



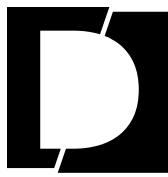
DIALOGUE

*The Interdisciplinary Journal of
Popular Culture and Pedagogy*



(Un)conscious Representation: Race, Gender, Ideology

Dialogue: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Popular Culture and Pedagogy
Volume 7, Issue 3 | Fall 2020 | www.journaldialogue.org



DIALOGUE

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INTRODUCTION AND SCOPE

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

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Making the Invisible Visible through Popular Culture

Popular culture possesses a hidden power that can be easily overlooked. It shapes and frames how we see the world and ourselves. The things we watch, read, listen to, and play impact the organization of our internal and external worlds. Over time this relationship with our popular culture artifacts creates reverberations that blur the line between input and output.

While this has been true for generations, as our society continues to move online, especially in light of COVID-19, there is a growing necessity to embrace new paradigms. We can see that human activity is changing; we are engaging with popular culture through image, stream, computer game—texts—in a *mediated* meeting place per se, the new living room. Thus, in the pandemic and post-pandemic digital gatherings, holiday dinner and cocktail parties are online and the media *product* is centralized. For example, we can consider the changing nature of engaging with popular culture through the new “Watch Party” feature on Amazon Prime Video or the 11 million people meeting for Island Tours on *Animal Crossing: New Horizons* (Zhu, 2020). Moreover, we can see new developments in storytelling through collective discussion amongst groups on specialized, digital distribution apps such as *Discord*. Sharing images and debating ideologies on social media platforms is nothing new, but in light of recent events, online calls for collective action and representation seem more immediate than ever before (Pinckney & Rivers, 2020).

These evolving relationships reveal a unique opportunity for reflection. For instance, *how can we as scholars and educators leverage the multivalent lenses generated by these deep conversations between people and media? How can we better understand such cultural products to learn for ourselves and also to teach others?*

For those of us who critically engage with these ideas, it is easy to take for granted the ways in which popular media works to influence points of view or disseminate and process vital, sociocultural information. In general practice, long-held and long since disputed assumptions about the functions and utility of films, television shows, video games, etc. can impede a person’s ability to see these materials as fertile ground for identifying the encoding of culture. For many folks, the concept of *passive consumption* continues to cast these important items of reflexive messaging as bits of mindless entertainment.

Often there is an urge to dismiss intent or agenda as a one-way process, perhaps even perpetrated by canny advertisers or authors. Yet, as we know, the consumer/producer/audience relationship is never linear (Fiske, 2010). People shape popular products they engage with whether consciously or unintentionally, by applying their own worldviews to an image or message. From this perspective, we are all in a teaching and learning relationship with popular culture.

Along these lines, the contributors for volume seven, issue three of *Dialogue: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Popular Culture and Pedagogy* speak to central questions of popular culture: *How to activate the teaching and learning relationship in meaningful ways? How to intentionally integrate and interrogate popular culture artifacts within our pedagogical practice? And what can be gained from such an intentional approach?* The common thread across the articles is about making the invisible visible. Each author questions this binary of visibility by critically exploring the spaces where popular culture intersects with constructions of identity

and ideology. There is a deceptively simple take away from these discussions: popular cultural texts have a lot to teach us about what we learn from popular culture texts.

In the first of the full-length articles featured in this issue, *Visuality of Race in Popular Culture: Teaching Racial Histories and Iconography in Media*, Joni Boyd Acuff and Amelia M. Kraehe address the long, repeating history of racist imagery in visual media and culture. The authors identify an absence in visual arts education often resulting in the reproduction of problematic iconographies that reinforces constructions of racial difference and social value in popular media. Uncritically perpetuated by cultural producers and accepted by consumers, these visual representations continue to code white supremacy as the normative socialization standard. Employing Critical Race Theory, Acuff and Kraehe investigate visual texts illustrating these processes and respond with practical pedagogical steps designed to support students in interrogating racial portrayals in popular culture, as well as their own racialized ways of viewing. As the authors explain, “Because popular culture is contested terrain, students can learn to be race-conscious consumers of popular culture today. A deeper awareness of visual codes and conventions can foster critical interpretations and creative responses to popular racial constructions.” To this end, Acuff and Kraehe provide a series of media site-based learning activities encouraging students to identify, analyze, react to, and reflect upon visualities of race as both consumers and producers.

The next article similarly addresses the previously unseen, this time to reposition gender analyses of literature in the college classroom. Ramón J. Guerra and Joan Latchaw discuss how their experiences teaching Sandra Cisneros’ *Woman Hollering Creek* to undergraduate students led them to consider what representations of gender-based social oppression in literature can reveal about masculine navigations of destructive patriarchal structures. In *Unmasking Male Voices in Woman Hollering Creek: Contributions to Pedagogy and Masculinity Studies*, the authors centralize treatments of male characters in Cisneros’ texts to address often overlooked gaps in commonly applied historical and analytical frameworks. They reflect on a revision of their undergraduate course including explorations of “masculinity effects,” putting Cisneros’ work in conversation with Rigoberto González’s collection of stories, *Men without Bliss*. According to Guerra and Latchaw, “Such an approach would work to uncover the network of relations (history, geography, social structures, identity politics, personal values, family), that is, the context that explains gender construction and performativity. It also means avoiding essentialisms and moving away from the all too common fallback of hegemonic masculinity.” The outcome for scholars and students alike is a reconsideration of Latinx literature focusing on the intersectional realities of lived experience.

The third article in this issue also explores gender and representation, focusing on the dynamics of visibility and change in roleplay and collaborative storytelling. In *D&D Beyond Bikini Mail: Having Women at the Table*, Daniel Carlson considers how the increasing popularity of the fantasy roleplaying game *Dungeons and Dragons* may be generating opportunities to address issues of representation (or lack thereof) as designers and new players reconsider the white, heteronormative assumptions of race, gender, and sexual identity built into the history of the product. Carlson’s research reveals that misogynistic origins, scaffolded by Eurocentric imaginaries, are challenged by new players and product developers as consumers and producers work toward gaming formats privileging inclusivity and collaborative storytelling. For the author, the low stakes, blank-slate nature of character and world-construction essential to tabletop roleplay gives players agency to experiment with representation and to reflect on what and why constructions of identity are commonly normalized, which are often left out. By applying Jacqueline Jones Royster’s concept of Critical Imagination to these rhetorical processes, the author suggests that the next obvious step for players is to imagine new representations that bring women, LGBTQ+ folks, and BIPOC players to the table. For Carlson, new initiatives introduced by developers and embraced by fans “have constructed a deliberate feminist intervention on [D&D] itself in

order to expand the types of stories that can be told through it, who they are told by, and who they are told for; making it explicit that this game has been designed to provide players the option to play diverse characters that better represent their own life-experiences.”

The final two featured articles continue to engage the revelatory power of the media artifact. Both provide practical examples of how popular culture products can situate US political processes and underscore the role that this kind of literacy plays in civic engagement. In *A Heartbeat Away*, Jay Wendland discusses how fictional enactments of the 25th Amendment in television can help students understand the mechanisms of a constitutional process that they might otherwise never see play out. In the run-up and aftermath of the 2020 presidential election, the 25th amendment has been broadly referenced in news media, but sections of the legislation have only rarely been invoked since its ratification. As a result, few Americans fully understand the complexities of presidential power and succession that the amendment addresses or the situational processes essential to its use. As Wendland points out, these same complexities and issues of circumstance make the 25th Amendment a favorite topic for popular culture treatments of political drama. Examples from television shows like *West Wing*, *Madame Secretary*, and *Designated Survivor* illustrate how fictional representations of non-electoral succession processes can contextualize the 25th Amendment’s intended function. For Wendland, this is particularly significant in the undergraduate political science classroom: “Traditional college students today do not recall Nixon’s resignation in 1974 nor Kennedy’s assassination in 1963. By using the depictions of presidential succession in the popular culture narratives... students are able to ground their conceptions of presidential succession in something they are able to actually see.” Here, the popular culture artifact explicitly acts as a pedagogical exemplar.

In the last article, Laura Merrifield Wilson also highlights the value of the popular culture product in encouraging multilevel student engagement when teaching political science. In *Pop Culture and Politics: Engaging Students in American Government through Art, Music, and Film*, Merrifield Wilson discusses integrating a variety of media forms into the classroom ecology to bring students closer to a subject that often feels too hard to grapple with or beyond their sphere of concern. Notably, she points out that popular culture has long been entwined with political structures, processes, and actors. Taking this further, Wilson identifies popular culture’s often overlooked pedagogical merit as a site where ideas are negotiated and contested, not unlike the classroom itself. Leveraging this in practice involves making space for popular culture artifacts in all of their myriad forms. As Wilson illustrates, different cultural materials can be differently employed for different outcomes. Songs, sitcoms, memes, and even toys can be analyzed to “demonstrate relevance, serve as a generational translator, expose the bias of experience, and enable an expression of self.” The popular culture artifact brings political science concepts into immediate view and allows students to reflect on the social constructions informing their perspectives on civic engagement. This is yet another example of how popular culture can bring students into closer proximity with concepts that may otherwise feel beyond the scope of their lived experiences.

As a whole, this issue is a product of collaboration and a carefully coordinated group effort. During this time, we have made some shifts in the *Dialogue* team, expanding Karina Vado’s editorial role to include Interim Musings Editor in addition to Book Review Editor, welcoming in Rheanne Anderson as a new copy editor, and thanking Kelli Bippert for her years of service in editor roles. Thank you to other key contributors of the *Dialogue* team including Creative Designer, Douglas CohenMiller; Copy Editors, Miriam Sciala and Robert Gordyn; and our peer reviewers.

As 2020 comes to an end, we are pleased to share these works in *(Un)Conscious Representation: Interrogating Structures of Race, Gender, Ideology*, highlighting how through popular culture, the invisible can become visible. The works are an exploration of our implicit and explicit constructivist relationships

with popular culture products. Across the articles, we can see a common engagement with what it means to be aware of these connections, to acknowledge that popular culture *teaches* audiences. This implies then that audiences learn, and learning is an active process. Being aware of the role we — and others — play in this exchange allows us to see what's there, identify what's missing, and reflect on what we take away.

Kirk Peterson
Managing Editor

Anna S. CohenMiller
Editor in Chief

A word from the Editor in Chief

In this year, our community and many others around the world have faced challenges and heartbreaking times. Your presence and engagement are even more obvious and appreciated at such times. I want to thank you all, the readers, the authors, and the whole *Dialogue* team for your investment, your passion, and commitment. As we move into 2021, I look forward to hearing from you, learning from you, and expanding this incredible community commitment — to understanding better and to sharing with others about the potential of popular culture and pedagogy.

Anna CohenMiller
Editor in Chief

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MLA

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Visuality of Race in Popular Culture: Teaching Racial Histories and Iconography in Media

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ABSTRACT

The repetition of racist imagery from historical to contemporary popular culture is indicative of a lack of visual culture education among artists, designers, and other creative cultural producers working today. This paper addresses the dearth of resources for teaching visual codes and conventions of racial iconography that are recycled in popular media and contribute to the fabrication of racial differences, maintenance of racial hierarchies, and normalization of white supremacist ideology. Inspired by Critical Race Theory in art and visual culture education, the essay proposes teaching tactics and sites/sights that can support students in developing visual understandings of race in popular culture and the practices of racialized looking it invites. Because popular culture is contested terrain, students can learn to be race-conscious consumers of popular culture today. A deeper awareness of visual codes and conventions can foster critical interpretations and creative responses to popular racial constructions. We suggest key vocabulary for scaffolding dialogue and counter-visual strategies for deconstructing racial images and practices of looking.

Keywords: race, representation, popular culture, art, visual culture, racial literacy, critical race theory

VISUALITY OF RACE IN POPULAR CULTURE: TEACHING RACIAL HISTORIES AND ICONOGRAPHY IN MEDIA

In February 2019, the world-renowned designer brand, Gucci, marketed an \$890 stark black wool turtleneck. The sweater has an elongated neck that dramatically extends over the wearer's mouth and nose (see Figure 1). Presented online on a White female model, the sweater features a circular opening in the fabric that outlines and defines the model's mouth with a bright, fire-engine red color. Whether intentional or not, the strategically aligned, bright red, exaggerated lip-esque hole, placed against the jet-black turtleneck evokes blackface,¹ a racist visual practice that has been used to dehumanize Black Americans since the mid-1800s.

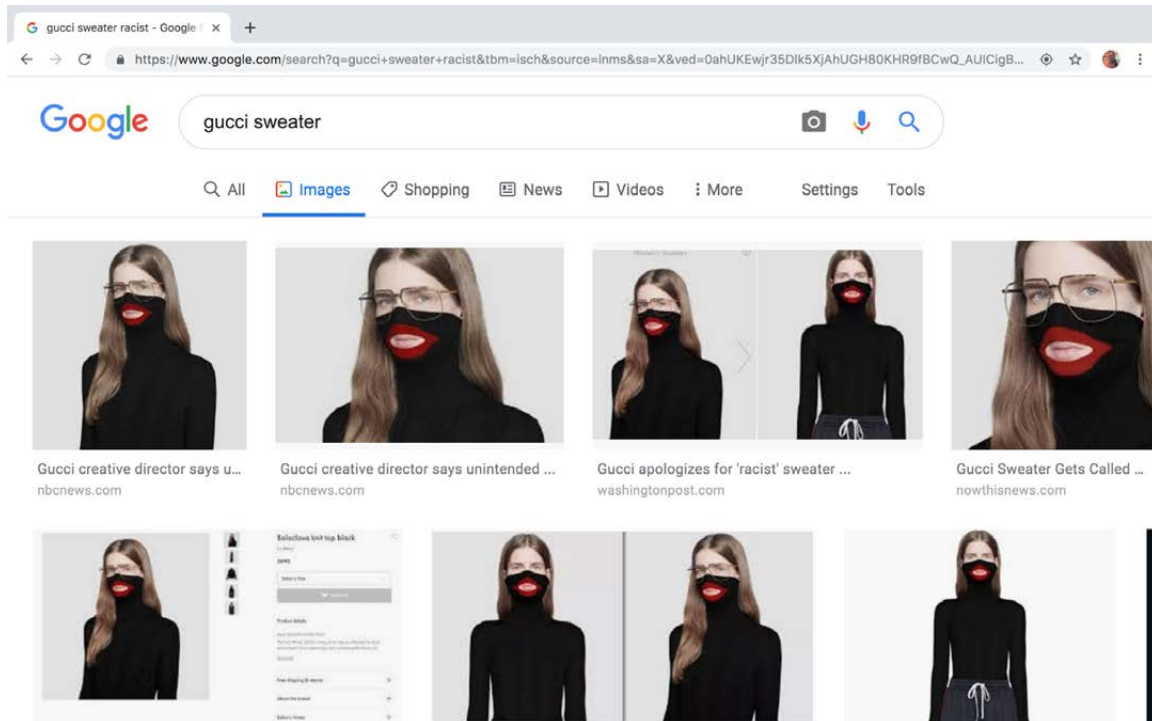


Figure 1. Screenshot of Google search for Gucci sweater, 2019

As evidenced in this contemporary example, the visual repertoire to which today's young people are exposed comes from popular visual culture and digital media, much of which trades in racial narratives and iconography that are just as historical as they are contemporary. From the recent debate about the removal of commissioned statues honoring confederate war heroes in Charlottesville, Virginia, to the release of *Black Panther*, an Afrofuturist blockbuster film providing a counternarrative for African and African American existence, we can see the way community identities and racial ideologies are both assumed and contested through popular culture. We believe the repetition of dominant visualities of race in popular culture is indicative of a lack of knowledge and recognition of historical visual practices, resulting in a recycling of centuries-old representations and techniques that continue to racialize and dehumanize particular bodies.

PEDAGOGICAL POSITIONALITY

As Black women scholars who engage in equity oriented research in the field of art and visual culture education, we are invested in understanding and teaching about popular constructions of race and racial

¹ Expanded upon later in the text.

justice through imagery and visualizing practices. We are interested in thinking about how popular culture might allow us to dig deeper and bring awareness to contemporary racial issues. As we pursue this interest in our teaching practice, we find it difficult to locate instructional resources and strategies that take seriously the role of art and popular visual culture in the construction of race.

Fields such as multicultural education and sociology education use films, advertisements, and other popular media to teach about race and racism, however, it is our observation that the racial images and the contexts in which they were created receive scant attention. More often, images serve as illustrations of other content rather than standing as content in and of themselves (e.g., Bell & Roberts, 2010; Khanna & Harris, 2015; Loewen, 1991; Trier, 2007; Upright, 2015). This oversight is a problem given how visually mediated racial experiences and events are. As Brown and Kraehe (2011) argue, “What gets represented in visual cultural spaces is easily picked up and reproduced in and outside of the media space so it is strategic to target analyses of visual media because it touches the lives of many” (p. 75). Moreover, when the arts and visual culture are engaged as a method of social justice education, the result is often a celebratory rather than critical pedagogy because of a romantic bias that casts the arts as inherently transcendent or transformative of the status quo (Kraehe, Acuff, & Travis, 2016).

In this article, we address the lack of methods for teaching visual knowledge of race and racism with the aim of contributing to the deconstruction of racial images and practices of looking, such as those noted in our introduction. We discuss the visual construction of racial ideologies and hierarchies and how these structures of meaning are maintained and contested over time through popular culture. Inspired by Critical Race Theory in art and visual culture education, we describe key sites/sights and practices we use in our teaching to support learners in developing a visual understanding of race in popular culture and the practices of racialized looking it invites.² We argue that popular culture is a visual carrier of racial narratives and meanings that teaches viewers to see race as real by making racial categories of difference appear self-evident, even natural. Yet because popular culture is contested terrain, we move this argument forward by showing that awareness of its visual codes and conventions can foster critical interpretations.

ORGANIZATION OF PAPER

The design of this paper is multilayered. Throughout the text, we italicize key concepts that we have identified as curricular touchpoints. These concepts are relevant to academic discourse around dominant visualities of race in popular culture, and they should be taught as a scaffold for racial literacy. As critical race theorist Lani Guinier (2009) defines it,

Racial literacy is the capacity to conjugate the grammar of race in different contexts and circumstances. . . . It is sometimes a virulent subtext, at other times a nuanced dynamic.

² This paper is situated in Critical Race Theory (CRT) (Bell, 1990). Conceived in legal scholarship, CRT has key tenets that guide our analysis of race, including: racism is pervasive in the US and, thus, liberal concepts like colorblindness, meritocracy, and post-racialism are subject to critique; racism is linked to other forms of social inequities such as class, gender, sexual orientation; and, counterstories are crucial to destabilizing racial oppression. CRT in education guides scholars’ analysis of the continued marginalization of historically underrepresented groups across educational levels (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1994). Art and visual culture education is an approach to understanding curriculum, learning, and teaching that extends beyond the fine arts disciplines to incorporate all realms of the visual. It considers the contexts in which people encounter images of all kinds, how the meaning of images is negotiated and contested, and the cultural practices of image-making across formal and informal environments. For us, to address popular culture as an educational site/sight is to concern ourselves with not only *what* we see before us but also *how* seeing is made possible through practices of looking (Sturken & Cartwright, 2018). CRT finds its intersection with art and visual culture education through theory and analyses that posit the arts and visualities found in popular culture are central to the creation, maintenance, and normalization of white supremacist ideology, policies, and practices; however, countervisuality is a creative strategy by which consumers and producers of culture negotiate, contest, and overwrite racialized images and their meanings (Herman & Kraehe, 2018; Mirzoeff, 2011).

But always the meaning of race needs to be interrogated and conjugated carefully in light of relevant local circumstances and their historic underpinnings. (para. 14)

To support students in conjugating the grammar of race, we introduce key concepts and vocabularies that enable critical thought and dialogue, particularly among students who have little experience in race talk. We also provide sample classroom activities throughout the paper. These activities are teaching tactics we have used in our own classrooms with preservice teachers because they offer opportunities for counter-visual reflection and discussion aimed at helping students “read” the world profuse with images (Freire & Macedo, 1987). Organized in tables 1-4, the activities and discussion prompts, titled “Suggested Activity,” are snapshots of how we teach students to be racially literate consumers of popular culture today. We understand that even before they ever step into our classrooms, students have already developed racialized practices of looking. Therefore, the teaching tactics shared in this paper aim to help instructors guide students in understanding how visual codes and conventions are interwoven with narratives about race to uphold particular ideologies, beliefs and accepted ways of being in the world. Race is visually mediated, thus any course that deals with race and racism can make use of the visual site/sights, concepts, and active learning strategies we discuss here.

TEACHING HISTORICAL UNDERPINNINGS: ART, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGIES OF LOOKING

We begin teaching with the premise that the visual has always played a role in the construction of race and racial hierarchy in the popular imagination. In the history of popular culture, racial ideologies commingled with artistic creation, scientific pursuits, and technological inventions. The result is materialized through images and image-making practices. If one examines popularized images and the contexts in which they were made, it is possible to see how visualization, the process by which ideas and social relations are made visible and thus knowable, was and remains an integral aspect of racial formation in the US. As technological advancements have allowed images to be reproduced and mass distributed, racial iconography and meanings that may have originated locally now travel via popular culture, becoming embedded in the everyday visual lexicon of people who consume and enjoy popular culture anywhere in the world.

To teach how the sites/sights of popular culture have contributed to the visual construction of race and racial ideologies, we incorporate a historical perspective. We do this by showing students some of the earliest race representations from what is now the southwestern US, territories that would have been under Spanish rule and link these to early European scientists’ constructions of a racial other first through printmaking, drawings, and paintings and then later with the new technology of photography. The confluence of art, science, and technology enabled and legitimated particular practices of racialized looking that found expression in the popular culture of the time. This historical approach is meaningful in helping students move from thinking of race as a natural or biological phenomenon to seeing how it was (and continues to be) socially constructed by human beings and from thinking of racism as an individual attitude to seeing it as a system comprising laws, rules of reasoning, and ways of perceiving the world (i.e., worldview).

SYSTEMA DE CASTAS: VISUALIZING A RACIAL ORDER FOR A NEW SOCIETY

In our teaching, we have found that *castas* paintings offer an eye-opening point of departure. In the 1700-1800s, castas paintings were a popular genre in New Spain, an empire that encompassed much of South America, Central America, and North America, including most of present day US west of the Mississippi River and the Floridas (Katzew, 2004). Castas paintings depicted family groupings as a carefully constructed taxonomy of race in which human beings were separated into types (see Figure 2). Each human type was accompanied by a label that referred to phenotype and cultural traits.³

3 The labels included classifications such as:



Figure 2. Ignacio María Barreda. 1777. *Las castas mexicanas* [The Mexican castes]. [Oil on canvas]. Public domain.

Peninsular, a person born in Spain to Spanish parents

Criollo/Criolla, person of Spanish descent born in New Spain

Mestizo/Mestiza, a person born in New Spain with one Spanish parent and one indigenous parent (later this comes to be used for any person of European and indigenous ancestry)

Indio/India, a person who is descended from any indigenous group of the Americas

Negro/Negra, a person of African descent

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY: COLOR CODES**Background Information**

Color theory is widely considered at all levels of artistic production, from creation to editing to marketing and display. The study of color is used to train the eye to perceive the subtle differences of quality among various hues. Colors are made distinct and nameable in relation to each other. The color scale is commonly used to train artists' visual perception. The scale is an organizational device, but it also asserts a theory of color. This theory claims that color exists on a graded, linear scale--gradations of value from white on one end of the spectrum to black on the other end. The visual logic of a color scale is that white is the lightest of light and black is the darkest of dark. White and black are made to appear naturally distant from and opposed to each other.

Activity for Practice

Make a list of everything you can think of associated with the idea of light. Make another list of everything you can think of associated with the idea of dark. What do you notice among the items noted in the first list? What do the items have in common? What do you notice among the items noted in the second list? What do the items have in common? What is the relationship between the items in the light list and dark list?

