



DIALOGUE

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**Traversing Realities: Genres, Histories,
and Politics in Popular Culture**

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Dialogue: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Popular Culture and Pedagogy is the first open access, peer reviewed journal focused on the intersection of popular culture and pedagogy. While some open access journals charge a publication fee for authors to submit, *Dialogue* is committed to creating and maintaining a scholarly journal that is accessible to all—meaning that there is no charge for either the author or the reader.

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We are excited about this new development in the studies of Popular Culture, and we look forward to your potential participation in this venture.

For more information and to submit manuscripts, email Lynnea Chapman King, Editor in Chief, or A. S. CohenMiller, Managing Editor, at editors@journaldialogue.org.



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CohenMiller also serves as a member of the Executive Team for the Southwest Popular/American Culture Association. She received her PhD in Interdisciplinary Learning and Teaching from the University of Texas at San Antonio. Her research addresses qualitative research, motherhood/mothering, and popular culture and pedagogy. Selected publications include “Developing globalized teacher education curriculum through interdisciplinarity” (CohenMiller, A., Dentith, A., Jackson, G., & Root, D., 2011) and “Motherhood in academia: A grounded theory pilot study of online texts” (2013).

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Editorial: Examining Perspectives and Applications

A class of freshman composition students were recently asked to consider the multitude of reality programs on network and cable television and to offer an explanation for the popularity of reality shows. They pondered all manner of reality shows, including competitions like *Top Chef*, *The Voice*, *Biggest Loser*, and *The Bachelor*, among others; reality dramas, shows which follow individuals as they live, work, and play, such as *Gold Rush*, *Appalachian Outlaws*, *Amish Mafia*, and the various *Real Housewives*; and “informative” reality shows, including *Pawn Stars*, *Antiques Roadshow*, and *Diners, Drive-Ins, and Dives*. Having contemplated the situation, my students cited viewer curiosity and superiority, and belief in the American Dream as potential contributors to the preponderance of these shows. They may well be correct.

We consume these programs to learn what life “really” looks like in Alaska or West Virginia or Beverly Hills; to watch the drama and scandal of the lives of others and feel some comfort in our own circumstances; or perhaps, drawing upon our better angels, to be inspired by the successes and happiness of the individuals on the screen before us. Though the veracity of these reality shows is often in question, each autumn a new class debuts, each hoping to be the next *Survivor* or *American Idol*. Due in part to these programs, television, a relic of the 20th century, remains relevant in the 21st, albeit consumed on ever-smaller devices and through a variety of delivery systems by many audiences of weekly programming. It is not surprising then that we find that our first open call issue primarily features articles which address the role of television in both past and contemporary culture, ranging from *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood* and *Little House on the Prairie* to *Jersey Shore* and the recent BBC adaptation *Sherlock*.

The editors and contributors of *Dialogue: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Popular Culture and Pedagogy* are pleased to present Volume 2, Issue 1, “Traversing Realities: Genres, Histories, and Politics in Popular Culture.” While several of these essays do indeed reference reality television, authors Kayce Mobley, Sarah Fisher, and Amy Fatzinger examine the relationship between television drama and the realities of politics and race relations. Mobley and Fisher use *The West Wing*’s fictional American president Josiah Bartlet and his administration to teach American foreign policy, and Fatzinger considers Laura Ingalls Wilder’s portrayal of American Indians in her books and their eventual adaptation in *Little House on the Prairie*, a show which would contribute largely to the perception of Native Americans for an entire generation of American children. These dramatic fictions and historic realities intersect on-screen, demonstrating the ever-fluctuating boundaries of the “real” in the artifacts produced by our culture.

Examining the sort of reality that we simultaneously fear and are drawn to, that of the zombie apocalypse, Anthony Neely considers *The Walking Dead* and its depiction of informal learning in the absence of a structured educational environment. In a related universe, Myha Do reviews M.J. Trow’s *A Brief History of Vampires*, in which Trow examines the relationship between the historical individuals who served as inspiration for the Count and the literary and cinematic character of Dracula. Kate Donley, too, undertakes an iconic figure and his representation on-screen, in her discussions of the pedagogical applications of Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes and adaptations of the novella *A Study in Scarlet*. We are pleased to include Donley’s application essay as a new feature for the Journal, in which scholars consider the use of texts—films, books,

art, music—in the classroom. We also debut here a reflection by Shannon Reed, who discusses her experience and those of other women in the world of Shakespearean theatre. Both the Reflection and Application sections will appear in future issues of *Dialogue*, when applicable and available.

We return, then, to reality television, with articles by May Friedman and Louisa Danielson, who write on *Survivor* and *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*, respectively. Friedman addresses the topics of representation and authenticity in reality television and how these issues could be incorporated in the classroom, while Danielson's article examines the children's show that incorporates both the actual persona and character of Fred Rogers and the fictional-yet-realistic situations addressed by the scripted interactions on the program. Shelbee Nguyen, in her discussion of higher education and travel abroad preparation, demonstrates how influential reality programming can be in shaping students' perceptions of people, nations, and the values and behaviors espoused by international cultures. And in perhaps the most "real" artifact treated in this collection, Peter Kay reviews a live performance by yMusic at the University of South Carolina.

These examinations included in Volume 2, Issue 1 take place in the spaces between genres, histories, politics, and realities, where fictional and factual figures traverse the landscape of our screens and classrooms. Enjoy your reading.

Lynnea Chapman King
Editor in Chief

A.S. CohenMiller
Managing

A Field Guide to Teaching Agency and Ethics: *The West Wing* and American Foreign Policy

Kayce Mobley
University of Georgia
Athens, GA, USA
kayce@uga.edu

Sarah Fisher
University of Georgia
Athens, GA, USA
skfisher@uga.edu

ABSTRACT

Though political science undergraduate courses reflect a rich theoretical tradition, they typically lack opportunities for students to express intangible concepts through the interpretation of creative works, a standard exercise of critical analysis. Educators can address this dearth in many ways, such as through utilization of popular culture texts. We employ the television series *The West Wing* to ground debates in American politics, specifically American foreign policy. Although this show has been off air since 2006, Netflix and Amazon have recently released the entire series for streaming, significantly reducing the hassle and monetary cost of using this source in the classroom. Using *The West Wing* as our guide, we enhance political science pedagogy using agency, structure, and ethics as our guiding concepts.

Keywords: politics, television, *The West Wing*, foreign policy, decision making, agency, structure, ethics, critical analysis, United States

Though political science undergraduate courses reflect a rich theoretical tradition, they typically lack opportunities for students to express intangible concepts through the interpretation of creative works, a standard exercise of critical analysis. In addition, political science courses, particularly American foreign policy, often appear internally disjointed; jumping from the role of Congress to the significance of the Cold War and then to democracy building can be dizzying for students and teachers alike. To address these challenges, we propose a two-fold solution. First, we recommend a renewed focus on the agency/structure problem and the ethics of decision making in political science. Emphasizing these elements throughout an entire course can provide continuity for discussions of disparate topics that is otherwise often missing. Second, we offer a guide to explore these themes throughout a course by utilizing the television series *The West Wing*. We provide an in-depth assessment of an episode, “A Proportional Response,” and two detailed lesson plans that we have used successfully in our undergraduate classrooms. Although this show has been off the air since 2006, Netflix and Amazon both recently have released the entire series for streaming, significantly reducing the hassle and monetary cost of using this medium in the classroom. By focusing on a common problem and a proposed solution for a specific course, we present a guide that is both practically and pedagogically valuable for instructors of political science and related disciplines.

The West Wing contains ideal case studies for American politics for several reasons. First, *The West Wing* series presents students with fictional foreign policy scenarios that typically stem from real or plausible events. Though imagined, these storylines provide students with common sources for discussion that they can address without the prejudices attached to historical events. Second, the focus on individual characters allows for the study of actor-centric decision making, which introductory political science courses often black-box. The interplay between characters’ lives and foreign policy decisions highlights the simultaneous importance and insignificance of individuals on the international stage. Finally, the series introduces numerous ethical and philosophical questions relating to American politics that are both relevant in current contexts and accessible to student audiences. Included in the article are several conceptual frameworks and lesson plans regarding agency, ethics, and *The West Wing* that have been used successfully in our own classrooms.

The conceptual framework described in this article stems from a desire to incorporate thematic approaches to the teaching of American foreign policy. American foreign policy syllabi commonly cordon off realism from liberalism or war making from peacekeeping. Of course, some of this division is necessary. For example, discussing the basics of liberalism and realism separately is a prerequisite for comparing and contrasting them. Yet including only cursory overviews of international relations theory or domestic sources of American foreign policy creates syllabi that “reveal a surprising degree of distance between the subfield of American foreign policy and the theoretical debates and issues within international relations,” political science, and the humanities (Hurrell 101-111). Taking domestic politics as an example of one such approach, a syllabus might spend one week overviewing the presidency’s impact on foreign policy and then another week on Congressional influence, but, in reality, discussion of Congress influences foreign policy for more than just that one week of the semester. Likewise, realism does not cease to exist once liberalism has been introduced the next week. While keeping these theories in conversation with one another throughout the semester is ideal, instructors can also use underlying themes to create a comprehensive and coherent picture of American foreign policy.

We offer a guide for teaching American politics at the high school and undergraduate level, particularly issues relating to American foreign policy, using the agency/structure debate and ethics as organizing concepts.¹ Attributing agency to a particular actor implies that the actor chooses his/her actions and that those

[1] The framework included in this article is primarily aimed at undergraduate students; however, the authors have also used it with high school students.

actions have an impact on the world, whether a small influence on a few close neighbors or a major impact on an entire society. Structure, on the other hand, suggests that forces outside of an actor's control—whether economic, cultural, or social—are the primary drivers shaping world events. For use in the classroom, the study of ethics broadly can be conceptualized as the analytical determination between right and wrong. Although there are many creative ways to examine foreign policy, such as using memoirs or film (Deibel 128-138; Simpson and Kaussler 413; Engert and Spencer 83), we explore agency/structure and ethics as guiding concepts systematically through *The West Wing*. The value of using *The West Wing* and other television series or films in the classroom is well established in pedagogical literature (Beavers 213; Engert and Spencer 83; Simpson and Kaussler 413; Peace 265; Bostock 454; Valeriano 52). Creative interpretation of this material allows students to explore some central issues, such as first image accounts of foreign policy decisions that are often difficult to grasp with traditional literature (Beavers 213). Our guide couples this proven medium with a thematic focus while capitalizing on recent online streaming capabilities.

In this article, we provide multiple solutions for improving teaching political science. We critically examine one particular episode from *The West Wing*, “A Proportional Response,” as an avenue for exploring agency/structure and ethics. We then detail two sample lesson plans that we have used for incorporating *The West Wing* into undergraduate classrooms. The first plan uses the previously examined episode, “A Proportional Response,” and the second uses a series of episodes from a later season that addresses the decision to assassinate a foreign leader. Additionally, we provide a larger list of episodes matched to specific issue areas so that instructors may easily choose episodes appropriate for their own classroom use.

The starting point for this analysis is the agency/structure debate. Although the agent/structure debate is abstract, this continuum is a flexible and accessible analytical tool that can be used in both high school and undergraduate classrooms. At the beginning of our American foreign policy courses, we ask students to score the extent to which they agree or disagree with statements such as, “As an individual, I am in full control of my life.” (See table 1 for additional examples of discussion questions.) Though this declaration may seem transparent, as students ponder it and the other statements, considering their own lives and experiences, they begin to grasp what “agency” and “structure” mean. One former student likened structure to his mother's rules and expectations. Though this might not be quite what political scientists mean by “structure,” it illustrates the reach of the concept. After pushing students to struggle with the statements, we then reframe the questions in terms of individual leaders, such as the president of the United States or US senators. Understanding these dilemmas in everyday life before applying the analytical constructs to political examples help students assess agency versus structure in various social interactions.

Beginning the course with this framework allows students to examine issues related to individual-level decision making as well as to explore broader theoretical approaches to American foreign policy and political science more generally.² Focusing on agency forces students to grapple with questions such as

- Who/what has agency in this scenario?
- How is power constrained?
- Do other actors limit options?
- How does the structure of the international system limit a decision maker's options?
- How much leeway does the decision maker have in this scenario and, by extension, similar scenarios?

Systematically focusing on agency and structure is a way of 1) addressing American foreign policy in conjunction with more traditional structural theories of international relations and 2) making policy conversations accessible and relevant to students.

[2] Hurrell notes that American foreign policy syllabi at the undergraduate level are highly disjointed and could benefit from a predetermined framework for analysis. We present one possible framework here with agency/structure and ethics (101-111).

Table 1. Student Questionnaire: Agency and Structure

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
-2	-1	0	1	2
<i>Respond to the following statements using the scale provided.</i>				
1. As an individual, I am in full control of my life.				
2. Individuals understand the implications of their actions.				
3. Constraints on individuals play a limited role in decision making.				
4. I live in a world that is not of my own choosing.				
5. We might be able to change small things, but, overall, individuals have little impact on the way the world works.				

The second element of this guide is the formal consideration of teaching students how to scrutinize ethical issues. Though the study of decision making itself is certainly not unusual to formal analyses of foreign policy (Hudson 1-30), what *is* more unusual within the field at large is a formal consideration of ethics. In the middle of the last century, the positivist movement within the social sciences swept out normative considerations from research. The pursuit of a scientific approach to politics nearly silenced ethical concerns over foreign policy decisions for fear of losing objectivity.

Scientific objectivity is a worthwhile goal, but pursuing it by sacrificing discussions of ethics carries a hefty cost. First, there is a problem with ignoring the insights of philosophers and historians of the past (Bull 361). Second, the bias in the field toward pushing past the first image discussion—the tendency to focus on institutions and states rather than on people—obfuscates responsibility for mistakes and poor judgments (Krasner 159). We cannot leave the people out of politics.

Our American foreign policy discussions should not shy away from ethical considerations and evaluations because we are training future policymakers and voters. Assessing ethical motivations behind policy decisions and discerning ethical questions regarding politics are skills that students must hone, and instructors should recognize the responsibility for addressing these challenges. Collective fears of losing objectivity are tenuous because we can limit formal instruction to *descriptive* ethics and leave *prescriptive* ethics for student-led discussions.

For use in the classroom, the study of ethics broadly can be conceptualized as the analytical determination between right and wrong. Descriptive ethics, then, allows us to examine 1) how decision makers view various choices in terms of right and wrong and 2) whether or not these considerations impact their final decisions. As a way of introducing these concepts to students, in conjunction with Table 1, we ask students to rank the extent to which they agree and disagree with ethical statements such as “I should always strive to do what I deem ‘morally right.’” (Other statements are included in Table 2.) Discussion of these moral choices in students’ everyday lives gives them a primer for examining ethical issues in foreign policy. After asking students to discuss these ethical questions for themselves, we pose the question, “What about national leaders? Are they, too, always bound to do what is morally ‘right?’” This sort of focus lends itself to myriad questions. For the purposes of this article, we choose to focus on one aspect of ethics—the notion of state responsibility, a concept that is accessible to students but often underutilized in teaching American foreign policy. In his survey of 69 undergraduate American foreign policy syllabi, Hurrell argues that these courses too often reflect an arrogance of superpower and a lack of critical discernment (101-111). One possible angle through which to incorporate ethical discussions and to address the ambiguity of decision making is the concept of state responsibility. Hastedt argues that responsibility is one of the three pillars of American foreign policy analysis

(along with power and national purpose) but that analysts and scholars often neglect it, despite American political rhetoric that is often heavy with references to authority and obligation (11-16). Analyzing the state's conception of responsibility is key because evaluating how leaders understand international obligations is a precursor to evaluating how they distinguish right from wrong. Additionally, right and wrong must be weighed with a metric that asks right and wrong *for whom?* Responsibility can fill this often-neglected gap in political science and foreign policy analysis.

Table 2. Student Questionnaire: Ethics

Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
-2	-1	0	1	2
<i>Respond to the following statements using the scale provided.</i>				
1. I should always strive to do what I deem "morally right."				
2. In most situations, there is a moral "right" and "wrong."				
3. There are some situations in which choosing the morally "wrong" choice is the "right" thing to do.				

Instructors might choose to deploy these two themes through case studies, current events, popular culture, or a variety of other avenues. Likewise, when teaching political science at the secondary and postsecondary level, instructors can incorporate media from popular culture, ranging from Jon Stewart clips to introduce current events or satire as a genre (Trier 424) to political cartoons as a way of critiquing hegemony (Ellefritz 125). Instructors have systematically incorporated television, such as *The Wire* or *The Simpsons*, in college courses to teach writing and critical analysis of texts while increasing student interest in material (Duchaney 81; Parke 2013). In light of these works, we have incorporated the television series *The West Wing* into political science courses at the high school and undergraduate level.

Rather than attempting to analyze *The West Wing* series in its entirety for this article, we present a critical reading of the episode "A Proportional Response," written by series creator Aaron Sorkin. Limiting the scope of this section clarifies how an instructor might use a single episode for analysis. Using the questions and concepts in table 3, we also provide a guide to discuss the implications for agency and ethics found in this episode. Then, we provide a sample lesson plan that we have used to accompany this episode. Finally, to show the breadth of the show, we provide a sample lesson plan that we have used for a separate set of episodes, as well as a larger chart that outlines the myriad American foreign policy discussions covered throughout the series.

Table 3. Episode Analysis

Guiding Questions: Agency	Episode example	Real-world example
Who/what has decision making power in this scenario?		
Does the structure of the domestic system constrain the actor(s)?		
Does the structure of the international system constrain the actor(s)?		
Guiding Questions: Ethics	Episode example	Real-world example
Do decision makers' personal ethics/feelings of responsibility impact decision making?		
Do concerns over ethics or responsibility make an actor pursue a choice he/she/it might not have otherwise?		
To whom does the actor feel ethically responsible?		

The following critical analysis illustrates how an instructor could lead a discussion of agency, structure, and ethics regarding an episode of *The West Wing*. First, throughout “A Proportional Response” (season 1, episode 3), characters face structural constraints and frustrations on international, domestic, and personal levels. The primary plot, concerning the president’s reaction to an American plane being shot down, and secondary plots present accessible and realistic depictions of decision making and structural constraints on characters’ actions. In the previous episode, the Syrian government shot down an American military plane carrying doctors visiting a teaching hospital in Damascus; President Bartlet’s personal physician and friend was also on board.³ In response, the fictional president wants to retaliate disproportionately—to “blow them [the Syrian officials responsible] off of the earth with the fury of God’s own thunder” (Sorkin). Despite the focus on the presidency during this episode, and through all seven seasons of the show, the viewer quickly realizes that the president is not an omnipotent Commander in Chief. Instead, virtually all of the decisions the president makes face some degree of constraint—whether from bureaucratic politics, Congressional approval, or international public opinion.⁴

“A Proportional Response” begins with the vengeful president impatiently waiting for bureaucratic outputs and estimates needed to plan the counterstrike. Here, a viewer notes the first hint of structural constraint. The president is helpless in the hours passed between hearing of the downed military plane and briefings by the heads of respective agencies. In line with Graham Allison’s bureaucratic politics model (143-196), bureaucratic organization shapes both the timeline of the response and the options presented to the president. This is especially evident in the president’s meeting with the National Security Council, when

[3] Shooting down a plane is a violent act. At the time of this writing, the conflict in Syria is still ongoing. Although there is some potential for students to be upset by violence in the episode echoing the violence on the news, the downing of the plane occurs off-screen in the episode. However, it might be a good idea for the instructor to note the violent actions portrayed in this episode.

[4] In light of recent debates over American intervention in Syria, this is an especially relevant episode. While the circumstances surrounding the fictional intervention on one hand and an actual intervention on the other are very different, all actors are choosing the best among “bad” options. Seeing the dramatic portrayal of shaky intelligence briefings or sleep deprivation has direct implications for understanding current policy dilemmas.

his military officers and officials from the Defense and State Departments only present him with a single option: to destroy a few highly-rated military targets in Syria, thereby promising to cripple the Syrian defense ministry with few civilian casualties. The commanders assure the president that the intelligence is reliable, that the targets are as far away from civilian population centers as possible, and that the military is poised to make the surgical strike. The United States military is perfectly capable of carrying out such a mission. The multiplicity of actors within the bureaucracy has spoken with one voice in favor of a proportionate and politically palatable response.

Yet, Bartlet—still reeling from the death of his friend and the prospect of his first military action as Commander in Chief—cannot stomach such a weak option. Rather than be resigned to the path before him, the president exercises his power in ordering the National Security Council to come up with a new plan: a *disproportionate* response. With this instruction, the NSC then proposes a more aggressive plan that would bomb more targets, incur more civilian and military casualties, and present a show of force in the volatile region.

Several hours later, after cooling down, weighing the costs and benefits of his options, and listening to his chief of staff, the president decides that his initial instinct was an overreaction and that the proportional response is the only viable option. In his next meeting with the NSC, the president nods his head, and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Fitzwallace, walks to a phone and gives the attack order for the proportional response. In this moment, the president's power seems absolute; he nods his head, and on the other side of the world, buildings crumble. But it is a false moment of power—a false choice. In effect, anticipated perception of the international community and other structural considerations influenced the president's ultimate decision to carry out a proportional response.

From an analytical perspective, Bartlet is caught in an “agent-structure problem,” and structural considerations prevail. Throughout the episode, the discussed “virtue” of a proportional response is partially an ethical one, but the episode also illustrates just how few options a decision maker has in a given situation. To his dismay, Bartlet realizes that in some ways, being a superpower is an illusion (Ferguson 21). The United States cannot simply demolish any town in which an American citizen is killed. In order to exercise that kind of power and control, “You’re going to have to kill everyone,” as his chief of staff remarks. Though the president's expressed purpose is to inflict retribution on Syria, the structural factors—the position of the U.S. in the world, as well as domestic and international public opinion—effectively restrict his options to a single, seemingly half-hearted response. Although he is the Commander in Chief of “the most mighty military force in the history of mankind,” he must also behave “the way a superpower ought to behave” (Sorkin). He knows that retribution for the downed plane would “be seen at home and abroad as a staggering overreaction by a first time Commander in Chief” (Sorkin). Of course, theoretically, Bartlet *could* have made the call; he *could* have ordered a disproportionate response. But the international system rendered that choice both unfeasible and unwise.

The options President Bartlet weighs throughout the episode—the disproportionate and proportionate responses—are distinct for two reasons. First, as discussed above, the international structure (in the form of reigning norms of warfare and public opinion) produces a proportionate response, whereas the agent initially prefers the disproportionate response. The second distinction between the two options stems from competing notions of responsibility. For any given choice, a decision maker must frame the decision by acknowledging *to whom* he is responsible, i.e., who is the *referent* in the scenario.

In the main plot of the episode, the president must decide between personal and public referents. His task is deciding how to respond to the calculated downing of an American plane and, with it, his friend. His initial, gut response is to act on behalf of his emotions, adopting an inward or personal referent. In contrast, Leo, his chief of staff, urges the president to respond objectively:

PRESIDENT: It's been 72 hours, Leo. That's more than three days since they blew him out of the sky. And I'm tired of waiting, dammit! This is candy-ass! We are going to draw up a response scenario today, I'm going to give the order today, we're going to strike back today.

LEO: I wish you wouldn't say "him," Mr. President.

PRESIDENT: What?

LEO: "Three days since they blew him out of the sky." Of course that's fine while it's just you and me, sir, but in there with Fitzwallace and the Chiefs, I hope you say "it" or "the airplane," not "him."

PRESIDENT: You think I'm taking this personally.

LEO: I think-

PRESIDENT: Why the hell shouldn't I take this personally?

(Sorkin)

Through most of the episode, President Bartlet continues to support a *personal, domestic referent* and to advocate a disproportionate response, which would please both himself and the American public. Leo and Fitzwallace, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, continue to push for an *international referent* and to support a proportionate response, in accordance with international norms. The factor that finally sways the president is the threat to international civilians that a disproportionate response would entail: his national security team estimates that the disproportionate response would create thousands of civilian casualties and severe humanitarian problems. With the acceptance of these facts, the president moves from a personal referent to a public, international one. He realizes that, in this scenario, American foreign policy must place its referent outside of the state, in the international community. Leo comforts him later in the episode by reminding the president that this is "the way a superpower ought to behave" (Sorkin).

Utilizing episodes of *The West Wing* can illuminate issues of agency, structure, and ethics, but using television in the classroom can present some practical considerations for instructors. First, using clips or full episodes does not necessarily mean that an instructor needs to show episodes in class. Given the accessibility of Netflix and Amazon, instructors can treat the episodes as a "textbook" for the class. Students can purchase individual episodes (\$1.99 each via Amazon Prime) or stream the entire series at home (via Netflix) and come to class ready to discuss. The episodes are generally cohesive wholes, and the themes of agency and ethics underlie the non-foreign policy subplots as well.

Second, the series covers many additional issues of foreign policy and national security; the storyline of "A Proportional Response" comprises only one example of *The West Wing's* potential for examination of agency/structure and ethics. This episode focuses specifically on retaliation strikes, but the series as a whole incorporates an enormous range of issues suitable for an undergraduate American foreign policy course or related political science classes at the high school level. While not comprehensive, table 4 contains a list of episodes matched with substantive themes ranging from US-China relations to foreign aid.

Table 4. Suggested Episodes by Theme

Themes	Description	Ep.	Title
Brinkmanship, US/China Relations	The US and China engage in brinkmanship over Taiwan while president engages his staff members in games of chess.	3.15	“Hartsfield’s Landing”
Cuban Embargo, Congressional Politics	When details of secret talks with Cuba leak to members of Congress and the press, the president must decide whether to overturn the embargo or give in to domestic pressures.	6.19	“Ninety Miles Away”
Globalization	As an international trade summit approaches, the administration learns that the negotiated agreement will jeopardize thousands of American jobs.	5.19	“Talking Points”
Human Security, American Propaganda	The renewal of an air base in a Middle Eastern country without women’s rights frames a broader discussion of human security. Staffers grapple with the implications of imprecise language in a UN treaty on prostitution, and the president must decide how to handle a potential outbreak of mad cow disease in the country. Also, WWII veterans protest a Smithsonian exhibit on Pearl Harbor that they deem Anti-American.	3.9	“The Women of Qumar”
Human Security, Development, Congressional Politics	When the administration loses a key vote in support for a foreign aid bill, the staff spends the day trying to find another vote. The side stories are also applicable to development: a service member on food stamps delivers a personal request to a staffer, and the president has a photo op with a goat for Heifer International.	4.12	“Guns Not Butter”
Humanitarian Intervention, Bureaucratic Politics	In the run-up to the inauguration of his second term, the president must decide whether to intervene in a genocide in Africa. Anticipating resistance, he bypasses the Secretary of Defense to obtain a force depletion estimate for a potential mission.	4.14	“Inauguration: Part One”
		4.15	“Inauguration: Over There”
Israel/Palestine	After a terrorist attack in Gaza kills several American officials at the end of the fifth season, the administration convenes peace talks with Israelis and Palestinians at Camp David.	6.1	“NSF Thurmont”
		6.2	“The Birnam Wood”
Nuclear Weapons, Iran, US/Israel Relations	An unclaimed nuclear explosion over the Indian Ocean surprises the president and his staff. With little intelligence to rely upon, the administration assumes that Iran is to blame and prepares for military strikes. Staffers debate the merits of unilateral strikes versus multilateral negotiations. Due to a lucky break, the administration realizes in time that the culprit is actually Israel.	5.13	“The Warfare of Genghis Khan”
Nuclear Weapons, Iran, US/Russia Relations, Media, Saudi Arabia	On the eve of a summit with the new Russian president, satellite imagery reveals progress on a nuclear weapons facility in Iran built with Russian technology. Also, the communications director debates the merits of credentialing a Russian journalist for the upcoming trip, and the press secretary speaks out against the treatment of women in Saudi Arabia.	3.2	“Enemies Foreign and Domestic”
Political Asylum, US/North Korea Relations	A celebrated pianist from North Korea attempts to defect once he reaches the White House. The president must decide whether or not to jeopardize ongoing negotiations by granting political asylum.	5.4	“Han”
Political Intervention	When protestors flood the streets in Saudi Arabia, the president debates the merits of political intervention with two former presidents while on their way to a state funeral.	5.1	“The Stormy Present”
Targeted Killings	This trio of episodes follows the president’s decision making process regarding the assassination of a foreign leader.	3.21	“The Black Vera Wang”
		3.22	“We Killed Yamamoto”
		3.23	“Posse Comitatus”

Third, instructors can incorporate the episodes into their syllabi to complement existing considerations of concepts and issues of American foreign policy. We have included two sample lesson plans to illustrate how we have used *The West Wing* to teach American foreign policy in our undergraduate classrooms. Sample Lesson 1 involves using the previously analyzed episode, “A Proportional Response.” This episode was incorporated into a week of classes covering decision making in American Foreign Policy and discussions of U.S. responses to surprise attacks. Sample Lesson 2 is an example of using clips of multiple episodes to talk about a particular issue (in this case, targeting killings). Given that this theme also crossed multiple days, we have also included suggested reading assignments for three class days (or one week) of material.

SAMPLE LESSON 1: “A PROPORTIONAL RESPONSE”

The episode “A Proportional Response,” like many episodes of *The West Wing*, has great potential for classroom use. While many ways of using “A Proportional Response” in the classroom exist, we will show the way we have used the episode in our undergraduate classes when discussing foreign policy decision making. Given the importance of decision making in this episode, the instructor reviewed and introduced concepts such as rational choice, prospect theory, losses frames, and groupthink along with agency, structure, and ethics before watching the episode.

In the following 50-minute class, the instructor showed the full episode (42 min.) of “A Proportional Response” after briefly introducing the series and providing a short recap of the previous episode. During the third class, the instructor developed questions of agency and structure outlined in this article as well as additional key terms discussed previously in the class:

- How much agency does the president have in this situation?
- What constraints—whether personal, domestic, or international—are at play?
- Is this an example of rational choice? Why or why not?

Using “A Proportional Response” as a starting point, the students were able to make connections to agency, structure, and ethics as well as see a clear connection to historical and contemporary issues in American foreign policy. For instance, after discussing the fictional scenario, the instructor introduced students to similar cases ranging from the Lusitania to the Lockerbie bombing. Given the in-depth portrayal of foreign policy decision making in *The West Wing*, students were able to frame those historical events from foreign policy leaders’ points of view. Table 5 provides a sample three-day lesson plan for using this full episode in class.

Table 5. “A Proportional Response”

<p>Day 1: Background</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students need to be familiar with terms such as decision making, rational choice, prospect theory, loss frame, and cognitive bias. • Students also need to be familiar with institutional constraints on the presidency (such as bureaucratic politics and the role of Congress in foreign affairs).
<p>Day 2: “A Proportional Response”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instructor provides a brief recap of the previous episode. • Watch episode (42 min.)
<p>Day 3: Discussion and Extensions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion of the episode: “How much agency does the president have in this situation?” “What constraints—whether personal, domestic, or international—are at play?” “Is this an example of rational choice? Why or why not?” • Discussion of similar historical events: sinking of the USS Maine, sinking of the Lusitania, the Tonkin Gulf crisis, Pearl Harbor, 1983 Beirut barracks bombing, Lockerbie bombing, 1998 embassy bombings, USS Cole, September 11 attacks, and recent embassy bombings in Libya.

SAMPLE LESSON 2: TARGETED KILLINGS, AGENCY, AND ETHICS

We have also incorporated *The West Wing* into our classes by showing selected clips rather than entire episodes. One of the topics for which this strategy works well is the discussion of assassinations, targeted killings, and the use of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs, or drones). A trio of episodes from the end of Season 3 of *The West Wing* finds President Bartlet wrestling with the idea of secretly assassinating a foreign diplomat purported to support terrorism. This legally and ethically precarious decision opens the door to a larger classroom discussion on US use of targeted killings during the post-9/11 era.

This second lesson plan also covers three separate 50-minute sessions (though, of course, it could be adapted to fit different needs). For the first day, the instructor required students to read several background articles covering the development and efficiency of drones. (See table 6.) During this class, the instructor first lectured on the history of American policies regarding assassination and targeted killing and on the development of drones. She then opened a discussion regarding the assigned articles and the perceived effectiveness of drone strikes. Sections from this day's *The West Wing* episode, "The Black Vera Wang" (3.20), were then showed at the end of the class. (See table 6 for the specific clips shown.) These clips establish the storyline to be discussed in the next two periods. Essentially, the White House discovers that the defense minister of a fictional Middle Eastern state, Qumar, oversees a terrorist cell that has targeted American military establishments. Qumar is a formal military ally of the US, and the defense minister is traveling to the US to meet with the president in ten days.

