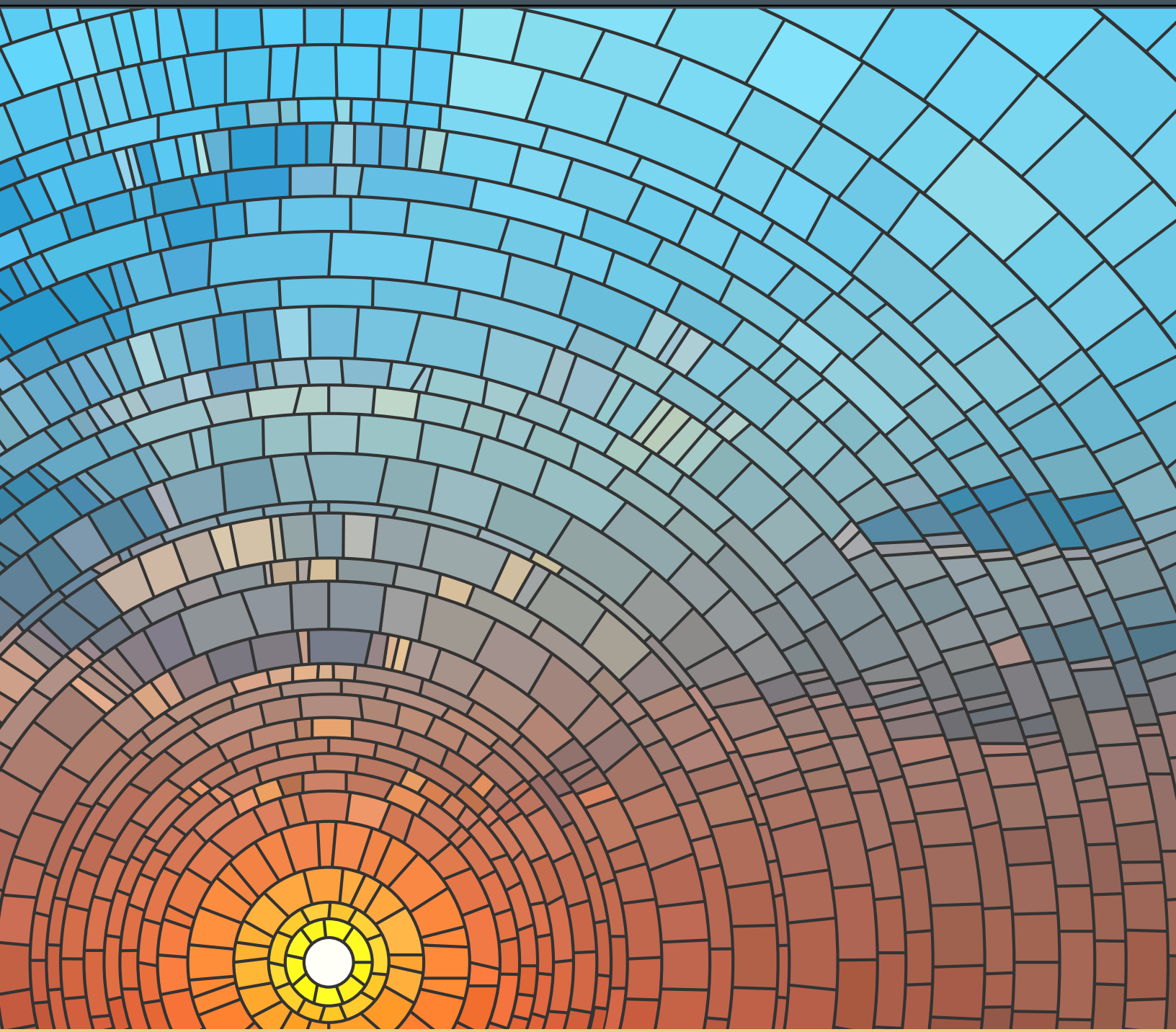
DIALOGUE
The Interdisciplinary Journal of Popular Culture and Pedagogy

10 YEARS OF DIALOGUE: Highlights from 2014 – 2022



10 YEARS

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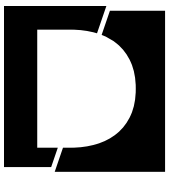

DIALOGUE

The Interdisciplinary Journal of Popular Culture and Pedagogy

Volume 10, Issue 3

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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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DIALOGUE
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Challenging Conventions: Provoking Thought with Engaged Teaching and Learning in Popular Culture

As 2023 comes to an end, we are delighted to have celebrated 10 years of *Dialogue*, exploring, questioning, and promoting engaged teaching and learning in, with, and through popular culture. In this special issue, we bring together highlights from across the decade, showcasing popular culture and pedagogy across themes, and modalities, from classical interpretations to current sociocultural, environmental, and political directions. These articles, starting from 2014, offer insights into how multimedia platforms such as literature, film, and comics, provide directions for interrogating the relationship between power and popular culture, questioning the status quo, and incorporating informal and formal pedagogy within and beyond traditional educational spaces.

As we reflect on the past decade of *Dialogue*, we also look ahead to the future possibilities that popular culture holds for education. The journey has been marked by a dynamic interplay between traditional and contemporary perspectives, demonstrating the evolving nature of pedagogy in response to societal shifts. Looking forward, we aim to continue fostering a space where educators and learners alike can explore the intersections of popular culture and education. In the coming years, we anticipate delving deeper into emerging themes, embracing technological advancements, and further amplifying diverse voices in the discourse. The articles underscore the importance of connecting timeless and contemporary narratives to present-day concerns, whether through interpretive frameworks or contemporary retellings, to foster meaningful engagement and pedagogical exploration. As we embark on this continued exploration, we express gratitude to our contributors, readers, and the broader educational community for their unwavering support in making *Dialogue* a vibrant hub of innovative pedagogical discussions and transformative opportunities.

The past decade has seen a great number of excellent and timely articles come across the editors' desks. Interpretations of pedagogy and pop culture have been varied during this time, but a consistent linkage between these articles—particularly the vibrancy of the selected work for this tenth-anniversary issue—has been the notion of communication as a form of change. From a discussion of postmodern influence and re-envisioning in Homer's The Odyssey to a meditation on the power of books to impart lessons about social justice, to discussions of queer culture, mixtapes, and the classroom itself, *Dialogue* authors have demonstrated their awareness of how communication in its many forms can change both individuals and societies at large. This has held true from the earliest modes of storytelling through the permutations of written communication and into our flourishing digital age; there is real, tangible power in transmitting information. At *Dialogue*, we've been grateful to witness our readers and contributors step into their positions of communicative power, changing the lives around them for the better as they go.

Leon Trotsky argues that art, including the cultural products borne of popular culture, is not just an individual's isolated expression of genius but arises from the interplay between an artist's life and their environment, including the social and political contexts it emerges from. Art can be a tool through which

we forge–or resist–a collective social and standpoint. Because of this, cultural products from literature to video games are mirrors that reflect back to us the naturalized values and norms of the particular social and historical contexts they emerge from. Popular culture can also reflect our dreams for the future of society. As Audre Lorde (1984) argues, poetry "forms the quality of the light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first made into language, then into idea, then into more tangible action." As a social and political act, art is, thus, an invaluable pedagogical tool that can make deconstructing abstract or complex political concepts more relatable and accessible. The articles highlighted in this issue demonstrate the immense potential of using popular culture as case studies through which to critically engage with broader social and political issues. These articles also show how some pop culture products can function as beacons that prompt alternate ways of thinking in the classroom.

Similarly reflecting on the potent educational possibilities of popular culture, late Black feminist scholar bell hooks argued that

whether we're talking race, or gender, or class, popular culture is where the pedagogy is, is where the learning is." Indeed, bell hooks stressed the primacy of popular culture as a "pedagogical medium for masses of people globally who want to, in some way, understand the politics of difference (1997)

For hooks, popular culture was (and perhaps remains) a generative site of learning and unlearning, of personal and collective transformation, one where questions of power, social identity, and (mis)representation can be engaged in complex and meaningful ways. The articles highlighted in this issue not only speak to the transformative potential bell hooks witnessed in her own experiences incorporating popular culture in the college classroom but also highlight the myriad liberatory modes of knowing and seeing that such critical engagements with popular culture invite.

Thank you for joining us throughout these last 10 years. Here's the next years!!

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

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ABSTRACT

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

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

"Well, I'm not going to lie… I'm a big fan of Jersday"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CASE ONE: ITALIAN LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

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

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

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

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

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

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

CASE TWO: INTERNATIONAL MEDIA & BUSINESS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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APPENDIX A

Focus Group Protocol for Faculty-led Study Abroad Participants

Legend: ***SN***—Question gauging social network, as public pedagogy, influences
PC—Question gauging popular culture, as public pedagogy, influences

1. Nominal Data: "Can we briefly go around the group and identify age, what year of study, academic interest (for example I am 25, I am a sophomore, I'm an education major)." *To be completed on the Note Card*

(SN/PC) 2. Let's talk about the beginning of your interest in study abroad?: "Can you remember the first time that studying abroad became of interest to you? When was the first time you thought about being in a study abroad? End quote?

(SN) 3. Who in your lives has provided support to your upcoming trip abroad to DESTINATION X (destination to be inserted, depending on specific faculty-led program)?: "What do you know about the place you are going? What do you not know, or want to know? Where do you feel this information comes from?"

(SN) 4. Can you tell me about any individual in your life (parent, teacher, advisor, friends, classmates, peers) that may have influenced you in making the decision to participate in a study abroad?: "What sort of messages were conveyed about study abroad? (what sorts of things do they talk about in terms of what study abroad would do for you as an individual)"

(SN) 5. What do your family and friends say about you upcoming study abroad trip?: "Do you feel like you are encouraged to go abroad by your family and friends? Do you feel discouraged by your family and friends to go abroad? How does this encouragement or discouragement get communicated? Have you shared your upcoming trip 'news' with all of your friends and family?"

(SN/PC) 6. Are there still things you feel like you want to know about where you are going? Or uncertainty that exists?: "Where would you seek out this information? What kind of information is it?"

(SN) 7. What sort of messages do you see conveyed from individuals in your life (parent, teacher, advisor, faculty or friends) about their own study abroad experiences?: "What sorts of artifacts or mementos have they used to talk about their experience (could be pictures, souvenirs, personal stories or narratives)? Do you think that these showed or illustrated what it means to study abroad for you?"

(PC) 8. Can you think of a movie/tv show/book/radio show/pod cast/musical, or song that comes to mind when I say DESTINATION X?: "Is there a particular show, channel, movie that may have reminded you of destination X? Is there any particular movie/tv show/book/radio show/pod cast/musical, or song that made you more interested in destination X? Can you think of

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

(PC) 9. ***If you asked you to think of a recent example of something that you saw on TV that influenced what you thought about DESTINATION X what would it be?*** "Do you think that there characters in Pop culture that have influenced how you perceive the people of culture of DESTINATION X?"

(SN/PC) 10. ***What is the first word that comes to mind when I mention DESTINATION X?*** "What do you feel that this word is informed by or where does this word come from?"

(PC) 11. ***Is there any particular informative channel on television that offers you insight into DESTINATION X?***

(PC) 12. ***Is there any particular movie that offers you insight into DESTINATION X?***

APPENDIX B

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

1. Can you elaborate more on the individuals who encouraged study abroad experiences? What made these messages meaningful?

2. Can you elaborate more on a movie/tv show/book/radio show/pod cast/musical, or song that gave you insight about study abroad or destination X?

3. Can you give more detail on _____?

4. Can you tell me what you meant by _____?

5. Since we last spoke, is there anything else about your influences and motivations to study abroad that you thought of that you'd like to talk with me about

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

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ABSTRACT

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

KEYWORDS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The time span of more than one hundred years, which occurred between the actual events in Wilder's life, when Wilder recorded them, and when they were revised for television is a significant factor in interpreting images of American Indians in both the texts and television shows. During the hundred-year span, the political relationship between Native Nations and the federal government underwent several major transitions, as did public sentiment toward Native people, which undoubtedly inspired—or might have inspired—changes to the presentation of Native people and themes in the adaptations of the *Little House* story. At the time the Ingalls family's covered wagon arrived in Indian Territory in1869, federal policy was in the Reservation Era, a time characterized by rigid assimilation policies for reservation residents, where both policies and boundaries were strictly enforced by federal agents. By the time Wilder wrote about her experiences in Indian Territory some 60 years later in 1934, policy had shifted several times and was entering the Reorganization era. As Wilder drafted the third novel in her series, *Little House on the Prairie,* the Indian Reorganization Act acknowledged the importance of maintaining, rather than eliminating Native cultures, but was couched in paternalistic approaches that prevented Native communities from being fully in control of their own affairs. In 1975, as the *Little House* television series was in its second of nine seasons, Congress passed the Self-Determination and

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

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

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

NATIVE CONTENT IN THE PREMIER MOVIE (1974)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

NATIVE CONTENT IN THE DISNEY TELEVISION MINISERIES (2005)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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DIALOGUE
The Interdisciplinary Journal of Popular Culture and Pedagogy

Lady Gaga Meets Ritzer: Using Music to Teach Sociological Theory

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents methods for instructors to deal with student anxiety over theory courses. The method is an interactive class exercise that provides instructors with direction as to using popular music. The paper accomplishes this through the use of several cases for including music in order to spark discussion and suggestions for helping students to interpret the theory presented. Additionally, suggestions for incorporating writing assignments with the exercise are provided here. A table linking music to a theorist is also provided.

KEYWORDS:

Music, Sociology, Theory, Teaching, Student Anxiety, Subculture, Class Exercise, Undergraduate, Popular Culture.

The challenges involved with teaching an undergraduate Social Theory course are oft reported. Lowney (1998) notes that students often enroll in Social Theory simply to fulfill a requirement for their major. Others cite the mental and emotional obstacles students face. Students are often "anxious and fearful" of Social Theory courses (Ahlkvist 471; Hickson and Stacks 262). Research into lowering student anxiety in theory and other core courses is a critical question explored by many scholars (Ahlkvist, 471; Ormrod, 191; Schacht and Stewart 329). From our anecdotal experiences and writings by Julie Pelton (107), we find students regularly report theory to be the most difficult Sociology course taken. Rumors tend to spread**,** thereby enhancing the fear and anxiety associated with courses in Social theory. Cases were discovered where instructors work around their students' difficulty in understanding complex concepts by constructing a theory course that is both fun and enjoyable, resulting in students feeling more comfortable with theory (Flanagan and McCausland 311). As in many courses, the patience and willingness of the instructor to put extra work into a theory course goes a long way in regard to students conquering their fear of theory. One suggestion is looking to contemporary examples and current events as a method for simplifying concepts (Hickson and Stacks 263). This can involve strategies that incorporate intensive writing where film (Pelton 107) or other popular culture content serves to engage students.

Employing popular music in Sociology courses has been lauded by both instructors and students alike (Albers and Bach 237-238; Martinez 260). To date we know of no systematic exercise integrating popular music in a standard Social Theory class; however, in the field of Criminology and Economics scholars have used music to teach key theoretical concepts in their courses (Rothe and Collins 227; Hinds-Aldrich 7; Van Horn and Van Horn 65). This is surprising because courses in Social Theory are important universally required and central to the discipline (Orum 95). Jarl Ahlkvist made an effort to integrate music when teaching classical theory in his introductory Sociology courses (473-478). Ahlkvist used "Progressive Rock" bands Pink Floyd, Yes, and ELP (Emerson, Lake, and Palmer), to illustrate the theories of Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim and Max Weber respectively (476). The music served as a "concrete organizing framework" to which students could "easily link abstract social theories." (Ahlkvist 476) In short, the use of music enhanced students' learning of social theories**;** however, there were some stated limitations. Notably, Ahlkvist found that his presentations of conceptually dense progressive rock actually decreased student participation relative to other introductory course topics (476). Moreover**,** he states, "most [students] initially dismiss this music from the 1970's as largely irrelevant for understanding our current social environment" (Ahlkvist 480). Ahlkvist writes that "A more ambitious extension of this technique might include the use of popular music that emerged in the aftermath of progressive rock."(481) This paper does so, not entirely eschewing music from the 70's, while still moving forward and presenting an interactive exercise that integrates various styles of popular music in the Social Theory classroom.

The musical tastes and stylistic preferences of youth have become more fluid and there is an "essential eclecticism of post-war youth culture" (Bennett 600). Musical tastes are less collective and genre based, reflecting what Bennett calls "neo-tribal sensibilities," mirroring aspects of "late modern consumer society" (Bennett 614). Like other patterns of consumption, young people are clearly accustomed to individualizing, and even personalizing, their choices. Albers and Bach find that using popular music in the classroom "bridges the gap between the professional and the personal" (Albers and Bach 238). The personal in this case, the world of popular culture and mass media, is a common immersion for most students. The professional is represented by the structured norms apparent to students and emblematic of the typical classroom environment. Material culture in the classroom allows for instructors to achieve their goals by sparking curiosity and limiting defensiveness and conformity (Groce 80; Hoefel 71).

Drawing from the above-referenced experience, using music in Ken Culton's introductory courses endeavored to bring music into the Social Theory classroom as well. As faculty members we are the bearers

of institutional norms, and as faculty who may have chosen to teach Social Theory, we are often that much further culturally from the traditional college student. Using music and other forms of popular culture allows instructors to appear to be less intimidating and as such should be especially advantageous in the Social Theory classroom, where we commonly find students to be prone to intimidation (Pelton 107; Albers and Bach 239; Hickson and Stacks 262). Less fearful students are more apt to active engagement in the classroom. Martinez finds that "music has always been a springboard for discussion of issues, provoking students to use a certain amount of 'sociological imagination'" (Martinez 415). The use of music in the classroom allows for "creating an active role for students" that involves the routinization of participation, thereby working to alleviate anxiety about a theory course (Macheski et al. 45). Finally, music in class can be used to create a "common language of discourse," given that the students take course material and apply it to the music played in the classroom (Macheski et al. 46).

Albers and Bach explain that playing music provides an "opening" or "back region" that allows students to make important breakthroughs in their understanding of the material (239). The authors go on to state that "If students perceive themselves in a backstage environment, they are more comfortable, and they are thus inclined to interact with one another and with us" (Albers and Bach 239). Additionally, Martinez points out that with students' connections to music culture, they discover that the concerns of social theorists are echoed by the artists they currently listen to—thereby altering their relationship to the entire enterprise (415). The ball is now on their side of the court**,** so to speak, since the invitation to participate has been delivered on their terms. It has been made appropriate for them to now speak, not as seasoned theorists, but as defenders and as translators of their own cultural artifacts. All of this, again, serves to bridge the gap between faculty members who are well versed in theory and comfortable talking about social theory and students who are not. We feel that bringing music into the classroom can help to alleviate this fear and anxiety.

Scholars who study various music genres and subcultures observed that music and lyrics often serve to reveal hidden truths about society (Assante 10; Wood 4; Gaines 177-192). The insight may add value and depth to the music, as such in the eyes of young students whose development can be seen as a search for truth in the face of myriad contradictions put forth by power holding adults (Hine 45).

THE EXERCISE

A great challenge in Social Theory courses, and many other courses for that matter, is getting students to read and think critically about the reading before class begins. Therefore, the teaching technique we describe in this paper involves beginning each class (or new theory) by displaying the song lyric and playing the song selection that corresponds to the listed theory in its entirety (See Appendix). In most cases the instructor would have come to class ready to play music either by using one of our suggestions or finding their own music. Additionally, the instructor could encourage students to bring in their own music. If the instructor plays a music video such as one may find on YouTube, then this video could add a visual dimension to a particular song before discussion. The lyrics can be posted on Blackboard for an ongoing discussion beyond the classroom. This approach, beginning each class with a song, was applied successfully by Albers and Bach (240). They noted greater student participation in sociological topics at the introductory level. The paper provides discussion having to do with how to extend this approach to sociological theory courses.

The authors feel that it is important for this exercise to be open-ended. The addition of rules and procedures, for the sake of appearances, merely reproduces the institutional imperative and undermines our collective purpose. Students desire involvement and they are less likely to participate if they fear their answer may fall beyond the scope of what the instructor finds acceptable. Under the most unspecified conditions student anxiety may still exist, but in this paper the argument is that it is mitigated by a true commitment to

a sort of structured informality. In short, students are challenged, or forced into thinking, while being given the leeway to think critically. The essence of what the paper proposes is simply process: play a song, present a lyric, and ask students to discuss how it relates to Social theory. The four examples below outline this structured informality in practice; there is an introduction of a song and lyrics followed by comments about how an instructor could incorporate the music into class discussion.

The song "Meat is Murder" by The Smiths[1] is a pointed example of an effort to redefine the commonly held definition of a symbol, in this case "meat." The vocalist, Morrissey, croons the following passage from the song, "Heifer whines could be human cries, closer comes the screaming knife. This beautiful creature must die. This beautiful creature must die. A death for no reason and death for no reason is MURDER."

After presenting the lyrics, the instructor can begin the discussion by asking students in an open-ended fashion, to consider how the song relates to symbolic interactionism.[2] The notion of symbol can arise from this discussion. The instructor might then ask, "What symbol is this song about?" After establishing that "meat" is the major theme, the instructor can then ask, "What is the author trying to say about meat being murder?" Once students engage with the symbol topic, the instructor can ask, "How the meaning of symbols is generally determined?" and "How do most people view this symbol (meat) most of the time?" There is plenty of room for tangential discussions here (ex. ecological cost of eating meat), and they should be welcomed. Vegetarians in the class may certainly weigh in, as well as those who find these ideas foreign. Students may conclude that many symbols in a complex society hold meanings that are subject to revision, often through the contention of various actors, just as observed in the classroom. The instructor may also choose to revisit this and other songs during the course to illustrate theoretical paradigms, such as critical theory.

The song "No" by Vivian Girls is a droll anthem of sorts with an entire lyric comprised of just one word: No. "No" is repeated in various melodies and harmonized in a pop whimsical fashion throughout. In this case, the song itself may function as a "breach," where the usual social order is disrupted. Similar situationally to Harold Garfinkel's "breaching experiments" (Garfinkel 44-49), the song elicits breach filling behavior on the part of subjects who, when faced with the true chaotic nature of the social world, are compelled to correct it or fill the breach. The puzzle is for students to figure out this very fact. Some students may at first be confused and even offended by the lack of more traditional lyrics. This confusion will only contribute to the breach and thus strengthen the example by bringing forth more frustration.

One conclusion to draw from the exercise is for students to think more critically about their preconceived expectations. What counts as an acceptable song lyric? Why is the use of one word troubling? Students should be challenged to consider what makes a song lyric acceptable. If Garfinkel and other ethnomethodologists are 'correct', then the world is much more chaotic than realized. The ensuing discussion could be an attempt to find other examples where our expectations override our ability to see situations clearly. This discussion could begin with music, where the instructor might ask, "What are some other examples of music that challenge our sense of what is normal?" and "How did you react when you first heard (death metal, gangsta rap, etc.)?" The sounds used in a composition may allude to, or upend, our expectations.

Known to be an empowering, uncompromising, strong, and likely feminist figure in popular music, Lady Gaga espouses the virtues of acceptance in "Born this Way." In the bridge of "Born this Way," Lady Gaga sings "Don't be a drag, just be a queen, Whether you're broke or evergreen, You're black, white, beige, chola descent, You're lebanese, you're orient. Whether life's disabilities, Left you outcast, bullied, or teased, Rejoice and love yourself today, 'Cause baby you were born this way."

Though postmodernism is a regularly debated concept, George Ritzer describes it to be "more accepting of the stranger," where, unlike modernity and its attempts to eliminate ambivalence, the postmodern world is seen to be "more tolerant" (228). Ritzer states that "The postmodern world is destined to be a far more uncertain world than modernity, and those who live in it need to have strong nerves." (228)

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Before attempting to grasp postmodernity, students need a sense of modernity as a project of intensifying bureaucratization, social stratification, and order. The instructor might ask students, "What are some ways in which (modern) society is segregated or stratified?" Next, "How dodes Lady Gaga's song respond to this trend of stratification?" From here, the instructor may choose his or her own emphasis. One obvious direction is to question how "postmodern" a society is or is not. This could be effectively framed by asking students "Are we or are we not living in the world described by Lady Gaga?" Postmodernism has also been characterized as "a lack of concern, playfulness, and self-centeredness" (Ritzer 228). This is reflected in the exhortation to "be a queen" and the emphasis on "I" in the lyric above. Students might be asked to consider if these proscriptions are in fact the best way to better the world? Or, is there something more, namely collective action, missing from Gaga's utopic vision?

"Okie from Muskogee" by Merle Haggard is a classic country tune that many students will find humorous. [3] It is emblematic of an era, specifically a prideful affirmation of "small town" values and rejection of the amoral other. Ferdinand Toennies's Gemeinschaft or *community* is certainly on display here, described by Peter Kivisto as based on "habit, tradition, shared beliefs, and affective bonds" (91). Though some tend to dismiss Gemeinschaft as the increasingly passé social arrangement in favor of Gesellschaft, or *society*, "both types coexist at any particular point in time" (Kivisto 91). This may resonate with students of a conservative ilk, who may find a sociological ally in Toennies, a theorist whom, like Emile Durkheim, clearly favored tradition and the collective over instrumental rationality. Some students may be able to offer examples of modern country songs that extend this trope; these types of lyrics will serve to strengthen the case while also making the classroom more inclusive.

Peter Kivisto brings forth a more nuanced interpretation of Toennies that recognizes both Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft as the outcomes of a social world that is "willed" (91). "Natural will" or *wesenwille* leads to actions that are "less consciously chosen, predicated instead on tradition, habit, or emotion" (Kivisto 91). Deconstructing the lyrical text below can uncover the mood or tap into the unsaid and reveal the implicit agreements made between Merle Haggard and his likeminded audience. Students might be asked to explain if residents of Muskogee in fact see their predilections as natural? Discussion could also be encouraged by asking students to identify the role of emotion in this *natural will* for Toennies to give birth to the Gemeinschaft social formulation. The following passage fits this argument: "We don't burn no draft cards down on Main Street; We like livin' right, and bein' free.I'm proud to be an Okie from Muskogee, A place where even squares can have a ball. We still wave Old Glory down at the courthouse….We don't let our hair grow long and shaggy, Like the hippies out in San Francisco do" (Haggard).

