 Monday, March 11th (midterm week): How to: A Feminist Critic’s Guide to Looking

- Dolan, *The Feminist Spectator in Action* (intro + how-to + examples) (BB/CM)
- Application #4

No class March 18th, spring break

#7 Monday, March 25th: Mixed Messages from Popular Culture (~ 200 pp.)

- Susan J. Douglas, *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media* (New York: Random House, 1994). “Introduction,” 3-20; Chapter Seven, “Throwing Out our Bras,” 139-161; Chapter Eight, “I am Woman, Hear me Roar,” 163-191; Chapter Twelve, “I’m Not a Feminist, But . . .” 269-294. (92) (ER)
- Susan J. Douglas, *The Rise of Enlightened Sexism: How Pop Culture Took us from Girl Power to Girls Gone Wild* (New York: St. Martin’s, 2010). “Introduction: Fantasies of Power,” 1-22; Chapter 8, “Lean and Mean,” 214-241; Chapter 9, “Red Carpet Mania,” 242-266; Epilogue, “The F-Word,” 297-206. (82) (ER)
- Anne-Marie Slaughter, “Why Women Can’t Have it All,” *The Atlantic*, July/August 2012 <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2012/07/why-women-still-cant-have-it-all/309020/>. (BB/CM)
- Application #5

#8 Monday, April 1st: Pleasure and Politics (126 pp.)

- Merri Lisa Johnson, “Introduction. Ladies Love Your Box: The Rhetoric of Pleasure and Danger in Feminist Television Studies.” In Merri Lisa Johnson, ed., *Third Wave Feminism and Television: Jane Puts it in a Box* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), 1-27. (ER)
- Melissa Harris-Perry, “The Crooked Room,” 28-50; “Myth,” 51-97; “Michelle,” 269-300. (99) (ER)
- Application #6

#9 Monday, April 8th: Pleasure and Use Value (84 pp.)

- Michael Bronski, *The Pleasure Principle: Sex, Backlash, and the Struggle for Gay Freedom* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998), “Introduction,” 1-14; “Popular Culture,” 26-36. (ER)
- Christopher Small, *Musicking*, Prelude: Music and Musicking, 1-18; Chapter Three, Sharing with Strangers, 39-49; Interlude 2: The Mother of All the Arts, 94-109. (43) (ER)
- Stacy Wolf, *Changed for Good: A Feminist History of the Broadway Musical* (New York: Oxford UP, 2011). “It’s All About Popular: Wicked Divas and Internet Girl Fans,” 219-236. (ER)
- Application #7

#10 Monday, April 15th: Gaiety (68 pp. + play)

- Sarah Warner, *Acts of Gaiety: LGBT Performance and the Politics of Pleasure* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012); “Preface,” ix-xxii; “Introduction,” 1-30; Chapter Five, “Unnatural Acts: The Tragic Consequences of Homoliberalism in the Five Lesbian Brothers’ *Oedipus at Palm Springs*,” 163-188. (ER)
- The Five Lesbian Brothers, *Oedipus at Palm Springs* (New York: Samuel French, 2010; acting edition). (LA)
- Application #8

#11 Monday, April 22nd: Pop Culture Mash-up: Wild Card

- *Glee* and *Smash* and the culture of “hating on”
- Anne Washburn, *Mr. Burns* (BB/CM)
- Application #9

Thursday, April 25, showing of “Miss Representation,” directed by Jennifer Siebel Newsom, 1:30-3:00, 113 Dickinson. <http://www.missrepresentation.org/>.

#12 Monday, April 29th: Presentations

Dean’s Date: Tuesday May 14th.

All work due by 5 p.m. via email attachment to my address, jsdolan@Princeton.edu.

Assignments (due dates and specific assignment sheets forthcoming)

1. **The Critical Practice Process:** Select a different object of study for each of these assignments. The choice of focus is yours: you can write about a play; a musical; a performance; a piece of popular culture; a film; a television series or episode; a music video; a video game; etc. You’ll study each of these objects from four different critical perspectives. For example, if I were studying the series *Girls*, here’s how these components would break out:
 - a. *Review of the literature:* Do a thorough web and library search of other critics’ responses, and chronicle them. What do significant writers/critics say about the series? What do they tend to like and dislike? What trends can you perceive in this literature review? In *Girls*, critics tend to be impressed with creator Lena Dunham’s iconoclastic view of 20-somethings in New York, as well as her frank examination of relationships and work. They criticize the absence of people of color on the show. Closely examine 5-7 different reviews, thought-pieces, or feature stories written about the series in various publications and engage them in an annotated bibliography format, 3-5 pages in length. **10% of final grade.**
 - b. *Close reading of a moment or a scene:* I might look closely at the final episode of the first season, commenting on its themes, structure, style, character development, camera angles, narrative, costuming, etc. Then I would construct a short essay of 3-5 pages that proposes an argument about what the scene means;

how it fits into the rest of the series; and what kind of cultural commentary/engagement I think it makes. **10% of final grade.**

