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Autoethnography and Popular Culture

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Popular Culture Theory 2.0

BOB BATCHELOR

Let's take a rather selfless view and say that popular culture studies has won. The macro perspective: while the world might not be awash in popular culture departments, academe is inundated with scholars essentially *doing* popular culture studies, but under a different guise. Scratch just a millimeter below the surface of most cultural studies, critical cultural communications, gender, race, and historical studies and one finds a popular culture project merely under a different name.

 Given the universal application of popular culture as a scholarly topic, it is not a stretch to declare victory for the popular culture popularizers that we claim as our forbearers, many in the great academic cradle of the American Midwest: Ray B. Browne, John G. Cawelti, Michael T. Marsden, Russel B. Nye, and Fred E. H. Schroeder. Looking again at *Pioneers in Popular Culture Studies*, edited by Browne and Marsden (1999), [which I never tire doing], I am struck by the how the editors branded themselves and their upstart colleagues as both "change agents" and "pioneers." The former transforms, while the latter discovers. Their final plea still rings true: "Education is too precarious to squander" (3).

 Yet, let's also be frank, and say that one still face "challenges" as a popular culture scholar, ranging from the arrogant view that popular culture studies is merely puffed-up "fandom," thus not a serious "line of inquiry," to the walls some have built that delineate between popular culture from other fields. [We won't even go into the absurdity of this skirmish in an era marked by pervasive anti-intellectualism, strident anti-unionism, and massive defunding of the Humanities and Social Sciences.]

The point is open for debate, but my thinking is that popular culture scholars expended massive amounts of energy and focus in an attempt to legitimize the field, but while backs were turned, those from related disciplines stepped in and built theory without actually advocating for popular culture. For example, many television and film scholars created their own sub-theories that gained footing, but never created the larger connection between these theories and the macro question of why studying popular culture is critical. An enterprising scholar just needed to swoop in, cut out the center of popular culture studies, apply the latest theories from one's own field, and never acknowledge any debt to scholars like Browne, et al. Thus careers and fields were born.

More importantly, many scholars who do not self-identify as "popular culture scholars" actually actively run to distance themselves from the moniker. While this may help them with the dreaded legitimacy question in their own cases or with obstinate colleagues, it certainly hurts the field when talented minds feel that "popular culture" sullies them.

I have heard from some colleagues that steering clear of "popular culture" is the only way they can exist within their institutions. When I hear these stories, I think back to the anger in Ray Browne's voice and the power in his words as he battled this notion, as well as the legions of scholars that have committed themselves to the field. There is no doubt that the larger question around "career expediency" and popular culture studies is one that should be addressed by senior scholars and other leaders as we look to the future.

About the special issue

When Jimmie Manning approached the editors of *PCSJ* about creating a collection of essays on popular culture and autoethnography, we had these issues of legitimacy and theory building in mind. Here was an opportunity to bring together – under the superb editorial guidance of Manning and co-

editor Tony Adams – a collection of essays that demonstrates the centrality of popular culture as a foundational tenet in the birth of a new field.

As popular culture scholars, we engage with our objects of study, interrogate them from every angle, but then disconnect ourselves from that narrative, because we have been trained to think that this is the only acceptable research practice, as if one can ever disconnect from popular culture, or perhaps as Browne might have asked (a twist on his famous pronouncement): can the fish disengage from the water?

Rather than removing ourselves in some nod to pseudo-scientific methodology (as if scientific method has not been proven to be highly subjective), autoethnographic popular culture demands that we deeply and fully mesh our lives and our work. The benefits are immense, from potentially redefining what it means to be a scholar to a fuller bond with readers based on mutual interest and collapsing the distance between the two.

What we present here is a new field of study that holds immense opportunities, including the prospect of building theory. Rather than *running from*, this issue demonstrates that scholars can profit by *running to* popular culture studies.

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"Wake up and smell the internet, Grandma": Literacy, Masculinity, and Sexuality in *Modern Family* and Fan Culture

LAURA A. DETMERING

In a 2011 episode of the mockumentary comedy series *Modern Family*, Luke Dunphy (Nolan Gould) asks, "You know more people have died hiking than in the entire Civil War?" His sister Alex (Ariel Winter) asks, "Okay, what book did you read that in?" Luke replies, "Book? Wake up and smell the internet grandma" ("Mother's Day"). This conversation draws on several stereotypes associated with U.S. culture, gendered identity, and the Internet. Ultimately, the conversation reinforces contemporary notions of male behavior (many boys are uninterested in intellectual pursuits), as well as a belief that information disseminated online is inaccurate and anyone who reads it automatically and uncritically believes it. Moreover, the conversation suggests that young people have no need for or interest in books unless they are nerds. The conversation further reinforces a larger social fear of information contained online, particularly information that is widely available, information that might "corrupt" young people's minds, as it has clearly done to Luke. Still, in the United States and particularly within popular culture, a perception exists that young people today spend most of their time within virtual worlds, whether they're using these spaces for fun or for work.

    Popular television series like *Modern Family* tend to reinforce this notion. In the pilot episode, for instance, the show opens on a scene at the Dunphy family's home. Claire Dunphy (Julie Bowen) yells for her kids to

come down to breakfast. Her daughter Haley (Sarah Hyland) enters the room texting and asks, "Why are you guys yelling at us when we're all the way upstairs? Just text us" ("Pilot"). The stereotypical teenage girl, dressed in a skimpy outfit and only halfway engaged in the conversation, Haley relies on her cell phone to communicate with her friends. Her sister Alex, on the other hand, stands in for a different stereotype of the pre-teen girl, one who utilizes technologies for academic success. For instance, when her parents Claire and Phil (Ty Burrell) decide the entire family needs to go a week without using technology, Alex complains, "I have a huge science paper due" ("Unplugged"). Whereas Haley uses technology primarily for social networking, Alex uses it primarily to be a successful student. Luke, meanwhile, uses technology to get information as quickly and easily as possible, even if that means approaching that information completely uncritically.

Literacy, technology, and identity are thus intimately tied with portrayals of characters using literacy and technology on the show. Within *Modern Family* fan communities, literacy, technology, and identity also tend to work hand-in-hand. Indeed, fans utilize social media and other forms of new and digital media to respond to the series, to develop their own identities as fans of the series, and to influence the series's production. Technology and literacy, therefore, function as important parts of the fan experience in response to this and other popular television shows. In *Modern Family*'s case, social media and literacy practices function within fan culture as a means of protest against social norms of behavior and sexual identity. While fans have mostly refrained from overt critiques of the series, in one case, which will be discussed at length in this essay, fan outrage over the portrayal of gay characters on the series ultimately and significantly influenced how *Modern Family* dealt with the issue.

The Internet, then, which has served as a site of fear for so many adults in contemporary U.S. culture, has enabled protest to move in new

directions not previously afforded by earlier means of communication. Moreover, fandom has come to carry a more positive weight as an identity marker in the age of new and digital media, which have enabled fans to enact positive social change in ways they previously could not. Unfortunately, the term "fan" continues to carry a certain negative weight among many, particularly among academics, often eliding fan involvement in such important social movements. As academics, we need to pay further attention to the positive moves fans are making online in order to enact social change, seeing them as small but nonetheless important moves towards the social progress we claim to hope for in the twenty-first-century United States. Moreover, the kinds of participatory practices fans are engaging in within these online spaces are significant regardless of whether they ultimately affect social progress because they demonstrate new levels of engagement with issues of identity and social status, particularly with regard to gender and sexuality.

In order to develop this argument, I begin with an analysis of gender and literacy practices within the series *Modern Family*, demonstrating how the series simultaneously reinforces and attempts to subvert normative notions of the relationships between gender, identity, and literacy. Having analyzed the series's portrayal of the relationships between gendered identities and literacy, I move into an analysis of a fan-led protest against the show's portrayals of social norms of behavior and sexual identities in order to demonstrate the potential power of fan-led grassroots movements to alter the production of television series. Again, it does not much matter whether the fans ultimately change the directions the series take; what is more significant is the fact that fans are collectively participating in many of the same kinds of interrogations of identity and social status that we believe are important to develop, that we seek to get students involved in, and those are the types of conversations that ultimately lead to social progress.

The *Modern Family*

As its title suggests, *Modern Family* intends to portray the contemporary U.S. family. In the pilot episode, we are first introduced to the Dunphy clan: Claire, Phil, and their children Haley, Alex, and Luke. Next, we meet the Pritchett family: Claire's father Jay (Ed O'Neill), step-mother Gloria (Sofia Vergara), and Manny Delgado (Rico Rodriguez). Finally, we meet the Pritchett-Tucker family: Claire's younger brother Mitchell (Jesse Tyler Ferguson), boyfriend Cameron Tucker (Eric Stonestreet), and newly adopted Vietnamese baby Lily, who is aged to a preschooler in season three (Aubrey Anderson-Emmons). It appears that we meet the Dunphys first because they are the most "traditional" of the three family units; in addition to their significant age difference, Jay and Gloria are a culturally diverse couple, she being Columbian and he being from the U.S., and Mitchell and Cameron are also obviously a non-traditional family, as they are a gay couple. From the outset, then, *Modern Family* both reinforces and attempts to subvert traditional notions of family, particularly of the "modern" family. Ultimately, its portrayal of this "modern" family proves to be stereotypical despite the show's attempts to be progressive, as I will demonstrate later.

Being "part of the man club": Masculinity in *Modern Family*

As has been well established in the humanities fields, "Gender is a socially imposed division of the sexes. It is a product of the social relations of sexuality. . . . Far from being an expression of natural differences, exclusive gender identity is the suppression of natural similarities. It requires repression: in men, of whatever is the local version of 'feminine' traits; in women, of the local definition of 'masculine' traits" (Rubin, "Traffic" 546). In the United States, children are trained to adopt certain gendered characteristics, to behave according to certain rules of

"masculinity" and "femininity" in order to fit into society. The consequences for not adhering to these social norms are great, and so we continue to "perform" gender in sanctioned ways in order to fit in. This need to fit in, to be "part of the club" carries with it a great deal of insecurity. Moreover, "[i]n spite of the fact that identities are not fixed, individuals have a sense of unity and continuity about their identity" (Ivanič 16). I would argue that part of this sense of "unity and continuity" involves both fitting in to and resisting social norms, particularly of gendered behavior. Indeed, several of the *Modern Family's* main characters find pleasure in both reaffirming and resisting culturally expected behavior.

Within U.S. culture, traditionally masculine men and boys are expected to follow a specific "code" of behavior. According to Thomas Newkirk, "The boy code sets narrow constraints in which boys must construct their relationships; these restraints offer a safety shield, allowing expressions of friendship while protecting the boys from appearing 'gay'" (126). This notion of masculinity is often reflected and/or reaffirmed through popular media. For instance, on *Modern Family*, this archetype of the masculine man is represented through the character of Jay, whom, despite their aversions to his behavior much of the time, all the other male characters on the show somewhat inexplicably look up to and seek to emulate. Phil, in particular, is desperate to win Jay's approval. Gendered identity, then, plays a significant role in the show. All the male characters on the show want to, as Cameron says of Mitchell, "feel like . . . part of the man club" ("Old"). At the same time, the show subverts the notion that this kind of male behavior is desirable by consistently critiquing Jay's behavior and featuring several male characters who regularly fail to fit the mold. Rather than Jay, we are typically encouraged to identify with one or more of the other adult men on the show. Thus, while the show seems to reinforce stereotypical masculine behavior, it ultimately contends that

traditional masculinity is not entirely desirable and may, in fact, be a hindrance.

On *Modern Family*, all of the male characters struggle with a desire to appear "manly" enough to fit in with the other men they encounter. For instance, in the third season premiere, Phil explains, "I've been practicing like crazy all my cowboy skills—shootin', ropin', pancake eatin'. Why? Because sometimes I feel like Jay doesn't respect me as a man" ("Dude"). For Phil, Cameron, and Mitchell, this insecurity about being masculine enough is paramount. And winning Jay's approval is not their only concern. Cameron, for instance, worries about how he is perceived by his partner when Mitchell makes him breakfast in bed on Mother's Day: "You think of me as Lily's mother! I'm your wife! I'm a woman!" ("Mother's"). To add insult to injury, when they go to a picnic with Lily's playgroup, the other parents insist that Cameron be in a photograph of all the mothers because he's "an honorary mom." Mitchell tries to apologize for his own and the others' behavior by telling Cameron, "We're just a new type of family. You know, they don't have the right vocabulary for us yet. Th-they need one of us to be the man" ("Mother's"). Cameron is understandably not appeased by this assertion; it seems like a pretty halfhearted apology for heteronormative behavior. Rather than being equally offended by his society's insistence upon applying such standards to their relationship, Mitchell just accepts it as the way things are, which he would likely not do if he was the one being treated like a woman. Unfortunately, given its other concerted efforts to undermine social attitudes about masculinity, the show ultimately reinforces homophobic attitudes, which insist that all romantic couples must consist of a "man" and a "woman."

Despite its ultimately heteronormative attitudes, the show does attempt to subvert normative notions of what constitutes manliness. The qualities that make Jay appropriately gendered fit neatly within social norms, including watching sports, building and fixing things, and resisting

emotional bonds with other characters, especially men. Jay also frequently exhibits a violent attitude toward other male characters. In the episode "Benched," for instance, Jay becomes violently angry and threatens Manny and Luke's basketball coach for yelling at the kids on the team. Later, Jay again becomes viciously angry when he and Manny ride to the mall with Phil and Luke and another man steals Phil's parking space. Seeing that Phil remains calm and has no intention of confronting the "snake," Jay tells Manny and Luke, "Boys, here's the only thing you got to know about being a man—never let someone take what is yours" ("Dance"). Jay does not just undermine Phil's authority here, but he also associates being a man with behaving angrily and violently. However, later, upon learning that the man did not know he stole their parking space because he is just wandering around after putting his dog to sleep, Jay says that perhaps the boys would benefit from behaving more like Phil. The series, then, reflects cultural attitudes about masculinity, by associating "being a man" with anger and violence, but it also subverts the notion that manliness necessarily has to involve anger and violence by upholding Phil's character as the more appropriate role model for young boys.

While Jay certainly meets the cultural standard of masculinity, he clearly does not represent *Modern Family's* vision of manliness or masculinity. Instead, the other three adult male characters serve as examples of how men should behave. On one of the rare occasions when Phil stands up to Jay, he asserts, "I get that I wasn't your first choice to marry Claire, but it's been eighteen years, and there hasn't been a day when I wasn't a loyal husband to your daughter and a great dad to your grandkids, so if we've still got a problem now, it's your problem" ("Dude"). During this speech, Phil defines manliness quite simply as being loyal and supportive of one's family, a view quite clearly upheld by the series itself. A conversation between Cameron and Jay from an earlier episode further exemplifies this view of manliness:

> Cam: "Mitchell just wants to feel like he's—part of the man club."
> . . .
>
> Jay: "I just think it's crazy, that's all. So what if he can't swing a hammer. Look
>
> at all he has done. Law school, great career, providing for his family, that's manly, too, isn't it? I mean in the classical sense."
>
> Cam: "Well, yes, I mean I think it also takes a big man to quit his career as a music teacher and raise a child."
>
> Jay: "You're a man, too, Cam." ("Old")

Manliness (and perhaps also masculinity) is again defined here as supporting one's family in a variety of ways. *Modern Family*, thus, drawing on what might be seen as "the classical sense" of manliness, argues that manliness means being supportive. While "providing for . . . family" is certainly a traditional element of masculinity, the show clearly attempts to redefine masculinity by associating this element of masculinity with three characters who are regularly portrayed in ways that would seem effeminate in most social circles. As I will demonstrate in the next section, these two models of "masculine" or "manly" behavior are reinforced in Luke and Manny, particularly with regard to their literacy practices.

"I *have* a book already": Male Literacy Practices in *Modern Family*

> Luke: "Dad, I need help. I was supposed to keep a journal all summer. It's due today."
>
> Claire: "Wow, first day of school and you're already behind?"

Luke: "I'm dead."

Claire: "All right. Tell me how far you've gotten."

Luke: "Okay. 'June 21. Found a stick.' 'June 22.' That's it."
("Run")

This conversation, which Luke has with his parents in the second episode of the series, is fairly representative of Luke's literacy practices. Later in the season, when Luke receives a book for a Christmas gift, he complains, "I have a book already" ("Undeck"). For Luke, literacy is a form of punishment, not a form of pleasure. Manny, on the other hand, takes great pleasure in reading and especially in writing. In the pilot episode, Manny asks Jay to drive him to the mall to see a sixteen-year-old girl for whom Manny has written a poem expressing his love: "I put my thoughts into words and now my words into action" ("Pilot"). For Manny, then, literacy is its own reward, a way of conveying his feelings and sharing who he is and what he believes with important people in his life. Within the world of *Modern Family*, then, it seems that young boys fit into two categories with regard to literacy— stupid and violent or nerdy and effeminate.

Studies of boys' reading and writing practices have shown that many young boys prefer to read and compose texts that are violent or otherwise inappropriate in nature. According to Thomas Newkirk, "[T]he materials that boys try to import must often violate stated or unstated rules of appropriateness" (xix). Within U.S. culture, boys are trained to find pleasure in these kinds of "inappropriate" texts, so it comes as little surprise that when asked what they want to read and/or write about, they often choose these kinds of texts. Further, as Christopher Grieg and Janette Hughes discuss in their study of poetry and boys' reading practices in Canada, "poetry is currently gendered differently than other literary genres . . . [,] marked as 'unmasculine' and more closely affiliated with 'feminine' values such as emotion, reflection and introspection than say

fiction or non-fiction" (92-93). While I would not necessarily agree that fiction and non-fiction are less associated with "emotion, reflection and introspection" than poetry, poetry tends to be gendered "feminine" because it tends to focus primarily on the writer's emotions. As a result, young boys often seem uninterested in poetry, as they are often uninterested in most literary works, because they do not want to appear to be effeminate, or worse "gay."

Modern Family's two young male characters take very different approaches to literacy, as demonstrated above—Luke resists it, and Manny glories in it. It comes as little surprise that Manny, the less traditionally masculine of the two, enjoys writing poetry and songs, while Luke only engages in literacy practices when he is required to do so. As his parents explain:

Phil: "Well, there's book smart, and then there's street smart."

Claire: "And then there's Luke."

Phil: "Some people ask 'why?' Luke asks 'why not?'" ("Coal Digger").

Luke clearly represents a certain type of young boy, then, one who is not necessarily unintelligent but who avoids intellectual pursuits to his own detriment. His pleasure in life comes almost solely from engaging in violent and aggressive behavior. In a first-season episode, Luke is working on a collage and presentation on Vincent Van Gogh. At the end of the episode, he practices his presentation for Alex: "Why did he paint The Starry Night? Maybe because the sky is beautiful, and everybody likes looking at it, and it reminds us that something's up there watching over all of us—aliens, who could be here in a second to liquefy us and use us as fuel. So wake up, people. We're next" ("Starry"). What seems initially to be a "normal" presentation about Van Gogh swiftly shifts to a science

fiction influenced, violent image of the destruction of humankind. While the show does seem to suggest at times that Luke might be slightly disturbed, having him undergo a psychological evaluation in one episode, he clearly represents a particular type of young boy, one not uncommonly found in the elementary or middle-school classroom, but one who is troubling to teachers, nonetheless. Newkirk writes of a young boy similar to Luke, "[a] reclusive student, obsessed by video games . . . , his stories are complex series of battles with complex weapons in which a band of friends single-handedly kills off the enemy, both mechanical and human" (136). Luke, too, is obsessed with videogames (which he plays with his "best friend," eighty-something-year-old next door neighbor and racist curmudgeon, Walt) and regularly engages in violent behavior. And yet, though Luke occasionally appears to be somewhat disturbed, he is regularly portrayed as a "normal" young boy.

Manny is clearly portrayed as the more abnormal of the two young boys. While Luke is engaging in typical boyhood pursuits like shooting off rockets, playing video games, and avoiding such "feminine" activities as reading and writing, Manny spends most of his time reading and writing and acting like an adult. In a third-season episode, Manny complains to Gloria, "I have a big report due, and the teachers don't seem to care about the substance. All they care about is the flash" ("Hit"). No typical twelve-year-old boy would have this concern. Clearly, Manny is an anomaly. While Luke is playing video games, Manny is writing poetry for his various romantic interests. In the episode "My Funky Valentine," for instance, Manny's entire plot revolves around what Mitchell calls the "theft" of Manny's "intellectual property" by a school bully. Unfortunately for Manny, even after the girl learns that the bully Durkas stole Manny's poem and passed it off as his own, she continues to find Durkas adorable and Manny loses the girl, as he always does. Manny is "nerdy," and, thus, he always misses opportunities for romantic involvement. Girls, it seems, prefer Luke types. Thus, his lack of

appropriate "masculine" behavior is a consistent hindrance to Manny. Still, the series does not exactly argue that boys should behave like Luke; rather, it encourages them to strike a balance between behaving like Luke and behaving like Manny.

Cultural Capital, Fandom, and Identity in *Modern Family*

In a 2010 episode of *Modern Family*, Manny anxiously awaits the arrival of his date Whitney (Kristen Schaal), a girl he met "in the online book club. We both like vampire fiction and the romance of eternal life" ("Fifteen"). Gloria excitedly opens the door upon Whitney's arrival, only to learn that Whitney is a thirty-something-year-old woman, who thinks Manny is an adult. As audience members, we can forgive Whitney's mistake, understanding why she proclaims, "He just seemed so mature online. . . . I mean, what kind of eleven-year-old talks like that?" ("Fifteen") because we regularly witness Manny behaving like an adult (albeit a somewhat unusual adult), wearing a burgundy dinner jacket, reading the morning newspaper while drinking tiny mug after tiny mug full of espresso, taking steams, and complaining about "kids today." His perception is much too astute for a boy his age. In a third-season episode, Manny demonstrates his maturity when he says, "Poor Reuben, huh? Having to rebuild his whole life at age 12" ("After"). Again, this bit of dialogue exemplifies Manny's behavior, showing why an adult might mistake him for another adult online. Thus, the writers successfully justify Whitney's mistake in choosing Manny as a potential mate.

   Throughout the episode, Whitney becomes a stand-in for the female book fan—a socially awkward, dowdy-looking woman who is so obsessed with reading and with the fantasy of a fellow fan as a potential lover that she does not understand how to attract a man. The episode's portrayal of Whitney as a female fan is fairly representative of larger cultural stereotypes of female fans, who are treated as obsessive. Though Whitney

is not sexualized, as Henry Jenkins argues female fans tend to be, "manifested in the images of screaming teenage girls" (Textual 15), she is certainly deemed inappropriately involved in her fandom and, thus, out of touch with how real romantic relationships work. Enter Gloria. This stunningly sexy woman gives Whitney a makeover, showing her how to accentuate her beauty so that she can attract men through her looks rather than her intellect. Of course, in this case, Gloria's plan backfires because Whitney is so caught up in her fantasy world of romance novels that she falls in love with the next man she sees, a fellow vampire romance fan, Cam. Thus, the episode ends with the image of the female book club member declaring her love for a gay man to the cameraperson. Whereas we could forgive Whitney for failing to realize that Manny was a child due to his adult writing style, we cannot forgive her for failing to recognize that Cameron is "obviously" gay. As viewers, we are left to judge Whitney for her failure to pick up on these clues, to see her as socially awkward and deficient. Female book fans, then, are portrayed as socially inept, unable to understand social cues and norms of human behavior.

This portrayal of Whitney's character is symptomatic of a larger cultural view of fan behavior, particularly female fan behavior. Female fans are either sexually and culturally deficient or "erotic spectacle[s] for mundane male spectators" (Jenkins, Textual 15). Indeed, female fans' "abandonment of any distance from" (15) the objects of their fandom is viewed as a significant problem socially, particularly among the elite. As Jenkins eloquently explains,

> The stereotypical conception of the fan, while not without a limited factual basis, amounts to a projection of anxieties about the violation of dominant cultural hierarchies. The fans' transgression of bourgeois taste and description of dominant cultural hierarchies insures that their preferences are seen as abnormal and threatening by those who have a vested interest in the maintenance of these

standards (even by those who may share similar tastes but express them in fundamentally different ways). (*Textual* 17)

Fans' behavior is deemed most problematic because of their lack of emotional distance from the objects of their fandom. Within academic circles, in particular, and other elite social groups, in general, being too emotionally attached to a cultural product makes it "impossible" for a person to approach it objectively.

While female fans are represented as obsessive but sexually deficient, male fans are represented in similarly negative ways. As explained above, Manny is a fan of vampire romance fiction, and he clearly does not represent the typical pre-teen boy; his behavior is more reflective of an effeminate man. Within this episode, Manny becomes one stand-in for the male book fan. The other representation of a male fan in the episode is Cam, who is not just a book fan but also a sports fan. In one episode, Cam even goes so far as to paint his face orange and blue to watch a football game at Jay's house ("Coal"), an act that might be mocked within many social circles, but which does not attract the same level of contempt as being a loyal fan of certain popular media, such as popular book series. If Cam were to wear this makeup publicly and on a regular basis or were he to shout or paint other parts of his body, it is worth noting, his behavior would warrant a stronger reaction. But he does not do that; he simply paints his face for a family gathering, so whereas Manny's and Whitney's fandom are mocked, Cam's seems to be relatively overlooked. His behavior is treated as normal. After all, as Jenkins notes, "sports fans (who are mostly male and who attach great significance to 'real' events rather than fictions) enjoy very different status than media fans (who are mostly female and who attach great interest in debased forms of fiction)" (*Textual* 19). Thus, the show sends a message that certain kinds of fandom are acceptable, even normal, while others are freakish. Being a fan in and of itself is fine, even normal; being *too much* of a fan is a problem.

Despite the fact that Whitney and Manny are both treated as obsessive freaks as a result of their chosen fan practices, *Modern Family* does not uphold traditional notions of taste. In fact, the series also mocks academic and elite or "high culture" fan practices. Claire and Phil pride themselves in being intelligent, even intellectual. But their personal tastes tend to diverge pretty significantly from normative "intellectual" tastes. To borrow from Jenkins, "Unimpressed by institutional authority and expertise, the fans assert their own right to form interpretations, to offer evaluations, and to construct cultural canons" (*Textual* 18). While Phil and Claire cite their academic achievements as evidence of their intelligence, then, they resist academic pursuits in favor of developing their own cultural tastes. By proxy, *Modern Family's* writers assert that individuals should develop their own tastes rather than simply adopt proscribed ones. During the second season, Claire and Phil reveal that they are huge fans of bad science fiction and fantasy movies when they decide to go see the movie *Croctopus*. In the same episode, Alex complains of her classmate and educational rival: "Sanjay's dad's a surgeon and his mom's a professor. I can't compete with that. I'll just have to do the best I can with what I was given" ("Our Children"). While Phil simply replies, "Good for you" ("Our"), Claire is embarrassed, and her embarrassment intensifies when they run into Sanjay's parents at the movie theater, so she decides that she and Phil should go see the foreign film Sanjay's parents are going to see. Phil responds, "Why do I have to watch a French movie? I didn't do anything wrong" ("Our"). Partway through the film, Phil leaves and sees *Croctopus* alone. As they leave the theater, Sanjay's parents ask what they thought about the film, and Claire, adopting an academic tone, says that the film failed to impress her.

Of course, the fact that Claire and Phil are able to make such critiques, mimicking academic tones, demonstrates that they possess a certain level of cultural capital associated with the middle and upper classes. That is, as upper-middle-class college graduates, Claire and Phil have learned how to

resist elite attitudes and beliefs about culture and taste by first learning and participating within elite educational systems. Indeed, without having been properly trained in such a system, the two would lack the requisite knowledge to critique it. On the other hand, their intellect is undermined at the end of the scene when, referring to one another as "doctor" and "professor" they attempt to push open a "pull" door. Still, the episode's message is clear—cultural capital and elite notions of taste are overrated; individuals should choose for themselves what to like, and those who do not do so, like the Patels, are dupes. While the show encourages viewers to develop their own tastes, then, it suggests that elite tastes are worthy of mockery, based on pretension, on wanting to appear intelligent, rather than on personal preference. These representations of Claire and Phil's taste, thus, suggest that *Modern Family*'s writers and producers embrace a similar approach to fandom, which will become significant in considering how fans have responded to the show's representation of sexuality and the producers' response to those fans' reactions.

"Let Cam & Mitchell Kiss!": How Facebook Affected *Modern Family*'s Production

Up to this point, I have focused on the series itself, demonstrating how issues of identity, literacy, and fandom play out within *Modern Family*. I argue, as well, that for all its claims of being a progressive show, the series ultimately reinforces normative behavior by placing its characters in stereotypical roles and situations in order to promote comedy. These issues play an important role in fan response to the series. In the following section, I shift my focus to *Modern Family* fans, demonstrating how they have utilized literacy within online communities to discuss and at times protest the series's dealings with issues of identity. Fans of the series have picked up on this issue, critiquing it within their online communities. Specifically, numerous fans have objected to the treatment of Cameron

and Mitchell's relationship on the series, utilizing social media to protest this portrayal. While most online fan protests are ultimately ineffective in terms of altering the production of the series, this movement had a significant impact on the series. More important, this protest demonstrated the power of literacy and digital media in creating collective response to social issues raised within popular television series like *Modern Family*.

In an article published in The New York Times about a season two episode, columnist Bruce Feiler quotes from an interview with the series's co-creators and several cast members, noting in particular their responses to fan outrage over the treatment of Mitchell and Cameron's relationship, specifically the desexualization of these characters throughout most of the series. Eric Stonestreet confesses, "While I appreciated that fans care about our characters, . . . I never understood why people put their focus on *'Modern Family,'* a show that introduced a loving, grounded gay couple on television who adopted a baby, and accused it of being homophobic" (qtd. in Feiler). Though Stonestreet makes a fair point—the show does present an openly gay couple in a positive light, an image that is severely lacking within much popular culture, particularly among major characters on television series—it is really no wonder that fans and critics alike find the portrayal of Mitchell and Cameron's relationship problematic and even offensive. Moreover, a straight man who plays a stereotypically and borderline caricature-like gay character may not be the best spokesperson for the progressive nature of the series.

Indeed, the fact that Stonestreet is not gay and that the only openly gay man who plays a role on the show (Jesse Tyler Ferguson) does not comment on the subject makes the show's claim to progressivity questionable. Further, series co-creator Christopher Lloyd's defense of the show's subversiveness, that "[t]here are different ways of being challenging. To find real, raw emotional moments about the difficulties of growing up, the challenges of dealing with children or unresolved stuff with your parents is as real as dealing with a big crazy event like a rape or

a crisis of faith" (qtd. in Feiler), while compelling, refuses to deal with the reality that *Modern Family* consistently treats Mitchell and Cameron's relationship as asexual. Thus, while the series features a prominent gay couple and thereby attempts to "normalize" homosexual relationships, it ultimately falls short of its claims of progressivity and subversiveness.

Feiler writes, "But all the attention on Mitch and Cam's lip life overshadowed deeper strands that make the show even more probative of contemporary culture" (par. 10). In other words, "quit complaining about the lack of kissing and see how progressive this show really is." While I would argue that the series is subversive in many ways, I cannot help being deeply disturbed by Feiler's, Lloyd's, and Stonestreet's refusals to engage with the issue at hand—why do *Modern Family's* creators continue to insist that the portrayal of a gay couple with an adopted daughter is progressive but refuse to acknowledge that Mitchell and Cameron's relationship is not equivalent to Claire and Phil's? Why do we witness sexual encounters between Claire and Phil but not between Mitchell and Cameron? Moreover, why do we not witness sexual encounters between Jay and Gloria? Ultimately, why is Claire and Phil's sexual behavior the norm against which all other couples' behavior must be compared? Why is their sex the only sex that matters?

By repeatedly showing Claire and Phil's sexual behavior and hiding the other adult characters' sexual behavior, the series reinforces what Judith Butler calls "compulsory heterosexuality" (xxviii). Indeed, *Modern Family* participates in a system which, as Gayle Rubin contends, "permeate[s] . . . ideas that erotic variety is dangerous, unhealthy, depraved, and a menace to everything" ("Thinking" 280). That is to say, *Modern Family* normalizes middle-aged adult, consensual and marital sexual behavior, treating all other sexuality as abnormal, as something to be kept hidden behind closed doors. While, due to programming laws, which, as Rubin indicates make "it . . . legal for young people to see hideous depictions of violence, but not to see explicit pictures of genitalia"

("Thinking" 290), the series could never satisfy queer theorists' desire for art that "chafes against 'normalization'" (Edelman 6), the series could more satisfactorily represent non-heterosexual identities. The drive to present Cameron and Mitchell's sexuality more overtly seems particularly compelling in light of President Obama's recent overturning of the military's "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy and his embrace of gay marriage, as well as the U.S. Supreme Court's landmark decisions in 2013 making the Defense of Marriage Act and California's Proposition 8 unconstitutional and the 2015 Supreme Court ruling legalizing same-sex marriage in all fifty states. As the United States adopts a more progressive view of marriage, *Modern Family* almost seems to present its own "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy by refusing to portray Mitchell and Cameron in the same light as heterosexual couples.

    Cameron and Mitchell are consistently desexualized on the show; Claire and Phil, on the other hand, are free to engage in sexual behavior in a variety of ways. In the pilot episode, Luke gets his head stuck in the banister, and Phil has to extricate him. When he asks Claire where the baby oil is, she begins to say that it is on the nightstand in their bedroom and then, realizing her children can hear her, tells him he will have to find it ("Pilot"). Later, when the couple tries to create a romantic Valentine's evening by roleplaying at a hotel bar, Claire walks into the bar wearing nothing but a trench coat ("My Funky"). In yet another instance, Haley, Alex, and Luke walk in on their parents having sex on the morning of their anniversary. While Claire and her children are all humiliated by the situation, Phil treats it as perfectly normal ("Caught"). The message is pretty clear—consensual sex between married, heterosexual adults is normal and perfectly palatable to U.S. audiences. One viewer comments on this message in response to Vulture's article "Cam and Mitchell Kiss on *Modern Family:* Short and Sweet": "We wonder why four gay teens have committed suicide in the past three weeks when something as ordinary as a kiss between two characters playing a committed gay couple

on TV makes news. Meanwhile, how many straight couples were kissing
and more on TV last night, but it was all considered normal enough to
ignore" (NELSPHIGHBERG). In fact, viewers would find it strange today
not to see Claire and Phil engaging in sexual acts with one another, as the
portrayal of sexual behavior among heterosexual adults is a standard part
of the contemporary U.S. sitcom. However, sex acts between non-
heterosexual couples are still treated as aberrant, no matter how innocuous
they might seem to progressive viewers.

During the series premiere, Mitchell mentions that his father always
knocks loudly before walking into any room to avoid having to see
Mitchell and Cameron kissing because one time he accidentally did.
Cameron responds, "I wish my mother had that rule. Remember?"
("Pilot"), which seems to imply that Cameron's mother witnessed a sex
act the couple was engaged in. Other than this quick reference, Cameron
and Mitchell's sex life seems nonexistent. To defend the fact that we never
see Cameron and Mitchell's romantic or erotic behavior, the series's
creators devised a plan, carried out in the episode "The Kiss," wherein
Mitchell avoids "public displays of affection" according to Cameron.
Nonetheless, this move seems like a cheap ploy on the producers' part to
avoid actually dealing with the justifiable critiques leveled at the series for
never showing Mitchell and Cameron overtly engaging in sexual behavior.
Moreover, the emphasis on the word public implies that Mitchell has no
problem with private displays of affection, while even those displays
rarely occur on the show. As a contributor to the Facebook campaign "Let
Cam and Mitchell Kiss on *Modern Family!*" writes, "That doesn't explain
why we've never seen them kiss or be affectionate in the privacy of their
home. . . . Seems like that fear of same sex public displays of affection by
a character translates to the PORTRAYAL of same sex affection by those
running the show" (Javier). Why is it Mitchell, one of only two openly gay
characters on the show, who suffers from this fear of public displays of
affection? And why is it that Phil and Claire and Haley and Dylan, the two

stereotypical heterosexuals couples on the show do not have the same problem?

Series co-creator and producer Christopher Lloyd points out in one interview that "[w]e did an episode recently where Mitchell and Cameron were in bed together listening to their baby monitor. . . . And we thought for sure that this would get us in trouble, but there was none" (qtd. in Smith). What Lloyd fails to acknowledge here is that the image of Cameron and Mitchell in bed together in the scene he mentions is entirely chaste—there is nothing sexual about it, and it could easily be any two adults in any kind of relationship lying next to one another within the scene. While it is uncommon, then, to see a gay couple in bed together on television today, and, thus *Modern Family's* portrayal of this scene is progressive to that end, there is nothing overtly sexual about Mitchell and Cameron's relationship, and that is why fans who want the show to promote gay rights are so offended by its portrayal of this relationship.

Clearly, the series is actively resisting any overt displays of gay characters engaging in sexual behavior in order to maintain its fan base. Even in season five, when Mitchell and Cameron decide to get engaged after Proposition 8 is overturned in the state of California, both men kneel, hold out rings to each other, and say "Yes," but before we can see them embrace or kiss, as any couple on a television show normally would after getting engaged, the scene cuts away ("Suddenly"). Indeed, conservative fans of the show might be "offended" and turned off by the image of two men kissing on the show and might thus stop watching the show. And some conservative fans did have that reaction. Responding to the article " "'*Modern Family':* Cameron, Mitchell Share 'The Kiss,'" one fan writes,

> The kiss was not necessary. The show is certainly the funniest thing in a long time but now I have to give it up. I don't have to see gay men kiss to have my life in sync with the world. The gay relationship was very obvious and comfortable on this series, the kiss was too much for me and too much for primetime in my

opinion, and yes I have the right to a conservative opinion.
(nanagirl)

Evidently, the portrayal of what to most progressive fans was an innocuous and "understated" (JMAHAK) kiss between Mitchell and Cameron was highly offensive to more conservative fans like the one quoted here. Thus, *Modern Family's* creators clearly are subversive from certain audience members' perspectives. By only rarely showing the more romantic aspects of Cameron and Mitchell's relationship, the creators hope to subvert conservative notions of homosexuality as aberrant.

On the other hand, a significant portion of the series's fan base begged producers to address their concerns, going so far as to create a Facebook fan page titled "Let Cam & Mitchell Kiss on *Modern Family!*" In 2012 the page had been liked by 13,014 Facebook members, indicating that there was strong support for its aim. Unfortunately, the page has since been deactivated, though it clearly had an active presence prior to "The Kiss." Moreover, in response to the article "Facebook Campaign Seeks *Modern Family* Cameron-Mitchell Kiss," a fan comments, "This fact is really one of the reasons I cannot enjoy the show. They're supposed to be this happy couple and all they can do is share chaste hugs" (RUNYON). The fact that the series refuses to portray the romantic aspects of Mitchell and Cameron's relationship while simultaneously broadcasting Claire and Phil's exploits suggests that its producers are not really comfortable pushing boundaries when it comes to sexuality, regardless of fans' opinions on the matter. It seems pretty evident at this point that the series is more concerned with maintaining its fan base than with pushing boundaries. When Mitchell and Cameron finally do kiss, it is a quick peck on the lips in the background of a scene featuring nearly every character on the show; viewers who were not watching very carefully missed it, as demonstrated by the comments "I didn't even notice it when it happened" (DANIELF23) and "honestly I completely missed the kiss while watching last night. if it wasnt [sic] for this article I never would have known that

they actually did it" (JMAHAK). Clearly, the series wanted to appease (or shut up) these fans without actually dealing with the issue at hand. Kids watching the show might learn to see gay couples as "normal" and "equal" to straight couples, but gay children and teens watching the show clearly learn that their sexual identities are still marginal, still ultimately unacceptable within U.S. culture at large.

Literacy as Protest and Power

Literacy has a rich history as a form of protest and power in the United States, enabling individuals to draw widespread attention to important social issues. The advent of new and digital media has only made such forms of protest and discussion more widely available or accessible. Fans of popular television series like *Modern Family* have begun to realize the significance of such media in protesting issues of significant social import. The Facebook fan page dedicated to the "Cam and Mitchell kiss" received over 10,000 "likes" and the attention of numerous news media outlets. Clearly, this fan protest has had an impact. Of course, there is a question of how significant this fan page's impact has been. After all, series co-producer Steve Levitan announced at a BAFTA (British Academy of Film and Television Arts) event that he found the critiques of *Modern Family*'s portrayal of Cameron and Mitchell's relationship "unfortunate" as an explanation of the character's lack of displays of affection was "part of the natural development of the show" (qtd. in Guider). However, as I discussed earlier, fans were not buying this claim. *If* the plot was already in the works, why did *Modern Family*'s producers wait so long to announce it? Assuming that Levitan's claim is legitimate and the producers did intend from the outset to write Mitchell's fear of public displays of affection into the series, that does not negate the impact of this fan group on the production of the series. Clearly, Levitan, Lloyd, and the cast had some familiarity with the fan page and felt it necessary to

comment on it during interviews. Moreover, the fan page caught the attention of numerous media outlets and Mitchell and Cameron's kiss became a big news story when it finally happened on the show. Thus, whether these fans of *Modern Family* altered the Mitchell-Cameron plot line is ultimately irrelevant. What is more interesting and more significant is the fact that these fans became rightly dissatisfied with the portrayal of a gay couple on mainstream television and took to social networking media, utilizing literacy practices, to effect social change.

Despite the fact that the show clearly refuses to deal with the larger issue at hand—the treatment of gay adults in U.S. culture, it is important to consider the power of fan influence at work here. A relatively small group of people—13,014 in a world of seven billion—began an online campaign demanding that two gay characters on a popular television series be permitted to kiss, and they won. Thus, being a fan in the twenty-first century means something very different than it ever has in the past; it means having an influence on cultural products, having a voice in how those products are produced and disseminated. Fans' influence on *Modern Family's* portrayal of Mitchell and Cameron's relationship fulfills an earlier prediction of Henry Jenkins's, that "fans of certain cult television shows may gain greater influence over programming decisions in an [sic] the age of affective economics" (Convergence 62). *Modern Family* is by no means a "cult television show," as it is currently one of the most popular series on television; however, the rest of Jenkins's statement applies—*Modern Family* fans have, indeed, swayed certain developments within the series through their fan activism, whether that influence has been positive (in the case of forcing the series's producers to address the overt discrepancies between the treatment of gay and straight couples on the show) or negative (insofar as fear of conservative fans walking away from the show has prevented the show's producers from presenting Mitchell and Cameron's sexuality as normal). Moreover, it is particularly interesting that, in a society that constantly complains that young people

today "can't write" and are "bad readers," young viewers of a popular television series like *Modern Family* are utilizing literacy practices in order to engage with elements of popular culture they find problematic.

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Prisoners and Guards: Bob Dylan, George Jackson, and Popular Memory

THEODORE G. PETERSEN

To some, August 21, 1971, is a day in which an American citizen was assassinated by his own government. To others, August 21, 1971, is a day in which a homicidal radical was killed before he could kill others in a botched, deadly attempted prison escape. Either way, George Jackson, the radical Soledad Brother, was killed in the yard of San Quentin prison. Shortly after Jackson's death, several competing narratives emerged, pushed by several voices. One of those voices was rock singer Bob Dylan.

This article examines the competing narratives of this disputed and convoluted case that came from different sources, Dylan included. This article will not answer the factual questions surrounding this case. That is not the intent. Instead, this article examines the news coverage surrounding Jackson's death by the nation's newspaper of record, the *New York Time*s; a historically black newspaper, the *Chicago Defender*; a west-coast voice, the *Los Angeles Times*; and Dylan's musical obituary released shortly after Jackson's death. The result: Bob Dylan's song closely resembles the coverage by news organizations, most notably the *New York Times*. More importantly, Dylan's version of the story endures in collective and cultural memory, in part because of the artistic form of his "coverage" and because of the impact of his celebrity. This song is one more piece of evidence that shows that popular music—while often ignored or even feared by dominant cultures—can create powerful narratives that shape worldviews, preserve otherwise forgotten perspectives, merge cultures, and frame and sustain historical events.

Music as history

Several scholars have shown that folk, rock, and popular music are more than just entertainment. Music changes the way we remember the past. John A. Lomax was one of the first to recognize the role of popular or folk music as a form of writing history (xix). Scott and Forcucci document some of the important folk songs throughout American history to show how it can be retold entirely in song. Rubin argued that the nostalgia in country music shows that "cultural memory does not necessarily strive toward simple preservation," but creates a past that is idealized or demonized, both for rhetorical purposes (109). And this was not trivial; Rahn argued that for many young people, folk music created their cultural understanding of their country and the world (193).

This music communicates in a way that history books can't. For example Rodnitzky argues that the music of the 1960s is still the best way to understand the decade labeled, "the age of protest" (119). Smethurst uses Elvis Presley's "Hound Dog" as a way to explore race in the 1950s and the interconnectedness of black and white music. He argues the blues is an artifact for "cultural historians to examine the unstable matrix of race, ethnicity, class, the 'folk,' and the 'popular' that makes up American culture" (64).

Filene concluded that folk singers served as "cultural 'middlemen' who move between folk and popular culture" and play an important role in shaping our perceptions of history (5). In an essay on popular music and the civil rights movement, Garofalo argues that the *musical* changes in rock 'n' roll from 1954 through 1973 are more telling of what is happening in society than the *lyrical* changes (231).

The above literature supports the argument that music plays a role in our understanding of the past, but historian Robert Darnton argues that music has helped people understand the present, functioning as a form of journalism. Darnton examined the communication system of eighteenth-

century France where the government suppressed a free press. He found that scandalous novellas and songs were the main way to disseminate information the government might not want publicized (19). Songs were extremely effective because "in a society that remained largely illiterate, they provided a powerful means of transmitting messages" (19).

American studies scholar Lipsitz has contributed much to the understanding of the role of music in preserving cultural memory, including working class culture in postwar America and Chicano culture. He argues in *Time Passages*, "[W]hile no cultural form has a fixed political meaning, rock and roll music has been and continues to be a dialogic space, an arena where memories of the past serve to critique and change the present" (100). Lipsitz dedicated an entire book—*Footsteps in the Dark*—to the "hidden histories" documented in the music of the 1990s and 2000s, even when the artist had no intention of documenting history (viii). While Dylan couldn't have known that his lyrics to song would be near the top of Google search results for the term "George Jackson," he most likely knew that he was laying down a version of Jackson's death that would reach thousands of listeners.

Bob Dylan as a subject of scholarship

Bob Dylan has been one of the most written about cultural icons in American history, both academically and in popular culture. His poetic lyrics, his mysterious personality, and his traditional, yet innovative style have provided plenty of material for rhetorical scholars, popular music historians, and cultural studies researchers.

Dylan is paradoxically one of the most visible and reticent stars in popular music. Playing upwards of 100 shows a year and releasing new material regularly, Dylan stays accessible to his fans. But he doesn't want to talk about it. At his shows, he rarely acknowledges the audience and wants to keep his personal life to himself. He seems to resent academics

and journalists interpreting his lyrics and prying into his life. Dylan said in a *Rolling Stone* interview in 1978, "I'm the first person who will put it to you, and the last person who will explain it to you" (Cott 60). The literature on Dylan can be broken into two categories, scholarly and popular. In the academic realm, Dylan has been studied by philosophers, rhetoricians, musicologists, historians, and more.

Ricks, a distinguished professor at Boston University and former professor of poetry at Oxford University, wrote *Dylan's Visions of Sin*, a close analysis of Dylan's lyrics focusing on his presentation of the seven deadly sins and the seven heavenly virtues. Rhetorical critics Gonzalez and Makay described the rhetorical techniques Dylan uses during his Gospel music phase. Bowden examined two performances and interpretations of Dylan's "A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall"— one performed by Dylan in 1963 and one performed by Bryan Ferry 10 years later. Beebee also considered Dylan's "A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall." Beebee referred to this song as an "apocalyptic ballad" because the song closely resembles the English ballad "Lord Randall" and because of its apocalyptic imagery (18). Even Dylan's bootlegged recordings have been the subject of academic research (Lewis).

Dylan's life has been captured in many popular biographies and critical books. These books inform this study in a number of ways. Robert Shelton, Bob Spitz, Michael Gross and Robert Alexander, Clinton Heylin, Howard Sounes, and David Hajdu have all written biographies about different aspects of Dylan's life. By consulting these detailed accounts of Dylan's history, it becomes possible to place his work within the context of his career. In many cases, these biographies and popular works discuss how a song was written or where Dylan got his inspiration, in some cases making contradictory claims.

Well-known rock critic Greil Marcus has written two books dedicated to Dylan. Bob Dylan's memoir, *Chronicles: Volume One*, offers insight into the construction of his character. As a whole, the academic and

popular works about Dylan provide a well-rounded picture of the man behind these songs. Each work has strengths and weaknesses. Some have been more useful than others. But they have all been important in contextualizing Dylan's life.

Bob Dylan's career

The two men at the center of this saga seemed to live parallel lives that should never have intersected. Born just four months and less than 500 miles apart in 1941, Bob Dylan and George Jackson had wildly different childhoods. Dylan was born in Duluth, Minnesota, and eventually migrated east to New York. Jackson was born in Chicago and eventually migrated west to California. Dylan had a middle-class, middle-American childhood, enrolling at the University of Minnesota in 1959. About one year later, Jackson's tumultuous childhood in and out of youth detention centers ended when he was accused of stealing $70. For the next decade, Dylan went on to write some of the most influential folk and rock music to come from the 1960s. Jackson spent the decade in prison, writing letters that would become *Soledad Brother* and *Blood in My Eyes*, two books that greatly impacted black revolutionary thinking in America. The following sections briefly highlight Dylan's background, Jackson's life, and the commentary on Jackson's case.

The first part of Bob Dylan's career seemed to indicate how the rest of his career should go. He was supposed to do what Pete Seeger, Woody Guthrie, and Cisco Houston did, and what Joan Baez, Dave Van Ronk, and Phil Ochs would do, and spend the rest of his career pointing out the ills in society and suggesting ways to improve it. Dylan had other plans. *The Times They Are A-changin'* in 1964 contained some of Dylan's strongest "protest songs," such as "Only a Pawn in Their Game," "The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll," and "With God on Our Side." Later

that year, the follow-up record, *Another Side of Bob Dylan* (1964) signaled a striking change in his career.

This album began what appeared to be a shift in Dylan's work from the politically and socially conscious thought of his earlier recordings. *Another Side* begins with "All I Really Want to Do," in which Dylan sings, "I don't want to fake you out, / Take or shake or forsake you out, / I ain't lookin' for you to feel like me, / See like me or be like me. / All I really want to do / Is, baby, be friends with you."[1] Dylan pretty clearly isn't trying to be persuasive; he's trying to be friendly. The record finishes with "It Ain't Me, Babe," in which Dylan tells his lover he's not the one she's looking for. It's possible that he was singing to the entire folk community: find another prophet.

From then, he began a shift away from topically minded folk music toward rock 'n' roll. *Bringing It All Back Home*, released in 1965, represented his return to his first musical love. *Highway 61 Revisited*, released later that year, and 1966's *Blonde on Blonde* are rock 'n' roll masterpieces by someone trying to completely reinvent the genre. Following a brief hiatus after a motorcycle crash, Dylan turned back to the folksy sound with *John Wesley Harding* in 1967 and the country-influenced *Nashville Skyline* in 1969. The next year brought critically and commercially disappointing *Self Portrait* and its more successful follow-up, *New Morning*. Dylan's bright career, it seemed, had begun to fade. Many of the old folk guard were pointing to his apolitical music as a turn away from his strengths.

But on August 21, 1971, black revolutionary George Jackson was gunned down in prison. Shortly after hearing the news, Dylan penned "George Jackson," a song he wrote after reading a newspaper account of

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[1] All lyrics were taken from http://www.bobdylan.com. "All I Really Want to Do." Copyright © 1964 by Warner Bros. Inc.; renewed 1992 by Special Rider Music. All rights reserved. International copyright secured. Reprinted by permission.

Jackson's death on November 3, 1971 (Heylin 330). He recorded two versions of the song on November 4, a solo-acoustic version and a full-band version. About a week later, on November 12, Columbia Records released a single with each version on a side, preventing radio stations from playing a less political song. The quick turnaround was remarkable for the slow-moving recording industry. Many thought the old Dylan was back. In a 1972 *Rolling Stone* review, music critic Paul Nelson was cautiously optimistic: "[T]he old fire's there: he's playing guitar and harmonica and singing with new life — but I think it's a lovely one-shot without a context" (par. 24).

George Jackson's Life and Death

Jackson's life and death was tragic. Convicted for only three crimes in his life—all robbery—Jackson spent more than one third of his life locked up in prisons and jails (Williford). The last time Jackson was convicted of a crime was at the age of 19. He was given one year to life for stealing $70. He, along with the other two "Soledad Brothers," was accused of killing a prison guard in the Soledad Prison in 1970. Jackson's 17-year-old brother Jonathan died while reportedly trying to free San Quentin prisoners from a courtroom in 1970. Two hostages and the presiding judge were also killed, and UCLA philosophy professor Angela Davis was implicated in and later acquitted of the crime.

Jackson's death came August 21, 1971, during an attempted escape, the details of which are still disputed. Somehow Jackson appeared with a gun, freed several convicts from their prison cells, and killed three prison guards and two other prisoners. The *Los Angeles Times* reported that Jackson had been planning an escape for several weeks and that his attorney smuggled the gun into the prison. The original autopsy suggested that Jackson was killed from above, supporting the official story that he was trying to escape. A later autopsy reversed the path of the bullet, ruling

out the official account. Many scholars, including French theorist Michel Foucault, thought Jackson was assassinated and his entire incarceration was not for the crimes he committed, but for the political views he held. On August 23, 1971, *New York Times* reporter Earl Caldwell offered a eulogy for Jackson, writing that those who recognized the injustice of the court system argued: "'Something is wrong,' they would say, 'when a man pleads guilty to stealing $70 and spends 10 years in jail and still has no hope of getting out.'"

By the end of the 1960s, racial tensions across the nation were peaking. In 1968, Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated, sparking riots across the nation. In 1969, Fred Hampton, the leader of the Black Panther Party, was killed during a police raid on his home, which is widely considered an assassination. In 1970, Angela Davis was on the FBI Most Wanted List. By the time Jackson was killed, the United States had been bogged down in Vietnam, and mass protests were becoming common. Less than three weeks after Jackson's death in California, more than one thousand inmates took over the Attica Correctional Facility in western New York. Four days later, state troopers and guards violently took back the prison, leaving twenty-nine inmates and ten hostages dead. Jackson's death came in the midst of an unprecedented period of turbulence.

Analysis and commentary about George Jackson

Jackson's story highlighted many important issues, from race relations, to prison culture, to freedom of political expression. The story pointed to the radicalization of prison culture and the way prisoners were treated in penitentiaries. It pointed to the fact that the nonviolent, civil-disobedient activists of the 1950s and 1960s were giving way to the militant revolutionaries like Jackson, Davis, and the Black Panther Party, who recognized that they couldn't fix the system by working from within the

system. Jackson's case captured the interest of postmodern thinkers like Foucault and Jean Genet.

In a pamphlet titled "The Assassination of George Jackson," the Prison Information Group, led by Foucault, called Jackson's death a "political assassination" (140), saying that in America, assassination is a "form of political action" (142). The pamphlet, which was published only two days before Dylan's song came out, had two parts—one featuring interviews with Jackson to demonstrate his political philosophy and one featuring an analysis of American press coverage of his death to reveal the assassination conspiracy. The section about the press coverage stated: "A man whose account of his neighbor's death is half as incongruous as the story told by the director of San Quentin about Jackson's death would be immediately accused of the crime, but this will not happen to the director of San Quentin" (140).

Historian Lee Bernstein calls Jackson "a key participant in debates over incarceration, colonialism, and racism" who hasn't been properly recognized for his role in prison activism and education (310). Jo Durden-Smith's *Who Killed George Jackson?* reconstructs as many of the pieces of the puzzle as he could, though the result is inconclusive and his narrative confusing. Durden-Smith titles the three sections of the book, "History as Fiction," "History as Fact," and "History as Feeling," showcasing the subjective nature of historical recollection.

In his well-known collection of letters, *Soledad Brother*, Jackson writes that black American men who live past 18 years old are "conditioned to accept the inevitability of prison" (4). In *Blood in My Eyes*, a posthumously published collection of essays clarifying his views on communism, fascism, and revolution, Jackson wrote, "Total revolution must be aimed at the purposeful and absolute destruction of the state and all present institutions, the destruction carried out by the so-called psychopath, the outsider, whose only remedy is destruction of the system"

(102). Many concluded that Jackson's views, not his crimes, kept him in prison.

The competing narratives

Dylan biographer Heylin writes that Dylan first heard of Jackson's death by reading about it in a newspaper (330). In fact, Dylan said that he got ideas for some of his most famous topical songs from newspaper accounts. Before performing "The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll" at the Royal Albert Hall in London on May 10, 1965, Dylan said, "This is a true story. It comes from the newspapers. Nothing in this story's been changed except the words" (*Dont Look Back*). While it isn't clear which newspapers might have contributed to Dylan's knowledge of Jackson's death, my goal is to examine a variety of types of newspapers to compare Dylan's narrative with the narratives presented in the newspaper. To get a well-rounded picture of the press covered story, I examine the national newspaper of record, the *New York Times*; the *Chicago Defender,* a black newspaper, to represent a black perspective; and the *Los Angeles Times* to represent a west coast perspective. Original stories —found in microfilm archives or digital ProQuest databases—served as the raw data for the historical analysis. Each story provided historical facts, and also raw data for the thematic textual analysis that informed the conclusion of this paper. The result is a paper that looks backward, toward the facts as reporters found them, and looks forward, at the way historical information gets documented, stored, and remembered in popular culture.

A National Perspective: The New York Times.

The original report of Jackson's death in the *New York Times* came on the front page of the August 22, 1971, issue. The story referred to Jackson's murder charges and the death of his brother. At the time the story was

written, it wasn't clear who had killed whom, if Jackson was the killer or the victim. The story included a quote from the associate warden James W. L. Parks referring to the gunshots that came after the prison was secured: "If one of these men made a false move, he would have been dead and I wouldn't apologize. When you walk in and see your fellow officers in a pool of blood, it doesn't help your frame of mind."

A story toward the back of the August 22, 1971, issue retold Jackson's story, beginning with the prison incident that led to the so-called Soledad murders, Jackson's eminent murder trial, and the escape attempt. The story mentioned Jackson's armed robbery conviction, but neither story in that issue offered details about the extent of his crime. This story contextualized Jackson's story in the black power political movement, which had a strong base in American prisons.

The next day's issue had a front-page story from Reuters about the search for the origins of Jackson's weapon and a story providing more details about the prison deaths. That issue also included Caldwell's story that most closely resembled Bob Dylan's song. Caldwell's story discusses the "two standards" that blacks see in the judicial system. He writes, "They mention, too, that often the juries that convict Negro defendants are white, that the judges are white, that the prosecutors are white and that the arresting officers are most often white." Caldwell writes that Jackson was a symbol of the way blacks are treated in prison, but he was also a political prisoner, held for what he stood for, not what he did.

In an August 24, 1971, column, Tom Wicker described the injustice many blacks saw. He wrote that many are "aware that all is not as promised in the promised land." His description of Jackson's confrontation with the courts, who "knew nothing better to do with him than to send him to its harsh prisons, where he spent a third of his life," resembles Dylan's line, "Authorities they hate him / Because he was just too real." For both Dylan and Wicker, Jackson was the victim, not the

perpetrator, though Wicker recognizes the unlikelihood that the prison incident itself was set up to kill him.

In an August 25, 1971, editorial, the *New York Times* offered a slightly more critical take on Jackson's life and death. The editorial states, "The dead prisoner's family is entitled, in its grief, to believe whatever gives it comfort. For the rest of us it is no contribution to the national good—in this case or in the courthouse slayings for which Angela Davis awaits trial—to explain away acts of savagery as the inevitable reaction to social inequities." The editorial finishes, "The true social revolutionary's hope in this country is still in the life of the law, not the death of its guardians." One can almost hear Jackson's likely response: Living a "life of the law" would never bring about the social revolution that "true social revolutionaries" are demanding.

In an August 27, 1971, op-ed, former assistant attorney general Roger Wilkins elaborates on the inevitable violence in American prisons: "Death of prisoner and keeper alike are the natural consequences of state-sponsored savagery. If some men kill to prevent the theft of the goods of their store or their family jewels might others not also kill to prevent the theft of their lives and their spirits?"

A Black Perspective: The Chicago Defender.

The death of a radical black activist at the hands of the guards who were supposed to be protecting him would naturally be an important issue for a black newspaper like the *Chicago Defender*. The *Defender* indeed covered the story, but with the traditional journalistic restraint typically found in mainstream news organizations. The stories contained little editorializing or moralizing. According to a search conducted in the Black Studies Center digital archives, the first editorial on Jackson's death didn't appear until September 29, 1971, more than a month after the slaying.

The first story in the *Chicago Defender* starts with a pretty soft lede for such a dramatic story: "George Jackson, born on Chicago's south side,

would have been 30 years old one month from today. Instead, he died in a hail of bullets during Saturday's aborted escape from the state's maximum security prison here." The article continues by retelling Jackson's biography, his confrontations with the law, and his role as a "hero to many radicals." The details of the attempted prison break don't appear until the fifteenth paragraph of the story.

The August 24, 1971, issue included a story from the United Press Service quoting Jackson's mother and father stating that their son was murdered in an assassination plot. Jackson's father, Lester Jackson, said, "I have no more sons. They have killed the last one now." The issue also had extensive stories looking at the unanswered questions in the case and describing the search for the lawyer who had supposedly visited Jackson right before the attempted jailbreak.

The next day, more details emerged, such as Jackson's supposed attempt to hide the gun in his hair and a lengthy story on Stephen Mitchell Bingham, the lawyer suspected as the supplier of the gun. An August 28, 1971, story described the "melee" that erupted at a hearing for the two remaining "Soledad brothers," who were accused of murdering a prison guard.

A handful of stories referred to Jackson in the *Chicago Defender* between August 29, 1971, and September 21, 1971, but those stories focused on issues like a new journal about injustice, Angela Davis' trial, and educating black children. On September 22, 1971, a United Press International story about a new autopsy report contradicted the original explanation. Essentially, the path of the bullet was reversed. The entrance wound, originally reported as the top of Jackson's head, was actually the exit wound. The conclusion showed that Jackson could not have been shot from the 20-foot tower as originally reported. An accompanying story ran a loud headline that included an exclamation point, rarely seen in news writing: "George Jackson shot in back!" The story shows that the report

gives strength to the family's theory that Jackson was set up and assassinated.

An editorial on Jackson's death finally appeared in the September 29, 1971, issue of the *Chicago Defender*. It reads:

> It has become quite possible for blacks of all political persuasion to take up the cause of a George Jackson, to see in him the rape of black manhood, to view him not as a criminal, as officialdom would have them do, but as a victim of a system that twisted and tortured him and in the end destroyed him.

> Jackson sinned against society and society rightly punished him. But in the punishment there was an element of vindictiveness that many blacks believed stemmed not so much from the nature of the crime for which he was convicted as it did from his radicalism.

In sum, the coverage of Jackson's death in the month following his death was unbiased and tame. The headlines were conservative, save for the exclamation point; the stories were unbiased; and the reporting focused on the facts. An explanation for the relatively straight reporting is that many of the stories were United Press International stories. The reporters were not necessarily *Defender* reporters. Another explanation could be that the paper wanted to distance itself from the Jackson's radical politics, potentially destroying any credibility the *Defender* held. An unabashed accusation of the government of assassinating Jackson might have been seen as unabashed support of Jackson's politics. While those speculations might not be the only explanations, the *Defender's* coverage seemed to be the least similar to Dylan's version.

A West Coast Perspective: The Los Angeles Times.

The *Los Angeles Times* ran two stories about Jackson the day after he was killed. The first story reported the killing and all the details made available

at the time, many from Associate Warden Park. Park clearly places the blame for the death when he said, "This talk of revolution by dilettantes outside the prison does a lot of harm. They aren't here getting killed. It's also a result of all this talk of killing the pigs."

The second story provided a little more background on Jackson's life and politics. This story reported that Jackson spent more than a third of his life behind bars, mostly for the $70 robbery. He reported that Jackson's prison life was "dedicated to revolution" and that he studied Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Huey Newton, Nikolai Lenin and other radical thinkers. The story summarized Jackson's symbolism concisely: "When Jackson died Saturday at San Quentin State Prison, he was a hero to many radicals but the epitome of the troublesome convict to prison authorities all over the state."

The stories on August 23 and 24, 1971, provided more details into the case, but nothing significantly more than the *New York Times* or the *Chicago Defender*. The article on August 23 reported the search for the lawyer who was suspected of providing Jackson with the gun. The story on August 24 provided a timeline of the incident, as described by Associate Warden Park.

The August 25, 1971, issue of the *Los Angeles Times* included an interesting story from the Associated Press about a widow of one of the fallen San Quentin Prison guards. She said, "Every article we've picked up glorifies Jackson as a political prisoner. But nobody seems to care about the officers." Jackson's life was celebrated by many, but his death caused great tragedy for the victims' families. This was lost in much of the press coverage.

The reporting in the *Los Angeles Times*, like the *Chicago Defender*, wasn't significantly different from what appeared in the *New York Times*. In this case, changes in location, perspective, and audience didn't seem to have the significant effects found on the Emmett Till case 16 years earlier, where the southern reporting was drastically different from the northern

perspective. A possible explanation is that as the civil rights movement gained momentum, the language of the press reflected that, becoming more homogenous.

    Bob Dylan's version of Jackson's death.

Dylan biographer Heylin noted the speculation many had about Dylan's sincerity, saying he wrote the song just to get people from the "left" off of his back (330-331). And the poor sales of the record suggest "that Dylan was not the only one for whom such political statements were passé" (331).

    The song follows a simple structure: a four-line verse with the second and fourth lines rhyming. The chorus after every verse is the same: "Lord, Lord, / They cut George Jackson down. / Lord, Lord, / They laid him in the ground."[2] Backup singers join Dylan on the chorus. Between each verse is a harmonica solo. The arrangement is simple: guitar, bass, and tambourine clap on the two and four of each measure. Piano and steel pedal come in and out of the song. The song has a strolling, happy-go-lucky vibe that belies the dark topic and lyrics. Dylan finishes the last verse a little over three minutes into the song, but the song goes on for two more minutes, repeating the chorus eight times before the song fades out. The chords follow the same I-V-IV-minor-ii chord progression throughout the song, with a slight variation at the end of the chorus where it returns to the I-chord instead of the minor-ii chord. Lyrically and musically, it pales compared to many of the songs in Dylan's catalogue. The second side of the single contained the acoustic version—just guitar and harmonica—that had a more somber feel.

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[2] All lyrics were taken from http://www.bobdylan.com. "George Jackson." Copyright © 1971 by Ram's Horn Music; renewed 1999 by Ram's Horn Music. All rights reserved. International copyright secured. Reprinted by permission.

In the first verse of the song, Dylan describes tears in his bed at the news of the death of a man "I really loved." There is no evidence that Dylan even met the man, much less truly "loved" him. The song begins with that seemingly insincere statement. Regardless, Dylan clearly concludes that Jackson was murdered. Jackson didn't die; he was killed. "Shot him through the head," he sings. It's not clear who the "they" are in Dylan's version, but in many conspiracy theory stories, the "they" is often unknown.

The second verse of Dylan's song is a pretty accurate description of Jackson's criminal history. He was sent to prison for a $70 robbery. They "closed the door behind him / and they threw away the key." Much of the evidence points to Jackson's being a political prisoner. Jackson's crime wasn't egregious or violent. His behavior in prison was fine. Dylan, like many other writers and journalists, concluded that Jackson was in jail because of his radical political views. For a man who has written some of the most iconic songs of the last 50 years, Dylan inserted a cliché—"And they threw away the key." Jackson was not getting out of prison, Dylan noted, even though he didn't even steal enough to buy a television. The cliché, and a few more that are to follow, indicate that Dylan's heart wasn't in this song, especially compared with his clever writing about Hattie Carroll and Medgar Edgars less than 10 years earlier.

In the third verse, Dylan's lyrics begin to take on the voice of the radical politics that Jackson was promoting. He sings that Jackson "wouldn't take shit from no one / He wouldn't bow down or kneel." This is lyrical shift for Dylan. He had always been a powerful lyricist, writing songs that moved people in many ways. From "Blowin' in the Wind" to "Like a Rolling Stone," Dylan knew how to manipulate the English language to its greatest impact. But this song is one of the first times Dylan uses a word like "shit." As the civil rights movement became angrier and more aggressive, as demonstrated by militants like Jackson, the Black Panther Party, and Stokely Carmichael, Dylan's music became

angrier and more aggressive, culminating in Dylan's case for Rubin Carter's innocence in "Hurricane," a song that grabs listeners by their collars and slams them against a wall. Compared to the sympathetic descriptions of Hattie Carroll and the naive and youthfully hopeful tone of Emmett Till, these lyrics have a strikingly different tone. The verse finishes with the perplexing couplet, "Authorities, they hated him / Because he was just too real." While authorities probably did hate him, it is unclear what it means to be "too real" or why that would be a cause for hatred.

The next verse continues this theme. Dylan describes the prison guards who hate him and how they watch him from above. He sings, "But they were frightened of his power / They were scared of his love." These lines, including the last two from the previous verse, must represent the response to Jackson's radical politics. *Soledad Brother*, his collection of prison letters, became an important political text. His power and love that so scared the authorities didn't come from weapons, but from words. Dylan never directly addresses Jackson's politics. Instead, he describes Jackson as someone with power and love, who doesn't take shit and doesn't bow down.

Dylan finishes the otherwise forgettable song with a memorable verse. He sings, "Sometimes I think this whole world / Is one big prison yard. / Some of us are prisoners / The rest of us are guards."[3] Dylan's line brings to mind the separation referred to between those with power and those without, those who control the means of production and those who don't, those on the inside of the prison bars and those on the outside. Jackson literally spent more than a third of his life as a prisoner, but Dylan argues that he was always a prisoner. The color of his skin and the amount of

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[3] Dylan recorded two versions of the song and two variations on the lyrics. The acoustic version, which is archived on http://www.bobdylan.com, is quoted here. The full band version is "Some of us are prisoners / Some of us are guards." The first version includes all, while the second version leaves room for people who are neither prisoners nor guards.

money in his bank account ensured his prisoner status. Those fortunate enough to take the role of guards, Dylan seems to say, are simply lucky.

It's dangerous to assign motivations to historical actions, but this entire song lacks sincerity: the clichés, the vague phrases, and the tears in bed all point to Dylan not taking this song as seriously as he did with some of his other topical pieces. When he wrote in "The Death of Emmett Till" in 1962, Dylan was a nobody, looking to find a story that might make him a somebody. That song fell flat, but Dylan seemed to grow from writing it. When Dylan wrote "The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll" in 1964, he was a somebody, and he powerfully told the story of a nobody. Fifty years after Carroll's death and that song can still give listeners goose bumps. But Dylan's musical obituary for George Jackson was different. He was a superstar, maybe going through a rough patch in his career. And Jackson was not a nobody; he was in many ways a public figure. The story of Jackson's short life and violent death—unlike that of Hattie Carroll's— would have lived on with or without Dylan's song.