The lyric loses explanatory power if applied to Gesellschaft. The hippies of San Francisco, though derided here, may also consider themselves both then and today a community of people with "shared beliefs" and "affective bonds" (Kivisto 91). Here again is an opportunity to further parse the theoretical terrain through probing questions. Perhaps ask students where they would *not* expect to see Gemeinschaft? The Gemienschaft discussion can also be used to illustrate Durkheim**'s** organic solidarity, though the concepts are not interchangeable. Is it the anomic city? On a rural campus such consensus may surface, but it is understood that cities are home to numerous tight-knit collectives. The instructor might end with the realization that Gemeinschaft, in one form or another, is almost universally desired, and Gesellschaft feared. The implications of this in a globalizing world is one of the many issues worth exploring.

The use of music lyrics as a class exercise allows for the students to think about the material in greater depth and connect through shared experience. Beyond the discussion based method proposed here, instructors may consider these alternative applications. One suggestion is small writing assignments where students answer a list of questions in light of the lyric and theory presented in class. For example, this could take the form of a brief memo, reflection paper, or as a unique way to begin a journal entry (Coker and Scarboro 219).

For those instructors that wish to incorporate technology, adapting Paul Dean's visual analysis assignment could serve as another outlet for students(1). Students could be given a writing assignment where they would blog about a song of their choosing and make their own connections to a theory presented in the course. Such an assignment would fit Pelton's argument for using "low stakes" or practice writing assignments (111); these assignments have value for reducing anxiety and building confidence. Instructors could also incorporate findings from this exercise in exams as a short answer or essay question. Finally, and ideally for smaller classes, students may be asked to prepare individual or group presentations where, again, a sociological theory is illustrated through an analyzed lyric. This last alternative approach is more advanced, as it puts the student firmly in the instructor's role. This should only be attempted if the instructor has time to offer ample support for the student as s/he develops the presentation.

This paper presents a method for instructors to deal with student anxiety in theory courses. The method included is an interactive exercise that provides instructors with direction as to using popular music in the classroom. The paper accomplishes this by supplying four cases for including music in order to spark class discussion as well as suggestions for helping students interpret the material. The classroom exercise can be reinforced through student reflection by writing short papers, keeping a journal, or alternatively for smaller classes, students may create group presentations where song lyrics are part of the final demonstration. Apart from courses that assign theory, the exercise may be employed in courses such as Sociology 101, Sociology of Gender, Visual Sociology, and Social Movements. For example, one of the co-authors used music on a regular basis in his Sociology 101 course. He teaches at a small private Catholic university that offers BAs in Sociology, which is usually populated by 10-20 students who are predominately white.

The other instructor teaches at a medium sized state university and Hispanic Serving Institution that offers a BA in Sociology. The Sociological Theory course size at this university ranges from 45 to 55 students and are racially and ethnically diverse. The exercise occurred in the final weeks of the introductory Sociology course, where the students were asked to find a song of their choosing and discuss the song's lyrics in light of some topic discussed in Sociology 101. It was found that each year several genres of music are applied in these small papers. Rap/hip hop, hard rock/heavy metal, pop, and country are *always* represented in classes of 30 to 40 students each. Finally, we want to address the fact the limited scope of some of the examples used in this paper. For example, it is beyond the scope of this paper to provide examples for every aspect of postmodernism and modernity. To be clear, the Lady Gaga example does not address every aspect of postmodernism.

ENDNOTES

1. The song samples chosen are not all new. Older songs can be integrated into the course, although it is recommended that at least some newer popular music be used. There is also value in using a variety of music that may appeal to diverse student interest. Students who are unfamiliar with a particular song will only expand their cultural awareness through this process. The use of one musical genre such as the progressive rock use by Ahlkvist is not recommended.
2. Ideally students will have been introduced to the theory through prior reading. Introducing theory in this way may coax students to read more and more carefully.
3. The instructor should be careful not to reinforce stereotypes that may unfairly denigrate a particular group, community, or state. The existence and persistence of these stereotypes however, can and should be discussed.

APPENDIX

Theory/Theorist	Song	Artist
Functionalism	"Don't worry about the government"	Talking Heads
Conflict Theory	"Take the Power Back"	Rage Against the Machine
Symbolic Interaction	"Meat is Murder"	The Smiths
Postmodernism	"Born this Way" "No Future"	Lady Gaga The Sex Pistols
Baudrillard	"Fake Plastic Trees"	Radiohead
Globalization/Neo-Liberalism	"Globalization (scene of the crime)"	Dead Prez featuring Mumia
Foucault (Panopticon)	"I'm Being Watched by the CIA"	Anti Flag
Modernity	"Fitter Happier"	Radiohead
Toennies (Gemeinschaft)	"Okie from Muskogee"	Merle Haggard
Veblen (Conspicuous Consumption)	"Royals"	Lorde
Marcuse (One-Dimensional Man)	"She Watch Channel Zero" "Bullet in the Head"	Public Enemy Rage Against the Machine
Ethnomethodology	"No"	Vivian Girls
Feminist Theory	"FYR"	Le Tigre

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DIALOGUE
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The Power of Books: Teachers' Changing Perspectives about Using Young Adult Books to Teach Social Justice

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ABSTRACT

This study examined teachers' knowledge about social justice and their perspectives and understandings about the use of young adult books to teach social justice. The participants were 14 graduate students in a graduate literacy course. The course provided learning experiences about social justice, including the use of young adult books. These learning experiences were designed to deepen students' understanding of how to address social justice issues with students in the elementary, middle and high school classrooms. Using qualitative measures, the researchers found changes in participants' understanding of social justice and the use of young adult books as a powerful resource for teaching social justice.

All four discussion groups noted a change in their thinking with the themes of awareness and acceptance evident in their responses. For two books, *Shine* (2011) and *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* (2007), what stood out for three of the four book discussion groups were the many social issues evident in the books. In the book *Shine* (2011), some participants felt that the social issues were not fully addressed, and others focused on the "dark" topics in the book including language usage, sexual molestation, and parental abuse. In their discussion of *Trafficked* (2012), three of the four groups felt that the book raised their level of awareness and gave them a new perspective about the issue of human trafficking.

The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian (2007) changed the thinking of all four groups of students about Native American culture and reservation life in regard to cultural assimilation and disparities that continue today. However, the experiences of the participants in reading the three books also deepened their understanding that some books address social justice issues in very strong and powerful ways—ways that may

result in constraints that need to be acknowledged regarding appropriate classroom use. The participants in our study reported that they acquired a more detailed and more in-depth knowledge base about social justice. This was especially evident in their growing awareness of social justice, in perhaps their personal acceptance of the issues, and in their comments about taking action that might lead to change in existing problems surrounding social justice.

Keywords:

Social Justice, Young Adult Books, Teacher Education, Bullying, LGBT

Today's news headlines continue to show that many people are the victims of unfair and unequal treatment by others. We read about instances of teenagers who are bullied and even killed, women who are abused, police violence, and young people embroiled in gang violence. In the midst of these challenges, we, two literacy educator/researchers, wondered how we could address such social justice issues as teacher educators in our college classrooms in ways that would encourage these teachers to address social justice with their own students. Turning to the rich resources found in young adult books, we investigated teachers' knowledge about social justice and their perspectives and understandings about the use of young adult books to teach social justice.

We first present how we framed our study within the context of what we know about the meaning of social justice as well as within the context of existing scholarly works about the use of young adult books for teaching social justice. We then describe our efforts and findings in addressing the following research questions:

- What are teachers' understandings about social justice?
- What are teachers' beliefs and perceptions about the use of young adult books as a tool for social justice instruction?

UNDERSTANDINGS ABOUT SOCIAL JUSTICE

The term social justice appears frequently in a variety of educational contexts. For example, in many instances teacher education programs include social justice in their mission and vision statements to emphasize a fundamental belief in the interest and well-being of all in a diverse society (Hytten & Bettez, 2011). Many of these programs are built upon specific principles and ideas associated with social justice, such as inclusion, equity, promotion of critical thinking, and social change (Bettez, 2008; Hackman, 2005; Michelli & Keiser, 2005, as cited in Hytten & Bettez, 2011). Hytten and Bettez (2011) further emphasize that the phrase is "used in school mission statements, job announcements, and educational reform proposals, though sometimes widely disparate ones, from creating a vision of culturally responsive schools to leaving no child behind" (pp. 7-8). While the term is ubiquitous on this broad level, it also a term frequently used by scholars in the field as well as practitioners.

Yet, it is difficult to pinpoint a precise definition of social justice since it may mean different things to different people. An informal poll of several undergraduate students seeking teaching certification revealed these differences. When asked what social justice meant to them, some replied with general responses about treating all people fairly regardless of race, religion, or socioeconomic status and upholding equality for all while providing for the needs of everyone. Others talked about social justice as a progressive theory socially constructed to provide equality in the field of education. More specifically, some felt that social justice refers to the treatment of minority groups to prevent discrimination and to ensure that their voices are heard.

Still others viewed social justice as a matter of perspective. In particular, a currently popular idea of what is morally just and equitable focuses on societal issues of race, culture, and personal beliefs. The fundamental idea underlying these informal responses about the meaning of social justice, as well as the use of the term in broader educational contexts, is respect for all regardless of individual differences—a respect that leads to fair and equitable treatment. Our knowledge and awareness of social justice encompasses these ideas in that it is a perspective that values equity, equality, and fairness and seeks to understand the complicated issues that lead to social inequality and discrimination. Social justice education focuses on ways that students can make real change in the world.

Social justice is such a broad term that is also closely related to social responsibility and stewardship (Wolk, 2009). Wolk (2009) views social responsibility as encompassing a wide spectrum of themes, including caring and empathy for others, existence of social problems, government issues, power and propaganda, historical consciousness, nonviolence, and even environmental literacy. While all of these social responsibility topics warrant careful and close attention, the existence of social problems, or rather social injustices, such as bullying, abuse, and gang-related problems continues to be prevalent in many of our schools today. From an educational standpoint, teachers can be instrumental in effecting change by helping students understand social justice. Young adult books can serve as a potentially effective vehicle for this instruction.

YOUNG ADULT BOOKS AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Young adult books hold appeal to adolescent readers because they address the issues, topics, and concerns that are relevant to these readers. As young adults are developing their sense of self-identity, which is a major factor during their transition to adulthood, young adult books allow the readers to safely explore various life situations vicariously. These situations resonate with the readers and enable them to consider the potential consequences for particular decisions made by characters in the book. Young adult books as a whole cover a variety of themes and issues dealing with realities of life, ranging from family relationships to gangs and violence (Bond, 2011). Young adult books also address particular issues of social justice, including the reaction of characters who bully others who are different. In these books the characters are different in many aspects, including race, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, religious affiliation, or culture (Harmon & Henkin, 2014). Many of these books speak to adolescents in direct, open, and sometimes starkly realistic ways.

This study is situated within the context of existing scholarly works that have addressed the use of young adult books as a tool for teaching about social justice. In the words of Glasgow (2001), "Young adult books provide a context for students to become conscious of their operating world view and to examine critical alternative ways of understanding the world and social relations" (p. 54). From this perspective, we note that various social justice issues as represented in young adult books have been addressed by others, such as Simmons' focus on social action in *The Hunger Games* trilogy (2012) and gender identity in the book *Stitches* as a topic in North's social studies methods course (2010). Moreover, Stover and Bach (2012) view young adult books as an important venue for not only introducing to students social justice issues but also serving as a catalyst for active involvement in service learning or social action as discussed by Simmons (2012).

According to Quinn, Barone, Kearns, Stackhouse and Zimmerman (2003), teaching socialization skills and tolerance can no longer be addressed as part of a hidden curriculum. It must be viewed as part of a democratic classroom where reading and writing are important tools for learning humane behaviors that include respecting others. Unfortunately, such admirable endeavors are at times overshadowed by the political context of today with its strong focus on standards and competition. Nonetheless, there are literacy proponents in the field who advocate the use of young adult books as an instructional tool to teach social justice (Groenke, Maples, & Henderson, 2010) and in particular social responsibility (Wolk, 2009). It is the

responsibility of everyone to confront the social problems facing many youth today, especially discrimination because of culture, gender, sexual orientation, and economic class.

However, while Davis (2010) argues for the role of books to teach about social justice and social action in democratic classrooms, he also cautions that such efforts require "genuine dedication…on the part of teachers everywhere" (np). In a similar vein, Golden (2008), in his interview with Linda Christensen, noted social justice educator, includes her belief that any teaching of social justice is challenging and rigorous. Therefore, it appears that the effectiveness of teaching social justice to students and using young adult books to do so is no easy task and may depend heavily upon what knowledge, awareness, and inclination the teacher brings to the task. This study therefore closely examined what teachers know about social justice and potential changes in their beliefs and perceptions about the use of young adult books as a tool for social justice instruction.

METHOD

The purpose of this study then was twofold: (1) to investigate teachers' understandings about social justice; and (2) to examine the impact of course instruction on teachers' beliefs and perspectives about teaching social justice using young adult books as a resource. The participants were 14 graduate students in a graduate literacy course offered at a large urban university in the southwestern United States. Most of the students were practicing teachers with varied years of experience and varied grade levels. The course, Integrating Reading in the Language Arts, was a required course for students interested in pursuing a reading specialist certification. The course in general focuses on reading processes and instructional practices that promote an integrated language arts curriculum across the grade levels from primary to secondary classrooms. In the following sections, we describe the project on social justice and then discuss our data collection and analysis process.

COURSE PROJECT

As part of the required course activities, graduate students participated in a variety of learning experiences designed to deepen their understanding of addressing social justice issues through young adult books. The learning experiences included: (1) exposure to young adult books that address social justice issues; (2) personal and critical response to the readings in professional online blogs; and (3) development of instructional tasks to accompany the young adult books. Specifically, the student participants were required to read three novels in which social justice issues played a critical role in character and plot development. The books represented different social justice issues, including poverty, dysfunctional families, human trafficking, sexual orientation, and ethnic discrimination. Furthermore, in following Glasgow's (2001) notion that young adult books provide critical contexts to help students become aware of their own worlds, these three books represent different contexts and different ways in which characters view and react to the social conflicts in their lives. The books were Sherman Alexi's *The True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* (2007), *Trafficked* by Kim Purcell (2012), and *Shine* by Lauren Myracle (2011).

In Sherman Alexie's *The True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* (2007), Junior, the major character, uses humor and wit to tell his story. He leaves the school on the Spokane Indian Reservation where he lives to attend a much better school in a nearby farm town—a school with only white students. In doing so, Junior rises above the expectations of others as he faces discrimination at school and contends with family and cultural issues at home. The context in which Junior finds himself forces him to grow up both at home and at school.

In *Trafficked* (2012), the issue of human trafficking is brought to light as we come to know Hannah, a Moldavian teenager who moves to Los Angeles to become a nanny for a Russian family. She quickly learns that she is an indentured servant to this family and has no hope of escape. In this context of being a modern-

day slave in a foreign country, Hannah is left to her own devices to change her situation.

In the coming of age book *Shine* (2011), sixteen-year-old Cat tries to figure out who perpetuated a terrible hate crime against her gay best friend. Set in a small southern community where everyone knows each other, Cat exhibits great courage as she confronts serious issues of drugs, intolerance, and poverty, all of which contribute to what had happened to her friend. She does so within the context of her own past experiences with others in the town, especially one encounter that has left her withdrawn, despondent, and alone.

For each book, participants wrote personal comments, impressions, and insights in individual blogs on the Google-site. These blogs served two purposes: (1) they allowed students to interact with each other online, and (2) they provided a springboard for entry into small group and whole class discussions of the book during class sessions. In this way, class members had an opportunity to think about and articulate their own questions and insights before the group discussions began.

The students then developed a unit based upon an appropriate social justice theme of their choice. The unit included an explanation and rationale for the social justice issue, ways in which the unit could be implemented into the curriculum, descriptions of critical literacy instructional activities, a sample lesson plan, and an annotated list of at least four high quality picture books as well as at least four high-quality, longer children's books (both fiction and/or nonfiction, trade books and/or informational books). Students were given guidelines on book selections that included choosing high quality books with recent publication dates. They were also asked to follow the guidelines for culturally appropriate books found on the wowlit.org website.

DATA COLLECTION

Our data collection came from several sources. During the semester, we collected data from teacher pre- and post-questionnaires about social justice issues and the ways in which teachers envision teaching social justice issues. (See Figure 1 for the questionnaire.)

Figure 1
Pre and Post Questionnaires

Pre Questionnaire

What is social justice?

What different issues or themes do you associate with social justice?

What are the responsibilities of an individual in regard to issues of social justice?

Should social justice be taught in schools? Why or why not?

If so, whose responsibility is it to teach social justice?

How should it be taught?

Can books serve as a vehicle for social change? Why or why not?

If so, what are some examples of books for children and young adults that address social justice?

How would you teach social justice with the children's and/or young adult books?

Post Questionnaire

What is social justice?

What different issues or themes do you associate with social justice?

What are the responsibilities of an individual in regard to issues of social justice?

Should social justice be taught in schools? Why or why not?

If so, whose responsibility is it to teach social justice?

How should it be taught?

Can books serve as a vehicle for social change? Why or why not?

If so, what are some examples of books for children and young adults that address social justice?

How would you teach social justice with the children's and/or young adult books?

What have you learned by participating in the social justice books unit?

The learning experiences described previously served as the intervention of the study across six weeks. In addition, another data source included the completion of a language chart for each book in which groups of students discussed their responses to the readings of the young adult books. A sample of the language chart for one book is in Figure 2.

Questions	Group #1	Group #2	Group #3	Group #4
What stands out to all of you about the book?	The current issue of domestic slavery stands out and especially the fact that many people have no clue about it. Also, Hannah's naivety and how she did not stand up for herself stood out. Sergey and Lillian played on her ignorance to keep her contained as a slave.	Her efforts to improve her life stand outs but yet she struggled so much and was constantly pushed back down.	A girl can want more opportunities by coming the U.S. but can end up becoming another statistic. She had innocence about her and seemed oblivious to what was really going on. She started to live the dream until she got into the home of Sergey and Lillian.	The main character never considered herself as being trafficked. Sergey was tender toward her; he seemed like not such a bad character; he seemed to help. The neighbor Collin stood out. Also, The innocence and ignorance of the character--Hannah and the children stood out. Females are really the villains.
Has the reading of this changed your thinking about human trafficking? In what way?	The book raised awareness of how bad an issue it was. We saw how they manipulated immigrants using fear.	The book gave us a completely new perspective on human trafficking. Previously we thought of it as kidnapping but not the type of living like Hannah was experiencing. The prevalence of it was also shocking.	We didn't really connect with it or thought it could really happen to someone coming to the U.S. from a different border other than the Mexican border.	This "face" of trafficking was different. The majority of the time we only think of the "sex traffic" part. It make us think of how close we are to it and how well hidden it is.
Is the book appropriate for classroom use? Why or why not?	Yes. It should be used for small books circles and self-choice readings. Grade level: high school	Yes. It is relatively tame for the topic level. It is a prevalent issue to study with them. Grade level: upper high school	Yes. It can show students how another person's kindness can change a life whether they know it or not. It is an occurrence and is real so if students see a different perspective, they can relate. Grade level: high school	Yes. It is a good jumping off point for awareness and research. The sexual content is not as explicit. Grade level: 9-10 Upper levels--use as resource--language too simple

What are the constraints for using this book in the classroom? How could you get around them?	The constraints are the graphic content and serious topics—sex and abuse. Allow individual choice. Warn students about the upsetting content ahead of time.	You will possibly need parental consent. It would be interesting to do with a gender study.	One constraint is the graphic words used. We could ask parents to read it first to give them an idea of it. We could get parental consent.	The topic of sexual abuse is a constraint. The book demands a mature audience Old-fashioned, classic literary teachers may not use this book. There may be objections from parents. The book could be an elective read. Teachers could use excerpts that lead to discussions but would need parental notice.

Figure 2
Sample Language Chart Used in Group Discussions for *Trafficked*

We collected these class assignments to analyze for themes about social justice and related instruction.

DATA ANALYSIS

After compiling the questionnaire responses, we used a constant comparative data analysis technique to examine all the data (Merriam, 1998). We first read the responses to the open-ended questions in the questionnaires individually and then came together to discuss our findings, address differences, and arrive at consensus. In addition, we tallied the frequency of occurrence of specific topics that the participants discussed. For example, in the pre-questionnaire where participants were asked to define social justice, we noted 31% focused on the topic of action. One participant stated that social justice was "ensuring that people are treated fairly and with equality." Another comment categorized as action was "standing up for what is right, even if society does not accept it."

We followed this same procedure with the instructional artifacts developed and completed by the participants. These artifacts included instructional tasks developed by the instructor to support participants' engagement with the young adult books as well as the instructional activities the participants developed with their own self-selected books. We examined this assignment closely to determine if the instruction was an appropriate match with the young adult book(s). For example, one participant focused on slavery for her instructional unit. She selected several quality young adult books, such as *Sold* by Patricia McCormick (2008) and *Copper Sun* by Sharon Draper (2008), to represent various forms of slavery for an eighth grade class. The unit contained several activities that engaged students in responding to the readings through writing and discussion. The culminating activity for the unit involved a visual aid representing a form of slavery and consideration of realistic ways in which to take action against modern-day slavery.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

We acknowledge the limitations inherent in this study. First, the instructor of record for the course was one of the researchers. While this had the potential to influence the outcomes, the responses to the questionnaires were anonymous and were not administered by the instructor/researcher. In addition, we realize that students typically learn something when they participate in a university course. However, given that the unit of instruction was focused on social justice, our goal was to capture the nature of this learning and the students' own acknowledgement of what they learned. Finally, we realize the pitfalls associated with self-report data but also understand that these data can be a rich source of descriptive information that may inform future investigations.

FINDINGS

We discuss the findings in terms of two major strands of data that were collected and analyzed in this study. The strands are the following: (1) participants' growing understandings about social justice; and (2) the nature of instruction about social justice. Across the two strands we noticed that the themes of awareness of social justice, acceptance of others, and the need to take action were evident.

Participants' Growing Understandings about Social Justice

We documented participants' growing understandings of social justice through several data sources (e.g., questionnaires and in class discussions) and found changes in the ways in which participants defined social justice. We present the findings for this section, highlighting participants' growing understanding of the meaning of social justice, changes in their thinking about social justice, and their recognition and appreciation of the responsibilities associated with social justice.

Defining social justice. Initially, approximately one third of the participants provided more generalized responses with references to issues facing those in leadership and government positions as well as issues relating to how groups of people are treated in society. More specifically, in the pre questionnaire, participants focused on issues, such as educational opportunity (14%), race relations (10%), and economic hardships (12%). In contrast, in the post questionnaire, the participants provided more specific issues in that bullying, racial inequality, and sexual orientation accounted for 40% of the responses about social justice issues.

The number of issues also changed, with participants mentioning ten different descriptions in the pre-questionnaire and 29 in the post-questionnaire. These differences were not only in terms of topics that participants associated with social justice but also differences in terms of the depth of understanding about social justice. The depth of understanding changed as illustrated in this general pre questionnaire response: "Social justice deals with issues that are continuously dealt with by leaders and people from government." In contrast, in the post questionnaire one participant defined social justice as "an all-encompassing topic including such issues as bullying, race relations, and equality of education. Social justice discusses, speculates, and researches ways to implement understanding and solutions of these issues."

We also noticed that the definitions provided by the participants in both questionnaires fell into distinct categories, including awareness, action, and equality. For example, while initially 31% of the participants defined social justice from an action standpoint, they did so in terms of what is done or should be done to others. In contrast, in the post questionnaire, the 15.3% of the participants who talked about action did so in reference to actions that need to be taken against unfair treatment and wrongdoing. Another difference was that some participants (15.3%) in the post questionnaire talked about social justice in terms of developing an awareness of the issues–something not evident in the pre questionnaire.

Changing ideas about social justice. As described previously, participants' definitions of social justice changed from general ideas to more detailed understandings of the concept. Other changes also occurred.

For example, 18% of the participants reported that they learned about the widespread use of the term social justice. They came to realize that social justice included not only bullying but also other issues such as lying, cheating, and stealing. Moreover, one student commented that social justice is "so much more than just being aware of an issue. We have to learn to take action." In addition, 22% of the participants felt that they now realized the value in using engaging books to help students grapple with the issues of social justice. One participant commented that "literature brings humanity into the situation. Most people need to view the situation through others' eyes in order to better understand the issues of social justice." Still another noted that "the more we can identify with book characters or story lines, the more we can see where there are problems that need attention and hopefully [lead to] correction."

Thirteen percent of the participants mentioned their understanding of the multiple ways to address social justice with students. One participant wrote "I have learned several different ways to present social justice issues to students. I have also learned that social justice issues can be taught to all students regardless of ability or age. All students have a voice." Another student learned that "there is more to social justice than what's going on in my class. It involves entire communities…with some issues that can be corrected through awareness and knowledge."

All participants except one admitted a change in their thinking about social justice. These changes were varied. For example, 15.8% were more open to the different issues associated with social justice, 21% claimed to have an increased awareness of social justice, and another 21% felt their knowledge base of social justice had broadened and deepened. One student wrote: "I previously saw this as an issue best addressed in higher grades. I now realize the importance of starting younger as well in order to prevent injustice." Another stated that "I have always felt strongly about issues and have always felt passionate about standing up for others, but it made me realize how common certain issues are and how these can be discovered through books." Still another wrote: "I feel that these are important issues that many people push aside. If we bring it up more often, perhaps children will discuss the issues."

Determining responsibilities associated with social justice. While the importance of taking action was mentioned in both the pre and post questionnaire, one major difference was an individual's responsibility to bring awareness of social justice issues to others. This awareness was not mentioned in the pre questionnaire. After the course unit on social justice, however, all participants felt that the topic should be taught in schools and that it was the responsibility of the teacher to teach about social justice. In particular, in the post questionnaire 23.9% of the participants stated that the responsibility of teaching social justice issues rests on the shoulders of not only parents but all those who work in schools (e.g., teachers, administrators, counselors). In fact, after the course unit, a few more participants who had not included parents initially now felt that parents are responsible for teaching social justice—an increase from 14.8% to 19.6%.

Nature of Instruction about Social Justice

In response to how social justice should be taught, most participants initially focused on general instructional procedures, such as by example, through modeling and explanations, and through the use of multimedia. In contrast, in the post questionnaire, participants provided more specific suggestions involving the use of multimodal traditional and multimodal digital tools. For example 16% felt that visuals, such as posters, photographs, movies, and video clips, were useful for teaching about social justice. The use of visuals was discussed in whole class discussions and used by the instructor and students in class. Another 20% stated that active participation in classroom activities is important for teaching students about social justice. Again, active participation was modeled in the course. These activities included skits, plays, and other dramatizations as well as discussions and even dance.

