

Call for Papers:

Pop Hero and Action Princess? Negotiating Gender in Popular Culture

Student Conference, Münster, January 12 – 13, 2018

Do Beyoncé, Nicki Minaj, or Miley Cyrus contribute to feminist* discourses? Are Sherlock and Dr. Watson more than friends? And can Thor be a woman?

Popular culture has long since become an important medium of societal discourse. Being far more than mere expression of aesthetics, popular culture is a battleground where social and political power structures are inscribed and (re)affirmed, but can also be contested or challenged. In contrast to high culture products which are rather accessed by and made available to a small socioeconomic elite, the entanglement of popular culture with everyday life causes an often unintentional confrontation with gender roles and opens an immediate dialogue of gender negotiation.

Society is structured inter alia by membership to a certain sex category and a societally constructed gender. More recently, however, the claim has been made that gender is always already linked to performance. As Candace West and Don Zimmerman have extensively argued, one 'does' gender: it is not biologically determined but rather configured by on-going performative acts. Judith Butler concluded that "[gender] identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results". Especially pop cultural 'expressions' of gender have the potential to provide insights into how power relations are encoded and perpetuated. Under the assumption that power is discursively constructed, the modes that are used to represent gender are crucial for understanding social and cultural practices. Representations of gender in popular culture thus transcend a purely mimetic reflection of power structures in our society, and instead partake actively in their production, by continuously influencing and subtly shaping performances of gender in everyday life. As powerful tropes in societal discourse(s), stereotypical references and their inversion can both oppress and empower as well as create subversive elements in daily performances of gender.

This conference aims to address the role of gender in popular culture, how it is represented and read. The discussion will focus on the political power of such representations and their impact on cultural practices; their critical and subversive potential. In order to do so, we would like to engage with various aspects of popular culture and look forward to discussing gender (re-)presentations and performances in a range of different media, including Film, Music, TV, Literature, Comic, Social Media, and other online media.

Potential topics of discussion may include, but are not limited to:

- Configurations of gender performance(s) in popular culture
- Fictional representations of heteronormativity and (toxic) masculinity
- Interplay of different dimensions of discrimination represented in popular culture (Intersectionality)
- Identity constructions between gender stereotypes and gender fluidity
- The influence of Queer Studies and Feminism(s) on pop cultural gender representations
- Body politics represented and negotiated in literature and other media
- Political dimensions: (hegemonic) narratives of gender in popular culture?

This conference is organized by a small team of students in the field of Literary, Cultural and Media Studies at the English Seminar of the University of Münster. With the department's support, we intend to create a platform for students and young scholars to exchange ideas and discuss the influence of gendered representations in the ever more influential domain of popular culture.

If you are a student interested in presenting a 20 minute talk at this conference, please submit a short proposal (max. 250 words) with a short biography and your current study program to genderpopculture@gmail.com by November, 10 2017. There will be no conference fee and presenting participants can apply for travel reimbursements. Technical equipment for presentations will be provided.