Table 6. Day 1: Background for Targeted Killings and Drones

<p>Required Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Byman, Daniel. "Why Drones Work." <i>Foreign Affairs</i>. July/August 2013. 32-43. • Cronin, Audrey Kurth. "Why Drones Fail." <i>Foreign Affairs</i>. July/August 2013. 44-54. • Kreps, Sarah and Micah Zenko. "The Next Drone Wars." <i>Foreign Affairs</i>. March/April 2014. 68-79. <p>Class Activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lecture: Targeted Killings, Assassinations, and the Rise of Drones • Discussion: Effectiveness of Drone Strikes • <i>The West Wing</i>: Sections of "The Black Vera Wang" (3.20) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10:08-11:55 • 18:39-21-17 • 29:57-31:58 • 38:09-39:59
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For the second class, the instructor required students to read articles about drone warfare that were more personal in nature than the background articles from the first day. (See table 7.) These articles opened a class discussion on the ethics of targeted killings. From there, the instructor assigned small groups of students to read and analyze different statements from the Obama administration justifying the use of drones. The groups were tasked with summarizing their statements and assessing the validity of the justifications. Finally, the instructor ended the class with sections of the next episode of *The West Wing*, "We Killed Yamamoto" (3.21). These clips show the Bartlet administration assessing its options regarding the terrorist leader. Many structural considerations intervene to limit the president's choices. For example, the US cannot arrest the defense minister of Qumar without setting aside diplomatic immunity, but the US cannot set aside diplomatic immunity without permission from the country's leader, who also happens to be the defense minister's brother. Additionally, the US government cannot pursue a court case against the suspected terrorist because the main evidence against him was obtained through torture, making it inadmissible. The episode ends by pushing the idea that assassination is the only feasible option, though the president finds it ethically repugnant.

Table 7. Day 2: Wrestling with the Ethics of Targeted Killings and Drones

<p>Required Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Junod, Tom. “The Lethal Presidency of Barack Obama.” <i>Esquire</i>. August 2012.• Mazzetti, Mark and Eric Schmitt. “U.S. Militant, Hidden, Spurs Drone Debate.” <i>The New York Times</i>. 28 February 2014.• Power, Matthew. “Confessions of a Drone Warrior.” <i>GQ</i>. 23 October 2014. <p>Class Activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Discussion: Readings and Ethics.• Small Groups: Reading and analyzing statements from the Obama administration about the use of drones.• Recapping the crisis scenario from yesterday’s <i>The West Wing</i> episode. What choices does the president have? How are those choices constrained?• <i>The West Wing</i>: Sections of “We Killed Yamamoto” (3.21)<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 0:37-3:15• 9:43-10:44• 11:58-13:29• 27:29-32:08• 39:56-43:00
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On the third day, the instructor directed students to engage each other in a debate over current US drone policy. She divided the class into two sections and assigned one as “pro” and one as “con,” and then she allowed each group time to structure their points. After the debate, the instructor opened the floor for discussion so that students could voice their own opinions on the issue and so that the class could discuss the day’s readings. (See table 8.) Lastly, the instructor showed the final installment of clips from *The West Wing*, which came from the Season 3 finale, “Posse Comitatus” (3.22).

Table 8. Day 3: Settling the Debate

<p>Required Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Shane, Scott. “The Moral Case for Drones.” <i>The New York Times</i>. 14 July 2014.• Kaag, John, and Sarah Kreps. “The Moral Hazard of Drones.” <i>The New York Times</i>. 22 July 2014.• Kaag, John. “Drones, Ethics, and the Armchair Soldier.” <i>The New York Times</i>. 17 March 2013. <p>Recommended Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Roth, Marco. “The Drone Philosopher.” <i>n+1</i>. 7 August 2013. <p>Class Activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Debate: Divide the class into two groups. Assign each group as “pro” or “con” for the use of drones.• <i>The West Wing</i>: Sections of “Posse Comitatus” (3.22)<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 0:35-5:50• 11:13-13:17• 15:07-17:08• 20:16-21:30• 35:21-37:36• 40:35-42:56• Discussion of <i>The West Wing</i>: Did the president make the right decision? What do you think would happen in reality? Compare and contrast the policies of the Obama and Bartlet administrations.
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After the conclusion of the episode, the instructor asked students to assess *The West Wing* story. Students rightly concluded that the show, like the Obama administration, makes the case that a less-than-ethical choice becomes ethical when no other options exist, combining the concepts of agency and ethics. Table 9 shows a side-by-side comparison of a statement from the Obama administration that students assessed on Day 2 with a passage from *The West Wing* episode shown on Day 3.

Table 9. Day 3: Comparing the Obama and Bartlet Administrations

<p>May 2013 Presidential Address at the National Defense University ...it is a hard fact that U.S. strikes have resulted in civilian casualties, a risk that exists in every war. And for the families of those civilians, no words or legal construct can justify their loss. For me, and those in my chain of command, those deaths will haunt us as long as we live... But as Commander-in-Chief, I must weigh these heartbreaking tragedies against the alternatives. To do nothing in the face of terrorist networks would invite far more civilian casualties... So doing nothing is not an option.</p> <p>(Obama)</p>	<p>Episode: "Posse Comitatus" PRESIDENT: It's just wrong. It's absolutely wrong. LEO: I know, but you have to do it anyway. PRESIDENT: Why? LEO: 'Cause you won.</p> <p>(Sorkin)</p>
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Table 9 illustrates that although *The West Wing* aired prior to current debates in the Obama administration, the ethical dilemmas found in the episode are similar to real world debates. In the final discussion of this episode, students also pointed out that the episodes covered many other concepts from the class, including how politicians can use the blurred lines between peacetime and wartime to their advantage. The blurred lines give politicians a sort of ethical cover; killing in wartime has different actors and implications than killing in peacetime.

This article tackles a problem identified in the literature regarding the teaching of American foreign policy. Specifically, Hurrell (110-111) argues that American foreign policy syllabi tend to lack unifying themes, connections to the subfield of international relations, and opportunities for the development of critical discernment. Because of his survey work and because of similar frustrations with our own syllabi, we have developed a two-fold solution that is both pedagogically and practically valuable. First, we have suggested that instructors consider refocusing their courses with the themes of agency and ethics, both of which open discussions about the motives of decision makers. In addition to American foreign policy, these concepts can unify discussions in many social science courses, partially because they address human behavior generally and because they have no simple answers. To this end, we intend for other instructors to adapt our charts and suggestions to their classroom needs. Second, we suggest that instructors and students apply these concepts to analyzing the fictional world created by the television series *The West Wing*. Though fictional, the scenarios represented in this show often seem shockingly current, which allows students opportunities to discuss relevant issues without all of the preconceptions attached to actual foreign policy scenarios.

Finally, by combining these two approaches to teaching American foreign policy, we open a window to a world otherwise not readily accessible to students. At its core, American foreign policy revolves around human decision making, yet, to the casual observer, this process often feels opaque, as these choices are typically made behind closed doors in the nation's capital. By opening those doors to a fictional administration, *The West Wing* is unique as a piece of popular culture because it illuminates this strategic and secretive culture for the public, rather than simply reflecting back elements of the dominant public culture to them, as do most elements of popular media (Wright and Sandlin). With a foot in the door to this clandestine world, instructors then can push open the door more fully for their students by framing discussions with critical themes that disentangle the usual political rhetoric and traditional understandings. In the end, we are left with decision makers who are neither omnipotent nor powerless and decisions that are often neither clearly right nor wrong.

"A Proportional Response" effectively addresses these concerns towards its end. After Leo talks the president out of massive retaliation against Syria, the president is, perhaps understandably, dissatisfied. The chief of staff notes:

LEO: We are not doing nothing. Four high rated military targets.

PRESIDENT: And this [option] is good?

LEO: Of course it's not good—there is no good. It's what there is.

(Sorkin)

If embracing themes of agency and ethics in our instruction helps students grasp the complexity of evaluating these decisions, then perhaps we *can* do something good.

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AUTHOR BIOS:

Sarah Fisher is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of International Affairs at the University of Georgia. Fisher will be an assistant professor at Emory & Henry College beginning in August 2015. Her research interests include foreign policy, civil wars, environmental policy, and college pedagogy. For more information, please visit her website at <http://fishersk.com/>.

Kayce Mobley is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of International Affairs at the University of Georgia. Her research interests include American foreign policy, security studies, ethics, and college pedagogy. For more information, please visit her website at <http://kaycemobley.com/>.

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Survivor Skills: Authenticity, Representation and Why I Want to Teach Reality TV

May Friedman

Ryerson University

Toronto, Ontario, Canada

may.friedman@ryerson.ca

ABSTRACT

This paper will consider the pedagogical potential in constructing a class on the phenomenon of reality television by exploring the possibilities and pitfalls of a shared viewing of these “texts” as a site of critical engagement with popular culture. A course on reality TV would require a deep analysis of the topics of representation, authenticity, and audience reactions. The course I would like to teach would also consider the ways that reality TV is simultaneously emblematic of, and contributes to, the foregrounding of neo-liberal discourses. This paper addresses some of the pedagogical implications of an analysis of reality TV by considering the above themes in greater detail.

I see the creation of a post-secondary class on reality TV as pedagogically radical in both form and content, as a site where new ideas can be applied to shifting and unstable terrain. In challenging the primacy of high culture as the only worthy area of analysis, in viewing one of the most debased forms of popular culture as academically rich, I hope to help my undergraduate students build bridges between what they think about in school and what they do at home. I see such a class as an exciting explosion of the binaries of high and low culture, public and private space, and truth and fiction.

KEYWORDS

Reality Television, Engaged Pedagogy, Popular Culture, Representation, Authenticity, Neoliberalism, Social Work, Critical Discourse Analysis

As an avid consumer of popular culture and a teacher of critical social work, I am always on the lookout for how these two domains overlap. Yet the overlaps should, in fact, be fairly obvious. In teaching my students how to “do” social work, I do my best to help them deconstruct their lives and their worlds. Yet one of the single biggest impacts on the public imaginary of my students, popular culture, is often curiously absent from social work education. An examination of popular culture gives a particular lens to understanding the specific interests and structural factors that aid in the creation of their surroundings. As always, however, the pedagogical lesson begins with personal moments and experiences.

Many years ago I went to school to achieve a Master’s in Social Work. Our cohort, like many before us, bonded through the frustrations of graduate school and the often-difficult emotional work of confronting our own biases and specific life circumstances in order to become qualified and self-reflexive social work practitioners. We found a unique way of blowing off steam at the end of the day. While we heard that the law students would gather round the TV to watch *Law and Order* and assumed that the med and nursing school pupils had a weekly date to watch *ER*, the social work students in my cohort would group together to witness a strange new phenomenon: reality TV, in particular the spectacle of the show *Survivor*. In watching the specific interpersonal challenges of groups of people uniquely selected for their capacity to engender conflict and be subjected to contrived situations of privation and stress, we laughed, analyzed, and shouted at the TV every Thursday night.

When I look back at that period of my life, there are tangible lessons I can remember from being in the classroom and powerful insights I can draw from my experiences in the field. At the same time, I recall less specific moments of learning that resonated with me and that changed my approach in both my private and professional life. Those Thursday nights have stayed in my memory as a particular way that my fellow students and I could take our formal learning and apply it to an analysis of popular culture, specifically to reality television. Our watching allowed us to simultaneously assess the same artifact and learn, to our alarm and delight, that we were often experiencing the “same” moments very differently. It allowed us to discuss human emotions and stressors very specifically in ways that our student placements—each at different agencies, and bound by both laws and ethical constraints of confidentiality—could not. Yet our analysis went further: those Thursday night goof-off sessions allowed us to see dominant discourses of racism and whiteness, of gender and sexuality, and of the ways that stereotypes are easily embedded in neo-liberal notions of individual agency. Those Thursdays remain an example of some of the most critical and delightful learning I have undergone. As I grow as an educator, and as I now observe my own students in social work classrooms and field placements, I wonder if there is a way to harness the magical critique of those early heady days of reality TV and apply them to the glut of reality television that has followed since the millennial days when *Survivor* was a strange and new media artifact.

My analysis of reality TV as a teaching tool thus draws from my own experiences as a student and educator, but it is disingenuous to suggest that my desire to bring this aspect of popular culture into the classroom is borne exclusively of thoughtful pedagogical analysis. Rather, my leisure time continues to be spent in part as a viewer of reality television in many different forms and contexts. On the one hand, my love of reality TV is my dirty little secret, the low culture hiding in my web browser’s history, silently standing alongside the scholarly texts that grace my bookshelf. On the other hand, I continue to observe the ways that viewing reality TV hones my critical lens, allowing me to consider the dominant discourses that shape my world as well as the commerce that foregrounds certain discourses while muting others. It gives me an entry, albeit one that is heavily mediated, into worlds that I could not otherwise see. Reality TV, like my other passions – memoir and blogs – gives me access to raw emotion and takes me beyond my own neighborhood and experiences. I have found that reality TV provides me with tremendous opportunities to apply the analyses contained in those scholarly tomes, to apply the critical theories that I hold so dear.

This paper will consider the pedagogical potential in constructing a class on the popular culture phenomenon of reality TV, suggesting that “reality shows can be seen as significant cultural objects whose production and consumption reflect and reveal norms and ideologies of contemporary culture” (Montemurro 84). I will explore the possibilities – and some pitfalls – of a shared viewing of these “texts” as a site of critical engagement with popular culture. To argue that reality TV provides a useful site of theoretical analysis, however, requires an examination of some of the key themes. A course on reality TV would require a deep analysis of the topics of representation, authenticity, and audience reactions. Finally, the course I would like to teach would consider the ways that reality TV is simultaneously emblematic of, and contributes to, the foregrounding of neo-liberal discourses. This paper addresses some of the pedagogical implications of an analysis of reality TV by considering the above themes in greater detail.

REPRESENTATION

Even a facile engagement with reality TV elicits discussion about issues of representation. If reality TV is meant to showcase reality, I would like my students to consider whose reality is being put forth and through which epistemology such a reality is constructed. Reality TV obviously perpetuates stereotypes and still skews toward the same normative tropes that exist in other sites of popular culture but, alarmingly, it does so under the guise of presenting the truth. Williams suggests that “the line between news and entertainment, documentary and reality TV is constantly blurred and shifting” (550). For many viewers, the clearly mediated “truths” of reality TV may provide as much information about communities and systems as more traditional news media and other expert discourses. For example, Morris and McNerney suggest that seventy-two percent of survey respondents who were pregnant for the first time saw popular pregnancy and delivery shows such as *A Baby Story* and *Birth Day* as important sources of information (134). As the authors go on to show in detail, these shows present a great deal of misinformation and may perpetuate myths about pregnancy and childbirth.

Likewise, dating shows such as *The Bachelor* and *The Bachelorette* suggest that fairy tale love is largely restricted to white middle-class couples (Dubrofsky and Hardy); Montemurro shows that, “among the women contestants, whiteness was privileged and racial others were either exoticized or assimilated, depending on what seemed to best serve the storyline” (96). Reality shows that center on tropes of personal transformation, such as *The Swan*, deliberately seek less normative participants at the outset but with the explicit motive of achieving normativity as the desired outcome. As Banet-Weiser and Portwood-Stacer note:

Plastic surgery shows often select as their subjects a “certain class” of woman, which translates frequently into working-class women. The selection of working-class subjects contributes to the seemingly inexhaustible ideology of the American dream where those of a lower socio-economic class can succeed at becoming middle-class subjects, and the media audience participates in this transformation by tuning in to watch. (266)

This affiliation may be particularly keen for viewers who do not see themselves reflected elsewhere in popular culture. Skeggs and Wood suggest that working-class viewers may find the unpretentiousness of participants “like them” appealing in the absence of many other sites of representation (“Labour of Transformation” 567). Finally, popular “game-docs” such as *Survivor* and *Big Brother* purport to pick diverse contestants but generally only manage to achieve “overplayed typecasting ... with their ever present Gay Man, Wild Woman, Single Mom, Yuppie, Everybody’s Friend, Redneck, Slacker, Victim ...” (Kerrigan 22).

Given the tenacity of both the stereotypical permissible diversities of much reality TV as well as the very explicit exclusions on many shows, how can these shows serve as a useful pedagogical tool? Leaving aside for the moment issues of authenticity, how can the deliberate selection of specific bodies over others, the deliberate creation, through editing, of specific “characters” associated with stereotypes, provide a launching point for analysis in the classroom? Is there anything to say about reality TV beyond a critique of its obvious limitations?

Using reality TV allows students to consider that “television talk is always a part of the broader conversational culture” (Aslama and Pantti, “Flagging Finnishness” 62). While it is certainly alarming to consider the implications of paternalistic shows such as *A Baby Story* standing in for empowered feminist obstetric knowledge, these shows did not single-handedly create the culture they reflect. Rather, expert-driven and reductionist approaches to information (about childbirth and beyond) are the norm. By amplifying some of the tropes of dominant discourses into sensationalized formats, reality TV may provide a point of entry for students to consider the failings of representation more broadly. As a result, they may develop a critical lens that extends beyond their analysis of these leisure-time shows toward sites that are more concretely presented as truth: an analysis of reality TV may engender a degree of skepticism about reality. Likewise, an analysis of who is missing from many of these shows may allow for a conversation to develop about which bodies are rendered invisible in the public sphere, or only visible in particularly virulent and narrow ways. For example, an analysis of *The Biggest Loser* may allow students to embark upon a more ambitious conversation about size acceptance and the scope of both the ignoring of fat bodies and the ways they can only be seen in the context of transformation (Cooper 35; Murray 155).

If there are lessons to be learned by an examination of the specificity with which particular bodies are represented, there is also pedagogical value in an analysis of people who are presented as simultaneously ordinary and bizarre. The subtype of reality TV shows that purport to provide a documentary lens on ordinary, unusual people has gained great traction over the last decade and provides a paradoxical story. On the one hand, people like JimBob and Michelle Dugger, with their nineteen children (and counting!), “little people” Matt and Amy Roloff and their family, or Alana “Honey BooBoo” Thompson are presented as people “just like us,” suggesting that difference is illusory or only in the eye of the beholder. At the same time, such shows present a latter-day freak show wherein audiences eagerly consume the mundane details of non-normative lives. Andrejevic’s assertion that, “by democratizing celebrity, such programs help reinforce the notion that a surveillance-based society can overcome the hierarchies of mass society” (“The Kinder, Gentler Gaze” 253) resonates here in its presumption that, by learning about difference, we may lose sight of our limitations and biases. Thus, an examination of the ways that non-normativity is specifically taken up in reality TV in deliberate ways may be productive for students grappling with both the limitations of their own experiences of difference and their own titillation by the gentle sensationalizing that occurs in these shows.

Reality TV may be taken up as a useful site of analysis on the basis of race, and significant scholarship has considered the ways that reality TV continues to maintain a commonsense and unyielding whiteness. Bell-Jordan suggests that “race continues to be constructed in superficial, reductive, and often hegemonic ways—and this process has increasingly come to define the genre” (369), while Dubrofsky and Hardy argue that these shows are “recentering Whiteness without calling explicit attention to this fact” (376). There is no question that the performance of race on reality TV is deeply flawed. In examining these flaws, however, many of the abiding archetypes of race (such as Hill Collins’s analysis of the Mammy, Jezebel and the Matriarch [69]) are so amplified that skeptical students may finally have a context in which to understand what many racialized students may have known, implicitly and explicitly in their bodies all along. It becomes harder to deny or minimize racism when its machinations are so explicitly exposed.

While an analysis of race reveals the dominant discourse of whiteness that invades nearly all reality TV, there is nonetheless a valuable lesson to be gained on the topic of agency and specificity in these shows. Shows that deliberately seek out ethnically or racially specific participants (such as *Flavor of Love* [Dubrofsky and Hardy], the Finnish show *Extreme Escapades* [Aslama and Pantti, “Flagging Finnishness”] or the Canadian version of *The Bachelor*) present their own deep flaws in maintaining stereotypical tropes about the populations they present. At the same time, an analysis of the specifics of these sites opens conversations about insider and outsider presentations, nationalism and globalization, and the ways that the colonizing influence of reality

TV is nonetheless mediated through the specifics of particular populations. Dubrofsky and Hardy highlight this by examining the ways that participants on *Flavor of Love* were held to a very different standard than participants on the “mainstream” romance show *The Bachelor*, arguing that while *The Bachelor* was centered on hegemonic and unselfconscious whiteness, *Flavor of Love* promoted an almost ironic hyper-performance of Blackness. While maintaining an awareness of the limitations of these performances, students may benefit from delving into a more nuanced analysis of dominant discourse and reality TV that complicates a discussion of representation and thus interrupts the idea that all non-normative performers are naïve dupes. Likewise, an analysis of sexual and gender orientations and disability could be usefully undertaken by considering both the agency of particular actors/subjects and the constraints within which such performances occur.

AUTHENTICITY

Despite the generic moniker of “reality” in reality TV, at this stage of its development, it is arguable that few viewers would perceive such offerings as genuinely presenting reality. Indeed, as the prior analysis of representation suggests, much of the offering of reality TV is neatly packaged in response to concerns about production and commerce, leaving “reality” far, far behind. Yet such an analysis relies on positivist notions of reality and does not extend to a more nuanced analysis of authenticity and emotionality as key characteristics that are exemplified in reality TV. As Kavka argues, “reality TV relishes contradictions. It shamelessly mixes the generic attributes of fact and fiction” (179). In so doing, a collective analysis of reality TV begs interesting questions about truth, fiction, performance, and our own assertions of what constitutes the real.

For example, one assumes that critical viewers might see the lives portrayed on MTV’s *16 and Pregnant* or *Teen Mom* as inaccurate and heavy-handed representations of the lives of young mothers and the particularities of their experiences (for example, see Guglielmo). While we are critical of the ways that young motherhood is packaged on these shows, we may nonetheless see through the moralizing discourses to view the real structural challenges experienced by younger mothers. Furthermore, the capacity to unpack the grey area between fact and fiction in a classroom context takes postmodernist and poststructuralist concepts of truth out of the realm of inaccessible theory and instead asks students to consider which truth they would accept as authentic, which story they would deem an adequate representation. In this context, the course might usefully be bolstered by contrasting viewings of documentary films (including those with a reality bent, such as the *7-Up* series) and considering the limitations of subjectivity.

Fundamentally, such an analysis allows students to call their own performances into question. If, as Dubrofsky and Hardy argue, “participants on reality TV shows perform for the camera, either unwittingly or explicitly, just as people perform in their daily lives to suit the imperatives of a given situation” (375), a shared viewing of reality TV guided by critical pedagogy would allow students to tease out their own unwitting and/or explicit performances. This is of obvious value to me in teaching social work students who are not only grappling with more obvious sites of performance such as professionalism but also negotiating with the many performances (e.g., race, gender, and ability) that may be beyond their control. Thus, while students may begin their analysis by taking for granted reality TV as inauthentic, our shared viewing may evolve into a more nuanced reckoning with the notion of authenticity itself. This follows Kavka’s assertion that “discursively, reality TV makes claims about ordinariness, authenticity and the social value of accessing private lives” (179).

If reality TV can be seen as an obvious contrivance of fact, what are we to make, as viewers, of the presentation of emotion on these shows? Can the rage, heartbreak, and passion presented in this context yield further lessons about authenticity of emotion, even as the machinations of editing and production suggest that such raw emotions are slickly incorporated into a discrete message? Skeggs and Wood suggest that “[w]hilst the staging of events on ‘reality’ television complicates any ontological claim to the ‘real,’ it *can* make a claim

to the ‘actual’—the camera tells us this ‘actually’ happened as a response to an unscripted, if contrived, *actual* situation” (“Labour of Transformation” 559). Kavka extends this in arguing that “authenticity is confirmed by the ... emotional intensity of the participants’ interactions” (181). In this respect, reality TV presents an interesting blurring of the public and private in presenting emotions (and, indeed, seeking out these high emotions through inevitably “shocking” twists and turns) that were, prior to the rise of this genre, largely inaccessible in the realm of mass media. Aslama and Pantti suggest that reality TV has resurrected the theatrical monologue, in which a lone character shares her or his thoughts with the audience privately (“Talking Alone” 178). At the same time, they note the inherent contradiction in this style of conversation: “The paradox of an individualized society is that while one is talking alone about one’s deepest emotions, at the same time one is selling one’s authenticity to viewers” (“Talking Alone” 181). Skeggs and Wood argue that this blurring of the public and private has implications for an analysis of traditional gender roles, suggesting that “[r]eality’ television, by sensationalizing women’s domestic labour and emotional management of relationships, displays the new ways in which capital extends into the ‘private,’ in which capital is engaged in the socialization of affective capacities” (“Labour of Transformation” 560) and that “[t]he space and practice of intimacy becomes like other social goods and exchange-values that are socially distributed and allocated” (562).

Students may benefit from having to grapple with both their own reactions to the strong emotions foregrounded in the viewing and with the ways that particular emotions are routinely assigned to particular bodies. Both Pozner and Dubrofsky and Hardy suggest that the aggressive and larger-than-life personalities often assigned to racialized bodies may lead to the inability of such participants enjoying any longevity on such shows. Referring to a feisty racialized contestant on the show *Road Rules*, Andrejevic and Colby argue that “the reason she had to leave was the reason for her being recruited to the show in the first place” (207). In other words, stereotypical racially or culturally ascribed characteristics may bring often-ignored bodies to the fore, but they do so at the price of maintaining stereotypes and cultural misunderstanding. As Aslama and Pantti suggest, “This dilemma of managed and unmanaged feelings can be seen at the core of reality television. However without doubt it also celebrates the loss of emotional control, emotional conflicts and the very emotions that are considered inappropriate in society at large” (“Talking Alone” 171). Arguably, the explicit portrayal of emotion is rarely available for analysis in the classroom, positioned as an unemotional and academic milieu. Yet it is also arguable that viewing a variety of strong emotions, perhaps particularly those that are garnered through contrivance and intersected with dominant discourses of race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, age, and so on, is of great academic interest. Certainly, such an analysis would allow our classrooms to evolve beyond a vague analysis of, for example, how service workers may behave, to a tangible discussion of the limits of what we feel comfortable accepting and why. This exercise would remind us that “television participants *and* audiences are located within extended ‘circuits of value,’ helping us to see why it is that vitriolic reactions ‘stick’ where they do, and why certain figures and bodies are loaded with more invective than others” (Skeggs and Wood, *Reacting to Reality Television* 9). These moments may tease out our students’ (and our own) deeply held notions of where lines rest between acceptable and unacceptable behaviors in both public and private contexts in meaningful and dramatic ways.

CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS AND THE IMPACT OF AUDIENCE

Students may benefit from examining reality TV as a microcosm of broader cultural discourses. An examination of reality television programming, however, may also expand students’ capacity to undertake discourse analyses. While the underlying goal of critical and transformative pedagogy is always the growth of strong analytical skills, the specific practice of closely examining elements of discourse may sometimes be given only brief space in methodology courses. As a result, students may view their critical research skills as

distinct from their capacity to critically engage with their surroundings. By creating a classroom that can act as a discourse analysis laboratory, students could be encouraged, through both teaching and assignments, to formalize their critical analytic skills. To achieve its transformative potential, however, such a class would need to move toward critical discourse analysis (CDA), which considers both the broader political contexts in which discourses are created and offered and the power relationships between discourse and people's lived experiences: it is, van Dijk argues, "discourse analysis, 'with an attitude'" (96). Furthermore, a true reckoning with critical discourse analysis would empower students to truly consider the ways that discourse is dialogically undertaken. Instead of solely poring over transcripts of programs, thus reducing television to a flat medium, students would be encouraged to consider the implications of audience and the ways that audience reactions are mediated across time and space, and through axes of difference.

There are a number of pedagogical implications in pulling back the camera further and allowing for an analysis of audience and reception. While students, particularly those in critically reflexive disciplines such as women's studies and social work may be familiar with the exercise of implicating themselves in the consumption of media and discourse, a class on reality TV would take the contrivances of this genre and explore the peculiar alchemy that occurs between the producer's intention and the audience's reaction. Montemurro suggests that "[g]iven the popularity of reality television ... the study of how these programs are consumed is essential" (98), yet it may be tempting to begin an analysis of these programs, as indeed, I have done, based on what "they" "say" or, at most, how we, as individuals, react. As an alternative, a course on reality TV would allow students to explore the dynamism between objects of cultural production and their consumption, to consider how "viewers make sense of these shows" (Williams 541). An exploration of intertextuality would consider the ways that individuals encounter culture, suggesting that "when individuals encounter media texts, rather than comprehending them in isolation, they position these representations in relation to other texts and cultural knowledge" (Williams 543). This would be well accomplished through access to scholarly texts that increasingly consider the implications of audience reaction (for example, Skeggs and Wood, "Labour of Transformation" and Skeggs and Wood, *Reacting to Reality Television*) but also through the tangible exercise of viewing cultural products in the classroom. As students grapple with the nuances of unique programs, the surface themes of representation and authenticity within these programs become complicated, and the deviations between the different ways the programs are offered and experienced may emerge. Skeggs and Wood discerned such differences in their analyses of focus groups of viewers grouped by distinctions of class and ethnicity. Their work suggests that television provides unique opportunities for interactive analyses, "demonstrat[ing] a complex interaction between television texts and subjectivity which was more dynamic than the relationship implied through the analogy of text-reader relations" ("Labour of Transformation" 562). By analyzing interactions together in the classroom, we may evolve beyond generalized discussions to a more targeted analysis of specific moments that may encourage reflexivity on the basis of populations, rather than merely individuals. At the same time, Skeggs and Wood caution us to ensure that an analysis of audience does not devolve into an undermining of the real concerns about oppressive representations within reality TV. They argue that "a great deal more serious attention needs paying to exactly how reality television works not only with audiences but with evaluating personhood more generally" (*Reacting to Reality Television* 233). By engaging in a politically accountable response of the complications of reality TV and the ways in which this genre interacts with systems of capitalism, judgment, and personal value, students may begin to explore the strengths of a critically discursive methodology and the implications of audience and reception.

NEO-LIBERALISM

If, as Kavka asserts, “reality TV is a genre in flux” (182), is there truly value in constructing an academic context for its consumption and analysis? Is such a course merely a means of pandering to students by allowing entertainment to masquerade as education? Ironically, such an argument betrays some of the same political ideologies as reality television itself, suggesting that educational models should emphasize measurability, empirical knowledge, and individual hard work over sites of non-standard, messy, and (heaven forbid!) enjoyable learning. The same ideology that presents a wearying slog as the only valuable form of education is likewise amply exposed in much reality TV: the ascendant and inexorable tropes of neo-liberalism.

The problematic representations explored above are of concern not only because of their overreliance on stereotypical notions of difference but also because they maintain the expectations that communities are, fundamentally, merely groups of individuals “surviving” for individual gain. The laughably popular insistence of reality TV participants that they do not join programs “to make friends” ensures that any collegiality is overlooked in favor of a race to the fittest. Deery surmises that commerce underpins this foregrounding of solo struggle, suggesting that “an individualistic Darwinian struggle produces better drama—and therefore higher ratings and therefore more revenue—than, say, utopian harmony and cooperation” (12). I would suggest, however, that the foregrounding of capital as the primary motivator is itself a value of neo-liberalism. In the world of reality TV, production is pursued to a means of maximum capital, but likewise, in the context of popular “game-docs” such as *Survivor* and *The Amazing Race*, monetary reward is what engenders the suspense and narrative push that allows for high ratings (and thus corporate financial gain). This capital spiral rests on another powerful “truth” of neo-liberalism—the notion of a level playing field: “These programs are a retelling, in other words, of the American dream wherein any individual can make it big—which usually translates as rich—never mind their initial circumstances. In tune with this ideology, we notice that these shows assiduously avoid raising any larger sociopolitical issues and instead focus on the personal and individual” (Couldry 13).

Beyond the level playing field, neo-liberalism emphasizes what Skeggs and Wood identify in reality TV contexts as a spirit of indefatigability (“Labour of Transformation” 565). Not only will hard work yield individual reward but also individuals will be praised for the hard work of endlessly aspiring toward the mean, thus negating any critical politics of difference. Pozner identifies this trend in *America’s Next Top Model* in which the narrow beauty myths used to evaluate participants provide limited and inconsequential responses to ethnic and racial diversity (196). Banet-Weiser and Portwood-Stacer, in looking at makeover shows, expose a more explicit race toward normativity: “... using a reframed rhetoric of individual choice, technological transformation, and celebration of the body, the individual women featured claim to be freeing themselves of their earlier lives. In fact, what is happening is a more intense policing of the body, a body that is ever more docile as it is literally reshaped according to a set of dominant norms” (263).

While an exploration of the prevalence of neo-liberal themes in reality TV is beyond the scope of this article (and has been well undertaken by Couldry), a viewing of reality TV as an accessible site of exposure of these themes is of great pedagogical importance. By positioning the problematics of representation and authenticity within an analysis of neo-liberalism, students may be challenged to unpack difficult ideologies that inform their lives and social contexts. The rhetorics of neo-liberalism have become so commonplace that they can be as difficult to expose as the air we breathe; arguably, this may be heightened for students in institutions of higher learning that may be even more steeped in neo-liberalism’s mores than the society at large. An examination of reality television thus allows students to begin to view the overarching framework that governs the discursive structures informing everyday life. In other words: though I talk about neo-liberalism and I teach about neo-liberalism, an examination of reality television allows me to stand before my students and say “*That* is neo-liberalism,” not in the context of the difficult-to-understand welfare state or in the realm of social policy, but in the framework of the “mindless” indulgence of last night’s viewing.