Conclusion: Song as Obituary

Stories about death take a particular importance in our society. Communication scholar Hume argues in her analysis of American obituaries, "[O]bituaries share 'death stories' of people who have never met, making individual and generational memories an element of public consciousness through the mass media" (16). But Hume argues that they even do more than that.

Hume's study revealed four common elements of American newspaper obituaries: "name and occupation of the deceased, cause of death, personal attributes of the deceased, and funeral arrangements" (23). Not all of these elements were there for every obituary, as sometimes the cause of death was unimportant or the funeral arrangements were to remain private. Hume found that as American culture changed, the obituaries reflected

these changes. Hence, she writes, "Obituaries may help distribute a type of ideology to their mass audiences" (22).

Dylan's obituary for George Jackson came quickly after he died. Jackson died on August 21, 1971, and according to Heylin, Dylan wrote the song on November 3, 1971, after reading of Jackson's death in a newspaper and was in the studio the next day to record.[4] Dylan's song was only 127 words long, counting the chorus only once, considerably shorter than most newspaper obituaries. But Dylan fulfills three of the four common elements Hume listed, not including the funeral arrangement for obvious reasons.

Dylan clearly provides the name and describes his occupation. The name "George Jackson" appears after all five verses. And while he doesn't provide detail into Jackson's "occupation," there is little to say considering he had been behind bars since he was 19 years old. Rather, Dylan depicts a man who would be a life-time prisoner when he sings, "Closed the door behind him / And they threw away the key." While not an occupation, Jackson's life work was clear. Dylan also described Jackson's cause of death in the first verse of the song, "They killed a man I really love / Shot him through the head." The cause of death? Murder.

Dylan's description of Jackson's attributes is not quite like the "loving mother" or "avid golfer" that many obituaries contain. But a picture of who this man was emerges. Dylan says that Jackson wouldn't take any shit or bow down or kneel to anyone. He was hated "because he was just too real." Dylan said the prison guards were scared of his "power" and "love." The image of Jackson that appears is a man, not the violent

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[4] The timing of this, as laid out by Heylin, seems suspect, as one wonders why it took Dylan more than two months to read about Jackson's death. The news coverage of the botched escape attempt was somewhat heavy. However, no other Dylan biographers contract Heylin's timeline.

militant revolutionary, but a persuasive, thoughtful, loving, and powerful man.

Dylan's version most closely resembled the early reports in the *New York Times*, questioning the truth of the "official reports" and suggesting that Jackson was a political prisoner and a victim of an assassination plot. Caldwell's story, which appeared two days after Jackson was killed, said that blacks "assert that prisons are filled with blacks and that guards and administrators and parole authorities are white." This line resembles Dylan's closing line, "Some of us are prisoners / The rest of us are guards."

A *New York Times* editorial on August 24, 1971, reads, "A talented writer, a sensitive man, a potential leader and political thinker of great persuasiveness, George Jackson was destroyed long before he was killed at San Quentin." Both Caldwell's piece and this editorial spoke kindly of a man who would have been tried for murdering a prison guard had he not been killed and whose supposed prison-escape attempt resulted in the death of two other inmates and three more guards. Unlike with the newspaper coverage of Emmett Till and Hattie Carroll—two other events Dylan sang about—Dylan probably approved of the sympathetic coverage of Jackson's death.

The editorial in the *Times* reads, "He was, that is, not merely a victim of racism, although he was certainly that. He was a victim, too, of the poverty and hunger and disadvantages that are not the lot of blacks alone in this richest country on earth." The *New York Times* editorial writers and Bob Dylan recognized that Jackson's death should not be considered just another tragic prison death, but that his life needs to be examined to understand the politics of poverty, race, and disadvantage.

Dylan didn't give the details in "George Jackson" that he gave in other topical song such as "The Death of Emmett Till," "The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll," or "Hurricane." He really only provided two verifiable facts—that Jackson was arrest for a $70 robbery and that he was killed.

Like an obituary, Dylan didn't recap the details of the death, but celebrated the life. Jackson's life is part of the struggle that began in earnest with *Brown versus the Board of Education*, the lynching of Emmett Till, and Rosa Parks and the Montgomery Bus Boycott. The struggle for equal treatment—politically, legally, economically—continued. While Dylan moved away from this movement musically, he continued to support causes that he thought were important, as demonstrated by his support of the supposed wrongfully convicted boxer, Rubin "Hurricane" Carter.

But to leave this song in the same realm as a newspaper clipping probably misses the impact a song like this can have. Not to downplay the importance of good journalism or the personal value loved ones find in an obituary, the shelf life of a newspaper clipping is relatively limited. But Dylan's song lives on, in the grooves of old vinyl records, in the ones and zeros of CDs, and in the ether of online music distribution. And Dylan's version of the event counts. A Google search for George Jackson, conducted on August 7, 2014, brought up about 38 million results. The first was to Wikipedia. The eighth website listed was a link to Bob Dylan's lyrics archive. This song has been covered by professional musicians and YouTube amateurs. Dylan's "on-off" single that didn't sell well on.

In *The Past is a Foreign Country,* Lowenthal argued that one of the biggest differences between history and memory is that memory does seek out new facts, and history is constantly looking for new interpretations and meanings (214). History is actively revised; memory is unintentionally revised. Bob Dylan's song contributes more to how we *remember* these events than to the *history* of the events. People may not remember the balanced coverage of the story by the newspapers or the rigorous academic historical studies on his death. But people can remember Dylan's catchy, repeated chorus, "Lord, Lord, they cut George Jackson down. / Lord, Lord, they laid him in the ground." Dylan's commemoration

of Jackson might not be accurate, comprehensive, or trustworthy, but that's moot. His version is memorable.

Why do we remember his version? Not because he's a more trusted source, although to some he might be. And not because he was closer to the scene or offered an insight others didn't. We remember it for the same reason the eighteenth-century French passed poems and songs as Darnton chronicled, and for the same reason Lomax, Forcucci, and Scott recorded and documented the folk songs passed down through generations. We remember Dylan's version because form matters, because the way we write or record something or the medium we transmit something changes the way others receive and interpret it, and because making a message beautiful makes it last. Even though this song is not Dylan's best, it is still a Dylan song. It matters because he matters. It matters because pop and rock songs are not trivial elements of popular culture, but are time capsules that were formed by the past, that depict the present, and that inform the future. Through Google search results and YouTube covers, Dylan's song continues to shape popular understanding of George Jackson's death in a way the *Los Angeles Times* or the *New York Times* never will.

Appendix

Bob Dylan's "George Jackson"

I woke up this mornin',
There were tears in my bed.
They killed a man I really loved
Shot him through the head.

Lord, Lord, They cut George Jackson down.
Lord, Lord, They laid him in the ground.

Sent him off to prison
For a seventy-dollar robbery.
Closed the door behind him
And they threw away the key.

Lord, Lord, They cut George Jackson down.
Lord, Lord, They laid him in the ground.

He wouldn't take shit from no one
He wouldn't bow down or kneel.
Authorities, they hated him
Because he was just too real.

Lord, Lord, They cut George Jackson down.
Lord, Lord, They laid him in the ground.

Prison guards, they cursed him
As they watched him from above
But they were frightened of his power
They were scared of his love.

Lord, Lord, So they cut George Jackson down.
Lord, Lord, They laid him in the ground.

Sometimes I think this whole world
Is one big prison yard.
Some of us are prisoners
The rest of us are guards.

Lord, Lord, They cut George Jackson down.
Lord, Lord, They laid him in the ground

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Interactivity in Contemporary Gothic Horror Cinema

MARIA BEVILLE

David Punter and Glennis Byron put forward an important question in relation to the monsters of postmodernism and what came after when they asked 'Can ghosts of ghosts abject otherness?' (159) Repeating this insightful question in the contemporary context of our transmedial culture, I would suggest that in order to find an accurate response, we must consider the function of the monster and of horror more broadly in the context of the obsessive textual sampling and hypertextuality that appears to define new Gothic trends which proliferate across multiple media. In this new context, does the object of fear which is so important to the Gothic, lose its power over the subject due to our awareness of and contribution to its existence as a cultural product? Does the monster lose its capacity to scare audiences who grew up with 'Leatherface' and now look fondly upon his horrific visage with nostalgia and even delight? Certainly in the case of Joss Whedon and Drew Goddard's *The Cabin in the Woods* (2011) – a horror film replete with postmodern literary and filmic features – most of the monsters are, ultimately, easily managed and defeated. The surviving teenagers know quite well how to deal with their demonic pursuers owing to almost complete knowledge of the modern horror genre. Arguably, the real threat in the film, and the most genuine source of terror, is not the monsters in pursuit of the teens, but those behind the surveillance operation that brings murder and destruction on the group out of self-interest and for their own entertainment – interestingly, those with whom we share point of view. In the new media

context of the film, the Gothic discourse of Otherness manifested in the concept of the monster seems to have shifted. The new media/technological paradigm that includes practices common to social media and online gaming brings about new opportunities for fear and nostalgia in Gothic works. *The Cabin in the Woods* demonstrates awareness of this and its self-conscious engagement with the Gothic horror genre will be explored here in relation to this self-reflexivity.

Along very similar lines, popular Gothic cinematic forms have become increasingly interactive in recent years. Much contemporary horror cinema can be seen to involve hypertextual processes such as literary sampling and mash-up, which function to remediate Gothic aesthetics and push the Gothic in new and challenging directions. A list of Gothic cinematic texts that demonstrate such trends would include, alongside *The Cabin in the Woods*, *Tucker and Dale vs Evil (2010)*, *John Dies at the End* (2012) and *Evil Dead* (2013). This paper will propose that these are films which plunder the canon of Gothic and horror film and literature, not for the sake of Gothic parody or pastiche, but in order to construct themselves as new hypertextual[1] Gothic forms. It will argue, through an analysis of *The Cabin in the Woods* in particular, that such films evidence a continuation of the palimpsestuous re-writing and overwriting that has for so long defined the Gothic mode in a popular culture context; a practice that has long been (and that continues today) to be driven by genre convention and fan culture.

The manner in which these films interactively engage with earlier formats of Gothic horror through homage, riposte, repetition, and rejection will be the focus here. I will argue that the echoes and repetitions that characterize the films differ significantly from those found in earlier Gothic horror cinema in that focus is placed on aesthetics rather than hermeneutics through the simultaneous horror and pleasure (of recognition) that the films ultimately work to evoke. In doing so, it will be

important to consider contemporary horror cinema[1], its current state, and its engagement with both the genre of Gothic horror and recent trends in online culture. These considerations will be the foundation for my point that the transmedial aesthetics of contemporary Gothic horror cinema respond to cultural shifts that tally with the increasing mediatisation of culture. Equally, they will reveal the way in which the Gothic has undertaken new directions as part of ongoing literary and filmic expansion beyond the remit of postmodernism both textually and theoretically.

Horror cinema and horror fandom in the twenty-first century

Horror cinema in the last number of years, and in particular since the expansion of what is often referred to as the social media revolution, has undergone a number of significant changes. On-demand internet streaming of films and other media has allowed for audiences to become increasingly selective and to gain access to film content that may otherwise have only been available on limited release. In this context, it is interesting that the most watched horror films on Netflix, which currently lists over 700 films as part of the horror genre for streaming, include films such as *Troll Hunter* (2010), *Tucker and Dale vs Evil* (2010), *Pontypool* (2008), *Funny Games* (2007), *Evil Dead* (2013), and *The Cabin in the Woods* (2011). Significantly, these are films that can be linked together by the fact that they are driven by a rigorous self-consciousness and dedicated to a culture of referencing other horror intertexts. Netflix proves an extremely useful source for those of us researching contemporary film and television. With its own extremely reliable system of collecting data on its users and their

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[1] Hypertextuality is used here with direct reference to the theories of Gerard Genette in relation to transgeneric practice in which adaptation takes place. It outlines the relation between a text and another text or genre on which it is based, but which it ultimately transforms, modifies, or extends.

preferences, the company can monitor when and where products are viewed, by whom, and even when films and shows are paused and discontinued. With over 44million streaming customers worldwide, Netflix's use of data collection allows them to discern what users want and to cater for the needs of niche and fan users. Alexis Madrigal argues that this has allowed for a reversal of Hollywood marketing that opens up the market to the audience (2014). With this in mind, it is interesting that among the most watched films in the horror genre, those films considered to be the 'genuine frighteners', are underrepresented - by this I mean films committed to generating an aesthetics of fear and singular engagement in their audiences - like *Paranormal Activity*(2007-), *The Shining*(1980), *The Thing* (1982)*,* and *Saw*(2004)[2].This appears to suggest a shift in popular horror cinema in the last number of years wherein self-referential horror and horror that responds acutely to audience knowledge of genre content, has become more prevalent. In order to try to account for this shift to some degree, it is worth considering wider cultural trends in the same period.

In 2005 online culture underwent an important change and transformed from a medium predominantly oriented toward publishing, to a medium driven by communication and user generated content. Advancing from this in the following years, the development of free web platforms, inexpensive software, and the availability of professional quality media devices such as HD video cameras were the conditions present that enabled a certain amount of democratization in the film and music industries. While these changes are still very much ongoing, we can at this point, consider the enduring impact of huge cultural change that has been brought about by recent media developments and the increasing cultural relevance of audience generated content. Some would argue that

[2]For more on Netflix statistics relating to horror, please refer to *The Movie Review Query Engine*: http://www.mrqe.com/lists/netflix100

the impact of these developments is much greater than it seems and that it is not just culture and the way that art and media products are generated that has changed, but alongside these things, everyday life has also altered significantly. Since the majority of objects that we use daily are, both mass-produced and technological, everyday life is, in itself, to a certain extent, now a media product. This changes our behaviour as media consumers and producers. This opinion is put forward by Lev Manovich. In his essay, 'The Practice of Everyday (Media) Life: From Mass Consumption to Mass Cultural Production?', Manovich discusses, through the theories of Michel de Certeau, the manner in which we negotiate and renegotiate our way through the structures and strategies that are already in place from traditional media institutions. Customisation is the new strategy, or tactic, for the consumer/ producer (322). Although Manovich does not engage in any analysis of the resultant cultural products or strategies themselves, we can see a perfect example of his point in emerging bespoke cultural practices and trends in fan culture and developments in fanfiction in particular, where the broader notion of design for customization seems to have been co-opted into the area of popular fiction and its remediation.

New Gothic writing strategies in this forum emerge in response to what is acknowledged in fan culture studies as 'acquired fan knowledge' (Hills 133)[3]. These strategies engage with key aspects of fandom, including desire, repetition, and identification (with the texts, but equally with the fan group in which a sense of belonging is created). From this situation, new reading strategies also develop, and in turn, new sub-genres of the Gothic arise in their own right; defined by fluidity, fantasy, and fanaticism. This is acutely evident in contemporary trends in horror

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[3]Matt Hills, in his book Fan Cultures, also importantly highlights the significance of the endlessly deferred narrative in texts that are aware of acquired fan knowledge as a condition for the fostering of extra-textual content in fan culture contexts (133).

cinema. The participative strategies which are generated through Gothic horror fandoms and the general popularity of horror texts since the seventies has resulted in a large number of horror films and television series that respond to the acquired fan knowledge of their viewers and demonstrate an open awareness of the creative potential of fan agency. Henry Jenkins, writing on 'textual poaching'[4], discusses fan culture in relation to the dynamics of those texts that acknowledge the influence of fans, but which also continue to work to contain them (xvii). He highlights the importance of fan agency in the development of genre and of particular film and television franchises, noting the importance of textual self-consciousness.

Arguably, this perspective on new media cultures is linked to changes in literary and filmic practice since the emergence of postmodernism when the reader, author, and text entered a new relationship whereby they became intimately dependent on each other. Early postmodern critics, such as Roland Barthes, suggested the birth of a new kind of reader in the latter half of the twentieth century that was prompted by changes in mass culture and late capitalism, one that interacts with the text so much so that the author and the text lose a large portion of 'authority' (Barthes 142).Alongside the particular cultural conditions of late capitalism, awareness of these popular postmodern theories and ideas drove the trend of increasing self-consciousness in popular fiction and film. This has extended so broadly in popular culture today that a wide range of popular texts now operate as 'meta' texts; guided by intertextuality, self-referencing and pastiche on a wide range of levels. Acknowledging this, it is probable that the social media explosion of the last ten years has again produced a new kind of reader and a new kind of fan in popular culture contexts; one that is born out of developments in and reactions to

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[4]Jenkins concept of textual poaching comes from Michel de Certeau's original considerations of the idea in The Practice of Everyday Life (1984).

postmodernism, and also to online and transmedial reading strategies and practices.

In a culture where downloading music and film allows for the emergence of niche and cult markets where the consumer/reader is free to choose from a vast array of styles and genres, we find that new texts that work within genre frameworks such as Gothic horror have to address a very different kind of audience. We see this in contemporary trends in fanfiction writing, and in keeping with the focus of this paper, in fanfiction that identifies itself in relation to Gothic horror. Interestingly, in the arena of fanfiction, the majority of Gothic horror writing is produced by young fans and re-crafts fantasy worlds where angsty teenage writers can flesh out their repressed sexual desires and identities. What is interesting about fanfiction, however, is less the content of the literature and more the broader cultural change that it reveals, especially as the publishing industry itself responds to such change by mimicking the strategies of its consumers.[5]

Horror Fan Agency and the Cabin Horror Paradigm

Paralleling changes in the institutions/ industries that govern cultural production in a new media age are interrelated changes in reading and consumption trends. Together these bolster the development of emergent aesthetics. This is referred to as participatory culture by Jenkins, who defines the term along a number of lines, highlighting the importance of certain conditions in participatory culture; in particular that it has few limits to artistic expression and that it is defined by the idea of creation for

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[5] For example, a significant proportion of the best-selling popular fiction novels of the last number of years started out as fanfiction, the 'Fifty Shades of Grey' novels of E.L James being a perfect case in point, beginning as they did, as Twilight fan writing.

sharing with a peer group which values a wide range of personal contributions. These conditions create unique cultural environments that are driven by social connection and group membership which foster the production of focused cultural texts.

In terms of genre, while Jenkins is perhaps more focused on twentieth century sci-fi cult classics such as *Star Trek*, it is worth noting that in this area, Gothic horror has also been massively popular with fan groups, perhaps due to the ease of replicating the aesthetics of Gothic literary and filmic style, but also perhaps due to the ease with which Gothic can be used to reflect and to express the anxieties frequently felt by the consumers-turned-creators of these cultural products. Gothic horror fandom and the general popularity of horror texts since the nineteen seventies, has resulted in a large number of horror films and television series that respond to the acquired fan knowledge of their viewers and demonstrate an open awareness of the creative potential of fan agency and this claim does not apply to just horror film franchises and cult horror films. It is also evidenced in the horror remake trends of the 1980's which brought us reworked classics such as *The Thing* (1982) and *The Blob* (1988). We see it too, in the expansion of vampire cinema during the nineties, when the 'vampire flick' became a genre of its own through films like and *The Lost Boys* (1987), *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1992), and *Interview With a Vampire* (1994), all of which had a wide audience and fan appeal.

In recent years, the creative potential of fan agency has reached new heights with the aid of social media which has allowed fans to petition for changes in popular film and television series. The online petition to bring back Andrea in season four of *The Walking Dead* (2010-) and the ongoing competition between fans of *Dr. Who* (2005-), again online, to name new characters and concepts in the show, testify to expanding industry recognition of fan agency aided by online culture and changes in consumer behavior. Perhaps one of the implications of this growing

powerful fan agency in relation to horror cinema is that recent horror cinema appears to respond more to fans' nostalgia and unique fan knowledge, than it does to artistic notions of creative originality. Those films that we watched collectively as teenagers, and films like them, seem to be more successful than the modern remakes, and more engaging than efforts at generating a new kind of scare in horror cinema. Whedon and Goddard, in making *The Cabin in the Woods* seem to have harnessed this new potential for horror cinema. In realizing that they could never please the horror fan audience with a film that was either a remake, or a new horror concept, they offered a film defined by that very tension between desire for originality and nostalgia for the classic horror.

Reading contemporary popular horror cinema as a correlative of Gothic fanfiction, and accepting both as intimately linked to developments in transmedial cultural practice can allow us to understand recent trends in horror cinema and the manner in which the genre has become increasingly interactive. In much recent horror cinema, the tenets of Gothic horror as we know them are remediated with a particular agenda – one that intends to disrupt the notion of a coherent narrative, and revels in superficiality, but which also offers its characters the chance to break out of their stock types. Of this type of film, the 'cabin movie' seems to dominate as an extremely popular genre. The success of cabin horror films like *Evil Dead* (1981), *Antichrist*(2009), *Friday 13th* (1980), *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974), and *Dale and Tucker vs Evil* (2010), affirms this. The cabin scenario in horror cinema is one that is much loved by horror aficionados and easily recognizable to most horror audiences. Its repetition across many levels of horror, from serious to spoof, implies the reliability of the trope, which perhaps comes from its fairy-tale origins (one thinks of little red riding hood and equally, goldilocks, both of whom have horrific encounters in small houses following a journey through the forest). In *The Cabin in the Woods*, the full potential of the cabin scenario and its and its contemporary cultural relevance are explored by Whedon and Goddard.

What results is a horror story that functions on a multi-lateral plane of engagement with its viewers. It develops within its own textual parameters, but only through interaction with audience and fan knowledge, which is enhanced by direct reference to other horror narratives.

The Cabin in the Woods

The Cabin in the Woods is an open pastiche of the modern horror film, and somehow manages to echo and reference almost every monster imagined by the popular horror genre in the last sixty years. These monsters are all reborn in a film which self-consciously repeats traditional horror narratives and their standard characters. Its main thrust is formed through key concepts such as recognition, knowingness, and nostalgia, as evidenced toward the end of the film in the series of glass elevators which contain various monster types ready to be unleashed to wreak havoc on unsuspecting victims. In the elevators there are both generic and specific monsters. A list would include: escaped convicts, and clowns among the classic or generic, and among the specific monsters a pain worshipping redneck family, echoing *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974); a doll-faced gang, repeating *The Strangers* (2008); a figure much like Samara of *The Ring* (2002); a Merman, much like that in *The Creature from the Black Lagoon* (1954); and twin girls who recall *The Shining* (1980), to name a few. These function in the film as a sort of conveyor belt of consumer horror products, which is a commentary on the genre in and of itself, but which also works to inspire delight rather than horror in the knowing audience.

However, in spite of the film's demonstrated awareness of its own mediatisation in relation to past and future horror texts, and its response to online culture and technological advancement in society, the print origins of Gothic horror are firmly re-established. Interesting, one could go so far

as to say that they are even honored in the film's highly ambiguous and referential final scene, when, in an extended shot, a giant hand charges up through the ground to destroy the fateful cabin, referencing both the giant helmet of Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* and the zombie hand of Stephen King's *Carrie* in the same move. Interestingly, Whedon described the film as an effort to reinvigorate the horror genre, claiming it to be a critique of what we love and what we hate about horror cinema. In an interview with *Total Film* magazine, Whedon said

> I love being scared. I love that mixture of thrill, of horror, that objectification/identification thing of wanting the people to be alright but at the same time hoping they'll go somewhere dark and face something awful. The things that I don't like are kids acting like idiots, the devolution of the horror movie into torture porn and into a long series of sadistic comeuppances. Drew and I both felt that the pendulum had swung a little too far in that direction ('Total Film'1).

The film, as such, operates both as homage and as an effort in contributing to the future of horror. Whedon and Goddard together in interview have commented on this, saying that rather than setting out to turn the genre on its head, they instead sought 'to embrace the genre and make something new' while honoring those who came before them (2011, DVD).

Acknowledging the way in which they sample earlier horror forms, Whedon and Goddard also reveal their own motivations as fan writers. As part of a much celebrated Gothic horror fandom, they seek to push horror in new and challenging directions and demonstrate a tension between the need to repeat, but also to reform a particularly well developed cultural schema. In *The Pleasures of Horror,* Matt Hills suggests that the pleasures of the horror fan are associated with connoisseurship more than emotional response and notes the subcultural capital accumulated by fans in terms of genre development (7). *The Cabin in the Woods* is a film that appears to

be constructed on this very premise, conscious of its already established fan audience and the pleasure of recognition that can be derived from nostalgic repetitions found in cult horror texts. Nevertheless, the film does more than simply repeat genre conventions and reference cult horror films. It uses these repetitions to generate a new path for Gothic horror cinema.

The premise of the film is revealed when five teenagers: the whore, the athlete, the scholar, the fool, and the virgin, are coerced by a futuristic surveillance operation into visiting a portentous cabin in the woods, where they are forced to indirectly choose a monster and ultimately their own untimely deaths. This is part of a loosely explained ritual sacrifice. Both horrifically and hilariously, having entered the iconic cellar of the creepy cabin, (knowing well from their knowledge of horror cinema that this is a bad idea) they summon a 'zombie redneck torture family' and spend the remainder of the film desperately trying to escape from their impending gory deaths. Ultimately, the virgin and the fool become aware of the surveillance program of which they are a part. However, by upsetting the required sequence of deaths needed for the ritual, they manage to survive and cause an apocalypse heralded by a league of evil giant gods who erupt into the film in the final shot. The absurdity and self-referential nature of the plot mean that it is not possible to impose a coherent or logical map of the intertextual plain of the film. After an hour and a half of echoes and repetitions we are left with the distinct feeling that this film is much more about aesthetics than it is about hermeneutics. We are not drawn into an effort in constructing narrative and meaning. Instead, we are invited to enjoy the references; to revel in our own knowledge of the genre as fans, and also to question the nature of our engagement with the 'meta' levels of the text.

Gothic horror tropes and motifs are widely sampled in the film. The narrative image set up for the film in its promotional material is based on standard slasher-horror iconography. The initial release film poster displays, at its center, a distant image of the creepy and isolated cabin,

undertoned in blood-red and surrounded by silhouetted forest trees. Overhead, are close-up shots of the terrified and blood-smeared faces of the five 'doomed' teenagers. These are accompanied by their titled film roles as archetypes. The title of the film appears in a Gothic font and is followed by a mention of Whedon and Goddard's previous horror genre offerings: *Buffy* (1997-2003), *Cloverfield* (2008), and *Lost* (2004-2010). The message to the prospective audience could not be clearer. However, there is a complete reversal of these established expectations when the film begins. We meet the five characters in a suburban setting which is heavily informed by media and communications technologies. The introductory dialogues relate to issues surrounding surveillance culture and technologies and we are subsequently introduced to the monitoring lab where every action of the five is being watched and manipulated by a team of researchers and technicians. At this point, the film becomes blatantly self-conscious and the audience soon garners an awareness of the meta-levels on which the film is operating. It is evident from the very beginning that the film is working on two different filmic paradigms and as the film progresses, this interplay becomes more intense, brilliantly demonstrated in the scene when the five approach a ramshackle gas-station in a blatant reference to *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974). In this scene, the scholar enters what appears to be an abandoned filling-station store. His curiosity is engaged by the creepy objects scattered around inside when he is suddenly approached by the owner: a cliché of rural isolation and a reference to the standard harbinger character in this type of horror film. As the five gather outside, the menacing gas-station owner warns them of the dangers of their destination and openly designates 'the whore' character as a potential first victim, ominously telling them: 'you've got enough [gas] to get you there. Getting back [he spits], that's your concern'. Here the film involves itself in the sex and death paradigm of the slasher-horror film narrative, in which the whore is the first to go while the virgin or 'the final girl' as Carol J. Clover has dubbed her, survives. Clover outlines the

significance of slasher-horror narrative paradigms in relation to gender in her consideration of the female survivor figure of the horror genre, who, defined by her androgyny and 'sexual reluctance', survives in the absence of male intervention (35). Clover discusses a paradigm that all horror fans are well aware of, and one that is played with in *The Cabin in the Woods* by its critically informed directors. The whore is indeed the first to go, soon followed by the 'macho' guys, leaving the virgin and the fool to face their ends together. Interestingly, however, the fool also survives, perhaps also saved by his androgyny and sexual reluctance. In the film, this level of engagement with audience and critical responses to the horror genre reveals the extent of the film's repetition and rejection of well-known horror paradigms, a depth required in order to engage with a hyper-aware fan audience. By initiating this level of interaction, *The Cabin in the Woods* invites us into its game. As viewers, we are encouraged to bet on the sequence of deaths and to engage our special knowledge of Gothic and horror narratives in order to follow the story. We have a special vantage point, knowing from the beginning about the surveillance program that observes the doomed five and we share perspective with the voyeuristic surveillance team who gamble on the horror events from the safety of the other side of a screen. We are thus forced to ask ourselves, as Whedon and Goddard explain 'what it is about watching kids get killed that [we] enjoy?' and 'why do bad things keep happening to these blonde girls?' (2011, DVD)

Interactive Gothic and 'para-sites' of horror

A major point in this discussion is that recent horror cinema and *The Cabin in the Woods* as a case in point involves processes of literary sampling which pushes the Gothic in new directions. I use the term literary sampling here, inspired by points made by Julie Sanders in her book *Adaptation and Appropriation* to refer to a trend that is evident in

many contemporary literary forms which celebrate the pleasure of recognition through remediation and hypertextuality. Sampling, used with reference to music trends in mixing and sampling is when a sample of one sound recording is re-used either as an instrument or as part of a collective of sound recordings in a new piece of music. Arguably, this works exactly the same way in literature, when a part of an earlier text is reused functionally or artistically in a new piece of text. Sampling in music often works cohesively within certain genres, in particularly in hip hop and jazz. In literature, it is also usually genre specific and is a useful term in relation to genres like Gothic horror and science fiction in that it makes us aware of the palimpsestuous nature of the genre across both literature and film. It is significant that sampling is distinct from horror mash-up; a mode which blends and hybridizes forms seamlessly. In relation to intertextuality, sampling is the mixing and loose connection of horror tropes wherein our attention is drawn both to the agglomerate of forms but also to the process of mixing itself.

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Understanding how literary sampling works can lead us to an outline of what we could for practical purposes call interactive Gothic; a contemporary mode of Gothic aesthetics defined to a certain extent by the conditions of late postmodern hypertextuality but to a larger extent by trends in online and fan culture. In this modality, Gothic horror works as a set of Gothic literary/ filmic conditions which include a set of source texts that are accepted as Gothic horror by readers and fans; a self-conscious engagement with Gothic aesthetics; and a cultural agenda which celebrates homage and repetition. Principally, interactive Gothic involves a remediation of the established aesthetics of the Gothic and a promotion of the remediated product to contemporary readers/ audiences who are uniquely placed in relation to reading not just across genres but across media as well. In *The Cabin in the* Woods, the film itself is both a parasite of horror and what Hills would call a 'para-site' of horror ('Pleasures of Horror' 118): it reflects and includes the multi-dimensional nature of the horror genre as it exists culturally across the various fora of television, reality (as in real life horrors), and theory and criticism. It works on a concept of Gothic horror that has been continuously remediated and renegotiated and that is bound to be consistently remediated in the future.

In a consideration of the remediation of aesthetics in contemporary culture, J. David Bolter and Richard Grusin discuss the importance of trans-media crossovers and the formal logic by which new media technology refashions prior media forms (8), stating the requirement to critically engage with the genealogy of new media with an awareness of this process. While hypertextuality is understood as a new text actively

refashioning old texts, remediation is essentially when a new form refashions old forms. Remediation brings with it a new transmedial aesthetics, which are to be found in many new forms that have emerged in twenty first century and continuously advancing techno-culture. These forms, like online fanfiction and much recent horror cinema, depend on other texts and readers in a unique way. Arguably, they are bound by the death of art that was signaled by postmodernism, and they interact excessively with earlier genres and styles. This interaction frequently assumes the reader's recognition of the echoed texts. As part of this new aesthetics, interactive Gothic becomes more than simply a style of literature; it is reflective of a 'state of literature'. It is a literary/filmic environment in which the reader and the author are implicated in a complex dynamic in relation to authority.

In *The Cabin in the Woods*, Gothic horror is part of a system of literary sampling in the film which effectively remediates the features of Gothic horror for a unique fan audience. As such, it forms part of a new contemporary Gothic aesthetics in transmedial literary and filmic culture. If we accept this idea, then we must ask how has the Gothic changed in its new contexts? As I claimed earlier in this paper, the focus of contemporary popular horror cinema has shifted away from the 'genuine scare'. There is an evidenced preference for nostalgia over real horror and terror. I would suggest that this move away from terror does not make the films any less Gothic. In fact, films which delight in the replication of celebrated horror motifs are reconnecting with the artifice, superficiality, and sense of fantasy that drove the Gothic of the late eighteenth century. Some critics might still argue that Gothic aesthetics are ultimately motivated by terror of the monstrous as it embodies the sublime, the uncanny, the grotesque, and the excessive. This would appear to suggest that what we have is essentially a diluted version of the mode. However, in the context of contemporary horror cinema, and films such as *The*

Cabin in the Woods, the role of the monster as a central figure of the Gothic is necessarily changed, yet it is as powerful a metaphor as ever.

Literary works (including film) are aways 'inhabited by a long chain of parasitical presences, echoes, allusions, guests, ghosts of previous texts' (J. Hillis Miller quoted in Gilbert &Gubar 2000: 46). However, in the case of *The Cabin in the Woods*, these parasitic references are functional and the manner in which the film works as a Gothic hypertext reveals much about the current state of the Gothic in popular culture and in relation to fan culture in particular. As a genre marked by its fascination with stories retold and rewritten, the Gothic can be seen in popular culture contexts to continue a long tradition of repetition and open-endedness. So, while Whedon claimed the film to be 'the horror film to end all horror films' (Beyer 2012), it is perhaps even more accurate to view it as the horror film to end all horror spoofs, bringing the horror genre in new directions, challenging audiences, and fans in particular, to engage their acquired knowledge of horror and to take part in an interactive Gothic text.

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All Too Human: Xander Harris and the Embodiment of the Fully Human

ANDREW F. HERRMANN AND ART HERBIG[1]

Buffy the Vampire Slayer. Haven't we heard enough about this show? After all, it was cancelled over 10 years ago. Plus, it is the most studied series in the history of television. There are academic books, articles, and of course, *Slayage: The Journal of the Whedon Studies Association.* Scholars examined power, law and ethics, familial relations, organizational types, aesthetics, feminisms, genders, and the love and the lore. Scholars analyzed Buffy – the character – to death (Buttsworth; Early; Karras). Same with Spike (Abbott, "From"; Herrmann; Wilcox). Willow receives kudos (Battis; McAvan; Pateman), as does Angel (Abbott, "Reading"; Riley, 2009). And yet here we are writing another piece on *BtVS*. As our heroine might say, "*Hmm, new?!*"

To this we have a one-word answer: Xander. Underappreciated. Overlooked. Understudied. This general neglect – if one were to really contemplate it – is astounding, considering Alexander LaVelle Harris (portrayed by Nicholas Brendon) goes unseen only in the episode "Conversations with Dead People" during the seven-year run of *BtVS*. Only Buffy and Willow appeared in every episode. Xander's importance is also made credible when one considers the words of *BtVS* producer Fran Kuzui: "You can educate your daughters to be Slayers, but you also have to educate your sons to be Xanders" (quoted in Jowett, para. 1). So yes, another piece on *BtVS*, concentrating on Xander, who "happens to have a lot to offer" ("The Zeppo").

Why this neglect of such an important character? We'll suggest a few reasons. First, the idea of *BtVS* began with Whedon's decision to challenge the stereotypical horror genre.

> I'd seen a lot of horror movies which I'd loved very much, with
> blonde girls getting themselves killed in dark alleys and I just
> germinated this idea about how much I'd like to see a blonde girl
> go into a dark alley, get attacked by a big monster and then kill it!"
> (Whedon, "Becoming")

This basis for the show did two things. In Buffy, Whedon created a positive feminist vision, a woman empowered, a woman who – despite the internal doubts and the external threats – achieved and triumphed in what is typically the heroic male role (Craigo-Snell). Fans and academics took to Buffy as a positive female role model. From the beginning, Whedon wrote strong female characters (Buffy, Willow, Darla, Faith, et al) in a positively pro-feminist show where men like Xander are forced to step out of the spotlight and fight side-by-side with their female counterparts. The second thing Whedon did with *BtVS* was conflate our conceptions of good and evil. Not all seemingly "good guys" were good; and not all seemingly "bad guys" were bad. The Watcher's Council and Angel are examples of each, respectively (Braun). Again, this genre-bending would be taken up by fans and academics, but this can often overshadow characters like Xander whose journey does not take dramatic shifts between good and evil.

Another reason Xander is overlooked is because he, out of all the major characters, is the one who is, to use Nietzsche's title, "All Too Human." He has none of the preternatural skill that the slayers – Buffy or Faith or Kendra – have in their positions of The Chosen One(s). He doesn't have the wisdom, knowledge, or experience that Giles has as Watcher. Unlike early Willow, he is not a computer guru. Unlike later Willow or Tara, he doesn't develop skills in the magicks. He's not a super

being like Angel or Spike. He's not a thousand year old former demon, like Anya. Nor does he, despite becoming a soldier in "Halloween," have intensive military training a la Riley.

Finally, the other reason for the exclusion of Xander in most *BtVS* scholarship is that unlike many of the other characters on the show, Xander doesn't appear to go on a major quest. Buffy, for example, finally realizes that life is worth living, and importantly, that her power can be shared. Buffy learns the power of community (Rambo). Willow learns magic, goes dark, and comes back. Hers is a story of redemption (Pateman). Angel's "helping the helpless" is also a story of redemption, as he attempts to make up for the evil he did as Angelus (Wilson). Spike goes from bloody awful poet, to "Big Bad," to trickster, to champion (Herrmann). Faith changes dramatically, falling from grace, choosing evil, and being restored (Foster). Even Giles rediscovers his place and sense of worth, after being fired from his position as Buffy's Watcher by the Council (Rambo). In each of these characters the changes are dramatic. Comparatively, Xander appears to remain the same.

This, of course, is a major error. By comparing Xander to the more obviously evolving characters, scholars have often neglected to examine Xander in his own right. As such he is often rendered as static and never-changing. He's considered "the not-too-bright but loyal boy next door" (Weldes & Rowley 4), "bumbling" (Buttsworth 187), "clumsy" (Shefield 3), "underachieving" (Schlozman 51), and "physically uncoordinated" (Greene & Yuen 10). "Xander is useless both as combatant and researcher" (Schlozman 2000), with "no remarkable personal skills" (Greene & Yuen 10), reduced to "a diversionary punch-bag" (Simkin 17), who often needs rescuing (Allesio). Xander is "the only character with no true power" (Camron 5). And then there is this backhanded compliment: "That is not to say Xander is completely useless" (Eggertsson 10).

When scholars do examine Xander, they generally concentrate on a few relatively inane throw-away items. The first is his "sardonic wit," and

his sarcasm to hide his feelings of inferiority (Schlozman 51). Scholars mention his unusual use of language, for example, when he uses "crayon-break-y" during his attempt to reconnect the grieving world-destroy-y Willow with her humanity in the Season 6 climax (Adams; Mandala). Likewise Xander's dating choices – from his love-disdain relationship with Cordelia, to the Incan Mummy, to the praying-mantis teacher – are examined and held up as examples of his geek-nerd ineptitude (Jowett). Xander constantly gets put upon. He acquires the multiple diseases, including syphilis ("Pangs"). He gets split into two Xanders: one competent, one not ("The Replacement"). He gets into a ridiculous slap fight with Harmony ("The Initiative"). His two attempts to use magic go horribly and hilariously wrong ("Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered"; "Once More With Feeling"). Given this, it is easy to dismiss Xander as a useless dateless nerd ("Beneath You"; "The Zeppo").

When examined from a gendered perspective Xander is often portrayed and coded as feminine. As Karras noted, "Xander [is] the feminized product of feminism" (20). He's described as "Buffy's handmaiden" (Pender 36) and as her "helpmeet" (Early 19). He is fighting for his "embattled masculinity" (Buttsworth 187) and viewed as "an archetype of a new 1990s embattled masculinity" shadow boxing with "machismo stereotypes" (Pender 39). He's an example of the anxiety-laden, disrupted, and dislocated "new man" (Simkin). Through such analysis, Xander is set up as a straw man and a foible for feminist scholarship, supposedly weak and inept compared to the powerful female characters, all of whom have their own faults, failures, and blind spots. In effect, these types of feminist analysis do *exactly* what feminist scholarship is working against: the essentialization of gender.

"Not completely useless" is an incongruous way to talk about such an essential character. Let's look at the *facts*. Much is made about Xander's saying, "We saved the world" to which Willow retorts, "We changed the world" in the series finale (Brannon). Yes, they changed the world.

However, Xander *did* in fact save the world multiple times. In "Grave" his love saved the world from Dark Willow. In "The Zeppo" he saved the world by saving his friends who were oblivious to the real danger. Xander came up with the idea to use the rocket launcher in "Innocence." He pushed Buffy out of the way and got himself "Toth'd": split into two in "The Replacement." He staked his best friend Jesse when he realized he could not save him ("The Harvest"). In "Prophecy Girl," it was Xander – not the supposed hero and love of her life Angel – who saved Buffy after The Master left her dead in a puddle. And without Buffy, we'd *all* surely be dead via some apocalypse or another. Xander was consistently willing to sacrifice himself for his friends – and us – throughout the series.

When Xander is spoken of in positive terms, he's called a "charming and loyal fellow" (Early 14), "witty" (Buttworth 187), Buffy's "right-hand man" (Burr & Jarvis, 277), "sharp" (Schlozman 51), sensitive (Sherman, 2004), socially intelligent and compassionate, "able to observe others and to demonstrate his understanding of, and concern for, how they feel" (Stuart 4). Many of these positive terms foreground Xander as the heart of The Scoobies (Bradney; Sherman; Weldes & Rowley). Much of this is based upon the gang's synergistic final confrontation with Adam in Season 4, where each member plays a specific role. Buffy (the hand), Giles (the head), Xander (the heart), and Willow (the spirit), merge to become überBuffy, who defeats the postmodern Prometheus ("Primeval"). However, this extrapolation leaves us wanting. Surely there's more to Xander than this relatively simplistic analysis.

We examine the evolution of Xander over the duration of *BtVS,* and how his character's depiction of masculinity itself is an interrogation of the rhetorics and discourses of masculinity. According to Stabile, since the September 11, 2001 attacks characterizations of masculine heroes have seen a resurgence. The return of superhero tales of comic book characters like Superman, Spiderman, or the aptly named television series *Heroes* is a reflection of a trend toward the stories of men that "represent a desire for

secular saviors, for men whose powers do not come from god, but are nonetheless sufficient to the task of saving the world from some kind of apocalypse" (87). Stabile argues that the gendered desire for masculine heroes is a response to the perception that feelings of insecurity and fear are "feminine." In a time where fear is used as a common political tactic (Altheide; Robin; Stabile), one of the results of that strategy is a reinvigoration of rhetorics that characterize safety and security as an outgrowth of a masculine approach to the world. How Whedon's depiction of Buffy has undermined the connection between being male and saving the world has been widely recognized, but *BtVS* does more than just replace a masculine male hero with a masculine female one (Buttsworth). Instead, we get to see Buffy as a leader of a gang of "Scoobies," each of whom is equally dedicated to saving the world from successive apocalypses.

As one of the "Scoobies," Xander is a male character who struggles with being a man in a world where being "the man" is not an option. Xander Harris presents us with a depiction of masculinity that must manage how cultural conceptions of masculinity and femininity are linked to discourses of power and individuality. Gender scholars have devoted a great deal of attention to the differences between the discursive use of masculinity and the many different ways of being a man. Much like the powers possessed by superheroes, Connell argued that masculinity "is not a fixed character type, always and everywhere the same" (76). The more preferable term, "masculinities," evolved to account for the ways in which what it means to be a man have shifted over time and to allow for space for different ways of being a man. Over time characterizations of what masculinity means have been adapted to social and cultural circumstances. However, those changes have also allowed it to maintain its privileged place in what Connell describes as "a massive structure of social relations" (65).

Connell and Bourdieu have similar perspectives on the interconnection between gender and social values, examining the ways in which the rhetorics of masculinity are conflated with a natural world order. Bourdieu claims,

> The strength of the masculine order is seen in the fact that it dispenses with justification: the androcentric vision imposes itself as neutral and has no need to spell itself out in discourses aimed at legitimating it. The social order functions as an immense symbolic machine tending to ratify the masculine domination on which it is founded. (9)

Bourdieu's observations about the connection between masculine ideologies and patriarchy are echoed in Connell's observations about masculinity as social phenomenon. Connell believes that the male body itself acts as a justification for masculine ideologies. According to Connell, "gender politics is an embodied-social politics" and perspectives on the body treat masculinity as the natural outgrowth of the existence of males in relation to females (66). Similarly, Bourdieu asserts the rhetoric of modern masculinity is based on the perception of "the active male and the passive female" in sexual relations, which has influenced social practice (21).

Similarly, in her work on the intersection of masculinity and war, Cohn discusses a distinction between "gendered individuals" and "gendered discourses" (228–229). She argues that gender refers to "a symbolic system, a central organizing discourse of culture, one that not only shapes how we experience and understand ourselves as men and women, but that also interweaves with other discourses and shapes *them*" (229, emphasis in original). According to Cohn, gendered discourses employ a series of binaries that are largely based on perceptions of value. Cohn claims that gendered discourses structure talk about events or actions using masculine terms to denote positive or active characteristics

and feminine terms for characteristics discussed as negative or passive. Cohn is careful to point out that her observations are not a reflection of a biological phenomenon, but a discursive phenomenon that couches discussions of power and influence in gendered terminology. Gendered discourse is a way of discussing issues such as war, which is the focus of Cohn's work, using terminology that perpetuates what she calls a "constellation of meanings that a given culture assigns to biological sex differences" (228).

Additionally, in an historical perspective on the evolution of masculinity in the U.S., Rotundo connected that belief to both masculinity and the development of the nation as a whole:

> The communal form of manhood lingered on through the first decades of the nineteenth century, but it was eclipsed by a *self-made manhood* which had begun to grow in the late eighteenth century. The new manhood emerged as part of a broader series of changes: the birth of republican government, the spread of a market economy, the concomitant growth of the middle class itself. At the root of these changes was an economic and a political life based on the free play of individual interests. (3, emphasis in original)

Rotundo depicts this type of individualism as an outgrowth of a new manhood, but what must also be acknowledged is how that masculinized structure has evolved beyond just a standard for manhood. Similarly to Rotundo, Thio observed that "the American ideology of success consists of two related social functions. It encourages the populace (1) to raise their level of aspirations and (2) to believe in the established society as one with abundant opportunities for all citizens" (381).

While often discussed as hegemonic masculinity, the truly hegemonic feature of masculine ideologies is their ability to masquerade as natural or generalizable other ideologies. For example, depictions of those who have

lived "the American Dream" often incorporate stereotypically masculine characteristics such as distinction from others and public success as core components of their narratives. These stories interweave traditionally masculine characteristics with social aspirations that require us to view the dream as a masculine ideology that masquerades as social philosophy. Tales of heroes who succeed by single handedly overcoming obstacles and realizing individualized dreams have become *the* standard for recounting the successes of Americans both male and female, but those tales reflect *a* standard for success that is largely based in masculinity.

One of the specific arenas where gendered discourses and rhetoric impact daily existence is the construed difference between the public and private spheres of life (Ashcraft & Flores). The public realm is viewed as the site of work, politics and economics, and is reified as masculine. The private sphere is linked to intimacy, emotion, and personal interests and reified as feminine. The self-made man and the lone hero are rhetorically and discursively gendered not only as masculine, but simultaneously situated within the public sphere. Cold War hero Rambo and post 9-11 Jack Bauer serve as exemplars of this rhetorical and discursive stylization of character. With few exceptions, neither have particularly interesting private (re: gendered feminine) moments.

Xander Harris, however, troubles the stereotypical public-private dichotomy. During the early seasons of the show his public persona is one of ineptitude, verbal dexterity, and geekdom. He's picked on by Sunnydale High's more publicly "masculine" athletes and abused by Cordelia and her merry band of überfeminine snobs. While in public, Xander is "The Zeppo," where he excels is within the private and supposedly feminine sphere of the Scoobies. How? Stuart correctly noted Xander possesses emotional intelligence, but this attribute goes relatively unexamined. Emotional intelligence is the "ability to perceive emotion, integrate emotion to facilitate thought, understand emotions and to regulate emotions to promote personal growth" (Salovey & Mayer 185).

The emotionally intelligent person is communicatively competent, able to appraise the verbal and nonverbal signifiers of their conversational partners, and interpret their emotional state (Eisenberg, Goodall & Trethewey). The emotionally intelligent individual uses their emotions to aid their problem-solving abilities, to temper others' emotions, as well as their own.

While obviously not perfect – none of our heroes are – Xander's communicatively-based emotional intelligence is often on full display in the show. He seems to consistently recall what Giles told him about Jessie: "Now you listen to me. Jesse is dead. You have to remember that when you see him you're not looking at your friend. You're looking at the thing that killed him" ("The Harvest"). It is Xander who reminds the Scoobies – who have developed emotional attachments to several preternatural beings – that these beings are, in fact, inherently evil ("Becoming, Pt. 1"). He consoles the unconsolable Willow when Oz leaves ("Something Blue"). He's the first to recognize Tara and Willow are "swinging with the Wiccan lifestyle" ("Family"). An exemplar of his emotional intelligence is in his confrontation with Buffy where he's seen the depth of Riley's love for her, and the mistake Buffy is about to make.

> Xander: See, what I think, you got burned with Angel, then Riley shows up.
>
> Buffy: I know the story, Xander.
>
> Xander: But you missed the point. You shut down, Buffy. And you've been treating Riley like the rebound guy, when he's the one that comes along once in a lifetime. He's never held back with you. He's risked everything. And you're about to let him fly because you don't like ultimatums? If he's not the guy, if what he needs from you just isn't there, let him go. Break his heart, and make it a clean break. But if you really think you can love this guy, I'm

> talking scary, messy, no-emotions-barred need, if you're ready for that, then think about what you're about to lose.
>
> Buffy: Xander...
>
> Xander: Run. ("Into the Woods")

Simultaneously, Xander realized the depth of his own love for Anya, as is revealed later in the same episode.

Eventually, Xander realizes his own power. "They'll never know how tough it is, Dawnie, to be the one who isn't chosen. To live so near to the spotlight and never step in it. But I know. I see more than anybody realizes because nobody's watching me" ("Potential"). It is his emotional intelligence – his ability to see and make connections in the private sphere – that discursively and rhetorically frames him as feminine, compared to what we normally perceive as masculine power, with its need to be actively in the spotlight and be seen. In fact, it is Caleb, the misogynist priest and right hand man of The First, who fully recognizes Xander's emotional intelligence – his seeing and knowing – as both his power and as a threat. "So, you're the one who sees everything? Let's see what we can do about that." And with that, Caleb gouges out Xander's left eye in one of the most gruesome scenes in the series ("Dirty Girls").

There is another way the rhetoric and discourse play into perceptions of Xander as unmasculine. As noted above, modern conceptions of masculinity intertwine the ideologies of the American Dream, self-made manhood, and individualism. These intertwined conceptions feed into and bring us face to face with that modern masculine model of "*homo economicus*": economic man. As Nelson noted,

> "Economic man," the "agent" of the prototypical economic model, springs up fully formed, with preferences fully developed, and is fully active and self-contained. He has no childhood or old age, no

> dependence on anyone, no responsibility for anyone but himself.
> The environment has no effect on him but rather is merely the
> passive material, presented as "constraints," over which his
> rationality has play. He interacts in society without being
> influenced by society: his mode of interaction is through an ideal
> market in which prices form the only, and only necessary, form of
> communication. He is one pretty tough guy. (289)

The ideological scientism that underpins the conceptions of economic man and related formulations like the American Dream are supposedly gender neutral. However, economic rhetoric structures various conceptions in intriguing masculinist ways. Integral to this is the rhetoric of the professional "and the division of labor in modern society," which separates and divides different kinds of – and attitudes toward – work (Cheney & Ashcraft 149). Similarly, success is configured with an emphasis on individual economic accumulation, consumption, and prestige. Likewise, it frames career success on a person's upward trajectory within one organization or occupation, moving forward into positions with progressively more esteem (Bujold). However, these masculinist rhetorical and discursive constructs inform not only how we enact economic activity in our own lives, but how we judge others' successes.

　　While his friends begin attending the University of California, Sunnydale, Xander ends his formal educational career once he graduates from Sunnydale High. "Educational career, " for example, is now its own rhetorical device, permitting judgments on those who do not desire or are unable to continue their educations and privileging those who do. An example will suffice as an exemplar of this type of judgment. Willow tells Xander:

> You remember, you fail math, you flunk out of school, you end up
> being the guy at the pizza place that sweeps the floor and says,
> "Hey, kids, where's the cool parties this weekend?" We've been
> through this. ("The Pack")

Until Season 6, he works a number of low-prestige, low-wage jobs:
bartender, protein bar salesman, ice cream truck driver. Worse yet, he
lives in his parents' basement, and is afraid he will remain there
("Restless"). Xander starts off and – even after he receives his promotion
with the construction company, gets his own apartment, etc. – remains
working-class. Through the rhetoric of economics, the American Dream,
professionalism, etc., and their "inherent" masculinity, Xander's own
masculinity is challenged. Due to the "strength of the masculine order"
(Bourdieu 9) Xander finds himself lost, feels incompetent and tries to find
ways to justify his "lack." Xander, like others in the working-class, is
shown through his experience of subordination to larger societal rhetoric
that devalues their type of employment (Kuhn).

Equally as important as Xander's struggles with education and
employment are his struggles with how he is privately perceived both by
others and by himself. According to Gramsci hegemonic power is not
simply a form of oppression, it is a form of oppression that derives its
power from the consent of the individuals being oppressed. Given that, it
stands to reason that hegemonic masculinity can be found in the ways that
masculinity is taken for granted. Throughout *BtVS*, we continually see
Xander grappling with how his actions will influence how others see him
as a "man." Particularly early on in *BtVS*, Xander's character is shown
struggling with what being a member of the Scoobies says about his
"manhood." In the second episode of *BtVS*, "The Harvest," Buffy is faced
with pursuing the vampire Luke in the graveyard to save Jesse. When
Xander offers to "saddle-up" and fight alongside Buffy, he is rebuked by
her. His response: "I'm inadequate. That's fine. I'm less than a man." The
fourth episode, "Teacher's Pet," opens with Xander's daydream about

saving a fawning and helpless Buffy from a dangerous vampire and continues with other guys questioning his sexual prowess at the Bronze. From the very beginning, Xander's insecurities are born out of how he perceives he is being judged by others.

These insecurities plague him throughout the series. In the episode "Grave," we see Xander leading Dawn, Jonathan, and Andrew out of danger from a turned-evil Willow while his other friends are engaged in a superpower fueled epic struggle. During their escape attempt, Dawn challenges Xander pushing him to reenter the fray, "You know if Spike were here, he'd go back and fight." Xander lashes out at Dawn, revealing the secret that Spike attempted to rape Buffy. Out of his own insecurities about his role in battle, Xander betrays Buffy's trust. It is a moment of weakness born out of a perception that he is not valuable. However, his actions *are* a contribution to the team and, as we will see, it is *his* love and concern that saves them all.

As we have noted, love is an all too complicated topic for Xander. Whether he is dealing with his boyish crush on Buffy, cheating on Cordelia with his best friend, or being tormented by one of the many demons who become the focus of his affections, Xander struggles with the role of love in his life. By far, the most complicated of Xander's love stories is his relationship with the former vengeance demon Anya (a.k.a., Aud or Anyanka). In many ways, Xander and Anya's relationship is crafted out of complimentary insecurities. Both characters feel out of place and seem to need to be needed. However, as we learn in "Once More with Feeling," their insecurities and their unwillingness to confront them would begin to undermine their relationship. Eventually, a man seeking revenge on Anyanka – for turning him into a demon – twists Xander's fears about marriage into a "nightmare vision of his future." Up to this point in his relationship with Anya, Xander's followed the path of gendered ideology and American masculinity which states that by marrying Anya, he could be more of a man in a traditional sense: good job, nice place to live, a

wife, and in the visions, a couple of children. However, following this ideological path was not enough to lift the burden of the vision he saw, nor the insecurities he felt, particularly as he watched his parents' unhappy marriage. This experience overwhelmed Xander and – even after the demon's plot was revealed – he walked away from Anya on their wedding day.

As other scholars have noted (Camron, 2007; Kociemba, 2011; Stevenson, 2003), one of the main points where the audience is presented with Xander confronting his insecurities is in the season three episode "The Zeppo." According to Kociemba (2011) in "The Zeppo" Xander "must face his real foes in this episode: his friends and his own low self-esteem" (86). Xander's struggles with his own masculinity, a masculinity that doesn't fit the supposedly natural and taken-for-granted definition of what it means to be a man in the everyday rhetoric and discourses which permeate the foundation of our society. Xander is more than a simple *example* of "embattled masculinity." He is the *embodied* interrogation of society's masculine rhetoric and discourses.

It is not until Season 7, in the episode "Potential," where we see Xander articulating his own place as a Scoobie that is distinct from his own gendered expectations. While comforting Dawn after she realized she is not a potential slayer, Xander makes an important distinction between special and extraordinary. Special is reserved for slayers, ensouled vampires, witches, and werewolves. It is a power derived from unique abilities and being chosen. Quite simply, to be "chosen" is to be appointed and anointed by something external. To be extraordinary, however, is not a calling: it is an existential choice. It is the choice to do the research and fix the windows while the special do the fighting. It is the choice to run into the fray, with nothing but one's simply human self. It is the choice to commit one's self to the people and ideas one cares about (Frankfurt). It is a distinction Xander is uniquely qualified to assess given his position as the person who watched his friends get "more and more powerful" for

seven years. After hearing Xander's monologue, Dawn turns to Xander and says, "Maybe that's your power. Seeing. Knowing." to which Xander responds, "Maybe it is. Maybe I should get a cape." In this moment, Xander's signature wit has been molded into a person who fits within a group through his own choice. Importantly, Xander shares this moment and this common bond with Dawn, a bond created by their shared humanity regardless of their sex.

Conclusion

In his essay about Xander's character, Camron writes that "attempts to pin a generic gender role on any of these characters does them a disservice, because, as in reality, what lies beneath the surface is more complicated" (15). We agree, but we find it equally as important to point out that this statement is true of any of us "all too humans." The conflation of gender and discourses of power often leaves both men and women grappling with their own personal subjective struggles. For this reason, what we see with the character of Xander Harris is the conflict that arises when a social conception comes into conflict with a personal identity. Xander's struggle in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is about discovering a personal identity not tied to a masculinity that is defined by individual power. It is a quest of self discovery where a person can both stand alone as an individual actor and simultaneously function as a member of a group without those two ideas coming into conflict. By becoming a man who can be both masculine and feminine, he is defined by neither. Thus we can see him, more than any other character, not struggling with a destiny or a past, but instead struggling with what it means to be a person in a culture that conflates gender with power.

   The ease with which critics can point to both feminine and masculine traits in Xander's character is what makes him so compelling. Certainly the struggles he is having can be seen in other characters, such as Buffy,

who struggles with a desire to be one of the girls, but Xander's primary journey is grappling with the relationship between social conceptions of manhood and his own place as a person in a community. In Stevenson's important chapter on the role of the quest for self in *BtVS*, he entitles his section about Xander "Xander Harris: Power and Weakness" (96), writing about a character who "wants to belong, wants to contribute to the group in a meaningful way" (97). What stands out is the word "meaningful" and its relationship to gendered preconceptions of what it means to be a man. If the only way to be a man is to fight the "Big Bad" or to kill the demon, then Xander is decidedly not a man. Consequently, Xander most often questions himself and his manhood in those instances where he imposes these "masculine" criteria upon himself. However, while being male is a biological determination, what we learn from Xander is that being *human* in the face of terrible danger and seemingly insurmountable obstacles is his meaningful contribution. It is strength accompanied by the presence of weakness, bravery with the acknowledgement of fear, and individuality with the understanding of how his skills allow him to contribute to the group that make Xander Harris a human hero.

As we find out in the Season 8 and 9 graphic novels that continue *BtVS* beyond the seven seasons on television, there is much more for Xander beyond his time at the Hellmouth. He becomes a leader in his own right. He becomes a watcher, even though he shuns this title, and finds love with none other than Dawn. It is, with a typical Whedon twist, a BIG love. His journey continues on in the pages of the graphic novels and only reinforces the journey he took while still on the small screen. Xander transcends the either-or dichotomy of the masculine and feminine by acting fully within the auspices of both, and by doing so embraces and exemplifies the fully all too human.

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Notes

Becoming "Boss" in *La reina del sur*: Negotiating Gender in a Narcotelenovela

JENNIFER C. DUNN AND ROGELIA LILY IBARRA

In the last two decades, Latin American *telenovelas* (soap operas) have been imbued with *narcocultura* or the glamorized manifestations of drug underworlds and their kingpins. *Narco* culture is informed by the very real and tragically violent international drug wars that have afflicted countries such as Mexico and Colombia. These two countries have taken the lead in introducing *narcotelenovelas*, a subgenre of the *telenovela,* made popular in the past decade by documenting the deeds of infamous drug lords. Among the most watched were: *Sin tetas no hay paraíso* (2006), *El capo* (2009)*, Las muñecas de la mafia* (2009), *Rosario Tijeras* (2010), *La reina del sur* (2011), *Escobar, El patrón del mal* (2012) and *El señor de los cielos* (2013) [1]. *Rosario Tijeras* and *La reina del sur* stand apart as the first *narcotelenovelas* with women in the lead roles and serve as products of intertextual play[2].

The drug world that informs both *narco* culture and *narcotelenovelas* is one defined in patriarchal terms by a Mexican *machismo*. This *machismo* manifests in an assortment of cultural practices related to illicit

[1] Translation: Without Breasts There is No Paradise, The King Pin, The Mafia's Dolls, Rosario Tijeras, The Queen of the South, Escobar: The Boss of Evil, and The Lord of the Skies.

[2] Most recently, two new *narcotelenovelas* showcase female protagonists: *La viuda negra* (The Black Widow) (2014) and *Camelia la tejana* (Camelia the Texan) (2014).

drug commerce, such as flamboyant styles of dress, dance moves, adornment and display of pick-up trucks, firearms, acts of religious devotion as well as a genre of music known as the *narcocorrido*. The narcotrafficker is typically male and his reality reflected in *narcocorridos* and the *narcotelenovelas* is hypermasculine, violent and sexist. According to Bialowas Pobusky, "It is commonly thought that such a blatantly sexist milieu leaves little space for women, limiting their roles to criminals' family members, drug mules, or high-class call girls (*prepagos*)"(274). In this way, women are typically represented as interdependent on the male narcotrafficker, are victimized, or sexually objectified. Women's bodies are symbolically utilized as a space where the drug war is fought, are commodified, and made forbidden pleasures of the drug underworld (Cabañas 82-83). However, a small number of women traffickers have emerged whose notoriety has paralleled that of their male counterparts (i.e. Griselda Blanco in Colombia). These women usually appropriate male characteristics to survive or rise in the male dominated world, such as that of the "mujer brava" (tough woman) (Tatar 84). Female drug lords achieve empowerment vis-à-vis men, which may empower the individual woman but not all women (Campbell 239). The *mujeres bravas* that populate some *narcocorridos* are represented as aggressive in defending their own honor or seeking revenge for sexual exploitation (Tatar 84, 96). *Telenovelas* have remained an important social institution in Latin America and often reinforce these traditional gender roles and patriarchal models of social relations (Acosta-Alzuru 271; Avila-Saavedra 383).

La reina del sur includes these traditional elements while creating a new model of the "*bildungsroman* of a female drug trafficker who inserts herself into larger structures of cultural and economic power, to eventually dominate over most of her male criminal competition" and in so doing "destabilizes the sexist norms of the drug underworld" (Bialowas Pobutsky 273). Such a portrayal seemingly challenges traditional representations of gender and tests the entire genre of the *telenovela*.

Through an analysis of both the novel and *telenovela*, *La reina del sur*, our study focuses specifically on the development of the female protagonist, Teresa Mendoza. We explore how Teresa's evolution from novice to boss is influenced by her gendered characteristics and behaviors and ask the question: does Teresa, as a female boss, challenge traditional gendered representations in *narcotelenovelas*? As her story began in novel form and then was adapted into a *telenovela*, we also consider how her character is affected by the ways her story is re-presented. Before discussing Teresa's evolution, it is first important to trace the traditions of gender representations in *telenovelas* and the importance of considering such portrayals as performed.

Telenovelas

La reina del sur continues the long tradition of the *telenovela*, whose early history paralleled that of the American soap opera. *Telenovelas* emerged in South America in the 1960s when television entered the Latin American market. This form evolved from *radio-novelas* (radio soap operas) and *folletines* (pamphlet-like novels). As a result, *telenovelas* inherited and combined the visual and aural elements of their ancestors to become "one incredibly powerful medium of Latin American popular cultural representation" (Benavides 2). Unlike American soap operas though, *telenovelas* have a finite number of episodes, are broadcast during the day and at night, and are so popular that well-known actors want to appear in these stories, such as the star of *La reina*, Kate del Castillo, an acclaimed actress in Mexico and the U.S.

According to Carolina Acosta-Alzuru, there are two broad categories of *telenovela* types: the *telenovela rosa* (rose-tinted), which focuses on the romance and misfortunes of a heterosexual couple, and the *telenovela de ruptura* (the break-away *telenovela*), which explores social issues perceived as problematic (271). For years, Mexican *telenovelas* used the

love triangle as its central story-telling device to entice its female viewership. A shift from government ownership to private ownership of media in the early 1990s as well as a move to evening timeslots led to significant changes in content. Brazilian and Venezuelen *telenovelas* are an example of this shift as they have introduced such taboo topics as birth control, divorce, and homosexuality and Brazilian *telenovelas* in particular have been noted as at the forefront of the *ruptura* movement (Downie 1; Acosta-Alzuru 194). Additionally, increasing pressure from North American television, especially from the United States, for more explicit sex, less focus on marriage, and inclusion of issues related to political and economic turmoil resulted in these values and behaviors appearing in *telenovelas* south of these borders in the form of the *telenovela de ruptura* (De la Luz Casas Pérez 409). The inclusion of contemporary social issues has led to global success of the format and has led some Latin American theorists to argue that melodrama might be the "most successful and culturally authentic revolution affecting the continent since the 1960s" (Benavides 2; Martín-Barbero 87). Even with this shift in subject matter, the storylines remain rooted in promotion of traditional gender roles and relate more often than not to issues traditionally related to heterosexual women's lives. *La reina*, although a clear example of the recent *narcotelenovela*, straddles between these two categories as it incorporates elements of the traditional genre, with added love triangles and female antagonists, but also stretches its boundaries by presenting a controversial topic and a female protagonist that is virtuous and sinful, compassionate and cold-blooded at once.

Gender Performativity

To become a female leader of a drug cartel, Teresa Mendoza must violate expectations of her gender. Gender binaries construct oppositions between women and men, and correspondingly feminine and masculine.

Characteristics of traditional masculinity are often associated with the mind and culture, and include competitiveness, cause and effect thinking, individualism, and rationality (Buzzanell 344; D'Enbeau & Buzzanell 5; Grosz 4; Rabine 2). As represented in film and television, these characteristics regularly manifest through the individual hero who saves the day all by himself. He usually dominates women, engages in violent behavior, and aims to "win," whether it be a competition, war, or the "girl". Traditional feminine qualities are associated with the body and nature, and include community, integrative thinking, and connections with others. Often this results in female characters being defined in relation to the male hero, which leads to female characters being silent, victimized, passive, or rescued (D'Enbeau and Buzzanell 5; Grosz 4; Powers 3).

Understanding the concept of gender performativity provides a guide for making sense of Teresa's evolution from novice to boss as she embodies the non-traditional *mujer brava*. In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler contends that the body is not a fixed, passive medium through which gender is ascribed from some external source (175-176). Rather gender is "created through sustained social performances" (193). Assuming then that there is some "true" or essential masculinity or femininity related to male or female bodies, respectively, "conceals gender's performative character and the performative possibilities for proliferating gender configurations outside the restricting frames of masculinist dominations and compulsory heterosexuality" (192-193). Judith Halberstam concurs that gender does not belong exclusively to the sex to which it is generally ascribed. Further, she argues that conceptualizing a "female masculinity" allows exploration of a "queer subject position that can successfully challenge hegemonic models of gender conformity" (9). From Halberstam's perspective the most challenging performance is the "excessive masculinity of the dyke" (29), but that "heterosexual female masculinity" (28) has its own potential to challenge gender conformity.

Even so, Butler warns in *Bodies that Matter* that if the materiality of sex is demarcated in discourse, then this demarcation will produce a domain of excluded and delegitimated 'sex.' Hence, it will be as important to think about how and to what end bodies are constructed as it will be to think about how and to what end bodies are *not* constructed and, further, to ask after how bodies which fail to materialize provide the necessary 'outside,' if not the necessary support, for the bodies which, in materializing the norm, qualify as bodies that matter (15-16). In other words, if physical bodies do not match the genders to which they are visibly ascribed, they may not *count* as the bodies they are trying to perform. Given the traditional masculine and feminine characteristics attributed to men and women, respectively, is it any wonder, as Paul Smith concludes, "in terms of cultural and political *power*, it still makes a difference when masculinity coincides with biological maleness" (3). It is useful in seeing how masculinity is constructed, then, as Halberstam contends, "when and where it leaves the white male middle-class body" (15). So, the potential challenge Teresa Mendoza poses as a female head of a drug cartel must consider not only the role she performs, but also the body in which she performs it. Consideration of both of these elements will allow us to explore how Teresa challenges the traditionally male role of the drug lord and the limits her gendered body may pose.

Analysis

Our analysis focuses on how Teresa's evolution from novice to boss in both the novel and *telenovela* appears to correspond with emphasis on her feminine characteristics and body (in her early development) to employment of her masculine characteristics and mind (when she becomes the boss). To explore both her professional and personal development, we will discuss how Teresa is portrayed as a victim of her sex and body at the start of her story. Then we will explore the tensions that arise as she

develops and employs traditionally masculine skills and behaviors while still making use of her female body as she ascends to power in the drug world. While the former earns her respect and power, the latter still gets her what she wants in particular circumstances. Finally, we will conclude this section by demonstrating how once Teresa becomes a boss, she often works to suppress her feminine side while embracing the masculine role she has come to play. Throughout this section, we will also discuss the relationships between fate and choice and gender in Teresa's evolution. We will highlight how the novel emphasizes the role of fate and tensions between fate and choice in her development whereas the *telenovela* appears to make Teresa much more an agent of her own destiny.