In both the pre and post questionnaire, approximately the same number of participants mentioned the use of books for teaching about social justice (24% and 25%). However, when asked directly about the use of

books for teaching social justice, only two participants in the pre questionnaire were not sure about the use of books to teach social justice. By the end of the course unit, however, all participants stated that books can serve as a vehicle for social change. The reasons especially focused on how books enable the reader to relate to characters. For example, one participant stated:

Yes, many times books can help us see things that we may have never paid attention to before. It can help give us empathy by putting us in someone else's shoes. Many times children may ignore a history lesson, but a book they can relate to may help to see similarities that they never saw before. Books can make us aware of more issues to where we want to work towards creating a world free of discrimination.

Another stated:

Many students might not know how to talk about a certain issue. Reading a novel can help open the door to what can be talked about. It gives students the opportunity to step into the issue and really live it & experience it while learning.

Initially, 30.4% (7/23) did not know any book titles addressing social justice. Those who did provided titles of fairy tales and well-known titles such as the Harry Potter series, Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) and *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* by Maya Angelou (1969). At the end of the course unit, as expected, participants provided a variety of current, quality book titles that address social justice issues, such as Jennifer Brown's *The Hate List* (2009), *The True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* (2007), *Lovely Bones* by Alice Sebold (2002), and *Perks of Being a Wallflower* by Steven Chbosky (1999). After the course unit, more participants (41.2% compared to 33.3%) mentioned the use of book discussions. While in both the pre and post questionnaires participants talked about the use of videos and drama activities, only in the post questionnaire did participants (10.3%) mention the use of writing.

After reading the three young adult novels that focused on different issues of social justice (i.e., trafficking, inequalities, and sexual orientation), participants initially shared their individual responses to the following questions in blogs and then discussed their thoughts in small groups.

- What stands out for you about the book?
- Has the reading changed your thinking about _____? In what way?
- Is the book appropriate for classroom use? Why or why not?
- What are the constraints for using this book in the classroom? How could you address these constraints?

We report the findings from their collective group responses in categories based upon the questions previously listed and also include examples from the blogs of their individual thoughts to support the findings. These categories include what stood out in the readings, changes in thinking about social justice issues, and classroom use of the books.

What stood out in the readings. For two books, *Shine* (2011) and *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* (2007), what stood out for three of the four book discussion groups were the many social issues evident in the books. In the book *Shine* (2011), some participants felt that the social issues were not fully addressed, and others focused on the "dark" topics in the book including language usage, sexual molestation, and parental abuse. For example, one participant wrote "the book also did bring to light for me how the stigma of being gay is still incredibly shameful for many people and how that can be exasperated by your upbringing and community." Another noted the following about *Shine*:

The bullying definitely took center stage in this book. There were so many instances of bullying, such as verbal abuse, sexual abuse, and physical abuse. The author put a lot of issues into this book, but I think that young adults can relate to most of those issues. The language was a little harsh for my taste, but honestly it made the story line seem more real to me.

On the other hand, in *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* (2007), participants in all four

discussion groups mentioned their new awareness of the many issues found on Indian reservations, such as extreme poverty, death, eating disorders, racism, bullying, and prejudice.

One participant reflected about these issues at a deeper level as evidenced in the following comment:

Sherman Alexie truly brings to life the impact of robbing someone or some group of their hope. He has truly opened my eyes to the ramifications of Americanization and of forcing someone to give up their culture and heritage. Previously, I have been involved in discussions about the power of hegemony and of Westernization and the dominant culture. However, I now understand that those were surface-level conversations and did nothing to open my mind's eye or heart to the life-altering impact those powerful concepts can have. It took a work of literacy and seeing the world through the eyes of a 14-year-old boy for me to truly understand.

Two groups also commented about the author's use of humor to lessen the harshness of these issues as well as the use of illustrations to depict character development.

For the book *Trafficked* (2012), the literary element of character made a strong impression on all of the participants. The groups mentioned several things that caught their attention as they read the book. Three groups noticed Hannah's innocence and naivety and the fact that she did not stand up for herself. One group felt that Hannah probably did not see herself as being trafficked and another commented on the futility of her efforts to improve her life. To illustrate this point, one participant wrote in her blog:

The thing that stood out the most to me was the fact that Hannah herself did not realize she had been trafficked until someone else mentioned it. She was willing to come over from her home and do whatever was asked of her in order to live in America and have the opportunity to become a doctor. She went on accepting that there was a chance she would not be a nanny but would end up being a prostitute…The fact that she would be willing accept such a life even for a short time and not even consider that she was being trafficked leads me to think that it is possible that the ones most likely to become victims are the ones least prepared to recognize the danger.

In addition, one group mentioned that Sergey and Lillian capitalized on Hannah's innocence to keep her contained as a slave in their home.

Changes in thinking about social justice issues. All four discussion groups noted a change in their thinking with the themes of awareness and acceptance evident in their responses. For example, in their discussion about *Shine* (2011), three shifts in thinking resulted for the groups—one on the topic of bullying and hate crime, the other on acceptance, and the last on communication. Two groups talked about how their thinking changed about bullying. They had never considered the varying forms of bullying, including physical, verbal, or relational (Harmin & Henkin, 2014). One participant stated, "This book has changed my thinking about bullying. There are so many different ways a person can be bullied…from the area they grew up in, to their sexual orientation, to the size of their bodies, etc. This book relates to many different forms of bullying, [such as] the 'hick' terms that are used throughout the book." One group focused on changes that involved the uplifting experience that comes with forgiveness and acceptance, and another group felt that proper communication could have prevented the major problems in the book.

In their discussion of *Trafficked* (2012), three of the four groups felt that the book raised their level of awareness and gave them a new perspective about the issue of human trafficking. One group commented on how well hidden such trafficking is while another group felt they could not accept the idea that such trafficking could happen to someone coming to the United States from another country other than Mexico. As in the words of one participant,

Reading this story changed my thinking in how we address these issues with young adults today either in school or at home. I think most of the time these controversial topics are ignored because we think that something like that could never happened where we are….While this topic is ugly and un-glorified, I think

that it still needs to be addressed to teens. We need to stop hiding the fact that it does happen and that in order to do justice to others, we need to attempt to help them and get them out of situations that are beyond their control. I have always been a believer in bringing up controversial topics, and I have always thought that these books make the best reads. However, I have not always promoted them to their targeted audience of young adult…We need to trust them [young adults] more and trust their instincts and provide them with the knowledge they need to be informed about what happens in the world.

Another participant wrote:

This book has changed the way I look at trafficking. I have heard the term but had never really thought about it on a deeper level…_I feel like I could relate to the character and this made me feel unsafe. The kind of unsafe feeling that you know you will never be the same again because you have been made aware of something that you can't take back. I feel like this is happening and in many times right under the noses of unsuspecting people.

The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian (2007) changed the thinking of all four groups of students about Native American culture and reservation life in regard to cultural assimilation and disparities that continue today. One group wrote, "The feelings you get from reading the book are far beyond what you would get from a history lesson." This quote illustrates how young adult books can contextualize events within social, cultural, and historical settings enabling readers to broaden their understandings about diverse populations and cultures (Groenke, Maples, & Henderson, 2010). The following written response about this book from one participant represents this change in thinking about social justice issues:

I reflected back to a professor I had who taught Navajo Indians for many years and shared her experiences with my class. The most important lesson I took from her stories was that the Navajo's (sic) taught her far more than she taught them. When I think back to that and pair it with this novel, I see the vast differences between the two. The lesson that will now always be at the forefront of my mind is that attempting to conform others to be like us is wrong in so many ways. Instead, we must actively seek to learn from others who are "different" from us to avoid having a "part-time" identity.

This is such an important insight. As educators, it's important to build on the students strengths and to see their culture as important and valuable.

Classroom use of the books. The two major topics covered about classroom use were the appropriateness of the books and the ways in which constraints for classroom use could be addressed. For the book *Shine* (2011), three of the four groups felt that the book was inappropriate for classroom use. Their major concern was the many controversial topics included in the book, topics such as molestation, drug use, physical abuse, strong language, and hate crimes. In addition, one of these three groups raised concern that, because too many of the issues were left unresolved, class discussions could lead to "uncomfortable and unpredictable situations." One participant noted the following:

> My first inclination is to declare this novel as inappropriate for classroom use. *Shine* contains extremely mature content. The combination of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, drug use, and coarse language seem to me difficult hurdles to pass. If it were used in a classroom, as with all books that deal with such issues, the maturity of the students needs to be kept in great consideration.

The teachers' hesitation to use *Shine* reflected their reluctance to discuss controversial topics in their classrooms.

One group in particular stated that teachers may be reluctant to use the book due to the mention of faith and religion. In contrast, one group felt strongly that the book was appropriate for high school classrooms. They argued that the types of bullying portrayed in the book mirrored reality and that students could engage

in discussions that addressed bullying from these different angles.

As one participant stated:

> I think it's appropriate for 8th or 9th grade. I think it's very engaging; students won't want to put the book down. I think the message it brings is very powerful. Your emotions are transformed to that of the characters. You feel how lonely and hurt Cat is. You feel her braveness and it makes you feel proud. You can feel how annoyed she was with Robert but also how patient she was with him. Students can get into this book and also learn from it.

Another noted:

> I feel this book is appropriate for classroom use. There are some instances such as when Cat gets attacked by Tommy at her house, and how the dad's (sic) in the story either had alcohol, drug, or mental issues that will need to be discussed while or prior to reading this book. I feel like many students will relate to the book, which might make it easier to talk about and or express feelings they may have about certain issues. The grade level that I would choose would be 9th-12th grade. I think you might want to get parents(sic) permission due to the level of homosexuality that is discussed in the book. Sadly, many parents do not want their child discussing homosexuality and I don't know how reading a book about it would make them feel.

For the book *Trafficked* (2012) all groups agreed that the book was appropriate for classroom use in grades 9-12 despite the constraints of the serious content of sexual abuse and the use of graphic language. One group recommended the book for self-selected independent reading and another group felt that the book could be used as an introduction perhaps to an inquiry project on human trafficking. Similarly, for *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* (2007), two groups of students felt that the mature content of the book was better suited for high school students despite the simplistic reading style used by the author. The other two groups felt that the book was appropriate for eighth grade students. However, all four groups voiced concerns about the sexual content and strong language used in the book. As one participant noted:

> I am truly torn about whether or not I would feel comfortable using this book in the classroom. While I think it is a transformational piece of literature, I think it requires an audience of a certain maturity level. I wouldn't want to use it below a high school level…I would primarily be concerned about the frank discussions and descriptions of masturbation in the book. I am certain that there would be parents (myself included) who would not want their children exposed to this kind of endorsement. I do recognize that I come from a very sheltered life and that I probably didn't even know the meaning of the term when in high school. Thus, I realize this has an impact on my perspective. On the other hand, the book is such a powerful tool in transforming one's thought processes about accepting those who are different, that I think it would be a wonderful thing for students to read.

To address the constraints imposed by controversial topics and graphic language, participants in all four groups mentioned the need, first of all, to seek parental consent to use the book in the classroom as a required assignment. One noted that for the book *Trafficked,* "I would agree that at some high grade level, probably high school, this book could be used for instructional use in the classroom but it may require parental permission because it has some sexual content." In addition, participants also felt it was appropriate to include the books in a classroom library. In this way, students would have the option to select the books for

independent reading.

DISCUSSION

This study investigated the changing perspectives of graduate students in a literacy education course about the learning and teaching of social justice. We did not set out to have the graduate students develop their own strict definition of social justice, a murky concept that can mean different things to so many different people. Rather, given that social justice has no firmly established meaning agreed upon by all and can be a controversial topic to many, we wanted our participants to grapple with the complex and broad issues related to this social concept. The instructor, using the books as a medium to guide the social interactions among the participants, served as facilitator rather than erudite professor with an agenda about social justice. Therefore, with no solid, concrete definition for social justice leading the experiences in the course, the participants were able to individually generate their own personal understandings of this concept and did so through reading and discussing young adult books. For example, in her response to the book *Shine*, one student wrote:

> …This book was much more than a story about the atrocities of an anti-gay hate crime. It was more about contrasting the negative impact and overwhelming power that hate and self-loathing can have on a person's life with the liberating glory, joy, and light that can come from forgiveness and acceptance. For example, we can trace Cat's journey from darkness, hatred, gloom, and loneliness to forgiveness, acceptance, joy, and love.

This response illustrates how the books mediated the participants' developing notions about social justice. It may be that this book enabled her to think more deeply about the meaning of life and the lessons that can be learned from life's events.

We also wanted them who? to focus on the use of young adult books for teaching social justice to students. The participants did report that they understood how books can serve as an important instructional tool for teaching about social justice as illustrated in this student's comment about the book *Trafficked*:

> This book is appropriate for high school kids. I would focus on a small group or individual reading assignment so that the discussion of the controversial issues would be a little more intimate than a whole class discussion. I bet most students are not familiar with trafficking (I know I wasn't in high school) and this book would be a great opportunity to open their eyes to this issue.

However, the experiences of the participants in reading the three books also deepened their understanding that some books address social justice issues in very strong and powerful ways–ways that may result in constraints that need to be acknowledged regarding appropriate classroom use. The same student who made the comment just mentioned above also had this to say about the constraints for using the book *Trafficked* in the classroom:

> This book has some horrific scenes of abuse. A few times a sexual encounter is referenced, but not really [explicitly] described and then toward the end, the sexual encounter between Sergey and Hannah is fairly graphic for adolescents. However, I thought the author kept it pretty clean overall. I would ask parents to preview the book before asking their child to read it and, of course, be open and willing to discuss anything that makes a student feel uncomfortable.

This comment illustrates that, on the one hand, participants learned that the issues need to be out in the open and discussed with students, but, on the other hand, discussion of such controversial issues may

create other problems that need to be addressed. This is not a new dilemma that many teachers face when making decisions about what texts to use with students (Golden, 2008). Yet, we believe that teachers want to create a safe environment where difficult issues can be discussed openly. In this way, students can hopefully be equipped with a variety of ideas and strategies for addressing the challenges they may be encountering in their own lives.

The importance of teaching educators about social justice must not be overlooked. We hope and believe, that in any course students take, they should learn something. Thus, after participating in the social justice unit of instruction, it appears that the participants in our study reported that they did acquire a more detailed and more in-depth knowledge base about social justice. This was especially evident in their growing awareness of social justice, in perhaps their personal acceptance of the issues, and in their comments about taking action that might lead to change in existing problems surrounding social justice. Overall, these educators appeared to value their newly gained knowledge about social justice that might lead to changes they could personally make in their own lives and, as mentioned above, in the lives of the children they teach.

We advocate that children and adolescents need to be taught about social justice, but we also realize the challenge this may present and the questions that arise. As teacher educators, we believe that all those involved in the field of education need to address the issue of social justice in ways that can evoke change. Hence, teacher preparation programs with a mission to transform practice need to consider the inclusion of social justice as part of these programs at both the undergraduate and graduate level. Furthermore, we advocate that teachers consider the use of young adult books as an instructional resource for addressing social justice in the classroom. These books can be vehicles for transforming the lives of the students we teach as well as a springboard for future change in society.

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DIALOGUE
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The Stonewall Books: LGBTQ-Themed Young Adult Novels as Semiotic Beacons

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ABSTRACT

In a society where the LGBTQ community continues to feel the stings of prejudice and discrimination, a straightforward means of conveying accurate information about LGBTQ student lives is urgently needed. The Stonewall Awards, an annual literary prize for "exceptional merit relating to the gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender experience" (American Library Association, 2016), has the potential to serve as an appropriate semiotic beacon for both the-acceptance of LGBTQ students as well as LGBTQ self-affirmation. This study investigated the perceptions of secondary school students and future high school teachers toward two Stonewall Award-winning novels. The findings revealed obvious similarities as well as critical differences across reader group perceptions in regard to character actions and reactions to the issues confronting them. The realism (authenticity) and relatability evident in the young adult books used in the study hold implications for serving as fruitful guides for developing deeper understandings of others.

Keywords*:* LGBTQ studies, young adult literature, Stonewall Awards, semiotics, realism, relatability, intersectionality

Now is a critical time in the perception of LGBTQ students in schools. With the accelerating advent of gay marriage across the globe, young adults can feel more appreciated as full members of their respective polities. Nevertheless, pejorative campaigns against lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgender individuals in other civic matters make the case for significant prejudice and discrimination against the LGBTQ community (Kosciw et al., 2012). For today's LGBTQ young adults, this era of change, with all its whirlwind potential for civil rights victory, defeat, and many hazy outcomes in between, is no less frightening than earlier days. Scholars are generally in agreement that LGBTQ-themed young adult literature can serve to diminish the insecurity and fear which LGBTQ students feel in such a troubled world (Blackburn & Buckley, 2005; Blackburn & Clark, 2011; Cart & Jenkins, 2006; Gallo, 2004; Moje & MuQaribu, 2003; Reese, 1998; Vetter, 2010). Many studies have already been conducted on the interactions between LGBTQ-themed literature, reader personal characteristics, and LGBTQ well-being or inclusion (Hoffman, 1993); as well as on the interactions between LGBTQ-themed literature, the school environment, and LGBTQ well-being or inclusion (Friend, 1993; Crocco, 2001; Kosciw et al., 2012). However, in spite of several attempts to broadly characterize LGBTQ-themed young adult literature (Clark & Blackburn, 2014; Bach, 2015; Blackburn, Smith, & Nemeth, 2015; Hermann-Wilmarth & Ryan, 2015), we could find little scholarship which concerned itself explicitly with mechanisms for the streamlined dissemination of valuable ideas from these texts. Because young adult novels have the capacity to educate young adults about important social issues (Wolk, 2009), it is important to determine if and to what degree the same is true for LGBTQ-themed young adult novels. All students, teachers, and administrators could benefit from the identification of those features which best convey to new audiences the positive ideas to be found in LGBTQ-themed literature.

Specifically, we contend that literary prizes such as the Stonewall Awards have the potential for effective semiosis on a large societal scale. James English describes literary prizes as "the single best instrument for negotiating between cultural and economic, cultural and social, or cultural and political capital" (10). Andrew Ford draws attention to the opposition even in antiquity between the social popularity of literary prize winners and the elite critical opinion of the same (2002). While this may bode poorly for literary prizes which seek to assess the 'artistic merit' of a work, it suggests a greater utility for those literary prizes that wish to establish a firm connection with societal concerns. As such, the recipients of the Stonewall Awards could be of chief import to a community in dire need of positive perception and public relations. To our knowledge, however, there has been very little investigation of the correlation between LGBTQ youth concerns and the content of Stonewall Award-winning young adult novels. Likewise, there do not appear to be any peer-reviewed evaluations of pre-service teacher responses to novels that purport to express aspects of LGBTQ life. Our research therefore focuses on the perceptions of two Stonewall Award-winning books among pre-service teachers and teenaged youth; these populations can provide valuable input on the utility of both this prize and LGBTQ-themed young adult literature in general.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

Given our interest in determining if these Stonewall Award-winning novels can "bridge the gap" between LGBTQ populations and sexual majoritarian populations, we choose a framework that purposely cuts across critical difference; evidence of this difference may arise through the course of our research, but we are not making the assumption that it will inherently characterize the events and characters of these novels. As such, special attention should be paid to established conduits of meaning-making, conduits with strong literary and filmic traditions. Bicchieri (2006) has very simply described *norms* as the grammar of social interactions. Queer frameworks are important and helpful in many regards, but we feel that the identification requires a multifarious approach, at least one part of which must take into account the semiotic paradigms encouraging (or not) connections between communities.

We believe that a semiotic – or Peircean representative – approach holds the potential to shed further insights into what can make LGBTQ-themed young adult literature useful in sharing lived LGBTQ truths with a wider audience. The Peircean sign, with its constituent parts of representamen, object, and interpretant, provides the ideal framework to investigate the perceptions of interested readers of LGBTQ-themed young adult literature. According to this framework, a "sign" is a complex of meaning-making relationships (Atkin, 2010). Atkin said that the *representamen* refers to that part of the sign which is most salient for meaning-making, while the *object* refers to that part of the sign which constrains the scope of meaning-making. The *interpretant* is an understanding of the sign which the viewer perceives (Atkin). Peirce elaborated upon the interpretant further, describing immediate, dynamical, and final versions of these (1998). The immediate interpretant is that meaning which was intended to reside in the sign, while the dynamical interpretant refers to the initial reaction of the observer to the sign (Peirce). The final interpretant refers to a cognized/analytical reaction of the observer to the sign. Our survey questions attempt to connect this framework with the readers' experiences of the novels.

This Peircean semiotic framework offers complex hermeneutic and discursive markers, markers which other frameworks do not always necessarily affirm or accept. Chiasson (2002) argues that this framework is helpful in conceiving of educational experiences as both analyzable and interpretable, while also recognizing the potential for meaning-making to be both a solitary and a group process (Smith, 2005). We agree that "signs are relational entities" (Stables and Semetsky, 2014, p. 3); as such, we believe that a semiotic perspective remembers both similarity and difference across experience and meaning-making, thus providing further key insights into this field of research.

Indeed, the evolution and parameters of the Stonewall Book Awards process evinces the desire of its founders to serve as a "relational entity" between the LGBTQ community and the world-at-large. Although founded in the 1970s, 2010 saw the Stonewall Book Awards inaugurate a young adult-oriented division (Sanders and Mathis, 2012). The growth in the award considerations – from handfuls of books to over 800 in 1995 (Sanders and Mathis) – strengthens the claim that the Stonewall Books are representative of a broad range of LGBTQ experiences. Likewise, Sanders and Mathis wrote that the commitment to gender parity, regional parity, and racial/ethnic parity during judge selection may create more opportunities for semiosis across groups. The authors noted that the selection of judges from as many different library types as possible reveals an awareness of audience accessibility; the award is evidently designed to take readership trends and needs into account.

For these reasons, we felt that the Stonewall Book Awards might act as a proxy for both LGBTQ lived concerns and a bid for accessibility of these concerns to as many populations as possible. This is what it means to us to serve as a 'semiotic beacon'; if the novels are seen as both veridical to LGBTQ youth and effective in conveying key LGBTQ-oriented concepts to non-LGBTQ individuals, they are Peircean signs valuable for pedagogical purposes. Thus, if we can determine more carefully its reception amongst LGBTQ youth and pre-service teachers, we may shed light on whether the concerns in these books are legitimate. We may also better characterize just how pre-service teachers experience LGBTQ-oriented narratives. The semiotic frameworks experienced and constructed through these texts can help determine the utility of the Stonewall Book Awards – as well as consciously constructed LGBTQ media – towards the acceptance and understanding of LGBTQ students.

METHODOLOGY

In this qualitative study, we used a constant-comparative analysis (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) to examine the responses of our participants to two young adult books that recently received the Stonewall Book Award

for Children's and Young Adult Literature. While we would have enjoyed having the resources to investigate responses to all the award-winning books since 2011, we felt that employing at least two novels could provide substantive, meaningful data. Because the aforementioned criteria for selection do not change from year to year, we saw less harm in choosing two books for what we hope will be a preliminary exploration amongst many equality and progress-oriented researchers. While we cannot generalize to all LGBTQ award-winning novels from our findings, we believe that they will provide much-needed insights for future investigation.

The two books were *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe* (Saénz, 2012) – hereby abbreviated as just *Aristotle and Dante* – and *Fat Angie* (Charlton-Trujillo, 2013). We chose these books because they were similar in some important respects – recently published, close in length, and with significant romantic elements – while different in others – taking place in different environments and eras, with protagonists identifying as either questioning/lesbian (*Fat Angie*) or questioning/gay (*Aristotle and Dante*). In *Fat Angie*, the eponymous protagonist wrestled and ultimately accepted her love for her friend K.C. Romance. Throughout the novel, Angie bonded with her neighbor Jake, dealt with the demands of her mother and brother, experienced bullying at the hands of Stacy Ann, and dearly missed her military-serving sister. In *Aristotle and Dante*, the two eponymous Mexican-American characters lived through events with their families and at their schools, slowly coming to the mutual realization that they were in love.

Participants

The researchers, who were from two different states, applied stratified purposeful sampling (Patton, 1990), to select different groups who may find interest in the books and which could perhaps lead to comparisons in responses to the books, especially in light of the age difference of adolescents and preservice teachers. As a result, the participants for this study composed three different groups. One group was comprised of ten undergraduate students majoring in education. While not enrolled in any particular course, these preservice teachers volunteered to read both books. Members of an LGBTQ group, not associated with any school, formed the second group of volunteer participants. All the participants were LGBTQ youth, as befit the mission statement of the Texas LGBTQ youth group these teenagers attended: "The mission of [the youth group] is to provide a safe, non-judgmental, affirming place for LBGTQ young people to express and explore who they are through education, peer-support, advocacy and friendship" (Anonymous, 2016). The youth, all between the ages of 12 and 18, had a month to read the novels. Nine youth read Aristotle and Dante and four read Fat Angie. The last group of participants consisted of members of a ninth-grade English class in a high school located in a state along the East Coast. As part of a literature unit, the students could select which book they wanted to read. Fourteen selected Aristotle and Dante and seven read Fat Angie. These students were not required to read these books, but were simply given an opportunity to do so.

Data Collection and Analysis

All participants completed an online questionnaire consisting of eleven questions. The questions focused on several aspects of the readings, some of which addressed initial impressions, authenticity of the book, and relatability to the characters and events. Because we are interested in documenting and analyzing perceptions to discrete semiotic phenomena, we chose to use each individual response as our unit of analysis and not the collected responses of each participant. To that end, we often refer to 'responses' instead of 'participants' during our elaboration of the results and subsequent discussion.

There were 110 units of analysis each for *Aristotle and Dante* and *Fat Angie* for the pre-service teachers. The LGBTQ youth supplied 99 units of analysis for *Aristotle and Dante*, and 44 units of analysis for *Fat Angie*. The participants in the English class, in turn, supplied 168 units of analysis for *Aristotle and Dante*, and 84 units of analysis for *Fat Angie*. Then, using a constant comparative approach (Mertens, 2015), we analyzed the data in three phases.