While a pedagogical analysis of reality TV may meet students “where they are at” and encourage the development of a critical lens that extends even to leisure activities, I concur with Pozner who suggests that, “... becoming critical media consumers isn’t enough. We can’t afford to see media literacy as the means to an intellectual end. Instead, let’s use it to prepare us to take on Goliath Structural changes are needed to achieve the creative, diverse, challenging media we all deserve, and we’re going to have to fight for such shifts” (325–26). Pozner follows her argument with a list of tangible suggestions for how to respond to the limitations and discriminations present in much reality TV. She also actively encourages the practice of culture jamming, in which a reclamation of primary discourses of entertainment and information is taken up as a form of activism. I see the provision of a course on reality TV as a fun way of being deeply critical, of holding up a magnifying glass to one’s distorted reflection of the broader society, while at the same time holding ourselves accountable for what we see. I would love to see students take up a critical autoethnography of their engagement with reality TV, such as that undertaken by Boylorn, as a final assignment, and would love, in provoking students toward Pozner’s suggestions for culture jamming as transformative change, to “jam” both culture and academy. I see the creation of a class like this as pedagogically radical in both form and content, as a site where new ideas can be applied to shifting and unstable terrain. In challenging the primacy of high culture as the only worthy area of analysis, in viewing one of the most debased forms of popular culture as academically rich, I hope to help my students build bridges between what they think about in school and what they do at home. I see such a class as an exciting explosion of the binaries of high and low culture, public and private space, and truth and fiction.

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AUTHOR BIO:

May Friedman lives and works in downtown Toronto. A faculty member in Social Work and Communication and Culture at Ryerson University, May looks at the intersections of non-normative identities, especially in relation to popular culture. Much of May's research focuses on maternity, inspired in part by her four children.

Social Media:

Academia: <https://ryerson.academia.edu/MayFriedman>

Twitter: [@drtiredmama](https://twitter.com/drtiredmama)

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Girls, Guns, and Zombies: Five Dimensions of Teaching and Learning in *The Walking Dead*

Anthony Neely

The University of Texas at San Antonio

San Antonio, Texas, USA

anthony.neely@utsa.edu

ABSTRACT

Rooted in sociocultural theory, this article utilizes a conceptual framework derived from Alexander, Schallert, and Reynolds' four topographical dimensions of learning: *who of learning*, *what of learning*, *where of learning*, and *when of learning*. Situated learning (Lave and Wenger) is presented as a fifth dimension to address how learning occurs in communities of practice absent of formal schooling. Content analysis (Elo and Kyngass) is used to analyze a teaching and learning event from an episode of *The Walking Dead* based on the five topographical dimensions of learning listed above. Findings provide insights for pedagogical application for grades 7-12 by addressing the potential benefits of contextualized and scaffolded situated learning activities, gender equity, and authentic high-stress high-risk tasks in secondary level curriculum design.

KEYWORDS

Popular Culture, Teaching Methods, Gender Equity, *The Walking Dead*, Socioculturalism, Situated Learning, Apocalyptic Media, Interdisciplinary Research, Communities of Practice, Contextualized Curriculum

The television series *The Walking Dead* (Darabont et al.) has become a phenomenon in American pop culture. Set in a post-apocalyptic Southeastern United States, the series follows a small group of survivors as they strive for existence on a zombie-infested planet. The zombies, referred to as Walkers, are relentless in their pursuit of human flesh, with the unfortunate soul who falls victim to their attack becoming a Walker himself. With characters living in a world devoid of any formal schooling and yet totally dependent on the development of skills for survival, *The Walking Dead* is ripe with examples of teaching and learning outside of the traditional classroom setting. In this article a teaching and learning event from *The Walking Dead* will be analyzed through a topographical interactive framework comprised of five dimensions of learning.

Prior to addressing the conceptual framework on which this article is built, it is critical to discuss what learning is in order to contextualize how learning occurs within a society absent of formal schooling. It is difficult to define *learning* due to the existence of a broad spectrum of theoretical explanations for the concept. While many learning theories share overlapping elements, there are also numerous irreconcilable differences among these frameworks. Thus, rather than attempting to produce a universal definition for learning, Alexander, Schallert, and Reynolds provide nine principles to describe the concept as derived from commonalities among salient learning theories.

The first principle the authors propose is that learning is change. From learning how to crawl to analyzing complex mathematical theories, humans are constantly changing, adapting, and evolving. This change not only influences individuals but also the entire system in which they exist. Next, the authors contend that learning is inevitable, essential, and ubiquitous. To state it simply, to live is to learn. Whether one learns not to touch a hot stove or how to quickly analyze traffic patterns on the highway, humans are kept alive by their ability to recognize and decipher environmental stimuli. The inevitability of learning does not, however, suggest that learning is irresistible. Consider the alcoholic who receives multiple infractions for driving under the influence. Despite his awareness that driving under the influence of alcohol may result in negative outcomes (e.g., court dues, imprisonment, loss of license), he continues to drive while intoxicated. The previous example segues into Alexander, Schallert, and Reynolds' proposition that some learning may be disadvantageous. Although learning is generally viewed as a positive endeavor, in certain contexts the object of learning may not be beneficial (e.g., the experience of overdosing on drugs).

Next, the authors propose that learning can either be tacit and incidental or conscious and intentional. For example, there are contexts in which learning occurs without conscious awareness (e.g., recognizing that stubbing a toe hurts), while in other contexts learning is an intentional and active pursuit (e.g., learning to fly fish). The sixth principle in the model proposes that learning is framed by our humanness. The authors contend that the biological features of our bodies (e.g., senses, cognition, psychological attributes) make learning central to the human experience.

Alexander, Schallert, and Reynolds present learning as both a process and a product. As such, learning is an active event that also has some type of output. Consider the student who goes through the process of learning to play the guitar. In addition to her procedural efforts (e.g., practicing scales, researching chord variations, developing hand dexterity), she will be able to produce a product as evidence that learning has occurred (e.g., the ability to play a song). The eighth principle presented by the authors is that learning is experienced in diverse ways, depending on the time and context in which it occurs. What and how one learns can be shaped by social, cognitive, and biological factors throughout his or her life (e.g., age, level of maturity, life experience, sociocultural environment). Finally, Alexander, Schallert, and Reynolds contend that learning is interactional. Learning does not occur in a vacuum, but rather as a scenario in which "learners are influenced by, and at the same time push back, take from, change, control, and create the environment in which learning is situated" (180).

The authors' last principle allows the act of learning to be anchored within a sociocultural

framework. Socioculturalism, a theoretical framework of learning and development based on the work of Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky, proposes that higher level mental functioning finds its origins in the shared experiences of society. Vygotsky contends that only after a concept exists outside of the individual (i.e. externalized) can it exist within the individual (i.e. internalized). One way in which this process (externalization ↔ internalization) can be illustrated is as a continuous spiral referred to as the Vygotsky Space (Gavalek and Raphael; Harre). The Vygotsky Space uses two overlaying dimensions, public ↔ private activity and social ↔ individual activity, to represent the externalization ↔ internalization process. When observed as a series of quadrants, these dimensions show that the construction of knowledge originates within the sociocultural context, is then transformed by individuals within society, and is ultimately reintroduced to society for the cycle to begin again. As described above, the foundation of Vygotsky's theory is that learning cannot be decontextualized from one's sociocultural surroundings because learning does not occur in isolation. Socioculturalism proposes that social interaction influences development because novice learners are dependent on the assistance of *more knowledgeable others* for sociocognitive progression. Vygotsky supports this stance in his writings on the zone of proximal development. The zone of proximal development refers to the distance between one's ability to complete a task on her own (i.e. actual development) and her ability to complete a task with the assistance of a *more knowledgeable other* (i.e. potential development). As learners are continually challenged to work with others beyond their own current level of development, Vygotsky suggests that their zone of proximal development will continually shift so that "What a child can do with assistance today, she will be able to do by herself tomorrow" (87).

Drawing from the literature of Alexander, Schallert, and Reynolds this article is built on a topographical interactive model of learning that seeks out common ground among multiple salient learning theories. The model proposes four dimensions of learning (i.e. *who of learning*, *what of learning*, *where of learning*, and *when of learning*) that are in constant interaction and provide context for describing a teaching and learning event.

The first dimension, *who of learning*, explores the agents involved in a teaching and learning event. This dimension contends that learning is directly influenced by the biological, cognitive, experiential (e.g., individual and cultural), and affective (e.g. motivational and emotional) characteristics of participants (Alexander, Schallert, and Reynolds 184). The *who of learning* is critical to understanding learning because, as Lakoff and Johnson argue, the learning process is highly influenced by the learner involved. The second dimension explores what is being learned. Within this dimension the authors propose an interweaving of the types and levels of learning that occur during a teaching and learning event. These may range from unconsciously acquired habits and tacit knowledge (e.g., recognizing that dropping a bowling ball on your foot is painful) to intentionally pursued higher order knowledge and skills (e.g., an aspiring carpenter learning to cut dovetail joints). The third dimension addresses the ecological context in which learning occurs. While some aspects of the ecological context are concrete and easily recognizable (e.g., physical setting and tools used to mediate learning), others require greater investigation due to their abstractness (e.g., historical and cultural context). Alexander, Schallert, and Reynolds place the *when of learning* as their fourth dimension. By understanding the interrelatedness of timing, duration, and cultural shifts that occur during a teaching and learning event, one can provide critical insights into the context of the event itself. In other words, skills and knowledge that are seemingly irrelevant today may be critical to one's very survival in the future. For example, the ability to start a fire using only sticks and grass may be considered an inconsequential skill until one is unexpectedly shipwrecked on an island.

Although Alexander, Schallert, and Reynolds do not include a dimension to address the *how of learning*, it is important to discuss because it describes the process by which learning occurs. In this article, Lave and Wenger's situated learning framework explains the *how of learning*. In Lave and Wenger's model, a novice advances knowledge through varying levels of participation with more knowledgeable others in a community

of practice as opposed to learning through decontextualized means (e.g., direct lecture or reading a textbook). Situated learning can manifest itself in two ways: participation and apprenticeship.

In participation the novice learns through situatedness within a community of practice. For example a person who grows up in a farming community, although not a farmer himself, may gain knowledge regarding the norms and practices of farming that far exceed an individual who lives in an urban environment. Thus, participation can be viewed as learning by proximity. The second classification of situated learning is apprenticeship. In this article, apprenticeship is defined as a dyadic relationship between a more knowledgeable other and a novice for the purpose of sharing wisdom and promoting skill development through active co-participation (Lave and Wenger). This framework suggests that the optimal avenue by which one (e.g., a novice plumber) learns a skill (e.g., replacing a rusted pipe) is not through decontextualized instruction on the topic (e.g., classroom lecture), but rather through active participation with one who is more experienced with said skill (e.g., assisting a master plumber with such a repair).

Situated learning is provided as the fifth dimension of learning in this article for two reasons. First, this framework aligns itself with socioculturalism in that it focuses on the learner having membership in a community of practice as opposed to existing in a vacuum (Lave and Wenger). Through participation in a community of practice, the learner develops an identity of membership by which she is socialized to the jargon, norms, and skills associated with the community. This development of identity within a community of practice is critical to situated learning because learning “implies becoming a different person with respect to the possibilities enabled by these systems of relations” (Lave and Wenger 53). Second, situated learning is a contextually appropriate framework for analyzing *The Walking Dead*. *The Walking Dead* takes place in a world absent of formal schooling. As a result, the characters in the show are co-dependent for survival and help each other develop essential skills through active participation in communities of practice.

Through content analysis, a research method in which various forms of media are organized into concepts or categories for the purpose of deriving new insights and inferences about a given phenomenon (Cole; Elo and Kyngas; Krippendorf), this study explores a teaching and learning event in Season 2: Episode 6 of *The Walking Dead*. The teaching and learning event being analyzed is situated within an ongoing storyline regarding a worldwide outbreak of unknown origins that has turned the majority of humans into Walkers. Human survivors discover early in the series that the only way to stop a Walker is to destroy its brain. Although there are a variety of tools that can complete this task (e.g., ax, sledgehammer, hunting knife), risk of death makes the possession of and skill set to effectively use a firearm a valuable commodity. In this post-apocalyptic setting, a gun not only represents increased likelihood of survival but also is symbolic of power within the social hierarchy.

After several mishaps with firearms occur on the survivors’ farm, the two primary community leaders, Rick and Shane, declare that any individual who has not been formally trained to use a firearm must surrender their weapon until formal training has been completed. As a result, very few individuals in the community are permitted to possess a firearm. For community member Andrea, the ability to once again wield her revolver has two levels of importance. First, it is an opportunity to break the gender roles that have been constructed in the community (i.e. men are community protectors and women maintain domestic responsibilities). Second, the gun serves as an artifact linking Andrea to happier times before her sister Amy was killed by Walkers.

The teaching and learning event being examined in this article focuses on the training Andrea undergoes in order to reclaim the right to possess her weapon. Andrea’s training occurs in four stages: (1) small group instruction at a makeshift firing range, (2) private instruction with Shane in the woods, (3) cooperative action on a search and rescue mission with Shane, and (4) supported action on the search and rescue mission.

Having addressed the context of the episode, findings will now be presented as they emerged during

analysis of the teaching and learning event. The constant comparative method of coding (Corbin and Strauss; Boeije) was followed during analysis to seek out emerging elements from the teaching and learning event as related to the five topographical dimensions listed above (i.e. *who of learning, what of learning, where of learning, when of learning, how of learning*).

Dimension 1 — *Who of Learning*, addresses all who are affected by the teaching and learning event in this episode (i.e. learner, teacher, and community at large). Designated as the primary learner, Andrea is portrayed as an attractive young woman who was a successful lawyer prior to the outbreak. Intelligent and headstrong, Andrea is initially an asset to the community, showing leadership skills and the ability to think on her feet. After the loss of her sister Amy to a Walker attack, Andrea becomes introverted and severely depressed to the degree that many perceive her as suicidal. This perception is one of the catalysts that lead to Shane and Rick's decree that only those who have been formally trained may possess a firearm. Although the firearm is presented as the predominant tool for survival in the earliest episodes of *The Walking Dead*, possession of this tool does not appear to be as significant to Andrea until she is no longer permitted to wield one. Initially opposed to the decree, Andrea eventually accepts the mandate and agrees to undergo formal training, having been forced to use a screwdriver to protect herself during a Walker attack.

Somewhat cocky and self-assured at the beginning of the teaching and learning event (i.e. small group instruction at a firing range), Andrea displays advanced proficiency by successfully shooting targets more difficult than those assigned to her. As a result, Andrea is extended the opportunity to move beyond group instruction into a dyadic apprenticeship under Shane's guidance.

However, it becomes evident during her first lesson with Shane (i.e. private instruction in the woods) that when placed in a more contextually realistic scenario (e.g., moving target, heightened stress levels), Andrea is not as skilled a marksman as she previously believed. Frustrated by her inability to master the skill of shooting a moving target (i.e. a log suspended by rope from a tree), Andrea is easily flustered by criticisms from Shane. Although she portrays herself as outspoken and independent, it is evident that Andrea is psychologically scarred by the loss of her sister. The mere utterance of Amy's name during private instruction with Shane causes Andrea to cease participation in this phase of the teaching and learning event.

Despite her conflict with Shane over the use of her deceased sister as an instructional tool, Andrea shows that she is dedicated to advancing her firearm skills by agreeing to assist Shane on a search and rescue mission to find a missing child. This mission is Andrea's first opportunity to assume the role of community protector since arriving at the survivors' farm.

The instructor during this teaching and learning event is Shane. A former sheriff's deputy, he serves as the proverbial alpha male and first community leader. The appearance of Rick, who was long assumed to be dead, leads to multiple internal and external conflicts for Shane. To understand Shane's mental state during this teaching and learning event, it is imperative to examine his trajectory throughout the series. Prior to the outbreak, Rick and Shane were partners and best friends. During an altercation with a fugitive criminal, Rick is shot and falls into a coma, resulting in long-term hospitalization. Optimistic his friend will make a full recovery, Shane stays at Rick's bedside until Walkers overtake the facility. Assuming that Rick's unconscious body will be consumed by Walkers, Shane flees the hospital to collect Rick's wife and son and to seek safety. In the months that follow, Shane and Rick's wife Lori develop an intimate relationship. When Rick miraculously appears at the settlement, Lori returns to her husband, leaving Shane both heartbroken and jealous.

While publicly Shane helps maintain the community and follows Rick's leadership, in private his persona becomes much more neurotic. Although Shane contemplates leaving the community to fend for himself, he ultimately stays due to his love for Lori. As a result of this emotional turmoil, Shane becomes increasingly combative, which is evident in his lessons with Andrea. During the teaching and learning event, Shane displays both sides of his personality by being hypercritical of Andrea and yet aware of socioemotional

boundaries (e.g. “I crossed the line when I brought Amy into it. So yes. It’s an apology” (Darabont et al.)). While Shane is experienced, exhibits a high degree of leadership, and is adequately skilled to survive when Walkers attack, he is, like Andrea, emotionally unstable, which adds an interesting dynamic to their apprenticeship.

The third *who* to be considered in this teaching and learning event is the community at large. The majority of the community is neither formally trained survivalists nor experienced combatants. They are average men, women, and children with no spectacular attributes, aside from the fact that they are still alive. For this reason, former sheriff’s deputies Shane and Rick are well credentialed to serve as the more knowledgeable others who provide firearm training. Knowing that such training can improve chances for survival, a large proportion of the community participates in the initial training session at a makeshift firing range on the farm.

The second topographical dimension, *What of Learning*, addresses Andrea’s intended learning objectives in the episode. Actively participating in increasingly contextualized settings (e.g., firing range, woods, suburban neighborhood invaded by Walkers), Andrea seeks to develop her intended skill set within an apprenticeship model. At its most basic and overt level, this teaching and learning event focuses on Andrea expanding her skills with a firearm. There is also a deeper level of abstract learning that occurs within the episode.

By acquiring a new skill set, Andrea is revising her identity within the community. Throughout the series, Andrea expresses a desire to circumvent the community’s socially constructed gender roles (i.e. men are community protectors and women maintain domestic duties). Andrea views the possession of a firearm as a gateway to transcending her prescribed role in the community. Rather than washing clothes or preparing food, the possession of a firearm allows its owner multiple options including the ability to leave the farm on supply gathering missions, participate in Walker hunting expeditions, and serve as a night watch. Thus, success in this endeavor may not only provide Andrea with a new identity in the community but could also serve as a catalyst for sociopolitical shifts in power for all females on the farm.

Within the psychosocial realm, Andrea is also learning how to accept the death of her sister Amy. Since the loss of her sister to a Walker attack, Andrea has fallen into a manic, often suicidal, state. Andrea resists talking about this element of her psyche and temporarily abandons instruction with Shane due to his use of Amy’s death as a motivational tactic (e.g., “You’re too damn emotional. You need to shut it down. Take all that guilt, that fear, that being pissed off...That’s the Walker that got Amy. Now you shoot that son of a bitch! You shoot him!” (Darabont et al.)).

Dimension 3 — *Where of Learning*, examines the physical and sociopolitical environment in which the teaching and learning event occurs. The setting of this episode is a community of survivors living on a farm outside of Atlanta, Georgia. The survivors have temporarily settled at the farm after experiencing numerous Walker attacks in other temporary settlements. Hopeful they will find a larger community unaffected by the outbreak, the survivors are semi-nomadic, settling in areas considered safe for habitation. The farm offers community members a sense of life as it was before the outbreak due to its various amenities such as clean drinking water and private bedrooms. At the farm, survivors live communally, sharing food, supplies, and various responsibilities.

In addition to the setting of the teaching and learning event, it is also important to examine its timing and duration; thus, the *When of Learning* is designated as the fourth topographical dimension. Although the characters involved in this episode bring a lifetime of experiences to the teaching and learning event, the event itself occurs within the span of a single day. This is displayed through several pieces of evidence within the episode. First, at the firing range Rick arranges for Andrea to receive personal instruction from Shane after the conclusion of the day’s group lesson. Next, after Andrea becomes angry and abandons her private lesson, Shane finds her walking down the road and invites her to join him as backup on a mission to locate a missing

child. The teaching and learning event concludes as the two narrowly escape a Walker attack.

On a broader scale, this teaching and learning event occurs within the context of a post-apocalyptic world. Prior to the outbreak, the skill set being learned (i.e. mastery with a firearm) was critical only for those whose career put them in harm's way. After the outbreak however, it is essential for survival in a Walker-infested world. For Andrea this event occurs at a psychosocial crossroads between wanting to end her life and desiring to transform her identity within the community.

Having explored the context in which the teaching and learning event is situated, focus will now shift to analyzing the pedagogical approach Shane utilizes to guide Andrea's development in this episode. Dimension 5 — *How of Learning*, emerges in a series of four scaffolded stages during the teaching and learning event: (1) small group instruction, (2) private instruction, (3) cooperative action, and (4) supported action.

In the first stage of learning, small group instruction, Andrea is an active participant in a community of practice at a makeshift gun range. Taking aim at bottles and old road signs, participants receive constant feedback from more knowledgeable others (i.e. Rick and Shane) regarding their technique and marksmanship. Of the four instructional stages in the episode, Stage 1 is the least contextualized, exhibits the lowest level of stress on participants, and is the most risk adverse. Although the firing range is a situated learning activity (e.g. participants are shooting firearms instead of reading a book about shooting firearms), the targets are stationary and nonthreatening. Hence, this phase of instruction does not accurately simulate the context of a Walker attack. The no stress-no risk environment of Stage 1 births in Andrea a false sense of self-confidence regarding her ability to use a gun.

During this stage, Andrea receives direct feedback from community leaders Rick and Shane. At first Shane believes Andrea has missed her assigned target (i.e. a glass bottle). Upon closer inspection he realizes that she was not shooting at the bottle, but rather had placed three bullets through the *O* in a *No Trespassing* sign. Impressed by Andrea's apparent proficiency at the firing range, Rick proposes that she receive advanced training from Shane. With her acceptance, Andrea becomes an apprentice under Shane's guidance. No other participants in the episode, male or female, are extended an invitation to enter an apprenticeship.

The second stage of Andrea's learning occurs via dyadic private instruction with Shane in a wooded area on the farm. As Shane seeks to further situate the training within the context of a Walker attack, he increases the difficulty of the task by requiring Andrea to shoot a moving target (i.e. a log suspended from a tree). This task proves to be beyond Andrea's current ability level and leads to numerous complaints from the learner. In response to Andrea's grumblings, Shane takes on an aggressive drill sergeant-like tone and interlaces instruction with statements explaining that the task is designed to simulate real life combat (e.g., "Now you stand here. You point your weapon. Point it like you point your finger. Do not think about it. I'm talking about muscle memory girl. Muscle memory!...You think a Walker is gonna' hold still for you?" (Darabont et al.)).

Although this pedagogical strategy does not appear to progress Andrea's shooting ability (i.e. she is still unable to hit the moving target), Shane continues his tactics by employing gender negative criticisms (e.g. "God you shoot like a damn girl...You're too damn emotional" (Darabont et al.)). At this point, Andrea not only challenges Shane's methods but also his abilities as the *more knowledgeable other* (e.g., "Stop badgering me...Right, and you're so calm?" (Darabont et al.)). Shane responds to Andrea's critique by effortlessly shooting the log and expressing his ability to separate emotion from task completion (e.g., "See? I can be pissed off, I can be whistling Dixie, and I always hit the target." (Darabont et al.)).

After reaffirming his role as the *more knowledgeable other*, Shane orders Andrea to try again. Shane continues his harsh tone and places Andrea under heightened levels of stress until she ceases the lesson due to his mentioning of Amy's death (e.g., "That's the Walker that got Amy. Now you shoot that son of a bitch! You shoot him!" (Darabont et al.)).

Although there is no risk involved in this stage of instruction, the stress level is significantly higher than that of Stage 1, which results in Andrea's choice to abandon the lesson prior to successful task completion.

After their altercation at the end of Stage 2, Shane finds Andrea walking down the road alone and seeks to make amends by explaining that his pedagogical method in the previous stage of instruction was both strategic and intentional (e.g., "Hey look. I'm just trying to get you rattled. Alright? Just giving you an idea of what it's like when the shit starts to fly." (Darabont et al.)).

Despite her failure to show mastery of the intended skill in the previous stage, Shane does not suggest that the two return to the woods or shooting range for further training. Instead, he extends an invitation for Andrea to join him on a mission to search for a missing child, thereby moving into a third stage of instruction based on highly contextualized cooperative action. Shane takes on a new pedagogical approach by ceasing the aggressive tone and placing Andrea in a high-risk situation in which her ability to hit a moving target (i.e. a Walker) could determine whether she and Shane survive the mission.

After a short duration of exploring the neighborhood where the missing child is assumed to be, Andrea and Shane are attacked by a herd of Walkers. Shane acknowledges that the two must work cooperatively in order to successfully reach their vehicle (e.g., "You cover that street. I'll clear the car." (Darabont et al.)). Although Shane has taken on the more difficult task by assigning himself an area with a greater number of Walkers, the two are ultimately co-dependent for a successful escape.

Quickly clearing his designated area, Shane notices that Andrea is still unable to shoot her targets in the head, the skill he was attempting to teach her in Stage 2. Shane provides Andrea with backup, allowing her to practice shooting at Walkers. This stage is high stress, as both Andrea and Shane's lives are endangered; however, Andrea's risk is fairly low due to Shane's active support.

The third stage of the teaching and learning event segues directly into Stage 4, supported action, when Andrea's pistol jams with Walkers quickly approaching. Initially, Shane provides coverage and supportive guidance (e.g., "Focus now. Clear the jam. Focus" (Darabont et al.)); however, as Andrea becomes more frantic and panicked, Shane lowers his gun as a sign that he is allowing her to engage in a sink or swim moment. Although he offers words of encouragement, Shane allows a Walker to get just outside of arm's length from Andrea without raising his gun to stifle its progression. At this point, Shane transitions from being an active co-participant to supportive observer in the teaching and learning event. It is worth noting that Shane places Andrea in this high-stress high-risk situated learning environment after she has failed to successfully hit a moving target during the previous two stages. Andrea, aware of Shane's instructional decision, questions his method while continuing to attempt the task (e.g., "Are you kidding me?" (Darabont et al.)). At the climax of the scene, Andrea successfully clears the jam and shoots a Walker moments before it attacks her. In this stage, Andrea's inability to execute the skill would have meant certain death, making it the most high-stress and high-risk of all four stages of instruction. After eliminating her most immediate threat and successfully completing the task, the stress associated with the learning event rapidly dissipates, as shown by a regained air of confidence.

The teaching and learning event in this episode of *The Walking Dead* provides multiple insights for improving curricular and pedagogical design in formal classroom settings. First, this teaching and learning event shows that contextualized active participation in a community of practice is critical to learner development. If Andrea had simply read a book about shooting a firearm or attended a lecture on clearing a jammed gun, she may not have survived the Walker attack during the mission with Shane. As shown in this episode, contextually appropriate experiential knowledge can allow learners the opportunity to reach their potential development more rapidly than decontextualized instruction. Thus, in classroom instruction it is critical that teachers forego decontextualized drill-and-kill style assignments and instead provide students the opportunity to be active participants in situated learning activities.

Second, the analysis shows that it is possible to scaffold knowledge within a situated learning activity. Actively participating in the act of shooting during each stage, Andrea moves through four scaffolded stages of instruction in the episode. Throughout the teaching and learning event, Andrea transitions from a controlled group setting that emphasizes basic skills with a firearm to personalized instruction meant to refine those skills. Andrea then assists Shane in a cooperative activity that requires her to display mastery and task completion in an authentic context. Likewise, classroom teachers can work with students on scaffolded learning activities. As students gain experience and master lower level skills, the teacher can allow students to assume greater autonomy in future endeavors. By way of illustration, a computer science instructor can facilitate a situated learning activity with a class of novice programmers in three scaffolded stages. During the first stage, the teacher could utilize a computer-mediated activity to help students learn a programming language (e.g., Java, C++, Python). After the students have shown proficiency with the programming language, the teacher and students could cooperatively write code for a program that was designed by the instructor. Finally, the teacher could challenge students to design and write their own programs, providing assistance as the *more knowledgeable other* when needed.

Third, the teaching and learning event displays the empowerment and motivation associated with gender equity in the learning environment. From the pilot episode to this one containing the teaching and learning event, Andrea becomes increasingly depressed and neurotic, resulting in the destruction of numerous interpersonal relationships. Despite her psychosocial troubles, an interest in becoming a community protector motivates Andrea's pursuit of formal training with a firearm. Regardless of her aspirations, there are sociocultural norms that have to be overcome for Andrea to transcend the community's socially constructed gender roles. As Andrea receives training and assists Shane on a mission, she is able to take steps toward obtaining the identity of community protector. The receipt of appropriate credentials (i.e. formal training with a firearm) allows Andrea's role in the community to transform where she is no longer expected to participate in tasks she considers demeaning and menial (e.g., preparing meals and washing clothes). As a result, Andrea experiences a renewed sense of purpose via a meaningful contribution to the community.

This example is important to classroom teachers in two ways. First, while socially constructed roles may be prevalent in society, gender marginalization does not have to extend into the classroom. By promoting equity in the learning environment, students of all demographics can have the opportunity to experience empowerment and motivation that otherwise may not be available in other social contexts. For example, teachers can enrich social studies curriculum, which traditionally emphasizes the contributions of dominant populations (e.g., wealthy, whites, heterosexuals, males), by intentionally incorporating content that gives prominence to the pivotal roles played by historically underrepresented populations (e.g., females, people of color, LGBTQ). By doing so, teachers not only disrupt dominant narratives that undermine the salience of these populations but also encourage diverse students to embrace their heritages and identities.

Second, like many students, Andrea suffers from severe psychosocial scarring that results in social isolation and decreased motivation. After being offered the opportunity to participate in an activity relative to her interests and goals, Andrea is able to work through her emotional issues and experience a renewed sense of community membership. This finding displays the importance of allowing students to have a voice in curricular decisions. Instead of assigning students tasks that do not align with their interests, which may result in decreased motivation and psychosocial health, teachers could utilize strategies that increase their knowledge of students' personal goals and affinities (e.g., interest inventories). By helping teachers craft curriculum that corresponds with students' passions and aspirations, the information gained from these activities can increase the meaningfulness of classroom instruction.

Finally, this episode shows that concurrently increasing stress and risk levels may be beneficial to student development. In the four stages of *Dimension 5 — How of Learning*, Andrea reacts to context as a

catalyst for her development. During the three initial stages, as Andrea faces no stress or risk or unbalanced levels of stress and risk, she is unable to move beyond her actual development level with a firearm. In the final stage however, Shane places Andrea in a high-stress high-risk scenario where survival is determined by the ability to exhibit skill mastery. Although Shane could help Andrea fend off the Walkers, he lowers his weapon symbolizing that Andrea is responsible for completing the task, making both the risk and stress levels of the activity high. When Andrea is placed into this concurrently high-risk high-stress environment, she not only successfully completes her given task (i.e. shooting a Walker in the head) but also replicates task completion by slaying numerous other Walkers in the vicinity.

While many primary and secondary level education programs seek to decrease the risk and stress associated with learning, this episode provides a case in which development does not occur until risk and stress are concurrently high. From this example it can be said that learning outcomes devoid of stress and risk may fail to motivate students' advancement beyond current development levels. Likewise, when there is an imbalance of stress and risk, students may rebel, act out in class, or fail to successfully complete assigned tasks. However, if a student is challenged to complete a task beyond her current development level and is informed of consequences attached to failure, she may be motivated to successfully complete the task. For instance, a student who aspires to become a published poet, but does not write consistently, might propose an assignment to her teacher requiring submission of an original poem each day prior to recess. The two may negotiate a consequence that requires the student to write during recess, rather than play with friends, on days in which she fails to complete her task. By incorporating stress (i.e. submission deadline) and risk (i.e. loss of play time) the student may be compelled to incorporate writing into her daily routine, a critical habit for any aspiring author.

It is worth noting that the author of this essay does not consider the term *high-risk* to be synonymous with *high-stakes* (e.g., state mandated standardized exams that are used as quantitative measures of student learning) for two reasons. First, *high-risk* assessments are relative to individual goals established and voluntarily pursued by the learner. Second, *high-risk* assessments are authentic in that they are contextually bound by an individual learner's aspirations. To correspond with a student's goals, consequences should be mutually negotiated by the student and teacher to encourage dyadic ownership of tasks and learning outcomes (Anderson). Inversely, *high-stakes* activities utilize decontextualized, often quantitative, means to measure a population's competency regarding topics chosen by legislators and administrative officials (Giroux and Schmidt). Differing from *high-risk* learning endeavors, *high-stakes* activities mandate the participation of a broad student population and offer learners no voice in what or how content will be assessed.

Although some critics dismiss popular media as a mere cultural novelty that stifles the intellectual progression of today's youth (Bauerlein), it has proven to be an invaluable tool for exploring best practices in teaching and learning. Gleaning insights from an episode of *The Walking Dead*, this article contributes to extant literature on the use of apocalyptic media as an instrument for analyzing instructional practice. Ripe with examples of teaching and learning in communities of practice, *The Walking Dead* is a valuable resource for examining the construction of knowledge in a society absent of formal schooling. As a result, future research may identify and analyze skills pursued by other characters in the series or perform longitudinal studies of characters' development throughout the series at large. Additionally, researchers may choose to explore teaching and learning in various popular television series, films, video games, and other media through the five topographical dimensions of learning presented in this article. Regardless of the direction taken in future studies, the continuation of research on teaching and learning in popular culture is essential to the evolution and proliferation of the field.

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AUTHOR BIO:

Anthony Neely is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Interdisciplinary Learning and Teaching at The University of Texas at San Antonio. His research explores youth and popular culture as instructional tools, affective teacher-student relationships, and reverse mentoring in secondary level classrooms. Prior to pursuing his doctorate, Anthony earned a Master's degree in Educational Theory and Practice at Arkansas State University and a Bachelor's degree in Secondary Education at Tennessee Technological University.

