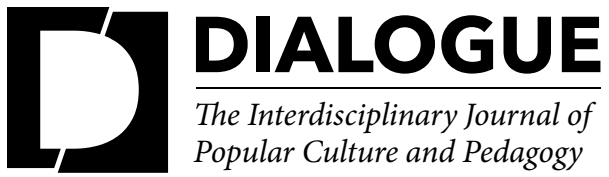




Traversing Borders, Transgressing Boundaries in Popular Culture and Pedagogy

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Traversing Borders, Transgressing Boundaries in Popular Culture and Pedagogy

The concepts of border and boundaries center the way in which we can think about the articles shared in this issue, 8.3, for *Dialogue: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Popular Culture and Pedagogy*. Borders can extend to the realm of the symbolic. As a popular working image deployed for interrogations of the multiplicity of identity, the border cannot be reduced to a geographical or territorial boundary. Anzaldúa writes in the preface to the first edition of *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* that borderlands “are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle, and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy” (Preface). Indeed, the very liminality of borders invites us to critically contend with the contradictions and negotiations that emerge from navigating or straddling cultural (ex. language and religion) and social borders (ex. race, gender, sexuality, and class). Yet while the image of borders habitually communicates notions of boundedness, dichotomy, exclusion, and stasis given the violent histories of oppression that belie it, borders, whether real or imagined, are open to contestation, disruption, and transgression. “Borders, after all,” as public intellectual and self-proclaimed nomadic performance artist Guillermo Gómez-Peña reminds us in his artist/personal website, “are there for us to cross.” In this vein, the four articles presented in this issue, *Crossing Borders, Breaking Boundaries in Popular Culture and Pedagogy*, deal with traversing and transgressing borders and the myriad possibilities and limitations that such crossings and transgressions invite.

In the first article in this issue, “Halfies, Half-Written Letters, and One-Eyed Gods: Connecting the Dots of Communicative Cultures,” Gregory Stephens traverses the seemingly intractable boundaries between communication studies, ethnographic studies, pedagogy, and popular culture to “distill the theory of communicative cultures as a tool for cultural analysis.” Defining “communicative cultures” as a “a set of shared commitments expressed through cultural means,” Stephens analyzes and explores the pedagogical potentialities of Jamaican writer Olive Senior’s short story, “Country of the One Eye God,” to “illustrate the necessarily unfinished and processual nature of cultural analysis.” In so doing, Stephens attempts to resist static conceptualizations of culture and essentialized notions of identity by enacting a practice of cultural analysis that “accounts for radical fluidity.” Animated by Abu-Lughod’s definition of “halfies” as a key group that, by virtue of their cultural and/or national in-betweenness, often “expose and challenge static concepts of culture,” Stephens adapts the term as a form of cultural analysis. Through this connect-the-dots analytical approach, Stephens suggests that teaching texts such as Senior’s “Country of the One Eye God” invites students to appreciate and “develop a sense of culture as *relational*, *distributive*, and attuned to the connections and interconnections of lived cultural processes.”

Using *Captain Marvel* and *Avengers: Infinity War* as central case studies, the second article of this issue, “Crossing Over: The Migrant ‘Other’ in the Marvel Cinematic Universe,” bridges media studies with migration studies to analyze how these films “reflect anxiety about the alien (migrant) ‘other’ through difference and

crisis.” Contextualizing these films within our rife sociopolitical climate, one marred by renewed anti-immigrant politics and the increasing militarization of our geographical borders, Casey Walker, Anthony Ramirez, and Arthur D. Soto-Vásquez argue that films/texts like *Captain Marvel* and *Avengers: Infinity War*, while innocuous on the surface, are “symbolic of a creeping right-wing discourse that dehumanizes outsiders, refugees, and migrants in popular culture.” By adopting Symbolic Convergence Theory as their key analytical framework, Walker, Ramirez, and Soto-Vásquez not only perform close readings of the MCU films under consideration but also, and perhaps more importantly, explore how “analyzing texts situated adjacent to fan communities can reveal how meaning flows in our hybrid media environment.” Though Walker, Ramirez, and Soto-Vásquez do acknowledge the film director’s “good intentions” behind the making of these films—they include, for instance, snippets of an interview where the director shares that he sought to emphasize Thanos’ villainous god-complex—the authors foreground the creeping “emergence of Thanos-inspired eco-fascism thinking among well-intentioned people.” In so doing, Walker, Ramirez, and Soto-Vásquez ultimately reveal how the emergence of this Thanos-inspired eco-fascist rhetoric precariously informs the “real world” dehumanization of migrant subjects who are too often deemed “dangerous border crossers.”

The third article in this issue, “Media Literacy, Education, and a Global Pandemic: Lessons Learned in a Gender and Pop Culture Classroom,” explores the pedagogical risks and adaptations that both a student *and* educator took on in an upper-division course— “Sex: Gender and Popular Culture”—that was being offered amid what was then the early stages of the coronavirus pandemic (spring 2020). In response to bell hooks’ invitation in *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* to “collaborate in discussion that crosses boundaries and creates space for intervention,” Lowell Mason (the course instructor) and Imobhio (one of Lowell Mason’s former students), offer readers a collaborative and dialogic essay that privileges pedagogical border crossings. Indeed, as Lowell Mason and Imobhio write in their essay, “in coming together, as student and teacher, [they] are deliberately collaborating, crossing boundaries and dismantling the power structure between teacher and student to create space for pedagogical awareness and change.” Moreover, in conceiving their dialogue as an academic *and* cultural text, Lowell Mason and Imobhio argue that they transgress the “boundaries of what is considered an ‘academic text.’” Shifting to a discussion on how an ever-evolving crisis-informed pedagogy prompted a re-imagining of the course, Lowell Mason argues that “being deliberate and specific about the role of media literacy’s role in the course is the pedagogical intervention that the pandemic produced.” Peppering the essay with student media literacy project examples, Lowell Mason ultimately suggests that “A media literacy course, one that teaches students how to view, question, and better understand the world and representations within it, is an important place for us to dismantle the culture of silence and create better representation.”

Bringing together video games studies and composition and writing pedagogy, Joy Sterrantino’s article, “It’s Dangerous to Learn Alone- Play This: Video Games in Higher Education, particularly in the Composition Classroom,” focuses on the importance of incorporating texts in the writing classroom that push the boundaries of what is understood as “proper dialects” (or, academic language) and what is considered a “suitable” academic text and/or teaching format. Though video games have, as Sterrantino’s makes clear, their own dialects and lexicons, ones that society oft-times dismisses as elementary and time-wasting, Sterrantino argues that video game dialects may be “the best way to teach students the material and skills we want them to learn.” Indeed, Sterrantino writes that “applying gaming language and structures to a class, a language many students already know, professors can use game structures to make students feel like insiders; students will then be more committed to what they are learning.” Putting to practice calls for the gamification of the higher education classroom, Sterrantino shares a preview of a collaboratively developed composition course where “gaming” elements will be integrated into the course’s content/Canvas page. By centering what game studies has to offer writing pedagogy (and higher education, more broadly), Sterrantino shows how coming

to understand gaming (and its dialects) as a valid pedagogical tool disrupts the idea that students need only “learn the conventions of this [traditional] classroom or leave.”

Across the articles in issue 8.3, *Crossing Borders, Breaking Boundaries in Popular Culture and Pedagogy*, audiences see the potential for thinking about popular culture and pedagogy through the complicated notion of borders, whether in constraints or the opportunities such as suggested in cultural analysis, in film, and through innovative practice integrating social media, dialogic work, and video game dialects in teaching and learning. As 2021 comes to a close, we can look back and see the challenges we collectively have learned from and moved through, for good, bad, and all the layers in between. This issue was made possible by a strong team of individuals, including the authors and peer reviewers for these articles, Copy Editors - Miriam Sciala, Robert Gordyn, and Arlyce Menzies; Reference Editors – Joseph Yapp and April Manabat; Creative Director – Douglas CohenMiller. We hope that there is something in these articles that encourages you to think about popular culture and pedagogy in new ways, offering potential for traversing border and transgressing boundaries in your thinking and practice.

Karina Vado
Managing Editor

Anna CohenMiller
Editor in Chief

A note from the Editor in Chief

I would like to thank Karina Vado for her insightful and incredible work across positions at *Dialogue* from Book Review Editor to Musings Editor. For this issue, it was my honor to have her come aboard as Managing Editor, making this a stronger, more robust issue because of her work.

Anna CohenMiller

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Halfies, Half-Written Letters, and One-Eyed Gods: Connecting the Dots of Communicative Cultures

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ABSTRACT

This essay distills the theory of communicative cultures as a tool for cultural analysis. Nadine Gordimer's line about the difficulties of returning to "half-written letters" is used to frame anthropology's critique of "bounded culture" or "container cultures," predominant in Cultural Studies. Anthropologists Lila Abu-Lughod and Kirin Narayan have described "halfies" as in-between peoples who can help us understand fluid, processual cultures as normative. Building on this stance, and the work of rhetorical genre scholars, Stephens defines communicative cultures as "a set of shared commitments expressed through cultural means." This approach to cultural analysis, in which literature is viewed as an "ethnographic resource," is illustrated through an analysis of Jamaican writer Olive Senior's story "Country of the One Eye God." The repeating patterns in Jamaican culture which this approach reveals, it is suggested, point to the wider utility of communicative cultures as an analytical concept.

Keywords: Communicative; cultural analysis; ethnography; repeating patterns; generations; structure of feeling; literature as ethnographic resource

INTRODUCTION

This essay is adapted from a book project which uses a theory of communicative cultures to model cultural analysis and interdisciplinary writing. Addressing readers at the interstices between popular culture and pedagogy, I call again on Ken Hyland's concept of "stance and engagement." The notion of a stance taken to facilitate a certain interactive mode helps explain my movement between scholarship and creative writing. My particular "disciplined interdisciplinarity" (Bazerman) aims to engage readers willing to imagine a cross-fertilization between theory and personal or literary narrative. My larger aims here include an argument for an ethnographic variant of cultural analysis and a demonstration of the value of creative writing pedagogies. I apply an ethnographic approach to both cultural analysis and creative writing, distilling my creative writing pedagogy as *culture shapes character*, for example.

My sense of disenchantment with most cultural studies is not uncommon. In fact, Stuart Hall came to have profound misgivings about his baby. Having already mapped this terrain (Stephens, "Beyond the Romance"), I will reference more narrowly anthropology's "Against Culture" or "Beyond Culture" turn (Abu-Lughod; Herbert; Fox & King), which critiques the celebratory or oppositional identity politics that have come to dominate cultural studies. Engaging this body of scholarship has led me to adapt "halfies" as a pivotal concept for cultural analysis, and the writing/ teaching of literary prose. Lila Abu-Lughod, a Palestinian-American anthropologist, introduced this idea in 1991 as a way of positing "in-between people" as a sort of antidote to static concepts of culture. The concept has been taken up by several anthropologists, notably Kirin Narayan, whose father was Indian, and whose mother was born to German and American parents. Narayan has lived and worked in India and Australia as well as in the USA. The interlayering of her various personal and professional roles and identities is a profound challenge to one-size-fits-all categories, including nationality, race, class, and gender. This multi-centeredness also applies to her diverse writerly approaches, which range from scholarship to fiction to literary nonfiction and all points in between.

Narayan's distillation of what being a halfie or "mixie" means in practice--and her argument that this phenomenon is far more pervasive than many are able or willing to acknowledge--has broad implications. If understood in depth, this reconsideration of what one might call a "halfie lifeworld" constitutes something of a "Samson job" on identity politics. Serge Gruzinski, a specialist of Latin American history, states clearly the implications of learning to see the pervasiveness of the halfie/mixie phenomena. In *The Mestizo Mind*, he writes:

Either we totally fail to see the mestizo phenomena that occurred or, once they become dominant and irrefutable, they are hastily described as "contamination" or interference. ... [Yet] the groups and individuals who act as go-betweens...have played a key role in history [while providing the] energy in new modes of thinking. (*Mestizo Mind*, 14; 23)

I enter this domain via a story by Nadine Gordimer. A bit of signposting is in order. My "half-written letters" about communicative cultures are incomplete, for reasons both intentional and unavoidable. Cultural analysis that accounts for radical fluidity must necessarily be incomplete, I argue. So, the "connect the dots" approach I demonstrate cannot or should not completely *finish the picture*. A writer can suggest a direction, but completion of interpretation should be left to readers. Both Gordimer's story and Olive Senior's "Country of the One Eye God" illustrate the necessarily unfinished and processual nature of cultural analysis.

The fictions of Gordimer and Senior help illustrate a key distinction regarding communicative cultures, which I define as *shared commitments expressed through cultural means*. Unlike the theories of discourse communities, or communities of practice, communicative cultures are outward directed. They invite some level of participation by listeners, readers, or observers who do not necessarily share the objectives of the original culture. This is true of literature and music associated with the apartheid era in South Africa (usually oppositional), and with musical expressions in Jamaica, such as reggae, which express a shared commitment

to racial equality, and decolonization. The stories are read and the music is listened to by a mixed public, some of whom simply enjoy the music, or who fasten upon one element of a story, or one theme in a song, without “buying into” the underlying equal rights. It is this transgressive, open-ended, fluid, and processual nature of communicative cultures that I hope to help visualize.

ANOTHER HALF-WRITTEN LETTER

In Nadine Gordimer’s *The Late Bourgeois World*, the young widow Liz, asked to provide a dangerous service for black nationalists in South Africa, remarks, “I can never go back to a half-written letter; the tone, when you take it up again, doesn’t match” (Gordimer 73).

My efforts to elaborate a type of cultural analysis which is communicative have been like half-written letters. The somewhat fragmented nature of this approach is due in part to its varied sources and inspirations: in a disciplinary, scholarly sense, I was trained in communication; but my writerly roots are in prior careers as a songwriter and journalist. Since 2014, my narrative repertoire has grown through work in Puerto Rico as a professor/practitioner of creative writing.

Cultural expression is characterized, above all, by repeating patterns. In the ethnographic and communicative cultural analysis I practice, cultural expression is always in reformulation and translation. So in practice, cultural analysis is always half-written: one can suggest a trajectory, but never be definitive. However, in my returns to an evolving theory of communicative cultures, certain patterns can be discerned. My “half-written letters” about reimagining culture begin to acquire a larger shape by connecting the dots.

This notion of connecting the dots has long been a cornerstone of my teaching and cultural analysis. As I explain it to students: the ancients looked up at star patterns and imagined bears, hunters, etc. Those figures are *not there*, physically. However, through imaginative projection, observers can draw connections between the “dots” and a picture emerges. This works like children moving a pencil along a series of numbered dots until an image appears.

In my work about the communicative nature of cultural expression, discussion of various “halfies” is a recurrent theme. As already intimated, I see the cultural patterns of in-between peoples as a norm of our disjunctive era. Let us examine the role that halfies have played in gaining insight into culture as a communicative process, rather than as a property.

“HALFIES” AND THE CRITIQUE OF BOUNDED CULTURE

My understanding of culture emerged in part over ten years of residence in the “greater Caribbean.” Influenced by long engagement with reggae music and its international producers and consumers, and by my marriage to/ partnership with a St. Lucian woman, I have come to experience certain Caribbean “structures of feeling” as shared (Williams). I am thinking of an affinity with post-national concepts of identity in Puerto Rico (Soto-Crespo), which leads to the sorts of interpenetrations (Stephens, “Borderland”) that are characteristic of borderlands. As Michel-Rolph Trouillot remarked, some “resident intellectuals have long been interlocutors in European debates about the region.” As a result, “no discursive field is fully ‘ours,’ or ‘theirs’” (“Caribbean Region,” 20). Resultant forms of intersubjectivity should be a caution to those tempted to apply *us vs. them* binaries, or procrustean forms of postcolonial theory.

My perspective on “permeable borders” in intercultural relations is grounded in a critique of the “bounded culture” concept that has endured for half a century (Abu-Lughod; Fox and King; Trouillot, “Adieu Culture”; Raud). Anthropologists have engaged in a sustained assault on the tendency to treat cultures as a *thing* or a property rather than a process (Evans 429). In fact, static views of culture and identity are pervasive in the cultural rhetorics that have emerged in the wake of ethnic studies. Political and educational institutions

are deeply invested in essentialized definitions of cultural, ethnic, or racial identity.

Lila Abu-Lughod suggests two ways to avoid a static, container concept of culture: to focus on interconnections (rather than static categories), and to engage in “ethnographies of the particular” (144). One can hardly do either without an understanding of communicative events that make interconnections possible, or express the shared commitments of cultural groups.

Abu-Lughod describes “halfies” as a “critical group” that can “expose and challenge” static concepts of culture. Halfies are in-between people “whose national or cultural identity is mixed by virtue of migration, overseas education, or parentage” (137). Given my background as resident/ scholar of racial frontiers and borderlands; having lived outside the United States for over a decade; having fathered three biracial, bilingual children, and having had “overseas education,” I am a proud “halfie.” As such, I am inclined to a certain sympathy with mestizo cultures. Gruzinski’s history of the “mestizo mind” is in this sense parallel to my work on the deep roots of interraciality, as part of an “interracial turn” (Stephens, “Arguing”).

The cultural studies tradition, it has been argued, is a “stale” field that has “exhausted [its] potential” (Raud 3; see also Fox & King; Bonnell & Hunt). However, I agree with Cristoph Brumann that cultural theory is too valuable to be discarded. The broader “study of cultures ... needs to be reinvigorated,” Raud insists (5). Cultural analysis can be revisioned through a communicative lens. This approach, rooted in Hymes’ “ethnography of communication,” allows for necessary distance from actually existing cultural studies, with its predominant adherence to “container” models of culture.

REPEATING PATTERNS

One core definition to which I return is that *cultures are distinguished by patterns that repeat themselves*. They are “dynamically recurring patterns in social life” (Heath and Street 11). This focus on repeating patterns is widespread in cultural anthropology and related fields (Benedict; Geertz; Peterson 138; Keesing 68; Pryor 397). Culture is our matrix: a largely unconscious structure; an “*invisible structure of life*” (Reynolds & Valentine xvii). Edward Hall characterized culture as “a vast unexplored region of human behaviour that exists *outside the range of people’s conscious awareness*, a ‘silent language’ that is usually conveyed unconsciously” (Reynolds and Valentine xix).

For pedagogical purposes, culture is an *invisible structuring pattern*. I teach students to make the patterns visible, and to narrate their structuring force. I want students to develop a sense of culture as *relational* (Desmond), *distributive* (Rodseth; Gatewood), and attuned to the “connections and interconnections” of lived cultural processes (Abu Lughod 472).

As a tool to recognize patterns in texts—including social texts, and visual narratives—I use the “Di Yanni method.” This has four stages. First one observes details in the text, while deferring judgement. This is a gathering data phase. Second, one begins to connect the dots of the details observed, looking for recurring words or themes, shifts in tone, etc. Third, the analyst begins to make inferences. Fourth, one arrives at a provisional conclusion (Di Yanni 10-11).

This method is valuable for gathering information and recognizing patterns in many fields. It is a transferable skill (Stephens, “Transferable”). An analyst starts with observation, while employing self-discipline, resisting the urge to arrive at premature conclusions. She begins to make connections between different details observed, and looks for inferences in the patterns that become visible. Finally, the reader or analyst arrives at subject-to-change conclusions.

COMMUNICATIVE CULTURES AS A MATRIX FOR CULTURAL ANALYSIS

A key point of reference is Swales' view of communicative events as achieving their specific form and content through a "shared set of communicative purposes." I have studied the shared commitments of groups in communicative form most fully within the "disciplined interdisciplinarity" of writing studies (Bazerman). "Communicative" is used here in the sense of *expansive* and *outgoing*. To be communicative in this sense is to try to express one's thought or message in a way that is intelligible to non-specialists, and even to those who disagree, or are inattentive. An open-ended willingness to invite others into the conversation infers that one must also learn about the communication and cultural styles of others, and tailor the conversation towards the communicative needs of people from various cultural backgrounds. To commit to an outward-directed writing and communication also infers that one will not use the sorts of language, tone, visuals, etc. that are unnecessarily exclusive.

"Communicative cultures" operate as *a shared set of commitments expressed through cultural means*. It must be acknowledged, however, that an "expansive" or "outgoing" approach is far from normative. Participants in a communicative culture can be antisocial. They may adhere to commitments we do not share. We may be opposed to, even appalled by, their objectives. Still, a communicative understanding requires us to listen dispassionately, at least in the observation stage, to the communicative styles of people or of representatives of groups whose pronounced commitments and objectives we find incomprehensible or even repugnant.

This proviso, and my ambition to extend the theory of communicative cultures beyond the realm of writing studies, is one reason why I chose as a case study "Country of the One Eye God," by the Jamaican writer Olive Senior. This ten-page story, from Senior's 1986 collection *Summer Lightning*, features a young criminal described as a rapist, a thief, and a murderer.

