



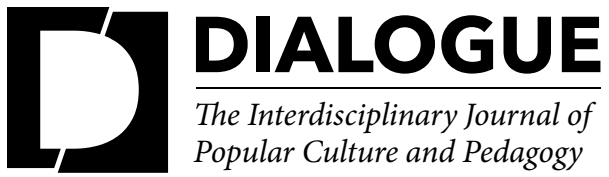
DIALOGUE

*The Interdisciplinary Journal of
Popular Culture and Pedagogy*



Provoking Awareness and Practical Applications in Popular Culture and Pedagogy: Syllabi, Games, and Teaching in Higher Education

Dialogue: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Popular Culture and Pedagogy
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DIALOGUE

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INTRODUCTION AND SCOPE

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

The Journal is interested in contributions offering theoretical, practical, pedagogical, and historical examinations of popular culture and pedagogy, including interdisciplinary discussions and those which examine the connections between American and international cultures. In addition to analyses provided by contributed articles, the Journal also encourages submissions for guest editions, interviews, and reviews of books, films, conferences, music, and technology.

For more information, please visit www.journaldialogue.org or email Dr. Anna CohenMiller, Editor in Chief, at editors@journaldialogue.org.



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Anna CohenMiller, PhD

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Anna CohenMiller is an innovative pedagogue and methodologist who addresses systemic issues of equity and inclusion in education. She has a long-standing interest in the intersection of popular culture and pedagogy, in particular, related to how young audiences learn informally from media representations. As an international specialist, Dr. CohenMiller has spent the past six years in Kazakhstan leading research and initiatives to facilitate success for all students (e.g., in online learning environments, for mothers in academia, for students with varied learning needs). She received her PhD in *Interdisciplinary Learning and Teaching* and MA in *Bicultural-Bilingual Studies* from the University of Texas at San Antonio. Since 2011, she has been involved with SWPACA in developing *Dialogue* and then as an Executive Team member. Dr. CohenMiller is one of the founding faculty of the Graduate School of Education at Nazarbayev University, the Co-Founding Director of The Consortium of Gender Scholars (www.gen-con.org), Founder of The Motherscholar Project (www.motherscholar.org), and founding member of the Higher Ed Learning Collective. Her contributions can regularly be seen in popular outlets such as InsideHigherEd, [Medium.com](https://www.medium.com), as well as in various international research and educational journals. Dr. CohenMiller's recent textbook (with Nettie Boivin) was recently published by Routledge, *Questions in Qualitative Social Justice Research in Multicultural Contexts* (2022).

Karina Vado, PhD

Managing Editor and Book Review Editor

Karina A. Vado is a fifth-year Ph.D. candidate in the Department of English at the University of Florida. Her research and teaching interests are in Literatures of the Americas, Critical Race Science and Technology Studies (especially the intersections of literature and science), and Science Fiction and Utopian Studies. Karina's scholarly writing appears or is forthcoming in *Race and Utopian Desire in American Literature and Society* (Palgrave) and *Human Contradictions in Octavia Butler's Work* (Palgrave). Her academic book reviews can be found in *Extrapolation* and *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*. Karina joined the Department of English at Penn State Abington in fall 2020 as a Diversity Pre-Doctoral Fellow.

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Miriam Sciala has been teaching Academic English internationally for over 25 years. She holds an MA in Geography from York University in Toronto and an MPhil in Second Language Studies from Stellenbosch University in South Africa. Born in Switzerland and raised in Zambia, she now carries a Canadian passport. She considers writing and editing her second career, having written and published numerous articles and short stories and has a first novel in progress.

Douglas CohenMiller

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Douglas CohenMiller is a graphic designer and founder of Umbrella Works design studio (www.umbrella-works.com), where he is the principal graphic designer and creative director. His practice focuses on long-term branding and identity for clients in the US and internationally. Since 2011, Doug has been involved with the SWPACA; first spearheading a rebranding effort and helping to launch *Dialogue: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Popular Culture and Pedagogy*. Alongside this work, he has been developing unique conference identities and material each year and producing and creative directing each issue of *Dialogue*. His other clients range from fields of academic institutions, non-profits organizations, as well as small businesses. Currently, Doug is living in Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan with his family.

Robert Gordyn, MPhil, MA

Copy Editor

Robert Gordyn has been an English Language Instructor since 1995, mostly teaching internationally in a variety of countries and regions of the world. Originally from and now based in Canada, he is a freelance editor and part-time English instructor. His academic background includes graduate degrees in Geography and Second Language Studies. Along with being an avid reader of philosophy and history, Robert has ongoing interests in communication, both in terms of the written word and in public speaking.

Arlyce Menzies, MFA**Copy Editor**

Arlyce Menzies was raised in the Rust Belt, educated in the Bluegrass and New England, and now teaches writing in the windy steppe of Kazakhstan. She got her MFA in Creative Writing, Poetry at Boston University, where she enjoyed studying and practicing translation from Russian to English, copyediting for Agni, and honing her writing craft. In addition to teaching at Nazarbayev University, Arlyce facilitates translation workshops through OLS@NU and is an Art Editor for Angime, Kazakhstan's first trilingual arts and literary magazine.

April Manabat, MLIS**Reference Editor**

April Manabat is an Expert Librarian at Nazarbayev University in Kazakhstan. She is currently the Subject Librarian for School of Sciences and Humanities and the coordinator for the Ask-A-Librarian Service of the NU Library. A Filipino licensed librarian, she finished her Masters of Library and Information Science at the University of the Philippines Diliman. She has more than a decade of experience in academic librarianship. Her research interests include academic librarianship, digital humanities, and information literacy.

Joseph Yap, MLIS**Reference Editor**

Joseph Yap is a registered librarian from the Philippines and is earning his Ph.D. at Eotvos Lorand University in Budapest, Hungary. He serves as a Project Team Member of the Nazarbayev University Integrity Initiative and is an Organizing Team Member of the Consortium of Gender Scholars. He is a faculty member teaching Library and Information Science courses at the University of Perpetual Help System Laguna. As part of his extension services, he acts as the Adviser of the Association of Special Libraries of the Philippines and Social Media Manager of the Special Libraries Association - Asian Chapter. His research works can be found here: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7852-1047>.

Yelizaveta Kamilova, MLIS**Reference Editor**

Yelizaveta Kamilova is a Masters of Library and Information Science and an Expert manager at Nazarbayev University Library in Kazakhstan. She is currently the Subject Librarian for Graduate School of Education and the coordinator for the Interlibrary Loan Document Delivery Service, also responsible for the Department Documentations as well. She has more than a decade of experience in academic librarianship. Her research interests include academic librarianship, library virtual services and information literacy.

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Provoking Awareness and Practical Applications in Popular Culture and Pedagogy: Syllabi, Games, and Teaching in Higher Education

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Provoking Awareness and Practical Applications in Popular Culture and Pedagogy: Syllabi, Games, and Teaching in Higher Education

Recognizing how we absorb ourselves with popular culture offers potential for learning more about ourselves and enhancing teaching and learning. Yet seeing our practices can require purposeful effort. Over time, scholars and advocates have promoted increasing our awareness of the popular culture we consume and what influences, ideas, and values are produced and reproduced. For example, to unpack gender in media, the Bechdel-Wallace Test is an exemplar of raising awareness of women's presence (or lack thereof) (Hooton, 2015). The test asks audiences to consider: if there are any women in the narrative, if the women have names, and if the women talk to each other about something other than a man. Through a simple analysis, viewers are prompted to engage in a simple critical reflection of the work.

A simple analysis of the presence of women in media echo organizational and governmental work through gender audits and gender mainstreaming. Such work aims to unpack how gender is represented and ways to embed considerations of gender from the onset of teaching, learning, research and other work. Looking into curriculum for instance, a gender audit can be a simple tool to review the authorship of assigned readings. How many are authored by a certain gender? Who is missing in the authorship? And what does the potential emphasis on one gender say about the production of knowledge? Often the result in assigned readings in curriculum showcase an emphasis on male thought and authorship, suggesting men own knowledge (CohenMiller & Lewis, 2019; Lewis & CohenMiller, 2022).

We are pleased to announce our fall issue, "Provoking Awareness and Practical Applications in Popular Culture and Pedagogy: Syllabi, Games, and Teaching in Higher Education" of *Dialogue: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Popular Culture and Pedagogy*. With a special double issue in February, this issue marks a unique fourth issue of the year. In the first article of this issue, Becca Craigin emphasizes the importance of syllabi and what they evoke and suggest to learners. Craigin describes how she works with students to engage them and lead to generation of ideas through studying the historical canon of feminist theory. She further notes how the prejudices of the past can be implicated in today's teaching and learning if not carefully unpacked and addressed. Ultimately, Craigin guides readers through the importance of syllabus development and the ways in which our choices are "building cultural theory today."

Framing a class with a syllabus offers an essential path towards teaching and learning. Likewise, understanding examples of classroom practice suggest insights for pedagogical practice. In our second article of the issue, Erik Stanley, David Sweeten, and Michelle Schmidt unpacks how games can be embedded within the formal classroom. Drawing from experiences of using one game, *Fiasco!*, they explain the utility of its application across disciplinary fields of English, anthropology and sociology.

Just as we can consider how gender is represented in popular culture and pedagogy, we can also work to increase our understanding of the intersectional nature of our lives. The ways we enter the world and the way others see us often intersect with our perceived ethnicity, region of world, socioeconomic status and class/

caste/tribe, gender identity and presentation. These topics reflect our cultural and historical context.

In the third article of this issue, Melinda Butler, Nadine Bravo, and Eva Arbor explain in their article, “It’s Not My Immediate Instinct”: Perceptions of Pre-service Teachers on the Integration of Popular Culture,” how sociocultural theory can help explain how our backgrounds influence our today. Specifically, the researchers examine preservice teachers’ consumption of popular culture and how their unique experiences with popular culture (or lack thereof) may color their openness to and/or hesitation over integrating popular culture texts into their curriculum. Butler et. al., in turn, observe five key themes that emerge across their interviews with pre-service teachers as related to questions of the incorporation of popular culture in the classroom: 1) Popular culture as social and sharing; 2) Popular culture as a way to hook kids; 3) Popular culture integration and engaging and relatable; 4) Popular culture as digital texts; and 5) Popular culture as unknown and unimportant. Through a robust exploration of these themes, Butler et. al. reveal the invaluable benefits of integrating popular culture in the classroom. Further, they offer suggestions on how to encourage the active and intentional use of popular culture texts on the part of teachers and how this incorporation can lead to a more generative and “permeable” curriculum.

In addition to the three robust articles in this issue, this issue also includes connections to a recent online publication of Tyler Sheldon’s Review of *The Missing Course: Everything They Never Taught You About College Teaching*, by David Gooblar. Sheldon emphasizes Gooblar’s points about the critical need for drawing in students through active learning especially in extracurricular learning.

Overall, the scholarship offered in volume 9, issue 4, *Provoking awareness and Practical Applications in Popular Culture and Pedagogy: Syllabi, Games, and Teaching in Higher Education*, speaks to “diversifying the narrative” (Craigin, this issue) about popular culture and pedagogy. Ultimately, we can work and learn from one another about consciously increasing our awareness and practices for enhancing research and teaching and learning.

We want to thank the incredible team of collaborators including the authors featured in the issue and willing peer-reviewers who made the scholarship possible, insightful Copy Editors (Arlyze Menzies, Miriam Sciala, and Robert Gordyn), Reference Editors (Joseph Yap, Yelizaveta Kamilova, and April Manabat) and Production Editor and Creative Director (Douglas CohenMiller). In reading the articles and Book Review in this issue, we hope you are engaged to consider and actively take steps to provoke new thinking and practice in teaching and learning in popular culture and pedagogy.

We look forward to hearing your thoughts on this issue and look forward to your submissions for future issues as we move into our 10th year in 2023!

Happy reading!

Anna CohenMiller
Editor in Chief

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MLA

- CohenMiller, Anna, and Karina Vado. "Syllabi, Games, and Teaching in Higher Education: Provoking Awareness and Practical Applications in Popular Culture and Pedagogy." *Dialogue: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Popular Culture and Pedagogy*, vol. 9, no. 4, 2022. <http://journaldialogue.org/issues/v9-issue-4/provoking-awareness-and-practical-applications-in-popular-culture-and-pedagogy-syllabi-games-and-teaching-in-higher-education/>



Tackling History in the Cultural Studies Seminar

Becca Cragin

Bowling Green State University

Bowling Green, Ohio, USA

bcragin@bgsu.edu

ABSTRACT

While cultural theory developed in past eras was often marred by the biases of its privileged authors, we are still often required to teach the canon, so that graduate students can recognize past intellectual trends to which current critiques of the canon respond. In this article, a “History of Feminist Theory” course is employed as an example of larger principles of foundations course design that can be used in any cultural studies seminar to productively address the tension between old and new schools of thought. It provides suggestions for structuring syllabi and discussions in ways that productively engage with earlier texts, yet without reinforcing their canonicity. The author suggests that viewing “classics” through a comparative and predominantly historical lens can allow teachers to address current cultural issues such as the #MeToo and Black Lives Matter movements via the use of older texts, constructively balancing the need to identify their oversights with the need to learn the history of a particular field. Students usually wish to analyze the popular culture of the present, sometimes resenting being obliged to take historical/foundational courses. However, these are courses we are often required to teach. The tension between obligations and interests can either derail a grad seminar or be harnessed constructively to help students critique the cultural studies canon *more effectively*.

Keywords: History, Foundations, Theory, Pedagogy, Canon, Classics

My first brush with cultural studies was via feminism from a coffee-stained, twenty-year-old copy of *Sisterhood is Powerful* (Morgan, 1970) I found at a garage sale and subsequently devoured over the summer break between high school and college. From that moment I was hooked, and despite my doctoral training in Women's Studies, I've continued to approach cultural theory as more of a dumpster-dive rather than an orderly perusal of book stacks: reading out of date and out of context literature both within and without the orthodoxies of the canon, shifting between the popular and the academic angle, always attempting to understand the merits of an abstract argument, and only then, its place in intellectual and cultural history. Setting analyses with wildly different tones, audiences, generations, and genres into dialogue with each other always seemed far more interesting to me than the standard recitation of theoretical taxonomies in a graduate educational environment (which may, after living long enough to have one's *own* heyday of activism and theorizing taught as history, seem much tidier than one can recall). Drawn as I am to the anti-orthodoxy impulses of a *Bad Feminist* (Gay, 2014), my tastes are probably too eclectic and contrarian to have me left in charge of an introductory course on the Foundations of Feminist Thought. Yet, I've managed to teach this graduate seminar at a large public university with a thriving School of Cultural and Critical Studies for many years.

Our two-course sequence (Foundations and Contemporary) is chronologically split, with the foundations course surveying the years 1780-1990. The course mandate is to prepare students for the contemporary theory course by exposing them to classic texts. My students hail from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds, ranging from doctoral students well-versed in feminist theory to those taking their first cultural studies course ever. A chronologically and taxonomically complete survey course can feel like an impossible mission, but the organizational and pedagogical strategies described below include suggestions for handling the tension between both recognizing and resisting past canonization. While theory developed in past eras was often marred by the bias of its privileged authors, we are still often required to teach the canon, so that graduate students can recognize past intellectual trends to which current critiques of the canon respond. This article uses a "History of Feminist Theory" course as an example of larger principles of foundations course design that can be used in any cultural studies seminar to engage productively with older texts.

