

Whether in *Mad Men* or the punk scene, gender norms and ideologies continue to be challenged, reaffirmed, resisted and adapted

Useful for any student of gender or cultural studies, this book examines the role of popular culture in the construction of gendered identities in contemporary society, drawing on a wide range of popular cultural forms – including popular music, newspapers and television. Although much literature has been produced on gendered media representations, new products are always in need of analysis, and Marina Franchi feels that the authors succeed in presenting the intricacies of representation analysis in a clear and appealing way.



Gender and Popular Culture. Katie Milestone and Anneke Meyer. Polity Press. December 2011

Find this book:

In the past 24 hours you may have flipped through a newspaper. Or you may have spent some time staring absent-mindedly at an advertising billboard on a Tube platform. You may have also sat on a train while reading a particular feature of a magazine. Getting into your school/place of work/local coffee shop/community centre/library you might have engaged into a conversation about the season finale of *Homeland* (can I just say, WOW! How long until the next season?). It is most likely that in the past 24 hours you consumed cultural products that have been produced by someone, and some of those products exposed you to representations. You consumed representations of gender, based on dominant notions of femininity and masculinity, in whose production gendered patterns can be traced and analysed. In *Gender and Popular Culture*, Katie Milestone and Anneke Meyer draw on key theories in gender studies, media studies, and cultural studies to guide you through a substantial overview of how gender relates to processes of production, consumption and representation and how those three processes interact to construct gender identities.



Katie Milestone and Anneke Meyer are both Senior Lecturers in Sociology and Cultural Studies at [Manchester Metropolitan University](http://www.manchester.ac.uk). In *Gender and Popular Culture*, as a disclaimer states on page 1, they do not aim to provide a general overview of the field; however the book provides a good resource for those interested in addressing issues of gender and cultural politics. The authors engage with primary research they conducted, and with case studies from the vast literature available, covering some of the most interesting debates around UK and US popular culture. The reader is conducted through poignant discussions touching upon diverse cultural texts such as *Mad Men*, the 70s British punk scene, *Cosmopolitan* and *Loaded*, *What not to wear* and *Jamie's Ministry of Food*. Whilst maintaining clear and accessible language through the entire book, the authors keep at the forefront the intricacies of the multi-layered analysis at the core of gender and popular culture.

The book is organised around the three cultural processes of production, representation and consumption, and is prefaced by an introduction in which the authors intend to provide the reader with

the *basic tools* needed to engage with the following sections. In this section the authors overview key concepts such as Popular Culture, Ideology, Discourse, Power and Hegemony. The space constraint causes this section to feel a bit rushed through; however the authors trace an interesting map that can guide the reader through the complexities of theories and provide a reference for expanding on the issues that are raised. Intricacies and complicated issues unfold throughout the book, whilst the authors accomplish the difficult task of highlighting how the analysis of popular culture unveils how gender norms and ideologies are challenged, reaffirmed, resisted or adapted.

I found the first part of the book the most interesting; it is composed of two chapters and deals with gender and cultural work and cultural production. This section focuses on who is responsible for producing popular culture: “What can we make of the anomaly that although women are often described as being more creative than men (...) the majority of frontline cultural producers are male?” (p.38) The authors, drawing on a range of research, convincingly highlight how cultural industries, saluted as diverse, inclusive and inherently non-discriminatory, are far from the quintessence of gender equality. The good worker in the creative industry is represented as passionate and committed; two traits that are routinely constructed as typically male traits (p.79). Those assumptions go unchallenged and potentially reinforced by the recruitment practices; mainly conducted through informal channels are heavily influenced by a managerial strategy of hiring *likeminded people* who are predominantly men. This, in turns perpetuates the dynamics of exclusion even in the *cool and progressive* creative industries.

In the second section of the book the authors examine representation in popular culture, highlighting how different media contribute to reinforce notions of appropriate femininity and masculinity and how, in turn, this perpetuate notions of essential gender differences that routinely pose women as inferior to men. This construction allows highlighting historical changes in dominant discourses on masculinities and femininities whilst cautioning the reader against a simplistic progressive reading since “a picture of contradictory and piecemeal change emerges in the representation of men and women in popular culture” (p.86). In the last section the authors, guided by the question “What impact does our media consumption have on the ways in which we perform our gender?” engage with the process of consumption of popular culture. Chapter 7 in particular brings into the discussion the notion of space and popular culture. At the core of this chapter is a review of case studies examining the ways in which our gender and our sexuality affect the way we respond to different spaces (p.184). Discussing recent research on the figures of the twenty first century *flâneur* and *flâneuse* the authors conclude that “Access to and power within space are strongly determined by gender. Whilst women are no longer absent from the city (as they were in the nineteenth century), they are not yet free to exist in the city in the same way as men” (p.209)

Milestone and Meyer contend that whilst we are immersed in discourses of achieved gender equalities, dominant notions of essential gender differences, ideological representation of masculinities and femininities continue to perpetuate inequalities. The authors achieve the aim of engaging with multi-faceted issues concerning gender and popular culture, in a clear and appealing way producing a book that is not only relevant to students and scholars interested in the issue but also to those who are interested in cultural politics in western societies.

Marina Franchi received a Laurea at the University of Eastern Piedmont (Italy). She worked within various EU funded projects as a junior researcher in the Department of Social Research in the Faculty of Political Sciences of Alessandria. In 2004 she joined the LSE to undertake a MSc in Gender and Media. Between 2006 and 2008 she worked at the EU-Daphne II project *Family Matters – Supporting families to prevent violence against homosexual youth*. In her PhD project at the LSE Gender Institute she conducts research on Media Discourse on the legal recognition of de facto couples in Italy. Through the analysis of media texts she aims to gain an insight into Italian sexual politics, and to

facilitate a fruitful understanding of the relationships between dominant notions of family, kinship and sexual citizenship in contemporary Italy. [Read more reviews by Marina.](#)

Related posts:

1. [Book Review: Gender and Violence in the Middle East, by Moha Ennaji and Fatima Sadiqi \(5.6\)](#)
2. [Book Review: Gender, Politics and Institutions: Towards a Feminist Institutionalism by Mona Lena Krook and Fiona Mackay \(5.2\)](#)
3. [Shortchanged: overcoming the gender wealth gap \(5\)](#)