COUNTRY OF THE ONE EYE GOD

My approach to this story is informed by a body of research that treats literature as a resource for ethnographic investigation (Craith and Fournier; Winner). Literary texts contain cultural traces—in this case communicative cultures in Jamaica. Ethnographers can recover elements of a culture through close reading of stories, much as through studying material remains, reading diaries, or interviewing participants. My reading of the cultural milieu Senior describes is shaped by having lived in Jamaica 2004-08, and by having researched Jamaican culture long before I moved there to teach at the University of the West Indies-Mona.

I first taught "Country of the One Eye God" Fall 2019 in a Fiction Writing class at the University of Puerto Rico-Mayagüez. I like to give students examples of how "non-traditional" or creole English(es) can be employed to write literary prose, or to augment one's communicative style in order to reach a broader audience. With this story, I also wanted to provide a model of how to write about a villain in such a way that the character remains multi-dimensional, and challenges stereotypes, rather than being reduced to a one-dimensional baddy who is too easily dismissed.

After employing the *observe the details* first reading, and beginning to connect the dots, it becomes evident that there are certain moral and rhetorical parallels between the two main characters, Ma Bell, a 76-year-old church-going, Bible-quoting matriarch in Jamaica, and her criminal, apparently amoral grandson Jacko, who is 19.

Several elements of Ma Bell's speech style attracted our attention. First, she is prone to rhetorical excess. In the first paragraph, she distills the bad news about her grandson Jacko: he is "a thief, a murderer, a hired gunman, a rapist, a jailbird, a jailbreaker," and has a price on his head. The second paragraph develops Ma Bell's tendency to pile on in describing the sufferings she and her family have endured: the nouns spill forth in a "trials of Job" variation: "deaths starvation hurricane earthquake cholera typhoid malaria tuberculosis fire diphtheria," etc. (16).

Second, Ma Bell is a very religious person, but has a peculiar relationship to her Lord. She ascribes her suffering to “struggling against the forces of a God who was sometimes deaf and blind” (16). Later we learn that the notion of a half-blind God, as in the title, is the worldview of her grandson. On a second read, we may begin to realize that the Christian grandmother, and the atheist and violent grandson, are more alike than is first apparent. Hints of their parallels can be gathered by noting the argumentative style that Ma Bell employs with her Lord, supposedly a “comforting presence.” But she argues with this silent divine dialogue partner rather vociferously. As Ma Bell reflects on the heavy burdens she has carried because her children fled to the U.S. and left her to raise their children, she enters into an extended self-justification in the form of a soliloquy to her Lord.

“If I did give short in my higglering days it was because I needed it, Lord. Pickney a yard needing shoes and books and clothes...” (17). A “higgler” is a female street merchant who aggressively hustles. As a higgler, Ma Bell sometimes short-changed her customers. This small-scale theft was justified, in her view, because of the needs of the children for whom she was responsible. But one assumes that on some level her conscience still bothers her, or she would not still be chewing her moral cud in this way. Ma Bell is rather combative in her disquisition to the divine present absence, accusing him of having forgotten her, like her children did. Her interrogation has something of the character of accusation against a deity who is morally tone-deaf: “But don’t you think a little cutting corner here and there is worth it? Talk truth now” (17).

A third theme that the reader observes, while moving into the connect the dots phase, is Ma Bell’s dehumanizing of Jacko. This sets up certain parallels with her violent grandson.

But that blood in him was bad from the start. A beat and a beat and it never come out...
You could beat Jacko from morning till night and not a drop of eye water ever come. Is
the times breeding them tough pickney. (18)

Fourth is Ma Bell’s use of the Bible to attempt to draw a moral distinction between her generation, and that of her grandson. “They is truly a generation of vipers,” she says to her nephew Jacob (18).

A literary-cultural analysis requires us to investigate the allusion to Matthew 12:34. Ma Bell quotes the King James Version, which is what most Jamaicans would know. In the Revised Standard Version, verse 34 continues with this famous quote: “For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.” Without the context of the Biblical text—Jesus’ condemnation of Jewish religious authorities—this sounds almost inspirational. Indeed, the fullness of the heart leads to uncontainable prophecy over and over in the Old Testament. But the following verses develop the critique in a way that begins to suggest that Ma Bell’s condemnation of her grandson’s generation may be describing certain hypocritical behaviors of her own:

³⁶I tell you, on the day of judgment you will have to give an account for every careless
word you utter; ³⁷for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will
be condemned.”

When Jacko scratches at Ma Bell’s door near dawn that night, his heart is full of bile towards Ma Bell and her generation. Repeatedly, he matter-of-factly recounts their careless criticisms and indeed their corporeal violence.

Ma Bell feels that “she was still his gran and had a right to expect a show of respect, even warmth, from him” (20). Instead he shows only “cold detachment.” The tension of the scene is driven by Jacko’s need for money to escape the Island, or he will be a dead man. Ma Bell keeps a “special fund,” a “cache of money she had hoarded for a purpose,” in a pouch under her dress. The purpose was for “the most beautiful coffin that the undertaker could provide... she wanted to leave this world and enter the next cocooned in the luxury she never had in life” (22).

After eating his grandma’s food, Jacko demands rum. He ignores Ma Bell’s insistence: “just know yu place. Rum in this house is a big man sinting” (20). A thing of a nominally sinful nature is permitted to a

grown man. He locates the rum, downs it, then demands her money.

Here moral certainties begin to erode. Many readers may see Ma Bell as representing the self-righteous grandmothers who try to push their faith on others. Yet the text also provides reasons for sympathy and empathy. Her burdens have been disproportionate. If not for her faith, one may infer, she would not have taken up the cross of caring for all the children that her own children left behind when they fled for “foreign,” i.e. the U.S., or perhaps the UK.

But Jacko begins to deliver a critique that muddies the waters. When Ma Bell demands: “Keep yu badness to yourself,” he is unrepentant, and defiant. “Me hear enough talk and get enough battering from you when I small” (21).

Ma Bell’s proclivity to violence, in the form of corporal punishment, has already been a part of her own Lord-directed monologue, which is part confession, part harangue. Now when she threatens to “bawl out fe murder so loud that every single soul for ten mile about hear me,” Jacko is unmoved. More, he turns the tables:

A would like to see you bawl for once for all the bawling you mek me do in my life. That is all your generation ever know how to do. How to drop lick and chastisement. (23)

It is in this context that Jacko derides the “foolishness bout God and judgement” of his grandmother’s generation. With his “cold detachment,” he has discovered a different truth:

But from morning me study seh in this country fey yu God is a one eye God. Him only open him good eye to people who have everything already so him can pile up more thing on top of that. (24)

As the tension thickens and this tale moves towards an apparently inevitable violent climax, the heartless criminal keeps drawing distinctions that suggest, if not exactly a moral high ground, at least an immunity from the hypocrisies he sees in his grandma, and her generation. “I aint quick to fire blow like yu... But is a hard time we living in now” (25).

Both grandma and grandson justify theft because of hard times. Their crimes may not be equivalent, but clearly Jacko has learned some of his lessons from Ma Bell. Employing words as weapons, and being willing to use physical force, one can get what one wants. From a certain angle, Jacko’s logic is irrefutable: “Give me the money. Yu soon dead and lef it yu know. What you want money for? Let it go nuh. I have the whole of my life still in front of me” (25).

When students are asked--who needs the money more in this circumstance?--their responses are split. Jacko needs the money more urgently in the moment, to survive. But he does not have a *right* to the money, they will also say. Ma Bell deserves to have a dignified burial, they may add, since she has suffered so much for this family. Yet they do not much sympathize with her. They know her moralizing type all too well.

When Jacko lifts the gun, in the story’s last line, the reader is put in an uncomfortable position. Our instinct may be to root for the grandma. Yet she has not helped her cause. One infers that this is intentional on the part of Olive Senior, as author.

Jacko says three times in succession that he will give “one more chance” or ask “for the last time, give me the money” (25). Ma Bell’s response is to close her eyes and pray: “please God don’t let what him saying about you be true. That you is a one eye God” (25). Yet we have already seen that this matriarch considers this God to be “sometimes deaf and blind.”

CONCLUSION

The preceding is a rather cursory illustration of how to detect repeating patterns in a text, in this case a literary story. “One Eye God” seems to be set in 1980s Jamaica, when the cocaine trade was overshadowing

“herbman hustling,” and violence by drug lords and political strongmen was endemic. Bob Marley died in 1981, and the heyday of cultural Rastafarianism was past. The story opens a window into the “hard time” of the 1980s. Senior seems to suggest that Jacko’s generation is a more extreme version of the “rude boys” for which Bob Marley was both a spokesman, and a critic, in his youth.

Reading this text as a cultural artifact, one may provisionally conclude that the last generation of the colonial era, and the generation that arose after the idealism of 1962 independence had faded, are not in full cultural opposition. On closer examination, these generations have some things in common. Their structures of feeling may be radically different. But they share a talent for rhetorical weaponry. They both stoop to moral self-justification for criminal behavior or corruption. On the level of a cultural substratum, one can detect an entrenched proclivity to use “licks and chastisement” to achieve political or economic ends.

This story also makes evident some strong differences in the “shared commitments” of the two main characters representing two once-removed generations. Ma Bell’s generation follows a Biblical code. In the old-school, King James mode, this requires recurring punishment of backsliders, which is a repeating pattern in the Old Testament narrative.

Jacko’s generation has presumably heard Peter Tosh’s lines from the Wailers song, “Get Up, Stand Up”: “If you know what life is worth / You will look for yours on earth.” Of the shared commitments of his generation, it might be said that they no longer believe in delayed gratification, much less “eternal rewards” in heaven. For most of his young life, Jacko has been given a secular version of heavenly recompense. If Ma Bell clung to the belief that she would be treated in heaven better than she was treated on earth, Jacko has long since seen through the promise that one day, next year, his parents will send for him, and he will pass to the better life “in foreign.”

Look for how long I wait for them to send for me and all I ever hear is next year next
year. Next year never did come for me for every year them breed up a new pickney.
Them could never afford to send for me... I decide to start take my next year this year.
I couldn’t wait no more. (21)

Jacko and his generation have adapted a rational choice perspective, one might say. Neither the promise of rewards in heaven, nor next year *in foreign*, can be believed anymore. Seen as a communicative culture, Jacko’s generation of bad boys share a commitment to using any means necessary to take, by force if necessary, what they perceive to be rightfully theirs. Ma Bell’s commitments, whatever her flaws, are to family and to faith. Her faith has no appeal to most of the younger generation.

Both Ma Bell’s generation and Jacko’s generation have ascertained that the deity they have been told to trust has limited vision and hearing, at best. At worst, this One Eye God seems to legitimate a racket of the sort envisioned long ago in the Billie Holliday song:

Them that’s got shall get
Them that’s not shall lose
So the Bible says
And it still is news. (Holiday & Herzog)

Stories like “Country of the One Eye God,” and the Nadine Gordimer passage, seem to answer questions about whether literature can serve as an ethnographic resource (Rapport). Craith and Fournier offer an affirmative answer to the question: “Can literature be considered as ethnography?” (1). Using literature as “a source for anthropological research” is not new: this is the start-point claim that Thomas Winner made in 1988.

Bringing communication studies and ethnography into the interstices between pedagogy and popular culture, I have tried to demonstrate some of the value of a theory of communicative cultures. Cultural patterns revealed through literature, or other cultural texts, are always communicative. The communicative

nature of social movements such as abolitionism, or the anti-apartheid movement, or decoloniality, or anti-racism, are expressed through cultural forms that allow for participation and contestation, but not necessarily for resolution. It seems safe to say that one looks in vain for closure on a “right” way to read the shared commitments expressed in those texts. This provides an opening to further research and reflection in which judgement is deferred and conclusions remain provisional.

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APA

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Crossing Over: The Migrant “Other” in the Marvel Cinematic Universe

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ABSTRACT

Two mainstream films from the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) reflect anxiety about the alien (migrant) “other” through difference and crisis. In this article, we explore how refugees and “shithole” planets form a major plot point in *Captain Marvel* (2019). At the most extreme, alien exclusion is articulated in *Avengers: Infinity War* (2018), from the villain’s perspective, as a Malthusian need for extermination of lives to preserve environmental balance. Seemingly innocuous, these narratives are symbolic of a creeping right-wing discourse that dehumanizes outsiders, refugees, and migrants in popular culture. Inspired by the call to consider how film and new media converge, and to bridge the gap between media and migration studies, we assert that the representation of and rhetoric about migrants deserve study in popular culture beyond their mere textual representation. Symbolic convergence theory (SCT) is used to do a close reading of the texts and the fandom communities around them, drawing out discourses and themes that resonate in popular discussion. We find translations of anti-immigrant narratives bleeding into fan communities, mediated through irony and internet culture.

Keywords: Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU), Other, Migrant, Symbolic Convergence Theory, Captain Marvel, Avengers Infinity War

In negotiations with Congress over the extension of Temporary Protected Status for refugees from Haiti, El Salvador, and other countries, U.S. President Donald Trump was caught asking why "all these people from shithole countries" wanted to come to the United States. Over a year later Marvel Studios released *Captain Marvel*. At the beginning of the film a character later revealed to be villainous calls Earth a "real shithole." Later in 2018, before the child separation crisis came to a head on the U.S.-Mexico border, *Avengers: Infinity War* featured a villain who sought to exterminate those whom the universe could not afford to feed or house.

This article discusses two films in the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) released at the end of the 2010s and their fan communities. This time period corresponds with a general rise of right-wing political movements in Europe and the United States finding electoral success by demonizing immigrants. Their anti-immigrant rhetoric frames immigrants as a threat to both national culture and national security. Both *Captain Marvel* and *Infinity War* are analyzed within this context of anti-immigrant politics. Using a symbolic convergence theory (SCT) perspective, we analyze both the films themselves as texts and the fandom communities around them as a co-productive meaning-making phenomenon.

Fandom communities have been well studied within the field of communication. Scholars have noted how fans are able to assemble a multiplicity of narratives and knowledge through transmedia storytelling (Jenkins, 2006). In turn, fans of media properties like the MCU also develop social capital through their often-arcane knowledge of back issues and post-credit teases. Since the rise of Web 2.0, the fans of the MCU have turned to online media platforms like YouTube and Reddit to discuss and share their fan theories of the series. Fans on these platforms create and consume content, blurring the boundary between creator and fan. More passive consumers of the MCU also encounter these fandom communities and view their content. The relative popularity of these new media platforms as a site for fan discussion prompts us to consider them a useful source of data for this study beyond the texts themselves.

This study integrates the analysis of fandom, new media, the MCU, and anti-immigration discourse into its structure. We first synthesize critical perspectives on the figures of alien "others" in science fiction and comics to discuss how popular films can both serve as forms of resistance to marginalizing discourses and reify them in the popular imagination. Superhero films have long dealt with themes of marginalization and assimilation, while science fiction has dealt with themes of invasion and border control. Subsequently we detail our process of SCT, and how analyzing texts situated adjacent to fan communities can reveal how meaning flows in our hybrid media environment. We then discuss our analysis of the two MCU films and fan reactions. Finally, we consider the implications of our findings within the broader media and political universe.

IMMIGRATION AND ALIENS IN POPULAR CULTURE

Popular culture can function as a site of both reification and resistance toward power. For instance, science fiction and fantasy films are often expressions of social anxiety and national paranoia. Similarly, superhero films have also been studied as expressions of post 9/11 anxieties about the War on Terror (McSweeney, 2018) and institutional politics (Acu, 2016). Their general features of aliens, invasion, and superhuman powers are fertile ground for those interested in understanding how popular culture shapes the perceptions of migration politics. This study brings these media studies into conversation with works relating to immigration and representation. The following section first focuses on the genres of science fiction and fantasy and then moves to discuss comics and superheroes as a genre and medium.

Marginalization of the alien "other" in science fiction films dates back to the rise in popularity of the genre in the 1950s, when popular culture reacted to what Sontag (1965) referred to as "world-wide anxieties," particularly the Red Scare and fear of the spread of communism. In these films, defeating the alien "other"

served to diminish these anxieties and ease the collective psyche of a nation fearful of a communist invasion via both military force and ideas. According to Broderick (1993), these films also served to assuage fears by “reinforcing the symbolic order of the status quo via the maintenance of conservative social regimes of patriarchal law” (p. 362). As the genre evolved, science fiction films’ marginalization of the alien “other” evolved as well, reacting to anxieties over nuclear war and terrorism, but also increasingly around the issues of nationalism, isolationism, and fear of globalization. Cornea (2017) notes that these films became increasingly obsessed with an “overwhelming concern with the defence [sic] of the nation throughout this period” and “the frequent narrative emphasis on confrontation (whether competitive, threatening, or violent) across circumscribed borderlines.” Throughout these films, even when future globalization seems imminent, we see a resistance or hesitancy to fully embrace open borders and cooperation between humans on Earth and aliens from another planet, which symbolize the immigrant “other.”

To understand why aliens (extra-terrestrials) are symbolic of aliens (immigrants), we must first look at Ramírez Berg’s (2012) work that posits that since the 1980s, the science fiction alien in movies is “a figure for the tide of alien immigrants who have been entering the country in increasing numbers for the past several decades,” specifically Latinx aliens, as they constitute the majority of immigrants, when the designations of naturalized, documented, and undocumented are all taken into account. Ramírez Berg argues that these aliens are represented either as destructive monsters bent on extinguishing humanity, such as in *Predator* (1987) and *Independence Day* (1996), or as the virtuous and/or lovable (but still incompatible) sympathetic aliens that offer us wisdom, but still must go home to their planet at the end of the movie, such as in *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977) and *E.T.* (1982). The only way an alien can stay on Earth (alive) is to “adapt, assimilate, and finally become native” through offering humanity the gift of its special abilities, a sacrifice that both Superman and Spock in the *Superman* and *Star Trek* franchises, respectively, were willing to make. Alien monsters are ideal for serving as symbolic imagery of alien immigrants. As Kearney (2005) explains, they are particularly “liminal creatures” that “defy borders,” making them an ideal symbol for immigrants.

The othering of migrants as aliens in popular science fiction also extends to material and political consequences, as Lechuga (2015) notes. *Independence Day* (1996) and *Battle: Los Angeles* (2011) are two films that “demonstrate that U.S. state and military interests continue to shape the actual borderlands between the U.S. and México” (p. 259) by encouraging audiences to jingoistically support a militarized southern border. Extremists can then play out (or even cosplay) their mediated fantasies, as seen with the Minutemen Project and other right wing paramilitary groups. Further, the relationship between science fiction, the migrant “other”/alien, and dystopian futures has also become clearer in recent popular culture as the effects of climate change have become more acute. Lechuga, Avant-Mier, and Ramírez (2018) discuss the rise of ecology inequality themes in science fiction films from the 21st century like *Children of Men* (2006), *Elysium* (2013), and *Sleep Dealer* (2008). According to them, these “three films take the alien- monster narrative and flip the script, making the alien-migrant character the protagonist while rendering the authoritarian state system of control the antagonist—or in other words, the terrorizing monster.” In the face of looming ecological disaster these science fiction films showcase a dark future where the majority of humans become alien “others” on their own barren planet.

These themes also appear in comics too. Blanc-Hoang (2017) examines the “alien invasion” subgenre within the Latin American comic books *Barbara* (1979–1982), *Lose Tecnopadres* (1998–2006), and finally *O Viajante* (1989). Relations between humans and non-humans are represented as three frames of the alien colonization process: the conquest, pre- and post-independence periods, and contemporary times. The aliens of these comic books are compared to Spanish *conquistadores* colonizing new territory. Sutton (2016) calls attention to the names of alien characters within the 1960s *Legion of Super-Heroes* comic series. The alien characters of this comic become “othered” through their skin color and names, but still appear and act like a

white person. The aliens did not become "diverse" until the 1970s, when inclusivity and diversity were more prevalent within comic book storylines. Finally, Gárdan (2020) states that both Marvel and DC Comics have translated the alien "other" into blockbuster films with complex stories about humans, mutants, gods, demi-gods, *inhumans* (superpowered aliens from Marvel), and *metahumans* (superpowered beings from DC). These "othered" characters were culturally objectified as weapons for good or evil by their powers and capabilities, not their voices. There has been some but not much discussion of "otherness" in the MCU. For example, McSweeney (2018) notes that almost all the Avengers characters are from or based in the United States and the villains are often foreigners, aliens, or robots. Yet the connections between the science fiction-inspired "other" and the popular film series have not been shown. The MCU films themselves have blended elements of science fiction (along with many other genres) into their action-adventure, comic book-based superhero films. As we argue in the next sections, the constructions of alien otherness must be also contextualized with audience reception, something that symbolic convergence theory lends itself to.

SYMBOLIC CONVERGENCE THEORY APPLIED

A rhetorical analysis of media texts, shared media universes, and their fandom communities is best achieved by conducting a fantasy theme analysis (FTA), guided by the larger theoretical orientations of symbolic convergence theory (SCT). Bormann (1972, 1982) developed SCT to interpret how dramatic messages can catch on in a dedicated community and develop a shared rhetorical vision for the group. Using FTA as a methodology requires the identification of the fantasy themes present in the text. In the case of each MCU film we are analyzing, we do so by paying close attention to the anti-immigrant narratives present in the text. FTA also requires the identification of *dramatis personae*, or the protagonists and antagonists of the drama. Plotlines and scenes are also described in FTA. Finally, a key part of this kind of rhetorical analysis involves describing the sanctioning agent, or the force that gives the drama its purpose. For example, in *Avengers: Infinity War* the sanctioning agent for the antagonist Thanos is to "give balance to the Universe," while the protagonists view their sanctioning agent as preventing genocide.