As a whole group, view the *castas* painting (many can be found online with a simple Internet search). Use visual thinking strategies (Yenawine, 2013) to guide your looking and discovery by answering the following questions: (1) What is going on in the picture? (2) What do you see that made you say that? (3) What more can we find? This questioning strategy builds skills in careful observation, discourse about visual perceptions, interpretation of images and the ideas they convey using evidence, and listening to and considering the perspectives of others, and discussion of various possible interpretations. The instructor adopts the non-authoritative role of discussion facilitator. Allow everyone to respond to the three questions so that new responses may be added beyond what has already been offered and agreements and disagreements may be worked out. This discussion may go on for about 15 minutes depending on the size of the group.

Table 1. Suggested Activity: Color Codes

Through this looking activity, students are often able to identify for themselves that, in addition to dividing humans into types, *castas* paintings were organized as a progression from lighter to darker skinned figures. Figures were commonly arranged in a grid format, with each compartment numbered from one to sixteen. What they see is that racial taxonomies were hierarchical in ways that largely mirror present day race relations and the privilege of whiteness. They quickly grasp that lighter skin represents a higher social status, power, and privilege through its placement on the visual plane.

We provide some additional context after the looking activity so they understand the implications of images like this for creating a racially ordered society. The *systema de castas* or *racial system* was both a cultural and legal invention aimed at bringing order to the interracial unions between indigenous, African, and Spanish peoples in these Americas during the colonial period (Carrera, 2003; Katzew, 2004). It determined many of the rights and restrictions of daily life. Only Peninsulares were permitted to hold public office, and they held the vast majority of the wealth. The state and the Catholic Church expected the lower *castas* to pay more in taxation and tribute.

As illustrated in Barreda's painting, *castas* made visually explicit and concrete the colonial gaze in which popular classifications were created to support a utopian social order based on the imagined superiority of European-born Spanish blood and the gradual whitening of the New World (Martínez, 2008). Originally these paintings were displayed in official public spaces such as museums, government offices, and universities. This meant they served as an early form of public pedagogy that taught its viewer to associate darker skin with lower social positioning.

Then, as now, new technologies develop and this leads to new ways of visualizing racial ideologies. Science and photography are two technologies that we spend time examining in historical context to disrupt their assumed objectivity and authority in shaping ideas on race.

SCIENTIFIC PHOTOGRAPHS: VISUALIZING THE BIOLOGICAL ORDER OF HUMAN SPECIES

One need only reflect on the power of digital photographs in propelling social media usage and the role of cellphone video footage in galvanizing support for the Black Lives Matter movement to recognize the importance of cameras in shaping how people perceive and understand reality. We find that a historical approach helps students to see how cameras and the photographs that they produce function as technologies of racialized looking.

In Europe in the mid-1800s, photography was popularized by *daguerreotype*, the first commercially successful photographic process (Dinius, 2012). Named after the inventor, Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre, each daguerreotype is a unique image on a highly-polished silvered copper plate. Daguerre marketed his invention to artists as an expressive tool and to scientists as an instrument for viewing details with precision.

Both artists and scientists adopted the idea that a photograph could capture the true essence of a subject better than many other popular methods of image-making at the time, such as drawing, painting, or printmaking. People understood photographic technology to be a medium that lends itself to distortion and often reflects the intentions of the person behind the lens as much as the subjects in front of it. Nonetheless, the precision and affordability of daguerreotype made it attractive to clients who wished to memorialize loved ones through portraiture. Scientists saw the value of these popular photographs and the artists' skill as capturing the essence of the human being--the qualities of hair, skin, eyes, noses, and other physical features (Rogers, 2010). Thus, scientists employed the same technology, often employing artists, to document and catalog what they believed were bio-racial markers of fundamentally different human kinds.

In 1850, Swiss-born Harvard University scientist Louis Agassiz commissioned daguerreotypes of enslaved men and women in order to provide objective proof that the races were not merely different in outward appearance, but were biologically unique and unequal species. Borrowing from portraiture, Agassiz's scientific photographs showed fully nude subjects against a blank backdrop in upright frontal, profile, and posterior poses (Smith, 2004). Figure 3 is a daguerreotype of Delia and Renty. Delia was the enslaved US-born daughter of Renty, an enslaved African from Congo. These are part of a series of photo-portraits taken of enslaved people on a plantation in South Carolina. Agassiz commissioned the photographs in 1850 for his study of human types.

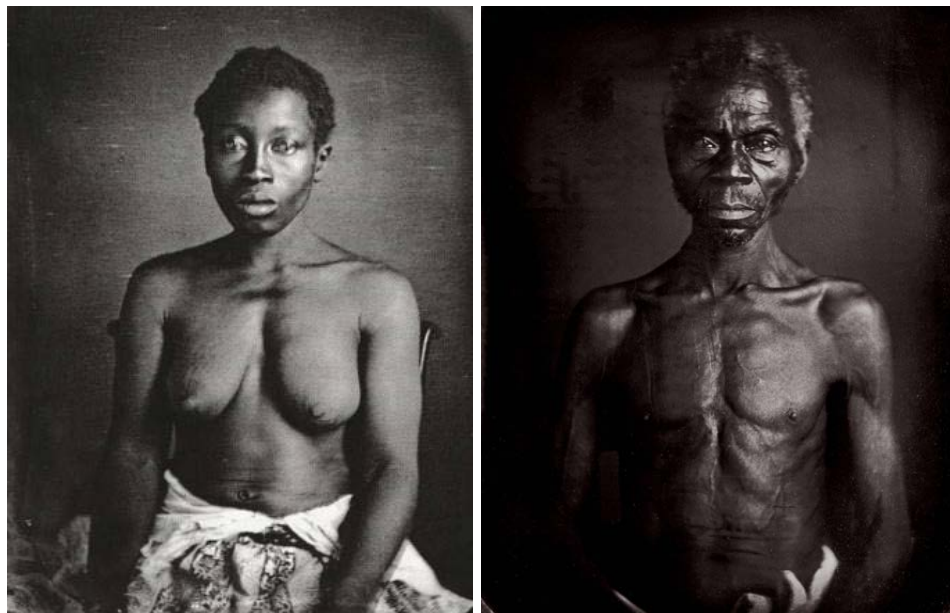


Figure 3. Zealy, J.T., commissioned by L. Agassiz. Circa 1850-1865. Delia; Renty. [Slave daguerreotypes]. Public domain.

Further, English anthropologists incorporated measurement into their individual nude portraits of indigenous peoples of Australia and Asia who lived under British colonial rule. They placed rulers and grids within the photographic frame alongside the non-White subject as a way to bring greater precision and standardization to images (see anthropological photos by John Lamprey from the late 1800s). Measurement lent an aura of objectivity to the side-by-side comparisons between peoples of the world. Thus, essentialist beliefs about the kinds of human differences that matter most were made to appear real, that is to say, natural to the subject of the photograph rather than a product of white racial thought and the colonial project of justifying the subjugation of non-White peoples around the globe.

Francis Galton, a British-born anthropologist and leading advocate of *eugenics*, the movement to improve society through controlled breeding of human types (Bruinius, 2006) created superimposed photographic portraits. These composite portraits were devised to approximate a general figure that would represent the average man of each racial type. Galton, like other eugenicists, believed Anglo-Saxons were the biologically, culturally, and intellectually superior race. The vast archive of images that was created cast non-White bodies as exotic objects of examination and eventually for consumption by curious White audiences in Europe and the Americas.

This can be seen in the case of the 16-year old, Sarah Baartman. Removed from her home in South Africa, enslaved, and transported to Europe, Baartman was dressed in feathers and beads and put on display to be viewed as a part of so-called “freak” shows (Collins, 2002). She was promoted as the “Hottentot Venus.” European onlookers took particular interest in her buttocks (see Figures 4-6). Her image was reproduced and circulated widely in cartoons, periodicals, and other popular media.

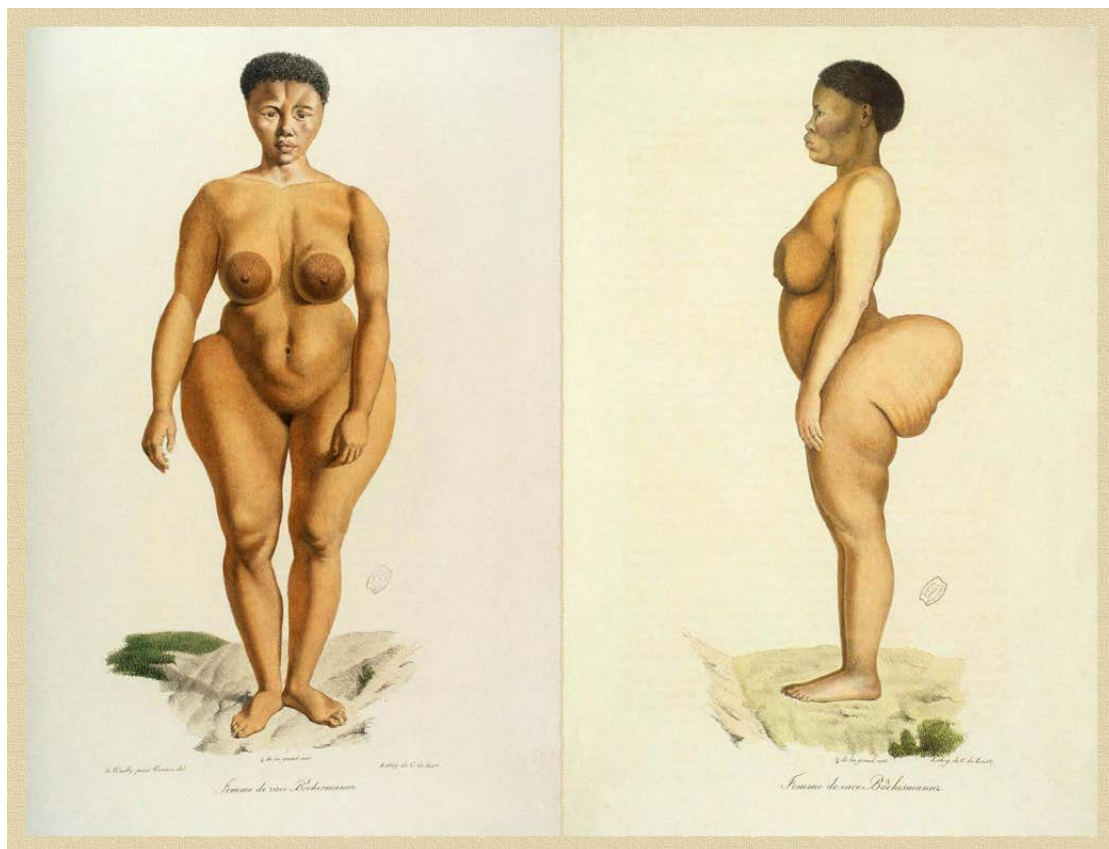


Figure 4. Wermer, Maréchal, Huet, designers ; C. de Lasteyrie, lithograph ; Etienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, Frédéric Cuvier, authors of the text. Uploaded, stitched and restored by Jebulon. 1815. Public domain.

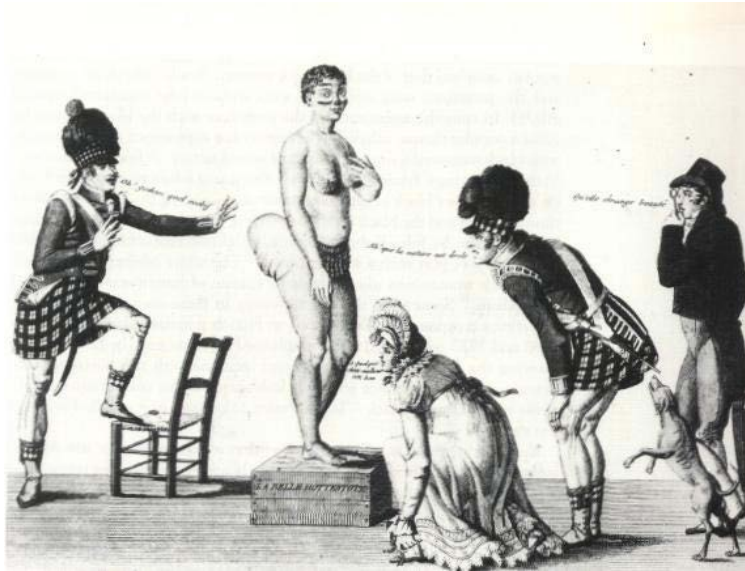


Figure 5. Unknown author. 19th century. "La Belle Hottentot" of Saartjie Baartman. [Print]. Public domain.

JUST ARRIVED
FROM LONDON,
And, by Permission, will be Exhibited here for a few Days,
 At Mr. James's Sale Rooms, Corner of Lord-street,
 THAT MOST WONDERFUL
Phenomenon of Nature,
 THE
HOTTENTOT
VENUS,
The only One ever exhibited in Europe.

In viewing this Wonderful LIVING Production of Nature, the Public have a perfect Specimen of that most extraordinary Tribe of the Human Race, who have for such a Length of Time inhabited the most Southern Parts of Africa, whose real Origin has never yet been ascertained, nor their Character, which has been so differently described by every Traveller who has visited those remote Regions of the World; and considering the natural morose Disposition of those People (who are scarcely ever observed to laugh) she is remarkably mild and affable in her Manners. She has had the Honor of being visited by His Royal Highness the PRINCE REGENT, and several Branches of the ROYAL FAMILY, also the principal NOBILITY, of both Sexes, in England, and declared to be a great natural Curiosity, well worthy the Attention of the Public. She is particularly obliged to the Female Sex who have so liberally patronized her Exhibition, and more especially after the malicious Reports circulated to her Disadvantage after her Arrival in this Kingdom; but which have been long since proved to be groundless. Over her Clothing, which is suitable to this Climate, is worn all the rude Ornaments used by that tribe on Gala Days.

N. B. Elegant Engravings of the Venus, by Lewis, sold at the Room.
ADMITTANCE—ONE SHILLING.

CHESTER, PRINTED BY J. FLETCHER.

Figure 6. Unknown author. 1810. Advertisement for the exhibition of Saartjie Baartman in London. [Newspaper]. Public domain.

Upon her death, Baartman's genitals and brain were requested for dissection by a European scientist. The request was granted. Her corpse was cast in plaster, and the cast again was placed on display in European museums. The image of the "hottentot," a term that is now widely considered derogatory, became a dominant racial trope that visually encapsulated European ideas about the primitive, overly sexual nature of African women (Collins, 2002). As these audiences looked at the images, they could "see" evidence that confirmed their own presumptions of superiority as a White race and the supposed primitivism of non-White others.

When teaching the iconography of the Hottentot Venus, we often present students with the music video from singer Taylor Swift's hit single "Shake It Off." Many students are already familiar with the song and move along to the pop tune as they watch the video. The music video stars Swift, a young blonde White American woman. She is dressed like the women dancing behind her: thigh revealing cut-off shorts with high top sneakers, a cheetah print cropped top, and large gold chains and hoop earrings. Looking toward us, the viewer, with eyes wide and mouth open, Swift gawks at seeing the diversely-hued women twerking behind her. Their rear ends are a spectacle, punctuated by a camera close-up of a Black dancer's *derriere*. We ask students to watch the video and look for evidence of the hottentot iconography. They compare and contrast the stills from the contemporary music video and historical Hottentot Venus posters with Sarah Baartman's likeness. To go further, we discuss #SayHerName, a present day racial and gender justice campaign to re-humanize Black women by remembering individual Black women and girls who have been victimized by police violence. It is a strategy that resists the white racial frame that renders Black women's bodies simultaneously hypervisible and highly consumable yet invisible and thus disposable.

Seeing is Believing: Visual Realism and the Fiction of Race

Photographic technology provided a realistic grammar that facilitated the construction and naturalization of social categories of race. For instance, mechanical reproduction and dissemination of the typological photographs discussed above helped fuel eugenics. Followers of the movement believed not only in racial categories but also in the biological, and thus predictable, inferiority of certain types of people, including non-White people as well as those who were seen as mentally ill, or socially deviant (Bruinius, 2006). Eugenicists sought to socially engineer a pure and superior race of White humans by eradicating (through sterilization and miscegenation laws) those deemed not White. For eugenicists, the photographic images taken in the name of science made visible the apparent "proof" of racial types and the "obvious" superiority of the White race. If examined carefully, facial expression, head size, bodily proportions, and other signs of the body captured in a snapshot would indicate the "real" cognitive, moral, and other interior traits.

How did photographs help to catalyze eugenics? For one thing, the photographs were an expression of a white colonial *gaze*. More than just a way of seeing, the gaze in visual culture is defined as the dynamic or relationship (of power) in which looking and being looked at takes place (Mulvey, 1989; Sturken & Cartwright, 2018). It is a social understanding through which individuals' thoughts, emotions, and behaviors are filtered. A shared gaze enables members of a society to make sense of the world and to derive meanings in roughly similar ways. Shared sense-making and meanings are how cultures form, and it is through culture that individuals are able to develop feelings, create attachments with others, and ultimately fashion their identities (Hall & du Gay, 1997).

The precision of photographic representation helped people who believed themselves to be White by virtue of a white gaze that projected criminality, feeble-mindedness, laziness, and licentiousness onto the image of the Other (Dolmage, 2014). Pseudo-scientific photographs also influenced intellectual writing and popular culture of Whites in the UK, Canada, and the US throughout the early 20th century. In particular, they sustained a Darwinian "survival of the fittest" narrative that justified the existence of racial inequality, changes in immigration policy, and the practice of selective breeding for a better society.

There is not one uniform gaze. Humans are more complex than that. Just as there are diverse ways of

locating and orienting oneself in the world, there also are multiple locations and orientations that inform and enable one's gaze when looking at another person, works of art, picture books, websites, video games, or movies. One's orientations can produce inconsistent, even conflicting, accounts. This is particularly the case in societies like the US that are rich in diversity or fragmented along racial, ethnic, economic, gender, and generational lines. A person's racial identification and experiences within a racialized context will inform how they view and are viewed by the world. Although the relationship between social location and perception is not predictive, the context of seeing--*when and why we look*-- is as significant as the object of the gaze--*what we look at*--in determining that which is visible and its possible meanings. Negotiating racial images and meanings, particularly those that have become iconic and accepted as part of the common sense, is an integral part of visual education.

VISUALIZING RACE IN 20TH CENTURY POPULAR CULTURE

The grand narratives and ideologies about racial superiority that once were conceived and supported via castas and daguerreotypes were further reified as new technologies of cultural production, making racial ideas and images more widely and frequently distributed to the masses. *The masses* is a concept introduced in the 19th century that refers to a unified body or grouping of people and the ways in which that body sway opinions and social practices about what is right or wrong, true or false (Sturken & Cartwright, 2018). Mass media are means of communication that are capable of distributing messages from a singular or centralized source, reaching audiences that represent a large portion of the population. Throughout the 20th century, mass media such as radio, broadcast television, film, magazines, and newspapers were largely controlled and used by commercial advertisers and politicians to generate and distribute messages that reflected and promoted dominant ideologies. These ideologies concerned not only race relations but also industries, education, wars, economics, and politics. By disseminating specific messages, sights and sounds, cultural producers represented aspects of US-American culture as though they were widely shared interests.

The landscape of mass media has expanded in the 21st century to include digital technologies such as the internet, the World Wide Web, wireless communication devices like cell phones and tablets. Mass media are pervasive in the modern world, so much so that when people encounter them in daily life, the content may be consumed unconsciously and the meaning internalized with little criticality. This is the broader educational force of cultural production in the new age of media, technology and multimedia. Learning through media can happen anywhere at any time. In this sense, mass-mediated culture is a *public pedagogy* that influences how people understand the world and their place in it (Giroux, 2004). Dominant racial narratives, imagery and sentiments come to be popularly held as they seep into everyday life. Media have become more democratized. A greater number of individuals are now able to access the mechanisms of cultural production, including technological tools such as cameras, camcorders, personal computers, editing software, and online distribution channels such as YouTube, Instagram, and other platforms.

Popular culture has long traded in racist scripts and iconography. The danger is that these attach to actual bodies. Popular culture is one of the most seductive mediums through which socialization occurs. *Socialization* is a process by which people adopt cultural codes and conventions that enable them to operate successfully within societal norms. Although individuals may exercise agency by resisting ideologies and practices that are against their own interests, socialization is a powerful process because it progresses slowly and unconsciously through small, everyday encounters. The nonconsensual, yet consistent engagement with certain messages, especially those disseminated via imagery, is why stereotypes and master narratives can be so successful.

Media Tropes

There are specific ways that mass-mediated popular culture invites particular practices of racialized looking. In the 1980s, about 50 corporations controlled US mainstream media, including television, newspapers, magazines, books, music and radio. Today, five corporations dominate about 90 percent of the mainstream media. These media outlets are owned and operated by wealthy White men who consult with executive boards who are also about 98 percent White and male (pbs.org, 2019). Plainly, White men have monopolized the media, which has resulted in the creation of certain aesthetic preferences and value judgements regarding who and what is desirable, loathsome, and worth looking at. White men who hold media power have been able to buttress their own subjective views of the world with a self-created set of values that idealize and valorize that which is associated with whiteness, while everything non-White is cast as subpar.

In addition to White males being the primary distributors of mainstream popular culture, they also write, produce, and direct the overwhelming majority of mainstream American film and television programming and content (Hunt, Ramon, Tran, Sargent, & Roychoudhury, 2018). For example, a 2018 Hollywood diversity report on research found that only about 1.3 out of 10 film directors are people of color (Hunt et al, 2018). As a consequence, visual representations of US-American culture are often *whitewashed* renderings, reductive and limited in scope because they are constructed around fixed images derived from the White male capitalist imagination. Ideas and images are considered whitewashed when they are conceptualized without the consideration of people of color or the narratives that derive from their experiences and perspectives (Gabriel, 2002).

Racial tropes, stereotypical representations of people in media, contribute to the durability of race over time. According to Goff, Eberhardt, Williams, and Jackson (2008), racial tropes in media, especially film and television, can be persuasive, as they produce cultural memory and implicit knowledge. They consist of characters and storylines that are static and recurring. Racial tropes affect non-Whites differently than they do Whites. Characterizations of White actors are most often perceived as unique to the role of the individual and not at all associated with their racial group as a whole. In contrast, the tropes that have been constructed for non-White people are attached to their entire racial group. This fuels cultural stereotypes with sociocultural consequences for those group members in real time.

Because they are so often repeated, over time racial tropes of non-White people calcify in the memory of people who have encountered them. This is a cumulative process due to repeated and unmitigated exposure to tropes. In addition, the racial characterizations are generally disparaging, as catalogued in Table 2. Despite their empirical inaccuracies, tropes come to feel familiar and thus take on an air of truth. They become a cultural tool for making sense of one's own identity and the subjectivity of others. Biased visual representations of non-Whites in the media facilitate socialization and also guide White people's understandings of non-White people. In addition, the development of positive racial identity among non-White children is undermined by seeing racial tropes in movies, television, and now video games.