Social Media:

Academia: <https://utsa.academia.edu/AnthonyNeely>

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/anthonyneely>

Twitter: [@anthonyneely](https://twitter.com/anthonyneely)

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"Can you imagine, a real, live Indian right here in Walnut Grove?": American Indians in Television Adaptations of *Little House on the Prairie*

Amy S. Fatzinger

University of Arizona

Tucson, Arizona, USA

fatzinge@email.arizona.edu

ABSTRACT

Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Little House* novels have been adapted into two major television series: Michael Landon's well-known series, which aired from 1974-1983, and a more recent Disney adaptation, which aired as a miniseries in 2005. The premier movie, which preceded Landon's series, and the Disney miniseries both focus on the events in Wilder's 1935 novel, *Little House on the Prairie*, which covered the period from 1869-1871 during which the Ingalls family lived among the Osage in Kansas Indian Territory. Wilder's portrayal of the Osage in her novel is controversial, but she does also include some literary devices that allow for a slightly more complex reading of the relationships between Native and non-Native settlers on the Kansas prairie. While adaptations of novels sometimes revise problematic or controversial content to better suit the perspectives of modern viewing audiences, the adaptations of Wilder's novels alter the Native content in ways that do not move it beyond the realm of stereotypes. Both television adaptations present Native themes in ways that initially heighten the sense of fear associated with Native characters, then resolve the issues through happy endings and heavy-handed moral lessons that diminish the seriousness of the historic tensions between Native and non-Native residents of the frontier. The changes made to Native themes in the adaptations do, however, call attention to the challenges associated with adapting autobiographical and historical content and raise questions about how to prioritize more respectful portrayals of Native people when working with people's life stories.

KEYWORDS

Little House on the Prairie, American Indian Studies, Pioneer Literature, Historical Fiction, Adaptation Studies, Television Studies

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In *Theory of Adaptation*, Linda Hutcheon reminds readers that in Adaptation Studies it is necessary to push beyond the usual tendency of contrasting a film to its source text and listing ways that it inevitably falls short of or deviates from the text; rather, she argues, “multiple versions of a story in fact exist laterally, not vertically: adaptations are derived from, ripped off from, but are not derivative or second-rate” (169). The more familiar (and beloved) the source text, though, the more difficult it can be to resist the temptation to find adaptations only a diminished version of the original, and Hutcheon acknowledges that “part of both the pleasure and the frustration of experiencing an adaptation is the familiarity bred through repetition and memory” (21). Few source texts could be as familiar to, and evoke such strong memories for, a viewing audience as Laura Ingalls Wilder’s *Little House* novels. As John Miller points out, the deep personal attachment readers feel toward Laura defies a logical explanation:

There are few American writers or historical figures who command the same sort of devotion and interest that Wilder does. People make pilgrimages to all of the historical sites associated with her. They read her books, not once or twice, but many times. Plausible explanations for her popularity can be suggested: the concrete, visual imagery contained in her books; her effective use of language; the simplicity of her moral vision; her emphasis on family values; nostalgia for frontier times; realization that these are basically true stories; and so forth. Still, the depth and continuity of Wilder’s appeal remain elusive. (Miller 24-5)

The personal attachments readers feel to Laura inadvertently ascribe a significant amount of power and authority to Wilder’s voice among both American and international readers. Her opinions, therefore, on subjects such as politics, women’s rights, Native issues and westward expansion of the American frontier are likely to influence her readers in both small and significant ways.

Despite the challenges of adapting stories beloved by generations of fans and the liberal deviations from the original stories, the *Little House on the Prairie* television series (aired from 1974 to 1983) acquired a fan base nearly as loyal as Wilder’s readers. Although fans of Wilder’s novels may have appreciated visual adaptations which closely followed the texts, Julie Sanders suggests that there may be important reasons for adaptations to deliberately part ways with the source text, including opportunities to de-marginalize oppressed characters, more responsibly address cultural contexts, or make political statements (98, 140). A timeline of more than a century extends from the time that actual events in Wilder’s life occurred, were recorded in the novels, and were recreated visually in both the original television series and a later 2005 Disney miniseries. Such a far-reaching timespan alone suggests good reason for rethinking portrayals of controversial subjects such as Native characters and themes, which have earned the novels some considerable contemporary criticism in juxtaposition to their otherwise near mythic status. Logic would suggest that portrayals of Native characters in Wilder’s texts would be the least well-rounded and that such portrayals would steadily improve in more recent iterations of the story. Such is not the case, however. The Native characters and themes in adaptations of the *Little House* story often continue to rely on old stereotypes, such as the “savage” and “noble savage,”¹ and tend to be oversimplified and more didactic than in Wilder’s texts. Such lost opportunities for revising problematic content pertaining to Native people in contemporary adaptations raise larger questions about how such portrayals might be improved upon, particularly in complex situations involving biographical and historical content.

[1] For a discussion of common stereotypes about American Indians and the development of the concepts of the “savage” and the “noble savage,” see Robert F. Berkhofer’s essay “*White Conceptions of Indians*” in the *Handbook of North American Indians*.

OVERVIEW OF NATIVE CONTENT IN WILDER'S (1935) *LITTLE HOUSE ON THE PRAIRIE* NOVEL

When Mary enthusiastically exclaims, “Can you imagine, a real, live Indian right here in Walnut Grove?” in a 1977 television episode of *Little House on the Prairie* (“Injun Kid”), it would seem that the Ingalls family’s attitudes toward Native people have evolved considerably since they first appeared in Laura Ingalls Wilder’s 1935 novel of the same name. In the novel, Wilder’s depictions of Native characters are often associated with negative imagery and fear; Laura’s sister, Mary, and their mother, were particularly terrified by even the prospect of encountering Native people. Fans and critics alike will recall times that Native people—most likely Osage men—visited the Ingalls home, nights the family stayed awake in terror as they listened to the “Indian jamboree” nearby, and Laura problematically longing for a papoose of her own—the epitome of non-Native appropriation of Native culture—as the Ingalls family watches the long line of Osage people file past their “little house.”

In the novel *Little House on the Prairie*, however, Wilder does also employ some literary devices that add some more complex dimensions to her portrayal of Osage people. First, she emphasizes repeatedly that the Ingalls family is intentionally going to “Indian Territory”—the region of the Midwest designated by Congress for Native people who were removed to the west from their eastern homelands—suggesting that they should have found the Osage presence there somewhat less surprising. At the end of the novel, it is the Ingalls family who must leave the area because the land still belongs to the Osage. Wilder also frequently juxtaposes Ma’s negative comments about Native people against Pa’s opinions which are usually more accepting and similarly juxtaposes scenes in which Native men steal from the Ingalls family with Native men who make neighborly social calls to the Ingalls home. Apparently visits from the Osage or other Native neighbors occurred with such frequency that Wilder stops describing them in detail but still emphasizes the various personalities of the Native people she saw: “Indians often came to the house. Some were friendly, some were surly and cross” (Wilder 275). Unlike many pioneer women on the frontier, however, Ma apparently never meets any of her female Native neighbors. Though even “a woman who headed westward with trepidation regarding Native Americans could, and often did, become sympathetic to those very Indians” (Riley 133) especially after meeting local Native women, Wilder does not describe any such opportunities for Ma. As a result, perhaps, Ma’s opinion of Native people remains static, and she serves a foil against which other characters’ perspectives on Native people can be juxtaposed.

In addition to reinforcing the idea that the Ingalls family had made its way deliberately into Indian Territory and juxtaposing at least some of negative or frightening portrayals of Native characters with more positive images, Wilder also takes several approaches which stand out as highly unusual in the context of women’s frontier literature, in both fiction and non-fiction genres. First, the plot of *Little House on the Prairie* is driven by the child protagonist’s *desire* to see Native people—particularly a papoose. In most frontier narratives of the time, female protagonists take a position more akin to Ma’s—a position characterized by an absolute terror of encountering Native people. While Ma’s position on Native people is justifiably problematic for contemporary readers who demand more respectful treatment of ethnic issues in literature, it does more or less accurately express the sentiments of many housewives who felt forced into journeying west with their husbands. In journals women recorded, sometimes sheepishly, their initial reactions to the Native people they met on the trail or on their homesteads. Women, and men, too, were so paranoid about seeing Native people that they often imagined them where none existed. Families on the trail were frequently frightened by members of their own traveling party, children, deer, stray dogs, cattle, escaped piglets, tumbleweeds, a colt, and owls, all of which were mistaken for Native people by frontier travelers on one or more occasions (Riley 101-8). In some cases, reactions to false alarms were so extreme that men shot and destroyed their goods, livestock, and companions because they momentarily believed them to be Native people (Riley 112).

Wilder’s decision to offset that all-too-familiar perspective with Pa’s generally more tolerant point of

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view, and Laura’s outright anticipation of meeting a Native person is most uncommon. But Wilder’s third unusual tactic pushes the issue even further. Wilder uses the voice of her protagonist to ask obvious but generally unspoken questions that ring throughout frontier literature. Laura first asks her mother why she does not like “Indians,” then follows up with her two most important questions, “This is Indian country, isn’t it? What did we come to their country for if you don’t like them?” (Wilder 46-7). Ma has no satisfactory reply to any of these questions. Wilder thus draws attention to the absurdity of pioneer families who deliberately went to Indian Territory, appropriated land from Native communities, and then lived in terror of encountering any Native people—even those who had the grace to sociably visit their non-Native neighbors under such circumstances.

Notably, Wilder appears to have gone out of her way to include Native characters in her story. The *Little House* series is based on events in her own life, though she often reordered or otherwise altered them to create continuity in her narrative. The events contained in *Little House on the Prairie* took place when she was about two years old, but the protagonist in the novel (who ages throughout the series) is about six. Wilder was so young when the events occurred, in fact, that she did not fully remember them all. Wilder’s correspondence reveals that she and her daughter Rose made a special effort (albeit with limited success) to research the Osage and fill in the gaps in the story, and Wilder appears to have specifically wanted to include Native people—and with some accuracy and cultural specificity—in her fictionalized life story. Beyond that, Wilder’s intentions regarding her Native characters are largely unknown. Her narrative point of view is strictly limited to the third-person perspective of her six-year-old protagonist, and both her established point of view and the conventions of Depression-Era children’s literature would have prevented her from stepping from behind her narrative curtain and offering a more mature or enlightened perspective—if she had wanted to. Inasmuch as she found some ways to avoid an oversimplified or didactic approach to Native issues, nevertheless there remain numerous problematic passages that raise concerns for contemporary readers.

For those interested in adapting the *Little House* story into a visual narrative, then, there is much to work with; there are positive aspects to build upon and some more negative areas that could be addressed with increased sensitivity in adaptations. As Sanders suggests, the study of adaptations in an academic context has in part been spurred on by the recognized ability of adaptation to respond or write back to an informing original from a new or revised political and cultural position, and by the capacity of appropriations to highlight troubling gaps, absences, and silences within the canonical texts to which they refer. Many appropriations have a joint political and literary investment in giving voice to those characters or subject-positions they perceive to have been oppressed or repressed in the original. (98)

And yet, the adaptations of the *Little House* story have not fully taken advantage of opportunities to provide more well-rounded portrayals of Native characters and themes; on the contrary, they have often taken more simplified and didactic approaches to complex themes. Though Mary, perhaps is capable of imagining an Indian in Walnut Grove in 1977, adapters of the *Little House* story have yet to imagine a sophisticated and sensitive way to portray Native characters and themes in their visual narratives.

CREATION OF THE (1974-1983) TELEVISION SERIES AND PREMIER MOVIE

Wilder, who never saw much value in television and never even owned a television set herself, would likely be surprised to see adaptations of her story replayed in syndication numerous times throughout the day in the United States alone. Roger Lea MacBride, the adopted son of Rose Wilder Lane and Libertarian candidate for the 1976 presidential race, became the literary executor of the *Little House* series upon Lane’s death in 1968. In a 1978 interview with William Anderson, MacBride explained that he had been careful “to refuse offers to bring it to the screen or to the movie screen by persons who didn’t understand what they were

all about” (Lytle). Eventually he decided to form a partnership with Ed Friendly, who was a Vice President of several networks, and together they produced a pilot episode based on the *Little House on the Prairie* text. MacBride believed Friendly was “a man of profound understanding of what the books are all about” but they were unable to sell their pilot episode to a network until they received help from Michael Landon (Lytle). Together they made a new pilot film, which they sold to NBC, and “as it was the biggest success that NBC had ever had,” NBC followed through with the television series (Lytle). Landon was already well known, especially from his role as Little Joe on *Bonanza*; his involvement initially helped garner attention for the pilot, but when NBC agreed to carry the series, “immediately thereafter Mr. Landon said he would like to make the series his way. And when he outlined ‘his way,’ it was to take the basic characters of the Wilder books and the basic setting in Walnut Grove, Minnesota, and create out of that cloth, the series of wholesome and appealing stories” (Lytle). MacBride and Friendly had had a different view in mind, wanting to adhere to the content of the texts as closely as possible, “concentrating on the real life adventures that Laura and her family had and to adapt them as best as could be done to television, and [they] thought that could be done quite faithfully, and in fact, have a saga treatment” (Lytle). As it turned out, “Mr. Landon didn’t see it that way.” MacBride recalled that Landon “didn’t think we could adapt it successfully” as a saga, and they disagreed on a variety of additional points, ranging from whether or not the family would be shown in their sod house by Plum Creek, to whether the Ingalls girls would attend school barefoot or wearing shoes (Lytle). According to MacBride,

These differences piled up until the point until we had to say to the network: really, you have to do it either our way or Mr. Landon’s way, but not both. And we knew, of course, in advance, what the answer would be, because a popular and very capable star, such as Mr. Landon is worth many millions of dollars to a network, whereas producers are highly expendable. And the result was that we were expended before the first series show ever appeared on the screen. (Lytle)

From the first, it was clear that the *Little House* show would be a reinterpretation, not a recounting, of Wilder’s stories. Even the target audience had changed; while Wilder envisioned a child audience for her novels, the target audience for Landon’s series was women in their forties. For this reason, according to Alison Arngrim (who played Nellie Oleson in Landon’s series), Landon (who played Charles Ingalls) was scheduled to take off his shirt about once every three episodes (Arngrim). Whether children or their mothers are the intended audience, however, the obligation to portray Native people and issues responsibly and respectfully remains the same.

The time span of more than one hundred years, which occurred between the actual events in Wilder’s life, when Wilder recorded them, and when they were revised for television is a significant factor in interpreting images of American Indians in both the texts and television shows. During the hundred-year span, the political relationship between Native Nations and the federal government underwent several major transitions, as did public sentiment toward Native people, which undoubtedly inspired—or might have inspired—changes to the presentation of Native people and themes in the adaptations of the *Little House* story. At the time the Ingalls family’s covered wagon arrived in Indian Territory in 1869, federal policy was in the Reservation Era, a time characterized by rigid assimilation policies for reservation residents, where both policies and boundaries were strictly enforced by federal agents. By the time Wilder wrote about her experiences in Indian Territory some 60 years later in 1934, policy had shifted several times and was entering the Reorganization era. As Wilder drafted the third novel in her series, *Little House on the Prairie*, the Indian Reorganization Act acknowledged the importance of maintaining, rather than eliminating Native cultures, but was couched in paternalistic approaches that prevented Native communities from being fully in control of their own affairs. In 1975, as the *Little House* television series was in its second of nine seasons, Congress passed the Self-Determination and

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Educational Assistance Act that marked the beginning of the Self-Determination era. The Disney adaptation of *Little House* was released in 2005, a time in which Native people’s rights to autonomy and self-governance were more fully recognized than they had been for centuries.

With each version of the *Little House* story emerging in such different political climates, there is reason to expect changes, and even improvements, in the treatment of Native themes. Yet Sanders raises a point of no small significance when working with an adaptation that “uses as its raw material not literary or artistic matters but the ‘real’ matter of facts, of historic events and personalities. What happens, then, to the appropriation process when what is being ‘taken over’ for fictional purpose really exists or existed?” (138). The challenge of adapting autobiographical material, historical facts, or even historical fiction, presents some special considerations, even in terms of simply adding and deleting content which is a process inherent to adapting a text into a visual narrative. Retouching a life story, or recontextualizing moments in history, in order to present a more respectful approach to Native content—while remaining true to the subject’s life experiences and story—is undoubtedly a delicate business. But both Landon’s and Disney’s television adaptations added substantial Native content that had no foundation in Wilder’s novels or life story. Yet they did not manage to move the issues beyond stereotypical representations.

Landon’s series went on to air 183 episodes over nine seasons. In the first episode, “Harvest of Friends,” the Ingalls family settled in Walnut Grove, Minnesota, where the Ingallses remained for the majority of the show’s run. Thus the show became the story of a nineteenth-century town, rather than the story of the frontier experience or of a pioneering family who firmly believed in self-reliance. As the show shifted the focus of the *Little House* story from the frontier experience to a well-established town, there is little room for a Native presence after the premier movie. As in many frontier women’s narratives, the Native people simply recede into the shadows with little or no explanation about what happened to them. Only thirteen of the 183 television episodes contain any references to Native people at all. Native issues are the central focus in only four episodes, while in the other nine Natives are off-handedly mentioned as part of a story from bygone days, used as mascots, or non-Native characters on the show pretend to be Indians. In almost every example, the Native characters are either assisted by or outsmarted by non-Native characters, which reinforces stereotypes about Native people as sidekicks and/or unintelligent people. For the sake of continuity, the discussion of Native themes that follows will be limited to the time the Ingalls spent in Kansas Indian Territory from 1869-1871, which is reflected in the novel *Little House on the Prairie*, the premier movie which preceded Landon’s television series, and the entire 2005 Disney miniseries.

NATIVE CONTENT IN THE PREMIER MOVIE (1974)

Like Wilder’s novel, the premier movie begins with the Ingalls family’s preparations for leaving the Big Woods of Wisconsin and ends with their departure from Indian Territory. In between the two wagon trips, many of the basic events from the narrative are included. The family arrives in a seemingly vacant territory after an uneventful wagon trip; Pa and Ma build a log house; Pa encounters a wolf pack while out riding on the prairie; some Native people visit the house when Pa is away; Pa helps some cowboys round up stray cattle in exchange for a cow and her calf; and their neighbor Mr. Edwards makes Christmas special for the Ingalls girls. A prairie fire nearly burns down the Ingalls home; the terrified family listens to the drumming and “war cries” coming from the Osage camp; the Osage leave; and eventually the family receives word that they must leave because they settled three miles over the line into Indian Territory. As much as the events in the premier movie are similar to those in Wilder’s novel, the framework for making the trip in the first place is quite different. In the text, for example, it is Pa’s irritability at having neighbors too close that moves him westward, along with his foot that is always “itching” to head west no matter what the conditions. Though it is unclear

if Indian Territory is open for settlement, Indian Territory is the specific destination mentioned repeatedly, and the family clearly expects to encounter Native people. In the premier movie however, Pa's justification for moving west is that they were barely able to sustain themselves in Wisconsin: they had been scraping by on a "hand-to-mouth" basis. This contrasts sharply with the abundance of foodstuffs described in detail in *Little House in the Big Woods*. In Wilder's novels, as the Ingalls's move west, they never achieve the same abundance they had in Wisconsin, which in itself challenges rather than perpetuates the usual mythology associated with westward expansion. By suggesting that Pa must move his family west in hopes of *survival* rather than for purely adventurous reasons in the premier movie, however, Pa downplays the Ingallses' responsibility for participating in the process of westward expansion.

In the premier movie, the adjustment in the Ingalls' motivation for going to Indian Territory is compounded by the fact that "Indian Territory" is not emphasized as the family's destination to the extent that it is in the novel. Rather, the family seems to expect only the one hundred and sixty acres "free and clear from the government" that will enable Pa to be "beholden to no man." As the family leaves their home in the Big Woods of Wisconsin amidst good-byes from their relatives, Laura's voiceover explains, "though it made me sad, I thought it was a fine thing to go where there had never been a road before." The Ingallses discount the presence of Native people altogether and there is just one mention of Native people along the way, as Laura again looks forward to seeing them as she did in the text.

As in the text, the Ingallses build a home in Indian Territory and Laura asks Ma why they came to Indian Territory if she does not like Indians. This time, Ma is a bit more responsive. She laughs and says mildly, "I suppose it does seem pretty foolish, coming to Indian Territory and hoping not to see an Indian." Once settled in, it is not long before the Ingalls family receives its first visit from their Osage neighbors. As soon as Pa leaves the house one day, two presumably Osage men arrive and enter the house. The men are dressed in full buckskin and have masses of thick black hair, inconsistent with Osage clothing and hairstyles of the time. Rather than entering, eating Ma's cornbread, and leaving peaceably as they do in the "Indians in the House" chapter of the novel, the Osage in the premier movie are considerably more frightening. One tears up a feather pillow and maliciously sends feathers fluttering all over the house, while the other approaches Ma and fingers her hair. Ma, clearly terrified, thrusts a box of tobacco at them, but her demise seems imminent until she reaches behind her and hands them a cutting board with a piece of cornbread on it. They take the bread, and Ma's knife, too, before leaving. When Pa goes to town shortly after this event, Ma observes Native people watching the Ingalls house from a distance and that night her behavior mirrors that of other pioneer women who were nearly frightened senseless by Native peoples' presence. Again, the fear in the scene is exaggerated as compared to the text as Ma rocks slowly in her chair, clutching a rifle balanced across its arms and singing a hymn in a voice wavering with fear. When horses whinny outside the door, Ma, appearing half-crazed and shaking with fear, cocks the gun and aims it at the door, and continues to aim it even as Pa enters. Only then does she finally collapse in his arms.

As much as the sense of fear is exaggerated in the premiere movie, the exaggeration helps to make the family's realization that their fears are unfounded all the more poignant. The next visit from the Osage occurs when Pa is at home. In the text, it is a fairly uneventful incident; an Osage man arrives at the house, he and Pa exchange greetings in the form of Hollywood "hows," and eat together before the man leaves without further incident. Pa surmises that the man was Osage, and that he was "no common trash"; they later learn he is Soldat du Chêne. In the premier movie, Pa hospitably invites the man into the house and they both smoke from Pa's pipe (a conjuring of the proverbial peace pipe). Laura is fascinated, but not afraid, and she asks whether Soldat du Chêne's necklace is a bear claw. Miraculously, Soldat du Chêne seems to understand her English, though he supposedly speaks only French. Instead of being too terrified to function, Ma understands his French and tries to interpret. As Soldat du Chêne leaves, he slowly unties his bear claw and ties it around Laura's neck,

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gently touching her cheek. Soldat du Chêne’s loving gesture makes him worthy of Laura’s and Pa’s sympathy for him because, as the family discusses, he will soon have to move west with the rest of the Indians. Mary is glad the Indians must leave, but Laura declares, “It’s not fair! They were here first.”

From the time she receives the necklace (which does not appear in the text), Laura wears it proudly, although Ma wishes she “wouldn’t wear that dirty thing.” Laura and Pa think the necklace is a “sign of a good hunter and it will bring protection and good luck.” Laura considers herself practically an Indian because of it—an idea that Ma clearly disapproves of. Ma remains jittery about Indians, particularly when the drumming begins in the nearby Osage community that lasts day and night. When little Carrie begins to sing along, “Boom! Boom!” Ma shouts at her hysterically. As in the text, the Ingalls family spends several days and nights in terror, listening to the drums and cries from the Osage camp. When the drumming stops, Soldat du Chêne comes by the Ingalls house to personally explain via an interpreter (after convincing Pa to stop aiming a gun at him) what has transpired between the Osage and the other Native Nations. He indicates that the other Natives in the area had wanted to kill the white men, but Soldat du Chêne had convinced them that they would be killed by soldiers if they killed their white neighbors. Ma absurdly declares that it must have been the bear claw that brought them good luck in deterring the massacre. As Ma thanks Soldat du Chêne for saving their lives, it is clear that her opinion of him has changed and she no longer fears him. It is somewhat difficult to determine, however, whether she has gained a newfound respect for Native people in general or a new inclination to believe in chiefs’ lucky bear claw amulets. While the invention of the bear claw necklace in the premiere movie is distracting in its absurdity, the changes to this scene in the premiere movie are significant to Ma’s character development. In the novel, the conversation between Soldat du Chêne takes place away from the Ingalls home, and when Pa recounts it to the family, Ma’s reaction is not noted. Situating this scene in the Ingalls home in the premiere movie affords Ma’s character an opportunity to express her gratitude to Soldat du Chêne and suggests she is able to change her heretofore rigid opinions about Native people (or at least one of them) in a manner never achieved in the novel.

While the bear claw necklace and Ma’s interactions with Soldat du Chêne are scenes added to the storyline in the premiere movie adaptation, Landon was more inclined to cut Native content than add to it. Most of the scenes in the novel in which the Osage are portrayed negatively, and those that add to the complexity of the issues in the texts are omitted from Landon’s adaptation. Laura’s quest to see a papoose is left out of the premiere movie entirely, for example, and there is no visit to the nearby camp to collect beads. There is little attempt to juxtapose various positive and negative perspectives about Native people or the frontier in the premier movie, and Mr. and Mrs. Scott’s characters are omitted so Pa and Ma have no opportunities to counter their narrow ideas about the only good Native people being dead ones. Ma only reminds Laura once about wearing her sunbonnet so that her skin will not get “brown and leathery,” but there is no association between the bonnet, dark skin, and Native people as there is in the novel. Significantly, there is also no long line of Osage leaving the area to emphasize the significant Native presence in the area nor the magnitude of their removal.

After the good luck from Laura’s bear claw necklace apparently saves the family from massacre, things quiet down on the prairie and the farm starts to bear fruitful. Soon, however, soldiers arrive to inform Pa that he will have to move on. Pa blinks back tears as he declares that he never would have settled there if that “blasted politician” had not said that all of Kansas was open to settlement. The sense of adventure prevails though, as the family drives away in the loaded wagon and Laura’s voiceover repeats the lines from the opening of the movie about the “rivers to cross and hills to climb” and her rejoicing at the prospect of seeing the “fair land.”

Overall, the additions and deletions to the *Little House on the Prairie* premier movie result in a notable simplification of the Native themes as compared to those in the text. The message in the premier movie is that Indians seem frightening and different from white people at first, but they turn out to be good people once you get to know them. They might even be inclined to give away a powerful object to a child, and even someone

whose fears are as out of control as Ma's are can quickly overcome her prejudices. The message in Landon's interpretation is not an entirely negative one, but it is rather different from Wilder's experience and probably shows more of a romanticized view of how cultural collisions on the frontier *could* have concluded instead of what actually happened in many frontier homes. The messages about Native people are not only simplified, but viewers need not search very hard for them as the music and lighting let the audience know how to think about each situation. In the premier movie, the importance of overcoming prejudices is difficult to miss, but the trade-off for tying up all the loose ends and emphasizing a clear moral, perhaps, is the implication that cultural encounters on the frontier usually went fairly smoothly.

NATIVE CONTENT IN THE DISNEY TELEVISION MINISERIES (2005)

Disney introduced its adaptation of the *Little House* story in spring of 2005. Aired as a five-part miniseries, the Disney interpretation of *Little House on the Prairie* brought still another perspective to the original story and dramatic changes to the presentation of Native themes in particular. Disney's version of the story replicates the events in Wilder's story to a remarkable extent, and at times, even dialogue among the characters is copied verbatim from the text. Disney's depiction of the events, however, is significantly more action-packed, and most scenes have an added element of danger or suspense. Like Landon's adaptation, the Disney adaptation also contains new scenes about the Osage that were not in the novel.

Disney's story of the Ingalls family's trip to Indian Territory opens just before the family decides to leave the Big Woods. In this version, many people mill about in the snowy woods, and a hunter almost shoots Laura when he mistakes her for game, suggesting that the Big Woods are overcrowded. Pa, moreover, is tired of "working for the man," and when Ma sees her husband belittled by his boss, *she* proposes the trip to Kansas. Pa is delighted and tells his family excitedly that they will be "going to where no one has been," and there will be "land, as far as the eye can see!" As in Landon's adaptation, there is no discussion about the fact that Native people already live there, and there is no repeated emphasis on the place name, "Indian Territory." The Ingallses' journey is considerably more exciting than in Wilder's original story, and the family narrowly escapes several catastrophes. The family reaches the place where Pa wants to build a house, and as they climb out of the wagon and hold hands in a thankful prayer, and Native people ominously watch from a nearby hilltop.

As the Ingallses settle into their new home on the prairie, the events from Wilder's narrative are inflated dramatically. When Pa and Mr. Edwards meet for the first time, for example, they mistake each other for Native people and nearly shoot each other. Later, Pa nearly falls off of the top of the house as he stretches the wagon cover across to make a temporary roof. The drama continues as Pa almost succumbs to the poisonous gases at the bottom of the well (instead of pulling himself out hand-over-hand as he does in the text). In another modified scene, when Pa goes to help the cowboys round up the cattle, Laura goes along and serves as a cook for the cowboys. When Pa encounters the wolf pack, instead of simply managing to escape as he did in the original narrative and in Landon's premier movie, this time the wolves attack him. In the scene from the book in which Pa investigates what turns out to be a panther screaming in the night, only in the Disney interpretation does the panther attack Pa— and Soldat du Chêne arrives in time to shoot the panther and save Pa's life. The Ingallses' fear of massacre is also intensified as in the Disney version they, along with Mr. Edwards take shelter at the Scotts' house for several days. Unlike any such scene in the texts, the petrified neighbors all barricade themselves inside the Scotts' home to wait out the anticipated attack from the Osage. Inside the house Mrs. Scott succumbs to a fit of hysteria in which she first aims a gun at Pa, and then shoots a hole in the roof as her husband tries to wrest the gun away from her.

Because the Disney adaptation does follow the text closely in terms of the basic events—albeit a dramatized presentation of them—most of the Ingallses' encounters with Native people from the text are

“Can you imagine, a real, live Indian right here in Walnut Grove?”

included. Conversations between Laura and her parents juxtapose ideas about Native people and their expected removal, and Mrs. Scott's character offers extensive negative opinions on Native people. Mrs. Scott declares, for example, that “treaties or no treaties, the land belongs to the folks who'll farm it” and “why bother with treaties? Just kill them.” In one scene Mary contradicts Mrs. Scott, repeating a line she heard her father say, that some Indians are good and some are not, just like all men. The scene in which the Osages file past the Ingalls home is also included in the Disney version, though they appear to be leaving the area permanently, not for a hunt. Laura's interest in seeing a papoose, and later, her desire to have a papoose, however, are omitted. Ma's character is also revised to the extent that she embodies the pioneer spirit and even initiates the trip to Kansas. None of the female characters in the Disney adaptation wear sunbonnets, which is notable as a pioneer “woman's pale complexion often signified privilege, shelter, protection, and confinements; it was also an external indicator that she did not belong to one of the darker-skinned races” (Romines 58-9). Ma and the girls are either bare-headed or they wear straw hats and thus risk “getting to look like Indians” (Wilder 122). As in the text, Ma first encounters Native visitors while Pa is away, and although there are three Native people instead of only two, she handles the situation with aplomb, and later defends Laura's interest in wanting to learn more about her Native neighbors.

In addition to the changes in Ma's character that impact the overall presentation of Native themes, there are several significant Native scenes added to the Disney version. The added scenes fit into one of two categories: scenes that add to the hype of the story (e.g., drama, fear, or excitement); and scenes that play upon stereotypes of Native people as exotically spiritual in a manner that is reminiscent of Disney's version of *Pocahontas*. The narrative offers a viewpoint that extends beyond Laura's limited scope of vision and knowledge in the texts and occasionally shows scenes in the Osage camp. The glimpses of men singing, drumming, and dancing, however, usually contribute more fear to the story than a balancing of perspectives. There are, for example, no conversations between Native characters that help viewers to relate to their position, and the shots of the Osage camp while usually vibrantly colorful are also accompanied by frightening music. When Pa and Mr. Edwards, in this version of the story, spy on the Osage camp, their fear only increases. A specific scene added to the Disney adaptation that significantly adds to the frightening portrayal of Native people is the destruction of Mr. Edwards's cabin. While he is sleeping soundly one night, several Native men enter his home and drag him out by his feet before setting fire to his cabin and touching him with a coup stick. It is the torching of Mr. Edwards's cabin that prompts the neighbors to create the makeshift fort in the Scotts' home. While in the Scotts' home, Laura also has a nightmare about nearly being clubbed to death by a Native man.

Alongside these events, which heighten the drama of Disney's *Little House on the Prairie*, are several other Native scenes which did not occur in Wilder's novel: Jack, the family's brindle bulldog in the novel, for example, is transformed into a “spirit dog,” and Laura finds nearby Native children to play with. When the entire family is stricken with malaria (“fever and ague” in the text), Dr. Tann nurses them back to health. Dr. Tann informs Laura that her dog is a “spirit dog” because it has two different colored eyes, and he assures her that a spirit dog is a good source of protection because local Native people fear such dogs. Dr. Tann's prediction proves accurate when, in another invented scene, Laura encounters an Osage man while alone and he raises his toothed club as if to strike her, then turns away when he sees her dog. Early in the miniseries, Laura encounters a young Native boy while out playing alone, and watches him, fascinated, until he suddenly vanishes into thin air. During this scene, and other scenes involving “mystical” encounters with Native people, the frightening, intense music is replaced with what sounds like an angelic children's choir singing “hey-ya, hey-ya; hey-ya, hey-ya” repeatedly. The next time Laura sees the boy, he is accompanied by three friends. Laura soon sees him a third time, and this time she follows him and his friends to the Osage camp, where she sees women picking berries and working with quills—and this is where her spirit dog saves her from being clubbed by a mounted Osage man. Each of these scenes are exclusive to the Disney adaptation of the

Little House story, yet none serve to de-marginalize oppressed characters, more responsibly address cultural contexts, or make political statements (Sanders 98, 140).