   As Victim

In the beginning, Teresa unquestionably plays the typical *narcocultura* role for women of "girlfriend of a drug dealer". In this position, her body marks her as female and as a victim of her sex as demonstrated in the opening scene of both the novel and *telenovela*. She is abruptly interrupted by a phone ringing as she lies naked in the bathtub. The call, she knows, signals that her boyfriend is dead and that she must run to avoid the same fate. When subsequently confronted by her would-be assassins, one of them, Gato Fierros, decides to rape her before killing her. Through the omniscient narrator in the novel, the reader also learns that Teresa has been raped before, alluding to a cursed life due to her gender and class status. The protagonist creates a split between her current reality and another consciousness to avoid the pain:

> And suddenly, she wasn't afraid. It isn't happening, she thought. I'm asleep and this is just a nightmare like all the others, the ones I lived through before, something that happens to the other woman I dream about, the one who looks like me but isn't. (Pérez-Reverte 24)

The "other" woman allows Teresa to become desensitized and almost disappear; this latter one accepts her fate, but the former takes action. As she is being raped, "the situation", or fate, changes course and allows Teresa's free arm to fall next to her bag, where she feels a pistol. The second Teresa becomes the strategist and leads the first to grab the gun: "…her and the other woman's fingers had closed around the butt of the pistol…She considered all this with dispassionate calculation: Safety, trigger, hammer. Bullet" (26). Then she acts and shoots him. The dual Teresa functions to highlight the tension between fate and choice, passivity and action. In this moment, the dual Teresa copes with being a victim of fate, which spurs her to act.

Although the rape scene in the premiere episode of the *telenovela* does not mark the split consciousness of the protagonist as meticulously as the novel, it does imply a separation between a passive and active Teresa through camera angles and flashbacks. As Teresa is attacked the camera in the *telenovela* uses close-ups of her face to focus on her upward gaze, toward the ceiling, to indicate a desire to escape and disengage with her current reality. The *telenovela* incorporates extended flashbacks from the protagonist and the aggressor to again mark Teresa's mental escape and also to provide background information regarding her boyfriend's murder.

The introductory telephone call and the rape scene symbolize rites of passage in both the novel and *telenovela* for Teresa's development from novice to boss. In both genres, as readers and viewers, we envision Teresa's fragmentation between the past and present and although fate is a generating force in her life, she makes conscious decisions that break with the traditional role of passive girlfriend that she assumed before her boyfriend, Güero's, death. The novel suggests the dual Teresa, the one being acted on and the one watching the action, develops as a result of the violence she is subjected to as a woman. Maura Grady contends in her analysis of *Kill Bill* that the juxtaposition of scenes of the main female character's rape, bloody body, and live burial with her physical

domination and triumph over her adversaries is a vivid exposition of male power and female defenselessness in one female character. This contrast demonstrates the potentialities of a woman taking on male characteristics (72-73). So too does Teresa's move from passive to active suggest her taking on male characteristics has the potential of transcending the weaknesses of her gendered body. This dual Teresa in the novel emphasizes her passivity during scenes where she is seemingly forced to act, such as when she shoots Gato to facilitate her escape. The *telenovela* suggests her victimage spurs her, beyond her gender, to act.

In both the novel and *telenovela*, the state of Teresa's female body in the opening sequences is highlighted. She goes from being naked in the bathtub to throwing on tight pants, a tank top, and high heels as she prepares to escape Mexico. When she is caught by her would-be assassins and raped, the novel includes a vivid description of the state of her body as she found the gun, shot her rapist, and with "her T-shirt bunched up over her breasts, naked from the waist down, holding her right hand with her left so she could aim more accurately" (Pérez-Reverte 27), made the choice *not* to shoot the second assassin. Interestingly, her decision not to shoot Pote appears to be the most agency driven moment in the scene. She then escapes through a second-story window, bottomless, running through the streets. The appearance of Teresa's naked body stresses that she is a vulnerable woman in the male-dominated drug world. Even so, the action of shooting her rapist to escape her own death is when she is described as watching herself rather than as an active agent. Additionally, her exposed, half naked, female body as she jumps out of the window suggests she is a victim of "the situation" or fate.

Female Body/Male Skills

When Teresa escapes to Spain and first starts working for Dris Larbi at the bar/brothel, Yamila, he expects her to work as a prostitute. Teresa realizes

in both the novel and *telenovela* that, as a woman, using her body in return for favors will allow her new boyfriend, Santiago Fisterra, to work in relative safety in the drug trade between Morocco and Spain. In the novel, it is unclear whether Santiago manipulates Teresa to act on his behalf or whether it is her choice. The *telenovela*'s depiction in "Jealous States" more clearly suggests it is Teresa's choice. She sees that Santiago does not have the contacts he needs. His lack of knowledge motivates her to act. Teresa asks a corrupt Moroccan official, Colonel Chaib, to give Santiago a job.

When Teresa walks in to a party in Morocco, everyone notices her. The colonel tells her she "looks like a queen." Unlike the novel, the *telenovela* includes several explicit references to Teresa as being like a "queen." She charms him as she speaks English to some of the guests and converses with him about religion, culture, and business. She is shown kissing the colonel and waking up in his bed the next morning, an act only implied in the novel. The colonel explicitly refers to them both as "business people" as he asks her what the night they just spent together was going to cost him. Teresa does not play coy or ignorant and asks him to allow Santiago to enter the drug trade. As shown on television, Santiago appears passive as he gets drunk and frustrated at home while she appears active as she sleeps with the colonel and makes the deal.

These scenes in the *telenovela* and Teresa's interactions with Santiago the next day highlight her agency and her gender. She uses her sexuality and body with the colonel in trade for Santiago's business. When Teresa returns home, Santiago demands to know if she slept with the colonel. When she says yes, he hits her. She hits him back. She tells him she wants him to remember what she had to do to get him the job every time he crosses the strait. She then asserts, "I'm a slut, but you're a kept man. My kept man." Teresa does not allow him to demean her by calling her a whore. Instead, she inverts the equation by putting herself in the keeper role, Santiago in the kept role. Suzy D'Enbeau and Patrice Buzzanell

focus on Christina Hendriks' character Joan Harris Holloway in *Mad Men* to support the idea that "gender norms influence what the work should look like, and these expectations vary according to sex. Even if a man and woman hold the same position, gender norms command that they do the work differently, and sexuality is often incorporated into a woman's organizational role" (7). Teresa asserts her agency as a woman through use of her body even as she acts as "one of the working girls". At the same time these scenes suggest she is not like the others as she chooses the man with the intent of making a business deal with him.

Teresa appears even more active in later scenes while she learns the ropes of drug trafficking with Santiago in the *telenovela*. Yet, she is also dressed more provocatively during these sequences, once again emphasizing the role of her body and female sex. In the novel, her dress as indicator of her Mexican ethnicity is often emphasized. Conversely, when working on the boat engines in the *telenovela*, she wears a bikini top and short-shorts, emphasizing her female body. Thus, the filmic strategies of the *telenovela* invite the male gaze (Mulvey 15). For example, the prostitutes' lessons at Yamila lead Teresa to wear a tight black and white mini dress, make-up, and her hair high off her neck at the party in Morocco. Teresa's looks during these sequences direct our gaze to her body and her gender. The juxtaposition of her working on an engine, a typically masculine practice, while wearing the bikini points to the blurring of gender in Teresa's life. Her dress at the party suggests her "passing" as a prostitute for the night and as a "normal" woman. Being naked and under a sheet when making the business deal with the colonel brings her masculine and feminine qualities into play. In this way, Teresa may be said to embody a heterosexual female masculinity or a feminine masculinity. Either way, she poses a challenge to traditional conceptions of what it means to be a woman in *narcocultura*.

The utilitarian power of Teresa's looks and body (and sex) continues to be explored in her relationship with Patricia. "Patty" serves as an agent

of Teresa's development while they are cellmates in prison and beyond the prison walls once the two have become partners and entered the drug underworld:

> Until then, she had dressed one way or another in response to two clear objectives: pleasing men—*her* men—or being comfortable. Viewing clothes as a tool one needed in order to do one's work better, as Patty had put it with a laugh—that was a new one. Getting dressed not just for comfort or seduction - or even elegance, or status. No, it was more subtle than that…Clothes could express a mood, an attitude, a person's power. (Pérez-Reverte 227)

Teresa expresses empowerment and liberation from the knowledge imparted by Patty. Pérez Reverte takes a traditionally gender-coded topic, like fashion, but reinforces it by making it a complex system of semantics which better equips Teresa for her developing role as business woman and ascension in the male-dominated world of narcotics.

This empowerment is undermined by how Teresa and Patty's friendship is visually represented and depicted in the *telenovela*, especially when they are in prison. The teacher-student dynamic is consistent in both genres. However, the prison episodes of the *telenovela* are extended and the plot is developed to include other prison characters and conflicts which add a gendered power struggle within the prison system based on nationalism and sexuality (Latin American versus European women and straight versus lesbian and/or bisexual women). Caught in this struggle, Teresa asserts her autonomy with her tough street knowledge. In this way, she catches Patty's eye and earns her protection.

Patty's romantic interest in Teresa is much more subtle and ambiguous in the novel; the *telenovela*'s treatment of this theme is partially censored but still male-defined. The hinted homoeroticism in the novel is accentuated in the *telenovela* by dressing Teresa and Patty during their prison stay in see-through t-shirts and fitted tank tops. The kiss scene after

Teresa's birthday party is set up in a less disgraceful light than it is in the novel and framed by a male-gaze to function more as a pseudo-male-lesbian fantasy. While the significance of Patty's influence and education remains present in the *telenovela*, the complex, potentially empowering, female-centered relationship created by Pérez Reverte in the novel is diluted by a more explicitly male-defined representation, likely a result of the visual bias of television.

In her last conversation with Patty in the novel, Teresa verifies that what she thought was mere admiration from her friend really was an illusion-filled desire to become her life partner and responds as follows:

> She experienced the absurd impulse to turn toward Patty violently, straddle her, take her by the shoulders and shake her until her teeth rattled, pull off her clothes and say, well, you're going to collect it all right now, once and for all, so we can finally put this to rest. But she knew not to do that. You couldn't pay back anything that way, and they were now too far apart—they'd followed paths that would never cross again. (Pérez-Reverte 345)

Teresa's violent response to Patty's lament is curiously framed in gendered terms, this time the former has fully appropriated a male instinct and is repulsed by her friend's vulnerability. Interestingly, Teresa's instincts mock a sexually dominant pose in which she imagines herself as Patty's aggressor followed by a quick emotional withdrawal. This split instinct resounds of Teresa's emotional separation during the rape scene discussed earlier. Although this is Teresa's survival instinct, it also signals an internal tension between the naïve, feminine, soft and emotional Teresa, with a colder, male, violent, strategist Other. In this moment, Teresa represents the challenge Halberstam contends the "excessive masculinity of the dyke" poses to patriarchy (74). However, her actions do so merely by creating another binary (of which Halberstam warns) where Teresa's masculinity is invoked to represent power over Patty, not to

create a new female masculinity (29). At the same time, her choice *not* to act on her initial impulse signals another shift in Teresa's thinking away from when she could use her body in trade for what she wanted to where her masculine role as boss (ironically, "queen") put her on a different plane than her female, bisexual, ex-partner.

Teresa's arrival in Spain, even before she meets Patty, is when she actually begins learning skills and using natural abilities that are traditionally considered masculine. Although Teresa acts as a prostitute on a couple of occasions, her "head for numbers" allows her to convince her boss that she should not be one of the working girls. At first, she is allowed to be a bartender, which already sets her apart from the other women, but eventually takes over all the bookkeeping. She gains the respect of her boss not for her body, but for her mind. We are never privy to where she learned this and, therefore, the novel suggests it is natural for her. Given the association with logic mathematics holds in society, and therefore its link with men and masculinity, this is one of the first suggestions that Teresa is not a typical feminine woman.

Later, in the *telenovela*, Teresa suggests becoming Santiago's partner. In the novel, it is unclear whether the impetus for their partnership is Teresa or Santiago's idea. In both genres, she nevertheless becomes a fellow trafficker. Despite the dominance of men in the drug world, Teresa learns the skills she needs to function competently as Santiago's partner from riding on the boat between Spain and Morocco and working to perfect the boat's engines to meeting with drug dealers and bribing local authorities. When Teresa goes on her first job with Santiago, she is described in the novel as seeing herself from the outside as if a mirror reflection of herself. This out of body experience Teresa began practicing in Culiacán as a coping mechanism to passively take the violations of her female body is now attributed with giving her the aptitude to be cold and calculating (read: masculine) enough to take the risks involved in trafficking drugs.

Even so, her unique vulnerability as a woman in a man's world cannot be ignored. Reporter, Oscar Lobato, says:

> In the street she started earning respect….First, because the Gallego had a reputation, people respected him. And second, because she was the only one of those girls that went out shoulder to shoulder with her man. Early on, people thought it was a joke … But when word got out that she had the same balls as any man, things changed. (Pérez-Reverte 129)

Her reputation went from being associated with Santiago to being her own and her behavior earned her metaphorical male body parts associated with courage in the face of danger. Her masculine characteristics are also noted by police Commander Juárez as he describes her "tremendous pair of balls" (214). He likewise distinguishes her from other women as having a calculator in her head instead of between her legs (as he says other women do). It was her metaphorical masculinity, in spite of her sex, that gained her respect.

Santiago is described in the novel as instigating Teresa's increasing involvement in all aspects of the business. He takes on the explicit task of teaching her every part of the business from the logistics of boating to business dealings with the various parties involved. Teresa is described as not wanting to go to meetings with the traffickers. However, "Santiago always insisted," explaining:

> You take the same risks I do….You have a right to know what goes down and how it goes down. Don't talk if you don't want to, but it can't hurt to pay attention. And if these guys don't like you being there, fuck 'em....(T)heir women are...not risking their cunts against the Moros five or six times a month. (135)

Santiago instigates her increased involvement and is given credit for her knowledge of the drug trade. Just as Teresa's power is attributed to her masculine characteristics, so too is her female biology given the responsibility for putting her at unique risk. Interestingly, Santiago suggests that the risk her gender puts her in should be her motivation for understanding the business.

To this point in her story, Teresa is subject to her body and her sex and the perceptions others have of her, making her too often a victim of circumstance. Just as *Mad Men*'s Joan poses a threat to patriarchy *because* she "transcends polarities" while taking into consideration "the structural gendered constraints in which her decision making must happen" (D'Enbeau and Buzzanell 14),Teresa's increasing awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of her female/feminine and male/masculine characteristics have the potential to challenge traditional roles for women in *narcocultura*. As a woman she is a victim of rape, but later uses her body to gain advantage. She uses her knowledge of numbers and mechanics to avoid *having* to be a prostitute and to become a partner in the drug trafficking business while at the same time knowing that as a woman the risks she was taking differed than those of her boyfriend.

Becoming a Masculine Queen

Once Santiago dies and Teresa and Patty are released from prison, the novel continues to represent Teresa's life as fraught with tension between fate and choice. Patty is described as the one who leads Teresa to the drugs, who arranges the deal with Russian mob boss, Oleg Yasikov, and who says she will do the talking in the meeting with Oleg. Yet, in his interview with the narrator of the novel, Nino Juárez, former head of an organized crime unit, says it was Teresa who came up with the deal she and Patty presented to Oleg. At the start of the scene with Oleg, he notes that they are both "playing it pretty cool" (Pérez-Reverte 215). But, their tough-girl façade begins to crack when Patty nervously attempts to light a

cigarette with shaking hands. Teresa sees panic in Patty's eyes and believes Oleg is about to reject the deal and kill them both. In the novel, the narrator characterizes the moment Teresa begins to speak as one in which she hears herself speaking as if her voice was not her own. "Then, without thinking, she heard her own voice…" (219). Despite her seemingly uncontrollable fear, Teresa calmly and clearly reintroduces the deal to Oleg and offers not just to sell his drugs back to him, but explains that she can help him get involved in the hash trade. She says, "I know that business. And I know you people don't have hash" (222). Although he tries to deny it, "Teresa shook her head confidently" (222). Outwardly, she appears the agent of her own fate, but the narrator explains: "A door opened, and that silent woman, the one who sometimes resembled her, was watching her from the threshold" (222).

Teresa uses the knowledge she has in the hash trade that she learned from Santiago to turn the tables on both Patty and Oleg. She asserts, "*I* know that business," and "*I* know you people don't have hash." At that moment she suggests to Oleg that she has something to offer that he does not have. She demonstrates her value to him and gives him a reason not only not to kill her (and by extension Patty), but a reason to agree to the deal they offered. As narrated, it was, once again, the second Teresa taking control and seeing the road lay itself out for her, which still implied less agency than the deal itself suggested.

The first meeting with Oleg is nearly identical in the novel as it is in the *telenovela*'s "Death Sentence" episode. In contrast, however, we *see* Patty and Teresa arguing about what to do with the drugs. During this exchange, it is Teresa who says, "If anyone knows this business, it's me." When they find the drugs, we then see and hear Teresa telling Patty how to deal with the drugs and the Russians. Although it is still Patty who makes the call to Oleg, the *telenovela shows* how big a role Teresa plays in their actions. Patty even tells Oleg that it was Teresa's idea to sell him his drugs back. However, when Teresa takes control of the meeting by

offering her knowledge of the hash business to Oleg, there is no second Teresa looking at the first. So, it appears that it is Teresa's actions that lead Oleg not to kill them. Also, the scene ends with Oleg saying they have a deal if Teresa can show him that she knows the hash route. Subsequent scenes again *show* Teresa's expertise in action as she recovers the drugs for the Russians. The visual representation highlights her agency. In her meeting with Oleg, Teresa more fully embraces her masculine characteristics, suppresses the feminine, and becomes "La reina del sur".

The scene that best demonstrates Teresa's transformation from novice to boss and how she negotiates between her feminine and masculine sides, is when her would-be assassins from Mexico come to Europe and are captured by Oleg's men. In the novel, Teresa is described as watching the men being tortured "with a dry, attentive curiosity that appeared to come not from her but rather from the other woman who was stalking around" (Pérez-Reverte 276). As Pérez-Reverte describes it, Teresa appears in total control of herself while seeing herself from the outside, as if she were being directed by this other self. In that moment, she makes a decision and says, "I'll do it" (276). Although the narrator still describes her as being watched by the other Teresa, the first Teresa speaks and decides to take action, just as she did in the first meeting with Oleg. She sees killing them and finishing the business from Mexico as her responsibility.

However, Oleg simply replies, "No" (277). In this moment, Teresa makes a choice and appears ready to take violent action, but Oleg denies her. It is not that she cannot act, but because she should not. As a woman working for her lover, she was considered a "dirty whore." As a boss, she must not get dirty. Teresa allows Oleg to have his men take care of business, but not before she chooses to free Pote as he "played it straight" with her when ordered to kill her, i.e., he did not try to rape her and tried to stop Gato. Her decision leads Pote to become her most loyal bodyguard

who remains with her until the bitter end. In this moment, she appears to make an unemotional, business, and therefore masculine, decision.

In the *telenovela* episode, "An Eye for an Eye", there are three would-be killers, Pote, Gato, and Ratas. Teresa's actions during this scene of the *telenovela* establish her as making conscious choices and being in charge. As she watches the men being tortured, the camera slowly shows Teresa, not looking at herself, but making direct eye contact with each man. Oleg then says, "These men's lives are in your hands." She approaches Gato and says, "Oleg, give me your gun." He replies, "No." She explains to Oleg, "This is a personal score. Give me your gun." He still says no and tells her to let his men take care of it so that she will not get her "hands dirty with this filth." Teresa sees this act as a way to "cleanse" herself of "the memories and anger" from what they did to her.

Teresa tells them to shut up when Pote interrupts asking to die and Gato begs her forgiveness. She says Gato sounds "like a girl" and wonders how he was so "macho" before. Ratas spouts, "As if you didn't like what he did to you, bitch." She slaps him and says he is nothing without a gun. She then pulls off Gato's belt buckle, which converts to the knife he used to cut off her shirt in Mexico. She holds the knife to his genitals and asserts that he "will never rape another woman again." Oleg physically pulls her off. She struggles and screams that she has to get revenge. He indicates they will do whatever she wants them to do with the men but he will not let her lose control. She says, "The worst of me exists because of what they did to me." Ultimately, she grants Pote his freedom and walks out, leaving the job of killing Gato and Ratas to Oleg's men.

This scene shows Teresa ready to take action and needing to be held back by Oleg. Revealing her emotional response to her rapist and would-be killers directs our focus to Teresa as a female boss who was once violated by these men, as does Ratas calling her a "bitch" and saying she enjoyed her rape. Yet, the authority she asserts over them by coldly watching their torture, slapping Ratas, holding the knife to Gato's genitals,

and ordering their deaths (and freedom in Pote's case) demonstrates the power she has achieved in this world. By calling Gato a "girl" when he begs for his life, Teresa also points to the weakness attributed to the female sex. Ultimately, Teresa's rational, unemotional side wins in the end. Once again her actions point toward her achievement of power through the embodiment of these masculine characteristics. These circumstances seem to be leading to Teresa's predetermined response: killing the men who wronged her. However, her choice not to act, not to kill them, clearly marks her as an agent, no longer subject to the forces of fate. By leaving the dirty work to Oleg's men, she also cleanses herself of her violation as a woman and embraces her cold, unemotional side, becoming the masculine "queen".

Conclusions

The irony of Teresa's transformation to a masculine "queen" highlights a central finding of our analysis, that is, the importance of sex, gender and the body in *La reina del sur*. The world of *telenovelas* has traditionally been peopled by women and romance for female audiences. *Narcotelenovelas* bring the drama of the masculine drug world to television for an increasingly diverse, transnational audience. Combining the *telenovela rosa* and the *telenovela de ruptura* makes room for a female protagonist like Teresa Mendoza - a heterosexual woman who gains knowledge from her ill-fated, drug dealing boyfriends and female, bi-sexual friend and partner that allows her to rise above her station to become a leader in the drug worlds of Mexico, Spain, and Morocco. In such a liminal space, theorizing Teresa Mendoza as the embodiment of Halberstam's heterosexual female masculinity seems apropos. Her experiences speak to those involved in illegal drug trafficking worldwide, but also to many women trying to make it and survive in a man's world. On one hand, this means learning valuable lessons from these personal

relationships. On the other, it means continually losing those close to her, which ultimately teaches her that to succeed in business she must sacrifice the personal. While this choice does not usually involve the extreme losses Teresa experiences, the tensions between home and work resonate for many women (and increasingly men).

Teresa begins as a victim of her sex, body, and fate as characterized in both versions of *La reina del sur*. Her seemingly natural mathematical acumen and the skills she learns from boyfriend, Santiago, and cellmate/friend, Patty, demonstrate both her masculine and feminine qualities. As she develops skills that will help her eventually become "la reina del sur," she also struggles with passively taking what comes to her and actively making choices to gain power. As a woman, Teresa's story suggests a new kind of protagonist - one who uses what she has as a woman to her advantage and embodying female masculinity. While this includes her body at times (which is nothing new), the relational nature of her learning and working with partners, including Santiago and Patty, could point to someone who values working with others, whereas traditional male leadership focuses on individuality. The reality, though, suggests she may have had to use her body and sex to get where she is, but that her real power comes from embracing her masculine side. That is, the lessons she learned from her partners contribute to her evolution, but she leaves them all behind and works alone to be the "queen".

The "moments" we included in our analysis support our conclusion about Teresa ending up alone as she reaches power. It is important to note, however, that at the actual end of *La reina del sur*, Teresa has her lover killed for betraying her, without telling him that she is pregnant with his child. She decides to return to Mexico, and her bodyguard (former would-be assassin) Pote accompanies her. Pote gives up his life protecting her. In the end, Teresa gives up her masculine power and her role as "queen" to save her unborn child, goes into hiding, and presumably becomes a mother (from what the conclusions suggest). Grady argues that despite the intent

of the producers and star of *Kill Bill* to make the Bride a male character in a female body, "(b)ecause the Bride is a mother, and rape victim, *Kill Bill* remains a chauvinist fantasy where a woman can play at heroism but is always defeated via her female body. In the end, the Bride becomes defined by her maternity and not her masculine action" (74). So too is any potential threat anti-heroine Teresa poses to *narcocultura* neutralized as soon as she gives up her masculine side for that of the feminine role of mother.

Our analysis further suggests that how Teresa's actions are characterized in the different media forms has implications for her agency. In the novel, her evolution from novice to boss was characterized much more by tensions between the forces of fate and choice, whereas in the *telenovela*, Teresa plays a much more active role in her own life. In both forms, Teresa clearly begins her story in a passive "girlfriend" role and ends as a leader in the drug world. Her escape from her rapist and would-be killers hints that there may be more to her than a victim. In the novel, circumstance and a psychological split are given more credit than she is for why she acts the way she does. Several later instances, including when she becomes partners with Santiago and when she goes into business with Patty, make it unclear whether Teresa has decided to take these actions or if she has merely reacted to circumstances she has been given. Narrative strategies, such as the omniscient narrator and the creation of the second Teresa, create tensions between her ability to act or merely react. In novel form, Teresa's destiny seems more pre-ordained, like she is living out the *corridos* written about her. The novel itself is presented by the narrator/author as one long-winded *corrido* in the end, unable to be reduced to less than 400 pages, but still left with an open ending.

In the *telenovela*, Teresa becomes more of an agent in her own life. The televisual nature of the medium *shows* the audience what Teresa does to escape Mexico, learning to become a trafficker, and taking control of the business. Television has been theorized as a dubious medium for

promoting feminism, especially where sexual women are involved (Arthurs 97). Without a narrator explaining her actions and the narrative ambiguity of her role in decision making, Teresa appears more active in the *telenovela*, and therefore her life appears to be a matter of her choice and action. That Teresa is played by as big a star as Kate del Castillo suggests her role as this female leader could have significant impacts on her audience.

Despite the potentialities of showing rather than telling Teresa's story in the *telenovela*, the visual nature of television also includes the spectacle of female characters' bodies more than in the novel. While the novel repeatedly discusses how Teresa looks, except for the rape scene (where her body is meant to show her as a victim), the purpose of these descriptions is mainly to point to Teresa's ethnicity and her Mexican origins, which highlights the transglobal character of the story (see Benavides). In contrast, the *telenovela* shows Teresa in bikinis and see-through tank tops. The purpose in this context appears more to draw the male gaze than to contribute to the story. Highlighting her female body reminds us she is a woman, while her actions still suggest a masculine character.

Butler contends that the performativity of gender cannot be theorized without taking into consideration the structures that shape and constrain its performance, from informal and formal regulations to material conditions of lived bodies (15). By considering the *narcocultura* represented and potentially challenged in *La reina del sur*, we suggest that Teresa Mendoza's character ultimately reifies the gender binaries she has the potential to transform. Her evolution from novice to boss involves moments where she challenges traditional gender roles and embodies a heterosexual female masculinity. However, ultimately, to become boss, she must transcend her femininity, and when she becomes pregnant she uses her agentic power to renounce her masculinity to become a mother.

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The Lyrics of Leiber and Stoller: A Cultural Analysis

ANTHONY ESPOSITO

Popular music lost one of its seminal members when songwriter, Jerry Leiber, succumbed to cardio-pulmonary failure in August of 2011. Often in popular music, it is the singer who receives the accolades, while the songwriter, if not part of the band, is positioned in a subordinate role in receiving popularity from both critics and the general population. This has happened numerous times since the advent of popular music, which by historical standards was established in the decade of the 1950s by such musicians as Elvis Presley, Chuck Berry, and Buddy Holly. It was during this decade that two white Jewish songwriters, Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller, changed the cultural landscape of popular music by writing for such artists as The Coasters, The Drifters, and Ben E. King. Himes details their importance, when arguing that "Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller are probably the top rock and roll songwriters of all time, They certainly rank right up there, for they have given us such enduring standards as "Kansas City," "Hound Dog," "Love Potion #9" and countless others" (7). Indeed, Leiber and Stoller were significant forces in that wide artistic genre of popular music.

They were responsible for writing the first hit for Elvis Presley, "Houndog." However, this would not be their most important role as songwriters. Their most significant contribution was employing their songwriting capabilities to highlight the talents of Black bands and musicians. Both The Drifters and Coasters were successfully assisted by this talented songwriting team, and both were commercially viable in this

decade because of the songwriting talents of Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller.

Not only were these two songwriters extremely talented, but their love and knowledge of the Black culture, which included their use of humor, enabled their songs to sound authentic when performed by Black musicians or groups. This was an anomaly during a time period when many white musicians were stealing the musical styles of black musicians (Szwed). Leiber and Stoller did not take part in this process. They established themselves as authentic songwriters of popular music. Certainly, they were not totally responsible for racial crossover music in America, but they were seen as catalysts in writing music that seemed authentic and true to the sound and culture of Black musicians. For instance, in 1961, Lavern Baker's "Saved," written by Leiber and Stoller, reached number seventeen on the R & B charts and number thirty-seven on the pop charts (Deffaa). Reed acknowledges the importance of this song when she states, "Saved" is an important symbol, representing the dynamics of race, religion, and class in Black popular music. It symbolizes that cyclical process in much Black music since the 1930s, whereby African American cultural themes are shaped into songs by white songwriters and handed back to black artists for authentic interpretation" (2). Reed informs the reader of the genuine capabilities of this songwriting team in constructing their songs from their love and knowledge of the Black culture and community.

This article will highlight Leiber and Stoller's roles as cultural contributors to the music of the 1950s. The main emphasis will be on their ability as white songwriters to construct songs from a Black perspective for Black musicians that sounded unique and employed a Black comedic writing style, which enabled white audiences to see a different culture and its discursive musical styles. Therefore, using the band The Coasters, and their songwriting team of Leiber and Stoller, I will attempt to show through their lyrics that humor played a significant role in enabling a

Black band to be accepted by white audiences. In order to show their significance as cultural contributors from the standpoint of race and provide a comprehensive overview of Leiber and Stoller, it will be paramount to discuss some of the following points. First, I will discuss Black music in a white world. In essence, how did bands cross over during the decade of the 1950s? Second, I will examine thoroughly the cultures of Leiber and Stoller, which will provide an insightful analysis into the construction of their lyrics. Third, I will analyze the importance of humor employed by Leiber and Stoller as a form of identification to serve as a link between Black and white audiences. Many other bands associated with the songwriting team of Leiber and Stoller could have been used in this study, but the Coasters, with their comedic musical style, seem to resonate most with what this study is attempting to uncover. Therefore, the lyrics of Leiber and Stoller will be studied as situated in the songs of the Coasters

Music Scene of the 1950s

For the fan of modern day pop music, it is probably difficult to think of a time when African American groups or singers were not played on mainstream radio. Perusing *Billboard Magazine*, listening to popular radio, or watching MTV, would provide one previously unfamiliar with modern day music with the impact of African American music on the current cultural landscape. Rap music, music formed in African American communities, is by far the highest selling music of the late 20th and early 21st century. History will emphasize how white kids have emulated the style of Black kids in both musical style and dress (Graham). In fact, African American musicians have been a mainstay in the homes of white Americans from about the end of the 1950s to the present. However, in the early 1950s, it was not common for Blacks to be played on white mainstream radio stations.

Crossover music, especially Black music, was not accepted during the time frame of the 1950s. But this pattern would begin to change in 1954. According to Propes,

> In the middle of March 1954, the Chords, a black six-man R&B vocal group from the Morrisania district of the Bronx, recorded their reworking of an old jailhouse song called "Sh-boom". A month later "Sh-boom" was the fourth release on the Cat label, a short-lived subsidiary of Atlantic Records. On 3 July, having climbed to number eight on Billboards national Rhythm and Blues singles chart, "Sh-boom" suddenly appeared on that journal's traditionally white best seller list. (6)

The above quotation signifies the crossover from the Black market into the mainstream pop charts.

Hall asserts, "Race has been central to social organization as it offers a process of giving things meaning by assigning them to different positions within a classificatory system that is the basis for the symbolic order we call culture" (236). It must also be noted that this was during the time of *Brown vs. the Topeka Board of Education,* which attempted to rectify the current status quo that was still in agreement that separate public school facilities for Black and white children was something that should still be enforced. Not only was *Brown* seen as a crossover, but also music was attempting to alleviate racial problems by allowing the Black culture access into white homes via the medium of popular music. In a sense, Black music was also acting as a change agent in American race relations during this decade. Ward, Stockes, & Tucker say, "Although it was not the first R&B record to penetrate the white pop charts, the crossover of "Sh-boom" nonetheless signaled the start of a new era in American popular music in which young whites increasingly turned to black music and its derivatives for their entertainment" (2). Black and white bands or

musicians did not play together during this time period. Even their music unions were segregated (Szwed).

Black music, or what we could define as Black rock and roll, was extolled by such artists as Little Richard and Chuck Berry. Music was usually distributed from a racial frame of reference. For example, there were labels devoted to Black musicians and their music (Szwed). Both Richard and Berry give the reader a template to begin assessing the popularity of crossover acts in the early 1950s. Not only did these two musicians become successful recording artists, but their brand of music spawned the white rock and roll sounds of Elvis Presley and Buddy Holly. All four of the above musicians played a seminal role in the construction of rock and roll and the crossover appeal of race music during this important decade. Historically speaking, music has been a way for Black musicians to express themselves to a white audience without fear of persecution or oppression (Cummings & Roy).

The Chords success and other Black bands/musicians that followed allowed some to believe that music somehow acted as a benevolent force to bind together the races. The crossover by the Chords into white mainstream radio charts in July 1954 was not the only Black record to make an impact on the charts. Such bands as The Crows, The Dominoes, Lloyd Price, and Faye Adams also charted well on white mainstream radio stations. (Ward et al.). This type of popularity would erode some of the racist programming taking place during this time period. According to the *Billboard* chart dated January 28, 1955, the following information provides the growing popularity of Black music during this time period:

> By the end of 1954, income from r&b records and tours constituted a $25 million branch of the industry. A growing, if still relatively small, contingent of young white fans had combined with the black audience to double the market share claimed by r&b from 5 percent to 10 percent of the total industry gross. (56)

Not only could the majority of white record producers and owners of radio stations not ignore the popularity of Black music, but these bands and music were beginning to add a commercial dimension to why this type of music should be distributed to white mainstream audiences. From the years 1955-1958, Black Rhythm and Blues music continued to have a growing appeal for the American buying public (Billboard). In the early 1950s, this would have seemed like an arduous task for mainstream white Americans to accept Black music on their airwaves and in their houses. However, it became a major paradigm shift as it changed the genre of popular music. According to Charles Hamm, "At no point in the two hundred year history of popular song in America had there been such a drastic and dramatic change in such a brief time period" (391). The major goal of both the Black musicians and white recording companies was to break down the walls of segregation and reach a white buying audience. Some record labels saw inner city Black neighborhoods as a wonderful context for Black popular production, especially music. (Jackson). The musicians were successful in negating some of the stereotypes by allowing music to play an integral role in bridging some racial ideologies between Black music and their white listening audience. At the time, Black musicians were struggling to be employed. Therefore, by employing more Black musicians they were given the chance to be played on white mainstream radio.

It should be noted that capitalism cannot be neglected when discussing this topic. Money certainly played a role in the decision making process of white-owned radio stations that would reap maximum profits from the music of Black musicians. Not only did the music have an impact on the economic functions of the recording industry, but it was also used by its white consumers as a pedagogical tool to learn about life outside of their racial frames of reference. One might assume that the South would seem averse to accepting the music of Blacks; however, in reality, this couldn't be further from the truth. According to Ward et al.:

In the early to mid 1950s, southern working class white male youths managed to make the R&B they found on the radio, in jukeboxes, and in black clubs on the wrong side of town into integral part of their lives with- haircuts and lurid suits not withstanding generally conformed to the social, religious, sexual and racial orthodoxies of the contemporary white South. (38)

Ward et. al. point to the growing crossover success of Black music during this time period. It certainly was not repairing all of the racial wounds of the past, but at least it was enabling some Black musicians the opportunity for greater appeal to diverse American audiences. Relying on evidence provided by Billboard's best seller chart, between the years of 1957 and 1964 recordings by Black musicians accounted for 204 hits (Billboard). Statistically speaking, it is an impressive paradigm shift, since the first crossover hit was only three years removed from the year 1957.This time period was by far the greatest advancement of racially integrated music in the history of American popular music. Groia expands on the notion of music's racial divide by supplying interviews with important Black musicians of this time period:

In 1956, the Platters argued that rock and roll was doing a lot for race relations. It's giving the kids a chance to meet rock and roll artists and this is helping them find out that many of the stories that they hear are not true. Over 30 years later Harry Weigner, the group's bass singer, still insisted that the music had helped to undermine venerable white racial stereotypes. Because of our music, white kids ventured into black areas. In the late 1950s, Herbie Cox of the Cleftones really believed that disk jockeys and record distributors were doing more for integration than Brown *versus the Topeka Board of Education*. (128)

Music was creating a sense of connectedness between some racial segments of American society. In addition not only were whites learning about Black culture, but for the first time in their careers, Black musicians were playing their music to white audiences. Therefore, the timing of the songwriting team of Leiber and Stoller would play an integral role in showing the comedic side of Black musicians and their culture. The next section will show their unique ability to immerse themselves in the culture and write from the perspective that would stay authentic to the sounds and words of Black musicians.

Expert Spectators

To understand the importance of culture, one must understand the values, mores, and traditions that are clear indicators of the culture or community under study. In fact, numerous musicians of the past and present have enhanced our knowledge of cultures, communities, and specific time frames that are an important part of the American landscape. For example, Robbie Robertson's album, *Storyville,* released in 1991, was a sort of historical ethnography of a bordello district in New Orleans in the 1920s. Robertson provided in this album specific characters, the flavor of this culture, and an enhanced understanding of the natives residing in this cultural community in New Orleans. In addition, Paul Simon's album, *Graceland*, incorporated African musicians and their unique and innovative traditions that are inherent in the history of popular music.

 Current popular music has a plethora of examples in which culture is referenced by either solo acts or groups. This is certainly evident in the genre of popular music known as rap music. I could employ many examples, but one of the most unique examples is the white rapper Eminem. Being a white rapper is an anomaly in rap music. Fraley said, "Eminem, a White MC, has achieved a level of success unmatched in the world of hip-hop. Conscious of his race, Eminem stresses that he is not to

be placed in the White rapper category but should be respected for his skills" (37). However, not only has Eminem achieved mass success with both white and Black audiences, he has received critical praise from music critics. Eminem's 2002 release, *The Eminem Show*, discusses his plight of growing up in a trailer court in Detroit, Michigan. One can argue that Eminem's addresses with characters from his neighborhood, as they live out their existences, and experience racial and class discrimination.

Numerous other musicians who could have been discussed, but this gives the reader a clear indicator that some musicians attempt to write from the perspective of the cultural insider. In the above examples, the researchers (musicians) of these songs were able to exhibit through their lyrics a cultural voice sometimes not heard by mainstream audiences. I am not arguing that musicians are researchers; instead, I am advocating that these individuals function in the same manner as researchers who study and perform modes of ethnographic research.

Both Leiber and Stoller can be described as experts, because they immersed themselves in the history and culture of Black musicians. Rosenfield states, "One characteristic of a critic, then, is his interest in observing and discussing instances of discourse, be they essays, speeches, performances, or advertisements from the vantage of the spectator" (10). Under these circumstances, both Leiber and Stoller showed an appreciation of Black culture and music, which contributed to an enhanced understanding of one part of this culture. According to Ward et al, they expound on the importance of this songwriting team to the time period of the 1950s:

> Leiber and Stoller dawned on the music scene at a time of stylistic rumblings and movement into a new territory of popular music, a time when the authentic American Rhythm and Blues of the black world was beginning to be embraced by the general music-buying public, a time when the phenomenon of crossover became apparent with the daily programming assistance of legendary disc jockeys

like Alan Freed, a Cleveland on-air personality who is said to have
coined the phrase, rock and roll. (32)

Their timing and exemplary songwriting skills were certainly seen as a
catalyst that had an impact on race albums in the United States. Their goal
was to write songs that highlighted the strengths of their recording artists.
These strengths included, but were not limited to, their voices, humor,
production, and technique. Palmer asserts, "When they began writing
together, Leiber and Stoller were concerned above all with sounding
authentic, which to them meant exclusively black" (19).

Authenticity to the Black culture encapsulated many things to this
talented songwriting team. Songs such as "Charlie Brown," "Young
Blood," and "Yakety Yak" as performed by The Drifters highlight the
comedic style through lyrical content and vocal performance. Leiber and
Stoller delighted in attempting to understand the culture they were
representing. Ward et al. evidences this when they quote Stoller saying, " I
wouldn't say that we were the only Caucasians interested in the blues, but
generally speaking it was unusual for the teenage white kids to be
involved, knowledgeable, and interested in black music" (87).

Both of these songwriters' interest in the culture and music of the
Black frame of reference and their own background experiences enabled
them to grasp a better understanding of the culture they were attempting to
emulate through such variables as language and instrumentation. It was
their interpretation of the Black experience which enabled these
songwriters to construct these interesting and relevant lyrics. According to
Palmer:

> In essence, Leiber and Stoller are conceptual artists whose medium
> is popular records. It is their influences-black Rhythm and Blues,
> ghetto   humor,   Broadway,   the   legitimate   theater,   classical
> music,Latin rhythms, jazz-which are diverse. And even this cultural

smorgasbord is readily comprehensible once one understands who they are and where they came from. (13)

For example, Leiber's mother ran a grocery store in a primarily Black ghetto in Baltimore, and Stoller grew up listening to Mexican-Americans and Blacks performing songs on the street corners and local clubs. Leiber, in an interview with Palmer, explains his own experience with the Black community when he states:

My mother was the only one who extended credit to black people, Leiber remembers. Most of their homes didn't have electricity; they used kerosene lamps. I was very welcome, and I loved to make that trip to their homes. They always made a big fuss over me. A radio was always playing. Those radios were like magic boxes to me; they played music I never heard anywhere else. Sometimes they played Southern country music but mainly they played rhythm and blues. (67)

In addition, the Stollers lived in a neighborhood in New York that was predominately Mexican American. Some of these Latin influences certainly were evident in the later recordings of The Drifters in such songs as "Spanish Harlem," "Save the Last Dance for Me," and "Under the Boardwalk." These are just a few examples of the Latin influence in their music that was derived by living in close proxemics to Mexican Americans. It would seem to be a cumbersome task for a white songwriting team to write from either the perspective of Black or Mexican musicians, but the team of Leiber and Stoller were ready for this arduous process. Stoller, in an interview with Fricke, explains his love for the Black culture when he states, "I felt black. I was, as far as I was concerned. And I wanted to be black for lots of reasons. They were better musicians, they were better athletes, they were not uptight about sex, and they knew how to enjoy life better than most people" (100). Passion for

the Black culture enabled both of these songwriters to maneuver their words to adhere to the sound and authenticity of Black musicians. Some research explains Whiteness as negative and some whites feel some negativity towards their race (Shome, 2000). This is the template that Leiber and Stoller seemed to emulate. Their passion for the Black culture is further articulated by Palmer when he asserts:

> More and more, Leiber and Stoller dropped out of conventional white society and began to identify themselves with the black subculture. They moved through a night world populated by jazzman, black hipsters, and other stylish, creative, economically marginal types. We found ourselves writing for black artists," Leiber says, "because those were the voices and rhythms we loved. By the fall of 1950, when both Mike and I were in City College, we had black girlfriends and were into a black lifestyle. (29)

Even though they were not Black, their ability to immerse themselves in parts of the culture under study enabled them to have somewhat of an insider's perspective on the overall values, norms, and mores of this culture. This will be evidenced later in this analysis by delving into the writing style of Leiber and Stoller. Black communication is more assertive than White communication style (Kochman). There are also different social rules that are embedded in the patterns of communication (Hecht, Collier, & Ribeau). Research purports that Black communication style is more direct (Kochman). Hughes and Baldwin assert, "The use of Black slang may call attention to itself, causing it be seen as loud and noisy" (45). In addition, it escalates stereotypes of comic Blacks and the portrayal of Blacks as comedians (Hall). The above characteristics are not exhaustive, but indicative of some of the characteristics of Black communication styles.

The above studies indicate the importance of race in communication situations. Conversely, it can be argued that these communication characteristics can be linked to the study of popular music. I don't believe that any ethnographer can ever be part of the culture under study. However, in the case of Leiber and Stoller, it seemed that their access to parts of the Black culture provided them with the knowledge to write music from the Black frame of reference. According to Jackson, "The real and primary concern is the extent to which underprivileged or subjugated groups are able to gain agency by moving from margin to center, from object to subject, and from Other to I." (10). Even though Leiber and Stoller were not part of an underprivileged group, they acted as catalysts to get these minority groups played on white mainstream radio stations. Their astute ability and passion for making this type of music was evident in the true blues fashion they were attempting to capture and emulate. Not only was this a unique arrangement, meaning white songwriters writing for Black musicians, but their songwriting skills were lucrative to Leiber and Stoller, The Coasters, and the record company.

Leiber and Stoller created an attention switching activity in the genre of rock and roll by enabling Black musicians and performers to have the opportunity to be heard on white mainstream radio stations. They were not the first, but they may have been the most successful. These songwriters were able to achieve this feat because of their expert knowledge and understanding of the Black culture and its important musical components and variables. According to Rosenfield, "What matters is exceptional understanding. Accordingly, critical posture refers to the capacity a person has to act as an expert commentator, and the critic, if he is nothing else, must be the one who is capable of filling the shoes" (18). Leiber and Stoller would be defined as expert spectators of the Black culture, especially in the area of popular music and sound. This knowledge assisted them in creating a unique sound that emulated, but did not steal from the culture of the Black musician. Unlike other cultural producers

before them, many of them white, Leiber and Stoller did not emulate the ideologies of past participants in the writing and production of Black performance to White audiences. Patton says, "Like a cultural consumer, a contemporary colonist holds the antiquated model of an anthropologist; one finds the other, studies like the other, reports on the other, and takes what they want from the other while furthering white hegemony." (156). They were a paradox to past practices in the music industry. In an interview with Fricke in 1990, Stoller asserts his goal when writing songs: "What we wanted to do was try as good as we could at writing blues, for blues singers. Which meant exclusively black performers, writing in the black vernacular" (98). The Black groups they represented successfully were the Drifters and the Coasters. Both of these bands employed the talents of this songwriting team, which gave the rest of America the opportunity to be invited into their discursive cultures.

It is evident that both songwriters wanted to highlight the talents of Black musicians. In addition, they wanted to correct the exigence of racism, prejudice, and oppression that were redundant themes in a recording industry dominated by Caucasians. Bitzer explains the importance of changing an old ideology:

> A rhetorical situation may be defined as a complex of persons, events, objects, and relations which presents an exigence that can be completely removed if discourse introduced into the situation can influence audience thought or action so as to bring about positive modification of the exigence (24).

Bitzer's notion of exigence can be applied to the recording industry during the decade of the 1950s. In sum, the exigence of unequal opportunities for Black musicians needed to be reversed to empower the talents of Black musicians. Consequently, Leiber and Stoller were able to influence American record producers, programmers, and top forty radio stations that Black music could be lucrative and influence the popularity of rock and

roll and its listening audience. By establishing a sense of ethos within the musical community by writing hit songs for such artists as The Coasters, The Drifters, and Ben E. King, Leiber and Stoller were able to help overcome the problem of unequal airplay and opportunities for Black musicians. In this instance, they were able to provide mainstream society a glimpse into the Black culture and its rich musical traditions.

Songwriting skills of Leiber and Stoller

As astute songwriters of popular music, it was essential for Leiber and Stoller's lyrics to resonate with their buying audience. This diverse audience would include both white and Black audience members; therefore, it was important that their music identified with the teenage population. Ward et al. quote Leiber in a interview when he discusses their songwriting skills:"If we were amused, if we really liked what we did, we had a pretty good darn shot at having a hit, because we were our own audience and we were on some level or another, typical of the people who bought our records" (88). Focusing on the notion of identification developed by Kenneth Burke, it is evident that Leiber and Stoller, through their songwriting skills, were forming identification between the Coasters and their audience. Burke says, "You persuade a man insofar you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, identifying your ways with his" (49). Leiber and Stoller were able to persuade their audience members because their lyrics, especially the ones written for the Coasters, spoke to their audiences' hopes, sexual pleasures, fears, pain, and rebellious behaviors. In this sense, the identification was one that showed empathy toward their audience members, yet in the process, attempted to socialize them on the taboo subjects often times rejected by mainstream society in the 1950s. Booth shows the relationship between the singer and the audience when he says, "The singers words are sung for us in that he says something that is also said somehow in

extension by us, and we are drawn into the state, the pose, the attitudes, the self offered by the song" (243). The skills of this songwriting team and their lyrics were magnetic to its listeners, and in turn, enabled them to act as active participants in the meaning and musical variables of their songs established for the Coasters. Palmer shows the importance of their lyrics:

> Leiber and Stoller could make us laugh at our loneliness ("Searchin"), at our sexual frustrations ("Love Potion #9"), at our rebellious goofing off ("Charlie Brown"), at our bossy parents ("Yakety Yak"). These songs were dramatic events, which a character and problems were established and then comically elaborated on, as when the boy had gone looking for the love potion and described swallowing it. (7)

Not only were Leiber and Stoller attempting to construct songs that adhered to the true Black tradition, but they were also implementing humor in the hope it would be accepted by the white mainstream buying audience. Their first hit, "Saved," by Lavern Baker in 1961, pointed to their knowledge of the Black culture by constructing a song that adhered to some of the traditions of this community. The first tradition was worship and religion. Second, they employed the use of humor that was part of the Black Church and culture (Reed). This isn't to say that these were the only variables present in the culture. However, it shows a part of the Black community that Leiber and Stoller were attempting to highlight throughout their songwriting. Some would say that Leiber and Stoller were escalating the already negative stereotypes of the Black culture. This would include the use of humor, which required Blacks to continue their use of minstrelsy to provide humorous personas to their white audiences. According to Reed:

> Minstrelsy provides a highly picturesque account of the way whites perceived and interpreted blacks and their culture from the mid nineteenth century as the late 1930s. However, that minstrelsy had multiple meanings, poking fun not only at blacks, but at a variety of both marginal and aristocratic types in antebellum America. (26)

Blackface minstrelsy has been seen as a damaging contributor to the negative stereotypes of Black performers. Blackface minstrelsy made Blacks seen like jokers to the white audience (Patton). In fact, Lott says, "The phenomenon of ministerly itself was an admission of fascination with blacks and black culture" (97). Since humor is a paramount ingredient in this study, blackface minstrelsy sometimes escalated racism and purported some of the stereotypes held by media organizations. Exposure to the above stereotypes assists in reinforcing the already racist ideologies held by white mainstream America.(Peffley, Hurwitz & Sniderman; Tan, Fujiika, & Tan). It is the above style that assisted Leiber and Stoller and their use of humor to make recording superstars of the Coasters. Therefore, in some instances, they were playing on the stereotype of the Black as a form of a jokester. But, they were using a part of the Black community that would be productive to the Black cause of allowing Black musicians to be played on white mainstream radio stations. In addition, some Black humor can be seen as a critique of white America (Barksdale). This is not an anomaly; it is something that has been employed throughout time by Black musicians. Reed says, "In order to have theatrical careers, many Blacks assumed the denigrating antics of minstrelsy, portraying what whites considered the most amusing behaviors and characteristics of the black culture" (4). It was with this knowledge that Leiber and Stoller would begin their successful writing career for the Coasters.

The Coasters and Leiber and Stoller

In 1957, when Atlantic Records signed the songwriting team of Leiber and Stoller, they were looking for a band that would showcase their songwriting talents (Ward et al.). The answer to the quest appeared to be the Robins; the group had already recorded two Leiber and Stoller songs on the Spark label. The songs "Smokey Joe's Café" and "Riot in Cell Black no. 9." However, the band's manager didn't want the band to record for Atlantic,so Leiber and Stoller talked the lead singer and bass player into becoming members of the newfound band the Coasters. The band's name was derived from them recording on the West Coast, unlike most of the other vocal groups who recorded in New York City (Deffa). Because the band had already recorded the above songs of Leiber and Stoller, it would seem appropriate these songwriters would become a catalyst in the initial success of the Coasters. Not only did Leiber and Stoller employ comedy in their lyrical content, but also the Coasters were a band that used comedy through implementation of their delivery style and musical accommodations. According to Deffa:

> Show business hasn't ever seen a vocal group quite like the Coasters. They are set apart, first of all, by their being a comedy team. There isn't another group that ranks in the top ten of Cash Box's annual survey of disc jockeys to determine the "Most Programmed Vocal Group" whose basic appeal rests on humor. Nothing in the world is more difficult to achieve than a long-term career in the record field by being funny. (35)

The above quotation is important because it informs one of the successes of this band and , most importantly, it describes humor as their success strategy. Humor can assist in producing laughter and smiling (Cann, Zapata, & Davis). Leiber and Stoller's love of Black culture, especially the ingredient of humor, and their employment of the Coasters as the deliverer

of the message, would lead to success for both the songwriters and the band. Even though some may argue that Leiber and Stoller played upon the stereotypes of the Black culture as comedians, it is evident that their understanding of the use of humor in this culture played a role that may have placated white audiences. According to Timmerman, Gussman, & King, "While there is a possibility of reaffirming the stereotypes in the process, there is also the promise and possibility of creating a perspective that while not eliminating the stereotypes of their history, does hold out hope for moving beyond them" (171). Since this research topic lends some significance to blackface minstrelsy, which established Blacks as buffoons in the white imagination, it seems important to note that Leiber and Stoller were trying to negate this practice through their production techniques for the Coasters. In the end, it allowed Blacks to share one part of their culture with the American people. Humor, in this instance, would be seen as a division that would exploit positively the Black musician and allow white audiences the opportunity to be exploited by the very system they embraced. It is said that music can be viewed as an appropriate mode of communication that allows the oppressed group to critique mainstream society. In sum, the group being castigated does not recognize the message by the oppressor as one that critiques and makes fun of the hegemonic group in power (Kaemer).

The theme of humor was evident in the songs performed by the Coasters. For example, such songs as "Searchin," "Poison Ivy," "Along Came Jones," "Yakety Yak," and "Charlie Brown" all had comedic forms of communication both in the lyrical content and musical style. Meyer says, "Not only is humor pleasant; its recurring presence suggests that communicators believe it to be persuasive" (310). It can either be employed as a form of inclusiveness or insulation. Leiber and Stoller used it for the purpose of selling their product to the American people. In this sense, inclusiveness played a role in establishing identification by employing humor, so a white audience would accept the actions of the

musical and performance style of the Coasters. Meyer says, "That because identification and clarification through humor engender agreement with the norm or issues involved, they tend to unify communicators" (323). This unification would be displayed between the band and its listening audience.

The two mainstays of the band were lead singer Carl Gardner and bassist Bobby Nunn. It was Nunn who would be the comic singer of the band. His baritone style during the refrains resonated comically with both white and Black audiences. The band displayed their performance style in 1957, when they recorded the Leiber and Stoller penned "Searchin". The song reached number one on the charts in May of 1957 (Rees and Crampton,). This is the band's first million selling album. In the song, the singer is searching for his girlfriend who has literally run away from the relationship and him. The lyrics include the following:

> Oh, yes, I been searchin' Searchin every which a way
>
> But I am like a Northwest Mountie
>
> You know I will bring her in some day
>
> Well, now if I have to swim a river, you know I will
>
> And if I have to climb a mountain, you know I will
>
> And if she is hidin' up on Blueberry Hill
>
> Am I gonna find her, child, you know I will

Both the lyrics of Leiber and Stoller and the singing style of the Coasters make this a unique recording for this time period. Ward, et al. say the song is about a "singer who is searching for his girlfriend, vowing to track her down with the tenacity of a Northwest Mountie or a Bulldog Drummond,

as the group executes a fiendishly tricky vocal arrangement built around the chant of "Gonna Find her" (152). Not only are the lyrics humorous in nature, but the sounds of the piano and the employment of the voice also make this an inviting song from a listener's perspective. Employing the song "Searchin," both Leiber and Stoller and the Coasters were showing through humor how the topic of a "broken heart" would make someone perform a task that would be out of character for that person. According to Meyer:

> An audience highly sympathetic to and quite familiar with the topic of humor may experience identification with the user of humor. Humor in this case serves to strengthen the commonality and shared meaning perceived between communicators. One valuable function humor serves is to build support by identifying communicators with their audiences, enhancing speaker credibility (317).

The concealment of sex was overtly present in this song. In fact, this was still a taboo topic in the decade of the 1950s. It is through the concept of humor that sex can be sold to the American buying audiences. Certainly, most if not all people can identify and empathize with the character in the song attempting to unite with a relational partner. Leiber and Stoller and the Coasters emulated this type of comedic style throughout the duration of this song. In sum, humor is associated with a variety of positive outcomes (Cann et al). Interestingly enough, Leiber and Stoller and the Coasters employed this style on the B-side to their song "Searchin" by constructing the comedic and sexual song "Youngblood." The song reaches the Top 10, hitting the charts at #8. Not only were the lyrics interesting, but Leiber and Stoller's use of musical style at this time was ingenious to the genre known as popular music. According to Palmer:

> In "YoungBlood," Jerry and Mike introduced a device, which was central to many subsequent Coasters records. There were breaks in which the instruments dropped out and the singers repeated a line one by one in rapid succession. "Looka there," each Coaster marveled as the "Young Blood" or underage girl walked by, with bass Bobby Nunn finishing off the sequence in a lascivious bumpkin's voice. The effect proved irresistible. (23)

Not only was the musical style unique, but Leiber and Stoller, through their lyrical geniuses, show the urgency of this individual attempting to form a relationship with a girl younger than him, and his adamant stance in establishing a relationship with this girl and receiving opposition from her parents, especially her dad. Sex and interpersonal relationships were not openly discussed in this decade. In addition, race was another variable that many people had an aversion toward discussing in the 1950s. Therefore, the song needed to be worded in such a way that it did not offend parents or its buying audience. Ward et al. explain why it resonated so well with its teenage population:

> In simple, direct language, it describes him meeting her, being tongue tied when he tries to talk to her, and finally encountering her father, who tells him to get lost. The last verse finds the singer tossing and turning till sunrise; and the song ends with the words "can't get you out of my mind" swooping up to a surprising and beautiful major chord resolution that seems to imply a subtle and wonderful surprise, that the story will have a happy ending anyway (152).

Sex as a topic can be both divisive and productive. Additionally, humor that addresses sex can easily backfire. In this case, the song was perfect for the situation. The first caption of the song finds Leiber and Stoller's

lyrics being put onto record by the Coasters as informing their audience about this individual seeing her for the first time:

I saw her standing on the corner

A yellow ribbon in her hair

I couldn't keep myself from shouting

Look a there look a there look a there

Young Blood

 I can't get you out of my mind

Not only do the lyrics reference sexual relationships, but musically with the use of the baritone voice, it sounds comedic in general. The song included comedy, sex, and innocence and seemed to capture the experience of teenagers during this time period. Just like "Searchin,” Youngblood" also used the theme of relationships to identify with their younger audience. Sex or sexual relationships that were performed in music by any artist were not commonplace topics heard in popular music at this time. In addition, it would be an even more arduous task for Black musicians to be delivering this type of message. Surprise, of course, is a key ingredient in humor from the incongruity perspective (Shurcliff). Therefore, it was the job of Leiber and Stoller to present this topic in a comedic fashion that did not cause dissonance with its buying audience, especially the white population. They performed this task by using comedy in their lyrical style. Humor from this perspective would rely on incongruity theory,which infers that people laugh at what surprises them (Berger, Deckers, & Divine, & McGhee,). In addition, Meyer speaks of humor under this template:

> An accepted pattern is violated, or a difference is noted-close enough to the norm to be non-threatening, but different enough from the norm to be remarkable. It is this difference, neither too shocking nor too mundane, that provokes humor in the mind of the receiver, according to the incongruity theory (313).

The song "Youngblood" seems to fit into the above criteria. First, it deviates from the norm of the music of the 1950s by mentioning the topics of sex and lust. Sex in the case of the song isn't overtly present, but it is implied through the communication style of comedy as performed by the Coasters. Second, the song is not too threatening in a sexual way. In addition, by using humor in this instance, Leiber and Stoller are able to use part of the African American heritage of humor without causing discomfort for their white audience members, who still had stereotypes and reservations about Black culture and its musicians. It can also be seen as a form of rebellion from the Black community. For instance, Black humor was viewed as an early form of Black power and a critique of white America (Barkdale). Singing proved to be a powerful tool for shaping a new image of African Americans for themselves and the larger world (Wyatt).

The year 1958 was a breakthrough year for both Leiber and Stoller and the Coasters. During this time period, "Yakety Yak" reached number one in July 1958. Rees and Crampton say the song "takes the form of a white kid's view (Stoller) of a black person's conception of white society" (200). This makes it interesting for several reasons. First, it is a critique delivered by white songwriters that deem themselves as experts of the Black culture. In this sense, experts (Leiber and Stoller) would write a critique that would be delivered by Black performers to a white audience about mainstream culture and ideologies. These include whites already oppressing Blacks and their voices. The way for the voice to be heard was through music. Ward, et al. state, "Leiber and Stoller hooked up with the Coasters again to make yet another teenage classic of social commentary,

yet another record that would set parents and school authorities against rock and roll: "Yakety Yak". Its hero was a poor kid bedeviled by his parents" (181). But did the song also include some racial overtures? The answer would be a resounding yes.

The first line in the song enables the listener to feel the oppression of Blacks or adolescents during this particular time frame as either white America or parents either warn Black America or their children to do their chores or they will be punished and not allowed to participate in mainstream society or listen to rock and roll music. The song provides a glimpse into this Orwellian environment:

Take out the papers and the trash

Or you don't get no spendin cash

If you don't scrub that kitchen floor

You ain't gonna rock 'n roll no more

Yakety Yak

Don't talk back

The above lyrics can be understood differently by discursive audiences. First, without understanding the history of the song, it would be commonsense knowledge to believe the song was written about teenage rebellion. However, upon further clarification, humor is employed in the song to hide the tragedy of racism during the decade of the 1950s. Watkins says. "That prior to the 1960s blacks were less likely to control the technologies and spaces where popular music was produced: thus the degree to which they could express an explicitly political message was seriously limited during studio recording sessions" (375). Perhaps the superiority theory would be appropriate to understand why Leiber and

Stoller wrote this song. Meyer says "that people laugh outwardly or inwardly at others because they feel some sort of triumph over them or feel superior in some way to them " (314). Maybe if the general white population knew what Leiber and Stoller were attempting to construct in this song, it would have changed their perceptions of this song and the Coasters. But this was not the case. It was a joke that was not privileged to be known by all people involved in this communication interaction. Superiority in this instance would say that even though Blacks were being subjected to the ridicules of whites by their thoughts and actions, it was this song that showed the superiority of Leiber and Stoller, which allowed Black musicians to show dominance by being the ones that made fun of white mainstream society. Meyer states:

> From superiority theory perspective, humor results, not just from something irrational or unexpected, but from seeing oneself as superior, right, or triumphant in contrast to one who is inferior, wrong or defeated. Laughing at faulty behavior can also reinforce unity among group members, as a feeling of superiority over those being ridiculed can coexist with a feeling of belonging. (315)

The song "Yakety Yak" certainly adheres to the above criteria. In this instance, were parts of Black America laughing at white mainstream culture and their ideologies? Additional lyrics of the song back up the above assertion:

> Don't give me no dirty looks
>
> Your father's hip he knows what cooks
>
> Just tell your hoodlum friends outside
>
> You ain't got time to take a ride

Yakety Yak

Don't talk back

The dirty looks may not be distributed because of social norms during this time period. However, it was this covert message that would supplant any forms of rebellion from a nonverbal frame of reference. The cornerstone of the success not only included the lyrics, but the continued fast progression of the song and the baritone style of the Coasters. Humor can be constructed that enjoyment of a funny message can be taken as a group's false sense of entitlement (Hobbs). In other words, the oppressor does not identify with the group being oppressed, but enjoys seeing an inferior group made fun of under certain situations and contexts (Banjo). Therefore, under these circumstances, the enjoyment of White stereotyping is considered to be influenced by Blacks sense of superiority and disconnect from White culture. This would be a major paradigm shift in this decade. It can be argued that Black music emphasized style over substance. However, in this case, both style and substance were combined together to form a protest song that could only be derived by the insiders of this culture, including Leiber and Stoller, the Coasters, and possibly African Americans in general.

It has been argued that Leiber and Stoller, through the implementation of humor in their lyrics and their love and knowledge of the Black culture, were able to get Black bands played on white mainstream radio. Since they were catalysts in this arena, it impelled them to write songs that were not comedic for other Black bands or musicians. These seminal songs include, but are not limited to such classics as "Kansas City" by Wilbert Harrison, "On Broadway" by the Drifters, and both "Spanish Harlem" and "Stand by Me" by Ben E. King. Therefore, it can be surmised that their earlier strategies set up success for Black performers in which they would no longer need to adhere to the established norms of humor that can be seen through today's lens as both racist and ethnocentric.

Conclusion

Chuck Berry, Elvis Presley, Buddy Holly, Little Richard, and Jerry Lee Lewis were all important cultural contributors to the genre of popular music. All of the above artists, both Black and white, contributed some forms of their culture and musical styles to their listening audiences. This list is not exhaustive, but indicative of some of the germinal figures that assisted in transcending musical and racial boundaries during the decade of the 1950s. However, the songwriting team of Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller also deserves to be mentioned as pioneers in the earliest stages of popular music. Not only were they talented songwriters, but what made them an anomaly during this decade was their ability as white songwriters to construct songs for Black musicians that were authentic to the Black tradition of humor as situated in both their lyrics and musical performances. This essay serves as an argument for the importance of Leiber and Stoller's contribution to crossover music, which enabled Black musicians to be listened to by white Americans who experienced their extraordinary musical talents. Especially, in this instance, the Coasters were the band that would play a crucial role as a catalyst for social change.

The decade of the 1950s in the music industry was one of change, especially in the form of crossover music. It was the rhetorical situation that would welcome the social change. In this case, the exigency would be the unequal airtime provided for Black musicians on white mainstream radio stations. This change would assist the songwriting genius of Leiber and Stoller.

Songs performed by the Coasters, including "Yakety Yak," " "Young Blood," and "Searchin," which all charted high in the U.S. The songs were exceptional; however, I would argue that it was their comedic meanings that relied on the Black and gospel tradition to discuss sex and critique white mainstream society. Overall, this research is an attempt to show how humor can be employed, both through the lyrics and musical style, to

present different messages to discursive audiences. In this instance, Leiber and Stoller and the Coasters incorporated humor to perpetuate the stereotypes of Black musicians as jokers. However, after a closer reading of the text, it was the use of these messages, which allowed Blacks to be played to the white mainstream audience that provided a sense of empowerment to a people who had been oppressed by mainstream institutions. In addition, themes of sex, rebellion, and adolescent fantasies were described comically through the lyrics and singing style of the band.

Future communication scholars should investigate how such cultural variables, including race, influence the writing style of musicians. Specifically, can someone from another race write from an authentic perspective that captures the nuances of another racial culture? In addition, will this rendering of the culture be authentic to the culture of people it is attempting to represent? Second, how does comedy play a role in promoting a covert message through a particular lyrical style? These are important areas to be explored by scholars interested in race, comedy, and popular music. Certainly, Leiber and Stoller played a significant role in acting as catalysts by creating an attention switching activity by which Black musicians, especially the Coasters, could be played in white mainstream households. This paradigm shifting activity transcended cultural and racial barriers and provided new assumptions for Black performers.

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The Popular Culture Studies Journal Interview
with PATRICIA LEAVY

With NORMA JONES

About Patricia

Patricia Leavy, PhD is an independent scholar (formerly Associate Professor
of Sociology, Chair of Sociology & Criminology and Founding Director of
Gender Studies at Stonehill College). She received her PhD in sociology
from Boston College. She is an internationally recognized leader in the
fields of arts-based research and qualitative inquiry. Her eighteen published
books include *Method Meets Art: Arts-Based Research Practice* (Guilford
Press)*, The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Oxford University
Press), *Fiction as Research Practice* (Left Coast Press), *Essentials of
Transdisciplinary Research* (Left Coast Press), *Gender & Pop Culture: A
Text-Reader* (co-edited with Adrienne Trier-Bieniek, Sense Publishers), and
the best-selling novels *Low-Fat Love* (first and second editions, Sense
Publishers) and *American Circumstance* (Sense Publishers). She is series
creator and editor for five book series including *Social Fictions*, *Teaching
Gender*, *Teaching Race & Ethnicity*, and *Teaching Writing* for Sense
Publishers and *Understanding Qualitative Research* for Oxford University
Press. She is Co-Founding Editor-in-Chief of *Art/Research International: A
Transdisciplinary Journal*. The *Journal* may be found online at
http://ejournals.library.ualberta.ca/index.php/ari/index.
    Known for her commitment to public scholarship, she is frequently
called on by the national news media and has regular blogs for *The
Huffington Post, The Creativity Post*, and *We Are the Real Deal. Examiner*

called her "the high priestess of pop feminism." She has also written articles for numerous newspapers, magazines, and online media sites as well as academic forums including *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. She received the New England Sociological Association 2010 New England Sociologist of the Year Award, the American Creativity Association 2014 Special Achievement Award, the American Educational Research Association Qualitative SIG 2015 Egon Guba Memorial Keynote Lecture Award, and the International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry 2015 Special Career Award (she is the youngest recipient). Dr. Leavy delivers invited talks and keynote lectures at universities, private events, and national and international conferences. Please visit www.patricialeavy.com for more information about Dr. Leavy or find her on Facebook at https://www.facebook.com/WomenWhoWrite.

What attracted you, initially, to academia?

The discipline of sociology. After changing my major as an undergrad from theatre arts to sociology, I decided to pursue graduate school. The general expectation once you're in a sociology PhD program is that you will go into academia, which suited me well because my primary passion was conducting research and publishing. As a single mother, when I was in graduate school, I also needed to earn additional income and so I was an adjunct at local colleges. During about a two and half year period I taught approximately 25 undergraduate courses. So, between my passion for publishing sociological research and my considerable teaching experience, an academic appointment seemed like the logical next step and I was fortunate to secure a tenure track job right out of grad school.

You left a tenured position to become a public intellectual. How did you come to the decision to leave academia?

I was at a point in my career during which I had significant publishing opportunities both as an author and book series editor. Since there are only so many hours in a day, I was going to have to turn down some publishing opportunities I had been working toward for over a decade. I had just finished my tenth year in my institution and was being promoted to full professor. It seemed like the perfect time to leave academia and work as a full-time author and independent sociologist.

Because I get asked about this a lot, I would add two things about my particular situation. First, I was already an income-producing author, otherwise I would not have given up my tenured position. I had probably published more than ten books by the time I left my job and had secured a flow of advances, signing bonuses, and royalties. Further, in the couple of years leading up to leaving academia, I created book series with two academic publishers, which I edit. The idea was partly that my livelihood would never be based on my writing alone, because that is a slippery slope in terms of the freedom to write what I want to write and not be constrained by material considerations. Second, I'm married with a working spouse. If I weren't married I probably would not have given up my tenured position at that specific time, just for benefits alone, like health insurance. I share all of this because often people coming straight out of graduate school ask me how they can build the kind of career I have and it's important to be open, that it took me a decade and advance planning to be able to pursue this path.

Was it hard leaving teaching?

No. While I was at my institution for 10 years, the reality is that between the high teaching load I had, the additional winter session and summer session

courses I routinely taught, and the extensive teaching I did as an adjunct during graduate school, if you count the actual number of courses I taught, it's almost as many as some professors teach in a traditionally full career as a professor. I think I accomplished what I wanted to in the classroom to the best of my ability and that teaching helped me enormously as a writer and thinker, but it was time for me to move on.