In our classrooms, we introduce tools and practices that assist students in their development of visual literacy, as well as racial literacy (Guinier, 2004). Our goal is for students to identify and reflect on how their beliefs about the world are conceived, but also continuously mediated by visualizations of race in the media. Table 2 presents instructional details for an in-class activity that helps students practice being conscious and critical observers of content. This activity guides students in making connections between what they see represented in media and popular culture and what they actually believe, ideologically.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY: TROPE BINGO		
To introduce a unit about representations in film, create a printable bingo table and enter various racial tropes listed in the trope characterization table below. Pass them out to students and have students watch short clips from movies of various genres. Give them bingo chips and ask them to place a chip on the tropes that they identify in the film clips. Once someone calls bingo, follow up with a discussion about the identified tropes and the way these images and characterizations may impact the racial identity development of those represented. In addition, discuss the impact racial tropes in film may have on how we view each other in real time.		
Trope Characterizations		
	Male	Female
Black/ African American	Scary, Violent, Dangerous, Uncle Tom, Comic relief, Drugdealer, Gangbanger	Mammy, Matriarch, Sapphire/ Independent Black Woman, Jezebel, Angry Black woman, Welfare queen
Native American	Savage, Dirty, Alcoholic	Nature worshiper, Magical and mystical
Hispanic or Latinx	Gangbanger, Lazy, Drug dealer	Hypersexual temptress, Short-tempered fireball, Sassy, Exotic
Asian or Pacific Islander	Educated, Nerdy, Broken English, Magical Asian	Meek, Submissive, Thin/Small body frame, "Tiger" mom
Arabs/Middle Easterners	Terrorists, Manipulative	Oppressed, Belly Dancers, Weak, Manipulative
Jewish	Wealthy, but frugal, Business owner	Wealthy, but frugal, Overweight and apathetic, Asexual

Table 2. Suggested Activity: Trope Bingo

At the end of this activity, we ask our students to brainstorm movies or television shows that present characters as multidimensional and intersectional beings. For example, are all of the Black female characters demonstrating the same kind of behavior in the movie/show over a sustained amount of time? What character traits can be identified that are outside of the trope narrative? This activity concludes with students writing a reflection paper about a time when they applied the trope script to others in real time, and how their tacit acceptance of certain tropes impacted their interactions with people from different racial backgrounds. We use this activity to conjure up *flashpoints*, which refers to "a heightened occasion arising from the activation of power that disturbs a seemingly fixed relationship" (Kraehe & Lewis, 2018, p. 3). This activity invites students to identify specific moments in time that have impacted how they make sense of their own differences and the differences of others.

We recognize that the trope characterization table in the bingo activity is presented within the male-female binary. The binary is a part of the dominant trope construction. By and large, transgender and gender non-conforming people are invisible in popular culture. To transgress the binary is to be unintelligible within the cultural script that makes tropes recognizable. However, when transgender and non-binary people have been introduced in film and media, the characterizations generally are not nuanced. Primarily, characters are not

nuanced according to their intersectional experiences of racialization as queer people; instead, characters who are gender non-conforming are caricatured in similar ways. Regardless of race, transgender and non-binary characters are portrayed as mentally ill, as sex workers, or as peripheral comic relief (Feder, 2020). The trope bingo activity can be extended to address these problematic characterizations, as well as the ways the gender binary perpetuates the invisibility of transgender and non-binary identifying people. Ask students to modify the bingo boards to include the consideration of gender binary tropes.

Dominant Popular Culture

According to Lemons (1977), popular culture is “neither high or art culture, nor is it folk culture, but it is something in between which is produced by the entertainment industry for mass consumption” (p. 103). Popular culture mirrors what the masses are thinking, feeling, their attitudes, concerns, desires, likes, and dislikes. At the same time popular culture promotes dominant ideologies, identities, ways of thinking and feeling. Thus, it becomes easy for those in powerful media corporations to suggest that they are merely supplying on the screen, over the sound waves, and in print that which the public demands. Historically, dominant popular culture was created by Whites (males mostly), for White consumption. As a result, dominant popular culture representations of Whites were flattering, whereas representations of non-Whites were largely negative and exaggerated in ways that were reductive, flattening the complexity and diversity of non-White individuals.

Popular culture utilized a catalog of staple ethnic and racial characters that were intended to “other” non-Whites in the US. Black people were represented with monkey-like characteristics, like big, wide gaping mouths, large ears, oversized hands and feet, and sloping foreheads. These images were used for things like product advertisements, trading cards and golf tees (see Figure 7). Popular culture reflected White society’s low regard for people perceived as not White, thus reproducing and reaffirming white superiority through images. Negative portrayals of those deemed not White, which would have included some European ethnic groups, contributed to their ongoing oppression. The Irish, for example, were characterized as uncivilized, unskilled and impoverished. They were forced into labor that was deemed “too diseased and too deadly” even for Blacks who were enslaved (Lemons, 1977). Nineteenth century anti-Irish cartoons were featured in mainstream magazines like *Harper’s Weekly* and *Puck*. Irish immigrants and their descendants were portrayed as drunken ape-like barbarians who were lazy and lawless. The Irish were more closely associated with Blacks than they were with Anglo-Americans. These visual representations also drew from pseudo-scientific race theories that posited non-Whites as less than fully human.

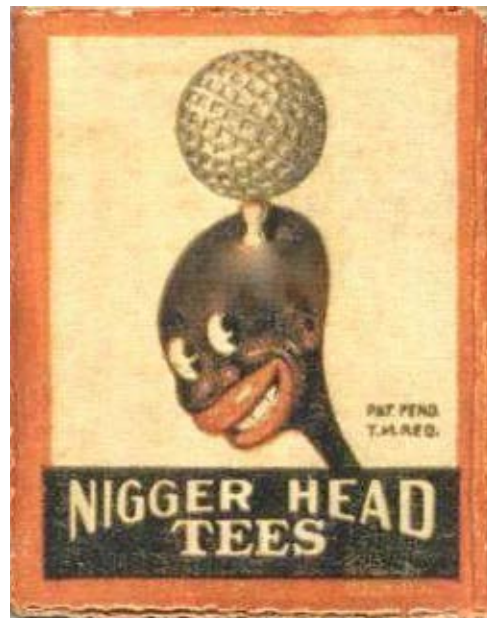


Figure 7. Philpot Brokerage company of San Francisco. Circa 1920-1950. Nigger Head [Golf] Tees. Public domain.

Minstrelsy as Popular Culture

Minstrelsy was America’s first national mainstream popular culture (Lemons, 1977). Minstrel shows extended the visual technologies of paintings, photographs and print to live drama and entertainment. They functioned similar to any other new technological advancement in that they reproduced and disseminated racialized images of people of color. Minstrel shows, which included live comic skits, music, and dance, became popular in the 1840s as a way to “depict” Black life to Whites in the North.

Minstrels were negative caricatures invented by and for White desire and power. White men would transform into “Black characters.” To them, this meant painting their skin pitch black instead of brown and exaggerating their facial features to resemble monkeys. Essentially, White men would apply greasepaint or burnt cork to their faces and fire red paint to their lips (see Figure 8). This practice in minstrelsy is understood as *blackface* (Lott, 2013). The White caricaturization of Blacks obscured the inhumanity of slavery by depicting it as amusing and amoral. White men even portrayed Black women in minstrel shows, as there were very rarely female performers in the antebellum minstrel shows. Minstrelsy was a spectacle that perpetuated and expanded the narratives regarding racial inferiority that were woven throughout history and at the crux of scientific racism (Lemons, 1977; Lott, 2013).



Figure 8. Strobridge & Co. Lith.; Wm. H. West's Big Minstrel Jubilee. 1899. "Four of Our Nation's Fun Makers." [Color lithograph]. Public domain.

Blackface minstrelsy was a visual exercise of racial power, a strategic practice used to create visual images that helped to normalize racial myths and codes. Whites engaged racial fantasies to portray Blacks as slovenly, ignorantly happy, eager to entertain, sexually promiscuous, and cognitively immature. Minstrel shows cemented racist tropes of Black people. As Black actors became more accepted on stage and in films, even *they* were forced to wear blackface. Ironically, White audiences often complained that the Black actors' faces were not "Black" enough (Lemons, 1977; Lott, 2013).

"The minstrel show had the blackface character as its focus; vaudeville inherited him and passed him on to the musical theater, the movies, and radio" (Lemons, 1977, p. 103). Films in early history were bound up with, even dependent on blackface minstrelsy. For example, D.W. Griffith's 1915 film, *Birth of Nation*, originally titled *The Clansman*, is cited as the first 12-reel film in the United States. The *Birth of Nation* was the first film to be shown in the White House under President Woodrow Wilson. While not intentionally so, President Wilson's initial praise of the film secured and supported White society's belief that Black people were inhuman and that the Ku Klux Klan's work needed to be continued in America. Nevertheless, Griffith is acclaimed for his pioneering film production, and cinematic innovations, like his use of close ups, fade outs, large battle scenes, color sequencing, and special use of subtitles that graphically verbalized imagery. The film influenced films produced long after. It is recognized even today as one of the top 100 American films. Just as the film is lauded for establishing film as an art form, its content had an equally significant impact on race relations in the United States. Most members of the cast who portrayed the Black characters were White men in blackface. The visual rendering of Black men as violent rapists, unintelligent, and animalistic further solidified the already normalized belief that Black people were not human, but dangerous, savages.

The White actors in *Birth of a Nation* vilified the Black people so ferociously that the film ushered in the second wave of the Ku Klux Klan up to a decade after it was released. The racist film ignited a sense of urgency for White people to revitalize the work of the Ku Klux Klan on the strength of saving their White women from rape and their country from pillage. Essentially, White people applied makeup to darken their skin in order to depict just about any race of people in film and on stage. Brownface, or "redface," was used to portray Native Americans, Hispanics, Latinx, and Middle Easterners. Even six years before D. W. Griffith presented the film *Birth of a Nation*, he wrote and produced *Comata, the Sioux*, a 1909 film about a Native American woman who falls in love with a cowboy (Behnken & Smithers, 2015). All of the actors were White, even those portraying the Native American characters.

Eventually, many non-Whites became emboldened to counter these negative dominant popular culture representations by creating their own imagery in protest. For example, in 1898, African American Bob Cole, a graduate of Atlanta University, created the nation's first all black full-length musical comedy, *A Trip to Coontown*. This musical countered the minstrel format that usually dehumanized Black Americans. The show was written, organized, produced and managed by all Blacks. Further, events such as the Harlem Renaissance in the 1920s, the domestic reaction to Nazi racism in the 1930s and 1940s, the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and the 1960s, and the Black Power Movement in the 1960-1970s gave momentum to the efforts to disseminate positive representations of non-Whites, particularly Black people in America (Gates Jr., 1992; Lemons, 1977). Nevertheless, while most of the imagery distributed in the 1800s and early 1900s have disappeared from popular media, the imagery has carried over and passively continues to enter our psyches, which impacts implicit bias. Even in the twenty-first century, research shows that the majority of US-Americans unconsciously associate Blacks with apes and society is more likely to condone violence against Black criminal suspects based on the broader ideology that Blacks are not fully human (Goff et al., 2008).

Cartoon animation carried forth traditions that originated in blackface minstrelsy. “With their white gloves, wide mouths and eyes, and tricksterish behavior,” Mickey Mouse and other popular characters carried “the tokens of blackface minstrelsy in their bodies and behaviors yet no longer immediately signif[ied] as such” (Sammond, 2015, pp. 1-3). Animators would “black up” the characters with exploding firecrackers and bombs that left soot on their faces. The Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia has an online collection of popular family cartoons that serves as an archive of racial tropes. These may be analyzed for the cultural codes and conventions that hide in plain sight by tracing their path from early photographs of race scientists to minstrel stage actors to present-day animations wherein language and sound combine with the visual.

Animation highlights how visual expressions of minstrelsy were not the only means of racially marked cultural performance. *Blackvoice* minstrelsy in cartoons and animation is the white appropriation of racialized speech that is most closely associated with “Blackness” or the culture of Black people (Chaney, 2004). Blackvoice in cartoons is most evident during interracial speech exchanges during which certain dialects and speech patterns demarcate Blackness, or Otherness. Even animal characters in cartoons assume trope-like character traits that help audiences conclude that the characters are racial Others. The hyenas in Disney’s *The Lion King*, are an example. In this movie, the hyenas are sneaky, dangerous, and not to be trusted by the lion cub, Simba. The voices given to the hyenas imitate the qualities of speech--vocal intonation, accents, and cadence--commonly used in media representations of Black people living in inner city neighborhoods. Pedro in Disney’s *Lady and the Tramp* can be read as brownface in its overplayed vocal interpretation of Mexican and Mexican American accents in the form of a Chihuahua (also the name of a state in México).

In addition to voices, cartoon characters take on slang, mannerisms, and fashion styles that read “Black,” while the person behind the character is actually White. The *Simpsons* cartoon also has received criticism for its brownvoice minstrelsy with the character Apu Nahasapeemapetilon, a South Asian Indian who was voiced by Hank Azaria, a White actor from the US (Shilpa, 2013). The show’s writers and producers are also White men, and despite years of criticism, the creators defended the practice as innocuous because it is intended as humor (Kondabolu & Melamedoff, 2017).

Cultural Appropriation, Appreciation, and Re-appropriation

To only see blackface and brownface as White America’s attempt to dehumanize people of color and manipulate the racial narrative would be naive. This practice was also an attempt to “try on” different racial identities, ethnicities and cultures. Lott (2013) confirms,

Minstrel performers often attempted to repress through ridicule the real interest in black cultural practices they nonetheless betrayed--minstrelsy’s mixed erotic economy of celebration and exploitation.... The very form of blackface acts--an investiture in black bodies seems a manifestation of the particular desire to try on the accents of ‘blackness’ and demonstrates the permeability of the color line. (p. 6)

The ability to take on and off certain racial and cultural ways of being represents privilege, but also reveals the desire to have a certain experience that is situated within a culture in which you are not a member. The contemporary name for this practice of “borrowing” is cultural *appropriation*.

Cultural appropriation is described as the practice of using or “taking” another culture’s intellectual property, cultural expressions, artifacts, history and ways of knowledge (Ziff & Rao, 1997). Cultural appropriation becomes problematic when the group being “taken” from has been marginalized and even oppressed for having specific cultural habits and ways of being, but once these cultural habits and ways of being have been adopted by the dominant group, then these traits are accepted and even desired. For example, for centuries, Black women have worn their hair in “cornrows” for varying reasons, such as to protect their hair from environmental damage, to manage the pure volume of their curl, as well as to honor the Afrodiasporic

connections passed on through ancestral traditions. However, in some workplaces, swimming pools and even in schools in the US (e.g., Kentucky), cornrows have been banned, citing reasons like they are unprofessional, unsanitary, and that they are a distraction to others. Students of color have been suspended from school for wearing their hair in certain styles, like twists, cornrows and dreadlocks (Roberts, Torres & Brown, 2016). It has only been since the creation of the Crown Act of 2019 that Black individuals have been ensured protection from discrimination based on raced-based hairstyles (thecrownact.com, 2020).

In 2016, the *New York Post* featured cornrows as “the hot new trend.” The *Post* and other news media sources even renamed cornrows to “boxer braids,” completely stripping the cultural history from the hairstyle. The renaming of cornrows and their new label of “trendy” appeared after reality star and social media personality Kim Kardashian and other high-profile White actresses and models were seen wearing the hairstyle in public. This example represents the imbalance of power that is aligned with cultural appropriation. Those from the dominant culture can assume traditional dress, hairstyles and practices of non-Western cultures, while willfully ignoring the challenges and struggles experienced by the people from those very cultures they are borrowing from. The ability to accept some aspects of a culture because they are “cool,” “different” or “in trend,” yet leave other aspects that have historically resulted in oppression when compared to the Western culture, demonstrates privilege. Contrastingly, *cultural appreciation* is characterized as having an authentic interest in another culture to the point of learning its origin, history, people, beliefs, perspectives and practices. Cultural appreciation, actually, oftentimes results in a person’s decreased desire to appropriate the culture because they have an advanced understanding of the culture and recognize that appropriating certain aspects of it are disrespectful.

It is imperative that our preservice art teachers leave our art education classrooms understanding the difference between cultural appropriation and cultural appreciation. This is a significant goal of ours because, unfortunately, there are art curricula resources online that are cesspools of cultural appropriation, advertising “multicultural” art lessons that use age-old stereotypes that essentialize whole groups of people (Acuff, 2014). Our preservice art teachers frequently look to these online resources as prompts and starting points for their very own units of instruction. As teacher educators, we find it necessary to teach our students critical questioning skills that embolden them to identify problematic curricular materials. Table 3 details a discussion activity that has helped our students hone in on their critical questioning practice. The activity centers the work of the controversial contemporary artist Nikki S. Lee, a Korean born woman who “tries on” different cultures as a means of “identity play.” Reviewing and reflecting on Lee’s work as it is described in detail in the table beckons students to consider questions such as: What is the context under which I am adopting another’s culture? Is it for entertainment? Am I honoring the cultural item’s (dress, hairstyle, practice) original intent if I wear it as an accessory (or practice it for pleasure)? Is it respectful to alter its cultural meaning? Am I interested in understanding how and where the dress, hairstyle, practice, etc. originated? In what ways am I committed to supporting this culture in ways that do not benefit me? Asking these questions as they consider their curricular choices can prevent teachers from causing trauma and harm to their students of color, whose culture may be at the center of cultural appropriation.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY: "TRYING ON" IDENTITY

Background Information

Nikki S. Lee, a Korean artist based in New York, is well known for her series titled, *The Projects*. In the series, Nikki immerses herself in different racial and cultural groups, eventually "taking on" the identity of the specific group. To transform, she experiments with her physical attributes (darkening her skin color, changing hair, applying stage makeup) in an effort to align her phenotype with those in the group in which she is immersed. Lee's series includes the "Hispanic Project," the "Hip Hop Project," the "Lesbian Project," the "Schoolgirls Project" the "Exotic Dancer Project," the "Seniors Project" and more.

In her preliminary research of the groups that she would enter, Lee had a choice regarding which characteristics to take on during her immersion. For example, in the "Hip Hop Project," Lee surrounds herself with a particular "type" of hip-hop artist, seemingly, those who fit inside of her understanding of what hip hop looks like. Based on the images she constructed, Lee identified hip hop artists as bandana and gold chain wearing Black men who entertain an abundance of oversexualized Black women. Lee herself, transformed into one of those women, darkening her skin with makeup, donning revealing clothes, and posing in ways that evoke sensuality. However, there are subcultures within hip hop that do not look and perform like those who Nikki chose to portray. So, the way that hip hop identity was fashioned is reflective of Lee's own perceptions and decisions concerning the use of ethno-racial codes. This point can be made for any of Lee's ethnographical "projects." Lee's body enters freely in and out of the varying communities that she infiltrates. She gets to decide when, where and how long she wants to perform within a specific culture.

Activity for Practice

Lee has been heavily critiqued for her method of assimilation into certain racial and cultural groups for her artwork. Conduct an internet search using the keywords "Nikki S. Lee The Projects." Click on "Images." Alongside students, co-generate a list of the varying identities that you think Lee "tries on." Make the list based on imagery alone; do not look at the titles of the images in your search. After you have compiled a list, refer back to the image captions to find out whether or not your list of identities align with Lee's representation. Lead a class discussion with the following discussion prompts: How did Lee's representations of certain identities affirm White people's imagination? In what ways does Lee's work play into trope characterizations? Did you find yourself referring back to these trope scripts to help you identify certain identities? How do Lee's intentional choices speak to her power to validate essentialized characterizations of certain people? In what ways does her art reduce race, ethnicity, culture and gender to particularized clothes and body type? Issues of cultural appropriation are forefronted in critiques of Lee's work, and some critics even call her work modern day blackface and brownface. Do you agree? Why, or why not? And can Lee's work be characterized as a form of cultural *appropriation* or *appreciation*? In addition, Lee's identity explorations bring up reflective questions such as, *Who* gets to "try on" racial, cultural, and gender identity?

Table 3. Suggested Activity: "Trying on" Identity

During this activity, students may struggle to be decisive about Lee's artwork and her use of cultural appropriation. Where is the line drawn? Lee's work is so multidimensional, this activity may actually leave students with more questions than answers. Nevertheless, one of the goals of this activity is for students to recognize that critical questions must be asked as they encounter information and imagery, especially as it relates to humans and their cultural landscape. As a teacher, accepting information and using it in their classroom without interrogating it can lead to them being implicated in perpetuating racism.

Cultural re-appropriation refers to the process of recovering cultural texts (art, artifacts, ideas, rituals,

language, imagery) that have been “borrowed” by those from the dominant culture for their own social, political, cultural and/or economic gain. Re-appropriation also happens when an oppressed group reclaims once pejorative texts that were meant to disparage their cultural community and shift their connotation to be empowering. Cultural meanings are fluid and can evolve through different interpretations, engagements and negotiations (Sturken & Cartwright, 2018). Contemporary visual artists recognize the fluidity through which culture is constantly remade and thus assume *counter-visual strategies* as a means for cultural re-appropriation. For example, Carrie Mae Weems, Byron Kim, Yong Soon Min, Hank Willis Thomas, Nicholas Galanin, and Michael Ray Charles’ use tactics like recontextualization, juxtaposition, abstraction, repurposing, and the reconfiguration of imagery to “dismantle the visual strategies of the hegemonic system” (Mirzoeff, 2011, p. 24) and resist dominant racialized meanings that are attached to certain bodies, places, and cultural texts. Table 4 presents an activity that allows students to explore the ways artists have used their practice to claim agency in the ways that they are represented. Betye Saar’s work invokes a media trope, Black woman as mammy, but counters this visual by adding artifacts that compel her audience to accept a different story.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY: RECLAIMING VISUAL REPRESENTATIONS
<p>Background Information</p> <p>Chris Rutt, the founder of the ready made pancake mix “Aunt Jemima,” came up with the product name and visual concept after watching a minstrel performance in which a White female actress wearing blackface sang a song titled, “Old Aunt Jemima.” “The song features a mammy, a racial stereotype of the Black female caretaker figure devoted to her White family. This image of supposed Southern hospitality inspired the hopeful entrepreneur” (Fauzia, 2020, para. 6). Believing this was a marketable concept, in 1893, Rutt and his business partner Charles Underwood filed a trademark for “Aunt Jemima” and attempted to sell the product nationally. After failing to get the product off the ground successfully, Rutt and Underwood sold the company and their recipe to R.T. Davis, owner of R.T. Davis Milling Co. Davis hired a Black woman, Nancy Green, to be a model for his newly acquired products. In line with minstrel iconography, Ms. Green was presented as a mammy trope on the original products. Over its 120-year lifespan, the product logo evolved from Ms. Green’s face to a fictional Black woman who is presented as more contemporary, donning pearl earrings and a lace collar. However, the name and concept behind “Aunt Jemima” has remained.</p> <p>Betye Saar is a Black American, female artist best known for her collage and assemblage work. Also a printmaker, Saar uses her work to address political, racial, religious, and gender concerns. She uses found relics and ordinary objects to make commentary that delves into the past, while simultaneously considering the future. Saar’s “The Liberation of Aunt Jemima” recoups historical racial iconography, the Black mammy trope, and replaces it with a multidimensional narrative about Black female existence.</p>

Table 4. Suggested Activity: Reclaiming Visual Representations

This activity emphasizes the artist’s role in renegotiating the distribution of oppressive visual imagery. If we have learned about race and racism by what we have seen, we can learn about anti-racism by what we see. Artists are leaders in disseminating counter-visual images that help the world conceive new and more multidimensional narratives. To go further, students can be led through a discussion about the evolution of Aunt Jemima’s appearance over the years, including the steps taken in 2020 by food company Quaker Oats to “[retire Aunt Jemima](#)” as their breakfast products’ logo. Does the evolution and now removal of the iconic image negate its racist visual origins? How do we reconcile this tension? This discussion is effective for scaffolding dialogue around tropes, minstrelsy, and blackface and the way these visual tools continue to impact the way we engage with each other in today’s world.

CONCLUSION

Race is visually mediated. It is formed by what we have learned to notice and perceive. Through casual encounters with racially encoded pictures, objects, and moving-images, we learn to “see” each other in racial terms. Indeed, what we think we see is as significant in visualization processes as is that which is objectively present within a field of vision. To counter racist practices of looking, we have argued for the importance of (1) recognizing racial iconography as an integral part of US-American popular culture and (2) understanding popular culture as a highly visual and seductive medium through which racial hierarchy (white supremacy) is socially constructed, learned, and contested.

The technological means for producing and consuming popular visual culture increasingly are embedded in daily life. Cameras, camcorders, editing software, sharing sites, and screens for viewing content are less expensive and more readily available than ever before. In this context, there is a growing opportunity for counter-visualities to gain prominence. But artists, designers, critics, and other creatives who participate in the making of culture need to be educated in the dominant visualities of race. If not, we can expect to see white supremacist imagery resurface again and again with each new generation.