PREMISE OF THE COURSE: BOTH/AND

Ann Snitow has argued that the central dynamic of feminism has been "oscillation" (1990, p. 9). She describes the history of feminist thought not in the traditional terms of chronological progress, but as a recurring struggle between different groups of feminists with often conflicting priorities, life experiences, and world views in each progressive era. Hence, we have oscillated between using the feminist identity as a rallying device and deconstructing it, and between prioritizing short-term strategies of survival and support in the world as it exists today and long-term work on changing cultural norms to create the world we wish to see – we oscillate in these ways, not only because we're positioned differently in relationship to power, and not only because we've lived in different cultures and eras where some strategies have been more effective than others, but also because we've been given an impossible task. Our response to any form of subordination will inevitably involve multiple logics and strategies because differences between groups are both elided (through the universalization of the dominant group) and exaggerated (through the justification of the unequal treatment of the subordinated).

Oscillation serves as both the conceptual premise and the organizational structure of my course. Because historical context is crucial to understanding theory, and because the mandate for the foundations course (at least at my university) is to cover a specific historical period, a chronological organization is required. On the surface, my syllabus might even look fairly canonical, as it covers the requisite first and second "waves" of feminist history. But an approach emphasizing oscillation is embedded within the model,

shifting the course into *a history of canonization itself*. This both/and approach (acknowledging the history of the canon while deconstructing it) reflects both the need to mentor graduate students with regards to the history of Women's Studies and to help create the means for its canon to be rewritten. Vivian May (2015) has analyzed the growing prominence of intersectionality within Women's Studies and the many ways in which its radical potential has been restricted through misappropriation of the concept. The heightened social power of more privileged feminists is reflected in their ability to define disciplinary norms, and therefore, "Attention to lack of fit, and what it might signify, is pivotal to intersectionality's capacity to change the role erasure plays in perpetuating dominance" (2015, p. 144). As May notes, the attempt to adopt a more intersectional perspective that is merely additive rather than revisional leaves the exclusions of the canon intact, as when early feminist history is framed through the gender-only lens of white feminists, with the contributions of women of color reserved for the contemporary period (p. 146). While my course does cover the time periods canonized as the first and second waves, I try to resist their further canonization through various means: assigning readings that analyze bias in the canon and the lack of fit with the experiences of poor women and women of color; using an intersectional approach to analyze all eras and groups, whether these groups have been socially dominant or subordinate; framing all forms of conceptualization as theory, regardless of aesthetics, genre, or medium, or whether it has been recognized as theory by the canon; covering feminist theorizing in all eras within the time frame under study, including those commonly ignored due to their having been perceived as periods of "abeyance" (Taylor & Rupp, 1987); and emphasizing the diversity of perspectives in each era, including differing feminist social identities, aesthetics and political strategies.

Diversifying the narrative in this way helps undermine the canon by demonstrating its foundation in social bias and highlighting the crucial contributions of feminists struggling for racial and economic justice in every era of the earlier period, even though these were often written out of the feminist canon because of the gender-dominant focus of its gatekeepers. The failure of many past feminisms to address forms of inequality beyond those related to sexism has been central to the distortions of the canon, and the fact that similar debates recur repeatedly within each feminism era can be partly explained by the intractability of privilege. But these debates also recur because privilege, while difficult to dismantle, is always changing. The difficulty of "engagement with social and cultural formations" (De Lauretis, 1990, p. 264) is that they continually adapt to the challenges mounted by activists, developing new rhetorical, often contradictory claims in every era: embracing, combining, and rejecting various essentialist and constructionist claims to justify different forms of oppression; it is this that makes the linearity of the canonical narrative most problematic.

If it were true that early feminism only focused on gender, or that it failed, wholly due to its own flaws, then it would make sense to dispense with the canon. But if we approach the question of what broadly counts as feminism, which seems necessary when studying different historical periods (Offen, 2010, p. 16), we find that the field of struggle was much richer than the narrow, gender-dominant feminism of the canon would suggest. In fact, the oscillation that Snitow traces involves wholly contradictory conceptualizations of the project of feminism within each era from those who focus on the ontological "Woman," to those who focus on the sociological "women" (and the diversity of subject positions and differing experiences within this category), to those who see no benefit to organizing such conceptualizations under the rubric of gender at all (1990, p. 33). If we approach this varied early work sympathetically, trying to understand how it has responded to the specific social and cultural formations of its era, we can better understand why different feminists conceptualized and strategized so differently. This is not to suspend judgment, however, but to render our evaluation of feminist history more effective. If feminist history has not progressed in a directly linear path, then the purpose of revisiting the canon cannot be merely to determine where its unintended gaps and forcible exclusions lie. More importantly, it can also be used to consider a variety of strategies through which feminism can simultaneously employ and deconstruct the subject positions culturally assigned to us,

perhaps learning how our own current responses are time- and culture-bound, and how to respond more flexibly to the inequities of our own current moment without harming some people for the advancement of others.

SCOPE OF THE COURSE: THEORY/THOUGHT

This approach is embedded in the organization of the course and the approaches used in class to confound our understanding of what feminism has meant in each era. We start the semester with Snitow's piece on oscillation (1990) and several other readings that provide a framework for the course that highlights the differing relationship of white women and women of color to patriarchal power (Hurtado, 1988; McIntosh, 1989) while theorizing about the conditions under which potential feminist alliances can occur (Jordan, 1985). These foreshadow our semester-long project of placing activists, theorists, poets, autobiographers and polemicists in dialogue, without presuming an automatic overlap or difference between social groups, and actively demonstrating (rather than merely stating) how marginalized viewpoints don't merely add new knowledge but generate reinterpretations of methods, theories, and knowledges embedded in the canon as well. I also start with these readings because of the accessibility of their language, the precision of their arguments, their varying degrees of objective and subjective voice, and the striking nature of their imagery. Hence, they provide a good introduction to the basics of feminist thought which, for many feminist classrooms, might not be deemed necessary. Given the introductory and cross-disciplinary nature of the foundations course, however, I find that basic concepts like privilege, standpoint, and intersectionality need to be explicitly taught rather than presumed.

Such readings also introduce a recurring theme of the course that is explored in the second week of class: the canonization of some forms of writing as theory – usually those requiring the most cultural and economic capital – and how the ephemerality of other forms means that the primary sources available to historians reproduce social inequality. It's one thing to simply state that early feminist writing was biased in this way, but it's far more compelling to demonstrate this by comparing differing accounts of well-known feminist political events from American vs. European upper-middle-class vs. working-class perspectives (Cott, 1990; Hewitt, 2010), or when analyzing a transcription of Sojourner Truth's "Ain't I a Woman?" speech (1851), to identify how less-privileged women's voices were filtered through the distorting literary conventions employed by elites. This second week raises key issues that will frame the course (and are revisited at the end), such as historiography and the very definition of feminism. For example, we read Karen Offen's "Was Mary Wollstonecraft a Feminist?" (2010) not to learn about Wollstonecraft per se but to raise the issue of how history is told, and how feminism is implicitly defined by the canon. Comparing Offen's fairly broad cross-cultural and cross-historical definition of feminism with that of Penny Weiss (2018, p. 3) allows us to debate the definition of feminism and whether such a definition should prioritize gender inequality over other forms of oppression, and if not, whether feminism is needed at all.

Given the wide historical scope of the course, the challenge lies in the need to provide students with enough historical and theoretical background to enable them to understand the weekly readings while keeping the workload manageable. I use some secondary sources (Tong, 2013) for a theoretical framework for the individual readings, and Giddings (1996) and Offen (2010) for historical background, but rely on lectures to provide most of the context, so that the bulk of students' reading is of primary sources. Finding primary materials from activists in the pre-internet era covered by the course can be challenging, especially for feminist groups outside of North America and Europe. The course is located in the nexus between an era so remote it has been well-colonized as "history" and the internet era, where the digitization of archives is becoming more widespread and more easily accessible. While anthologies do often include documents from the suffrage/abolitionist era and from the 1960s and 1970s, what is reprinted often reproduces the exclusions

of those political periods, and what is available in the period in-between these so-called “waves” is often far more limited. Two excellent exceptions to this pattern are *Writing Red* (Nekola & Rabinowitz, 1993), which collects a variety of genres of socialist fiction and non-fiction writing from the 1930s and 1940s in the United States, and *Feminist Manifestos: A Global Documentary Reader* (Weiss, 2018), which includes manifestos of feminist movements around the world from the 1600s to the present. Both collections are unusual in the breadth and variety of primary materials provided, and the historical contextualization of sources.

Contextualization is critical to approaching the sources productively, as students have a tendency to react to older theory solely from their own current cultural moment, for example in their criticism of Wollstonecraft’s pre-birth control framing of women as mothers (1792), or their frustration at the failure of writers to acknowledge transgender issues centuries before the modern concept emerged. Hence, framing the course around the concept of oscillation allows us to analyze feminist theorizing as a strategy that responds to the rhetorical framing and political needs of its era, which can differ substantially over time and across feminist communities. This is where an historical focus is considerably more helpful than a taxonomical approach, not only because many theorists don’t fall neatly into categories, but also because the canonical periodization of feminist schools of thought is often misaligned with the scholarly and activist work of women of color. It’s hard to imagine two feminist writers more dissimilar than Beauvoir (1953) and Friedan (1963), yet their most popular works were written within a decade of each other. Placing these in dialogue with each other reveals the aesthetic and ideological differences that help explain why Friedan’s work was popularized and embraced while Beauvoir’s wasn’t. Placing them in dialogue with the civil rights movement surrounding them (I use Houck and Dixon (2009) for primary sources and McGuire (2010) for secondary analysis) allows the activism of that period to illuminate gaps in canonical thinking, as we explore both the gender politics and historiography of the civil rights movement and the racialized framing of Beauvoir’s and Friedan’s analyses of gender. Furthermore, even after identifying gaps, we often explore the reasons why theorists framed their analyses the way they did, and whether their approaches, however flawed, could be useful today.

Despite the distance history creates, my students are easily able to make these connections. As they read Uma Narayan’s (1993) personal history interwoven with the rhetorical struggle over the meaning of a transnational feminism (1993), they perceive a thread of continuity with Roxanne Gay’s disidentificatory play with the trope of the bad feminist (2014). They are struck by how strongly Emma Goldman’s (1973) commentary on the challenges and joys of feminism (1917) resonates with debates over feminist generations and the navigation of heterosexual relationships today. They are moved by June Jordan’s lyrical demonstration of how narration of personal experience can build alliances (1985). They passionately debate the reproductive technofuturism of *The Dialectic of Sex* (Firestone, 1970) and delight in framing the audacity, wit, and snark of *The SCUM Manifesto* (Solani, 1967) in terms of the #MeToo movement. They compare the blistering, brilliant arguments of Wells-Barnett’s anti-lynching campaign (1900) to Black Lives Matter activism against police brutality today. Thus, I believe my strategy of immersing students in these earlier historical moments and presenting theory as a socially- and individually- situated response is what allows them to make such passionate connections with their own concerns.

THEORY AS AESTHETICS/DYNAMICS

Jumping back and forth across time requires a lot of preparation and context, but it does generate lively engagement with what might otherwise feel like dry, disembodied texts. I encourage my students to approach theory not as disembodied thoughts on the page but as the ideas of socially involved people, and as early attempts to articulate, often before the terminology was even formed, many of the same social problems we struggle against today. Traditional academic approaches to theory can be nearly biblical, at least toward some

theorists, citing Foucault (1978) chapter and verse, as if it were an essential truth rather than (as I describe it to my students) “just the thoughts of some guy.” Personalizing and demystifying theory helps make it less intimidating, and reminds us that many of the early feminist writers we study were writing alone, without the support of activist communities in some cases, or flourishing feminist academic communities in others. Much of what we read, especially from the 1960s and 1970s, was written at a time when people with a variety of credentials and writing styles were trying their hand at generating High Theory for a general audience, which was marketed as paperback bestsellers. This lends itself to discussions of each era’s aesthetic, cultural, and political norms that have generated theory that looks and feels quite different from that of other eras.

Schools of thought are often retrospectively described as “winning” or “losing” based on their merits, with interpersonal and intergroup dynamics also playing a significant role in how, when, and why feminist movements have either flourished or self-destructed (Boxer 2010; Echols 1989), both historically and today. They also impact the aesthetic forms through which politics are expressed. From the personalization of utopian politics in new social movements to the structuralism and violent rhetoric of Marxism, feminism has often been influenced by the flavor of its political moment, and the struggle for acceptance within and against other (often male-dominated) leftist movements. These aesthetic influences might seem trivial, but I would argue that they strongly shape the meaning we take from feminist arguments. For example, the sex wars were often framed by the “anti-sex” side as an intergroup struggle: they accused “pro-sex feminists” of shaping their arguments to win the approval of men, and represented themselves as the brave souls who were willing to speak the truth, regardless of the culture’s response to them.

But when we compare the “pro-sex” and “anti-sex” claims of the period in formalist rather than ideological terms, my students notice the enormous significance of the authors’ choices to frame their discussions in totalizing, abstract voices vs. concrete, personal ones. Comparing the vulnerability that Hollibaugh and Moraga (1981) risk by sharing a *conversation* about what they’re rolling around in bed with to Dworkin’s (1987) transmutation of her own experience (the sex I’m having doesn’t feel good; it feels like rape) into a universal dictum, it’s easy to see how one adds to our understanding while the other obscures it. This viscerally demonstrates how aesthetics and politics are inextricable. Despite the flaws in its logic, Dworkin’s piece is not irredeemably bad: it is an early call for a phenomenology of sex, before it was even termed as such. But the author’s rhetorical choices had a significant impact on the kinds of activism its theorizing inspired. By comparing two contrasting writing styles on the same subject in the same era, we’re able to tease out which of their components are productive or counterproductive to feminist progress. It’s a shift from asking are these good or bad, correct or incorrect, to *under what conditions* is feminist theorizing helpful, *and to whom*?

COURSE VS. CURRICULUM: PAST/PRESENT

Hence, I would argue for the continuing importance of spending some time studying the canon of older texts. Though they are rife with errors of omission and commission, approaching them with an empathetic eye — not to *excuse* their exclusions, silences, and cruelties but to better understand them — trains students to approach contemporary theory with an equally nuanced perspective. My students seem to have been primed from past coursework to merely “call out” early work and stop analyzing there, but if the goal is to understand and not merely to judge, it becomes easier to admit that while contemporary feminist thought has certainly learned from past mistakes, it has not been able to resolve many of the tensions between the differing feminist theories and activism that Snitow outlines. For example, once can easily identify moments in past eras when some feminist groups attacked others as a means of gaining acceptance within male-dominated institutions (as in Boxer’s 2010 study of the role of intra-group dynamics on socialist feminists’ attacks on liberal feminism), similar anxieties over acceptance within the academy may have been one of the motivating

forces behind the rise of post-structuralism and its ritualistic attacks on “essentialist” feminism in the early 1990s (Gallop, 1991).

Similarly, the prejudices of the past are often conflated with the essentialism present in early feminism pre-“theory” (i.e., the period covered in a foundations course), yet many of the same prejudices were operating in the age of High Theory as post-structuralism entered academic feminism, given the lack of attribution that feminists of color received for their contributions to contemporary feminist thought (King, 1994). Despite their deficiencies, the classics of the feminist canon have their uses, and can be mined in order to engender an understanding of challenges feminists continue to face today. Very often, the students coming into my classroom are already aware of the *what* — that resistance to the recognition of privilege impedes feminist progress, for example — but seeing the *why* and the *how*, closely tracing that process as we place feminist theories in dialogue (across subject positions, locations, and generations) generates a productive space for students to discuss the difficulties of recognizing our own forms of privilege, find effective ways to challenge those of others, and sustain our networks of support when dialogue does not result in enriched alliances.

