“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)
• Mary Kearney, “Feminist Media Manifesto,” 2012 (BB/CM)
• 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.)


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


App. #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.)


App. #2

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

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.)

• Anne-Marie Slaughter, “Why Women Can’t Have it All,” The Atlantic, July/August 2012 
• Application #5

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

• 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.)

• 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)
• Application #7
10 Monday, April 15th: Gaiety (68 pp. + play)

- 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 29\textsuperscript{th}. **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; Rizzoli 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