Phase 1. In this initial phase, which involved the development of a coding system to form an analytic framework, we worked together examining the second question responses to establish a pattern for initial coding. We then individually read through one group's responses and began generating these initial codes. After coding the responses for one group, we came together again to compare our codes noting similarities and differences. We then discussed the differences at length and arrived at consensus. We followed this same pattern for the other two groups of participants.

Phase 2. At this point, we individually examined the agreed upon initial codes and engaged in more focused coding efforts resulting in the development of salient categorical themes for each participant group (Charmaz, 2006). We then came together to discuss the categories for that particular group and negotiated the final categories. The same process was used for the other two groups.

Phase 3. In this final phase, we examined these emerging themes across groups noting similarities and differences in their responses. At this point, we discussed at length the meaning of each category or theme and the use of appropriate language to clearly represent the category. For example, with *Fat Angie*, we determined that references to Angie's sister, Angie's mother, Angie's brother, and K.C.'s father could be condensed into a 'family relationships' category. Likewise, with *Aristotle and Dante*, we decided that references across groups to personal growth and self-development could be condensed into a 'bildungsroman' category.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

We have chosen to present the responses in five categories. First are the similarities across books and groups, and then differences across the books, across ages, across sexual orientations and gender identities, and other subgroups.

Similarities Across Books and Groups

All groups found the events and characters of *Aristotle and Dante* relatable. One response revealed that "I was able to connect with each character written! The authors craft made every character relatable," while another stated that "I can definitely relate to trying to find yourself in the world; I can relate to trying to find out who you are." Many readers expressed an appreciation of the author as an engineer of characterization. They never lost sight of the fictional nature of the text, and therefore approved strongly of what they felt were attempts to engage them. The semiosis of mimicry factored into this appreciation; the characters were described well enough in their expressions and growth to allow the readers enjoy the novel.

One response shared the following about the novel's relatability:

> There were many things I connected to with Dante and Ari. Even though I am not a boy who likes boys, I have felt the strangeness in not thinking quite the same as my peers, having a family member incarcerated, and feeling out of place racially. These connections really drew me in to the characters.

As signs crafted by the author, Ari and Dante achieved a balance of more LGBTQ-oriented experiences and experiences common to other groups. Notably, the story retained appeal for pre-service teachers because of the latter, but not never lost sight of its LGBTQ focus – which readers of all groups positively acknowledged.

All groups revealed common semiotic touchstones in each of the novels. For the *Fat Angie* responses, K.C.'s purple heart tattoo made an impression (one response remarked that "the purple heart or K.C. Romance was everywhere"), while responses in *Aristotle and Dante* focused on the figurative potential of the novel's birds and dreams. Dreams, for example, "gave insight to how [Aristotle] was feeling about the events of his life or what might happen in the near future", and "were used to express Ari's fears". One youth contended that the dreams "confused [Aristotle] or helped him understand the things he was feeling", while another youth stated

that "Ari's dream also represented his loneliness". As evaluative tools for the characters (amongst themselves) and the readers (for understanding the characters), these dreams act – as with the relatability markers above – as semioses of reflective growth. Readers of all groups recognized the dreams as important messages to them, perhaps understanding the dreams to be a common cultural, and even psychological, touchstone for change; the predictive potential of counterfactual thought in general – in this case, dreams – is a key feature of all human thought (Epstude and Peetz, 2012).

Birds, on the other hand, "seemed like a metaphor for the trials Dante goes through in the book while trying to stay happy". One response stated the following:

> [The bird] symbolized both danger and hope. When Dante tried to save the bird in the middle of the road Ari jumped out to save him and got hit by a car, yet later in the book it mentions how they see birds singing and flying around being happy.

One response revealed that "Dante's emotional response to the shooting of the bird became important to a critical element in the story", while another shared this interpretation:

> Dante tries to rescue a sparrow with a broken wing only to be nearly struck by a car before Ari saves him, and Dante says that Mexicans are "like sparrows" in a letter to Ari. Ari has dreams about sparrows falling from the sky.

Other semiotic templates for further analysis and understanding in *Aristotle and Dante* were perceived elements of self-discovery. Readers remarked on how the novel served as personal evolutions for both characters (and themselves), with obvious moments of wrestling with and growing through adolescent issues: "I was able to relate to [Aristotle] the most... in terms of teenaged identity confusion. There were certainly times in my life where I felt no one in my family could understand the things I was feeling." As a semiotic marker, the developmental quality of the novel made connection with either of the LGBTQ protagonists likely: "I felt that I related more to Dante, because he actively searches to make sense of his feelings and where his life is going." Appreciation of particularity – in this case, the lives of sexual minorities – came about through the appreciation of a semiotically multifarious "coming of age."

Differences Across the Two Novels

The receptions and analyses of *Aristotle and Dante* differed substantially from *Fat Angie* in one respect: both youth and pre-service teachers nearly unilaterally stated a desire to recommend *Aristotle and Dante* to others. This response was similar in both passion and sense of urgency to recommend as many others we read:

> I actually called my sisters and told them to buy it immediately after finishing it. It was so well-done. It would be a shame not to share it.

> I would recommend this book, it had become one of my top favorite books. The book gives a detail filled setting and plot.

> Yes, Yes, Yes! A thousand times yes. It was the first really good LGBT book that I have read and it really focuses on the teenage struggle.

> Yes, because I believe in this book alone helped me change my opinion about homosexuality by showing the viewpoint of their mind.

Time and again, readers revealed an admiration for the craft within *Aristotle and Dante*. The philosopher W.V.O. Quine once spoke of a "web of belief" (1970), or the propensity for belief in one arena to be positively or negatively impacted by the belief in another arena. The author's carefully delineated semioses are, to the

readers, consistent with each other, which lends credence and relatability to the characters and their struggles.

While there were several responses expressing a desire to recommend *Fat Angie*, over a quarter either expressed misgivings about recommending – "not really, I found it very odd," "I would, however it wouldn't be at the top of the list" – or refused to do so: "No, because although it was a quick read, certain parts felt rushed and cliché," "I would not recommend this book. It actually left me with a bad taste." When responses did recommend Fat Angie, though, they focused on a perceived strong sense of realism:

> Yes, I believe that this book stays true to real life and is a great story. I would recommend this book to young adults as well as adults.

> I would absolutely recommend this book. I was moved by the characters and their interaction. The book deals with things that everyday teens face everyday and should be brought to light.

Hearkening back to Quine's "web of belief," it seems likely that the web seemed shaky or ill-formed to some of the *Fat Angie* readers. These readers found it hard to imagine the events transpiring matter-of-factly as they were portrayed. Liao and Szabo (2016, p. 3) define as "imaginative resistance" the breakdown of authorial authority, a lack of trust in phenomenological verisimilitude, and/or aesthetic questioning of a text. The responses we chronicle here reveal that some readers experienced this phenomenon enough to linger in the memory after finishing the book.

Generational Differences

As a whole, the pre-service teachers found the events of the two novels to be more realistic and/or authentic than did both groups of youth. All of the pre-service teachers found the content of *Aristotle and Dante* representative of teenage interaction and experiences, with many especially so:

> I was hooked by the first couple lines and I couldn't put it down. The way the author described how his summer started was so realistic and full of sarcasm and real teenage thoughts.

> It was intriguing and realistic. The characters were believable teenagers with quirky families and typical confusion.

The pre-service teachers also found *Fat Angie* realistic, although at least three of their responses took issue with particular details, such as the portrayal of military life or the intensity of the bullying that Angie faced. Even so, many pre-service teachers found the events of the novel to accurately reflect teenage life:

> The social interactions were typical to what is expected when a student is an outcast. It is sad to say that the majority of teenagers in this society are cruel when their peers don't fit into the norm, and this book highlights that in the interactions that "Fat Angie" has with her peers.

> The bullying and taunting in this book done by both the teens and the parents was scarily accurate, in my opinion.

Meanwhile, the teenagers were more ambivalent about the realism of *Fat Angie*, with half of the relevant North Carolina responses (and one-fifth of the relevant Texas responses) questioning the authenticity of the events:

> I don't think there are as many bullies in today's society as there were portrayed in the book. However, the reactions Angie had were very realistic.

One youth stated that "the bullying wasn't very realistic but the relationship Angie had with her mother was", while another revealed that "even at the end of the book, I didn't get a clear understanding of why the antagonist didn't like Angie". The intensity and circumstances of Angie's mistreatment were called into question various times. What the author felt was an alignment between *representamen* and object seemed not to be for some youth; the high school experience as object did not match the language and events shared in the novel.

Less than half of the germane pre-service teacher responses expressed this same doubt: "I would have liked more expansion on the main character finding out that Stacy Ann did not hate her just for being fat, but that it was deeper than that". Where the pre-service teachers differed from the youth again was in the attention, alluded to in the above quote, they paid to the characters' health, both through discussion of body issues and mental well-being. Twice as many more pre-service teacher responses than youth responses dealt with these two particular themes:

> The bodily fat references of Angie were recurrent throughout the book; her double chin, tight fitting uncomfortable clothing, sweating profusely, gasping for breath and her deprived hunger.

> The action of cutting is also something that I struggled with and experienced in high school when attempting to deal with emotions and situations I felt I couldn't handle.

Another feature wherein the pre-service teachers differed substantially from the youth was their recognition of pop cultural elements in *Fat Angie*. One pre-service teacher noted the "reoccurring references to songs, movies, comic books, and television shows but not all were symbolic to the storyline". Another remarked that "the pop culture references and awkward humour serve as comedy relief for the serious situations going on in the novel". While at least 14 pre-teacher responses referred to pop culture, none of the youth in either Texas or North Carolina commented on this aspect of the book. While the pop culture references appeared to interest and ultimately increase the credence in the "web of belief" for the pre-service teachers, this did not appear to be the case for the youth.

Differences Across Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

Often, the commentaries of the LGBTQ Texan youth were opposed to both those of the pre-service teachers and the North Carolina youth. With *Fat Angie*, for example, the LGBTQ Texas youth remarked often upon the romance between the protagonist Angie and her eventual girlfriend K.C. One reader wanted the novel to "maybe have more cutesy fluffiness between K.C. and Angie? I mean it would give it that much more of a depth into how a lot of lgbt+ relationships are." Another reader revealed that it was "honestly really nice for me being a lesbian to read this fantasy book about my kind of lifestyle, other than the normal guy and girl love stories. This felt more real to me than those ever will."

With *Aristotle and Dante*, the LGBTQ youth were concerned with categorizing language, or language which labeled – whether negatively or positively – perspectives on and identities within LGBT life:

> I'm extremely curious as to why someone such as the author continually used the word transvestite to describe the person Aristotle's brother killed. Trans or transgender definitely would have been more appropriate.

> I would [recommend the book], with the added comment on the trans-centered violence toward the end. All in all, it's a good book in a queer library that too often focuses more on the sexuality than the characters and their stories.

One reader "would make Aristotle more openly transgender, and take out the mention of hate-crime towards

the trans girl," while another shared that "[the book] shows that [the] LGBT+ community is not weird or out of the ordinary, but can be very normal and assimilated to society's norms." Another response revealed that "my first impression was that it was very low-key queer, in a good way."

To a much greater degree – three times as often – as for the North Carolina youth, the LGBTQ Texas youth were dubious about the realism evinced in *Aristotle and Dante*, with some eventually finding veracity in the events and characters and others not:

> I question how realistic the parents were with their support. Yes, some parents are really supportive of their children and how they identify, but not all parents are that way. Alas, I question how both sets of parents are supportive of their sons.
>
> I believe it was somewhat accurate. The main characters, teenage boys, displayed more maturity and foresight than most teenage boys I have encountered, but taking into consideration the different time period, it was still a believable portrayal.
>
> It definitely didn't represent me personally but I do love the struggles of intersectionality addressed throughout the entire book. I do however feel the interactions were very real and very human and the internal struggle Aristotle faced with coming to his own fabulously gay conclusion was definitely as complex as it should be.

The latter quote points to a striking commonality that the LGBTQ Texas youth and the pre-service teachers shared: the recognition of intersectionality. Sociologists Hill Collins and Birge define intersectionality as "an analytic tool that sheds light on the complexity of people's lives within an equally complex social context" (2016, p.25). As a lens, intersectionality is concerned with understanding lives through "many axes [of social division] that work together and influence each other" (Birge and Collins, p. 2), as well as the "systems of power [that] intersect and coproduce one another to result in unequal material realities and the distinctive social experiences that characterise them" (Collins and Chepp, 2013, p. 60). In an intersectional framework, each 'axis' and/or 'system of power' corresponds to a social identity and/or label. While the status of Angie and K.C. as intersectionally female and lesbian are of note, we were struck by how both the LGBTQ Texas youth and the pre-service teachers lingered on the intersectionality of an LGBTQ identity and a Mexican-American identity:

> I feel like it tackles the internal turmoil any gay minority faces when they aren't white. He somehow felt broken ethnically because of his homosexuality, as if that invalidated him. It was definitely restated over and over again that he was a half-assed Mexican.
>
> I particularly enjoyed the fact that the boys truly inhabit what Gloria Anzaldúa refers to as 'The Borderlands'. They are not only navigating the space between their Mexican Heritage and their American Culture, they also navigate their own sexual identity. It is clear that the two borderlands which they inhabit complicate the other.

The semiotic potential of *Aristotle and Dante* is enhanced by its intersectionally-enabled multiplicity of identities; with greater opportunities for personalized meaning-making through identity relation, the greater chance there seemed to be for both relatability and realism. Several times reader responses take note of and remark positively upon the combination of identities in this work. Almost uniformly, readers recommend *Aristotle and Dante*; while the recognition of intersectionality cannot be explicitly connected with this fact, these responses do suggest that intersectionality may be a strategy in a text that successfully – and perhaps most importantly, without strong opposition – reaches across personal histories and identities to inform.

Other Notable Differences

The North Carolina youth agreed on several occasions with the pre-service teachers in particular. Two abiding interests of just the North Carolina youth, however, were their desire to –in *Fat Angie* – replace Angie's girlfriend K.C. with her male friend Jake and their desire to either downplay or disagree with the LGBTQ presence in *Aristotle and Dante*. One reader simply stated that they prefer "KC and Angie… just be friends and Angie and Jake would date", while another reader connected the same thought with a stylized narrative: "I would have liked for Angie and Jake to date. It would have been your typical teenage relationship, but the cute kind that forms from long-time friends." One youth contends that "in this day we have seen (sic) that homosexuality has become semi-popular and more accepted"; in an earlier response, the same youth states that they "don't agree with homosexuality", and believed that it would make the novel "weird". Another youth reveals that they could not relate to the characters because they "don't find the same sex attractive."

Both the pre-service teachers and the North Carolina youth were preoccupied with the relationships of the two main characters in *Fat Angie*, Angie and K.C., with their families. In particular, the North Carolina youth, by a margin of 2 to 1 in relevant responses, wondered about Angie and her connection with her missing military sister. Both groups also reflected at length on Angie's relationship with her mother. One pre-service teacher stated that "the interactions with her mother exemplified that she had no parent figure to talk to or to even protect her from the cruelty of her environment". One pre-service teacher claims that "her mother expects 'perfection' and is far from perfect herself", while another shares that they "believe her not-to-be-bothered-mother was also something that was also connected back to how Angie viewed herself". One North Carolina youth reveals that "it was almost made out to be like their mom didn't actually care about Wang and Angie, she only cared about how other people viewed her children and their family."

This look at family and friendships often predicated the appeal of *Fat Angie*, at least for the pre-service teachers and the North Carolina youth. (The Texas LGBTQ youth responses focused more on the possibility and presence of romance – but even they recognized the family relationships in the novel, albeit to a lesser degree.) Reader responses expressed concern for Angie's turbulent family life, evaluated Angie's friendship with Jake, and often compared the relationships of the characters to their experiences with their own families. Pre-service teachers especially found these aspects of *Fat Angie* realistic and relatable; the variety in relationship types of *Fat Angie* drew the sustained semiotic attention of those who might choose these novels for students: namely, adults.

CONCLUSION

While the nation is on a trajectory of acceptance for gay and transgender youth and adults, there is still a major undercurrent of hatred present in our society. Providing literature with LGBTQ themes should not be a one-time event in a classroom (Clark & Blackburn, 2009). Instead, it should be incorporated in a thematic unit in which the semiotic markers of acceptance, compassion, and caring are the major focus (Wood, Kissel & Miller, 2016). Stonewall Award-winning works are an excellent means for approaching this focus. In this way, all marginalized youth can see themselves in the literary characters and, with teacher instruction, empathy, and assistance, the examination and discussion of this literature has the potential to help all students understand one another more completely.

The intersectionality in some LGBTQ books like *Aristotle and Dante* may be a productive way to introduce texts like these into the classroom. One of the participants commented that although he was not gay, he understood being different because of his race and other issues in his life. Students, both gay and straight, can see semiotic connections between parts of their lives with parts of others that they might not have realized. Intersectionality may offer us a way to talk about these issues productively. Negotiating identities, power,

and relationships through the intersectionality framework may help students gain insight into themselves and others.

Certainly, the political reality encourages classroom teachers to avoid these issues, but the data is very clear. Our LGBTQ youth desperately need these books in their high school curriculum, and they are asking for them. While our future teachers may be hesitant to use LGBTQ texts, we must create spaces in our preservice programs to help them productively integrate these books into the literacy curriculum. Teachers, if supplied with novels that accurately convey – at least to LGBTQ youth – the LGBTQ youth experience, can teach all youth how to effectively signal – or make a Peircean sign – in a way that fosters LGBTQ-safe environments. The ways in which these novels successfully appeal to and resonate with LGBTQ youth can teach faculty and student peers how to enforce a better quality of life for these youth. It is through the study of literature on the topic of diversity, in all its forms, that we have a neutral vehicle by which to create "safe zones" for our youth, where students can feel free to be who they are without fear of disdain or reproach from peers (Henkin, 2011; Ratts et al., 2013). This is a most pressing challenge for us as teacher educators – one that needs to be addressed immediately.

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APPENDIX

1. Please state the name of the book that you have just finished reading.
2. What were your first impressions about the book? Why?
3. Were the interactions between characters in the book representative of the way teens/young adults that you know interact? Explain your response.
4. Were there any motifs (recurrent imagery, symbols, or structural elements) in the book you read? If so, what were they?
5. Were you able to personally connect with the feelings, emotions, and actions of the characters? If so, which ones, and why?
6. What are some events in the book that you felt might be especially helpful in informing the reader about the protagonist's struggles? Explain your response.
7. Were there any parts of the book that you question? Explain your response.
8. How realistic are the characters and the problems they are facing? How realistic are the reactions to the things that happen to them? Explain your responses.
9. If you could change one thing about the book to make it more realistic, what would it be? Why?
10. If you could change one thing about the book to make it more enjoyable, what would it be? Why?
11. Would you recommend this book to someone else? Why or why not?
12. Would this book make a good television show or movie? Why or why not?*

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DIALOGUE
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Zombie Literature: Analyzing the Fear of the Unknown through Popular Culture

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ABSTRACT

This paper will focus on how the rise in popularity of zombie literature in the 21st century is reflective of a western cultural need to address the fear of the unknown through popular culture. Through the flesh-eating zombie, we enter a parallel world where everything familiar in our communities becomes evil. The genre reflects the fear in Western society of the neighbor who has turned against you, survival in the midst of government collapse, and the monster within. Zombie fantasy literature allows society a venue to deconstruct what is known while dealing with these fears and the unbridled hate of the unthinking zombie through a collective experience using popular culture. What this fantasy subgenre allows, the author will explain, is a monster that embodies an individual human's greatest fears. At times, the zombie reflects the fear of social breakdown; at others, the zombie reflects aging and death. The versatility of this embodiment of fear allows it to be a genre that continues to evolve.

Using the writings of Mikhail Bakhtin on carnival and festive folk humor, the author will discuss how the zombie genre has provided fantasy lovers a desconstructive space to deal with fear, death, and hate in a genre that breaks down what western society has constructed for itself, and also allows readers to rebuild the future without constraint. Zombies, however, always leave room for humanity to hope for life and the future. This popular culture phenomenon goes beyond mere entertainment as it reaches into the heart of viewers and allows them to express their greatest emotions.

Keywords: Bakhtin, carnivalesque, zombies, deconstruction, laughter, fear, popular culture

It is common knowledge that zombie fiction has been on the rise for the last several years. The zombie has become infused into many areas of entertainment. From television shows to movies, graphic novels to Young Adult (YA) novels and adult fiction, the many genres of modern literature bow to the popularity of the undead menace. The obvious reasons for this rise in popularity in mainstream popular (pop) culture would be that the zombie story is exciting, it is packed with adventure and action and it is completely fantastical, but, if one looks deeper, then one can see the fundamental need of humanity to deconstruct social understandings, break away from the known and deal with the themes of fear, death and the unknown.

While one could trace the rise of zombie literature, especially zombie films, to their roots in the 1960s and 1970s, this paper is not about how the genre got its start. In fact, the author will not spend much time talking about the roots of the genre, or even many popular origin stories that many iterations of zombie literature holds on to. The zombie is now an "important *cultural* figure because of its powerful role as a multifaceted *allegorical* figure (emphasis in the original, Bishop, 2015). The purpose in this article is to show that there is a human need to deconstruct what we perceive as real and engage and analyze fear on the individual and societal levels.

SITUATING ZOMBIES WITHIN RESEARCH IN POPULAR CULTURE

Extant research on zombie literature in popular culture, whether it is analysis of film, television, or print media, often draws on the voodoo origins of the word zombie and its relation to the evolution on zombies in popular film (Platts (2013), social satire in film, television, and video games (do Vale, 2010, Schott, 2010), zombie walks (Austin, 2015, do Vale, 2010, Orpana, 2011) and simply as allegory representing the various moral and political discourses of the time in which they are made (Nagypal, 2014, Orpana, 2011). Often using Rubinstein & Romero's (1978) *Dawn of the Dead* as the ultimate example of the zombie as an epicenter of social commentary on rampant American consumerism, research in popular culture and literature about zombies cannot avoid the negative discourses surrounding the zombie as a representation of a decaying culture focused on materialism.

However, to analyze the zombie in popular culture, researchers have to dissect not only the overt discourses represented in texts, but the subversive goals of the writers and directors themselves. In looking at zombie video games, Gareth Schott (2010) speaks to the zombie video game as an agent of potential social change "because of their interactive and transformative qualities" (p. 67). In looking at *Dead Rising* (2006) the author compares the social implications laid out by Rubinstein & Romero of survivors of the zombie apocalypse surviving the new world while trapped in an American shopping mall. In order to analyze the viewer as consumer in a consumer culture, Schott looks at how varying aspects of the game were created to point, sometimes overtly, at the social problem of materialism represented by a shopping mall.

The analysis of the zombie genre cannot be separated from the sociopolitical ideologies that influence it. Nagypal (2014) analyzes three zombie movies in order to understand the utopian hopeful future often included in zombie literature. The films under study here represent distinctly opposite political futures and how existence comes into contact with death represented in the living dead of the zombie (p. 17). The author shows how the zombie genre represents the sometimes contradictory hope of the political divide when thinking of future society.

Humanness is an essential concept that must be analyzed when looking at zombie literature, and writing also shows how the universal fear of the other cannot be separated from the genre. Simone do Vale (2010) while examining the cultural phenomenon of "zombie walks" describes the social fears of "towering menaces like terrorists, ecologic and economic disasters, HIV, bird flu, swine flu, and young Marilyn Manson fans going postal" as universal discourses tackled by zombie literature (p. 198). However, the author concludes

by sharing how zombie walks "could be understood as a carnivalization of fear" that allows like-minded individuals to gather together and express their power to resist that fear (p. 199). Resistance to dominant society, thus, becomes another focus of zombie literature.

Additionally, Platts (2013) insists that research in zombies must be looked at as representations of valuable cultural objects (p. 547). In looking at the history of the genre and the various cultures and individuals who influenced and developed it, the author found that zombies were a prime site of study in sociology for researchers to examine both social anxieties and cultural fear. He states that "[w]hat nearly all understandings and depictions of popular culture zombies have in common is a flexible creature designed to evoke our macabre fascination and whose likeness adapts to contemporaneous tumult, concerns about manmade and natural disasters, conflicts and wars, and crime and violence" (p. 550). These fears, essentially, are universal to most cultures and most time periods, and must be examined, analyzed, and dealt with at the societal level in order for society to dream of a better future.

USING BAKHTIN'S CARNIVALESQUE AS A THEORETICAL FRAME

While Bakhtin's carnival has been used in analyzing zombies in popular culture before (see Austin, 2015, do vale, 2010, Nagypal, 2014, Orpana, 2011), much of the connection has to do with Bakhtin's "treatment of the body" (Austin, 2015, Orpana, 2011, p. 255) and less to do with zombie literature as a tool for social deconstruction argued here. The zombie is the perfect political representation of the modern human. Orpana (2011), while examining zombie walks in particular, explains that "The simplicity of the zombie trope makes it a useful vehicle for political allegory and cultural critique; however, the flexibility and diversity of the genre make uncovering the latent psycho-social trauma that lends horrific energy to these [zombie] films a difficult task" (p. 253). While Orpana focuses much on Bakhtin's theory on grotesque realism as a part of carnival to understand and analyze zombie walks as vehicles of social commentary, in contrast, here the focus is on a societal level of dealing with the fear of the unknown by having a carnivalesque hope.

Fantasy literature, specifically zombie fantasy literature, allows western culture to deal with our deepest and darkest fears. Zombie literature provides an escape, a space to deal with our greatest fears and a space to consider how we, individually and as a culture, might fare if the worst thing imaginable came to be. For some, zombie literature merely represents the fear of the unknown and the question of survival in a dark and hostile world. Others deal with the fear and hatred of the "other" that lives down the street from them or in a faraway land. The themes tying all of these cases together are the emotions of fear and hatred. What if the world was really out to get us? What if the government no longer existed or we were left to fend for ourselves without the protections of our modern society? The truth is that many consumers of zombie literature hold on to the question of "what if?" and then the focus becomes how will we respond? While fear, violence and the deconstruction of social norms are often in the forefront of zombie literature, an underlying theme of hope, survival, and salvation coexists in zombie literature that shows that even in the darkest of days humanity has hope for a better and different future.