I have argued that revisiting the canon can be a helpful tool for today, but it is not the only tool, or even the most important one for *any individual course*. But — at the graduate curricular level — allowing students the time to study the foundational texts is still necessary in order to address the original academic understanding of theory, precisely because it is what has been canonized. In that sense the canon is foundational, in that it is what came before and was once understood to be central. One course in a graduate curriculum can serve this role, especially if canon-formation is approached critically and with the goal of preparing students to move beyond it. But because this canonized understanding should not be the foundation of any cultural studies *program* as a whole, it might better be named “History of Theory,” as in some programs. This would more accurately reflect the professional need to document the history of the field while avoiding the sense of endorsement that “Foundations” implies. Rather than avoiding the canon, this approach helps students learn how to critique the older texts more accurately and productively, using critique not as an end but a beginning — a springboard to deeper understanding. Of course, students bring different types of knowledge to the classroom, and therefore have different needs in relation to the canon. For privileged students, ceasing to call out earlier prejudices could serve as a form of resistance to interrogating their own privilege, and so an historically-, aesthetically-, and sociologically contextualized exploration of past theorizing could encourage them to consider the role privilege plays in their relationship to current cultural studies. At the same time, even those who are less socially privileged can still benefit from a course on the canon if it has been framed in a way that develops familiarity with and ability to critique it in the field.

Creating a syllabus is its own form of canon-building, an act of complicity I engage in every year. My course is designed to construct a dialogue across the semester that foregrounds questions of canonization, draws on histories of academic and activist analyses that explore the impact of intragroup dynamics and social privilege on theory, and openly discusses the thought process behind my syllabus design, as well as my own ambiguity about the kind of balancing act a foundational course requires. In addition to the standard learning outcomes, my unofficial goals for the course include awakening students’ curiosity about older texts, past activism, and the impact of non-academic voices on academic thought, as well as modeling a scholarly method of studying theory that situates it within the personal, political, and intellectual contexts and histories in which it has been shaped. I believe these methodological and affective shifts help students understand contemporary theory more deeply, giving them a frame of reference for critiques of the canon and insights into the production of cultural theory *today*.

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AUTHOR BIO

Becca Cragin is an Associate Professor of Popular Culture at Bowling Green State University in Ohio. She received her Ph.D. in Women's Studies from Emory University in 2002 and her B.A. in Sociology/Anthropology from Swarthmore College in 1992. Her research and teaching interests include gender and sexuality in television and film, in comedy and crime genres.

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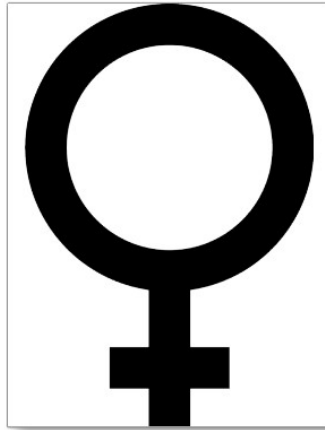
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APPENDIX



FOUNDATIONS OF FEMINIST THEORY

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This online course will explore the historical origins of contemporary U.S. feminist thought, which has been shaped by a variety of cultural forces around the world. We'll use this historical perspective to understand how the development of theory is affected by the political and intellectual work preceding it and contemporaneously surrounding it. Because of the diversity of women's experiences, feminists often disagree in their analyses of and tactics for countering inequality. A central question of the course, therefore, is whether feminists worldwide can or should have a unified women's movement across national and cultural borders.

A background in feminist theory is not required for this course, but those with one should still find the seminar helpful.

READINGS

Given the historical nature of the course, we're using older books alongside newer ones. All are available at the bookstore, can be purchased online, and are on reserve at the library for students local to the area.

REQUIRED BOOKS

- Nicholson, Linda, ed. *The Second Wave: A Reader in Feminist Theory*. New York: Routledge, 1997.
- Tong, Rosemarie. *Feminist Thought: A More Comprehensive Introduction*. 3rd, 4th or 5th ed. Boulder, CO: Westview, 2009/2013/2019.
- Weiss, Penny, ed. *Feminist Manifestos: A Global Documentary Reader*. New York: New York University, 2018.

OPTIONAL BOOKS

- *The following are all excellent resources, and you might want to purchase some of them if you plan to pursue further study in their respective fields. However, most of them are expensive (around \$100.00), and one is out of print. Therefore, we'll only be reading several articles from each, which will be available on Canvas.*
- Bhavnani, Kum-Kum, ed. *Feminism and 'Race'*. New York: Oxford University, 2001.
- Giddings, Paula. *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America*. 1st or 2nd ed. New York: William Morrow, 1996. [NOTE: BOTH EDITIONS HAVE THE SAME PAGINATION]
- Hirsch, Marianne, and Evelyn Fox Keller, eds. *Conflicts in Feminism*. New York: Routledge, 1990. [NOTE: OUT OF PRINT]
- Offen, Karen, ed. *Globalizing Feminisms, 1789-1945*. New York: Routledge, 2010.

ONLINE ARTICLES:

All other readings (see the "Reading List" section below) can be accessed through Canvas.

ASSIGNMENTS

60 PTS *Discussion participation:* regular, substantive contributions to our 15 discussions: Discussion starters will be posted by 9 a.m. on Monday each week. Your final response *must be posted under the "Final Thoughts" thread* (if one hasn't been started yet, please start it.) Begin with the title "Final Thoughts," and include your impressions of the most important ideas expressed, common patterns you noticed, remaining questions, etc.

15 PTS *Discussion starters:* You'll sign up for 2 days in the "Oscillations" module, and for each, you'll upload a discussion starter by 9 a.m. the Monday before our Wednesday discussion. The report is a mini-essay (750-1500 words) that describes and then analyses one of the manifestos in the Weiss anthology from that week's era, connecting it to assigned readings and including several questions for the class. Your third discussion starter will be based in the final section of Weiss (21st century) and will be posted for the "Integrating Global and U.S. Feminisms?" discussion at the end of the semester.

25 PTS

25 PTS *Proposal and essay:* To prepare for the essay, you'll submit a 500-750 word proposal with an annotated bibliography (3-5 scholarly sources). This is an informal document that specifies your plans for the essay. For the essay (20 pages, double-spaced), you'll apply the debates framed in this course to one non-U.S. group that works directly on the empowerment of women, or strives for their empowerment indirectly through its work on other issues. The group doesn't have to explicitly define itself as feminist, womanist, empowering women, etc.

CLASS SCHEDULE

INTRODUCTIONS

Introduction to Feminism

PRIMARY	Jordan, "Report from the Bahamas"
PRIMARY	McIntosh, "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack"
PRIMARY	Hurtado, "Relating to Privilege: Seduction and Rejection"
PRIMARY	Snitow, "A Gender Diary"
DISCUSSION 1	INTERSECTIONS AND OSCILLATIONS

Early Feminism and Internationalism

SECONDARY	Tong, “Liberal Feminism”
PRIMARY	Wollstonecraft, excerpts from <i>A Vindication of the Rights of Women</i> (1792)
SECONDARY	Offen, “Was Mary Wollstonecraft a Feminist?”
SECONDARY	Weiss, “Introduction”
SECONDARY	Hewitt, “Re-Rooting American Women’s Activism”
SECONDARY	Choose one from Offen, <i>Globalizing Feminisms</i> to report on:
	Edwards (<i>China</i>) Molony (<i>Japan</i>)
	Fleischmann (<i>Middle East</i>) Ruthchild (<i>Russia</i>)
	Grimshaw (<i>Aus/Hawaii/NZ</i>)
DISCUSSION 2	REVOLUTION AND COLONIZATION

OSCILLATIONS

Early Feminism: Gender Inequality and Racial Inequality

SECONDARY	Giddings, <i>When and Where I Enter</i> [119-127]
PRIMARY	Truth, "Ain't I a Woman?" (1851); "When Woman Gets Her Rights" (1867)
PRIMARY	Terrell, "The Progress of Colored Women" (1898)
PRIMARY	Cooper, "The Status of Woman in America" (1892)
PRIMARY	Wells-Barnett, "Lynch Law in America" (1900)
DISCUSSION 3	STRATEGY, TACTICS, AND PRIVILEGE

Socialist Feminism (1910s/1920s)

- SECONDARY Tong, "Marxist and Socialist Feminism"
 PRIMARY Trent, "Breed, Women, Breed" (1929); "Lady in a Limousine" (1929)
 PRIMARY Schreiner, "Sex Parasitism" (1911)
 PRIMARY Goldman, "Traffic in Women" (1910); "Tragedy of Woman's Emancipation" (1917)
 SECONDARY Cott, "Historical Perspectives: The ERA Conflict in the 1920s"
 SECONDARY Boxer, "Rethinking the Construction of 'Bourgeois Feminism'"
 DISCUSSION 4 SEEING RED, WRITING RED

Civil Rights and Feminism (1950/1960s)

- SECONDARY Giddings, *When and Where I Enter* [257-288]
 PRIMARY Houck and Dixon, *Women and the Civil Rights Movement* [154-168]
 SECONDARY McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street* [xv-xxii, 98-107, 156-173]
 DISCUSSION 5 POSTWAR GENERATIONS *optional: Eyes on the Prize, ep. 3*

Liberal Feminism and Existentialism (1950/1960s)

- SECONDARY Tong, "Liberal Feminism"
 PRIMARY Friedan, excerpt from *The Feminine Mystique* (1963)
 SECONDARY Giddings, *When and Where I Enter* [234-239]
 SECONDARY Tong, "Existentialist and Postmodern Feminism"
 PRIMARY Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (1953): Introduction and Ch. 12 excerpt
 DISCUSSION 6 THE PHILOSOPHER AND THE JOURNALIST *optional: Lorraine Hansberry on Beauvoir*

The Transition to Radicalism (1960s/1970s)

- SECONDARY Davis, *Moving the Mountain* [70-77]
 SECONDARY Hartman, "The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism"
 PRIMARY Morgan, "Goodbye to All That" (1970)
 PRIMARY Firestone, "The Dialectic of Sex" (1970)
 PRIMARY Rubin, "The Traffic in Women" (1975)
 DISCUSSION 7 STRUCTURE AND ANGER

Radical Feminism (1960s/1970s)

- SECONDARY Tong, "Radical Feminism"
 SECONDARY Echols, *Daring to Be Bad* [139-15, 186-202]
 SECONDARY Davis, *Moving the Mountain* [87-89]
 PRIMARY Excerpts from *Sisterhood is Powerful* (read all):
 ▪ National Organization for Women, "NOW Bill of Rights" (1970)
 ▪ New York Radical Women, "Principles"
 ▪ Redstockings, "Redstockings Manifesto" (1970)
 ▪ Solanis, "Excerpts from The SCUM Manifesto" (1967)
 ▪ WITCH, "WITCH Documents" (1970)
 DISCUSSION 8 NEW SOCIAL MOVEMENTS *optional: She's Beautiful When She's Angry*

Lesbian Feminism (1970s/1980s)

- SECONDARY Echols, *Daring to Be Bad* [210-220]
PRIMARY Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" (1980)
PRIMARY Frye, "To Be and Be Seen" (1983)
PRIMARY Radicalesbians, "The Woman Identified Woman" (1970)
PRIMARY Excerpts from *For Lesbians Only: A Separatist Anthology* (*read all*):
 - Revolutionary Lesbians, "How to Stop Choking to Death or: Separatism" (1971)
 - Gutter Dyke Collective, "This is the Year to Stamp Out the Y Chromosome" (1973)
 - Marty/SEPS, "Popular Separatist-Baiting Quotes" (1983)PRIMARY Combahee River Collective, "A Black Feminist Statement" (1977)
DISCUSSION 9 LESBIANS, WOMYN, AND SEPARATISM

Proposal for final essay due

The Sex Wars (1970s/1980s)

- SECONDARY Echols, "The New Feminism of Yin and Yang" (1984)
PRIMARY Hollibaugh and Moraga, "What We're Rollin Around in Bed With" (1981)
PRIMARY Dworkin and MacKinnon, "Questions and Answers" (1988)
PRIMARY Dworkin, *Intercourse* (1987)
PRIMARY Rubin, "Thinking Sex" (1984)
DISCUSSION 10 CONFLICTS IN ACTIVISM AND ANALYSIS

Post-Structuralism/Postmodernism (1970s/1980s)

- SECONDARY Tong, "Postmodern Feminism"
PRIMARY Cixous "Laugh of the Medusa" (1975)
PRIMARY Wittig, "One is Not Born a Woman" (1981)
PRIMARY Butler, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination" (1989)
PRIMARY Scott, "Deconstructing Equality vs. Difference"
DISCUSSION 11 AROUND 1981

The Women of Color Critique (1980s)

- SECONDARY Tong, "Women of Color Feminisms"
SECONDARY Alarcon, "The Theoretical Subject(s) of Bridge"
PRIMARY Anzaldua, "La Conciencia de la Mestiza" (1987)
PRIMARY Excerpts from *This Bridge Called My Back* (1981/1983) (*read all*):
 - Anzaldua, "La Prieta" (1981)
 - Carrillo, "And When You Leave, Take Your Pictures With You" (1981)
 - Chrystos, "I Don't Understand Those Who Have Turned Away From Me" (1981)PRIMARY Lorde, "The Uses of Anger" (1981)
DISCUSSION 12 BRIDGES, BORDERS, AND BETRAYALS

Postcolonialism (1980s/1990s)

- SECONDARY Tong, "Global, Postcolonial, Transnational Feminisms"
PRIMARY Narayan, "Contesting Cultures" (1993)
PRIMARY Ong, "Colonialism and Modernity" (1988)
PRIMARY Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988)
PRIMARY Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes" (1988)
DISCUSSION 13 THEORY IN ITS FEMINIST TRAVELS

CONCLUSIONS

Integrating Global and U.S. Feminisms? Case Studies

PRIMARY Beijing 1995 links re: UN's Fourth World Conference on Women (1995)

DISCUSSION 14 UNITY AND DIFFERENCE; YOUR ESSAY RESEARCH

Final discussion starter due: choose one from the final section of Weiss (21st century)

Bad Feminism?

PRIMARY Contemporary Feminisms, Contemporary Divides links

PRIMARY Gay, Roxanne, *Bad Feminist* (2014)

DISCUSSION 15 WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Final essay due

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Embracing the *Fiasco!*: Roleplaying Games, Pedagogy and Student Success

Erik Stanley

Eastern New Mexico University
Portales, New Mexico, USA
Erik.Stanley@enmu.edu

Michelle Schmidt

Eastern New Mexico University
Portales, New Mexico, USA
Michelle.Schmidt1@enmu.edu

David Sweeten

Eastern New Mexico University
Portales, New Mexico, USA
David.Sweeten@enmu.edu

ABSTRACT

This article explores the relationship between games and pedagogy through the example of the roleplaying game *Fiasco!*. *Fiasco!* is a part of a growing genre of collaborative roleplaying games (RPGs) that have important applications in the university classroom. *Fiasco!* is an innovative game system that upends the traditional model of Game Master-led RPGs to create a collaborative environment for players to create their own stories. This paper explores how the unique model embedded within *Fiasco!* can be employed as a pedagogical tool for active student-led learning.