In slight variation to the original story, it is Dr. Tann who brings word to the Scott fort that Soldat du Chêne and the Osage convinced the other tribes to cease plans to massacre the citizens. Pa decides to search for Soldat du Chêne to personally thank him and encounters a small party of Osage instead. One man who speaks English tells Pa that he wants to be remembered as the “last of the Osage to agree with du Chêne” and delivers a speech that explains why the Osage, not whites, have a justified presence on the land. Nevertheless, the Scotts soon arrive with word that the Native people will be leaving the area for good, and Ma and Mrs. Scott head indoors to celebrate over tea. In a rearrangement of scenes, the visit Laura, Mary, and Pa make to the nearby Native camp to collect beads is positioned here after the Osage’s final removal, apparently making the process of appropriation complete.

Predictably, however, soldiers visit Pa and inform him that the family must move on because he has settled three miles over the line into Indian Territory. The ensuing scenes reinforce the idea that the Ingallses are blameless, that they settled in Indian Territory by mistake, and that they would have filed a land claim with the homestead office but it had not yet opened. In this version of the story, Pa does not accept his family’s fate quietly—he is furious that the government is “making an example” of him and initially refuses to leave unless he is thrown off the land. Eventually Pa decides to leave before the soldiers literally drive him away, and Ma reassures him that all is well, since she did after all, fall in love with a man with “wanderlust.” Ma tells Pa, “We’ll go and find another home. If we get kicked off of that one we’ll find another after that,” and Pa agrees, declaring that he’ll build an even bigger house next time. The series ends as the family drives off in their wagon, with Laura, who placed a bead from the Osage camp on the windowsill of her family’s empty home before leaving, looking forward to a new adventure.

The especially frightening images associated with Native people in the Disney adaptation, and the addition of the mystical elements, reinforce stereotypes rather than diminish them. Ma’s makeover as a friend to her Native neighbors makes her a likeable character but raises questions about manipulating the personality of a historic figure to rid her of prejudices. The overall portrayal of Native themes in the Disney adaptation does not advance in sophistication beyond that of the novel as would be expected, given Disney’s apparent willingness to add and modify content from the source texts; the seventy-years’ worth of progression in both federal policy and public sentiment toward Native people since the time the texts were written; and the importance of portraying Native people accurately, respectfully, and responsibly.

The adaptations of the *Little House* story serve as examples of the challenges of representing Native people and issues in both text and visual narratives. Whereas the original story is criticized for its inclusion of negative language about Native people, even removing such language and replacing it with didactic messages about the importance of positive multicultural experiences, as in Landon’s adaptation, does not necessarily result in messages about Native people and the frontier that are more positive overall, nor does creating a frontier town in which the Native presence has already been eliminated. Similarly, adding mystical elements and showing more Native people without contextualizing the images, as in the Disney adaptation, do not help to create a more balanced understanding of the events. The adaptations present the Native themes in ways that leave little room for interpretation or discussion and weaken the likelihood that the audience will leave the show with increased understandings of either Native people or the Frontier. In this sense, to use Hutcheon’s terms, it is possible to readily see the adaptations laterally in relation to the source material rather than vertically (169), as there is no significant progression from worse to better (or vice versa), at least in the portrayal of Native themes. The challenge to “imagine a real live Indian right here in Walnut Grove” demands strategies beyond magic necklaces and spirit dogs, and beyond disingenuously altering historic figures’ perspectives on Native people in order to simplify the story or render it more comfortable for contemporary

“Can you imagine, a real, live Indian right here in Walnut Grove?”

viewers. The *Little House* story, therefore, continues to challenge adapters to find ways to contextualize Native content in more responsible, and respectful ways; when children are in the audience, the stakes for telling the story with care are at their highest.

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AUTHOR BIO:

Amy Fatzinger is an assistant professor in American Indian Studies at the University of Arizona where she primarily teaches courses in Native literature and film.

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The Gentle Tongue: How Language Affected the World of *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*

Louisa Danielson

Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne
Fort Wayne, Indiana, USA
danila02@ipfw.edu

ABSTRACT

Although new episodes of the program ceased to be recorded in 2004, the *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* show is still recalled by many today as an iconic childhood staple—the right show to watch if you are a young child or a parent looking for something wholesome to view on television. This is as Fred Rogers, the creator of the program, wished, but what exactly were the goals behind the *Mister Rogers' program*? What were the shaping forces that inspired Rogers' theory for children's educational television? These are questions explored in “The Gentle Tongue: How Language Affected the World of *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*.”

Research for this article is compiled from Rogers' book on parenting philosophies, dialogue excerpts from the television program, and published interviews with Rogers. Comparative information has also been provided by research from humor development, childhood imagination development, and popular television studies. Thoughtful exploration of this data can explain how and why Fred Rogers was inspired to create a program that demonstrated love and care towards television's youngest viewers. Although *Mister Rogers* may be leaving the airwaves, its effects can still be seen in today's modern television programming.

KEY WORDS

Adult, Child, Television, Language, Make-Believe, Play, Responsibility, Care, Puppets, Humor

In his earliest years as a working adult, Fred Rogers was a floor manager for NBC studios in New York City. One of the programs on which he worked was *The Gabby Hayes Show*, which starred a cowboy who had good rapport with children. Rogers asked the old cowhand, “Mr. Hayes, what do you think about when you look in the camera and know that there are thousands of people looking at you?” Hayes responded, “Freddy, I think of one little buckaroo.”¹ Later, when he began his own television program, Rogers channeled that idea from Hayes. In his book for parents, Rogers states: “That’s what I’ve been doing ever since on *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood*—imagining that I’m talking with one ‘television friend.’”²

In today’s world of cartoons and comedy entertainment for kids, this sensitive approach is unique. It leads one to want to better understand Rogers’ purpose behind the program, to dive deeper into the philosophy of the show. What better way to research a program than to explore the words used on it—i.e. the dialogue? This researcher is led to ask the following questions: What was the dialogue that Rogers used to communicate with his “television friend?” Did his words vary among its intended audiences? Would young viewers be addressed in a different way from adult audiences? What were some possible reasons behind the language choices that Rogers made? What examples might demonstrate Rogers’ background and focus for the *MRN* television show?

To answer these questions, I viewed twenty-five episodes of *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood* (abbreviated *MRN*). These episodes were randomly selected to include shows spanning the broadcast history of *Mister Rogers Neighborhood*, so the evolution of his word choices could be examined over its multi-decade recording period. I also investigated other sources, including essays and articles about language, children’s television and Fred Rogers; a parenting book by Rogers; a collection of reminiscences about *MRN*; a reflective book on Rogers’ faith; and books about television literacy and child development. After analyzing these sources, it became evident that Rogers had in mind specific roles for each character to play. The careful direction that each character takes with his or her words indicates that there is some greater purpose—or, philosophy—driving the composition of Rogers’ seemingly simple programming for the young viewer.

Proof for this can be seen immediately after viewing any of Rogers’ *MRN* programs. Rogers draws a definite line, via words, between the responsibilities of adults and those of juveniles. It is as though he creates a definite role for each age category. Throughout the show, adults and adult-role puppets play responsible parts. The grown-ups perform adult tasks like fixing broken machines or buying items at the grocery store. Occasionally, Rogers refers to something being an “adult job,” like using a wrench to repair the faucet. While children are welcome to observe these adult actions on the show, Rogers explains that there are things that are not safe for young viewers to do. A major part of adult work, as demonstrated by Rogers, is to take time to care for people. Adults use words to inform, comfort, and discover facts.

Juvenile characters, on the other hand, hold different responsibilities. Children and child-like puppets of the program use words to demonstrate dependency. Young characters are never disparaged for their youth; instead, they learn from their adult counterparts. Young characters receive help and instructions. They learn how to do practical things—like make a sandwich. Young characters on *MRN* are encouraged to explore and expand their horizons in a safe way and they are applauded for their efforts.³ Child characters of the program, as a result of the *MRN* environment, use their words to learn, to explain, and to ask for help.

Sometimes, the characters of children and adults trade places. Typically, an adult character only acts in a childish way if humor is being added. But child-like speakers on the *MRN* show can also assume adult

[1] Kimmel and Collins *The Wonder of It All* 18, quoting an interview of Rogers with Karen Herman. See also Rogers and Head 9.

[2] Rogers and Head 9.

[3] See *MRN* episode 1546, 8:32. When Nicki, (age six and a half) is brought to Rogers’ studio, the boy plays a piece on the piano and speaks candidly about music and how much work practicing is. “Everybody has to practice, before they can learn something,” Niki says. “And it’s okay, even when you make mistakes,” Rogers replies.

“responsible” roles: for example, occasionally, a young character offers comfort or ideas to an adult. This occurs especially in the world of Make-Believe, where the majority of juvenile-adult interaction happens. A clear example of the division between adult and child word choice comes from *MRN* episode 1528, when Rogers gives a clear example of the “taking care of you” role played by adults. In this show, the people of Make-Believe start to dig a hole for a new pool. Everything is going well until Daniel Striped Tiger (puppet) starts chatting with Lady Aberlin (human adult). The dialogue begins at 15:18:

Lady Aberlin: Hi Daniel

Daniel: Oh, hi, Lady Aberlin

LA: It's almost time. Are you ready?

Daniel: Well, I thought, maybe I'd work on my boat. It really needs help.

LA: But Daniel, you offered to help us dig out the hole, remember?

Daniel: Yes, I remember.

LA: Is something bothering you, Daniel?

Daniel: I guess so.

LA: We could talk about it, if you'd like.

Daniel: Everybody's all excited about digging this hole, Lady Aberlin, but I'm not.

LA: That's okay, Daniel. Work doesn't always have to be fun and exciting. Sometimes, it's just plain hard and tiresome and that's that.

Daniel: Do you think it's going to be fun?

LA: Well, it's going to be very different for me, so I think I'm going to like it a lot.

Daniel: Well, I'll do it. But I think it's just going to be hard - and what was the other word you said?

LA: Tiresome.

Daniel: Hard and tiresome. And dark.

LA: Oh. Oh, well, it can get dark, down in the hole. But that's why we're going to be wearing these hats with flashlights on them, see?

Daniel: Oh. Then it won't be all dark down there in the hole.

LA: No - not if we use our flashlights.

Daniel: Oh!

LA: Here's yours.

Daniel: And will you keep your light on?

LA: As soon as it gets the least bit dark.

Daniel: Oh good!

Here, Lady Aberlin takes an adult role in *Make-Believe*. She first informs Daniel that it is time to help dig the pool. Daniel, as a child puppet, hints that he is not comfortable with the idea. Lady Aberlin starts to ask questions to discover why Daniel is worried. Daniel explains his fears about the dark. Lady Aberlin then becomes a comforter, demonstrating the flashlights and offering to stay close by so that Daniel will not be frightened. This is typical of the role-playing word usage Rogers demonstrates in *MRN*: Adults take care of children.

However, at times in the *MRN* show, there are no child-figures present. This happens usually in the reality segments, during events like field trips. In these sections, Rogers emulates the role of a child, asking questions and seeking information or asking for help. The adult models genuine child-like behavior. In one episode, Rogers visits the Museum of Art, Carnegie Institute (*MRN* episode 1482). Bay Judson is the tour guide who shows Rogers the different paintings. Here's Rogers' childlike dialogue, starting at 5:45:

Rogers: Ah—let's go over to this one! This looks familiar, Bay.

Bay: That's a portrait, Fred, of Homer St. Goddens ...

Rogers: Is this his mother, back here?

Bay: That's his mother, and she's reading out loud to him. He had to sit for a real long time for that portrait and she was trying to keep him amused.

Rogers: Oh, you mean the painter would have been out here, actually painting both of them like that?

Bay: For hours and hours. And he just had to sit, still as a statue.

Rogers: He looks a little bored, doesn't he?

Bay: I think he wants to go outside and play with his friends.

In the museum, Rogers is demonstrating language that requests information. He asks to see a particular painting; he learns about how the painting was made and why the mother is in the picture. Rogers explains his thoughts about the boy in the painting—the boy looks “bored.” The language Rogers uses relates in a very understandable way to a child who has waited to get his or her picture taken.

Finally, there is the occasional moment when a young character comforts or cares for the needs of an adult. Roles are reversed and the caregiver becomes the recipient of care. Here is the dialogue from *MRN* show 1529. In this particular excerpt, the pool project that the neighbors are working on has been cancelled, since a water main broke during the digging. Plumbers are summoned and the price of fixing the Neighborhood pipes is steep. Lady Aberlin and Neighbor Aber visit the School at Someplace Else to see if the students have some ideas for solutions to the situation. The excerpt begins at 20:11:

Lady Aberlin: We're here to try to be helpful to (King Friday).

Neighbor Aber: Yes, we've come to ask your advice.

Daniel: Oh - you want our advice?

LA: Yes, we do. And Uncle Friday does, too.

Daniel: Oh.

Prince Tuesday: What for?

LA: Well, as you know, we had to turn off the water when the main pipes broke.

Daniel: And there isn't any water to drink or shower in, or anything!

LA: That's right.

NA: And the reason we need your advice is that we must find some money to get new pipes. Otherwise, we won't have any water— ever!

Prince: Have you thought of using straws? You could put a whole lot of straws together for the pipes.

Ana: I think straws might break after a little while, Tuesday . . .

Daniel: How much money do we need for the pipes?

LA: Three thousand.

All the children: Three thousand!

LA: Yes, I know that's a lot!

Daniel: Well, how much money do we have for the swimming pool?

LA: Three thousand.

Daniel: Well?

Ana: See what Daniel means?

Prince: Give up the swimming pool money to get new pipes?

NA: That would be a way to do it.

LA: It certainly would!

Ana: But we wouldn't have any swimming pool!

Daniel: Well, Ana, it wouldn't be any good without water in it, anyway.

All of the students in the class are children (puppets), but the children ask the adults (humans) for information. The adults ask for help. The children listen to the problem, then make suggestions. Although Ana Platypus and Prince Tuesday are reluctant to give up the pool, Daniel remarks sensibly, "It wouldn't be any good without water in it, anyway." Here the children and adults have reversed their roles. While children are usually the ones who need answers and comfort, here they are the providers of those emotional staples. The adults learn from the children's feedback.

MULTI-GENERATIONAL APPEAL AND THE LANGUAGE OF ROGERS

At times, the clear divide between “child” and “adult” language is blurred by Rogers’ word selections. Of the twenty-five episodes explored for this paper, the use of humor by Rogers (who wrote the majority of the programs⁴) is never the main emphasis of the show⁵. Most of the spoken work is direct, with no jokes between young and adult dialogue. But unexpected dialogue sometimes can entertain the adults who would watch the program with children, especially when an adult actor behaved like a child—in a not-so-serious way. To highlight that dialogue, a few episodes must be mentioned. In one early show, an adult actor tries to install a punch clock for his adult puppet friend. The puppet takes a (purportedly) juvenile view of the clock. Here’s the excerpt, from episode 4, starting at 16:01: (Note: the puppet, Grandpierre likes to speak in French.)

Grandpierre: What does it mean? *Qu’ès que savetier* punch?

Handyman Negri: Uh, a punch, Grandpierre, a punch—you know like that! (he swings his fist) *Compère?* . . . This is a punch clock.

Grandpierre: An’ you punch the clock?

HN: That’s right—you punch the clock when you come in, and you punch the clock when you go out.

Grandpierre: Oh, *très bien!* . . . Let me try it! (He gives it a solid whack and knocks it sideways.) . . .

HN: Oh, Grandpierre! You’ll break it like that! No, no, no no— *piano!* Uh, *piano.* Easy!

Grandpierre: Oh—easy! Oh, *très bien!* . . . (he practices punching the clock, still knocking it over with relish.)

HN: Just a minute—I want to be sure it’s still working—yes, it’s still working.

Grandpierre: *Très bien.* And you will be there, each time when I’m punching the clock—to pick it up?

HN: No, Grandpierre, I will *not* be there each time. I am going to place it right here on the Eiffel Tower, and then you can punch it whenever you leave and whenever you come home.

Grandpierre: Ah, *bon.* And I will pick it up.

HN: Yes, and you will pick it up yourself.

A child would love to punch things. Probably, the majority of adults would appreciate Grandpierre’s attitude to the punch clock. Note how Grandpierre requests information, in the vein of juvenile dialogue. Negri plays the adult, giving an explanation first of what a punch is and then of how the punch clock works. Young viewers enjoy the scenario because of the physical comedy and the misunderstanding. Older viewers

[4] See Owen.

[5] Rogers admits, later in life, to using a “punch line” for the final episode of the last week-long sequence of programs. Owen’s article refers to end of the final series of MRN shows that Rogers filmed before his retirement. Rogers discusses his final series, stating “I can’t tell you the punch line of it all because it’s just too wonderful . . .”

enjoy the suggestion that punch clocks can be despised⁶.

A paradox can also be found when an adult puppet is sincere in its adult behavior but also presents irony to the viewer. For example, Negri again plays the adult when, in episode 1526, he stops by puppet Lady Elaine's Museum Go Round, to give her the annual tax report. This report, he tells Elaine, demonstrates how the kingdom has used tax money for the past year. Lady Elaine hears the word *taxes* and at 19:13 says: "Well, you'll probably want more money. Well I don't have any more—I'm cleaned out!" Now, Lady Elaine is playing the grumpy adult because she just spent all her money on paint and forgot to get brushes. She is also playing the part of a child: she is explaining why she doesn't want to hear about taxes. She is "cleaned out." Again, the line between the adult character and juvenile role is blurred by an adult acting as a child. A child viewer would probably take the whole dialogue seriously; the adult viewer would appreciate the slang and the unwillingness to pay more taxes.

What happens if the adult characters don't use any childlike language yet still invoke humor? Sometimes, Rogers liked to create a gentle parody of popular culture. Adult viewers would probably pick up on it—while the satire of the situation would sail over a young viewer's head. For example, look at episode 1475, the *Windstorm in Bubbleland Opera*. The completely adult-spoken dialogue exemplifies Rogers' mild satire at 1:35:

News Anchor: "Hello, I'm Robert Redgate, bringing you this O'clock edition of

Bubblewitness News: all the news that's fit to speak, all the news that's fit to hear, all the news to bring you cheer right here, in Bubbleland."

(Anchorman Redgate sings the latest news. His notices include the following song.)

There's never, never, never, never, never
Any trouble here in Bubbleland, Bubbleland, Bubbleland,
There's never, never, never, never anything but joy,
Right here in Bubbleland, Bubbleland, Bubbleland!
Our bubbles make us happy, they are with us night and day.
We know that they are so important
They must never blow away.
Of course, they never would.

(Then the song repeats with slight modifications . . .)

(Then follows an announcement of the very good news.)

Redgate beams at the camera:

"The National Bubble Chemical Company has today announced its newest, environmentally safe, propellant product: Spray Sweater - the ultimate protection for your precious bubbles. Until today, we've always had to knit or to buy old-fashioned, regular sweaters to protect our bubbles. But now, Spray Sweater makes it easy for everyone. All you have to do is put those spray sweaters around your favorite bubbles and they'll be safe. Spray Sweater: the absolute ultimate in bubble protection.

Betty: It's a fraud! It's a fraud! There's nothing in this can but just plain air! There's no

[6] Southam gives a more complete discussion on how young children enjoy physical comedy while more mature viewers understand wordplay.

way that a sweater could ever come from there! It's a fraud—I tell you, it's a fraud!

Redgate: What's going on?

Betty: The chemical folk pulled the wool over you! Let me show you - you see? You see?

Redgate: This is highly irregular!

Betty: Oh—I'm the, um, manager of Betty's Better Sweater Company. I have a right to check the competition.

Redgate: Heh—ladies and gentlemen, we'll have an in-depth report about sweaters on Bubblewitness News tomorrow. But now for the weather! Here's Friendly Frank, your weather porpoise, the porpoise with a purpose!

This dialogue is tongue in cheek. There is information: “never any trouble,” “environmentally safe propellant product,” “fraud” and “competition.” But what is the viewer learning from this dialogue? On one level, the viewer sees a news program and Spray Sweater, the top story. Then the viewer sees that Betty, of Betty's Better Sweaters, is upset by the competition to her hand-knit products.

But there is the double-speak which is also going on. The mature viewer is alerted by the “all the news that's fit to speak,” opening, having only good and very good news—only in the land of Make-Believe could that occur! The advertisement for Spray Sweater is a bit like an infomercial, but the adult viewer would understand the promotion, since the National Bubble Chemical Company is a major sponsor for Bubblewitness News. However, how many viewers would catch Betty's comment, “I have a right to check the competition?” Again, only in Make-Believe could a manufacturer interrupt a live news broadcast to air her grievances about a competitor's product. Children might pick up the physical cues that Betty gives when she makes thumbs up and thumbs down motions towards her sweater and the Spray Sweater can. But mature viewers probably will pick up much more.

This presents the viewer with a great divide. Would the target-age, *MRN*-viewing child understand the thought behind the complex humor Rogers presented? Probably not. But this is why the *Mister Rogers* program appeals to the entire family and has had a lasting impact on children's television programming—as witnessed by the dialogue used in the *Bubbleland* opera, there is no real age limit to the viewership⁷. The wit of each quote depends on what McGhee refers to as “expectancy violations.”⁸ In the tax scenario, Lady Elaine surprises the viewer with slang. The anchor of Bubblevision News tells good news and very good news. Grandpierre socks the punch clock until it breaks. Southam suggests that, for this type of humor, the audience would need to have more advanced comprehension than the projected 2-4 year-old audience member.

This, then, is the great divide of the *MRN* program: while most word usage on the show can be understood by young viewers, there is some which only applies to more mature viewers. From the observations completed for this article, the majority of the dialogue used is applicable to both children and adults, but when one of the adult characters crosses the line and starts behaving in a childish way (i.e., using childish language where it is not expected), the show appeals to its more mentally-developed viewer and not to the young child. Therefore, the *MRN* show is able to reach beyond the preschool age bracket, and this is why it became a staple for family television time.

[7] Daniel McGinn's article, “Guilt Free TV,” goes so far as to discuss one mother who installed a television in the kitchen, so the children could learn from a variety of PBS shows while eating. “They learn so much,” says the mother, whose children were ages 2 and 7 at the time of the article's writing. Since McGinn's article was published in 2002, it is assumed that Rogers' program (which began more than 30 years before) created momentum for multi-generationally appealing PBS programming.

[8] See McGhee 125.

PURPOSE BEHIND THE ROGERS PROGRAM

What motivated the language choices that Rogers made for his program? Research provides the following suggestions. Close to the time that Rogers received his undergraduate degree from Rollins College, he saw television for the first time and was disgusted by characters who threw pies at one another⁹. The violence and senseless slapstick inspired Rogers to strive to create wholesome, nurturing programming for children, where young viewers wouldn't be bombarded with potentially traumatic images and actions. He began working with NBC studios. By the mid-1960s, Rogers was starting work on his own American program, *Misterogers' Neighborhood*. The title of the show was later changed to *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*, "out of a concern for viewers who were learning to read," Rogers notes¹⁰. (He was worried that spelling his name and title as one word without proper capitalization, spacing and spelling would confuse fledgling readers.) To emphasize his goals when creating programming for children, Rogers writes:

The roots of a child's ability to cope and thrive, regardless of circumstance, lie in that child's having had at least a small, safe place . . . in which, in the companionship of a loving person, that child could discover that he or she was lovable and capable of loving in return. If a child finds this during the first years of life, he or she *can* grow up to be a competent, healthy person . . .¹¹

In discussing television and its role in helping a child prepare for life, Rogers also says: "those of us who make television programs . . . have a responsibility to do our work with the greatest of care." Why was Rogers compelled to create characters that were responsible—and characters that needed responsibility in order to thrive? For the purposes of this research, three primary concepts are outlined as being the basic propellants for the Rogers character/language roles. They are as follows:

Theological: Fred Rogers was an ordained Presbyterian minister. His specific instruction, when he was ordained, was "to minister to children and their families through television."¹² While Rogers did not use many direct references to theology, there was an undercurrent of spiritual thought that seemed to support the goals of the program.

Educational: The *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* program included field trips to the crayon factory, discussions about plumbing and recipes for making simple foods, to name a few activities that were filmed. Rogers seemed to have a specific focus on learning because it helped children become more understanding individuals.

Social: the *MRN* program was filmed over the course of four decades. Although he maintained a static time frame for the "real" neighborhood and the Neighborhood of Make-Believe, Rogers helped young viewers deal with current events.

Evidence for each of these three concepts is bountiful, both in the television programs and in the literature written about and by Rogers. By combining all three concepts, it is possible to piece together purpose influencing the style or format of thought behind the characters Rogers brought to life. The characters' language/word usage is symbolic of these ideas that founded and sustained Rogers' legacy of nurturing children's programming.

To lay some groundwork for the theological perspective of Rogers' language on the *MRN* show, it

[9] See Kimmel and Collins i, Hollingsworth xx and 124. (As Hollingsworth notes, this pie-throwing act might have struck an internal sore spot with Rogers, who was bullied as a child.)

[10] Rogers and Head 163.

[11] See Rogers and Head 11-12.

[12] Kimmel and Collins 13.

should be stated that he was a 1962 graduate of the Pittsburgh Theological Seminary¹³. His commission, to minister to “children and their families through television,” was something Rogers took seriously. Ministering took place outside of the pulpit, as Rogers demonstrated through his program. Look at the *MRN* program 1484, in which two characters in the neighborhood of Make-Believe lose a football game. The losers are quite disappointed. But there is an element of comfort (or ministering), that King Friday is able to extend to the losers. The dialogue begins at 18:02:

King Friday: But you players seemed sad . . .

Bob Dog: Oh, yes—we, we were.

Lynn Swann: We lost our game today, King Friday.

King Friday: Oh, uh, did you do your best, Mr. Swann?

Lynn Swann: I think we did. Don't you, Bob Dog?

Bob Dog: Yeah, I guess so.

King Friday: Well, then, you won. All you need to do is your best and you've won, in my book.

Considering the fact that Lynn Swann was a real-life professional football star when the episode show was taped, Bob Dog's disappointment at their loss is doubly painful. When King Friday hears that both of the players did their best, he comforts the losers, ministering to the needs of his people. Friday is also demonstrating the adult role that the *MRN* program models constantly: the adult comforts (or ministers to) those around him.

Rogers directly mentions theological topics infrequently. Only once during the twenty-five shows watched for this program does Rogers talk about God. When Rogers addresses religion, he does so sensitively. In episode 5, Rogers sings the lullaby titled “Good Night, God.” The lyrics begin at 25:47 and are as follows:

Good night God, and thank you for this very lovely day.
 Thank you too, for helping us at work, and at our play,
 Thank you for our families, for each and every friend,
 Forgive us, please, for anything, we've done, that might offend.
 Keep us safe and faithful God, tell us what to do.
 Good night, God,
 And thank you God, for letting us love you.

The song is a simple statement of care. Rogers is careful to note that, “We have a song, in our house, not everybody sings this song, but we do—just before we go to sleep; called “Good Night God.” Even if some of the viewers' families do not sing this particular lullaby, Rogers wants to let his viewers know that each person is loved and that he or she can love in return. Words like “thank you,” “faithful,” “forgive,” “friend” and “letting” are important to the message of the song, as they make the listener think that someone is concerned about the viewer's welfare.

Years after singing *Good Night, God*, Rogers was interviewed by Amy Hollingsworth, who worked for eight years with the *700 Club*, which promoted Christian television. Hollingsworth had several meetings with

[13] Rogers and Head 163.

Rogers and explored the ways in which his Christian faith impacted his television work.¹⁴ As a part of their final in-person interview, Hollingsworth asked Rogers, “If you had *one final broadcast, one final opportunity* to address your television neighbors, and you could tell them the single most important lesson of your life, what would you say?” (Emphasis added by Hollingsworth.)

Rogers responds:

Well, I would want [those] who were listening somehow to know that they had unique value, that there isn’t anybody in the whole world exactly like them and that there never has been and there never will be.

And that they are loved by the Person who created them, in a unique way.

If they could know that and really know it and have that behind their eyes, they could look with those eyes on their neighbor and realize, “My neighbor has unique value too; there’s never been anybody in the whole world like my neighbor and there never will be.” If they could value that person—if they could love that person—in ways that we know that the Eternal loves us, then I would be very grateful.¹⁵

Clearly, Rogers’ goal of ministering to children and their families through the television waves was not diminished by his long tenure on the air. His language stands out in the interview: he uses words like “unique value,” “love” and an emphasis on the care that people show each other—because they are loved by a “Person.” Subtly, Rogers is maintaining his goal of ministering. He is still helping individuals know that they are acceptable and lovable as they are. Even though his commission came years before the interview, he still serves as a minister to his audience.

But what about the educational aspect of the MRN show? Although he was not officially a teacher, Rogers’ programs constantly encourage children to learn. Following a visit from the singer Ella Jenkins, Rogers tells his television neighbor, “I like to learn things, don’t you? And there’s so much in this world we can learn, no matter how young or how old we are” (episode 1548, 8:11). More concrete evidence of Rogers’ didactic purpose can be found in looking at how he planned a weeklong series of television episodes—for example, the “Bubbleland” opera. On Day 1 (episode 1471), Rogers brings an electric synthesizer to his living room and plays it. He demonstrates how the synthesizer could copy the sounds of other musical instruments. On Day 2, Rogers shows a video of people making machine-knit sweaters (episode 1472), and he visits Robert Trowe’s workshop, where Trowe is repairing a knitting machine. On Day 3, Rogers takes his television neighbor on a visit to Brockett’s Bakery, where he learns how to make a snack and a drink from bananas (episode 1473). Finally on Day 4, Rogers takes a field trip to a weather station, where he helps launch a weather balloon, looks at radar, and explores different ways of measuring the forces of nature (episode 1474). By the last episode (1475), it is time to perform the opera. Production of the opera includes synthesizer music, a sweater-based economy, a banana crate wall, and a windstorm.

A more graphic example of Rogers’ didactic bent is the School at Someplace Else in the land of Make-Believe. The students are taught by Harriet Elizabeth Cow. Here’s an example of the language that the school members use from episode 1481, when King Friday has Miss Paulificate telephone Harriet Cow to ask her to come to the castle. The dialogue starts at 16:36:

Cow: Now then, what can I help you with, dear?”

Paulificate: Oh, King Friday would like you to come over to the castle right away. He

[14] Hollingsworth xix, and back cover flyleaf.

[15] Hollingsworth 160-161.

has a wonderful idea... (Harriet Cow refuses to leave the school at first, Paulificate negotiates between King and Cow)

Paulificate: Well I could ask. Ah, Harriet, could I be the teacher's helper?

Cow: Well of course, dear! Come right over—you can teach about Telephones . . .

(in the school, Paulificate discusses telephone etiquette)

Daniel: So if somebody calls, and it's the wrong number, you say you're sorry?

Paulificate: That's right, Daniel.

Daniel: But why do you say you're sorry if it's not your fault?

Paulificate: Oh you know, I really don't know. Does anyone have an idea?

Tuesday: Maybe you're sorry for yourself because you had to answer the phone and you were playing!

Ana: Or maybe you are wishing that somebody special would call, and then it wasn't your friend, after all!

The teacher, Miss Cow, demonstrates her adult language by implying that she cannot leave the classroom because she is teaching and she does not have a "teacher's helper." Language that targets the education goal is the use of "why," "does anyone have an idea," and "that's right." Paulificate guides student awareness, helping them (and the viewer) become proficient in telephone etiquette.

Educational goals in the *MRN* program, although not as deliberately advertised as they are in other children's programs, are still evident. Rogers finds opportunities to make learning a part of daily life, something that viewers can absorb without having to consciously contemplate the effort of accepting the ideas presented.

A final facet of examination must come from examining the socially-aware information Rogers uses to address current events and emotional reactions to those events. While current events from the news are never specifically mentioned in the episodes viewed for this article, the earliest week of the *MRN* show that was viewed for this project wanders perilously close to the military conflict of the late 1960s. After that set of programs, Rogers' other episodes focus more on the feelings people might have, rather than the news that causes those feelings. This is not to say that Rogers completely ignored social events. For example, shortly after the assassination of Robert Kennedy in 1968, Rogers filmed the pilot for what would become the *Mister Rogers Talks to Parents* series. The original program was filmed and aired to help adults deal with the questions that children might have—following widespread television coverage of the assassination—"I plead for your protection and support of your child. There is just so much that children can take without it being overwhelming," Rogers states.¹⁶ His reaction to this widely-publicized violence was to present parents and caregivers with some guidelines that could help explain and limit the graphic information that children were consuming. Later episodes of the parent-focused television series discuss child-care, superheroes, and other popular culture concepts. The goals of these special shows are to explain and prepare for the concerns or confusion children might have when faced with a real-life situation that is unfamiliar. While these shows incorporate the Make-Believe puppets, the goal is to reach parents and help them understand ways to help children, rather than to reach children directly. Rogers states:

[16] Galinsky 165.