A curriculum that focuses on dominant visualities of race should include opportunities to identify racial tropes as they are represented in popular visual culture and as they are reiterated in newer forms, mediums, and contexts. The curriculum should also support students’ competence and confidence in talking about what they see in popular culture. Thus, key vocabularies for naming and framing visual phenomena are fundamental knowledge for critical interpretation of and dialogue about contemporary racial issues. The visual and verbal lexicon we propose is, in fact, what we use in our classrooms with our students to uncover older meanings and construct newer ones through counter-visual engagement with popular culture. More scholarship is needed to extend this lexicon and the activities to support further curriculum development on racial histories and iconography in and through popular media.

Our pedagogy is one that goes beyond the common practice of teaching that stereotypes are problematic. We find that approach can lead students to think the appropriate and only response to racism and other forms of oppression is to avoid difficult topics altogether. Race avoidance does not dismantle racial injustice but very likely contributes to more insidious forms of structural and microaggressive racism. Instead of an evasive politically correct response to stereotypes, we want students to dig in and explore the mechanisms of racist imagery in popular culture and the provocative modalities by which white supremacy is fomented. In having the tools to know how it all works, students may develop a greater sense of agency, moving from mere subjects of history to being co-creators of the world they wish to see.

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Unmasking Male Voices in *Woman Hollering Creek*: Contributions to Pedagogy and Masculinity Studies

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ABSTRACT

In teaching Sandra Cisneros' *Woman Hollering Creek* to undergraduates, we have developed a sociocultural and historical framework, beginning with the theoretical work of Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands* and the concept of *transfrontera feminism*. With incidents of seduction and sexual abuse of women, spousal abuse, and patriarchal family structures, the collection of stories strongly indicates the oppressive representation of *machismo*. Scholars and teachers have drawn important critiques of Cisneros's work based on destructive sociocultural forces on women. However, in rereading the text with an intended focus on the representations of male characters, we have surmised that Cisneros structured the stories in the text to reveal that men are simultaneously affected by sociocultural pressures. The male characters in this story collection play an important role beyond the characterization as oppressors.

Cisneros's stories have helped us unmask important social forces that affect not only Chicana characters, but husbands, lovers, and even neglected fathers. Male characters in *Woman Hollering Creek* also have basic needs for food, shelter, love, and dignity, and they too suffer the consequences of politically charged borders. Furthermore, these masculinity effects may not often be acknowledged in teaching literature courses. The pain and struggle of male and female genders are aligned within this collection; there are several male characters who signify masculinity, and compassion, and beauty. Therefore, in revising our curricula, we intend to place some stories from *Woman Hollering Creek* and Rigoberto González's *Men without Bliss* (2008) in conversation with each other. We do not intend to privilege one writer against another, but encourage students to consider the contributions and limitations of each in terms of theme, characterization, plot, and literary technique. It

is our intention to teach students that Cisneros's *Woman Hollering Creek* humanizes both men and women in their strength, frailty, and quest for love.

Keywords: Sandra Cisneros, Chicana Literature, *transfrontera feminism*, *Woman Hollering Creek*, Gloria Anzaldúa

Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street* has been taught in many high school and college classrooms as an example of a young, perceptive, and specifically *Latina* voice to diversify curriculum. Since that novel's publication in 1984 and its significant mass appeal, Cisneros has become a resounding voice for *feminismo popular*, transnational feminism, and *transfrontera* (identity) politics (Mullen, Ramirez-Dhoore, Wyatt), all of which contest oppressive agendas against women from Latin America and beyond the borders of the United States. For instance, Saldivar-Hull notes that the title story in *Woman Hollering Creek*, the short story collection Cisneros would publish in 1991, "changes the subject of dominant, patriarchal discourse and lets readers imagine how Chicana *transfrontera* feminism and Mexican *feminismo popular* can converge in other spaces and under other circumstances to produce socially nuanced global Chicana Mexicana coalitions" (251). Cisneros's contributions to Chicana feminism in literature cannot be overstated, especially in paving the way for writers, such as Julia Alvarez, Ana Castillo, Cristina García, Melinda Palacio, and Carla Trujillo; the adoption of Latino/a writers in secondary and post-secondary education; and the further rise of Latino/a and Chicano/a Studies Departments.

Because Cisneros's *Mango Street* had achieved popularity in educational circles during the early late 1980s, Latchaw adopted it over the last decade teaching her Latino/a unit for Ethnic Literature, a sophomore level course. On the advice of another faculty member, she later opted for the edgier *Woman Hollering Creek*. In the early 2000s, Guerra also adopted selected stories from this collection for his American Literature survey course. During one semester the two of us co-taught the book, combining our two classes for several sessions. In our approach we highlighted *transfrontera* feminism, noting that early reviews of the book were contradictory and polarized. One *Kirkus* review from March 1991 describes the book as stories of "growing up female in a culture where women are both strong and victimized [and] men are unfaithful" (*Kirkus Reviews*). The stories were viewed as either presenting strong piranha-like women, abusive men, or weak naïve victims. Latchaw and Guerra's collaboration over this period led us to discover how we could reconsider and complicate our initial approach, which had been informed by dominant scholarship; through ongoing conversations between the two of us and examinations revealed through class discussions, we both agreed that Chicano men in *Woman Hollering Creek* also suffer, grieve, and love and therefore demand a more nuanced reading, comprehension, and pedagogical approach than is typically given.

In this adapted approach, we find that men's strife in the short stories is muted or concealed primarily because male characters do not "holler" in pain *or* in triumph—as Cleófilas does in the story "Woman Hollering Creek," who suffers abuse but ultimately escapes—and because patriarchal oppression is so blatant. (One notable exception is "Salvador Late or Early," a story that comes early in the collection and which features a small boy's "geography of scars" from poverty and isolation.) We argue that the sociocultural plight of Chicano boys and men in Cisneros's story collection deserves to be explored and exposed. In addition to constructing and revising pedagogical approaches to Cisneros's work, this analysis will also contribute more broadly to the field of critical masculinity studies, an emerging field in which recent "endeavors have pinpointed a number of important issues regarding men and masculinity, [but] they continue to overlook the role of agency and reflexivity in these experiences, a concept that is vital to feminist research" (Waling 2).

We embark on this project by tracing our ideological shift in teaching Cisneros's *Woman Hollering Creek*. The Course Background and Pedagogical Reception sections reflect a feminist *transfrontera* ideology, focusing on the silencing of women, male dominance, and patriarchal language patterns, all of which are built

on our knowledge of existing and dominant scholarship. In “Expanding Our Perspectives,” we demonstrate an approach to teaching *Woman Hollering Creek* that includes influences of cultural identity, economic deprivation, and geographical displacement on various male Chicano characters. We argue for what Gloria Anzaldúa calls a “tolerance of ambiguity,” whereby men are portrayed sometimes as oppressors, sometimes as victims, and sometimes as more complex, enigmatic figures that shed binary distinction (Anzaldúa 101). Not coincidentally, representations of the women characters necessitate a similar tolerance; for example, Clemencia, in “Never Marry a Mexican,” seduces a young boy as retribution for betrayal by Drew, his white father. Clemencia’s mother also has an affair while her husband is fatally ill. As a child Clemencia opines, “That’s what I can’t forgive” (73). These examples serve as warnings against essentialism of men as Anzaldúa characterizes it: “Lumping the males who deviate from the general norm with man, the oppressor, is a great injustice” and “[m]en even more than women are fettered to gender roles” (106). Our developed approach is an attempt to combat this inclination to essentialize men or women and pushes beyond prescribed structures of gender and other confining expectations as defined by cultural norms or dominant patterns of reading.

PEDAGOGICAL RECEPTION

Chicano Studies programs were developed on campuses in the late 1960s, continuing with the emergence of mid-1970s era Chicana feminists. With the “mainstreaming” of Latino culture in the 1980s (famously forecast by *TIME* in 1978 as the “Decade of the Hispanics”), Chicano/a texts have been taught more frequently in American Literature courses as well as in classes devoted specifically to Chicano/Latino Studies. Cisneros’s *The House on Mango Street* in particular has been prominently taught across several types of courses. Composition instructors have also used the book in various writing courses. For instance, James Ottery, teaching an Introduction to College Writing course, assigned excerpts from Richard Rodriguez’s *Hunger for Memory*, bell hooks’ *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*, and Cisneros’s *Mango Street* to help students explore their own cultural identities in personal essays. One Mexican-American student in Ottery’s class was inspired by “A House of My Own” (from *Mango Street*), as a way to declare her “independence from Mexican macho expectations” (Ottery 134). In a high school English course, P. L. Thomas assigned that same chapter from *Mango Street* as a modeling exercise, whereby students could become “authentic readers and writers” (90). Other instructors, who teach literature, have used *Mango Street* not only to discuss racial and gender politics, but literary techniques, such as narrative strategy (Bérubé).

In contrast to the many references to *Mango Street*, we found only a few pedagogical sources that featured the grittier and more challenging *Woman Hollering Creek* collection. One article from *Radical Teacher* featured the experience of Linda Dittmar, a white “ambassador” teaching a postcolonial course in India. The students read *Woman Hollering Creek*, but rebelled about “all this whining and self-pity” that “doesn’t help us move forward” (60). Dittmar followed these complaints with a lecture, arguing that the titular story, “Woman Hollering Creek,” was actually an emancipatory tale. At the end of the course, Dittmar questioned her role as a cultural ambassador, acknowledging that students should have the authority to reinterpret a story’s meaning from their own cultural perspectives (62). A more successful pedagogical experiment was undertaken in a high school class in Arizona. In “Developing Critical Consciousness: Resistance Literature in a Chicano Literature Class,” Curtis Acosta demonstrates how students who studied and applied resistance literature to their own circumstances developed agency and became presenters at community events and even at the University of Arizona; many became activists in educational and immigration policy (Acosta 42). These successes are clearly significant, but we noted that Acosta categorized Cisneros’s work (in *Woman Hollering Creek*) primarily under feminism, machismo, and gender roles. His categorization reinforces the dynamics of patriarchal authority, which in turn makes men’s experiences, standpoints, and vulnerabilities invisible.

Such a perspective on the oppression of women has been reinforced by Cisneros's own commentary: that men are really much worse than her portrayals, and that she has "been rather lenient on them" (qtd. in Chávez-Silverman 183).

COURSE BACKGROUND

Our pedagogical approach, prior to reconceptualizing the Latino/a unit of our respective courses, privileges the "minority" terms: Latinas, women, homosexuals, Mexicans, Spanish, among others. They reflect the predominant ideologies informing Cisneros's collection: patriarchy, colonialism, and folk Catholicism. Therefore, we appropriated Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands* as an ideological primer for interpreting the stories in *Woman Hollering Creek*. Both of our courses began with chapters from *Borderlands* that focus on the suppression of Chicano Spanish ("Linguistic Terrorism") and the silencing of girls and women in "How to Tame a Wild Tongue." Some of Latchaw's class notes highlight the character Malinche's embodiment as a villain and traitor (in history and literature), Anzaldúa's struggle with double consciousness, and cultural gender roles/rules. Anzaldúa, in *Borderlands*, has famously proclaimed that "Culture is made by those in power—men. Males make the rules and laws; women transmit them" (38). *Borderlands* offers a memorable example of this cultural enforcement: a warning from Anzaldúa's mother that "Flies don't enter a closed mouth," meaning that she should strive to avoid "having a big mouth, questioning, carrying tales, signs of being *mal criada* [badly bred]" (76). Anzaldúa reinforces this silencing from within her own culture along with identity repression by exposing the biased structure of the Spanish language: "We are robbed of our female being by the masculine plural [os]. Language is a male discourse" (76). In teaching Anzaldúa we each emphasize how her work reveals invisible borders and intersections between Latinas/os and Non-Latinas/os, men and women, Spanish and English: for instance, educating readers about linguistic differences between formal Spanish, Tex-Mex, and Chicano Spanish and the status each confers. In class we ask students to consider how these borderland schisms will be manifested in Cisneros's collection.

Guerra's class typically examines Anzaldúa's descriptions of the "prescribed patterns" of Latinas leaving their fathers' houses in order to shed light on the rigidly defined gender roles that her work analyzes and deconstructs. Anzaldúa proclaims, "For a woman of my culture there used to be only three directions she could turn: to the Church as a nun, to the streets as a prostitute, or to the home as a mother" (39). While this claim expresses a hyperbolic capitulation of the limited, oppressive outcomes for Latinas, students discover Latinas' reductive roles as objects of sexuality. Latinas either repress and forego their sexuality as a nun, misuse and abuse their sexuality as a prostitute, or curtail and "appropriately" apply their sexuality as mothers/wives. Anzaldúa indicates that Latinas contribute to the growth of these oppressive cultural structures, as illustrated in some *Woman Hollering Creek* characters. Again, those women see that "[m]ales make the rules and laws" in an ongoing relationship of power; as important or even more so, "women transmit them," in the way that demonstrates acceptance, self-deprecation, and continuity.

CLASSROOM APPLICATIONS

To reinforce the patriarchal theme, Latchaw asked students in her class to answer the following question in an exam: "Explain how the persona in 'The Marlboro Man' critiques Latino *machismo* and challenges cultural values." One student responded to the first query by noting that the Marlboro man represents a manly type to be desired (for women) and an archetypal macho man to emulate (for men). He also noted that worshipping Latino *machismo* is superficial especially given the irony of selling cancer causing agents. Another essay question asked students to analyze the meaning of the title "One Holy Night," referencing the affair of a 13-year-old child (who gets pregnant) with the 37-year-old "Boy Baby," who turns out to be a serial

killer. Most students were understandably horrified and read the title ironically: for instance, comparing the “seduction” with the birth of the Christ child. The strong, almost visceral emotions elicited by these predatory scenes blinded students to historical and cultural realities that might have shaped Boy Baby’s personality and character. (After later reexamination of Boy Baby’s background and cultural experience, we complicated the question to include a male perspective.)

“Never Marry a Mexican” evoked a similar reaction when readers saw that Clemencia (the protagonist) seduces her former lover’s son in retribution. A young male student in Latchaw’s class, who had recently immigrated to America from Mexico, was horrified at Clemencia’s affairs because they threatened his culture’s social norms. “Having mistresses is acceptable for men,” he said, “that would be no big deal. But for women adultery is a major taboo.” The class exploded. Shocked and dismayed by the student’s macho attitude, a cacophony of voices started verbally pummeling the young man about gender equality and ethics. Latchaw took a poll, asking the class if they agreed or disagreed with the student. Everyone else in the class said having affairs outside marriage was equally wrong for men or women. Latchaw prompted the class to explore the ideologies underlying cultural norms and social practices of both American and Mexican society. The Mexican student regained his voice by describing his upbringing in terms of gender roles, which resulted in mutual understanding and respect. Amiability was established by the end of the hour. In the Mexican student’s final reflection, he said this discussion provided an important lesson about ethical concerns regarding fidelity and the ability to critically examine his own culture. The other students also expressed an appreciation of various cultural traditions, norms, and values.

EXPANDING OUR PERSPECTIVE

Based on our students’ empathy for the plight of some male characters, scholarly analysis of “Remember the Alamo” (with flamboyant, poverty-stricken Tristan, a gay night club entertainer), and a masculinist reading of “Salvador Late or Early,” which examines themes of youthfulness, sensitivity, and sacrificial responsibility, we elected to reread the stories in *Woman Hollering Creek* and begin to expand and develop our focus of *Borderlands*. We drew on Anzaldúa’s warning to avoid cultural collisions and the tendency to become locked “into a duel of oppressor and oppressed.” Instead, readers should seek a new integrated consciousness, reflected in the term *la mestiza*, which values “divergent thinking, characterized by movement away from set patterns... and that anticipates ambiguity” (101). This is the habit of mind we wanted our students to develop in approaching the stories sympathetic to boys and men.

The sections below reflect our rereading, highlighting scenarios where Cisneros’s male characters are drawn with more complexity. In order to test this new interpretive strategy, we identified relevant passages, analyzing them with the *mestiza consciousness* in mind. These analyses include ideas for student engagement with masculine perspectives.

- “Salvador inside that wrinkled shirt, inside the throat that must clear itself and apologize each time it speaks, inside that forty-pound body of boy with its geography of scars... is a boy like any other disappearing out the door, beside the schoolyard gate, where he has told his brothers they must wait” (“Salvador Late or Early” 10-11).
- As one of the most emotionally intense stories in the collection, Salvador suffers a terrible indignity of the body and spirit, and his life journey seems predestined because of his environment. In *Woman Hollering Creek* neither gender is spared when poverty collides with cultural isolation and invisibility. We also noted that the placement of this story as the third in the collection seems to bookend nicely with the similarly depicted male personas in the later stories in the collection, “*Los Boxers*” and “*Tin Tan Tan*.” With this perception in mind, students might consider how *Woman*

Hollering Creek's structure of growth and development reinforces or deconstructs some of the binaries we have discussed.

- “If they are lucky, there are tears at the end of the long night. At any given moment, the fists try to speak. They are dogs chasing their own tails before lying down to sleep, trying to find a way, a route, an out, and—finally—get some peace” (“Woman Hollering Creek” 48).
 - This passage from the titular story provides an opportunity for students to interrogate the idea that borderland struggles affect both men and women. The narration implies rather than states, and the pronouns are ambiguous—creating gaps that are ripe for interpretation and suggesting multiple groups of people in trauma.
- “When my wife died I used to go to a place over on Calaveras way bigger than this... You know how to keep a stain from setting? Guess. Ice cube. Yup. My wife taught me that one... Oh boy, she was clean. Everything in the house looked new even though it was old... You betcha... Starched and ironed everything... Even ironed *los* boxers. But now that she’s dead, well, that’s just how life is.” (“*Los Boxers*” 131-132).
 - This story, fourth from the last, is placed in a section titled, “There Was a Man, There Was a Woman,” indicating what might be called an equality or coexistence of experiences between men and women. For instance, students have noticed from passages like the one above that men also grieve, although not in the same way as the young Salvador, placed earlier in the collection. Class discussions might draw students’ focus to the narrative style and structure, tone and mood, and sentence variety to reveal/imagine the rhetorical effect on readers: their emotional responses to this husband’s loss.

In several instances from our classes, we noted that students were beginning to understand Anzaldúa’s warning about gender binaries. By recognizing the fluidity of prescriptive gender “norms” in line with Anzaldúa’s “tolerance for ambiguity,” several different students vocalized a need to perceive Cisneros’ portrayals of male characters with complexities beyond a simple binary. We trusted that our classes were prepared to revisit the crucial and complex story “One Holy Night” in Section II as it provides rich opportunities to deconstruct binaries reflected in the story: oppressor/victim, shame/pride, fiction/history, and love/fear.

Students still required careful guidance to analyze the complexities of the representations in the story because the overwhelming *feminist popular* reactions to the seduction of a 13-year old girl by a serial killer were horror, disgust, and fear. At this point, Latchaw asked students to research the names of Mayan cities, Tikal, Tulum, Chichen, and the Temple of the Magician where “Chaq” (the lover in the story) says he prayed as a child. These are important and real place names that resonate with a Mexican, indigenous heritage, which on some level creates sympathy with Chaq as a victim of poverty, and perhaps even displacement and cultural erasure. In an attempt to more critically understand Chaq and the young narrator’s desires and longings, Latchaw asked students to consider the following questions:

- Why does Chaq mention these place names to the narrator?
- What significance might they imply for both?
- What passages evoke sympathy for Chaq?
- What are the narrator’s feelings about and attitude toward Chaq?
- Is the narrator ashamed of her pregnancy?
- What relationship might be implied between the narrator and the Virgin Mary?
- What does the story say about love?

The ensuing discussion of “One Holy Night” revealed that to some degree Chaq, as a representative indigenous Mexican, could be considered both oppressor and victim. With a clearer understanding of Chaq’s deep connection to his ancestral roots and profound poverty, the students began to feel some empathy for

this sociopathic character. One student argued that even if Chaq/Boy Baby fabricated his ancestral history, becoming part of that ancient Mayan culture would establish an alternative respectable identity, both to himself and his innocent partner. It is reasonable to conclude that the young narrator was so dazzled by Chaq's transformation into a Mayan king, that she imagined herself as his queen. In fact, as a coming of age story, the narrator experiences pride in entering a "mature relationship" that includes romance and motherhood and contrasts with her elders' feelings of shame and fear. This divergence highlights the ambiguity of the title, "One Holy Night," which can be read satirically, sincerely, or historically, depending on various points of view including those of the narrator, the narrator's grandmother and uncle, and male or female readers. Such differences encourage a tolerance for ambiguity regarding morality, social norms, religious values, and generational conflicts. This ambiguity or acknowledgment of complexity can often create a disturbance in students' receptions. In light of such disturbances, we also ask students to consider Cisneros's insistence on love in different capacities as we have worked through the collection.

AMAR ES VIVIR

Due to the ideology of gender as so powerfully dramatized in the collection, universal themes of love and acceptance are generally overlooked. These desires are more directly expressed in Cisneros' poetry collections, *My Wicked*, *Wicked Ways* and *Loose Woman: Poems*. The refusal to give up on love, even in the direst of circumstances, is a testimony to Cisneros's belief that love is a universal necessity—for young and old. As well as for both men and women. This theme runs like a river through Cisneros's work. Therefore we would feel remiss in limiting the *Woman Hollering Creek* stories to gender, language, and sociocultural barriers and conflicts.

While the relationships among life experience, love, and sexuality are not directly addressed in the collection, they are ripe for interpretation. Students can examine the earlier childhood stories in the section titled "My Lucy Friend Who Smells Like Corn," analyzing how a lack of desire for love might affect the ability to thrive as an adult. The three-page story that shares the section's title is narrated by a young girl who envies Lucy's eight sisters ("... the baby Amber Sue on top of Cheli's flowered T-shirt, and the blue jeans of *la* Ofelia over the inside seam of Olivia's blouse ..." [Cisneros 2]) despite poverty in the entire neighborhood. The fact that Lucy's arm got caught in a wringer washer and that her father went missing are merely side notes in imagining joyful companionship at Lucy's house. The story closes with laughter between the two friends.

Even in the more troubling "One Holy Night," the thirteen-year-old narrator, whom readers recognize as a victim of rape, asserts her love for Boy Baby and expresses her superior knowledge of the male body in lilting, rhythmic language: "They don't know what it is... to look and look without worry at the man-bones and the neck, the man-wrist and man-jaw thick and strong, all the salty dips and hollows, the stiff hair of the brow and sour swirl of sideburns ... and stare at how perfect is a man" (34-35). The jarring dissonance between the rape plot and the elegant descriptions creates dis-ease for readers; our students in particular found it difficult to acknowledge Cisneros's admiration for physical beauty under such horrifying conditions. It is also hard to justify the young narrator's later vision of parenthood, "I'm going to have five children. Five. Two girls. Two boys. And one baby" (35). Cisneros imbues even this young, damaged child with an indomitable spirit and a positive vision of the future that includes love and sexual desire.

Cisneros's stories show that to live is to love, even when love is experienced only in memory. In "Eyes of Zapata" Inés talks in absentia to Emiliano, the famed Mexican revolutionary Emiliano Zapata, about their lives together in the context of historical events and the trajectory of their relationship. Like her thirteen-year-old counterpart from "One Holy Night," Inés extolls the beauty of the male body, "I put my nose to your eyelashes. The skin of the eyelids as soft as the skin of the penis, the collarbone with its fluted wings...

" (85). The elegant language belies the reality that Zapata seduced Inés as a young girl and abandoned her as a woman, just as with the characters portrayed in "One Holy Night." Cisneros might be suggesting that admiration and appreciation of the physical body are valuable and even necessary in themselves. From a feminist perspective, Inés exercises agency through her narration, creating an aesthetic that is emotionally gripping. She writes Emiliano into existence in her own terms—"I re-create you from memory" (88). She also sees the truth of her lover's betrayal through magical realism. In escaping her body by night, alighting on "the branch of the tamarind tree," she sees "that woman from Villa de Ayala," Zapata's new wife (98). However, the story ends with physical longing, "My sky, my life, my eyes. Let me look at you" (113). Inés proclaims that vision, which she refuses to abandon. In the romantically focused stories, *vivir* (to live) is inextricably tied to passion, but has another resonance for women's empowerment.