I'm fortunate to be invited as a guest speaker at various universities and conferences and I also routinely Skype into classes that have adopted one of my books for an author Q&A. I also serve as a graduate student advisor on theses and PhD projects. So in many ways, I feel like I'm able to get optimal contact with students while having enough time to focus properly on my publishing projects. Right after leaving my academic position I also co-edited a book called *Gender & Pop Culture: A Text-Reader* with my colleague Adrienne Trier-Bieniek (Sense Publishers, 2013). The book gets at the heart of what I taught for over 12 years. By putting the book out I felt like I chronicled the major lessons in my teaching and made it available for others to use.

On public scholarship

What do you consider public scholarship and why is it so important?

Public scholarship is accessible to people outside of academia. I mean accessible in two respects. First, the work has to be understandable to people outside of academia. Public scholarship is jargon-free and written or expressed in formats that large numbers of people can understand and

engage with. Second, the work has to be available to people outside of academia. In other words, it needs to circulate in places that non-academics are likely to find it. When you're engaging in public scholarship it's important to think about the relevant stakeholders, given whatever your substantive topic is, and how you are going to reach those stakeholders, including in what format.

Public scholarship might include blogs, op-eds, and other popular forms of writing, or it might include appearances on radio, television, podcasts, or it might include artistic formats from literary genres such as poetry, short stories, or novels or visual genres such as photography, photoblogs, or visual art exhibitions, or performative genres such as film, theatre, dance, or music. I believe that there are ethical and practical imperatives for making our work publicly accessible.

Research should not circulate within the confines of the academy alone. When you consider all of the resources – human and financial – that go into academic research articles that generally have an audience of 3-8 readers, most of whom are simply citing the work to advance their own research agenda, you really need to ask yourself whether this system makes sense. For me, there are serious issues of elitism and ideas about who is entitled to knowledge. I believe that knowledge should belong to the many, not the few. There is also the issue of impact. What kind of impact do you want your work to have? Do you want it to be useful to actual people in some real-world setting?

In my own work I engage in public scholarship in two primary ways. One, as a means of participating in discussions about current events. This is a part of social justice work and usually takes the form of op-eds, blogs, or radio. When a teaching moment in the country occurs, meaning a moment when a sociological lens can help societal understanding or change, it's important to use our tools to be part of that conversation. Two, as a means of sharing my research with broad audiences, which usually takes an artistic

form such as a novel. My novels are grounded in a feminist, sociological perspective so this too has a social justice component.

As a very vocal and recognized advocate of public scholarship, what advice do you have for others about how to engage in public scholarship?

I have a few bits of advice for people who want to engage in public scholarship. First, you need to start off small. I often receive emails from people who wrote their first op-ed and want to submit it to the *New York Times* or who wrote their first book and expect phone calls from NPR or CNN. Start with blogs in your subject area, local newspapers, and local radio to build your portfolio and to gain some experience. Early in my career I was quoted in more than 200 newspaper stories in newspapers all over the country but that you never would've heard if you didn't live in that location. I was glad to be asked and never saw a media opportunity as too small. I actively pursued small-scale opportunities and learned a lot in the process. Second, for each project you need to think about the audience you most want to reach. Who are the relevant stakeholders and what media platforms do they engage with? Third, you need to develop a thick skin. When you put yourself out there, you get all kinds of responses back. Internet culture emboldens people to write particularly extreme, and often harsh, comments. Divorce yourself from it. Frankly, while the positive feedback can be inspiring, it can be dangerous as well.

My best advice as you build larger and more diverse audiences for your work is this: develop your own relationship with your work that isn't dependent on external validation. Get feedback before you put your work out in public forums, but then make peace with it and let it go.

About arts-based research:

For those unfamiliar, what is arts-based research (ABR) and how may we learn more about it?

Arts-based research (ABR) is a set of research practices that involve adapting the tenets of the creative arts in social research projects. There are numerous strengths of these research practices, including: tapping issues that are otherwise difficult to reach, getting at and expressing the feeling-based dimensions of social life, disrupting or unsettling stereotypes, fostering self or social awareness and reflection, crystallizing macro-micro connections, and producing research that is publicly accessible and useful. Since this is a popular culture journal, consider an example from everyday life that shows the power of the arts to transform and educate.

Think of the emotional impact and learning you might experience seeing a dramatic film, let's say one about a historical event. If it's a good film, you might talk about it with friends after and continue to think about it. You may learn to think about a time or group differently than you had before, imagining yourself in someone else's shoes.

Going to the movies is fun and something people elect to do for entertainment, but movies can also be vehicles for self and social reflection, learning, and making emotional connections. Imagine now the power of using this form in research perhaps in sociology or health care, how we might reach new audiences and reach traditional academic audiences in new ways.

For people interested in learning more my book *Method Meets Art* (Guilford Press), now in its second edition, is a comprehensive introduction to arts-based research that includes significant methodological instruction for the different genres of ABR, textual and online exemplars, evaluation

criteria, and additional resources. More details are available on the Guilford Press site: http://www.guilford.com/books/Method-Meets-Art/Patricia-Leavy/9781462513321

Why is creativity and art so important in research, for you? (What are we losing by being too "academic-y?")

Research should be useful and not just a line on a CV. When we are too academic, we fail to engage relevant stakeholders in the process and benefits of research, which makes no sense at all. That's why so many people think academics are out of touch and in ivory towers. But beyond this, creativity is also vital to problem-solving and exploration. When we apply creative ways of thinking we see problems, issues, or experiences from new perspectives. Progress doesn't come with innovation. I also think there are implications for education.

Learning can be pleasurable, and when possible, it ought to be. Learning can be fun. The idea that if it's fun it isn't rigorous is not only misguided, it's sad. We are active agents in our learning and the more participatory or engaging the methods and texts used are, the more students get out of it. For example, I edit five academic book series, so I see a lot of responses to different books. I have never experienced a response to anything like to the *Social Fictions Series*, nor has the publisher. The series publishes scholarly research written in literary forms, so anyone can read them. Professors rave about the books, routinely saying that students participated more in discussions and their assignments showed deep engagement and reflection. The reason is simple. They enjoyed what they were reading. So whether it is how we share our research with those outside of the academy or within our classrooms, creativity and artful approaches are powerful tools. And from a totally selfish point of view, one should derive pleasure in their own research experiences, which can come from creativity.

As someone who has done both traditional and creative work, I can attest that my best work has happened when I was having fun doing it. That doesn't mean it isn't rigorous, that's a false dichotomy. People needn't fear fun. I have been most challenged and experienced the most pleasure writing arts-based novels. Creativity takes discipline. It's about trial, error, and risk, not a bolt of lightning from the sky. The creativity I was pushed to has also influenced how I see and think about everything else. As others have noted, creativity is a bottomless well. The more you take from it, the more you have.

This interview is featured in an academic journal yet, we are discussing arts-based research. What do you see as a future for academia and ABR?

The traditional journal system is on its way out, or to lesser supremacy within the academic system because it simply doesn't make sense. A system in which people spend years, using up human and financial resources, to produce work that is read by an audience of three, can't be sustained forever. You can see by the plethora of online and open source journals, social media platforms for sharing scholarship (like academia.edu for example), and increases in tenure and promotion requirements globally to show the "impact" of work, the tide is turning. Within the emerging academic landscape, arts-based research will increase, as one of many paradigms. This is already happening as evidenced by book publications, citations, conferences, and online journals that allow all mediums to be represented. As someone enmeshed in the publishing world, I can say that publishers uninterested in ABR a decade ago are investing greatly in it now because they see the audience response. It is clearly on the rise. Obviously there's some pushback, as there always is when people privileged in the current system feel threatened by innovation and change. But posterity

favors the innovators so I encourage people to be unafraid to take some risks and be a part of expanding the bounds.

About popular culture, social fictions, and novels

Your books, *American Circumstance* and *Low-Fat Love* are bestselling fictions and you are the editor of the Social Fictions Series at Sense Publishers. How did you make the "transition" from academic writing to "fiction?" What advice do you have for others?

In the beginning it was actually sort of an accident. I spent years writing about emergent research methodologies including arts-based research, which I was particularly drawn to. I was on a sabbatical and started doing some creative writing just for myself. I thought at best I might write a short story, but as I progressed the project grew. That book was my first novel *Low-Fat Love* and it wasn't until it was finished that I knew I wanted to try to publish it. *Low-Fat Love* was informed by a decade of interview research and teaching experiences, as well as my own autoethnographic reflections. Therefore, it was important to me to publish it as a piece of research, even though it can be read purely as a novel. I spent several months thinking about it and came up with the idea for the *Social Fictions* book series so that my novel would be a part of something larger. The first publisher I approached turned me down, although he was intrigued and encouraged me to pursue it further. The second publisher, Sense Publishers, signed me to a deal for both the book series and my novel as the launch title. The series publishes full-length works of ABR including novels, short story and poetry

collections, plays, and other literary genres. We are the first book series published by an academic publisher of this kind and it is the professional accomplishment I am most proud of.

While my transition from academic to writing to fiction was very much learn-as-you-go, I did make a concerted effort to seek more feedback and learn more about my craft as I worked on my second novel, *American Circumstance*. For example, I joined a local writing group where I read pieces of the novel out loud and solicited feedback. I also found a local writing buddy with whom I meet weekly. She read every word of *American Circumstance* and provided feedback along the way, and has continued to do so on all of my fiction. The new edition of *Method Meets Art* provides instruction on how to write fiction-based research for those interested, as does my book *Fiction as a Research Practice.* If you just want to get into the habit of creative writing there are free daily writing prompts available online that might be a good place to start.

Popular culture plays a central role in your novels. How do you weave popular culture into your novels?

Popular culture is really the subtext in my novels. There are loads of popular culture references throughout the books and each one was selected with intent. This is a primary way that I bring my sociological and feminist perspectives into my fiction. For example, in *Low-Fat Love* I used popular culture and women's media in particular as signposts throughout the book in order to make visible the context in which women come to think of themselves, as well as the men and women in their lives. Our ideas about beauty, appearance, romance, love, and so forth, are shaped in a context not just in our own heads. I wanted to show how that context is internalized by some people. As a feminist sociologist, I attempted to offer a critical commentary about popular culture and the social construction of femininity.

For instance, the protagonist is repeatedly engaged in consuming media targeted at women, such as tabloid TV, home shopping, Lifetime movies, plays, books, and even music videos. The sociologist in me was trying to link the macro context with people's individual, micro-level experiences. Media culture, which is the macro level, impacts the character personally, which is the micro level. I also used popular culture to mirror what was going on with the characters, including their relationship and life mistakes. In *American Circumstance* I referenced popular culture and visual art in particular to add another layer of meaning to the book. If readers are unfamiliar with a particular reference, then the novel also becomes a vehicle to experience other pieces of art. I've been told that some book clubs and classes who have used my novels have looked up the art references and I think that's fantastic. If a piece of literature can expose us to other art the potential for personal growth expands which is exciting. The novel I am writing now, which is my favorite project to date, is in some ways a love letter to popular culture. It's absolutely loaded with references, especially to film and visual art. There's a big 1980s pop culture theme throughout the book, which helps me articulate the characters' stories and moves the plot forward. In other words, popular culture is active in the plot.

Future endeavors?

What are some ongoing important issues you want to explore in your writing and public scholarship?

I want to continue exploring what arts-based research might be in my own work and to advocate for its place in academia and publishing. I also want to use the platforms available to me to speak out against sexism, racism,

classism, and homophobia, and their interconnections, in academic organizations and the larger society.

You have so many exciting projects and have been hinting at secret book projects, what's next for you, any hints?

I have one project that isn't secret that I'm very excited about, which is my first collaboration with a visual artist. I'm working with Victoria Scotti on a book called *Low-Fat Love Stories*, which is based on interview research I conducted, and combines fictionalized short stories and visual art. The work Victoria is doing is expanding the bounds of what arts-based research is and it's changed the way I think and see. It's been an amazing collaborative journey. I'm also editing a handbook of arts-based research for Guilford Press and a handbook of methods for public scholarship for Oxford University Press.

Then there are the secret projects. I've come to value how important it is to nurture the creative process and to be free to explore without others getting inside your head and imposing their views, especially those on the industry side. So I've made a conscious effort to keep some of my projects private. Because I'm grateful and appreciative that my friends on social media and publishing partners are interested in what I'm doing, and because having folks cheering you on can be motivational, I came up with the hashtag #SecretBookProjects so I could post things online about my writing process, without having to reveal details. For example, when I'm having a tough day of writing it's helpful for me to be able to put that out there and dialogue with people, but I don't necessarily need to say what the specific project is. All this said, here's a little scoop on one of my secret projects. As I mentioned earlier, I will soon be releasing a new novel in the *Social Fictions* series. The title of my new novel is, *Blue*. It is absolutely my favorite thing I have ever done. I started writing it the day my daughter's

father died after a long battle with cancer. It began as a way to use creativity to get through the pain that day, but it took on a life of its own. Notwithstanding the painful impetus, it's actually the most lighthearted and joyful book I have ever written. Popular culture junkies like me should enjoy it because the subtext celebrates popular culture and pays tribute to 1980s popular culture specifically. In addition to many film and television references, there are also nods to the art scene in 1980s SoHo, New York. I expect it will be out this November or December. If interested, check-in on my Facebook page (https://www.facebook.com/WomenWhoWrite) or check-out the *Social Fictions* page on the Sense Publishers website (https://www.sensepublishers.com/catalogs/bookseries/social-fictions-series/)

Popular Culture Studies and Autoethnography: An Essay on Method

JIMMIE MANNING AND TONY E. ADAMS

At a recent Popular Culture Association/American Culture Association national conference, I (Jimmie) opened the social media app Yik Yak to pass the time while waiting for a session to begin. Yik Yak has become quite popular, especially on and around college campuses, as it allows users to post anonymous messages that can be read by others who also have the app and are in close proximity. It is, in many ways, a more anonymous form of Twitter. Because of such anonymity, it is not unusual to see secret confessions, rude comments about others, people making bizarre posts, and even requests for support in embarrassing situations. The yak I saw that particularly caught my attention seemed to be a mix of a secret confession and a request for support: "Someone did something called autoethnography in my last session. Really different. Left me crying. Is it wrong to say I'm intrigued?"

I quickly yakked back: "Wrong? Heck no. Welcome to the club!" And then, "Check out the Adams, Holman Jones, and Ellis book to learn more about autoethnography." That was the beginning of a stream of yaks where participants asked for more details about the presentation, mentioned that they were interested in the method, and asked questions about how autoethnography could be considered "research." There were also some skeptical responses, including someone who questioned the objectivity of autoethnography (an unusual question given that so much popular culture research is humanistic) and someone who said it sounded narcissistic and navel-gazing. However, yakking allowed us to have a

productive conversation about autoethnography, one where people had a
chance to learn about a method that has an increasing presence across
many disciplines in the social sciences and humanities.

Discussions on Yik Yak are ephemeral, and even though that
conversation is a distant memory we believe that people who do popular
culture studies would benefit from learning more about autoethnography.
In an attempt to provide something more substantial and enduring, we
collaborated to write this essay and edit a special issue of *The Popular
Culture Studies Journal* (Manning and Adams). The goal of both is to
offer newcomers to the method a sense of what autoethnography is and
how it can be used in popular culture studies; while simultaneously
providing new ideas for those who are already familiar with
autoethnographic methods.

We begin this essay by defining autoethnography, paying special
attention to the various orientations of autoethnographic research. We then
review popular culture research that has used autoethnography as a
method of inquiry before identifying key strengths of autoethnography. As
those strengths reflect, autoethnography is a valid, viable, and vital
method for popular culture research. We conclude by examining criteria
for evaluating autoethnography, especially in terms of quality and risk. As
we demonstrate, autoethnography offers another way to study popular
texts and contexts, or, in the words of Stuart Hall, the "local hopes and
local aspirations, local tragedies, and local scenarios that are the everyday
practices and the everyday experiences of ordinary folks" (107-108).

Defining Autoethnography

Autoethnography is a research method that foregrounds the researcher's
personal experience (*auto*) as it is embedded within, and informed by,
cultural identities and con/texts (*ethno*) and as it is expressed through
writing, performance, or other creative means (*graphy*). More specifically,

it is a method that blends the purposes, techniques, and theories of social research—primarily ethnography—with the purposes, techniques, and theories associated with genres of life writing, especially autobiography, memoir, and personal essay.

For example, and similar to ethnography, autoethnographers often take, as their focus, their experiences with cultural identities, popular texts, and a community's attitudes, beliefs, and practices. Autoethnographers study these phenomena by doing fieldwork, which includes observing and interacting with others, conducting archival research, and directly participating in community life. They often take "field notes" of their experiences; consult with relevant research and theories about the identities, texts, attitudes, beliefs, and practices; and may interview members of the culture to inform their understandings.

Similar to genres of life writing, autoethnographers value personal experience, memory, and storytelling. They are interested in how people—especially the researcher—make sense of mundane or notable life events and the lessons they have learned across the lifespan (Bochner and Ellis). Autoethnographers share this sense-making and these lessons with the purpose of offering guidance and wisdom to others. Autoethnographers might consult with artifacts such as photographs, diaries, letters, and other personal texts, and often use storytelling devices such as narrative voice, plot, and character development to represent their experiences.

Although we will discuss variations in autoethnographic practice, we want to highlight three characteristics shared by most autoethnographic research. First, autoethnographers assume that culture flows through the self; the personal, the particular, and the local are inseparably constituted and infused by others as well as by popular texts, beliefs, and practices. For example, in justifying his use of autoethnography, John Fiske characterizes himself

not as an individual, but as a site and as an instance of reading, as an agent of culture in process—not because the reading I produced

> was in any way socially representative of, or extrapolable to, others, but because the process by which I produced it was a structured instance of culture in practice. (86)

Fiske further writes, "Any personal negotiation of our immediate social relations is a necessary part of our larger politics—the micro-political is where the macro-politics of the social structure are made concrete in the practices of everyday life" (97). Ron Pelias makes a similar observation about personal experience, noting that we are each "situated within an historical and cultural context," and, as such, ideology drapes our "every utterance" (*Performance* 152). To be an autoethnographer and to do autoethnography means recognizing that personal experience cannot be easily or definitively separated from social and relational contexts. In this way, personal experience becomes a valid, viable, and vital kind of data from which to make meaning and use in research.

Second, autoethnographers engage in laborious, honest, and nuanced self-reflection—often referred to as "reflexivity"—in an attempt to "explore and interrogate sociocultural forces and discursive practices" that inform personal experience and the research process (Grant, Short, and Turner 5; Berry and Clair). More specifically, reflexivity allows autoethnographers to identify, interrogate, and make explicit the persistent interplay between personal-cultural experiences; consider their roles in doing research and creating a research account; and hold themselves responsible for their mistakes or errors in judgment in a research project (Ellis, "Telling Secrets"). Given the use of reflexivity, autoethnography stands in stark contrast to traditional social scientific studies in the sense that terms such as "objectivity," "researcher neutrality," and "stable meaning" are eschewed in favor of understanding the researcher's careful and thoughtful interpretation of lived experience and the research process (Grant, Short, and Turner 3).

Third, autoethnographers tend to write about life-changing epiphanies (Denzin); difficult and perhaps repetitious encounters (Boylorn, "As

Seen"); insights about, and dilemmas in, doing and writing up research (Chawla); mundane but notable interactions and events (Bolen; Speedy); and experiences about which they felt shame, confusion, and/or despair (Herrmann, "I Know"). As Carolyn Ellis eloquently notes, "I write when my world falls apart or the meaning I have constructed for myself is in danger of doing so" (*Ethnographic I* 33). Tami Spry makes a similar observation: "After years of moving through pain with pen and paper," she writes, "asking the nurse for these tools in the morning after losing our son in childbirth was the only thing I could make my body do" (36). Autoethnographers write about these often-private experiences not only to better understand those events themselves, but also to show others how they make sense of and learn lessons from them.

Although a large community of scholars across many disciplines has contributed to the quickly-expanding corpus of autoethnographic research, we also recognize variations in autoethnographic practice, all of which emphasize different aspects of the social research-life writing continuum. Drawing from our previous work (Adams and Manning), here we review four common orientations—social-scientific, interpretive-humanistic, critical, and creative-artistic—that many autoethnographers use to design, conduct, represent, and evaluate autoethnographic projects. Although we list four distinct orientations, it is not unusual for autoethnographers to blend the goals and techniques of each in a single research project or as they write about the same experiences over time. This flexibility is linked to the reflexive nature of autoethnographic research practices.

One common autoethnographic orientation is the *social-scientific autoethnography*, sometimes referred to as *analytic autoethnography* (Anderson and Glass-Coffin). This orientation involves a combination of fieldwork, interpretive qualitative data, systematic data analysis, and personal experience to describe the experiences of being in, or a part of, a community. Some social-scientific autoethnographies foreground the researcher's experiences (e.g., Zibricky), but most tend to treat personal

experience as secondary to a more-traditional appearing qualitative research report (e.g., Manning, "I Never"). Similar to other social scientific qualitative research, these autoethnographies might also include discussions about rigor, systematic data collection, use of coding procedures, and valid and reliable findings (e.g., Burnard; Chang; Manning and Kunkel, *Researching*). Social-scientific autoethnographies are often presented as written research reports using the traditional introduction-literature review-methodology-results-discussion format common to most social scientific research (e.g., Adams, "Paradoxes").

A social-scientific orientation to autoethnography is one of the least common, as the inherent and required use of personal experience that accompanies autoethnography is seen by some as threatening to social scientific desires for objectivity and researcher neutrality. On the contrary, we believe that social science scholarship that uses autoethnography allows for lucid interpretations of research findings as readers are connected to vivid accounts of lived experience. Given that there is often a chasm between social scientific and humanistic approaches to popular culture studies, this orientation of autoethnography might be especially beneficial for blurring lines between those research orientations and combining ideas that have been generated across the different methodological paradigms.

An orientation that will probably feel more familiar to many who study popular culture—especially because of its heavy focus on cultural description and analysis—is *interpretive-humanistic autoethnography*. This approach to autoethnography typically involves fieldwork, the use of extant research and theories, and the researcher's personal experiences and perspectives. At the heart of this orientation is "thick description," the principle of recording personal and cultural experiences in descriptive, thoughtful, and illuminating ways (Geertz 10). Although some interpretive-humanistic autoethnographers use ethnographic research methods such as participant observation, interviews, and/or archival

research (e.g., Goodall), many choose to make the thick description of personal experience the primary focus of a project (e.g., Ellis, "Maternal Connections"). A coherent representational structure should also exist for interpretive-humanistic autoethnographies, but it does not need to follow the introduction-literature review-method-results-discussion format often expected of social-scientific research. Based on the literature review we provide later in this essay, we estimate that the interpretive-humanistic orientation is one of the two most common orientations for autoethnographies that research popular culture.

The other most common orientation for popular culture autoethnography is *critical autoethnography*. Similar to other methods that involve critical approaches (e.g., Hall), these autoethnographies use personal experience to identify harmful abuses of power, structures that cultivate and perpetuate oppression, instances of inequality, and unjust cultural values and practices (Boylorn and Orbe). Critical autoethnographies often call attention to harmful cultural assumptions about race (e.g., Boylorn, "As Seen"), gender equality (e.g., Allen and Piercy), sexuality (e.g., Adams and Holman Jones), social class (e.g., Hodges), grief (e.g., Paxton), and colonialism (e.g., Pathak). Critical autoethnographies also make arguments about what texts, attitudes, beliefs, and practices should and should not exist in social life, and, as such, are not concerned about objectivity and researcher neutrality.

Whereas some autoethnographers focus on the use of more traditional research practices and choose more traditional forms to represent their autoethnographic research, creative-artistic autoethnographers are more concerned with the life writing side of the social research-life writing continuum. As such, those who create *creative-artistic autoethnographies* value aesthetics, evocative and vulnerable stories, and the use of different forms or media to represent their work, including fiction (e.g., Leavy, *Fiction*), poetry (e.g., Faulkner; Speedy), performance (e.g., Pelias, *Performance*), music (e.g., Bartleet and Ellis), and blogs (e.g., Boylorn,

"Blackgirl Blogs"). Creative-artistic autoethnographers might consider themselves "artists" rather than "researchers" and are the least likely to use academic jargon or care about systematic data collection. Instead, they are moved by the research/artistic process, emergent questions, and new ideas. They often take great care in the craft, feeling, and flow of research and incorporate these sensory processes into their finished texts.

As popular culture scholars embrace autoethnographic research, it is important to recognize that there is no single way to do autoethnography and that these orientations fall across the social research-life writing continuum. Similar to Laura Ellingson and other scholars who encourage the blending of methods, we believe some of the best autoethnography can happen when orientations overlap. This overlap might be subtle, such as a social-scientific autoethnography adopting a critical tone as personal experience is brought into the discussion section (e.g., Zibricky); or it might be more obvious, such as personal artwork being placed throughout an interpretive-humanistic essay to complement the written text (e.g., Metta). Because autoethnography is a form of research that involves at least some creativity, blending orientations can be illuminating and useful.

Connecting the Personal to the Popular

Now that we have explained what autoethnography is and some of the most common ways that researchers choose to do it, we turn our attention to the ways autoethnography can be beneficial for popular culture studies. To begin, we review popular culture research that has used autoethnography to provide a sense of how the method has been used as well as to serve as inspiration for those who want to do their own autoethnographic projects. In the spirit of autoethnography, particularly its focus on the use of personal experience, we begin by sharing our experiences related to autoethnographic popular culture studies.

I (Jimmie) have mostly written social-scientific and interpretive-humanistic autoethnographies. My social scientific work includes a qualitative interview research project where I interviewed viewers of the television program *Grey's Anatomy* to learn about how they identified with the characters featured in the program (Manning, "I Never"). Because I found that most participants identified as the characters—people would say, "I am Meredith Grey" or "I'm just like Christina Yang"—I opened the essay with an autoethnographic vignette about how my coworkers and I engaged in similar behaviors as part of our office banter. I then blended that opening into the discussion section of the essay where I offered a theory of *symbolic boasting*, or the idea that people place themselves inside particular popular culture figures or characters in order to boost their personal worth. In other words, even though the theorizing I did was tied to the data, it was also informed by my personal experiences that resembled what participants in the study were sharing.

In another study, I blended autoethnography and media criticism of *Catfish: The TV Show*. In this mixed-orientation project, I juxtaposed my own story about being catfished (i.e., tricked by someone online) with analysis of the television program (Manning, "Ipsedixitism"). This back and forth between my personal account and the arguments I made as part of the criticism allowed for an expanded sense of scope in the essay. I could also understand more about the assumptions and values I carried when approaching the text as a media critic. As I argue in an upcoming essay ("Relationships and Popular Culture"), the awareness that autoethnography can allow is helpful for researchers in the social sciences and humanities. Not only does it provide the potential for new insights and research ideas about a topic or project, but it also allows a good personal sense of values, assumptions, and inclinations as they relate to the research.

I have also used more traditional interpretive-humanistic autoethnography. In a project I described as *audience autoethnography*, I

examined the thoughts and feelings I had when watching the television program *Mad Men*, specifically my reactions to storylines regarding alcoholism (Manning, "Finding Yourself"). Even though my father was not much like the main character Don Draper, I still found myself making comparisons between the two. These comparisons motivated me to consider my father's motivations for drinking and how they were probably quite different from Don's. I also considered Betty Draper's feelings of being trapped to how I imagined my mother felt. The essay included thick description both from my experiences as child and the television program. That allowed me to theorize about how we use popular narratives and the characters in them to make sense of our own lives.

I (Tony) too have used autoethnography to study popular culture texts. In my first book, *Narrating the Closet: An Autoethnography of Same-Sex Attraction*, I used personal experiences to write alongside, and against, popular representations of coming out of the closet—that is, representations of the moment when a person discloses a lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer identity. I specifically discuss coming out representations featured in the television sitcom *Will and Grace* and films such as *Brokeback Mountain* and *Another Gay Movie,* and as discussed by popular writers such as E. Lynn Harris and Dan Savage. In orientation, I would classify the book as a mix of interpretive-humanistic, critical, and creative-artistic autoethnography.

In another essay (Adams, "Watching"), I use autoethnography to describe how the values and practices represented in the reality television series *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo* align with my experiences of being raised in a rural, lower class environment. And I am currently finishing an essay about "Queering Popular Culture," in which I use both queer theory and my personal experiences to offer queer interpretations of popular, mass mediated texts such as *The Golden Girls*, *The Leftovers*, and *Inside Out*. In orientation, I would classify these essays as a mix of interpretive-humanistic and critical autoethnography.

Beyond our work, there is a small but growing body of autoethnographic popular culture studies. For example, some authors have written about their relationships with popular music. In one essay, Andrew Herrmann described how popular cultural texts—particularly music—can assist in the "creation of self" ("Daniel Amos" 7); and, in another essay, reflected on his punk identity as he interacts with younger members of punk culture ("Never Mind"). Patricia Leavy described her connections with musicians such as Tori Amos and Paula Cole, her daughter's connections with musicians such as Pink and Katy Perry, and how these musicians espouse empowering messages for women ("Confessions"). Derek Greenfield also examined the power of music to inspire, sharing his accounts of using hip-hop in the classroom. In an auto/ethnographic study of popular music and karaoke, Rob Drew described what happens in karaoke environments, such as who participates, how, and why people choose and perform particular songs. Stacy Holman Jones has written two books about her experiences with torch singing, feminism, and popular music (*Kaleidoscope Notes*; *Torch Singing*). And Art Bochner used Leonard Cohen's "Bird on a Wire" to write about his tenuous relationship with his father, including the ways he has freed himself from the grief and memories of his father's actions and how he has learned to live and love himself—and others—more ("Freeing").

Other autoethnographers have critiqued popular representations of race, ethnicity, and gender. Robin Boylorn ("As Seen") used autoethnography to describe and critique problematic representations of Black women on reality television shows, especially representations that perpetuated erroneous stereotypes and assumptions. Ron Pelias used autoethnography to write against harmful binaries of masculinity, particularly the (perceived) need to be a "Jarhead," a tough and violent man, and the fear of being called a weak "girly-man," a phrase popularized by actor-celebrity-politician Arnold Schwarzenegger ("Jarhead"). And an entire issue of *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical*

Methodologies, "Iconography of the West: Autoethnographic Representations of the West(erns)," included essays by authors who use autoethnography to write against "the script of how we discuss notions of the West" (Alexander 224). Authors specifically discussed their (lack of) relationship to representations of the West, disturbing characteristics of the Western television and film genre, and how recurring motifs of Western-themed texts can be perpetuated and embodied by audiences (e.g., discourses about exploration and domination; human connections to the environment; and relationships between "Cowboys" and "Indians").

Some autoethnographers have described their media use, fandom, and the ways in which they relate to popular texts, events, and celebrities. For example, David Lavery's autoethnographic essay about crying at television programs—written in response to his own tears during the final episode of *Six Feet Under*—illustrated how popular culture texts can bring us together, make us reflect on our own lives, and encourage us to think about the values we hold dear. Although Lavery clearly wrote his essay from the perspective as a fan of the series, Jeanette Monaco took a more explicit approach to theorizing about how fandom ties to popular culture research by advocating that autoethnography is a way of making motives more explicit in popular culture studies. Damion Sturm also used autoethnography to study fandom, drawing from his experiences as a fan of gaming, football, racing, and wrestling to consider the affects and contexts in which fandom occurs.

Some explorations of fandom have been more personal and intimate. Markus Wohlfeil described his experiences as a fan of celebrity Jena Malone and how the actress has been present in his everyday life—including his awkward dating experiences—and by way of numerous autographed photos, wall posters, and films (Wohlfeil and Whelan). Other fan-oriented autoethnographies have been more media-centered. For example, Danielle Stern described her connections with the feminist characters and messages of three televisual series—*My So-Called Life*,

Felicity, and *Sex and the City*—and how these characters and messages informed her intimate relationships. Stern placed media texts in the forefront of her essay, but Shinsuke Eguchi—who also explored connections between intimate relationships and media texts, only with a focus on interracial dating—chose to put his personal experience at the forefront of his writing with the critique of media texts serving more in a supporting role.

Although this review is not exhaustive, it provides a sense of the many ways that autoethnography has been used in popular culture studies. As the review demonstrates, many different forms and genres of popular culture are being explored, and by way of many different methodological approaches. Collectively, the essays also help to illustrate some of the many strengths that accompany the use of autoethnography for studying popular culture. In the next section, we more explicitly consider these strengths, drawing from the contents of this special issue to provide concrete examples.

Strengths of Autoethnography for Popular Culture Research

Here we articulate five strengths of autoethnography for popular culture research. Our hope is that by making these strengths explicit, popular culture scholars will gain both a better understanding of how they can use autoethnography in their work as well as be able to justify that work to others who might not be familiar with autoethnography. These strengths include the ability for researchers to 1) use personal experience to write alongside popular culture theories and texts, especially to show how personal experiences resemble or are informed by popular culture; 2) use personal experience to criticize, write against, and talk back to popular culture texts, especially texts that do not match their personal experiences or that espouse harmful messages; 3) describe how they personally act as audience members, specifically how they use, engage, and relate to

popular texts, events, and/or celebrities; 4) describe the processes that contribute to the production of popular culture texts; and 5) create accessible research texts that can be understood by a variety of audiences. Although most popular culture autoethnographies will not capitalize on every strength, we expand on each one here so that one or more might be used in a particular autoethnographic project.

First, autoethnographers can use personal experience to write alongside popular culture theories and texts and, more specifically, show how their experiences resemble or are informed by those same theories and texts. In this way, autoethnography can be used to illustrate the importance of theories and texts for particular audiences. As Hall writes, "It is only through the way in which we represent and imagine ourselves that we come to know how we are constituted and who we are" (111). Many essays in the special issue use autoethnography to write alongside popular culture texts and show how those texts influence their experiences and relationships. For example, Janice Hamlet describes how different television and movie characters have served as her personal mentors, showing how characters such as Celie from *The Color Purple* or Olivia Pope from *Scandal* have informed her experiences as a Black woman. Similarly, Renata Ferdinand shares her stories of being inspired or shamed about having dark skin based on both celebrities as well as popular culture representations. M. Cuellar draws from parasocial theory to describe his relationship with media, telling stories about how different celebrity personalities served as his mediated boyfriends in times of loneliness and longing. And Michaela D. E. Meyer takes yet a different approach, making sense of falling in love with her future husband against the backdrop of the popular television series *Castle*.

Autoethnographic studies about how popular culture has informed personal lives are not limited to television and film. For example, L. N. Badger weaves popular literature (e.g., *Flowers in the Attic*) with narratives about illness, insanity, and her family. Sandra Carpenter writes

alongside the work of bell hooks and Dorothy Allison, considering how their writings inform her sense of history and space. Linda Levitt demonstrates how early feminist icons, including Mary Tyler Moore and Maude, influenced the ways she understands and lives feminism. Finally, Gary Strain considers how the board game *Pretty Pretty Princess* offered him a context to play with gender and express his femininity. Each of these essays shows palpable, personal, and profound ways that popular culture has played into or against the author's life experiences, both informing and constituting their lived worlds.

Second, autoethnographers can use personal experience to criticize, write against, and talk back to popular culture texts, especially texts that do not match their personal experiences or that espouse harmful messages. In this special issue, numerous autoethnographers did just that. Authors critique harmful representations of class (Rennels) and ability (Scott); the inaccurate and harmful ways in which Brazilian comics portray indigenous Amazonian people (de Almeida); and everyday moments in which Disney princess culture—a culture that is problematic in terms of feminist values—infuses the lives of parents and children (Shuler). We mentioned previously that Strain described how the board game *Pretty Pretty Princess* offered him a context to play with gender and express his femininity, but Strain also offers important critiques of the game, not only in its encouragement of competition but also its insidious racialized aspects such as the game's celebration of White beauty norms.

As the topics of these essays and of the many essays reviewed earlier suggest, pointing to the harms of popular culture texts will likely result in a project that embraces a critical orientation. To be certain, problematic representations related to race, ethnicity, class, gender, nationality, sexuality, and ability—among countless other identities—are often harmful. In addition to exposing personal and cultural injuries related to identities and social inequality, autoethnographers should also consider how popular culture provides and perpetuates harmful information. Such

information could be about health, relationships, technology, civic processes, or a host of other topics. For example, actress and talk show host Jenny McCarthy famously made anti-vaccination comments that led to movements against allowing children to be vaccinated as well as countermovements, often led by health scientists and physicians, that involved educating people about why vaccines are not harmful. An autoethnography from a parent who bought into McCarthy's popular rhetoric but who has since realized the importance of vaccinations might help other parents to consider how they, too, might be tempted to believe popular discourses about their children's health.

The first two strengths of autoethnography we identify here combine to suggest a third strength: The method can show how researchers serve as audiences of particular texts (Berry). As Rob Drew notes, "Few people nowadays linger within particular 'audiences' long enough for researchers to monitor them" (25). Related, Dhoest critiques closed, survey questions asked of audiences about their media use as these questions "often hide mixed feelings or more complex stances" about such use (37). Instead, he suggests, autoethnography can provide more complex insider accounts about how people use media – specifically how they engage and relate to popular texts, events, and/or celebrities. Such a shift also allows for the dominant research focus on media or popular culture *e*ffects to expand to consider how *a*ffect circulates in relation to some aspect of popular culture (Manning, "Finding Yourself"). That is, the autoethnographer can consider complex historical, emotional, and embodied responses as they are constitutive of popular culture and lived experience.

Fourth, autoethnographers can use personal experience to describe the processes that contribute to the production of popular culture texts. Thinking of popular culture as an industry—an industry that produces everyday pleasures, values, and texts consumed and appreciated by many people—requires thinking about its numerous gatekeepers. Autoethnographers who have directly encountered and transcended these

gatekeepers and who have directly participated in creating popular culture texts can use their personal experiences to offer insider accounts of production processes and the numerous decisions that go into making these texts. By doing so, they offer insight into processes and products that outsiders, including most researchers, could rarely access.

Stephanie Patrick's article in this special issue offers one such example. She uses her experiences as a film and television casting agent to offer an insider, behind-the-scenes account of how media texts come to be populated by certain kinds of actors. Her descriptions both provide the reader a sense of seeing the casting process in action as well as her inner turmoil about some of the requirements of the job. Because essays offering insider accounts of production are rare, they are an especially valuable resource for popular culture studies. Other notable examples include Ragan Fox's autoethnography that explored how he had to perform "multiple characters" on the popular reality television series *Big Brother*. As he explains, "Other research methods would not provide immediate, ongoing, and in situ access to the *Big Brother* house, nor would CBS likely permit non-affiliated investigators to enter the show's immediate contexts (e.g., soundstage, casting interviews, and sequester house)" (194). In a similar way, Amber Johnson uses a kind of autoethnography—"autocritography"—to describe her experiences auditioning for and performing as a "video vixen" in a rap music video, as well as her struggles in being perceived as a (hyper)sexual Black woman. In so doing, Johnson provides an insider account of how the music industry commodifies and sexualizes particular raced and gendered bodies.

Fifth, autoethnography allows popular culture scholars the opportunity to create and disseminate accessible and relatable research. As an interdisciplinary field, popular culture studies has excelled at making its work accessible to others while still making sure it exemplifies academic rigor and merit. Multiple academic book series (e.g., the Blackwell Philosophy and Pop Culture Series) have allowed scholars and fans alike

to consider philosophical themes, think about sociological implications, understand communication practices, and critically explore television, movies, music, and sports. Departments that are dedicated exclusively or even partially to popular culture studies are rare, however, and most scholars who study popular culture do so while housed in another discipline. These disciplines tend to have decades if not centuries of writings that are difficult to access, filled with jargon, and that reference research ideas that likely appear unfamiliar to readers with little academic training (Herrmann, "Criteria"). Although these studies almost certainly have value to those in the academy, their direct value to people outside of academe—especially those who could possibly benefit from the findings—is suspect.

Given autoethnography's ties to genres of life writing, particularly uses of storytelling and personal experience, the method often results in texts that are both interesting and accessible. Such accessibility can ground dense theories and concepts in lived experience (Herrmann, "Criteria"); allow readers to gain an intimate understanding of how those theories and concepts look and feel (Manning and Kunkel, "Making Meaning"); and allow scholars to serve more in the role of "public intellectual" (Batchelor). Autoethnography is also easily translatable for outlets beyond academic books and journals. For example, Robin Boylorn, a prominent and prolific autoethnographer, is a regular contributor to the Crunk Feminist Collective (CFC), an online blogging site whose Facebook page has more than 34,000 members. In addition to her regular CFC posts, all of which reach thousands of readers, Boylorn also published an essay in *The Guardian* about Black and White uses of the term "bae" (Boylorn, "Now That"). Within a few months, Boylorn's article had been shared more than 2,000 times via social media and had more than 1,000 comments from readers. Such reach and impact are not enjoyed by most academic writers.

Evaluating Autoethnography: Quality, Risks, and Limitations

The five strengths we identified in the previous section point to some of the unique and valuable contributions autoethnography can make to popular culture studies. Even though we are enthusiastic about the potential of autoethnography, we also acknowledge that it is no panacea. Some autoethnography is poorly conceived or executed; other projects are pursued without consideration of impact or ethics; and still some research goals are not well-suited for autoethnographic inquiry. In response to these concerns, we conclude this article by offering some basic criteria for evaluating autoethnography as well as a review of some potential risks associated with the methodology, including ethical concerns. As we illustrate with these criteria, engaging autoethnographic research involves consistent and ongoing personal reflection about how our work might impact others.

Evaluation. Two essential qualities should be present in all autoethnography projects. First, any work labeled "autoethnography" should include personal experience and demonstrate, through thoughtful analysis, why the experience is meaningful and culturally significant. An essay that does not use or describe the importance of personal experience in a cultural context should not be considered an autoethnography. Second, this personal experience must be reflexively considered through the use of extant theory, other scholarly writings about the topic, fieldwork observations, analysis of artifacts (e.g., photographs), and/or involvement with others (e.g., interviews). If many of these elements are not evident, then a project should also not be considered an autoethnography (Adams and Manning).

Beyond these core two criteria, evaluation of autoethnography depends on the research orientation. For example, those using a social-scientific orientation should be concerned about evaluative criteria such as the soundness of data collection (Chang), the development of good research

questions (Manning and Kunkel, *Researching*), and the validity and
transferability of the data (Burnard; Philaretou and Allen).
Autoethnographers who approach autoethnography from an interpretive-
humanistic, critical, or creative-artistic orientation are not going to be as
concerned about those criteria. Rather, researchers working within these
orientations are going to be focused more on providing coherent stories
with details that help readers clearly envision a setting, the people and
feelings involved, and the actions that occurred (Bochner "Criteria").
Those approaching autoethnography from a creative-artistic orientation
must especially consider the aesthetic aspects of the research text,
including the use of narrative voice, development of characters/people,
and dramatic tension or emotional resonance. However, creative-artistic
autoethnographers might also find themselves subject to some of the
critiques that accompany different art forms, e.g., creative writing ability
(Gingrich-Philbrook).

As a final note, good autoethnographies are interesting. Although the
stories included in an autoethnography do not have to be fantastic,
unusual, or even particularly unique—in fact, some of the best
autoethnographies happen when the researcher reflects on seemingly
mundane practices—there must be some interesting sense-making or
theoretical development in the text. Good autoethnography happens when
the researcher has something deeper to say about an experience, and that
something deeper should go beyond simply pointing out how personal
experience aligns with or defies a theory or common research finding. The
autoethnographic work also needs to teach, inspire, and/or inform. Asking
why an experience or story is important, what it might suggest about
social interaction and cultural life, and what it suggests about ourselves is
valuable for ensuring the worth of an autoethnography. These questions
can often be answered or explored through theoretical reflection,
examining the existing research about a topic, and/or by talking with
others as part of the project.

Risks. Before taking on an autoethnographic project—and especially before publishing or presenting it—considering what risks might result from the research is important. Risks include sharing vulnerable, private, and possibly controversial personal experiences; being exposed to unnecessary judgment; and receiving accusations of offense and betrayal from others (e.g., family members, friends, students) who feel as though their privacy has been violated, that the autoethnographer shared too much personal information, and/or that particular information is not accurate and truthful (Ellis, "Telling Secrets"). For autoethnographers, these criticisms can feel like highly personal attacks that can call into question the validity of shared accounts, motivate anxiety, and generate emotional pain (Chatham-Carpenter). Although autoethnographers often recognize the importance of telling stories, sharing personal experiences, and humanizing research, it is also important to frequently consider the potential risks of sharing these experiences. That includes both risks to the self and risks to others.

Ethics. "Relational ethics" is a key ethical concern relevant to all autoethnographic research (Ellis, "Telling Secrets"). Relational ethics means considering all of the people who might be implicated in your account (e.g., family members, friends, students), possibly seeking their approval for what you say or suggest about them, doing your best to ensure that others are not harmed by your representations, and thinking about the possible consequences of your autoethnographic texts on their lives. Many textual strategies can be used to address relational ethics, including using pseudonyms (e.g., Anonymous SF), fictionalizing an experience (e.g., Angrosino), creating composite characters (e.g., Ellis, *Ethnographic I*), or through collaborating with others in ways that increase anonymity regarding whose particular story is associated with whom (e.g., Adams and Holman Jones). In the process of doing autoethnography, it might also help to seek feedback from others, recognizing that seeking

feedback is different from asking or needing others to approve the account (Adams and Manning).

In some cases, autoethnographers try to de-identify people within a story, but doing so can be difficult. If people are not directly named they may still be identifiable by others who are familiar with the author's story (Bolen and Adams; Ellis, "Emotional"). Others who may not even be mentioned in a text may be affected as well. For example, as we wrote in another essay,

> If I (Tony) use autoethnography to examine personal experiences of familial homophobia, it may be difficult to disguise family members, especially if I come from a small family; these members, and even readers, may be able to identify these people in my life. When I (Jimmie) use autoethnography to talk about alcoholism in my family, it often requires pointing to my father's abusive or irresponsible behaviors, vulnerable moments experienced by my mother or other family members, disputes my family has about what did or did not happen, as well as the responses of non-immediate family members and community members. In other words, my account implicates not just me but also my mother, brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles, close family friends, teachers, and co-workers. (Adams and Manning)

Recognizing that we may implicate family members should not suggest that we should not tell our story or that doing so is unethical. Instead, we pledge to do our best to consider who our representations might affect and how we need to acknowledge and/or protect others.

Beyond these concerns, it is also important to consider that some autoethnographers, especially those who do social-scientific or interpretive-humanistic inquiry, might need to adhere to requirements espoused by research ethics review boards. For autoethnography, this is commonly informed consent for interviews (Tullis). However, other

autoethnographers, especially creative-artistic autoethnographers, will probably consider review board requirements to be irrelevant and unimportant, particularly because artists such as painters, dancers, musicians, and life writers do not need to worry about these requirements in order to paint, dance, play music, or write about their lives.

Conclusion

In this article, we have provided an overview of autoethnography and its orientations, reviewed past examples of popular culture scholarship that uses autoethnographic methods, and identified several strengths of using autoethnography to study popular culture. This overview demonstrates that the interdisciplinary field of popular culture studies has much to gain from autoethnographic research. Recently, media scholar Alexander Dhoest wrote, "a collection of autoethnographical essays by researchers would be helpful to establish broader patterns in (self-understandings of) contemporary media uses" (41). In reviewing the contents of this special issue, we believe that Dhoest's observation was correct. The essays included here illuminate self-understandings about media use as well as numerous other ways in which popular culture informs, challenges, interacts with, and constitutes everyday life.

If, as Herrmann astutely notes, "Popular culture helps us define who we are, what we believe, and influences whom we befriend" ("Daniel Amos," 7), then we need a method that can provide rich and nuanced examinations of how popular culture shapes our personal and cultural identities, inquires into researchers' popular culture use, and allows researchers to discuss how they make sense of their relationships to popular culture theories, texts, events, and celebrities. It is our hope that the articles in this collection, along with this essay, connect the broader cultural texts, artifacts, ideas, and events that we collectively refer to as popular culture with the personal experiences of everyday life.

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Lights, Camera, Silence: How Casting Processes Foster Compliance in Film and Television Performers

STEPHANIE PATRICK

I remember arriving late and frazzled for the job interview after getting lost. It was for a casting assistant position in a large Canadian city. The interview itself was being held in one of the city's prominent film studios, which gave off some sense of legitimacy to a young woman who never dared to dream of actually working in the film industry. I arrived to find that my tardiness was irrelevant. The whole event was more of a cattle call than a traditional interview, with a hallway packed full of eager kids waiting for their shot in the movie business (most in their early 20s and thus less likely to have social and/or financial responsibilities beyond the job). I waited more than an hour. Already the message was clear: "you're one of many dying for the gig; your chances are slim; you will be *lucky* to get it."

Such messages, of course, form the backbone of the casting trade. They are sent daily to actors who similarly pack the halls at casting sessions, sizing each other up as they rush to learn lines or get "into character." They send these messages to their assistants every time they bring them onto a star-studded set or to a red carpet premiere. They are subject to those messages themselves by producers and directors who think that everyone beneath them on the production team is replaceable. After three years of working in the Canadian casting industry, I became certain that these workers – myself included – were not, in fact,

replaceable. It is the job of the casting team to find actors who are "special," "talented" and "authentic." It is simultaneously our job to convince the actors that they are not special. And, if necessary, it is our job to replace them. This contradiction drives the work of the casting department, forcing us to find ideal yet replaceable workers to agree to production demands.

This paper aims to contribute to autoethnographic work on identity and power in relation to popular culture by deconstructing the casting processes for film and television. As outlined by Carolyn Ellis, autoethnography is "research, writing, story, and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social and political" (xix). Autoethnographic work "[reveals] social processes that might apply to other settings" (Ellis, *The Ethnographic I*, 10) and can therefore bridge individual experiences with wider structural and political realities. Drawing upon my experiences casting over 20 films and television shows, as well as numerous commercials, videogames, music videos and other productions, this article explores the ways in which the film industry fosters compliance amongst employees who might otherwise question or critique the creation of content that is explicitly racist, sexist, ableist, homophobic or in other ways discriminatory.

Using autoethnographic techniques that protect the identities of those with and for whom I worked, including the omission of identifying characteristics and details as well as the use of composite characters (Ellis, "Telling Secrets, Revealing Lives," 16), this paper describes my personal struggles with the content that I helped to create. This method is also grounded in feminist standpoint epistemology, as it illustrates my insider/outsider conflict as a white female working with and for a mostly white, male-dominated industry ("2013 Job Patterns for Minorities and Women in Private Industry (EEO-1)"). Acting on behalf of the production team, I often had to take on (in the form of actively searching out) the team's dominant perspective and comply with what was expected of me in

ways that contributed to the continued stereotyping and marginalization of minority groups in mainstream media (Harding; Hesse-Biber, Leavy and Yaiser). I participated in the casting of women in roles that perpetuate female oppression. And, for a while, I felt lucky to be able to do so.

Neoliberal Work in the Media

As part of our job interview process we were made to believe that we had to compete with two other candidates for the casting assistant position. In a reality TV-esque showdown, we were brought together with our potential employer and given specific instructions for our first task/test: we had to read a short script and provide two "wish lists" of actors for each of the roles. A wish list is a kind of "dream team" of actors that you would cast in each role if money and availability were of no concern. As a Canadian company, there was a caveat to all of our work – we always needed two choices: one American and one Canadian, as the number of Canadian actors and crew members on a production affects the amount of funding that can be accessed. American stars can "sell" potential projects to distribution teams, but they also take up valuable spots that could be filled by Canadian actors. Knowing the Canadian star system was a key aspect of the job.

I remember agonizing over these wish lists. We had three days to get back to the casting boss with our choices. I did not have any formal training for this process and instead relied on my own tastes and the hopes that they might fall in line with that of the hiring team. I remember being so proud of what I thought were unique, washed-up, B-rate, character actors for the roles – my American choice was Tony Danza; my Canadian one was William Shatner (this was back in the *Boston Legal* days before the reboot of both *Star Trek* and Shatner's "coolness" level). I sent in my carefully constructed lists, feeling I had much on the line with this opportunity but having no guess as to how well I did.

Having never received feedback, I still do not know how well I did with that particular task. It must have been somewhat acceptable because I was called in to help with an audition session. I got the job! When I showed up for the session, I found myself face-to-face with another of the supposed "finalists" for the gig. In fact, it turned out that they hired all three of us (it was explained that the first project would be our "trial" session), thus ensuring that none of us had any sort of gauge as to how good we were at casting. I am now quite convinced that is impossible to know how good one is at casting.

The ambiguity of the notion of "talent" is not unique to the art of casting. Actors learn certain "tools of the trade" but the skill of acting itself is a vaguely defined talent that has varying worth, depending on many factors including persistence and pure luck. Although some people train for years to perfect the craft, others are plucked out of obscurity and deemed worthy of fame, often with no previous acting experience. Casting is arguably even more evasive to define as a skill. There are few – if any – casting training programs for wannabe casting directors and to this day there remains no Academy Award recognizing "Best achievement in casting.[1]" Further confounding the craft is the fact that casting decisions are made by a varying slew of people, not only the person who is credited with casting.

This confusion surrounding the term "talent" in relation to specific skills sets and the job market extends beyond those working in the media. As noted by Arne Kalleberg, the shift from a knowledge-based economy to a more creative or talent-based one wherein "talent" remains an obscure

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[1] There are other industry awards for casting (i.e. Spirit Awards). However, despite the 2013 addition of a Casting branch of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, the Oscars have yet to create an award designated specifically for casting directors ("Casting Directors Celebrate New Academy Branch, Hope for Casting Oscar - The Hollywood Reporter").

notion at best, has produced a labor market with a growing number of highly educated yet underemployed workers, numerous careers over the course of a lifetime and an increasing return to adult education and training programs by more experienced workers (Kalleberg, 10).

The ambiguity surrounding the notion of talent serves three important functions. Firstly, it fosters a sense of uncertainty and, therefore, insecurity in workers. When workers are not confident in their precise skillset they feel lucky to even have a job – especially when that job is viewed as a "glamorous" one. Furthermore, neoliberal globalization policies – the outsourcing of work, for instance, or the demise of labor unions – have resulted in a growing shift toward part-time, contractual work (Arat-Koc; Arnold and Bongiovi; Bérubé; Brodie; Kalleberg). Kalleberg defines *employment precarity* as the state in which "people lose their jobs or fear losing their jobs, when they lack alternative employment opportunities in the labor market, and when workers experience diminished opportunities to obtain and maintain particular skills" (2). This sense of precarity weighs even more heavily on workers as other social welfare programs and community supports decline. A climate of individualism and competition is favored over alliances and collectivism.

Secondly, this sense of uncertainty and competition forces workers to increasingly commoditize themselves in innovative ways. On the one hand workers find additional ways to monetize their free time (i.e. taking on paying riders through drive-share apps like Uber; having their lives recorded for reality entertainment programs) while on the other hand workers are promised that precarious, non-monetized labor will be eventually be rewarded with full-time paid careers (i.e. internships). The film industry is notorious for such forms of employment and numerous interns cycled through the casting company over the three years I worked there. Although it must be acknowledged that such forms of labor can and often do provide some form of reward to laborers – in the case of casting, they offer experience, access to film sets and stars as well as industry

parties and screenings – they disproportionally reward those at the top of the economic ladder with more profits at lower costs.

A third major benefit to corporations unwilling or unable to define "talent" is that, as Brown and Tannock point out, it "gives corporate employers an awful lot of leeway to make self-interested and unfair recruitment and promotion decisions" (387). Hiring and promotional discourses draw on vague notions of "talent" and "hard work" to justify practices that can be (and often are) couched in bias. Discourses of merit mask the structural obstacles that prevent many from accessing the elite training institutions or social networks needed to obtain desirable work in the first place, as well as the necessary politics often involved in climbing corporate ladders. This sense of "meritocracy" – that it is possible to earn what one deserves – is one of the underlying appeals of the capitalist system, so its circulation as a popular myth is crucial. One of the key sites of circulation of meritocratic discourses in Western society is the celebrity system.

Casting and Celebrity

Throughout my short career in casting I witnessed first-hand multiple failures of meritocracy in the media system. There is one instance, however, that serves as a glaring example of how little "talent" really comes into play in the decision-making. I was positively crushed when an actor who gave—in my view—the best audition I had ever seen was passed over for the part. The decision was based not on his performance, but on the production team's desire to go with a "known" actress in the mother role, making him far too old to pass as her son. The miscasting of a too-young actress who is known more for her physical assets than her emotive ones was not an uncommon occurrence, but it usually did not so directly undermine the legitimacy of what I did on a day-to-day basis. I am certain that it's no coincidence that this incident took place toward my

final days in casting. I was increasingly fed up with the lack of reason, fairness, and accountability in a system that serves, on many levels, as the public example of meritocracy at work.

Many scholars in celebrity studies have noted the ways in which the celebrity system both perpetuates and deconstructs myths of meritocracy (Collins; Holmes, "Whoever Heard"; Negra and Holmes; Rojek). Merit-based celebrities are held up in market-driven systems as examples that hard work and "talent" combined with just the right amount of luck are the keys to success in an equal playing field (Smith). Celebrities whose fame is not based upon some notion of talent or achievement are framed as having unmerited success and often denigrated for daring to defy meritocratic norms (Holmes, "Dreaming a Dream"; Williamson).

Though there have been structural analyses of the power dynamics at play in the celebrity system (Dyer; Gamson; Marshall; Rojek; Turner), there has been significantly less scholarly work on the microcosm of casting systems in which stardom itself can originate. Although much has been written not only on the craft of acting (Adler; Hagen; Meisner), as well as performance more generally (Goffman; Taylor), there has been comparatively little theoretical engagement with the casting process as a structural barrier to visibility and power.

There are obvious issues of practicality – how to access insiders whose own precarious job security relies on a certain level of complicity and silence – that limit where and how such analyses may unfold. At the time of my employment in casting I had no interest or foreseeable future in scholarly research and thus, for this article, had to rely on saved correspondences, informal dialogue with a former colleague (who reviewed and offered feedback on this article), and my memories about casting. As such, this work follows methodologically from previous autoethnography such as that of Chris Chapman and Nancy Taber who retrospectively reflect on the role they once played in perpetuating

institutionalized power relations to which they/we at some point become morally attuned/opposed.

My Casting

Though growing up I certainly never dreamed of being specifically in casting (does anyone?), I had always loved film, television and popular culture. I remember being amazed and thrilled to discover that one could actually obtain a university degree in film studies. Although other people in my program wanted to be actors or directors, I just wanted to earn credit for watching movies. I never thought that I would one day find myself on the same set as one of my favorite comedic actors of all time… The awe and excitement I felt that moment was something I knew tapped into the deepest desires of most everyone in our celebrity and media-saturated society. It was also a feeling I called upon again and again in my day-to-day work of casting. I decided who could walk onto those sets and who could not. I controlled access to the stars and to stardom. I granted people a chance at pursing their dream.

In Eastern Canada I worked with three different star systems, depending on the origins of the production team: the Quebec system, the English-Canadian system, and the American (United States) system. Though stars were regularly featured in the projects, those contracts were negotiated between producers and directors, usually long before the casting team signs on. Our job was to find the "unknowns" – hiring local actors (from auditions) and extras or background performers (usually recruited online). Though I did not engage with the casting of stars myself, stardom or celebrity served two key functions in relation to my job: first, celebrities were helpful in selling a gig to potential recruits; second, fame itself was clearly the (exploitable) goal of the pool of workers from which I could choose. I will first explain the ways in which I sold work.

Selling is a large part of the casting job at both ends – on the one hand the casting director needs to sell an actor to a director in order to complete the job, while on the other, the casting team often has to sell a project to actors and extras. Film industry work, by nature, is precarious. Though in total, film and television production creates approximately 125,000 full-time jobs in the country each year ("Industry Facts & Figures | Canadian Media Production Association"), those jobs are often temporary. In Canada in 2011, artists and cultural workers were 20 percent less likely to hold steady, full-time employment than the general labor force, while actors and comedians were four times as likely to be self-employed ("A Statistical Profile of Artists and Cultural Workers in Canada | Hill Strategies"). The precarity of the work necessitates a certain level of compliance on the part of performers, but it can also mean that actors, who know that a gig is temporary and unlikely to be the "big break" they need, are less willing to humiliate themselves, perform naked or nearly naked, simulate graphic acts of sex or violence, etc. Selling these frequent scenarios to actors was one of the hardest parts of my job. One of the ways in which actors can be convinced is through the prestige of association with certain "known" and "respected" actors and directors. In particular relation to the Canadian setting, the prestige of an American project itself was often enough to sell performers on the job. Throwing in an American star or two usually made the sell downright easy.

The most common sell was nudity. Projects often required one or more women to appear nude onscreen – usually with few or no lines to say. Producers and directors often want a certain kind of nude woman in their production. The chances of lining up what they wanted and who was available were slim. On one French-Canadian co-production we needed to cast three women to appear as silent and naked escorts in our protagonist's room – to demonstrate how out-of-control his ego and partying had become. My male colleague and I canvassed the best, most elite local strip clubs and persuaded a number of women to meet the director in person.

But it was not *his* name that convinced them to come—we fortunately had an American star on the roster. When they met with the director to discuss the scene, it was up to him then to convince them that his vision was "artistic," "inspired" and "tasteful."

My own gendered experience of this phenomenon has made me hypersensitive to female representation onscreen – particularly the background casting of women as "strippers" and/or prostitutes as specters of white male protagonists' loss of control. Films like *The Wolf of Wall Street* benefit from high-profile actors (Leonardo DiCaprio) and directors (Martin Scorsese) who enable the casting of marginalized groups in peripheral and degrading roles that they might otherwise refuse.

Though my first experience on a film set involved high-profile actors and Hollywood directors, I quickly learned that those gigs were rare. On most Canadian film sets, there are no A-list actors or directors that can lure workers to the gig. I quickly learned the improvisational techniques necessary to lure actors and background performers onto a set. Shooting in small towns attracted onlookers willing to monetize their curiosity about the film industry. Getting paid as an extra to stand around and watch people shooting films was a somewhat lucrative pastime that I also partook in to supplement my precarious salary. Other times we would sell the extras on an "up-and-coming" director or an important historical moment that "needs to be told."

The more seasoned actors know that background work rarely leads to more prominent opportunities and thus refused multiple job offers. Sometimes they could be convinced otherwise by telling them that they were featured and more likely to get upgraded: "you're right beside the star" or "there are only two of you in the scene!" Once an actor arrived on set, what happened to them—wherever they might be placed or whatever they might be asked to do—was beyond my control. And more often than not, whatever they were asked, they did. I once sent numerous girls to the same set – some were to be partygoers, others were to be strippers at the

party. The director was not satisfied with the look of the girls cast as strippers (who had agreed and were comfortable in that role) and switched them on set with more "attractive" women – women who had declined that role to me on the phone, but said yes to the director on set. I clearly and absolutely benefitted from their compliance. The refusal to do something on set certainly reflects poorly on the casting director, but it is their team that has to scramble to find replacements, which, with specific roles and limited time, can be more difficult than the initial hiring.

Though certainly the issue of nudity could be viewed as an actor's personal choice, there are numerous other ways in which actors are asked to go the extra mile to prove that they really want the role, and, consequently, the career. It is one thing to ask a person to do something they might find embarrassing or uncomfortable, but why would an actor sacrifice his core beliefs for a small role on an unknown – or even a known – director's project? Besides the damage to one's identity (see Robinson), there are economic considerations to take into account as well: because of continued marginalization – perpetuated by media representation – women and other minorities might not be in a position to turn down paying jobs. Across all industries, women in Canada are more likely to have part-time, precarious employment while visible minority women are even less likely to access stable, full-time employment (Stats Canada).

The economic harms of contract work in general place workers in a precarious position and disempowers them. Cultural workers in Canada earn, on average, 12 percent less than the average worker, while artists earn 32 percent less ("A Statistical Profile"). In order to supplement lower incomes, many art and cultural workers take on second jobs, as I sometimes did myself by taking background work. In 2011, 11 percent of artists worked at least two jobs, twice the overall number ("A Statistical Profile"). The prevalence of unpaid or low-paid positions (often sold as internships) suggests to workers that if they want to "get their foot in the

door" they need to be willing to work for less than anyone else. In return for "paying their dues," most hope just to be able to eventually gain some type of economic stability.

Yet, above and beyond being able to earn a living in a trade they love, acting provides the potential for reward on a much greater scale. Though many might be hesitant to admit to aspiring to fame (see Allen's recent study on girls in performing arts schools), there is no doubt that, besides the more obvious perks of celebrity, a certain level of renown is desirable in order for an actor to move from a more precarious working position to having a sense of stability and security. Certainly higher levels of fame make actors less replaceable (though they always still are – high profile firings include Eric Stoltz in *Back to the Future* (Klahn) and Charlie Sheen from *Two and a Half Men*), yet there are standardized features of the industry – and the casting process specifically – that serve as a constant reminder to actors of their interchangeability.

Getting Into the Room

"She's too fat." "She looks *nothing* like her headshot." "He's not black enough." "She's cock-eyed." Before the days of dating apps like Tinder, split-second decision-making based solely on appearance was the purview of casting teams. Actors are not only expected, but also, by profession, required to expose themselves to this kind of physical scrutiny. As a female casting assistant working with males, I was in no way shielded from such talk – in fact, the longer I worked, the more implicated in it I myself became. Headshots are an actor's key of entry into the audition room or onto set. Many actors are excluded from the process based solely on who they are.

This level of scrutiny means that the audition room is one of the hardest places to get into. Once a casting breakdown was released and the submissions from agents poured into the office, we would use photos to

pick and choose which lucky few had the chance to come in to audition for the role – a role that most usually called for a white male. Therefore, there was a clear singular demographic of local actors I came to know quite well because they auditioned most frequently. As I grew more experienced and confident in my position, I struggled with these norms and tested the limits of the casting boundaries, bringing in women or racialized actors when a role lacked any physical description in the script (i.e. "Doctor" or "Lawyer"). In Canada, women are half as likely as men to work as producers, directors or in other top-level creative positions ("A Statistical Profile"). In the U.S., minority women occupy only 5.5 percent of senior or executive-level management positions in the motion picture and sound recording industry ("2013 Job Patterns for Minorities and Women in Private Industry (EEO-1)"). It is not surprising that producers and directors often default to white male characters.

The rarity of auditions heightens the urgency and sense of competition among actors, particularly when they are part of a visible minority. Once they manage to land an audition, they are merely one, among many, auditioning for the role – usually actors come to know their competition in their type as they regularly encounter each other at the same auditions. Often, the casting directors will arrange the auditions as they did during my first interview, telling everyone to come at the same time so that the hallway is packed and the intimidating messages about your competition are clear.

Once inside the audition room, the power of the actor diminishes further. Usually it is the casting team and not the director who is in the room – again, showing actors how inconsequential they are. The actors perform their scenes and take their cues from the casting team; this is where some of the most obvious power dynamics can emerge. I once ran a casting session for a project that required female performers to play "hookers," "hot make-out girls" and "strippers." At the end of the short audition scene I interviewed each young woman: "Are you willing to do

partial nudity? Full nudity? Are you comfortable kissing a man? Another woman? Are you willing to simulate sexual acts?" The audition room is a vulnerable place for a young actress and is not the best time to say "no." And, mirroring my own gendered performance of professional neutrality, not a single woman did.

At times I was lucky enough to be in the audition room with the decision-makers. On key projects or for certain roles, directors and producers would join the sessions – or, more likely, the callbacks – to see how easy it was to work with the actors themselves. The power dynamics are even more unevenly distributed in such sessions. The pressure on actors to comply with what they are asked is immense. Once the actor is on set, the cameras rolling, the crew and cast all on the clock, the pressure intensifies. Any hesitation on their part costs money and time, marks them as "difficult" and undesirable to work with, and – at the most extreme – can halt production altogether. Workers who could present this kind of threat to the system are safest when they feel disempowered. But actors are not the only workers within the film industry made to feel disempowered. The film industry employs numerous peoples on sets from many different backgrounds– people who themselves are subject to discrimination and marginalization, whose labor then contributes to the creation of cultural products that sustain their own marginalization. What keeps them going back?

A Wake-Up Call

Eventually I broke out of the cycle. Though three years over the span of a lifetime may seem inconsequential, it can feel like a lot longer when it is filled with internal struggle. The mundane day-to-day tasks of casting are easily forgotten when you find yourself at an exclusive party, surrounded by A-list stars (Canadian *and* American), celebrating the premiere of your work at the Toronto International Film Festival. The discriminatory nature

of casting can be more easily overlooked when visiting a diverse and vibrant film set full of actors and extras who are both grateful to be there and who are not being asked to do anything unexpected. The inherent nepotism, sexism, and bias within the system are overshadowed by the prestigious awards shows and the proud family and friends. The long underpaid, overtime hours are forgivable when you're supposed to be driven by passion rather than money.

Passion is, in fact, key to the continuation of this cycle. This shared passion brings vastly different people together to work on a collaborative creative project that is much greater than themselves. Passion keeps people going, providing moments of accomplishment, satisfaction and even wonder amidst other times of helplessness and compliancy. Perhaps it depends on who the coworker is, but mine certainly drove me forward as we supported each other through the most unbearable of times.

One particularly difficult project renewed my faith in the potential of teamwork and creativity. The film required hundreds of extras per day in the middle of winter, most of whom were young men with no car trying to get on set before public transportation even started. Between the snowstorms and the difficult wardrobe, hair and directorial team (including a director who actually *films* his extras!) I came close to unraveling. On one particular occasion I came too close for comfort. It was a Sunday shoot, with the usual on-set call time of 6AM, which means that I start fielding calls from late and lost extras by 5AM (after I finish confirming all the extras the night before at 1AM, maybe 2AM). On these occasions it was simplest just to stay at the office overnight on one of the pullout sofas. I was alone, and I was exhausted, but by 6:30AM my phone had calmed down. I felt that usual sigh of relief when you know you've done all you can to get the right people to the right place. Now that the situation is out of your hands maybe you can go back to sleep for another hour or two… And maybe not.

My boss called to tell me that the director had seen all the extras on set and decided that there simply were not enough. I remember that moment – all the stress, all the frustration, all the exhaustion from that project just overwhelmed me. I came undone. I just cried. He tried to get me back on track over the phone but it didn't work. We hung up. He was on his way. I continued to cry. I don't know for how long. After a while I made coffee, which calmed me. Eventually my boss walked in, it couldn't have been much past 7AM. He picked up the phone and started calling people from our database. He didn't get angry that I hadn't already started. He didn't say a word when I sat and drank coffee while he called potential extras. Eventually I picked up another phone and started calling too. Together, we managed to get about a dozen more young men up, out of bed, and onto set on a wintry Sunday morning. The director was happy. He and the film won numerous awards and he was one of the few directors I worked with who went on to a prestigious Hollywood career. It was a job well done.

Conclusion

Incredible things can happen when workers feel a sense of community and agency. Unfortunately such feelings surfaced rarely in my casting career, and are increasingly uncommon in today's neoliberal work environment. As precarious, part-time, contract work continues to rise, so too does the sense that we are all fighting for just a few jobs, and, consequently, the abandonment of collective consciousness and alliance. Increased discourses about "competitive job markets" and "high unemployment" – whether statistically true or untrue – can affect the psyche of workers. In a world in which social supports are shrinking and discourses of personal responsibility are increasing, the prospect of losing one's job is fearful enough to influence individual choice and behavior. Workers who once were in a position to negotiate with employers (let alone those who are culturally conditioned not to negotiate) are less likely to make demands.