To understand zombie literature from an analytical standpoint, two concepts from Mikhail Bakhtin's (1984) work *Rabelais and His World* will be used as a lens to discover why zombie pop culture provides such a valuable space for westerners to explore their deepest fears. In particular, Bakhtin's writings on carnival show the value and potential of zombie literature as escapism, and also Bakhtin's writings on medieval folk humor and laughter show the reasoning behind why the zombie is such a valuable tool for overcoming that fear. Literature is the perfect space to engage in these concepts because "From a social perspective, language also works as a unifying force among the individuals of a group. Bakhtin argues that only through the interaction with others may our consciousness as beings arise" (Sempere, 2014, p.51). Thus, zombie literature is a social

tool for deconstructing the social fabric of the culture we live in.

At its root, the zombie apocalypse is impossible. However, whether it is a virus outbreak or a biochemical weapon attack that starts it, there is just enough "that's possible" to make the genre a perfect place to deal with humanity's great hope to start all over from scratch. The fears of an individual bleed into the fears of society as a whole, and as the anxiety rises culture needs a place to deal with the emotions that individuals face every day. The Greeks sought community catharsis though their festivals and plays, medieval Europeans in feudal states also dealt with the fear of the unknown through folk literature and plays. Modern society does the same.

Bakhtin writes extensively on how carnival was used in many cultures and in many different ways to allow people to step away from normal life, break down and deconstruct society and escape all the pressures that come with that. What carnival provided was a freedom from social constructions that were not felt during the rest of the year. According to Bakhtin (1984), "They [carnival festivals] were the second life of the people, who for a time entered the utopian realm of community, freedom, equality, and abundance" (p. 9). What this freedom from normal life provided was "'...gay diversion…' so that foolishness, which is our second nature and seems to be inherent in man might freely spend itself at least once a year" (p. 75). Society needed a break from itself, and this was a break from the formality associated with medieval life, a life of rules both from the church and from the government.

Carnival was a form of popular culture at the time that was needed to take place so that society could step away from what was known and analyze the unknown fears and the unknown hopes that existed for everyone. Zombie literature as a form of popular culture is important because "…popular culture texts [can be used] as a space in which to contest racialized, gendered, and universalized experiences" (Alvermann, 2011, p.544). There is a cultural desire to engage with pop culture, and society uses pop culture to analyze social constructions and provide a foundation for change in the future. It is not reserved for only those belonging to certain fandoms. Young and old can engage with zombie literature to individually and collaboratively deal with the complex emotions in their lives. In building this deconstructive foundation through zombie literature, it must be noted that "Bakhtin explains how artistic events are first of all responses to previous events, but all the same, they demand further responses in the future" (Sempere, 2014, p. 40). The rise in popularity in zombie literature is evidence of this deconstructive space continuing to be needed year after year.

Bakhtin wrote of carnival as a deconstructive force. Sempere (2014) uses Bakhtin to engage with his work as a foundational deconstructive voice; he says that "Deconstruction is a mode of reading whose main concern is to highlight the inheritance, the traces of a particular reading of a text" (p. 31). Writing on the carnivalesque feast of the fools, Bakhtin shows this deconstructive inheritance when he wrote that annually "Nearly all the rituals of the feast of the fools are a grotesque degradation of various church rituals and symbols and their transfer to the material bodily level: gluttony and drunken orgies on the altar table, indecent gestures, disrobing" (pp. 74-75). These are deconstructions of everything ritualistic in medieval life. The connections to the undead zombie and the zombie apocalypse here are obvious. A breakdown of society and the power of the church and government are represented by man's darkest devolution into the unthinking monster. The zombie has an insatiable appetite for his former friends and neighbors; it is man in his most grotesque form.

Connected to this idea would be the rituals of travesties, uncrownings, and thrashings where "Abuse is death, it is former youth transformed into old age, the living body turned into a corpse" (p. 197). Carnival deconstructed the fears of death and aging according to the social constructions at the time. Zombie literature is a modern tool for this because "Each new act of reading diverges from the previous one because each new reading may stand for a deconstruction of other previous acts of reading" (Sempere, 2014, p. 51). Individuals reengage with the themes of aging and death through serial reading and viewing of zombie literature in order to continually deconstruct the forces of society around them. This is why carnival was held every year. One participation in carnival or engagement with a zombie text does not "solve" these fears for an individual.

Death is celebrated in carnival as inevitable which the zombie genre makes quite obvious. It is this fear of the unknown associated with death that surrounds carnival that shows the value to society of letting go of those emotions. Then, as a studied text, "…people's uses of popular culture texts can inform the large social, political, and economic structures governing their lives" (Alvermann, 2011, p. 564). Zombie literature, in this sense, would transcend the individual viewer's experience and become an agent of shared emotion with all others who engage with it, and then it can be used as a tool for social criticism and hope at the societal level.

FLATTENING THE HIERARCHIES WITH ZOMBIE LITERATURE

Many pop culture texts like zombie fiction are often seen as mindless entertainment without social capital. Alvermann (2012) writes that "The perception that low culture is synonymous with popular culture is based on the supposition that audiences lack agency in interpreting messages embedded in media… (p. 218). Deconstructionism, on the other hand, thinks that agency is available to all. For example, the zombie is a manifestation of death. The inherent fear of death is made physical in the zombie, giving a direction for our emotions that makes them easier to deal with. All viewers of zombie literature engage with personal and social constructions of death and dying.

What zombie literature does for readers and viewers is that it takes away all that we know and trust to be true. It is not the creation of a place of fear, but a place where one can step away from life and look at it from the outside. This is mirrored when Bakhtin stressed how carnival provided a "...complete liberation from the seriousness of life" (p. 247). It flattened the differences between man and man, and man and woman because "In the world of carnival all hierarchies are canceled. All castes and ages are equal" (p. 251). Lastly, "The authority of the official realm of Church and state is suspended, with all its norms and values. The world is permitted to emerge from its routine" (p. 259). This is a key point when looking at zombie literature as a deconstructive force. The individual must exist in a stripped and deconstructed society where he owes no one any explanation; the way of the world must be brought closer and all the rules, laws, and understandings of the world must be swept away in this apocalyptic event. It is in this space that humanity deals with its fundamental fears of the unknown, death, hatred and chaos.

However, carnival was not just a place to strip away the official and to indulge in whatever fancies may exist (although there is an element of this); carnival was a place for hope. With this realization that carnival and zombie literature are more than just a glorification of fear and death, we can apply Bakhtin who would insist that in the midst of death and uncertainty there is hope. Many zombie stories contain this element of hope. Without it, there is little reason for characters to try to survive. There must be salvation, hope or a safe zone without zombies to hold on to. From death comes life, and "Carnival… did liber-ate human consciousness and permit a new outlook, but at the same time it implied no nihilism; it had a positive character because it disclosed the abundant material principle, change and becoming, the irresistible triumph of the new immortal people" (p. 274). This cycle was included in all of Bakhtin's writings on carnival. Death and rebirth are paired, as are fear and hope. It is the continued survival in the face of overwhelming and unexplainable odds in the zombie story that keeps readers and viewers connected in that same way. As an individual person engages with zombie literature, all of their experiences, both good and bad, engage with what is transpiring in the text. Viewers live through the experiences of the characters in zombie literature and this gives them a critical disposition to everything they are reading or watching. In turn, they apply this new critical lens to the social world around them.

These pairings of fear and hope are inevitable. Humanity clings to this because, as Bakhtin writes, "The victory of the future is ensured by the people's immortality. The birth of the new, of the greater and the better, is as indispensable and as inevitable as the death of the old" (p. 256). Zombie literature, like carnival,

allows society to experience the full range of human emotion and deal with the fears associated with life and death and walk away with renewed hope. Morrell (2007), speaking of pop culture as a deconstructive tool in the classroom, writes that "Popular culture can help students deconstruct dominant narratives and contend with oppressive practices in hopes of achieving a more egalitarian and inclusive society" (p. 72). Ultimately, through the cathartic expressions of fear and hope, zombie literature allows viewers to analyze the world around them and also empowers them to affect change. It is in this hope where "In the whole of the world and of the people there is no room for fear. For fear can only enter a part that has been separated from the whole, the dying link torn from the link that is born. The whole of the people and of the world is triumphantly gay and fearless" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 256). Zombie literature always contains the element of hope and triumph. Whether it is as simple as escaping the undead horde in a character's town, finding a group of survivors to call family or reaching that place of safety, the future, although uncertain, remains hopeful. This is the essence of deconstructive thought.

Zombie literature does provide modern society with a carnivalesque escape. The world as we know it ends, and the survivors are left to deal with a new world that is hostile, but popular culture allows for "… the expression of universal human values, namely the desire and struggle for freedom from tyranny and oppression" (Morrell, 2007, p.73). The modern unknown fears of terrorism, violence, and death are manifest in the zombie. Fear, as a tangible entity in this genre, can be dealt with through pop culture in ways that fear in normal life cannot. Bakhtin writes that "Fear is the extreme expression of narrow-minded and stupid seriousness, which is defeated by laughter" (p. 47). The ultimate defeat of fear is to laugh at it or trivialize it, but fear is a universal human emotion and the dealing of it in order to have hope for the future is also universal. Harari would add that popular culture should be used "…not in order to predict the future, but to free yourself of the past and imagine alternative destinies" (2017, p. 65). The zombie apocalypse takes everything that society knows and destroys it. Just like the flattening of hierarchies during carnival, all people become equal in the eyes of the bloodthirsty zombie.

The undercurrent theme of hope that is often included in zombie literature is rooted in this concept of laughter over fear. Individuals participating in carnival must laugh in the face of the grotesque, in the face of seriousness, and the formality of the Church and of the government. "Thus carnival is the people's second life, organized on the basis of laughter" which breaks participants away from the known, deconstructs that which limits society and gives space to deal with the unknown (p. 9). Zombie literature, if applied to this idea, is a part of western society continuing to deal with an ever changing world, and the fears that are associated with those changes.

There are many positives to the use of laughter as a tool for victory over fear in Bakhtin's writings on medieval life and carnival. In particular, "It was the victory of laughter over fear that most impressed medieval man" (p.90). Laughter at fear allows readers of zombie literature and consumers of zombie pop culture to deconstruct the known and have a chance to see beyond the horror in front of them to begin to see the potential for hope in a hopeless world. Bakhtin adds that "It was the defeat of divine and human power, of authoritarian commandments and prohibitions, of death and punishment after death, hell and all that is more terrifying that earth itself. Through this victory laughter clarified man's consciousness and gave him a new outlook on life" (p. 91). Often, deconstructionism includes this element of seeing the world through new, different and better eyes. It is through this new outlook that characters are driven to pursue salvation, to reach the zombie-free Promised Land and to continue to survive and to build a new, better future. The viewer then sees the world in a new way.

To take a step away, essentially, the reader or viewer of zombie pop culture looks at the horrifying grotesque form of the zombie and has two options. One is to have absolute fear, which we see often, and the other is to laugh in the face of fear and defeat it. In carnival, "The acute awareness of victory over fear is an

essential element of medieval laughter" (p. 91). The medieval carnival participant broke down the hierarchies that surrounded them and laughed in the face of social constructions. In many ways, the zombie apocalypse in literature provides this same space. The inefficient government, the annoying neighbor, homeowners associations, the boss at work and the policeman giving out a speeding ticket, all turn into comic form as zombies. They are slow, stupid, and easy to defeat one-on-one. In essence, "The people play with terror and laugh at it; the awe-some becomes a 'comic monster'" (p. 91). The great importance of this is seen in Bakhtin's writing as he says, "This is why festive folk laughter presents an element of victory not only over supernatural awe, over the sacred, over death; it also means the defeat of power, of earthly kings, of the earthly upper classes, of all that oppresses and restricts" (p. 92). Absolute freedom comes to participants in carnival and in zombie pop culture. All that restricts is swept away and humanity is left with only its base needs to the forefront: food, water and shelter. Then, after all is deconstructed, the future can begin to be built anew.

In this apocalyptic world, anything is possible. Bakhtin stresses that there is so much more to the tearing down that carnival provides, the rebirth must not be forgotten. What better way to find new life than laughter at what makes one fearful? This does not mean that fear no longer exists. In fact, "Victory over fear is not its abstract elimination; it is a simultaneous uncrowning and renewal, a gay transformation. Hell has burst and has poured forth abundance" (p. 91). This process cannot be overlooked. One must realize that "It is impossible to determine where the defeat of fear will end and where joyous recreation will begin" (p. 91). Therefore in zombie literature, as in carnival, character and reader alike must continue forward with the hope of new life and salvation. The fear of the unknown is unmasked in the zombie and can be dealt with just as "Medieval laughter, when it triumphed over the fear inspired by the mystery of the world and by power, boldly unveiled the truth about both" (p. 92). It is in this laughter where the social constructions of western society are laid bare, and a new hope can emerge to guide the future.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this analysis was to show how zombie literature is a deconstructive power, and the theme of the fear of the unknown as well as the hanging onto of hope in zombie pop culture is representative of Mikhail Bakhtin's writing on carnival and medieval folk laughter. In essence, zombie literature provides for its viewers a carnivalesque escape and deconstruction of the reality of their daily lives. It is used by viewers to deal with their deepest, darkest fears about society, and allows them to reach the freedom that Bakhtin writes of, one that is a "...second life of the people, who for a time entered the utopian realm of community, freedom, equality, and abundance" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 9). Zombie literature breaks the hierarchies and constraints that western society has constructed for itself. These constructions include politics, fear of the other, and materialism that causes neighbor to distrust neighbor. Viewers escape these constructions and find hope in a "what if we could change it all" new world represented in the zombie apocalypse.

The comic zombie with its shambling gate and drunken inability to function as a normal human creates a caricature of human life that is a tool for laughter to defeat the fears that viewers have and allows them to build something new. Bakhtin writes that individuals laugh at the manifestations of their fears to defeat them which describe how we can now see the role of a zombie in modern literature (p. 91). Zombie literature allows westerners the chance to step away from the social constructions of their lives, and allows them to consider the possibility of how life could be different, how they would react or survive if their worst fears came true and to mentally prepare for the unknown future that haunts them.

One must not forget the second half of the purpose of carnival that Bakhtin insists his readers remember. One must remember that in carnival, from chaos becomes a new world (p. 91). Carnival does not exist just to bring down and flatten those things that separate us; carnival provides rebirth and rejuvenation of culture,

society and the individual. This is the power of zombie literature. Viewers can experience their own fears of the unknown through the experience of watching the fear associated with the zombie apocalypse, and the hope often granted to survivor's shows viewers that there is a chance for more and to always strive for better things and have hope for the future.

Viewers of zombie literature get to put all of their fears into the manifestation of the zombie. It is in the heart pounding fear of that unknown violence and hatred that causes viewers to panic in their seats. One sees that it must be impossible to survive such a horrific life in an undead world. Yet, viewers hope through every character that they meet. It is easy to see themselves in the survivors of any zombie book or movie. Viewers question themselves on every decision made for survival. Would they make the same choice? Do they see the danger that the characters do not see? Viewers, more importantly, get to experience the same joy and hope that the characters do as they make a new world when society has been completely deconstructed, and by escaping the reaching clutches of the undead. It is in this experience of hope that a carnivalesque rebirth happens, leaving viewers with a chance to see life through new eyes.

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DIALOGUE
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Queerly Cultivating Anti-Racist Feminist Pedagogy

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ABSTRACT

Queerly Cultivating Anti-Racist Feminist Pedagogy raises questions and analyzes classroom practices based on adrienne maree brown's (2017) *Emergent Strategy,* a radical self-help manual for our current political climate that calls for a paradigm shift in organizing work. Black, mixed, queer, pansexual, feminist writer, pleasure activist, facilitator and sci-fi scholar, brown builds on a continuous tradition of women of color feminists resisting oppression to bring together science fiction and permaculture, biomimicry and organizing, pleasure and activism. She offers fresh perspectives on how to imagine liberation and provides dynamic ways to think about teaching and learning. *Emergent Strategy* provides principles to help us change and grow, essential for all pedagogical work, and asks us to imagine liberation. In fact, emergent strategies can be integrated into classroom teaching and educational practices to create more meaningful learning, engagement, and measurable success using the principles: trust the people, what you pay attention to grows, less prep more presence, never a failure always a lesson, and change is constant (brown, 2017, pp. 41-42). This article addresses present moment classroom concerns using these five principles to explore why and how to cultivate anti-racist feminist pedagogy and to do it queerly. In this case, queer is an action, a verb, something to do, and something to do to counter normative approaches: queer them. Thus, queerly cultivating anti-racist feminist pedagogy questions the status quo, and can be used to challenge taken for granted, problematic and oppressive classroom practices.

Keywords: Feminist, Anti-Racist, Queer, Pedagogy, Privilege, Oppression, Organizing, Emergent Strategy, Teaching

QUEERLY CULTIVATING ANTI-RACIST FEMINIST PEDAGOGY[1]

All that you touch
You Change.

All that you Change
Changes you.

The only lasting truth
Is Change

God
Is Change. (Butler, 1993, p. 3)

Octavia Butler begins her speculative apocalyptic novel, *Parable of the Sower,* with this pronouncement, setting the stage for her African American young woman protagonist, Lauren, to lead a radical cultural movement for societal transformation. Butler published 13 books and won many prestigious awards including being the first science fiction writer to be named a MacArthur Fellow. She saw herself as an outsider—a working-class Black woman raised by a single mother—and her fictional worlds challenged her readers' understandings of gender, race, sexuality and humanness.

Butler's recurring theme of change as a constant also inspires and frames the work of New York Times best-selling author, Adrienne maree brown, in her social justice organizing and self-help text, *Emergent Strategy* (2017). Black, mixed, queer, pansexual, feminist writer, pleasure activist, facilitator and sci-fi scholar, brown builds on a continuous tradition of women of color feminists resisting oppression to bring together science fiction and permaculture, biomimicry and organizing, pleasure and activism. *Emergent Strategy,* brown (2017) explains, "Is how we intentionally change in ways that grow our capacity to embody the just and liberated worlds we long for" (p. 3).

I draw on this radical genealogy in my pedagogy to ask how our current oppressive systems and carceral logics—including policing and punishment—shape our lives and constrain how we imagine our responses to injustice, harm and violence. How can we imagine a just society, and how can we raise questions about injustice and harm in the classroom? *Emergent Strategy,* a radical self-help manual for our current political climate calling for a paradigm shift in organizing work, has, to this point, not permeated discussions and analysis about classroom practices; yet it offers profound insights, building from Octavia Butler's radical tradition, to utilize in classrooms. brown offers fresh perspectives on how to imagine liberation and offers new and dynamic ways to think about teaching and learning. *Emergent Strategy* provides principles to help us change and grow—essential for all pedagogical work and asks us to imagine liberation.[2] In fact, emergent strategies can be integrated into classroom teaching and educational practices to create more meaningful learning, engagement, and measurable success using the principles: trust the people, what you pay attention to grows, less prep more presence, never a failure always a lesson, and change is constant (brown, 2017, pp. 41-42). Working from the school of feminist science fiction, particularly the insights in *Emergent Strategy*,

1 I acknowledge and pay respect to the traditional custodians of the land on which I live. Recognizing our role in colonialism and that we are on stolen land acknowledges that the present United States is a collection of chopped up territories and land purchases accumulated by genocide. I am conscious of my place on the ancestral homelands of the People of the Council of Three Fires: The Ojibwe, the Potawatomi and the Odawa. Chicago was also a site of trade and healing for the Miami, Ho-Chunk, Winnebago and Sauk and many others. Today there are more than 65,000 Native people, representing hundreds of tribal nations who call the Chicago-area home. Remembering the history and honoring the contributions and traditions of indigenous people is one step towards fighting their erasure.

this article engages present moment classroom concerns using these five principles to explore why and how to cultivate anti-racist feminist pedagogy and do it queerly.

Queer can be a noun, an adjective, and a verb, with various meanings in different contexts, similar to the ways in which *education*, *art* and *media* take on significance in different times and spaces. Non-binary white sex educator and scholar Meg-John Barker and white transgender illustrator Jules Scheele in *Queer: A Graphic History* (2016) note that in queer theory there is a particular emphasis on the idea of queer as an action, a verb, something to do, rather than something that folks are (or are not). Queer is at odds with 'regimes of the normal': those 'normative' ideals of aspiring to be normal in identity, behavior, appearance, relationships, etc. (Warner, 1999). Thus, queering questions taken for granted, status quo relations we, especially those of us with power and privilege, may have come to accept as part of white supremacy or sexism. In queer theory nothing is inherently straight and queering can be used to challenge harmful and oppressive classroom practices.

WHY PEDAGOGY?

Pedagogy, the study of theories of education, is about the practice of teaching. As a Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies faculty member at an urban, working-class, majority students of color public university, teaching is a central component of my academic position. The people who enroll in my classes often struggle to pay for their education and negotiate multiple hurdles on their way to the university: childcare responsibilities, underemployment or low wage full-time plus work, and long commutes. Their time in the classroom is valuable and I take seriously my work to create meaningful teaching and learning environments. I draw on popular culture, particularly speculative fiction, to make feminist theories and ideas relevant, visionary and accessible to my students, motivated by the questions: How can we imagine justice and liberation, and how can we work for life free from harm and violence, free from racism and white supremacy? These questions seem extremely timely given the political climate of ongoing racially motivated police murders and pandemic death. I am interested in research and dialogue surrounding pedagogy as I am committed to using this platform for radical social transformation. My pedagogical practice is characterized by feminism, anti-racism/anti-oppression, and queerness.

My framework for feminism is intersectional, anti-sexist, and gender curious. The term intersectionality was first used by Black legal scholar and civil rights advocate Kimberelé Crenshaw (1989) to describe the specific oppression Black women experience based both on race and gender. Crenshaw's work is part of a long history of feminists, especially Black, Indigenous and other women of color, conceptualizing the interrelated nature of oppression. In 1977 the Combahee River Collective, a group of Radical Black Lesbian Socialist Feminists, explained how oppressions are interlocking, simultaneously experienced, structural and omnipresent. For me, as Barbara Smith, one of the Combahee River Collective organizers, wrote in 1979: "Feminism is the political theory and practice that struggles to free *all* women: women of color, working-class women, poor women, disabled women, lesbians, old women, as well as white, economically privileged heterosexual women. Anything less than this vision of total freedom is not feminism" (emphasis in original, p. 49). This freedom for all women, including Indigenous women, transwomen, and femmes everywhere, would change our whole world in ways that would make us all free.

I use the term "cultivating" to modify anti-racist feminist pedagogy, inspired by queer white anti-racist feminist, activist and scholar Ann Russo's (2019) *Feminist Accountability*, an intersectional analysis of anti-racist, accountability and transformative justice work. Cultivating, then, is a way to recognize this work as "a practice, not an end, and it is a continuous process, rather than a single act." Pedagogy and teaching are "often embedded in the logics and structures of power and oppression" (p. 11). Thus, cultivating an awareness of power and oppression has the potential to alter our own pedagogy in ways which lead to more justice and transformation.

As I cultivate my anti-oppression pedagogy, I recognize ways my work—indeed my life— has been

radically shaped by lesbian feminism (not the trans exclusionary kind) and the love of women. I use queerly here because I am. Queer thinking and queer pedagogy is about resisting norms and normal. Additionally, queer is about people, activism, history and theory. Queer theory examines power relations and questions dominant and normalized binaries such as teacher/student and gay/straight.

My pedagogical lens amplifies anti-racism because white supremacy, capitalism and settler colonialism shape the U.S., continue to harm, and form the context of my lived experience as a white, cis-gendered, non-disabled, monolingual, U.S. citizen. The work for people with privilege is to acknowledge the benefits we receive, to take accountability for the harm we commit, both intentional and unintentional, and to struggle for justice. Using *Emergent Strategy,* we can learn to teach and "change in ways that grow our capacity to embody the just and liberated worlds we long for" (brown, 2017, p. 3).

BUILDING EMERGENT STRATEGIES IN THE CLASSROOM

Learning can be a transformational act and brown's *Emergent Strategy* offers a clear description of liberatory philosophy with principles to help us change and grow. Using elements of *Emergent Strategy* as pedagogical interventions enable those of us in classrooms to imagine a liberated future: trust the people, what you pay attention to grows, less prep more presence, never a failure always a lesson, and change is constant (p. 41-42).

Trust the People (If You Trust the People They Become Trustworthy)

One of the primary principles of emergent strategy for brown (2017), is: "if you trust the people, they become trustworthy. Trust is a seed that grows with attention and space. The facilitator can be a gardener or the sun, the water" (p. 214). This principle can be applied to all forms of facilitation, especially pedagogy and teaching.

Trusting the people, or for educators, trusting the students, can be challenging because the longer we work in the field, the further we are from our own student days. We start to see the students through the lens of the hierarchical institution: on the other team, grade grubbing, scamming or trying to get away with doing less. We communicate this to them by not believing them when they offer the reason they were not in class or did not finish their work; when we ask for documentation for their illness or doctor visit or suspect they do not do the readings assigned because they are blowing us off or their crosstalk in class is because they are not paying attention, are bored or …. The list of ways professors and teachers suspect our students of being untrustworthy goes on and on.

I create a paradigm shift by offering another way to inhabit the classroom: *Trust the students. If you trust the students they become trustworthy.* If teachers change the way we view students as our opponents, harboring suspicions of them and their motives at the outset of the semester what might that look like? How can we use our pedagogy, our syllabi, our classroom interactions to build trust? Faculty must recognize our power: we are the ones who construct the curriculum, assign the reading, control the conversation, assess the work. What do we actually have to lose if we trust the students? More importantly, what do we gain if we plant the seeds of trust; what can grow in our classrooms with students? No matter our disciplines or fields, we can foster a collective classroom culture centering a willingness to learn, to engage the materials, and to create community.

I approach building trust in the classroom the first day by learning the names students want to be called (reading out names from the roster can alienate students if you mispronounce their names or use a name they don't want to be called). I spend time before class starts talking about how things are going in the world, in our lives. I share about my life when it relates to the texts or to topics which arise in class. I talk about the importance of their thoughts and them coming to their own ideas about the world. Sometimes we get into a

circle for our class conversations and start class with a check-in where students share how they are doing, in addition to building trust, this creates a context where their whole selves are welcome into the room and can create opportunities for them to recognize how they are feeling and embrace learning alongside. This respect, and classroom empathy more broadly, is linked to student success and participation (Okonofua et al., 2016). How might we practice this more regularly in our classrooms? How do we build our syllabi in ways that trust our students? And if we have a random student here or there trying to "get around" on us, what have we lost? Who really loses if they lie about a doctor visit or why they need an extension on their paper? Across disciplines we can read syllabi for their emphasis: Are the due dates or the attendance policy more centrally located than what the learning will be? Can we create syllabi and classroom interactions to build trust?