For instance, the character Lupe in "Bien Pretty" proclaims through grief, rage, and art that *Amar es Vivir*—"to love is to live." This verbal arrow eventually travels to Lupe herself. After her split with San Francisco Eduardo, Lupe flippantly says with a tone of self-mockery, "San Francisco is too small a town to go around dragging your three-legged heart" (142). This is a quicker recovery than women in other stories, which shows a progression throughout the collection. Before long, Flavio the exterminator arrives and Lupe's eloquent and passionate words convey love as a sacred beauty imbued with their common cultural heritage. As with Inés in "Eyes of Zapata," Cisneros extols the male body:

God made you from red clay, Flavio, with his hands. This face of yours like the little clay heads they unearth in Teotihuacán... Used obsidian flints for the eyes

... And then he blessed you, Flavio, with skin sweet as burnt-milk candy, smooth as river water. He made you *bien* pretty. (152)

This time when the abandonment occurs, the narrator turns grief into a meditation on nature. The language throbs with the wonderment of grackles, birds Cisneros translates to *urracas*: "that roll of the *r* making all the difference" (164). Sensuality is transferred to description of the sky and the sun "setting and setting, all the light in the world soft as nacre, a Canaletto, an apricot, an earlobe" (165). Here pearl, fruit, and earlobe (male, in this case) have equal value and are equally worthy of adulation.

The meaning of *amar es vivir* extends beyond physical boundaries, as Lupe turns grief into joy—the joy of pure being. That she was able to reach this profound understanding may have originated in observing, experiencing, then extolling the wonderment of a lover's body, which is a rarity in literary fiction. In terms of parental love, Cisneros seems to question its ability to be sustained. For instance, in the title story "Woman Hollering Creek," Cleófilas remembers her father promising, "*I am your father, I will never abandon you*" (43). Yet, although Cleófilas goes on to escape her new husband's abuse by returning to Mexico and her father, it is not clear that the father will or will not abandon her. In fact, that paternal love may have given way to other forms of love: self-love, love between fellow women, and love for a new child. These are elements of love that students could take on from their own knowledge and experience in addition to Cisneros's many representations.

Based on this more nuanced reading, we have developed the following questions for potential discussion or student writing assignments:

- What is the relationship between sex and love in stories such as "One Holy Night," *Bien Pretty*," and "Eyes of Zapata"? What other factors might complicate that relationship?
- Male and female characters sometimes suffer for and/or glory in love. Why do you think Cisneros tolerates this kind of ambiguity?
- Some of the most eloquent prose in the collection valorizes the male body: "And when you are gone, I re-create you from memory. Rub warmth into your fingertips... To look at you as you sleep, the color of

your skin. How in the half-light of moon you cast your own light, as if you are a man made of amber” (“Eyes of Zapata” 110). You might also look at other passages in the collection that idealize the body. How do the aesthetics of Cisneros’s writing inform, reveal, contest, and/or add to themes or issues raised in *Woman Hollering Creek*?

CONTRIBUTION TO MASCULINITY STUDIES

Cisneros’s stories have helped us unmask important social forces that affect not only Chicana characters, but husbands, lovers, and even neglected fathers (such as in “Never Marry a Mexican”). We have shown how male characters in *Woman Hollering Creek* also have basic needs for food, shelter, love, and dignity. They too suffer the consequences of politically charged borders. However, we agree with Michael Kimmel in his sociology textbook, *The Gendered Society*, that masculinity effects are not often acknowledged in teaching British (and presumably other) literature courses:

... not a word is spoken about Dickens and masculinity, especially about his feelings about fatherhood and the family. Dickens is understood as a “social problem” novelist, and his issue was class relations—this despite the fact that so many of Dickens’s most celebrated characters are young boys who have no fathers and who are searching for authentic families. And there’s not a word about Thomas Hardy’s ambivalent ideas about masculinity and marriage, in, say, *Jude the Obscure*. (6-7)

To address what is yet to be unmasked in men’s sociocultural environments and literary studies, we have turned to journals established within the last twenty years. These include *Masculinities: A Journal of Identity and Culture* (2014), *Men and Masculinities* (1998), *Psychology of Men and Masculinities* (2000), and *Norma: International Journal for Masculinity Studies* (2006). These journals explore sociological, psychological, and theoretical perspectives and representations of men’s lived experiences, such as internal conflicts and social relationships. This direction is convincingly argued in Andrea Waling’s “Rethinking Masculinity Studies: Feminism, Masculinity, and Poststructural Accounts of Agency and Emotional Reflexivity.” Waling calls for a retheorization of masculinity studies that complicates categorization and typologies that characterize men in essentialist terms. She objects to framing masculinity as inherently oppressive and domineering (on the one hand) or victimized and subjected by social constraints (on the other). Instead she advocates a theory that examines men’s lived experience in terms of their agency and emotional reflexivity. Such a focus privileges performance, what men “do” in their relations with others in sociocultural environments, rather than what they are seen to be or represent in essentialist theories.

One notable and cogent example that has pedagogical relevance to our work is “Refusing Masculinity: The Politics of Gender in José María Arguedas” by John C. Landreau. The author analyzes Arguedas’s 1958 novel *Los Rios Profundos* (Deep Rivers), whose protagonist, a young boy named Ernesto, empathizes with the Peruvian oppressed, longs for an intimate and tender relationship with his father, and is appalled by violence and abuse. He refuses his old uncle’s version of dominance, a “familiar gift of masculinity and its obligations... that cannot be separated from his [Ernesto’s] refusal of the old man’s economic power or his racism” (394). In that way Ernesto exercises agency, though what he does and says in reflective moments leaves him profoundly alienated from his father and other male role models. Instead, he finds solace only in nature and memory. The complexity of these characters’ lives reveals the chasm between ideal social and familial relations.

Likewise, writers of fiction are contributing to masculinity studies by creating complex characters that defy categorization. We were intrigued to discover Rigoberto González’s 2008 collection of stories, *Men without Bliss*. Even before cracking open the book, readers are immediately confronted with conflicting emotions: the disheartening title and the stylized image of a man with halo-like hair in brilliant copper leaf.

The resulting tension is palpable and symbolizes the complex realities faced by Latino characters of different family backgrounds, social and economic circumstances, and sexual identities. With intimate knowledge of his male characters' life experiences, González refuses to judge/condemn or admire/glorify them—regardless of their successes, failures, or flaws. In “Mexican Gold,” whose title reflects the irony of the book's cover, the teenage protagonist, Marcos, suffers conflicting emotions (jealousy, love, rivalry, and guilt) surrounding the brutal murder of his half-brother, Roger. The reader's attention is drawn primarily to the male triumvirate: Marcos, the living son; Roger, the dead brother; and *Abuelo*, the sympathetic grandfather attempting to mediate tensions between Marcos and his mother. Marcos lives with the resentment of his mother, who has no compassion for the son who lived. Nevertheless, he is neither aggressive and domineering nor only a victim of racial bias (from his own mother), poverty, deprivation, alienation from his nuclear family, and grief over Roger's murder. In fact, Marcos has the insight and compassion to admit that his mother is “human, vulnerable, like the times... he hears her cry” (4).

González humanizes and gradually empowers Marcos by endowing him with agency and reflexivity. His character is a manifestation of Andrea Waling's call for a fuller, more complex view of masculinity. We see Marcos exercise agency in attempting to protect Roger from aggressive behavior (a brawl) that led to his tragic death. And later in the story, he decides to join the army as a way to make meaning of his life. Throughout the story, Marcos reflects, considers, and analyzes his actions and behaviors. He admits his jealousy of Roger, his poor academic performance in school, his guilt from failing to bond with Roger, and the troubled relationship with his on-again, off-again father. Marcos' inner life is revealed through self-examination and a balance of reason and emotion. In “Cactus Flower,” González further develops emotional resonance with the character of Rolando, a migrant worker picking lettuce. We hear meditations on Rolando's missing, ghost-like wife, including visions in which “the deep ebony of [Mirinda's] eyes keeps her within reach. She is tangible and touchable like before” (35). The narrator dramatizes Rolando's withdrawal from the world in profound, melancholic, poetic reflections. The suggestion that he might have physically restrained Mirinda, “her neck in his hands” (39), is never elaborated. Such innuendos acknowledge Mirinda's unspoken pain and subsequent actions (leaving the migrant camp) without blame or shame for either husband or wife. In this case it's Mirinda who exercises agency, but Rolando whose discourse expresses loss and sorrow. González does not dismiss the plight of women trapped in their *transfrontera* circumstances, but he also ensures that we comprehend the feelings of men who suffer from pain in a culture that may more often recognize the emotional pain and suffering of women.

In light of González's portrayal of masculinities, we turn back to Cisneros's representation of male characters in *Woman Hollering Creek*. Boy Baby in “One Holy Night,” Emiliano Zapata in “Eyes of Zapata,” Juan Pedro in “Woman Hollering Creek,” and the child Salvador in “Salvador Late or Early” are, to a greater or lesser extent, determined by the social forces that create them as hero, oppressor, or victim. Those characters that do have agency, like Juan Pedro the wife-beater or Boy Baby the rapist, use it to dominate and abuse. In terms of emotional reflexivity in men, the closest we get in the collection is through the eyes of Inés, Emiliano Zapata's mistress. She is pondering Zapata's struggle as a revolutionary in the Mexican Civil War: “I wish I could rub the grief from you as if it were a smudge on the cheek... You're tired. You're sick and lonely from the war...” (87).

Therefore, in revising our curricula, we intend to place some stories from *Woman Hollering Creek* and *Men without Bliss* in conversation with each other. We do not mean to privilege one writer against another, but encourage students to consider the contributions and limitations of each in terms of theme, characterization, plot, and literary technique. The following prompts could be assigned in essay exams or more formal papers:

- Both Inés in “Eyes of Zapata” and Rolando in “Cactus Flower” have visions of their missing lovers. What are some similarities in style (i.e. magic realism) and for what purpose are they employed?
- Descriptions of the physical body are abundant in both *Woman Hollering Creek* and *Men without*

Bliss. Choose some passages from both texts and compare the nature of the descriptions (i.e. beauty, ugliness). What do they tell you about the value of the human body?

- Examine the role of sympathy in terms of plot and characterization in stories from *Woman Hollering Creek* and *Men without Bliss*. Describe the origin of the sympathy (in each case) and its effect on readers.
- *Woman Hollering Creek* has been valued and discussed in scholarly venues because of its contribution to *transfrontera* feminism. What are some of those contributions and what are the limitations of the collection?
- *Men without Bliss* is a more recent collection focusing on men's lived experiences and follows Cisneros's collection by almost two decades. What themes, ideas, and/or ideologies have been added or changed from those reflected in *Woman Hollering Creek*?

Having expanded our pedagogical framework—by including a fuller analysis of male characters in *Woman Hollering Creek*—and researching advances in masculinity studies, we are convinced that critical examinations of Latinx literature must account for the complexity of lived experience. This means taking an intersectional approach to both feminist and masculinist theory and literary analysis. Such an approach would work to uncover the network of relations (history, geography, social structures, identity politics, personal values, family), that is, the context that explains gender construction and performativity. It also means avoiding essentialisms and moving away from the all too common fallback of hegemonic masculinity.

Scholars often determine what a particular story or novel is “about,” and commonly that perspective becomes a consensus among literary critics. We have shown that the primary focus of *Woman Hollering Creek* is *transfrontera* feminism, particularly the oppression of women, which is limited and ignores effects on men, the nature of love, and desire for beauty. Likewise John C. Landreau has challenged the entrenched critical reception that Arguedas's fiction is not only about transculturation of “Peruvian modernity informed Quechua cosmovision” (390) through the lens of hegemonic masculinity. Instead he has read some of Arguedas's work through gendered male characters who have resisted and refused dominant masculinity. Although the adolescent protagonists end up in solitude, they have had profound moderating effects on their elderly male counterparts. Importantly, these relationships suggest a period of cultural transition. Thus, we argue that scholarship (literary and theoretical) in Latino/a studies should reflect the complexity that is true to the lived experience of people in both real and fictional worlds.

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D&D Beyond Bikini-Mail: Having Women at the Table

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ABSTRACT

Dungeons and Dragons represents a space that is often treated as an echo chamber for young (usually white) men to act out fantasies of power and control, which makes up for their inability to perform such actions in the real world. Using the work of Sherry Turkle and Michelle Dickey, I posit that this game is a nuanced location acting as a safe space for people to act out different aspects of their identity or life experiences in a low-risk environment enhanced by the connections made between the players and their characters. In this work, I have utilized feminist frames of criticism and analysis developed by Gesa Kirsch, Jacqueline Royster, Sonja Foss, and Cindy Griffin to show how the developers of the fifth edition of *Dungeons and Dragons* have made a feminist intervention on their own product. This feminist intervention, comprised of changes to rules and art policies, invites players to consider their preconceptions of race, gender, and sexual orientation. These challenges now materializing from within a space traditionally associated with the toxic masculinity of western popular culture are designed to make players think about the nature of the imagined worlds of gameplay while also considering the ways that their own world's norms and expectations have been constructed. Hence, through this game, players are offered the opportunity to learn and understand complicated concepts that impact their daily lives.

Keywords: *Dungeons and Dragons*, *D&D*, Invitational Rhetoric, Rhetoric, Strategic Contemplation, Critical Imagination, Role-play, Toxic Masculinity, Popular Culture, Critical Role

INTRODUCTION

The words “Dungeons and Dragons” (*D&D*) typically evoke variations of a mental image: a group of unclean white men, huddled around a table in their parents’ basements, rolling dice to murder monsters, acquire loot, and seduce fictional women. Women are usually absent from the table, but those that are present are there at the behest of one of the male players. Usually, the woman is a girlfriend who has been cajoled into joining in order to spend more time with their significant other. The world that these men encounter can also be easily imagined as a variation on “White Fantasy Crypto-Europe”, which is populated by noble (almost exclusively white) heroes wielding swords, practicing sorcery, dramatically fighting dragons guarding piles of gold, facing crude humanoid monsters that coincidentally share visual similarities with one ethnic group or another, and rescuing damsels in need of saving (Wundergeek).

The women that appear in the worlds imagined by these players are not always damsels; sometimes they are sensual sorceresses with thin, gossamer robes. Sometimes, women appear as barbarian queens wearing the finest of bikini mail (leather or metal bikini-like garments) and wielding broadswords (so chosen because these swords are both physically broad and wielded by broads, an often offensive term for women). Other times, the women are nameless bar-wenches, existing solely to provide the male characters a way to sate their lust without upsetting the male players’ perception of “historical realism. Attempts to move away from these familiar heteronormative and masculine tropes are frequently decried as breaking the players’ immersion due to moving away from “historical realism”.

In many ways, *D&D* has historically represented a masculine power fantasy that is uninviting to those outside its intended audience; it represents a community space in which those who do not identify with straight, white, and male norms are excluded unless they uphold those norms. This space is an echo chamber of normalized misogyny and racism, pushing men who are otherwise outside such popular hegemonic constructions of masculinity to embody these characteristics, if only for an evening. In an effort to embody an elusive masculine power fantasy, even those men who are otherwise rejected by the fantasy are still able to wield its power to further reject others whose presence does not fit with the fantastical norms they are attempting to embrace. This whole process becomes interesting, however, when this fantasy is challenged from within that space.

Dungeons and Dragons is currently experiencing a renaissance of sorts; its player-base is increasing dramatically as people are introduced to the game by other media such as popular television shows (e.g., *Stranger Things*, *Community*, *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*, etc), podcasts (Penny Arcade’s *Acquisitions Incorporated*, *Dungeons and Daddies*, and *High Rollers*) and Twitch streams (*Critical Role*, *Adventure Time*, and *Dice, Camera, Action*) (Deville). What is especially interesting is that many of the players in these media depictions, as well as the real-world players rolling dice and writing out backstories for the first time are not the traditional audience, but are increasingly including players who identify as queer, woman, or people of color.

In analyzing the most recent edition of the game, I posit that this increased player diversity is not only a function of the game’s more recent popularity in popular culture, but also stems from changes in art, storytelling, and amended rules made by the game’s designers to challenge the exclusionary space the game has perpetuated. These changes have constructed a deliberate feminist intervention on the game itself in order to expand the types of stories that can be told through it, who they are told by, and who they are told for; making it explicit that this game has been designed to provide players the option to play diverse characters that better represent their own life-experiences. This feminist action, which I tie to Royster and Kirsch’s concepts of critical imagination and strategic contemplation and to Foss and Griffin’s theory of invitational rhetoric, denormalizes harmful fantasy tropes while opening spaces for female, queer, and racialized bodies. By extending these theories to *Dungeons and Dragons*, I will show both how role-playing games are still an

evolving realm of interaction that deserves further study as well as how small changes to these games can have real-world impacts on their players.

PLAYING THE GAME

In order to fully understand conversations about *Dungeons and Dragons*, it is necessary to have at least some understanding of how the game is played. Abbreviated to *D&D* by its fans, the game is an exercise in collaborative storytelling, in which each participant takes responsibility for certain aspects or characters within a shared and expanding narrative. One player takes on the mantle of Dungeon Master (DM), working behind the scenes to create the outline of the world in which the other players then create characters. The creation of this world is not the end of the DM's role, however, as they are also responsible for choosing the rules that are to be in force in the game world, upholding these rules, determining the plausibility and results of player actions, controlling the actions of non-player-controlled inhabitants within the fictional world, and taking on other roles, in accordance with their personal style or the general agreement of the group.

Based on the set-up established by the DM, the other players engage in what is commonly known as role-play, in which they create and then play out the actions of their character, a special and empowered participant of that world. Players have free rein to create characters based on their desires and the rules of the game, selecting such components as their species, profession, name, history, personality, and abilities; which in turn are reflected in their ability to influence or interact with the world. These choices taken together, sometimes referred to as a character's statistics (or stats), might confer a numerical bonus to dice rolls (instead of rolling a twenty sided die and comparing the result against a set goal, they also add a set number to that roll), adjust game mechanics entirely (normal people cannot cast magic spells, wizards gain a feature that allows them to do this), or exist solely to connect the player to their character and to help the player determine what their character will do. The specific rules determining the impact these decisions have, as well as the available options, are grouped together based on the version of the game being played at that time with the original game being retroactively called 1st Edition and the most recent being called 5th Edition, or 5E for short.

It is important to note that while the options listed in the game's documentation guides/books are considered core to the game, the DM and their players are encouraged to come up with new ones as needed. The 5E *Player's Handbook* specifically says that, "You aren't limited by the rules in the *Player's Handbook*, the guidelines in this book, or the selection of monsters in the *Monster's Manual*. You can let your imagination run wild" (Crawford and Mearls 263). The text is littered with advice on how to tweak the game to suit the stories, adventures, characters, and rules that the group wants to engage with.

Once the players have designed and equipped their fictional characters, the 'real' gameplay can start. The DM's authority undergoes a shift from world-builder to storyteller, now acting as the eyes and ears of the other players' fictional characters and describing scenes for the players to react to. At this time, the players basically have the freedom to do what they want, with the likelihood of success being based on their creativity and a literal roll of the dice. As a reward for dealing with a variety of situations, the characters have the possibility of receiving treasure with which to acquire more equipment, experience-points that can be used to improve their characters' abilities, or other non-quantifiable awards such as noble titles, advantageous political alliances, and access to new areas (Bowman 30). While this experience was originally designed to be experienced in person, chatting with your friends around a table, with advances in technology came changes in format, allowing people to play via forum messages, synchronous video conferencing software such as *Skype* or *Zoom*, and even specially designed programs such as *Roll20* or *Fantasy Grounds* (Abbott). While different play formats do impact gameplay, for the sake of this article we will focus mostly on the in-person table-top gameplay experience.

While there are many and varied situations for players and their characters to confront, there is a heavy emphasis on combat situations, which can be seen in the disproportionate number of rules and abilities that have no use outside of battle (Schick 20). Because the game is based on the creative imagination of its players, the stories that are created are effectively endless. Similarly, there is no way to ‘win’ the game; sessions continue as long as the DM is willing to create situations for the players to encounter and the players are willing to engage with them. While my father is fond of saying that “The real treasure was the friends we made along the way,” for *D&D* it might be more accurate to say that “The real game was the story we made with our friends along the way.”

PLAY TO LEARN

Character construction and control are crucial to the enjoyment of the game, and so is the game’s importance as a location for feminist intervention. In this context, I use feminism not as a theory solely for observing gendered understandings of a text, but as one that takes into consideration the ideological positions of author, audience, and text in relation to “gender, race, class, sexuality, identity, image, place and more” (Royster and Kirsch 32). As Bowman explains, because the players create the characters and their interactions from nothing but statistics, rules, and their own imagination, the players can form a special attachment to their characters. Further, Bowman notes, their enjoyment stems from stepping outside of their own mundane worlds and into the game world; they feel anxious when their characters are placed into dangerous or tricky situations and exhilaration when these obstacles are overcome. The catharsis experienced when a player’s character accomplishes a task is greater than when a character performs that same task in a movie or book because the player is not just a passive participant in the story, but rather a co-author in the world (Bowman 74).

While character construction and control are significant from a feminist point of view as a place of listening and shared authorship, the spaces in which these characters are played are conducive to the player’s broader education. Drawing from Michele Dickey’s “Game Design and Learning: A Conjectural Analysis of How Massively Multiple Online Role-Playing Games (MMORPGs) Foster Intrinsic Motivation,” role-playing games teach the player how to interact with both their created world and the real one. These games, according to Dickey, allow players to “experiment in a safe, non-threatening environment and to expand, explore, and reflect on different aspects of themselves” through the medium of characters who “players often feel an emotional proximity to” (Dickey 258). While players are enjoying the game’s narrative or mechanics, it is also teaching them how to “share information, test understandings, and reflect on learning” while working with others to “communicate, collaborate, plan, strategize, and socialize,” giving them an opportunity to challenge their own modes of thinking (Dickey 255).

Dickey’s article is focused on computer games; however the games she looks at are strongly rooted in *D&D*. MMORPGs are, as the title suggests, role-playing games that have been reformatted to be massively multiplayer, usually via the Internet. These games include complicated chat rooms, graphically enhanced multi-user dungeons (MUDs), and fully animated video games. At the end of the day, however, they are all just different variations of role-playing games. Role-play itself is a complex phenomenon, either on or offline, that allows people to “‘act out’ unresolved conflicts, to play and replay characterological difficulties on a new and exotic stage,” facilitating growth and development through the actions of an imagined other (“Cyberspace and Identity” 644). The creation of this alternate persona within a controlled space allows the player to act in ways that are not constrained by existing societal or personal norms, such as exploring parts of themselves that they may not be fully comfortable expressing in their everyday lives, for example, their sexuality, insecurities, or fears (645). This persona allows people to try understanding situations from different perspectives, projecting

shadows of their current dilemma onto the game from where they can be examined from different angles, which, in turn, allows them to gain a deeper understanding of the situation by approaching the problem in another person's shoes ("Life on the Screen" 188). *D&D* might not be the only role-playing game that has graced the table-top, but it is considered to be the first modern one, exerting great influence over the others and their descendents, leading me to argue that Dickey's claim regarding the power of roleplaying for social development and growth is just as applicable to *D&D* as they are to computerized versions games, if not more so (Bowman, 11).

While the depth of character customization in computer games can be staggering, in *D&D* it is even more so. Video games such as *Baldur's Gate* or *Pillars of Eternity* might include dozens or even hundreds of possible actions programmed into them, but ultimately any given situation has a strict limit of solutions in keeping with what has been pre-programmed into the game, hence cutting off potential avenues for players to connect with their character's behavior. *D&D*'s ruleset, on the other hand, offers guidelines that can be applied to almost any situation and invites DMs to create new rules in response to player inquiries occurring outside of those situations. Doing so allows players greater opportunities for interactions with the game, which, in turn, creates emotional connections and catharsis that can be more personal to the player and their character, potentially allowing for greater connections than those found in video games. The players thus have opportunities to try almost anything, to be anyone, and to explore whatever experiences of human existence they can dream of.