To showcase the pedagogical innovations of a game like *Fiasco!*, we present classroom applications in English, Anthropology, and Sociology. Our experiences teaching with *Fiasco!* show how quickly and intuitively the game can be integrated into curricula with significant benefits for student engagement and learning. Roleplaying games that emphasize player agency, like *Fiasco!*, offer adaptive and innovative strategies for student-led learning in an interdisciplinary setting. Much as the structure of *Fiasco!* drives player engagement by making each player an equal participant in the generation of narrative content, using *Fiasco!* in the classroom allows each student an equal stake in developing course material. Beyond individual case studies, this article offers pedagogical inspiration for using *Fiasco!* in a variety of classroom settings that offer the possibility of an adaptive and interdisciplinary approach to student engagement.

Keywords: Active Learning, Gamification, Student Centered Education, Teaching Strategies, Interdisciplinary, Roleplaying Games, Flipped Classroom Introduction

This paper explores the unique benefits of *Fiasco!* (Morningstar, 2009), a player-centered roleplaying game, as a pedagogical tool for active learning in the classroom. In recent years, the introduction of gaming elements to the classroom has been shown to foster student engagement, problem-solving, collaboration, and communication.¹ Employing roleplaying games as a teaching strategy encourages diverse voices to be heard in the classroom and allows for alternate modalities of learning that help students apply and have ownership over course concepts beyond the textbook and in their own lives.

Fiasco! is a lightweight and adaptable roleplaying game that can easily be incorporated into classroom sessions of varying lengths. Throughout this paper, we argue that *Fiasco!* is an ideal tool for educational use because it upends the traditional model of roleplaying games. Following the model originally presented in *Dungeons and Dragons*, standard roleplaying game design relies on an asymmetrical play between a game master (GM) and players, with the game master running the world, presenting challenges, and adjudicating choices made by players. The standard classroom model functions in a similar way to the standard roleplaying game (RPG) model.² In the classroom, course content, and classroom environments are developed through instructor choices of materials and delivery, much like the GM plans the adventure for the RPG players. This format can create student expectations of passive learning and undermine the collaborative potential of both game and learning. The classroom applications of *Fiasco!* discussed in this paper present an alternate pedagogy that overcomes the limitations of hierarchy, responsibility, and agency shared by both the standard college classroom and the tabletop roleplaying game.

Unlike the standard RPG model, *Fiasco!* actively engages all players in constructing the game narrative. *Fiasco!* is a GM-less roleplaying system that maximizes the collaborative potential of RPGs by eliminating the differential roles of GM and player, instead positioning all players with equal agency in the construction of the game. All participants develop the plot and apply its lessons within the game itself. Rather than relying on the game master (GM) or instructor, *Fiasco!* is driven by student choices and interconnections. Without a game master to ultimately rule on rules and player choices, *Fiasco!* encourages players to work together to craft the narrative. This participant engagement makes *Fiasco!* an especially good course activity for instructors looking to implement innovative approaches to classroom pedagogy through active learning and student engagement.

By its very design, *Fiasco!* flips the gaming table and the classroom to place student players in control of the game and lesson narratives. Players use a themed playset to establish the tone and organize the game. Bully Pulpit Games creates playsets in a variety of genres. They can also be created by anyone for any setting, from the wild west, race to space, gilded age, steampunk, and zombie apocalypse – imagination is the only limit! Playsets lay out the setting, special rules or considerations, and a series of die-determined relationships, needs, locations, and objects that motivate the role play and plot points of the game. The rest of the story emerges from die rolls, role play, and player imaginations. *Fiasco!* decentralizes the gaming table by having each player equally participate in the construction and play of scenes throughout the game.

The application of *Fiasco!* as an active learning tool in the classroom allows students to learn from each other and their experiences rather than relying on the instructor's lectures to be the sole source of instructional content. The implicit relationality of *Fiasco!* gameplay is an integral benefit of the game's unique structure because it decenters learning as an individual activity and instead emphasizes collaboration between students as well as the instructor.

1 The flagship for this approach has been *Reacting to the Past*, an educational roleplaying system that incorporates active learning styles within gamified course materials. The main limitation of *RttP* is the large classroom footprint which requires restructuring of the overall syllabus.

2 Beginning with *Dungeons and Dragons* (D&D) in 1974 and increasing to hundreds of games in various genres, settings, and playstyles, tabletop roleplaying games have progressively risen in public profile and popularity in recent decades and are now a multibillion-dollar industry.

To showcase the innovative pedagogical implications of employing *Fiasco!* in the classroom, we describe three case studies of how *Fiasco!* was integrated into English, Anthropology, and Sociology classrooms at the university level. In each of these classroom applications, *Fiasco!* is employed as an active learning tool in which the game's structure of collaborative relationality reinforces the lessons conveyed by the course material.

GAMES & PEDAGOGY

Roleplaying games in particular have immense potential to engage students' imaginations in active learning and encourage students to see beyond preconceived biases and personal experiences (Coil et al., 2017). Roleplaying games provide a collaboratively creative environment where the participants in the game all tell the story together through the players' collective choices. In pedagogical applications, roleplaying games upend the standard classroom dynamic through active learning strategies, improve student engagement with the learning process, and contribute to the larger goal of student mastery of course material. With this collaborative base, roleplaying games offer educators an avenue for presenting students with an opportunity to embody different perspectives and take ownership of the classroom experience.

Theorists of educational pedagogy have proposed a variety of ways to move beyond the standard classroom model in which students are passive recipients of knowledge. Building from Vygotskii's (1978) constructivist model and work begun by King (1993) and Mazur (1997), the concept of student-centered learning or peer instruction has generated a great deal of pedagogical discussion. One of the most prominent of these pedagogical turns for active learning and student engagement is the concept of a "flipped classroom." A flipped classroom is usually defined by its flexibility in classroom and assignment structure that encourages students to engage with material through focused activities.³ These exercises encourage collaboration between students, their peers, and the instructor. Students become facilitators of classroom learning, which fosters better processing of information and ownership of the learning process. While most studies show that the flipped classroom improves student engagement and motivation, Jensen (2015) suggests that rather than flipped methods themselves, the touted performance benefits may result from active learning strategies.

The concept of student-centered learning considers the function of students as active participants in their own educational path, ones with the agency to develop their own procurement of educational benefits within a classroom setting. Roleplaying games engage students in active learning and circumvent many of the potential short-comings pedagogical scholars have identified with a fully flipped classroom model (see Akçayır, 2018; Awidi & Paynter, 2019; Blair et al., 2015; Stöhr et al., 2020).

The approaches of Baker (2000, p. 13-14) and other advocates of student-centered learning shift information normally provided via lecture to alternative delivery methods and relegate in-class time to active learning where students clarify, apply, or practice that material under instructor supervision. Lainema (2009) situates this active learning approach within constructivism, plotting two defining components: "(a) Learning is an active process of constructing rather than acquiring knowledge, and (b) instruction is a process of supporting that construction rather than communicating knowledge" (p. 49). Active learning is best conducted in a collaborative group and designates learners as the primary agents in constructing knowledge facilitated by the instructor rather than passive recipients of information passed on by the instructor (Michael, 2006). This approach emphasizes how classroom engagement with these pedagogical strategies allows students to participate in the course using methods that best fit their own learning styles, encouraging student agency and cooperative learning alongside the mastery of course material (Lage et al., 2000, p 38-41). Because of their collaborative and flexible dynamic, games are an important method through which educators can employ a

3 For more on the FLIP Learning Network pillars of Flexible environment, Learning culture, Intentional content, and Professional educator, see "Definition of Flipped Learning" and the subsections on each of these pillars at flippedlearning.org.

classroom model that emphasizes active learning through collaboration.

In particular, the roleplaying game *Fiasco!* offers an innovative pedagogical tool for employing active learning strategies in the classroom. In addition to being an award-winning game, *Fiasco!* has been used by educators across a variety of disciplines as a teaching tool to help students engage in collaborative and creative endeavors (Morningstar & Segedy, 2011). One of the most pedagogically generative features of *Fiasco!* is that rather than having individual winners and losers the team wins by collectively telling a compelling story. This creates an environment of cooperative learning in which students can collaborate rather than compete without feeling that their ideas are threatened if they lose the game. Authors such as Morningstar and Segedy (2011) have noted the educational benefits of using *Fiasco!* as a teaching tool such as helping students gain confidence and self-esteem by providing opportunities for public speaking, relational storytelling, and improving interpersonal dynamics (p 136-142). This emphasis on the group outcome and collective decision making over the success of the individual player makes *Fiasco!* an ideal tool for classroom use because it emphasizes the importance of student-led discovery within a cooperative learning environment. Within the structure of the game, students become active participants because the structure of the game demands it. We next turn to a discussion of how *Fiasco!* overcomes the intrinsic limitations of both classroom and RPG by increasing the collaborative potential of learning and play.

BACKGROUND: WHAT IS FIASCO!?

Fiasco! is a 2009 storytelling-based roleplaying game for 3-5 players that is “inspired by cinematic tales of small-time capers gone disastrously wrong” (Morningstar, 2009).⁴ Like other RPGs, in *Fiasco!* players take on the role of a fictional character within a shared world created through interactive storytelling. Rather than mediating player decisions with a Game Master (GM) who describes the world and adjudicates the rules, *Fiasco!* has no GM and puts players in the driver’s seat of narrative choices. Players collaboratively develop the major plot, setting, and character dynamics that shape the game.

The first step to playing *Fiasco!* is for the group to collectively choose a playset that provides the setting for the game. These playsets cover a wide range of genres that can be set in any time or place from medieval England to 1940s Los Angeles to spacefaring science fiction. In addition to published playsets, instructors and players can easily construct their own playsets in new genres to fit the respective needs of the classroom or meet players’ interests. An example of an instructor-created playset is included in appendix 1 of this manuscript.

The gameplay in *Fiasco!* takes place in a number of distinct phases that are shaped by a series of die rolls. In the “Setup Phase,” players use the numbers from rolled dice to generate possible relations, settings, objects, and needs tied between two players. The connections between players’ respective characters populate the game with shared motivations and circumstances that act as the driving force of the narrative.

⁴ *Fiasco!* is part of a fast-growing genre of independent roleplaying games (RPGs) and has won numerous industry awards for its innovative structure including an Indie RPG Award at 2010 GenCon, shortlisted for an Origins Award, and only the 4th RPG to win the Diana Jones Award for “excellence in gaming.”

Relationships

1 Academic

- ▣ Professor/ teaching assistant
- ▢ Lab partners
- ▤ Instructor/student
- ▥ Teammates
- ▦ Club members
- ▧ Rivals

2 Friends

- ▣ . . .for now
- ▢ . . . from childhood
- ▤ Since our shared ordeal
- ▥ Cool kid/nerd
- ▦ Sorority or fraternity
- ▧ “Cousins”

3 Community

- ▣ Supervisor/subordinate
- ▢ Journalists for the college newspaper
- ▤ Work study program
- ▥ Roommates
- ▦ University police/frequent offender
- ▧ Coworkers

4 Romance

- ▣ Old flame
- ▢ Unrequited love
- ▤ Regrettable hook-up
- ▥ Friends with benefits
- ▦ . . . is a distraction
- ▧ For the ages

5 Villains and Henchmen

- ▣ Supernatural entity/human avatar
- ▢ Mad scientist/test subject
- ▤ Mastermind/stooge
- ▥ Criminal genius/dirty campus police
- ▦ Unethical advisor/grad student
- ▧ Evil team captain/followers

6 Classic Duos

- ▣ Final girl/slasher
- ▢ Hysteric/skeptic
- ▤ Paranormal expert/haunted
- ▥ Harbinger of doom/protagonist in denial
- ▦ Old person/ignorant youth
- ▧ The hunter/monster

Figure 1 – Excerpt from the authors’ playset

Following the Setup, play begins with “Act One” in which each player stars in two scenes between their character and another. The star player distributes dice depending on the outcome of the scene. After everyone has had a chance to run two scenes, the next phase of the game is the “Tilt,” in which two unforeseen developments upset the narrative arc established in Act One. The Tilt portion of the game is designed to upend players’ plans and turn the plot on its head to create a true fiasco. Combined with the cooperative storytelling dynamic throughout the game, the chaos brought by the Tilt de-emphasizes competition between players to instead help them focus on collaboratively building a satisfying narrative.

After the Tilt, Act Two proceeds with each player starring in two scenes and keeping the outcome dice. The game concludes with “The Aftermath” which acts both as a conclusion and denouement for each of the characters in the scenario. During The Aftermath, each player rolls all the dice they have acquired and consults the aftermath table to learn their die-determined fate. Each narrates the (often disastrous) outcome of the scenario for their character. The game’s emphasis on relationality, collaboration, and creativity makes *Fiasco!* an effective and adaptable tool for active learning.

COURSE APPLICATIONS

The unique structure and flexibility of *Fiasco!* promotes innovative engagement with course material in a variety of disciplines. Our classroom experiences with *Fiasco!* highlight how this game promotes active learning and works well as a modular pedagogical tool within a flipped classroom model. For example, in the English classroom application, *Fiasco!*'s interactive process illustrates how story protagonists rely on connections with other characters. In anthropology, the analogous structure of *Fiasco!* with Campbell's "Hero's Journey" instructs students on the larger structure of myth as it shapes multiple central narrative figures through relationships. The relationship-building and roleplaying aspects of *Fiasco!* provide Sociology students with experiential learning opportunities for the application of concepts from classical theory. Each of these case studies shows how the relational gameplay of *Fiasco!* upends the traditional classroom dynamic to emphasize student collaboration and agency.

ENGLISH

In the English classroom, one co-author has utilized *Fiasco!* to facilitate instruction of creative writing, narratology, genre conventions, and cultural concepts just to name a few applications. In this case study, *Fiasco!* was employed as a classroom exercise in a freshman composition course focused on the cultural function of heroes. Since the "social turn" in composition studies, pedagogical theory has focused on synergistic relationships between cognitive and compositional development best summed up by Bizzell's (1982) seminal work: "students' thinking needs remediation as much as their writing" (p. 213). To facilitate this development of key critical thinking and analysis skills, students read primary texts focused on heroes in different contexts – such as superheroes, Arthurian knights, and post-apocalyptic narratives – as part of the larger narrative of how heroes themselves reflect the values and issues of their respective cultures. While the class had previously engaged this material through guided discussion, students often focused more on restating what occurred in the text rather than reflecting on the ideas and tropes demonstrated therein.

The instructor employed *Fiasco!* as an in-class activity in a single class session to tackle these ideas from a different angle. Based on the time constraints of the course, only the Setup phase of *Fiasco!* was employed for this exercise, resulting in ten minutes of setting up and providing instructions for the exercise, forty-five minutes for conducting the Setup phase, and the final twenty minutes of class time reserved for groups discussing their setups and guided discussion. The class was divided into groups of three to four students and classroom furniture was rearranged to enable students to face each other in their groups. The instructor introduced the activity to the class and provided *Fiasco!* playsets in a number of genres highlighting variant heroes – including westerns, comic book superheroes, space-faring science fiction, detective noir, and crime narratives – for student groups to choose from. Groups then conducted the Setup stage of the game by rolling dice and choosing defining Relationships, Needs, Objects, and Locations situated within the settings. The instructor floated between groups to help answer questions and guide students through the process. Once students completed the Setup stage, the instructor led a discussion walking through each group's choices followed by questions on how those choices were made. Students were finally assigned a writing assignment to reflect on their group's Setup phase with two questions: How do our expectations of heroes shift in different settings? Why does that matter? Despite the use of only the Setup phase for this exercise, the positive results were quickly apparent in both the subsequent discussion and in the assignments written by students. For the former, students were happy to share their group's experience, including not only the more amusing choices but also how the choices made by others affected their own choices in kind. Further, students began piecing together how so many of their choices were built upon the expectations of the genre and how internalized those expectations had become. This discussion was lively and encouraged even those students hesitant to speak on similar subjects in previous sessions to engage in the larger conversation.