One of the benefits of FTA is that it is a form of rhetorical analysis that requires one to look beyond the text and consider the implications of the narrative for its community of fans. Cragan and Shields (1995) define the process of groups associating with a narrative as a common shared reality as developing a "rhetorical vision." The most popular mass media franchises often have dedicated fans who adopt a rhetorical vision, and the conglomerates that produce the media are often strongly supportive of this deep identification, as in the case of the MCU (Bryan, 2018).

Cragan and Shields find that most rhetorical visions are undergirded by foundational master analogs present throughout society. These master analogs are righteous, social, or pragmatic (p. 42). Righteous rhetorical visions are typically moral or ethical dramas in which good and evil are clearly defined, and the community adopts a feeling of righteousness through their association with the text. Social analogs focus on themes like friendship and comradeship. Pragmatic analogs are those associated with utility and practicality.

In this study we apply FTA to the texts of *Captain Marvel* and *Avengers: Infinity War*. Given the expansive nature of the MCU, there are often a multiplicity of themes present in the films. The vast number of long-running themes, such as institutional teamwork and the post-9/11 security state (Acu, 2016; Chambliss et al., 2018; McSweeney, 2018), are not the focus of this study. We focus on the anti-immigrant narratives present in the texts and explore how the various elements of the drama (*dramatis personae*, plot, scene, sanctioning agent) give meaning to those themes. Further, we approach analyzing *Captain Marvel* slightly differently than *Avengers: Infinity War*. Since *Captain Marvel* is a superhero origin movie, we focus in more detail on the plot. Since *Avengers: Infinity War* is an ensemble crossover, we focus more on "assembling" the themes of the MCU

up to that point with the sanctioning agent of Thanos. We then use media platforms like Reddit and YouTube to determine to what extent these themes have “chained out” into the online fandom communities of the MCU.

CAPTAIN MARVEL: ALIENS AMONG US

Most of the discourse surrounding the release of *Captain Marvel* (2019) primarily focused on Marvel Studios’ first stand-alone film centered on a female superhero protagonist. Warner Bros. released *Wonder Woman* (2017) two years earlier, and the critical and trade press outlets questioned why Marvel Studios, releasing consistently more profitable superhero films than Warner Bros., was so late to the game with respect to female superhero representation. There was also discussion surrounding *Captain Marvel*’s rhetoric regarding immigrants and white nationalism. The film’s plot centers on what is described as an ongoing war between the Kree, a powerful human-like race, and the Skrulls, an alien race positioned as the immigrant “other” in juxtaposition to the self-described “noble warrior heroes” that make up the Kree.

To apply FTA and SCT to this film, we must first identify the *dramatis personae* (i.e., the protagonists and antagonists). The film’s protagonist, referred to simply as Vers (Brie Larson), is suffering from memory impairment regarding her past before assimilating with the Kree, but she has aligned herself completely with their ideals and displays much of their strength and some unique powers of her own. The Kree are led by an all-knowing artificial intelligence known as the Supreme Intelligence, which is the primary channel of collective memories and information the Kree share regarding their purpose and their sanctioning agent (i.e., the force of purpose), to stop their enemy, the Skrulls (the apparent antagonists), from becoming an unstoppable force. Initially, Vers shares this sanctioning agent, but through the course of the film rediscovers her past and with it the truth about the conflict between the Kree and the Skrulls, leaving her to question her own identity and her allegiance to the Kree.

The Kree’s hatred of the Skrulls is informed directly by the Supreme Intelligence, which presents itself in sessions with the Kree as the individual each person most respects. In an early session with Vers, the Supreme Intelligence reminds her of the dangers of “the Skrull expansion that has threatened our civilization for centuries.” It refers to the Skrulls as “impostors who silently infiltrate, then take over our planets,” and positions them as the destructive aliens that Ramírez Berg tells us must be destroyed. The first representation the audience sees of a Skrull is featured in one of Vers’s memories, in which a Skrull emerges from a fog of smoke, angrily firing a weapon, presumably at her. Just as the Skrulls’ status as the Kree’s enemy is reinforced through the Supreme Intelligence, the Skrulls’ initial status as the film’s antagonists is reinforced to the audience through the depictions of the Skrulls as alien “others.” The Skrulls are green and scaly and have pointed ears, almost resembling goblins. At one point in the film, they are referred to as “lizards” and “ugly bastards.” And yet the Skrulls’ upright stature, in addition to their two arms and two legs, presents them as anthropomorphic.

This juxtaposition of the human form and the alien form in science fiction films is an important part of the scholarly discourse surrounding alien “others.” Sobchack (1997) argues that in the science fiction genre the “articulation of resemblance between aliens and humans preserves the subordination of ‘other worlds, other cultures, other species’ to the world, culture, and ‘speciality’ of white American culture.” However, as Ramírez Berg notes, depicting the aliens as vastly different from the human form, or distorting them, dehumanizes them and represents them as monsters to the viewer. Lechuga argues that this distortion is a result of the “process of affective conditioning” and reshapes “the borderland as. . . a place of violent exclusion for those perceived as alien” (p. 242). Lechuga et al. write that “Hollywood is using extremely distorted images of aliens to create large, menacing, hyper-violent, extraterrestrial invaders” that “are the furthest distorted from humans” (p. 246). Thus, when given the option of identifying with the monstrous alien “other” or the

nationalist U.S. military forces ordered to destroy it, the audience is conditioned to choose the latter.

However, in *Captain Marvel*, discerning the human-like Kree from the monstrous Skrulls is not always so easy. The Skrulls can shapeshift into anyone they see, and this complicates the Kree's goal of stopping them. Throughout the film, Skrull citizens take on the form of surfers, government agents, and members of the Kree. The inability to distinguish between the alien Skrulls and the human-like Kree triggers the same anxiety that nationalists feel when they are not able to identify their immigrant enemies. If an immigrant doesn't look like an immigrant, how can they be subjugated or deported? This trope of the invisible other has been deployed in film since the 1950's around Cold War fears of Communist infiltration, most famously in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956).

The Skrulls' green, scaly appearance sets them apart as the alien "other," similar to how people of color are positioned as "others" through physical features marked as different by supremacists. But when a Skrull takes on the appearance of a Kree, those visual differences are eliminated, presenting multiple questions. Are the Kree and the Skrulls so different after all? And if the Skrulls look just like us, the Kree wonder, then how do we identify the true enemy? The anxiety these questions produce in the Kree is foreshadowed at multiple points in the film. Early on, the audience is introduced to Korath (Djimon Hounsou), a Kree swordsman, who recalls his confrontation with a Skrull who mimicked his own form: "I stared into the face of my mortal enemy and the face staring back was my own." Later in the film, Yon-Rogg (Jude Law), Vers's Kree commander, warns her, "Know your enemy. It could be you." These anxieties even foreshadow how anti-immigrant sentiment can cause political paranoia and a societal turn inward.

The Kree further position the Skrulls as alien "others" through their use of anti-immigrant rhetoric. The Kree describe the presence of the Skrulls as an "infiltration," an "invasion," and an "infestation." These terms evoke dehumanizing anti-immigrant rhetoric, often used by nationalists to compare immigrants to pests and insects. Ramírez Berg points out that comparing aliens to non-human entities, such as animals, pests, or insects, makes them all the easier to exterminate from the perspective of both the characters in the film and the audience (Berg, 2012). Ronan the Accuser (Lee Pace) verbalizes this desire to eliminate the Skrulls: "The infestation will be eradicated." The audience also discovers that the Kree's anti-immigrant sentiment is leveled not just at the Skrulls but also at inhabitants of Earth. Minn-Erva (Gemma Chan), a Kree sniper, refers to Earth as "a real shithole." While the line is played for laughs in the film, the term *shithole* serves as a racist dog whistle for nationalists, especially in the wake of President Donald Trump, a vehement nationalist himself, who referred to places such as Haiti and El Salvador as "shithole countries." Even the protagonists of the film mock and dehumanize the Skrulls for a laugh. Maria Rambeau (Lashana Lynch) asks Talos (Ben Mendelsohn), the shape-shifting leader of the Skrulls, if he can turn himself into a filing cabinet. Nick Fury (Samuel L. Jackson) also quips, "I'll give you fifty bucks right now if you turn into a venus fly trap!" Ultimately, it is Talos who convinces them of the importance of treating the Skrulls as equals: "You really should be kinder to your neighbors. You never know when you're going to need to borrow some sugar."

This realization that the Skrulls are not the destructive aliens nor the antagonists of the film after all, but the sympathetic aliens instead, begins the character arc of Carol Danvers, Vers's newly discovered pre-Kree identity, and alters her sanctioning agent from stopping the Skrulls to helping them instead. Her memory loss regarding her past gives her a blank slate from which to build her own opinions of the Skrulls rather than accept the collective conditioning of the Supreme Intelligence and the Kree. She begins to question her identity, as do the other characters of the film, who ask her, "Is that really who you are now?" Danvers also resents those characters who try to tell her who she is: "You don't know me! You have no idea who I am!"

When she agrees to help Talos, Danvers transports him to a cloaked ship hovering over the Earth's atmosphere, where she discovers that Talos's family and other Skrulls have been hiding for years. Talos's reunion with his family serves as a humanizing moment for his character and the other Skrulls, ultimately

forcing Danvers to admit she was wrong in believing they were her enemies. “I’m so sorry. I didn’t know,” she says. For the remainder of the film Danvers serves to stop the Kree, save the Skrulls, and help them find a new home. Like other sympathetic aliens before them, the Skrulls do not have the option of staying on Earth. Following Ramírez Berg’s model, since the Skrulls are unwilling to assimilate with the humans, they must find somewhere else to live.

By the conclusion of the film, it is evident that the Kree are the actual antagonists of the narrative and the true destructive aliens of the film. Danvers states her new sanctioning agent to Yon-Rogg: “Tell the Supreme Intelligence ... I’m coming to end it.” By “it,” she is referring to not only the war between the Kree and the Skrulls but also presumably the habitual subjugation practiced by the Kree upon alien “others” and “shithole planets.” This assertion that she is no longer under the Kree’s control also serves as a feminist statement for Danvers, as she was continuously oppressed not only by Yon-Rogg and the Supreme Intelligence but also by human men in her time on Earth, the instances of which come flooding back to her when her memories return. Throughout the film Yon-Rogg and other male characters tell her she doesn’t belong, she’s not strong enough, she’s too emotional, and to “lighten up” and “smile.” The toxic masculinity displayed by Yon-Rogg and others may not seem relevant to a discussion about immigrants at first glance, but it is important to note that the nationalist groups that spread anti-immigrant rhetoric in our current sociopolitical climate are the same groups that often spread misogynist rhetoric in online forums and social media. Thus, the nationalist movement represents not just white nationalism but specifically white male nationalism, with respect to both the movement’s tenets and its agenda of maintaining the white male power structure. The movement’s apparent absence of female leadership or even abundant representation further enforces the notion that white nationalists are interested in maintaining their perceived racial and gender dominance, as men such as Patrick Casey, Richard Spencer, Gavin McInnes, and Alex Jones, and groups such as The Proud Boys, make up the public face of white nationalism. However, there are women involved in the ranks of both the alt-right and white nationalist movements, and as much as their involvement in these movements may be marginalized by the leadership, their efforts to spread the rhetoric of white male nationalism and expand its membership base should not be discounted either. *USA Today* and other publications have published stories about the difficulty these movements have in expanding their female membership, though, noting “how the leadership of far-right groups has portrayed women in the media and [created] a culture of excluding women from certain groups and in certain instances advocating for violence against women” (Pitofsky, 2018). Thus, it’s important to understand that the concept of the “other” with respect to the white nationalist movement applies not only to non-whites and non-Americans but in most cases also to anyone who does not fit into a traditional identity.

These same white male nationalist groups attempted to create a fan backlash against *Captain Marvel* upon its release, staging boycotts, online review bombing, and social media campaigns designed to impact the film’s box office. FTA encourages us to examine these reactions and identify their implications. Many online fan reviews of the film not linked to white nationalist accounts praised what they saw as the pro-immigrant message of the film, but other fans saw the film as an endorsement of Trump’s current nationalist policies. A fan review on the white nationalist site Delarroz.com, titled “Captain Marvel: FINALLY, A Movie Supporting Trump’s Immigration Policies” (Del Arroz, 2019), praised the ending of the film in which the Skrulls leave Earth as an endorsement of Trump’s immigration policy, which closes the door to refugees from countries destroyed by war. So, while some fans saw the Skrulls’ status as the sympathetic aliens as positive representation, others saw the required outcome of the sympathetic aliens leaving Earth as support for their nationalist ideology. Other fans found sympathetic characters in the toxic white men that Captain Marvel defeated. In a deleted scene from the finished film, Captain Marvel encounters a mouthy, misogynistic biker, named “the Don,” who repeatedly demands she smile for him. Through justified force, she convinces “the Don” to give her his helmet and motorcycle. A fan on Cosmic Book News saw this as a direct attack not only

on white men, but on Donald Trump himself, through the use of the nickname "the Don." The fan identified with the biker and asked, "What if the roles were reversed and the footage showed a male doing this to a female?" (McGloin, 2019). Here we see most clearly a fan adoption of the righteous rhetorical vision, which develops through a relationship with the text by reading the hero of the film (and Disney/Marvel) as the true villain and the right-wing audience as the victim.

Marvel did little to dissuade these fan reactions that clearly identified with the unintended protagonists of the *dramatis personae*. In fact, outlets such as Screen Rant questioned why Disney felt the need to delete the aforementioned motorcycle scene at all, calling the decision "mistaken" and "inexplicable" (Bacon, 2019). Marvel was likely unconcerned with this reception of the film by white nationalists, as the film was highly successful and would go on to gross over \$1 billion worldwide, setting up *Avengers: Endgame* (2019) to become the all-time global box office earner just two months later. Given this massive success, Marvel Studios likely felt little need to denounce the white nationalist attacks and the white nationalist support for the film or explain its complicated depiction of the alien "other."

INFINITY WAR: CRISIS AND EXTERMINISIM

Preceding *Captain Marvel* in release date but taking place later in the chronological timeline of the MCU, *Avengers: Infinity War* focuses on the Avengers' attempt to prevent Thanos from collecting the Infinity Stones. The Infinity Stones, which Thanos needs in order to accomplish his goal of extermination, serve as a plot device (sometimes called a McGuffin). The Avengers end up failing and Thanos collects all the stones. The film concludes with Thanos accomplishing his goal.

The plot has a real-world resonance. The effects of the climate crisis go beyond destruction of the natural environment and ecological systems and species loss. Rising sea levels, drought, and other increasingly common climate catastrophes will affect the most vulnerable human populations. The idea that climate change has a sociological and political layer, which leads to civil unrest, war, immigration, and refugees, is gaining currency in foreign policy and international studies (Parenti, 2011). For example, a devastating drought in Syria set the stage for the destructive and brutal Syrian civil war (Selby et al., 2017). Droughts and severe weather in Central America are also to blame for disrupting the developing economies and livelihoods of the marginalized in Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador (Hallett, 2019). Hurricanes Eta and Iota in 2020 further exacerbated the humanitarian crisis in these Central American countries. Both extreme climate events have left close to 3.5 million people food insecure, prompting many to seek refuge in the United States (Narea, 2021). Climate change will only further worsen the lives of those most vulnerable. And the stark response from the United States and countries in Europe will more than likely not be to limit the effects of climate change and accept refugees, but to close borders and prevent those escaping catastrophes from entering—protecting what they have at all costs.

A frighteningly similar scenario is presented as the sanctioning agent for the main antagonist, Thanos (Josh Brolin), in *Avengers: Infinity War*. In a scene heavy with expository dialogue set on his desolate home world, Thanos explains to Dr. Strange (Benedict Cumberbatch) that his planet "Titan was like most planets—too many mouths and not enough food to go around." As a response to this crisis, Thanos offers a neo-Malthusian solution: the random genocide of half the population. He is declared a madman and, as he predicts, the extinction of his people comes to pass.

Earlier in the film Thanos expands upon his neo-Malthusian ideology, arguing that the resources of the universe are limited. In dialogue with his pseudo-daughter who he separated from her parents, he says, "Little one, it's a simple calculus. This universe is finite, its resources, finite. If life is left unchecked, life will cease to exist. It needs correcting." This kind of thinking is an underlying feature of right-wing discourse

about immigrant populations. Immigrants, whether they are from Central America or North Africa, are essentialized as resource-draining, job-stealing figures. They exist as a threat to the resources meant for the rightful inhabitants of a country. Even the supposed fertility of immigrants is constructed as a threat. Chavez (2013) writes about how the U.S. Right is particularly obsessed with the supposed fecundity of Latina women and their “anchor babies.” These new children and their immigrant parents are further threats to the perceived limited resources they believe should be reserved for “true” citizens. The response has been to prevent immigrants from entering through border securitization or removing them once they arrive through a vast apparatus of immigrant surveillance and control.

What makes Thanos especially villainous in *Avengers: Infinity War* is that he suggests a final solution: extermination. The Avengers are thus set up in the film as characters trying to prevent this outcome. The main protagonists of the MCU up until *Avengers: Infinity War* have been Iron Man (Robert Downey, Jr.) and Captain America (Chris Evans). In the climax of the film both characters lead different teams trying to prevent Thanos from collecting the stones and both fail. We argue that both Iron Man and Captain America play symbolic roles here as the primary opponents of Thanos in his quest. Iron Man functions as a representation of the scientific, technocratic, neo-liberal, interventionist order. As McSweeney (2018) argues, the MCU is explicitly situated in the post-9/11, War on Terrorism world. McSweeney also argues that in the first *Iron Man* film, the capturing of Tony Stark by vaguely Arabic-looking soldiers and the eventual creation of the Iron Man suit represents the ability of U.S. military technology to win the war on terrorism. More specifically, once Stark has learned the immorality of his previous life as a weapons maker, he decides to unilaterally intervene in a foreign country and destroy his former captors, while utilizing technologies of force that spare the innocents. This mimics the fantasy that the U.S. can intervene “cleanly” in other countries with minimal civilian casualties. Throughout the rest of the MCU films, Stark as a character embraces the Avengers as a force for good in the world to atone for his past life. However, in his new role he often forgets his past lessons and ends up creating problems (see the villains Ivan Vanko in *Iron Man II*, Ultron in *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, and Aldrich Killian in *Iron Man III*) through his own vanity and arrogance. By the time of *Captain America: Civil War*, Tony Stark has come to represent (by taking the pro-registration side) the ultimate fusion of the neo-liberal state: highly reliant on privatized technology to protect the world from danger while fully legitimized through state power.

Captain America’s symbolic role is more nuanced, as one might categorize his character as representative of the United States and nationalism. Right before *Avengers: Infinity War*, Captain America is on the run from the government for refusing to register as a licensed superhero in *Captain America: Civil War*. While his earlier films portrayed him as trusting the government and institutions, by *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* and *Captain America: Civil War* he has learned that institutions have been corrupted inside and out. In *Avengers: Infinity War*, Captain America leads the resistance to gather in the techno-utopia of Wakanda. As a result, Captain America, while opposing Thanos, comes to represent those who resist and protest their governments as they proceed toward further militarization and immigrant removal. He upholds higher values and principles, refusing to “trade lives” to stop Thanos. The film ends up portraying Captain America’s moral intransigence as a vice rather than virtue. The final Infinity Stone is held by Vision, whom Cap refused to sacrifice earlier in the film. The resistance fails at the end because they were unwilling to sacrifice their moral “vision.”

This might be the most frightening outcome of all, as even our best intentions may not be good enough in the face of crisis and exterminism. Vision (Paul Bettany), an android character introduced in *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, can be considered a synthesis of the best features of Iron Man and Captain America. It is fitting that by the time Thanos has dealt with the other characters, the last Infinity Stone is held by Vision. Thanos coldly rips the Mind Stone out of Vision’s head, turning the android’s body into a grey and hollowed-out shell. He then paternalistically comforts Vision’s romantic partner, Scarlet Witch (Elizabeth Olson), calling her “my child,” and later fulfills his goal of exterminating half the universe. Thanos often refers to his victims and

followers as "his children." This tying of exterminism with a discursive formation of the benevolent father reveals how anti-immigrant authoritarianism would work in a world without Infinity Stones: with a thin veneer of humane concern to justify monstrosity. Children may be coldly separated from their parents, but it's for their *own good*.

Eventually right-wing paternalistic authoritarianism often turns its attention from policing the borders of the nation to policing the nation *using* the technologies of border control and colonization. Look no further than the use of a Border Patrol drone to "monitor" the 2020 summer protests over racial injustice (Kanno-Youngs, 2020). As Cope (2012) argues, "Geographically speaking, on its own soil fascism is imperialist repression turned inward" (p. 294). According to the ideology of Thanos, half of the universe must be exterminated due to material overuse. In this formulation Thanos becomes emblematic of the authoritarian state monsters motivated to control and repress their restive populations in an ecological crisis, as Lechuga et al. (2018) discuss.

