

## The Persistent Need to Look behind the Curtain

Frank Baum created the *Wizard of Oz*, and the grandiose man who lived behind a curtain. Perceived as holding immense power, the façade proved different than the reality. But what exactly *is* the reality? Daily, what are we as viewers, as students, as teachers, learning from popular culture sources around us? Trying to reach for a reality can be problematic in of itself, yet denying their existence is also a trap. The four articles in this issue bring together varied popular media outlets to uncover violence, gender, and powerful pedagogy in and out of the classroom.

First, Becca Cragin explains in her article, “Grounded Aesthetics: Pedagogy for a Post-Truth Era,” how students are often challenged in untangling the variety and substance of information streaming into their lives. Many students feel overwhelmed with the information, the discussion of fake news, and tend to believe there is no way to determine veracity. To address these concerns, Cragin provides pertinent sources and applications of literary and critical media literacy which have led her students to see beyond the concept of life in a “post-truth era.”

Thus, what we see is the impact of popular TV shows, whether in desensitizing people to violence, to presenting varied cultural values, or to suggesting appropriate gendered presentations and behaviors. Just as Cragin evidences steps to expand student thought, Elizabeth Gartley provides insight into guiding middle and high school students to see different perspectives through considering *The Walking Dead* and the proposing the question “who would be on your zombie apocalypse team?” To ground this discussion, the article, “We All Have Jobs Here: Multiple Intelligences in *The Walking Dead*,” creates a connection between the characters on the show and Howard Garner’s multiple intelligences. What becomes evident in this article is the practicality of drawing popular culture into pedagogical practice to support learning. Through Gartley’s article, as readers, we are shown glimpses of the ways violence and gender intersect in media representations.

These media representations present a key outlet for informal learning—learning that can take place in ones living room instead of in a traditional classroom. The ways then we understand what we watch can be viewed in many ways, such as seen in, Allen Culpepper’s, “A Gendered Perspective on Policing Violence in *Happy Valley* and *Fargo*.” Culpepper unpacks the crimes and argues for a deep parallel between the on-screen portrayal of women in the TV series, *Happy Valley* and the film, *Fargo*. He also suggests a reflection to contemporary thought and political views, hinting at important gendered perspectives affecting (in)formal learning.

Lastly, Adam Nicks moves us to considering the media consumption of live action events, in particular that of professional wrestling in “The Many Faces of Foley: A Journey of Discovery and Influence on Professional Wrestling.” He examines the ways in which Mick Foley, a key professional wrestler from the 1990s, developed intricate personas which merged a real and “fake” world. Drawing from Foley’s autobiography, Nicks emphasizes the uniqueness of the wrestler’s “blurring of the lines between reality and fiction” while addressing concepts of gender and violence that affected audiences and professional wrestling in general.

These articles as a whole highlight the need to continue to explore and examine what is opinion and

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what is truth. Collectively, these articles address the persistent need to look behind the curtain and understand further. In some contexts, this plays out in representations and behaviors and others as fiction and reality. The authors here have pressed us to think differently about the influence and potential of media texts and portrayals, from TV, film, to literature and dramatic endeavors.

As is always the case, the vision and work to develop an issue depends upon the work of a strong team. In particular for this issue, I would like to thank our peer reviewers, Douglas CohenMiller (Creative Director), Rob Galin (Copy Editor), Kurt Depner (Managing Editor), and Kelli Bippert (Educational Resources Editor) who provided extra assistance in finalizing this issue. Moving forward, we are excited to see your contributions, encouraging you to submit for both journal articles and also critically perspectives and practices on pedagogical practices and/or popular culture. We hope you enjoy this issue and are encouraged to consider how popular culture presents both opportunities for formal pedagogy while also demonstrating inevitable dynamic effects for informal learning.

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