Helping children learn to separate fantasy from reality is a most important task of early childhood and one with which children need adult help. In my livingroom and in other places in our television neighborhood, real things happen and we show them and talk about them as realistically as we can. In the Neighborhood of Make-Believe, we can make up anything we like and pretend anything we like and feel safe about it because it is only pretend.¹⁷

In the *MRN* show, the “real thing” that happens in the black-and-white episodes (broadcast in 1968) is King Friday’s martial law. Friday is upset that his scenery has been re-arranged. The King declares martial law in order to prevent Change. The neighborhood folk dress in helmets and place wire fencing around the castle. Betty Aberlin comes to visit Mister Rogers in his reality studio and they discuss the confusion in Make-Believe in episode 3, 8:23:

Rogers: Have you been in touch with (King Friday?)

Aberlin: No, not in a while.

Rogers: Well, uh, he isn’t the happiest Great-Uncle Friday that you’ve seen in a long time.

Aberlin: Oh – what’s wrong?’

Rogers: Lady Elaine has been up to her tricks again, and she’s moved the Eiffel Tower on the wrong side of the castle, and the tree has gone way from over here to the middle, and the clock is over there, and the fountain—well, it’s just all mixed around.

Aberlin: He must be really upset!

Rogers: He’s furious about it. And he has established border guards.

Aberlin: In the Neighborhood of Make-Believe?

Rogers: Edgar, poor thing—he has to walk, back and forth, and be sure that no one will come in.

Aberlin: That sounds like a war!

Rogers: It certainly does—but at least there isn’t any shooting, yet.

Aberlin: Well, do you think that I should take a make-believe gun or something?

Rogers: Oh, I don’t know that you’ll need that. ‘Course you could always use your finger, or, if you do that. (Makes a pretend gun.) But how about this? Would you like this cape?

Aberlin: Oh, yes!

Rogers: I just made it. Burlap bag and a safety pin.

[17] Rogers and Head 65.

Aberlin: That should keep me very safe, then.

Rogers: Sure.

Aberlin: Oh, I feel better already.

Rogers: I hope so. I hope you'll be brave and strong as you go off to the Neighborhood of Make-Believe.

Aberlin: I will, Mister Rogers. Good bye. (She marches off, singing "Be Brave, and Then Be Strong.")

Notice the charged language. "Border guards," "war," "shooting" and "gun" hint at the Vietnam conflict, which would have been discussed on other television programs of the time. Rogers gives Aberlin the cape to keep her feeling "safe." He tells her to "be brave and strong" on her way to the pretend conflict. By the end of the week, Daniel Striped Tiger launches a plan to send balloons with peaceful messages to the castle. Here is the dialogue from Episode 5, 21:39:

Edgar Cook: What is it? What is it? What are these things? What—oh, I must tell

King Friday, I must tell King Friday.

Friday: Fire the cannon! Fire the cannon! Fire the cannon—man your stations! Fire the cannon!

Negri: What is it, King Friday, Edgar?

Friday: Paratroopers!

Negri: Edgar—man the cannon—Edgar! Edgar!

Friday: Paratroopers!

Aberlin: No, no no—just read the bottoms of them before you start shooting!

Negri: Read the bottom? Hold it—hold it Edgar! Hold it, King Friday!

Friday: What is your name, rank and serial number, Lady?

Aberlin: Oh, Great Uncle Friday, you know my name! It's Lady Aberlin! Just, just read the bottom of the signs, won't you?

Friday: Oh, of course.

Negri: Look at this, King Friday—

Friday: What is it?

Negri: These aren't paratroopers—they're messages of peace. Look at this! Tenderness!

Friday: Messages of peace?

Negri: Peaceful coexistence! Well, isn't that marvelous? They're peaceful messages, Sir.

Peaceful coexistence!

Friday: Stop all fighting. Stop all fighting.

Negri: Hold your fire—hold your fire.

Friday: Oh, my, this is such a surprise!

The language again suggests current events. “Paratroopers,” “cannons” “messages of peace” and “peaceful coexistence”—what would a child notice? This is probably Rogers’ answer to the blare of television news. To repeat the quote mentioned earlier, Rogers felt that “In the Neighborhood of Make-Believe, we can make up anything we like and pretend anything we like and feel safe about it because it is only pretend.” This scheme of balloons and peaceful messages is certainly a sample of make-believe in action. As history has demonstrated, this is not the way the Vietnam conflict was resolved, but to a young viewer, this solution could make some sense. The danger is never too terrible to handle, (after all, the conflict was only over stopping the Changers!) and the resolution is simple, something that a child could understand and perform. A message of peace and tenderness might not solve a war, but it could make a child feel better because it would give him or her a sense of resolution—the feeling that somehow, the situation could be concluded happily.

This is Rogers’ way of caring for the emotional needs of a child in response to frightening television. He demonstrates a situation where trouble could occur, then shows a method for coping with that struggle. It empowers viewers to take control of their feelings, even if the cannot completely control the events that have affected them. In a different program, Rogers becomes angry. The dialogue below opens in the middle of a phone call with deliveryman Mr. McFeeley, who could not come right over to Mister Rogers’ place, in episode 1485, 4:01:

Rogers: Okay, nothing seems to be working out right today. All right, well, I’ll see you a little later then. Thanks anyway. (He hangs up the phone and begins to sing:)

What do you do with the mad that you feel,
when you feel so mad you could bite?
When the whole wide world seems oh,
so wrong and nothing you do seems very right,
What do you do, do you punch a bag,
do you pound some clay or some dough?
Do you round up friends for a game of tag,
and see how fast you go? . . .

Rogers finds a giant tablet of paper and a box of crayons and draws vigorously. Rogers, through his song, suggests what to do with “the mad that you feel.” Obviously, Rogers cannot control Mr. McFeeley or the other events that have added up to the sense behind “nothing seems to be working out right today.” But Rogers reacts constructively: he wants viewers to work through their emotions in ways that are not dangerous to themselves or others. Besides demonstrating his own methods, Rogers explores the ways other people express their feelings. In his visit with the cellist Yo Yo Ma, Rogers asks (episode 1547, 16:17):

Rogers: Well when you play, I’m sure you have a lot of different feelings. And as you played as a child, did you ever play happy things, or sad things or angry things, just ‘cause you wanted to?

Ma: Oh, sure. I mean, there would be times . . . if I was happy, I’d do something like this

(plays a Bach dance) . . . One of my favorites was “The Swan” (he plays) . . . you could imagine the swan. . . and I loved to play
That . . . This was obviously a very peaceful, tranquil mood.

Rogers: Did you ever play when you were really angry?

Ma: Sure. And there’s one piece I know that I love to get into (he saws on the cello with temper.) It just goes on and on and on, and you’re just digging in with all your strength, and . . . just got rid of a lot of frustrations.

Rogers: That’s how you feel, afterwards—relieved?

Ma: Relieved. Absolutely relieved. And just, after having given all this burst of energy, it felt good.

Whether it happens in *Make-Believe*, to Rogers himself, or to a television neighbor on camera, Rogers demonstrates ways to cope. Rogers’ theory respects these models for their healthy emotional release: “We . . . try to show models for coping with [anxiety] as well as models of trustworthy, caring, and available adults,” he writes.¹⁸ Through his language, and the lyrics of his songs, Rogers implements a system of emotional survival. He shows his viewers how to understand themselves, and from his position as the chief adult in the show, Rogers yet again fulfills the grown-up role of informing and comforting his audience in the mores of emotional responsibility.

The initial goal of this paper was to investigate the word usage of the *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood* television program. As a result of this research, it is evident that both the language and the message of the *MRN* show were intended to make a positive impact. According to Rogers’ pastoral commission, his job was to help “children and their families.” But perhaps Rogers’ influence reached further than that. As David Bianculli notes in “The Myth, the Man the Legend,”¹⁹ “. . . *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood* remains one of the first, best and safest programs through which preschoolers should be introduced to the medium of television.” Bianculli reinforces this reasoning in a separate book: “Television is our most common language, our most popular pastime, our basic point of reference; it’s also where most of our children are first exposed to allusion, satire, and other ‘literary’ concepts.”²⁰ If television is truly the literacy medium of our modern society, then Bianculli is in tune with Rogers’ *MRN* programming goals. Rogers wanted television to be a positive force in the lives of children. Using the *MRN* program to positively prepare children for other programs, as Bianculli suggests, is something of which Rogers would approve.

Has anything changed on the young people’s television scene since Rogers was first exposed (and disgusted by) television? Evidence exists to say yes—as stated in a *Newsweek* article, written by David McGinn. His piece, “Guilt Free TV,” includes a list of children’s television programs and information about how television can be a helpful tool for parents to use in raising children. Although he admits that some parents have serious misgivings about children watching television, McGinn states, “Now that PBS, which invented the good-for-kids genre, has new competition from Nickelodeon and Disney, there are more quality choices for preschoolers than ever.” While these shows are “stiff competition” to the *MRN* show, McGinn quotes Rogers as saying, “I’m just glad that more producers and purveyors of television have signed the pledge to protect childhood[.]” Notice how Rogers emphasizes that this new television programming “protect(s) childhood.”

[18] Rogers and Head 167.

[19] Collins and Kimmel, *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood: Children, Television and Fred Rogers* 43.

[20] Bianculli 5.

This would indicate that Rogers believes that his original goal—to create and promote programming that nurtured childhood—was achieved.

This attitude towards wholesome childhood development is echoed by psychiatrists Dorothy and Jerome Singer, who discuss imagination and successful ways of helping children understand that they are loved and accepted: “There must be a key *person* in a child’s life who inspires and sanctions play and accepts the child’s inventions with respect and delight.”²¹ In their careful documentation of child’s play, the Singers demonstrate that children must use their imaginations in order to grow—starting as young as infant “play” and interaction with caregivers: “Whatever babies may bring with them at birth will be molded and tempered by the behavior of those entrusted with their welfare . . . when children can play openly and freely, they become good learners, developing their cognitive skills through the stepping-stones of play.”²² Although the Singers’ research was published in 1990, years after the start of the *MRN* program, it is plain that Rogers was following a similar philosophy. He allows children to use their imaginations in the Neighborhood of Make-Believe but Rogers also feeds the intellectual side by going on field trips and doing practical activities. Rogers and his program are something that parents can “trust with [a viewing child’s] welfare,” to paraphrase the Singers. As a role model for children, Rogers wanted to make sure that his show gave children a time to learn to trust and believe in something positive—a time when they could grow up straight and true inside.

To achieve this goal, Rogers notes, “I think play is an expression of our creativity; and creativity, I believe, is at the very root of our ability to learn, to cope, and to become whatever we may be.”²³ Play, on the *MRN* show, while it could be demonstrated through physical actions and pictures, is also exemplified through the verbal interactions of the puppets, the actors, and the figure of Rogers himself. The *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood* television program vocalizes methods of creativity, coping, and responsibility in order to help children gain life skills. Today, there are a number of children’s television programs dedicated to developing those same skills, but they have been influenced no doubt, by the words of Mister Rogers.

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L. Danielson

AUTHOR BIO:

Louisa Danielson, BA, MA English (Indiana University – Fort Wayne) is a limited-term-lecturer at Indiana University, Fort Wayne, where she teaches introductory and intermediate expository writing. Her piece, “Teaching from the Sidelines: Using Marginalia to Encourage Good Writing” was published by the Journal of South Texas English Studies (2013).

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Learning about People, Places and Spaces of the World through Informal Pedagogy: Socio-(inter)cultural Constructions and Connections to Popular Culture

Shelbee R. Nguyen
Kennesaw State University
Kennesaw, Georgia, USA
snguye18@kennesaw.edu

ABSTRACT

This article explores how adult and higher education (AHE) learners utilize popular culture as an informal pedagogical resource when learning about different cultures and preparing for international learning abroad or study abroad. Specifically, this case study research is concerned with what particular sources of popular culture serve as informal pedagogy and how these shape AHE learners' cultural perceptions about study abroad to a specific international destination. A review of current literature at the intersection of popular culture and study abroad identifies both the need to include adult and higher education learners as well as the ubiquitous nature of learning through popular culture outside the classroom. Popular culture's function as a source of informal pedagogy and how informal learning relates to AHE learning are synthesized in the literature. The theoretical frame from which this research was undertaken is provided to highlight the innately social process of popular media consumption. The researcher offers methodological considerations about participants, data collection and analysis with findings from two different embedded cases to reveal ways AHE learners use and are influenced by popular culture characters, plot and themes. Additional discussion about cultural understandings and motivations to participate in international education or study is also highlighted throughout the findings. AHE learners' personal hobbies and interests as well as personal goals play an important role in shaping the type of experience desired. Implications and directions for future research underscore the complex and multifaceted nature of popular culture and media to generate support in this research area for educators, scholars and practitioners in the field of international education.

Keywords: Informal learning, popular culture, adult and higher education, study abroad, perception, motivation, international education, culture and language exchange, business education, multicultural education, sociocultural learning

“Well, I’m not going to lie... I’m a big fan of Jersday”

In 2010, a group of New Jersey lawmakers made headlines in a highly-publicized move against Viacom’s MTV hit reality television series, *Jersey Shore* (State Legislatures 7). The New Jersey Italian American Legislative Caucus (NJIALC) reportedly insisted the reality television show be cancelled due to “untrue” and “offensive” portrayals, which encouraged negative and pejorative “ethnic stereotypes” of Italian Americans (State Legislatures 7). Unfortunately for the NJIALC, *Jersey Shore* went on to air six highly-viewed seasons, resulting in the popular phrase, *Jersday*, signifying the show’s long-time run on Thursday evenings (Purdon 33). While the NJIALC may have not been successful in their efforts to thwart production of the hit series (and subsequent spin-offs), their concern about how popular culture shapes perceptions about cultural groups/subgroups is a powerful topic warranting further discussion.

Higher education across the United States (US) is comprised of over 17.5 million undergraduate learners with roughly a third of those individuals being characterized as non-traditional adults, 25 years of age or older (National Center for Education Statistics). According to scholars of adult education, age is not the salient or most critical determining factor in categorizing adults and traditional-aged learners, 24 years and younger (Knowles, “Modern Practice” 25; Sandlin, Wright and Clark 4). Malcolm Knowles summarizes that both traditional and non-traditional-aged students can be characterized as adults based on intrinsic motivations to learn, life roles and responsibilities assumed by the learner and the learning dynamic (“Adult Learner” 40). Further, Knowles states that the most pressing matter in differentiating adult education from transactional, teacher-centered instruction is the emphasis placed on the learner. Thus, employing the term adult and higher education (AHE) learners is optimal for examining ways individual learners use popular culture as an educational resource when learning about cultures of the world. This article addresses how adult and higher education (AHE) learners utilize popular culture as an informal pedagogical resource when learning about different cultures and preparing for international learning abroad or study abroad. More specifically, this research is concerned with how particular popular culture artifacts (e.g., TV shows) serve as informal pedagogy, shaping AHE learners’ cultural perceptions about a specific international destination.

Lev Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory explains how AHE learners form perceptions about race, class and cultural ideas through the various mediums of popular culture (9). Sociocultural theory suggests knowledge begins or originates from society or culture and is modified or reordered based on continued engagement within dimensions of social interaction. Because popular culture serves as a socially pervasive and powerful presence in the lives of AHE learners, it becomes important to assess the sort of identifications made when connecting meaning to their own lives. Assumptions critical to understanding learning occurring through social interactions are 1) individuals often construct their own knowledge about the world, 2) the development of cognitions and knowledge cannot be separated from the context in which they exist, 3) learning occurring in context can lead to new growth/new insights, and lastly, 4) the symbols and exchange of communication through language play a role in the evolution of the mind (Woolfolk 3). To understand how AHE learners use popular culture as an informal pedagogical resource, the scope of examination is focused on the individual and the popular culture he/she accesses within the context of his/her own life outside of the educational institution.

While popular culture in an increasingly globalized, technological and interconnected world is virtually inescapable for AHE learners, identifying, defining and mapping functions of it outside of the classroom can be both attractive and also elusive. The ways students make meaning from popular culture is receiving increasingly more attention in AHE research as the pervasiveness of popular culture becomes more powerful. Messages or artifacts within popular culture can be seen as negotiations between preservation of current dominant practices/ideals and resistance, or transformations into new cultural practices/values (Stuart Hall 59). Ernest Morrell’s work encourages learners to think about popular culture as the “struggles between

the subordinate and dominant groups” (78). Collectively, researchers agree on contentiousness inherent in popular culture. Additionally, the meaning derived from popular culture by AHE learners about their own culture and about other cultural groups can be multifaceted (Guy 16). Scholars in the field of AHE focus on the pedagogical power of popular culture, underscoring its function as a “site of education beyond formal schooling” (Sandlin, O’Malley and Burdick 1). Henry Giroux’s work emphasizes increasing awareness about “student experiences and their relationship to popular culture” rather than defaulting to dismissive attitudes about mere entertainment value (66). Although it appears quite obvious that learners would have some sort of interaction with popular culture prior to a trip abroad, a more critical perspective could be more helpful to understand individual student experiences within a recent, culturally relevant frame. Exploring learners’ individual relationship with popular culture can provide educators and practitioners with specific resources, which can then be targeted as a point of critical inquiry. An interdisciplinary foundation composed of cultural theorists, feminists, critical media scholars, psychologists, sociologists, educational researchers and humanists unanimously places a high value on the teaching mechanisms inherent in the Internet, movies and television. Collectively, these outlets teach individuals about the world and its cultures (Sandlin, Wright and Clark 5; Guy 17).

Most recently propagated by the work of cultural theorist Henry Giroux, the term public pedagogy addresses Carmen Luke’s research, which “. . . refers to various forms, processes, and sites of education and learning that occur beyond the realm of formal educational institutions—including popular culture (i.e., movies, television, the Internet, magazines, shopping malls” (Sandlin, Wright and Clark 4). For example, Talmadge Guy’s central argument explains how learning that occurs outside of formal institutions teaches viewers what it means to be ‘white,’ ‘black,’ ‘straight,’ ‘gay,’ ‘middle-class,’ ‘poor,’ ‘wealthy,’ ‘Christian,’ ‘Muslim,’ ‘American’ and so on” and that it is mass mediated through music, television, cinema, radio and advertising (18). Oprah and Gayle’s *Big Yosemite Camping Adventure* illustrated this idea in a two-part episode of the *Oprah Winfrey Show* that aired in late October of 2010. This episode set out to “change perceptions about camping for African-Americans” (“Oprah and Gayle”). The trip was reportedly in response to Park Ranger Shelton Johnson’s letter to Oprah where he explained that only 1% of the 280 million tourists who visit the national parks each year are African-American. Oprah shared her desire to alter the thinking “about the kind of people who go camping,” extending Guy’s position about how race and class-based identities are formed and how this serves to limit perceptions about cultural groups (“Oprah and Gayle”). Both agents within popular culture, like Oprah and Gayle, and scholars (e.g., Talmadge Guy and Henry Giroux) concerned with the problematizing of popular culture recognize innate social construction within and throughout popular culture.

Patricia Duff’s research indicates that limited knowledge about a particular destination or culture can encourage a student to access multiple formal and informal learning resources, including popular culture, when forming opinions and perceptions (482). For example, Stuart Hall discusses the ways in which learners connect popular television networks like *The History Channel* to concepts and ideas from their coursework (297). Scholars further note that popular culture serves as a critical resource of informal learning or learning occurring “outside the curricula offered by formal and non-formal learning activities, self-directed . . . [which] can happen anywhere, and can occur at any point from birth to old age” (Schugurensky 2). Encountering a new culture in a foreign or international destination via study-abroad is a major academic and life event for most AHE learners (Dolby 151). When a student makes a decision to participate in international study abroad, any number of resources can be considered in offering new insight, learning and understanding about the destination and culture of interest (Simon and Ainsworth 2). To investigate how AHE learners use popular culture when forming perceptions and ideas about international education or study abroad, individuals were recruited from two faculty-led study abroad courses set to depart in the spring and summer semesters of 2012.

The two faculty-led study abroad courses available for recruitment were an Italian Language and Culture course (IL&C), taking place in Italy, and an International Marketing and Business Course (IM&B),

taking place in one of seven different destinations (Chile, Argentina, United Arab Emirates, Finland, New Zealand, Australia and Singapore). Because informal lessons from popular culture are inherently (AHE) learner centered, intimate and highly individualized (Giroux 68), learners are likely to consume pieces of popular culture that connect to their immediate life circumstances. Further, the Internet, television and movies actively and passively “teach us about race, class, gender and other forms of socially significant difference” (Guy 16).

In the selection of participants from faculty-led study abroad programs, criteria were 1) adult or higher education learner status and 2) a commitment to departure classified as the explicit decision to participate in the study abroad program and having enrolled in the course. This offered the researcher opportunity to identify specific sources of popular culture and how they contributed to cultural understandings or perceptions of their destination of interest. A total number of 15 participants (n=15) were recruited for this study, eight females and seven males. Participants ranged from 19-54 years of age with a mean age of 26. Students were from a variety of majors including business, international business, marketing, English literature, British literature, political science, history, educational psychology and engineering. Participants self-identified their ethnic backgrounds and listed Caucasian, Japanese-Caucasian, Native-American and Hispanic.

Three data collection techniques were employed to assess how AHE learners use popular culture as an informal pedagogical resource: focus group interviews (Appendix A), individual reflection within the group interview, and follow-up interviews were used to assess how AHE learners connected to various mediums of popular culture in forming perceptions about the culture they would be immersed in and their destination of interest. Focus groups of six-to-eight interviewees and telephone interviews were utilized with “generally open-ended questions . . . few in number and intended to elicit views and opinions from the participants” (Creswell 181). The focus group interviews were conducted for each embedded case with nine participants in the IL&C course and six participants in the IM&B course. Note cards offered private space to reflect on specific questions about the culture and destination in addition to demographic information. Follow up telephone interviews (Appendix B) aimed to extend understanding of particular participant answers from the focus group interview and private reflections. All interviews and private reflections were recorded and transcribed for analysis.

AHE learners across both cases took part in the construction/modification of their own identity and the identity of others when they connected to multiple interfaces of popular culture. As social constructions of identity and difference are constantly changing, it becomes important to gauge how AHE learners utilize popular culture to make meaning about their world and its cultures in the 21st century dynamic. To account for these nuances, the interview protocols were developed with a loose structure so that AHE learners could discuss meaningful places and spaces of popular culture that added to their understanding of the culture and values they would soon be encountering. John Creswell’s process for analyzing qualitative research was used to organize, prepare, read, make sense and interpret the data within a coding process that uses actual participant responses to “organize the material” into categories and common themes to transform data into findings (Creswell 186). Emerging codes were identified from participant responses and were compared to other responses both within and across the embedded cases.

CASE ONE: ITALIAN LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

To begin discussions about how popular culture influenced thinking about a particular culture or destination, participants were asked to reflect privately on “What is the first thing that comes to mind when thinking about your study abroad course and media?” One participant noted “Travel Channel, Discovery Channel, History Channel, Food Network,” while another offered “*Letters to Juliet* (the movie).” Other students mentioned specific identifications to the destination or cultural artifacts like “Discovery Channel and any

food network show taking place in or around Italy, specifically Rome” and “*Jersey Shore* and the Statue of David.” For some participants, “media” translated to popular television and/or film specifically, and for others, it translated to web sources and other media outlets available via the Internet. However, two participants within this case shared a resistance to popular culture outlets; for example, one shared: “I do not watch TV, but media for me is Google and of course Facebook and all of the social media components . . . especially blogs and forums. I feel like you learn a lot from personal testimonies where people don’t get paid, rather than TV shows pushing some agenda.” Responses varied in degrees of trust and distrust of popular culture and media. Sociocultural theory explains learning happens when individuals interact in the context and society of lived experience. Thus, sociocultural theory may serve an explanatory value in the sense that students were possibly more receptive to learning and knowledge co-constructed in personalized Internet social networking than in more overt mediums like popular film and television. Most importantly, there seemed to be a distinction between the credibility of Internet testimony and those prevalent on popular television networks.

Although some participants had prior exposure and knowledge about Italy, their responses highlighted a choice to learn new things about their personal interests like “Italian culinary traditions” and “Shakespeare romanticism.” Other learners more generally shared: “Honestly, I don’t even know what initially made Italy stand out over study abroad options, it’s just . . . especially in the last few years . . . with so much about Italy in movies, television and a lot of other stuff, it’s always fresh on my mind.” Another stated: “Well, I’m not going to lie . . . I’m a big fan of *Jerzday* (sic) so really when I found out about this trip, I found myself paying way more attention to the interactions between the cast and Italian people.” Participant responses place importance on popular culture as a “go-to” resource when thinking about their study abroad destination and forming perceptions about Italian people and their cultural interactions with Americans. Adult and higher education learners within the embedded case did not report especially critical views about ways that media sources like Google, television networks, popular movies and reality television tacitly construct and encourage positive perceptions and romanticized ideals.

Many connections made between Italy and popular culture were highly personalized and revealed identifications with characters and even romantic ideals. For example, one learner reported on the “magical and historical context of Italy” and how it contributed to some of the “everlasting . . . living literature and the period of re-birth” still present in many popular stories. Rather than feeling compelled to live the lives of these characters, this particular person felt a relationship to the author and was inspired to write similar stories or “to do something like that.” Similarly another participant shared her passion for creative writing and expressed motivations to “Write main characters that have a real sense of themselves, and they try do what’s right for them no matter what other people say . . . it is also about identity, and getting to be in the context of where those identities were formed . . . I feel like Italy could really shape my identity in the same way, plus I would like to see like Juliet’s house and all that stuff.” Both examples paint a captivating picture of the way characters in television, movies and literature speak to both personal interests and personal identity. Participants alluded to how stories and characters, at least in part, provided a preview into what Italian living and culture would be like. Additionally, both participants suggested that context was important to character development and internalized the idea their identity, too, could be enriched abroad.

Other participants mentioned more general character and identity associations about the kinds of experiences they connected with from popular shows on the Travel and Cooking Channel. “*No Reservations with Anthony Bourdain*” portrays “a pioneer” who “has no fear.” One learner suggested “that is something I wish I had and hopefully something I can work on (abroad).” Another participant similarly stated a “no fear” mentality was a powerful connection for her as well. She noted, “watching Rachel Ray, . . . she just seems so confident and has so much fun with it when she travels.” This participant continued, “that is something that has always made me want to learn more, to have that confidence. . . .” Participants valued courage, confidence,

risk-taking and strength cultivated in experiences abroad to Italy, isolating these as experiences they wanted to have for themselves. Moreover, AHE learners alluded to an inherent fear that exists when interacting with people from a different culture in an international setting. While learners were quick to identify the kinds of experiences they wanted to have, using popular culture as an illustrative resource, it is not clear whether or not fear was also cultivated from media messages. Ultimately, learners relied on popular culture to alleviate fears and uncertainties and form ideas about the world and its cultures. So, it could be suggested that popular culture contributed, in part, to those initial fears and uncertainties.

CASE TWO: INTERNATIONAL MEDIA & BUSINESS

For participants in embedded case two, media translated to television shows, television networks, online sources and magazines. When talking more fully about study abroad and popular culture, one participant suggested watching shows on the Travel Channel “gives me a better idea of how I think my experience abroad will be like.” Participants enrolled in the IM&B course placed importance on cultural understandings as a core component of modern-day business practice. Learners suggested that popular culture prepared them for what cross-cultural business would be like in specific destinations. Shows like *House Hunters International*, *Samantha Who?*, and *NatGeo Explorer* were some of the specific places learners identified how “Chileans network” or “outsiders engage local Australians.”

Interestingly, participants suggested because international experiences are becoming an essential component of business, “more and more people are realizing that it’s possible to travel without being rich.” Participants in embedded case two were eager to offer input and discuss popular culture’s role in shaping their perceptions about other cultures, affordability of studying in that country, as well as what the destination in general could offer. Participants identified connections to informal learning resources because they served to paint a picture or illustrated something that was of personal interest. Similar to embedded case one, interest played an important prerequisite function, indicating the more interest one has in a particular program/movie/television show, the more likely they would be to internalize information from that program/movie/television show. Additionally, this finding suggested that pictures and visual media become important for all of the participants who have limited knowledge or experience of any given culture and destination.

In following up on these responses, participants revealed that particular television shows influenced how they perceived or pictured other countries and cultures. More specifically, informal learning via television shaped the kind of experience that each of those students wanted to have for themselves. For instance, one participant explained how impactful it was to see television programs with “a normal person, not some travel guru, going to a foreign country or a foreign city and not really going to the touristy places, but going to the places that all the Australian locals go to. She encourages other people to venture off the path . . . so they can also continue that on, and share with other people who may not know about it.” This participant also introduced the idea of “paying it forward,” by sharing new knowledge gained about less popularized destinations and cultures with others. Emphasis here can be placed on uncovering and discovering new places and sharing personal stories as an educational experience. Her idea of a “normal” person having these experiences was particularly noteworthy. She suggested that the “Samantha Who” character was someone with whom she could relate to personally, rather than an expert or aficionado who may have professional experience with travel. Identifications with themes and characters in foreign destinations also occurred when the individual shared similar thinking and cognitive process. For example, American students identified with the American characters and revealed feeling like the “outsider.” Television networks, blogs, Facebook pictures, narratives and movies supported identifications by creating an “outside looking in” dynamic told from the experiences of someone who has limited knowledge about the place of interest.

Participants touched on their desires to be a source of knowledge on new cultures and people of the world. Respondents internalized a need to play an ambassadorial role and express motivation to model some of the same themes or plot lines from the messages they consumed. Through popular culture, learners identified and mirrored the plot and characters of individuals they connected to and use these individuals to map out the kind of experiences that they wanted to have. Emphasis on discovering “something new . . . something not everyone would have the chance or opportunity to do” was especially important.

Many of the participant responses throughout the study emphasized how popular culture and media, in various forms, shaped students’ perceptions of other cultures and can shape the kind of experiences sought after by AHE learners. While these findings can appear fairly obvious or can be taken for granted, it remains important to underscore that popular culture is a powerful pedagogical resource utilized by students. Scholars concerned with study abroad participation have yet to direct much attention to how popular culture functions in shaping perceptions in the most critical time when students have made the commitment to study abroad (Jackson 16). Students may have learned a great deal about how interactions occur with foreigners and locals in such places as Italy, the United Arab Emirates, Chile, Argentina, Finland and Australia, but this knowledge is specific to the programming, message and independent motives of the creators and directors of that media. For several networks, including the Travel Channel, Cooking Channel and Food Network, the goal is to encourage tourism and market international travel as a consumer commodity. The veracity of content and reality of how these experiences compare to study abroad or international learning for AHE learners is fairly unexplored. However, given that an AHE learner studying abroad is not a popular narrative across mainstream media, students supplemented knowledge from sources they perceive to be comparable in nature. This is especially important to consider from a scholarly and cultural perspective.

Data from this study demonstrated popular culture plays a powerful and recursive role in forming new ideas and understanding about cultures of the world. Cultural and media scholars like Henry Giroux suggest popular culture has the strength and ability to teach and educate its audiences (58). Giroux identified popular culture as a site of public pedagogy or place of powerful learning outside of a classroom, with drastic implications for its viewers. As stated earlier, much of the research concerned with the relationship between popular culture and study abroad places importance on barriers to participation, underscoring an exclusionary perspective for minority students. Marilyn Jackson’s research further identifies that associations between media and its viewers are made possible to affluent Caucasian females but do not offer minority students and males the same chances to form identifications with messages and narratives within the media (17). Jackson’s work echoes the research in the present article in that popular culture messages have power in shaping cultural understandings about others, in addition to shaping one’s own cultural understanding of self.

Individuals available for participation in this study mirrored the plot and characters reflected in the media and popular culture they consumed. Individuals have the ability to identify markers of social status, encouraging associations with characters’ products, dilemmas, houses, celebrations, experiences and overall life situations in order to model and replicate these in terms of their own lives. Nearly ten years ago now, the conversations surrounding the intersection between popular culture and study abroad were characterized by deficits and privilege. Pat Burr’s research revealed minority students felt like study abroad and international education was not something applicable to their lives or identities (36). However, AHE learners are now recognizing, both through formal and informal learning spaces like popular culture, the growing importance of international experiences in an increasingly global and competitive business market.

Students reported an awareness of the changing nature of why a student engages in international education and identified places in popular culture that have contributed to these changes in thinking. This is especially important when thinking about the national participation rates for AHE learners across the US. Practitioners and educators must recognize the importance of showcasing these messages within the

classroom to encourage direct engagement and breakdown preconceptions, should they exist. These messages then become popular culturally relevant curricula and are offered a certain level of credibility as course material, holding potential to be even more impactful for AHE learners. Further, instructors across AHE may find practical use in critically analyzing popular culture messages in the classroom even if the major aim and focus is not study abroad. Findings from this study lend importance to the fundamental relationship between intercultural perceptions and popular culture's influence. Instructors at the undergraduate level could find value in isolated sources of popular culture, identified by participants in this study, which also resonate with modern-day AHE learners in their classes.

Adult higher education learners reported a "demystified" understanding about what interactions across two different cultures would be like in a foreign locale. Popular culture offers a window into the other countries around the world, but because of the volume of messages accessed, learners end up paying particular attention to the plots, characters and themes that are most directly related to their own personal interests. Participants indicated that popular culture was commonly used as a resource when seeking information about their personal interests in other cultures' cooking, baking, wine, travel and people. The reciprocal nature the role of interest plays can be both satisfied by and originate from popular culture sources. Scholars and educators, including practitioners and cultural theorists, encouraging global and cross cultural understandings must remain conscious and aware of how personal interests and incidental learning serve as a baseline or foundation of knowledge about other cultural groups. In bell hooks' research, a similar contention further illustrates that popular culture has the ability not just to shape audience members' cognitions but also has the potential to stay with that individual over a long period of time (3). Long held interests in particular hobbies, stories, subject matter or pastimes fuel motivation to live and be a part of those experiences in the context that they authentically happen. Conversely, reality television and commercially dramatized interpretations seeking to exploit and reify cultural stereotypes and stigmas may also need to be approached and accounted for by faculty and international education staff when a student is thinking about study abroad.