Finally, we also position the recent MCU texts in the way they are received by audiences and fandom. *Avengers: Infinity War* was one of the most popular films of 2018. Indeed, many were shocked but also intrigued by the cliffhanger of the film, wondering if their favorite superheroes would come back from the "snap." Some fans also wondered if they might have survived such a snap. One group emerged on Reddit as a subreddit called */r/thanosdidnothingwrong*. As the group grew in popularity, many of the memes were similar in theme to Figure 1.

You don't have to feed half the
population if they're dead



Figure 1: A meme posted on Reddit

A similar post in the subreddit featured a meme that used the infamously edited photograph of Stalin and Nikolai Yezhov on the Moscow Canal. The first photograph, which included Yezhov, adds a speech bubble where another person in the photograph says, "Sir, we don't have enough food to feed everyone. What should we do?" Stalin, with the infinity gauntlet (Thanos' weapon from the film), then appears to "snap out" the existence of Yezhov, who in real life was executed after he fell out of Stalin's favor. USSR censors also edited the original photo to literally erase the existence of Yezhov. The comments cleverly fused historical knowledge with quotes from the film, with little reflexivity and loads of irony.

This line of thinking, especially taking Thanos' plan half-seriously was prominent on other online platforms too. A YouTube video with over 12.5 million views as of April 2021, claimed that "if you stop and look at the economics, statistics, and historical precedents, Thanos may actually be right" (The Film Theorists, 2018). Specifically, they note how the Black Death in Europe, which killed over $\frac{1}{3}$ of the population, led to higher wages in the years after. While the video ends up concluding that human life is priceless and genocide is never a solution, most of the video is spent justifying Thanos' quest with social science. Here we see the

adoption of the practical analog rhetorical vision. Several TikTok videos, with a heavy dose of Internet irony and humor, also claimed Thanos did nothing wrong like the many memes saying the same.

Returning to /r/thanosdidnothingwrong, a member of the group proposed that half of the members of the subreddit be randomly banned (following the logic of Thanos). The actor who portrayed Thanos, Josh Brolin, and even the Marvel Studios Twitter account got in on the action. An article on *Mashable* (Connellan, 2018) told readers they could watch the live stream of the ban on Twitch. As of 2021, the subreddit is still active with over 600,000 members. The event was emblematic of the transmedia phenomenon of MCU fandom. Much of internet humor is deeply ironic, but the event also signifies how easily extermination can be depoliticized and treated as humorous. In this post-modern age, irony and humor are some of the best tools for someone attempting to mobilize a cynical and distracted group of young men online toward authoritarian goals.

IN THE ENDGAME NOW

These film texts show the extent to which anti-immigrant discourses have been normalized. These discourses are troubling as the ecological and political crises become clearer in the early 2020s. The COVID-19 pandemic highlights many of these issues. For example, while most were ordered to shelter in place, many migrants were caught in limbo. Most were not able to receive government stimulus. COVID-19 also spread in migrant and refugee encampments on the Mexican border and other places. While political attention and the public agenda have moved on from the migrant caravan and the child separation crisis, these issues persist. Just as worrisome, however, is the emergence of Thanos-inspired eco-fascism thinking among well-intentioned people. As COVID-19 forced the economy to shut down, memes spread online claiming that dolphins had returned to Venice and the air had never been cleaner in Los Angeles and in China. The memes went even further, claiming that humans are the virus on the planet. This kind of thinking is dangerous, as the *Avengers: Infinity War* example shows. Even in *Avengers: Endgame* Captain America notes that he saw “a pod of whales when I was coming over the bridge.” The writer of a *Forbes* article uses this very line to argue that the science of the film really does prove that Thanos did nothing wrong (Chamary, 2019).

These anti-immigrant narratives are assigned to the villains of the films, so perhaps it is a stretch to say they represent the film’s message. One of the directors of *Infinity War* calls Thanos “an extreme sociopath with a messianic complex,” leaving no doubt they intended for his actions to be viewed as villainous. Yet audience reception is complex and meaning can be derived from a text that the authors did not intend. As Chemers (2017) argues, villains arise out of a societal desire to self-define through negation. In other words, the villain is the dark marginal figure who the audience can see “caught and punished” in a temporary victory over the forces they represent in society. As discussed earlier, in the 1950’s film villains were often either foreign or alien others, which represented Cold War anxieties. The villains of the late 2010s are more complex. They generally have goals with legitimate rationales (see Killmonger in *Black Panther*) with extremely violent means. Yet specifically because the villains of the late 2010’s have somewhat legitimate goals as compared to the outright evildoers of the past, some segments of the audience might even identify with the villains’ means and ends. This is even the case given the highly polarized political and social differences in the late 2010s. So, while some might cheer when Captain Marvel defeats the supremacist Kree, others might see the meta-textual narrative of the film as an attack on their worldview.

The stakes are certainly high. The mass shooting at a Walmart in the U.S./Mexico border city of El Paso, TX horrifically exemplified anti-immigrant violence committed under the ideology of white nationalism. The targeted area in El Paso was a popular shopping area known as a major destination among Mexican tourists who cross into El Paso. It was later discovered that the shooter had posted a white-supremacist and anti-immigrant manifesto online to an online forum prior to the shooting and stated that he intended to

kill as many Mexicans as possible (Arango et al., 2019; Baker & Shear, 2019; Hafez, Farid, 2019). Within his manifesto, he referred to the 2019 Christchurch mosque shooting, and a white nationalist right-wing conspiracy theory known as "The Great Replacement" as inspiration for the attack. This horrific event further exemplifies in an extreme case how those considered the "other" or those who do not fit white nationalist movements' identity are treated. By no means do we suggest that watching MCU films will subtly imbue the viewer with racist beliefs or inspire violence. However, as this article shows - there are elements in the films that can be interpreted by fan communities online which further anti-immigrant narratives. As we show, this is a complex process. It involves heavy doses of internet irony and in many cases, identifying with the villain and against the protagonist.

In summary this article has discussed how anti-immigrant narratives have been infused into popular culture and specifically in two recent MCU films. These narratives take the concept of the alien "other" from science fiction and transfer it to the genre of superhero films. The anxieties now being represented revolve around political and ecological crises of late capitalism. In one case, *Captain Marvel*, the discourse is used to resist othering. Meanwhile, in *Avengers: Infinity War* the othering and extermination are done by the villain but also presented as potentially good for the universe. These discourses are then interpreted by fans and shared on new media platforms, using an ironic and humorous distance. Both films must be understood not as simplistically promoting these anti-immigrant narratives, but by assigning them to the villains, as an example of how contemporary society is grappling with these issues amid social strife and change. Further, we argue they cannot simply be analyzed in isolation, but also understood in relation to the fans that consume and interpret the content of the MCU.

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Media Literacy, Education, and a Global Pandemic: Lessons Learned in a Gender and Pop Culture Classroom

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ABSTRACT

In *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, bell hooks writes that “to engage in dialogue is one of the simplest ways we can begin as teachers, scholars, and critical thinkers to cross boundaries.” Hence, this paper explores, through narrative dialogue, teacher and student perspectives on the pedagogical impact of the global pandemic on the process of engaging with and learning about media literacy. By naming and narrating teacher and student experiences and perspectives from a course on gender and pop culture that took place during the Spring 2020 semester, the paper aims to demonstrate the way that crisis can both expose certain pedagogical issues as well as generate pedagogical opportunities. It narrates and reflects on the ways in which moments of crisis create opportunities for educators to think differently and more expansively about pedagogy by demonstrating its occurrence in one course, and how the combination of factors specific to the crisis required both the instructor and their students to re-situate themselves in relation to the course content. Through a teacher-student meditation, the paper argues that media literacy is a subject that leads to increased pedagogical deliberation and experimentation in the study of pop culture. It suggests that the experiences described might provide wisdom for further pedagogical development on the subject of media literacy, more broadly, positioning and inviting educators and students to engage in dialogue in order to shift paradigms according to the moment of crisis at hand. The broader aim of the article is to encourage educators to follow the example of the students in the gender and pop culture course who felt empowered to create innovative and social-justice-focused media literacy projects as a way of exercising agency, and of confronting and dealing with the harsh realities of global circumstances.

Keywords: Media literacy, media, pedagogy, pop culture, pandemic, education, gender, gender studies, gender and pop culture

A GLOBAL HEALTH CRISIS AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF MEANING

“Media literacy” might have been a burgeoning pedagogical buzzword during the last decade, but in 2020, without much notice and under the urgency of a global health crisis, the term became a conceptual umbrella into which the entire education system was enfolded. Describing the position of pre-pandemic media literacy, Dr. Hans C. Schmidt states that “for all the media technologies that have come to be used as tools in education, there has continued to be surprisingly little time devoted to actually teaching about media. Such educational experiences—related to both media production and analysis—are particularly important in higher education” (“Media Literacy in a Post-Pandemic World”). When the pandemic began, however, media literacy took center stage, as nearly all education moved to online forms of communication (Schmidt). At this time, teachers and students were collectively crunched into a position wherein media literacy was crucial to the survival of education and a subject of concern and discourse. It was also a pedagogical occasion to which teachers were asked to rise and on which they had to focus their energies. For some, this meant communicating over email with students more frequently and learning to communicate and disseminate information to students via platforms that were familiar but perhaps under-utilized, such as Zoom or Google Hangouts. For others, this meant learning to communicate in entirely new ways, on new platforms, or by using unfamiliar media technologies, such as WebEx and Panopto, and interacting with both materials and each other in the midst of a steep learning curve and in an unfamiliar media terrain.

Regardless of the shape that this crash course in media literacy took during the pandemic, there was an immediate need for educators from all different backgrounds to enhance their media literacy (Schmidt). Accordingly, educators, administrators, students, and parents had to confront the question of media literacy – whether that question was about the gap in media literacy or about the best resources to use to make media literacy part of the curriculum. It follows that a (re)new(ed) consciousness about media literacy arose during the pandemic –a growing awareness of the role of media in our lives and the need for the development of media literacy skills– the momentum of which persists and will continue to do so after students return, full-time, to the physical classroom.

Primary, secondary, and post-secondary educators have, in previous decades, been encouraged to be “critical consumers” of media and to use caution and care when selecting media to support their instruction (Silverman and Keane). In her introduction to *The Gender and Media Reader*, Mary Celeste Kearney explains why the study of the relationship between gender and media matters by emphasizing “the media’s extensive presence in most human lives today” (3). But she acknowledges that this “extensive presence” and our collective everyday exposure to it does not result in critical “knowledge about media production, representation, and consumption” (Kearney 3). “Media studies,” she writes, “provides us with the tools we need to become more media literate... in a media-saturated society” (Kearney 3). Kearney makes an important point: our collective immersion into media culture does not necessarily correspond with media literacy and with the tools needed to be critical media consumers and analysts. The pandemic put the media’s “extensive presence” in our lives into overdrive across the board and compounded it for every educator and student in every virtual classroom. In our undergraduate gender and pop culture classroom, in which a primary part of our work was to attend, with critical analysis, to various representations in popular media, this shift into overdrive and crisis mode placed us in a unique position to attend to media literacy through the lens of the current crisis. It made it evident that the widespread plunge into online learning and the (re)new(ed) consciousness about media literacy produced by the pandemic needs to be considered critically, theoretically, narratively, and interpersonally. In this regard, this paper focuses on the experiences and lessons learned in a gender and pop culture studies classroom during a global crisis and aims to contribute to pedagogical knowledge derived by lived experience on the subject of media literacy. Our paper is written with the recognition that “media are sites of considerable ideological negotiation and contestation, that is sites of struggle over meaning and value”

(Kearney 3). The pandemic brought our attention acutely to these sites of struggle over meaning and value, as we encountered them through and with the media, and some of these struggles are what produced this dialogic essay.

This paper chronicles some of the effects of the pandemic on the course in which both of the authors of this paper were involved in the Department of Global Gender and Sexuality Studies at the University at Buffalo. Sections of the paper included under the heading of ‘teacher perspective’ were written by Jessica Lowell Mason (at the time, a third-year Ph.D. student and teaching assistant); those written under the heading of ‘student perspective’ were written by Ebehitale Imobhio (at the time, a graduated undergraduate student). The paper was co-constructed in a dialogic format: each of us wrote and shaped our sections independently, but responsively and interactively. For example, a teacher segment was written and shared with the student, who formulated a section after reading it, somewhat in response to it and somewhat as an independent formulation. After a student section was written, a teacher section was written, added to, or re-shaped, partly but not directly in response to the act of reading the student’s section. In other words, we formulated our sections while in the process of reading each other’s work, and this was a form of readerly-dialogue.

The way we formulated our dialogue into an essay, and the way the smaller essays came together to form a dialogic essay, follows the guidance offered by feminist educator and theorist bell hooks in the tenth chapter of *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. The chapter is titled “Building a Community: A Dialogue” (129). At the start of this chapter, hooks writes that it is “crucial that critical thinkers who want to change our teaching practices talk to one another, collaborate in discussion that crosses boundaries and creates space for intervention” (129). We “occupy different locations within structures” and our goal in engaging in this dialogue is to map out what hooks calls “terrains of commonality, connection, and shared concern with teaching practices” (130). In coming together, as student and teacher, we are deliberately collaborating, crossing boundaries and dismantling the power structure between teacher and student to create space for pedagogical awareness and change. The radical statement made by bell hooks, that “to engage in dialogue is one of the simplest ways we can begin as teachers, scholars, and critical thinkers to cross boundaries, the barriers that may or may not be erected by race, gender, class, professional standing, and a host of other differences” (13), is the way we pedagogically justify producing our dialogue as an academic and cultural text, despite our awareness that it pushes the boundaries of what is considered an “academic text.” We hope our reflexive and collaborative dialogue will provide a basis for understanding how and why the global health crisis allowed us to engage afresh with media literacy, for using media literacy in the service of understanding social justice issues, and constructing new meaning around the concept of media literacy, especially as it relates to pop-culture-as-social-justice pedagogy. We also hope it will encourage other educators to involve their students in the pedagogical reflexivity process.

PANDEMIC-HEIGHTENED ATTUNEMENT TO MEDIA LITERACY

Teacher Perspective

Before the pandemic unfolded, I was invested in helping students engage with the subject of gender and pop culture by placing my focus on the use of gender-focused theory to guide and inform the process of analyzing popular cultural representations of identity. The upper-level gender studies course I was assigned, titled “Sex: Gender and Popular Culture,” afforded me the opportunity to take a broad subject area and to tailor it to my own pedagogical philosophy, an opportunity that inspired me to think about how media literacy can and should be brought into a pedagogy that focuses on pop culture and gender. But media literacy had not been the focus or foundation of the course, but instead was a branch of it prior to the pandemic. Previously, media literacy had been something that I taught in the composition classroom, without announcing it as such,

because it was interwoven in subjects I taught, related to rhetoric, writing, gender, and more broadly, identity. Accordingly, in the composition classroom, the focus on media literacy was not something I identified, named, or reflected on; it was something I inadvertently utilized and addressed.

As it played out, I arranged the course so that rhetorical analysis and Stuart Hall's work on representation would serve as its foundation, and arranged the rest accordingly. Thus, we would first re-familiarize ourselves with concepts necessary for sophisticated visual rhetorical analysis and an understanding of cultural studies and concepts related to representation. Then, using Stuart Hall's work, we would move on to consider gender through a variety of theoretical analytic lenses, each with their own vocabularies to ground our analytic considerations, such as that of considering representation and meaning in utopic and dystopic representations from fairy tales to reality TV. We would, furthermore, consider masculinities using Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's theoretical work on the subject, the impact of certain gazes using Laura Mulvey's work on the male gaze, and the colonial gaze and the spectacle of difference through Ella Shohat's work. These were some of the themed modules in the composition class. Other modules focused on gender and pop culture representations of (and discourses surrounding) cyborgs, and concepts from Haraway's and LeGuin's work provided the theoretical analytic lenses through which critical discourse related to gender identity and capitalism were configured. The final module of the course combined the subject of media literacy with that of intersectionality, and the works of bell hooks and Kimberlé Crenshaw were crucial to leading the way to students' engagements with media literacy that were grounded in intersectionality and part of a social justice pedagogy. This arrangement worked well and had a structural methodological quality to which students, on the whole, responded with a sense of critical agency and empowerment. Critical media literacy was part of the last module, which was titled "From Social Media to Social Justice," but it was unnamed.

This worked well, but my focus was not on media literacy: I was not consciously drawing students' attention to media literacy because I, was not thinking about how the course was functioning as a media literacy course. There is a degree of blurriness between the conceptions of media culture and pop culture because little distinction is made between the two and the two are co-constructive (Trier-Bieniek and Leavy 12). In the introduction to *Gender and Pop Culture: A Text Reader*, editors and sociologists Adrienne Trier-Bieniek and Patricia Leavy explain that the lack of distinction between pop and media culture is a function of the way that both engage with cultural production, but they do not go so far as to equate the two. According to Trier-Bieniek and Leavy, pop culture involves diverse practices through which culture is consumed and produced textually (e.g., in narratives, objects, and mediated images), whereas media culture functions as an "agent of socialization" through which social norms and values are instilled (12-13). This is a key definitional distinction that they have put forward for teacher- and student-readers, which nonetheless still leaves the question of the relationship between media and pop culture open and flexible.

It seems obvious that pop culture can be transmitted through media culture, and in doing so, can act as a socializing agent. This overlap is a key part of the exploration of pop culture in a gender studies classroom because it sets up a premise for understanding gender as a set of norms that are produced through the socializing of pop-media culture. Trier-Bieniek and Leavy's introduction offers an example of the way that media literacy is being taught without being named as part of the lesson's aim. Thus, they don't declare that their aim is to raise student self-awareness and develop their abilities to analyze media literacy, but the book clearly offers students opportunities to develop this media literacy. The way that Trier-Bieniek and Leavy approach media literacy in their text-reader is the way that I was approaching it in my classroom: by inadvertently and not-consciously addressing media literacy through the subjects of media and pop culture. Indeed, media literacy was not part of my pedagogy and course description, and even more importantly, it was not part of the reflexive and deliberative consciousness of my pedagogy.

The vague but important ways that media literacy comes into play in multiple discourses is made evident in Jacquelyn S. Kibbey's essay, "Media Literacy and Social Justice in a Visual World." In Kibbey's essay,

media literacy is, at first, discussed as its own category, but, as was the case in Trier-Bierniek and Leavy's introduction, it melds with the literacy through which it functions, in this case, visual literacy. The mass media mediums that Kibbey describes come to be studied through visual literacy, which, as Kibbey points out, "raises awareness of visual culture" (51). Kibbey articulates the relationship between media literacy and visual literacy in two ways by arguing (1) that mass media is the conduit through which visual culture is created and disseminated and (2) that visual literacy is the "overarching concept, the 'big picture,' into which we infuse media literacy" (51). Kibbey advocates for the inclusion of both media and visual literacy beyond the art classroom and in all subject areas (52). Through the convergence of visual literacy, media literacy, and technology literacy, citizens encounter and "are influenced about" social justice issues (Kibbey 51). The way that Kibbey addresses media literacy, as both part of and separate from visual literacy, might offer an explanation as to how media literacy functioned in my pop culture classroom prior to the pandemic where it was assumed to be part of pop culture, but that assumption made it somewhat invisible as a subject.

Being more deliberate about how pop culture and media literacy relate, how they are part of one another and co-constructive, but also how they are distinct, is an important intervention that the pandemic brought forward. In fact, being deliberate and specific about the role of media literacy in the course is the pedagogical intervention that the pandemic produced. I credit the crisis, my students' openness about their struggles during the crisis, and the work of Jennifer Pozner, whose creative media literacy project suggestions I relied on in the moment of crisis for shifting my pedagogy and creating an opportunity to transform my gender and pop culture class from a course in which media literacy was present but latent to a course in which media literacy was a critical subject of discourse and an area for the development of student agency. Pozner describes media literacy through the lens of consumerism. She writes to her (student and teacher) readers that "being an educated media consumer... requires bringing critical media literacy skills to the news we read and watch; the music, videos, and movies we hear and see; the video games we play; and the print ads, commercials, and billboards that surround us" (Pozner 300). One of the stated goals of her chapter on media literacy projects and games is to "help educators bring media literacy discussions into the classroom," and she encourages educators to adapt the media literacy tools that she provides according to student needs (301). Pozner's chapter enabled me to re-formulate the end of the semester amidst the pandemic in three ways: (1) it provided creative pedagogical activities with a spirit of enthusiasm, (2) it brought media literacy as a subject into focus, and (3) it provided the flexibility that would allow me to connect with and address the diverse needs of students trying to complete a semester during a pandemic.