Employees increasingly comply with policies or procedures with which they disagree and often ethically oppose. Employers either become complacent towards employees or they overcompensate in ways that foster a sense of gratitude (i.e. competitions for internships or contracts at the most prestigious companies).

There is one industry, however, that has to seduce, confuse, manipulate and outright bribe people to agree to its demands – the film and television production industry. Across North American film sets there are workers performing in ways that humiliate them, harm their sense of identity and community, and conflict with their core values. What is it about the "American Dream" that makes these sacrifices worth it? What does this say about the power of the promise of fame and riches in an increasingly precarious and disparate world?

As an employer, the film and television industry is more implicated in fostering such harms than most industries – the media create and circulate the images that perpetuate the marginalization of minorities in mainstream society. And they rely upon those minorities to do so. But what might happen if casting assistants were honest with and accountable to the actors they engage? What if casting directors were freed to make choices based on which talent best suited each role? What if actors refused roles that locked them into stereotypes? What kinds of films might get made if we weren't all just so thankful to be there in the first place? I don't know, because I left.

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Living the Romance through *Castle*: Exploring Autoethnography, Popular Culture and Romantic Television Narratives

MICHAELA D. E. MEYER

> BECKETT: Why are you here? You don't care about the victims, so you aren't here for justice. You don't care that the guy's aping your books, so you aren't here 'cause you're outraged. So what is it, Rick? You here to annoy me?
>
> CASTLE: I'm here for the story.
>
> BECKETT: The story.
>
> CASTLE: Why those people? Why those murders?
>
> BECKETT: Sometimes, there is no story. Sometimes the guy is just a psychopath.
>
> CASTLE: There's always a story. Always a chain of events that makes everything make sense. ("Flowers for Your Grave")

<p align="center">* * *</p>

The scene: March 2009. My life as I know it is over. My life-partner of eight years declares he is leaving one month after the miscarriage of our child. Our child is gone. He is leaving. I am somehow expected to function. It is at this moment, one of my darkest moments, that ABC

releases a mid-season replacement – *Castle*. Similar in structure to other
television crime procedurals (e.g., *Moonlighting* or *Bones*), the show pairs
NYPD Detective Kate Beckett with popular mystery writer Richard Castle
as partners who solve murder cases. The series operates primarily as a
crime drama but the romantic connection between the main characters is a
large part of the show's popular appeal. During the regular television
season, Castle shadows Beckett and then "writes" a novel about his
experiences. ABC's sister publisher, Hyperion Books, releases these
novels just before the beginning of the new television season. The series
immediately captures my attention, and I tune in week after week to the
tough-as-nails Kate Beckett and campy Richard Castle. It is fun, light-
hearted – everything missing from my daily narrative that consists of
unending sadness and layers of deeper and darker depression. I watch (and
re-watch) each episode waiting for the next one to appear. I will myself to
hope.

<p align="center">*   *   *</p>

BECKETT: Well, guess this is it.

CASTLE: Well, it doesn't have to be. We could go to dinner.
Debrief each other.

BECKETT: Why, Castle? So I can be another one of your
conquests?

CASTLE: Or I could be one of yours. ("Flowers for Your Grave")

<p align="center">*   *   *</p>

Ever since Radway's germinal work on women reading romantic fiction,
our academic discussions of women's relationship to romantic narratives
in popular culture center on the process of "reading" or "using" these

narratives as "equipment for living" (Burke 594; see also Crane; Dubino; Johnson). My purpose in this essay is to suggest that although these metaphors have a place in how we understand popular culture, they fail to recognize the symbiotic nature popular culture plays in personal identity. Our identities are not only informed by popular narratives/representations, but are often an intricately constructed bricolage (Hebdige 103-104) where the "pop" and the "real" become inseparable (Boylorn; Herrmann).

This is particularly true of consumers of romantic narratives. Many humans aspire to create and maintain romantic pairings throughout the life-course, and for many, engaging romantic fiction is part of that process. According to the Romance Writers of America, romantic fiction generated over $1 billion in sales in 2013 comprising 13% of total fiction sales ("Industry Statistics"). Romance reading is so widespread that Dugger argues, "Even those who don't partake in it usually know and respect someone who does" (16). Yet, academic discussions of romantic narratives often focus exclusively on published novels and literacy, failing to account for the myriad of popular romantic narratives occurring in visual outlets such as television.

To expand our academic discussion of romantic narratives in popular culture, I offer an autoethnographic layered account (Ronai 396) of my identification as a *Castle* fan and its impact on my romantic imaginary. For many individuals, the line between popular culture (aka fiction) and lived reality (aka real life) is best conceptualized as a fluid ether where our identities bleed, shift, transmute, and collide in our day-to-day interactions with culture. In my story, I illustrate how the romantic fiction created in the *Castle* universe (through the television show and the book series) shaped (and continues to shape) the romantic narrative of my life. I then discuss the implications for autoethnography and popular culture, particularly how the romantic imaginary functions as a liminal construct between mediated discourse and interpersonal relationships. Ultimately, I argue that both popular culture scholars and autoethnographers should

concentrate on mapping unspeakable love, joy, and happiness through and in our lived realities.

* * *

"Hey," he says, with an air of familiarity. Since my life took its darker turn, I spend several nights at bars, usually ones that have karaoke. Over the past year, I've cultivated a group of karaoke friends – a network I can go to with no questions asked. We don't talk about our personal lives. We don't wallow in our sadness, though we are all sad in our own way. We put sadness aside. We drink, we laugh, we sing. I am the oldest of the karaoke crowd, a not-quite-so-badge of honor for a thirty-something. It's acceptable for the twenty-somethings not to have things figured out. I enact a self-imposed psychosocial moratorium (Erikson 156) and allow myself not to be bothered by this.

"Oh, hi James," I say. James went to high school with several of my karaoke friends, and we've met before. He is tall, slim and handsome in a boyish way. He wears his hair slightly long, in that floppy look made popular by teen film and television stars. His smile draws attention to his cheeks, which have a baby-faced sort of quality.

"How have you been?" he asks. Phatic communication, obviously. But I've just left the lawyer's office drawing up separation agreements and talking through legal implications of eight years of shared financial lives. I am not okay.

"Eh, okay," I say, "what have you been up to?" We chat briefly about writing. James is an aspiring writer. He's finished his third novel and is working on editing. I am finishing the semester and looking forward to writing more in the summer.

"Well, we should get together and write sometime. I'd like that," he says.

"Sure," I say, "I usually work better if someone holds me accountable for my progress anyway." He pauses, "Yeah, we can talk too, you know, if you need to talk about anything." I clam up. We end the conversation. I assume this writing date will not actually happen. I might see him out and about at the bars. I might not.

* * *

Autoethnography and popular culture are often conceptualized as incompatible scholastic undertakings. As Herrmann observes, popular culture studies examine "culture and identity from the outside in," while autoethnography examines identity "from the inside out" (6). In many ways, the proscription for evocative writing contained in autoethnographic methodology suits it to difficult cultural subjects such as depression (e.g., Jago), abuse (e.g., Ronai), illness (e.g., Moore) and death (e.g. Ellis). The overwhelmingly serious emotional focus of autoethnographic work can, to many, leave an "impression that there is no point in doing autoethnography if everything is fine" (Uotinen 165). On the other hand, popular culture is often conceptualized as frivolous and light – a way to pass time and enjoy life. Thus, why do autoethnography of popular culture? Because autoethnographies remind us that cultural representations *matter deeply* in the lives of those who turn to popular culture as a way to understand their identities (Neumann 191). Popular culture is intricately linked to individual and group identity, and its location should be central to autoethnographic explorations.

* * *

My ex is coming over to move out the rest of his belongings. I begin to panic. I don't want to be here, don't want to watch him take his things and leave. But I also don't have anywhere to go. He's coming first thing in the

morning. Bars won't be open. The karaoke crew is still sleeping. My work colleagues and "adult" friends offer to take me in – but I can't. So many of them have young children, happy marriages. The last thing I want is to hang out with children who would only remind me of the one I lost. The last thing I want is to see couples working together.

The night before, I get a random Facebook message from James – "Some friends and I are hitting the beach tomorrow. Want to come?"

I stare at the screen. This offer comes somewhat out of nowhere. I haven't spoken to James since our brief conversation a few weeks ago. The beach isn't exactly the writing date we'd talked about. But I can't help feel the universe is offering me something – a chance to escape maybe.

"Yes," I reply, "Come pick me up." I give him my address, and he promises to be there first thing in the morning.

My ex shows up, with a sad, pathetic look on his face. And I can't take it. We were so good on paper. How did we end up here? I can't breathe. But James honks the horn. I let my ex in. "Take your things and go. Lock up when you leave. I don't know when I'll be back." I grab my beach hat, sunglasses, sunscreen and a romance novel. I run to a car full of people I don't know except James. I escape.

*   *   *

CASTLE: Nice guy. I can see how it wouldn't work, though.

BECKETT: Really?

CASTLE: Sure…Handsome, square-jawed, by-the-book.

BECKETT: And that's a bad thing?

CASTLE: Yeah, he's like the male you. Ying needs Yang, not another Ying. Ying-Yang is harmony, but Ying-Ying is…a name for a panda. ("Little Girl Lost")

*   *   *

The weather is beautiful – the perfect 80 degree day with a slight breeze rippling the water. Sitting on the sand, breathing the salt air deeply, slowly, I feel my muscles start to relax. The boys are horsing around in the water. The girls are sunbathing and chatting about fashion and swine flu. I feel woefully out of place, hanging out with a crowd of people nearly a decade younger than I am. So I leisurely read my romance novel, looking up from time to time to observe the carefree existence I wish I still had.

As I look up, I see James rising out of the water, water dripping slowly from his chest. He runs both hands across his face and through his hair, slicking back his drenched locks. He shakes the water out of his eyes, and I watch the light catch each minute movement of his body. *He is like a gorgeous dolphin*, I think to myself, and then promptly groan inwardly. I can't believe my inner monologue sounds worse than the prose in the book I'm reading. The boys bound back toward the towels on the beach, so I quickly snap out of it. The girls trade places with them, and head into the water. Although I am invited to join them, I decline and stay firmly planted in the sand.

"I'm pretty sure this relationship is going to be over after the summer," Josh says while watching his current girlfriend and another woman splashing around in the water. "What about you and Katie?" he asks James. James glances to the water, and I ascertain that the woman with Josh's girlfriend must be Katie.

"Eh. It is what it is," he replies cryptically. "I'm looking for something more." I think when he says this that he looks at me, but I am probably imagining that. Josh turns to me and asks, "What's your story?"

I hesitate, not wanting to cross a line of disclosure that would warrant me talking about the whole mess. "I'm … single. It's, uh, … complicated. I'm just getting out of a pretty serious thing," I reply. It feels weird to characterize myself this way.

After a few hours, everyone has had enough of the sun and we start to pack up. Mentally, I am thinking through where I will go from here. My ex won't be finished moving things and I don't want to go back home. As I am running through options in my head, James says, "So, do you want to go home now? I can take you back."

I should probably say yes, but I say, "No." He pauses, reads my face and says, "You know, we were just going to hang out the rest of the day anyway. Probably go shoot some pool, play some poker. I mean, if you need a place to hide out or anything."

A wave of relief washes over me, "That sounds great. Count me in. I suck at pool, but I'm an excellent poker player."

"Well, that should work out well then because I'm a decent pool player, but a terrible poker player. Especially after I get a couple drinks in me." He smiles at me and I feel my face flush. I'm pretty sure he's flirting with me, but I am preoccupied with what's happening outside of this temporary reality – the end of my "real" life.

<p style="text-align:center">*   *   *</p>

We fail to truly understand romantic discourse in popular culture when we specifically and purposefully label "romance" as a certain type of cultural trope, wedded to a particular kind of formulaic fiction. Radway explains that the process of reading to escape one's present is "neither a new behavior nor one peculiar to women who read romances" (89); Cawelti observes that formulaic types of fiction (such as romance novels) are commonly defined by scholars as "subliterature (as opposed to literature), popular art (as opposed to fine art), lowbrow culture (as opposed to highbrow), or in terms of some other pejorative opposition" (13). But the metaphors of escape and formula fail to account for the everyday pleasure of popular culture:

> The culture of everyday life is best described through metaphors of struggle or antagonism: strategies opposed by tactics, the bourgeoisie by the proletariat; hegemony met by resistance, ideology countered or evaded; top-down power opposed by bottom-up power, social discipline faced with disorder. These antagonisms, these clashes of social interests are motivated primarily by *pleasure*: the pleasure of producing one's own meanings of social experience and the pleasure of avoiding the social discipline of the power-bloc. (Fiske 47 *emphasis added*)

Romantic narratives are pleasurable because they enable a romantic imaginary – a set of "one's own meanings" tied to our interpersonal expectations of romantic relationships. Popular culture produces multiple points of entry into a variety of potential romantic scenarios. As more "blended" narratives appear, mixing traditional romantic fiction with other genres (e.g., mystery, Westerns, sci-fi, etc.), more nuanced readings of popular narratives of romance will need to extend beyond the romance novel as genre and into more complicated discussions of popular romance (Thompson, Koski, and Kolyfield 447; see also Meyer, "*Charmed*").

<p style="text-align:center">*   *   *</p>

After the initial crisis of my ex leaving, I was still left with the (re)adjustment to my new life alone. Going home was eerie. I've always been an introvert, and I typically relish time to myself. But this was different – the isolation wasn't self-chosen or rejuvenating, it was forced and surreal. I spent several nights scrolling through phone contacts, considering calling. Sometimes I did. More often than not, no one picked up the phone. I was left alone.

James shared an apartment with two twenty-something males, and it quickly became my haven, a safe space. It was one of the filthiest places I've ever seen – boxes upon boxes of random stuff stacked in the main

room, dishes piled up with (several) days old food, laundry thrown asunder so that you couldn't tell what was clean and what was dirty. But someone was always there, or would be there soon, and after hanging out with these guys after the beach trip, they decided I was cool enough to have a standing open door invitation. The door was never locked.

One night, I went over to watch TV in a space that wasn't my house – my house full of eight years of memories slowly suffocating me. All of the guys were out. I'd just started up *Castle* when James walked in from his shift. "Hey," he said with a smile, "Whatcha watching?"

"Ah, it's this new show – *Castle*. It has Nathan Fillion in it. I added it to your DVR last week. Hope you don't mind."

"Isn't he that dude from *Firefly*? I loved that show!"

"Everyone who bothered to watch it loved that show," I said.

"Hang on a sec – I'll take a shower and join you," he said. And then mischievously added, "Or you could join me…"

He's joking – clearly he is joking, but suddenly I'm not. Months of flirtation, that gorgeous body. Roommates not home. I pause the show and stand suddenly, stripping off my shirt. *What am I doing? This is going to be so embarrassing in a minute.* But he crosses the room quickly to meet me, before I can change my mind, pulling me into an embrace and kissing me deeply. He smells of sweat and smoke and kitchen lines and char-grilled steak but I don't care.

<p style="text-align:center">*   *   *</p>

Whatever worry or uncertainty or conflict she'd felt before, she pushed it aside as too much thinking. At that moment, Nikki Heat didn't want to think. She wanted to be. … The flickering of the candles gave the room a feeling of motion, the way it looked to Nikki when the plane she was in flew through a cloud. She pressed herself down to him and he came to meet her, the two of them not so much moving as drifting weightless toward each other, attracted

by some irresistible force in nature that had no name, color, or
taste, only heat.

And then what began so gently took on its own life. They flew to
each other, locking open mouths together, crossing some line that
dared them, and they took it. They tasted deeply and touched each
other with a frenzy of eagerness fired by wonder and craving, the
two of them released at last to test the edge of their passion.
(Castle, *Heat Wave* 104)

<p style="text-align:center">*   *   *</p>

"Merry Christmas," James says, handing me a package that is clearly a
book. The summer has come and gone, and what seemed like a brief
summer fling somehow morphed into a full-on relationship. At the end of
the summer, James' lease was up and his bachelor buddies were moving
on to other places. That started the "what if" game – What if we didn't
break up at the end of the summer? What if we moved in together to see if
the relationship could be long term? What if all of this is *completely and
totally insane*? An eight year age gap. My career situated as a professor,
stable. His, starting out as a sous chef. My days are a constant war
between the rational, adult voice in my head and the hopeless romantic
who can't help but wonder if he is "the one."

I feel the package and hold it up, shaking it briefly. "It's a book!" I
declare without opening it. "Next present."

"Ah, come on now – you have to open it," he says. I tear away the
bright red wrapping paper and reveal the treasure underneath.

"NO FUCKING WAY!" I exclaim. I'm holding *Heat Wave*, the first
of the ghost-written *Castle* books designed to be the "inspired product" of
TV character Richard Castle's interaction with Kate Beckett. The show
has become a staple for us and this adds to my excitement.

"I thought we could read it together," James says. We've been experimenting with reading aloud to each other when we have books that we both want to read. It's a way to connect at the end of the day, curled up tight under the covers. But we haven't read a romance together – and I'm pretty sure I'm going to be embarrassed about the kind of fiction I typically enjoy alone.

"Okay," I say, "but if you ruin all the juicy sexy parts by laughing at it, I will never read a romance with you again."

"I won't laugh," he says and winks at me, "I might groan…and then we can groan some other kind of way." I smile and kiss him.

*   *   *

 "What is your ideal dream of earthly happiness?" Heat paused only a moment to think. Then she said nothing, but stood and slid out of her panties. Rook looked up to her from the couch with a face that she couldn't resist, so she didn't. She bent down, taking his mouth in hers. He met her hungrily and pulled Nikki into his arms. Soon, the rhythm of their bodies answered that last question. She didn't think about it but found her lips to his ear whispering, "This… This… This…" (Castle, *Heat Rises* 99-100).

*   *   *

James comes home after a double shift at the restaurant. I've been in my pajamas all day binge watching a television show I'm currently writing an essay on. Taking notes, transcribing passages that will become part of the argument. I've been so focused I haven't even taken a shower. But I have taken time in between watching and working to make dinner – roast chicken with potatoes. Simple, but smelling the rosemary and lemon for

the last several hours has me salivating, so I start to plate the food the minute he walks in the door.

"Man, I had a crap day," he says, "Let's go out to eat."

I stare at him – clearly dishing out food I've just made. "I already made dinner. We can eat here."

This begins half an hour of bickering back and forth because James wants a particular sandwich from a particular pub near the beach. I am annoyed. I relent though, refusing to take a shower or dress up because this entire plan is ridiculous. We have to drive 20 minutes to eat when I already made a perfectly good dinner. I spend the entire drive salty.

When we get to the beach though, I relax involuntarily. I don't know what it is about the water that does it for me, but no matter the body, a large expanse of water will calm my nerves almost immediately. I am distracted by my annoyance, but I go with James to the pub and we order dinner. I am engaged but not at the same time. He is recounting our time together, our first "date" as he calls it at this beach last spring. After dinner he suggests we walk on the beach because there is a full moon this evening, and now that I'm no longer starving, I agree. The water hits the shore calmly, the sky is crystal clear. The moon looms large creating shadowy patches in the sand. James is running through our favorites – beach days, concerts, quiet nights at home. I notice someone playing a cello on the sidewalk near the beach, which is a beautiful accent to the night sky. Without realizing it, I somehow had gotten ahead of him, and when I turned to point out the cello, he was on his knee in the sand, outstretched arms tapering to the small box in his hand. Inside is an elegant emerald cut diamond ring.

"Michaela, these past few months have been the best of my life and I want more. I want all of my days to be with you. Will you marry me?"

I am in shock. It's too soon. I am not ready. He's barely seen what my life as a professor really entails. I purposefully took a step back to deal with my personal life falling apart, but I'm going to have to go back to my

former workaholic hours at some point. He doesn't even *know* me yet. This simply cannot be real. It is a fiction I've created to help me cope with the reality surrounding me. Happiness, for me, is not this simple.

But people are staring now, and I feel awkward. I am waiting too long to respond, and it is not how the narrative is supposed to go. So I say, "Yes." Everyone claps and my heart races because James looks relieved, and I know I'm going to have to tell him my "yes" really meant "maybe." He is too young. I am too wounded. And although my heart aches because I wasn't ready to let go so soon, I know I am not ready. Maybe I will never be ready.

*   *   *

BECKETT: Well she's right, you know. I mean, odds are it won't work out. She's just being practical.

CASTLE: Relationships aren't math problems. You don't solve them by being practical. I mean, what happens when she meets her soul mate and she doesn't risk it because it's not practical? ("Pretty Dead")

*   *   *

I gaze at the small box sitting atop the dresser.

CASTLE: "I've been doing a lot of thinking about us. About our relationship, what we have, where we're headed. I've decided I want more. We both deserve more." ("Watershed")

Why should I say yes?

CASTLE: "Because of everything we've been through together! Four years I've been right here! Four years, just waiting for you to

open your eyes and see that I'm right here. And that I'm more than a partner." ("Always")

But I can't say yes – I don't know how to give my heart away any more. It's been shattered too many times.

CASTLE: "It's who you are. You don't let people in. I've had to scratch and claw for every inch." ("Watershed")

And you will grow weary of it. Just like everyone before. And you will leave when you reach that point. I will break you – and you are too perfect to ruin.

CASTLE: "There comes a point in our lives where we have to stop fooling ourselves into thinking life's going to be the way we want it to be and start seeing things for how they really are." ("Watershed")

Exactly! This is who I really am! I'm scared and insecure, and unable to imagine a relationship that won't entirely destroy me! Don't you know that?

CASTLE: "Every morning I bring you a cup of coffee just so that I can see a smile on your face because I think you are the most remarkable, maddening, challenging, frustrating person I have ever met. And I love you Kate, and if that means anything to you, if you care about me at all, just don't do this." ("Always")

I don't know.

CASTLE: "Beckett, what do you want?"

BECKETT: "You. I just want you." ("Always")

*   *   *

"I've been thinking about your proposal," I say. We are driving on backed up streets. It is spring – one of those first lovely spring days where the sun is shining and the weather is finally warm after the dreary grey of winter. I've been brooding, and I'm finally ready to answer.

"Oh really?" he asks, turning his head slightly from the road to glance at me. Maybe that's why I chose the car to start the conversation. I won't have to look him in the eye.

"Yeah….so about that," I say, "I've been through all this before and it didn't work out so well for me. And I appreciate all the time you've given me to think things over and adjust."

I pause. He doesn't fill the space. He waits for me to continue.

"And I don't know if I can ever be happy. Happiness seems so easy for everyone – easy for you. You see everything good about the world in every single moment. And I love you for that. But I'm not that way. I'm dark and twisty and broken and I don't know why you'd want to be with someone like me."

"Because I love you," he says.

"But I don't know if I can change. I don't know if I can be happy. And you deserve all of that – someone who isn't broken. If you want me, then you'll have to take all of this crazy forever. And you'd have to be a crazy person to do that. So if you are still interested – I'm in."

He doesn't reply immediately. We are stopped at a red light, but he is not looking at me.

"Are you saying what I think you're saying? Because if you want me to propose again maybe you could give me some tips as to how to go about it – because I did the whole by-the-book thing, and it didn't work out so well for me."

"Oh God, don't do that again. At this point, I've made you wait so long, you should just throw the ring in my lap and say 'Marry me already bitch!'"

"Well, I'm certainly not going to call you a bitch," he says, reaches into his pocket and tosses a jewelry box into my lap. "But I think it's about time you marry me already."

The box is different than the one on the dresser. I open it slowly and a stunning three opal ring stares back at me. Opal is my birthstone.

"What's this?" I ask. My eyes begin to tear up because I already know the answer.

"Ring number two. If you don't say yes soon, I might run out of rings."

"Yes," I say, "I'm saying yes." The light turns green and we are finally moving forward.

*   *   *

In my previous work on popular culture and romantic narrative, I conceptualized the romantic imaginary as a place "composed of unrealistic expectations in relationships and idealized notions of romance where the gendered other fulfills the missing part of any woman" (Meyer, "*Sex in the City*" 429-430). Recently, however, I have become wary of reductionist readings of women's investments in romantic popular culture as mere escapism, misplaced desire, and ultimately, the process of cultural patriarchy impinging on women's identities. Cultural critiques of romantic narratives in popular culture are anything *but* romantic, explaining the consumption of romantic popular culture as "heteronormative, relationship-seeking identity" established in a "capitalist structure" that "continues to limit the possibilities feminism affords" women (Stern 430). I would like to see scholars embrace the romance – the love and desire with which we live our lives, extending that same love and desire to our

dearest held popular narratives. Despite their common limitations as heteronormative, gendered, raced and classed, these narratives influence and shape the way romance appears in our lives – from our expectations of the romance, to its articulation, and in some cases, its dissolution.

Autoethnographic approaches to popular culture are one way to potentially give form to a more situated romantic imaginary, one intricately and simultaneously woven from personal experience and popular culture. Fluck captures this eloquently:

> If an essential part of the romance consists in the quest for the expression of something that, by definition can never be fully known and directly articulated, then it must remain an important part of the discussion of the American romance to trace the wide array of attempts to give shape to the seemingly "unspeakable." (425)

Instead of reducing women's pleasure and desire interacting with popular romantic narratives to generic cultural critique, why not turn our attention to mapping the "unspeakable?" The hidden, secret desires of our hearts, and how they are illuminated by and through popular culture? Instead of simply condemning romantic narratives in popular culture as the culture industry capitalizing on the fears and anxieties of women who are pressured to improve their cultural capital through romantic pairings, maybe it is time to "move beyond apologetics, to understand how such apologetics have limited the scope of our work" (Horne 45). Romantic fiction and its centrality to our lived emotional lives need not be a hindrance, a treacherous terrain colonized by the forces of capitalism. It can be the unspeakable love, joy, and happiness that holds the fabric of our relational lives together.

Perhaps I imagine a different way of reading, a different way of living. Many people choose relationships of affection and care that are not necessarily loving "because they feel safer," "the demands are not as

intense as loving requires," and "the risk is not as great" (hooks 10). Does my desire for a romance that appears like it does on *Castle* – light hearted, balanced, supportive, unconditional – negate the affordances of feminism? Can I not seek what could be conceptualized as a heteronormative romantic imaginary and still maintain agency? If what I *want* happens to be a stereotypical, popular romantic narrative, what is inherently *wrong* with that? Romance novelist Jennifer Cruise captures this eloquently when articulating her joyous turn toward romantic fiction as a genre after years of doctoral training in "traditional" literature:

> For the first time, I was reading fiction about women who had sex and then didn't eat arsenic or throw themselves under trains or swim out to the embrace of the sea, women who won on their own terms (and those terms were pretty varied) and still got the guy in the end without having to apologize or explain that they were still emancipated even though they were forming permanent pair bonds, women who moved through a world of frustration and detail and small pleasures and large friendships, a world I had authority in.…and two life-changing things happened to me: I felt more powerful, more optimistic, and more in control of my life than ever before, and I decided I wanted to write romance fiction. Anything that did that much good for me, was something that I, as a feminist, wanted to do for other women. (81-82)

Romantic fiction need not enable an *imaginary* unattainable in our lives. Rather it can inform our *reality* by assisting in the formation of meaningful interpersonal relationships that improve our self-actualization. It shows us we need not suffer alone, that we can have sex without shame, and that we are worthy of a standard of love and care often missing from modern relationships.

Autoethnography offers researchers the ability to "retrospectively and selectively write about epiphanies that stem from, or are made possible by,

being part of a culture and/or by possessing a particular cultural identity" (Ellis, Adams, and Bochner 3) and provides a way of chronicling and critiquing "past experience to make better, hopeful experiences possible" (Adams 621). Perhaps my consumption of romantic popular culture, the pleasure and desire it enables, is a product of capitalist culture. But it is also a series of narratives that has made better, more hopeful interpersonal relationships possible. Popular culture is not my whole story, but it is an important *part* of my story. It is the chain of events that makes everything *make sense*.

* * *

BECKETT: The moment that I met you, my life became extraordinary. You taught me to be my best self. To look forward to tomorrow's adventures. And when I was vulnerable, you were strong. I love you, Richard Castle. And I want to live my life in the warmth of your smile and the strength of your embrace. I promise you, I will love you. I will be your friend. And your partner in crime and in life. Always.

CASTLE: The moment we met, my life became extraordinary. You taught me more about my life than I knew there was to learn. You are the joy in my heart. You're the last person I want to see every night before I close my eyes. I love you, Katherine Beckett. And the mystery of you is the one I want to spend the rest of my life exploring. I promise to love you, to be your friend and your partner in crime and life, 'til death do us part and for the time of our lives." ("Time of our Lives")

* * *

The weather is beautiful – the perfect 80 degree day with a slight breeze rippling the water. Sitting on the sand, breathing the salt air deeply, slowly, I feel my muscles start to relax. The boys are playing in the water while I read one of my traditional beach romances. James is throwing our young son in the air and catching him just before he hits the water. He giggles uncontrollably, jabbering "aga, aga, aga," which suggests he wants to do it again. I watch them and smile, a wave of contentedness washing over me.

I think briefly of the past few years. The Valentine's Day where James reenacts one of my favorite scenes from *Love Actually*, cue cards written in purple paint declaring his love for me quietly. The bouquet of dandelions he produced shortly after we read the *Hunger Games*, the bright yellow bringing happiness instead of destruction. The birthday he interrupted my class to serenade me with balloons, and a series of other public serenades that remind me of Lloyd Dobbler in *Say Anything*. The ringtone from *Castle* he installed on my phone, so that every time he calls, I am reminded of our romantic television doppelgangers.

I am no longer *reading* the romance, I am *living* the romance.

I bookmark my progress and set the novel down. It is time for me to swim.

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The Makings of a Boyfriend: Doing Sexuality through Parasocial Relationships

M. CUELLAR

I chuckle at his admission. He doesn't say it directly. He says it with a sound reminiscent of a catcall, "Mmm mmm." It catches me off guard, so I immediately turn around to see if I heard him correctly. It was an unexpected move. He put his cards on the table, and I had no poker face ready to mask my surprise. I am fairly certain he's gay, but I didn't think he had a thing for me.

"What was that for?" I awkwardly ask.

"I'm admiring the view," he shoots back.

What view? I think. I'm fairly thin. Maybe he had a thing for thinner guys.

I joined this guy at the library early that evening. I've only known him for a few months and met him through a mutual acquaintance. We don't have any classes together at the university, but he is a tae kwon do instructor and, as is the story of my life, I am interested in getting into shape. On this particular day, his tae kwon do class was cancelled. I was the only one who had shown up and he said he needed to check out books for an assignment.

"Would you like to accompany me to the library?" he asks.

"Sure," I reply. After all, I have nothing better to do now that class is cancelled.

"I want to unzip your pants and give you a blow job," he confesses.

I snicker again, not accustomed to come-ons as straightforward as this.

"Quit fucking around," I tell him, unable to think of a better response. We play this game back and forth for the rest of the evening. We play it back and forth for the rest of the week. By the end of the week, I am running out of awkward retorts. I am nineteen years old, and I am a virgin. His come-ons keep getting stronger and so does my desire.

Sitting in the driver's seat of my Ford Tempo, he makes another attempt.

"I want to blow you. It will feel good," he says before reassuring, "I've never had any complaints."

I'm out of excuses, and I'm tired of pretending I don't want to fool around.

"Okay," I finally say, surrendering to my desires. Moments have passed since I've uttered the words and I still can't believe I've agreed to do this.

"But we have to do it at your dorm room," I insist.

He doesn't like this suggestion. "I have a roommate," he says. "Let's go to your place."

He knows that I live with my grandmother. My grandmother's house sounds like the last place I'd want to have my first sexual experience—too many pictures of dead relatives. The thought of some guy wrapping his lips around my cock while dead ancestors look down from Heaven in disapproval doesn't put me at ease. He puts his hand on my leg and starts sliding it upward. This puts me at ease. After all, my grandparents probably aren't home. My grandfather works a late night job, and my grandmother is likely at church. I drive to her house, and my suspicions are correct. Nobody's home.

After I park at my grandmother's house and turn off the car, I lead him to the front door and pull out my keys. My hands are shaking so much it takes a bit of effort to turn the key and unlock the door. We go in and there's no time for foreplay. I lead him straight to the spare bedroom.

"Just get comfortable. I've got to go check on something," I tell him. I hurry to the bathroom and grab a wash cloth.

What the fuck am I doing? I don't want to go to hell. Religious sermons play back in my mind. I see Jerry Falwell pointing his finger at me in contempt as he calls me a sinner. Fuck Jerry Falwell. I dampen the wash cloth and clean myself. I've never done this before, but this seems like a nice gesture.

I return to the spare bedroom, and my heart races. He's not in the mood to waste time. I want to talk. There are so many things I want to say. By that, I mean there are so many things I want to ask: How many times have you done this? Are you sure we'll be finished before my grandmother gets back? Should I let you know when I'm about to cum?

I can tell he's ready. I unbutton my Girbaud jeans and slide them with my underwear down to my knees. Before I can even sit down, he has me inside of his mouth. With him working on my body, I lie down and look up at my grandmother's walls. Dead relatives look down on me, surely judging me for engaging in a sexual act with another guy.

This isn't how it happens on TV. I think of Dennis Quaid frolicking with Ellen Barkin in The Big Easy. His pants popped off, revealing a very fit backside, and in a moment of passion, they embraced in an unadulterated act of pleasure. I had masturbated to that scene so many times that it wasn't hard to imagine Dennis Quaid while my friend attempted to gratify me. This wasn't The Big Easy though. The complexity of the moment prevented the type of pleasure you see in the movies.

I think he thinks I am straight. I think he thinks he has conquered another straight guy, something he seems to enjoy bragging about when we talk about sex on the way back to his dorm room. On my ride back home, I question my actions. I feel bad for tainting the sanctity of my grandmother's house. For the first time since our rendezvous, I also think about the possibility of having contracted a sexually transmitted disease.

I could have AIDS.

I pray.

"Dear God, please forgive me for what I have done. Please don't let me have any STDs. Please keep me from ever doing it again. I promise that if I ever mess up and do something like that again, you can…you can…you can damn my soul to hell."

That will solidify it. I will never risk going to Hell. I only hope that God will forgive me and that I can get back on the "right" track again.

I swear to God as John Michael Montgomery sings about his own vow on the radio. My mind is made up.

I'm never going to have sex with another guy again.

* * *

As long as I can remember, growing up in a small city in West Texas, God has been present in my life. My family—a Hispanic family that placed a high degree of importance on religion—transitioned from Catholicism to Southern Baptist around the time of my birth. My first memories include my grandmother telling me stories about Jesus and about how my great-grandfather was instrumental in bringing the word of God, according to the Southern Baptist religion, to a large population of Hispanics in our community. God has been present in my life from the beginning.

I have also felt different than other boys since an early age in my childhood. I did not gravitate toward athletic sports. Instead, I played with *Star Wars* action figures and stuffed animals. I remember being attracted to certain figures on the television screen in my parents' living room. Harry Hamlin, doing his best to keep up with Sir Laurence Olivier, appealed to me in *Clash of the Titans*. As a teenager, I was more enamored with Rob Lowe than Demi Moore. Teenage heartthrob magazines also caught my eye, especially when bare-chested male celebrities graced the cover of such publications. This feeling of difference and these uncommon desires propelled me to keep certain things to myself, a decision I made early on in my childhood.

My family felt like a typical family. We went to church. My parents worked hard to provide enough income to support a middle class way of life for my brother, sister, and me. My grandparents lived with us—my grandfather finishing up a thirty-three year military career as my grandmother looked after us. I learned from their example. I understood their messages. It was clear to me: grow up, find a pretty girl, get married, have children, go to church, and continue the traditions my family had passed down to me. I had a role to follow.

I accepted the role, against my own desires, and performed it well. I am both blessed and cursed by a performance that appeases dominant societal preferences. My entire life, until recently, has been a façade. I appear masculine enough to walk the thin line between what I feel is expected of me and what I secretly desire. It's a feat of maintaining my balance while steadily moving forward on a tensioned rope. I know that being gay comes with certain struggles in society. I am just as aware that concealing one's sexuality may provide a guise of safety, but might never truly provide personal satisfaction. I want to be out—living life the way I see fit. It is so easy to fill the chamber, but not as easy to pull the trigger. How freeing it would be to simply pull back the trigger and release. The dark clouds would be lifted. I would be free. However, my friends and family, in the aftermath, would be left not understanding why I did what I did. They'd wonder why I threw heterosexuality away.

In this autoethnographic account, I retell personal struggles with same-sex desires, call upon personal fantasies with distant others, and problematize choices that prohibit one's personal desires in favor of performing heteronormativity. The decision to deny personal desires prevented intimate relationships with actual same-sex partners. Instead, I chose another path. I sought intimate relationships with celebrities on television and characters in books. These one-sided, mediated relationships, or parasocial relationships (Horton & Wohl), provide enough emotional attachment to partially satisfy certain needs, but fail at

providing the intimate relationship I secretly crave. They are deficient in emotional feedback.

I use two types of narratives in this article: stories created from memories of experiences—current reflections of moments that can never be fully recaptured (Adams, "Mothers, Faggots, and Witnessing" 623; Ellis 303)—and stories created from fantasy—a confluence of interpretation and construction. Through these stories, I consider the struggle with both unrequited passions and unfulfilling public performances of heteronormativity.

I organize my narrative as a layered account (Rambo Ronai 396). The layered account interweaves story with literature, aesthetics with epistemology—the double bind of autoethnography (Gingrich-Philbrook 302). I tell my story as a way of forming a relationship, connecting my story with larger stories circulating within the culture at large (Adams, Holman Jones, & Ellis 32-33). My discourse joins a space where multiple discourses add to cultural understandings. In retelling my story, I hope to provide a narrative that might encourage others to follow their hearts—to form relationships with others despite any deviations from socially constructed norms of behavior (Holman Jones, Adams, & Ellis 35-36).

* * *

I maneuver through the aisles of the movie theater to find a seat toward the middle of the row. My spirits are up because it's the last day of school and I have two and a half months to spend however the hell I want to spend them. I'm 25 years old. It's my first year as a public educator—not a particularly good year. I'm happy to have my mind off of school and this cinematic screening will give me the release I need to get back into summer mode—a welcome transition back to my "real" self instead of pretending to be the morally sound, dressed-up schoolteacher I had become for the past nine months. I didn't pick the movie, but I had seen a lot of buzz about *Pearl Harbor* (2001) on the E! network. The movie was

chosen by my fiancé. In a few weeks we are going to walk down the aisle and become husband and wife.

<div align="center">* * *</div>

Holy shit, Josh Hartnett is hot! Why can't I find somebody like that? I bet he would be an awesome boyfriend.

<div align="center">* * *</div>

 My fiancé squeezes my hand as we glance at each other during a pivotal scene in the movie. I quickly turn back. I can't miss another moment. Josh Hartnett has dropped a bomb on me. It's a day that will live in infamy!

<div align="center">* * *</div>

Parasocial relationships are one-way relationships between individuals and characters or celebrities from various forms of media (Horton & Wohl 215). These relationships deviate from traditional interpersonal relationships, which are often characterized by the exchange of information between two or more relating parties. In a parasocial relationship, the person engaged with the media feels a real and meaningful connection to the character or public personality (Horton & Wohl 217-220); sometimes the person places their life "into a text" (Manning). It can be a simulation reminiscent of Baudrillard's conception of the simulacrum, in which what initially stood merely as a representation of the real gains a life of its own and threatens to overwhelm the real (Abbinnett 77-78).

Although parasocial relationships have increasingly become an important part of many people's lives due to the pervasiveness of media, there are many shortcomings of such a relationship. Relationships with characters from television, movies, or books seem intimate despite the distance between the relating parties. Eyal and Cohen contend that this type of one-sided relationship is limited in "social and emotional functions" and follows similar patterns to interpersonal relationship dissolution (504-505). The simulated interaction only goes so far, but the emotions feel real. If emotions are not reciprocated, thoughts of depression

can materialize. For all of the same reasons that one feels depressed when an interpersonal relationship ends, a relationship with a distant other—one that feels real through a strong parasocial connection—can motivate depression; it can become a problem if I start to have strong feelings for the guy on TV and he doesn't love me back.

*   *   *

"Do you think I'm too old to become an actor? I didn't really have a good first year of teaching and I'm not sure if I want to do it again. I know that I'm moving from the fourth grade to the first grade, but what if I dislike first grade even more?"

"What are you talking about?" my fiancé interrupts.

"Acting. I could start doing some stuff at the community civic theater. I really enjoyed the teacher talent show, and I always have a great time doing dramatic stuff in front of people, once I get over my initial panic. Maybe I could be good at it," I reply.

"I don't want to hear this anymore," she complains.

"Why not? I'm talking about something very important to me," I plead.

Actually, I think I want out of the relationship. I'm having strange feelings for Josh Hartnett right now that are weirding me out, but I can't get him out of my head. I read old interviews he's done online. I watch entertainment news shows with the hope that he'll be featured in a story. Hell, I even bought the fucking VHS of *Here on Earth*, that shitty movie with him, Chris Klein, and Leelee Sobieski. I think I've got it bad.

There's this scene in the movie where his heart is broken and he starts crying. It's fucked up, but I really connect with him during that scene. It makes him hotter.

"You don't want to get married, do you?" she argues.

"What? What in the hell does wanting to become an actor have to do with not wanting to get married. I mean, if I get really good at it, I could

maybe move to L.A. You'd come with me though. This isn't about not wanting to get married," I assure.

Tears well up in her eyes. "I don't want to hear this anymore."

I end the conversation. I rarely bring up acting again. I continue to fantasize about Josh Hartnett. He provides the relationship I wish I had, as I proclaim the relationship I actually have in front of friends, family, and God.

Newlywed life is fairly good. The honeymoon is nice. Summer ends and first grade gives me more happiness than fourth grade. I don't watch much of Josh Hartnett after a while. He was a good boyfriend, but my job and my married life got in the way. Ten months later, *40 Days and 40 Nights* comes out. There's a scene where Josh Hartnett sort of drops his towel before catching it after getting out of the shower.

Holy shit, Josh Hartnett is hot!

* * *

I replay past conversations in my mind as I sit on his couch, waiting for Josh to get out of the shower. Sometimes it seems like he's just as into me. Sometimes I feel like he's not interested at all, that he's just a friend. I'm confused.

It's been a month since we've seen each other, but something in his voice sounded different when he called and invited me over for dinner. I've had an attraction to him for a long time now. I figured that I'd continue to like him from a distance, while being envious of the cavalcade of girls that came in and out of his life. This time, *he* called *me*, and his voice sounded urgent. There was that thing that happened the last time we saw each other. While watching *Signs* (2002) at the movie theater, he put his hand on my leg. I thought it was a mistake at first, but he kept it there for a minute or two. Maybe I'm being foolish. It's just wishful thinking.

I'm bored with the show he has playing on his TV. I get up and nosily look at the pictures on his wall. I'm jealous of the girl kissing him in the first photo I see. I look away. His DVD collection is impressive. I start

thumbing through them to see if he likes the same kind of movies I like. Despite his affinity for action films, we're a match. I think it's strange that he owns *Trash*. That's not a movie straight guys typically watch. The water stops. I hear him getting out of the shower. He comes into the living room, wearing only a towel.

"I'm sorry I'm running late. Feel free to change the channel on the TV if you want. I'll be ready in a second. Oh, and if you want something to drink, help yourself," he offers. "I have a bottle of wine over there," he says as he points in the direction of his kitchen countertop. When he points, he loses his grip on his towel. He tries to grab it before it drops, but he misses. He's fully exposed. He's also fully aroused. There's a long silence.

I look into his eyes. He doesn't look away. It wasn't a burning bush, but it was good enough of a sign for me.

I walk toward him and, without talking, grab his erect cock and enclose it with my lips. With my other hand, I reach around and grab him from behind. I like the feel of my hand pressed against his skin. Against my desires, I stop to ask him if I should stop. Maybe I came on too strong.

"No, keep going," he says. He looks down at me and grabs the back of my head.

Now that I know that he wants it, I take pleasure in playing with his body. He barely makes a noise, but every now and then he moans to let me know when I'm doing what he likes. I've wanted to do this for a long time. I also worry that this might just be a one-time affair. Sex is great, but I have feelings for him. He grips my head tighter. He breathes heavier. I feel him grow closer to climax.

He finishes. He gives a few grunts as I complete the act. Before long, he's calm again. He loosens his grip on the back of my head. I let go of him. I didn't want to let go of him. I slide my hand toward his. I want to grab his hand, but I hold back and just rub my fingers against his. He grabs my hand. This is what I wanted. He looks down at me. He smiles

and says, "That's been a long time coming. I started to think we'd never get together."

    Together. I like the sound of that. I want to be together.

<div align="center">*   *   *</div>

These fantasies run through my mind constantly. Josh Hartnett seems like a perfect match for me. I can relate to his demeanor. Like me, he seems quiet and reserved. In movies, he gets his heart broken. I want to comfort him. He's full of emotion. It draws me closer to him. He has a sensitive side. He's caring. He has all the qualities I look for in a partner.

    He can't be my partner though. I'm married. In front of family, friends, and God, I made a vow to be faithful to my wife. I desire a companion like Josh Hartnett because he seems to possess the qualities I look for, but also because he possesses many things my wife does not—including anatomical features such as a penis. My religious upbringing comes into play. I'm ashamed I want to kiss his lips. I'm ashamed I want to play with his body. I'm ashamed of all the things I want to do with him. I want to have sex with a man. That is not the will of God.

<div align="center">*   *   *</div>

Certain acts of sex have historically been shamed in political, cultural, and religious contexts (Foucault; Warner). Society constructs understandings through social consciousness that position certain acts and behaviors as favorable, influencing how individuals act and live (Nicol & Smith 669). Foucault contends "sex became an issue, and a public issue no less; a whole web of discourses" (26). The politics of sex have rendered the practice subject to regulation (Altman 25). As one form of sexual behavior attains privilege, variant forms of sexual behavior become marked as deviant (Rupp; Sullivan; Warner). Sexual behaviors marked with such a stigma are positioned as detrimental acts that harm morality, health, and family (Bauermeister, Giguere, Carballo-Dieguez, Ventuneac, & Eisenberg 680; Brewer 174; Landau 82-89).

The shaming of these acts makes inclinations toward sexual behaviors that deviate from social expectations difficult. On one hand, behaviors associated with marriage, heterosexuality, and fruitfulness are considered good. Behaviors with different associations (e.g., sex outside of marriage, same-sex relationships, sex for pleasurable purposes) are labeled as bad (Warner 25-26). Numerous facets of society try to advocate the "good" and restrict the "bad." In addition, individuals who partake in such bad behaviors can become stigmatized (Coates 537).

Religious convictions create difficulties for individuals characterized by stigmatized identities (Trammell 1). Biblical texts position same-sex behaviors as against God and subject to eternal damnation (Brooks 330). Many religions go further and focus attention on stigmatized individuals rather than shamed acts (Ketrow 6; Smith 3). Through stigmatization, contempt shifts from "the sin" to that of "the sinner." Religious individuals with gay identities might make several choices in seeking to justify both God and self: staying in the closet, abstaining from sex, and even fostering thoughts of suicide (Trammell 3-10). In my particular case, I shifted back and forth between all of the obvious choices. My religious convictions prevented me from engaging in same-sex acts. An alternative presented itself. I constructed a one-way bond with media celebrities and fictional characters. I could still do sexuality through parasocial relationships.

* * *

I've wanted to see this movie for a long time now. I decide to go jogging early, so I'll be home and showered in time to watch the HBO debut of *500 Days of Summer*. I jog, which is made difficult by the fact that I'm jogging earlier than normal and it's a blazingly hot summer day. I shower just in time. The movie is about to start. The HBO feature film theme song that used to beckon me from far-away rooms during my childhood house begins playing. Regina Spektor belts out ponderings of "Us." Then it

begins. Over the course of the movie, I start to become increasingly attracted to Joseph Gordon-Levitt, who plays Tom Hansen.

*   *   *

Joseph Gordon-Levitt? What the hell is wrong with me? Isn't he the kid from *3rd Rock from the Sun*? I mean he's cute, but he's not uber-hot or anything. Plus, his body isn't much more defined than mine. Why am I starting to get feelings for this guy?

*   *   *

All summer long, Joseph Gordon-Levitt haunts me. I join hitrecord.org, his online film collaboration site, with the goal of one day getting a response from him. He goes by the handle of RegularJOE. I like the idea of calling him Joe. I watch Peter Travers's rolling stone interview with him on YouTube repeatedly. Damn, he looks good in a suit. But he's kind of a regular-looking guy. Why am I so infatuated with him? I mean, he does have gorgeous dimples – but, beyond that, he doesn't look much like a Hollywood heartthrob.

*   *   *

The New York Times has this thing on YouTube called Screen Test. It's black and white, which makes him look even more handsome. I set my male gaze (Mulvey 20-21) upon this video, in its monochrome beauty, as the ghost of Montgomery Clift seems to possess Gordon-Levitt. He uses a French accent to prove that men aren't as sexy as women when using the language of love. I disagree. During this Lynn Hirshberg interview, Joseph Gordon-Levitt answers questions about his likes and dislikes. He tells stories. Looking deep into his eyes, I feel like I am getting to know him better. He looks better unshaven. I love the sound of his voice.

*   *   *

I bet he would make an awesome boyfriend.

*   *   *

It's getting bad. I think of Joseph Gordon-Levitt from sunrise to sunset. I cannot talk to anybody about it. I can't divulge my secret desire for the

male body. My happiness is seemingly dependent upon emotions I feel he is stirring up within me. Still, I can't let others know I like him. "He's a cool actor," I tell others instead of what I'm really thinking. "He dresses nicely," I say instead of "I want to undress him." I keep these thoughts to myself. It is only safe when I communicate with him in my mind. I must perform for others. I must, like Joseph Gordon-Levitt, portray a role—a heteronormative role. I pay close attention so that I refer to the movie as funny, instead of romantic. I comment on how pretty Zooey Deschanel is, instead of how attractive I find Gordon-Levitt. I do my best to play straight until nighttime. At night, I can fantasize some more. Nobody can hear what I tell him before I go to bed.

<p style="text-align:center">*   *   *</p>

Heterosexual behaviors are positioned as normal, resulting in heteronormativity (i.e., the construct that situates heterosexual behavior as normal/natural) (Yep). Jackson defines heteronormativity as "the numerous ways in which heterosexual privilege is woven into the fabric of social life" (108). The concept of heteronormativity, through reification, gains a universalizing distinction (Butler 24). Individuals, thus, feel the pressure to perform heteronormativity (Hensley 57). Every instance in which heterosexual behaviors are given approval and every act that contributes to such understandings reifies the premise that heterosexuality is normal. In contrast, behaviors in which members of the same sex engage in sexual acts are cloaked with shame (Warner 24-33). Acts of sexual others are marginalized and erased through discourse (Yep 19). Politically, culturally, and religiously, these acts are scrutinized (Fejes & Petrich 401-402). Moral judgments prevent alternative sex acts from gaining equal footing with acts associated with heteronormativity. So abject and contemptible, these acts suffer from public shaming.

I felt shame when I gave in to my impulses. Whether it was masturbating to a shirtless guy on a soap opera or getting an erection while gazing at the ripped guys on *Baywatch*, I felt ashamed of my desires.

Perhaps a quick prayer after a shameful act could wash away my sins again. As ashamed as I was of my desires, I certainly could not act upon them. It was safer to fantasize about the guys on TV. I could be the dutiful husband by day and the lustful sinner at night. It was easier to ignore reality and instead embrace the fantasy. Heteronormativity, for me, lacked compassion and fulfillment, but it also provided safety.

<div align="center">* * *</div>

He laughs as I admit again that I've never done that. He has a sexy laugh. "Why are we even playing this game?" he asks. "You apparently haven't lived life much."

"We don't all have people falling all over us," I tease.

"Oh please," he says. "Next question. Have you ever worn clothes to cover up a hickey?"

"Nope," I answer. "I can't say that I have. Have you?"

"Well, one time," he answers, "but it was cold out anyways, so I would've worn the extra layers even if I didn't have the hickey."

"It must constantly be cold outside for you," I jest. "My turn," I say while picking up the next card. "Have you ever played strip poker?"

"Wow. No," he says. "That's something I've never done. Should I even ask if you have?"

"Well, actually, that I *have* done," I admit. "It was at a church lock-in. I was new to the church and apparently this was the way certain members of the youth group initiated new youth into the church."

"How blasphemous," he says while laughing. Again, his laugh turns me on.

I defend myself and say, "It wasn't in the actual church. It was in the fellowship hall, and we didn't go all the way. Nobody got completely naked. Looking back, it was a stupid thing to take part in."

"Well, maybe you won't go to hell after all," he suggests. "I'm surprised you can finally admit to doing something naughty. I guess

there's a first time for everything." He picks up the last card and asks, "Have you ever had a crush on your best friend?"

The room grows silent. I hesitate because we both know that he *is* my best friend. Do I tell him the truth or do I keep my feelings for him a secret?

<p style="text-align:center">* * *</p>

"*500 Days of Summer* is such an amazing movie. I wish I could be a part of something that creatively impeccable," I say for what seems like the tenth night in a row.

"I'm tired of hearing about *500 Days of Summer*," my wife responds.

"I know. I can't get over it though. I think Joseph Gordon-Levitt is the best actor under the age of thirty in Hollywood today," I affirm.

"I'm especially tired of hearing about Joseph Gordon-Levitt. I wish he would fall off the face of the Earth. That's all you talk about now. I'm tired of hearing about him," she confirms.

I stop talking, but I don't stop thinking about him.

By this point, I'm beyond infatuation. Joseph Gordon-Levitt is the boyfriend I want but can't have. Maybe I'm so into him because he's such a great actor. Maybe I am attracted to the character he portrays in *500 Days of Summer*. Maybe I like him because he is so ordinary. To borrow a line from the movie, he's "better than the [guy] of my dreams. [He's] real." Regardless of why I'm attracted to him, it's starting to affect my happiness. I'm no longer happy in life. I realize that I'm in a relationship I don't want to be in. I yearn for a relationship I can't have.

"I'm not really happy. I don't know what's wrong with me," I say.

"I think you should see someone. It would be good for you," she insists.

My wife frequently looks out for me. She always attempts to keep me happy, even at times when my desires are in direct opposition to her own. She provides companionship when I am depressed and need somebody to talk to. I am not always good at paying back the favor. My nurturing skills

are no match for her. I recall making her stay at my parent's house to finish a movie long after she was ready to go home. When she is sick, I continue life as normal. When I am sick, she quickly takes up the task of helping me get better. I do not deserve her. She's always been good to me. I wish I could be good to her.

* * *

In turning to various forms of media to satisfy particular needs, individuals can execute agency by choosing which forms of media are going to help attain specific goals. Ball-Rokeach and Defleur's media dependency theory posits that the more a person becomes dependent on a certain form of media, the more influence the media will have on a person's life. Comparably, if one turns to media for romantic connections that are not present, these parasocial relationships become preeminent in one's momentary lived experiences. Media dependency theory does not merely situate relationships of need as the act of an autonomous self. Rather, cultural influence and social conditions are simultaneously at play through an audience-media-society tripartite relationship (Maxian 275). A spiritual upbringing, suggesting that certain behaviors are immoral, gave me certain cultural understandings about same-sex desires that preceded alternative understandings later developed from the culture at large.

Likewise, discourses that support procreative sex under the holy umbrella of wedlock create an atmosphere where transformative discourses are met with struggle (Trammell 2-4; Yep 19-26). When certain desires are constrained by social constructions of "right" and "wrong," parasocial relationships offer avenues through which needs can be met while simultaneously conforming to societal demands. However, one might begin to question: do parasocial relationships fulfill the desire to connect with a relational other in a meaningful way?

* * *

"The other night when you told me you had a crush on me," he says, "I didn't know how to take it."

"Don't worry about it," I say. "I shouldn't have said anything. I know you like girls and it's cool just being your friend. You don't have to worry about me hitting on you. I rarely make the first move," I assure.

"It's not that," he says. "I was kind of scared. I, uh, I like you too…a lot," he admits. "I just don't want to ruin our friendship. I mean, if we changed the dynamic of our relationship, we might destroy the good thing we've got going here. But I can't stop thinking about that night. I don't know what to think," he confesses.

I stare at him in disbelief. He admitted to having feelings for me.

"Well, say something," he pleads.

I say nothing. I quickly lean in and press my lips against his. He doesn't pull away. For a first kiss, we go at it like we've done this several times before. We probably have, in our minds. At least, I know I have. When we stop, he looks at me with concern.

"Are you sure we're ready for this?" he asks.

I don't answer him. I lean in again and we continue just where we left off. I reach down and start unbuttoning his jeans. I pull off his shirt, and he helps out by kicking off his shoes. In a couple of minutes, we're both only in our boxer briefs.

"Wait. I've got protection and lube in the bedroom," he urges. I wonder what he's trying to suggest, but don't stop to ask. I follow him into the bedroom. He opens the drawer and pulls out a condom. After ripping it open, he slides down my underwear. He looks up at me and says, "I want you to do it."

I know what he means. He applies the condom and comes up for another kiss. I start to shake in excitement.

"Are you nervous?" he asks. "If you don't want to…"

I push him onto the bed and slide off his boxer briefs. I kiss his body while he applies the lube. With concern, I look at him, but he assures me again that it's okay. He puts his hand against my chest when I lift his leg and slowly slide in. A few minutes ago, we were laughing at an episode of

Friends. Now, we're trying to keep our balance as we walk along that line between friends and more than friends.

When I cum, I go in for another kiss. It's a deeper kiss. We've graduated to tongue.

I look at him and tell him it's his turn. I've never done this before, but I want to do it with him. I turn over and lay on my stomach as he prepares me for what I've never experienced. "Tell me if I need to stop," he demands. I can feel him entering me, but it's not really that bad. I wonder if he slipped out, but then I feel it—an intense moment of pain. I think of asking him to stop, but I want to do this with him. I relax, and after a while I feel good again. Something about knowing that he is inside of me turns me on. I'm equally ashamed to be giving in to such desires and excited to be finally participating in the type of sex I've always fantasized about.

Later that night, I shower and put on my pajama bottoms. I head toward his bed and start to climb in. He turns off the TV and turns over to kiss my neck. He starts to laugh—that sexy laugh—and puts his finger on my lips.

"What was that about you rarely making the first move?" he asks.

* * *

I didn't go see a psychiatrist. I didn't think I needed to. The school year began again and, after a while, Joseph Gordon-Levitt and *500 Days of Summer* no longer controlled my mind like a parasitic equivalent to the leucochloridium paradoxum: the flatworm that transforms a snail into the duplicate of a caterpillar so that the circle of life can be completed once the snail unwittingly crawls to higher vegetation, is swallowed by a predatory bird, defecated by the bird, and digested by another unsuspecting snail.

The truth is, I was scared to see a psychiatrist. What if she detected something about my sexuality? A psychiatrist wasn't necessary. Beside, at this point, my parasocial obsessions with Josh and Joseph are not as strong as they once were. Yet, I'm still not completely content with life. Josh

Hartnett and Joseph Gordon-Levitt represented boyfriends who I desired to know and love. The only problem was they didn't love me back. Time passed and their grip on me loosened. They were not meant to be—the odds were not ever in my favor. Then came Peeta Mellark.

I am interested in seeing *The Hunger Games* (2012) at the movie theater, but think I should read the book first. I mention this to a colleague of mine, and the veteran school teacher reveals that she has a copy of the book I can borrow.

It's a carefree Saturday. I'm waiting for my car, taking advantage of the lifetime oil change stipulation that I bargained for when purchasing my vehicle. It might have been a bargain, but that doesn't mean the process is prompt or pleasurable. This time, I have something to help pass the time. I turn to chapter one. "When I wake up, the other side of the bed is cold," it reads (Collins 3). Instead of waking up, I enter a dream. I'm engulfed by an immense attraction to the boyishly handsome Peeta Mellark, a love interest for the protagonist in the story. Peeta is sweet. His love is undying. He puts the interests of his beloved before his own. Peeta is funny and sexy. Peeta is sensitive.

* * *

I bet Peeta would make an awesome boyfriend.

* * *

Before I know it, I'm deep in depression because all I can think about is how nice it would be to be in a relationship with someone similar to Peeta. The love he ultimately shares with Katniss Everdeen, the story's heroine, was something I have never experienced myself. I've either been in positions where I'm in love with someone who doesn't reciprocate—those bastards!—or somebody loves me and I don't feel the same way—what an ass! I hesitate before reading the subsequent book in the series because I'm afraid to fall even deeper into this spell. I forge ahead. I cry a bit when I read the final words of the last book in the series, *Mockingjay* (Collins

390), because Peeta is now out of my life. He was real while there was still story left to be read. Now, he exists only in the past.

*   *   *

I have to see somebody. I have to stop playing these games. It's getting bad.

*   *   *

Although parasocial relationships are rewarding, they still leave plenty left to be desired. A relational illusion is achieved through this form of distant relationship. The relationship becomes rewarding through "moments of aesthetic wholeness," (Baxter 187) in which certain "experiences," being either dream-like or imagined, provide a person with an emotional attachment or the fulfillment of desires. These "experiences" transcend toward a fleeting mutuality, in which there is a completion of self through the *imagined* other (Baxter & DeGooyer 3). During the fleeting aesthetic moment, the character or celebrity figure becomes realized to a degree that when the two relational parties share a personal connection, they move toward a "cosmic oneness" (Bolen 142). The "experiences" shared, while often mundane, take on epic proportions for the meaning of the relationship. These rewards, however, can be misleading.

Parasocial relationships, being unidirectional, do not offer the same rewards that can be achieved through interpersonal relationships (Horton & Wohl 225-229). You cannot lie beside this romantic partner and talk about life before both succumbing to the night. You will not be getting flowers from this romantic entity, and you will not embrace with a kiss after coming home from work. You will not be able to *love* a character you only know through media in the same way you can *love* some*body* with whom you share an intimate relationship.

*   *   *

Tears well up in my eyes as I tell her what I never wanted to tell her before, "I love you. I will always love you. But I'm not passionately in love with you."

"I wish I could have the you back that I was married to before, the you that I fell in love with," she whispers as tears roll down her cheek.

"I was never the person you thought I was. I wish I could say differently. I've always loved you, but never in that way. I know that it was horrible of me to make you believe otherwise," I confess.

<p style="text-align:center">*   *   *</p>

My experiences within the larger culture have value for an understanding of relationships and sexuality (Adams, *Narrating* 159-163). The turn to narrative allows me to connect my personal lived experience with the larger culture (Adams, Holman Jones, & Ellis 26-27). In doing so, I present my storied account to others within the culture that might have similar experiences (Foster 447). My understandings become meaningful through personal relationships, through social influence. In this way, my autoethnography is not unique (Holman Jones, Adams, & Ellis 21). Through praxis, my story informs the culture while the culture simultaneously informs my story (Spry 709). I aim for reflexivity in hopes of understanding how my experience represents: (a) a moment in time/space, (b) an inaccurate account subject to my own personal biases and recollections, and (c) an attempt toward ethical considerations. Ethically, my standpoint is biased. My research grants me a position of power. My representation has potential to repress. In my account of my past histories with my wife, I struggle with the ethics of storying her in ways that misrepresent, omit, and invade (Adams, Holman Jones, & Ellis 11-14). I also ponder questions about audience. As Ellis points out, the story can change depending upon perceptions about the intended audience (219). For instance, would I have written this piece the same way if I were writing specifically to my wife or to members of her family? I want to be fair to her. I want to story her in positive ways. I feel guilty about her position within this story. I think of happier times.

<p style="text-align:center">*   *   *</p>

I hop over the patio fence. My heart races. The cold wind, ushering in a new year, pushes against my cheek as I knock on the back door of her apartment. She opens the door to find me kneeling with a ring in the palm of my hand.

"Will you marry me?" I ask.

She pretends to think about it and then says "yes." I go back into her apartment to think about the magnitude of the moment. "More Than Words" plays on MTV's New Year's Eve show. It's not the quintessential version by Extreme, but some live cover performed by the British boy band BBMak. We vow to spend a lifetime together. I love her.

<p style="text-align:center">*   *   *</p>

I love her, I tell myself. Isn't that enough? I love her. It's not enough. It takes more than just words.

<p style="text-align:center">*   *   *</p>

According to Holman Jones, Adams, & Ellis (2013), "autoethnography creates a space for a turn, a change" (21). Autoethnography can bring about transformational change for persons struggling with the marginalization of specific identities (Adams, *Narrating the Closet* 129-144), the loss of a relative or intimate other (Holman Jones & Adams 1), and people involved in bad relationships with partners or family members (Rambo Ronai 405-406). Alternate contemplations for how to do relationships emerge. Not only can relationships extend beyond dualistic interpersonal relationships, but any form of relationship can be reevaluated through stories to seek a better way of living (Adams, Holman Jones, & Ellis 32-34). Autoethnography helps me recount my steps and consider new trajectories that may diminish the problems of my current socio-cultural location. I transcend, I spin reflexively, which helps me to see "who [I] have been and who [I am] willing to become" (Berry 223). I have shifted in my outlook, no longer feeling shame for personal desires. Who I love is no longer a source of personal discomfort. I embrace my same-sex

desires. Like a comic book character throwing off a costume, I can shed my heteronormative disguise and emerge as a new self.

Autoethnography helps me understand how the stories of others contribute to the meanings I construct for my story (Spry 710). Together, our stories seek change. I turn from the limitations of today's story and seek a story that may provide a better way for doing relationships, for doing life, for doing sexuality. Parasocial relationships are only *one way* of relating.

* * *

I don't fantasize about Josh Hartnett or Joseph Gordon-Levitt right now. Peeta Mellark doesn't control every waking thought. Maybe some other guy on TV will be next. I leave it open to possibility. Maybe it won't be somebody who only appears to me through my television screen. Maybe, just maybe, it will be some*body* else.

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Still Standing, Still Here: Lessons Learned from Mediated Mentors in my Academic Journey

JANICE D. HAMLET

While driving to work one spring morning after surviving a rather lengthy and brutal winter, I became enthralled at the sight of the beautiful purple shrubs and plants that aligned a street. This breathtaking display reminded me of an unforgettable moment in Steven Spielberg's *The Color Purple,* an adaptation of Alice Walker's 1983 novel of the same title. *The Color Purple* is an epic tale spanning forty years in the life of Celie Harris Johnson, an African American woman living in the rural south who survives incredible physical and psychological abuse at the hands of her stepfather. Celie's abusive father gives her to an equally abusive man in the community, Albert Johnson, who Celie simply acknowledged as "Mister" because he was a man and she was a mere child. After Mister separated her from her sister Nellie, Celie is left isolated and helpless, seeking companionship anywhere she could while holding on to the belief that she and Nellie would one day be reunited.

Such were the daily experiences of Celie to the extent that she didn't know that any other life for a Black woman was possible until she met Shug Avery, a jazz singer who was also her husband's mistress. After a degrading introduction, Shug befriends Celie and helps her to develop self-confidence, self-esteem, and self-worth.

In a touching scene, Celie and Shug are walking through a field when Shug proclaims: "I think it pisses God off if you walk by the color purple in a field somewhere and don't notice it."

Celie: "Are you saying God is vain?"

Shug: "Naw, naw, not vain, just want to share a good thing."

Celie: "Are you saying it just want to be loved, just like the bible say?"

Shug: "Yes, Celie. Everything wants to be loved."

I often smile when recalling this touching scene and wonder whether it has anything to do with my obsession with the color purple. I am drawn to purple because this deep majestic hue radiates boldness, encourages dignity and exclaims *do not ignore me; do not typecast me nor disrespect me. I am somebody and I am here!* This has been my mantra as well as my struggle as an African American female professor at predominately white institutions (PWIs), a career that has spanned more than twenty-five years. The treatment of African American women in PWIs mirrors the treatment of African American women in U. S. American society. As cultural scholar bell hooks notes:

> No other group in America has had their identity socialized out of existence as have black women. We are rarely recognized as a group separate and distinct from black men, or as a present part of a larger group, "women" in this culture…When black people are talked, the focus tends to be on black men, and when women are talked about, the focus tends to be on white women. (7)

Constance Carroll relates hooks' argument to the academy when she argues that there is not a more isolated subgroup in academe than African American women. "There is no one with whom to share experiences and gain support, no one with whom to identify, no one of whom an African American woman can model herself" (120). Not being privy to mentoring nor formal and informal networks, many African American female faculty

exist in isolation. Not only can this feeling of isolation have a detrimental effect on the faculty member's morale and self-esteem, but can also be associated with the faculty member's research interests and level of productivity.   Mentoring, notes Vance, often involves career socialization, inspiration, and belief in each other, and promoting excellence and passion for work through guidance, protection, support, and networking (7). Most often a senior colleague can provide support, feedback, information, and advocacy to a junior or less experienced colleague. However, peer mentoring (colleagues of the same rank) is also an important type of mentoring. Some of the benefits to those who are mentored include insight into the academy, skill development, enhanced intellectual abilities; opportunities for career enhancement and access to "reality checks," advice, encouragement, and honest feedback. Literature (Diggs, Garrison-Wade, Estrada, Galindo; Stanley; Tillman; Turner and Myers; Wilson) has supported the argument that a significant factor necessary for contributing to the survival and success of African American women in the academy is having a mentor to lessen the feelings of isolation, and to advance and enhance their careers.

The lack of mentoring has been cited as the primary reason why predominantly white institutions have difficulty recruiting and retaining African American women (Blackwell). Although Stanley argues that cross race faculty mentoring relationships aid retention, Jackson, Kite and Branscomb's research found that African American females overwhelmingly prefer African American female mentors. Participating in a mentoring relationship with someone who looks like them, who has similar personal, professional and scholarly interests, and who is devoted to their holistic experience as well as their personal success is important to African American faculty (68). Because many African Americans in academia are the only African Americans or African American females in their departments (and sometimes the college), they might seek mentoring,

friendships, and scholarly collaborations outside of their departments and universities (Tillman).

I am grateful for the mentoring I have received from my mother who taught me the value of self-worth, dignity, and the power of faith in God and in myself. I am also indebted to older African American female colleagues who have traveled the professional path I now travel and have shared with me their challenges and strategies. I have a cross race mentor who offers support and friendship even though we are miles apart. And, I have been blessed to have peer mentors, four African American female professors who I refer to as my "sista circle." Although they work at different universities in different parts of the country (one is retired), over the years we have conducted numerous reality checks with each other regarding various situations in our academic and personal lives. Whether over the phone, email, texts, or face-to-face at conferences, we have vented, cried, laughed (until we cried), and prayed; shared pleasant and unpleasant experiences; celebrated victories; and offered comfort in times of defeat and despair. Critical race theorists Solorzano and Yosso might suggest that we have created *counterspaces*, a term they coined to refer to safe areas or relationships with other individuals with whom one can share common experiences and will be encouraged and nurtured. I have survived academia because of these counterspaces. Having a mentor, whether face-to-face or via social media is an asset. But, I have also discovered that mentoring and mentors can emanate from mediated characters in popular culture, as characters can provide advice, new perspectives, and inspiration for the various situations in which we find ourselves.