- c. *Ethnography or auto-ethnography*: For this component, I would interview friends or classmates about their responses to *Girls*, to get a sense of what people think about the series, but also about how they *use* the show. That is, do they use it to affirm their own lives and choices? What kinds of pleasures do they derive from watching it (or “hating on” it)? Why do they take time to watch it every week? Alternatively, you could do an auto-ethnography in which you probe your own viewing habits and report them. Why do *you* like watching *Girls*? What does it do in your life? What function does it serve? *The ethnography should be written up in a 3-5 page essay, in which you quote from your interviews or engage your own impressions. 10% of final grade.*
 - d. *Thematic study*: On what themes does *Girls* touch each week and across the arc of a season? What role do these issues play in American culture at large? How does the show speak into its historical moment in ways that bring it attention and resonance? What’s missing from the series thematically—that is, what *doesn’t* it address, in ways that are meaningful to current cultural preoccupations? You should pull one or two key themes and *construct a 3-5 page essay that argues for your perspective on their centrality to the show. 10% of final grade.*
2. **The Final Project**: For the final project, you’ll write a “pitch” memo for an essay, written for publication on a feminist or queer magazine, website, or blog. Using the skills you’ve practiced with other objects of study, you’ll focus on one film, TV show, etc., and do a review of the literature; a close reading of a scene or moment; an ethnography; and a thematic study. You’ll also add a theoretical angle to the pitch, based on the materials we’ve read in class. You’ll address this *5-8 double-spaced page (1250-2000 words)* pitch memo to a publication in/on which you’d like to publish the fully written (yet still hypothetical) essay. That “pitch” will be rehearsed at our final class meeting on April 29th. **25% of final grade.**
 3. **The in-class application**: Working in groups of two or three, you’ll decide in advance of the meeting for which you sign up an “application” on which we can hang the discussion of the day’s reading materials. For instance, on the week focusing on “the gaze,” you and your group might select an episode of a television show, film, music video, or theatre performance on which you’d like to focus our conversation. You might, for instance, look at the opening scene of the recent James Bond film, *Skyfall*, to discuss how the gaze operates across its carefully constructed moments and what those choices imply. You will create the lesson plan for one hour of our class meeting; send out discussion questions in advance of class; keep a log of your preparation work; and then turn in a one-page self-assessment the day after you present in class. I encourage each group to meet with me to discuss possible options well ahead of your due date. [*Note: The application cannot overlap with anyone’s final project “object.”*] **20% of final grade.**
 4. **Participation**: Because how we talk about our critical pleasure in popular culture, film, and theatre is as important as how we address it in writing, your in-class participation weighs heavily in your grade. I’ll be looking for frequent, concise, specific contributions to

our discussions at each of our class meetings that draw from careful consideration of the reading we do each week. What you say in class will be evidence that you've not only read and prepared the material, but that you've thought about it carefully prior to our meetings.
15% of final grade.

Objects/People to Consider for applications and final projects

Kristen Wiig; *Bridesmaids*; Tig Notaro, queer comedian; popular music, including Lady Gaga, the coming out of singer Frank Ocean, and torch-singer k.d. lang; *Twilight* and *The Hunger Games* young adult book series; plays or musicals such as *Wicked*; *Love! Valour! Compassion!*; *The Vagina Monologues*; *Boys in the Band*; or *Rent*; films including *Thelma and Louise*; *The Social Network*; *The Black Swan*; *Desert Hearts*; *Cruising*; *The Help*; *Precious*; *Go Fish*; *D.E.B.S.*; or *The Incredibly True Adventures of Two Girls in Love*; television series such as *The L Word*; *Sex and the City*; *Girls*; *Hung*; *Queer as Folk*; *Rissoli and Isles*; *Scandal*; *Glee*; *The New Normal*; *Modern Family*; *Mad Men*; and *Homeland*, as well as criticism about show-runners Shonda Rhimes (*Scandal*, *Grey's Anatomy*), Matthew Weiner (*Mad Men*), Alex Ganza (*Homeland*); and Liz Brixius and Linda Wallem (*Nurse Jackie*).

Partial, but I hope Helpful, Bibliography

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- Johnson, Steven. *Everything Bad Is Good for You: How Today's Popular Culture Is Actually Making Us Smarter*. New York: Riverhead, 2005.
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- Radner, Hilary. *Neo-Feminist Cinema: Girly Films, Chick Flicks and Consumer Culture*. New York: Routledge, 2011.
- Radner, Hilary, and Rebecca Stringer, eds. *Feminism at the Movies: Understanding Gender in Contemporary Popular Cinema*. New York: Routledge, 2011.
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- Shaw, Marc E., and Elwood Watson eds. *Performing American Masculinities: The 21st-Century Man in Popular Culture*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2011.
- Streitmatter, Rodger. *From "Perverts" to "Fab Five": The Media's Changing Depiction of Gay Men and Lesbians*. New York: Routledge, 2009.
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