The circumstances of the pandemic, paired with Pozner's flexible and creative approach to media literacy, provided an opportunity for me to re-conceptualize the course mid-semester. It allowed me to reconsider the content of the course and the assignments, which in turn, led me to think differently about both the assignments and the goal of the course, as well as about the actual meaning of media literacy. It was a reminder of a point that Rebecca Ropers-Huilman makes in her essay, "Scholarship on the Other Side: Power and Caring in Feminist Education," when she writes that feminist teaching is not "pure practice" but, rather, is "affected not only by participants but also by institutions in which it takes place" (40). The teaching context is shaped by several factors, many of them institutional, but a moment of crisis like a pandemic, brings them into more acute focus and raises questions about how that context, and the pedagogy from which it is formed, might be reconsidered and reshaped in the future. Pozner's model of teaching media literacy through creative projects enabled me to reimagine media literacy and its importance as a pedagogical subject and educational tool for both teaching media literacy and supporting students through a crisis.

Representation and media literacy began to matter more during the pandemic, and the pandemic created space for new meaning to be made and for pedagogical reflexivity. We moved from being on the outside looking in at concepts to suddenly being immersed in media and cultural texts in a way that made

our work more alive and palpable. Media literacy became a vehicle of urgency for us to articulate and claim an active role within the space of crisis we occupied, a space that thrust us into media sources and developed a more conscious awareness about it. It became an occasion for disclosure and cooperation. Rebecca Ropers-Huilman urges educators to “share our struggles with students as we negotiate relationships supported and disrupted by power and caring practices” (55). I certainly openly shared my struggles with housing and lack of access to resources that spring semester. The pandemic provided an opportunity for educators and students alike to share struggles and negotiate pedagogical relationships with heightened attention to power and care. It also brought our attention to theoretical frameworks within the course that considered power in immediate and high stakes applications, as both my students and I were immersed in the media we were studying. Media literacy served as a framework for examining our circumstances.

Watching catastrophes unfold through multiple forms of media, and feeling its real effects in our bodies, minds and families was difficult, but rather than compounding the difficulty, media literacy provided us the means with which to confront it. Our concepts were there to help us comprehend and cope with what was unfolding. Mythical gendered tropes that arise out of the colonial gaze, for instance, as described in Ella Shohat’s “Gender and the Culture of Empire,” which we read during the earlier part of the course, offered tools for either comprehending or remaining critical and distant from media coverage. The way that Shohat describes colonizing notions of “rescue” and the “Western imaginary” as “metaphorically render[ing] the colonized land as a female to be saved from her environ/mental disorder” were not just frameworks through which we could study and understand pop culture representation in films (Shohat 95); they were strategies for coping with the real-life events with which we were being bombarded in the media at a moment of vulnerability. These concepts came to have a more embodied meaning, grounded in the here and now, as we lived and studied together through a time of pipelines and assaults on sacred lands, environmental crises, pandemic lock-downs, mass Covid-19-related deaths, political upheaval, anti-Semitic attacks, police and state violence against People of Color, and widespread uprisings against bigotry and racism.

Instead of us having to search out examples in pop culture media contexts, the examples were blasting us every day in the media coverage of the crises associated with the pandemic. “Bushfires in Australia Rage On,” “World Health Organization Announces Novel Coronavirus,” “Trump’s Impeachment Trial Begins,” “Trump is Acquitted,” “Pandemic Triggers Global Recession,” “The Deadliest Mass Shooting in Canadian History,” “Murder Hornets Introduced,” “Ahmaud Arbery Video Shocks the Nation,” “George Floyd Killed,” “The Black Lives Matter Movement Ramps Up,” “Another Police-Involved Shooting Grabs Headlines,” “Officer Fired in Breonna Taylor Case,” “Bubba Wallace Situation”: these were just a few of the headlines representing traumatic events that took place between January and June, 2020 (Ganley “2020 in Headlines”). We, as students and the teacher, were embedded within the framework of the media we were studying; we were actors exercising agency within that realm and were deeply invested in the happenings around us at the same time as being subjected to all of the violence and trauma of living through that period.

What we had read about earlier in the course was showing itself and being fought against before our eyes, within our minds, and in our lives. One glaring example of this occurred in March, when Donald Trump referred to the Coronavirus as “the Chinese virus” and “kung flu” (Moynihan and Porumbescu). *The Washington Post* reported that Trump’s use and weaponization of the Western gaze through this incendiary slur was an attempt to shift the blame for the negative effects of the virus away from himself and toward China (Moynihan and Porumbescu). What was clear was that Trump was using pre-existing racist hostility toward China and anti-Asian sentiment, the current symbolic relations in representational colonial discourses, to produce his intended rhetorical effect, which was utilized to increase hatred against Asian people in the United States. We, as students and the teacher, were part of this moment. We were participants in it, primarily through the news and through social media. Our pedagogical shift toward media literacy happened over the

course of a semester of continual crises and events of violence and death, which culminated, toward the end of the semester and the start of summer, in an uprising of people standing together to protest against racism and colonialization some of whom gathered to bring down statues of Columbus, a symbol of contentious meaning and conflicting narratives.

Racism and colonial apparatuses were forcing us to contend with meaning, to make meaning, and to respond in a meaningful way to what was happening to us, and the course content became part of our tool bag for surviving the moment. Because our class was already exploring these subjects theoretically, the students were uniquely equipped to consider and respond to the racial violence and uprisings that accompanied the landscape of the pandemic. These theoretically tools for analyzing popular culture became the ones we used to think about, process, analyze, and respond to. Our media literacy tools were our crisis-management tools. This was an educational opportunity that could not have happened in the way it did without this particular confluence of events, perhaps, but it does offer pop culture educators new directions and possibilities, in terms of what media literacy can do to help students, both in and outside of the classroom. Sharon M. Ravitch would characterize the way that the course was re-shaped by the crisis as part of what she calls “flux pedagogy” (Ravitch). In her article, “Why Teaching Through Crisis Requires a Radical New Mindset,” Ravitch provides a hopeful outlook for the way that the pandemic changed the rules in academia. She writes that “during this time of radical flux, with our daily lives and wellbeing disrupted, COVID-19 has also spotlighted a 400-year pandemic of structural racism; these deep civil reverberations, too, have generated new kinds of accountability for faculty across every field” (Ravitch). Hence, framing the pandemic as a “time of radical flux” helps to frame the pedagogical opportunity it provides to make radical changes, with social justice in mind.

Although reimagining assignments and reimagining the course to centralize media literacy was not something that occurred as a result of following a pedagogical model; it is helpful to frame and understand what happened across the semester using Ravitch’s “flux pedagogy,” which “integrates ‘teaching agility’ and a ‘radical growth mindset’” (“Why Teaching Through Crisis”). She outlines five dimensions to “flux pedagogy,” which include an inquiry stance and distributed wisdom approach, radical compassion and self-care, responsive and humanizing pedagogy, racial literacy, and brave space pedagogy (Ravitch). I did not have this exact model to follow when the pandemic took place, but each dimension of flux pedagogy seems to be what the pandemic was pushing us toward, and it embodies most of what I did, mid-semester, to reshape the course. Realizing that my students were not merely a critical audience to the forms of media they were studying but that were also actors in it, in addition to attending to student needs, first and foremost, allowed me to create, through my collaboration with them, an opportunity to help shape their own media literacy by having them create media literacy projects of their own using the tools provided by the course to make something that was useful and possibly empowering, on much of their own terms.

Student Perspective

As a queer Black woman, my perspective and opinions are always informed by my sexuality, gender, and race. Everything I think, learn, or do is reflective of these identities. Race is especially relevant to my lived experiences because it is the first facet that dictates how I move in the world and how the world responds to me. As a result of this, I can never exist outside the context of race, which has placed me in the unique position of being able to consider how race and racism operate in the media. I am always vividly aware of how Black people are presented in the media— how we are demonized, sexualized, caricatured, and otherwise brutalized by media curators/content creators who do not care to go beyond surface-level recreations and repetitive racist tropes. Black people exist in narrow, negative spaces in the media in a way that no other groups of people do. We are never allowed to be nuanced or fully embodied as real people. Black characters are often some portrayal of a negative stereotype usually written from the perspective of non-Black people. Subsequently, Black people cannot consume media without the awareness that most portrayals we see of

ourselves on screen, usually created by non-Black people, are perspectives we have to take at face value. We are critical viewers of everything we exist in because we have to be prepared to confront people's ideas about us in real life as a result of their unfiltered, unexamined consumption of Blackness in media portrayals. This skill, formed entirely by necessity, is the primary reason I decided to take an upper-level gender studies class entirely dedicated to gender and pop culture because no education on these subjects can be complete without race being part of the discussion.

Before the pandemic started, there were a few assignments where we [students] had to analyze media, looking beyond its surface level. For one of those assignments, I chose to analyze a song by Childish Gambino featuring several other artists, called *This is America*. To an uncritical consumer, this song is just another rap song with no real meaning or message. In reality, the lyrics and video are full of imagery that challenges the viewer to examine America's racism, state-sanctioned violence enacted by police, and social media. In the song and music video, there are several allusions and explicit references to the violence perpetrated against Black people historically, which are present in Gambino's lyrics, the performances, and the choreography throughout the video. Some visual allusions include mimicking the facial expression of minstrel show cartoons and having a representation of a biblical version of Death escorted by police cars. In addition to these, he strikes a Jim Crow pose and features a parallel image of violence against Black people. There is a moment in the video when the virality of Black creativity on social media distracts from the violence going on in the background, which could be a comment on social media being a way to blunt the impact of Black tragedy through distraction. The lyrics reference police violence and refer to Black men as barcodes, implying that they are still viewed as property in the United States. This song and its accompanying video were full of social commentary about the state of Black existence in a country in which we are supposed to be equal and free citizens. It was crucial for me to analyze the messages and symbolism in this song because they can so easily be missed. To me, it was a perfect example of why media literacy is a necessity as it is a perfect example of how being an uninformed viewer allows one to miss the deeper messages in the media they consume.

After the pandemic had begun and the world was submerged into chaos, it was hard to miss the importance of having media literacy skills as a media consumer because everything we watch, whether it is a show, documentary, or the news, is presented with intention and we, as viewers, cannot afford to remain ignorant of this. This is especially the case for Black viewers watching portrayals of Blackness in entertainment. In reality TV shows, Black people, especially Black women, are shown to be more aggressive than people of other races and ethnicities (Jacobs, 2018). The intention to present people of color, particularly Black people, in a specific light is obvious in, for example, how Black criminality and White victimhood is overreported in the news and how documentaries of drug dealing feature primarily Black and Latinx people, whereas, in reality, White people are more likely to sell drugs (Gladstone; Ingraham). How Black people are intentionally portrayed as violent, disruptive, dangerous, and criminal would later become more obvious in the media coverage of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests at the end of the semester when the most common narrative of the movement, triggered by the avoidable death of yet another unarmed Black man, would be of violence and destruction despite the overwhelming percentage of protests, approximately 93%, being peaceful (Mansoor).

The deliberateness and intentionality of the media representation of marginalized people were the reasons for my choosing to focus my final project on reality television, since Black women are often depicted as aggressive and destructive, and women, overall, are shown to be catty, petty, and undermining. While watching reality television during the pandemic, I noticed how shows for an assumed Black audience were promoted differently compared to those for an assumed White audience. I knew that with millions of people stuck at home due to the pandemic, television would have a captive audience made up of those whose opinions on people like me would be formed from and informed by sound bites and caricatures in the shows they watched.

PEDAGOGICAL SHIFTS THROUGH THE REFLEXIVITY OF A CLASSROOM IN CRISIS

Teacher Perspective

The changes in my pedagogy, brought on by the pandemic, did not occur all at once but did so within a flurry of tumult, as my and my students' lives were collectively upended. I vividly recall the last day I held class. Here, we expressed our dismay, but in the midst of it, also had a frank discussion and started to try to problem-solve. I asked the students what they thought they might want, prefer, and need if we never met together again in person. I wanted to listen to them and take guidance from them before we were separated. I also wanted them to feel that I had really heard them and taken their feelings, ideas and needs into consideration when re-working the course for distance learning in the event of this happening. Yet, we were having this discussion while *in crisis*. They expressed unanimously that they preferred that I not try to hold classes at a specific time each week, but that I make lecture videos for them to access it whenever and wherever they could. This was our impromptu, in the moment, plan, which then ended up being echoed by my department and the university-at-large, once it was announced, during the following weeks, that we would be moving to remote learning.

My life circumstances changed drastically during those next couple of days and weeks. My students' life circumstances changed drastically, too. Some of my students lost loved ones. Some did not have internet access. One, I never heard from for the rest of the semester. But most of the students sought contact with me, as well as solace and stability in the course, and I believe this was in large part because I allowed the course to change shape according to our circumstances. The course, then, became an occasion for us to work together to problem-solve and struggle together while in crisis. We were thrust by the pandemic into a different way of relating, enveloped by a shared sense of vulnerability.

In an interview with George Yancy, for *Truthout*, Judith Butler reflects on the relationship between the pandemic and resulting vulnerability in a way that speaks to what (re)shaped the pedagogical situation in our course during the Spring 2020 semester. In the interview, Butler expresses that the pandemic "exposes a global vulnerability" ("Mourning is a Political Act"). They write:

Vulnerability is not just the condition of being potentially harmed by another. It names the porous and interdependent character of our bodily and social lives... We are impressed upon by the environment, social worlds and intimate contact... These reciprocal and material modes of sharing describe a crucial dimension of our vulnerability, intertwinements and interdependence of our embodied social life" ("Mourning is a Political Act").

It was thus not just the vulnerability, but the collective awareness of the vulnerability of our bodily and social lives that connected us during the crisis in a way that we had not previously been able to connect in the classroom, even though our bodies were no longer together in it. The shape of our reciprocal and material "modes of sharing" formed our vulnerability and our relationships to one another during the pandemic. In the news media, politicians and healthcare organizations alike referred to groups as "the vulnerable" as those who were the most vulnerable to the negative effects of the pandemic. It is clear, in this context, that vulnerability is a political and social justice issue that involves historically oppressed people and class differences. This attention to vulnerability in the news relates to the attention we can pay to vulnerability within pedagogy. The pandemic brought the nuances of vulnerability into immediate and urgent public and private attention. To have tried to conduct "business as usual" in the classroom would have been as socially unjust as it would have been impossible. To avoid the financial consequences of the disruption, high schools and colleges began an immediate emergency shift to "online learning," but the vulnerability of the moment and the way it disrupted the power structures and norms of the education system were more forceful than efforts to diminish and ignore the moment of mass vulnerability.

In his essay, “On Violence and Vulnerability in a Pandemic,” Michael Bernard-Donals writes, “if the COVID-19 pandemic is teaching us anything...it’s that pandemic does violence to our sense of place, to how we think of respite (where we feel safe and free from violence), and has highlighted our sense of vulnerability in the midst of (potentially infected) others” (225). His essay grapples with the ways in which, in creating new and intensified violence(s), the crisis of the pandemic reveals the violence that comes with the disordered and disordering state of catastrophe, as well as the vulnerability it exposes, which were both there all along (Bernard-Donals 226). In calling the pandemic a form of “violence” in which systems of order are disrupted, Bernard-Donals harkens back to the work of Walter Benjamin to make the point that “the pandemic makes clear not only that there is no respite from violence, but that violence describes the human condition, and that language is its instrument” (226). Benjamin, in his “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” writes, “the tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the ‘state of emergency’ in which we live is not the exception but the rule” (392). Framing the pandemic in this way is helpful for describing the way a (re)new(ed) awareness, or realization, about media literacy and social justice is formed through a period of crisis, and it is also validated by the experiences that shape this awareness. What we saw unfold in the media supports what both Benjamin and Bernard-Donals have observed about the state of emergency in relation to oppression and violence. The violence of the pandemic, carried out in large part through the media, brought simultaneous attention to other forms of violence that had existed long before the pandemic such as racial violence, class violence, and gender violence. The violence of the pandemic intensified our collective awareness of the violence of systems that produce and rely on social injustice. This, in turn, affected what happened in the virtual classroom, as we responded to and participated in a moment of increasing awareness about the way violence is represented and constructed by the media. Our critical engagement with media literacy was intensified by the violence and vulnerability of the pandemic. It was media literacy that helped us to make sense of and deal with the violence of the state of emergency, a violence that was there before the pandemic and compounded to the violence of the pandemic. Engaging with media literacy during the state of emergency was the pedagogical intervention that gave students agency to actively participate in constructing, dismantling, pushing back, or reconstructing the world-in-crisis around them.

Together, as teacher and students, we formed our pedagogical response to the state of emergency. My pedagogical decisions were based on my own experience of the moment of crisis, as well on the responses to the crisis that my students shared with me and the feedback they gave me at the start of the crisis, about what might work best for them. When I revised the syllabus after we were told we would not be returning to the classroom, I cut back on some of the readings, made adjustments for the students who had not given presentations yet, and made the decision to reconceive the final assignment in the course. This last decision allowed me to take into consideration our current circumstances and my own self-awareness around media literacy, as it was becoming the foremost focus of my life during that strange time. I decided it did not make sense to ask students to write a paper analyzing a film, so instead, I wanted them to create a project of their own that would give them room to engage with and construct their own forms of media literacy. This expansion on and shift in the assignment, combined with my decision to build the assignment out of Pozner’s chapter on media literacy, encouraged us to be critical media consumers at a time during which we were consumed with media, yet also feeling so collectively helpless to practice agency. The chapter demonstrated to us what media literacy looks like in action at a time when it could feel empowering to take action during a crisis.

Scrapping the original assignment, I created a new one where students were to use the concept of media literacy, explained so concretely by Jennifer Pozner, our discussion, my lectures, and their tools from the course (the theory and the content we had discussed) to devise media literacy projects that would allow them to act as “problem solvers and agents of change.” Against the backdrop of the stuckness of the pandemic, a stuckness so many of us felt despite our total immersion in media, being able to bring agency to the monotony,

high anxiety, and powerlessness of our perpetual encounters with media was a helpful exercise. Students brought excitement and creativity to their projects. I never would have imagined that, during a pandemic, so many of them would feel supported and anchored by this open-ended opportunity, to quote the assignment, to “participate in the making, remaking, interrogating, and deconstruction of representation.” I asked them to do what Jennifer Pozner urged them to do: to (a) “have fun with media literacy” and to (b) “do something.” How often are we asked to do something, how often are we given a broad command that is undergirded by suggestions, ideas, theory, content, and a deep involvement in a growing self-awareness of media literacy that is developing so explosively and uniquely under circumstances of global hardship? We brainstormed together, and I also worked individually with students to help them create projects that would be meaningful to them and would empower them to feel that they were, not just reflecting on media literacy but also, affecting and practicing media literacy. My students went above and beyond what I could have expected from a group of students in crisis.

What is even more exceptional about this strange collaboration of dire circumstances and educational agency is that the active study and practice of media literacy, when combined during a time of crisis and heightened awareness of the impact of media on our lives, made students more aware of media literacy and deepened their understanding of it. For this reason, I think that the pandemic, despite its devastating effects on us globally and personally, provided an opportunity to nurture a deeper emerging understanding of media literacy and the subjects that we study in relation to it, such as gender, race, class, and ability. My hope is that articulating this fact will encourage educators concerned with media literacy, identity, and pop culture to consider the opportunities that exist to re-conceptualize their pedagogy and assignments through the current moment and through an attunement to the role that both crisis and media play in our lives. I hope educators will feel inclined to follow the example of my students, who so admirably took joy in doing something with their emerging awareness, working with and within the harsh realities of our global circumstances to affect change within the realms of agency available to them.

Student Perspective

When the final assignment of this class was changed from a paper to an open-ended creative assignment that required me to interact with and closely examine media, it felt liberating. During a time where everything seemed to be falling apart, it was gratifying to have something being changed in a way that gave me the agency to shape my education and learning experience. With everything shut down and nothing to do but schoolwork while also feeling anxious about the state of the world, I started to rely more on creative works than I had in recent years. The shift to online school and work had given my roommate more and me more free time but fewer things to do with it, so we used our time doing something we had not had the time to do in years; we sat and watched television. We watched everything from telenovelas to documentaries, from movies to gameshows, and, eventually, when we ran out of things to watch, I turned to watching reality television. I had never been a consumer of reality television because they painted women as petty, sabotaging, and unable to get along despite, and sometimes because of, their individual successes, so this almost felt like culture shock to me. I knew that like me, many people would eventually find themselves exploring media content that they never would have before, some of which would be reality television. I also knew that the only way that I could ever reconcile my objections to reality television and my newfound fascination with it would be through media literacy and analysis.