Horton and Wolf refer to this type of relationship as parasocial, a one-sided relationship where one person extends time, interest, and emotion toward the personae while he or she is completely unaware of the other's existence. They suggest that the viewer is free to withdraw at any moment from the relationship, as well as to choose among the different

relationships that are offered. They describe parasocial relationships as one-sided, non-dialectical, controlled by the performer, and not susceptible of mutual development. A character's persona is a part of the parasocial concept. The fictional character is the one whom the viewer develops the parasocial relationship with often resulting in the viewer's feelings as if he or she knows the personae as if they were friends. Movies and television programs are instructive and full of liberating potential. They need not be extraordinary in their technical, artistic, or conceptual presentation to exert a mentoring influence (Sinetar). In the privacy and comfort of our homes, we can recognize courage and cowardice, sincerity and self-deception, assessing the best and worst of who they are and who we are (48). This autoethnography focuses on some of my parasocial, "mediated mentors" and the lessons I have learned from them that have guided me in my academic career.

The use of autoethnography allows researchers to write a highly personalized narrative which draws on their experiences in order to extend readers' understanding about a specific phenomenon or culture. The autoethnographer uses narrative to make sense of the fragmentation and reveals how people "invent innovative ways of surviving when conventional ways fail them" (Bochner 434). Autoethnography rejects the notion that experiences can only be communicated indirectly through observations, interviews, or surveys. Autoethnographies by African Americans and other faculty of color are steadily increasing (see Allison and Broadus; Boylorn; Hamlet; Hendrix; Robinson and Clandy). In addition to illustrating the significance of this approach to research, autoethnography also serves as a valuable method for self-reflection and self-analysis within particular contexts. It is a methodology that audaciously supports the claim that personal stories matter.

My Story, My Song

When I first began my academic career path in the late 1980s I accepted a position at a small liberal arts college in the Midwest. I was the

only faculty of color, lauded by the administrators and other faculty because they had finally gotten "one." I was nearly destroyed for the same reason. My colleagues and students treated me as a novelty and they frequently expected me to live up to every stereotype they had about what an African American woman should be. When I didn't live up their stereotypes they assessed that something was terribly wrong (with me). The thought of treating me like a regular faculty member was an outlandish notion. For example, when presenting the new faculty during my first year, my name and photo was omitted from the directory. Others rarely informed me about department meetings or invited me to events, many of which were dismissed as a mere oversight with a half-hearted expression of "we're sorry." But when my white colleagues had conflicts with African American and Latino students, they had no problems remembering me and expecting me to explain and resolve the conflict. Students of color similarly expected me to be their protector when they had conflicts with their white faculty. I hated my job. I left this college after two years but it took me two additional years to get over these experiences. I even attempted to seek refuge at a predominately black institution only to discover (when I arrived for the interview) that the chair and faculty in the communication department were all white. I candidly explained to the chair why I rejected the offer. I told her that I would have difficulty being the minority in a department at a predominately black university. She understood.

Years later I continue to face many of the same issues I faced at that small college in the Midwest. Little has changed in terms of stereotyping and institutional networks. Little has changed, except for me. I extinguished a lot of the fire, the anger I felt in the 1980s. But in so doing, I also had to recognize that most administrators do not know how to deal with issues of diversity, especially race, and so they don't. For this reason, even though I still encounter invisibility, isolation, and stereotyping, I had to develop a different perspective about my existence

and interactions, one that would have a more positive effect on my temperament and attitude toward my colleagues and my workplace. I also had to develop new rhetorical strategies and coping skills. I continue to hope that I will connect with colleagues who recognize my ways of knowing and the culture that informs these ways, and that my pedagogy and research are no less rigorous than their own. Every institution I have worked at since the late 1980s has been a little better than the previous one and for that I am grateful. I have also developed networks, both professional and social, that have helped me along the way. Most importantly, I learned and internalized "the serenity prayer":

Lord grant me the serenity to accept

the things I cannot change,

courage to change the things I can

and wisdom to know the difference.

My journey has been made less problematic since embracing this prayer and accepting certain truths. I have had to accept the truth that when I speak, my ideas, concerns, questions and comments might be ignored until articulated by one of my white colleagues, but I continue to speak. I have had to accept the truth that I might only be appointed to committees because of my ethnicity (and rarely my gender, which my colleagues tend to ignore). But if I have something to say, I speak. What gets me through these truths, challenges, and frustrations is recognizing and valuing my self-worth. I had to learn the art of re-invention and establishing contingency plans. It was a strategy I learned through popular culture specifically through examples offered by Celie Harris (*The Color Purple*), Teri Joseph (*Soul Food*), Harriet DeLong (*In the Heat of the Night*), and Olivia Pope (*Scandal*).

Three dominant attributes of Celie's personality include her endurance, faith and the consistent search for truth. Celie's endurance arose out of a belief in herself and connections with others. Her resilience is miraculous and a tribute to humankind. The ability to endure under the worst of circumstances is Celie's key to survival. She manages to withstand the sexual abuse of her stepfather, the loss of her babies, the cruelty of her common law husband, the separation from her sister, and the uncertainty of her friend's love—all combined with a life filled with poverty, struggles, and prejudice. In spite of the hardships, Celie never abandons faith. She looks for ways to stand up to the unfair social system. As the older daughter, she is expected to stay at home and care for the stepfather and the house, while Nettie attends school. Fortunately, Nettie privately teaches and coaches Celie.

Shug also offers life lessons. It is Shug who teaches Celie about her own self-worth, making her believe in herself. As a result, she finally leaves her abusive husband, and goes off with Shug to make a life of her own. By the end of the novel/movie, we learn that Celie has built a successful business, largely because she never gave in to the reality of her life but searched for the truth beyond it. Equally important, we discover in the novel that Celie also comes to terms with her oppressor. She forgives Albert and they become friends. Celie learns how to be self-sufficient which brings her story to a triumphant conclusion. Although Celie's story is not my story, her particular pains and life's circumstances are foreign to me, I benefitted from her life, her self-sufficiency, the power of her faith and her ability to reinvent herself. And, in understanding her story, she mentors me.

It was my first day in my new office on my new campus. As I approached the door, I smiled as I saw that my nameplate had been attached to it. I had moved to this new environment a month before the beginning of the fall semester so I would have sufficient time to get settled in on campus as well as in my new apartment. Today I needed to unpack.

As I stood in my office unpacking and shelving books, my African American male colleague heard my footsteps and walked over to my door to talk. This was the first time I had actually been in a department that had more than one African American at one time. Usually departments hire "one" to replace the "one" that got away. I was looking forward to having an African American colleague. It was one of the reasons I had accepted the position. But that feeling didn't last long.

As we talked, a white woman, a secretary in another department in our building, approached my doorway and, ignoring my presence and our conversation, immediately started a conversation with my African American male colleague. Suddenly, he, too, ignored my presence, turning away from me to engage in a conversation with the secretary. They talked for about five minutes. Realizing that I had faded into "invisibility" I proceeded to continue my chore of unpacking and shelving books.

At the end of their conversation, the white woman looked into my office and asked my African American male colleague, "Who's that? You got a new maid?" It took every fiber of my being to remain silent, but I did so because I was new and didn't want to start off the new school year in an awkward way. If I had openly reacted I could imagine the hallway quickly buzzing with echoes from other faculty and staff of how the new African American professor is one of those angry black women who went off on the innocent white women for no reason. So, I willingly fell prey to becoming a victim of stereotype threat, avoiding the risk of confirming to a negative stereotype about my ethnic/gender group (Steel and Aronson). I remained silent and earnestly tried to control my gaze. He said, "Oh, that's Dr. Hamlet. She's a new professor in our department." The white woman turned up her nose and responded in a condescending tone of voice, "Ohhhhhhhh." She then turned to my African American male colleague and said, "Well, I'll see you." She walked away.

My African American male colleague then turned to me and attempted to continue the conversation we had been engaged in before the white

woman approached him without any thought to what had occurred. As he talked, I stared at him in disgust. I made no effort to disguise it. He innocently asked what was wrong. I couldn't respond. I didn't want to respond. I just stared at him for several seconds then returned to my task. After a moment, he walked away. The possibility of any real collegiality between us was destroyed on that day. My experiences only became worse.

In coming to this university I also became the second woman in the department. My female colleague exemplified a type of feminism I did not understand nor embrace. Although we had mutual feelings of uneasiness with one another, she expected me to be supportive and loyal to her based on our shared gender while my African American male colleague demanded loyalty and support to him based on our shared ethnicity. But neither of them offered such support to me based on these commonalities. I would quickly discover that the two of them were supportive and loyal to one another based on their shared sexuality. As the school year continued, I became increasingly aware of my ability to fade in and out of "invisibility." During faculty meetings, whenever any discussion of women was brought up, my white female colleague was considered the expert and whenever any discussion of African Americans was raised, my African American male colleague was considered the expert.

Neither of them ever included me in the discussions and whenever I attempted to contribute, I felt silenced. Yet, I experienced this "invisibility" and disrespect from my colleagues on a daily basis, especially from my two minority colleagues, even to the point of the two plotting how to get rid of me. Why? I would later discover that it was because I had invaded their space, their distinctiveness. They were no longer the *only* female and *only* African American faculty member in the department. They weren't special anymore. However, as difficult as it was, I tried to persevere. I worked hard to increase my record of conference presentations and publications. I won three national

fellowships. I established myself in the community as a lecturer in African American Studies and Women Studies, especially in the area of womanist theory and methodology and soon was regarded on the campus as an expert in Women Studies, African American communication, and multiculturalism, being invited to give lectures in other faculty's member classes, conducting workshops for students, and giving presentations to women's groups in the community.

I was later appointed founding director of the university's ethnic studies program. Despite obstacles and roadblocks, some initiated by my two minority colleagues, the launch of the program was a major success. The next year I was invited to kick off the Women's Studies Annual Colloquia Series with a lecture highlighting my research on intersectionality and womanist theory. In doing these things I reinvented myself from the position for which I had been hired and the role others stereotypically expected me to fulfill. My new identity as a leader had been created. Celie taught me how to transform my situation and myself.

In reflecting on this experience, it was made more significant when I became a devoted fan of the television series *Soul Food* (Henderson). *Soul Food*, adapted from the critically acclaimed movie of the same title, looks at family traditions and life through the trials, tribulations, and triumphs of the Josephs, an African American family living in Chicago, Illinois. The oldest sibling, Teri, a labor attorney, is a junior associate at a prestigious law firm, Greene Norris, located in Chicago. She is the only woman and rblind discourses on television viewing audiences of the primetime junior associate at the firm, winning the most cases and bringing in the most clients. She has worked hard and has followed the rules. A two-time divorcee, Teri is a highly driven and ambitious career woman, full of ideas and strategies from which the firm has greatly benefitted. However, her self-confidence, aggressiveness, and ambition were contributing factors in her being passed over for partner, as communicated to her by her mentor. But in one particular episode (2001) Terri is taught an important lesson

from one of her clients, Rick Grant, an African American male and CEO for Lamont Airlines. Rick comes to Teri's office to complete their work and notices a change in her demeanor. She's still professional and courteous but not as cheerful.

Rick: "Are you okay?"

Teri: "Actually no, but I'll work through it. Besides my problems aren't Lamont Airlines' problems."

Rick: "Lamont Airlines isn't sitting here asking you how you are. Rick Grant is."

Teri: [sigh] "I found out today, unofficially, that I didn't make partner."

Rick: "I see. How many African Americans partners are employed here at Greene Norris?"

Teri: "None."

Rick: "How many women?"

Teri: "None."

Rick: "So what happens now?"

Teri: "I really don't know."

Rick: "You're so sure of yourself that you don't have a contingency plan? You are a young black woman working in a minefield called corporate America. You should always have a Plan B no matter how good you think you are."

In this scene, Rick introduces Teri to the art of reinvention, a skill that will serve her well in the future. Teri leaves Greene Norris to work at a predominately African American law firm where she makes partner quickly. Later, a large New York based law firm recruits her—a firm that has also acquired the Chicago-based Greene Norris. In illustrating the notion of "turnaround is fair play," Teri is made the managing partner of the Chicago office, effectively positioning her as the superior of the same attorneys who refused to make her a partner a year earlier.

Even though my first reinvention had occurred almost seven years earlier, this episode reinforced for me that I had made the right decision. The art of reinvention occurred again in 2006 at a different institution when I felt like I had been maliciously pushed out of a multisectional course that I had been so successful in teaching. I was momentarily upset about it but felt I couldn't openly complain because I would become the stereotypical angry black woman. This time I consciously thought about Rick Grant's advice to Terry. *You're a black woman; you have to always have a backup plan.* As a result, I took one of the not so popular rhetoric courses, recreated it, and made it my own. The course now works well for me. I also took advantage of work opportunities outside of my department.

The experiences for many faculty of color, especially women, at PWIs have been described as negotiating "personal and psychological minefields" (Ruffins 18-26). Contributing factors to the existence of such minefields include a display of cognitive dissonance because the faculty member can feel overworked, over-committed, and burned out; placed unwillingly and continually in the role of multicultural expert and unable to move beyond that role because of other colleagues' expectations and assumptions; appointed to committees solely because of race/ethnicity and gender; lack of supportive networks; the need to continually prove oneself to colleagues; feelings of isolation and alienation because of different perspectives; research interests and classroom experiences that differ from

colleagues; being penalized in the tenure and promotion process for engaging in diversity-related activities and research.

Additional factors include having your authority challenged in the classroom; expectations of being an "easy" grader and compensating for the "tough" grades students will get from their white professors; your otherness status is always exposed and made available to be the sacrificial lamb or thrown under the bus, if needed.

The experiences of faculty of color as they are subjected to these situations have come to be categorized as racial microaggressions. Racial microaggressions are brief and common verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, which, whether intentional or intentional, communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color (Sue, Capodilupo, Turino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal, and Esquilin). Perpetrators of microaggressions are often unaware that they engage in such acts when they interact with racial/ethnic minorities, although I contend that some perpetrators are quite aware of their actions and their potential impact. I have experienced racial microaggressions and have learned that it is healthy and necessary for colleagues of color to discover the power of bouncing back by creating contingency plans when insults, disappointments, and failures occur. It was a lesson I had to learn quickly if I expected to survive. Celie Harris and Teri Joseph offered good examples.

Another mediated mentor for me has been Harriet DeLong, from the critically acclaimed series, *In the Heat of the Night,* created in 1988 (Barrett), and based on the novel by John Ball and the 1967 movie (Jewison) of the same title. Situated in the fictitious town of Sparta, Mississippi, the show centered on the relationship of Virgil Tibbs, a Philadelphia detective who has returned home for his mother's funeral. Based on his relationship with Police Chief Bill Gillespie from a past murder investigation, Tibbs is persuaded by Gillespie to remain in Sparta to become Chief of Detectives in an effort to help overcome the city's

reputation of being a racist town. Although the relationship between Tibbs and the police officers was tumultuous at the beginning, Tibbs's expertise motivated the officers to warm up to him and they began to come together in improving law enforcement in Sparta. The weekly storylines provided a variety of real world issues including racism, sexual abuse, police brutality, drug abuse, homophobia, Anti-Semitism, government corruption, drunk driving, and burglary.

Season Three (1991) introduces Harriet DeLong, an uncompromising city councilwoman. DeLong is intelligent, beautiful, aggressive, the consummate professional who can stand up for herself in any conversation with anyone. She never thinks of herself as less than anyone. She's tough but feminine and polite in her toughness. Harriet DeLong often butts heads with Chief Gillespie (who she would later marry) and the other members of the city council, but she is unabashed in standing up for what she believes is just. For these reasons I am inspired by the character of Harriet DeLong.

Perhaps my greatest modern-day mediated mentor is Olivia Pope from the series, *Scandal* (Rhimes). *Scandal* is a political thriller television series that takes place in Washington, D.C. and focuses on Olivia Pope. Pope is the head of Olivia Pope and Associates, a crisis management firm. She and her staff are known as "gladiators" who have dedicated their careers to protecting the public image of the nation's elite, including the president and White House staff. Prior to forming her own crisis management firm, Olivia Pope was the White House Communications Director. She's also the president's mistress.

I devote every Thursday night to *Scandal*. During this hour I do not make nor receive phone calls. I do not send nor receive emails, texts, tweets, nor answer the door. Thirty minutes before *Scandal*, I walk my dog and upon our return give him a toy or treat that will keep him occupied for at least 45 minutes. I dress for bed, go to my kitchen cupboard and take out my Olivia Pope wine glass. Sometimes it has wine

in it; oftentimes milk. But it really doesn't matter what's in the glass. It's the large wine glass that's important because Olivia has one. It's for ambiance. I'm a gladiator in pajamas. So I take refuge every Thursday evening on the living room sofa to become an eyewitness to secrets and lies, mayhem and corruption, blood and guts, trials and triumphs, viciousness and sycophancy, seduction and romance.

Each action-packed hour also offers insight about real world issues and personal dilemmas. There are lessons to be learned. Nearly every line that Olivia Pope speaks is empowering and I, in kind, feel empowered. Every female *Scandal* fan likely comes to this conclusion via their commitment to the drama. We aspire to be more like Olivia Pope. She is beautiful, intelligent, feisty, skilled in the rhetoric of argumentation, and can communicate powerfully with anyone. Olivia has a swagger that demands respect. Her public persona is a model of proficiency, efficiency and grace. She is always impeccably dressed. Her personal life is in disarray unfortunately because she has not devoted much time to developing one. But in many ways Olivia Pope represents many professional women. The more time spent developing a professional public persona, the less time we have to devote to the personal one. In this sense Olivia is merely a mirror reflecting our own dilemmas. Many women can identify with Olivia Pope and are drawn to her because of her public persona. The following are some of Olivia Pope's sage wisdom which I use as daily affirmations:

> 1. Whatever happens, I do not give up. It is my name on the office door and I do not give up.
>
> I think about Olivia's affirmation to her gladiators in moments of frustration after leaving a class where someone was disruptive or a committee meeting where an hour or two of my day has been wasted over nonsense. I will then assess that as long as my name is on my office door, I continue to fight and do the work I believe in and have been called to do.

2. It's handled.

I love this affirmation. It communicates loudly and clearly confidence in the work you can do and have done. When I leave my classroom every Tuesday and Thursday and have done what I set out to do, when I have expressed what I needed to say in a meeting, giving breath to my physical presence, weakening my objectification, I quietly affirm to myself, "It's handled."

3. My gut tells me everything I need to know.

Instincts are powerful. This affirmation relates to the importance of following one's instincts. I have learned that trouble or hurt happens when I don't follow my own instincts, my gut feelings. When I ignore the siren going off in my head that tells me not to trust a colleague on a particular issue or don't go along with a colleague on a plan of action, I pay the price for ignoring the warning. I have learned to trust my gut. Olivia continues to mentor me to do so.

4. You don't get to run. You're a gladiator. Gladiators don't run. They fight. They slay dragons. They wipe blood. They stitch their wounds and live to fight another day. You don't get to run.

Olivia's mantra to her gladiators has relevance to me as well. In view of all of the challenges I have faced, why do I continue? It's a question I often contemplate. I always return to the same answers: I enjoy what I do, I feel compelled to do what I do, and I persist in the manner in which I do it. I have tried to walk away from the academy but I can't. I have concluded that it is what I was called or destined to do. Like Olivia Pope, I don't get to run.

Feminist scholar Patricia Hill Collins reinforces for women of color that we cannot afford to be fools of any type, for our objectification as the

Other denies us the protection that white skin, maleness, and wealth confer. This distinction between knowledge and wisdom, and the use of experience as what divides these issues, has been key to (our) survival. In the context of race, gender, and class oppression, the distinction is essential. Knowledge without wisdom is adequate for the powerful, but wisdom is essential to the survival of the subordinate (208).

Of all of the *Scandal* episodes, the most memorable scene is one in which Collins' argument is reinforced. In this episode (2013), the media and the country discovers that Olivia is the president's mistress. She departs from her condo building unaware that others know. The media has gathered outside of her building and when she steps outside, she is ambushed and overwhelmed. However, bodyguards are waiting to whisk her away to a limo. When she gets in the limo, she says in amazement, "Dad?" Olivia's father, Rowan Eli Pope, makes his debut to *Scandal*. He takes her to a hangar at the airport and has prepared for her to leave the country with a new identity. Rowan scolds Olivia for believing that the president loves her and wants to marry her. He is disappointed that she would settle for being the president's lady instead of secretary of state or chief of staff. Olivia argues with him and the following exchange occurs:

> Rowan: "What did I tell you? What did I tell you? How many times have I told you, you have to be what? You have to be what?"
>
> Olivia: "Twice …"
>
> Rowan: "What?"
>
> Olivia: "Twice as good as them to get half of what they have. "
>
> Rowan: "Twice as good as them to get half of what they have."

Although race is never mentioned, the exchange was, indeed, a "racial moment," espousing a lesson I continually heard from my parents, my pastor, my teachers as a student in segregated public schools, and my professors at my historically black university. The "you" in Rowan Pope's furious baritone voice referred to African Americans and the "they" referred to White Americans. For African American viewers, especially "baby boomers" and their off-spring, Rowan Pope's advice about the need to work harder and outperform white peers just to be considered "good enough" was an all too familiar sage wisdom. It has been a valuable life lesson for African Americans in the workplace for decades.

For example, in the movie, *Something New* (Hamri), the African American characters refer to this mantra as paying the "black tax." What was interesting about this *Scandal* episode was that because it was considered a "racial moment" by so many African American viewers, it immediately went viral. This event reinforced for me that the advice was not outdated. It would become the most epic of Rowan Pope's passionate monologues endorsing the advice of a race-conscious parent. Even in his wickedness, Rowan Pope can sometimes offer important "equipment for living" (Burke) for Scandal viewers. Olivia gets on the plane anyway but quickly changes her mind and exits the plane. Being known as the Washington fixer, she handles the media and turns the situation around. But she is frequently haunted by her father's words.

I return to Celie in *the Color Purple:* On an Easter Sunday, Celie prepares to leave her common-law husband and goes with Shug Avery, Shug's new husband, and Tweet, a young woman who has also discovered herself. Out of anger, Mister flings insults at Celie. Mister says: "Look at you. You're black, you're poor, you're ugly, and you're a woman. You're nothing at all."

But, as Celie gets in the car with her friends, she finds her voice, her inner strength, her dignity, and God within herself. Celie proclaims:

"I may be poor,

Black,

I may even be ugly.

But Dear God,

I'm here!

I'm here!"

When I think about all I have experienced and survived in this multi-faceted minefield known as academia, painful memories no longer torment me and I am grateful for the friendships I have made, the networks I have developed, the skills and strategies I have constructed, and the blessings. But when I am rendered invisible, when colleagues forget how to pronounce my name, and when my worth is devalued because of my otherness, I think of Celie Harris and that extraordinary Easter morning when she found her voice. Her words emancipate me.

Although I will continue to seek the advice, collegiality, and support of live mentors, mediated mentors will also continue to have a place in my journey in the academy. I see mentoring reflected in whoever helps me to reveal and perhaps demonstrate a truth, suggest a course of action, or to consider a different point of view. Stories can reinforce harsh truths, teach us to endure, celebrate, or apply ourselves in ways we might not have imagined possible.

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Skin Tone and Popular Culture: My Story as a Dark Skinned Black Woman

RENATA FERDINAND

"I got teased and taunted about my night-shaded skin, and my one prayer to God, the miracle worker, was that I would wake up lighter skinned." These are the words of Lupita Nyong'o, the Oscar winning star of *12 Years a Slave*. She spoke them at an *Essence* Black Women in Hollywood Awards Luncheon, where she was awarded the Best Breakthrough Performance Award in 2014. I listened attentively as she told her story of bargaining with God to make her lighter; of her disappointment of waking each day to find herself in the same dark skin and of the constant ridicule she received as a result of it; of how her mother encouraged her to see her beauty from the inside out; and of how she finally came to accept her skin color after seeing model, Alek Wek, proclaimed and praised as beautiful by an international audience.

And then, I thought about my dark skin. I thought about how it often dictates the clothes I wear, opting for bright to light apparel choices. I dye my hair according to what looks attractive on dark skin. I even polish my nails to complement my dark hue. Clearly, my aesthetic choices were impacted by the awareness of my dark complexion. I often remember the phrases of others who commented on my skin: "You're cute to be dark," or "You can't wear that because you're dark." I can even recall the hurtful names my siblings and I called each other as a child: *black dog*. We hurled this insult at each other like grenades. With such a tongue-lashing, these words bore stripes across the attending body, slashing the opponent's confidence. No physical touching was warranted—once *black dog* was

used, it could slice the opponent down to size. Yet, now that I think about it, we never used this term towards my lighter skinned sister. In fact, we never had an insult for her. No, *black dog* was reserved for us with darker skin.

This essay is an awakening of sorts. As demonstrated above, it highlights the ways in which I came to understand the complexity of having dark skin in a society that privileges light or white skin. By framing my personal experiences through a discussion of colorism and popular culture, I critically examine larger critical race issues of black beauty, feminism, and white privilege. This is an autoethnographic essay, a way "of connecting the personal to the cultural" (Ellis and Bochner 739). Through narrative and reflective writing, I use my personal experiences to show the ways in which my identity is influenced by and through popular culture; as Herrmann notes, "our identities and pop culture have a long-term recursive relationship" (7).

From this writing, you will learn of the ways in which I am reminded that my dark complexion is a problem. It exposes intense and terrible—yet important—personal moments as a way of highlighting the ways in which skin tone impacts everyday life experiences. Further, it proceeds by showing how my experiences are entangled with the lives of other dark skinned black women in popular culture, from the fictional to the real. In that sense, the essay examines beauty standards, dark skin, and the representations of African American women in television and film. But this writing does not come without its own challenges, particularly when writing about lived experiences of African American women academic scholars. Griffin writes, "Choosing a contested and subjective method such as autoethnography runs the risk of providing more ammunition for those with a vested interest in silencing our voices" (144). Still, I hope my voice serves as a catalyst for more autoethnographic research written by scholars of color as a way to engage those issues that are often overlooked, unrecognized, and undiscussed.

Within this narrative, you will find reference to the African American musical tradition of the blues, used as a way of connecting the various fragments and sections together. The blues often use narrative to tell of a troubling experience in African American life. My daunting experiences often encourage me to have "the blues." In fact, if my story was set to an AAB pattern, coupled with a line sung over repetitious bars, it would possess all the qualities of an actual blues song.

<p align="center">*   *   *</p>

"Colorism is the allocation of privilege and disadvantage according to the lightness or darkness of one's skin" (Burke 17).

July 27, 2007, was one of the happiest days in my life. After laboring for 26 hours, I had finally given birth to a beautiful, bouncing baby girl. The joy emanating from my heart could be felt clear across the room. As I coyly pressed her warm body against my moist flesh, I immediately thought of all the wonders of her life, the steps towards learning to walk, the first time I would hold her hand to cross the street, the moment she would experience heartbreak and pain, and her eventual growth into a mature young woman. My anticipation for being a witness to her life consumed my thoughts.

And then, the inevitable discussion occurred between my family members. My mother, peering through the hospital blanket that engulfed my daughter's tiny body, began the conversation.

"How dark do you think she will get?" She gently asked.

"I don't know, and I don't care," I responded, hoping to put an end to this conversation.

A moment of silence.

Then chimes from other relatives, so much so that a cacophony of noise ensued. My ears are bombarded with:

"She's going to be dark—check her ears."

"She won't even be noticeable at night."

"She has the darkest little fingers."

"She's already turning colors."

These comments reference the looming darkness that will inevitably consume my daughter. Audrey Chapman, a Washington D.C. family therapist and radio host, discusses the tendency to inspect the color of black babies with Denene Millner of *Essence*, stating, "We look at the color of the ears and the fingertips and say, 'Oh, that's going to be a dark baby,' with the fear of what life will be like for that dark person with the more Negroid features when they have to deal with White Society" (134). As if given in a poetic, melodic refrain, my ears attuned to the words that described my daughter's color as ugly. How did I respond to this? I said nothing. But it definitely ruined my mood. Usually the blues is signified by a call and response pattern; unfortunately, I had no response to this. All I had was a musical arrangement in my head of guitar strings and melancholic refrains.

I wish I had some sharp-witted reply that would have put my family in their place. In a defiant tone, I would have showed them my disdain for their conversation by alerting them to how they were reinforcing white privilege and white beauty, of how they subscribed to the view of blackness as ugly and reinforced negative connotations of being black, of how they were merely projecting their own skin color insecurities onto my daughter. But instead, I lay quietly, engulfed in misery and joy.

<div align="center">*   *   *</div>

"Whiteness is a 'standpoint,' a place from which White people
look at themselves, at others, and at society" (Frankenberg 447).

No one was more excited about the hip hop concert in the park than I. When I heard that Outkast and Usher would be playing at Atlanta's Centennial Olympic Park, I knew I had to be there. Because I lived an hour away, it was easier for me to ride with friends than to attempt to put my old jalopy on the road. As luck would have it, my friend was willing to

drive, as long as I was okay with riding with four other women. No problem!

We were well on our way to the concert. I sat alongside my friend, a lighter skinned black woman. Along the back row of the SUV were three white women. We jammed along to the radio station as we continued our journey to Atlanta, until I'm momentarily interrupted by a voice coming from the backseat.

"Look how much lighter I am than you," she excitedly proclaimed as she put her arm next to mine.

"You're white," I said, thinking that there was a clear and reasonable explanation for the obvious difference in skin tone.

"So. I'm not that much lighter than Tina," pushing her arm next to my friend, the driver, who is clearly lighter than I am.

Again, I am speechless. Looking back, I wish I had some kind of clever retort. Maybe I could ramble her ear off about whiteness and white privilege, of how she is further participating in the denigration of black skin and black women, of how her comment refuses to see me by instead focusing on the contrast of me, of how she is commenting on my beauty and my worth as being descriptive of dark, of how she is working to create a divide between me and the driver by focusing on our differences in skin tone instead of our connection as black women. But no, I didn't say any of this. Instead, I cue the music in my head.

And like before, my silence is deafening and defeating. Put these feelings over a 12 bar beat pattern, coupled with instruments and a hard bass line, and you have the beginning of a first rate blues song.

*   *   *

"Skin tone discrimination can be either interracial or intraracial" (Banks 213).

I'm reminded of my darkness in moments when I'm not really thinking about it, and at moments when I am clearly excited about something else.

The timing of the reminder affects my emotional state. Is this on purpose? I often believe that being black, especially dark skinned, ultimately influences how others interact with me, the effects of living in a society that not only privileges Whiteness, but lighter skin. I even hate to admit it, but my experience mirrors those affected by colorism—the benefits and disadvantages received based on skin tone.

In fact, colorism spans many ethnic and racial groups, often at the expense of those with darker skin tone. It assigns meanings and values to different color complexions, with most negative connotations and perceptions given to those with a darker hue. Colorism also upholds white privilege, as manifest through the advantages of having light skin. Hochschild and Weaver find that "with some exceptions, most Americans prefer lighter to darker skin aesthetically, normatively and culturally. Film-makers, novelists, advertisers, modeling agencies, matchmaking websites—all demonstrate how much the power of a fair complexion, along with straight hair and Eurocentric facial features, appeals to Americans" (644). For African Americans, colorism is rooted in the slave system that created a hierarchy of skin tone preference, with lighter skin seen as the most desirable.

Colorism has a gendered component as well. In a society that holds ideal beauty standards for women that are often unattainable and unachievable, colorism fits neatly into a sexist paradigm that both includes and excludes certain women. Millner suggests the dangers of colorism as being fueled by a society that connects women's beauty to their value and significance. As a result, the ideal beauty standard for women is the adulation for lighter skin. Hill finds that "throughout Europe and the West, fair skin tone has long been perceived as a particularly desirable feminine characteristic" (79). In fact, dark skinned black women are often perceived as less attractive, less intelligent, and less desirable than other women. Stephens and Thomas also note, "Researchers have consistently shown that lighter skinned black women are viewed as more attractive and

successful than darker skinned black women even when economic status is considered" (295).

Some may question the impact of skin tone. Some may believe that we have progressed so far in our racial harmony that skin tone plays no significant part in our lives, that skin tone is irrelevant to our understanding of beauty, that skin tone does not affect our daily existence. Well, tell these beliefs to the thousands of darker skinned people who face obstacles in terms of employment and socioeconomic standing (Hill; Hughes and Hertel; Hunter; Keith and Herring; Seltzer and Smith). Tell these beliefs to the thousands of darker skinned people who face harsher prison sentences (Hochschild and Weaver; Sanders). If a thousand is too many, then tell them to the one little black girl, who like Toni Morrison's Pecola Breedlove in *The Bluest Eye*, prayed for lighter skin, often wondering, "What made people look at them [little white girls] and say 'Awwwww,' but not for me" (22). The same little black girls, like Paula, whose aunt often commented, "She's so pretty. If only she wasn't so Black" (Millner 134). The same little black girls that are bombarded with the images of feminine beauty as represented by white princesses. What impact does it have on a black child when Cinderella doesn't look like her, or Snow White, or Belle, or Rapunzel, or Ariel, or Aurora? Think like a child. In fact, it wasn't until 2009 that Disney unveiled its first African American Disney princess with the debut of *The Princess and the Frog*. Yet, Griffin reminds us to be cautious in our admiration for this film, for it occurs several decades after the debut of Disney's first white princess, and it ultimately shows the black princess as a frog for the majority of the film.

Some may argue that with the election of the first black president, Barack Obama, and the prominence of the first lady as a darker skinned black woman, Michelle Obama, that the tide is changing in the way darker skinned is viewed. But even Michelle Obama is not immune from the negativity associated with dark skin. Quinlan, Bates, and Webb examined newspaper and blog commentary about the first lady, and found evidence

that the body of Michelle Obama was often the target of criticism, from her butt to her weight. Although the critics never commented directly on her dark skin, their coded language showed a reference to stereotypical images of black women, all of whom are of darker skin tone. Therefore, a criticism of her butt and weight is a criticism of her dark skin. Michelle Obama's dark skin differs drastically from the skin highlighted in our society, the skin privileged in various circles and shown in the national and international arena as beautiful—the Halle Berrys and Beyonces of the world. Harrison concurs, finding that the media praises and awards light skin as the ultimate beauty component.

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> "Stereotypes are created to serve as substitutions, standing in for what is real. They are there not to tell it like it is but to invite and encourage pretense. They are a fantasy, a projection onto the Other that makes them less threatening" (hooks 38).

You know me, even if you have never met me. In fact, you know a lot of black women. You know us because of what you see of us in popular culture, the stereotypical versions at least. Yet, the stereotypes come to represent reality. So, you don't have to picture what I look like. You don't have to wonder about the angles of my facial features, or the contours of my eyes or nose. You don't have to consider the space between my lips and chin, or the shape of my ears. Here I am:

Sapphire: neck rolling angry black bitch

Jezebel: hyper-sexualized black woman

Mammy: always smiling and willing to please servant

Matriarch: superwoman who leads the household

Whether I conform to these stereotypical images or not, an image of me already exists in your psyche, simply due to the popularity of these images. And the common thread that binds these images and me: we are all dark skin. Hill writes, "Unflattering and unfeminine stereotypes of darker-skinned African American women—such as the sexless black mammy or the emasculating black matriarch—have suffused American popular culture" (80). hooks concurs, writing that negative feminine qualities shown in the media are oftentimes depicted by someone with dark skin.

I often wonder how to escape these images when they are so common. How can I redirect or rearticulate these images for myself? I mean, if I apply the tenets of Collins "Black Feminist Theory," maybe I could get some kind of clarification regarding these images and images of myself. Maybe I could work to improve the standing of darker skinned black women or offer new meanings to raise awareness and public consciousness. Collins encourages us to center ourselves, to use our lived experience to ground theoretical understandings, to rearticulate consciousness as a way to "empower African-American women and stimulate resistance" (32). Of course, this is a worthwhile idea, but sometimes I find these racial tasks to be somewhat daunting. I mean, there are so many pertinent issues affecting the African American community—jobs, access to adequate health care and education, adequate housing—that focusing on colorism loses its thrust. Sometimes I think it is easier to acquiesce, to accept defeat and realize that society will never change. Or maybe put my worries over a syncopated beat and seductively sing.

At least, I would have accepted the situation, and resisted the need to combat any further. There's a certain realization and acknowledgement in the blues: powerlessness and the inability to control a situation. I consent to this, and comfort in misery is my newfound mood.

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"The gendered nature of colorism stems from the close link
between skin tone and perceptions of physical attractiveness, and
from a double standard that applies expectations of attractiveness
more rigidly to women" (Keith 26).

By the time I learned that Viola Davis was playing the new lead in a
primetime show, I was already basking in the glow of the blues. In fact, I
had no desire or impetus to concern myself with the plight of anything
related to raising awareness or assisting in knowledge production of and
about darker skinned women. Even the thought sounds exhausting, and
truly, I was defeated. My thoughts changed with Viola Davis.

Davis plays the character of Annalise Keating on the ABC series *How
to Get Away with Murder*, which premiered in the fall of 2014. She is a
fierce and sexy defense lawyer and law professor who uses her students to
help her win cases at all costs. Robert Bianco of *USA Today* describes
Davis' character as "tough, smart, vibrant, sexy, anguished, ambitious,
conniving, mature, immature and somehow, underneath it all, admirable"
(1D). The show averages almost 15 million viewers each week and is one
of ABC's top new shows. It comes on the heels of Davis' 2013 taping of
Oprah's Next Chapter, where she argued that the image of black actresses
in film and television was in "crisis mode" and she questioned the "quality
of roles." In terms of her new role, Davis says, "It is time for people to see
us, people of color, for what we really are: complicated."

So, imagine my fascination with Davis's character. Here is a woman
who is dark skinned. She is not a darker version of someone else. She is
not apologetic for her darker hue. She is not the wholesome sidekick of a
lighter actress. Instead, she is, as Davis describes herself, "sexualized,
messy, mysterious" (Rice 29). Sometimes because of the lack of
diversifying roles offered to African American actresses, and largely due
to the misrepresentations and distortions displayed by the media, black
actresses are doubly tasked with playing roles that are aimed toward
uplifting the black race. It creates a double bind when the image of black

women in popular culture has been one that has either been under constant assault or bearing the burden of improving the moral virtues of all black women. Davis' character, however, is not stuck between this binary.

Take, for example, the "Pilot" episode. We are immediately introduced to the physical attributes of Annalise Keating. The distinctive elements of black women are put on display. Her tight black skirt and low-cut burgundy top (with a little cleavage showing) propels viewers to see the dark skin. And this is dark skin with confidence—not the usual portrayal of dark skin as deviant, criminal, uncivilized, threatening, or violent. Instead, here is a dark skinned African American woman, who is 49 years of age, leading a cast in primetime. What else can I say? I'm hooked. My fascination increases with each episode, but admittedly, it is the "Let's Get to Snooping" episode (1.4) that really conjures up images of dark skin and beauty. At the end of the episode, Annalise removes all of her jewelry, piece by piece, and her eye lashes. Then she removes her wig, exposing her braided hair. Lastly, she wipes off the makeup, eye shadow, and lipstick.

What courage this must have taken? To reveal one's true image to almost 15 million viewers. She is not only revealing the typical nightly routine for a lot of women, she is showing her dark skin in its natural state. No makeup. No wig. No false lashes. Nothing. Bare. And knowing how dark skin is perceived in society, she takes a risk at incurring ridicule and shame. This is more than acting: this is life. Breger writes of the explosiveness of this scene, and how it resonated with many audiences, writing, "It's a nightly ritual that had probably never been depicted on network television" (11). Lynette Rice of *Entertainment Weekly* writes how Davis "defied conventions and stoked conversation again by removing her wig and makeup on screen" (31). In this scene alone, Davis challenges current perceptions of black women, and especially the hegemonic discourses surrounding a woman's beauty. I hate to go back to the old phrase, but in this moment, I did believe that "black is beautiful."

But with all my excited moments comes a backlash for being dark. This time, it came with the publication of an article by *New York Times* writer, Alessandra Stanley, who aptly describes Viola Davis' character:

As Annalise, Ms. Davis, 49, is sexual and even sexy, in a slightly menacing way, but the actress doesn't look at all like the typical star of a network drama. Ignoring the narrow beauty standards some African-American women are held to, Ms. Rhimes chose a performer who is older, darker-skinned and less classically beautiful than Ms. Washington, or for that matter Halle Berry, who played an astronaut on the summer mini-series *Extant*. ("Wrought in Rhimes's Image")

Perfect timing. I knew something would come along to ruin my moment. I considered writing a response piece to Stanley's article. I envisioned myself sitting down at my desk to draft a crafty letter. It would go something like this:

Dear Ms. Stanley,

I am appalled by your rudeness and lack of depth when writing and considering yourself a critic.

A closer reading of your lines revealed several things: that your remarks reflect the denigration of darker skinned black women rampant in society by the focus on the ideal beauty standards of white femininity and contrasting those standards with Viola Davis.

Your use of coded language is not lost on me. You use it to mask the association with beauty and race, opting instead for words like "typical" and "classically beautiful." Your phrasing, Ms. Stanley, is most disturbing, the idea of Viola Davis as being less "classically beautiful" than the lighter skinned black women of other shows. "Less classically beautiful" means non-white features.

In fact, you blame black women for the existence of an ideal beauty standard. You fail to indict Whiteness for this construct. Instead, it is African American women who are held to such rigid beauty standards, not as a result of the prevalence of Whiteness, not as a result of a systemic racial color caste order established with the founding of this country, not due to the overwhelming emphasis and preference for lighter skin in almost every facet of our daily life. According to you, Ms. Stanley, African American women are held to this unattainable beauty ideal at the hands of a mysterious puppet master.

You are not progressive in your thinking. You are not offering a new way of thinking about beauty and race; rather, you are the messenger to the "good-ol-boy" network of thinking. You are so infused with white power, it's pathetic.

Consider using your platform with *The New York Times* in a better way.

Until then,

    Fuck off!

I was tempted to send this letter. But instead, I did nothing. I was, however, pleased with Davis' response. In an interview with Jada Yuan, Davis commented on Stanley's article, saying, "There is no one who could compare Glenn Close to Julianna Margulies, Zooey Deschanel to Lena Dunham. They just wouldn't. They do that with me and Kerry because we're both African Americans and we're both in Shonda Rhimes shows. But they wouldn't compare me to [Grey's Anatomy's] Ellen Pompeo . . . because Ellen Pompeo is white" (110). Davis is referring to the executive producer of the show, Shonda Rhimes, and Kerry Washington, the lead African American woman who plays Olivia Pope in *Scandal*, another

highly rated ABC primetime show created by Shonda Rhimes. Ironically, with the show *Scandal* preceding *How to Get Away with Murder* the variation in black skin tone is evident.

Kerry Washington even found herself in the midst of a skin tone firestorm with the publication of *InStyle* magazine's March 2015 cover. When Washington appeared on the front of the issue, her skin tone was clearly several shades lighter. Fans took to Twitter to lambast the magazine, accusing the editors of photo-shopping her image. Some even compared her complexion to Halle Berry and Vanessa Williams. Maria Puente of *USA Today* asked the question: "Does her skin tone look lighter than she really is?" The controversy encouraged the magazine to issue an immediate statement, blaming the cover lighting as the reason for the change in skin tone. My response: Yeah right! It eerily reminds me of the *Time* magazine cover of O.J. Simpson during his murder trial, where his image is presented several shades darker than his actual skin tone, linking darkness with criminality. These controversies are distractions at a time when I'm supposed to be happy with the new identification with dark skin. Davis words eased my concerns, and this time, the thrill was not gone!

I continued to watch the show and learn more about this character. I was especially intrigued by her sexual endeavors. Previous images of African American middle-class women on television presented them as chaste and pious. But here, I watched a woman embrace her sexuality. With each episode, I learn more and more about her white husband, a psychology professor who has and continues to cheat on her, and her black lover who is a detective. There is a sexual allure to her character. Her steamy sexual encounters subvert the prescribed sexual scripts from the past and establish a sense of agency in her sexuality, especially given that most networks steer clear of showing a woman engaging in satisfying sexual activity. In an interview with Cori Murray of *Essence*, Shonda Rhimes discusses challenging the way that sex scenes are shown on primetime television. She states, "If a woman was being attacked or

brutalized or raped, you could discuss it in any graphic terms you wanted. You could show thrusting. But if you were talking about anything that pleased the woman, you certainly couldn't discuss it" (89). Davis's explosive sex scenes are a clear indication that the show intends to push all sorts of boundaries, from skin tone to age, race, and gender.

Some may say that Viola Davis conforms to the stereotypical images of black women on television given that "producers and writers built roles around the common stereotypes associated with her [black women] in hopes to not only fulfill the fantasy of whites but also maintain the status quo in America at large" (Sewell 324). They may say that her sexual promiscuity alone lands her in the Jezebel category, or that the comfort and protection she offers her students is a symbol of a Mammy, or that her sharp witted, no-nonsense attitude reflects a Sapphire or an in-charge Matriarch.

In looking at any character, there will be contradictions and commonality in what is represented. A deeper study may intend to further analyze the role that Davis plays. Maybe a researcher may investigate audience perception of Davis's character. Likely, someone will explore the ways that Davis subverts stereotypical images of black women on television, or offer explanations of how she nicely fits into a specific stereotypical category. I'm sure that a critique of the ways that she challenges popular media images of authentic black womanhood will soon happen. Someone may insist on exposing the either/or binary that affects black women—I've started the process by exploring the lighter skin/darker skin controversy. I chose to focus on only one aspect, skin tone, though there are other ways of exploring and expanding this topic. Yet, I insist on keeping the conversation moving in a productive manner, with a special emphasis on including the lived experiences of black women. Like Boylorn, I believe that "the ability to resist representations . . . allows Black women to own the positive and negative, good and bad, real and fictional aspects of Black womanhood that are depicted on television.

Black women must bring their own personal experiences and realities to the forefront to serve as a place and point of comparison" (430). This article is my contribution to Boylorn's quest.

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Popular culture can be a site of change and resistance to stereotypical images. Hall argues that popular culture provides an opening of new spaces in which marginalized groups can present new identities on the cultural stage. We've seen steady changes over the years. And academic research has to critically examine the ways that popular culture influences identity transformations. We can see an edge towards this discourse with Andrew Herrmann's article, "Daniel Amos and Me." I follow in the footsteps of Danielle Stern's article, where she uses autoethnographic reflections to explore the development of her feminist identity as constructed through her dating experiences and her role as a media consumer. It is from Stern's writing that I was inspired to create "stories of my identification with specific television characters" (420). Furthermore, Manning's autoethnography on *Mad Men* helps me understand the ways in which we can project our identity onto the characters we find on television, and how we use characters to better understand our lives. He writes, "As I watched and re-watched 'The Marriage of Figaro' [1.03] to better understand the situation, I kept coming back to how I am prompted to think of my family while viewing even though we have little in common with the Drapers" (94). Like the authors mentioned above, I, too, find the benefit of exploring popular culture as a way of understanding myself; in fact, an exploration in popular culture is an exploration of self, as "popular culture helps us define who we are, what we believe, and influences whom we befriend" (Herrmann 7).

Yet, I take my analysis one step further by examining my experience with popular culture from a critical race theory (CRT) perspective. As Trevino, Harris, and Wallace write,

> CRT privileges storytelling, not only as a rhetorical device for
> conveying personal racialized experiences but also as a way of
> centering the metanarratives—the images, preconceptions, and
> myths—that have been propagated by the dominant culture of
> hegemonic Whiteness as a way of maintaining racial inequality. (8)

It is through my personal experiences with colorism that call attention to the ways that racism and discrimination still exists. Using a CRT perspective, I am further able to challenge the notion of the colorblind discourses perpetuated in the media. Colorblind discourses fuel racism and white privilege by diminishing the effect of race, opting instead to view race as inconsequential and irrelevant. For example, Kretsedemas discusses the effect of colorblind discourses on television viewing audiences of the primetime show, *Ugly Betty*. He notes that colorblind discourses urge viewing audiences to disregard race in their interpretations of the characters and their actions; instead, black characters should be judged by their qualities and characteristics alone, without any concern for racial classification.

Yet, colorblind discourses are a ruse to distract from the system of racial oppression that exists in this country. And colorblind discourses are used in the media to subvert attention away from race and racism and instead promote idyllic moments of racial harmony, thereby preserving Whiteness and white privilege. Bonilla-Silva discusses the impact of colorblind discourses, writing, "And the beauty of this new ideology is that it aids in the maintenance of white privilege without fanfare, without naming those who it subjects and those who it rewards" (4). Even the shows that I analyzed purport to engage in colorblind practices. Everett notes that Shonda Rhimes' shows, including *Scandal* and *How to Get Away with Murder* both feature racially and sexually diverse cast members who reflect typical United States society. They challenge white hegemonic cultural practices, opting instead for "non-traditional casting choices" (36), with African American women as the lead, and in particular, with the

casting of Viola Davis as an attractive, dark skinned, sexually desirable woman.

Yet, I think Rhimes was fully aware of her choices when making the decision to cast Viola Davis. Maybe she knew that television viewing audiences were unfamiliar with seeing a dark skinned woman as the lead in a primetime show. Maybe such casting was Rhimes' way of challenging stereotypical and colorblind portrayals of women with a darker hue. I often wonder if Davis' character would say and do the things she does if she were of a lighter skin tone.

I liken Rhimes' effort to my own movement of resistance. In fact, my experiences vehemently resist colorblind assertion by my insistence on calling attention to these discourses. My experiences show how palpable colorblind discourses are, and yet, my experiences also stand in opposition to colorblind discourses. From the mundane experiences of choosing nail polish to hair color to being a concert-goer, my experiences call attention to the ways in which race and white privilege have affected my life. Even precious moments, like becoming a mother, succumbed to colorism—a byproduct of racism. Given that I have to find a dark skinned advocate in Viola Davis proves the futility of colorblind discourses. The sudden emergence of leading black women in primetime television, which is limited to two, demonstrates why color and race still matter.

At the end of the day, I'm not looking for validation for my skin tone. I've accepted it in all of its glorious majesty. Who cares if I am judged as inadequate or unintelligent as a byproduct of my dark skin? Should I be discouraged that my dark skin does not come with "kindness, popularity, attractiveness, and social desirability associated with lighter-skinned black women" (Stephens and Thomas 292), or that my skin is not considered [beautiful] as defined by lighter skin (Landor et al. 823), or that I likely did not receive "certain advantages when it comes to educational and occupational opportunities, or . . . experience discrimination to a lesser degree" (Harrison 68)? Validation would imply that I suffered from low

self-esteem, which I deny. Validation assumes that I need some kind of support or confirmation, a recognition for my dark skin or for my experience. I do not need validation of my lived experience. But, I must admit, my world is a little more bearable with Viola Davis as Annalise Keating.

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Taking Out the Trash: Using Critical Autoethnography to Challenge Representations of White Working-Class People in Popular Culture

TASHA R. RENNELS

"We live in the Taj Mahal of the trailer park."

Mom feeds this lie to her new friend, Laura, who is visiting our home for the first time. I cringe and run to my room, my sanctuary from embarrassment and the strains of adolescence. Seventeen has not been easy. As I slide the flimsy, faux wood accordion door open, I breathe a sigh of relief. At least in here I don't have to witness mom trying to polish a turd.

We own one of the few double-wide trailers[1] in our white working-class neighborhood, but Laura isn't blind. Our ceilings are leaking. The walls, made of a material no thicker than cardboard, are lined with gaping holes—the remnants of conflict. Half of our windows are missing blinds. The carpets are so stained and faded it's hard to tell whether they are blue or brown. And a vice grip is needed to operate the broken shower faucet.

My door is closed, but I can hear Mom's laughter echo through the house. I wonder if Laura is buying her bullshit. Laura befriended my mom during a community theatre production this past summer, and she is

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[1] A double-wide trailer is made of two modular units that have been connected together side by side lengthwise making the width *double* that of a typical *mobile home.*

everything I hope to be one day—hip, beautiful, college educated, happily married, and gainfully employed as a leader for a reputable company. Her new three-story brick home is a candidate for the cover of *Better Homes and Gardens*. From the outside, her life seems like a dream. I can't believe Mom has exposed her to our nightmare. Frustrated, I grab the remote to turn on my 13-inch TV hoping to drown out their conversation. I mindlessly flip through channels until I stumble across *Trailer Park Boys*, a satire about the misadventures of white ex-convicts who live in Sunnyvale Trailer Park, located in Nova Scotia. Great, I think, another show featuring a trailer park full of white people who are filthy, criminal, and riddled with addiction. I wonder if Laura thinks the same of my family and me.

<p style="text-align:center;">*   *   *</p>

My essay, as the above suggests, focuses on the tension between mediated representations and lived experiences of white working-class people. At the root of this tension is the recognition that mediated representations of white working-class people do not adequately capture the complexities of their lived experiences. Calling attention to this issue is important because, although social stigma is a growing reality for those who struggle to survive economically, the white working-class is one of the few targets left in our cultural shooting gallery (Sweeney). Many other targets have been deemed off limits due to written and unwritten laws of cultural sensitivity. In other words, white working-class people are open game for ridicule, which occurs repeatedly. Whether clad in overalls and no shirt or shoes with bucked teeth and eight "illegitimate" kids in tow or running around high off of crack, holding a bottle of moonshine and a stack of lottery tickets, farcical depictions of white working-class people permeate mainstream U.S. popular culture. These depictions fuel widely held impressions that white working-class people are stupid, criminal, racist, dirty, lazy, and addicted to alcohol, drugs, and sex among other things (Cooke-Jackson and Hansen; Newitz and Wray; Sweeney).

In short, white working-class people are made to appear in popular culture as if they are unable to abide by middle and upper class standards associated with their race. For this reason, they are considered "white Others" (Newitz and Wray; Sweeney). Another common term used for this population in is "white trash." Associating "trash" with white people who are clinging to the lower rungs of the socioeconomic ladder "pollutes whiteness" (DiAngelo 53) because it exceeds the class and racial etiquette required of white people to preserve their power and privilege. Those who rupture the etiquette of whiteness, who fail to perform a normative, white, middle to upper class act, are figuratively thrown to the curb—the only place where they cannot pose a threat to the symbolic social order (Bettie; Gibbons; Wray). This type of marginalization can be found in the vast array of films and television shows centered on white working-class people, which are steadily on the rise, especially within the genre of reality television (e.g., *Moonshiners, Swamp People, Trailer Park: Welcome to Myrtle Manor,* and *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo*). Given my background, every time I am exposed to portrayals of white working-class people in popular culture, I have a visceral reaction.

*   *   *

I am 29 years old, seated on the bright red couch in my living room, my eyes glued to *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo*—a reality TV show that follows the adventures of a child beauty pageant participant, Alana "Honey Boo Boo" Thompson, and her white working-class family from rural Georgia. Clad in a ruffled pink gown plastered with sequins, Alana prances across a brightly-lit stage, and I see myself in her routine. According to Giroux, a majority of contestants who enter local pageants are from working-class families driven by the desire for social mobility and the lure of a small cash prize (39). Alana is no exception; her family's dreams of mobility are couched in pageant performances. Where pageantry is their potential source of mobility, academia is mine. I exist in a liminal space between the "white trash" and "educated elite." I twist and

turn in a ruffled pink gown through the halls of the ivory tower and no one knows what I look like without my costume. My identity, for the past fifteen years, has hinged on presenting a middle-class persona—one driven in part by problematic media images of white working-class people, fostering in me a yearning to pass and disassociate myself from the class of my youth and family.

As I watch Alana and her family, I am repulsed. I can tell producers have amplified the family's bodily functions and chosen to feature clips highlighting various grotesque-seeming flaws such as stained, ill-fitting clothing, mispronounced words, and unhealthy foods. To me, this is poverty porn—a common occurrence in the media, driven by the likelihood of increased ratings, where viewers are invited to voyeuristically gaze upon the supposed failings of those who are less fortunate. This invitation places viewers in a superior position separate from the failings they see (Wasserman). In short, poverty porn is a voyeuristic trope that exploits the poor and their surrounding conditions to reinforce class stratification. This exploitation angers me because it makes a mockery of white working-class people, robbing us of our dignity by encouraging people to laugh at, rather than sympathize with us and the adversity we face because of systemic failings. For this reason, I have chosen to write alternative stories that are rarely, if ever, found in popular media—stories that talk to, talk with, and talk back to mediated representations and canonical ideas about white working-class people; stories that take the "trash" out of "white trash." To write these stories, I rely on critical autoethnography, a method that entails providing cultural analyses through personal narratives using a critical lens. With this lens, the critical autoethnographer not only focuses on how lived experiences are affected by the dominant social order, but also seeks to defy and deconstruct this order (Boylorn and Orbe 17). Griffin and Boylorn, for example, write critical autoethnographic accounts to confront controlling images of Black women in the media. My goal is similar, though I focus

on images of white working-class people because it is the population to which I relate.

Digging in the "Trash"

I have felt the weight of the media on my shoulders for as long as I can remember. By age 12, I developed a habit of sitting in front of the TV to compare images of white working-class people on the screen with my experiences growing up in a white working-class family and neighborhood. I would watch blockbusters like *Drop Dead Gorgeous* and see characters living in a trailer park, usually holding a cigarette in one hand and a beer in the other. When I pulled my eyes away from the screen, I would turn to see my parents holding the same things in their hands. I remember inhaling second-hand smoke while counting the bottles of Bud Light consumed every night. It was as if the movie had never ended.

I would constantly make these comparisons, finding people in films and television shows who were and were not like me. I embodied our similarities (e.g., I was white, poor, from a broken family, had experienced violence and the aftermath of substance abuse, and lived in a trailer), but felt disembodied by our differences. I was not stupid. I was not promiscuous. I was not dirty. I was not a criminal. Yet, because most of the white working-class people on screen were stupid, sexual, and dirty criminals, people assumed I was too. The "white trash" stereotype, which permeates popular culture, impacted the way I felt others saw me, and how I saw myself.

*   *   *

The wind rushes through my long, blonde, sun-kissed hair as I race up the street on my rusty mountain bike to the neighborhood pool. Today marks the first day of summer. Having survived seventh grade, I'm eager to celebrate with a swim. I approach the black metal gate surrounding the pool and see a tall boy, about my age, wearing khaki shorts, a 311 band t-

shirt, and a baseball cap. I wonder if he's new to the neighborhood or visiting. He looks at me with piercing green eyes and smiles, revealing a straight set of white teeth—my weakness. A wave of excitement rushes over me, and I can't help but smile back.

"Hey, are you Tasha?" he asks in a surprisingly deep voice for a boy my age.

"Yea, I am," I say cautiously. "Who are you?"

"Sean. I go to Delano. You go to Rockford, right?"

"Yea."

"I know some people from your school. I live on the other side of town but I was hanging out here in the trailer park last week with a couple of guys, Nate Jones and Scott Brown. You know them?"

"Yea. We don't hang out or anything, but I see them around."

"They told me who you were. I asked about you after I saw you last week biking around the neighborhood." He smiles with half of his mouth. "I thought you were cute."

"Oh!" My face turns red.

"Yea." He clears his throat. "Glad I ran into you. I was meaning to ask if you wanted to hang out some time."

I hesitate, trying to look as casual as possible. I don't want it to be obvious I haven't dated anyone yet. "Sure," I manage to say, "that would be cool."

"Yea, I normally don't hang with girls in the trailer park, you know, but," he shrugs his shoulders, "you seem cool."

"What? What do you mean by that?"

"Well, my mom doesn't like me coming here. She's worried about the whole—." His eyes meet mine. "Never mind. It's not a big deal."

My curiosity is piqued. "What's your mom worried about?"

"The whole trailer trash thing," he says, rolling his eyes.

I stare at him, bewildered.

Sensing my discomfort, he continues. "Well, have you seen that show *Trailer Park Boys*? My mom watches a lot of that stuff. She thinks every trailer park is full of drugs and crime and pregnant teens and shit. She worries about me knocking up some girl who lives here. But I don't care what she says."

"Haha that's good," I say, laughing to cover the embarrassment coursing through my veins. It bothers me that the media has fed him and his mother such negative ideas. But I can't blame him. I've also seen films and TV shows depicting neighborhoods like mine in terrible ways and that have encouraged many people to assume the worst of my family, my neighbors, and me.

"So yea, want to hang out?" Sean asks, interrupting my stream of consciousness.

Lured by his looks and determined to prove not all trailer park residents are like what people see in the media, I say, "Yes."

* * *

One week after meeting Sean, we went on our first date. After that, we were inseparable. In the eight months we dated, I started to spend time with some of Sean's friends, like Nate and Scott, who lived in my neighborhood. Many of these guys engaged in rebellious behaviors that fit the "white trash" stereotype portrayed in film and television, though this was not the case for most of the people who lived near me—a point I address later. Instead of judging Sean's friends and fighting against the stereotype, I gave in. I spent the summer smoking cigarettes and weed, wearing low cut shirts, swearing like a sailor, and sneaking out at night to explore local forbidden property. By the start of eighth grade, I was a new person. I was convinced I had found "my people" until my classmates began to ridicule me incessantly—a common occurrence for mobile home youth (Kusenbach 402). Friends I made in seventh grade stopped hanging out with me, and some of the popular girls I admired called me "trailer trash" and "white trash" under their breath. I continued on the same path

for a few more months until I almost got arrested for smoking weed with some friends. We were standing behind a small storage shed near school when a cop spotted and began to pursue us, his sirens wailing. I ran as fast as I could into a densely wooded area where I hid for more than thirty minutes, long after the sirens had stopped and until I knew the cop had left. In that moment of solitude, I knew something had to change.

Over the next few months, I broke up with Sean, dressed more modestly, stopped smoking, cleaned up my language, and disassociated from the trailer park. I slept there, but did little else in that context. My performance shifted to one that appeared middle-class, driven in part by befriending the girls in my grade who were popular, pretty, fashionable, lived in respectable homes, and sought success. I tried hard to imitate their lifestyle of social and material privilege because it resembled what I saw in popular magazines such as *Seventeen* and TV shows such as *Saved By The Bell*. I used the money from my part-time job at a grocery store to purchase clothes at Abercrombie and Fitch because that's the brand my new friends were wearing, and it was the focus of many advertisements to which I was exposed. During one shopping trip, I spent $40 on a single t-shirt at that store. Though expensive, the shirt enabled me to blend in. When I wore it, I no longer felt like I was on the margins. I felt like one of the privileged girls I admired, the girls I saw in my school and in the media.

Bettie describes similar experiences in her ethnographic study of white and Mexican American girls as they navigated through their senior year of high school in California's central valley. She concludes that an abundance of girls who came from working-class families tried to pass as middle-class in order to fit in with their privileged peers. Like me, these girls purchased and used certain products to make them appear middle-class. Whether it was clothes, shoes, lipstick or makeup, these products literally became the girls' "transitional objects" (43) to privilege. Although the girls might not have been middle-class, many of them passed as such

which, at times, involved a great deal of sacrifice. It is one thing to perform middle-class if one has the means to do so but quite another to be working-class and try to acquire the means to pass as middle-class. For me, this disparity meant working one or two part time jobs. The girls in Bettie's study reported similar sacrifices. Our desire for mobility came at a cost.

In addition to purchasing the "transitional objects" I needed to appear middle-class, I boosted my grades and became actively involved in several school activities where I was able to succeed: drama, choir, band, speech, softball, volleyball, and more. My "white trash" past eventually became a distant memory, and a point of denial. But films and television shows featuring trailers in negative ways (e.g., *Vegas Vacation, Joe Dirt, The Waterboy, Trailer Park Boys,* etc.) frequently reminded me that this memory was not as distant as I desired, and perhaps not a memory at all. Like it or not, the trailer park was a part of my life—a place I returned to every day that carried with it a set of judgments, at least according to numerous popular culture texts.

<p style="text-align:center">* * *</p>

It is the summer before my first year of college, which means that graduation parties have become something of a ritual. Despite limited funds, Mom has decided to throw me a party, too. I am simultaneously thankful for and mortified by the gesture. She's hosting the party at our house and has made the invitation open, which means that some of my new and popular friends, who have no idea where I live, may show up. During the first hour, family members and neighbors flood the house bearing gifts and inquiring about my future plans for college. Close friends from childhood, who have been to my house before, show up, too. Everything is smooth until I see Amber and Laura, two of the most popular girls in my grade, enter through the front door. My heart palpitates and eyes open wide. I've always been envious of them, both head cheerleaders who welcome attention with their long blonde hair, blue eyes,

tiny waists, budding chests, and keen sense of fashion. They also happen to be smart and incredibly kind.

 I walk towards them with a large smile, trying to hide my nerves.

"Hi, how are you?" I say, giving each of them a brief hug with open eyes, which fixate on the surrounding deterioration. My home is a wreck, but there's nothing I can do. My cover is blown. "I didn't expect you to come to my party, but," I lie, "I'm glad you did."

"We wouldn't miss it," Laura says.

Both girls then smile, their gesture followed by a long and palpable pause.

"I didn't know you lived in the trailer park," Amber says, breaking the awkward silence. "I would have never imagined that."

"Oh really?" I ask, with an uncomfortable laugh.

Amber shrugs her shoulders. "Yea, you don't seem like the type who would live here. You've got so much going for yourself."

"I pictured you in a normal neighborhood," Laura adds, rendering me speechless.

*   *   *

I was not able to adequately respond to Laura or Amber in that moment, but I wish I would have. I wish I could have told them that among the people in my neighborhood with whom I grew up, many of us had a lot going for ourselves despite the adversity we faced. We were successful in school and shared dreams about making the world a better place. The "type" of people who Amber, Laura, and many of my peers had envisioned living in trailer parks, thanks to the media, were not the type of people who lived around me. Although there were some who did fit the "white trash" stereotype more than others (e.g., Nate and Scott), most did not, which leads me to wonder why popular culture often only features the trash. Where are stories like mine, stories about white working-class people who live in mobile home communities whose experiences

challenge the one-dimensional trashy caricatures that flood popular culture?

My story, however, is not the only one missing—a point that became increasingly clear when completing the fieldwork for my dissertation (Rennels). Part of this work involved interviewing families who live in mobile home communities and who identify as white and working-class. While listening to their stories, I was viscerally reminded that mediated representations of white working-class people are far too essentializing. For example, though many films and television shows portray white working-class people comfortably living in rundown mobile homes, my family and the families I interviewed all complained about being stuck in their living situations due to increasing lot rent.

As a child, I can remember the beginning of each month when Mom would begrudgingly write a check for at least $400 to Rockford Riverview Estates—an amount that only covered the small lot for our trailer. The mortgage payment was separate. Because money was always so tight, lot rent increases were the worst. But our experience is not exceptional. More than ten million people live in mobile home parks throughout the United States (Manufactured Housing in the United States) and most of them are at the mercy of the parks' owners who are free to raise lot rents as they please, often beyond residents' means (Salamon and MacTavish 51). Although it would seem logical for residents to pursue better housing options, they often cannot build the capital to do so (Hart, Rhodes, and Morgan). Additionally, residents are more prone to deal with increased rent than pay the large fee required to move their home to another place, which can range from $5,000 to $10,000 (Sullivan 478). If this immobility is so prevalent, why is it not accounted for? I know my family would have moved if we could, but we were stuck. The same could be said for my participants who not only battled access to affordable housing, but also access to affordable healthcare, education, and childcare. This inaccessibility warrants more attention in popular culture.

* * *

Taking Out the Trash

As I reflect on my stories and the stories of my participants and other white working-class people I know, I am convinced we are not the "trash" the media has portrayed us to be. Many of us are stuck in a liminal space, seeking mobility but finding immobility due to increased cultural ridicule as well as a lack of adequate and affordable resources. Collectively, our stories resemble "counterstories" (Delgado 2414) because they "talk back" (hooks 1) to dominant cultural narratives about the white working-class, which saturate popular culture and paint our struggles as if they stem from individual problems. We have failed the system, the system has failed us; this is what our stories reveal, which is why they are important to tell. As Delgado argues, stories are an essential tool for the survival and liberation of oppressed groups (2437).

   The stories I have written thus far, however, do not stop here as autoethnography is intended to provoke other stories (Ellis 366). There is a depth in using autoethnographic approaches to engage and analyze popular culture that I hope to have revealed. It is one thing to say that white working-class people (or any people, for that matter) are marginalized but to use vivid stories derived from lived experiences to show how such marginalization can look is quite another. What emerges is a more comprehensive mode of inquiry, one that evocatively challenges the essentialism and ridicule that permeates the media sites in which white working-class people are featured as well as highlights the complexity and immobility that pervades our everyday lives. By using autoethnography, scholars can dig deeper into and remove the "trash" of "white trash" and other pop culture phenomena.

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Belonging in Movement: Appalachian Racial Formation, White Flight, and Lived Experience

SANDRA CARPENTER

> "I feel like there is a nation of us—displaced southerners and children of the working class. We listen to Steve Earle, Mary J. Blige, and k.d. lang. We devour paperback novels and tell evil mean stories, value stubbornness above patience and a sense of humor more than a college education. We claim our heritage with a full appreciation of how often it has been distained.
>
> And let me promise you, you do not want to make us angry,"
> (Dorothy Allison, 27).

My story is full of contradictions, the past often paying a visit to my present when I come across folks who sound like home: with a certain down-to-earthedness that reminds me of my mother who never met a stranger or of my Nana whose mantra was "Well where yuh been?" But my mother stole cars and never paid the bills and my Nana was actually of no blood relation to me. Until recently, I thought of my family as being part of what Dorothy Allison refers to as the good poor: "The good poor were hardworking, ragged but clean, and intrinsically honorable" (2). But memories have a funny way of wafting back into consciousness. Like watching a childhood movie after growing up, I finally began to pick up on the punch lines of our poverty. I never questioned my mother when she painted our old Buick with house paint and moved us to Kentucky. I naively assumed that we couldn't afford car paint rather than thinking my

mom was disguising the car and skipping the state to avoid repossession. Our final home count before my mother, my sister, and I split paths was 25 different houses/trailers/apartments and 17 different schools clustered in and around the Ohio valley. Moving from place to place, the three of us made home where we could find it and forged integrity into a life marked with shame.

I always knew we were poor, but it wasn't until we moved to Kentucky that I was able to see myself as a racialized subject. When in Ohio, my sister and I attended some city schools (coded in southern Ohio as poor and black) and mom would sometimes take us to predominantly Black churches because she felt more at home there. I don't know enough about my mom to explain why she, as a white woman, felt such a deep connection to most things marked black. What I do know, though, is that trying to qualify the swing in her hips when she sang to the sink full of dishes or her bittersweet cry of "Oooh child things are going to get easier," feels almost sacrilegious. Like the Bible on our coffee table that no one ever read, you don't question it; it was just there. These small things—the Bible, mom's shoulder towel, her worn out Tina Turner album—were all things that kept us safe in our homes. When you move around so frequently, comfort becomes a luxury you can't afford and safety resides in maintaining a familiar connection to the few things you take along.

Growing up in a constant state of motion situated me in a place between trying to belong where I was and yearning for the familiarity of where I had been. This ambivalence would travel with me as I entered the university to study social justice and literature. Trying to both earn my spot in academia while also navigating home's rough terrain led me to seek out stories of women who'd somehow reconciled their Appalachian identities with their investments in larger social justice and scholarly projects. My story, paired with an analysis of bell hooks and Dorothy Allison's personal narratives, takes a systems approach—"a structural view of racism that enables us to see the connections between seemingly

independent opportunity structures" (Kirwan Institute)—to the phenomena of white flight in the United States, illustrating that Appalachians navigate the neoliberal white supremacist capitalist (hetero) patriarchy in such situated ways that we are simultaneously complicit to it as well as victims of it. In this sense, Appalachian narratives of belonging become our resistance, our epistemology, our outsider narratives within systems that both benefit and erase us.