This ability for players in *Dungeons and Dragons* to do *anything* is complicated, however, by the player's historical tendency to repeatedly perform the same, very specific actions, using the game's stakes-free world to "act out" their frustrations rather than "work through" or explore them ("Life on the Screen" 200).

THE FIRST STEP IS ADMITTING YOU HAVE A PROBLEM

On September 16th, 2014, shortly after the release of *D&D* 5E, a user named Grubman, on an RPGnet thread, made a post commenting on one of his most significant perceived issues with the new edition of the game's rulebooks:

I certainly don't want this next bit to come out sounding wrong, but I also have to ask what's up with the excess of women? Call me a chauvinist if you like, but it's just... weird...they [the developers] tried to be so politically correctly racial diverse that none of it [the book] looks like a part of any coherent fantasy world (Wundergeek).

While conversations about the number and depiction of women in *D&D* have their place (this essay's next section, for one), what I find to be the most important part of this quote is the last sentence, which implies that the presence of a diverse population is antithetical to a coherent fantasy world. To put it bluntly, Grubman cannot conceive of a fantasy world in which members of diverse races, genders, and ethnicities live, suggesting that the only worlds that make any sense to him are those in which the cast of characters is massively skewed towards a specific type of man. After Grubman's initial thread was locked by moderators, he made another post to apologize for his "poor wording" before repeating his assertions in less divisive language in yet another thread. When forum member Devlin1 asked what Grubman considered an appropriate amount of diversity he redirected them to the apology thread and refused to engage in any critique of this claim over the next 200 or so exchanges in the thread ("RE: D&D 5 Art IMHO better").

While I do not wish to speak for Grubman at an individual level, this situation is an example of a common problem that must be faced when discussing any issues pertaining to ideological positions: the conflation of an individual's or individual group's experiences and bodies with universal experiences and bodies such that their experiences are seen as 'normal' and all others as seen as 'abnormal' or deserving of special attention.

When people such as Grubman claim that some depiction of a fantastical world is abnormal, incoherent, or historically unrealistic, they are invoking an unspoken, yet specific, notion of normality that they have been taught to perceive as non-political and non-controversial: their own worldly experience. According to the work of Karma Chávez, readers do not consider all bodies or aspects of bodies to be equally worthy of attention or mention. Specifically, bodies that are white, cisgender, able-bodied, heterosexual, and male are identified as being abstractly ‘normal’, and thus devoid of inherent meaning, while bodies that deviate from this model are seen as inherently significant, necessitating justification for deviating from the more coherent or historically accurate norm (Chávez 242-244). While any particular signifier is realistically a signifier of a particular subjective position, because many of these are maintained through recurring societal effort, groups subconsciously perceive them as being more normal than others on a general level.

Keeping within the *D&D* community, role-play blogger David Prokopetz described the normative *D&D* world as “‘Generically medieval,’ by which we mean our peerage is French, our castles are German, our weapons are Italian, and everybody speaks English.” The idea that Prokopetz appears to be trying to get across is that players’ notions of historical accuracy are false, instead focusing on merely ensuring that the normal (vaguely European) people are properly represented as normal. Groups not meant to be taken as normal, for reasons of culture, race, sexuality, gender identity, or other characteristics are exoticized within the game, and removed from the realm of normal stories or fantasies.

This concern with deviations from the norm seems to be why Grubman is so alarmed at the presence of women and people of color in *D&D* 5E. Within this worldview, women and people of color cannot be normal, and thus must have been added to be so “politically correctly racial diverse that none of it [the book] looks like a part of any coherent fantasy world” (Wundergeek). Thus, it is not the presence of women or people of color, but the absence of a majority of white men, that appears to be distressing to Grubman. This distinction is evidenced by two points: (1) his lack of response to a forced racially motivated inclusion that has rendered his perceived normal group more distinguishable and (2) a closer analysis of the art he judged as radically diverse. Regarding the first point, let us discuss a fictional character named Regdar.

The art team for *D&D*’s third edition designed a collection of adventurers to be used as exemplars of different races and classes, one being the human male fighter, Regdar. Such characters were pictured in their associated class section, as well as in other artwork within the books and promotional material for the games. According to Morfie, Monty Cook, a prominent developer of the third edition, the game’s sales and marketing team insisted on the inclusion of a more prominently white and male heroic character for the player base to associate with. Regdar was thus shoehorned in, replacing the previous fighter, a white-skinned dwarf who was considered too far from normal to be properly associated with, in the class page (Morfie). Additionally, Regdar was highlighted in much of the out-of-book promotional material, such as cardboard props and DM’s tools (Morfie). While Regdar’s prominent place in the game’s advertising might not be common knowledge, it was brought up in the same discussion thread that Grubman frequently posted in, although he never engaged with this information the way that he did with the “excess of women” discussion (Wundergeek).

While a lack of response does not necessarily suggest a lack of concern, when it is coupled with a deeper look at the art that offended Grubman, we gain insight into his worldview. Blog author S. Ben Melhuish performed an analysis of the 5E *Player’s Handbook* by tracking the characteristics of humanoids as depicted in its art. If we adjust the data to only include people the author was able to make a hard decision on, male bodies out-represent female bodies 58% to 42%, whereas light-skinned bodies out-represent dark-skinned bodies 76% to 24%. While the author goes on to make several interesting points about the correlations between perceived gender/race and active/passive poses or perceived martial ability, the fact that these percentages were considered so outrageous that some fans of the game complained is rather telling. Even with most depicted bodies being male and light-skinned bodies, Grubman considered this situation too radically diverse

to be coherent. Then again, by these standards our own world is too diverse to be a logical land, even in its imagined form. . . Looking at 2010 U.S. census data and comparing these numbers to the numbers in the 5E *Player's Handbook*, the world depicted in the book is less diverse than the United States of America, where Grubman lives, according to his profile. While these numbers are more impressive than previous editions, the fact that these depictions, skewed from the real world as they are, are still too problematic to be considered a “coherent fantasy world” by some is alarming (Wundergeek).

This is not to say that Grubman and those like him have reached these conclusions by accident. As discussed by Chávez, Western society reinforces the universality of the white, male, heterosexual experience, allowing this segment of the populace the “privilege of denying their body”, of assuming experiences coded towards their bodies are universal to all bodies (hooks 137). In studies on male perception of gendered presence in discussions, men report discussions in which they men twice as frequently as female participants as still being female dominated (Cutler and Scott 254). The hegemonically created ‘normal’ male body is positioned as being unworthy of consideration, whereas ‘abnormal’ or ‘othered’ bodies (such as the female) are noted as distinct and worthy of note. *D&D* is no exception to this and the core books of the game have included specific language that defines normalization work. In a *D&D* book from 3rd edition, *Oriental Adventures*, every weapon with a Japanese, Chinese, or Indian origin is classified as an “Exotic Weapon,” requiring an extra allotment of resources for the characters to use. That these weapons are considered exotic and unusual for all characters, even those with roots in those real-world regions, identifies them as abnormal and unusual in any game-play scenario while reinforcing the norm of a vaguely European fantasy as universal (Wyatt 72). Another example, dating back to the first edition of the game, placed a lower limit on the maximum potential strength of female fighters compared to that of male fighters, making their gender necessitate an exception to the normal rules of play (Spalding).

While such overt sexism written directly into the rules has not been common since the days of the first edition, notions that sexuality and gender must be displayed in ways that match the expectations of their audience are still alive and well. Depictions of women typically focus on eroticized equipment, such as armor that emphasizes female characters’ breasts at the cost of the armor’s protective utility, or human sexual characteristics being applied to species that do not demonstrate sexual dimorphism in a human-like fashion. Mike Mearls, one of the head developers of 5E, has even expressed frustration that artists working on the project continued depicting female dragonborn (a species of lizard people descended from, you guessed it, dragons) with breasts. This was despite the species’ description which clearly stated that they were not visibly distinguishable from male dragonborn and were six-foot tall lizard people who were in no way, shape, or form mammals (Wundergeek). The fact that the presence of “fully-clothed, actively posed, heroic looking women... brown people...heroic looking brown women...” with “NO BOOBPLATE” in *D&D* 5E is considered noteworthy and can be seen as an indication of the game’s historical problems and their legacies (Wundergeek, emphasis in original).

To live up to its narrative and disruptive potential as well as to expand its player base, *D&D* needed to intervene unto itself. *D&D* creators did this by identifying all the bodies it depicted as being worthy of consideration in order to challenge the norms that the game’s older editions had helped create, to break its reliance on Eurocentric fantasy tropes and stories, and to invite players to tell new stories that highlight different bodies, cultures, and norms.

CRITICAL IMAGINATION, STRATEGIC CONTEMPLATION, AND INVITATIONAL RHETORIC

Critical Imagination, as conceived by Jacqueline Jones Royster in her work, *Traces of a Stream*, and expanded upon in a book coauthored by Gesa Kirsch, *Feminist Rhetorical Practices: New Horizons for Rhetoric*,

Composition, and Literacy Studies, is a tool of inquiry that is meant to help the user see “the noticed and the unnoticed, rethinking what is there and not there, and speculating about what could be there instead” (20). Royster and Kirsch propose the use of this tool to help examine scholarly work and relationships and think about the frame in which that work was developed and the impact of that frame, all with a focus on listening to what is being said as well as that which is left unsaid.

By applying this tool to the whole of *D&D*, it becomes easier to see the frame that the *D&D* players who resist diversity frequently operate within. These players, who have often been denied real-world masculine power, feel entitled to and attempt to regain it through alternate means. While achieving moments of fictional glory in a game of *D&D* might not be considered as masculine as, say, catching a football while riding a motorcycle, it still aligns men into societally accepted, hegemonic understandings and norms. Thus, they play these games to “increase their group status” while pushing themselves against the anti-man, typically relegating women “to subordinate positions” (Martin et al. 293). This leads the women who do remain present in such environments to frequently act in very specific ways, by adopting their own masculine personas and mindsets, or by only partly participating with the rest of the group. Such half participation is frequently seen when players drag their partners along to play *D&D* but don’t let them explore the worlds in the ways they desire (Martin et al. 299).

To counteract this frame, the designers of *D&D* 5E used a similar approach to Royster and Kirsch’s second term of engagement, *Strategic Contemplation*. By taking time to reflect on what the current situation is and the voices of those affected, these developers were able to create a feminist intervention within their product, allowing “new vistas to come into view, unexpected leads to shape scholarly work, and new...questions to emerge” (Royster and Kirsch 22). Despite the toxic environments, often filled with fantasy purists, low-key to high-key sexism, and frequently insecure men, women still made up approximately 20-25% of *D&D* players in 2012, according to a survey conducted by the game’s owners, *Wizards of the Coast* (Kane).

By gathering demographic data on the people who used their product and taking their considerations seriously, rather than just playing to their historical base, *Wizards of the Coast* and *D&D* 5E’s development team came to the realization that if they made the game’s space less exclusive, they could not only better satisfy many of their game’s consumers, but also potentially broaden the game’s demographics. While I would like to think that their motivations were primarily ideological, such widening of the game’s demographics would also help increase revenue.

One of the ways chosen to widen the games demographics was by explicitly inviting their players, the co-authors of these fantasy worlds, to perform their own Strategic Contemplations and spend more time considering who might populate their game world, and thus, who might one day appear at their game table. As mentioned above, the artwork in the 5th edition *Player’s Handbook* is some of the most diverse the game has ever seen, inviting readers of various social groups and minoritized communities to see themselves in the game world while inviting those in positions of hegemonic power to consider whether their version of ‘normal’ needs to be the norm in the fantastical worlds they are constructing.

It is not a coincidence that the first piece of art in the 5E *Player’s Handbook* depicts a man of color taking on a heroic position, slaying (presumably) evil goblins. Not only a man of color, but a dark-skinned man of color with his hair styled in locs. This intentional choice in physical appearance was likely to surprise some older players and spur them to question their position on race in the game, while also showing people of color that their experiences, cultural heritage, and stories have space in the game as well (Wundergeek). This fore-fronting of people of color continues throughout the rest of the book, with the artwork accompanying the most popular class and race options (fighter and human, respectively) depicting a non-eroticized or demonized woman and man of color, respectively, as their representatives (Crawford and Mearls).

While it would take too long to account for every noteworthy depiction of a minoritized group in the game materials, suffice to say the developers tried to place representatives of diverse groups in numerous

places throughout the game, aligning groups with roles that some would view as surprising. For instance, one can find a woman with East Asian features acting in an unremarked upon martial capacity; a man of color serving in an ascetic tradition; a half-orc (traditionally associated with evil) serving as a warrior of divine light; and a Tiefling woman who is *not* overtly sexualized. While that may not sound like a substantial accomplishment, female Tieflings have traditionally been portrayed as quite alluring, leather-clad succubae, to be seen as sexual objects rather than actual living women with a ribcage or a need to breathe.

Beyond artwork, the development team also placed textual items in the game's rules that preemptively called out the acts of limited imagination common to previous generations of games. One of these is the subheading for sex and gender appearing on page 121 of the *Player's Handbook*, the only book that the developers explicitly suggest all *D&D* players should own. This subheading makes it clear that characters can be "male or female...without gaining any special benefits or hinderances" as well as asking players to "think about how your character does or does not conform to the broader culture's expectations of sex, gender, and sexual behavior..." or "binary notions of sex and gender" (121).

The presentation of sexuality as something to be approached within the game is invitational, to use the language of Sonja K. Foss and Cindy Griffin. The developers knew that they wanted to change the way their game's community treated sensitive topics such as sex and gender, but they also knew that if they attempted to impose different values on their audience they would fail in their goal of convincing those leery of change that bodies unlike theirs have a right to exist within their imagined worlds. Instead, they invite players to "think about" the choice rather than forcing them in any one direction, to spend time and resources strategically contemplating what place gender and sex might have in their games and how the lived experience of different characters might differ.

A common criticism of this persuasive approach is that nothing is really forcing people to engage with it. Players are not prevented from creating characters who fit into the same heteronormative and masculine tropes as before, nor are DMs prevented from fashioning worlds rooted in historical realism, but in many ways this is part of the point. What this approach does, however, is make players confront the fact that this is a choice they are making, encouraging them to consider the possibility that their consideration of "normal" is constructed. Since individual groups can choose to ignore or even de-standardize the rules, there is little that the book's authors can actually do to enforce any one way of understanding or of playing the game. However, by having the in-book rules specifically state that diversity is a choice players can make, resistant groups can be challenged by individual members who wish to understand why they have moved away from the written material in a sourcebook, calling on those who resist to explain their position and engage in a potentially educational dialogue. In any case, it invites more conversation and consideration than previous systems have. Sometimes these conversations are more confrontational than others, as we saw with Grubman, but they are important nonetheless.

The invitation encourages the strategic contemplation of the players, giving them the chance to imagine worlds with different accepted norms within a safe space that provides value to their thoughts and opinions (Foss & Griffin 10). Because of the deep connections players make with their characters, as discussed above, this invitation is particularly effective, asking players to strategically contemplate not only their game worlds, but ultimately, the real world that they live in as well.

THE ADVENTURE CONTINUES

While it is too simplistic to claim that these efforts of inclusivity alone have made *D&D*'s 5E successful, several pieces of evidence suggest that there is a connection. Between 2012 and 2017, during the time frame that *D&D* 5E came out, the percentage of *Dungeons and Dragons* players who identified as women almost

doubled, stabilizing at around 40%, according to the company's surveys. The game also saw a massive growth of 40% in sales between 2016 and 2017, which represented the period in which early adapters to the 5th edition would have had the chance to be inspired by the game and share it with their friends (Kane). The normalization of the Internet, and specifically streaming services such as *YouTube* and *Twitch*, have also played an important role in the game's growth.

As pointed out by blogger Vivian Kane in her article, "How Women Are Driving the Dungeons & Dragons Renaissance," in 2017 "10 million hours of *D&D* were streamed on Twitch, and only about 500,000 of those were produced by Wizards of the Coast." (Par. 3). This data reveals a clear and massive interest on the part of users in sharing and watching *D&D* related content as well as the powerful way potential players can discover first-hand what the game is actually like through its introduction via other media. While all these streamed games have indeed helped to establish interest in the game and show how easily it can be played, special interest should be paid to what is often considered the most popular live-streamed *D&D* game, *Critical Role*.

Critical Role, a web-series whose players are eight friends in the voice-acting and television industries, had its first season run for approximately 373 hours of gameplay over two years and 115 episodes (Par. 5). The show remains so successful that the group recently earned over 11 million dollars from fans through a Kickstarter campaign to convert parts of their game's story into an animated television series (*Critical Role*, Par. 5). While there are many facets that contribute to the success of *Critical Role*, one significant aspect of the show is the way it forefronts stories outside of male or heterosexual norms. The core cast contains three women who actively encourage other women to play and who are active participants in the story's creation. Additionally, the players have been able to represent and depict various queer identities or alternate gender expressions without stigma while the world itself draws on non-European cultures in a respectful way. This show lives the dream that the development team put forth, imagining a world in which different voices and bodies may coexist, while sharing that dream even further through the internet. While this particular game is, perhaps, not indicative of every gamer's experience, the wide number of people in the *D&D* community who state that they were inspired to play by *Critical Role* shows that it is very influential (Shea).

This is not to say that *D&D*'s toxicity problems have been completely resolved. Just as *Critical Role* serves as an example of how *D&D* can challenge patriarchal, heterocissexist, and white supremacist norms, its player community also shows that these norms continue to exist. Two of the three female players on *Critical Role* are scrutinized at a much higher rate than their male counterparts, with the most criticized player being the DM's wife, Marisha Ray. This scrutiny has frequently resulted in threatening emails to Ray, cries for her to quit the game, claims that she is a bad gamer, and other such harassment ("Between the Sheets: Marisha Ray"). For example, following a particularly heated argument in-game between Ray's character and two of her male counterparts' characters, one of her male counterparts felt the need to not only break character during the game to address the audience and tell them that "it's just a game", but also to tweet after the game that everyone was acting out their character, and that they shouldn't send hate-mail to anyone involved (O'Brien). While many within the community were already defending Ray in forums and online, the fact that one of the players felt the need to go to this extreme indicates the viciousness and offensiveness of some of the comments towards Ray.

This reaction shows us there is more research that needs to be done on the potential backlash that the game's evolution might spur. If inviting players to consider who should be at the table results in whiny fanboys attacking players who would not have been welcome previously, to what extent does this damage the game's potential as a tool to act out alternate identities?

There remains much work to be done before players who are not white, cisgender men can expect to openly play the game without drawing more fire than their white, cis, male party members. The changes

made in *D&D*'s 5th edition have not completely eradicated the harmful social norms and normalization that were present in previous versions of the games, nor has it eradicated such social norms and normalizations in the broader world. What these changes have done, however, is to have helped the game's audience envision new possible worlds to play in and new possible characters to inhabit those worlds. By helping foster this environment, one that does not *have* to be rooted in sexist or racist traditions, in *D&D* 5th edition has enabled a feminist intervention in its player base, providing a learning opportunity that could be applied to their own table. As is the case with any good game of *D&D*, the journey forward is a long, potentially fruitless quest, full of traps, monstrous people, and danger; there is no promise of success, although if success is achieved, the reward can be truly world-shaking and monumental. Sounds like an adventure to me.

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A Heartbeat Away: Popular Culture's Role in Teaching Presidential Succession

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ABSTRACT

The role of popular culture in civic education is important. Many television viewers learn about the American political process through various dramatized depictions. The 25th Amendment has often received much attention from Hollywood, as it provides writers, directors, and producers a tool with which to further dramatize presidential succession. Through the television shows *West Wing*, *Designated Survivor*, *Commander in Chief*, *Madam Secretary*, and *Political Animals*, viewers are exposed to storylines revolving around the 25th Amendment. By viewing these dramatized versions of presidential succession, viewers are better able to understand the process and political science instructors are better able to elucidate the process in the classroom.

Keywords: Presidential Succession, 25th Amendment, Popular Culture, *West Wing*, *Designated Survivor*, *Commander in Chief*, *Political Animals*, *Madam Secretary*

The role of popular culture in civic education is an important one. In fact, as Foy (2010) writes, “many people first learn about important governmental offices, such as the presidency, Congress, the courts, and the public bureaucracy, and organizations such as interest groups and political parties not from a textbook or political science class, but from a TV show, a movie, or a song” (p. 3). While popular culture does not guarantee a thorough civic education, it can provide some guidance to the general public about the role of certain governmental institutions. The presidency largely attracts attention in popular culture because of the vast power the president wields and the influence he has on the world stage. Writers, directors, and producers are given the freedom to explore the power of the presidency through dramatized—often excessively so—scenarios. Television shows focused on the presidency often involve a storyline focused on the 25th Amendment (the amendment that describes how, and under what circumstances, a president is to be replaced should he or she be unable to fulfill his or her term of office) as a way to dramatize presidential succession. The 25th Amendment provides answers to questions surrounding presidential succession, including instances outside of death and resignation. While the 25th Amendment has been used sparingly in actual administrations since its ratification in 1967, it appears as a major plot point in several television shows devoted to exploring the presidency.

Throughout United States history, nine presidents have failed to finish their full term in office. Four of these were due to natural causes (William Henry Harrison, Zachary Taylor, Warren G. Harding, and Franklin D. Roosevelt), four were assassinated (Abraham Lincoln, James Garfield, William McKinley, and John F. Kennedy), and Richard Nixon resigned the presidency rather than face impeachment. In each of these cases, the Vice President took over the presidency and finished his term. This line of succession has been codified in various laws and most recently the 25th Amendment, but this line of presidential succession was not always clear. Nixon was the only president who did not complete his term in office after the passage of the 25th Amendment. However, the 25th Amendment has been invoked six times, including Gerald Ford’s succession to the presidency after Nixon’s resignation.

While failing to finish a term of office is uncommon, the portrayal of it in popular culture happens quite regularly. In fact, most television shows involving the presidency regularly portray and play with presidential succession. My goal in this paper is to explore the role of popular culture in teaching viewers about presidential succession. I draw on examples from *The West Wing*, *Madam Secretary*, *Designated Survivor*, *Commander in Chief*, and *Political Animals*. I argue that these popular culture references help Americans learn about the process of presidential succession, as popular culture provides a great avenue for learning about a political phenomenon we have little experience with or may have never actually witnessed (Van Belle, 2018).

THE FOUNDERS’ INTENT & THE HISTORY OF PRESIDENTIAL SUCCESSION

The Constitution initially specified that when a president was unable to fulfill his term of office, the Vice President would take over his responsibilities. In the case in which both the President and Vice President were unable to fulfill the duties of the presidency, Congress had the ability to declare which official would take over the presidency until a president could be elected. Thus, initially, the Constitution only specified the Vice President in the line of succession to the presidency, which has been further clarified by both the 20th and 25th Amendments. However, these amendments were not ratified until 1933 and 1967, respectively. Until then, there were several cases in which the Vice President had died in office: George Clinton (served under Thomas Jefferson and James Madison), Elbridge Gerry (under James Madison), William R. King (under Franklin Pierce), Henry Wilson (under Ulysses S. Grant), Thomas Hendricks (under Grover Cleveland), Garret Hobart (under William McKinley), and James Sherman (under William Howard Taft).

Should something have happened to these Presidents while their Vice Presidencies were vacant, the Constitution specified that Congress would have had the power to decide who became president until the

next president could be elected. However, Schlesinger (1974) points to the vagueness of this provision and the fact that there is little certainty that the Founders originally intended for the Vice President to inherit the presidency were the President unable to fulfill his term. In fact, the Founders feared a dynastic presidency and with the President getting to pick his Vice President, it is akin to a President choosing his successor and thus creating a political dynasty (Republicus, 1788).