For participants in embedded case two, popular shows, channels, social media, networks and movies were often accessed to get a sense of a specific cultural practice and travel in general. Participants noted seeing an "average/normal" person immersed in a lesser-known foreign locale as encouraging. Connections were made readily because the individual was coming from a similar place of limited understanding about the country and its people. Adult higher education learners expressed a desire to foster similar experiences and emulate the very same goal and themes depicted in the popular culture they consumed. As such, learners expressed motivations to be ambassadors of cultural understanding for places and people across the world that are less known to the general public and are not commonly depicted in popular culture.

Popular culture undoubtedly plays a powerful and pervasive role in the lives of 21st century learners. The seamless way story, characters, themes and plot interweave within and throughout AHE learners' cognitive processes are extremely complex. To advance this and previous research at the intersection of popular culture and international learning, it becomes important to map out the current dominant practices/ideals across time in order to gauge where preservation and transformation has occurred (Stuart Hall 59). International learning or study abroad has yet to be the norm for each AHE learners' undergraduate experience, but it is clear that students across AHE in this study saw the importance and necessity of establishing global and cultural understandings. The consumption of popular culture and media will exponentially continue to increase, and as such, understanding about how it shapes AHE learners becomes not just important, but necessary.

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APPENDIX A

Focus Group Protocol for Faculty-led Study Abroad Participants

Legend: SN—Question gauging social network, as public pedagogy, influences

PC—Question gauging popular culture, as public pedagogy, influences

1. **Nominal Data:** "Can we briefly go around the group and identify age, what year of study, academic interest (for example I am 25, I am a sophomore, I'm an education major)." *To be completed on the Note Card*
- (SN/PC) 2. **Let's talk about the beginning of your interest in study abroad?:** "Can you remember the first time that studying abroad became of interest to you? When was the first time you thought about being in a study abroad? End quote?"
- (SN) 3. **Who in your lives has provided support to your upcoming trip abroad to DESTINATION X (destination to be inserted, depending on specific faculty-led program)?:** "What do you know about the place you are going? What do you not know, or want to know? Where do you feel this information comes from?"
- (SN) 4. **Can you tell me about any individual in your life (parent, teacher, advisor, friends, classmates, peers) that may have influenced you in making the decision to participate in a study abroad?:** "What sort of messages were conveyed about study abroad? (what sorts of things do they talk about in terms of what study abroad would do for you as an individual)"
- (SN) 5. **What do your family and friends say about you upcoming study abroad trip?:** "Do you feel like you are encouraged to go abroad by your family and friends? Do you feel discouraged by your family and friends to go abroad? How does this encouragement or discouragement get communicated? Have you shared your upcoming trip 'news' with all of your friends and family?"
- (SN/PC) 6. **Are there still things you feel like you want to know about where you are going? Or uncertainty that exists?:** "Where would you seek out this information? What kind of information is it?"
- (SN) 7. **What sort of messages do you see conveyed from individuals in your life (parent, teacher, advisor, faculty or friends) about their own study abroad experiences?:** "What sorts of artifacts or mementos have they used to talk about their experience (could be pictures, souvenirs, personal stories or narratives)? Do you think that these showed or illustrated what it means to study abroad for you?"
- (PC) 8. **Can you think of a movie/tv show/book/radio show/pod cast/musical, or song that comes to mind when I say DESTINATION X?:** "Is there a particular show, channel, movie that may have reminded you of destination X? Is there any particular movie/tv show/book/radio show/pod cast/musical, or song that made you more interested in destination X? Can you think of

a story (movie/tv show/book/radio show/pod cast/musical, or song) that served to inspire your own interest to study abroad?”

- (PC) 9. *If you asked you to think of a recent example of something that you saw on TV that influenced what you thought about DESTINATION X what would it be?* “Do you think that there characters in Pop culture that have influenced how you perceive the people of culture of DESTINATION X?”
- (SN/PC) 10. *What is the first word that comes to mind when I mention DESTINATION X?* “What do you feel that this word is informed by or where does this word come from?”
- (PC) 11. *Is there any particular informative channel on television that offers you insight into DESTINATION X?*
- (PC) 12. *Is there any particular movie that offers you insight into DESTINATION X?*

APPENDIX B

Follow-up Interview Protocol for Faculty-led Study Abroad Participants

1. Can you elaborate more on the individuals who encouraged study abroad experiences? What made these messages meaningful?
2. Can you elaborate more on a movie/tv show/book/radio show/pod cast/musical, or song that gave you insight about study abroad or destination X?
3. Can you give more detail on _____?
4. Can you tell me what you meant by _____?
5. Since we last spoke, is there anything else about your influences and motivations to study abroad that you thought of that you'd like to talk with me about

AUTHOR BIO:

Shelbee R. Nguyen is an Assistant Professor of Education at Kennesaw State University in the Department of First-Year and Transition Studies. She has taught in six different international locales, including two years spent in Dubai exploring intercultural and international experiential education. Central to her core research is academic and social adjustment within multicultural contexts. Her particular research interests place importance on sociocultural influences to the learning environment, study abroad participation and the practice of adult learning theory. Recently her research has underscored critical reflection and transformational learning for Veteran and Hispanic learners transitioning into the higher education environment.

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Reflection: The Twenty-Line Trap? Shakespeare Enacted by Young Women

Shannon Reed

University of Pittsburgh
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA
sreed151@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Professional actors assemble a toolkit of monologues with an obligatory “Shakespearean monologue” of around 20 lines. But female actors are at a disadvantage, with less than 150 women in a repertoire of over 1100 characters in Shakespeare’s 37 or more plays. Young female¹ actors are even more at a loss, if the powerful and complex older female roles are removed, leaving only a few dozen appropriate speeches. What effect does this limited canon have on such actors? Here, I reflect upon my own participant observer experience as a young woman actor, who received the bulk of my early training as a student in a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Theatre: Acting and Directing program at an American university in the 1990’s. I also present research, accomplished through interviews with two other women who also played Shakespeare’s young female characters, in which they reflect on their casting, rehearsal and production experiences in the roles, as well as how their subsequent choices of theatrical work were influenced by such formative experiences. Their words point to the dual, contradictory nature of this limited canon, proving both its limitations and opportunities. Findings explore what these experiences suggest for pedagogical changes in teaching Shakespeare.

Keywords: Theater, Shakespeare, Feminism, Academic Theatre Training, Girls, Girl Actors, British Theatre, American Theatre, Renaissance Theatre, Pedagogy

[1] Here, I define “young female” as aged 18–22, the most common age of college students in America. A few of Shakespeare’s “girl” roles are generally agreed to be younger in age (e.g. Juliet). In keeping with academic theatrical practice of the early to mid-1990’s, I have chosen to use the words “female” and “women” interchangeably, although we understand them to mean different concepts today.

Professional actors put together a toolkit of monologues they can perform at auditions, with often at least one obligatory Shakespearean monologue. There's no way around Shakespeare for most professional actors: there are over 65 festivals dedicated to his work in the United States and his plays are performed far more frequently in college theatre, summer stock, community theatre and regional theatre than any other playwright. For good reason, of course; Shakespeare's work is widely agreed to be beautifully written and dramatically compelling, fun for audiences and fulfilling for actors and directors.

Or, to be more precise, the plays are fulfilling for *male* actors, who are given a multitude of casting opportunities in any Shakespearean play. Female actors are at a disadvantage, with fewer than 150 women in Shakespeare's repertoire of over 1,100 characters, unless they choose (or are chosen) to perform a male role. For young female actors, the choices are further limited, with the powerful and complex older female roles removed, leaving only a few dozen appropriate speeches that are long enough, at twenty lines or so, to serve as an audition monologue.

I call this the *twenty-line trap*, a problem often faced by young female actors just as they begin their professional training. What effect does this trap have on them? What effect did it have on me as a young female actor? Here, I reflect on my own experience as well as that of Willow and Eileen², both women, like me, in their 40's, who shared through ethnographic interviews their thoughts about their struggles with the twenty-line trap. They reflected back on their experiences twenty years ago when in academic acting training programs.

In approaching this work, I kept in mind the responsibility feminist scholar Lynn Walter assigns to such research. Although I do not identify as a feminist anthropologist, I am in sympathy with how the field-specific point she makes here applies to broader scholarship:

As a field of study, feminist anthropology should ask questions about how differences in power and knowledge have been constructed over time as gender differences, how people recreate and resist these gender differences in everyday life, and how they are occasionally able to change them. (272)

Using Walter's view allows for the validity of localized experiences, such as my own, Eileen and Willow's, as a lens for questioning the construction of gender differences. Small, considered fragments of our lives cannot constitute a definitive statement about the role Shakespearean drama ought to play in theatre that seeks to be inclusive to young women. Instead, I hope these shared experiences reveal the possibilities of small-scale change that may prove effective in eventually creating a larger-scale adaptation to new norms all the while keeping in mind that the individual experiences recounted here cannot represent the whole of female actors' experience. As Walter points out, "No anthropologist has enough experience...to [fully] represent others" (247).

MY EXPERIENCE

As a white, middle-class, young woman residing in the suburbs of a small city in Pennsylvania in the 1990's, I had access to after-school activities that spurred my love of acting. Getting cast was never an issue for me: I always got a plum part in the drama club productions (which were chosen with the student participants in mind) or accepted that I was not suited for musical productions (I cannot sing!). Until my college experience introduced me to the fierce competition for parts among the young women in the theatre department of my small Midwestern university, I never sensed that being female would pose challenges to me in my acting career. Suddenly, acting was not about portraying a role I was interested in or felt drawn to.

[2] Names provided are pseudonyms.

Instead, acting was a contest in which a large number of young actors competed for a small number of main-stage parts. Those uncast worked on crews or did not participate in the productions.

It was in this atmosphere that I became aware of the problem of the twenty-line trap. It began when I had to choose a Shakespearean monologue. At 20 years old, my choices were limited; the powerful and complex older women's roles—Gertrude, Lady MacBeth—might have posed an enticing acting challenge but would do me good in competing for the ingénue roles for which I would most likely audition. I was left with only a few dozen speeches from the girl roles. This was a secret canon of twenty-line monologues, known to every young female actor, of which Juliet's speech in Act 2, Scene 5 of *Romeo and Juliet*, begins, "The clock struck nine when I did send the nurse..." Whether we liked it or not, it seemed that young female actors were trapped into a very limited selection and had to hope we suited something from it.

Our training program at that time slotted us into a class in Shakespearean acting during our junior year. I was assigned a scene from *As You Like It*, playing Rosalind, as well as Lady Anne's monologue from *Richard III*. Of course, I was thrilled to attempt such challenging roles and barely noticed as my female colleagues, generally physically smaller and prettier than me, struggled through their own assignments. Looking back now, I can see that, in keeping with Walter's view that people may "ask about gendered symbolic and material structures without necessarily asking how such structures are constructed and contested," at the time I was concerned more with the roles I had been assigned than with asking why so few roles were available to so many young women (275).

Meanwhile, my classmates were struggling to apply the craft of acting techniques they'd learned to the small roles available to them. It turned out that such tasks as constructing a character biography were much easier to do with larger, more complex roles than we had been assigned. "Yes, but what does she *want*?" one classmate complained about Miranda from *The Tempest*. Another, assigned to play Ophelia in a scene, joked that she barely had anything to memorize, so long as she could "run around and look scared." They were beginning to realize what actor Fiona Shaw has pointed out about some of Shakespeare's female characters: "I'm dying to put up a fight but look at the text – it ain't there!"³

It was not until we had to choose our own monologue to work on that I fell into the trap. We were encouraged to be conservative in our choosing and find a role that we might conceivably be cast in after college. Our male classmates had dozens of young male roles to choose from; meanwhile, we young women tried to find some appropriate monologue that was not already taken by a classmate. Some gave up and simply worked on one of the standards.

I did not really understand what was being asked of me, it seemed, since I asked if I could work on a young man's monologue, perhaps one of Prince Hal's from either of the *Henry IV*s. Much like Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, I wanted to play all the roles. Also like Bottom, I was firmly told whom I must play—and it was not Prince Hal. Finally, I coaxed the professor to let me attempt the gender-less Prologue from *Henry V*, which would go on to serve as my Shakespearean audition piece for the few years until I left acting for playwriting, where I was (finally) able to play all the parts.

In the years since, I have occasionally thought about the twenty-line trap. Although I was principally angry with my professor at the time, I see now that the trap is contained within Shakespeare's plays themselves, with their staggering reliance on male characters over female. The structure that I might have contested was not only that of my college's theatre department but also that of the Shakespearean canon itself. The plays are inherently male, deliberately outside of the world of young women. In *Clamorous Voices*, Carol Rutter quotes the actor Juliet Stevenson who said, "If you are playing one of Shakespeare's women, you are by definition in a supporting role. You appear in relationship to the man—as wife, daughter, mother, lover" (xxiv).

³ See Aston, Elaine, 94. Shaw was speaking specifically about Kate from *The Taming of the Shrew*.

Given the prohibition against female actors taking the stage during his lifetime, as well as the all-male composition of his troupe, Shakespeare chose to create many more male roles than female. The women characters of Shakespeare, young and old, were played by men, so it is not surprising that the female roles were far fewer in proportion and often smaller in speech length and time on stage. All of the young female roles I was allowed to consider had been played by young men (called “boy actors”) in Shakespeare’s troupe.

Today, we may find it curious, as Carol Rutter notes, “to think that as a modern actress my opportunities in Shakespearean repertoire have been determined by the limitations or excellences of two or three generations of Elizabethan boy players” (xxiv). While Shakespeare could only work within his era, we are not of that time. The theatre community—particularly the academic theatre community—might question its general lack of awareness about or action to fix the inherent issues for young women arising from the seemingly perpetual performance of Shakespeare, performances that often take place without the investigation of insightful ways to combat gender-determined casting.⁴

I do not want to argue against the perennial performances of Shakespeare’s plays but instead to closely examine the experiences of two other female actors to ponder the impact of their experiences; to understand what each woman learned about theatre and Shakespeare, and, as Lynn Walter suggests, to ask questions about the possible limitations of both; and to anticipate ways to change the trap I have identified.

EILEEN’S EXPERIENCE

Eileen holds a Bachelor of Arts from a large University in the Southern United States in English and Theatre, a Master of Arts in Teaching from the same school in Theatre, and a PhD in Educational Theatre from a large Mid-Atlantic university. We spoke in 2014 specifically about her time as an undergrad 20 years before, where she first faced the twenty-line trap in preparing for an audition. She said, “It was hard to find a Shakespearean monologue that was age appropriate. [I turned to] Juliet almost as a default setting.”⁵ But when the department decided to stage *Romeo & Juliet*, Eileen realized she would have to compete with 100 other young women for three roles. She decided to present the Jailer’s Daughter’s monologue from *Two Noble Kinsmen* at her audition because she was worried that “the director might feel there was a ‘right’ way to play Juliet et al. but if I busted out something he didn’t know I’d have a better shot.” The role went to someone else, and she says she was not surprised, since she knew subconsciously that the role was preconceived for someone of a different type. The woman who was cast was “very petite,” she says, “and I’m very tall.” Because there were so many talented and skilled young women to choose from, the director could insist on a particular physical type. Eileen had the instinct to change something about the audition process but did not consider trying to resist or adapt the structure and tradition that informed it.

Her university presented a Shakespearean play every year, Eileen noted. Women in the department grumbled about how few female roles there were in these plays, but there “was also a sense of ‘this is the way it is,’” Eileen said. These are the “‘important’ plays so in order to get a proper theatre education these are the ones we have to study or perform or so on.” It meant that young men in the undergraduate acting program often were cast more often than women in the MFA program, but that was accepted as necessary because the classics had to be performed.

The department was what Walter refers to as an “oppressive structure” (273) that many wanted to challenge, but challenging the structure in order to create change was difficult. I asked Eileen if she had ever considered auditioning for a male role. She said,

[4] It is interesting to note that Elizabethan theatre, in allowing men or boys to play female roles, actually practiced less rigidity than many mainstream theatres today, which insist that women play female roles and men play male roles (and defines those gender roles rigidly).

[5] All quotations from Eileen and Willow are from personal interviews conducted by the author.

I definitely thought about it—and was fascinated by the women who played breeches roles. I remember having to learn a Hamlet monologue in English class in high school, essentially as a memorization exercise, really. And I felt a much stronger interest in Henry V than I remember feeling in most other Shakespearean roles. I had a much stronger desire to say those lines than anything Juliet utters.

But, in the end, her professors were not interested in cross-gender casting since there were many young men available to play the roles.

Looking back now, Eileen felt that was disappointing. She says, “I would have found it extremely empowering to have been encouraged to look at male roles. The message that [came through to me was] there are limited ways of being female but a multitude of ways to be male.” Further, she notes, “I think that enabling students to seek the words that call to them—like the visceral pull of Henry V [for me]—would yield far greater rewards in both artistry and academia than the ‘traditional’ way of doing things.”

Eileen was captivated by some of Shakespeare’s work and interested in exploring it, but the option of doing so was cut off by her department’s rigorous adherence to established gender roles, a structure that had been in place for many decades. She sought to be empowered and intellectually energized by the complexity of Shakespeare, but the way the department sought to teach Shakespeare did not allow her to be so, as she was forced to try to find a role within a structure quietly oppressive to young women. In fact, what she learned was that girls should not seek complexity but be satisfied to fulfill a type; that there are set limits on what females can be and do; and that the important work fell disproportionately to the men in her program. These lessons may have been tacit, but they were clear.

WILLOW’S EXPERIENCE

Willow earned a diploma in theatre arts and then an advanced certificate in dramatic art from a prestigious university in the United Kingdom. We spoke in 2014 specifically about her time at that school in the mid-1990’s where she played Titania from *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and Miranda from *The Tempest* in repertory during her first year. As in many British drama schools, students were allowed to specify what kind of role they would like to play in the final shows of their time at the school. These requests were made before the specific productions were announced, so, for example, while a student might specify wanting to play a male lead in a musical, he wouldn’t know what part he was assigned in which musical until some time later. Willow asked for the lead female role in the school’s next Shakespeare production. When it was announced, she learned that, as she said, “[*Troilus and Cressida*] was our final college production and as I’d asked for the [female] lead role in the Shakespeare, I got [Cressida].”

Although the part met the guidelines she had been allowed to specify, Willow explained that she was not happy. She had hoped for a large, exciting role such as Rosalind from *As You Like It* or a similarly more complex part. “Cressida is a bit of a sap,” she says. Worse, the director chose to cast other women from her department in roles that were traditionally male. Thus, playing the “female lead” actually turned to be a smaller, less rewarding part than many of the women onstage got to play. As Willow said, “The women playing the men were obviously women playing men, but . . . it didn’t really matter. [Cressida] is abused by pretty much everyone she encounters.” Although the director pursued a production that was untraditional in gender roles, the main female character remained written in a way that Willow found to be disempowering to play, the very opposite of the experience she wished to have before graduating. She should not have been surprised, she says now: “In fact, most of Shakespeare’s girls have that same pathetic, put upon . . . start off excited, end up abused crap.”

Asked to compare playing Cressida to Miranda, whom she had played the year before, Willow pointed

out that Miranda “. . . actually had a bit of kick to her . . . At least I don’t recall her wailing as much as Cressida.” Also, Willow was alternating playing Miranda with Titania from *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, which made it more “challenging.” “The ingénue was never for me,” she said, and playing Titania, a role often cast with an actress past girlhood, allowed her to see that there was more to Shakespeare than “playing boring little girls.” She wanted to do more than “Stand there. Look pretty. Wail a bit.”

While Eileen and I struggled with the oppressive structure of our respective academic environments and with Shakespeare’s plays, Willow’s difficulties were grounded solely in the latter. As David Mann notes in *Shakespeare’s Women*:

In Elizabethan plays, whilst female characters are often the fulcrum of the action in some moral crisis or transgression, it is almost always one which relates to male sexuality, and the actual focus of their contribution to the plot; hence, their frequent relationship to the principal male character as wife, mother, or daughter. (124)

For Willow, the lack of agency was harrowing, especially coming so fast upon the heels of feeling that she had some say in choosing her part.

Willow said that she wished she had realized as a girl that for her, comedy was much more rewarding to both play and watch. Her favorite Shakespearean roles, even then, were the comedic older women’s roles: the Nurse, Mistress Quickly, and so on. Even though she sensed this, she did not feel empowered to do more than ask for a role in a Shakespearean piece. She said it would not have occurred to her to request a specific play or demand to try out for a male part, having been given the plum role of the female lead.

Ultimately, as much as she loved Shakespeare, she feels that “in training [young women] to be actors there are probably better, more challenging roles to learn your craft with” than Shakespeare’s girls. But this insight arrived with maturity; in her student years, Willow did not attempt to question the structure around her, nor, as with Eileen and me, try to change it.

WHAT TO DO?

As young women, Eileen and Willow, like me, found part of the process of acting Shakespeare disempowering. Instead of having opportunities to carefully research and prepare a role that would push us to our limits in the intelligent choices, emotional depth and technical craft required for Shakespeare’s finest roles, we were all left with the understanding that our other, usually physical, qualities had more value for our professors and directors. We absorbed the message that acting Shakespeare was for other people—either those older than us, or male, or more of the physical type of the director’s preference. Simultaneously, we were told, both implicitly and directly, that Shakespeare’s genius made his work accessible and appropriate for all and that the proper course of actor training included the ability to study and enact his works.

With an emphasis on physical appearance and one’s ability to match expected norms, acting is admittedly often a disempowering profession. Our professors did their best to prepare us for a difficult career. As Willow noted, “Acting as a profession rarely has gender blind casting, so I’m guessing that in order to prepare young female actors [professors and directors] should let them know what they’re in for. Ingénue-ity.”

However, it’s also important to note that all three of us were intrigued by the possibilities of Shakespeare and wanted opportunities to explore his work through our chosen craft of acting. Outside of any private

[6] Even if one of our programs had presented a play with some of Shakespeare’s more intriguing girl roles, *As You Like It*, perhaps, or *Twelfth Night*, the experience of playing those roles would have gone to one or two women in the department, while the men of the department would still have had 15 roles or more to be sorted into.

effort we put forth, though, we were not able to do so: the classic twenty-line trap.⁶ Because agreeability is a characteristic that directors sought, we did not want to “resist” the gender differences we saw and therefore lose roles (Walter 273). We did not understand that resisting had the potential to change more than our own casting fates, that it might help to change the values of the structure we were enmeshed in.

What can be done now? Cutting Shakespeare out of the college theatre department repertoire seems as unlikely as it is foolish, removing the valuable educational and artistic opportunities presented by his work. But there must be some middle ground between a Shakespeare-less season and one in which 90 young women compete for one part. Eileen, Willow and I all have had different subsequent experiences that may serve as a guide for a way forward.

After earning a doctorate in educational theatre, Eileen taught high school theatre in South Carolina for several years. “I think the limitations I experienced as an actor did to some extent inform my choices later,” she said. It was important to her to find a way to incorporate Shakespeare into her curriculum in a way that welcomed all of her students because she felt his work was necessary: “It was rewarding . . . to work to understand the language choices and appreciate the poetry. Shakespeare is so much in our culture that any firsthand experience would enrich other encounters.” For her drama club’s production of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, for example, she found a way to have 70 students in the play, most with at least a few lines. She cast to talent and work ethic, not gender, finding it very easy to justify doing so in an educational institution. The play went so well that she continued a policy of gender-blind casting for the rest of her directing career. Her choice is to change the structure of how theatre works in order to accommodate the best actors for each part.

Willow continued as an actor and recently performed in an all-female *Julius Caesar* that played at Donmar Warehouse in London and at St. Ann’s Warehouse in Brooklyn. This opportunity to be part of largely female cast is rare; to be in an all-female production of Shakespeare seemed like improbable good fortune. She said that the experience was liberating but reminded her of the limitations of Shakespeare’s women and girls. As the director of the production said to her, “Men in Shakespeare talk about really big subjects, life, the universe, feelings . . . women talk about being women or being next to their man . . . Even the women playing men talk about the men they love.”⁷ This was apparent in rehearsal as some women had large parts with big themes to play and others played the wife. The relative skimpiness of Shakespeare’s female characters remains and cannot be changed; the casting and production of his plays, however, can be.

Willow noted that at least in England the show, which was heavily covered in the media, seems to have had an impact: “I think that production has spawned many others—so the generations [of girls] to come might get a better crack at the whip.” She added: “Wouldn’t it be amazing if young women *had* to play the young male roles in college training programs so as to be ready for the myriad of roles they might be offered upon leaving school and taking up acting as a profession? And what about the young men who want to take a crack at playing Miranda?” Willow’s frustration with the oppressive structure of Shakespeare’s plays is somewhat supplanted by an excitement over how this structure might change for women.

As for me, I played Shakespeare just one time after graduating with my BFA in Acting and Directing in 1992. I was cast as Lennox in 2003 in a production of *MacBeth* that ran at the Edinburgh Fringe. My casting was a matter of expediency, as I was really there to play female roles in the other, non-Shakespearean plays we were running in rep with the Scottish play. Without much directorial guidance, I chose to play Lennox as clearly female but in a man’s garb. No one, audience or cast, seemed to mind. The entire proceeding was so unremarkable that I found myself reflecting on my college experience all over again, wondering what possible harm there was in allowing women to audition for and play any of the roles in *MacBeth*. Theatre is entirely a

[7] This is Willow’s recounting of the director’s statement.

façade anyway, so why is ignoring gender a step further than ignoring all of the other realities in front of the audience for the sake of the production?

In Elaine Aston's 1999 text on feminist theatre, she seeks to help feminist theatre companies to create new productions of Shakespeare's plays with all female or mostly female casts. Aston was at work around the same time that I earned my BFA, and her text wasn't published until after I'd graduated. Thus, expecting my professors to be familiar with her ideas is too much of a demand on them. Still, I find myself wishing that my professors (and perhaps Eileen's and Willow's, too) had been able to know her work and follow her advice: "Don't be conditioned by dominant images" (94). She urges directors to allow their actors to follow their interests and enthusiasms in choosing parts to play, much as Eileen and I had longed for, and Willow had tried to achieve. Aston's ideas seem to be not just good feminist theatre practice but of pedagogical importance too. Teachers who allow their students to follow their interests are generally more helpful to those students.

More recently, I saw Willow's production of the all-female *Julius Caesar* in Brooklyn. The experience for me was similar to seeing an all-male production of *The Importance of Being Earnest* at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin a few years ago: a little strange at first, but in the end, the production rose and fell on the directorial and design choices as well as the skill—not gender—of the actors. Some of the women in the play were young enough to be cast in a role like the wimpy, wailing Cressida, so I found myself feeling happy that they had found the *Caesar* roles which offered them far more to do while learning the craft of acting. I began to think that the trap was not in the girl roles at all but in the idea that such roles were *all* that young women were allowed to play⁸. Few young men thrill at the thought of playing a thankless role like Horatio, Hamlet's best friend, but they know that Hamlet might be next. For young women, the trap is that after Ophelia, there's more of the same—at least until they age considerably. The actor Harriet Walters (who later played Brutus in Willow's *Julius Caesar*) told Carol Rutter: "There are plenty of middle-aged parts for men, but not for women. We can play Juliet in our teens and Margaret in our seventies, and all the great female roles in our thirties, but not much... in our own middle age" (xxv).

When Fiona Shaw played Richard II at the National Theatre in 1995, the *Guardian* called her casting choice "the sort of thing you might expect to see at the end of term in a boarding school" (Rutter 314). The critic is implying that casting a woman in a male role would only be done in a setting—such as an all-girl's boarding school—which did not allow for the casting of men. Leaving aside the merits of that particular production, as well as the condescension that is intended, this quote reminds me that it is often true that our schools can, if they choose, be more daring than our established theatres. Eileen's and my experiences (and to some extent, Willow's) do not show much in the way of such innovation by our departments, and sadly, not much has changed in how Shakespeare is produced on college stages since the mid-1990's. But the potential is still there.

Professors and directors who wish to produce a Shakespearean play in an academic theatre venue might consider several questions carefully, in sequence. First, why produce the particular play in question, aside from such sentiments as "We always do a Shakespearean play" or other tradition-based impetuous? Second, how can this play be liberated from the existent tradition of casting women in female parts and men in male parts in order to provide a richer, less biased educational opportunity for all involved? Third, how can the female parts in this play be best portrayed, including a careful consideration of what cuts are often made and whether they are the best choice for this production? Finally, how can the young women participating in this play be heard as needed and valued voices in the production regardless of the size of their role?

As Aston reminds readers who might wish to mount a feminist production of Shakespeare, "Aim to keep hold of a resistant voice" (100). And, of course, Walter reminds us that feminist anthropologists "are

[8] As the director Leigh Adcock-Starr points out, many presented versions of Shakespeare's plays, such as *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, have a long tradition of extensively cutting many of the female characters' lines, removing much of their dramatic arc.

occasionally able to change” the gender differences they see around them (273). Theatre departments and motivated directors within them have the opportunity to create such change.

I was reminded of this recently, when I served as a judge of the Pittsburgh Public Theatre’s annual Shakespeare Monologue and Scene Contest for middle and high school students. I sat in a dark theatre and watched student after student present, including several teenage boys who sped through the St. Crispin’s Day speech from *Henry V* as if the French Army was in the back of the auditorium. One of the last performers that I saw was a 6th grader. She could not have been five feet tall, and the plastic sword she had as a prop dragged on the ground as she mounted the steps. Then she faced us, and said, “I’m Katie,⁹ and I will be playing Henry V.” No one much responded; certainly there were no snorts or laughs of derision. The audience just waited to see what she might be able to do. The St. Crispin’s Day speech poured out of her tiny frame, loud and clear, with enough emotion that it was clear that she knew what she was saying. She was easily the best of the Henrys we saw. Katie’s performance gives me hope that she, and many other young women, will escape the twenty-line trap.

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[9] A pseudonym.

S. Reed

AUTHOR BIO:

Shannon Reed is finishing her MFA in Creative Writing: Fiction at the University of Pittsburgh, where she also teaches writing. She holds an M.A. in Educational Theatre from New York University and a BFA in Theatre: Acting and Directing from Otterbein University. As an essayist, Shannon has recently contributed to *Narratively*, *Vela Magazine* and *The Billfold*. Her fiction had recently been published in the *Mud Season Review*, *Kweli Journal* and *McSweeney's Internet Tendency*. Links to these and others of her works can be found at her website, www.shannonreed.org.

Social Media:

Twitter: @SReed151

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Applications in the Classroom: Hardly Elementary— Frontiers for Freshman Composition with Conan Doyle's *A Study in Scarlet*

Kate M. Donley
Norwich University
Northfield, Vermont, USA
kdonley@norwich.edu

ABSTRACT

Three recent television and film adaptations testify to the continuing popularity of Arthur Conan Doyle's consulting detective Sherlock Holmes. The fast-paced novella that introduces detective duo Holmes and Watson, *A Study in Scarlet* involves some astonishing elements, and not just in the plot. With just a little probing, collegiate readers may wonder whether Conan Doyle plagiarized his most famous character, invented forensic science, despised Mormons, and accidentally wrote a Western.

The novel was adapted as *A Study in Pink*, the first episode of the BBC's series *Sherlock* created by Steven Moffat and Mark Gatiss. Their vision of Holmes set in present-day London will thrill students and also leave them wondering what happened to the second half of the novel. Beyond the predictable (yet exciting) classroom discussion topic of adaptation, *A Study in Scarlet* presents a rich context for research and discussion by challenging students' modern-day notions of genre, historical truth, political correctness, and academic credibility. Although this novel is well-suited for high-level secondary or freshman composition classes, advanced students of English literature will find much to explore. This book analysis contains a summary of *A Study in Scarlet* with explication of its literary features and associated pedagogical issues for the freshman composition class. Topics for more advanced students are also identified. Instructors can make a free virtual casebook of ancillary readings with the Internet links provided.

Keywords: college composition, first-year writing, freshman composition, Arthur Conan Doyle, Sherlock Holmes, *A Study in Scarlet*, detective fiction, adaptation, pseudo-scholarship, fanfiction

I hate to admit it, but I selected a text for my college English Composition and Literature students based on a television show. In 2010 I was swept away by the series *Sherlock*, created for the BBC by Mark Gatiss and Steven Moffat. The premier episode *A Study in Pink* was especially thrilling, so I picked up Arthur Conan Doyle's original work *A Study in Scarlet* (1887) and was impressed by its characters and quirky narrative structure. Subsequent investigation into Conan Doyle's literary allusions and the subject matter of the novel raised deeper questions. I was hooked, an addict who had to bring this novel to the classroom. *A Study in Scarlet* sparked students' exploration of literature, history, and popular culture far beyond my expectations.

