

The Geek and Popular Culture

Southwest Popular / American Culture Association (Southwest PCA/ACA)

Area: The Geek and Popular Culture

Join us for the 35th annual conference of the Southwest Popular/American Culture Association, February 19-22, 2014, at the Hyatt Regency Hotel and Conference Center in beautiful Albuquerque, New Mexico.

<http://www.southwestpca.org>

Conference Theme: Popular and American Culture Studies: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow

Submission Deadline: November 1, 2013

The Geek and Popular Culture: A Love/Hate Relationship

It's every child's schoolyard nightmare—to be called a “nerd.” From an early age, we know that being labeled a “nerd” or a “geek” isn't a good thing. It implies too much knowledge and too few social skills. Yet, as much as we don't want to be labeled a “geek,” we value their knowledge and expertise, as Best Buy's labeling their technical support “The Geek Squad” exemplifies. Furthermore, the popularity of the reigning “nerd” powerhouse *The Big Bang Theory* (now available nightly via syndication) or any number of other series—NBC's *Chuck* and the ubiquitous “Nerd Herd,” BBC's *Doctor Who*, Fox's *24* and *Touch*, or the Sci-Fi Channel's *Eureka*—proves that America may want to watch “geeks” and use them but we “wouldn't wanna be them.”

America's love/hate relationship with geeks, or nerds, is not new. The power of the nerd character was solidified in the early 90s with the introduction of the character Steve Urkel onto the series *Family Matters*. Urkel, with his heavy-rimmed glasses, suspenders, and pocket protector saved the series from cancellation with his first appearance. The new millennium has seen “reality” television that focused on geeks and transformation in *Beauty and the Geek*, reality television that allows us all to embrace our own “nerd” in the case of *MythBusters*, as well as crime dramas that cannot function without the “squints”—*Numb3rs* and *Bones*. It appears that nerds are here to stay which begs the question: is it that American culture is becoming more accepting of difference or have we made “geeking out” okay and thereby created a new level of “geekdom”?

This area seeks to examine the relationship between popular culture and the ever-changing geek or nerd. This year's conference theme of “Popular and American Culture Studies: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow” is the perfect opportunity to look at the way the nerd has changed over time and what these changes can mean for the future of “nerds” of every type. Topics could include: defining the “geek,” the geek versus the nerd, female geeks or nerds, depictions of geeks, depictions of nerds, tropes surrounding nerds/geeks, Hollywood's pseudo-nerd creations, the “babe” in nerd/geek television series or films, differences between the two terms and their depictions in television or film, the power of the nerd, the social acceptance of the term “geek,” and much more.

Abstracts should be no more than 250 words. The deadline for abstract submissions is November 1, 2013. Pre-constituted panels should contain 3 to 4 different abstracts (each submitted on a separate proposal form). All submissions must be made through the conference database at <http://conference2014.southwestpca.org>. Please include a brief biographical statement (no more than 150 words) in your submission.

The Southwest PCA/ACA welcomes submissions from professors, independent scholars, and professionals. Graduate students are particularly encouraged to participate, with award opportunities for best grad student papers. For more information about conference awards go to: <http://southwestpca.org/conference/graduate-student-awards/>.

Any questions regarding The Geek and Popular Culture area should be directed to Kathryn Lane at KELane@nwosu.edu