In addition, the early discussions surrounding the Electoral College seem to support the idea that the vice presidency was not designed to inherit the presidency. Each elector was expected to cast two ballots for president and could not vote for two candidates from the same state (Hamilton, 1788; Dewey, 1962; Neale, 2017). The winner of the vote would become President, while the second place finisher would become Vice President. According to Schlesinger (1974) the reason for the double vote was to ensure local or state preferences did not overrun the vote and so that the United States was left with a president that advocated for, and represented, national interests. Hugh Williamson, a North Carolina member of the drafting committee, stated, “such an office as vice-president was not wanted. He was introduced only for the sake of valuable mode of election which required two to be chosen at the same time” (quoted in Schlesinger, 1974, p. 489). Thus, it seems as though the Founders never really intended for the Vice President to replace the President should he be unable to fulfill his duties.

THE 25TH AMENDMENT

In 1967, the 25th Amendment was ratified by the requisite 38 states. While previous legislation made the line of succession clear, this amendment codifies that succession in the Constitution as well as answers to several other concerns that arose after the 1947 Presidential Succession Act was passed. Specifically, the 25th Amendment (U.S. Const. amend. XXV. Sec. 1-4) contains four sections:

1. When the President is removed from office, by impeachment, death, or resignation, the Vice President becomes President.
2. If the vice presidency becomes vacant, the President will nominate a Vice President who must receive a majority vote in both houses of Congress in order to assume office.
3. The President may temporarily transfer power to the Vice President via written communication to both the Speaker of the House and president pro tempore of the Senate. Upon ability to resume office, the President should submit another written document to both offices in order to regain the office.
4. The Vice Presidency and a majority of the President's cabinet can declare the President unable to perform his duties, in which case the Vice President assumes the presidency. The President has the ability to submit written communication to the Speaker of the House and president pro tempore that no such inability exists, but the Vice President and a majority of the Cabinet have four days to report to Congress whether or not they agree the President is ready to re-assume power. Congress then has 48 hours to convene (if not in session) and a total of 21 days to decide the matter. If two-thirds of both Houses votes the president is unable to discharge his duties, the Vice President once again assumes the presidency.

Since its ratification, the first section has only been invoked once: when Richard Nixon resigned, Gerald Ford was administered the presidential oath of office (McDermott, 2007). Section two has been invoked twice since ratification: once after Spiro Agnew, Nixon's Vice President, resigned amid scandal, and second, after Gerald Ford vacated the vice presidency to become President after Nixon resigned (Goldstein, 2000, 2010). Prior to the ratification of the 25th Amendment, however, the vice presidency was left vacant quite regularly. In fact, it was vacant 18 times, which amounted to roughly 37 years, or one-fifth of our nation's history (Gilbert, 1998). Section three has been invoked three times since ratification: Reagan invoked section three (in 1985) when he was under general anesthesia to get colon polyps removed and George W. Bush invoked it twice

(in 2002 and 2007) when he received routine colonoscopies (Feerick, 2014). There are other instances when section 3 could have been invoked, but was not (McDermott, 2007 points to Reagan's prostate surgery in 1987; Feerick, 2014 points to the attempted assassination of Reagan). Regardless, invocations of the first three sections of the 25th Amendment have remained fairly uncontroversial since the amendment's ratification.

Of the four sections of the 25th Amendment, section four has been the most controversial, despite the fact that it has never been invoked. One reason this section has proven controversial is due to the vagueness of impairment. When is a president too impaired to perform his or her duties? Could invoking section 4 lead to a coup-like takeover of power?

These concerns are raised in response to the possibility of a president being diagnosed with a mentally degenerative disease, an assassination attempt, a stroke, or experiencing some sort of head trauma (McDermott, 2007). Originally, concerns were raised in the aftermath of Ronald Reagan's assassination attempt. After Reagan was shot, he underwent surgery requiring general anesthesia but never transferred the powers of the presidency to George H.W. Bush. This raised concerns regarding who was in charge of governmental decisions during that time period. In fact, Reagan's Secretary of State, Alexander M. Haig Jr., responded to one such question by saying,

Constitutionally, gentlemen, you have the President, the Vice President, the Secretary of State in that order and should the President decide he wants to transfer the helm to the Vice President, he will do so. He has not done that. As of now, I am in control here, in the White House, pending return of the Vice President (Gilbert and Bucy, 2014, 5).

Haig was incorrect in his report on presidential succession; before the Secretary of State takes over the presidency, the Speaker of the House and president pro tempore of the Senate are in line to assume power.

Further, while Reagan's surgery lasted only a matter of hours, he was hospitalized for the 13 days following. While he was recuperating, Reagan was on medication that could have impaired his decision-making skills (Feerick, 2014). George H.W. Bush led cabinet meetings and conducted presidential duties as needed while Reagan was hospitalized, but the country was still given the impression that Reagan, not Bush, was governing the country (Feerick, 2014; McDermott, 2007). In fact, for roughly one month after Reagan's surgery, Bush led cabinet meetings (NY Times, April 25, 1981, I); and it was not until almost two months after his surgery that Reagan worked a full day (NY Times, June 4, 1981, B15). Nonetheless, despite all of the evidence that Bush should have been made acting President while Reagan recovered from the assassination attempt, the 25th Amendment was never invoked.

Many attempts have been made at clarifying the intent behind section four. President Jimmy Carter actually weighed in on this subject via an article in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. Carter writes that the responsibility of declaring a President unfit to serve should be left to medical doctors rather than the Vice President, cabinet members, and the president's personal physicians—all of whom have a personal conflict of interest (Carter, 1994). It would be better, Carter (1994) suggests, to use an independent team of medical doctors to make such a judgement. In response to these concerns, a Working Group was established at the Carter Center in Atlanta, GA to examine and make recommendations about how to best carry out section 4. Several recommendations were made, but the main recommendation about a Medical Group weighing in on presidential inability was overwhelmingly voted down, with 83 percent in opposition, citing concerns over separation of powers, political motives, and undermining public accountability (Gilbert, 2000, 2003, 2011).

THE PORTRAYAL OF THE 25TH AMENDMENT IN POPULAR CULTURE

Popular Culture provides us with several interesting depictions of presidential succession. *Commander in Chief*, a short-lived drama starring Geena Davis as Vice President-turned-President Mackenzie Allen, begins with Vice President Allen being pulled from a children's school concert in Paris, France to be told that President Theodore Roosevelt Bridges experienced a stroke after suffering a brain hemorrhage (Lurie, 2005). As President Bridges lies in a hospital bed, he asks Allen to resign the vice presidency so that the Speaker of the House Nathan Templeton can become acting President while Bridges recovers. He informs Allen that Templeton better fulfills his vision for the presidency, given that they are both Republicans, while Allen is an Independent and was selected as Vice President only to help Bridges appeal to female voters. Further complicating Allen's ascension to the presidency is her gender—she would become the first female President in U.S. history if she did not resign (for a thorough treatment of Allen's gender and its implications see Goren, 2013; Hoffman, 2013; Michlin, 2012; Vaughn and Michaelson, 2013). As Allen considers resignation, the President dies and she is sworn into office, per section one of the 25th Amendment. This television show demonstrates that no matter what the President's wishes may be, the 25th Amendment is followed. Even the President does not have the power to overrule the Constitutionally mandated line of succession. President Allen makes this assertion in Episode 7, "First Scandal," when she states, "He had no authority to ask that of me... The People elected me to this position, and only the People and their representatives can ask me to step down" (Wallace, 2005).

Commander in Chief also explores section two of the 25th Amendment in Episode 7. Given that Allen has become President, she is entitled to appoint a Vice President. To fill that vacancy, Allen selects retired Army General Warren Keaton. Keaton was Allen's opponent in the previous election, being the vice presidential choice of the Democratic candidate. Given that former President Teddy Bridges was a Republican, Allen receives some pushback by appointing a Democratic Vice President. Viewers are reminded that Allen has the authority—via the 25th Amendment—to appoint whomever she believes is best qualified for the vice presidency, though the nominee must face a confirmation hearing in both the House of Representatives and the Senate. This episode presents us with a view of the House hearing, with President Allen telling him to "kick some tail" like he did in the Senate before his hearing begins (Wallace, 2005). Thus, we are led to believe Keaton has already been confirmed by the Senate and only the House has yet to vote on his appointment. Keaton is confirmed via a 386-46 vote in the House and becomes Vice President. The episode teaches its audience how section two is invoked and how replacing the vice president works.

Finally, *Commander in Chief* depicts section three of the Amendment as well. In Episode 16, "The Elephant in the Room," President Allen falls ill with appendicitis which requires emergency surgery (Roth, 2006). Since she will be under general anesthesia, she has her chief of staff prepare the paperwork to swear in the President pro tempore of the Senate as acting President while she is unconscious. Her chief of staff questions this decision, given the Speaker of the House is next in line for the presidency since her Vice President resigned to tend to his cancer-stricken wife. She mentions that she assumes Speaker Templeton would not want to resign his post for only a few hours in the White House while she is under anesthesia. Templeton would need to resign from the House of Representatives because an individual cannot be a member of the legislative and executive branches of government simultaneously. The President pro tempore would also need to resign his position in the Senate, but his (un)willingness to do so is not discussed in the episode, leaving us to believe he is indeed willing to resign his Senate seat to serve as acting President. However, Templeton decides he is willing to resign his position in the House, as he has ambitions to run for the presidency in the upcoming election. With Templeton willing to serve as acting President, both he and the President sign written statements to that effect and he is administered the presidential oath of office. After Allen is out of surgery, her chief of staff informs Templeton that the president is awake and resuming the presidency,

highlighting exactly how section 3 is supposed to be executed.

In 2016, *Designated Survivor* premiered on ABC and ran for only two seasons, but is currently on Netflix, which produced a third, and final, season. The entire premise of the show was that the Capitol building was destroyed during the President's State of the Union address, leaving the designated survivor in charge. Tom Kirkman, the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, becomes president, as he was the individual tasked with staying in the bunker during the State of the Union address. This became standard practice during the Cold War, as concerns about nuclear war were heightened. The year in which this originated is unclear, as the Senate's Historical Office has only kept track of designated survivors since 1984, prior to which the identities were often not made public (Senate Historical Office, n.d.). By using a designated survivor, there is no ambiguity about who is in charge post-apocalyptic destruction—there is one person in the line of succession that will be quickly sworn into office and assume the powers of the presidency.

Designated Survivor portrays this aspect well and also covers section two of the 25th Amendment regarding appointment of the Vice President when there is a vacancy in that office. In Season 1 Episode 10, Kirkman appointed Peter MacLeish to the vice presidency (MacLeish being the only surviving congressional member of the president's party in the Capitol bombing). He was confirmed by both the House and Senate with majority votes in both houses, just as section two mandates (Toye, 2016). Additionally, during MacLeish's swearing-in President Kirkman is shot, therefore MacLeish becomes acting President. In Season 1 Episode 11, entitled "Warriors," the show makes it very clear that in order for MacLeish to take power, the President must inform the Speaker of the House and the President pro tempore of the Senate via a written and signed statement—exactly the procedure outlined in section three of the 25th Amendment (Surjik, 2017). We see the process of vice presidential appointment once again in Season 2, Episode 14, entitled "In the Dark" when President Kirkman nominates Ellenor Darby to fill the vacancy left after MacLeish was assassinated in Season 1 Episode 12 (Listo, 2017; Banker, 2018). In this case, we do not hear about the entire nomination and confirmation process, likely because the show covered the process in Season 1.

The West Wing had a major story arc at the end of its fourth season and beginning of its fifth season that revolved around section 3 being invoked. In Episode 22 of Season 4, entitled "Commencement," the President's daughter, Zoe Bartlet, graduated from Georgetown with her Bachelor's degree (Graves, 2003a). Later that evening, she attended a graduation party at which her boyfriend spiked her drink with ecstasy. Her secret service detail became anxious when she did not return from the restroom and upon investigation found an agent who had been killed, along with Zoe's panic button. In the following episode, entitled "Twenty-Five," the storyline revolves around Zoe Bartlet's kidnapping and the various reasons that could have caused it, along with the potential courses of action to take in response to it (Misiano, 2003a). President Josiah "Jed" Bartlet decides to invoke section three of the 25th Amendment because he is unable to separate the office of the presidency from his emotional reaction to his daughter's kidnapping. Complicating this is the fact that there is a vacancy in the Vice Presidency, as President Bartlet's Vice President, John Hoynes, resigned amid an infidelity scandal. Because of this vacancy, the Speaker of the House, Glenallen Walken, is next in line for the presidency. Unfortunately for Bartlet, the Speaker happens to be a Republican while Bartlet is a Democrat. This difference in partisanship does not deter Bartlet from resigning, given his perceived inability to perform his job to the best of his abilities. So, Season Four comes to a close with Bartlet signing a letter temporarily transferring power to Walken who is sworn in after he resigns the Speakership. Season Five begins with a two-part episode in which we see Zoe's kidnapping resolved (Graves, 2003b; Misiano, 2003b). She is found alive and upon her return, President Bartlet returns to the Oval Office to sign a second letter reassuming the presidency.

This story arc in *The West Wing* highlights a number of interesting aspects of section three of the 25th Amendment. In addition to the transfer of power, it also highlights the fact that presidential succession does

not require same-party control of the White House. Same-party control is advocated for by Sindler (1987), who argues that the voters chose a member of a specific party when they cast their ballots and a member of that party should succeed them if the need arises; without such a guarantee, there would be a violation of popular sovereignty, as it would actually reverse the decision of the electorate. In the case of *The West Wing*, the voters chose a Democrat and the acting President was a Republican—a party with a completely different governing strategy. Throughout this storyline, the President's staff openly discussed the downsides of handing power to political opponents, but most of them agreed with the deputy Communications Director Will Bailey when he said, “the President temporarily handing over power to his political enemy? I think it's a fairly stunning act of patriotism and a fairly ordinary act of fatherhood” (Misiano, 2003a, Season 4, Episode 3). Nonetheless, the discussion of same-party succession is an interesting one considering political parties were not anticipated, nor advocated for, by the Founding Fathers. This was not a concern until 1947 with the passage of the second Presidential Succession Act. President Truman was troubled by the fact that unelected officials would inherit the presidency before someone who was elected and thus encouraged Congress to place the Speaker of the House and President pro tempore ahead of the cabinet members, which Congress ultimately agreed to. Thus, *The West Wing* does well in teaching its audience how section three works, along with the potential significance of the partisan differences between the president and who might ascend to the presidency via section three.

Despite the fact that we have not seen section four of the 25th Amendment invoked, *Madam Secretary* explores a scenario in which it could plausibly be used (Reinisch, 2018). The television show focuses on Secretary of State Elizabeth McCord, and her role in President Conrad Dalton's administration. In Episode 12 of Season 4, McCord notices that President Dalton is not acting like himself and is becoming easily agitated. In fact, Dalton threatens military strikes against Russia in response to a sonic attack on a United States embassy in Bulgaria. Russia denies the attack and Dalton's advisors cannot produce clear evidence that Russia was indeed behind the attack. Nonetheless, Dalton wants to order military attacks immediately. The National Security Council director refuses to comply with the order and Dalton promptly fires him. Ultimately, his advisors, including McCord, convince him to delay for 24 hours. In that 24 hours, Dalton is presented with evidence that Russia did not conduct the sonic attack, but still wants the U.S. to conduct missile strikes. McCord assembles the entire cabinet and argues that Dalton is unwell and should be removed from power until he is better prepared for the presidency. It is clear that the cabinet is conflicted on the idea, with one of them stating “don't we owe it to Conrad to protect him and his reputation? Other administrations have shielded their presidents in the past. Maybe it's our turn to step up. Do our jobs while limiting his public appearances” (Reinisch, 2018, Season 4, Episode 12). Secretary McCord responds by saying, “I want to protect him too. But a shadow government of un-elected cabinet members running the show while keeping the president under wraps is no way to govern a democracy” (Reinisch, 2018, Season 4, Episode 12). Ultimately, the cabinet votes to remove Dalton from power and make the Vice President acting President until Dalton undergoes medical testing and has recuperated. Upon testing, Dalton learns he has a malignant brain tumor pressing on his frontal lobe. After surgery and a full recovery, Dalton is once again made President.

Since section four has never actually been invoked in real history, its portrayal in *Madam Secretary* is our best example of how it could be done. The show's creator, Barbara Hall, gave an interview in which she said that her goal with the episode was to create drama, give a civics lesson, and “show people what the process was” (CNN, 2018). *Madam Secretary* actually shows the process quite well. The removal of the president from power should not be an easy decision for the cabinet to make. In the removal of Dalton from power, it was clear that the cabinet was struggling with the decision. They also clearly discussed the rules behind invoking section four: the Vice President and a majority of the cabinet members must be in favor of temporarily removing the president from power. In addition, this episode correctly covers the fact that the president can return to the presidency upon recuperation from the cause of the president's inability to perform his duties. Finally, the

episode highlights this via the use of the cabinet's suspicion that the president is suffering from some sort of medical condition. McDermott (2007) argues that this is a scenario that those who drafted the Amendment had in mind when writing this section. As the President was unwell, the cabinet took it upon itself to remove the president from power until he was able to show that he was fully recovered. Overall, *Madam Secretary* does a thorough job of teaching its viewers how section four of the 25th Amendment should be used.

In addition to *Madam Secretary*, the television mini-series *Political Animals* (which aired on USA in 2012) also gives us a glimpse into a scenario in which section four could be invoked. The mini-series centers on Elaine Barrish, a failed Democratic presidential nominee, former Illinois Governor, and Secretary of State, who plans to resign her cabinet position in order to run against the sitting President in the upcoming Democratic nominating contest. In the finale, we learn that Air Force One crashes off the coast of France with the President on board and his fate uncertain (Petrarca, 2012). The Vice President meets with the White House counsel to discuss his options for assuming the presidency and he ultimately summons the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court to the oval office to administer the oath of office. Before he does, however, Secretary Barrish organizes the cabinet to invoke section four of the 25th Amendment, arguing that because uncertainty exists about whether or not the President is alive, this is the proper course to take. Should the President be found alive and the Vice President were administered the oath, the country would then be presented with the constitutional question of which man is the rightful occupant of the presidency. Barrish meets with the Vice President and convinces him to invoke section four rather than take the oath of office until the President's fate is determined, presenting him with a letter signed by all members of the cabinet authorizing him to become acting President. Viewers are then shown the Vice President informing both the Speaker of the House and President pro tempore of his invocation of section four—the proper protocol outlined in the 25th Amendment.

The intent behind section four is to provide a way for the Vice President to become acting President should something happen to prevent the President from relinquishing power on his own (e.g. he is unconscious, suffering from a debilitating illness, or in the case of *Political Animals*, presumed to be dead due to a tragic accident). This episode of *Political Animals* properly instructs audiences as to how section four should be invoked and the protocol surrounding it.

THE PEDAGOGICAL USEFULNESS OF POPULAR CULTURE

The popular culture narratives discussed should prove valuable in any political science classroom when focusing on presidential succession. The presidency is often of interest to students, because it is one of the most visible components of the American political system. Yet, despite the visibility of the presidency, presidential succession—outside of electoral succession—is largely shrouded in mystery. Aside from four presidential assassinations, four presidential deaths, and one resignation, the American public has not been exposed to the sudden vacancy of the presidency. And even in cases in which the presidency was vacated outside of normal electoral mechanisms, there has been a protocol to follow stating the Vice President would accede to the presidency until the next election is held.

Consequently, popular culture has opted to play with storylines in which the presidency is vacated and a successor is needed to fill the office. Thus, it is evident that the American public's understanding of presidential succession may be largely shaped by popular culture. Outside of a political science classroom or these works of popular culture, there are few avenues through which the public is exposed to the Constitutional order of presidential succession.

Popular culture can thus help fill in the gaps when it comes to the mechanics of the 25th Amendment. Importantly, the narratives highlighted here have largely succeeded in portraying these mechanics. From the five television shows discussed here, all four sections of the 25th Amendment have received attention.

While some Americans may remember Nixon's resignation or Kennedy's assassination (both of which have also received significant attention from popular culture artifacts), those that do not have likely not witnessed presidential succession outside of normal electoral mechanisms. Due to this, popular culture can be a useful tool employed in the political science classroom. By using an episode of *Madam Secretary* or a small story arc from *The West Wing*, political science instructors can provide students with a dramatized learning experience to go with an assigned reading and discussion.

There is much pedagogical value to be gained from the use of popular culture in the classroom in general. Using various popular culture artifacts may help stimulate students in the classroom and increase appreciation of the content they are learning (Tierney, 2007). Clapton (2015) also makes the point that using popular culture examples in the classroom helps students better relate to the material and helps provide concrete examples for more abstract ideas or theories. This is precisely why popular culture proves useful in discussions of presidential succession. Traditional college students today do not recall Nixon's resignation in 1974 nor Kennedy's assassination in 1963. By using the depictions of presidential succession in the popular culture narratives discussed here, students are able to ground their conceptions of presidential succession in something they are able to actually see.

CONCLUSION

Popular culture provides an interesting look into presidential succession, including examples of all four sections of the 25th Amendment. Failure to fulfill a full term of office is actually quite rare for a president, yet almost all television shows revolving around U.S. politics have included a storyline in which a president is unable to complete a term or faces some constitutional challenge to his or her position. This is likely due to the dramatic nature of presidential succession, which brings in viewers, and increases ratings. Nonetheless, these storylines on television help Americans understand how presidential succession works and can help political scientists teach students about the mechanics of the process. Using popular culture can help students visualize what they have discussed in the classroom and provide examples of aspects to presidential succession students may not have witnessed firsthand, or in the case of the section four of the 25th Amendment, something that has never been invoked.

While the 25th Amendment does not regularly get discussed in the media, and section four has never actually been used, both have received a fair amount of attention during the Trump presidency, given the mention of the 25th Amendment in an anonymous editorial published in the *New York Times* in September 2018. The author, originally anonymized and described as a senior official in the Trump administration and later identified as Miles Taylor (a Department of Homeland Security official), declared, "there were early whispers within the cabinet of invoking the 25th Amendment, which would start a complex process for removing the president. But no one wanted to precipitate a constitutional crisis" (Anonymous, 2018). While it is questionable to assert that invoking the 25th Amendment would cause a constitutional crisis, it would be certain to cause a large (and likely spirited) discussion throughout the country.

Due to the few times it has been used, many undergraduate students of political science are unfamiliar with the process by which the 25th Amendment is invoked. They read about these cases in textbooks and discuss it in the classroom. By relying on popular culture, we are able to provide examples (albeit fictional) of presidential succession via a variety of ways. There are popular culture examples of all four sections of the 25th Amendment, including article four, something our country has never witnessed. To that end, popular culture can be an incredibly useful tool in teaching presidential succession.

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Pop Culture and Politics: Engaging Students in American Government through Art, Music, and Film

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ABSTRACT

Strategically and thoughtfully employing popular culture in teaching political science can enable students to better understand, analyze, and relate to the material. In a discipline that can be viewed by students as too boring, too distant, and too polarizing, the use of relevant music, TV/film clips, toys, memes, and other popular culture artifacts can engage otherwise unengaged students in a meaningful way. This paper argues that using popular culture in teaching political science can demonstrate relevance, serve as a generational translator, expose the bias of experience, and enable an expression of self. In demonstrating relevance, popular culture makes material fresh and applicable for students; by operating as a generational translator, the material transcends the time in which it originated; biased experiences are exposed through popular culture mediums through which students are comfortable projecting new and different ideas that challenge what they already know and believe; finally, students can learn to express themselves in relationship to the material by using these mediums with which they are already familiar but in a new and intentional way. Watching clips from the hit TV show “Parks and Recreation” (2009) can illuminate the complexities of the bureaucracy and the role of regulation in everyday life; likewise, listening to the award-winning Broadway musical “Hamilton” (2015) with clever lyrics regaling the debates of federalism demonstrate the passion and ideas behind such constitutional conflicts. This paper first provides an overview that establishes the value of applying popular culture specifically to political science pedagogy before reviewing the relevant literature. It then charts the four ways in which popular culture can be beneficial to teaching and learning political science, concluding with a larger analysis of the advantages and potential for such approaches.

