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## Female Pervert

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# Female Pervert

## **Abstract**

This is a film review of *Film Pervert* (2014), directed by Jiyoung Lee.

## **Author Notes**

Kristian Petersen is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Nebraska Omaha. His research and teaching interests include Islamic Studies, East Asian traditions, Media Studies, and Theory and Methodology in the Study of Religion. He hosts several academic podcasts at Marginalia Review of Books, Religious Studies News, New Books in Religion, and New Books in Islamic Studies.



*Female Pervert*  
(2014)  
Directed by Jiyoung Lee

Jiyoung Lee's *Female Pervert* is a short reflection on social identities, collective expectations, and the lived consequences of transgressing norms. In the context of the study of religion the film could serve as an entry point into discussions of classification and the social construction of normative behaviors. The story follows a young digital designer, Phoebe, whose sexual desires fall outside what is usually prescribed for American women. While her erotic preferences frame the narrative the film largely follows her through a series of socially awkward encounters: a Haruki Murakami book group, professional massages, work meetings, therapy sessions, and evening hangouts. The film itself is uninspiring but several conversations help us think through the cultural subjectivity of defining what is 'normal.'

During a book group meeting one participant identifies the 'perversions' of Murakami's characters but Phoebe contests, "don't you think the moral boundaries in Japan might be different from what we are used to in the US?" In explaining her point,

she refers to a scene in Hayao Miyazaki's film *My Neighbor Totoro*, in which a father bathes with his two daughters, one of whom is eleven years old. Overall she concludes that this scenario is "natural enough to be included in a children's movie" but would be condemned in the West. So, "what we think is perverted here may not be perverted at all in a different part of the world." These type of contemplative shorts are repeated in an exploration of Saartjie Baartman, an enslaved 19<sup>th</sup> century South African who was put on public display for her large labia and buttocks, and biblical assertions of proper womanhood, referencing Timothy 2:11-15 and Ephesians 5:22-33. Overall, the film displays how social boundaries and expectations are constructed within particular settings, especially in relation to contemporary female sexuality, but the flat narrative and unsophisticated humor may make it laborious to watch this 'long' sixty minute film.