WS 205-3: Women and Popular Culture

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Friday. 9:30-12:20

Popular culture provides an important window onto the positioning of women within the culture at large. Popular 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 feminist cultural studies. We will then apply these theories to some of popular culture’s most feminized genres: the fairy tale as interpreted by Disney, the women’s magazine, the Hollywood melodrama, the soap opera, and the internet chat group, asking how the construction of 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. Students will research and do presentations upon particular pop cultural genres, making use of cultural studies’ tools of analysis.

Required readings:
Hollows, J. Feminism, Femininity and Popular Culture.

Course requirements and Grading Structure:

25% - Presentations: A list of presentation topics will be passed around on the first day of class. Students choose which topic and at which class they want to do their presentation.

30% - Reading Reports: Two short (5 pages) papers on two of the required readings

30% - Term Project: (8-10 pages) You may choose the topic of your final project in consultation with the instructor

15% - Participation/attendance: You are required to attend all classes, to participate in tutorial discussions and to complete between-class assignments.

Prerequisites:
WS 101 or WS 102 (may be taken concurrently)

The Department of Women’s Studies encourages clarity of thought and expression and good writing. Students will be evaluated on these skills in all courses given by the Department.