Beyond discussion, however, the students' journals demonstrated how the activity led them to reflect on the cultural function of heroes. In particular, one student considered the moral variance of a hero's intentions as determined by their setting: *"In the western setting, the hero could be considered an outlaw, but he is stealing to help someone else... You would always expect the hero to do what is right, but that depends on the context."* This student went on to consider how their own interpretations of a hero's righteousness largely varied by the conditions surrounding that hero. Another student wrote that their perception on heroes in war narratives changed after the exercise: *"The nurses were the main heroes because they saved so many lives via their physical help of healing the wounded and mentally by keeping them company and talking to them when there is very little they could give to help with pain and suffering."* This student expanded on how the glorification of violence changes audience reception of a hero. Yet another student reflected on the role of immoral acts from heroes: *"Most of the time we see heroes as these great people who do good for the world and save everyone in a peaceful manner to make the world a better place. However, that is not always the case. Sometimes heroes must kill in order to keep the world safe. But how can a murderer be considered a hero?"* This student concluded by considering if context was enough to excuse actions and remarked that far worse acts than murder are regularly carried out by heroes in popular media. Even using *Fiasco!* in a single class session and only conducting its initial phase, students were better able to process, interpret, and engage course material throughout the term. More importantly, the development of critical analysis and reflection skills showed marked improvement following the *Fiasco!* activity, an improvement that carried on through the remainder of the course. By integrating *Fiasco!* into the classroom dynamic, even just once, students worked together to process course material from a different perspective that provided lasting benefits.

ANTHROPOLOGY

Another author employed *Fiasco!* in their "Anthropology of Science Fiction" classes in 2014, 2015, and 2019 as part of a larger project on speculative fiction and student filmmaking. This course focused on the application of anthropological perspectives to popular culture and communication of anthropological lessons through the medium of film.⁵

As part of this movie-making process, the first portion of the class used *Fiasco!* as a three-session workshopping tool to help introduce students to the analysis of narrative stages and character development within the structure of Campbell's Hero's Journey. *Fiasco!* was used to teach the structure of myth in a memorable way while also serving to create cinematically inspired and narratively cohesive stories for their short films. The first step of the filmmaking process was an introductory lecture on the concept and history of the Hero's Journey, as well as critiques of its universality.⁶ At its core, the Hero's Myth is a purported universal structure underlying much of human myth and storytelling. Campbell distills the central theme of the Hero's Journey as *"A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man"* (Campbell, 2009).

The second classroom session introduced *Fiasco!* to facilitate student use of the Hero's journey as a template for the successful creation of their short films. The gameplay of *Fiasco!* provides students with a recognizable character arc within the typical three-act narrative structure. Heroes move through a series of trials, unexpected

5 In these films, the students created short 10-minute movies that focused on teaching a specific anthropology concept using a fantasy/sci-fi setting through the medium of film. At the end of the semester, students presented their films at a variety of public forums including the 2019 Jack Williamson Science Fiction Lectureship and the ENMU Student Research and Creativity conference.

6 The Hero's Journey is most closely associated with Joseph Campbell, who drew on scholars such as psychologist Carl Jung (2014) interpretation of symbolism and dreams as well as the cross-cultural study of myth from E. B. Tylor (1871), who is considered the father of anthropology. Campbell's Hero's Journey has been used extensively in the movie industry as a guideline for creating cohesive narratives (Vogler, 2007).
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reversals, setbacks, and small victories. This session helped students approach *Fiasco!* as an academic part of the course narrative and create narratively tight films using *Fiasco!* as a storytelling framework.

On the third day of the Hero's Journey *Fiasco!* exercise, students ran the Setup of their scenario and the first few scenes of their screenplays. Students watched a video of an actual *Fiasco!* game (Geek & Sundry, 2013) as homework in order to introduce the game mechanics and see the process in action. Students were organized into groups of 3 to 5 class members that would be their partners for the larger movie-making project. Each group chose a *Fiasco!* playset based on the genre of movie they wanted to make and to establish the principal Relationships, Items, Locations, and Goals that would motivate their movies.

One of the most innovative aspects of using *Fiasco!* to teach the Hero's Journey is its emphasis on interpersonal dynamics as the foundation of the story. In the setup of a *Fiasco!*, players first build relationships with each other based on social relationships such as family, work, love, or neighbors by placing a note card between two players and writing what type of relationship connects them. In a subsequent homework activity, students later expanded on the roles and obligations associated with these relationships within the framework of the Hero's Journey. In this write-up, students worked to flesh out the name, identity, and other attributes of their character after the relationship is established.

By emphasizing the webs of relationships that support, guide, and even oppose the hero as equally important parts of the narrative, *Fiasco!* inverts tropes of individualism present in both Hollywood and traditional RPGs. Rather than as autonomous beings within the supposed universality/primacy of the individual in Western culture, *Fiasco!* introduces the anthropological concept of "dividual" personhood in which people take their identities from their relations with others, (Strathern, 1998; Mentore, 2007; & Omarova et al., 2018). Dividuals and relationality revitalize the concept of the Hero's Journey by emphasizing that success in heroic undertakings depends more on teamwork and interpersonal relationships than on one individual.

At the end of the semester, students were asked to reflect on the assignment and the effectiveness of using *Fiasco!* and other alternative mediums of instruction as tools for engaging with anthropology. Students were enthusiastic about their experience using *Fiasco!* as a way to both create the scripts for their movies and learn about the steps and character archetypes of the Hero's Journey. One student remarked on the accessibility of *Fiasco!* as a storytelling tool, saying: *My favorite class activity was the Fiasco! Game. I have never played Fiasco! up until I came to this class. It was pretty interesting and was a great way to build a story* (2015). While another commented on the pedagogical implications of *Fiasco!* for teaching anthropology: *It is a great introductory Anthropology class since it not only explains the fundamental principles but also used Fiasco! to delve into great detail about Hero's Journey* (2014). Students commented on how *Fiasco!* changed their perception of the Hero's Journey as the story of an individual. One student remarked: *The relationships between our characters was the best part of the Fiasco!. Everyone played an important role in the story instead of just one person being the star* (2019).

With its focus on relationality in the narrative, rather than a singular hero, *Fiasco!* is an ideal tool for teaching the structure of myth, the Hero's Journey, and anthropological concepts like dividuals to students. *Fiasco!* sessions are constructed according to a similar narrative structure as the Hero's Journey while challenging its underlying assumptions. The characters' archetypes found within the Hero's Journey, including mentors, sidekicks, threshold guardians, and the final boss (shadow), offer students an opportunity to showcase the relationships between the characters as the driving force of the larger narrative. Employing *Fiasco!* as part of an active classroom pedagogy makes the learning experience more accessible to a wider variety of student populations, broadening the exposure of students to the discipline of anthropology.

SOCIOLOGY

Another co-author used *Fiasco!* as part of a course unit on socialization and the social construction of “the self” in classical sociological theory and introduction to sociology courses. *Fiasco!* is an especially promising instructional tool for cultivating an experiential understanding of classical American sociological perspectives and complex philosophical questions that are often difficult for students to grasp. Even within the Setup stage of *Fiasco!*, students creatively re-imagine themselves according to roles that were structured by the game, relationships forged through the interaction of die-rolls, and interpersonal narration. *Fiasco!* is an accessible illustration of many aspects of the social self in practice that directly connects with the methodologies and philosophies of sociological disciplinary founders. Classical sociologist George H. Mead (1934) based many of his social scientific theories of the self on the study of roleplaying and viewed games as an important part of the socialization process. *Fiasco!* serves as an aptly enacted metaphor for many foundational sociological concepts, and engages students in a first-hand study of how roleplaying can influence both social action and self-perception.

Prior to running *Fiasco!* in the sociology classroom, the instructor set the sociological stage with lectures and discussions on the social self. Students were introduced to three theoretical perspectives for which *Fiasco!* is especially relevant, distilled into three sets of vocabulary terms and the classical theorists known for introducing these concepts to the discipline. First, *Fiasco!* is a hands-on illustration of how statuses and roles in society shape personality, action, and life possibilities (Simmel, 1909). Secondly, the relationship-building aspects of *Fiasco!* demonstrate the concepts of intersubjectivity and relationality, and how social actors co-construct social reality and themselves through communication (Schutz, 1970; Mead, 1934; Thomas, 1923). And finally, as an RPG, *Fiasco!* engages students in the concept of performativity, how the “self” is created through performances that are determined by social and historical contexts (Goffman, 1978).

The initial game Set Up and play took one fifty-minute class period. Students watched an introductory video as homework to prepare for in-class play. During the Set Up, students wrote basic information about their characters’ needs, relationships, objects, names, and backstories as they emerged from the game set, available die rolls, and their own creativity. Documenting each step of the *Fiasco!* experience kept students focused on the game and served as a basis for later reflection activities. After gameplay, a second classroom session was spent debriefing the *Fiasco!* experience and applying a sociological framework to lessons learned through the game. Students framed their gameplay experience using sociological theories of socialization. Students were given a set of reflection questions to guide the discussion and submitted written responses to these discussion questions at the end of the unit. Reflective questions included: 1) What statuses does your character hold? (professional & personal), 2) What roles (expected behaviors & obligations) are associated with each status? 3) What assumptions did you make to form your character? 4) Did your character surprise you? Why, when you were the one who created it?

The overarching lesson to be learned through these questions was that reality is collectively and socially created, from the micro (personality) to the macro (social structure or “sets”). The provided discussion questions encouraged students to consider the social construction of reality through the three major themes of the unit: social forms, intersubjectivity, and performativity. Student responses to these questions were varied, but reflected the sociological concepts introduced at the beginning of the unit and served as a departure point for a more fully developed discussion of social theory as experienced through the hilarity of *Fiasco!*.

The first major theme that emerged from student responses related to the way character types were determined by the play setting and available dice. These structural constraints illustrate “formal sociology,” which focuses on how personality is determined by social roles, relationships, and networks (Simmel, 1909). The terms and mechanics of the game emulate how extra-individual social forms constrain players’ choices. As the game unfolds, characters evolve through a combination of performance and the intervention of forces

outside of the players' control (die rolls). Societal expectations are internalized through dynamic social-psychological processes that are shaped and constrained by social position (Du Bois, 1903; Frazier, 1949). *Fiasco!* places students into roles that they do not experience in their own lives, providing a window into the experiences of others and the ways that ascribed roles shape life outcomes.

A second major theme of the post-activity analysis concerned social roles and relationships. The structure of gameplay demonstrates early American sociological theories of "the self" as a fundamentally social construct. This social-self is an inter-subjective phenomenon that develops through communication and symbolic interaction (Blumer, 1962; Schutz, 1970). Roles in *Fiasco!* emerge from character relationships, which were determined by dice and collaborative storytelling. *Fiasco!* positions individual characters as secondary to relationships, highlighting the primacy of relationality over individualism. *Fiasco!* enrolls students in the enactment of intersubjective communicative development by creating characters and narrative arcs through interaction with classmates and genre. Rather than an autonomous, individual essence, the characters' selves emerge from the evolving relationships of the game.

A third topic that students remarked on was the performance of cultural ideals. The three acts of *Fiasco!* demonstrate the sociological lesson that we learn and enact our social selves through the performance of cultural scripts (Goffman, 1978). Cultural assumptions about setting, genre, roles, types, and corresponding scripts shaped how students played their characters and thus how those characters developed. Role-play itself unfolds according to our cultural notions of behavior in different social positions (status) and settings (social context). *Fiasco!* also illustrates the power of shared cultural perceptions and conventions on the development of self. Classical theorists view the self as a social structure that emerges from a dialectic relationship between agency and reflexive self-perception (Mead, 1934). Common cultural symbols are internalized through socialization and interaction.

Fiasco! works particularly well as an instructional device for sociology because of its emphasis on relationships and collaborative narrative. Classical sociological theory understands even the most intimate aspects of character and personality to be largely determined by social relationships and positions within larger social forms (Simmel, 1909), a perspective embodied by *Fiasco!*'s reliance on set, genre, trope, and die-determined circumstance. Actions and choices were continually influenced by the other players in the game, as much as the available game options. In a game that is touted for both its "dark humor" and appeal to "poor impulse control," characters often evolved in ways that surprised even the players who animated them. Character personalities and possibilities in the game develop through interaction and situational context, which serves as an enacted metaphor for how life outcomes are constrained by social structures and relationships.

DISCUSSION: BENEFITS OF *FIASCO!* AS A TEACHING TOOL

These three case studies offer examples of the versatile pedagogical application of games like *Fiasco!*. In English courses, students learn to employ narrative conventions, plot devices, genre, tropes, character development, and critical thinking in an applied and collaborative context. By employing roleplaying games in the Anthropology classroom, students gain new perspectives on the relationality of the Hero's Journey and gain the opportunity to inhabit the lived experience of other people through a first-person perspective. Through role-play in the Sociology classroom, students explore alternate positionalities and gain a better understanding of the self as a performance that is heavily shaped by social roles.

Many benefits can be gained from doing all or even just part of the *Fiasco!* game phases and the settings themselves provide a wide range of subject matter that can be easily customized to specific class settings. *Fiasco!* playsets are highly customizable, following templates that instructors can easily modify to fit their course material. Instructors who wish to utilize *Fiasco!* as an extended exercise to structure their classes can

engage the system on a deeper level by designing play sets in a variety of social or historical settings. As demonstrated by the above case studies, instructors can design course-specific worksheets with reflection questions and explicit learning objectives to help students stay on track during this exercise. Perhaps most important to utilizing *Fiasco!* in the classroom is post-game discussion, where instructors elicit discussion and critical evaluation of the game itself from the class. This discussion allows a prime opportunity to fill in any gaps students may have had during play and to reorient student reflection on the course content covered during the game.

The unique structure of *Fiasco!* allows for customizable applications within a wide range of classroom settings with minimal disruption to the overall class structure. Though pedagogical strategies based on active learning have significant potential benefits in the classroom, restructuring course material to accommodate these strategies while adhering to student learning outcomes and course requirements can be difficult. Instructors often do not possess the luxury of switching their entire course to a new “system” for both practical and administrative purposes. However, flipping a handful of class sessions with *Fiasco!* can result in lasting and fruitful benefits for students, instructors, and the class dynamic at large.

One of *Fiasco!*’s greatest benefits as a pedagogical tool is its modularity. *Fiasco!* is easily scalable for different time increments and classroom needs, ranging from a week-long unit to a single-day activity, while still providing a meaningful and memorable learning experience. The authors found that *Fiasco!* activities worked well with a 1-day preamble explaining the objectives of the activity, 1-2 days for game set up and role-play, followed by an additional class period to debrief the experience and discuss lessons learned. However, the game is adaptable for instructors only able to devote more limited time to the activity. The Setup and Act One can be accomplished in one class period each, through which students have an opportunity to gain genre, narrative, and role-play experience. Even in one class session of *Fiasco!*, students can have a meaningful experience from the game setup. Each part of the game offers opportunities for learning, from familiarizing with the selected playset, establishing initial plot points, developing characters, tilting the story upside down, and concluding with the limited resolutions of The Aftermath.