Keywords: political science; politics; government; TV/Film; music; memes; cartoons; popular culture

1. INTRODUCTION

Popular culture and politics have always shared a mutually beneficial, if also somewhat parasitic relationship. Art, film, music, theatre, toys and other manifestations of popular culture interrogate and cajole politicians, their policies, their parties, and their power. They extend beyond providing simple entertainment for their audience and offer instead a clever and thoughtful opportunity for engagement. Politicians, campaigns, parties, and causes can all benefit from the adoption and popularization of their ideas through popular culture, making them more comprehensible and accessible to the masses. The effort is mutual and collaborative; popular culture uses politics as a topic through which they can engage their audience and politics benefits from the accessibility and interest that popular culture brings about.

Popular culture allows for the desanitization of the academic environment from its traditional focus on terms, theories, and concepts to lessons that are, instead, infused by incorporating these same components with exciting and often entertaining pieces that enhance the material. Employing clips from current popular television shows, providing a humorous and relevant meme, demonstrating the underlying message in lyrics of a musical hit all engage students with the material at a different level. With the inclusion of popular culture, classes become more exciting, accessible, easier to understand, and relevant to our students, meaning that the material is not only easier for students to grasp but its value is clear, and they are thus more likely to both retain and apply it.

Political science as a discipline has often suffered from afflictions familiar to many academic fields. Students complain about the material being boring or dry, unrelatable and inaccessible, challenging to master, and irrelevant in application. Civic education, though experiencing a cultural revival, is often secondary to vocational and technical training, which is aimed at helping students achieve post-graduate employment, and not necessarily a sense of civic engagement and an understanding of one's own role within it.

Applying popular culture artifacts and themes in political science courses can help illuminate the material, making it not only more engaging but also more valuable for the student. Showing a clever cartoon mocking the illness-inducing fad of eating tide pods can ignite discussion on the reasons why the founding fathers were distrustful of the masses and created various mechanisms (like the Electoral College and indirect selection of senators) to prevent the feared tyranny of their potential involvement in government. Conversations about the 4th Amendment can instantly incite participation and questions after listening and analyzing the lyrics of Jay-Z's rap hit "99 Problems" (2003) that recounts a racial profiling incident. Hence, by bringing in elements and artifacts from popular culture into the classroom, the material can become more relevant, the learning process can become more enjoyable, and students can become more engaged.

This paper examines the advantages of utilizing popular culture for teaching government and politics, providing four key arguments for how this pedagogical method can be beneficial to students' learning and offering examples of application to support those claims. First, it will provide an overview of the reasons why using popular culture as a teaching tool can be helpful for exciting and engaging students in material that might otherwise be viewed as dry or distant by incorporating current and seminal texts from the field in the review of current literature. Next, the paper will outline the four primary benefits of using popular culture in the classroom, specifically the demonstration of relevance, the service as a generational translator, the exposure of experience, and the expression of self. Finally, the paper will conclude with an analysis of why popular culture not only makes learning in the classroom easier and more enjoyable for students, but how it can also, from the standpoint of the educator, make the teaching process more engaging and provide a more meaningful educational experience for all involved.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The research examining the use of popular culture in the classroom has long argued about the benefits it can have on students. To situate this paper among the current literature, we must first agree on a working definition of the term “popular culture”. For the purposes of this paper, this research relies on the definition of referencing struggle between social groups, as outlined by numerous theorists (Adorno and Horkheimer, Docker, Hall, and J. Story). More specifically, using John Fiske’s (2010) analysis, popular culture can be seen as “deeply contradictory in societies where power is unequally distributed along axes of class, gender, and race, and other categories that we use to make sense of our social differences” (5). This struggle or conflict is replicated in various forms, such as in art, music, film, and other mediums.

From this conceptualization, it can be understood that popular culture, though traditionally excluded from pedagogical practices, is now embraced. Ernest Morrell (2002) believed that “popular culture can help students deconstruct dominant narratives and contend with oppressive practices in hopes of achieving a more egalitarian and inclusive society” when applied to adolescent literacy (72). Additional research demonstrates the benefits of using popular culture in children’s education (Mitchell and Reid-Walsh 2005), leadership curriculum (Callahan and Rosser 2007), religion (McDannell 1998), rhetoric (Brummett 2015), archeology (Holtorf 2016), critical media literacy (Alvermann et al. 2018), and even race and ethnicity (Hall 2006, Lee 1999, and Turner 1994).

The literature connecting popular culture and politics as part of a conscious and strategic curriculum is notably sparse. Numerous studies have upheld the merits of political science education as a “problem-driven discipline” (Isacoff 415) that provides real-world significance (Kohli et al.) and can address real problems (Dewey). Research by Robert Botsch and Carol Botsch has suggested that mandating American government coursework at the college level would significantly impact students, improving “factual knowledge, political interest, political efficacy” and even establishing long-term habits with regards to civic participation that would extend beyond graduation (121).

Disagreements have arisen over whether the influence of popular culture on politics has been detrimental (Postman) or influential (Coleman) for consumers of these various mediums. Though such influence on politics (and, inversely, the use of politics in popular culture) may have its drawbacks, the advantages are still evident. Liesbet Van Zoonen argued that popular culture is deeply related to politics and that “politics has to be connected to the everyday culture of its citizens; otherwise it becomes an alien sphere, occupied by strangers no one cares or bothers about” (3). Additionally, McCarthy and Anderson found that using active learning techniques, like incorporating popular culture and activities into the coursework, had a positive and lasting impact on students compared to their peers who were educated through a more traditional and passive mode.

This research suggests that including popular culture in a strategic and thoughtful manner can be beneficial for teaching content that can often be characterized as boring, challenging, or unimportant. By integrating popular culture into the method through which students learn, courses can become more engaging, accessible, and relevant, especially for students who are not naturally interested in the material and may struggle to connect its value to their lives. Popular culture can enhance teaching and learning in the political science discipline by demonstrating relevance, serving as a generational translator, exposing others to experience, and encouraging self-expression. Each of these benefits is outlined in terms of what they incorporate, why they are helpful, and examples of how they can be used with the curriculum are provided.

3. ANALYSIS

Demonstration of Relevance The discipline of political science itself encompasses a variety of different

fields in both content and the approach, often making it seem complicated for students adept in one area but challenged in another. The broad range of history, economics, sociology, psychology, and even anthropology are all interrelated in this material. Even in the most basic introductory course, a student will be exposed to content from each of these fields through their study of political science because of the interdisciplinary aspect of the concepts. To understand voting behavior, we rely on economic and psychological models; to analyze the constitution and our relationship to government, we reflect on history and analyze the impact of society and culture.

Because of the merging contributions from other fields into the study of government and politics, the material can often feel irrelevant to students who are not well-versed or necessarily interested in these fields. Understanding the role of history and societal relationships is critical to the comprehension of the principles of government yet it also means that the discussion and lecture will center on important events and issues that occurred over two hundred years ago—hardly recent nor relevant for a college student in the 21st century. Connecting these historical themes to similar but recent debates through popular culture can illuminate the importance and relevance of the material to current issues, essentially demonstrating to students why this still matters.

The demonstration of relevance shows students why the sometimes century-old material they are analyzing still affects their lives today. This answers the larger question of “why does this matter?,” a very broad but equally imperative issue that such a course needs to address. As higher education has become more available to a wider range of students, it can no longer assume that they enroll and study simply for a greater pursuit of knowledge; indeed, many of our students are vocationally-focused and want to see the direct value of the work they are completing for their degree. As such, we should aim to illustrate the worthiness of the content and help students make the connections of how seemingly less relevant material may actually be very salient in current debates and discussions for themselves.

Using popular culture as a mechanism for making material relevant and related to current issues provides the perfect bridge through which students can begin to understand, analyze, and apply the content. Teaching the role of the Electoral College, the original indirect selection of senators, and the general distrust of the masses our founders felt serves as a great example of how applying popular culture can make both teaching and learning more meaningful.

The founders shared a wariness of the public that stems from ancient Greek philosophers such as Plato, who also characterized his dislike of direct democracy as a fear of the people (Plato 71). Individuals would not always be educated or care about politics and could easily make unsound decisions that would have horrendous results if they were not carefully restrained (Madison 58). Thus the US Constitution included the Electoral College to ensure that the masses would not overrule presidential elections, that senators would be selected by the state government (not individual voters), and that no popular initiative or referendums (both examples of direct democracy) at the national level would exist, so that all policy changes would have to go through the elected officials.

While the arguments of the extent to which you can trust the public and how much power they should have may seem old, strategically selecting popular culture artifacts for class discussions can suddenly show how the contemporaneity and relevance of these debates. Arguments against direct democracy and giving too much power to voters can be summarized in memes poking fun at the tide-pod eating craze and a nationwide study that found that many Americans believe chocolate milk comes from brown cows (see figure 1). On the other hand, cartoons mocking the low approval ratings of Congress and questioning the belief that if we believe all people can't be trusted, why would we give some people more power, challenge the preference for representative democracy (see figure 2). When incorporated alongside public opinion polls showing how few people can name their elected officials and basic constitutional processes, these popular culture artifacts can

make the centuries-old arguments relevant to the current political climate and provoke students into thinking about their preferences for good governance.

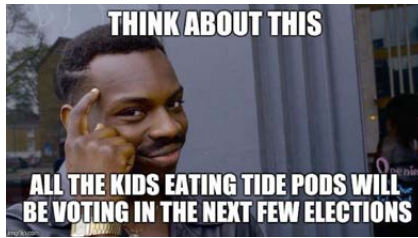


Figure 1. Think about this: All the kids eating tide pods will be voting in the next few elections



Figure 2. Congress: You had one job

Generational Translator

Making the material more relevant to students, based on their specific peer group, helps them understand not only why something matters, but why it matters at the present time. Popular culture can serve as a translator across generations, allowing students to view the same concept from different historical lenses, and then use that context to consider the current issue from a more critical perspective. Particularly for disciplines that encompass contributions from other fields, as political science does with the social sciences and humanities, using popular culture artifacts from previous points in history and comparing them to those from current times can enable students to gain a greater understanding of the magnitude of change and similarities in the subject matter.

Teaching gender politics, for example, can show how using popular culture as a generational translator makes the material more accessible while simultaneously providing a historical and cultural comparison for students to assess. In American government, women have traditionally been either underrepresented or entirely excluded from participation. Until the 19th Amendment, women could not vote or engage directly in the election process at all in most states. Even after suffrage was won, female candidacies continue to lag disproportionately behind their male counterparts, and no branch of government at the federal level (nor most at the state) have equal proportionality of women serving in public office respective to the general population. This phenomenon, of course, is not limited to just government but follows a cultural pattern in our country in which women are treated differently and often unfairly compared to men.

Music, toys, and film can illustrate these themes for students and allow them to see the differences and similarities in gender politics throughout generations. Songs such as Dionne Warwick's "Wishin' and Hopin'" (1962) (that advises to "wear your hair just for him, do the things he likes to do") and The Crystals' "He Hit Me (It Felt Like a Kiss)" (1962) (unapologetically endorsing sexual assault and violence) provide a stark contrast compared to Helen Reddy's "I am Woman, Hear Me Roar" (1971) and Beyoncé's "Run the World (Girls)" (2011). Such lyrics illustrate an evolution of cultural attitudes. Women, once encouraged to be submissive and subservient, are then empowered to take charge and act on behalf of their own interests. Beyoncé's claims of "how we're smart enough to make these millions, strong enough to bear the children, then get back to business" relates to her own life's story and points to the balance in professional and personal achievements that have become a cultural norm for many women.

Mattel's Barbie doll, a cultural icon in and of itself, has lived through and reflected these cultural changes as gender politics has evolved over time, even directly in terms of Barbie being represented as a political candidate (see figure 3). The company introduced "Barbie for President" in 1992 with their doll outfitted in a blue-and-silver ball gown with gaudy silver stars and a coordinating red suit. Though no candidate would like to wear such an impractical ensemble on the campaign trail, Barbie made her debut as a candidate the

same year as hundreds of other female candidates in the “Year of the Woman,” as 1992 came to be known. Each presidential election year ushered in a new version of Barbie as a candidate, revealing the cultural shifts and fashion changes that accompany the times. Twenty years after her debut, “Barbie for President” arrived in 2012 with her own podium and abandoned the iconic high heels for slightly more sensible platform shoes. This was promoted on the box with the declaration, “she stands on her own (literally)”. In 2016 “Barbie for President” included two Barbie dolls, proclaiming “the first all-female ticket” and each was dressed smartly in a pantsuit and dress suit. Though the country has yet to elect a woman to the top of the ticket, these toys show just how seriously female candidates have changed over time and how our image of female candidates has as well.



Figure 3. Barbie for President 2016

Watching excerpts from various films and TV shows also helps show students how gender politics has evolved across generations despite some recurring themes. Issues of working women and the balance between their personal and professional lives reappear frequently throughout films and TV episodes. Comparing episodes from “The Dick Van Dyke Show” (1961-1966) to “The Mary Tyler Moore Show,” (1970-1977) to “Murphy Brown” (1988-1998) and “The Good Wife” (2009-2016) reveals the ways women’s roles and our expectations of them have changed, with each show and episode representing different takes on issues of balance, femininity, and sexism. When high-powered attorney Diane Lockhart (played by Christine Baranski) demands, “I want what I am worth” in a negotiation, her claim reveals the gender inequity that remains while also highlighting the cultural acceptability for such a demand (“A Precious Commodity,” Season 5, Episode 3, *The Good Wife*).

Using popular culture as a generational translator provides students with the connection between the reason why something matters to them now and an indication of how that has changed over time. It goes a step above demonstrating relevance because it is not simply answering “why this matters” but instead adds the element of “how” to provide a historical perspective. By using popular culture artifacts to bring concepts to life, those concepts become rooted in a cultural context and enable students to see past their own moment in time into a previous one, allowing them to analyze the evolution of that concept. For a topic like gender politics, popular culture can make the material more poignant and relevant to the students, allowing them to critically analyze it in the context of time and place.

Exposure of Experience

Showing students how others’ experiences are valuable and worthy in and of themselves can serve as one of the biggest challenges in higher education. Thinking outside one’s own lived experience requires introspection and self-awareness which are paramount to good citizenship, but also difficult to teach and

learn. Exposing students to different perspectives and helping them critique their own privilege allows them to see their own biases and recognize how their views are shaped by their experiences, which are different from others.

This need for widening students' perspectives and considering privilege is particularly important in discussions involving government and politics as the views individuals and groups hold are deeply rooted in their own experiences. Political socialization focuses on the role that family, schools, and religious institutions play on a person's upbringing; the differences across these will likewise result in different views and ideas. Particularly in the current political climate, as the electorate seems increasingly polarized and debate becomes more acrimonious, teaching students how to understand general differences in lived experiences and perspectives, empathize with others, and debate matters with respect and insight.

Using popular culture can help expose students to different experiences and allow them to question their own biases by demystifying concepts that may feel to be otherwise distant or unimportant. Racial politics serves as a great topic through which popular culture can be used to expose students to others' experiences. As the frequency of racial issues continues to rise within the country, divisions across racial lines can easily become exacerbated, especially when students feel unable or are unwilling to understand the perspective of others. For white students, the problems of racial profiling and the police shootings of unarmed young black men may feel irrelevant to their daily life, but for students of color, these events may feel so real that the emotions and responses are raw and haunting.

Movies, music, and artwork chronicling racial politics can provide a great platform to initiate dialogue about race barriers in politics among students. *Fruitvale Station* (2013) followed the last day in the life of Oscar Grant as he played with his daughter at daycare, went to work, and then enjoyed a night out with his fiancé and friends before it ended in his brutal murder on a subway station platform. The film is earnest and emotional, inviting viewers in to see this man's life and his work and relationships before they all came to a screeching halt when a subway police officer reportedly confused his gun with his taser and shot Grant once in the chest, ultimately leading to his death.

Jay-Z's hit "99 Problems" (2004) traces his own experience with racial profiling in the lyrics which, accompanied by a catchy beat, makes listening enjoyable and simultaneously informative. In the song, he relates an incident in which he was pulled over by a police officer for a meaningless infraction and how the officer was surprised that he knew his legal rights.

So I, pull over to the side of the road
 I heard "Son, do you know why I'm stopping you for?"
 Cause I'm young and I'm black and my hat's real low
 Or do I look like a mind reader, sir? I don't know
 Am I under arrest or should I guess some mo?
 "Well you was doing fifty-five in the fifty-four", uh huh
 "License and registration and step out of the car
 "Are you carrying a weapon on you, I know a lot of you are"
 I ain't stepping out of shit, all my papers legit
 "Well do you mind if I look around the car a little bit?"
 Well my glove compartment is locked, so is the trunk and the back
 And I know my rights so you goin' need a warrant for that
 "Aren't you sharp as a tack? You some type of lawyer or something?"
 "Somebody important or something?"
 Child, I ain't passed the bar, but I know a little bit
 Enough that you won't illegally search my shit

The artwork of Amit Shimoni, painting famous political leaders such as Abraham Lincoln and Barack Obama as hipsters with bold colors in the background and amusing imagery takes a different look at racial politics. The image of Barack Obama shows the former president with fake dreadlocks stacked neatly at the crown of his head, complete with a single gold hoop earring and a gold chain adorning a loose-fitting white tank top (Shimoni). The painting is both surreal and fantastic, as it portrays a one-time world leader as a basic nobody who could be walking down the street at any point in time. Obama is smiling his characteristic grin and clearly recognizable, but without his full suit or button-up shirt, he resembles an entirely different person.

Viewing this image can incite discussions of the role race played in Obama's election and politics. His election as the first African-American president broke a racial barrier to the highest elected office in the country, but racial politics became exacerbated during his administration and revealed the ugly history of racism from which our nation still clearly has not recovered. As the former president looks just like a normal young man, it can also encourage questions about racial differences and the role profiling plays in the treatment of racial and ethnic minorities.

The balance in these conversations is precarious but demonstrates the value of using popular culture to open and motivate discussion. Some of the films, music, and art can act as triggers for students who see their life experiences reflected all too clearly in them. The instructor must be strategic about the use of these mediums and the way they are introduced and explained to the class to avoid victimizing or fetishizing some experiences for the sake of the education of the others. The classroom should provide a safe and open space for an honest and clear dialogue, but that also means it should feel comfortable to everyone involved. Because the students will already be familiar with some of the popular culture artifacts, and they will have been primed throughout the course to understand the emotional weight associated with them, embracing film, art, and music can lighten and focus the conversations.

Exposing students to the experiences of others enables them to understand why something matters even when it may not affect them directly or explicitly. It enables them to transcend their own position and perspective and analyze alternatives that they might not have otherwise considered. Nothing, of course, will remove an individual from their biases, but popular culture can be used to render the act of challenging the privilege and perspective easier and more meaningful.

Expression of Self

More than anything else, popular culture can allow students to express themselves and their political ideas through mediums in which they are comfortable and fluent. Students can sing along to songs with lyrics that question the balance of government intervention and individual liberties, they can share memes joking about the limitations of a two-party political system, and they can watch movies and TV shows that highlight the dysfunctions of the legislative process. Even when the material presented through text feels distant or irrelevant, artifacts from popular culture can transcend the limitations in understanding such material and bring the course concept to life in an entertaining and engaging way.

Ultimately helping students connect the material with their own sense of self, understanding who they are and what they believe, and how they will contribute to the world serves as a goal that is essential to liberal arts education. It is simply not enough that we teach our students what something is and why it matters, we must also teach them why it matters to them and then help them make the connections necessary to understand how that is the case. This is especially true for students who find the research within the discipline or the historical texts to be difficult to decipher and apply. Using film, art, music, and other modes of popular culture can provide a medium for them to express their opinions and ideas about the material in an easier and more engaging way.

Using popular culture to express oneself can be particularly effective in addressing salient political issues that are complicated and divisive. Addressing the elusive balance between national security and

individual liberty, for example, poses fascinating questions to students as they consider the role of government, regulatory powers, and individual liberties. Using clips from TV shows, political cartoons, and memes can highlight the complexities of these arguments and also empower students to think critically about their own perspectives in them as they grapple with principles at odds with one another.

“Parks and Recreation” (2012) was a TV show that focused on an aspect of government often neglected in popular culture: local bureaucracy. Centered around local government and issues involving its role in the community made the show unique amid the political genre that is often dark and either dramatic or satirical and usually focused on the federal level and Washington DC. In the episode, “Soda Tax” from season 5, episode 2, protagonist Leslie Knope interrogates the spokesperson for a local restaurant, Kathryn Pinewood, on their new soda sizes that seem to promote the consumption of sugary soft drinks as a value to the consumer.

Leslie Knope: Well, Paunch Burger just recently came out with a new 128-ounce option. Most people call it a gallon, but they call it the regular. Then, there is a horrifying 512-ounce version that they call child size. How is this a child-sized soda?

Kathryn Pinewood: Well, it’s roughly the size of a two-year old child, if the child were liquefied. It’s a real bargain at \$1.59.

Knope questions the value from a public health standpoint, arguing about the role this might play in the community’s obesity epidemic while Pinewood maintains that “it’s not our place to speak for the consumer but everyone should buy it” (“Soda Tax”). As the episode title implies, this clip can serve as a segue into a discussion over the New York City soda tax, what the details of the policy were, what was included and excluded, and what principles are ultimately at odds in this policy. It challenges the students to think about the role government plays in their lives and what the balance should be between government and individuals in a harmonious and productive society.

Students can express their attitudes and ideas on government regulation and individual liberties through various cartoons and memes as well. When discussing the changes in public policy after 9/11, the creation of the Department of Homeland Security and the introduction of the PATRIOT ACT, memes that joke “I am so sick of the government looking at, but never liking, my Facebook status” or “You know what really grinds my gears? People who post every detail of their life on social media then complain about the NSA.” Students are forced to consider the strengths and limitations of such policies and explore their feelings towards them.

As social media becomes more ubiquitous and far-reaching, questions about information, privacy, government access, and the discretion of the individual become more complicated but also more imperative to discuss. Popular culture can provide students with a medium through which they can challenge and determine their own ideas on these issues. As these artifacts are presented in tandem with the themes of policy prioritization, security vs. liberty tradeoffs, and governmental influence, students are able to consider these concepts and apply them to their own lives and experiences.

4. CONCLUSION

Incorporating popular culture into a political science curriculum proves to be beneficial, especially to the student who is unfamiliar or less interested in the material. By approaching this type of inclusion in a strategic and thoughtful manner, selecting pieces that specifically speak to the issue at hand, introducing them beforehand and explaining them afterward with enough background to enable students’ full comprehension, popular culture proves to be an effective teaching tool. It can break down barriers of understanding and interest, igniting engagement and encouraging students to critically analyze routine aspects of their life that they might have only considered to be entertaining rather than educational.

Employing popular culture artifacts like music, film and TV, art, cartoons, and others facilitate students' connection to key course concepts through experiences they extend beyond the traditional confines of education. It is particularly important in communicating the value of the course, not just as another general education requirement or credit hour, but as the beginning of a lifelong quest to ignite civic interest and political participation.

As students consider the value of their college coursework, especially those courses not directly related to the major, they may ask why material matters, why it is important now, why it is important to others, and why it should matter to them. Forgoing a self-indulgent tirade extolling the worthiness of a liberal arts education, these questions are important to our students, and thus, should be important to us as educators as well. We serve to help them make sense of a complicated world and to teach them critical and analytical thinking skills that they will use for the rest of their lives.

Interjecting popular culture into the curriculum can make it easier for the teacher and more exciting for the student as they answer these questions about the value of their classes and their experience within them. Demonstrating relevance provides an answer to the question of "Why does this matter?" while using popular culture as a generational translator offers a response to "Why does this matter now?" Being exposed to other experiences suggests an understanding of "Why does this matter to others" just as employing popular culture to express oneself answers "Why does this matter to me?" These questions are relevant to student needs and curriculum values, utilizing popular culture as a pedagogical tool to bridge this gap.

This paper argues that applying popular culture to the political science discipline can enhance and excite the learning process. Though the examples and explanations given here focus on the political sciences, the principles are undoubtedly applicable to a variety of disciplines and provide the same role in each application. Popular culture can cause concepts to become more engaging, more accessible, and more exciting, and thus, demonstrates the incredible value of the material being learned, making it more relevant and meaningful for student engagement.

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