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Book Review

Katie Milestone and Anneke Meyer

'Gender and Popular Culture'

Cambridge, Polity Press

Published in 2012

242 pages

ISBN-13: 978-0-7456-4393-9

This thoroughly accessible new book from Milestone and Meyer impressively explores how the production and consumption of cultural texts and the process of representation within those texts interact to construct normative gender identities. The authors achieve this through a summary and critique of the last thirty years of cultural studies theory in relation to gender; the book is ideally suited for cultural or gender and media studies undergraduates, rightly crediting Angela McRobbie's work as highly influential throughout.

Drawing on a broad range of popular cultural texts, including television, newspapers, magazines, popular music and new digital media, Milestone and Meyer offer readers an interesting and thoughtful overview of gender and cultural studies. Key theories and concepts on gender and popular culture are summarised, critiqued and, most

helpfully, applied to contemporary cultural products such as men's magazines, blogs, video games and DJs through a series of case studies.

The authors structure their argument into three clear, user–friendly sections, each of which clearly demonstrate how gender identities are performatively constituted through discourse, power and persisting inequality.

The first section examines the production of popular culture; who produces cultural texts, why gendered patterns occur, and the impact of these on content. The authors wonder how it is possible that the process of cultural production remains predominantly in the hands of men, despite the notion that women are seen as more 'creative' than men (38). Technology is still deemed a masculine realm, despite the democratising promise of new digital media. A critical question is then asked of the reader: does it actually matter that most popular culture consumed by both men and women is produced by men? The answer is a resounding 'yes': the hegemony of patriarchal ideology maintains white, male, hetero-normative values - women are simply not 'cut out' for frontline cultural production (p57).

The second section of the book explores how men and women are represented in contemporary popular culture, and how normative gender identities and behaviours are constructed and maintained by this process of representation. The book cover shows a still from the hit television show 'Mad Men' and the programme, which portrays the cultural industry of popular advertising, is used as a case study in both

cultural production *and* representation and the impact of this on the construction of hetero-normative gender roles. The authors also apply contemporary cultural studies theories to television programmes such as 'How Clean is Your House', cookery programmes and men's magazines such as 'Nuts' and 'Loaded' to argue that women remain represented as firmly embedded in the domestic sphere while men predominantly occupy the public sphere. This is despite men entering the traditionally female space of the kitchen, in some cookery programmes for example, or being represented as good fathers.

In the final section the authors explore the concept that consumption is not only gendered but also *gendering*: what we consume and how we consume it constructs our gender identities. Yes, cultural products are mostly aimed at either men or women, but how we respond to these is confounded by other factors such as class, race, sexual orientation and political views for example, and consumption is frequently critical and active. Milestone and Meyer sensibly desist from answering the obvious question of whether men and women consume cultural products differently, and instead explore various discursive positions.

The authors conclude by suggesting that despite being surrounded by discourses of gender equality, where women have been told that they have achieved equality, ideological and essentialist notions of masculinity and femininity persist in the perpetuation of inequalities in both the cultural industries and cultural texts. The cumulative effect on culture of what the authors consider the discrediting and dismantling of feminism over the last 20 years is nicely summed up by citing one of

Debbie Klein's interviewees in the advertising business: "It's got worse because everyone thinks it's got better" (Klein, 2000, cited on p 80).

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