In addition to the classroom applications which we piloted in our own classes, *Fiasco!* is a versatile learning tool that can be adapted to many other classroom settings. The dynamic interactive play of *Fiasco!* is especially relevant to social learning and narrative-focused disciplines, such as those piloted in this study, with wide relevance to instructors across the fine arts, humanities, social sciences, communications, and personal development courses. For example, a course on early American history could use a playset themed on the American Revolution to perform the respective needs of various colonists, the British, and Native Americans in a time of social upheaval. Similarly, a playset based on police procedurals could allow students to evaluate their own assumptions on the criminal justice system as well as how those assumptions differ by respective position within that system. A playset designed around medieval Arthurian romances could present the conflicts of social hierarchies, military prowess, and chivalry as forces that should operate together but often work against one another. In social work, a variety of playsets can easily be integrated into class lessons on mediation and negotiation. For instructors in the natural sciences, laboratory or space-themed play sets could also be of use in a more creative biology or physics classroom.

CONCLUSION AND PEDAGOGICAL APPLICATION

As a classroom activity, *Fiasco!* introduces an instructive space where students employ the knowledge they have gained in a setting that collaboratively constructs knowledge. Applying course material in a hands-on method puts students in the driver’s seat of course material. In these activities, students all have agency and become equal participants in building a story together that reinforces course content.

Across a variety of disciplines, *Fiasco!* offers an effective pedagogical exercise for active learning in the classroom because it challenges many of the preconceived notions about both RPGs and the classroom. *Fiasco!* creates a flexible environment where all participants collaborate together to develop narratives according to their settings. As an imaginative and collaborative activity, roleplaying games like *Fiasco!* open up the classroom environment and provide a highly memorable learning experience. Rather than focusing on whether their individual characters won or lost, the group wins together if they create a narratively satisfying storyline. Playing characters other than themselves allows students of all ages to be more outgoing and engaged with dialogue, interaction, and what could otherwise be tense subject matter in a non-threatening environment. The collective silliness of a *Fiasco!* session builds confidence in creative enactment, communication, and analysis in a variety of classroom settings.

The unique structure of *Fiasco!* as an RPG encourages group collaboration, making this game an ideal exercise for an active classroom. These benefits are applicable to an entire course built around student-centered pedagogy or a single class session to drive home course concepts. The learning culture of *Fiasco!* has each participant adding to and developing the game's content through their own choices and reactions to other participants, removing the hierarchical divides of the standard classroom that gives each person at the table equal stakes and authority. The intentional content of *Fiasco!* allows students to find their own conceptual understanding and procedural fluency as they work through the game's processes together.⁷ Finally, by employing *Fiasco!* the instructor operates as the Professional Educator in the room, not standing at a podium to proclaim course content but working with each group individually to answer questions. Instructors facilitate students' process through the game, develop coordinating assignments that drive home the pedagogical gains from the exercise, and encourage students to continue applying those components. *Fiasco!* is the self-promoted game of "small-time capers gone disastrously wrong," but allowing students to play through these events together in a decentralized pedagogical activity develops stronger ties to course material while creating engaging and unforgettable class sessions.

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AUTHOR BIOS

Dr. Erik Stanley is an Assistant Professor of cultural anthropology at Eastern New Mexico University. He received his PhD from the University of Virginia in 2015. His theoretical research interests in socio-cultural anthropology include pedagogy and popular culture, digital humanities, museum studies and student engagement, anthropology of science fiction/fantasy, human-environmental relations and the anthropology

of religion. His ethnographic research focuses on the Mopan Maya of Belize, C.A. and is concerned with the transformation of cacao (*Theobroma cacao*) from a ritually and culturally important plant to a global commodity. His publications include the article *Monilia (Moniliophthora roreri) and the Post-Development of Belizean Cacao* in the journal *Culture, Agriculture, Food and Environment* as well as *Religious Conversion and the Decline of Environmental Ritual Narratives* in the *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture*. For more information on his research, please visit <https://enmu.academia.edu/ErikStanley>

David Sweeten is an Assistant Professor of Early British Literature at Eastern New Mexico University whose primary scholarly work focuses on the intersections of economic thought, marriage, and gender in Middle English texts, including a chapter on inter-reliant economies and social capital in *Wynnere and Wastoure*, entries on wealth and money in *The Chaucer Encyclopedia*, and a larger book project on the economics of marriage, gender, and agency in late Middle English literature. In addition to his work in medieval literature, David Sweeten has also taught courses on fantasy fiction, comics, composition pedagogy theory, and critical theory. Each semester, his composition courses heavily focus on fandom, popular culture, and gaming to reach students where they are and develop stronger critical analysis, research, and writing skills. More information can be found at: <https://enmu.academia.edu/DavidSweeten>

Michelle Schmidt is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at Eastern New Mexico University. She received her Ph.D. from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign in 2018. Her research interests include popular culture as pedagogy, community and environmental health, and transnational economic development. Her pedagogical research focuses on the implementation of active learning strategies in the classroom. She presents annually at the Southwest Popular/American Culture conference on using popular culture, media, and games to teach sociological theory. Her ethnographic research in Belize, C.A. focuses on the intersection of modernization with Indigenous agriculture, food, and health systems. She has an article in *Agriculture and Human Values* entitled *Cultivating Health: Diabetes resilience through neo-traditional farming in Mopan Maya communities of Belize* and a chapter *Commodification and Respect: Indigenous contributions to the sociology of waste* in *The Handbook of Waste Studies*. More information can be found at: <https://enmu.academia.edu/MichelleSchmidt>

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APPENDIX 1 – AUTHOR CREATED FIASCO PLAYSET



Horror U

A Fiasco Playset

Horror U

CREDITS

This playset is written by Michelle Schmidt, Erik Stanley, and David Sweeten.

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BOILERPLATE

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The Score

Campus life can be a real killer

At Horror U, students joke that the remote location next to a small rural town has a dead nightlife. Bored undergrads resort to strange efforts to entertain themselves, whether that means tipping cows, raiding the bio lab mice to prank a sorority house, or finding new locations to throw ragers. When the grisly remains of a student are discovered in the quad, the games seem to have taken a dark turn that brings new meaning to “Dead Week.”

This playset assumes most players will be part of a campus community or adjacent to it, with students, faculty, staff, or locals. The horror elements steer toward slasher films, but there are more cosmic and other horror options as well.

Movie Night

Urban Legend, Scream 2, PCU, Happy Death Day, Van Wilder, Initiation, Sorority Row, Pledge

Relationships

1 Academic

- ▣ Professor/ teaching assistant
- ▢ Lab partners
- ▣ Instructor/student
- ⌘ Teammates
- ⌘ Club members
- ⌘ Rivals

2 Friends

- ▣ . . . for now
- ▢ . . . from childhood
- ▣ Since our shared ordeal
- ⌘ Cool kid/nerd
- ⌘ Sorority or fraternity
- ⌘ “Cousins”

3 Community

- ▣ Supervisor/subordinate
- ▢ Journalists for the college newspaper
- ▣ Work study program
- ⌘ Roommates
- ⌘ University police/frequent offender
- ⌘ Coworkers

4 Romance

- ▣ Old flame
- ▢ Unrequited love
- ▣ Regrettable hook-up
- ⌘ Friends with benefits
- ⌘ . . . is a distraction
- ⌘ For the ages

5 Villains and Henchmen

- ▣ Supernatural entity/human avatar
- ▢ Mad scientist/test subject
- ▣ Mastermind/stooge
- ⌘ Criminal genius/dirty campus police
- ⌘ Unethical advisor/grad student
- ⌘ Evil team captain/followers

6 Classic Duos

- ▣ Final girl/slasher
- ▢ Hysteric/skeptic
- ▣ Paranormal expert/haunted
- ⌘ Harbinger of doom/protagonist in denial
- ⌘ Old person/ignorant youth
- ⌘ The hunter/monster

... In A College Horror Movie

Needs

1 To Win/Earn

- ▣ ...MVP after the big game
- ▣ ...student organization of the year
- ▣ ...that big grant
- ▣ ...grad school acceptance
- ▣ ...the ultimate frisbee tournament
- ▣ ...control of the dark forces lying beneath the school

2 To Get Out

- ▣ ...of this crappy little town
- ▣ ...of this career path
- ▣ ...of this life of conformity
- ▣ ...of dating my high school sweetheart
- ▣ ...of this final
- ▣ ...of the deal I made to get here

3 To Get Even

- ▣ ...with your freshman year roommate
- ▣ ...with the jocks
- ▣ ...with the one that stole your boyfriend/girlfriend
- ▣ ...with the professor that failed you
- ▣ ...with the townie boss that fired you
- ▣ ...with the campus squirrel that took your sandwich

4 To Get Popular

- ▣ ...and stop being “the nerd”
- ▣ ...and get the popular girl/guy
- ▣ ...and win student body president
- ▣ ...and reinvent yourself
- ▣ ...for the right connections
- ▣ ...for revenge

5 To Graduate

- ▣ ...first in your family
- ▣ ...top of the class
- ▣ ...before financial aid runs out
- ▣ ...despite your dark past
- ▣ ...and get the hell out of this town
- ▣ ...and get that cushy job at dad’s firm

6 To Party

- ▣ ...to forget your past
- ▣ ...while you’re still young
- ▣ ...to feel something again
- ▣ ...because that’s what’s expected of you
- ▣ ...before you fail out
- ▣ ...because partying is your identity

... In A College Horror Movie

Locations

1 A Gathering

- ▣ The biggest party of the year
- ▣ Club lock-in
- ▣ Athletic competition
- ▣ Concert or theater production
- ▣ Awards ceremony
- ▣ Graduation

2 Academic Unit

- ▣ Laboratory
- ▣ Art studio
- ▣ Hazmat storage
- ▣ Archives
- ▣ Research farms
- ▣ Computer lab

3 Campus Building

- ▣ Library
- ▣ Stadium or athletic facility
- ▣ Student union
- ▣ The quad
- ▣ Theater
- ▣ Dormitory

4 The Neighborhood

- ▣ Greek row
- ▣ Dated off-campus student housing
- ▣ Owned by slum lords
- ▣ Professorville
- ▣ Fancy apartments
- ▣ Family friendly suburbia

5 Building Off Campus

- ▣ Train or bus station
- ▣ Gothic mansion
- ▣ Old farmhouse
- ▣ Local bar
- ▣ Hotel/motel
- ▣ Mall

6 Outside of Town

- ▣ Cemetery
- ▣ The woods
- ▣ Abandoned summer camp
- ▣ Lake
- ▣ Quarry
- ▣ Country road

... In A College Horror Movie

Objects

1 Dorm Food

- ▣ 15 Cup Noodles
- ▣ An obnoxious amount of Redbull
- ▣ Case of granola bars
- ▣ Pepperoni Hot Pockets
- ▣ Last night's leftovers
- ▣ A half-eaten box of cereal

2 Clothing

- ▣ Sunday best
- ▣ The clothes you fell asleep in last night
- ▣ Clubwear
- ▣ Uniform
- ▣ Fresh change of clothes
- ▣ Halloween costume

3 Information

- ▣ Hot gossip
- ▣ A thumb drive with evidence to blow this thing open
- ▣ A conspiracy map covered in red strings
- ▣ Photographs of questionable provenience
- ▣ Blueprints of an academic building
- ▣ The "Truth"

4 College Survival Kit

- ▣ Screwdriver set
- ▣ Axe body spray
- ▣ An inherited mini-fridge
- ▣ Mace
- ▣ Scarface/Bob Marley poster
- ▣ Shower shoes with a broken strap

5 Party Essentials

- ▣ Huge stereo system
- ▣ Jello shots
- ▣ Custom beer pong table
- ▣ Oversized bong disguised as vase
- ▣ Trashcan punch
- ▣ A fake ID

6 Objects of doom

- ▣ Demonic board game
- ▣ Cursed religious symbol
- ▣ Scary mask
- ▣ Haunted mascot uniform
- ▣ A book of forbidden knowledge
- ▣ Satanic frat paddle

... In A College Horror Movie

Horror U Insta-Setup

Relationships at Horror U

For three players...

- Academic: Teammates
- Friends: Sorority or fraternity
- Community: Roommates

For four players, add...

- Romance: Regrettable hook-up

For five players, add...

- Villains and Henchmen: Advisor/grad student

Needs at Horror U

For three players...

- To Get Even...with the professor that failed you

For four or five players, add...

- To Get Popular...and stop being “the nerd”

Locations at Horror U

For three or four players...

- A Gathering: the biggest party of the year

For five players, add...

"It's Not My Immediate Instinct": Perceptions of Preservice Teachers on the Integration of Popular Culture

Melinda S. Butler

University of Southern Maine
melinda.butler@maine.edu

Eva S. Arbor

University of Southern Maine
eva.arbor@maine.edu

Nadine Bravo

University of Southern Maine
nadine.bravo@maine.edu

ABSTRACT

Popular culture curricula integration provides educational benefits for students (Morrell, 2002; Petrone, 2013); bridging students' out-of-school popular culture knowledge with their in-school literacies promotes learning, engages students, and values students' background knowledge (Dyson, 1993, 2021; Marsh, 2006; Morrell, 2002; Petrone, 2013). Therefore, teacher educators may consider the addition of popular culture education into preservice teacher's preparation for teaching (Petrone, 2013). In this qualitative study, researchers were interested in asking the following questions: What popular culture texts did preservice teachers consume as children and adults? and How does preservice teachers' previous popular culture text consumption factor into decisions to include or exclude popular culture texts in the curriculum? Preservice teachers in a graduate teacher education program participated in surveys and interviews about their popular culture text consumption (e.g., podcasts, television shows) as children and adults. Additionally, participants were questioned about the affordances and constraints of integrating popular culture texts into the curriculum. Data were coded using In Vivo coding (Saldaña, 2013), and analyzed through a sociocultural lens (Vygotsky, 1978). Themes that were generated from the findings were: 1) popular culture text consumption as both social and shared; 2) popular culture text integration as a way to entice and engage students in learning; 3) popular culture texts as engaging and relatable; 4) popular culture as digital texts; and 5) popular culture texts as unknown or unimportant. Although all participants spoke about the benefits of popular culture text integration, the preservice teachers who consumed more of them as children and adults spoke more favorably about including popular culture texts in curricula.

Keywords: Literacy/reading; preservice teacher education; qualitative research; popular culture

Fiber artists create beautiful tapestries by weaving weft and warp threads together. Similarly, Dyson (1993, 2021) theorized about a permeable curriculum, weaving students' out-of-school literacies (e.g., reading, writing, and talk) into the threads of traditional school learning and expectations. In 2013, Petrone described the permeable curriculum "as one that allows and creates spaces for students to draw on their own popular culture frames of reference to access, learn, and develop academic literacies" (p. 252). Importantly, weaving popular culture into the curriculum may spark students' critical thinking (Dyson, 1993, 2021; Petrone, 2013). As Dyson (2021) noted, "When children's interests, knowledge, and passion *do* permeate the official world, they may become more conscious of their collectivity and thus their responsibilities to be respectful, even caring, of others" (p. 141). Of significant interest, researchers have determined that some pre-service and in-service teachers do not perceive popular culture texts (e.g., books, music, television) as valuable lesson components (Author, 2018; Gerber & Price, 2013; Lambirth, 2003; Marsh, 2006; Tanis, 2010). As a result, many preservice teachers do not integrate out-of-school literacies into in-school literacies (Marsh 2006; Petrone, 2013), reducing the opportunity for a permeable curriculum (Dyson, 1993, 2021).