Queering this first principle questions taken for granted, status quo relations of power many have come to accept as part of capitalism, white supremacy and heteropatriarchy. Those of us with power, white people, men, heterosexuals, citizens, teachers and professors in the classroom, especially need to trust the people deemed untrustworthy: outsiders, queers, trans folks, people of color, undocumented, people with disabilities. Simply because those that experience the world without structural power and in different ways might just be the folks to lead us to liberation, like Lauren in Butler's (1993) text *Parable of the Sower.* Simultaneously the role of the professor as having the power is queered by faculty of color or teachers with disabilities who are themselves deemed untrustworthy. Drawing on Smith's (1979) definition of feminism, everyone must be free in order to imagine just and liberated feminist futures. Additionally, brown is not setting up the binary of either trustworthy or untrustworthy with this principle, she is reminding us: many things can be true at once.

What You Pay Attention to Grows

This principle rings true when we hear it and has been stated by many (Chopra, 1995, p.111; GeneenRoth, 2012) and used in fields of life coaching and self-help. How can it be applied to queer anti-racist feminist pedagogy? Just as trust can grow with people when we pay attention to trust, so can the power of feminist love, a central tenet of my pedagogical practice. I believe, as Black woman scholar, author and public intellectual bell hooks (2001) emphasizes that when love is nurtured in us it enhances our capacity to be self-actualized and to engage in communion with the world around us (p. 4). **This is not romantic love but the love of resistance and collectivity.** Teaching this form of love asks students to resist the self-hatred promoted by oppression and to take themselves—their minds and bodies—and each other seriously. Recognizing systems of oppression, through theory and analysis, allows students to examine society and culture, to think in more liberatory ways, and to build collective and individual forms of resistance to ableism, patriarchy, white supremacy, heterosexism, transphobia, nationalism, capitalism, anti-Semitism, etc. The first step to resist patriarchy is to resist self-hatred. When we get the oppressors out of our heads we can imagine freedom. As Audre Lorde (1984), a self-described Black, lesbian, mother, warrior, poet reminds us, "The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" (p. 110).

To focus on love may appear a tall order to practice in classrooms. I start each semester off with structured opportunities to connect across differences and build community—for students to get to know each other and me. Because *what you pay attention to grows*, I often assign bell hook's (2001) book *All About Love: New Visions* to center our exploration of feminist love. I pay attention to assignments which prepare students to talk to each other about the readings and to encourage participation in class. For example, I create assignments giving them chances to write their thoughts about the readings on their own and then to share those ideas in smaller groups, to learn about each other through the meanings they made from the texts. This also gives every student the opportunity to think through some of their ideas in advance, not only to those that feel comfortable answering questions from a lecture or speaking up in class discussion.

In addition to traditional theory and research texts, I incorporate film, video, poetry and fiction into the curriculum to create opportunities to engage ideas from multiple genres, forms, and points of view. The

interdisciplinary course content challenges students to imagine different ways to think, to practice love, to resist domination and to relate to each other with justice.

I use this range of media to welcome different teachers into the classroom, an aspect of the concept of *ethical referencing*. Regina Yung Lee (2018), offers this framework to center, research and actively reference Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian, other people of color and LGBTQ folks in work, in syllabi, and course lectures.[3] The *Cite Black Women* and *#CiteASista™* movements also motivate people to practice incorporating and centering Black women's scholarship and writing. When syllabi include assigned readings by people of color and the students are required to properly reference those texts, it highlights the work people of color have done and continue to do. It also makes sure students, especially students of color, know they belong. They belong in higher education, as professors, researchers, poets, filmmakers, writers, and everywhere. Ethical referencing, *Cite Black Women*, and *#CiteASista™* pay attention to creating and supporting multiracial communities in academia and can be practiced across all fields. Whose work do you teach? Who is featured in the textbooks and examples you use? Make a point to investigate and diversify syllabi (use the Center for Urban Education's, 2018, *Equity-minded inquiry series: Syllabus Review*) and texts because research confirms: diversity and inclusion contribute to college success and retention (U.S. Department of Education Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, 2016). When you imagine what you want to grow in your classrooms with students, such as their ability to learn and understand the ideas, what can you change in your teaching or materials to pay more attention to the acts and practices that contribute to those abilities and to students' academic success?

How to queer this principle of what you pay attention to grows? First, recognize some of what folks are conditioned to value in our culture: money, influence, and ourselves as individuals, not feminist love or ethical referencing. In fact, what most teachers have been taught to pay attention to, for example, assignment due dates and the canon in academic fields, is steeped in white supremacy, heteronormativity, patriarchy, and capitalism. If the focus of our attention remains normative, love and connecting across differences cannot happen. Queering this principle is resisting the pull of cultural norms to buy ourselves happy or distrust difference. It is to go one step beyond and become aware of the interconnected nature of social identities, such as gender identity, sexuality, race, class, ability, nationality, and religion, among others. It is to accept "the relational nature of those differences," as Elsa Barkley Brown (1992) has evocatively noted: The privileges afforded to white people are literally at the direct detriment of those not white; white people lead the lives we do because women and men of color live the lives they do (p. 298). Paying attention to how power circulates creates opportunities for all of us to learn, listen, dialogue and act across differences.

Less Prep More Presence

In becoming too attached to the preparation for class and covering all the material, we might miss the actual practice of being present with each other and learning. Practicing community building in classrooms, meetings, and organizing work gives us the opportunity to listen to each other across differences, learn across differences, and grow our capacity to embody the worlds we long for. This is not just a practice in women's, gender and sexuality studies, the humanities or social sciences; *less is more* is a common principle in business and leadership studies.

In the sciences, Elizabeth Kitchen and her colleagues (2003) researched the idea of "attempt less and accomplish more" (p. 188) in their large lecture Cell Biology courses. They covered less material but used interactive teaching techniques which required students to explain about the science they were learning in more depth than the traditional lecture course control group. At the end of the semester the students in both settings did equally well on the same exams, even the students in the sections which did not cover all

3 I practice ethical referencing in this article and cite the race or queer identity of authors when possible or known.

the material that was on the test. The real change was the students in the interactive sections gained more confidence in dealing with biological concepts and scientific reasoning (p. 190-191). For Kitchen and her colleagues, more presence meant learning to talk about science and explain scientific concepts, which led not only to accomplishing more than just content coverage, but also to community building and critical thinking.

How can we cultivate more presence in our pedagogy and classrooms? There are days when many students come to class without having read the assigned texts (the students did the less prep part of this principle) and we can still practice presence and engage the texts in the classroom. Ask students to read out loud specific quotes or paragraphs and together as a class analyze their meaning. Or have the students turn to their neighbors to think about what the textual passage might mean together. Additionally, reading out loud encourages a different valuing of the texts, centers students' voices, increases their public speaking skills and confidence. It is also important to explain the value of reading out loud in class. Often students have negative or fearful responses to this request, so to frame it as an opportunity to hear different voices and to think differently about the texts can transform some of those responses.

Valuing student voices brings back the first tenet of trusting students when it comes to less prep, more presence. When we are present in a class and a conversation takes an unexpected turn, when a great question stumps the instructor, can we be present enough to change our lesson plan, our curriculum to add new ideas, questions or themes into future classes? Can we be generous enough to encompass more?

In these pandemic times how might this principle work in online learning? In my teaching, less preparation means my online learning environments are confusing to students (many emailed to tell me my course was disorganized and hard to follow). I know organization and what makes sense is socially constructed; what is disorganized for some might be clear to others. Simultaneously taking a course which seems disorganized is frustrating. My response is to be present with generosity and respect. I empathize with the confusion (this is all confusing to me too!), validate the students' experiences of alienation and inability to find assignments and due dates. I email and check in on them when I do not hear from them. I appreciate their work, support their ideas and them showing up. I encourage them, which research shows improves their participation and engagement (Okonofua et al., 2016). This is not a social science or humanities response: generosity and compassion can be practiced in all online teaching. Teacher empathy can change student interactions and improve their success (Okonofua et al., 2016). In my evaluations during the pandemic, students reported: they learned a lot, felt heard, and found this online class less alienating than others.

Is all presence the same and equal? Queering the idea of presence is to question anything constructed as value-neutral and to ask ourselves and others for a deeper listening, listening with more intent, and more vulnerability. This is a multidirectional listening where we are willing to see our interrelatedness as humans and our desire to connect across the power lines, oppressions and harms separate us. AnaLouise Keating (2009), feminist woman of colors, defines, "This deep listening as listening with raw openness to underscore its difficult, potentially painful dimensions. … Peeling back our defensive barriers, we expose ourselves (our identities, our beliefs, and our worldviews) to change" (p. 92). Listening with raw openness challenges us to queerly resist the binaries of either/or thinking and judgments, and the normative ways we have been taught to fear difference, instead using it as a resource for transformation as Lorde (1984, p. 115) challenges us to do. Listening with raw openness means teachers are present with their students, learning with their students and learning from their students. This form of listening also asks, especially of people with privilege, to listen in ways that open us up to uncertainty and recognize we don't always know. This offers us so many opportunities to learn. And sometimes not knowing can lead to mistakes.

Never a Failure Always a Lesson

Failure or mistakes happen in interactions with students and colleagues and this principle reminds us: mistakes and failures are chances to learn. In anti-racist pedagogy, particularly for white educators, often the

mistakes are about racism or other oppressions.

Feminist accountability recognizes, as Russo (2019) explains, we are often overwhelmed, hurt, angry when we are in a classroom or a meeting where racism, homophobia, anti-Semitism, sexism manifest. Sometimes these occurrences get pointed out, other times ignored or silenced. It can be difficult to know how to address these inevitable harms which cannot be avoided in systems of oppression. Our work is then to cultivate the ability to respond to the commonplace instances of oppression and harm (Russo, 2019, p. 28-29). Also, the logics normalizing systemic oppression are always present, as Black psychologist and educator Beverly Tatum (1996) explains, "like smog in the air. … [A]lways, day in and day out we are breathing it in" (P. 6).

Thus, we are all involved in the everyday occurrences of racism, sexism, heterosexism because we are all breathing the smog of systemic oppression. Often these harms stem from unconscious bias. "The human brain can take in 11 million pieces of information in any one moment. We're only consciously aware of maybe 40 of these—at best" (powell, 2014, slide 3). We will not be rid of this bias and thus need to address it. We need to become more cognitively aware of our own biases and slow down. We must take more time so our minds can make conscious choices and recognize the logics of sexism or racism, for example.

Even when I take time, I am still racist and commit microaggressions. (I use this term for its current parlance despite my agreement with theorists' critiques, like Ibram X. Kendi's (2019), about how it minimizes racist abuse.) Derald Wing Sue (2010), Asian American multicultural scholar, explains that microaggressions are, "brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to certain individuals because of their group membership. The term was first coined by Pierce in 1970 in his work with Black Americans" (p. xvi).

African American psychiatrist and professor Chester M. Pierce, defined microaggressions as "subtle, stunning, often automatic, and nonverbal exchanges which are 'put downs'" (Pierce, Carew, Pierce-Gonzalez, & Willis, 1978, p. 66). I have done this by calling students the wrong names, mispronouncing their names, passing papers back incorrectly and more. These mistakes are compounded by systemic racism. It means something different for me, the white teacher, to mix up the white students' names than those of the Latinx or African American students, or to mispronounce Asian and Asian American student names. How we respond in these moments can be the lesson. When I call an African American student by the wrong name: Do I recognize it? Can I apologize and name it as racialized? Sometimes.

Sometimes I can stop and apologize in front of the whole class and discuss how as a white person not remembering or not pronouncing the name correctly is a white way of being. In other words, I can use my own failure as an example of the way white people don't have to be good at that work because of white supremacy. I recognize white people have the privilege to: not always be able to tell the difference between people of color and not always remember people of color's names, nor even be able to pronounce them. And those acts are microaggressions. Sometimes I explain and take accountability for my failure, try to learn and change, and not do it again. Because I have been taught, like white people and other people with power are: my feelings matter, I am tempted to apologize and explain too much; ask for assurances, especially from those I harm. This centers me and my feelings, how I feel bad because I committed a microaggression, and also how I really am a good white person.

Sometimes I can recognize this behavior as white fragility. For Robin Diangelo (2018), white educator and consultant, white fragility "may be conceptualized as the *sociology of dominance*: an outcome of white people's socialization into white supremacy and a means to protect, maintain and reproduce white supremacy" (italics in original, p.113). After I realize that I commit a microaggression, in the classroom or a meeting, sometimes I can also recognize the mindset that continues the harm: I must then be validated by those I have harmed. Thus, another layer of utilizing the principle of failure as a lesson is to move to repair (Diangleo, 2018, p.145), apologize, take accountability, and not spend time on *my* feelings, *my* fragility, with the folks I hurt.

The lesson is: I will, sadly, commit microaggressions and harm others, in meetings, classrooms and

beyond. We will all be in spaces where sexism, racism, homophobia, settler colonialism, anti-Semitism manifest. We all experience privilege and will commit microaggressions and oppressive acts against others. There is not one of us who is free of the "smog" of systemic oppression. These failures and mistakes happen in all disciplines and classrooms. We can be racist or sexist, ableist or anti-Semitic, Heterosexist or anti-Muslim because of the "day in and day out" nature of oppression (Tatum, 1996, p. 6). The lesson is: we need to cultivate our ability to recognize our harmful actions, respond to our mistakes, take accountability, move to repair, realize our failure as a lesson, and become resilient in our work to imagine justice and liberation.

Where is the queer in this principle, in recognizing our mistakes and asking for ourselves and other people to be accountable? The queer is in the resiliency, in the face of failure we continue to build community. The queer is also in recognizing a good/bad behavior binary. We are not bad people but people living within systems of oppression shaping how we engage in the world. Committing microaggressions does not make us bad people; apologizing and taking accountability to learn and change does not make us good people. The queer work then is to recognize how these systemic power relations manifest and impact us, so in coming together we will have more power to resist and, as brown (2017) says, "work for the just and liberated worlds we long for" (p. 3). The queer is also in the connections created in repair and community building. In the feminist love of justice and valuing the humanity of those different from us. In the students who were encouraged to succeed with our respect. The queer is the joy in our ability to change. To return to the opening quote from Octavia Butler (1993), the work of queer anti-racist feminist pedagogy is to recognize: "All that you touch you change. All that you change, changes you. The only lasting truth is change" (p. 3).

Change is Constant

One thing we can count on in this world is how things change. Can we embrace it? One strategy I practice is what Mari Matsuda (1991), Asian American activist and lawyer calls, "Ask the other question" (p. 1189). Matsuda invites us to recognize interlocking forms of oppression by not just focusing on the most glaring form. For instance, Matsuda writes, "When I see something that looks racist, I ask 'Where is the patriarchy in this?' When I see something that looks sexist, I ask 'Where is the heterosexism in this?'" (p. 1189). Asking the other question reminds us how oppression is interconnected and changing.

How does this analysis emerge in my teaching and community? I used to call out and try to isolate people who caused harm, or people who were racist or people who were homophobic. I thought isolating the person would somehow create a space free from harm and oppression; through asking the other questions I now realize we all commit harm and microaggressions. The work, as Russo (2019) reminds us is to focus "more on how we will respond *when* it manifests" (italics in original, p. 29) and to see ourselves as continually implicated in the "smog" of white supremacy which requires a collective to sustain meaningful political change.

Why not use the organizing strategy of "Calling In," instead? It has been called "A Less Disposable Way of Holding Each Other Accountable" (Trần, 2013). Calling in, supporting and educating people to recognize the "smog," gives those of us who make mistakes an opportunity to change and be accountable, to recognize how all are shaped by sexism, racism, classism, islamophobia, heterosexism, anti-Semitism, xenophobia, ableism, and colonialism. Thus, we all commit harm and microaggressions and all need to take accountability, repair and change, the practice of calling in can help.[4] By working together, we can overcome the overarching systems of oppression which keep us separate and unequal, whether in the classroom, in autonomous spaces for people of color, in white anti-racist groups, in people with disabilities organizing spaces and beyond. It is first in our imaginations where we are unconstrained in our responses but in queerly cultivating anti-racist feminist pedagogy we intentionally change in ways to grow our capacity to embody the just and liberated worlds we long for. This involves trusting each other, recognizing failure as a lesson, working to be present

4 As Ngọc Loan Trần (2013) notes, this is not in opposition to calling out but another tool to be used in community and with people we with whom we have common ground, say in the classroom or in faculty meetings.

and pay attention to what we want to grow. Let us resist white supremacy, settler colonialism, capitalism, Anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, Xenophobia, ableism, and heteropatriarchy together!

Gloria Anzaldúa charted a path for us. As one of the first openly queer Chicana Indigenous writers, her theory and activism helped redefine and develop inclusionary movements for social justice. She reminds us, "Nothing happens in the "real" world unless it first happens in the images in our heads" (1987, p. 87). She challenges us to change our minds, our hearts and our behavior:

> We are ready for change.
> Let us link hands and hearts
> together find a path through the dark woods
> step through the doorways between worlds
> leaving huellas for others to follow,
> build bridges, cross them with grace, and claim these puentes our "home"
> si se puede, que asi sea, so be it, estamos listas, vámonos.
> Now let us shift. (Anzaldúa, 2002, p. 576)

Let's cultivate our capacity to embody the just and liberated worlds we long for.

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Laurie Fuller's feminist teaching and learning practices center the use of imagination as a key tool to transform the contemporary conditions of oppression and to engender new ways of being in liberated, free and accountable societies. As the Audrey Reynolds Distinguished Teaching Professor of Women's, Gender & Sexuality Studies at Northeastern Illinois University, Laurie uses anti-racist, queer and speculative texts in the classroom to cultivate transformative justice. She has published articles in journals such as *QSE, GLQ, Radical Pedagogy, Radical Teacher* and the *Journal of International Women's Studies*.

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DIALOGUE
The Interdisciplinary Journal of Popular Culture and Pedagogy

Hell You Talmbout: Mixtapes as method for online environmental justice pedagogy

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ABSTRACT

This paper takes on the mixtape as a pedagogical method for approaching urgent and critical topics within the undergraduate online classroom. Drawing on two case studies from different sections of an introductory course on environmental and social justice taught in an American studies department, we demonstrate how mixtape-inspired assignments offer a method for theorizing and enacting the connections between popular culture and critical scholarship around injustice in the humanities and social sciences while also altering the space of the classroom to promote deeper student engagement, comprehension, and reflection. We argue that introducing popular culture as both content and method within an undergraduate course not only strengthens student understanding of key concepts and the relevance of these outside the classroom, but also acknowledges the importance of time and context within the space of the online course. Popular culture, a component of this context, enriches the online learning experience and responds to contemporary issues and events that students encounter in the material world. Mixtapes serve as a conceptual tool for understanding the contents of a syllabus and as a pedagogical tool for assessment. The practice of making mixtapes within a course on environmental and social justice opens the possibility for radical expression.

Keywords: mixtape, environmental justice, online classroom, online teaching and learning, popular culture, pedagogy

*The authors wish to indicate that there is equal authorship on this article.

INTRODUCTION

Beginning in Fall 2016 and continuing to the current academic year (Fall 2019-Spring 2020), we taught sections of a new 100-level online course titled *Introduction to Environmental and Social Justice* for the Department of American Studies at the University of New Mexico. Based on a previous iteration of a course titled Introduction to Environment, Science, and Technology, the structure of the course was part of a larger institutional effort to standardize online classes so that content and assignments would remain the same from semester to semester, regardless of the instructor teaching the course. In the original structure of the course, students wrote three-sentence précis for assigned readings, summarizing each reading's argument, method, and purpose. Over the duration of the semester, students also took three open-book exams made up of definitions for key terms, short answer questions, and five-paragraph essays. In consequence, this paper examines two different approaches to remixing this online syllabus to further engage popular culture as a mode of student learning and engagement.

Given that the subject of Environmental and Social Justice combines academic discourse with the embodied and felt realities of the students who take the class, we felt it important to draw on the flexibility and immediacy of the online classroom in order to enhance student learning. Integrating popular culture and current events into the course would help both instructors and students to synthesize topics presented in the assigned academic literature, as facilitated by the online classroom setting. The current global pandemic highlights the necessity for dynamic, high quality online instruction that is not merely a stop-gap substitute for classroom learning, but that adapts and adopts creative approaches to virtual instruction in response to the urgent need for accessible learning for students. Further, the vulnerable populations at the core of discourse in Environmental and Social Justice experience the brunt of the impacts of COVID-19 (Newton, 2020; Jackson, 2020; Ahmed, 2020). Adaptive and relevant online learning environments could be one response to the environmental and social injustices associated with the pandemic (Kim, 2020; Gardner, 2020).

This essay includes two case studies that demonstrate how assignments inspired by the mixtape offer a method for theorizing and enacting the connections between popular culture and critical scholarship that revolve around injustice in the humanities and social sciences. We look at two pedagogical approaches to using mixtapes in the online classroom and consider how the mixtape can function as a practice for altering the space of the classroom. Not only does introducing popular culture as both content and method within an undergraduate course deepen student understanding of key concepts and their relevance outside the classroom, but it also highlights the importance of time and context within the space of the online course. Finally, we argue that effective online teaching is attentive to the context in which it is taught, and that popular culture provides an opportunity for students to navigate the current social climate in relation to the course.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Environmental justice as an academic discipline owes its origin and development to peoples' movements for economic, environmental, reproductive, and civil rights. Here in Albuquerque, we are fortunate to be in the company of radical figures such as Sofia Martinez and Richard Moore, who are responsible, with many other leaders from around the United States, for the development of principles and documents that are foundational to environmental justice work. These include the "Principles of Environmental Justice" adopted at the First People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit in 1991, and the "Jemez Principles for Democratic Organizing," generated at a meeting in Jemez, New Mexico in 1996 hosted by the Southwest Network for Environmental and Economic Justice (SNEEJ). Our understanding of environmental justice is also shaped by Indigenous movements and organizations such as New Mexico-based Tewa Women United and the Red Water Pond Road Community Association. These organizations take a braided approach to

addressing environmental, economic, and reproductive justice - not as discrete units, but as integrated parts of a whole vision of Indigenous liberation and decolonization (Sanchez, 2019; RWPRCA, 2016).

Introduction to Environmental and Social Justice draws on the radical activist roots of environmental justice to illuminate the links between environmental and social injustices. We assemble the work of key thinkers in environmental justice scholarship, such as Robert Bullard (2018), Laura Pulido (2000), and David Pellow (2007), introduce essential themes such as pollution, garbage, and climate change, and bring these key thinkers and themes together with scholarship, movements, and mediums that push boundaries and definitions of environmental justice as a disciplinary category. For example, we draw on critical theoretical developments by movements such as Black Lives Matter, scholarship from critical prison studies and critical Indigenous studies, and mediums such as podcasts and music videos (Dillon and Sze, 2016; Gilmore, 2007; Whyte, 2017). In this way, we create a mix and remix of environmental and social justice issues that pushes student understanding of the boundaries of environmental justice without losing sight of the genealogy of environmental justice as a discipline.

Our theory and practice of environmental justice pedagogy is inspired by scholarship that initiates conversations about what constitutes environmental justice and how we can shift what students perceive and understand as being "environmental." In Spring 2017, when we taught sections of this course for the second time, we assigned Lindsey Dillon and Julie Sze's 2016 essay "Police Power and Particulate Matters: Environmental Justice and Spatialities of In/Securities in U.S. Cities." Students read it shortly before the semester midterm, in tandem with a 2006 essay by Rose Braz and Craig Gilmore on prisons, policing, and pollution titled: "Joining Forces: Prisons and Environmental Justice in Recent California Organizing." We hoped that this pairing would help students perceive movements such as Black Lives Matter as key actors for environmental justice, while also honoring the long history and significance of Black studies and critical prison studies to environmental justice activism and scholarship. In the first half of the semester, students struggled to move beyond conceptions of environmental activism as movements for an awareness of individual efforts such as recycling, riding bicycles, and "ethical consumption." Many struggled with the articulation of the term *racism* in environmental racism. But upon reading the essays by Dillon, Sze, Braz, and Gilmore, students began to grasp the relationship between environmental and social justice and between environmental injustice and systemic racism. What clicked for the students, as evidenced in the short essays they wrote on the midterm exam, was Dillon and Sze's analysis of the conditions of Eric Garner's death and the ways in which Garner's words "I can't breathe" articulated not only his choking at the hands of a police officer, but also the racialized exposure to environmental conditions that caused and exacerbated Garner's asthma. Through their own engagement with everyday popular culture and current events, students were already familiar with the story of Garner's death and with the use of "I can't breathe" by the Black Lives Matter movement. Situating course concepts within this moment of public consciousness gave students a place from which to approach other readings, videos, and podcasts assigned in the course.

Moved by students' immediate connection to and grasp of Dillon and Sze's analysis, we decided to explore further methods of using popular culture to teach environmental justice. In addition to the scholarship of Dillon and Sze, we found particular inspiration in Min Hyoung Song's paper presentation at the 2016 annual meeting of the American Studies Association on the visibility of climate change. While playing the first episode of the first season of *True Detective*, Song challenged common assertions that it is difficult for people to believe and grasp the concept of climate change because it is not visible. Song pointed out that images of the over-industrialized landscape, poverty, and racialized and gendered violence permeate the opening credits of *True Detective*. He argued that climate change, its effects, and the affected are constantly visible, both in our everyday experiences and in popular culture.

While *True Detective* might not resonate as a tale of environmental injustice, Song's analysis remixes

the series for viewers interested in environmental justice, finding a relevant story that undergirds the narrative arc. Storytelling is an essential practice of environmental justice scholarship in the humanities and social sciences. In their chapter in *The Routledge Handbook of Environmental Justice*, Donna Houston and Pavithra Vasudevan write: "Environmental justice storytelling is a particular form of political intervention that envisions socio-ecological transformation and produces more hopeful futures by narrating the environment as intimately connected to human well-being" (Houston and Vasudevan, 6). For Houston and Vasudevan, environmental justice storytelling enacts connection, recognizes emergent realities that may not yet have been measured through scientific data collection, and makes sense of narratives, data, and experiences that have been obscured.