Though nearly all of my freshmen were familiar with the recent Sherlock Holmes films starring Robert Downey, Jr. (2009 and 2011), few had been exposed to Conan Doyle's short stories or novels. Conan Doyle's language and the setting of late Victorian-era London posed challenges for some students, but they were tantalized to witness the beginning of the Holmes and Watson "bromance," which is the first of many delightful features of *A Study in Scarlet*. Conan Doyle's narrator Dr. Watson "reminisce[s]" through his journal, describing his return from combat in Afghanistan as a battle-weary convalescent, unable to afford living quarters on a military pension. Luckily a friend introduces him to Holmes, who agrees to room with Watson. Watson tags along to a crime scene where Scotland Yard detectives have botched the investigation. Watson observes as Holmes gathers evidence and profiles the criminal based on his own prodigious mental database of crime history. In an eventful series of twists, Holmes catches the perpetrator Jefferson Hope and solves the murders of American victims Enoch Drebbler and Joseph Stangerson. At this precipice, the reader turns the page into Part II, which unexpectedly detours to a new setting with an omniscient point of view and a different protagonist.

Part II takes place in the 1850s American West, in an ominous landscape called the Alkalai Plain. A charming little girl named Lucy and her protector nearly perish from thirst but are rescued by a wagon train of Mormon pioneers led by Brigham Young. After time passes, the Mormon community turns sinister. Brigham Young himself presents an ultimatum: the now-lovely young woman will be forced into polygamous marriage, but her choice of suitors is limited to Drebbler or Stangerson, both of them repellent and already married. Instead, Lucy and her adoptive father flee with her cowboy fiancé Hope. Alas, Lucy is captured and marries Drebbler under duress, her father is shot, and Hope vows revenge when she dies of a broken heart. The novel then returns to 1880s London where Jefferson Hope describes his method in the crimes. The book's ninety fast-paced pages breezily introduce elements common to Conan Doyle's four novels and fifty-six stories that feature Sherlock Holmes: observation, deduction, technology, police incompetence, exotic cultures, deep friendship full of good humor, and the curious role of a consulting detective.

The novel's two-part structure is a dynamic element for students. Their experience of reading the novel is similar to experiencing a Seth Grahame-Smith mash-up¹— let us call it *Sherlock Holmes and Watson Meet Cowboys*. Students report flipping back and forth through Parts I and II, checking to see if they were reading the right book and wondering how the two parts are connected. The abrupt switch from detective fiction to a Western style illustrates the impact of literary elements such as genre, setting, point of view, character, theme, imagery, symbolism, and dramatic irony. Although contemporary readers classify detective fiction and Westerns as separate genres, Arthur Conan Doyle would not have done so. In the context of Victorian literature, Conan Doyle wrote in the genre of romance,² which encompassed what today's readers would separate into various categories of genre fiction: science fiction, adventure, thriller, horror, fantasy, detective fiction, and Westerns. Students may enjoy perusing Conan Doyle's extensive oeuvre, populated with pirates,

[1] Author of *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies: The Classic Regency Romance Now with Ultraviolent Zombie Mayhem!* Philadelphia: Quirk Books, 2009. Print.

[2] For a comprehensive discussion of genre and other issues in the novel, see Joseph McLaughlin's "Holmes and the Range: Frontiers Old and New in *A Study in Scarlet*." *Genre* 25.1 (1992): 113-135. Print.

a reanimated mummy, spirits, medieval knights, soldiers, anachronistic dinosaurs, and other adventurous elements.

Sherlock Holmes is a pivotal character in the development of detective fiction, but he has important literary antecedents. The second chapter of *A Study in Scarlet* contains a few significant lines of dialogue: Watson compares Holmes to Edgar Allan Poe's detective Auguste Dupin and Emile Gaboriau's police inspector Monsieur LeCoq. Sherlock Holmes arrogantly claims superiority to them both. This wry metatextual allusion cleverly acknowledges Conan Doyle's debt to both authors. Sherlock Holmes is so similar to Auguste Dupin that some early readers accused Conan Doyle of plagiarism and "piratical appropriating."³ Poe's "Murders in the Rue Morgue" is a great read for comparison. Likewise, Conan Doyle mimicked the two-part structure of Gaboriau's detective novels. In his autobiography, Conan Doyle himself mentions both authors in connection with his development of *A Study in Scarlet*. Even a third novel is widely considered to have been Conan Doyle's source for Part II, the sensational and bizarre romance *The Dynamiter* by Robert Louis and Fanny Van de Grift Stevenson. Advanced students can research Conan Doyle's intertextuality and the development of the detective genre. Graduate students could debate whether Conan Doyle's appropriations would label him an early "textual poacher," to use a term popularized by Henry Jenkins in fan studies.

No doubt Victorians were titillated by Conan Doyle's references to polygamy, but students today will be more preoccupied by Conan Doyle's offensive portrayal of Brigham Young as a religious despot. Students should discuss whether Conan Doyle's view of Mormons was bigoted and whether some schools were justified in banning the novel, most recently the Albemarle County School District in Virginia in 2011. Research on Brigham Young's biography and the history of the Latter Day Saints yields exciting comparisons between historical fact and fiction. Conan Doyle's colonialist worldview is obvious in his stereotyping of Native Americans and the implication that the United States is just one large cowboy frontier. Students interested in colonialism, cultural studies, and post-colonial literary theory will find much to contemplate in Conan Doyle's work.

Holmes has starred in a variety of adaptations in every sort of media, including theater, radio plays, video games, graphic novels, and of course film and television series. One adaptation in particular is an excellent companion for students studying the novel. Steven Moffat and Mark Gatiss's 2010 *A Study in Pink* sets the action of Part I of the novel in present-day London with updated characters and technology, including a prominent role for social media. Actors Martin Freeman and Benedict Cumberbatch breathe new life into Watson and Holmes, creating dynamic characters students will love. *A Study in Pink* incorporates two significant characters that do not appear in *A Study in Scarlet* but loom large in many adaptations, Sherlock's brother Mycroft Holmes and his famous nemesis James Moriarty. Also, the episode ignores the Mormon section from Part II of the novel, which is an exciting deviation from the original narrative structure. Students will be eager to discuss these two artistic choices, which connect to the narrative demands of a series. Although *A Study in Scarlet* is the first of Holmes and Watson's many adventures, the novel was written as a self-contained work. Later, Conan Doyle pioneered an episodic approach for his subsequent Sherlock Holmes stories that were serialized in monthly magazines, notably *The Strand*.⁴ Discussing the narrative structures of a single, stand-alone work versus installments in a series is useful when many Sherlock Holmes adaptations are episodic, as is much of the entertainment students enjoy in contemporary pop culture.

Numerous research topics can tempt students: Conan Doyle's fascinating life, his contributions to the developing genre of detective fiction, the Victorian era, the mental health of Sherlock Holmes, the Western novel, the historical basis of the Mormon setting in Part II of *A Study in Scarlet*, other Sherlock Holmes stories and adaptations, the history of forensic science, and crime in Victorian London. As students conduct research, instructors need to remind their students to exercise judgment in finding sources. Rumor and scandal abound

[3] Chapman, Arthur. "The Unmasking of Sherlock Holmes." *The Critic* 46.2 (1905): 115-117. Web. 10 Jan. 2014

[4] Wiltse, Ed. "'So Constant an Expectation': Sherlock Holmes and Seriality." *Narrative* 6.2 (1998): 105-122. Print.

on the Internet, and gullible students will find themselves persuaded by outlandish blogs with all manner of misinformation, such as accusations that Arthur Conan Doyle was Jack the Ripper.⁵ Of course, this type of information literacy training is a typical part of a freshman writing class. However, research into Sherlock Holmes poses unusual complications for freshmen, and a few issues merit special attention.

Several elements of Sherlock Holmes fandom may baffle student researchers. Since the early 1890s, dedicated fans of Sherlock Holmes have written literary tributes: pastiche, parody, fan fiction, and pseudo-scholarship. Pastiche of Sherlock Holmes occasionally present “newly discovered” Watson journals that may confuse academic novices. One of my students misunderstood something he had read online about Nicholas Meyer’s novel *The Seven-Per-Cent Solution* and reported to me that Sherlock Holmes had been a patient of Sigmund Freud, and he had a citation to prove it! Advanced students will enjoy the homages to Sherlock Holmes penned by an array of literary greats and contemporary writers, such as J. M. Barrie, Mark Twain, Bret Harte, O. Henry, Ellery Queen, Agatha Christie, P. G. Wodehouse, Steven King, Michael Chabon, Steve Hockensmith, Neil Gaiman, Laurie King, Anthony Horowitz, Mitch Cullin, Lyndsay Faye, and even John Lennon. Students researching on the Internet may also encounter the impressive amount of fanfiction connected to the original Conan Doyle stories but more significantly to the BBC’s *Sherlock*. Fanfiction is a worthwhile topic to mention to students, both to raise awareness of the genre so students will understand what they find online and also because of fanfiction’s growing presence in popular culture.

Another longstanding tradition of fan writing presents even greater challenges to credulous student researchers. Some dedicated fans read Conan Doyle’s stories with the attention of Sherlock Holmes himself, acting as detectives investigating inconsistencies and related literary, scientific, and historical topics. These fans identify themselves as “Sherlockians,” and some write in a literary style called the Grand Game, which is a reference to an oft-quoted saying of Sherlock Holmes in midst of an adventure, “The game is on.” Sherlockians maintain a pretense in the Game that Sherlock Holmes was the best detective who ever lived (yes, lived!). In a purposeful misreading of genre, Sherlockians playfully classify the “Canon” of Sherlock Holmes stories as biography written by Watson about Sherlock Holmes. Conan Doyle is considered a minor figure, Watson’s literary agent. Sherlockians are particularly fascinated by *A Study in Scarlet* because it presents a whodunit: if Part I had been written by Watson as biography, where does Part II come from?⁶ Within the tradition of the Game, the omniscient point of view in Part II, obviously not Watson, is an anomaly that needs to be explained.

Sherlockian scholars playing the Game produce pseudo-scholarship, which is rigorous research within this fictional premise. Their academic-style books and articles are fully footnoted with reliable sources, found in libraries, indexed by some academic databases, and widely available online. Several journals and publishers specialize in this genre, and mainstream publishing houses have also released these works. Sherlockian pseudo-scholarship tests novice researchers’ instincts about text reliability because the genre has the usual trappings of non-fiction. Students may need to be reminded that if a book claims to be a biography of Sherlock Holmes, it is fiction not fact; even if a book appears authoritative, Sherlock Holmes was never alive and Arthur Conan Doyle really was the author of the Sherlock Holmes stories. To illustrate this concept, I show students a book called *I, Sherlock Holmes*, published by Dutton in 1977, which purports to have been “edited and annotated” by Michael Harrison. With its slipcover, hard-cover binding, index, footnotes, list of actual references, and photographs, this book has all the textual and paratextual cues of credible nonfiction. To students, the book appears exhaustive, scholarly, well-researched, and boring—a perfect source for their next research paper. I ask students to identify the genre of such a book. Typically, half of my freshmen mistakenly classify the book as autobiography, which continues our discussion of truth, fiction, and genre. In the freshman composition

[5] Scamahorn, Charles. “Jack the Ripper was Arthur Conan Doyle.” *Probaway—Life Hacks*. 2009. Web. 10 Jan. 2014.

[6] Visozkie, Ben. “Who Wrote the American Chapters of *A Study in Scarlet*?” *Baker Street Journal: An Irregular Quarter of Sherlockiana* 50.2 (2000): 29-36. Web and Print.

class, pseudo-scholarship should be discussed in the context of academic credibility, but advanced students may find themselves captivated by this creative fan genre.

Freshman composition students will continue to have popular culture associations with the character of Sherlock Holmes for many years to come. A recent court decision in 2014 against the Conan Doyle Estate confirmed that, with a few small exceptions, the character of Sherlock Holmes is in the public domain, which means that most creators of Holmes adaptations can proceed without paying licensing fees to the estate. Each time I think that the media has become saturated with adaptations, I hear of new creations starring the Great Detective and the Good Doctor. I am eagerly anticipating five projects to be released in 2015: a novel featuring Mycroft Holmes by basketball legend Kareem Abdul-Jabaar; the second installment of the graphic novel *Watson and Holmes: A Study in Black* that sets the action in present-day Harlem; a film starring Ian McKellen called *Mr. Holmes* based on Mitch Cullin's novel *A Slight Trick of the Mind*; the fourth season of the BBC's *Sherlock*; and even another *S(her)lock*, a web series featuring a trans-positive and feminist vision of Holmes and Watson.

Because students are more accustomed to media adaptations featuring Sherlock Holmes, the original novel becomes a high-interest text that portrays familiar characters in a fresh and exciting way. In class, my students use the inexpensive Dover edition of *A Study in Scarlet and the Sign of Four*, but free digitized and html versions are also available. Plentiful online resources can be compiled to create a virtual casebook for student enrichment:

- Digitized old print edition of *A Study in Scarlet* readable online: [https://archive.org/details/studyinscarletno00doyl](https://archive.org/details/studyinscarletno00doyl/studyinscarletno00doyl)
- *A Study in Scarlet* with illustrations: <http://ignisart.com/camdenhouse/canon/1-stud.htm>
- Free fiction by Conan Doyle, Poe, the Stevensons, and Gaboriau: www.projectgutenberg.org
- Examples of Sherlockian scholarship from *The Baker Street Journal*. The free article by Ben Vizoskie (2000) is written in the tradition of the Grand Game and addresses the authorship of Part II in *A Study in Scarlet*: <http://www.bakerstreetjournal.com/morleymontgomeryaward.html>
- Arthur Conan Doyle's autobiography: <http://www.unz.org/Pub/DoyleArthur-1924>
- Early anthology of Sherlock Holmes pastiche and parody: https://archive.org/details/scriblio_test_044
- Parody implying Conan Doyle's plagiarism from 1905: http://books.google.com/books?id=FGMyAQ_AAMAAJ&lpg=PA115&ots=bQKQRFIgz&dq=arthur%20chapman%20unmasking%20sherlock%20holmes%20the%20critic&pg=PA115#v=onepage&q=arthur%20chapman%20unmasking%20sherlock%20holmes%20the%20critic&f=false
- *Deseret News* article discussing the novel's Mormon section: <http://www.deseretnews.com/article/705395945/Latter-day-Saints-and-Sherlock-Holmes.html?pg=all>
- Autobiography of an English Mormon woman that may have been one of Conan Doyle's sources for *A Study in Scarlet*: <https://archive.org/details/utahenglishwom00stenrich>
- Historic filmed interview of Arthur Conan Doyle from 1927 in which he discusses creating Sherlock Holmes and also his faith in Spiritualism: https://archive.org/details/SirArthurConanDoyleSpeaks_272
- One site for fanfiction inspired by the Sherlock Holmes short stories and books (search the website separately for fanfiction inspired by film or TV adaptations): <https://www.fanfiction.net/book/Sherlock-Holmes/>
- Update from *Publishers Weekly* on the copyright case involving Sherlock Holmes and the Conan Doyle estate: <http://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/digital/copyright/article/60503-conan-doyle-estate-says-sherlock-not-free-yet.html>

[7] Berdan, Marshall. "Playing with Dynamite: The Literary Fuse that Led to the Explosion of *A Study in Scarlet*." In *A Tangled Skein: A Companion Volume to The Baker Street Irregulars' Expedition to the Country of the Saints*. Leslie S. Klinger, Ed. New York: *The Baker Street Irregulars*, 2008: 58. Print.

Arthur Conan Doyle's novel *A Study in Scarlet* illustrates the unexpected nuances that students can discover in familiar cultural icons. Instructors of college composition can use students' fascination with Sherlock Holmes to inspire meaningful classroom discussion, research, and writing. The novel can serve as a fine course text on its own or can facilitate a deeper exploration of adaptation, genre, history in literature, allegations of bigotry, the history of detective fiction, academic credibility, and even copyright. Indeed, the first novel starring Holmes and Watson is hardly "elementary:" the numerous pop culture, historical, and literary issues associated with *A Study in Scarlet* support composition and literature instruction at a variety of levels.

AUTHOR BIO:

Kate M. Donley, M.A., is an adjunct faculty member in the Department of English and Communications at Norwich University, where she has taught freshman composition for eight years. Recently she has been exploring the potential of intertextuality, archival documents, and service learning to motivate meaningful writing and undergraduate research. This book analysis reprises a colloquium Kate presented in September 2013 sponsored by the Norwich University College of Liberal Arts, and she is grateful to her colleagues for their kind support. She has a goldfish named Sherlock.

Social Media:

Twitter: @k8donley

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Music Review: “Indy Classical Innovation: yMusic” at USC’s Southern Exposure New Music Series March 21, 2014

Peter B. Kay

[Treefalls](#)

Spartanburg, South Carolina, USA

peter@peterbkay.com

Quiet fills the concert hall. A young man, about 30 years old, stands in front of the audience. With him are a number of musicians in what appears to be a traditional ensemble, but with a few interesting and unusual changes. The young man is stylishly dressed, his clothes a mix of fashion and formality. His hair is a bit long and a little unruly, but this is the trend for young artists and musicians. The audience, mostly made up of 20-, 30-, and 40-somethings, do not seem to notice these small departures from tradition. They are simply eager to hear what this new composer has written.



The music is edgy and exciting. The composer pushes to the edge of convention, incorporates modern, popular music rhythms and instrumental techniques, and drives forward with youthful energy. The concert is a success, and the audience is eager for the next new work by this young man—this young man whose name is Ludwig van Beethoven. The year is 1800.

Just as we tend to forget that our parents were ever children, we also forget that the great masters of classical music were at one time on the cutting edge of innovation. They were as inspired by their contemporaries as their predecessors, and composers, even Beethoven, often borrowed ideas from the pop music of his time. Sadly, for obvious reasons Ludwig van Beethoven has not written anything new since 1827, and his music has become part of the old tradition. So, let us instead look to those living composers who are writing music for our time.

Familiar with the size of the [University of South Carolina School of Music](#) recital hall, and the typical “sold out” nature of this series, my friends and I arrive at the show thirty minutes before the doors open. We wait with the eager crowd of patrons who know that the concerts are typically standing-room-only. There is an air of restlessness until 7:00, and Director [Michael Harley](#) gives the thumbs up to begin letting people

inside. We move quickly to claim our spots. A large number of seats are reserved for donors, but these are free concerts—no tickets necessary—so the rest of the hall is fair game.

Within minutes, the concert hall is filled to capacity. I glance around the room, and it appears to be a wonderfully diverse audience, covering a broad spectrum of age and background.

Set in an academic recital hall, complete with a pipe organ backdrop, there is the customary classical music atmosphere—a bit stiff with ceremonial undertones. Yet, the pale blue and orange lighting, the array of microphones and instrument pick-ups, and the electric guitar sitting next to the horn, suggest a very different concert ahead.

The lights dim, and yMusic walks out onto stage to waves of applause. Their clothes are trendy and tasteful—jeans and neckties, colorful dresses and collared shirts—nothing flashy, nothing boringly conventional. They appear more like an indie pop band than a concert hall ensemble, and this impression is quite fitting. I soon find in the program notes that the musicians have often, as a group or as individuals, backed and collaborated with bands such as The National, Bjork, Bon Iver, Dirty Projectors, Peter Gabriel, Paul Simon. . . and the list goes on and on.

There is a moment of silence as the musicians pick up their instruments and prepare to play.

The concert opens with Beautiful Mechanical, the title track from the group's debut album released in 2011. Written by composer Ryan Lott—perhaps better known by his alt hip-hop name Son Lux—the piece is first on the album as well as the first piece ever written specifically for this ensemble, so it seems a good place to begin.

Having never seen yMusic live, my knowledge of the piece has been restricted to that studio recording, one which, to my great delight, does not do full justice to the wonderful blend of colors, rhythms, and structures that are evident in the performance.

Lott's piece opens with an energetic solo cello line that sets the stage for the edgy, rhythmic piece ahead. The ensemble's usual cellist, Clarice Jensen, was unable to make this show, but in her place is the young, but overwhelmingly accomplished, Gabriel Cabezas. Cabezas launches into the work with intensity and passion, driving the pace from the start. His tempo is noticeably faster than the studio recording, but his playing is precise, exact, and clear.

Nadia Sirota, viola, flashes a grin at Hideaki Aomori, clarinet, just before his entrance, as if to say, "here we go!" Aomori effortlessly joins Cabezas, matching his speed and intensity, and one by one, the rest of the ensemble stacks on top of the aggressive cello line and staccato clarinet. The piece grows and flows with practiced ease, albeit appreciably faster than the album version. Now, every time I listen to the album, I'll think of this charming interplay between the musicians.

yMusic is a curious blend of timbres, mixing a violin, viola, and cello with a bass clarinet, flute, and trumpet/horn. One might think that the wind/brass would overpower the stringed instruments, yet with delicate precision and powerful playing, the ensemble finds an excellent balance.

There is a modicum of amplification that may be contributing to the excellent balance. Yet, recording engineer Jeff Francis does such an artful job that the result is wonderfully subtle.

Rob Moose, violin/guitar, introduces a newer work that has not been in the studio yet. Andrew Norman's Music in Circles begins with the lightest wisp of the bowhair on the viola, playing thin, very high notes. The violin makes soft, crunchy glissandi. There is a rapid explosion of noise from the instruments, and then a return to the scratchy sound effects. The winds begin to blow pitchless air through their instruments.

Chairs are squeaking, paper programs are rustling, and there are more than a few coughs. The audience is audibly uneasy. Unfortunately, there is a stigma about extended techniques these days, and it appears that many here at the concert are not fans.

The bow begins to bounce across the strings of the viola, and suddenly there is harmony. Then, a scant progression appears. Gradually, each instrumental line grows from nothing; they are like a breeze, then

squeaking pitches, then tones, then melody. As the tempo increases and the intensity builds, the voices of the instruments seem to crash and collide with one another. The strings furiously hammer their instruments, and the winds crescendo in waves of sound. Distinct patterns and clear harmonies emerge, and the seemingly chaotic, stunningly beautiful music pushes onward.

Norman builds tension so perfectly in this work that I am literally on the edge of my seat.

A clear melodic passage develops. [CJ Camerieri](#), trumpet/horn, plays both an upward leading line and a downward leading line, alternating from one to the other in expanding intervals. The flute, played by [Alex Sopp](#), echoes the trumpet. This would-be canon is broken by rhythmic differences that wonderfully disrupt expectations. Each of the instruments take up the material, while at the same time getting softer and softer until again we are left with the solo viola.

The viola continues, upward and downward, alternating, thinning, slowing, and fading away until the last note—an exact quotation of the first. In stark contrast to the opening of the piece, the audience is completely silent and perfectly still for the last few minutes of the piece. We are thoroughly captivated, mesmerized by the music, and breathless from the intense energy of the work. Applause, when it comes, is abundant and genuine. This is the highlight of the concert: a gorgeous, electric, and powerful piece.

Then, the lights dim further and a warm blue light is cast across the stage. The band begins to play [Jeremy Turner's](#) *The Bear and The Squirrel*, a warm and inviting piece, lush with traditional harmonies and a lovely compliment to the previous three works.

Throughout the evening, it is difficult to distinguish the classical traditions from the modern pop, indie rock, alt hip-hop influences. Two fascinating and colorful works, *Year of the Horse* and *Year of the Dragon*, originally by electronica singer-songwriter [Sufjan Stevens](#) and arranged by Rob Moose and [Nico Muhly](#) respectively, illustrate the ease by which these extraordinary musicians incorporate both worlds.

[Judd Greenstein's](#) piece, *Clearing, Dawn, Dance* is an extraordinary work of art. With a pervasive sense of perpetual motion, the lively rhythmic exchanges between the six instruments create compelling melodic lines and delightful harmonies. Then there is [Marcos Balter's](#) mysterious and hauntingly beautiful work, *Bladed Stance*, which saturates the sounds of the instruments (and a few performers whistling) with copious amounts of added reverb. Though this music is born from classical traditions and is not rejecting its heritage, it has grown into something new—something that challenges the conventional "classical music" label. This New Music is less about genre-bending and more genre-blending. Every piece reminds me: music in the concert hall can be alive, connected, current, and thriving.

Hosted by the University of South Carolina, the [Southern Exposure New Music Series](#) brings ensembles of the highest caliber to Columbia, SC. Each year, the award-winning concert series offers four free concerts of cutting edge contemporary works. On September 30, 2014, [New Amsterdam Records](#) released yMusic's album, [Balance Problems](#). The record features several of the works from the March concert including *Music in Circles* by Andrew Norman, *The Bear and The Squirrel* by Jeremy Turner, and *Bladed Stance* by Marcos Balter. Audio and video excerpts from *Music in Circles* can be found online at <http://newamrecords.com/y-music-balance-problems>.

P. Kay

AUTHOR BIO:

Peter B. Kay is a composer, teacher, and scholar from the upstate of South Carolina. He is currently the Music Technology Director at the Cline School of Music at North Greenville University and the Operations Manager for the Spartanburg Philharmonic Orchestra. Kay is also the founder and Artistic Director of Treefalls, a New Music chamber concert series in the southeastern United States. He received his DMA in Music Composition from the University of South Carolina. Publications include, “Music and Humor: What’s So Funny?” (2006) and “Musical Humor and Beethoven’s Symphonic Scherzi” (2013).

Social Media:

Academia: <https://usouthcarolina.academia.edu/PeterBKay>

Twitter: [@peterbkaymusic](#), [@treefallsmusic](#)

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Book Review: **M. J. Trow. *A Brief History of Vampires.***

Philadelphia: Running Press Book Publishers, 2010. xv, 368 pp. Paperback, ISBN 978-0-7624-3988-1.

Myha Do
University of California, Davis
Davis, California, USA
mthdo@ucdavis.edu

From the works of Anne Rice and Stephen King to films on vampires and the walking dead, the appeal of vampirism has become a cultural phenomenon in the United States, especially to young people. In the modern era where the typical American family is broken and where marriages can last a few days to weeks, troubled maturing young people find little comfort in a society that represents separation. In contrast, vampires, as the living undead, provide stability and lasting relationships, because they live forever and thus their love is consequentially eternal. *A Brief History of Vampires* is an inspiring book that attempts to explain this resurgent phenomenon as M.J. Trow links fictional Gothic beings to actual people.

M. J. Trow presents a brief but strong overview of the recent resurgence of vampires and zombies in twenty-first century literature and media by examining a number of recent films and television series such as the *Twilight* (2008-2012) and the *True Blood* (2008-2014) sagas. The book brings together an impressive description of reasons why modern Americans cannot satiate their fear and love of vampires, with a particular focus on modern cinema and the biography of the Romanian Vlad III from the Draculesti clan, better known as Vlad the Impaler (Vlad Tepes). Trow introduces how literature has a profound influence on people and how actual lives are depicted best by linking real vampiric people with literary undead beings. With this, Trow's premise of "Dracula was real" and "Dracula was there" (p. xii) bespeaks of the need to interpret and consider both fictional and realistic representations of vampires. Indeed, we cannot truly know the fictional Dracula if we do not understand the real Dracul.

While this book is a must for people interested in vampires as a twenty-first century cultural phenomenon, it should also gain the attention of scholars on contemporary Gothic or vampirism. The book is comprised of sixteen chapters organized and separated into two parts: celluloid versions of vampires to explain the current vampiric craze and the life of Vlad Tepes. The first half provides observations of the vampire craze in contemporary U.S. and very briefly details different folklore vampires and other cinematic undead from various parts of the world; yet the second half weighs too heavily on the detailed life of Vlad Tepes. Part 1, the section on cinematic effects, discusses vampires in the twenty-first century and their influence on cultural development, on teenagers (chap.1), on "Twilight Moms," and on vampire cinema (chap. 2). The following

chapters describe Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (chap. 3), the impacts of Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (chap. 4), Eastern folklore influences (chap. 5), and vampires in European folk traditions (chap.6).

From observing the influence of literature to the impact of vampiric visual mediums, the book's emphasis begins to shift to Vlad Tepes and how his actual lifestyle turned him into a prototypical figure that later writers used for vampiric Counts. Part 2 expands on this mutual effect of bloodthirsty people and literary characters by detailing chapters on the Draculesti clan: the rise of Vlad Dracul, the *voivod* prince (chap. 7), historical sources on Dracul's reign (chaps. 8 and 9), historical background and the childhood and life of Vlad Tepes (chaps. 10-13), accounts of Vlad Tepes's death and resting place (chap. 4), and the reception of Vlad Tepes and modern vampiric practices (chaps. 15 and 16). The end of Part 2 expands on vampires as cataclysms for a transnational frame by situating a number of recent films, television shows, and cinematic representations such as *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920), *Nosferatu* (1922) and *Metropolis* (1927) with other world-wide vampire traditions in order to show how people's belief in horror and romance persists today.

Trow reads troubled youths and middle-aged mothers together and argues that both parties develop a sense of lack and thus search for completeness: teenagers feel loss because they live in a broken-up world and middle-aged mothers have life crises because their bodies are deteriorating. Vampires offer everlasting love, youth and completeness - qualities that many teenagers desire. In addition, few young people feel safe and complete living in fast-paced societies where cars and computer brands lose their value within a year. As a result, these youths become outcasts of societies, as portrayed in the media. Trow proposes that the murderous crimes of isolated and misunderstood adolescences are committed out of frustration or for attention. In other words, if murder translates into some level of control, then it follows that vampires who grow increasingly strong through murder embody a sense of limitless power; they derive a sense of self and reassurance from other people's loss of capability.

Aging mothers likewise find reassurance in vampires. In societies that value youth, aging can be an unforgiving and sometimes terrible thing. Many people in Hollywood, for example, have cosmetic surgery to retain a youthful appearance. Therefore, Trow believes that middle-aged mothers find their heroes in ageless vampires: beings that recapture and immortalize youth. For lost young adults and conflicted middle-aged women, vampirism offers consolation and self-confidence because it provides a type of community based on each individual, even though it is an exclusive community built on the practice of blood sucking.

Whether it is teenagers lusting after power or moms trying to regain youth, Trow details this mix of attraction in the combination of the real and fictional vampire. He provides, for example, the case of vampire Edward Cullen from Stephenie Meyer's vampire saga, *Twilight*, as his starting point. Trow perceives that fans have a difficult time of separating their love of Edward Cullen, the moody vampire, and their love of the alluring Robert Pattison (4). In other words, by stating that their craze for Edward Cullen is the craze for Robert Pattison and vice versa, Trow explicitly highlights the connection between the fictional vampire and the real person. Which vampire fans favor - real or imagined - matters little, for what is more important are the values and fantasies vampires fulfill.

Part 2 covers the life of Vlad Tepes and the crimes he committed in Romania. Trow thoroughly describes the life and death of the Draculesti clan, even detailing how they were dressed for burial as inspirations for Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. Vlad Tepes was a ruthless ruler who was exiled for twelve years and who returned to his country as if from the dead. He was equally known for his infamous ways of torture: he would attack and impale people at night and drive stakes into corpses. Despite people's fear of the Impaler, Trow writes that the forever-ness of the vampire continues to exist in the twenty-first century where people have the "Dracula Syndrome" because they are attracted to powerful beings. Modern day Tepes is just the unsatisfied, brutal man who deals with the world with his own personality and temperament.

Trow's foremost contribution to the increasing scholarship on vampires and on the supernatural, specifically on Stoker studies, is his insistence on matters of vampiric people in relation to literary art and cinema. He argues in the introductory chapter that we cannot fully understand vampires and their effects if we do not consider Vlad Tepes, the living vampire, because merely utilizing a fictitious reading disregards 300 years of the belief in true vampires that was written down as folklore after the death of Vlad III. We can better understand the resurgent craze for vampirism by looking at the literary alongside realistic representations of vampires. Indeed, if fans are unable to separate their love of Edward and Robert, then as Trow notes, it is impossible for us to separate Dracula and Dracul. He writes,

Very few people accept the real link between the Count of fiction and the real Vlad Tepes. The only connection, they will tell you, is that Bram Stoker rather liked the name and that there are no contemporary references to the Impaler as a vampire . . . The Saxons, who may not have believed in the undead anyway, branded him a homicidal tyrant; the Russians were impressed by his power; his native Romanians believed him a hero. There was no place for a revenant in any of that. And I believe that the intriguing parallels between the man of fiction and the man of substance - the undead and the living - cannot be merely coincidental. (329)

Trow effectively demonstrates the linkage between reality and literary portrayals and helps us see the intricate effects that literature has on its readers and how life is depicted best in representative arts. Despite the fact that Trow's argument about the effects of Vlad Tepes's reception establishes a broad overview of vampires, it falls slightly short with his substantial focus on the Draculesti clan. However, the wide compass of *A Brief History of Vampires* admirably showcases Trow's effective demonstration of the constitutive elements that connect people with vampiric actions and vampiric literature and cinema. Even though the book seems unequally proportioned, we cannot help but agree with Trow's defense that vampires have been and will always be a part of us: their timeless wings constantly offer us fear and comfort in their forever-ness.

AUTHOR BIO:

Myha T. Do is a PhD candidate of Comparative Literature at the University of California, Davis. She earned her MA in Comparative Literature (University of California, Davis 2013), her MA in English Literature (Mills College 2011), her MFA in Creative Writing (St. Mary's College 2009), and her BA in English and Comparative Literature (University of California, Berkeley 2007). Her research reexamines the ghost stories of the Chinese writer Pu Songling and the Anglo-Irish writer J. Sheridan Le Fanu from a feminist Bakhtinian perspective.

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Submit articles to Lynnea Chapman King, PhD, Editor in Chief, and A. S. CohenMiller, PhD, Managing Editor, at editors@journaldialogue.org.

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