I did not know what it was I wanted to do or accomplish initially; I only knew that watching the shows made me uncomfortable. I later realized that this discomfort derived from their being created in a way that is meant to draw an unwitting consumer into the narratives of these shows without leaving room for them to deconstruct what they are viewing. I found myself picking sides with the random manufactured issues the women on these shows had and growing to like and dislike the different characters on the shows. Women’s

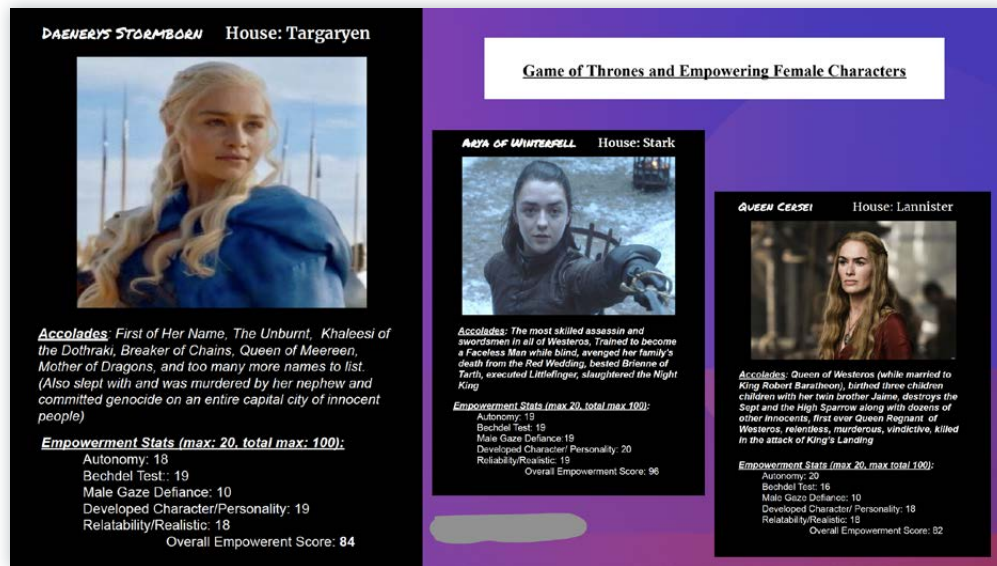
lives and “realities” were being reduced to soundbites, petty arguments, and vapidly, and they were being presented as commodities for other women to consume, and for a moment, I watched these shows thinking that they were not worth further examination. For a moment, it as if something in me turned off and I became a mindless consumer. When I realized how uncritically I was watching these shows, I became excited at the opportunity to take them apart and examine where my initial discomfort came from and could not wait to see where the project would lead me.

A GALLERY OF STUDENT WORK THAT INVITES PANDEMIC PEDAGOGY

Included in this section is a gallery of student work. It includes images of students’ final projects in the Spring 2020 course, as well as brief descriptions of them. They have been included in the spirit of recognizing the tremendous accomplishments and creativity of the students, as well as to give readers of this essay ideas for directions their students follow for similar projects related to media literacy. All of the students whose work is pictured and described in this section have granted us written permission to share it. The students whose work is anonymous granted permission for their work to be included anonymously, and the students whose work is not anonymous granted permission for their names and their work to be included. The students’ interest in and dedication to media literacy as an avenue for social change will be, we hope, evident in this gallery. As their work reflects, the students are reflective about the role of media in their lives, and they are motivated to use their own understanding of media literacy to bring gender-, race-, and class-focused media literacy to the attention of others.



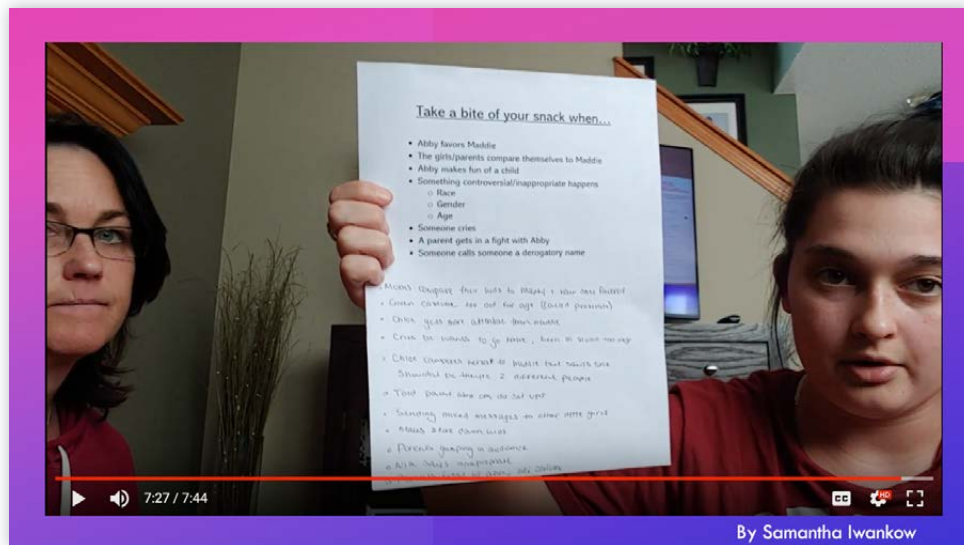
The image included above is a diagram featuring six titles of assignments that were created by students for the final media literacy project in the course. The intention in including these titles is to offer anonymous recognition for the creative work of the students beyond the examples that are included in the rest of the gallery below.



"I chose five different criteria to determine an 'empowerment score' for each of the three characters. These five criteria consist of the following: a character's autonomy, how they apply to the Bechdel Test, their defiance of the male gaze based on both their presentation in the series and their actions, their character development/personality, and their relatability/ realistic-ness. Autonomy in this context refers to a character's ability to self-govern, be in charge of their own lives and decisions, and their overall self-independence."

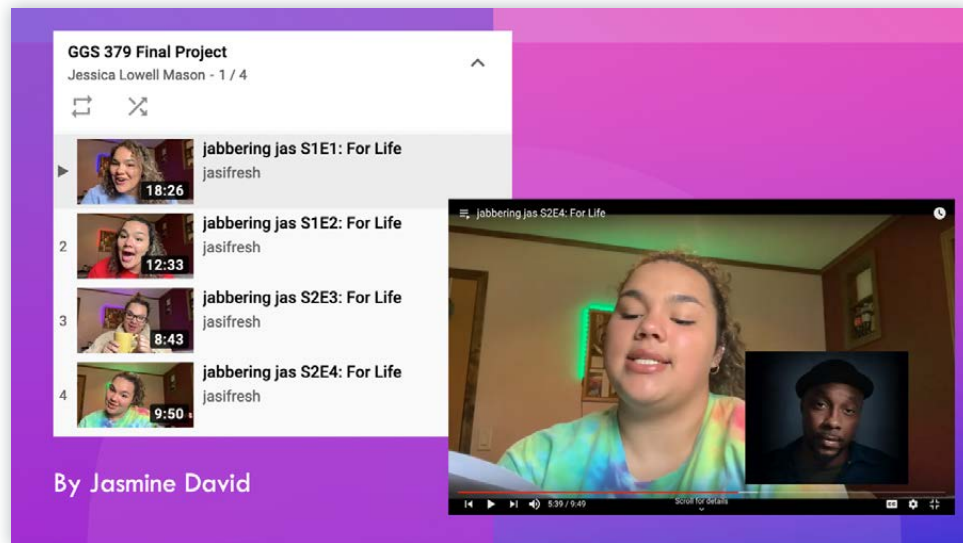
– A Student Enrolled in the Spring 2020 Section of GGS 379

One student, not named here but who has given us permission to include her work, created her own empowerment rating trading cards, styled after Pokémon cards, for female gendered characters on *Game of Thrones*-- giving each character an empowerment statistical rating and ranking them according to criteria devised from theoretical and other concepts they encountered in the course (such as on autonomy, Bechdel Test adherence, male gaze defiance, complex personality development, realistic portrayal level), which they unpacked in a reflection paper.



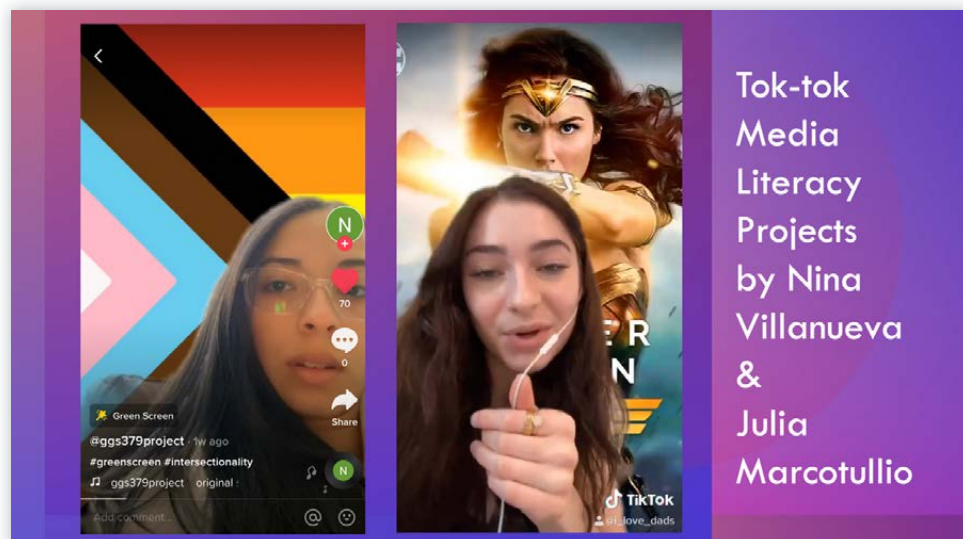
Student Samantha Iwankow made up a social media screening game to play with their mother in which they broke down problematic aspects of the show *Dance Moms* — and then the student made a video with their mother, and together in their media review film, they reflected on what it was like to play the gender-focused media literacy game and offered a critical commentary-dialogue on the show.





Jasmine David created a media literacy talk show series of videos on YouTube in the style of a podcast, in which they provided a commentary on the ABC show *For Life*. The review of episodes of the show was informed by theory related to gender, race and sexual orientation that we engaged with in class, and David demonstrated that it is possible to use the medium of a podcast to enact gender-focused media literacy studies in a way that would appeal to pop culture consumers.

One student (unnamed) made a collage titled "Get Off The Internet," which consisted of headings of and excerpts from articles about violence against transgender people. The student wrote a powerful paper contextualizing the elaborate collage in its call for a media literacy that demands attention to the media's portrayal of transgender bodies and an end to violence against transgender people.

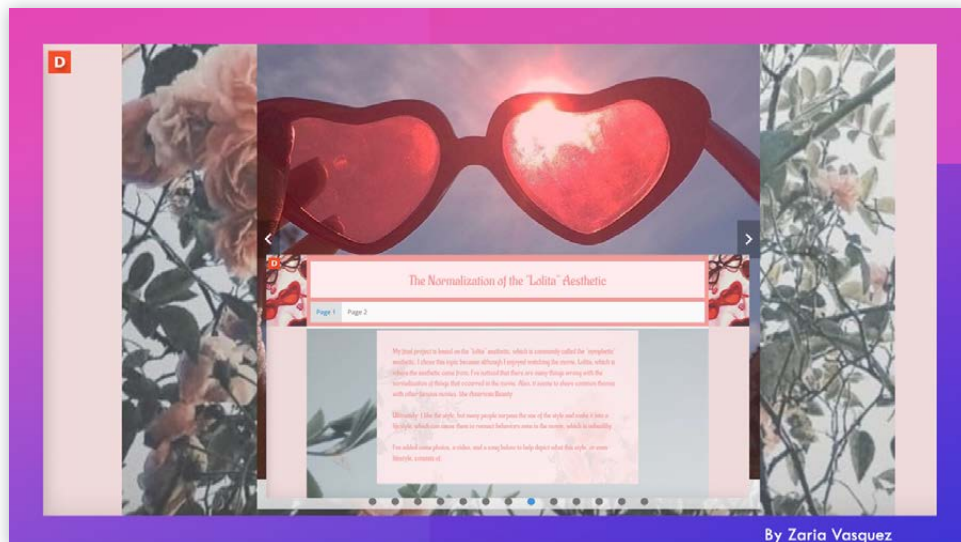




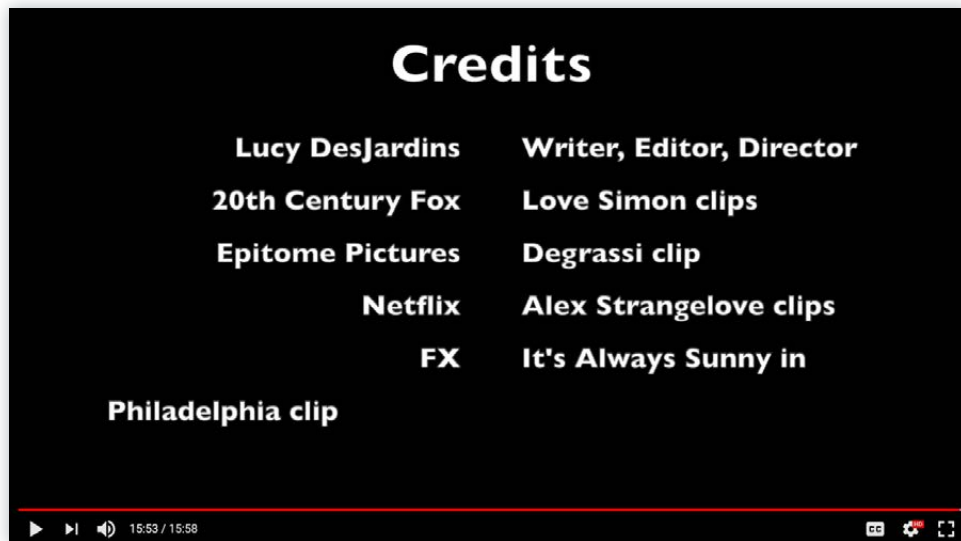
“I focused my videos around trying to open people’s minds to the underlying messages that gender and race representation in film has.”

– Julia Marcotullio

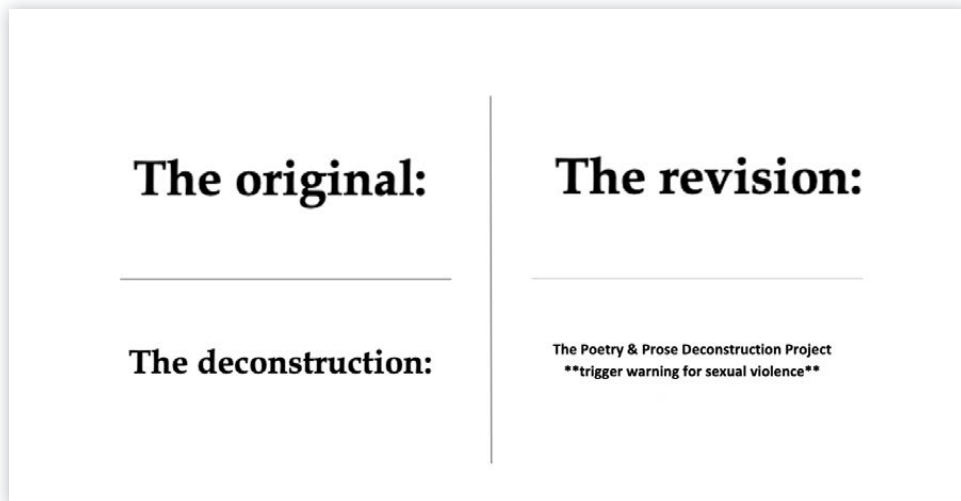
Two students, Nina Villanueva and Julia Marcotullio, made educational TikTok videos on topics of interest to them from the course that are aimed at introducing and promoting gender-focused media literacy to a medium that tends to not lend itself to reflection, introspection, and critical analysis. One was focused on responding to issues that arose on social media, and the other focused on gender representation and film. Both projects incorporated our coursework on re-vamping the hashtag as a tool to provide contextual information.



Zaria Vasquez created a blog dedicated to an examination and critique of the Lolita aesthetic, which appears so often in consumer and pop culture contexts. The blog served as a space for them to gather materials that demonstrate the Lolita aesthetic in different contexts, and the reflection they wrote served as a space for a critical and theoretical critique of it.

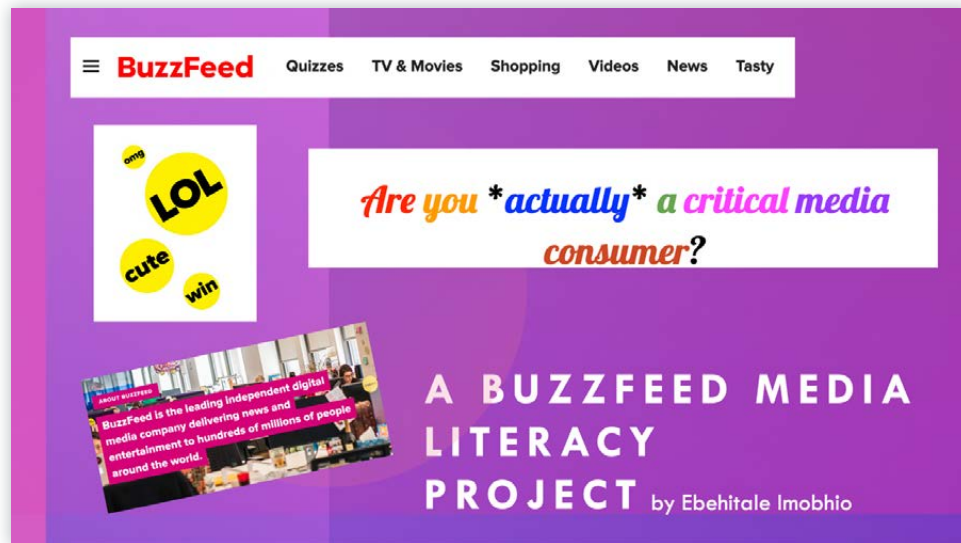


One student, Lucy DesJardins, created a video for their family that was focused on the impact of pop culture media in discovering and constructing their own gender and sexual identity. It was incredibly personal, but the student also included material from the course in their media reflection on their identity. In the video, the student discussed how pop culture influenced their experiences with identity-formation and the concept of coming out. This project demonstrated the power of media literacy to affect personal change within families and empower LGBTQ+ people.



Samantha Whitman deconstructed old poems they had written in the past on the subject of identity, poems that made reference to both media and popular culture. They reconstructed the poems in the present using theories from our course, offering a reflection on each of the de- and re-constructed poems.

Another student took on some of the problematic aspects of the game Cards Against Humanity by creating their own version of the game, called Intersectionality. It reversed the aim of the game; instead of trying to shock players into laughter by political incorrectness, the game's aim was to create awareness around the problems of the tropes used in the game and to use the platform to educate players on concepts related to gender, theory, and media literacy.



The top part of the image shows a screenshot of the BuzzFeed website header with navigation links: BuzzFeed, Quizzes, TV & Movies, Shopping, Videos, News, and Tasty. Below this is a slide titled "Are you *actually* a critical media consumer?" with the BuzzFeed logo and a small image of a BuzzFeed article snippet that reads: "ABOUT BUZZFEED BuzzFeed is the leading independent digital media company delivering news and entertainment to hundreds of millions of people around the world."

Are you *actually* a critical media consumer?

A BUZZFEED MEDIA LITERACY PROJECT by Ebehitale Imobhio

The Media Literacy Project Intervention

Are you *actually* a critical media consumer?

Think of all the times you've watched cringe-worthy reality TV and take the quiz below to see how much of a critical viewer you are while consuming "mindless" content. Feel free to add your own questions or modify this quiz however you see fit

If you watch reality TV shows, how often do you cringe or bite your tongue or feel annoyed when any of the following happens:

By Ebehitale Imobhio

1. A woman attacks another woman by calling her a bitch, slut, hussy, whore, homewrecker, tramp, etc?

- a. Never! (it's just part of the show, who cares?)
- b. Never! (they deserved to be called that and had it coming for a long time!! Serves that bitch right)
- c. Once in a while (but only when they didn't deserve it)
- d. Once in a while (just cause I don't think it's fair to use that kinda language but it is what it is)
- e. Once in a while
- f. Sometimes
- g. Almost always
- h. Always
- i. I have never even noticed this
- j. I don't consume media that includes things like this

By Ebehitale Imobhio

<p>11. A minority is treated as an accessory or pet or in any tokenizing way</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Never! (they knew what they signed up for) Never! (it's not that serious) Once in a while (but it's not meant in a harmful way so who cares) Once in a while (but you gotta take these things in stride) Once in a while Sometimes Almost always Always I have never even noticed this I don't consume media that includes things like this 	<p>5. A gender-queer or trans character is treated as a curiosity and subjected to invasive questions</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Never! (they knew what they signed up for) Never! (they could just leave) Once in a while (but I'm curious too GODDAMIT!) Once in a while (but these are confusing times so I understand/feel their confusion) Once in a while Sometimes Almost always Always I have never even noticed this I don't consume media that includes things like this
<p>6. A non-straight character is treated as a curiosity and subjected to invasive questions</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Never! (they knew what they signed up for) Never! (they could just leave) Once in a while (but I'm curious too GODDAMIT!) Once in a while (but these are confusing times so I understand/feel their confusion) Once in a while Sometimes Almost always Always I have never even noticed this I don't consume media that includes things like this 	<p>3. A woman throws a drink at someone else unprovoked, mildly provoked, or just straight up provoked!</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Never! (it's just part of the show, who cares?) Never! (they deserved it and had it coming for a long time! Serves that bitch right) Once in a while (but only when they didn't deserve it) Once in a while (who's gonna have to clean that up! Sheesh!) Once in a while Sometimes Almost always Always I have never even noticed this I don't consume media that includes things like this

By Ebehitale Imobhio

Critical Feedback Media Literacy Intervention

A and B: if you frequently answered in this range, **OOE!** You definitely just take it all in without question, don't you? Why even watch TV if you're not **GGGGA** try to be critical of it at all?!