MIXTAPE AS METHOD IN THE SPACE OF THE ONLINE CLASSROOM

Many academic fields commend the possibilities created through the introduction of the mixtape to the classroom. For Black studies, the mixtape serves as a radical response to the capital-driven world of popular music culture. Jared Ball, in "FreeMix Radio: The Original Mixtape Radio Show: A Case Study in Mixtape 'Radio' and Emancipatory Journalism," identifies the mixtape as "source of emancipatory journalism" (Ball, 617), one that disrupts the powerful and predominantly white corporate-owned media. It calls out and replaces a colonial voice. The process of sampling, excerpting, rearranging, and perhaps adding commentary within the mixtape medium can create radical creative forms from familiar content, challenging media forms that see present music as settled, fixed, and mastered. George Ciccariello Maher argues that "mixtapes represent an often overlooked source of hope for escape from what has been characterized as a zero-sum dilemma of dissemination" in "Brechtian Hip-Hop: Didactics and Self-Production in Post-Gangsta Political Mixtapes" (Maher, 139).

Within the social sciences, mixtapes serve as an analogy for the dialectic process of generating knowledge from within and outside of disciplinary traditions and norms. Sociologist Paul V. Stock looks at how the practice of sociology resembles the creation of a mixtape in "Sociology and the Mixtape: A Metaphor of Creativity." He argues, "Sociology and the mix tape are products of their historical context and to that end exist in a dialectical push and pull of conventions, cutting edge, newness, traditional classics and personal experience" (Stock, 287). This notion, that a discipline and a mixtape share similar productive approaches, is also important for fields within cultural studies. Before the 2016 meeting of the American Studies Association (ASA), the ASA program committee encouraged meeting attendees to participate in the creation of a mixtape around the annual meeting's theme "Pedagogies of Dissent." Attendees were encouraged to submit songs for the mixtape that were "associated with, or inspired by, dissent (in the widest possible sense of the term)" (Program Committee of the ASA, 2017). The mixtape was distributed to attendees before the meeting and was the subject of a presidential plenary session at the annual meeting. At the session, participants focused on the role that music plays in activating, expressing, and affirming dissent, and highlighted music as a pedagogy that produces a sense of intimacy through its compilation and sharing.

This interest in the mixtape extends into theoretical discourse on method, genealogy, and historiography in American studies. In 2017, former ASA president Philip J. Deloria and Alexander Olson published a book on methods in American studies titled *American Studies: A User's Guide*. Deloria and Olson use the concept of the mixtape as an heuristic to narrate the history and historiography of American studies. They create lists, which they call mixtapes, of essays and books focused on particular strands of American studies, with nods to texts that readers might consider canonical within American studies, and then follow these mixtapes with remixes. In the remixes the content, theme, and method overlap with the original mixtapes, by incorporating more recently published writing – scholarship that might be written outside of American studies yet has

weight in the field, or twenty-first century turns to old-school American studies themes. For example, "Original #4: The American Spaces Mixtape" features Jacob Riis's 1890 monograph *How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York*, Henry Nash Smith's 1950 *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth*, and Gloria Anzaldua's 1987 *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (Deloria and Olson, 77). The ten selections on this mixtape highlight a variety of primarily North American geographies and ways of thinking about these spaces through the lenses of race, class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, and Indigeneity. This mixtape is followed by the "American Spaces Remix: Transnational Spaces." In this remix, the category of American spaces spans oceans via Paul Gilroy's 1993 *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*; continents via Melani McAlister's 2002 monograph *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East since 1945* and Lisa Lowe's 2015 *The Intimacy of Four Continents*; and analytics via Brent Edwards' 2003 *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism*. (Deloria and Olson, 78). The remix does not negate the original mixtape, but is instead a new take on it with an informal citational practice to mark inspiration, relationship, and perhaps diversion from the original.

Following the success of teaching Dillon and Sze's essay on Eric Garner within the *Introduction to Environmental and Social Justice* course, we decided to expand upon this opening to further engage students through popular culture. We both incorporated a version of a mixtape into the syllabus of our respective course sections; Caitlin created a mix of her own and Elspeth assigned her students the task of making a mix. Each assignment provided an opportunity for the students to become spatial architects with the assigned materials. As instructors and course designers, we traditionally perform this role while the students navigate the constructed space in an effort to reproduce the nodal concepts introduced throughout the course. In "The Space Between: Mix Taping as a Ritual," Rob Drew cites the mixtape as an "affectively charged medium of communication" (Drew, 145), and the exchange of a mix functions as "a kind of back channel to face-to-face interaction" (Drew, 151). The act of creating and gifting a mix is a remote exercise. It feels intimate, but as Drew argues, "the practice of making and exchanging mixes can easily be understood as a ritual of distance" (Drew, 147). This is particularly useful in an online classroom setting because we do lack the face-to-face interaction that the traditional classroom has to offer. Distance is an inherent quality of online teaching. Beyond grading students' work, in an online classroom, the instructor is not always privy to how students receive the literature or how the material engages with their affective, ordinary lives. Conventional assignments that assess student engagement with readings and other sources assigned in a course do not necessarily reveal how a student relates, engages, and applies new learnings to their life beyond the boundaries of the course. Assigning a mixtape works "within the constraints and boundaries, while at the same time challenging those same conventions that create great intellectual breakthroughs, artistic genius and opportunities for students to make connections" (Stock, 280). The mixtape provides an opportunity for students and teachers to revel in the ambiguities that can surround online learning with regards to the boundaries of the classroom and it produces deep answers to questions proposed throughout the course.

EXAMPLES AND ANALYSIS

Caitlin's Mixtape Assignment: Navigating the mix of the syllabus

For extra credit at the end of the Fall 2018 Semester, Caitlin provided a mix of five songs, via *YouTube* links, to the students: "Gentrification" by Ry Cooder, "Water Fountain" by Tune Yards, "Hell you Talmbout" by Janelle Monáe featuring Wondaland Records, "Trouble in the Water" by Common featuring Malik Yusef, Kumasi, Aaron Fresh, Choklate & Laci Kay, and "Idle No More" by Pura Fé. She asked the students to choose two tunes and write a 700-1000 word paper using these songs as guides to reflect on the material and ideas they had engaged with throughout the semester. Caitlin encouraged the students to research the songs and seek out

videos of live performances to gain a better understanding of how the music is used in critical movements. Though the nature of the reflection allows the students to take the paper in any direction they like, Caitlin did provide the following guiding questions in an effort to motivate and inspire the students in their writing : Who wrote the song and why? How does the song demonstrate and/or push the content of articles/podcasts/chapters that you read/listened to this semester? How does the song incorporate multiple components of the course and what does that say about the relationship between environmental justice and social justice? Some of these songs are performed in specific locations or at specific events. Why is this important and what does that say about music as a tool for those who experience environmental and social injustices? Is the song a cover song? Has it been covered by others? If so, why? What does that say about the relationship between injustice, time, and space/place?

Each student reflected in a unique way and their approach spoke to how they processed the entire course. Though their work did vary to a large degree, two overarching themes ran through the papers. First, the songs provided an opportunity to bring literature from different modules together to better understand how different places are affected by environmental racism. Second, music videos and live performances shed light on the role of music in the historicized present of current critical environmental and social movements.

The water crisis in Flint, Michigan, represented by the song titled "Trouble in the Water," resonated with many students and they felt that the song/performance emotively embodied the emplaced reality of Laura Pulido's 2016 article titled, "*Flint, Environmental Racism, and Racial Capitalism.*" However, the song led to explorations in the relationality of how these concepts exist in multiple places. The environmental racism that fuels the Flint water crisis was analyzed alongside notions of white privilege in Aspen, Colorado (Park and Pellow, 2011), the advantages of capitalism in Malibu, California (Davis, 1995) and the gendered environmental injustice of uranium mining on the Navajo reservation (Voyles, 2015).

The students also paid attention to where the songs were performed. "Hell you Talmbout" resounded on the streets of Washington D.C. during the Women's March in 2017, in 2015 during a Black Lives Matter protest in Chicago, and in concert venues throughout the country. One student related that the song is also covered by other performers, notably David Byrne, in large concert venues internationally. All of the performances analyzed by the students centered around a call for awareness. For them, this awareness was reinforced by the literature we read in our online class. While the students were able to experience the emotional weight of a live performance, they could do so while being just one click away from scholarly articles and media that detailed each artist's motivation to create. This type of engagement is unique to the online setting and would not be possible in a traditional face-to-face course.

There are a couple areas for improvement with this assignment. Because it was offered as extra credit, few students completed the task with enough time to ask questions and clear up any confusion about the relationship between music and environmental and social justice movements. One way this limitation could have been curbed to help develop more robust analyses would have been through the introduction of the songs throughout the semester while encouraging the students to engage with their peers and the instructor about the content throughout the course. Also, if the instructor had presented the assignment towards the beginning of the semester, the students would have been encouraged to consider and analyze the songs they listened to and experienced during the course instead of only adhering to the assigned five; they could thus have created their own unique mixtape.

Elspeth's mixtape assignment: Remixing the environmental justice canon

As a final, cumulative project, Elspeth asks students to create an "Environmental and Social Justice Mixtape." Elspeth first assigned this mixtape project in Spring 2019 and continues to use it as the final project in her teaching of this course each semester. The assignment has three parts: a mixtape, liner notes, and an album cover. The mixtape is a conceptual multimedia list, which could be made up of songs, essays, book

chapters, visual art, podcasts, videos, or any other medium. The students are required to include at least four sources assigned within the course, as well as four to eight additional sources selected by the creator of the mixtape. Accompanying the mixtape are 600-800 word narrative liner notes to explain what the creator intended to invoke, inspire, and incite through the mixtape. Finally, a piece of cover art represents the creator's mixtape and narrative. It could either be designed by the student or borrowed and cited with documented permission from the original artist.

If, drawing on Deloria and Olson, the course syllabus can function as a mixtape, the final projects created by students are remixes on the original mixtape. This assignment functions as a reflection on and synthesis of the key concepts in the course. The students are asked to consider what they would like an imagined audience to experience, feel, or learn as a result of exploring the mixtape. In addition, they are asked to consider the narrative arc of the mixtape, considering whether the audience's experience should be smooth and gradual or a reaction to contrast created between the pieces.

Students retitle and reimagine scholarly monographs as tracks on a hip hop remix, and analyze the theoretical contributions of the lyrics to the field of environmental justice. In these final mixtapes, students juxtapose Dillon and Sze's "Police Power and Particulate Matter" with Kanye West's "New Slaves," Rob Nixon's work on slow violence with Kendrick Lamar's album DAMN. One student created a new title for each item on her mixtape, starting with a chapter from Julie Sze's monograph *Noxious New York*, and re-named it "Clogged Lungs". Another student described the process of staging a photo for her mixtape's album art. She described how, after choosing the theme of environmental racism with a particular focus on how communities of color are disproportionately exposed to the harmful effects of pollution, she struggled to find publicly available images that fit her criteria for an evocative image that both fit the theme and spurred particular emotions in the listener/viewer. Instead, she staged a photo with her niece as a model. In the liner notes accompanying the mixtape, she described the process of obtaining consent from her niece and the niece's parents, collating the materials she used, manipulating the materials to create the image, and listening to the responses from other family members when they saw the final photo. In the image, a child wears a dust mask that is smudged with dirt. The lighting is harsh and the child looks directly into the camera's lens, gaze steady but guarded. The student described how her mother, the photo subject's grandmother, was upset with the photo because she felt it made her granddaughter look abused and sad. The student then described the conversation that ensued between herself and her mother about environmental injustice and her purpose in creating the mixtape and the accompanying image. This student's narrative captures the tension present in many student mixtapes between anger and sadness and a sense of encouragement and aspiration for radical change.

Students initially express hesitation upon encountering a new assignment format they have not yet experienced, particularly with regards to what "counts" as a track on the mixtape. To address this, Elspeth creates a discussion board thread as a space where students can post their questions, emphasize the questions of others which they share, and where both other students and Elspeth can answer questions. Through this board, students quickly learn that almost any type of media "counts" as a track on the mixtape. As they create the mixtape, liner notes, and album cover, they create knowledge and imbue each track with meaning.

CONCLUSION

In 2016, when we began teaching *Introduction to Environmental and Social Justice* online, we were concerned about the possible constrictions imposed by teaching online. However, through collaboration and a shared love for incorporating popular culture into our teaching, we came to realize that introducing a mixtape assignment into the syllabus allowed us to take a creative approach to pedagogy in an online space.

We each had a different strategy: Caitlin created a mix of songs that she felt expressed the affective spaces of the course and asked her students to use two of them as guides in reflection papers where they highlighted

the interconnectedness of the material and concepts. In contrast, Elspeth asked her students to remix the themes and concepts from the course to create a multimedia mixtape spotlighting cultural production outside of the scope of the course syllabus to create an affective listening, reading, and viewing experience through the mixtape, album art, and long-form, reflective liner notes.

We found both approaches to be effective and well received by our students. The mixtape facilitates the experience of students as spatial architects; the students hold the power as they confront the structural limitations imposed by the syllabus. Students can incorporate imagery and music from the shows and albums that they may watch or listen to while they complete their classwork, thereby bringing their individual experience of the online course into the shared experience of the online classroom. Therefore, what is usually considered a distraction in the traditional face-to-face classroom turns into an opportunity to make connections between course topics, cultural production, and current events. While these sorts of connections can also be made in a traditional face-to-face classroom environment, we suggest that integrating popular culture as assigned course material and as student-generated creation gives the online classroom a unique advantage. As students move between tabs on the computer screen, implicit relationships form between current music videos and traditional scholarly texts. Through the mixtape assignments presented here, those implicit relationships become an activated note of student learning.

Finally, both creating and analyzing the mixtape recalls the radical roots of environmental and social justice, creating theory from community movements and practices. In this course, environmental justice theory becomes the method of instruction. As online instructors, we rarely have the opportunity to understand if and how the students are engaged with revolutionary work in their communities. Disruptive and productive, this assignment turns the students into critical creators and provides them with a toolset that was originally fashioned by activists and radical figures.

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DIALOGUE
The Interdisciplinary Journal of Popular Culture and Pedagogy

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

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ABSTRACT

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PEDAGOGICAL RECEPTION

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

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

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

COURSE BACKGROUND

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

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

CLASSROOM APPLICATIONS

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

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

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

EXPANDING OUR PERSPECTIVE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

AMAR ES VIVIR

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

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

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

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

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

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

> God made you from red clay, Flavio, with his hands. This face of yours like the little clay heads they unearth in Teotihuacán… Used obsidian flints for the eyes
>
> … And then he blessed you, Flavio, with skin sweet as burnt-milk candy, smooth as river water. He made you *bien* pretty. (152)

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

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

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

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

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

CONTRIBUTION TO MASCULINITY STUDIES

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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DIALOGUE
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Crossing Over: The Migrant "Other" in the Marvel Cinematic Universe

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ABSTRACT

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

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

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

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

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

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

IMMIGRATION AND ALIENS IN POPULAR CULTURE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SYMBOLIC CONVERGENCE THEORY APPLIED

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

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

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

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

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

CAPTAIN MARVEL: ALIENS AMONG US

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

INFINITY WAR: CRISIS AND EXTERMINISIM

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Figure 1: A meme posted on Reddit

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

This line of thinking, especially taking Thanos' plan half-seriously was prominent on other online platforms too. A YouTube video with over 12.5 million views as of April 2021, claimed that "if you stop and look at the economics, statistics, and historical precedents, Thanos may actually be right" (The Film Theorists, 2018). Specifically, they note how the Black Death in Europe, which killed over ⅓ of the population, led to higher wages in the years after. While the video ends up concluding that human life is priceless and genocide is never a solution, most of the video is spent justifying Thanos' quest with social science. Here we see the

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

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

IN THE ENDGAME NOW

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

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

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

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

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

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DIALOGUE
The Interdisciplinary Journal of Popular Culture and Pedagogy

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

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ABSTRACT

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

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

A GLOBAL HEALTH CRISIS AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF MEANING

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

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

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

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

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

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

PANDEMIC-HEIGHTENED ATTUNEMENT TO MEDIA LITERACY

Teacher Perspective

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Student Perspective

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

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

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

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

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

PEDAGOGICAL SHIFTS THROUGH THE REFLEXIVITY OF A CLASSROOM IN CRISIS

Teacher Perspective

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Student Perspective

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

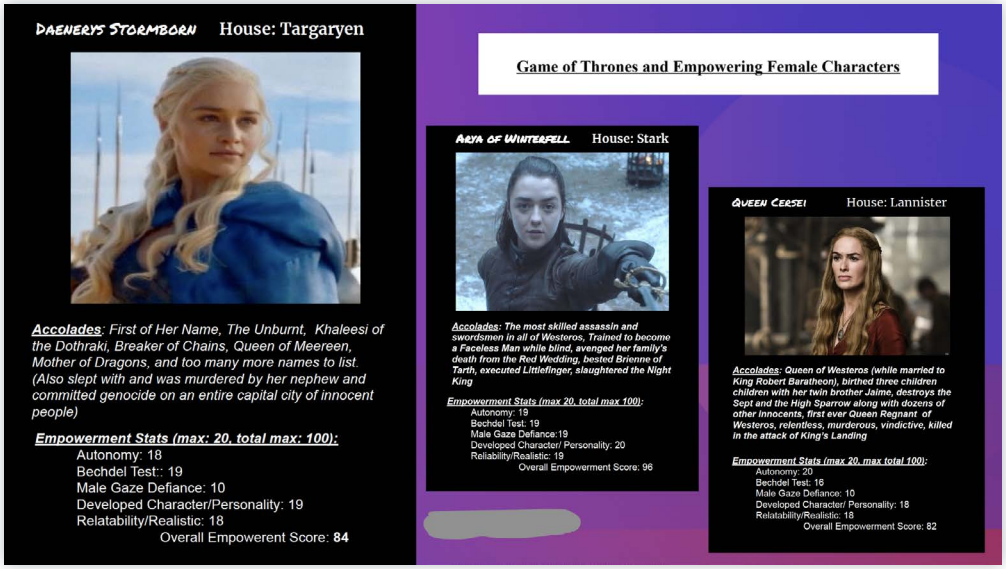
I did not know what it was I wanted to do or accomplish initially; I only knew that watching the shows made me uncomfortable. I later realized that this discomfort derived from their being created in a way that is meant to draw an unwitting consumer into the narratives of these shows without leaving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

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

A GALLERY OF STUDENT WORK THAT INVITES PANDEMIC PEDAGOGY

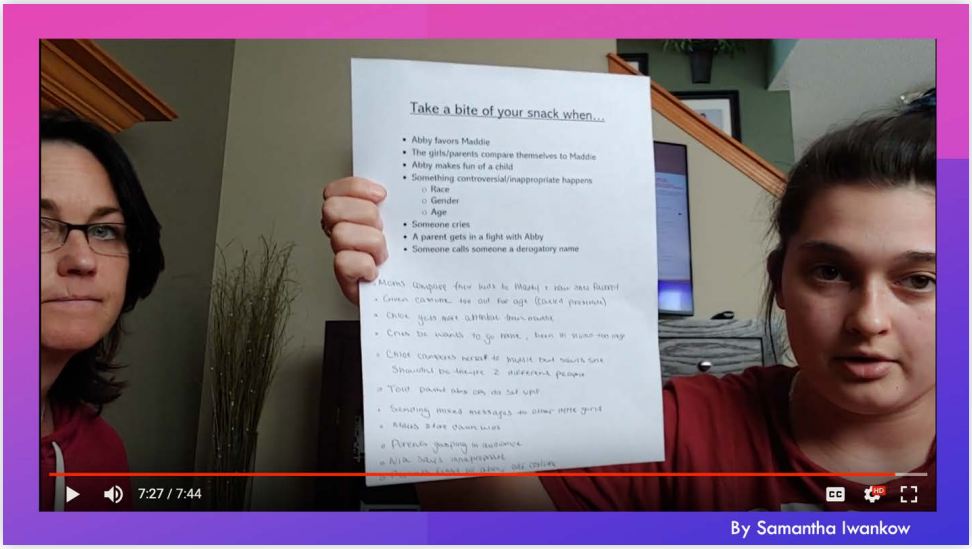
Included in this section is a gallery of student work. It includes images of students' final projects in the Spring 2020 course, as well as brief descriptions of them. They have been included in the spirit of recognizing the tremendous accomplishments and creativity of the students, as well as to give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

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

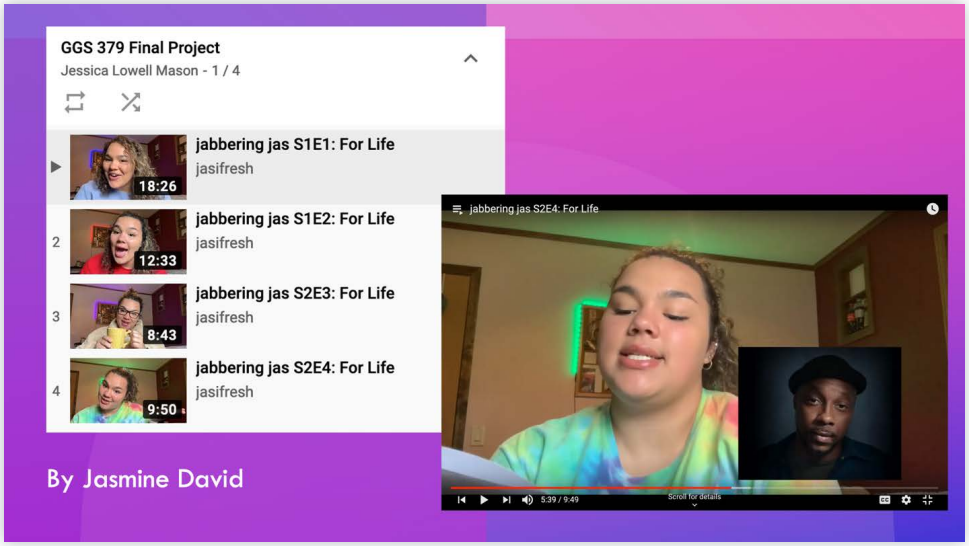


> "I chose five different criteria to determine an 'empowerment score' for each of the three characters. These five criteria consist of the following: a character's autonomy, how they apply to the Bechdel Test, their defiance of the male gaze based on both their presentation in the series and their actions, their character development/personality, and their relatability/ realistic-ness. Autonomy in this context refers to a character's ability to self-govern, be in charge of their own lives and decisions, and their overall self-independence."
>
> – A Student Enrolled in the Spring 2020 Section of GGS 379

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

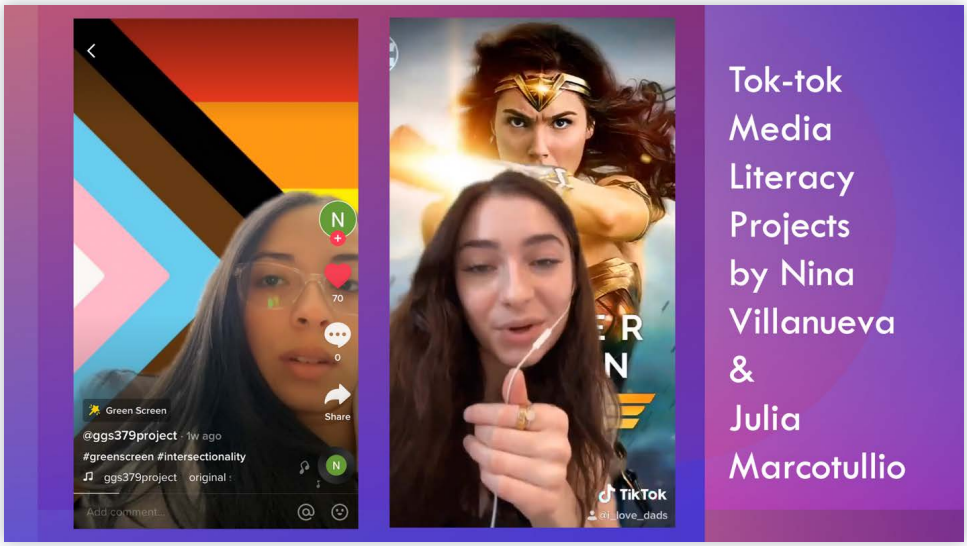


Student Samantha Iwankow made up a social media screening game to play with their mother in which they broke down problematic aspects of the show *Dance Moms* — and then the student made a video with their mother, and together in their media review film, they reflected on what it was like to play the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



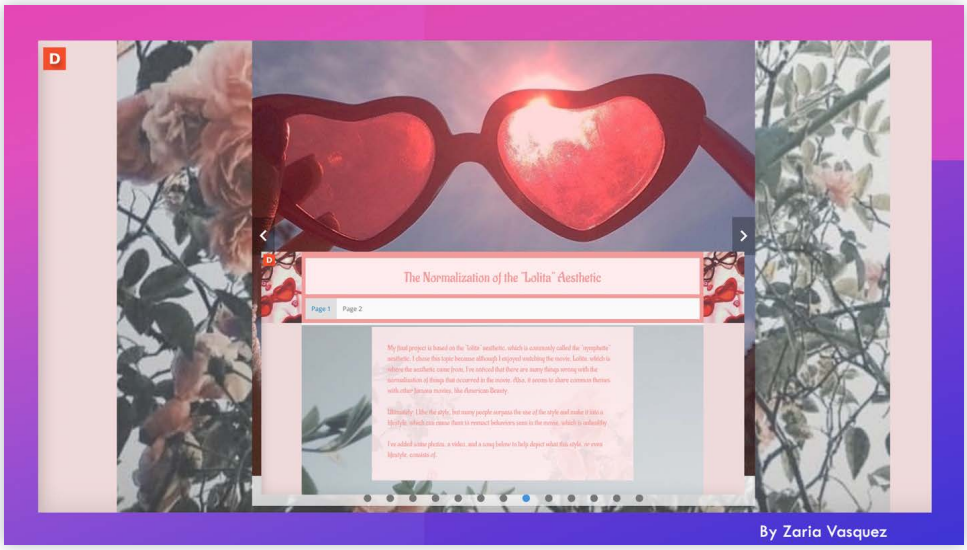
Jasmine David created a media literacy talk show series of videos on YouTube in the style of a podcast, in which they provided a commentary on the ABC show *For Life*. The review of episodes of the show was informed by theory related to gender, race and sexual orientation that we engaged with in class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