We were interested in exploring preservice teachers' popular culture text consumption as children and adults and determining how this may influence their beliefs about integrating popular culture texts into the curriculum. As Tanis (2010) noted, "...little research has explored how teachers use popular culture outside of the ELA classroom and whether or not that personal practice supports or hinders the use of popular culture in the classroom" (p. 112). Our research questions were: 1) What popular culture texts did preservice teachers consume as children and adults? and 2) How does preservice teachers' previous popular culture text consumption factor into decisions to include or exclude popular culture texts in the curriculum? We surveyed and interviewed preservice teachers concerning their popular culture consumption as children and adults, and we asked if and how preservice teachers integrated popular culture into their planning and instruction. We were interested in how, why, and if preservice teachers create permeable curricula (Dyson, 1993; Tanis, 2010).

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this section, we define popular culture and discuss the permeable curriculum (Dyson, 1993, 2021), popular culture integration (Lambirth, 2003; Petrone, 2013), and Marsh's (2006) studies of preservice teachers' experiences with popular culture text integration. Finally, we present our theoretical framework of socioculturalism (Vygotsky, 1978).

Popular Culture Texts Defined

Popular culture definitions are abundant; Fiske (1989) defined popular culture texts as almost anything consumed or experienced in our daily lives (e.g., a beach, a billboard, or even a shopping mall). Storey (2001) proffered six definitions of popular culture: 1) Popular culture as simply that which is desired; 2) popular culture as what is left after the upper class culture has been determined; 3) popular culture as "mass culture" (p. 8), manufactured or produced for and revered by the masses— mass culture gives no thought to value or quality; 4) popular culture as grassroots culture; 5) popular culture as one of hegemony; and 6) popular culture as a transcendent of class—there is no perceived "high" and "low" culture. For the purposes of this research, we used the lens of Storey's (2001) first definition: that which is desired.

Permeable Curriculum

Dyson (1993, 2021) spent many research hours in classrooms, observing and noting children's and teachers' interactions as they read, wrote, talked, listened, and learned together. In a conceptual paper presented to the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), Dyson (1993) described the social interactions and writing of several Black children in a kindergarten and first grade multi-age classroom in the San Francisco area. During these observations, the children conversed constantly with their peers while reading and writing,

bringing their out-of-school popular culture knowledge into their classroom reading and writing. Dyson (1993) described the affordances of the popular culture schema that the children discussed as they wrote and read. As Dyson (1993) wrote:

... It is to suggest that those materials are of no use unless they engage children with the social and cultural worlds they know best and, moreover, to suggest that both child worlds and school worlds would be considerably enriched by the interplay made possible in a permeable curriculum (p. 28).

According to Dyson (1993), three criteria are necessary for a permeable curriculum; 1) student writing, (e.g., providing a setting where children are free to compose and share by talking, collaborating, and performing writing); 2) respect for “cultural diversity” (p. 28) (e.g., encouraging children to bring their knowledge of popular culture into the classroom); and 3) the teaching (e.g., the teacher’s open invitation to bring popular knowledge into writing and classroom conversations emanating from a desire to get to know the students better).

Therefore, teachers who intentionally welcome popular culture knowledge into the classroom, may create a permeable curriculum where students’ schemas are valued.

Popular Culture Integration

Drawing on Dyson’s (1993, 2021) permeable curriculum, Dickie and Shuker (2014) surveyed and interviewed New Zealand teachers about their popular culture knowledge and curricula integration. The teacher participants exhibited extensive knowledge about the popular culture consumption of students in their classroom. Additionally, most teachers reported that, based on their knowledge of the children’s out-of-school literacies, they did indeed integrate popular culture texts into their lessons.

Petrone (2013) examined a number of peer-reviewed popular culture research works and reflected upon personal experience with popular culture as a secondary teacher and a literacy educator. In doing so, Petrone (2013) synthesized understandings about popular culture as 1) meaning making; 2) identity making; and 3) political/critical/sociocultural thinking and urged teachers to become ethnographers as a means to examine students’ lives to determine their funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992) about popular culture. Funds of knowledge, Petrone (2013) noted, “...refer to the linguistic, cultural, and intellectual resources, skills, and frames of reference found within students’ families, homes, and communities” (Moll et al., 1992, p. 250). Although some students may not excel in academics at school (Petrone, 2013), they may possess vast amounts of popular culture knowledge (Author, 2018). Indeed, teachers and researchers have successfully used students’ popular culture funds of knowledge as a bridge to academic achievement (Dyson, 1983; Morrell, 2002; Petrone, 2013). Petrone (2013) suggested that popular culture integration serves three purposes: 1) to build a bridge between out-of-school and in-school literacies; 2) to encourage critical discussions about popular culture; and 3) to connect popular culture discussions with critical social justice issues. Further, Petrone (2013) argued that the study of popular culture belongs in teacher preparation programs. Finally, Petrone (2013) surmised that preservice teachers fall into three camps: 1) future educators who anticipate integrating popular culture into the classroom; 2) future educators who may be afraid to integrate popular culture in fear of getting in trouble with peers or administration and/or worry about censorship; and 3) future educators who do not value popular culture and do not see its importance.

Teachers’ Perceptions About Popular Culture Texts

Researchers have examined preservice and in-service teachers’ perceptions of the value of popular culture texts and the value of popular culture text integration (Lambirth, 2003; Marsh, 2006; Tanis, 2010). Studying elementary preservice teachers’ beliefs about the integration of popular culture into the literacy curriculum, Marsh (2006) interviewed preservice teachers during their teacher education program. Employing

a qualitative study, Marsh (2006) coded and analyzed the responses of three participants using the theoretical framework of Bourdieu's concepts of pedagogic action (PA): habitus, field, capital, and doxa. Although many of the preservice teachers indicated an interest in popular culture integration, most followed the teaching direction of the mentor teacher and the school curriculum. Marsh (2006) reported that many of the preservice teachers did not question the status quo, or the habitus, "a set of dispositions created in an individual over time and shaped by structural elements in a society, such as family or schools" (p. 164). Further, Marsh argued that when preservice teachers' experiences aligned with the academic culture of the campus, they rarely challenged the curricula. Marsh (2006) contended that education programs may invite critical conversations about teaching, stating, "Perhaps the most important work teacher education programs can do is to provide students with opportunities to analyze the sociocultural, economic, and political restrictions on their practice" (p. 172).

Lambirth (2003) met with a focus group of teachers in England with the purpose of exploring ways to develop teachers as proficient writers. Interestingly, teachers voiced their negative feelings about integrating popular culture texts into writing lessons, even when their own childhood experiences with popular culture were positive. Lambirth (2003) reported, "Many felt that it was not the school's place to highlight popular culture texts like these because *'they get enough of that at home'*" (p. 9).

Exploring educators' beliefs about popular culture integration, Tanis (2010) employed a combined phenomenological and narrative inquiry, meeting with three practicing secondary English Language Arts (ELA) teachers for focus groups and individual interviews. Interestingly, the participants were former graduate students of secondary teacher education in their third year of teaching, and the researcher was their former reading methods instructor. Tanis (2010) was curious whether the popular culture perspectives of the teachers changed over their years of teaching. During the study, Tanis (2010) also explored the personal popular culture consumption of each of the three teachers, interested in how that consumption may have affected the integration of popular culture materials into their curriculum. Tanis (2010) found that although the participants varied slightly in their perspectives about popular culture, their use of popular culture texts in the classroom was limited. That is, despite beliefs about the importance of teaching popular culture texts, the participants integrated few popular culture texts into their curricula.

Tanis (2010) acknowledged that in addition to learning about the participants' perspectives, they learned very important insights about their own perspectives on popular culture texts, noting, "I would argue that hearing the teachers talk about their tensions with culture and popular culture provoked me to consider my own perceptions about culture, popular culture, and English (teacher) education" (p. 178).

Sociocultural Theory

Sociocultural theory (Davidson, 2010; Vygotsky, 1978), aligns well as a theoretical framework and lens for our research. Socially and culturally constructed knowledge must be valued and taken into account when assessing literacy development (Davidson, 2010). That is, teachers who understand that investigating, encouraging, and valuing students' out-of-school literacies are embracing a sociocultural perspective (Davidson, 2020; Tracey & Morrow, 2012). According to Davidson, (2010), "From the sociocultural perspective, therefore, children's literacy development is understood by exploring the cultural, social, and historical contexts in which the children have grown" (p. 249).

METHODOLOGY

To determine how preservice teachers' previous experiences with popular culture factor into popular culture text integration in the classroom, we conducted a qualitative, multiple case study by Yin (2014), which consisted of a popular culture survey (Dickie & Shuker, 2014) and interviews (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). The popular culture survey was adapted with permission from Dickie and Shuker (2014) and was administered

using Qualtrics software. After the survey was administered, the researchers interviewed the participants remotely, recording via Zoom and completing written transcripts. Surveys and interviews were coded and analyzed using In Vivo coding (Saldaña, 2013), searching for categories and themes. Themes were further developed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) wherein the researcher infers meaning using codes and themes (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007) and keywords-in-context (KWIC) analysis (Bernard & Ryan, 2010). KWIC can be defined as creating a simple concordance and a word count of every unique word in a document. Additionally, we employed the use of reflexive, analytic memos written during data collection, data analysis, and the data interpretation stages. Analytic memos are a tool for qualitative researchers to journal about reflections and questions through the research process (Miles et al., 2014). Finally, member-checking was employed by sharing interview transcripts with participants (Miles et al., 2014).

Participants

The participants in this study were graduate students in a Master of Science in Teacher Education program at a university in the northeastern United States. The graduate students were enrolled in a K-8 reading methods course in the fall of 2020 and a K-12 writing methods course in the spring of 2021. During the 2020-2021 school year, graduate students taught or interned in K-8 classrooms while taking education classes at the nearby university. Seven out of 16 graduate students agreed to participate in the study. It is important to note that of the seven participants, five participated in the survey, and five participated (with pseudonyms) in the interviews. It is not known if the five who participated in the survey are the same five that participated in the interviews. For this reason, the participants in the survey are numbered (e.g., Participant 1, Participant 2), and participants in the interview provided or were given pseudonyms. The five graduate students who participated in the interviews were (pseudonyms): 1) Alex, who originally attended a small liberal arts college; 2) Marion, who received a degree in political science from a public university in the northeastern United States; 3) Veronica, who graduated from a northeastern university with a degree in psychology; 4) Sarah, who obtained a Bachelor of Arts (BA) in both sociology and English; and 5) Alice, who graduated with a BA in environmental planning and policy. Of the five participants in the survey, all identified as of Caucasian/European descent, four identified as between 30-39 years of age, and one participant identified as between 20-29 years of age. Although the participants were preservice teachers obtaining their Master of Science in Education, three of the participants reported having three to five years of previous teaching experience, one participant reported less than two years of teaching experience, and one participant reported having no teaching experience.

Data Collection and Analysis: Survey

Five participants completed a popular culture survey adapted with the permission of Dickie and Shuker (2010). In the survey, we asked about popular culture text consumption as children and adults and included a Likert survey based on popular culture beliefs. To analyze our survey data, we individually read the survey responses several times, jotting analytic memos about the responses. Once this work was completed, we met via Zoom to share analytic memo writing. In a similar manner, we individually conducted In Vivo coding (Saldaña, 2013) on the survey responses, and met via Zoom to discuss possible themes and connections from the surveys. Later, we met to review survey responses and discuss possible themes and connections.

Data Collection and Analysis: Interviews

Following the completion of the survey in Fall 2020, interviews were conducted via Zoom in the spring of 2021. Participants either selected their own pseudonyms or were given pseudonyms by the researchers. Employing In Vivo coding (Saldaña, 2013), researchers examined the five interview transcripts, line by line, jotting down reflexive memos and possible themes. Once the coding was complete, a Keywords in Context (KWIC) (Bernard, Wutich, & Ryan, 2017) concordance was created, examining word frequencies and sentences

using "popular culture" and "pop culture." According to Bernard and Ryan (2010), "...these methods can help us identify core ideas in a welter of data" (p. 65). Following the keywords-in-context (Bernard & Ryan (2010) study, the six phases of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) were employed. For this analysis, we 1) familiarized ourselves with the data by rereading; 2) generated codes; 3) read and analyzed codes for themes; 4) reviewed and revised themes; 5) named and created definitions for themes; and 6) constructed and revised this research. In the next section, we discuss our findings.

FINDINGS

We now examine the findings of the survey, interviews, and reflexive memos. Following this exploration, we organize our findings by the themes generated during data analysis. Our research questions were: 1. What popular culture texts did preservice teachers consume as children and adults? and 2. How do preservice teachers' previous experiences with popular culture texts consumption factor into decisions about the inclusion or exclusion of popular culture texts into the curriculum? In our survey, we asked participants about the popular culture texts they consumed as children and as adults. Of the five participants in the survey, all identified as of Caucasian/European descent, four identified as between 30-39 years of age, and one participant identified as between 20-29 years of age. Survey participants' popular culture consumption can be found in Table 1 in Appendix A and Table 2 in Appendix B. Additionally, we administered a series of belief statements about the integration of popular culture texts using a Likert survey question. Of the five participants, all either strongly agreed or agreed with statements about the affordances of integrating popular culture texts in classrooms. When asked if reading and writing standards discourage teachers from integrating popular culture, two participants somewhat disagreed and three somewhat agreed.

Interviews

Once the survey was administered, we interviewed and recorded the participants remotely using Zoom, asking questions about their education, their popular culture text consumption as children and adults, and their beliefs about integration of popular culture into their lessons. Additionally, we asked for examples of popular culture integration. In the next section, we provide our findings about the five participants who were interviewed.

Alex

When asked about knowledge of popular culture texts, Alex replied, "I don't think I know a lot. I don't know celebrities. I don't follow popular storylines..." The popular culture texts that Alex consumed as a child were video games, comics, and musicals. The texts they reported consuming as an adult were podcasts and YouTube. When asked their thoughts about integrating popular culture texts in the curriculum, Alex replied that although their mentor teacher modeled instruction using characters such as Yoda and Voldemort in language lessons, using popular culture is "...not my immediate instinct; I'm not going out of my way to use popular culture." Later in the interview, Alex added that popular culture texts were a "useful tool."

Marion

When asked to define popular culture texts, Marion replied, "...I think of one that is current, that is referencing things that are written in relatable language, that is sort of like everyday youth would realize." Elaborating, Marion suggested *Persephone* as a popular culture text. When asked about popular culture consumption as an adult, Marion replied:

I would say podcasts are big. I think that I often find with friends being like, 'Did you listen to that?' We consume music in such a different way now; it's almost like who can find like the newest thing that no one's heard because it's so easy now to find that new

thing that no one's heard of...Everyone's like, you know, hitting on refresh all the time.

Reflecting on integrating popular culture into the curriculum, Marion expressed great interest, explaining that a popular culture reference in a lesson may hook students, and that “it’s not going to in any way inhibit their learning.” Marion then described how their mentor teacher integrated popular culture into a Hero’s Journey unit and a science lesson, where they used the popular soccer player, Lionel Messi, as an example to teach about heart rates.