C to E: if you frequently answered in this range, at least you feel some discomfort? You're one soft push away from being with the A and B folks (which is **SCARY**) and one hard push away from the F and G folks. You're not quite a critical viewer but there's still **hope** yet! You cringe at things but not for the right reasons though. With any luck, you might start to ask yourself the hard questions when you watch these shows and finally start thinking more about just what it is that you're watching.

F and G: if you frequently answered in this range, reality TV **MUST SUCK** for you but hey! At least you can sometimes enjoy it before you start noticing all the ways in which it is problematic again, so yay you..? You are more aware than most which means that you're on your way to critical viewing. You now need to take active steps to consider who is putting out these sorts of content, why, what message is being pushed, and who is the intended audience?


H: if you frequently answered in this range, **poor you!** Watching TV like this must be torture for you, huh? Like with the F and G folks, you are well on your way to **being** a critical viewer. You need to consider the same things as they do and also maybe not watch these types of shows anymore since it seems to cause you pain..?

I: if you frequently answered in this range, **are you sure you're watching reality TV?** Is this quiz for you? Are you okay? Do you need to talk?

J: if you frequently answered in this range, **GOOD FOR YOU!** You're in some way better than most people and you need to teach us your ways, oh wise one! Seriously though, help us! Please! Not consuming this kind of media doesn't mean you don't have to be a critical viewer though. Whatever else you might be consuming should also be done through a critical lens.

By Ebehitale Imobhio

Author's Note:



"For any of you curious, cool cats and kittens that want to be better at being critical media consumers, check out Jennifer Foxner's "Reality Bites Back: The Troubling Truth About Guilty Pleasure TV" for all the ways for a regular Jo or Joe to become more media literate. When you're done with that, think of ways to take action in your life in order to mobilize and make effective real-life changes. Maybe stage letter writing campaigns to bring the attention of media bigwigs to these issues. Show them that you're not **GGGGA** keep taking this sitting **down**."

*Remember, patience is a virtue and change **is** going to take time. Taking down the status quo might seem overwhelming but remember, you're not in this alone. Don't give up hope and don't get discouraged!!*

By Ebehitale Imobhio



"In doing this [project], I can start intervening on people's media consumption in a simple way that doesn't come across as preachy and keeps them from being too defensive. It is incredibly important that people be made aware of the layers of problematic behaviors that we engage in when we consume media. This way, we are better able to sort through it and, hopefully, come out better on the other side."

— Ebehitale Imobhio

Ebehitale Imobhio created a BuzzFeed quiz titled "Are You Actually a Critical Media Consumer," in an effort to use a social media medium that is rich in the construction and reflection of pop culture but that often fails to create critical discourse to make readers more aware of their own media habits and of problematic facets of media consumption. She followed the formula of BuzzFeed quizzes but revised the content and educated the quiz-taker on an array of subjects. This project particularly highlights the way that media literacy is an occasion for creating more media literacy: the student practiced media literacy and, while practicing it, educated the quiz-takers on it, demonstrating the way that our reflections on media literacy make us as well as others more media literate and generate awareness around media literacy, which easily and successfully combines with efforts to draw readerly and critical attention to other subjects implicated in conversations around representation such as gender, race, sexuality, and ability.

SEEING MEDIA LITERACY AGAIN AS A TOOL FOR DECOLONIZATION

Teacher Perspective

One of the aspects of the space for dialogue that pairing media literacy and the pandemic opened for me, as an educator, was an opportunity to think about my own pedagogical shortcomings and how to address them. For example, why did I not consider media literacy more thoroughly when I planned the course? Why had it taken this confluence of events to inspire the transformation of the assignment and to pave a (re) new(ed) direction for the course? Why had I not included more representations of current events into the course prior to the pandemic? Reflection by me, as an educator, had become necessary just as it was needed in the education system and across the country. My students were my teachers on this matter.

In recent months, much has come out on the subjects of anti-racism and decolonization that have to do with what the pandemic, social media, and widespread systemic violence brought to our collective attention. As Professor of History Steven Mintz notes in his article, "Crisis-Informed Pedagogy," the pandemic was not

just a single crisis; it was a triple crisis: “a health crisis, a financial crisis, and a long overdue reckoning over racial injustice” (Mintz). Leaders of organizations stepped down to allow for listening and needed changes, including Reddit cofounder Alexis Ohanian, who resigned in June of 2020 and pledged his seat on the otherwise all-white executive board to a Black candidate (McEvoy). University presidents released statements condemning violence, acknowledging the need for change, and promising to put together committees devoted to addressing racial justice. Some government officials promised better leadership and initiatives going forward to address social injustice. Organizations put out statements addressing their commitment to anti-racist justice efforts such as the Conference on College Composition and Communication, which published widely “This Ain’t Another Statement! This is a DEMAND for Black Linguistic Justice” in July of 2020. The statement, written by six university educators, begins the demand by acknowledging that we are “in the midst of a pandemic that is disproportionately infecting and killing Black people” (Baker-Bell). During the pandemic, students and teachers became immersed in new ways of media technologies while also becoming immersed in a moment of needed awareness and reflection on the way that systemic oppression works and the roles we play in upholding it. The pandemic affected not just our collective view but also our consciousness of the intersectional injustices interwoven into it.

Education is changing because of this, and the more we reflect on and write about our experiences, the more we will be able to utilize them as an opportunity and responsibility to decolonize our syllabi, our curriculum, the way we teach, the way we learn, and the way we come together with students in order to learn. Co-writing this paper with Ebehitale Imobhio is part of my own effort to build on what started in the virtual classroom early in the pandemic and to decolonize my own relationship with paper-writing, with publishing, and with pedagogy. As her insights in this paper powerfully demonstrate, we are part of what Stuart Hall calls a “system of representation” (3); knowing this allows us to deliberate and to be deliberate in the way that we participate in the making of meaning from within spheres of meaning and agency. We are poised to use our pedagogical self-reflection in order to be deliberately decolonizing. That means, for some of us, giving up power, giving up our leadership position as we know it, stepping back, sharing space, and listening. For others, it means stepping into our agency, our power and our wisdom. For others, it’s a combination of both. But for those who currently hold any form of power within the educational system, we have a responsibility to think about it and to act on it.

Student Perspective

There are two lessons any educator who was paying attention in 2020 should have learned: (1) flexibility is vital to the success of students and (2) good representation must be centered in the learning experience. As unprecedented as the events of last year were, they taught us how much room for improvement there is in higher education. They also showed us that flexibility is vital to long-term success. Flexibility is necessary because in times of crisis, we have the room to adjust as we go without losing out on material and experience. Flexible classes give students more agency and afford them the room to be more engaged in the material. We also have to center good representation in our classroom dialogues because just being represented in media is not enough; students need to see *good* representation in their classes, which is when diversity is not an afterthought but part of the creative process, where people who are part of minority groups are active participants. It is when diversity is authentic and real and when questions about the intention or message of media from minority viewers who are seeing themselves being represented on screen are not primarily from a place of hurt. Students from marginalized groups need to see themselves included in this way in their classrooms. It may mean the instructor has to do more work to create this inclusive space, but this is an aspect of what educators already do and is part of ensuring the participation of their students. Education should be the first place where systemic racism, misogyny, misogynoir, queerphobia, and all other types of marginalization are challenged and rebuked. There is nothing in education that has not been shaped by racism

and colonization, and as such, the culture of silence that exists on these topics needs to shift. A media literacy course, one that teaches students how to view, question, and better understand the world and representations within it is an important place for us to dismantle the culture of silence and create better representation.

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AUTHOR BIOS

Jessica Lowell Mason, Lecturer at Buffalo State College and Doctoral Candidate in Global Gender and Sexuality Studies at the University at Buffalo, is serving as Editor and Accessibility Fellow with the Northeast Modern Language Association. During the 2020-2021 year, she was a graduate fellow with the College Consortium and the Coalition for Community Writing's Herstory Training Institute and Fellowship Program, Teaching Memoir for Justice and Peace, a year-long program in partnership with the Humanities Institute at Stony Brook University. Some of Mason's poems, articles, and reviews have been published by Sinister Wisdom, Lambda Literary, Gender Focus, The Comstock Review, IthacaLit, The Feminist Wire, SUNY Buffalo's Romance Studies Journal, and Praeger. Her research, pedagogical, and literary interests and practices center, broadly, on identity and language, but more specifically on representations and constructions of madness within archival documents as they strive to assert identity and self-fashioning under systems of oppression that seek to silence and erase them. She is also the co-founder of Madwomen in the Attic, a feminist mental health literacy and advocacy organization in western New York.

Ebehitale Imobhio is currently completing her masters degree in Community Health and Health Behavior in the School of Public Health and Health Professions at the University at Buffalo. She is currently a member of the Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Council and the co-founder of the Envision Mentoring Program for undergraduate students of color in the program. She is passionate about bridging the gap between academia and communities through the use of accessible language.

SUGGESTED REFERENCE

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It's Dangerous to Learn Alone – Play This: Video Games in Higher Education, Particularly in the Composition Classroom

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ABSTRACT

When people think of educational games, they often just think of ones geared towards kids: these might include spelling and vocabulary games like *Scribblenauts*, creative games such as *Minecraft*, as well as historical games such as *Carmen [San Diego]'s Ancient Caper*, but according to the Entertainment Software Association in 2019, 65% of adults play video games (almost half of which are female), the average gamer is 33 years old, and 63% of all gamers are playing *with others* at least one hour a week (“Essential Facts” 4, 5, 8). This means that the majority of the population plays video games of one type or another. Video games are part of most people’s discourse today, so it is odd that they are virtually ignored as a pedagogy once students enter middle or high school, and they certainly are not considered as a viable learning method in college. However, since games may be the key to how the majority of people of all ages learn best, it is a tool worth utilizing in higher education. I believe in particularly stressful classes, such as freshman composition, gamifying the classes can help reduce student stress and help achievement by couching complex and unfamiliar ideas in a fun and familiar structure.

Thus, dialect is important because we often get caught up in “proper dialects,” academic language and in this case, traditional academic formats. And while these are important to learn, students can learn them better when working by adapting an already-effective language to new and often intimidating information. Gaming has been proven to be one of the most effective methods of motivation and feedback to exist which is exactly what students need.

Keywords: video games, higher education, composition, writing, dialect, English, game, gaming, university, fun

ARTICLE

When people think of educational games, they often just think of ones geared towards kids: these might include spelling and vocabulary games like *Scribblenauts*, creative games such as *Minecraft*, as well as historical games such as *Carmen [Sandiego]'s Ancient Caper*, but according to the Entertainment Software Association in 2019, 65% of adults play video games (almost half of which are female), the average gamer is 33 years old, and 63% of all gamers are playing *with others* at least one hour a week (“Essential Facts” 4, 5, 8). This means that the majority of the population plays video games of one type or another. Video games are part of most people’s discourse today, so it is odd that they are virtually ignored as a pedagogy once students enter middle or high school, and they certainly are not considered as a viable learning method in college. However, since games may be the key to how the majority of people of all ages learn best, it is a tool worth utilizing in higher education. I believe in particularly stressful classes, such as freshman composition, gamifying the classes can help reduce student stress and help achievement by couching complex and unfamiliar ideas in a fun and familiar structure.

Two ideas will contextualize the connection between composition studies and video games. First, the Committee of the Conference on College Composition and Communication said in 1972:

We affirm the students’ right to their own patterns and varieties of language ...The claim that any one dialect is unacceptable amounts to an attempt of one social group to exert its dominance over another... [emphasis mine] (“Students Right...”)

It should be noted, this represented a fundamental shift in teaching pedagogy that is still followed today. Thus, “dialect” is important because we often get caught up in “proper dialects,” academic language and in this case, traditional academic formats. And while these are important to learn, students can learn them better when working by adapting an already-effective language to new and often intimidating information. Gaming has been proven to be one of the most effective methods of motivation and feedback to exist (something on which I will speak later) which is exactly what students need.

To further emphasize this student-centered pedagogy is the current Mission Statement from the university at which I teach English, Southern Utah University. I use this as an example of the typical university mission statement:

Southern Utah University, as our founders envisioned, is a **dynamic teaching and learning community** inspired by its unique natural surroundings. As Utah’s designated public liberal arts and sciences university, SUU engages students in a **personalized and rigorous experiential education, empowering them** to be productive citizens, socially responsible leaders, high achievers and lifelong learners. [emphasis mine]

David Bartholomae is a prominent composition scholar; in his landmark 1986 article called “Inventing the University,” he described what students are typically facing in college: “[**Students**] **have to invent the university... They must learn to speak our language.** Or they must [...] carry off the bluff, since speaking and writing will most certainly be required long before the skill is “learned” [emphasis mine] (4). I believe this, unfortunately, is the stance that the majority of professors still take: “learn the conventions of this classroom or leave.” It is completely contrary to the ideas put forth by the CCCC and SUU’s mission statement and what many universities and professors say they believe.

Video games have their own dialects, their own lexicons, although they are ones in which many educators are either not well-versed or know how to apply in the classroom. Additionally, they are ones which society is in the habit of dismissing as childish and a waste of time. However, these dialects may be the best way to teach students the material and skills we want them to learn. This doesn’t mean that they don’t need to learn academic language and conventions, but if educators can make these conventions easier for students

to learn by translating the new academic language through the familiar video game dialect, then it should be done. An example of a game that already does this is the language-learning game *Duolingo*, where the player learns another language by using multiple-choice, fill-in-the-blank, and speaking-into-the-mic questions. The rewards for playing, besides learning the language, is the ability to level-up, to compete with others by way of a public XP chart showing the amount of time each has played, upgrades to the owl mascot's outfit, and the ability to "buy" extra levels. To date, there are 120 million *Duolingo* users, most of whom play on their own, but many language classes have also added this game to their lessons because it is a motivating and fun way to learn.

Kurt Squire, who studies the learning aspect of games, says that games are more than spitting ideas of what is supposed to have been learned back to a teacher (a traditional classroom practice) but games allow a player to step inside and explore and experience new kinds of things, test hypotheses and develop new kinds of knowledge, all to become a new person." He also explains that a good game is designed to be a smooth experience, meaning there is a logical order to the learning experience. (qtd. in Engenfeldt-Nielsen). This is one reason they are so well-adapted for college classrooms. Even though most professors have a logical order in which information is given to students, the students don't often easily see it. In composition, for example, each concept builds upon the last: we learn formatting, then how understanding audience is the foundation of good writing, then we add how to make a good argument using a thesis statement, how to back that statement with reliable sources, etc. At times, no matter how much I reiterate these connections in class, in the way I lay out my assignment order and in individual assignment directions, as well as through grading rubrics, students do not always readily see how one skill builds upon the last; this manifests itself when some students do not use proper formatting or explain their arguments in their final papers, even though that was what we had been practicing all semester. Video games do this better than professors can because of their tight design, meaning that in most cases, there are clear objectives and immediate consequence or reward, whereas there is time between when classes meet, assignments take time to grade, etc., sometimes causing a disconnect for students. For example, when a person plays *The Legend of Zelda*, (a game that is a good example, because most people have at least heard of it) the player gets to be Link, an adventurer with great fighting and musical abilities who gets to battle evil and save the world. But it's more than that. The player gets a condensed experience so that while they get to live this adventure, they don't have to experience months of useless wandering like one would in a real-life parallel. They get to try dangerous things and then see what the consequences are, all in the safe space of the game. And usually, they can keep trying (and want to keep trying) until getting the desired outcome. Daniel Johnson, who studies language and culture, states:

General knowledge of video game culture demands acquisition of the language which embodies the constituents of our subculture (i.e. the language is part of the knowledge) ... As a group of people who share a common fondness to video games, our commonality creates what one might call a subculture. There are ways in which we interpret and react within this world that is heavily influenced by our role as a member of the video game playing populace. This influence, of course, varies depending on the games we play and the way we interact with others within this community, if at all.

When playing *The Legend of Zelda*, there is essential knowledge that is needed (which is taught by the game as it is being played). There are the main characters: *Link* (the player), *Princess Zelda*, who needs Link's help, and *Gannon*, who is the adversary. There is the player's *life*, represented by hearts; when the player's hearts run out, they *die* and have to start over. *Weapons* must be acquired and *skills* must be learned to protect this life while *potions* can restore any lost life. All of the parts are needed to get to the *goal* of the game, defeating Gannon and returning the *triforce* pieces to Zelda.

Really, we can look at the structure of any college course in the same format. When taking English composition, there is essential knowledge that is needed (which is taught in the class). The main characters: *the student* and *the professor*- who needs the student to complete tasks- and the *assignments leading up to the final grade*, which seems like the adversary. There is the student's final grade, made up of many smaller grades. Skills must be learned to be able to write, and there are peers, office hours, and the Writing Center to help with any lack. All the parts are needed to get to the goal of the class- learning writing skills that will help them in other classes and life, as represented by a grade.

By applying gaming language and structures to a class, a language many students already know, professors can use game structures to make students feel like insiders; they will then have more commitment to what they are learning. But it can go farther than that. The English composition community has been talking for over 40 years about how to create a student-centered classroom. Peter Elbow famously discussed the idea of having a classroom without teachers: "In proposing the teacherless writing class, I am trying to deny something- something that is often assumed: *the necessary connection between learning and teaching*. The teacherless writing class is a place where there is learning but no teaching... I think teachers learn to be more *useful* when it is clearer they are not *necessary*." While I'm not advocating that we design all classes for an online, on-their-own experience, what better way to initiate the motivation of learning on one's own than to create the classroom as a game. Daniel Johnson, who wrote "Analysis: Mapping Gamer Dialect," says, "Strip it all down and video games are fundamentally a series of rules with attached terminology." A perfect scaffolding for teaching.

According to Jane McGonigal, there are four defining traits of a game, no matter the type or genre: 1. *A goal*, 2. *rules*, 3. *a feedback system*, and 4. *voluntary participation* (21). "The *goal* is the specific outcome that players will work to achieve. It focuses their attention and continually orients their participation throughout the game. The goal provides players with a sense of purpose" (21).

Looking again at *The Legend of Zelda*, the *goal* is to get all the pieces of the trifold in order to defeat Ganon and save Zelda.

In the classroom, most students' goal is to get an A or sometimes just to pass with doing as little as possible (the point being that the goal for the majority of English composition students isn't to become better writers, except in relation to their real goal of a grade) it doesn't matter that professors try to teach them to think outside of the bubble of the classroom or that improvement is the goal and that writing isn't something a person masters in one or two semesters. When they don't reach that goal, they often say, "But I've turned in all my homework!" or "I worked really hard on this!" This indicates that they already look at the classroom as a game, but in their minds, it is a poorly constructed one because there isn't a clear enough way to "win". In reality, if they'd put in the practice and work required, they could easily win, but they rarely are willing to do the actual amount of work it would take. In the gaming world, we call repetitive tasks like fighting minor enemies "grinding". It is understood that in order to gain gaming skills to level up sufficiently for the coming tasks, a good amount of grinding is necessary. However, the idea of practicing writing over and over in their "spare time" is not a concept that students have considered worth their time.

Looking at McGonigal's second trait for defining a game, she says, "The *rules* place limitations on how players can achieve the goal. By removing or limiting the obvious ways of getting to the goal, the rules push players to explore previously uncharted spaces. They unleash creativity and foster strategic thinking" (McGonigal 21).

In *The Legend of Zelda*, the *rules* are: fight monsters to get rupees in order to buy weapons and other necessary supplies. Get enough weapons in order to work through each dungeon (level) to defeat the minor bosses in each which are guarding more powerful weapons and magical items necessary for harder dungeons. And try not to die.

The *rules* for university students are laid out in a syllabus. They usually include the necessity for coming to class, to do assignments on time, to not plagiarize, and it indicates how many points equals which grade. Each assignment has another set of rules that include the topic on which to be written, writing conventions needed (like a thesis), formatting rules, length of the paper, etc. The problem here is that students usually believe that grades are given arbitrarily, not based on concrete rules, even when there is a grading rubric showing them what they did right and wrong and why. Because there can be different perceptions on if a student is writing well, they often think they have accomplished the goal, when according to the rules from the professor, they have not. Therefore, they need a clearer set of rules to follow for them to feel like the game is winnable and fair.

Third, the *feedback* system tells players how close they are to achieving the goal. It can take the form of points, levels, a score, or a progress bar. Or in its most basic form, the feedback system can be as simple as the players' knowledge of an objective outcome: 'The game is over when...' Real-time feedback serves as a promise to the players that the goal is definitely achievable and it provides motivation to keep playing (McGonigal 21).

The *feedback* in *The Legend of Zelda* comes from getting new weapons and abilities- it's better to be able to kill a blue *ocorok* (the spiky octopus-like creatures at the beginning of the game) with one blow of the white or magic sword instead of two blows of the wooden one, and it's better to bomb holes in the wall of a dungeon to make a shortcut instead of going around. Players like to see their rupee numbers go up and have the ability to buy supplies that they couldn't afford before; they are willing to put in the work for these small upgrades and to level up, which tells them how close they are to winning the game.