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

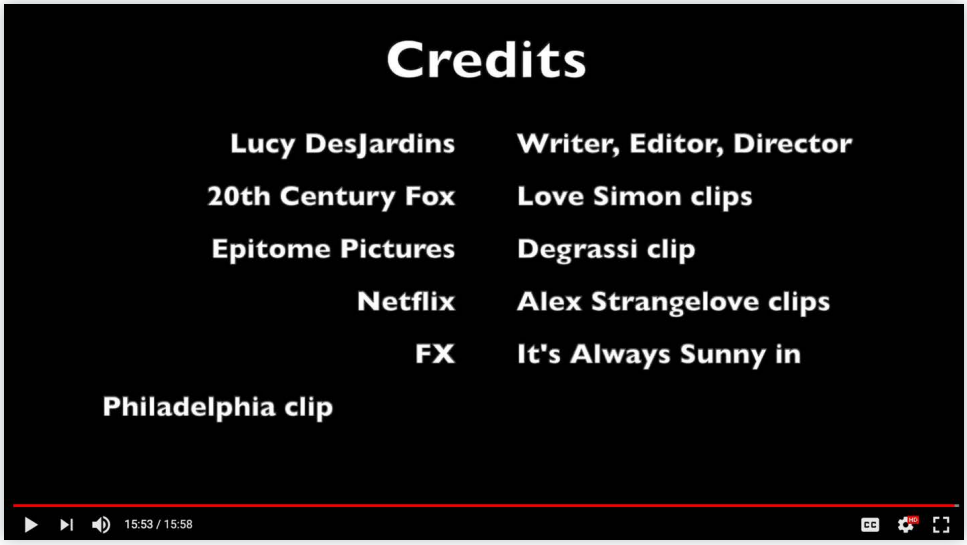


> "I focused my videos around trying to open people's minds to the underlying messages that gender and race representation in film has."
>
> – Julia Marcotullio

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



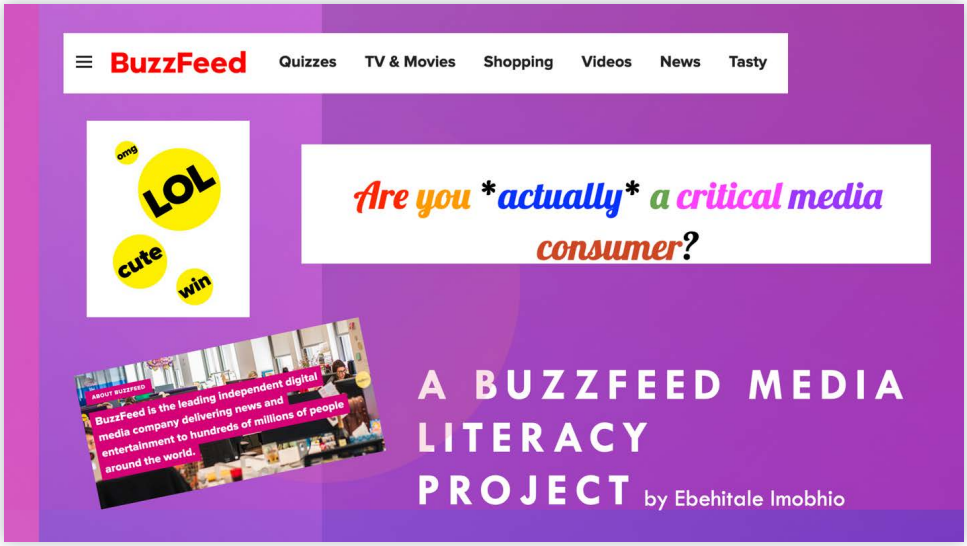
Zaria Vasquez created a blog dedicated to an examination and critique of the Lolita aesthetic, which appears so often in consumer and pop culture contexts. The blog served as a space for them to gather materials that demonstrate the Lolita aesthetic in different contexts, and the reflection they wrote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

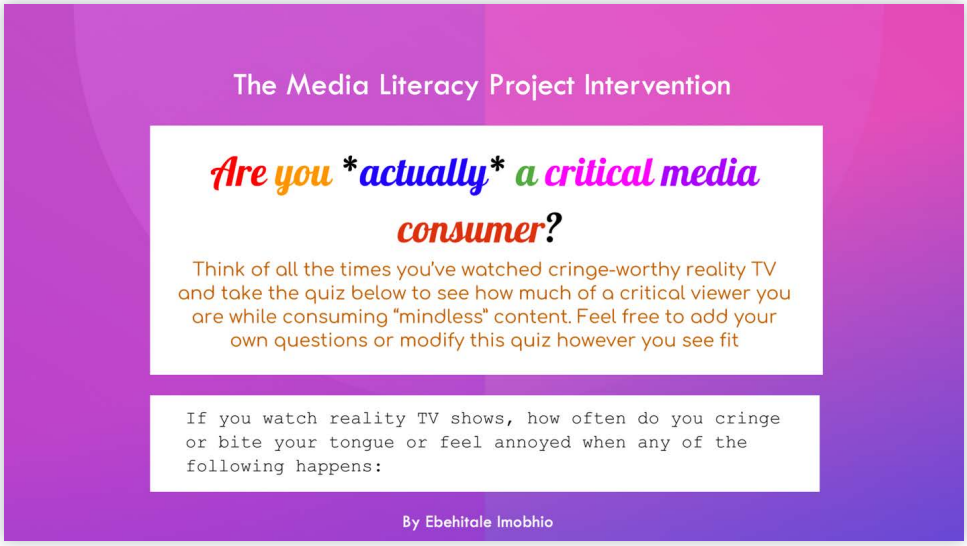


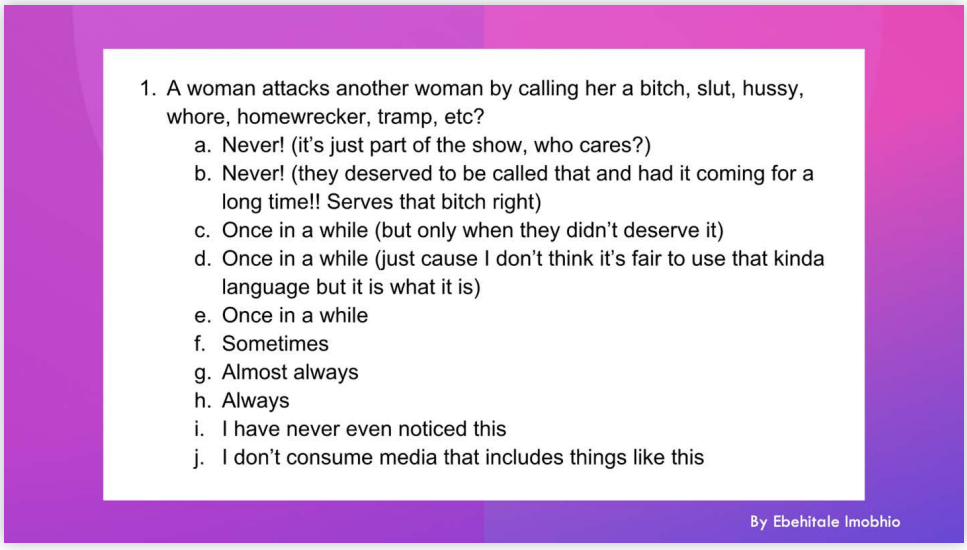
One student, Lucy DesJardins, created a video for their family that was focused on the impact of pop culture media in discovering and constructing their own gender and sexual identity. It was incredibly personal, but the student also included material from the course in their media reflection on their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

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

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


BuzzFeed
Quizzes
TV & Movies
Shopping
Videos
News
Tasty
omg
LOL
cute
win
Are you *actually* a critical media consumer?
BuzzFeed is the leading independent digital media company delivering news and entertainment to hundreds of millions of people around the world.
A BUZZFEED MEDIA LITERACY PROJECT by Ebehitale Imobhio


The Media Literacy Project Intervention
Are you *actually* a critical media consumer?
Think of all the times you've watched cringe-worthy reality TV and take the quiz below to see how much of a critical viewer you are while consuming "mindless" content. Feel free to add your own questions or modify this quiz however you see fit
If you watch reality TV shows, how often do you cringe or bite your tongue or feel annoyed when any of the following happens:
By Ebehitale Imobhio


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

11. A minority is treated as an accessory or pet or in any tokenizing way
    a. Never! (they knew what they signed up for)
    b. Never! (it's not that serious)
    c. Once in a while (but it's not meant in a harmful way so who cares)
    d. Once in a while (but you gotta take these things in stride)
    e. Once in a while
    f. Sometimes
    g. Almost always
    h. Always
    i. I have never even noticed this
    j. I don't consume media that includes things like this

5. A gender-queer or trans character is treated as a curiosity and subjected to invasive questions
    a. Never! (they knew what they signed up for)
    b. Never! (they could just leave)
    c. Once in a while (but I'm curious too GODDAMIT!)
    d. Once in a while (but these are confusing times so I understand/feel their confusion)
    e. Once in a while
    f. Sometimes
    g. Almost always
    h. Always
    i. I have never even noticed this
    j. I don't consume media that includes things like this

6. A non-straight character is treated as a curiosity and subjected to invasive questions
    a. Never! (they knew what they signed up for)
    b. Never! (they could just leave)
    c. Once in a while (but I'm curious too GODDAMIT!)
    d. Once in a while (but these are confusing times so I understand/feel their confusion)
    e. Once in a while
    f. Sometimes
    g. Almost always
    h. Always
    i. I have never even noticed this
    j. I don't consume media that includes things like this

3. A woman throws a drink at someone else unprovoked, mildly provoked, or just straight up provoked!
    a. Never! (it's just part of the show, who cares?)
    b. Never! (they deserved it and had it coming for a long time!! Serves that bitch right)
    c. Once in a while (but only when they didn't deserve it)
    d. Once in a while (who's gonna have to clean that up! Sheesh!)
    e. Once in a while
    f. Sometimes
    g. Almost always
    h. Always
    i. I have never even noticed this
    j. I don't consume media that includes things like this

By Ebehitale Imobhio

Critical Feedback Media Literacy Intervention

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

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

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

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

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

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

By Ebehitale Imobhio

Author's Note:

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

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

By Ebehitale Imobhio

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

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

SEEING MEDIA LITERACY AGAIN AS A TOOL FOR DECOLONIZATION

Teacher Perspective

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

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

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

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

Student Perspective

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

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

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Tackling History in the Cultural Studies Seminar

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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 Unites 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 (Solanis, 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 activisms 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.

SUGGESTED REFERENCE CITATION

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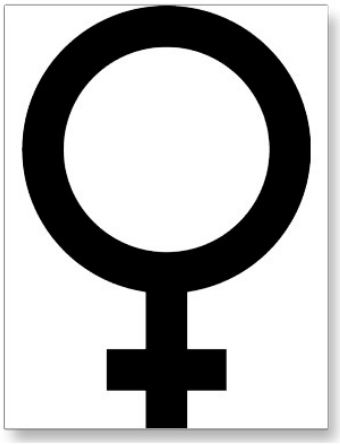
APPENDIX



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 *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 *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792)
SECONDARY	Offen, "Was Mary Wollstonecraft a Feminist?"
SECONDARY	Weiss, "Introduction"
SECONDARY	Hewitt, "Re-Rooting American Women's Activism"
SECONDARY	Choose **one** from Offen, *Globalizing Feminisms* to report on:
	Edwards *(China)* — Molony *(Japan)*
	Fleischmann *(Middle East)* — Ruthchild *(Russia)*
	Grimshaw *(Aus/Hawaii/NZ)*
DISCUSSION 2	REVOLUTION AND COLONIZATION

OSCILLATIONS

Early Feminism: Gender Inequality and Racial Inequality

SECONDARY	Giddings, *When and Where I Enter* [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

READING LIST

Afshar, Haleh. "Women and the Politics of Fundamentalism in Iran." *Feminism and 'Race.'* Ed. Bhavnani, Kum-Kum. New York: Oxford University, 2001. 348-365.

Agarwal, Bina. "Environmental Action, Equity, and Ecofeminism: Debating India's Experience." *Feminism and 'Race.'* Ed. Bhavnani, Kum-Kum. New York: Oxford University, 2001. 410-455.

Ang, Ien. "'Other' Women and Postnational Feminism." *Feminism and 'Race.'* Ed. Bhavnani, Kum-Kum. New York: Oxford University, 2001. 394-409.

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Anzaldua, Gloria. "La Prieta." *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings By Radical Women of Color*, 2nd ed. Eds. Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua. New York: Kitchen Table Women of Color Press, 1981/1983. 198-209.

Beauvoir, Simone de. "From The Second Sex." *Feminist Theory: A Reader*, 4th ed. Eds. Wendy Kolmar and Frances Bartkowski. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1953/2013.

Boxer, Marilyn. "Rethinking the Construction of 'Bourgeois Feminism.'" *Globalizing Feminisms, 1789-1945*. Ed. Offen, Karen. New York: Routledge, 2010. 286-301.

Carrillo, Jo. "And When You Leave, Take Your Pictures With You." *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings By Radical Women of Color*, 2nd ed. Eds. Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua. New York: Kitchen Table Women of Color Press, 1981/1983. 63-64.

Chrystos. "I Don't Understand Those Who Have Turned Away From Me." *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings By Radical Women of Color*, 2nd ed. Eds. Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua. New York: Kitchen Table Women of Color Press, 1981/1983. 68-70.

Cixous, Helene. "The Laugh of the Medusa." *Signs* 1/4 (1976): 875-93.

Combahee River Collective. "A Black Feminist Statement." *Women's Studies Quarterly* 42/3-4, (1977): 271–280.

Cooper, Anna Julia. "The Status of Woman in America." *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought*. Ed. Beverly Guy-Sheftall. New York: The New Press, 1892/1995. 43-49.

Cott, Nancy. "Historical Perspectives: The ERA Conflict in the 1920s." *Conflicts in Feminism*. Eds. Marianne Hirsch and Evelyn Fox Keller. New York: Routledge, 1990. 44-59.

Davis, Flora. *Moving the Mountain: The Women's Movement in America Since 1960*. Chicago: University of Illinois, 1999. 70-77; 87-89.

Dworkin, Andrea. *Intercourse*. New York: The Free Press, 1987. 121-143.

Dworkin, Andrea and Catherine MacKinnon, "Questions and Answers." *Making Violence Sexy: Feminist Views on Pornography*. Ed. Diana E. H. Russell. New York: Teachers College Press, 1988/1993. 78-96.

Echols, Linda. "The New Feminism of Yin and Yang." *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*. Eds. Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983. 439-459.

Echols, Linda. *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967-1975*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1989. 139-158; 186-202; 210-220.

Edwards, Louise. "Women's Suffrage in China: Challenging Scholarly Conventions." *Globalizing Feminisms, 1789-1945*. Ed. Offen, Karen. New York: Routledge, 2010. 275-285.

Fleischmann, Ellen. "The Other 'Awakening': The Emergence of Women's Movements in the Modern Middle East, 1900-1940." *Globalizing Feminisms, 1789-1945*. Ed. Offen, Karen. New York: Routledge, 2010. 170-192.

Friedan, Betty. *The Feminine Mystique*. New York: Norton, 1963/2001. 15-32.

Frye, Marilyn. "To Be and Be Seen." *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory*. Freedom, CA: Crossing Press, 1983. 152-174.
Gay, Roxanne. *Bad Feminist*. New York: Harper Perennial, 2014. ix-xiv; 303-313; 314-318.
Giddings, Paula. *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America*. 2nd ed. New York: William Morrow, 1996. 119-127; 234-239; 257-271; 273-288.
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Goldman, Emma. "The Tragedy of Woman's Emancipation." *The Feminist Papers: From Adams to de Beauvoir*. Ed. Alice Rossi. New York: Bantam, 1917/1974. 506-516.
Grimshaw, Patricia. "Settler Anxieties, Indigenous Peoples, and Women's Suffrage in the Colonies of Australia, New Zealand, and Hawai'i, 1888 to 1902." *Globalizing Feminisms, 1789-1945*. Ed. Offen, Karen. New York: Routledge, 2010. 111-121.
Gutter Dyke Collective. "This is the Year to Stamp Out the Y Chromosome." *For Lesbians Only: A Separatist Anthology*. Eds. Sarah Hoagland and Julia Penelope. London: Onlywomen Press, 1973/1988. 338-339.
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Lorde, Audre. "The Uses of Anger." *Sister Outsider*. Freedom, CA: Crossing, 1984. 124-33.
Marty/SEPS (Separatists Enraged Proud and Strong). "Popular Separatist-Baiting Quotes and Some Separatist Responses." *For Lesbians Only: A Separatist Anthology*. Eds. Sarah Hoagland and Julia Penelope. London: Onlywomen Press, 1983/1988. 343-345.
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Molony, Barbara. "Women's Rights, Feminism, and Suffragism in Japan, 1870-1925." *Globalizing Feminisms, 1789-1945*. Ed. Offen, Karen. New York: Routledge, 2010. 51-62.
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1. Articles/essays — theoretical or practical discussion of popular culture and pedagogy. Articles and essays are reviewed through a double-blind peer review process. Submissions should follow these general guidelines:

- MLA or APA format (please note which format you are using)
- 5,000-7,000 (inclusive of abstract, endnotes, and citations).
- Submit two manuscripts, one blinded for review. All manuscripts should be in Microsoft Word format, 12pt Times New Roman with:
  - 10 keywords;
  - abstract (250-300);
  - author bio(s) (up to 100 words);
  - author contact information (email, phone, and social media as applicable).

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2. Proposal for Special Issues — brief description (up to 500 words) of the topic to be considered, the breadth of appeal of the topic to *Dialogue's* audiences, and the need for such an issue. If a set of articles have already been identified for consideration, include a list of titles of 6-8 articles, suggested referees, and short bios (up to 250 words) of all authors and editors

3. Reviews — essays reviewing books, films, games, conferences, children's media, and other sources as they relate to popular culture and pedagogy. Reviews are assessed through an editorial process guided by the lead editor. Submissions should follow these general guidelines:

- MLA or APA format.
- Length: 1,200-1,800 (inclusive of endnotes and citations).

- All manuscripts should be in Microsoft Word format, 12pt Times New Roman with:
  - 10 keywords;
  - abstract (250-300);
  - author bio (up to 100 words);
  - author contact information (email, phone, and social media).
- **Book Reviews** — See Call for Book reviews for specific formatting and a list of suggested books (http://journaldialogue.org/books-for-review/). Book Review questions and submissions can be emailed to the Book Review Editor, Miriam Sciala (miriamsciala@gmail.com).
- **Children's Critical Media Reviews** — See Call for Critical Media Reviews for specific formatting and a list of suggested media http://journaldialogue.org/call-for-childrens-book-reviews/. Questions and submissions can be emailed to the Children's Critical Media Review Editor, Roxanne Henkin (rhenkin@journaldialogue.org).
- All other review questions and submissions can be emailed to editors@journaldialogue.org.).

4. Musings on Pedagogy & Practice — Highlight applications in the classroom, best practices in teaching and learning both inside and outside the classroom, new multimodal approaches, and additional items/ideas not fitting neatly into a scholarly article. See http://journaldialogue.org/musings-submissions/ for Musings specific style guidelines. Questions and submissions can be emailed to the Musings Editor, Karina Vado, kvado1224@gmail.com.

To submit an article, visit http://journaldialogue.org/submissions/

For questions and more information, contact the editors: editors@journaldialogue.org
Anna CohenMiller, PhD, Editor in Chief, and Karina Vado, PhD, Managing Editor and Musings Editor

DIALOGUE
The Interdisciplinary Journal of Popular Culture and Pedagogy

Call for Book Reviews

Editor: Miriam Sciala

www.journaldialogue.org

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.
Free to read. Free to submit.

THE BENEFITS OF BOOK REVIEWS AND A NOTE FROM THE BOOK REVIEW EDITOR

In *Dialogue, The Interdisciplinary Journal of Popular Culture and Pedagogy*, book reviews play a crucial part in the introduction to the public of newly-written books that provide analyses of popular culture and the way it reflects current social conditions. These publications can serve to educate not only the general reader, but also researchers and educators. Indeed, by providing insight into a particular book that goes beyond what the title – be it catchy or not – provides, the reviewer lays out the main components of a book to the potential reader and can be instrumental in convincing that reader to choose that particular book for a future read.

Hence, by describing the main gist and viewpoint on a book of popular culture for our journal, which caters to social scientists/researchers and educators, the reviewer is placed in a position whereby they can reach out to our readers and pique their interest in a book that is pertinent to their interests. For instance, an educator reading one of these books may be induced to translate the knowledge gained from the book into practical methodologies that can be applied to their pedagogy. Ultimately, this will help them guide students towards more salubrious perceptions of social issues and a deeper understanding of the various existences among various social groups, thus engendering a kinder and more tolerant society.

Academics involved in the social sciences also appreciate reading our book reviews as they search for sources to support and enhance their own research. A book review could help them save time as they can then more rapidly decide whether the book in question is suitable for their endeavours in explaining the way popular culture reflects our society.

Writing a review of one of the books on our list would be beneficial to our readers. By helping them to ascertain the genre of popular culture under discussion and the angle in which the information is presented, the reviewer places the readers in a position whereby they can better judge whether reading the entire book would be beneficial to them and whether it could lead to potential applications within their respective fields.

The books on this list have a focus on a specific genre of popular culture, be it fiction, film, television, music, video games or technology. They have been written with the aim of helping the reader understand popular culture and its assistance and limitations towards the generation of a deeper comprehension of society. If you are interested in reviewing one of these books, we invite you to contact us letting us know which book you would like to review. We look forward to collaborating with you.

A note from the Book Review Editor - Miriam Sciala

For me as a reader, or more specifically, as a bookworm from a very early age, book reviews open up possibilities as they guide me to the next set of books on my lengthy "to be read" list. Realistically, though, despite the best of intentions, I never will

read all the books on that ever-expanding list as life is much too fleeting. Therefore, for all those that will remain unread, book reviews serve a different purpose – that of providing a synopsis - a brief description that offers me a view of the author's stance, the context within which the book was written and a few choice details that enable me to gain a sense of the subject matter; in truth, it is a condensed account that nonetheless provides some information, opening a window into the narrative. In fact, a perspicacious review on its own can provide me with a few precious moments of reading pleasure. And after turning that page, I will have gained knowledge and the possibility of applying it in my work.

The act of writing a book review, in my experience, is extremely rewarding, too. This type of writing has done more than afford me the opportunity to read a particular book; it has engendered a perusal with intent – a deeper reading than that done merely for pleasure. Book reviews are my mini-research projects where I approach the book from the angle of the chronicler who endeavours to comprehend and explain the content and point of view of that book, connecting these to the context in which it was written. It is an exercise in objectivity to outline the strengths and limitations that form the features of the book. Penning a book review for the reader activates my creative side as I communicate the salient information appearing in the book to an imaginary fellow reader, albeit without giving too much away, in an attempt to prompt that reader to pick that book up and experience it through their own eyes.

CALL FOR BOOK REVIEWS

Dialogue would like to invite experienced academics to review new books for our readers. We are currently seeking reviews of the following books:

1. Allen, Craig. *Univision, Telemundo, and the Rise of Spanish-Language Television in the United States.* University of Florida Press. 2020.
2. Allen, Paul V. *I Can Read It All by Myself: The Beginner Books Story.* University Press of Mississippi. 2021.
3. Bordwell, David. *Perplexing Plots: Popular Storytelling and the Poetics of Murder.* Columbia University Press. 2023.
4. Dorney, John; Regan, Jessica; and Salinsky, Tom. *Best Pick a Journey through Film History.* Rowman & Littlefield Publishers. 2022.
5. Frymus, Agatha. *Damsels and Divas: European Stardom in Silent Hollywood.* Rutgers University Press. 2020.
6. Giannini, Erin. *Supernatural: A History of Television's Unearthly Road Trip.* Rowman & Littlefield Publishers. 2021.
7. Gomer, Justin. *White Balance: How Hollywood Shaped Colorblind Ideology and Undermined Civil Rights.* The University of North Carolina Press. 2020.
8. Gonzalez, Aston. *Visualizing Equality: African American Rights and Visual Culture in the Nineteenth Century.* The University of North Carolina Press. 2020.
9. Mahdi, Waleed F. *Arab Americans in Film: From Hollywood and Egyptian Stereotypes to Self-Representation.* Syracuse University Press. 2020.
10. Manno, Andrew. *Toxic Masculinity, Casino Capitalism, and America's Favorite Card Game: The Poker Mindset.* Palgrave Macmillan. 2020.
11. Mitchell, James G. *Watching in Tongues: Multilingualism on American Television in the 21st Century.* Vernon Press. 2020.
12. Turzi, Mariano. *The International Politics of Superheroes.* Rowman & Littlefield Publishers. 2022

Guidelines: short articles reviewing books, films, games, conferences, etc. as they relate to popular culture and pedagogy

- Format: MLA or APA
- Length: 1,200 – 1,800 (inclusive of endnotes and citations)
- Editorial review
- To be considered for online publication on a rolling basis

Contact editors@journaldialogue.org or miriamsciala@gmail.com to coordinate writing a review for the journal.

DIALOGUE
The Interdisciplinary Journal of Popular Culture and Pedagogy

Call for Musings

Editor: Karina A.Vado, PhD

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The "Musings" section of *Dialogue* highlights innovative popular culture integration in the classroom, best practices in teaching and learning inside and outside of K-12 and college/university classrooms, emergent multimodal teaching approaches, critical insights into popular culture, and/or additional items/ideas not fitting neatly into a scholarly article. Of particular interest are "Musings" that explore one or more of these topics/areas:

- The politics of popular culture
- The role of popular culture in politics
- Intersections between critical pedagogy and popular culture
- Intersections of social justice and popular culture
- (Mis)Representations of class, (dis)ability, ethnicity, gender, race/racialization, and sexuality in popular culture
- Global popular culture
- Multimodal popular culture
- Student perceptions of popular culture
- Representations of academia/education in popular culture
- Popular culture as pedagogy
- Popular culture and media literacies
- Popular culture and multimodal literacies

See http://journaldialogue.org/musings-submissions/ for Musings specific style guidelines. Musings can be emailed to editors@journaldialogue.org or to the Musings Editor, Karina A. Vado, kvado@journaldialogue.org.

Dialogue: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Popular Culture and Pedagogy is the official journal of the **Southwest Popular/ American Culture Association (SWPACA)**.

Read Dialogue online at: www.journaldialogue.org

The mission of the **SWPACA** is to promote an innovative and nontraditional academic movement in Humanities and Social Sciences celebrating America's cultural heritages. To provide an outlet for scholars, writers, and others interested in popular/ American culture, to share ideas in a professional atmosphere, and to increase awareness and improve public perceptions of America's cultural traditions and diverse populations.

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