Research Practices

I employ a combination of practices to provide both a situated context for white flight as well as an intersectional feminist textual analysis of narratives of home. In order to avoid homogenizing Appalachian folks, I analyze narratives of authors who identify as feminist, are racially and geographically diverse, and vary in their stories' emphases on class and race-based experience. I look at accounts such as bell hooks's narrative of "Kentucky is My Fate" and Dorothy Allison's *Trash* to provide racialized and classed narratives of Appalachian belonging different than my own. I then draw from my own epiphanic moments of racial visibility living in both rural, predominantly white, Appalachian settings and urban, more racially diverse, cities in the Ohio Valley.

I trace my experiences using feminist autoethnography to disrupt the white flight narrative and move toward diversity and antiracism. Feminist autoethnography is an especially appropriate method for this project because it explicitly connects the personal to the political by way of displaying multiple layers of consciousnesses (Ellis 37). Doing so illustrates a connection between the more traditionally academic analyses and the embodied lived experiences of queerness, fatness, poverty, and racialized Appalachian identity—identities about which feminist scholars often theorize and that this project will materialize. Additionally, autoethnographers often incite emotion to inspire action and "use narrative

as a source of empowerment and a form of resistance to canonical discourses" (Ellis 121). I often find myself critical of the distance between many researchers and their subjects, especially when they make claims to objectivity and rationality; thus, I aim to disrupt the notion that the personal cannot be academic by materializing my experience in such a way that illustrates that my epistemology as a scholar consists of both academic and lived experience.

I elect to layer these practices in order to provide both an Appalachian narrative of home that disrupts the homogenized narratives of white poverty and political conservatism as well as to critique academic and popular narratives of urban renewal that inherently promote post-racial and neoliberal ideologies. Due to the scope of this current project, I am focusing solely on textual analysis and personal narrative; however, there is more to be said about feminist and anti-racist activism in Appalachia. Analyzing personal narrative, then, requires contextualization and an understanding of the situated experiences of the author: "the researcher describes the context by which she or he moves from personal narrative to how both person and narrative were located and back" (Peterson and Langellier 136). Thus, I analyze hooks' and Allison's disclosed positionalities as well as the processes of producing their narratives and the impetus to write itself.

Racial Formation and White Flight

Racial formation is defined as a process describing how racial identities are created, lived, transformed, and destroyed (Omi and Winant 109). Popular discourse tends to see racial formation as only having to do with people of color; however, racial formation informs all identities—even if that formation would lead to signify a racial identity that is typically invisible, or so close to the neoliberal capitalist white supremacist (hetero)patriarchy that it does not define itself in its difference. Looking

explicitly at the notion that whiteness is often seen as an invisible racial category, Ruth Frankenberg interviews white feminist women as well as more politically conservative white women to trace their perceptions of whiteness and their cultural identities. Frankenburg finds that white women overwhelmingly see their culture as one that is invisible, unmarked, and even boring at times (94). This particular discussion of whiteness is one my Appalachian narrative disrupts, as whiteness becomes quite visible and tangible when it intersects with other forms of oppression within the neoliberal capitalist white supremacist (hetero) patriarchy. Further, racialization occurs when racial meaning is assigned to a particular social practice or group (Omi and Winant 109). hooks's, Allison's, and my narratives all disrupt the racialized implications for our geographical and racial situations, thus disrupting a process of racialization that would homogenize Appalachian folks into simplified groups.

Racial formation, however, is not simply a product of social construction. Dorothy Roberts provides a keen insight into the social construction of a biological race—leading to racialized lived realities. This biologizing of race serves to create propaganda that upholds white supremacist racial projects such as gentrification and white flight, displacing many raced and classed populations from their homes (Roberts 288). Some scholars use "suburbanization" as a euphemism for white flight. Using coded language to discuss these racial projects normalizes them and, consequently, renders their racialized nature invisible, motivating a mass denial of racialized oppression. Robert Beauregard perpetuates this post-racial notion that social movement and inequities have more to do with resources and less to do with race:

> The nation celebrated its suburban lifestyle, consumer products, and high wages. It also had to contend with pictures of boarded-up buildings, rioting African Americans, looted stores, burnt-out

automobiles discarded on inner-city highways, and idle and
abandoned factories. (35)

Using coded language, Beauregard creates a binary between white,
suburban "national" citizens and black criminals by suggesting that the
nation celebrated its collective suburban lifestyle and "contended" with
(read: criticized, pathologized, and problematized) the black others who
remained in the cities. This popular notion of white flight is one that
creates a simplified narrative of racialized movement and, I argue, also
hints at a white flight discourse within narratives that promote post-racial
and essential points of views. Whereas, Allison's, hooks's, and my
narratives of home, movement, and racial formation all metaphorically
disrupt this essentialist, theoretical white flight and create new paths that
illustrate the need for movement among counter-hegemonic Appalachian
cultures. We create racial meaning-making within the movements
themselves.

Epistemology and Movement

This project works explicitly with black feminist standpoint
epistemology and alludes to theories of third space feminisms, or
feminisms that work from knowledge situated in borderlands,
contradictory and paradoxical spaces wherein "a dialectic of doubling"
undercuts the notions of essentialized racial and gender identities (Perez
57). Black feminist epistemology, then, utilizes standpoint theory to
legitimate subjugated knowledge in a way that contextualizes the
knowledge in the lived experience of women of color: "I approach Black
feminist thought as situated in a context of domination and not a system of
ideas divorced from political and economic reality" (Hill Collins 252). I
also work from Sandra Harding's explanation of existing in borderlands as
women, racial/ethnic minorities, the victims of imperialism and

colonialism, and the poor occupy spaces within the margins, the periphery; they are "outsiders within" or on the "borderlands," in two influential standpoint phases. More specifically, "A standpoint is not the same as a viewpoint or perspective, for it requires both science and political struggle . . . to see beneath the surfaces of social life to the 'realities' that structure it" (Harding 334). Our Appalachian narratives of belonging and of home forge a connection between the science and political struggles of oppression and the realities of the social lives that structure and are shaped by oppression.

Further, emotional epistemology informs this project in terms of the discussions of survival throughout the narratives. In response to a masculinist, imperialist legitimating of knowledge, Allison Jaggar argues that few challenges have been raised thus far to the purported gap between emotion and knowledge . . . I wish to begin bridging this gap through the suggestion that emotions may be helpful and even necessary . . .to the construction of knowledge. (Jaggar 379)

In an attempt to work from a decolonizing theoretical framework, emotions play a large part in contributing to a feminist construction of knowledge. Additionally, Maria Lugones's notions of "'world' travelling" will guide the narratives in and through places of being as opposed to places of belonging, or being "at ease" in a world, characterized by being a fluent speaker of the shared language, normatively happy in the environment, human bonding, as well as a shared experience with other folks within that "world" (12).

Racialization and Moving to Kentucky

Much of my early childhood was spent bouncing from one city school to the next in and around central Ohio. The daughter of a woman who felt more at home with black folks than she did her own family, I grew up comfortable being white in mostly people of color spaces. I grew up

knowing how to talk about racism and oppression and felt a deep commitment to anti-racism from a young age. What I didn't grow up knowing how to talk about was my own race and how I was different from my black peers. Despite the contemporary push to move "beyond race" (Omi and Winant 218). I think colorblindness, in my case, mostly applied to how I saw myself. I knew my peers were black, but I've not always been conscious of my own whiteness, that is, until my family moved to eastern Kentucky.

At thirteen, I had mentally prepared myself for what I knew of Kentucky, based mostly on what I'd seen on TV. I knew about southern hospitality and that people talked differently, but I'd also heard that Kentucky was a dangerous place, especially for women. My mom, my sister, and I moved to a small town in eastern Kentucky where we didn't know anyone—I later learned that this refuge-style move was my mother's intention. My first day of school was bizarre: I woke up at 4:45am to catch the 45 minute bus ride to school then was told to wait in the gym with the rest of the bussed kids until homeroom. As kids started to trickle in with each bus drop off, I began to notice that many of them looked the same, and a lot like me—poor, fat, and white. Partly because of how backward I had heard Kentucky was but mostly because I had yet to see any black kids, I walked up to my homeroom teacher's desk and asked if the schools in Kentucky were still segregated. Shocked at my question, she explained that they weren't and that there weren't a whole lot of black folks who lived in eastern Kentucky.

The lack of faces of color in eastern Kentucky made room for many to be ignorantly and complacently—if not intentionally—racist. What was even more bizarre than the long commute was the fact that, for the first time, I consciously felt like an outsider, despite the fact that most of these kids and I seemingly shared racial and class identities. I was teased for acting "ghetto," how fast I talked, and the music I listened to. Soon after we moved to Kentucky, some of our close friends came to visit from Ohio

and I understood why they were too scared to leave our house, and subsequently didn't visit again. Their small family complemented ours well, consisting of a single mother, a daughter my age, and a son my sister's age. I was nervous during their visit partly because of the poor condition of the trailer we lived in but also because of the confederate flags waving from our neighbors' porches. Most of the people I talked to about the flags referred to them as rebel flags and expressed their connection to heritage rather than white supremacy. I hadn't paid too much attention to these flags until I got word of their visit, then I saw them everywhere. The idea that they represented some subversive Appalachian counter—or "rebel"—culture became impossible to reconcile with the perceived threat it posed to our friends. If my peers were willing to criticize and police me for "acting black," I couldn't imagine how folks would treat our friends for actually *being* black. Much like the flags, it was then that my whiteness became visible. I was growing to realize that I wasn't like my black peers—that the teasing I got at school for the way I acted was in no way comparable to the fear our friends felt in our home during that visit.

Since that move, any kind of naïve hope for colorblindness I held onto when I was young has been erased. Whiteness began to mean an unfair freedom I possessed, but my black friends didn't. Literally speaking, I was able to leave my house that weekend to grab some food or go to the grocery, while my black friends didn't set foot outside until it was time to leave. Throughout the years that I lived in eastern Kentucky, I remained resistant to any kind of affiliation or identification with the area, rejecting even some of the positive aspects. I consciously policed the way I spoke, being sure to say I was from Oh-hI-oh instead of from Oh-hai as to avoid acquiring a twang like my sister did. Disciplining myself to be critical of Appalachia, then, served a dual purpose of my goal in maintaining some stable identity that I'd assembled along the way as well as becoming hyperaware of my identity situation within a historically white region. On

one hand, I did feel a sense of belonging because it was a space where I could be poor and not necessarily cast out; but on the other hand, I felt a strong urge to flee and reject the iteration of whiteness that feared my unfamiliar alliance with antiracism and people of color.

Deciding to Write – Deciding to Live

 As I, hundreds of miles away from home, read hooks's "Kentucky is my Fate," I am reminded of the kind of ambivalence Appalachians feel towards places of belonging. Belonging is a matter, not of convenience or preference for class-oppressed and racialized Appalachians, but of safety. We are scattered, displaced, moving through our stories like we move from city to city for adjunct gigs, social activism, and education. For many poor Appalachians, going to college is a means of survival. If you demonstrate academic potential and are poor enough, scholarships and federal grants combined will pay you to go. What young Appalachians don't often account for, though, is the trauma involved in leaving their families for an institution bent on making them "global citizens." For instance, Allison poignantly discusses her experiences and thoughts of suicide during her first few years away at college:

> There I met people I always read about: . . . children to whom I could not help but compare myself. I matched their innocence, their confidence, their capacity to trust, to love, to be generous against the bitterness, the rage, the pure and terrible hatred that consumed me. (1)

Going to the university, Allison was faced with the impetus to travel to that "world," or to be distinctly different in that world than she was in the world of poor folk in South Carolina.

Both Allison and hooks describe writing through their experiences in their native places as means of resisting suicide while situated in places of being—that is, places where one isn't at "ease" with one's surroundings (Lugones 12). hooks alludes to the in-between space of being both critical and nostalgic of home once she's left:

> The intense suicidal melancholia that had ravished my spirit in girlhood, in part a response to leaving the hills, leaving a world of freedom, had not been left behind. It followed me to all the places I journeyed. (16)

hooks continues to explain that writing through her experiences helped her reconcile the emptiness she felt leaving home, while also allowing space to continue to journey through different "worlds": "Resurrecting the memories of home, bringing the bits and pieces together was a movement back that enabled me to move forward" (18). Not only does writing down one's personal narrative help heal the wounds inflicted when leaving home, but it also aims to disrupt the violent erasure of racialized and classed Appalachian narratives.

Allison echoes hooks' need to write through one's history not only as means of catharsis and survival, but also as a way of inserting one's narrative into the conversation:

> Every evening I sat down with a yellow legal-size pad, writing out the story of my life . . . Writing it all out was purging . . . More subtly, it gave me a way to love the people I wrote about—even the ones I fought with or hated. In that city where I knew no one, I had no money and nothing to fill the evenings except washing out my clothes, reading cheap paperbacks, and trying to understand how I had come to be in that place. (3)

Moving from home, then, is not necessarily a way *out* of Appalachia and all of its connotations; rather, it becomes a way *in* to a world where you either leave your Appalachian identity and ways of being behind, rendering you unable to go home, or you retain what fragments of home you can, but risk remaining in a constant state of exile. Once in exile, Appalachians might imagine their material homelands as both "prison and protecting cocoon," assembling the nurturing aspects of home alongside its violent and stifling characteristics (Stewart 42). Movement through the narrative and through the "worlds," then, becomes a perpetual contradiction.

Racialized Appalachians

Both hooks and Allison reflect on what made them leave their native places, both pointing to racialized identities that didn't blend with their surroundings. hooks discusses how Kentuckians navigate white supremacy:

> Even though the forces of imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy did ultimately subordinate the land to its predatory interests it did not create a closed system, individual Kentuckians white and black, still managed to create sub-culture, usually in hollows, hills, and mountains, governed by beliefs and values contrary to those of mainstream culture. (20)

hooks points to a culture that both perpetuates white supremacy and a culture of anarchist white hillbillies who threaten the white supremacist capitalist (hetero)patriarchy. Living in the mountains teaches Appalachians to forge their own communities, become simultaneously interdependent and self-reliant, as well as to resist oppressive power structures (hooks). bell hooks and Dorothy Allison, then, become major

names in a group of anti-racist Appalachian radicals as they express counterhegemonic identities that disrupt oppressive power structures, not because of theories learned in state schools, but because of lived experiences of racism and class oppressions. These lived experiences interact with one another in a way that establishes a situated Appalachian anti-racist epistemology: "the way in which that culture of anarchy had distinct anti-racist dimensions accounts for the unique culture of Appalachian black folks that is rarely acknowledged" (11). hooks suggests that this distinctly anti-racist Appalachian counter culture is one that is often overlooked, if not intentionally erased.

Allison experienced a similar, but not identical, yearning to leave one's home because of its complicity in oppressive systems:

> It is the first thing I think of when trouble comes—the geographical solution. Change your name, leave town, disappear, make yourself over. What hides behind that impulse is the conviction that the life you have lived, the person you are, is valueless, better off abandoned, that running away is easier than trying to change things, that change itself is not possible. (19)

Allison's narrative continues to disrupt a romantic notion of "good poor," reflecting that no one in her family ever joined a union and that their racism coupled with grit and endurance contributed to her ambivalence about her upbringing: "I would grind my teeth at what I knew was my family's unquestioning racism while continuing to respect their pragmatic endurance" (25). Travelling from one world to another, Allison expresses an epiphanic moment in racial solidarity when she conducted two speaking engagements regarding her coming out as lesbian: one at a predominantly white Episcopalian Sunday school class and another at a predominantly black and Latino juvenile detention center. She expresses frustration and contempt at the politeness expressed by the Episcopalians, their stammering questions illustrating that they are in some way complicit

in perpetuating the shame surrounding her sexual and classed identity. Her experience with black and Latino youth, on the other hand, was more comfortable, more at home, as they teased her and shamelessly asked blunt questions about her sexuality. Allison saw herself in the black and Latino youth heckling her, resisting power structures, refusing to raise one's hand and instead belting out what begs to be spoken.

Both hooks and Allison take up racial formation in a way that explicates the particular situatedness of Appalachian anti-racism. hooks suggests that there is a thriving counterculture of Appalachian anarchists and anti-racists, but that they are also conflicting with the hegemonic culture of white supremacy that is also tied in with southern US identity. Allison illustrates in her narrative a sense of contradictory allegiances to both one's racist family and also to one's commitment to political activism. Racial formation, in these cases, is found in the movement from one place to another, as these Appalachian radicals discover and write through their journeys—Allison reclaiming the term "trash," traditionally used to connote a particular kind of whiteness marked as poor and ignorant, and hooks writing blackness and Kentucky into her work, even as she lives and works in more cosmopolitan areas such as New York City.

Journeying Home

Returning home for hooks and Allison, then, becomes a nuanced journey. hooks recalls her decades of living away from home as necessary both for her own survival and development as a black Appalachian social activist and for her to even become able to recognize home for the place of belonging it signifies to her. In this particular movement, hooks illustrates a larger back-and-forth migration of young Appalachians from their homes to places of study or work. Young people's "drifting back and forth from the city to the hills" brings with it "revivalistic" progress in exchange

for the sacrifices made in exile (Stewart 48). hooks describes this progress with a certain amount of hesitancy and fear:

> Each year of my life as I went home to visit, it was a rite of passage to reassure myself that I still belonged, that I had not become so changed that I could not come home again. My visits home almost always left me torn: I wanted to stay but I needed to leave, to be endlessly running away from home. (17)

Realizing that racism informed her experience at home, she expresses that she doesn't simply desire to leave home, but that she needs to; however, hooks does ultimately realize that her place of belonging is in Kentucky. Seeing how the capitalist white supremacist (hetero)patriarchy dehumanizes black folk and Appalachian folk outside of Kentucky, hooks returns home for the sense of belonging that resonates with a specific geographical area.

<center>*   *   *</center>

Examining my Appalachian homes from my current location in Tampa, Florida has challenged me to look past my experiences of exclusion within Appalachia and long for the places that once nurtured and embraced me. Examining my home after a literal move away from it situates me at a "point in between" where my impression of home is not only influenced by my experiences there, but my feelings about Appalachia once in exile (Straight 8). Similar to hooks's experience in exile, I have become "more consciously Kentuckian than I was when I lived at home" (13). It wasn't until I moved to Tampa that I realized I'd found a place of belonging in Louisville, Kentucky. I'd moved there initially for graduate school, but dropped out after a year because I couldn't continue without funding. When I moved to Louisville, my only criterion in finding a place was affordability. I'd told myself that I could live anywhere so I searched for a place with cheap rent close to campus. I

ended up renting an unfinished basement apartment in the Old Louisville neighborhood, not knowing much about how different neighborhoods were racialized there.

I initially planned on staying at this apartment for only one lease cycle, but when I began to see folks I knew from school or work moving from Old Lou, claiming that it was too "ghetto," I was reminded of the times folks used the term around me as a coded word for blackness, using it to describe something as simple as my favorite potato chips. I remembered riding the "ghetto" bus from a trailer park in Chillicothe, Ohio to a county school where most students did not receive the same free lunch ticket I did. This "flight" that I'd read about was, for the first time, happening right in front of me. Or at least at a time and place where I could recognize the white flight away from racialized Old Louisville for what it was.

During my time in Louisville, I continued to read about poor folks and black feminists, and tried desperately to reconcile what home meant to me. Louisville being a border city between Northern-liberal and southern-hospitable connotations, folks were constantly asking me where I was from, and I never knew the answer. I felt the need to choose between the counter-hegemonic whiteness I picked up as a poor kid in city schools in Ohio and the creek-dwelling, frog-hatching Appalachian identity I picked up as a poor kid in rural Eastern Kentucky. My need to create a sense of home and belonging led me to write through my experiences. After I'd finished my one year of graduate school, and in between part-time jobs and adjunct gigs, I took to the road with my sister to photograph all of our old homes that we could find. Even though my sister still lives in Eastern Kentucky, we were both desperate for evidence of our existences, moves, flights, and, ultimately, identities.

Frankfort, OH. Fourth and fifth grade.

We were only able photograph about a dozen of the 25 houses we lived in as some of the trailers were removed from the lots or simply because we couldn't find our way back to others. Photographing our homes did not immediately provide us with the answers we'd been looking for, but the process of looking for them did. We spent hours at a time navigating interstates, highways, county roads, and hollers talking about what the homes looked like and why we moved there.

As I began to recollect the traumas that caused us to move as well as the parts of myself I had to hide, I discovered that I was beginning to find a place of belonging in my counter-hegemonic, queer, anti-racist, grassroots activist community in Louisville. Although I returned to these places hoping to retrieve something I felt I was missing, I ultimately found that it wasn't any singular place that developed my racialized identity. These physical homes failed to provide us with the figurative and imagined sense of home that Appalachian Others long for in the movements from place to place. Rather, it was the movements themselves that shape how I can recognize a sense of belonging (Straight 92). Travelling through different "worlds," it becomes clear which ones are

more at ease with the poor, anti-racist, queer, and sometimes-trashy iteration of whiteness I perform.
Wittensville, KY. Fifth and sixth grade.

Final Thoughts

Throughout the three narratives, a theme of epistemic privilege emerges. Appalachian radicals not only have situated knowledges within racialized and classed Appalachian identities, but also illustrate a specialized way of knowing that is often overlooked, whitewashed, or erased altogether. Resisting normative feminist narratives that would lead me to dissect my positionalities and suggest that I work from a more essential standpoint of oppressed woman or sexual minority, I choose to identify with the movement – the paths in between temporal and geographical locations that highlight and make visible the interlocking patterns of oppression of the neoliberal capitalist white supremacist (hetero)patriarchy. Identifying with the movement illustrates a notion of being on "the verge of home" or an idea that, for many Appalachian

Chillicothe, OH. Sixth and seventh grade

women, home is a place in between the movement and the staying still, the idealized and the inaccessible, the urban and the homely (Straight 2).

Chillicothe, OH. Sixth and seventh grade.

Throughout my discussion and narrative, I participate in a counterhegemonic white flight that guides me through whiteness and the shame associated with poverty and away from white supremacist notions of white performativity. Identifying with the movement helps me resist the compulsion to "overcome" my poverty or to "get out" of the Appalachian region I've come from. Allison's truths speak to mine in a way that

connects us both to a larger reclamatory space: "the inescapable impact of being born in a condition of poverty that this society finds shameful, contemptible, and somehow oddly deserved, has had dominion over me to such an extent that I have spent my life trying to overcome or deny it" (viii). Dorothy Allison and bell hooks both illustrate that this journey is necessary for the literary, social, and epistemic survival of Appalachian radicals, for the dominant culture frequently shames us into the pressures of assimilation.

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The Evil Woodcutter and the Amazon Jungle: What Comics Have Taught Me About the Environment

MOANA LURI DE ALMEIDA

Autoethnography is a qualitative method that combines autobiography and ethnography to investigate how certain personal experiences relate to specific social and cultural contexts in a given time (Ellis, Adams and Bochner, paragraph 1). The autoethnographer usually presents these experiences either through performative writing, stage performance, or a combination of the two (Spry). The difference between autobiography and autoethnography is that, besides presenting aesthetical worth, autoethnography must use theoretical and methodological tools consulted from research literature (Ellis et al. paragraph 8; Madison 109) and illustrate the researcher's use and understanding of criticality, intersectionality, context, and social justice (Willink, Gutierrez-Perez, Shukri, and Stein 4-5).

Criticality means to uncover history, ideology, identity politics, interests, purposes, and other power-laden factors to interpret the world. Intersectionality (Crenshaw) seeks to evidence the connections between marginalized and privileged positions, such as class, race, gender, sexuality, religion, nationality, and (dis)ability. Context links personal to

cultural and social backgrounds in order to describe complex imperfections and possibilities for change. Social justice means giving the marginalized a voice, as well as encouraging oneself and co-performers (people studied, readers, audience) to reflect, criticize injustice, imagine alternatives, and politically act (Ellis et al. paragraph 25; Pollock 78).

Autoethnography aims to highlight silenced or marginalized voices, directly link the micro- to meso- and macro- structures, critically illuminate the multilayered interplay of cultural performance and identity in a given context, and capture everyday embodied experiences, thus overcoming the archetype of the researcher as an objective outsider (Willink et al. 15).

Herrmann argues that Autoethnography and Popular Culture Studies can be combined and explored together because popular culture impacts our identities: "Popular culture helps us define who we are, what we believe, and influences whom we befriend" (Herrmann 7). Likewise, many scholars are less inclined to use qualitative methods in social and personal relationships such as Family Studies and Interpersonal Communication (Manning and Kunkel). The present investigation attempts to combine autoethnography, popular culture, social and personal relationships, and a qualitative approach to understand how comics strongly influence the development of an Amazonian child in her daily relationships with others and herself.

Two decades ago, Browne called Popular Culture Studies scholars to internationalize the discipline, but few academics have followed his advice. In a globalized world, it is urgent for US American scholarship to dissociate culture from the self-contained idea of the nation-state. Popular Culture Studies in the country must not only recognize its diversity within, but also its relationship with other countries, and the existence of relevant scholarship and topics outside national borders. The present article aims to contribute to the internationalization of Popular Culture Studies and Communication Studies in the US.

This article is divided into six sections: 1. An overview of *Maurício de Sousa Produções*, the studio that produces the analyzed comics; 2. A retrospective autoethnography that describes the thoughts and feelings I had at the moments in which I read comics of the character Chico Bento, as well as during the daily situations in which my child-mind connected the stories to real life events; 3. A retrospective autoethnography of me reading comics of the character Papa-Capim as a child; 4. A contemporary autoethnography of how I now read and interpret the comics; 5. An autoethnographic and analytic letter to the cartoonist Maurício de Sousa; and 6. An epilogue to review my autoethnography through a postcolonialist lens. The retrospective autoethnographies are written in italics to differentiate them from the contemporary one. The objective of this paper is to reflect on the implications of the discourses in the comics to an Amazonian child's formation of identity.

1. Maurício de Sousa and the Environment

Maurício de Sousa, a cartoonist from São Paulo, founded Maurício de Sousa Produções in the 1950s with much success. The multi-media studio made partnership with the largest publishing companies in the country: Abril in the 1960s, and Globo in the 1980s. In 2007, the partnership was transferred to Panini, an Italian publishing company that distributes comics and animations to several European countries. According to the official websites, turmadamonica.uol.com.br (in Portuguese) and monicaandfriends.com (in English), Maurício de Sousa Produções sells more than 3,000 products worldwide, as well as being the largest studio and covering 86% of the comic book market in Brazil. It has sold 1 billion comic magazines to date and prints more than 2.5 million issues per month.

Numerous scholars have written about how Maurício de Sousa's comics can be used as a pedagogical tool in Environmental Education

(Lisbôa, Junqueira, and del Pino; Smarra, Lotufo, and Lopes), Natural Sciences (Reis), History (Palhares), and other disciplines. The characters' lessons about plants and animals, folk culture, and farming challenge urban values and introduce an alternative world where people live a simple and fulfilling life in harmony with nature. Moreover, the peasants' hillbilly language teaches children to respect different dialects while learning formal Portuguese. Notwithstanding, the celebratory tone of most academic articles about the use of *Turma da Mônica* in education is worrisome because it assumes that the media is transparent, well-intentioned, and innocent (de Castro).

Communication and Linguistics scholars have written about the stereotypes in these comics, in which an urban-rural binary establishes the reader as a child who lives in the big city, and presents farmworkers as inherent protectors of nature, stuck in the past, and who are naïve and dumb. Even though some have written about the negative impact of these stereotypes in students from the countryside (Villela) and natives (Neves; Rodrigues), nobody seems to have published about such impact on readers from the Amazon and its influence on the formation of our identities.

Despite comprising over 60% of the Brazilian territory, the Amazon Region[1] is hardly represented in the national media. Nearly the totality of news, soap operas, movies, advertising, and magazines are produced in the wealthy Southeast (Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo) and then distributed to the other regions. Maurício de Sousa's comics are no different, and I argue that the under- and misrepresentation of Amazonian characters in the stories are potentially damaging, as Southeasterners are exposed to a harmful stereotypical image of the Other, while Amazonian children could develop low self-esteem and confusion over their identities.

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[1] The Pan-Amazon region comprises eight countries of Latin America. In Brazil, the Amazon comprises nine States: the whole North region, part of the Northeast, and part of the Center-West.

2. Chico Bento, the Countryside Boy

All kids love "Turma da Mônica" ("Monica and Friends")! This year, my mom, uncle, and aunt purchased a subscription for my cousin and me. Every two weeks, we can't wait to get from the mail the little magazines with our dear characters: Magali, Cebolinha, Cascão, and others. My favorite magazine is "Turma do Chico Bento." Chico Bento is a seven-year-old boy who lives in a farm in the countryside of São Paulo. He's dumb, lazy, and a brute, but is also kind, generous, and hard-working when helping his father in the field. Most importantly, he protects the environment against evil woodcutters, scientists, tourists, and other outsiders from the big city. I know my mom feels proud of me when I protect nature, because she keeps a newspaper picture of me holding a sign in a street protest against deforestation. I know my teacher feels proud of me when I volunteer to take care of the classroom's plant. So I want to be like Chico Bento and make people understand that everybody has to defend nature.

The woodcutter is a man with scruffy beard, a beanie hat, a red-checkered shirt, blue jeans, and boots. He looks angrily at a tree and is about to cut it with an axe, but Chico Bento arrives just in time! The young hero reasons with the man and shows how sad a land with fallen trees looks like. A tear falls from the woodcutter's eye, so he gives up and leaves, ashamed of himself. The tree is saved.

Fig. 1: Chico Bento in Privileges of the City
Zeca [Chico's cousin who lives in the city]: Damn, Chico! I don't know how you can survive here, in this end of the world!
Chico: Why do you say it's the end of the world? [My translation]
Source: turmadamonica.uol.com.br (Reprinted with permission)

Mom is a Biology professor. Every once in a while, she needs to collect biological material, so we take a ferryboat and a "popopô"(a small boat that makes the sound "po-po-po") or canoe to Vila do Carmo. There, we stay at Mr. Alderico's palafitte by River Tocantins. I love the long trips by ferryboat, where everybody swings on their hammocks, listening to old people's jokes and stories. I also love Mr. Alderico's house, where I play with his children, grandchildren, and other kids from the community. We run on "açaí" seeds among pigs and chickens, play with the little shrimp the current brings, and jump in the river to swim. In a calm portion of the river, we can see the "boto-cor-de-rosa" (pink dolphin). My friends keep me company and support me all the time, because my mom is "the professor."

There is no electricity or piped water. Women wash clothes in the "igarapé" (narrow riverbank between two islands or between an island and the mainland), we poop in a hole, and use oil lamps at night. The local kids refresh themselves in the river dozens of times a day, but they never use soap or shampoo. My mom always brings Snoopy shampoo, and my friends love it because it smells good and their hair gets smooth. At night, she reads stories to us, and even five-year-olds come by themselves on the canoes to listen. Before we leave, my mom donates the books to the local teacher.

At dinnertime, Mr. Alderico is talking and I comment, "O senhor fala errado que nem o Chico Bento!" (You talk wrong like Chico Bento). My mom pinches me under the table. Uh-oh, I'm in trouble! But what have I done wrong? I have no idea. After dinner, my mom takes me aside and tells me that I should not have made fun of Mr. Alderico's accent. Oh, I didn't know there was anything wrong about talking wrong like Chico Bento!

In the Portuguese class, the teacher often includes comic strips in the exercises: "Mafalda," "Calvin and Hobbes," "Garfield"… Today, she asks us to "translate" Chico Bento's speeches into formal Portuguese. After we do it, she says, "You have to use formal language at school, and you will have to use it at work when you grow up. But this norm doesn't mean colloquial language, accents, and dialects are inferior. You must respect all forms of language." Hmm, I see… Out of here, we can talk any way we want, but in here we need to talk properly. This expectation is why I'm always complimented for speaking and writing good Portuguese, while my classmates are corrected for using inappropriate Portuguese. Sometimes the teacher even asks me to read in front of the class, to make an example for the other students. They're not smart enough to switch from one language to another. I'm smart! I'm smarter than my classmates who make grammar and spelling mistakes.

3. Papa-Capim, the Native Boy

Papa-Capim is an indigenous boy who lives in the forest, in a tribe isolated from civilization. His stories are usually inside "Turma do Chico Bento" magazines. I think it's because they are so similar, always trying to protect nature.

I'm in fifth grade. Now we have a class called Amazonian Studies. We study the geography, history, and problems we see in the forest and in the cities of our region. We also talk about these things in other classes. The History teacher told us that when the colonizers arrived in Brazil, they thought it was India, so to differentiate between the two we must call Indians "indianos" and Native Brazilians "indígenas." The other day, the teacher showed us a documentary about some tribes who live in Parque Nacional do Xingu. We also see many pictures of them in our textbooks, in magazines, or on TV. Each tribe has different appearances, a different language, and different customs.

I'm confused... In Papa-Capim's stories, all indigenous people look the same, speak the same language, and have the same customs...

Papa-Capim is walking around in the jungle, when he sees a family from the city doing a picnic. He hides under a bush and is surprised to note that the man has white skin, blonde hair, blue eyes, and body hair. Even I am amazed—it's so rare to see white people around here! And who does picnic in the jungle anyway? This family is so weird... Maybe they're foreigners...

In another story, a white boy teaches Papa-Capim to drink soda, chew gum, and eat "quebra-queixo" (a sticky sweet). Papa-Capim is scared because the soda bubbles make his belly tickle, the gum bubble explodes on his face, and the "quebra-queixo" makes his teeth sticky. Papa-Capim distributes the sweets to tribe members, who suffer the same effects. Natives are so funny! They have never seen industrialized food! No wonder they get scared and look so goofy when trying to be like us.

Fig. 2: Papa-Capim in: The Boy in the Mirror
Man: I can't stand it, honey! We are lost in the Amazon Jungle and all you care about is touching up your make-up!
Woman: Jeez! You're so annoying! [My translation]
Source: turmadamonica.uol.com.br (Reprinted with permission)

In my school, most administrators, teachers, and kids look part indigenous and part black. Some kids are Japanese descendants, like my best friend

Kimie and me. There are a couple of Japanese communities in the countryside of the State: Tomé-Açú, Santa Izabel, Castanhal... But most people are brown. Some of them even know that their grandparents are indigenous, but they don't remember from which tribe. Even when people look indigenous, in the city they wear clothes, speak Portuguese, live in houses, and buy food at the market. We are all civilized in the capital.

Today, at school, I learned that the forest in the Southeast is called Mata Atlântica. Does this mean that Papa-Capim lives in Mata Atlântica? I'm so disappointed! I want to see characters from the Amazon in my comics!

Oh, I got a "Parque da Mônica" magazine in the mail! Mônica, Magali, Cebolinha, and Cascão (the main characters, who live in São Paulo) go to Parque da Mônica (Turma da Mônica's theme park, located in São Paulo) and enter the attraction called Amazon Forest. The four friends magically, with the power of imagination, see themselves in the jungle wearing khaki clothes and a helmet. They look like those white explorers in American cartoons who go to India or Africa in search for adventure. In the dense forest, Mônica, Magali, Cebolinha, and Cascão meet two indigenous kids, a boy and a girl, and many friendly animals. Now I see: Papa-Capim is from Mata Atlântica, but now there are two Amazonian characters. I hope they become a success!

The two Amazonian characters never appeared again. In Maurício de Sousa's comics, we're not there. There are no city kids like us, no "ribeirinhos" (people who live by the river), no "quilombolas" (residents of "quilombos," which are communities of black people who fled from slavery). Why aren't we there? Aren't we good enough? It's probably the woodcutters' and hunters' fault. They make a bad name for us.

Now a story says that Papa-Capim lives in the Amazon... I'm confused...

Fig. 3: "The Amazonians, happy in their untouched paradise." [My translation]
Source: turmadamonica.uol.com.br (Reprinted with permission)

A white, fat hunter is searching for a present for his mother: panther fur,
alligator skin, bird feathers, etc. But Papa-Capim shows the hunter that
killing animals is wrong, and teaches him to make a pot for his mom. The
mother says it's the best present she's ever received, even though her
house has a bear fur carpet, a deer head on the wall, a snakeskin purse,
etc. Well, that's strange—there are no bears in Brazil, and I've never seen
animal skin carpets or heads on the wall.

Why are hunters so mean? I know that in the small towns of my State,
people hunt animals to eat, not for fun. I've never heard of anyone in my
city that hunts. Who are these white hunters who appear in Chico Bento
and Papa-Capim's stories? Whoever they are, they're evil. They are the
problem.

Chico Bento's girlfriend Rosinha and Papa-Capim's love interest
Jurema do nothing. Their lives seem to revolve around the boys' and they

never help to protect nature. In Papa-Capim's tribe, men and boys walk around with weapons (bow and arrow, or a spear), while women and girls walk around with jars on their heads. Men and boys expel hunters and woodcutters, fight alligators with their bare hands, and rule the tribe! They're strong and courageous. We know almost nothing about the female characters. Well, I don't want to be like Rosinha and Jurema. I want to be brave and do stuff!

4. Contemporary Autoethnography

Now I am a confident woman, proud of my Japanese-Brazilian heritage and Amazonian upbringing. I am aware of my disadvantages as Asian, Latina, female, lower-middle-class in the US, and coming from a poor region where the primary language is not English. Most importantly, I am aware of my privileges as Japanese (when compared to other Asian groups such as Cambodians or Vietnamese), middle-class in my hometown, institutionally educated, cisgender, heterosexual, and able-bodied. At home, having a highly educated mother gave me access to formal Portuguese in daily conversations, books, magazines, a computer, help in doing homework, and many other advantages that my schoolmates did not have. Moreover, because the national language standards are dictated in Brasília, Rio de Janeiro, and São Paulo, the fact that my maternal family is from São Paulo gave me the privilege of talking to them in official Portuguese, outside of school.

I flip through the pages of my old *Turma da Mônica* comics and get angry. I used to have an idealized image of Maurício de Sousa, with his benevolent face and speeches about the environment, respect for different cultures, as well as the importance for children to play outside with friends instead of watching TV and playing video games. But at this point in my life, I can see the silenced voices of Amazonians, women, LGBTQIA, and

other subaltern communities. Maurício, how could you do this to me? How could you do this to us?

Turma da Mônica comics can influence children in the Amazon who read them, but the comics affect me differently. Like Cherríe Moraga in her late self-identification as a Chicana, the difference lies in choice (28): I can choose to call myself Amazonian, whereas most Amazonians cannot. Growing up, I could "pass" as a genuine Japanese girl from São Paulo. Since college, I have had numerous opportunities to tell foreigners I am from the Amazon, and hear an enthusiastic "Cool!" rather than a contemptuous "Oh." In contrast to my privilege, Amazonian children generally do not receive enough positive messages about their identities to compensate for negative ones and to make them proud of who they are.

When I reread my old comics, I feel ashamed of myself for believing in those stereotypes: the lazy farmworker, the native who lives in harmony with nature, the woodcutter, and the hunter. I feel ashamed for thinking that I was smarter than my classmates because of my proficiency in formal Portuguese. I feel ashamed for thinking that Mr. Alderico spoke "wrong" Portuguese. Even worse, I feel guilty for being at a US university while most Amazonians live in poverty.

I look at Chico Bento, and he is the archetype of a *caipira. Caipiras,* or *sitiantes*, are people who "survive precariously in niches between the monocultures of the Southeast and the Center-West, in small properties where they develop agricultural activities and raise cattle in small scale, whose production is for family sustenance and the market" (Villela 7013). In contrast to *caipiras*, people from the countryside in the Amazon are known as *caboclos*. As a child, I could not clearly distinguish between *caipiras* and *caboclos*, as Chico Bento comics portrayed all countryside communities in Brazil similarly. This assumption has created some conflict in my early encounters with *caboclos*.
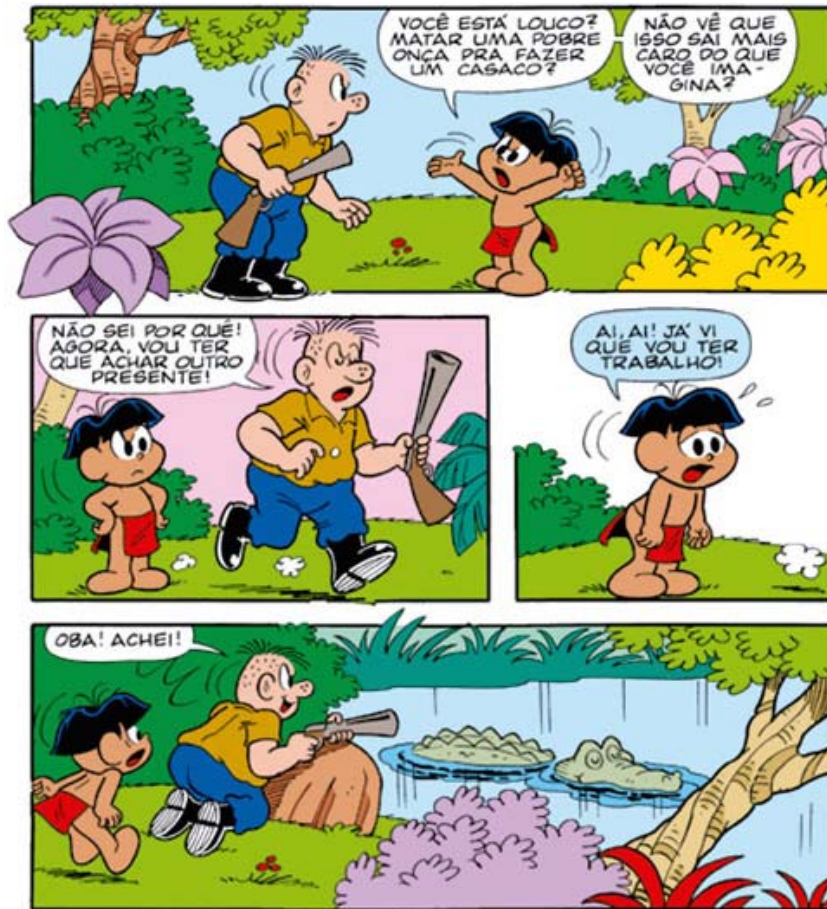
Fig. 4: Papa-Capim: Are you crazy? How can you kill a poor jaguar to make a coat? Can't you see this costs more than you can imagine?
Hunter: I don't know why! Now I'll have so search for another gift [for my mother]!
Papa-Capim: Sigh! I can see I'll have a lot of work to do here!
Hunter: Yay! I found it!
Source: turmadamonica.uol.com.br (Reprinted with permission)

I look at Papa-Capim, and he is the archetype of an indigenous child. He has brown skin and black straight hair cut in the form of a *cuia* (bowl made of calabash). Skin painting is reduced to parallel red lines on the

cheeks. The tribe sorcerer wears a big, feathered headdress and a red loincloth, and smokes a peace pipe. None of these customs are present in Brazilian tribes, but are rather borrowed from foreign media representations of Native Americans (Simm and Bonin 89) such as Disney (e.g., *Californy 'er Bust*, *Peter Pan*, *Pocahontas*), René Goscinny (e.g., *Oumpah-Pah the Redskin*, *Lucky Luke*, *Asterix and the Great Crossing*), and Quino (*Mafalda*, when the children play cowboy games). This conflation of Native Brazilian and Native American tribes encouraged me to think that all indigenous peoples of the continent looked the same. In 2001, *Maurício de Sousa Produções* published the special edition *Manual do Índio Papa-Capim*, (Manual of the Indian Papa-Capim), which explains some particularities of various Native Brazilian tribes. However, most Papa-Capim stories do not account for native cultural diversity; indigenous characters in these stories, including the ones from different tribes, look and behave more or less the same.

I am appalled by how naïve I was in believing in the idyllic farm of Chico Bento, and the untouched forest of Papa-Capim! In Maurício de Sousa's comics, animals are frequently anthropomorphized with friendly behavior and smiles—even predators such as panthers and alligators. Planting, hunting, and fishing are reduced to pleasure, adventure, and fun rather than survival. Furthermore, in some stories Papa-Capim goes so far in protecting animals that he refuses to eat the potential prey. This type of environmentalism is an urban and Eurocentric conceptualization of nature that suggests a modern relationship to animals (Descola). Therefore, people in rural areas should not be expected to protect nature by ceasing to cut down trees completely, turning into vegetarians, or resisting outside hunters; rather, the comics should be more respectful toward *caipiras* and natives' traditional ways of relating to the environment.

Fig. 5: "Woodcutter: Can I go now?
Mônica: Now, you can!
Woodcutter: This was the last time I cut off a tree!"
Source: turmadamonica.uol.com.br (Reprinted with permission)

I remember the countless times someone from São Paulo, Japan, or the US, in learning that I come from the Amazon, has asked, "Is your house inside the forest?" I remember the countless stories friends have told me

about Southeasterners asking, "Do alligators walk freely in the streets?" or "Aren't you afraid of piranhas and anacondas?" or "Do people swing on vines to go from tree to tree?" The memory of *Tarzan*, *Mowgli*, *Anaconda*, and other imported pop culture products conflate Africa, India, the Amazon, and other "uncivilized" settings into one reference. We are the same in savagery, so we are the same in the need for urbanization, industrialization, and enlightenment.

When I was reading Maurício de Sousa's comics, I could feel they had not been written for me, and less still for my Amazonian friends. Even as a child, it seemed obvious to me that the envisioned audience was white, urban, middle-class children in the Southeast. In Papa-Capim, the heroes of the stories are "pure" natives, their allies are the "good" whites (usually children) with whom the reader is expected to identify, and the villains are "bad" (usually adult) whites. This representation can encourage Southeastern readers to feel good about themselves and think that they are enlightened in relation to ignorant woodcutters and hunters. In this manner, readers are prevented from reflecting on how they are also part of an oppressive system that destroys the environment and the people who live in it.

In the comics, Amazonians are natives isolated in the jungle. Well, I grew up in the city, and guess what? Nobody around me had white skin, blond hair, and blue eyes. My best friends are either brown or Japanese. Reading the comics used to bring me joy, but also doubt: "are my friends and I inauthentic Amazonians?" (Farenzena and Mendes 8) If we don't appear in pop culture, does it mean we don't matter?" Trinh Min-ha calls "planned authenticity" the process of instilling, into the subaltern's mind, the need to prove one's genuineness (268). When an ethnic group is presented as an "endangered species," white liberals are portrayed as their saviors, and so the oppressed subject can become "more preoccupied with her/his image of the *real* native—the *truly different*—than with the issues

of hegemony, racism, feminism, and social change" (267, Trinh's emphasis).

I open the comic book, and once again, there it is: Papa-Capim, the redskin, encounters the white city-dweller for the first time in his life. The representation leaves out the fact that, for indigenous descendants in the Amazon, genocide and enculturation have occurred for more than 500 years; no indigenous boy is bumping into a white outsider by chance, or solving their differences in the blink of an eye.

In the colorful comics, the forest is a beautiful and tranquil paradise, without stress or responsibilities (de Castro 473). Outside the pages, the Amazon is overcome with deadly conflicts over rural land property, large-scale deforestation by big companies, massive migration to the capital, and other social diseases. Is the place I grew up in not genuine? The child in me could instinctively notice something was off when the Amazon I experienced daily and learned about at school had nothing to do with the Amazon I saw in comics, cartoons, and movies, but I could not yet identify these differences. The idyllic forest appeared to be more real, because that was how it allegedly used to be before evil woodcutters invaded it, and that was how it was supposed to become again.

As an adult, I can point out the dichotomies that were invisible to me as a young reader: society versus nature (Procópio), civilized versus uncivilized (de Lima; Luíndia and Oliveira; Torrecillas), modern versus outdated (Manthei), protector of nature versus destroyer of nature (da Silva et al.; de Castro and Oliveira; Natal), and reason versus intuition (Procópio). Of course, the child in me wanted to be and enact the first of each binary. Not anymore. I reject both options, because they are not really options. Instead of choosing a rigid and self-contained identity given to me, I choose more fluid, nuanced, intersectional identities. Do all Amazonian children have the opportunity to grow into this realization? I hope, but doubt that they do.

5. A Letter to Maurício de Sousa

Dear M. Maurício de Sousa,

I'm a huge fan of your work. I grew up reading your comics and watching your cartoons, over and over again.

I'm from Belém, Pará. You've been going to the Amazon in the last few years, haven't you? You've been talking about the desire to create characters that speak to us: an indigenous boy, a *seringueiro*'s little son (rubber latex extractor), and a group of *ribeirinhos* boys. Why not girls? The only important girls in your stories live in the city, as if only urban life allowed for feminine agency, and women in the capital were liberated.

In 2013, you declared, "Like every guy from the Southeast, I used to see the Amazon as a jungle, but when I realized the place's great scope in conversations with scholars, natives, and people who lived in these areas, I decided to stop and organize an adequate group to show this beautiful thing without being exaggerated" ("'Pai'," my translation). I'm glad you recognize the urgency to listen to Amazonians and make the representations of the Amazon more complex. Nonetheless, the *Chico Bento* and *Papa-Capim* comics, as well as your posts about the Amazon on the official website, continue to be problematic for the abundance of stereotypes, binaries between city characters and forest/countryside characters, preservationist discourses, and other ideologies that, despite your good intentions, can harm the self-perception and development of critical thought in Amazonian readers.

Millions of Brazilian children look up to you. Many of them even dream of becoming a cartoonist in your studio. But what kind of

examples do you offer to these aspiring cartoonists, when all creations are credited solely to you in the publications? Disney, Marvel, and other comic studios have already abolished this practice (Natal 4). This says a lot about the appropriation of artistic work, but it also justifies appropriation in general: of our labor, culture, and image for the profit of your company.

You frequently say the environmental messages in your comics originate from a commitment to education and social justice. The Ministry of Education, NGOs, Unicef, and many other institutions use your characters to teach about the environment, health, and human rights. But we both know this is not solely about selfless contributions; it is a commercial strategy for the promotion of the *Turma da Mônica* brand in Brazil and abroad (de Castro and Oliveira). Your characters feature in governmental campaigns, textbooks, television screens, and thousands of products.

Maurício, perhaps you don't realize how much your stories impact the lives of Amazonian children. You forget we are part of your audience too. The messages about preserving nature, or leaving the responsibility of preserving it to *caipiras* and indigenous children, can contribute to the formation of a conservative public opinion (da Silva et al.). The positioning of indigenous characters as old-fashioned can promote hurtful consequences to native readers, while stereotyped portrayals of Amazonians as anachronous have the potential to encourage young consumers from the North to reject their indigenous heritage, or assume that indigenous people live an outdated life. This hegemonic discourse was the same employed during colonization and is now present in neoliberalism (de Castro).

The villains in your comics, particularly the woodcutter and the hunter, presuppose the blame for deforestation lies on individuals (Scareli). Ironically, these individuals do not exist in the Amazon. The woodcutter is based on US American lumberjacks shown in imported cartoons, and has nothing to do with the timber factories operating in Brazil, or the impoverished workers exploited in them. Similarly, the hunter is based on US American and Western European representations of rich aristocrats who hunt fox and deer for sport, rather than Brazilian peasants and natives who hunt armadillo, paca, and turtle to complement their diet.
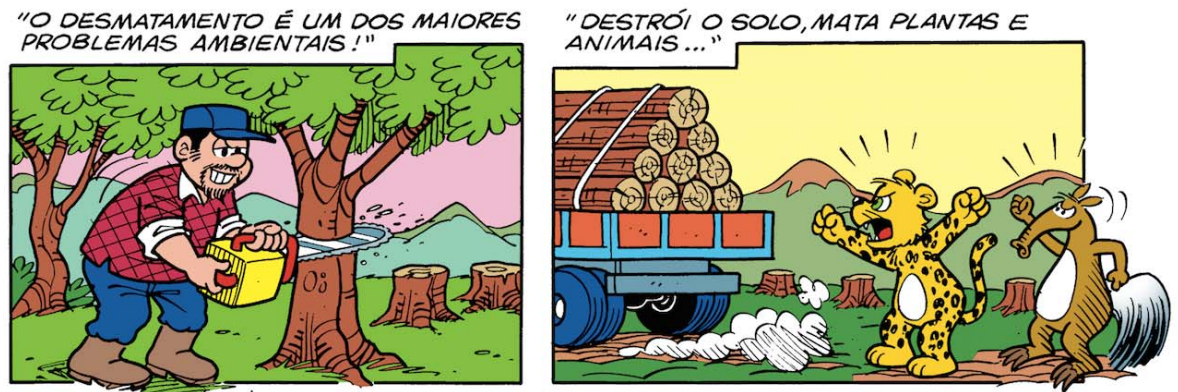
Fig. 6: "Deforestation is one of the biggest environmental problems! It destroys the soil, kills plants and animals…" Source: Image sent to the author by *Maurício de Sousa Produções*. (Reprinted with permission.)

In the globalized context of pollution, deforestation, land theft, predatory fishing, transportation barriers, and poverty, access to food becomes limited and hunting gains a new importance to contemporaneous dwellers of non-urban areas. Ignoring the survival needs of these communities, the law criminalizes hunting and fishing, and the general public makes community members responsible for the future of humanity through complete

preservation, instead of finding fault in the *de facto* cause of environmental destruction: the expanding urban-industrial model (Arruda).

In the comics, when a little boy can stop deforestation through interpersonal relations, by persuading a misguided adult into being ashamed of his selfish acts, the larger cultural context is ignored. The discourse does not give the child a chance to minimally understand environmental issues in a constructive way, or empathize with the real sufferers of such an oppressive system. All the child sees is a hero and a villain. Let's not try to be heroes, let's not try to persuade a fictional villain. We Amazonians want to be ourselves. And we want you, and everybody else, to be our allies.

Sincerely,
M.

6. Epilogue: Brazil, a Postcolonial Land

I reread my letter to Maurício. Oh, no, I did it again… I made it personal. I let my childhood memories, where he was a "cool uncle" who betrayed me, cloud my judgment. Maurício is not a villain, like the evil woodcutter; he is an entrepreneur inside a larger hegemonic system of neoliberalism that involves public and private institutions. Amazonian children's low self-esteem is a consequence of a long history of colonialism by Portugal, and neocolonialism by continental Europe (especially France) and the USA. As some activists and intellectuals fight to decolonize our politics and economy, others fight to decolonize our minds, as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o professed.

In academia, Postcolonial Studies have canonized scholars from the Third World, such as Edward Said. I, too, as a woman of color from a

poor country and an even poorer region, want to be heard in developed countries' educational sites. Perhaps my work can open the way for more silenced voices; for instance, the countryside Amazonians and indigenous students who are just now getting the opportunity to graduate. Perhaps when I translate my publications to an accessible Portuguese and make them available for free online, some Brazilians will take notice and feel empowered. Perhaps my call for building alliances can inspire the subaltern and elites in the Amazon, Brazil, and the US to stop attacking each other, and instead turn against the common enemy of structural oppression.

Postcolonial Studies itself is divided. Poststructuralists such as Ella Shohat and Anne McClintock criticize research within their own discipline, while academics from other areas such as Arif Dirlik and Terry Eagleton criticize postcolonialism in an almost generalizing form. The two most common critiques, classism and a focus on the micro (the agony of a hybrid identity) to the expense of the macro (neocolonialism), might place me as a culprit: I am in a privileged position among the subaltern like Gayatri Spivak is, and sometimes I "forget" systemic oppressions like Homi Bhabha does. Nevertheless, my commitments to criticality, intersectionality, context, and social justice guide me to self-criticism, so that I can acknowledge my mistakes and try, try again.

Besides the hybridity of my cultural identities, I also try to find my academic identity in Communication Studies, Popular Culture Studies, Postcolonial Studies, and every other discipline I explore. Latinocentricity, Asiacentricity, Lusophone Postcolonialism, and Epistemologies of the South are only a few of the options. I must use my privilege of having options to become an ally of those who have nearly none: my spiritual family from Amazônia.

Acknowledgments

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Popular Fictions and Unspeakable Family Stories: Weaving an Autoethnography through Shame and Deviance

L.N. BADGER

I don't have any memories from before my brother's birth. I am told I would ask endlessly for stories. My godmother says *you were so self-absorbed as a child.* I don't know. I could tell there were holes and horrors in what we'd all known together, and I wanted someone to say so. There are things my family would hint at but wouldn't easily talk about while I was growing up, and still won't. The reason everyone always spoke to my grandmother like she was a child waking from a nightmare, for instance. Or an explanation for the absences of my father and Chrissy, my godmother's son.

My mother and godmother raised me, and so they've claimed the right to narrate the years I don't remember.[1] The stories I've been told about my childhood, stories they still tell, seem fantastical, impossible. They say *you were speaking at six weeks old.* They swear *we moved fourteen times before you turned four.* They say *Aunt Viv's ghost moved the teapot to the*

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[1] Cavarero insists that our own story, from birth, can't be told autobiographically—the tale of one's own life story can only come from the mouth of another. In this way, each of us entrusts his or her identity to another's story (xvii). For me, the relationships that are constructed in this essay reflect my inability to represent even the very intimate others that I am in relationship with, while I also recognize my definition is attached to them. In fact, following Madison, the articulation I make about my family is one I make about myself: "they are part of me now" (51).

coffee table where she always kept it, floated it across the kitchen and out to the front room right in front of our eyes. They say *we could leave you, as a two year old, on the back of the Clydesdale all afternoon and the horse would babysit.* I was also watched by a black lab, *Strider, a wonderful person*, they say, *who was smart enough to keep you out of the lake.*

I am building this essay from the incongruences and hard wonders of my childhood. I was sure I would never write about things, once commonplace, that I learned to bury in borrowed shame: the mistakes I made on my way to socialization, the mistakes I watched my family and friends make that have marked them forever inside the categories of deviance.[2] This is an autoethnography of formative stories that were untold, mistold, and covered over. Stories that we sometimes don't tell because it is our power to keep, and more often, don't tell because we don't want to carry the burden of having fleshed out our shame and given it a place in the world.

This essay weaves together the gendered stories that taught me how to be a woman, and how to understand men to be men. How women's bodies became a site to hide trauma, to manifest illness. How women stay, sick and hopeful, or leave their men. How men are to be understood as trapped between uncontrollable addictions and their own hopelessness. And in their dark hour, will repeat the violence they want desperately to escape. These gendered patterns feed one another, creating a web, which is a

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[2] I would like to re-awaken the elements of the sensory that have been relegated to the "common" or "everyday," and have been, thusly, dismissed—consigned to "spaces of social amnesia and anesthesia." "There can be no reflexivity unless one passes through a historical reenactment of perceptual difference," re-opening the spaces that we have forgotten and muted (Seremetakis, 19; 23). Attending to ways of seeing and sensing become key to shifting the discourse away from dominant cultural constructions of logic and toward the possible lessons buried in everyday experiences. The experiences of the body—deviant bodies, our own bodies—become critical.

genre, marking our failures in repetitious plotlines, tropes, and character roles. Our lived genre sometimes sits uncomfortably close to sensational stories: the popular genres of horror and crime literature, which do not reflect the ways we would represent ourselves, while we can see that it is *us* that is being represented. I share the pieces of stories I still hold from the men, women, and children who I knew in my childhood community and the institutions we encountered—the prisons, hospitals, schools, hotels, and libraries that invited and validated cultural conformity. Even the explicitly educative institutions failed to create collective mobility within my community. Instead, they divided and isolated many of the people I knew deeper into the isolation of deviance, while separating the few of us who have learned to thrive within institutional frameworks from carrying those we both fear and have loved the hardest with us, to some better possibility. The essay ends in a reflection on how our bodies hold our stories, cycling a haunting pain that is spun under our flesh, generation to generation.

Although I signal an order for this essay, it is important to mark the way my own shame, and the shame of my family members, many of whom are afraid of my education and found voice, gets into the form and structure of re-telling broken and hidden stories. Before each sentence I write comes the question: how do I move in a way that is meaningful rather than sensational, between a hyper-policed, criminalized, and often silenced or self-silencing family and community and a more recently accessed community in which I share more consistent privilege, education, agency and voice? I find, as I track through memories and old writing, that there is a second question that closely follows the first: Which stories are mine to speak now, and how do I navigate the still-pressing silences that punctuate these stories?[3] I fall into the very logic that, for the sake of my

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[3] The silences of shame and power that keep secrets work on as I write. I'm making choices—out of love or fear. I read again what I have written. Participating in the hiding, I remove things I think might hurt my mother or aunt. I cannot take enough of it away.

family, I would like to resist: I let sensationalized fiction sit close enough to the lived experience of deviance that the two might be conflated. This is a condition of my relationship to popular literature and, to a lesser extent, teledrama that wrote the cultural story on deviance in the 1980s and 1990s. Sensationalist fiction was a significant part of my cultural education as a child, and the things I remember from my youngest years are as much in the books I read as the encounters I had with my family and community. These books gave and keep giving voice to things I was to stay silent about, webbing over my fractured unspeakable life with clean narrative arcs and predictable generic frameworks.[4] They also articulated

I will share my work with them, but not my godmother—who assumes hurt, and does not want to read my writing, afraid she could come upon Chrissy's face. And she would. Even with their permission to write, I know writing this close to the unsayable borders on a violation. Is the optimist in me, who keeps putting wild hope in reflection, in amplifying the edges of unsayable narratives, actually going to do more harm than good? I don't know yet. I sit at the flank of the ethical, which, in this case, carries the burden of also being familial. I am as attentive as I can be to how my speech acts can hurt and deepen the very shame that I am trying to write through to write past. I hope this essay is not a false start, but instead a first step toward something new for us—interpersonally within my family, but also in the larger world that this autoethnography might reach. This is why, though I cannot make the choice for others, I ultimately chose speech over shame. I hold on to Judith Butler's idea of "a speech act as an insurrectionary act." She claims that "as we think about worlds that might one day become thinkable, sayable, legible; the opening up of the foreclosed and the saying of the unspeakable become part of the "offense" that must be committed in order to expand the domain of linguistic survival. The resignification of speech requires opening new contexts, speaking in ways that have never yet been legitimated, and hence producing legitimation in new and future forms" (p. 41).

[4] Devitt suggests that genre is not simply a literary form and organizational structure, but instead invites genre to be understood "as a nexus between an individual's actions and a socially defined context. Genre is a reciprocal dynamic within which individuals' actions construct and are constructed by reoccurring contexts of situation, context of culture, and context of genres" (31). This framing guides me to put pressure on socially defined

the supernatural, frightening, criminal, and ill in markedly different ways than I imagine we would have, had shame not kept my family publicly silent and intimately cryptic.[5] As I weave a relationship between popular culture and autoethnography, I reflect on the way popular fiction has infected and filled gaps in my memory, refiguring the narratives I know.[6] But popular fiction is not only mobilized to fill the place of silence with stories that lack the tenderness and possibility of stories I would claim as mine: as sensationalist fiction is re-evoked, as it comes to fit into my own life, popular stories becomes contaminated with the more complicated stories I have known. The simple narrative structures and logics of popular stories become disconnected as they are inserted into my own stories and nightmares, an uneven adaptation that fails to unify the fictional and lived unspeakable worlds. In this way, there is no perfect integration. I want to emphasize both the dissonance and overlap between experience and popular representations of deviance. My hope is that recognizing

contexts and popular and predictable genres that might obscure or disempower individual articulation.

5 I center the supernatural in relationship to other unspeakabilities, recognizing the uncomfortable ways that leading with the uncanny creates a place for academic dismissal. In this place, I must ask: What does it mean to write within and through pre-dismissed ways of knowing and writing? Ghosts as ghosts, and not as perfect fictions are not typically welcome in academic journals. Maria del Pilar Blanco considers how ghosts and the uncanny have become "staples" within a set of genres. "It would appear that ghosts haunt genre theory and genre haunts ghosts." (33). I wonder: How do we challenge the entwined dismissal of haunting, horror, and generic conventions, and create a way to consider and welcome new articulations?

[6] As Lepselter has asked: "how does the indeterminate nature of what the ethnographer is trying to represent infect the way he or she chooses to portray it in writing?" (141, The License). I recognize the ways both the supernatural fiction I have absorbed and the half-concealed family stories are unfixed and partial representations of the larger unspeakable, and in often dissonant ways, contaminate the story I am telling.

dissonance will inspire an ongoing effort to listen to imperfect and partial stories that complicate what we have known and judged in our culture because of what we have accepted from sensationalizing literature. I hope, also, that this essay guides a recognition of the complicated way stories of horror and crime have been woven into the social "webs of significance," even for those who are socially controlled by, and might otherwise challenge, conceptions of deviance.[7]

The web is a useful structural metaphor because of the multiple ways it can be evoked.[8] I am spinning this essay, searching for meaning. It is marked by empty, still unspeakable space around which I am drawing tiny repeating and interconnecting frames. It is fragile, ephemeral, replaced again with a replica of itself. I walk in the woods daily, and the webs I meet as I think about writing also resonate into the framing for this autoethnography. I have grown accustomed to orb-weaving spiders stringing their webs across deer trails that I follow. Accustomed does not mean, however, that I remember to consistently see spider webs. Instead, I should say that I have grown accustomed to walking through webs, the structure lost, the thin silvery threads ghosting across my face and throat, stuck together in new ways, in less precise ways, because of my encounter with the web. I have sometimes stopped short of running right through the web: attentive to its structure. Often I am attentive to the web only as my body and my memory collide into it, the structure lost because I moved

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[7] I am echoing Geertz's web, "Man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun. I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning" (248, Interpretation of Culture).

[8] Burke argues that metaphor is important in its capacity to create such knowingly provisional and partial accounts, while offering an "invaluable perspective from which to judge the world of contingencies," allowing us to remain open to the possibility of error, and thus the possibility of further invention (266).

through it. This metaphor—which partially contains and organizes the unspeakable, and partly acknowledges the disruption that story telling carries—builds silver-threaded bridgework between popular and personal experiences, and structural generic conventions and poetic rule-breaking. Ultimately, the bridges do not lead between or create more direct roads in content or form. Instead, they weave cyclical and interconnected pathways, often disrupted in the re-telling, where ghosts and dreams, crime fiction and serial teledrama, family secrets and white lies, can be read both as untrustable *and* critical articulations that put pressure on the real and unsayable.[9]

When I started to question family stories, or started to press my mother and godmother for details, they both stopped talking about who we'd been. I'd search boxes in the basement for clues—stealing, collecting, re-ordering, re-concealing relics as I found them. Both my mother and godmother always talked about *boxes of pictures in the basement*, and I searched endlessly, but never found more than a handful of photos tucked beside old clothes or in book flaps. When pressed, my mother would say *the boxes must have been lost in the moves*. If I bothered my godmother enough she'd throw up her hands and say, *Luthie, I simply can't go looking. I'll find pictures of Chrissy and it would break my heart all over again*, and *can't you just sit and watch the television?* I found two pictures

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[9] Similar to Orr, I seek to "actively re-fuse and confuse the boundaries between the real and the unreal . . . playing seriously with the logistics and illogics of perception" (13). Orr suggests that transformation in form and content that disrupts the hegemonic flow of scientific prose allows an author to become a tactical player in the cultural production of perception itself. She claims that performative writing not only dissolves the hegemonic order of form, but also draws attention to the breaking that is happening, revealing and challenging the terms of who has the power to create the real and sustain the discursive and political structures used to control both knowledge and nation.

of Chrissy and me together. I would never tell my godmother. Chrissy's jaw was set sideways. He was drooling. His arms were pulled into his chest and lacked muscle tone, like he didn't use them. I had carried a sense of having lost an older brother and best friend that I would recognize in a photograph; a picture would reawaken a memory. But the pictures didn't create any connection: I didn't know his face, his physical disability.

In a box in the basement I found a photograph of my mother and Strider with a man and another dog. And a necklace with two tin plates. My mother said *they're your father's dog tags from Vietnam*. They are smiling in the photograph, even the dogs. *That war made your father crazy*, my godmother said*, but he was a good man before that*. No one says anything else about my father, and these articulations burn into my memory. My godmother says *there's a set of old-style photographs your mother took of you on Greek Easter one year, that she made to look like tin types, and someday*, my godmother said *I'll get up the energy to find them*. I haven't found them, she never looked. I found a picture of my grandmother, grandfather and me. My grandmother looked younger than I ever remember her looking. Her hair was yellow in the photograph and not white as I remember. We were standing perfectly straight, untouching, in front of my Aunt Jo's barn in Rosebush. I was the only one smiling. I found a photo of me, maybe one year old in a sink, backlit by a kitchen window so that I look more like a grey and yellow smudge than a baby. Me, in a red robe in front of a Christmas tree, me standing on the hood of an old work truck. These photographs have no stories that weave into my memories.[10] Except this one: I remember posing to hold my new baby

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[10]Hall claims "photography gives us dramatic access to our multiple identities" (370). The photographs that I cite here dramatize my formative identities, but in decidedly dull ways, making my childhood appear more "normal" to me than the stories I've heard. This adds complicated layers to the divide between how I am remembered and how I was photographically recorded. Found photographs served and continue to serve as a window to moments in my past that were rarely articulated, illuminating details that were left out of the stories that my family was unable or unwilling to tell, but it often remains unclear

brother. Years later, I found the picture of me curled up on the sofa, my arms wrapped around that tiny newborn.

My mother and godmother would let me stay up to watch television with them after my baby brother was asleep. Mostly, I remember watching reruns of the CBS fantasy teledrama *Beauty and the Beast*. I remember the episode where Vincent went mad in the underground labyrinth—where no one, not even Catherine, could get through to him and I thought, maybe, he was going to kill her. I remember when Catherine was attacked in the dark by two police officers and Vincent came to her rescue and ripped one of their heads back. I remember when she was given a lethal injection by someone working with the police, or maybe by the police, right after she gave birth to a baby boy, and the way she died in Vincent's arms because he got there too late. I remember he went crazy. I started to have a nightmare on repeat: It was already dark, and my mother pulled the car into the driveway and left me in the backseat while she took in groceries. She said *I'll be right back for you*, but after a minute I could see her through the kitchen window, washing something at the sink. I heard a crunch on the gravel behind me. I turned and saw nothing. I turned back and Vincent had his clawed hands at the top of the window. His eyes were wild, and he broke through the glass and reached through to grab me. I woke in a sweat. *He is good*, I told myself. *He is good in his heart, something just made him go mad. He's still good*, I'd say, like my mother would say to the television when it seemed like it might not be so.

When we moved and my mother got another job my godmother was already sick with cancer and so neither of them could pick me up from school on time. I went to latchkey and read on the steps by the back door of the school while other kids were sent to different corners of the room to

how to interpret the story the photographs *do* tell—and impossible to situate them in relationship to how we remember. As such, photographs increase pressure on the still unknown, marked by inaccessibility as much as accessibility.

wait it out, to *take a break*, until it got dark outside and our parents could sign us out to go home. I had my own library card and would find popular horror in the public library on weekends when my mom was working. It was the only reading loud enough to tune everything else out. It let me safely into problems that I couldn't articulate—and then let me out again, with a tidy conclusion.[11] The explicit exposé of the unspeakable, partnered with the predictability, seemed brave and safe in comparison to the maddening way stories were half told and obscured in my family. I see now how sensationalist horror and crime fiction are not personal and so do not defame the author—while my own narratives, both as autoethnographies and family stories, become less tellable because of the double-stacked shame in echoing sensationalist literature that defines deviance *and* the shame of everyday lived experience.[12] Even as fictions I consumed are inescapably interwoven into my childhood memories, the sensationalizing genre conventions and narrative structure of popular horror remain impossible and unethical[13] to mirror in my own writing.