Students like feedback, but often they aren't getting feedback that will help them "win" the grade they want. Some professors only give a grade without any explanation of what was wrong (or right, for that matter). Some give notes on the final paper or exam but no opportunity to improve. If the goal is to learn certain skills in a class, students have to be given the opportunity to try again. Imagine playing a video game that does not allow the player to try again- one chance and that's all. That will illicit frustration, not success.

Lastly, *voluntary participation* requires that everyone who is playing the game knowingly and willingly accepts the goal, the rules, and the feedback. Knowingness establishes common ground for multiple people to play together. And the freedom to enter or leave a game at will ensures that intentionally stressful and challenging work is experienced as a safe and pleasurable activity. (McGonigal 21).

In *The Legend of Zelda*, players choose to play, so they don't mind (for the most part), killing monsters over and over in order to get enough rupees to buy something wanted/needed to progress in the game. Many players get every item that is earnable, not because those items are needed to pass the game, but because the player can choose that challenge for themselves.

Going to college, of course, is *voluntary*, but once there, freshman composition isn't. If the class were set up like a game played in the classroom but with the professor as the Dungeon Master of sorts, so that they are also part of the game, students would react more positively to a class that in reality is forced on them, because they'd feel like they had some control over their learning. In this scenario, some quests (assignments) would be required, some wouldn't be. Some things would be collaborative, some wouldn't be.

McGonigal goes on to say, "This definition [of goals, rules, feedback, and voluntary participation] may surprise you for what it lacks: interactivity, graphics, narrative, rewards, competition, virtual environments, or the idea of "winning"- [these are] common but not defining features of games." Because games don't require these "extras" that most assume are essential to games to be engaging to the player, the structure transfers easily into the classroom (25). There is an intrinsic reward in leveling up that makes players want to do it again and again, even when a level is hard. That is what we need them to feel in our classes. In the book, *Glued to Games: How Video Games Draw Us in and Hold Us Spellbound*, the authors argue that content does not matter. What matters is how players interact with the material (Rigby and Ryan 6). A good illustration of a video game

lacking all of these extras is *Zork*, a *text-based* or *interactive fiction* game that came out in 1981. Rob Lammle explains the basics of the game:

The game's environments and the actions you take are described for you. For example, the first line of *Zork* is **"You are standing in an open field west of a white house, with a boarded front door. There is a small mailbox here"** [emphasis his]. Using a series of simple commands, you direct the main character to do something, like "open mailbox." To which the game will reply, "Opening the small mailbox reveals a leaflet." Naturally, you would then "take leaflet," "read leaflet," and then maybe "walk east" to get to the house. The story unfolds from there as you collect items, like a sword, a lantern, rope, and other adventuring necessities, before entering a vast, underground cave where you'll face enemies inspired by *The Lord of the Rings*, like elves, trolls, and the darkness-lurking grue.

This kind of game acts like a choose-your-own-adventure book, though by deciding what commands to give, it is even more immersive for the player than the former is for the reader. Without a defined list of commands, the player has to try different wording until the player finds the right command to accomplish a goal to forward the story.

McGonigal calls the willingness to work hard on mundane tasks in games "blissful productivity," or a "virtuous circle of productivity" (53). Gamers want satisfying work that they know they can accomplish. In real life, people are not always sure that hard work will accomplish something. Many games like *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild I and II* (the latest iteration of the *Zelda* games), *The Last of Us*, and *Genshin Impact* have foraging and crafting as necessary to the player's survival. But even searching for and collecting ore or apples is satisfying, because players know if they need an item, they will be able to find it eventually. In the real world, if a person were to hit a rocky mountainside with a pick, they might not find anything, and even if they did, it would likely take a long time to do so and they wouldn't know what to do with it afterwards. In game worlds, they do. There is a guarantee of productivity in a well-designed game.

This is where gaming in higher education, specifically the composition class, comes in. The rules become the tricky part and why students struggle so much with composition classes and other classes like them. The professor can give them the rubric ahead of time, can provide them with examples of good essays for each assignment, can break down the concepts of a thesis, how to make a clearer sentence, how to transition between ideas, how to write for an audience. But in the end, it isn't always easy for them to understand why they aren't making a good argument or why their sentences aren't working for their audience, even when having it explained to them in terms they intellectually understand. They often repeat the errors and end up defeated and occasionally angry at the professor. The myth is that people have to have ideas completely together before writing so it will come out in one perfect session, which is totally false. But, students still tend to believe that myth even though they understand that this kind of mentality while playing video games is foolish.

It's not because students don't want to work hard, most of the time anyway. "Blissful productivity" is the reason gamers play for so long. "Just let me get to the next level!" "I almost have this boss!" They don't get overly discouraged when they fail, because they believe at some point, they will succeed. Students need to feel the same way, and that comes down to designing a good class.

Earnest Cavalli talks about the game *Age of Conan*. It takes 250 hours of gameplay to get to the maximum level- this means the gamer creates a character or avatar, then spends 250 hours molding and training their character until it is a master at whatever that character can do. *Then* the player is ready to really play the game. But, when *Age of Conan* came out, people were disappointed that it *only* took 250 hours to reach max level ("Age of Conan's"). If they didn't have the feeling of accomplishment during these 250 hours, they certainly

wouldn't be asking for more time. They are willing to work, and they want enough work to feel accomplished at the end. Let's compare this to a college class.

A semester of a class is 3 hours a week for 15 weeks= 45. Plus, the oft-quoted two hours of homework for every hour of class- this equals 90 hours for the semester for one class, so 45 plus 90 equals only 135 hours for one semester of work. And students often feel like they are dying by then. Yet 250 hours of gameplay is disappointing to them. It takes twice as long- 500 hours- to build up to maximum level in *World of Warcraft*, which has had more players than any other online game, because they enjoy the process as much as the end goal. Compare this with the 650 hours of a full load in a typical semester (15 credits plus 2 hours of homework per class period x 3 days a week x 15 weeks), which isn't even focused on one subject like those 500 hours for *World of Warcraft*.

So how do we do that in a practical manner and why is it so difficult, then, to mesh education and game design well? Part of the issue, according to Dr. Frans Mäyrä, is that Game Studies in general is rarely its own course of study. It is housed in other disciplines from communication to media studies, English to even Anthropology, depending on what degree the game studies scholars have themselves received. Even most undergrad programs in gaming focus on game design, not the entire field, and often there are only a few institutions that have more than one or two games studies scholars when they have them at all, making collaboration and mentoring that much harder both while pursuing higher degrees and then while doing research for the rest of their careers (5). And this fact hasn't changed since 2008 when Dr. Mäyrä explained the field. Dr. Bonnie Ruberg has updated the graduate degree options in the United States in 2019, and not one has a degree in "game studies."

Additionally, there is limited support given in the school systems. Max Lieberman is optimistic about educators' desires to implement gaming but explains the consensus that there are too many obstacles:

Research and theory within this emerging field cover a wide range of promising approaches, but evidence suggests that teachers are focused primarily on the most straightforward implementations of game technology. In light of the obstacles faced by many teachers today, including government-defined educational standards (Simpson and Clem, "Video Games"; Charsky and Mims 42), limited time, money, and technological support (Charsky and Mims 39; Van Eck 25-26; Tüzün 471) and organizational skepticism of game-based teaching (Shultz Colby and Colby 302; Charsky and Mims 39), such strategies are quite logical. However, other approaches are possible and may prove more appropriate and effective in certain situations.

In some ways, educators' hands are tied unless or until somebody outside the system designs a good gaming structure that would be adaptable to many different kinds of classrooms, all without making extra work for the instructors. But, in the meantime, there are steps toward that perfect gaming mechanism that can be taken, partly by piggy-backing on technology that school systems will invest in, such as the course management system Canvas.

I am in the process of gamifying my English 2010 classes. These are the intermediate writing classes all students must take. While my classes are face-to-face, or in the current Covid-19 climate, remote synchronous (live through Zoom), I have the syllabus, assignments, and most other information online through Canvas, our university's course management system. I've been working with a team from SUU to use what Canvas already has available and add gaming elements¹. The student/player will start in the proverbial tavern and have

¹ The rest of my team at Southern Utah University: Jill Mallek (Learning Management System Administrator); Kyle Dillon (Instructional Design Specialist); Andrew Mitchell (Illustration/Animation Production Specialist); and Jacob Klausmeier, Bryce Mecham, and Nikki Wood (Canvas Student Workers).

to make their first choice in order to start the adventure:

You enter the local tavern, The Boozy Bard, late at night. It is hazy with candlelight. You sit at the well-worn walnut bar, nursing a house ale, watching the different characters who make up the scene before you. You've been itching for an adventure, but you must choose what you do next carefully. There is a man cloaked in the corner who is also people-watching tonight; you wonder if he, like you, is looking for others to join him on a quest. On the other hand, the tavern owner, Rosie, seems to know every person who comes in; surely, she could tell you the right person for you to meet. Who should you talk to? [Man or Rosie]

As they complete modules in Canvas, they will have more choices. Canvas already has the module structure integrated and is an easy way to separate the content of the class into levels for both the adventure and the assignments.

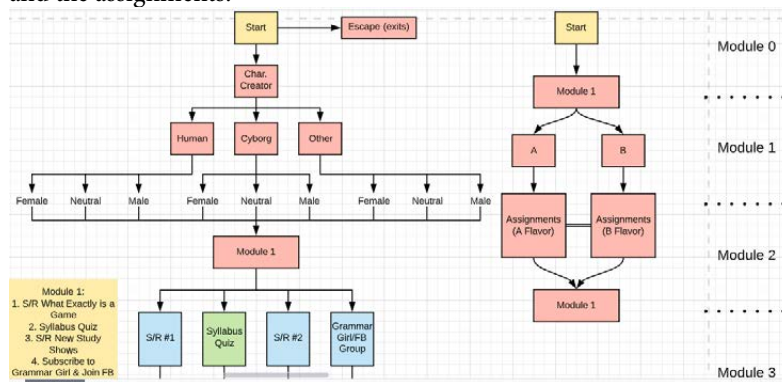
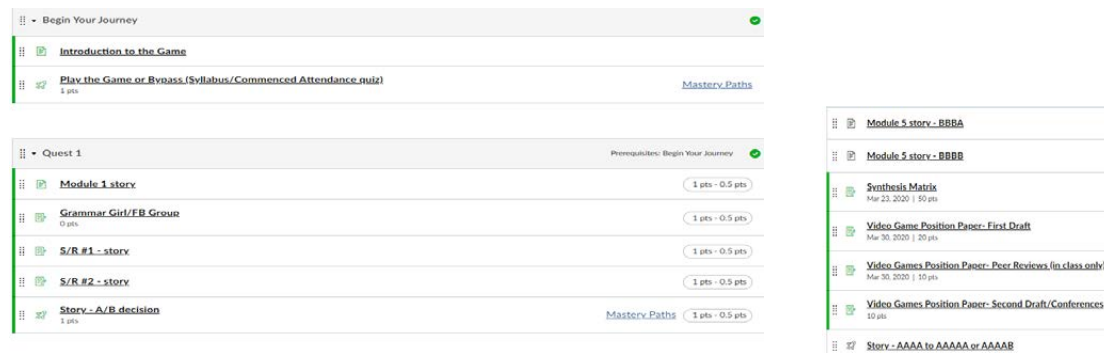


Fig 1. Concept of Canvas Integration



Figs 2-3. Screenshots of a few of the Canvas modules for structure reference, mixing gaming elements and writing assignments.

As students complete each “level” or module, they will make more choices about the adventure their character is going on. Some of the choices will include choosing to talk to the barkeep or the shadowy figure in the corner, choosing between two doors to open, picking up a lock pick or a hammer, grabbing a treasure or a spell book.

The result will be that they will need to complete assignments in a module in order to unlock the next part of the story. While initially, this will be the result of a simple decision tree, eventually, we will add side quests that add not only more to the story but will also give students more practice on

skills that they struggle with the most, skills like MLA formatting and grammar that we can only go over briefly during the actual class time but are things that they need to practice repeatedly to master.

The following images show the initial rough story layout for the modules..



Fig 4. Storyline Decision Tree.

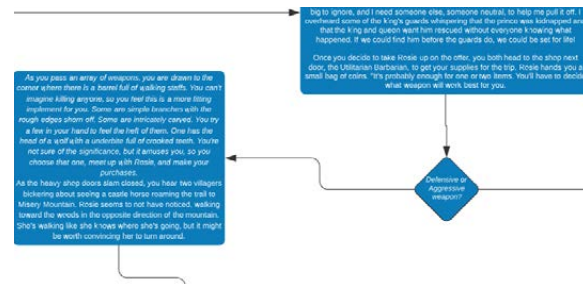


Fig 5. Detail of Storyline Decision Tree

Over time, and depending on the ability to integrate complex algorithms, I would like to see some game choices be dependent on the grade of certain assignments, so in order to get the best weapon, they'd have to get a 90% minimum on an assignment; this would give an added incentive to double-check the instructions and to match their work to the grading rubric to make sure they have done what it takes in order to receive the grade and the weapon desired. While they can, in theory, do these types of things with their assignments now, many lack the motivation to do so in a class that they traditionally are intimidated by and therefore often dislike. In an ideal future, classes could be plugged into a fully immersive world, a small-scale massively multiplayer online game where part of the adventure is to turn in quest work (assignments from the class) to an in-game professor character in order to help solve in-game issues. Perhaps the avatars can go to an inn and meet up with tavern keeper, who has a task for them to perform. Once they perform the task out in this virtual world, they must come back and report to the inn keeper, who in reality is the professor who can gather intel by way of a virtual drop box for their assignments. The possibilities are only limited by the fact that right now, professors work within the confines of their own disciplines, which rarely includes game design or the ability to program. My team and I at SUU are attempting to change that possibility in order for students to learn more and learn better based on their needs and abilities that tie into gaming mechanics and culture.

Game studies now is what film studies was in the 1970's, just starting to come into its own and gain acceptance in the academic community. As game studies continues to be taken more seriously as a discipline and in relation to other academic studies, I believe more professors will apply gaming principles to their classes. In the words of Jane McGonigal, "We can no longer afford to view games as separate from our real lives and real work. It is not only a waste of the potential of games to do real good- it is simply untrue" (354).

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Joy Sterrantino is an English professor at Southern Utah University, where she teaches a Writing About Video Games composition course; she also teaches composition classes about Big Brother, conspiracy theories, art, and science fiction, as well as teaching Science Fiction literature and Shakespeare classes. Her interests in video games include the prominence of the dystopian genre, the creation of fictional cultures, and game structure as a means of motivation in higher education. She is currently working with a team to gamify her composition class through the Canvas education management system.

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Call for Papers – Special Issue

Beyond Charlottesville: Cultural Wars, White Nationalism, and the Peril of American Democracy

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Due January 15, 2022

August 11–12, 2022 marks the fifth anniversary of the “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville, Virginia. In 2017, White supremacists carried out two days of violence, culminating in the death of Charlottesville native Heather Heyer (killed by neo-Nazi James Fields of Ohio). While the “Unite the Right” rally was grounded in its opposition to the removal of a Robert E. Lee monument, its subtext was White nationalism. This movement had gained momentum during the election of America’s first Black president Barack Obama (2009–2017) and was subsequently inflamed by President Donald Trump (2017–2021), whose rhetoric and policies aligned with White nationalist ideologies.

Since the rally, White nationalism in the United States has become normalized by Donald Trump, the media, and a right-wing political machine. Many of America’s internal conflicts simmer with an undercurrent of racism: immigration, protests during the U.S. national anthem, “cancel culture,” the politics surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, QAnon conspiracy theories, the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter Movement, Critical Race Theory, and “election integrity” or “The Big Lie.” On January 6, 2021, thousands of people stormed the U.S. Capitol with the intention of harming elected officials and overturning the 2020 presidential election. In this riot, like the rally in Charlottesville, a mostly White mob assembled in force, this time to enter the legislature. The shocking invasion led to violence, destruction of public property, injury, and death.

While there are other scholarly and journalistic publications examining the “Unite the Right” rally, this timely special issue looks at how the event, as a stepping stone, furthered the country’s problems. We are looking for original, in-depth articles/essays (a theoretical or practical discussion) reflecting on the 2017 “Unite the Right” rally *in relation to popular culture and pedagogy*. How did it help precipitate current cultural conflicts? In what way was the rally a social turning point for rising White nationalism in our country? How did it help lead further to an imperiled American democracy?

We encourage essays to be based on how the rally relates to cultural issues such as the following:

- Black Lives Matter versus Blue Lives Matter
- Protests during the U.S. national anthem
- Monuments: from Charlottesville to the age of #TakeItDown
- The COVID-19 Pandemic
- Critical Race Theory
- Gamergate
- 2020 Election / The Big Lie
- Jan. 6th attack on the U.S. Capitol
- “Cancel Culture”
- Alt-Right and the rise of hate groups

The writing guidelines for the essays are the following:

1. Use MLA or APA format.
2. 5,000–7,000 words (inclusive of abstract, endorse, and works cited)

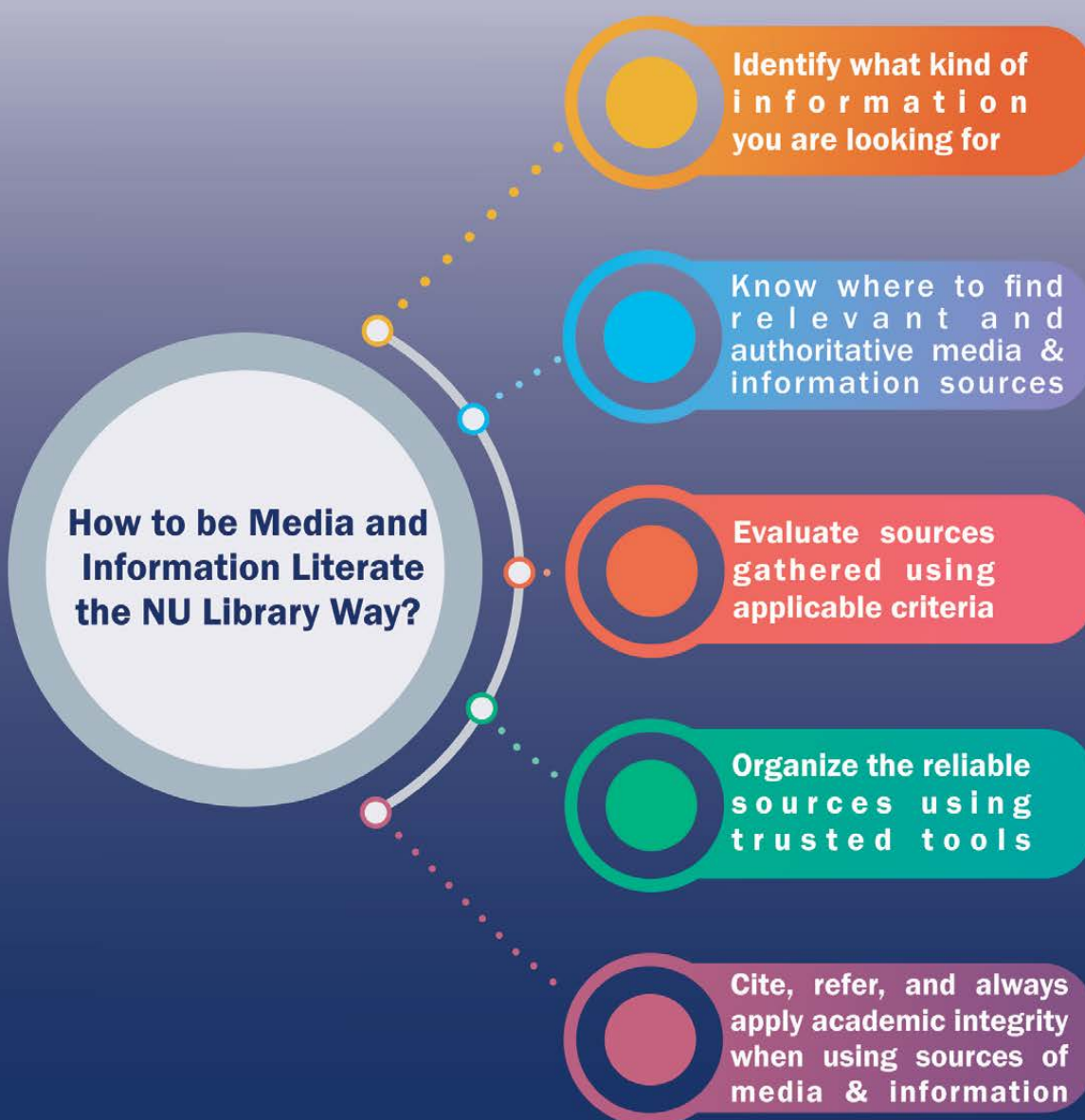
When submitting an essay, please confirm that your work is

- *not* previously published or simultaneously submitted to other journals or anthologies for publication;
- written in clear, U.S. English;
- without the use of jargon and language that is discriminatory or inflammatory in nature;
- conforming to the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 8th edition (2016), or the *APA Manual*, 6th edition (2010).

Essays are due on **January 15, 2022** and will undergo a double-blind peer review.



Media & Information Literacy





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