Popular culture provides an important window onto the positioning of women within the culture at large. Pop culture is seen differently by different schools of thought: source of oppressive imagery, site of pleasurable negotiation, manufacturer of consent. This course will survey debates surrounding the ways in which we look at and receive representation of women in popular culture. As industry, institution, entertainment and source of cultural capital, how does popular culture appropriate and/or reconfigure feminist thought? How can feminist thought incorporate popular culture? Does popular culture oppress women? Can we as feminist scholars access tools to resist its gaze?

This course will begin with an overview of basic theories of spectatorship (Berger, Mulvey, Hall, et al). We will then apply these theories to some of popular culture’s most feminized genres: the fairy tale, the women’s magazine, the Hollywood melodrama, the TV talk show, the situation comedy, and the internet chat group, asking how the construction of normalcy and gender identity operates via these genres, and how/if audiences may subvert these constructions. As much as possible, we will examine these genres from a cross-cultural perspective, asking, for example, how melodrama operates in Latin American culture, how the fairytale is differently gendered in East European culture, how First Nations women are represented in North American popular culture. Students will research and do presentations upon particular pop cultural genres, making use of cultural studies’ tool of analysis. We will also examine examples of feminist art and film/video that have drawn upon and reworked pop cultural imagery. In addition, we will consider the function of popular culture within the realm of digital media, and examine the ways in which young women are producing feminist subjectivities via digital technology.

**Required readings:**

A reading package will also be provided for purchase at the bookstore.

**Course requirements and Grading Structure:**
Students will be given a variety of assignments highlighting and developing both written and oral skills. Regular writing time will be provided in class after screenings. Regular vocabulary reviews will occur in small-group discussion. Each student will be expected to do an oral presentation based on one of the course readings, in consultation with the instructor. A choice of final research paper topics will be provided by the instructor.

30% Midterm (takehome) exam  
30% Group presentation  
30% Term project (8-10 pages)  
10% Participation/attendance

**Prerequisites:**  
WS 101 or WS 102 – may be taken concurrently

*THE DEPARTMENT OF WOMEN’S STUDIES ENCOURAGES CLARITY OF THOUGHT AND EXPRESSION AND GOODWRITING. STUDENTS WILL BE EVALUATED ON THESE SKILLS IN ALL COURSES GIVEN BY THE DEPARTMENT.*