



# **Making Camp: Rhetorics of Transgression in U.S. Popular Culture (Albma Rhetoric Cult & Soc Crit)**

*Helene A. Shugart, Catherine Egley Waggoner*

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*Making Camp* examines the rhetoric and conventions of “camp” in contemporary popular culture and the ways it both subverts and is co-opted by mainstream ideology and discourse, especially as it pertains to issues of gender and sexuality.

Camp has long been aligned with gay male culture and performance. Helene Shugart and Catherine Waggoner contend that camp in the popular media—whether visual, dramatic, or musical—is equally pervasive. While aesthetic and performative in nature, the authors argue that camp—female camp in particular—is also highly political and that conventions of femininity and female sexuality are negotiated, if not always resisted, in female camp performances.

The authors draw on a wide range of references and figures representative of camp, both historical and contemporary, in presenting the evolution of female camp and its negotiation of gender, political, and identity issues. Antecedents such as Joan Crawford, Wonder Woman, Marilyn Monroe, and Pam Grier are discussed as archetypes for contemporary popular culture figures—Macy Gray, Gwen Stefani, and the characters of Xena from *Xena: Warrior Princess* and Karen Walker from *Will & Grace*.

Shugart and Waggoner find that these and other female camp performances are liminal, occupying a space between conformity and resistance. The result is a study that demonstrates the prevalence of camp as a historical and evolving phenomenon in popular culture, its role as a site for the rupture of conventional notions of gender and sexuality, and how camp is configured in mainstream culture and in ways that resist its being reduced to merely a style.

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