

Dr. Holly Holladay

Judith Enyeart Reynolds College of Arts and Letters Research Symposium

Time and Date of Talk:

April 21, 2023, 12:15-1:15 p.m., Siceluff Hall 126

Title of Talk:

Treat Yo' Self: *Parks and Recreation* and fan practices in the social media age

Speaker Biography:

Holly Holladay earned her Ph.D. in Communication with an emphasis in Media and Cultural Studies from the University of Missouri in 2015; she began her career as an Assistant Professor at Missouri State in 2016 and is currently an Associate Professor in the Department of Media, Journalism, and Film. Dr. Holladay's research centers on the relationship between popular media and issues of identity, with specific attention to how audiences use media as a way to negotiate aspects of the self, including gender, race, and class. Her research has been published in a wide range of media and communication journals, including *Feminist Media Studies*, *The Journal of Popular Culture*, *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*, *Journal of Fandom Studies*, among others. Dr. Holladay's book, *TV Milestones: Parks and Recreation*, was published with Wayne State University Press in March, and she is currently editing a volume that examines how television comedy is used to navigate cultural crises.

Abstract of Talk:

When the sitcom *Parks and Recreation* (NBC) premiered in 2009, contemporary social media platforms were in their infancy, and the “old” medium of television and “new” social media were relatively distinct. By the time the series concluded in 2015, however, social media had become the “second screen” on which television programmers vied for audience attention during and beyond the runtime of television content. Further, although fan engagement with television texts has long existed in analog form, social media’s ubiquity gave audiences an avenue through which to digitally disseminate the fruits of their fan labor quickly and with an increased promise of interaction with other fans.

This research talk is a segment of a larger project in which I argue for *Parks and Recreation*’s inclusion in the pantheon of “television milestones,” or series with a significant lasting impact in television history and broader culture. Accordingly, I will explore the relationship between *Parks and Recreation*, digital content, and fandom to make the case that *Parks*’ longevity is driven in part by its position as an archetypal text to illustrate online participatory culture. I argue that in the post-network era of niche, narrow casted programing, considering a series itself is no longer enough to establish a television program’s milestone status, and attention must be paid to how auxiliary content, produced by both media creators and fans, influences understanding of and engagement with a series.

After briefly articulating theoretical approaches to media content in the twenty-first century, I first detail how the supplementary digital content produced by NBC and *Parks*’ creative team functions as a marketing strategy that allows fans to re-experience the program’s highlights vis-à-vis social media, as well as a potential point of entry for new audiences of the series who might see the content shared by their social networks. I then turn to fan productivity

specifically, arguing that shifts in perceptions of media fandom and the pervasiveness of social media have not only made participatory culture an incredibly normative way to creatively express television fandom in the digital age, but also allow fans to acquire the cultural capital needed to establish themselves as “real” fans of the series. Finally, while many programs in the digital era share these features, *Parks* is unique in that digital and in-person fandom coalesce around two “holidays” organically born from the series. I explore how, as participatory fandom experiences shared on social media, Galentine’s Day and Treat Yo’ Self Day contribute to the longevity of *Parks*’ influence.

Interdisciplinarity:

The cultural studies approach to media analysis is inherently interdisciplinary, drawing from the literary analysis and communication studies disciplines, among others. Anyone who engages with popular culture in their professional or personal lives and is interested in the role it plays in shaping our everyday lived experiences will likely find value in this talk.