Veronica

While pursuing their graduate degree, Veronica worked in special education in a kindergarten classroom. Upon the question of what they knew about popular culture, they stated that they were not able to share a lot of knowledge. Their interpretation of popular culture was related to any literature that becomes popular. Veronica added, “I got hooked on *Goosebumps*.” They also mentioned that other popular series, like *Amelia Bedelia* (Parrish, 1963) and *Boxcar Children* series (Warner, 1989) were not particularly appealing to them as a child. Veronica also found that “incorporating popular culture into the curriculum... hooks people.” In addition to books, Veronica also pointed out video games as a medium of popular culture, and being in high demand with children, could engage children in terms of literacy learning. In their future classroom plans, Veronica wanted to include short video clips from a movie or television show, to engage children in their upcoming adventures unit. They valued the real-life connection between popular culture and the unit: “it helps to make things stick when you tie it to something relatable to the kids”. Additionally, Veronica mentioned age as a factor that influenced their decision on utilizing popular culture texts. According to Veronica, the importance of keeping children engaged with interesting popular culture texts increases with age. Their overall view confirmed the idea of diversifying interesting trade books for individual readings and read-alouds that tie into current class units.

Sarah

Sarah considered their experience growing up in a predominantly White suburban East Coast neighborhood and going to a regular K-12 public school a positive one and elaborated on what popular culture impacted them as a child. They remarked on the impact of music channels like MTV and VH1 and television shows such as *Will and Grace* [TV series] (Mutchnik et al., 1998-2006 – 2017-2020) and *Gilmore Girls* [TV series] (Sherman-Palladino et al., 2000-2007). When asked about their definition of popular culture, they mentioned that any popular book such as *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* (Rowling, 1998) can be considered popular culture once it gains popularity. Upon the question about what popular culture impacted them, they mentioned that some popular culture could be a “gateway to more popular culture.” Apart from Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, they spoke of podcasts as a daily interaction with popular culture. Sarah remarked on the podcast *Keep It* [Podcast] (Long & Martinez, 2017- present) stating that they valued the fact that it “tries to look at pop culture through like a queer lens.” Sarah then shared the observation that the majority of E! news and E! entertainment had an aspect of Whiteness. Additionally, Sarah stressed the importance of connecting children’s interests to the class work and starting a conversation with the children via popular culture: the value of integrating a Pokémon character into a math lesson or a persuasive essay could impact the students’ engagement in the lesson. They concluded that whatever the children choose to read would increase their literacy and most likely, the selected books would be popular culture texts.

Alice

Alice reported that it was challenging to define popular culture. An avid reader, they consumed book series such as *Little House on the Prairie* (Wilder, 1953) and *Baby-Sitters Club: Kristy’s Great Idea*: (Martin, 1986) as a child. Even though Alice considered them not the most well-written books, they considered those stories to be interconnected and attention-getting for children. Alice read popular culture books to their

children and remarked that *The Adventures of Captain Underpants: The First Epic Novel* (Pilkey, 1997) was a great graphic novel for hooking children into reading. They mentioned that their son, who had challenges learning how to read, was able to succeed eventually due to the series' catchy nature. They concluded that they would include popular culture in the classroom when the opportunity arose. Alice indicated a strong belief that children should have choices when it comes to reading and suggested that peer pressure was another factor that contributed to finding material to read.

Themes

Based on the data analysis of the surveys, interviews, and reflexive memos, the following themes were derived: 1) Popular culture as social and shared; 2) Popular culture as a way to hook kids; 3) Popular culture integration as engaging and relatable; 4) Popular culture as digital texts; and 5) Popular culture as unknown and unimportant.

Theme 1: Popular Culture as Social and Shared

Throughout the survey and interview responses, the theme of popular culture as social and shared was prominent. Many times, participants reported that a sibling, a best friend, a group of friends, or a parent shared popular culture texts with them. As an example of parents inspiring a love of popular culture, Participant 3 reported in the survey:

Our dad took it upon himself to educate us as well about comedy, starting with movies like *Uncle Buck*, and *Vacation*, and *Young Frankenstein*; he loved Chevy Chase and Mel Brooks, and anything directed by John Hughes. Both my parents loved classic rock and helped inspire my love for all kinds of music.

Similarly, Participant 2 responded in the survey that they remembered receiving a toy that they wanted because their friends owned one:

I grew up fairly poor but I remember that one year I got two Webkinz's (stuffed animals with website pass code to play on a virtual world) and I was so excited because all my friends had accounts and I didn't."

During the interviews, the theme of social and shared persisted. In fact, participants reported that searching for the latest and greatest popular culture to share with friends and family was of high importance. For example, Marion, when discussing the podcasts that they consume now, responded: "It's almost like who can find, like the newest thing that no one's heard of because it's so easy now to find that new thing that no one's heard of."

Theme 2: Popular Culture as a Way to Hook Kids

During the interviews, there were many mentions of "hooking" readers by providing popular culture texts as choices for reading or for lessons. That is, participants indicated that finding interesting popular culture celebrities, sports figures, or media characters to incorporate into lessons engaged students. For example, Alice explained, when discussing their own child's exploration of popular culture texts: "And it was the *Captain Underpants*, like the silliness of it, but also like the incorporation of illustration with text. . . . It was like the first book that he actually, I think, felt excited to read by himself." Similarly, Sarah, when discussing the texts they read as a child, said, "Definitely, my big thing was *Goosebumps*. I got hooked on *Goosebumps*. That's what got me hooked on reading." Concerning the integration of popular culture texts into the curriculum, Marion asserted, "And if it's something that can be taught well, with a popular culture reference or activity then the kids are going to be hooked and it's not going to in any way inhibit their learning."

Theme 3: Popular Culture Integration as Engaging and Relatable

In the popular culture survey, we asked participants if they agreed with several statements about popular culture integration. One of the statements was: “Incorporating aspects of popular culture helps children to make sense of literacy in literacy programs.” Of the five participants, three strongly agreed and two agreed with the statement. Alice, when asked about integrating popular culture into lessons, responded, “I feel very strongly that they should be incorporated into the curriculum. Or at least think, yeah, at least be given like an option.”

Indeed, most participants indicated that integrating popular culture texts into the curriculum was important for engagement and relatability.

Theme 4: Popular Culture as Digital Texts

Digital popular culture was mentioned many times, particularly in texts that participants reported consuming as adults. Indeed, some participants indicated that they searched for digital popular culture texts to consume. They reported seeking out the newest, edgiest, and most political podcasts and social media. For example, Sarah described an interesting new podcast titled *You’re Wrong About* [Podcast] (Marshall, 2018-present) and continued: “I think Twitter is my go-to for most pop culture, it’s so digestible and just that a 180 characters or whatever they have up to two.”

In another example of digital popular culture text consumption, Participant 3 mentioned:

Podcasts are important. “The Daily”, we went through a big “Pod Save America” phase. Books still hold a place, but I find that I read less now than ever, maybe I’ll get back into it! Also, social media has really taken hold. I scroll through Instagram every day.

In sum, the popular culture texts that the participants consumed as adults were largely digital texts such as podcasts.

Theme 5: Popular Culture as Unknown or Unimportant

In their interviews, some of the participants were unclear about defining popular culture and its usefulness in the classroom. Veronica suggested that popular culture texts were more important for older children: “Yeah, I think the biggest takeaway is like I feel like it becomes more important as they get older, they get I think it becomes more and more and more important.” Veronica went on to explain:

I’m just trying to make sure they have popular books that they want to pull out like, they want to get out of their browsing box at this age is just a little bit different because they’re not, they’re still emergent readers, right?

Alex, when asked about popular culture texts, responded that they knew very little about popular culture texts, saying, “I don’t think I know a lot. I don’t know celebrities. I don’t follow popular storylines. I don’t watch movies. I’m not a tv watcher.” When queried further about integrating popular culture texts into the curriculum, Alex continued, “I see it as a useful tool...it’s not my immediate instinct.”

Findings in Relation to Research Questions

The first research question focused on the materials that the participants consumed as both children and adults. Sarah, Marion, and Alice reported an abundance of popular culture consumption as children and adults. Indeed, they mentioned that, as children, they loved toys, music, television, movies, and books. As adults, they consumed many podcasts and some music, movies, and television. In contrast, Alex and Veronica reported consuming a smaller amount of popular culture texts as children and adults.

The second research question concerned how preservice teachers’ previous popular culture text consumption factored into decisions to include or exclude popular culture texts in the curriculum.

Interestingly, Sarah, Marion, and Alice, who reported the largest consumption of popular culture as children and adults noted that popular culture text integration was of prime importance. Alternately, Veronica and Alex, who reportedly consumed smaller amounts of popular culture texts, discussed the integration of it with some hesitation. For example, although Veronica mentioned upcoming plans to incorporate short videos into instruction, they responded that with younger students, popular culture integration was less important than with older students. Additionally, Alex noted that integrating popular culture is "not my immediate instinct."

DISCUSSION

During the interviews, all five participants reflected on the importance of sharing popular culture with family and friends, providing a concrete example of the theme of popular culture as social and shared. Additionally, the theme of sharing popular culture provides an example of sociocultural theory in practice (Davidson, 2010; Vygotsky, 1978). Indeed, in their 2010 study, Tanis discussed the importance of sharing popular culture with one of the three participants: "While most critics of popular culture talk about the isolated, individual consumption of popular culture, May talked about sharing experiences with teammates, boyfriends, and friends... May reflects on the value of the shared experience of popular culture consumption" (p. 149).

Decisions about popular culture integration may be connected to participants' understanding of popular culture texts. Just as diverse definitions of popular culture abound in the literature (Storey, 2001), participants' responses ranged from Alex's brief reply, "I don't think I know a lot," to more extensive descriptions. Indeed, while four of the five interview participants provided their own definition of popular culture texts, they all indicated that they were not completely clear on the definition of popular culture.

Most participants reported observing some popular culture text integration into their mentor teachers' instruction. Although four of the interview participants indicated that they planned future instruction incorporating popular culture texts, none of the participants mentioned fear of administrators' or other teachers' disapproval or negative reactions. Importantly, no participant discussed the negative effects of popular culture integration (Brooks, 2008; Taylor, 2010). Therefore, in light of Petrone's (2013) three kinds of teachers, more participants indicated that they valued popular culture texts and may integrate these texts into instruction in the future, and two participants indicated that, although they thought it was important, they may not integrate popular culture texts into their future lessons.

When teachers listen respectfully to children's talk and provide the freedom and space for children to bring their knowledge of popular culture into their reading and writing, when teachers look for ways to bridge home and school literacies, the curriculum becomes more permeable. When teachers are open to teachable moments when the student teaches the teacher, true, contextual learning can occur, and a tapestry of permeable curriculum is woven (Dyson, 1993, 2021).

LIMITATIONS

We now turn to the limitations of this research. We selected convenience sampling (Miles et al., 2014) because the research took place in 2020 when COVID 19 concerns canceled in-person learning in universities and schools across the country and the world. The participants in this research were preservice teachers enrolled in masters-level reading and writing methods courses. Importantly, of the seven graduate students who agreed to participate in the study, the five participants who completed the survey may not be the five participants who completed the interviews. Still another limitation may be confirmation bias: the threat of a researcher's prior beliefs or convictions impeding any of the stages of data collection (Greenwald et al., 1986). For example, the instructor's prior knowledge of popular culture texts may have threatened the integrity of the research process.

IMPLICATIONS

We now explore the implications of this qualitative research. Based on the benefits of popular culture text integration for students (e.g., connecting home and school literacies, and supporting critical literacy discussions) (Petrone, 2013), teacher education faculty may consider creating courses in popular culture education; incorporating more popular culture texts and discussions into literacy and content methods courses; sharing examples of how popular culture texts build bridges between students' in-school and out-of-school knowledge; and supporting students' developing critical literacies. Preservice teachers can be encouraged to incorporate popular culture texts into lesson plans and units of study and reflect on that implementation. Educators and preservice teachers may be encouraged to become popular culture ethnographers (Petrone, 2013) to examine how their own consumption of popular culture as children and adults may transfer into classroom teaching. Future research may include interviewing preservice teachers who are enrolled in a popular culture education course and who plan, implement, and reflect upon lessons that integrate popular culture texts.

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AUTHOR BIOS:

Melinda S. Butler, Ed.D., is an assistant professor of literacy in the Department of Literacy, Language, and Culture at the University of Southern Maine and the Director of the USM Summer Reading and Writing Workshop. Her research interests include popular culture texts, student access to texts, literacy clinics, and independent reading.

Nadine Bravo is a multilingual and multicultural second-year graduate student at the University of Southern Maine, pursuing two M.Ed. (ETEP and TESOL) and a Graduate Studies Certificate in Native American Studies at Montana State University. Her research interests revolve around the literacy of Native American English Language Learners.

Eva Arbor is finishing up her Master's in Policy, Planning, and Management with the University of Southern Maine in hopes of one day opening a non-profit in Bangor, Maine, where she is originally from. Her interests are centered around advocacy, family planning, and access to mental health resources for marginalized individuals.

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APPENDIX A

Table 1

Survey Participants' Popular Culture Consumption as Children

Survey Participants' Popular Culture Consumption	As Children
Books	<i>Harry Potter</i> <i>His Dark Materials</i> <i>Goosebumps</i> <i>Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark</i> <i>The Berenstain Bears</i> <i>Anne of Green Gables</i>
Television Series	Disney Channel <i>Will and Grace</i> <i>Queer Eye for the Straight Guy</i> <i>Full House</i> <i>Saved by the Bell</i> <i>Unsolved Mysteries</i> <i>Hey Arnold</i> <i>SpongeBob</i> <i>Little House on the Prairie</i> <i>Rugrats</i>
Movies	Disney Movies <i>Uncle Buck</i> <i>Young Frankenstein</i> <i>Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer</i>
Music	New Kids on the Block (NSYNC) Madonna Michael Jackson Boyz II Men Kids Bop Backstreet Boys Ricky Martin Pink Christina Aguilera TLC
Toys	Webkinz ViewMaster Skip-It Bedazzler Barbie My Little Pony Polly Pocket Pogs Furbies
Games	Clue Scattergories Pictionary

Survey Participants' Popular Culture Consumption	As Children
Video Games	<i>Mario 1</i> <i>Mario 2</i> <i>Mario 3</i>
Sports	Softball Field Hockey Baseball Red Sox Patriots

APPENDIX B

Table 2

Survey Participants' Popular Culture Consumption as Adults

Survey Participants' Popular Culture Consumption	As Children
Websites and Social Media	<i>Vulture.com</i> <i>Instagram</i>
Movies	<i>Marvel series</i> <i>Goonies</i> <i>Back to the Future</i> <i>Beetlejuice</i> <i>Home Alone</i>
Books	<i>Harry Potter</i> <i>Diary of a Wimpy Kid</i> <i>Warriors</i> <i>Dog Man</i>
Podcasts	<i>My Favorite Murder</i> <i>Bananas</i> <i>Terrible, Thanks for Asking</i> <i>The Daily</i> <i>Pod Save America</i>
Music and Music Blogs	<i>Underground Indie</i> <i>Sound</i> <i>Pitchfork</i> <i>Stereogum</i>
Television	<i>Last Week Tonight</i> <i>Parks and Rec</i> <i>Schitt's Creek</i> <i>The Office</i> <i>Seinfeld</i> <i>Cheers</i> <i>Curb Your Enthusiasm</i> <i>Stranger Things</i> <i>Unsolved Mysteries</i>



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