[11] Following Radway, I consider the genre of horror in place of romance, and think about what it means for readers to absorb and interpret genre in our messy lives. "A more complete cultural analysis of the contemporary romance might specify how actual readers interpret the actions of principal characters, how they comprehend the final significance of the narrative resolution and, perhaps most important, how the act of repetitively encountering this fantasy fits within the daily routine of their private lives. We need to know not what the romantic text objectively means—in fact, it never means in this way—but rather how the event of reading the text is interpreted by the women who engage in it." (55)

[12] Stewart marks "everyday life [as] a life lived on the level of surging affects, impacts suffered or barely avoided. It takes everything we have. But it also spawns a series of little somethings dreamed up in the course of things" (9).

[13] The editors and many of the authors of *Women Writing Culture* demanded recognition for the long history of female contributions to the ideas that were taken up as "new" ethnography, while also insisting that one could not accept "new" forms and techniques without acknowledging the way they informed emerging ethical and political orders (See

Both my mother and godmother were bedridden and homebound for
most of my life. They had diagnosed and horribly painful conditions:
Cancer of the blood, breast cancer, Irritable Bowel Syndrome, migraines,
irreparable shoulder injury, fibromyalgia, cystitis, allergies. And other
ailments I have forgotten. My mother is afraid to talk about her pain now.
Some of her diagnoses, such as multiple chemical syndrome, have become
discredited in the medical world; now she, too, dismisses them. She hides
her pain as best she can and keeps to herself because *people just think
you're crazy.* I built my own narrative about their stacked illnesses
growing up, sure that illness was put up as a barrier to prevent me from
asking hard questions – a defense that would allow them to stay silent
about uncomfortable stories. I held tightly to this interpretation even after I
moved away from home, nuancing it only slightly, growing convinced it
was all tied somehow to their shame, which changed their vision, affected
their ability to move through trauma and their ability to tell the stories I
wanted.[14] I still conflate their shame and illness, as I conflate their shame

Behar's "Introduction: Out of Exile" and the eight essays that make up Part II: "Another,
History, Another Canon" by authors Lamphere, Babcock, Finn, Hernandez, Cole,
Lutkehaus, Frank, and Harrison,). Similarly, Hicks argues "conversation, debate,
discussion, narrative, and poetic [production] are not simply different forms of
expression, but rather each of these genres of communication is constituted by different
norms, functions, and effects. Furthermore, each genre activates a different moral and
political universe establishing distinctive rights, obligations, and orientations to the other"
(237). While borrowing generic conventions from other genres as it becomes productive
to do so, I may claim that autoethnography projects consistently share goals that turn on
the personal, situated, and political and that the limits to autoethnography are the
questions: What moral and political universe does this intervention or invention
construct? Within it, how might we ethically create meaning? How and what might we
ethically know? I might add one additional set of questions: "Is the knowledge useful? If
so, to whom?" (Hale 15).

[14] I call this "trauma," knowing this language has been used to dismiss women, knowing
also that the fragmented and veiled narratives and silences from the women in my family

and my own. I weave shame into every part of me in which I can find them, into everything.

Just a little before my grandmother decided to die, she told me the dramatic details of the missing stories about her, with none of the context. She told me my mother didn't live at home as a baby and about shock therapy, about *the leather restraints and the bit in your mouth, so you couldn't thrash around and potentially injure yourself or crack your teeth.* She *said each time you were sure you were being killed by being made softer, made liquid, like the bath you were in. You just became the bath. And then in between baths they'd give you drugs to keep you feeling like water, keep you forgetting about your babies so you wouldn't go crazy. It was all poison though, maybe they thought they were helping you get better, some of the nurses seemed so nice and like they really cared*, she said. *They just didn't know they were killing you.* I was reading *The Green Mile* in the waiting room at the hospice center when my grandmother was pulling the needles from her arms. I was reading the electric chair scene. Aunt Jo said *your grandma was paranoid, delusional, that was always her*

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fails to fit the genre of trauma testimony. Gilmore suggests fragmentation and inconsistencies in representation can be productive ways to address the traumatic, while she also finds careful ways to refuse scripting (predominantly) female narrations of trauma in ways that would accommodate persistent imaginations of the feminine as scattered, hysterical, broken, and deceitful. Gilmore argues that insistence on "truth" discourse is insistence on a legibility that obscures women's experiences, or attempts to code women's self-narration in deception. She claims fragmentation is critical to women's narration, but not because it is a natural condition of the feminine that proves a woman to be less capable than a man. Instead, Gilmore marks fragmentation as a residual condition of the power that the feminine is enforced within. She emphasizes fragmentation as part of women's writing of trauma because of the way it is part of their lived experience (x; see also: Walker and Curry). This intervention does not only script new possibilities for the form of narrating trauma, but a careful consideration of the usefulness of the suggested forms and an awareness and refusal of the way the inventive possibility could be co-opted to universalize and denounce feminine expression.

problem. She said *your grandma never got shock therapy,* she said *your grandpa wouldn't let them do it because his own mom worked at a mental hospital and she had told him what it did to people. Maybe grandma just saw people get shock therapy or heard about it.* Aunt Jo said *your grandma had a hard time separating things that happened to her from things that frightened her. No, they just gave her drugs*, Aunt Jo said, *just got her drugs right so she could come home. She would just get confused and dangerous to herself, and needed some help. She was not really dangerous to anyone else, harmless, really, just paranoid*. I didn't trust either of them, any of them. And I learned to tell stories that I wanted to be true. I learned this is how you make it through the parts you can't forgive. I learned to not trust myself. Or I learned to trust my family, myself, with the same trust I gave to fiction I read- knowing I should not believe, but feeling all the emotions that go with belief anyway.

Davey Wexler's dad was killed in a botched robbery at the convenience store that their family owned. I imagined this end for my own father, imagined that he was a good man and that if it had been a few more years before he died, I could have held him like Davey Wexler held her father while he died. I could have cradled him in my arms and gotten his blood all over my clothes, and then kept the clothes hidden someplace. I turned toward the wall so no one could see me sob and read the passage of his death over and over again, and let it run through me.[15] I told people

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[15] Davey Wexler was a character in one of my favorite Judy Bloom books. When I sort through memories, I still imagine her as a friend of mine, a friend who I know well enough that I might accidentally conflate pieces of her memories with my own. When I can sort our memories apart, I must admit that part of me still wants her story because it is more recognizably heartbreaking and cleaner than mine. This appears, of course in how I represent the story in this essay. Davey Wexler is introduced as a person, the fictiveness comes late in the presentation. As I go on, I realize other places in this essay when the markers around the fictional emerge late, or fail to emerge because the emotional connections I made with fiction are as real as my other remembered experiences.

that my father died in the war, until a teacher remarked that Vietnam was over before I was born.

We moved out of my brother's father's house when things got too rough. *You can't save an alcoholic* my mother said, my godmother said. My godmother moved, too, because she was convinced that the old women who argued in the downstairs living room of the old house were keeping her sick. I could hear the women, too, or I thought I could when my godmother was asleep and I felt alone. *They must have had a bad end*, my godmother said, *for them to stay on as ghosts after they died and resist being cleared out even with sage smudging*. My godmother and mother refused to unpack when they moved. Mountains of boxes went into the basement or storage. The furniture was put into the living spaces, but otherwise, we started again. My mother wouldn't explain. My godmother only said *I need new dishes because if I look for the old ones, I'd be afraid I'd find Chrissy's face*.

I think my mother suggested that my brother's father never hurt her, or she wanted me to think that. I can't say what I dreamt and what was real. I know that after she left him, she had a rule that we never open the door of the new house for any adult. Not even a friend of the family that we'd known for a long time. She wanted us to be safe. If anyone showed up when she wasn't there we were supposed to get the cordless phone and go to the basement. My brother tried to make the exception that if his dad showed up to take him on a fishing trip that it would be okay. This turned my mother's face pale. My brother's father never took him fishing, but he would show up every Christmas with a bucket of Kentucky Fried Chicken and expensive gaming systems or bikes or snowboards. I think he brought fishing poles and tackle once. My brother spent years detailing imaginary trips with his dad and I wasn't *allowed to say anything because he's hurting*, my mother said. *Just let him alone*, she said. Then the stories stopped suddenly, until one evening we were playing a board game and my brother said, *I wonder why my dad doesn't take me out any more*, and I

was so struck by the idea that he believed all of his own stories that I forgot I wasn't supposed to say anything. I just blurted out something about how he'd made up all those stories, that his father had never taken him anywhere. My brother's face flushed. I remember the way his spittle looked thick as he shouted. I remember the imprecision of the attack—his body so wild with anger that he had no control of the violence. When he was very young it was easy to get out of the way and then hold him down. My mother and I got him in a sleeping bag so he couldn't hurt himself or scratch us if he did calm down enough to strategize. Then we told him to breathe which mostly caused him to hold his breath. Eventually, and not because of us, he just crumbled and sobbed. When it was over and he'd fallen asleep my mother said, *Lindsey, don't make him mad. Don't make him crazy like that.*

I want to think most of my brother's rage was a mirror of his father's rage, a pattern that he remembered from before my mother left. I want desperately for it to be learned, and not written into the codes of his blood and bones. I want him to break with the men's genre that is woven and explained by the women in my family as inevitable. I know all of the men through stories. I don't have any actual memories with most of them. They were absent, or I wasn't alone with them. There is one exception: I remember staying up late to watch *Arachnophobia* with Aunt Jo's first husband. I don't know where Aunt Jo and my Mom were. I sat on his lap, my stomach lurching, while he played his hands like spiders across my back and neck. Years later my Aunt Jo's second husband was sentenced to a few years in a Mississippi State prison for drugs. *They raided his convenience store down south and the police knew exactly where to look and Henry didn't even know there was stuff there, and so it was obvious that he'd been set up*, Aunt Jo said. She said *it was his daughter from his first marriage and the girl's boyfriend who did it* to get the boyfriend out of trouble somehow. I didn't understand that part. *Henry's daughter testified against her own father and she blinked a lot* Aunt Jo said. *His*

parents wouldn't testify and that worked against him, too, and they were wicked people Aunt Jo said, *and they showed how wicked they could be after that*. I was reading the short story "Rita Hayworth and Shawshank Redemption." I got my uncle a poster of a dog for his cell that looked like his dog on a motorcycle but then learned he was in a dorm, I think, or I just felt weird about it because I didn't really know him at all and I never sent it. I found the poster in my closet a few months after he came back, right after he died of a bacterial infection in his lungs.

Once my godmother, angry at my godfather *for drinking so muc*h, fell back on the bed pillows dramatically, her mouth agape, truly exhausted, and she told me a story I had never heard. She told me *we had to both be sensitive anyway, because he lost his only son and he'd also gone to prison. It had almost destroyed him*, she said. I never asked questions about stories she wasn't supposed to tell because she would just stop talking and try to get me to watch television. If I let her go on though, she'd sometimes eventually tell me what I would have asked. *They tried him as an adult to teach him a lesson. It was just a joke, he and some friends pretended to stick up a convenience store just to freak out some kid from school who was working there that they didn't really like. It almost destroyed him*, she said. *It's one of the reasons he still drinks so much*. My godfather was supposed to be *like your father*. I didn't know if that meant he resembled or was supposed to replace my father, but we never spoke much to one another. He was a *kind drunk,* a loud man when he made noise, but most of the time he didn't. He was out of the way, *out of the circus*, he'd say. This meant he was mostly drinking cheap red wine by the gallon and watching basketball in the basement.

My Uncle Mark taught construction in the prison south of town. *It wasn't good work*, my godmother said, *it was part of what killed him, but it let him get the hours he needed so he could see his kids on the days permitted by the court. He had Wednesdays and Thursdays and his ex-wife kept moving to make it harder; he had to go all over the state to see them.*

I remember the story of one trip he took so vividly that for years I thought I'd read it in a book until my godmother told the story again. Sometimes he drove for hours and still didn't get to see them, *just sat in a motel parking lot, waiting. He'd sit up all night waiting.* And then he came back up and went to work long hours, and you *can't let your guard down in the prison.* When he did get to see the kids, he taught them martial arts, because he was sure his daughter was being molested by her grandpa, by his ex-wife's father, just like his ex-wife had been as a kid. *That's what really made his ex-wife so crazy,* my godmother said—and so she said *you had to forgive her some of her spite, rage, fear.* Uncle Mark's in-laws were horrible people, cheaters and molesters, which is part of what killed him. And his ex-wife, *no one knew at first, but she was really crazy, like nuthouse needs help crazy—it made him crazy, too, being around it long enough, and maybe he did overdose,* but my godmother said she *doubted it. It was mostly how crazy his ex-wife was that gave him the heart attack that killed him, and maybe the stress of working at the prison, but mostly, it was that she was abusive, bless her heart she'd seen some abuse, but she was institutional, out of her mind.*

Amber Deckard and I would smash windows to break into the closed state hospital. I took a whole roll of photographs that turned out yellow and black because of the dim lighting. Amber Deckard and I searched through the photos for ghosts. The state hospital was officially named the Northern Michigan Hospital for the Insane, but no one called it that. It shut down just after I was born. Some of the cottage type buildings were re-sourced to the primary hospital at the edge of the state hospital property. The rest of the buildings were left to rot. We broke into building 50 because it was the creepiest and largest and easiest to enter. It was originally the main hospital dormitory and had a large women's wing and a much smaller men's quarter. For a while there were windows we could smash to get in, and when all the windows were boarded up to keep kids out, it only took a crowbar once and then you could prop the board like it

was still keeping people out and use the same entrance for a while before they discovered it was open. You could also get in from a sewer hole that led to some of the tunnels under the building, but that was a last resort.

In building 50 we'd act out our nightmares: Vincent, going mad in the labyrinth under the building, evil ghosts taking over our bodies in the room we called 217. Sometimes I sat in a bathtub and pretended I was my grandmother, being shocked, and then staring blankly. Sometimes we forgot it was a game. We tried to make sense of what was left and what wasn't in the building—the doorknobs and locks stripped from doors, the medicine cabinets with their plastic mirrors left—the single wooden chair in the room, the three bathtubs, the floral curtains that would float up sometimes even when the windows weren't open. The building had taken water and the paint peeled off the bottom half of some of the walls and left piles of chips all over the floor. We called the rooms that didn't have peeling paint the rubber rooms. Their walls felt like dusty leather, but still not soft enough to keep someone from hurting themselves. By a nurse's station there were several spots on the wall showing the coloration where there used to be framed photographs blocking the sun's fade, but all the pictures except one had been stolen or taken down. The remaining picture was yellow-grey, and in it, all the patients were in long dresses. No one smiled. They did not touch one another and stood very straight.

I kept a spider collection on my bedroom wall. Originally I had lined up all the hacklemesh weaver spiders based on which ones had the most black on them, but their colors changed as they decomposed. The collection was left over from a science class project where we classified arthropods. I couldn't tolerate killing things I pitied, and so I collected arthropods of the class Arachnida. Spiders. *What makes you pity something?* My science teacher asked. *I think fragility*, I said, *like soft wings, like moths, I don't know*. I remember that we all wrote KILLING JAR—POISON on our containers, and we dropped in rubbing alcohol cotton balls. Depriving spiders and insects of oxygen alone would have

worked, but it would give them time to thrash around and potentially injure themselves or curl their legs. The aim was to kill so they still looked poised with life and not too beat up. My godmother said that *if you killed and collected spiders you would always have bad luck because the Greeks believe spiders are the weavers of people's fates, the connectors of past and future. You don't mess with that, I don't care if some scientist told you to*, she insisted. We hadn't used the toxic preservation chemicals for our collections, and so the bodies eventually hollowed out and became a translucent yellow. I started the collection over again to replace the dusty exoskeletons left from the original. The second time I didn't use a killing jar because when I was in Washington visiting my grandmother, my Uncle Bill taught me that you can put spiders in the freezer in Ziplocs to kill them. I brought several huge spiders back to Michigan with me to pin to my board. One night I was awoken by a scratching sound at the wall. One of the spiders was alive and was scrambling its legs about on its pin. I thought for sure I was dreaming, but I got my mother and she saw it, too. She thought maybe it hadn't died all the way in the freezer. After that I went back to using the killing jar.

The Soviet Union had just fallen. My godmother and CBS couldn't stop talking about it. In Social Studies we listened to the news and then drew maps of Europe and Asia, filling in the blurry middle places and changing borders. I did a "war events" report on my favorite story by Stephen King, called "The End of the Whole Mess." The narrator is writing a journal about how his little brother, a child genius, isolated and collected a naturally occurring chemical that calmed people enough to reduce violent crime. Ultimately, he defused the threat of a nuclear war and the destruction of humankind. And then it was discovered, after the chemical had been intentionally disseminated all over the world, that it caused degeneration and death. The thing I found so brilliant about the story was that the language starts to be incoherent near the end, just babbling, so you're not just told about it, but you really feel the world, in

the language, breaking down. My Social Studies teacher told me that I was supposed to report on a real war. He said I had to cover Vietnam. I couldn't do it. My nightmares came back. I was dying in the war, or my father was dying and I held him, soaked in his blood. I threw up every day before Social Studies. My mother had me see a psychiatrist.

I started homeschooling in Jr. High. I was too sick to go to school, to get out of bed, for months. *Write something that matters to you* my mother assigned. This was an echo, from years before and one of the most important gifts my mother has given me. In kindergarten or first grade, our class made father's day books and I wrote the word *nothing* all over the pages when I was supposed to copy stories from the board if they were things I did with my father. My mother had been sick, and *wasn't excited to be pulled into the office again*. But her eyes went to steel when she found out what I'd done, and she took me home with her. She told me *that it was a stupid assignment and you don't have to do it. I don't know what they're trying to teach you. Write about whatever matters to you*, she said, she kept saying.

The summers in my home town were mild and sunny and there was a lot of beautiful water and so lots of people vacationed there. Amber Deckard and I pushed at the boundaries of our bored days. We jaywalked just to jam traffic, we took the stacks of maps from the tourist information center and cut holes in them and sometimes added details, things like "Rita's grave" or "entrance to secret labyrinth." Then we'd put them back. It was an assertion of the fictional worlds I knew in the "real" world, a game, a meanness, even. Amber Deckard intentionally smeared fruit all up her face and made herself puke at the cherry pie eating contest trying to get her picture in the paper. At an exceptionally slow Cherry festival parade we decided we could log roll at the same speed the parade was moving, and so we ran out in front of the police motorcycles that are always at the end of a parade and we lay down and rolled as fast as we could down the street. A policeman got us up and asked us to walk over

through the crowd and down a side alley. A cop car showed up, silent but with its lights on and the men circled around while the first cop kept talking to us. *Ladies*, he kept saying, *ladies*. One of the policemen recognized Amber and they all kept getting closer. I was suddenly terrified and tried to run. One of them caught me and pulled me over to the side of his car and handcuffed me but my wrists were too small. I think there were three of them working on it. When they gave up on my wrists, they put me on the sidewalk on my knees and cuffed my ankles together.

I dreamt that Vincent came and saved me from the police who were going to kill me. I dreamt that Vincent went mad again and had me cornered. I dreamt that I locked the front door and then a hand shot through to grab me. I spent the night at Amber Deckard's house and her parents weren't home and the police came and they saw us and yelled at us to open the door but we didn't, we just went to the basement like we were supposed to, and they broke in or found an open door and we could hear them above us, but we got out a basement window and ran to my house. I dreamt the police were at the door. I dreamt that I was a child and Vincent broke the window to the backseat of the car and reached in. I dreamt the police were on a motorcycle and I ripped one of their heads back. I dreamt I was at Amber Deckard's house and the police showed up and her mom made us go in the basement and we heard the sound of bodies fighting, slamming into things above us. I was prescribed medicine for night terrors.[16] When I spent the night at Amber Deckard's house I always

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[16] I saw a therapist for frequent nightmares, and later for Attention Deficit Disorder and Panic Disorder—diagnoses for an embodied repetition, never for a single event. Lauren Berlant argues for a movement away from assumption of the traumatic as exceptional and outside of the everyday, claiming instead that trauma is rooted within the fragility and uncertainty built into ordinary domestic and social conditions of "crisis ordinariness" (10). This is important to consider, as Didier Fassin does, recognizing the ways that trauma discourse refuses or obscures certain people and experiences, and obliterating embodiments of trauma when reducing trauma to a single event that must pass through specific processes of victim recognition (281).

forgot my meds. Her dad was drunk and her mom made us go to the basement. I heard the sound of things crashing, of bodies.

Amber Deckard's mom loved Stephen King like I did. Once, she thought our makeup looked slutty, so she read us the part of *Gerald's Game* where the woman gets raped, so we could know what looking slutty could get us. *Don't use foundation or eyeliner, it makes you look too old*, she said. I remember how ashamed I was. *Don't tease your hair. You're kids*, she said, *I don't want the men who come around here to think otherwise*, she said. *You don't need anything but lip gloss*, Amber's mom said. I had just turned 14 when I got my first job, scooping ice-cream beachside at a gift shop attached to one of the larger resorts. It was hard-serve ice cream, and my left arm thickened from the double scoop effort over the summer, enough for the boys who worked at the parasail rentals to tease me. All the girls I worked with, and actually all the girls who worked resorts along the whole bay strip and the golf course resorts inland, were young. We all wore our hair in pony tails and wore tight polo shirts and little khaki shorts, and we pulled our white socks up to our calves and we wore lip gloss. The gift shop had a roach infestation and part of my job before closing each night was to sprinkle poison around the baseboards in the entire store. I worked three resorts down from The Beach, where Kaylee Bruce was raped and murdered. The girls whispered that she was so mutilated and beaten up that she could have died from any one of her injuries. She was a little older than me, working a summer resort gig, a cute girl, a pony tail and lip gloss. The guy who they think did it was staying there, they said. He didn't even know her. My mother said *it was drugs and alcohol—everyone in the summer who comes to our town is tripped out on drugs for their vacation. Drugs could make you not know the difference between good and bad—they could make you crazy*, she said. She started talking about how *it's not who people really are* and it unnerved me that I couldn't tell if she was talking about the murderer or the men I'd seen her fall in love with. All of us girls who worked the

resorts and a lot of folks from town had a night vigil for Kaylee, walking the streets with candles. I remember that the bit of sky just above the flame of the candle looked like wet oil, and then, I'm sure I imagined it, the heat distorted above the flame and shaped a girl's face. Horror slipped to a haunting—a distinct shift in energy—a movement from shock and tangible fear to something softer, lingering. Something still unspeakable and more untrustable.[17]

Amber Deckard was convinced her mom was trying to kill her. Or maybe we were just pretending because we liked to freak ourselves out. Amber showed me where she found the poison hidden in the drawer with the syringes that her mom stole from work. Sometimes her pillow smelled like rubbing alcohol, and she said her mom came in at night and knocked her out and then gave her poison in shots, just enough to kill her really slowly so no one would know. Once we found a hole as proof, but it might have been a bug bite and we didn't want to call the cops and we didn't know who to talk to. Amber didn't read as much as I did, but she really loved the book *Flowers in the Attic.* The mom in the story was killing her kids with poison. I remember when Amber let me borrow the book. She said the story was true. I said *it was all made up—that none of the places or people were real—*but she said, *no, it doesn't matter if that part was made up. The reason we call things made up isn't because it's not true, but because there's a lot in there that you just shouldn't say if you're being decent. There's a lot people can't say about their lives, but books can say them because they pretend they aren't true, even when they are.*

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[17] For a more directed exploration of the ways narratives of the *unknowable* attempt to become *sayable* through and alongside narratives of the uncanny, see Susan Lepselter's essay, "Why Rachel Isn't Buried in her Grave." Lepselter examines how those things that exceed easy narratives in the genres we have, that is, the stuff "of class, loss, and colonization, and of the body's unmoored location in a world of accelerated technological change" merges with, and/or comes to be narrated within "historical trauma [that] can lodge itself in the bright, broken bits of stories about fantastic things" (257).

In *The Dark Tower* the guy called the weasel was reading John Fowles' *The Collector*. One day at the library I found the book, the real book that this character, who was supposed to be not real, was reading. The layers of the fictional worlds came together, like that, into my real. When I was returning the book the librarian wanted to talk to me about it. I told *her I didn't like that Miranda dies but I also didn't like how snobby she was*. I told her *I felt bad for Clegg*. She asked me, *did you read the whole book?* And when I said I had, she told me *the way you read the book is interesting because that wasn't exactly what the author wanted you to feel by the end*. She said *it was really about power getting into the hands of people who aren't educated enough and can't make reasonable judgments or be in respectful relationships*. She *said your sympathy is really interesting* and I felt ashamed that I hadn't read the book right and I was on the wrong side at the end.[18] I got rid of my spider collection after that.

Amber Deckard and I still used makeup to cover up our bruises. I bruised really easily. *It runs in the family,* my mother said. I was never

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[18] Pointing to the way I have read the text "wrong" highlights the way that I let the text reflect my own understanding of the world I occupied. The fictional text became a surface upon which I recognized my alienation from the librarian's claim to authorial intention and, more deeply, to a middle class experience of knowing and interpreting. While I would hesitate to call my interpretation a representation of some unified lower class culture, I can signal the way our interpretations of the text were contaminated by what we knew and believed to be true in our everydays. Our cultural differences became visible as our similarities in interpretation broke down. There is a feminist history for exploring the reading of texts in this way. Judith Newton reveals that "materialist-feminist work also frequently emphasizes the way in which a text is reproduced by its readers, and reproduced differently in changing historical situations . . .What is inherent in the text is not a fixed verbal structure but, rather, in [Catherine] Belsey's words, 'a range of possibilities of meaning'" (20).

really hurt.[19] Amber's mom showed us how to put concealer under the foundation and then green under eye concealer to balance the color and then powder over it to get rid of the shine. We didn't talk about how we got bruises, but I assumed it was her brother, too. My brother raged. He mostly hurt himself—he wasn't after me, I just got hit sometimes when I was trying to hold him so he'd calm down. My mother would have held him, but he had stopped calming down for her. We tried sometimes to not hold him, but he'd really hurt himself. It usually ended the same: eventually he'd go slack in my arms, he'd curl his legs in and look almost dead, or like an infant, sleeping, and we'd all be so tired and hollowed out. We hit a point when it stopped working for me to hold him, too, when he was about eight. He tried to hang himself from his bunk bed and he broke the window in his bedroom to jump out. My mother kept him out of school while they tried different *therapies*. In the end he didn't rage but he didn't care about anything. My family called this *getting the drugs right*.

Later, my brother told me he'd put me on his jail visitation list. I never went. I was getting out of a relationship that had its secrets and wasn't sure where I'd fall next. I was horrified that we were inventing ourselves in patterns that were written before us. I was ashamed of having failed him and afraid of going into such a locked place because my own panic had grown unpredictable again. I dreamt I was there and we were across a table from one another and there was nothing in his eyes like there was nothing in his eyes sometimes when he was a child. I dreamt there were spiders in his cell. I dreamt the cops were after my brother, or after me, and then they took my brother, just a baby still. I dreamt that I got to the

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[19] I am fairly confident that this line is both not true, and that I want it to sit there in the narrative, exactly as it is. I have proven myself, already, an unreliable child—lying about my father's death, and an unreliable narrator, unwilling or unable to separate my memories of fiction and family stories. I am unreliable here also, because I have become used to softening my childhood experiences, both to myself and to others.

door and locked it and we were safe and then it opened, and a hand shot through and grabbed me. I wrote a piece about my brother's incarceration so that he knew he was remembered and loved and that our lives were more complicated than the genres we were following. I wrote this because I wanted it to be true. I sent it to him, asking if I could publish it. He didn't say anything else except, *yeah, write whatever you want.* I wanted to be let in. I wanted to open the gendered ruts of incarceration and hidden abuses which are frighteningly extended generation by generation. I wanted to imagine a better story for us.

My five-year-old daughter was in the bathtub, stalling instead of drying off, saving a closet spider that had fallen in. It had long string-like legs, like closet spiders do, that even when dry seem incapable of balance. The spider was wet like thread, a lost cause. Every spider in this essay, every interwoven bit of the story that precedes this was born out of that spider. It woke up the memories. It marks the loss that sits before the embodiment of trauma. It frames the webbed and still webbing structure of the essay. I asked my daughter, again, *please get out of the bath.* And she closed her eyes, sunk down lower, so her chin touched the water and said to me *I just need to soak my shoulder for five more minutes.* It is a repetition of a narrative she has heard from me, which I have heard from my mother. She has no injury—she has been watching me. I have a real diagnosed and horribly painful old injury, marked with a silvery scar that my daughter runs her fingers over whenever it is exposed,[20] but I am

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[20] Our bodies hold our stories, and inform how we tell our stories. Pezzullo claims that "if we wish to transform politics, we need to expose our physical, emotional, and political scars. We need to wonder why we feel compelled to look and/or to look away" (356, Breast Cancer Awareness). Conquergood moves us not to reflect only on how we engage the bodies of our external subjects, but on our own bodies as subjects. He suggests "Ethnography is an *embodied practice;* it is an intensely sensuous way of knowing. The embodied researcher is the instrument" (83). Lidia Yuknavitch encourages thinking about how the body, and its lived experience through emotion and memory, informs our writing. She claims **"**linearity doesn't move the way the body moves. Linearity follows

certain, suddenly, when I hear my daughter speak, that I remember the pain from before the injury. It was waiting there already. I know this sounds fantastical, impossible, but I knew, like I know about love, that I carry my mother there in a tight knot in my right shoulder. It is a pain I feel constantly, exacerbated by stress and fear, a hard kernel of generations of American childhoods that sit at the periphery of the American dream,[21] childhoods that are forced to reconcile intimate and popular constructions of insanity, illness, haunting, horror and criminality that seem to bleed into one another. Childhoods that grow into adulthoods, and must navigate the embodied unspeakability of shame.

When my brother was still young, but on the bipolar drugs, sometimes I tried to taunt him to see if I could get him worked up. For all his rage from before, I had no anger for him—I just wanted to provoke him to feel something. He was after it too, I could tell. I'd read him really horrifying stuff at bedtime—adult fiction we were both too young for, which sometimes seemed to reflect our every day, which we were also too young for. Our betimes story of choice—one that was just the right amount of frightening was *The End of the Whole Mess*. I read it to him over and over

logic and certain constructs we like to call "time" and "realism." Our lives don't move that way, our emotional intensities don't move that way, and our memory for god damn sure doesn't move that way" (interview).

[21] Constructions of self and space are "best witnessed not at center, which is a perceptual effect, but at the verges; at sites where modernity is an unfinished and contested hegemony" (Seremetakis vii). Pezzullo advocates for scholars to enter un-centered environments, bringing attention to the senses and bodies "excluded from elite sight." She warns that "refusing to explore beyond what hegemonic relationships help make invisible, we provide further, albeit indirect, consent" (30, Toxic Tours). In this way, attention to the periphery is not only productive because the politics are incomplete and open to contestation, but because our acceptance of the active, political un-centering of disenfranchised communities refuses to see, and so comes to support the perpetuation of rampant inequalities and oppressions.

again. I think he liked it because he liked to see me cry, liked to see my face redden, and hear my voice break in sobs when I got to the last line, when the narrator writes to his little brother, "*i love you it wuz not yor falt i love you forgivyu loveyu.*"

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Embracing the F Word: Growing Up as a Reluctant Feminist

LINDA LEVITT

Growing up in the 1970s, I was, like millions of other American girls, stuck in a liminal space between feminism and femininity. The phrase "women's liberation" floated around the discourse of my childhood, on the fringes of Sunday barbecues or afternoon martinis. Most of the adults around me fell into naturalized gender roles without resistance or question, yet the thread of dissatisfaction that Betty Friedan articulated in *The Feminine Mystique* seemed like a current running under the flow of everyday family life. Influential to both my mother's generation and my own, Friedan's best-seller is credited with launching second wave feminism. Friedan herself was a co-founder of the National Organization for Women and became an iconic figure for women's rights.

I was encouraged to believe that the movement liberated not only those who fought for it, but also liberated me. If there was a sense that I would have more opportunities as a woman than my mother and her friends did, what would these opportunities be? Because the narratives and characters of feminism helped me understand social norms and expectations beyond my lived experience, I turned to television for answers. Critical theorist Douglas Kellner notes that "radio, television, film, and the other products of media culture provide materials out of which we forge our very identities; our sense of selfhood; our notion of what it means to be male or female; our sense of class, of ethnicity and race, of nationality, of sexuality; and of 'us' and 'them'" (7).

Television offered a limited spectrum of roles and identities for women: as mothers, wives, and homemakers; as single women seeking companionship; as women in the workplace looking for contentment in some form. From Edith Bunker to Maude, from Mary Richards to Rhoda, television presented girls of the 70s with a variety of characters to emulate or avoid. I struggled with confusion about how to best form my identity as a woman. I saw game shows and soap operas, made for television movies and prime time dramas, but sitcoms clearly had the strongest effect on shaping my sense of self.

One of the earliest female characters I aspired to emulate was Samantha Stephens, the charming witch of *Bewitched*. I remember the series in black and white, so it must have been in syndication (reruns, as we used to say) because the toddler who I was when the series started running in color could not comprehend the complexities of Samantha and Darrin's relationship. Looking back on the characters who shaped my ideas of gender presents me with a then-and-now duality. I remember admiring Samantha for her beauty, her magic, and her motherhood. She seemed able to please everyone. Yet watching *Bewitched* on DVD in 2015, I am furious with Samantha's constant prioritizing of Darrin's contentment. Then I remember: what I am watching aired to a prime time audience fifty years ago. Samantha may have aimed to please her husband, but her independence and intelligence were uncommon among women on television. And Endora, Samantha's mother, was even more independent and adventurous.

In fact, Samantha's decision to privilege marriage over adventure is likely the frustration I experience now, when I watch the episode tellingly titled "Witch or Wife?" in which Samantha finds herself bored while Darrin manages an overwhelming workload at the advertising agency, due to his boss's vacation. Finding Samantha at home playing solitaire, Endora convinces her to take a quick trip to Paris, a journey the witches can accomplish in a flash. There, they enjoy a decadent lunch at a sidewalk

café then take in a stylish fashion show. Despite these refined pleasures, Samantha returns to Darrin and the pleasures of their domestic life. She convinces him that a settled marriage is truly what she wants the most, and sacrifices the lifestyle she can engage with a twitch of her nose.

Samantha chooses the heteronormative, socially sanctioned life that young women were beginning to question in the 1970s. Today, I bristle at the way a strong female character is easily subdued, sending a message to viewers about making a particular choice that privileges a suburban marriage for a smart, savvy woman who is capable of anything, thanks to witchcraft. Not being a witch myself, I am not sure that I saw myself as able as Samantha to chart my own independent path. There were many cultural messages that said women should not go the park or to the store alone, so how could I possibly imagine myself jetting off to Paris? Susan J. Douglas, in *Where the Girls Are*, indicates that Samantha's duality appealed to a particular audience: "The show hailed young female viewers by providing, and seeking to reconcile, images of female equality—and, often, even images of female superiority—with images of female subordination" (133). This reconciliation draws viewers to sitcoms today, as women still encounter misogyny, not only in their lived experience but also in the media products informed by everyday life.

Sexism moderated by humor was a staple of the *Mary Tyler Moore Show*, a perennial favorite in my household. Following the formula typical of sitcoms, each week focused on a misunderstanding or miscommunication that played out over the course of the episode and resolved in the end. Sitcoms thus gave me an idea of what conflict among adults looked like, especially conflict in workplace and romantic relationships between men and women. *Mary Tyler Moore* is a situation comedy, so the conflicts are, as Jason Mittell points out, "low-stakes comedic mishaps," which become, especially for the child viewer, a safe space for playing out conflict without consequence. Mittell adds that these storyworlds are presented in "a low-key naturalistic style, focusing on

realistic characters in plausible scenarios" (248). The realism of this particular sitcom facilitated the possibilities of Mary Richards serving as a role model.

John Caughey's 1984 ethnographic research asked participants about their parasocial relationships with celebrities and the characters they play. One participant who watched *The Dick Van Dyke Show* as a child wanted her mother to be perfect like Laura Petrie, the perky young wife played by Mary Tyler Moore. The *Mary Tyler Moore Show* aired when Caughey's interview subject was in junior high school. She told Caughey: "I didn't pay much attention until I realized that I wanted to learn how to become a woman for myself. I had the perfect person to model myself after: Mary. On her show she was a career woman and still as perfect as before: she dressed well, she was slender, she knew how to cook, she was independent, she had a beautiful apartment, she was intelligent, she had friends. There was still nothing wrong with her" (62).

Perhaps it was that sense that there was nothing wrong with Mary Richards that made it difficult for me to see her as a role model. I appreciated her independence and ability to find a satisfying life without a partner to "complete" her: Mary Richards was a whole person on her own terms. What Mary had that I lacked, however, was what Lou Grant called "spunk." In an infamous bit at the end of the first episode of the *Mary Tyler Moore Show*, Lou Grant interviews Mary Richards for a job at JWM-TV. After asking her several inappropriate questions that would today be serious Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) violations, Grant says, "You know, you've got spunk." She demurs, thinking it a compliment until he quickly adds, "I hate spunk!" Here, then, is the binary: no matter how successful Mary might be in her career at the television station, no matter how many times she saves the day, it is always within a frame that critiques her courage and character. Then again, what good is a feminist in a sitcom without the patriarchy to rail against?

In the same way I lacked spunk, I was also not the girl who would grow up to toss her hat up into the air in a celebratory gesture of self-confidence. Surely I wouldn't catch it, and it would fall in the mud (an ironic spoof of this famous scene is the opening of *Sex and the City*, in which a passing bus splashes muddy water on Carrie's ballerina dress). I gravitated toward Mary's friend and neighbor Rhoda Morgenstern, who more closely epitomized my idea of a realistic role model: a sweet yet somewhat whiney, smart yet insecure, Jewish woman trying to find her way in the world. Rhoda was also deeply affected by the traps of cultural expectations for women, and perhaps I could relate to this as well.

The series premier of *Rhoda* features the eponymous character traveling from Minneapolis to visit her sister Brenda in New York, where the Morgenstern sisters grew up. The opening scene in which the sisters reunite in Brenda's tiny apartment speaks volumes about women's self-perceptions in 1974.

Brenda: I can't believe you're really here. God, you look so gorgeous.

Rhoda: So tell me everything. I want to hear it all...what's going on with your life.

Brenda: Oh, you know. The same things: mother problem, weight problem, date problem.

Rhoda: That's terrific. You don't have a job problem.

Brenda: Hey! That's right. I got promoted at the bank. Now I'm a teller.

Rhoda: Hey, there you go. That's terrific.

Brenda: And the best thing about being a bank teller is that your
legs don't show.

Rhoda: Why do I get this feeling I'm looking in an old mirror?

This was familiar, self-deprecating dialogue. Even the positive successes,
like Brenda's promotion, have a failure (unattractive legs) to undercut
them. The laugh track playing under the conversation only enhanced my
pre-teen idea that pointing out your own shortcomings could be something
others appreciate as humorous. This is not a particularly winsome scenario
for role models. Was Rhoda a feminist?

Her mother, who enters the apartment shortly after this conversation,
hugs Rhoda and scolds her for not wearing a bra. Did I really want to be a
feminist? There was always a certain edge of dissatisfaction to Rhoda's
personality: no matter how content any given moment might find her, she
was ever cautious of what misfortune might await. In retrospect, I can see
these tendencies in my teenage self, always insecure. Was that classmate
flirting with me, or did he see me as friendly and easy to talk with? Would
I actually be prettier when I got my braces off? Would I feel comfortable
to show my teeth when I smiled? Like both of the Morgenstern sisters, I
worried about my "mother problem, weight problem, date problem," even
though I was still finding my way in the world, not yet the single,
independent career woman that Rhoda and Brenda somewhat, and
unhappily, exemplified.

And then there's Maude. We meet Maude Findlay as Edith Bunker's
cousin on *All in the Family*, where Maude's liberal, feminist, open-minded
attitude was a comedic foil for the conservative curmudgeon, Archie
Bunker. Standing 5 foot, 10 inches with a deep, gravelly voice, Bea Arthur
played Maude as an outspoken woman who seldom held back her feelings.
Maude addressed controversial content despite the tendency for broadcast
networks to shy away from it in order to retain corporate advertising
sponsorship. For example, early in the first season, 47-year-old Maude

discovers she is pregnant, and she and her husband Walter decide that it is best for her to have an abortion. The two-part episode aired in November 1972, three months before the Supreme Court's decision in Roe v. Wade. At the time, abortion was legal in New York, where the series was set.

Maude was unrelenting. She was difficult. She did not back down. As an extreme introvert I could not aspire to those qualities, but I did admire them. I identified with Maude. Through identification with media characters, many of us are able to learn more about the world and about ourselves as well, as we consider how we might act and react in a given situation. Jonathan Cohen posits that "identification is defined not as an attitude, an emotion, or perception but, rather, as a process that consists of increasing loss of self-awareness and its temporary replacement with heightened emotional and cognitive connections with a character" (251). Cohen argues that identification occurs not as a way of seeing similarities with the character but actually imagining oneself in her place. If that is the case, did I want to be Maude? Yes and no.

Maude represented many of the things that get articulated negatively along with the distasteful rendering of "feminist": she was smart, "bossy," and stood up to men. I did not want to be seen as the "ugly feminist." I wanted to be a secret feminist superhero: that feminism could be the power I could hide and unleash in the moment when I needed to save the world.

These early influences that shaped my ideas of who and how I should be remain on the periphery of my sense of self. Great television characters do not disappear: they remain in circulation like old friends and neighbors. *Maude* was finally released in its entirety on DVD in 2015, putting that character into contemporary conversations about comedy, television, and feminism. As I talk now with women who were my fourth- and fifth-grade friends, we reminisce about Maude's boldness and conviction, marveling at some of the intricate humor that was too sophisticated for us to understand as children. Yet each of us, in navigating our feminism, felt

empowered at some point by Maude Findlay. She spoke unhesitatingly about controversial issues like abortion, addiction, and divorce. I could model my voice after hers: even when I lacked confidence, Maude demonstrated courage that I hoped to imitate.

Although programs and characters have changed dramatically over the decades, cultivation analysis argues that television itself has changed very little. In the film *The Electronic Storyteller*, George Gerbner attributed this to what he called casting and fate. The ways that men and women are cast differently on television affects our understanding and communication with each other. "For young women it has the effect of reducing—of tending to reduce—their sense of adequacy, and their sense of opportunities, potentials, and a range of activities in which they are likely to be seen as appropriate, and as adequate, and as successful" (*Electronic Storyteller*).

Television told me that women could have careers, but with caveats. I watched Pepper Anderson on *Police Woman* go undercover and be subjected to degrading behavior and violence from men as she masqueraded as a prostitute, a go-go dancer, or a flight attendant. The abuse suffered by Pepper while under cover created an aura of respect for Pepper-as-police-officer, whether authentic or not. Fast forward to 1982: Pepper would arguably not be described as a feminist, but Christine Cagney and Mary Beth Lacey certainly would. For me, and likely millions of other viewers, Cagney and Lacey were groundbreaking in a way Pepper Anderson was not. Critical and public praise for the series routinely points out that these characters were not police offers who happened to be women, but women who happened to be police officers; they were real people with real lives. If television gives audience members scripts to consider for managing their everyday lives, *Cagney and Lacey* offered abundant options.

As far as career choices were concerned, I knew I would not be a police officer. Gerbner also notes that television shows us far more police

officers, attorneys, and medical professionals than exist in contrast to other professions. These jobs enable action, conflict, and drama for televisual narratives that are not the typical experiences of writers and librarians. The professions that interested me enabled a quiet life. I preferred intellectual adventures to real-life danger. I had graduated from college and was taking my first small steps into a career in communication when *Murphy Brown* came on the air. Murphy was not a role model but a reprise, an echo of Mary Richards, Rhoda Morgenstern, and Maude Findlay. Coming back to television journalism after dealing with her alcoholism, Murphy has done so in the most publicly acceptable way, by checking in to the Betty Ford Clinic. The character is, like Maude, publicly brash yet privately sensitive. Audiences get more heart from Murphy Brown than they did from Maude, and that tenderness constantly reminded viewers that women are complex, multifaceted human beings, equally capable of surprising you and doing exactly what you expected.

In his reflections on the pedagogical power of film and television, Keller says that "media show us how to dress, look and consume; how to react to members of different social groups; how to be popular and successful and how to avoid failure; and how to conform to the dominant system of norms, values, practices, and institutions." Murphy Brown enabled me to finally embrace the F word. Not quite able to wear the badge of feminism in the waning years of the second wave, I saw that feminism and femininity did not need to be a binary. Although Bonnie Dow convincingly argues that Murphy Brown is the epitome of postfeminism, I learned that conforming to social norms did not necessarily mean creating a public persona to hide behind. Dow points out that "a clear message of Murphy Brown is that the personality traits [...] such as aggression, competitiveness, and lack of interpersonal sensitivity, are key to Murphy's professional success in a patriarchal world" (141). At issue is how Brown's defiance of traditional gendered behavior is often

the source of humor on the show: the audience laughs at Murphy's failure to be a feminist, as well as her failures *because* she is a feminist.

Many of the issues addressed on *Murphy Brown* are prevalent today, both inside feminist circles and in the larger public discourse: work-life balance, single parenting, leaning in, the role of women in the workplace. We need not admire or identify with Murphy Brown or any of television's female protagonists, but we can thank them for starting conversations that still persist.

These conversations take us back once again to Betty Friedan. In their overview of autoethnography, Carolyn Ellis, Tony Adams, and Art Bochner refer to *The Feminist Mystique* as an example of writing as a therapeutic process, for both author and readers. In Friedan's descriptions of the plight of women like herself who felt discontented in their lives, she was able to articulate what others felt but did not have the opportunities to discuss. Her readers "felt alone in their struggle, as if their isolation and feelings were issues with which they had to contend personally" (Ellis, n.p.). Friedan's stories are not dissimilar from the stories of television characters who offered viewers models for their gendered experiences. These characters taught me both the positive and negative consequences of being outspoken, and what it might look like to stand up for myself. Feminism showed me that I could speak out on behalf of others in the hope of improving the circumstances for all women. Nonetheless, it took many years before I could assert the values of feminism as something I embrace, rather than the F Word I feared would render me an outcast.

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Raising (Razing?) Princess: Autoethnographic Reflections On Motherhood and The Princess Culture

SHERIANNE SHULER

We're already about five minutes late, and as I drive around the sprawling upscale outdoor mall in the rain, I mutter under my breath, "Pretty and Pampered…Pretty and Pampered…Precious and Privileged…Pretentious and Patriarchal…damn it, where are you?" Finally, I spot the pink flowery sign through the mist on my third loop around the Chili's restaurant: "Pretty and Pampered: A Spa for Girls." "Here it is!" I announce with relief, and Lucy begins kicking her patent leathered feet on the back of my seat in excitement. "Yeah! We found it!" she exclaims. We unbuckle and she climbs out of the Subaru quickly, rather than in her typical dawdling fashion. I grab her hand while balancing the pink beribboned birthday present and my huge "mom purse" on the other arm. We run through the wet parking lot to the location of her school friend's fourth birthday party.

I open the door and gaze upon a pink and glittery haze. We step into a gift shop, filled with princess wands, kids hair products and makeup, and other artifacts of modern girlhood. A middle-aged woman at the cash register wearing a hell of a lot of makeup for 10 a.m. on a Saturday morning looks up and smiles as she exclaims, "Welcome to Pretty and Pampered!"

"Jordan's birthday party?" I ask, as an uncharacteristically shy Lucy clings more tightly to my hand and steps behind me.

"Oh yes, right back here," she exclaims, as she lifts the gift I am precariously holding off of my arm and leaves her post to walk us back to the party area.

"Lucy's here!" a little girl's voice exclaims, and Lucy beams and starts to jump up and down while still attached to my hand. At barely three, she is the youngest kid in her Montessori preschool class. She longs to be accepted by the four year olds, but often comes home with sad reports of how Jordan or Alicia or Emma didn't let her play with them because she's only three. Today, though, she bounces and dances around me with excitement as she sees her classmates. Eight little girls, ages 5 and under, already wearing an assortment of long pink, purple, or blue princess dresses, are sitting primly in high director's chairs in a semi-circle. The party is almost exclusively made up of white girls, with the exception of Hannah whose family is Filipino. Aside from Emma, who called out to Lucy as we entered, the girls are remarkably quiet. Typically, at school, there's a lot more noise from this bunch.

"Jenna, can you get this little girl changed into her dress?" the middle-aged woman calls out enthusiastically.

A teenager in jeans and a black t–shirt with the pink and purple "Pretty and Pampered" logo emblazoned on the front steps away from the group and says, "Sure." She offers Lucy her hand.

My daughter looks at me for reassurance before unsticking herself from my side. "Go ahead, sweetie, I'll be right behind you," I say encouragingly. "Let me take your coat."

Lucy slips out of her coat and then skips along holding Jenna's hand and they disappear behind a long purple velvet curtain that screens the dressing room. Although I am just on the other side of the curtain, I am surprised to find myself uneasy at my lack of involvement in this process of wardrobe selection.

"Okay! Choose the dress you like the best and I'll help you put it on!" I hear Jenna's sing-song voice ask from behind the curtain.

"I want THIS ONE!" Lucy exclaims.

"How about one of these?" Jenna chirps enthusiastically, "They are more like princesses."

"NO! THIS one," my strong-willed girl asserts.

"Well, okay, that will look beautiful," Jenna concedes.

In a few moments, Lucy emerges from behind the velvet curtain wearing a pale pink satin ballerina leotard with a short tutu instead of a long flowing princess gown. This is where my mother demons, the ones that sound a lot like the voice of MY mother, start to appear. On the one hand, I am somewhat pleased that she doesn't look like Cinderella. At the same time, I want to scold, "Lucy! Why did you pick a ballerina costume?" She is doing it wrong! Right here in front of the other mothers.

Instead, I say, "ooooooooh, cute!" With her head held high, Lucy slowly and carefully walks her tutu-clad self over to join the party.

"Lucy! That's a ballerina costume!" shouts Emma.

"No, it's a ballerina princess costume," Lucy answers regally. It is then that I notice with a mixture of glee and shame that Lucy has an octopus temporary tattoo covering most of her forearm. Tattoos and tutus—a gritty ballerina princess.

As I join the other moms off to the side, Jenna hoists Lucy up on the empty chair next to Emma, who is busy inspecting her pink fingernails as she holds them up to dry. With Lucy, there are now nine little princesses sitting quietly and properly, as Jenna and two other teenage girls wearing matching Pretty and Precious t-shirts move around the circle to beautify them. Jordan, the four year old birthday girl, already has her long curly hair pulled up into a fancy style, and her makeup and nails are done. The other princesses are in are in various stages of completion. The employees have this down to a science, as they make their way around the circle with no one spending more than three minutes on a hairdo, the application of glittery makeup, or nail polishing. This is a veritable princess assembly

line. I'm pretty sure Henry Ford never could have foreseen a factory quite like this.

<p style="text-align:center">* * *</p>

"But little girls have always loved princesses," my mother exclaims. "My generation grew up with Snow White and Cinderella." This is not an uncommon reaction, but it is patently false. As Forman-Brunell and Eaton argue, the dominance of the current princess culture is an historically contemporary phenomenon. Yes, the princess has been around as an occasional part of girls' lives for the past two hundred years, but not as the constant presence that marks her current status in the culture. The princess figure has changed over time, and has "often absorbed contradictory conceptions of girlhood that vied for dominance," and is not as "natural and timeless" (339) as many (including my mother) claim. Part of this framing of our collective understanding of princesses, Do Rozario argues, is due to nostalgia (37). In fact, despite Disney's efforts to imbue the princesses with a sense of timelessness, each princess created reflects different social attitudes and conditions particular to her era.

The story of how we have landed at this particular point in the princess culture goes something like this: Once upon a time, long ago in the year 2000, a man by the name of Andy Mooney left Nike for a spot in Marketing at Disney. One of his first actions was to attend a Disney on Ice show, where he was aghast to see hundreds of little girls in the audience wearing homemade princess costumes. He saw an opportunity to make money – not by creating something brand new, but simply by repackaging the old (Orenstein 13). Fifteen years ago, Mooney grouped 8 female characters, some of whom weren't even technically princesses in their stories, and created a phenomenon that has become known as the Disney Princesses, or sometimes simply THE princesses. With no new movies, this manipulation and repackaging of old characters by 2009 had become a better than $4 BILLION dollar industry (Orenstein 14). And Disney did not stop there, as evidenced by a princess bridal line (Setoodeh) and even

a Disney Baby line marketed directly to new mothers in maternity wards by offering free newborn clothing to infant princesses (Barnes). Because of Andy Mooney, today's girls are growing up with an entirely different experience of princesses than did anyone who is currently over the age of about sixteen. And these figures precede *Frozen*, the film which introduced Disney's newest princesses and that is responsible for better than $1 billion in retail revenue in 2014 alone (Applebaum).

As the mother of Lucy, a now eight-year-old girl who has spent the past five years being enthralled with all things princess, I have become alternately frustrated, fascinated, bored, concerned, and intrigued by what has been termed "the princess culture." As academics do, I turned to the literature. Or at least, I tried. I looked for scholarly work about the princess culture and how it impacts children, and I came up short. I found plenty of work about Disney in general (e.g. the 1995 edited volume by Bell, Haas, and Sells), or analyses of individual princess texts (e.g. Downey; O'Brien; Henke, Umble, and Smith), and a bit about the historical place of the princess in our culture (Do Rozario; Forman-Brunell and Eaton). The phenomenon I concern myself with here is unique in that it is a subset of Disney and broader than any one princess text. Girls today generally experience the princesses as a package, yet our scholarship has been slower to examine it from that perspective. There are plenty of popular references to the princess culture, most notably Orenstein's *Cinderella Ate My Daughter*, but not much of a scholarly treatment of this recent phenomenon. The popular literature either gravely sounds the alarm about issues such as gender stereotypes (Orenstein), body image (Orenstein), or consumerism (Linn; Orenstein; Schor). Missing is the more nuanced approach that examines the way that children and their parents experience the princess culture that our scholarship might be able to address.

Thus, I set out to explore the contours of the princess culture through autoethnographic reflections on my reluctance to mother a princess. As a

qualitative method that privileges writing as a way of knowing, autoethnography has cultivated insights about my unease that I had not previously voiced. As an accidental ethnographer (Poulos) of sorts, my habit of attending to signs, clues, and the deepest urgings of my maternal heart also brings up anxieties. Through the practice of narrative construction as a means of inquiry (e.g. Ellis; Goodall; Poulos), this paper delves into how my daughter's identity (and to a lesser extent, mine) is intertwined with the princess culture, writ large.

To do this, I turned to scholars who examine media autoethnographically. Stern, for example, examines how her own identity as a woman and a feminist media scholar can be viewed as intertwined with the characters in the shows that she was most interested in at the time. She concludes that these characters helped to shape her own romantic and consumer desires (419). This, of course, represents my primary concerns about my daughter's obsession with princesses: How might they shape her ideas about what it means to be female in this world?

In Manning's audience ethnography of how viewers identify with Grey's Anatomy, he suggests that viewers often engage in what he calls symbolic boasting (142), in that they see themselves identifying with the characters' positive characteristics and disavowing characters' negative qualities. It is not so much that viewers see themselves as just like a character, but that they see positive qualities in a character that they aspire to. Further, in Manning's 2012 autoethnographic account of *Mad Men,* he argues that symbolic boasting allows viewers to place themselves inside a media text, while also maintaining their distinctiveness from the text. Indeed, he argues, perhaps this is the more important aspect of media effects (or affects, as he playfully suggests) for scholars to concern themselves with. Rather than worrying about the ways that media might be influencing our behaviors, he suggests that scholars focus more on how media texts can make viewers think about our own lives (96). Through

audience autoethnography, he urges us to explore this intertwining of identities.

Here is where my own positionality as the mother of the primary person consuming the princess culture complicates matters. Three or four year old girls—possibly more media savvy than they are often given credit for being—still do not have the skills to think deeply about their own identities vis-à-vis the media texts they consume. As Lucy's mother, I do have these capabilities; but I am not the primary audience of princess texts. In his 2006 book, Jenkins discusses his use of the term "Aca/Fan" to refer to media scholars who read texts as both academics and as fans (4). Leaning on this notion, with thanks to Jenkins, perhaps I am best positioned as an Aca/Mom in this story. I am not always a fan of the princess media myself; indeed, I have often been the opposite. As an academic mother, I can never fully leave my critical sensibilities at the office when I am engaging in mothering work. It is rarely possible to simply be swept away with Lucy in the pure enjoyment of a princess story or film or game as an Aca/Mom. And even when I truly enjoy viewing a film or reading a story with my daughter, my fan response is filtered through both academic and parental lenses. Thus, my autoethnographic work is not solely of my experience with texts: but of watching someone else interact with texts and then observing my own reactions.

It's not about my identity. Or is it?

<div align="center">* * *</div>

As my daughter sits still for her turn with the bobby pins, hairspray, and makeup, I am struck by the ridiculousness of a three year old getting made up like this. My husband, Nathan, was against allowing Lucy to attend this party, worried about her growing obsession with princesses whose beauty alone seems to lead to happily ever after. But Lucy was so excited to get the invitation along with all of the other girls in the class, and I didn't have the heart to say no. I notice now that she is sitting on her salon chair surrounded by her tutu and an air of regal self-importance, but

without a smile. Is she even having fun? I then notice that none of the little girls are acting like their typical giggly selves. These girls are much more lively and chatty when I see them at drop off or pick up time each day. No one looks sad, really, but somber and perhaps nervous as they wait for an employee to perform princess work upon them. They are taking this seriously—very seriously—as if becoming a princess is important work. When it is her turn to have her curly hair pinned up and sprayed, Lucy squeezes her eyes shut and winces but does not complain. She scrutinizes her reflection in the hand-held mirror held up by the princess factory employee. "Do you LOVE it?" the worker enthuses. Lucy nods somberly. "Good!" the worker chirps, moving along to princessify the next girl in the circle.

Two more girls arrive late and are quickly ushered behind the purple curtain to be fitted with princess gowns. Rakhee and Ipsita were both born in India, and their mothers have carpooled to the party. Along with Hannah, these two disrupt the sea of whiteness all around us. With a bit more racial diversity in the room, the party somehow seems a little less creepy. But only a little. Even with the addition of a few princess of color, the main Disney princesses are overwhelmingly white. Tiana, Jasmine, and Mulan sometimes lurk in the background, but they are rarely the centerpiece of Disney's marketing of the princess line. And even beyond Disney, the princess icon is rarely depicted as anything but white.

Gesturing to the three teenaged girls who are beautifying our daughters, Emma's mom asks me, "How much would you have loved THIS job when you were a teenager?"

"Probably more than telemarketing," I truthfully replied. Emma's mom is loving the experience. I glance around furtively at the other moms, trying to make meaningful feminist eye contact, but I can't figure out if anyone shares my ambivalence.

I long to find a safe mom to be snarky with, but don't want to stand out uncomfortably in this crowd. Every time I have complained about the

prevalence of the princess culture, even among other progressive moms, I have faced a chorus of, "What's the big deal?" and "Let her have fun!" Best not to chance it here, especially because we're new to the class. And by "we," I guess I mean that Lucy is new. Even Alicia's mom, who I had previously pegged as a kindred spirit, is smiling and taking pictures.

So I keep "oohing" and "ahhing" over our adorable daughters and snap more pictures like everybody else. I mean, she IS adorable. No denying that.

<p style="text-align:center">*   *   *</p>

Goodier explored the dual identities of academic mothers, comparing these women to "double agents," (49) but focused more on how the mothering self is revealed or hidden in the professoring self. The story of how the academic self, with her critical feminist sensibilities, is expressed or repressed in motherhood is not as often told. One notable exception is Kinser's work that examines her struggles to integrate her feminist, academic, and mothering identities. She argues, "raising children with knowledge that most of the mothers around me, that most of those who parent my son's friends and peers don't have is in many ways awful, dreadful" (384). And worse, "raising my children to hold that same knowledge, surrounded by children who do not, has proven at times, for my kids, dreadful" (384). Focusing more squarely on the impact of feminism than academia on mothering, O'Reilly points out the catch-22 that our children need feminism to "ready them for survival in a patriarchal world" but also that "resistance to patriarchy is indeed dangerous to our feminist daughters" (29). The approach to parenting that most resonates is Leavy—a feminist academic mother who enjoys makeup, clothing, and consuming the very media she critiques—who writes of the difficulty of parenting a pre-teen daughter (32). She inspires me to ask: Who am I, a former cheerleader and sorority president, to squelch my daughter's pleasure in popular "girly" things?

As Susan Linn argues in her book, *The Case for Make Believe*, the problem with linking consumption and make believe—as Disney has successfully done with the princesses—is that it constrains imagination (34-39). The princesses cannot work as doctors or breastfeed babies or go on new adventures because their stories do not allow for these acts. There was controversy when Mooney first suggested that they lift the princesses out of their stories because there was a concern about each princess remaining faithful to her character. So, if you notice the packaged group of Disney Princesses, none are making eye contact with one another (Orenstein 13). They cannot; they are from separate stories. So although they are grouped together, strangely, they can't interact. They can't be friends. Kind of like supermodels on the runway, staring off into the distance.

The more solidly the notion of "princess" is tied to particular stories and images, Linn argues, the more difficult it is for kids to imagine alternative realities. And even worse, when kids only know the princesses as icons outside of their stories, they are nothing more than their hairstyles and dresses. As far as three-year-old Lucy knows, to be "Belle" is not to be brave, smart, and a voracious reader – because she hasn't seen the movie. No, to be Belle is to wear an off-the-shoulder yellow dress. If you don't have the dress, you can't be Belle.

Ever since Lucy was a baby, she has been called "princess" by grocery store cashiers, her aunts, and even her pediatrician (as in, "Let me look inside your ears, princess"). This is all before she even knew what a princess WAS, except to know that she was one. We tried to resist—we purposely did not purchase baby clothing that said "princess" on it, which wasn't always easy. We went for a more gender-neutral "Clifford the Big Red Dog" lunchbox, a yellow bedroom, and princess-free toys and décor. We did not give her princess movies to watch. And still, the princesses somehow climbed in through the windows or under the doors of our home and lives. They are sneaky, like cockroaches. They came in the form of

gifts I couldn't bring myself to confiscate, they elbowed their way into the play of her school friends, and they even have found their way into media that I trusted, such as the PBS Kids cartoons.

And, of course, they came in the form of birthday party invitations. I could have chosen to not let her attend Jordan's party. But it seemed mean to exclude her from a social event she was excited about because of my hang-ups with the princesses.

<p align="center">* * *</p>

"Okay princesses, it's time for your coronation!" one employee says excitedly, but the girls are too busy being careful with their fingernails and dresses to register that a vague command has been uttered.

Realizing this, the princess party leader takes different tack, "OKAY! Everyone come over here and line up!" Now we're getting somewhere. Lining up is something these preschoolers understand and they jump to attention. "Okay, birthday girl, you are first!" bellows the party leader, who has now obtained a handheld microphone, and Jordan struts to the front to take the coveted spot of line leader. The rest of the girls jostle and elbow for places in line after her. Lucy is near the end, in deference to the older girls, a role not uncommon for actual princesses. One at a time, each girl is helped up onto the stage behind the curtain and handed a scepter.

When it is Lucy's turn, I feel the acid churn in the pit of my stomach. "Please don't trip, please don't trip," I obsess internally, my mind flashing to some of the many high profile times I had done exactly that. Oh, God, am I a stage mother already? I hate to think that I'm living vicariously at the princess factory.

The emcee enthusiastically shouts, "Meet Princess Lucy!" as Lucy emerges cautiously from behind the curtain and looks around, bewildered. "Her princess rule is that everyone must eat ice cream!" One of the employees hands her a scepter and points her toward a pink feather boa that is stretched across the end of the stage. She shuffles down the catwalk in that direction and ducks underneath, as instructed. "Her favorite thing to

do as a princess is to get dressed up!" Another employee grabs Lucy's arm and pulls her to one side to place a silver tiara with fuzzy pink feathers on her glittery head. "And her princess pet is a lion." Finally reaching the end of the catwalk to the half-hearted applause and hoots of the three employees, she jumps off to sit beside her princessy friends. Not a single wave with hand or scepter.

Where did my bold, limelight-loving girl go? And what is she learning from this experience? That imagination and dressing up are a spectacle for others' viewing pleasure and not something to have fun with for herself? I hope that is not one of those memorable messages she will internalize.

"Now it's time for the princess dance party!" booms the microphone.

"Great," I'm thinking, wondering if we are about to be treated to a techno remix of "Someday my Prince Will Come." The music starts, and…huh? The Hokey Pokey? For the first time during the party, the girls lighten up and smile as they put their nail polished hands in and out and shake them all about. As they turn themselves around in their poofy dresses, the princess birthday party experience suddenly seems more innocuous. And if that wasn't enough to make the point, the princesses were then instructed on the "Chicken Dance." I was expecting the Macarena or the Electric Slide to follow, but instead, the employees attempt to gather the girls for the souvenir group photo that comes with the "perfect princess" party package.

All the perfect princesses line up to smile prettily. All the princesses, that is, except one. With a chubby little hand on either side of her face, she smooshes her cheeks together and turns toward me with a sly grin, ignoring numerous pleas from the photographer to cooperate with the perfect picture.

"Okay! Time for everyone to take off your costumes and put your clothes back on!" an employee yells, her happiest sounding voice coming off a bit more on edge than before. Lucy sometimes still needs help with

dressing and undressing, so I trail behind the gaggle of older princesses and hover near the purple curtain.

Suddenly, the woman from the front counter brushes by me, frowning and hissing at an employee to "Go back there and tell her to hurry up, this other party has been waiting and this is unacceptable."

Please step off to your left. The princess party assembly line must not be delayed.

As I peer behind the curtain to where 10 little girls are shedding their princess gowns and one is shedding her ballet costume, I finally begin to recognize them. I feel relieved as they pose and tickle each other and laugh at fart noises. These are the girls who call me "Lucy's mom" every evening at school pick-up time. One by one, they burst out from behind the purple curtain and drop their poufy dresses in a pile on the floor. As the girls dance, march, bounce, and skip out from behind the curtain, each one adds her gown to the growing mound of abandoned pouf and takes her place in the unimaginatively named and neutrally decorated "Cake Room #1."

I peek into Cake Room #1 and spy a box labeled "The Cake Gallery." THIS discovery, that the cake is from the bakery my family adores above all others, makes allowing Lucy to be immersed in princess culture at this party completely worth it. As Jordan's mother cuts the cake and two employees pass it out on pink princess plates, I worry that there will not be enough left for the moms. But after all the still-glittery and beautifully-coiffed former princesses have been served, nearly half the adorable white cake with pink polka dots is left. As I strike up a conversation with another mom in the hallway to avoid looking too eager, I am distracted by thoughts of buttercream frosting.

Imagine my chagrin as I watch Jordan's mom retrieve the white cardboard box from the corner. None of the other moms seem to be paying attention as the remaining fluffy white pink polka dotted frosting disappears into the box. I glance surreptitiously around at the other moms

and not a single one lets on that she has noticed the cake. Even Jordan's mom does not eat cake, though I am pretty sure she will later. Probably after Jordan goes to bed. She'll sneak into the kitchen and slice off a sliver ever so carefully so that it's not even obvious that a piece has been taken. Then she'll eat it with her hands to avoid creating the evidence of a dirty plate and fork. Here at the party, the myth that women don't eat is preserved. Meanwhile, back in Cake Room #1, Lucy is enjoying her treat. Although most of the other girls seem to be using their forks, Lucy is busy scooping frosting off with her fingers and then licking it off, bit by bit. I am both appalled by her manners and delighted that she still gets to openly enjoy birthday cake. At least there's that.

<p style="text-align:center">* * *</p>

"I don't want chubby cheeks! I want regular cheeks!" Lucy whines one night at bedtime, a few months later. Standing in front of the mirror in her dress-up corner, she pushes her cheeks inward with the heels of her hands. Then, she walks over to her dresser and picks out some barrettes.

"What are you doing, honey?" I ask.

"I need something to push my cheeks in," she announces, and then proceeds to poke her cheeks with the barrettes.

"Lucy, no!" I exclaim. "You could really hurt your cheeks that way!"

"Well, I am trying to make my cheeks NOT CHUBBY!" she yells.

"Honey, that won't make your cheeks less chubby. It will only make them owie." I pry the barrettes from her hands and lead her over to her bed. She struggles a bit and then finally relaxes as I pull her into my lap and put my arms around her, saying, "Lots of people would love to have cheeks just like yours. They help your smile be prettier!"

"But Emma doesn't have chubby cheeks, and she's the prettiest girl in the class," Lucy cries. "I want cheeks like Emma!"

"Sweetheart, we all need to be happy and proud of our bodies the way God made us," I tell her, realizing how I, myself, don't really buy this. I snuggle her close as she thinks about this for a moment.

"Does it hurt God's feelings if we don't like our bodies, since God made us?" she asks anxiously.

Oh jeez. By introducing trite theology into this conversation, I might be making it worse. Now she'll feel bad about her body AND guilty about it.

"Honey, I think God understands when we feel bad. I don't think God has hurt feelings. But God does love you the way you are, and God wants you to love yourself that way, too. And so do I," I explain. It sounds somewhat convincing.

If only I could convince myself.

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"Watch the snacks," her pediatrician casually mentions during Lucy's annual checkup. "Her BMI is technically right on the border between healthy and overweight, in the 'at risk for overweight' category," she continues. I was glad that Lucy was distracted and not hearing this conversation. At least I don't think she heard.

To her credit, Dr. Novak was purposely trying to say this to me and not to Lucy. But as a mother with a far too high BMI to be considered "healthy," and as the person who largely controls what Lucy eats, I feel ashamed. Food, especially the food that Lucy consumes, is a bit of an obsession of mine. I worry I'm being too strict and controlling, and then I worry I'm being too relaxed. I want Lucy to get joy and pleasure out of food and from her body, and not to constantly worry that she's too fat or that her cheeks are too chubby. I want her to keep enjoying frosting and not feel that she has to pretend to be uninterested in birthday cake. But I do not want her to struggle with her weight as I have.

Funny, I don't notice Nathan spending too much time worrying about any of this at all.

<p align="center">* * *</p>

A few months later, I sit slumped in my office chair, staring at the last line of my email from the Dean:

I don't think that you make a sufficient case for the College spending the proposed funds to support your travel to Disney World.

This is the same Dean who last week said, "Yes, I think we can do this. I'm persuaded by your argument that if you were studying family systems in Nepal, you would apply for extra sabbatical funding to cover your travel there. You want to study princesses, so where else would you go besides Disney? I need to look into how we can support at least some of it. I doubt you can use college funds to purchase tickets to the parks, but we can probably fund your airfare and hotel. I'll get back to you next week."

I knew I probably would not receive the funding. Yes, I have decided to study princesses and princess culture for my sabbatical project. But a college funded trip to Disney World? It seems shady. And adding that my daughter would have to go with me in order to allow me access to "princess places" was probably pushing it. Still, his curt refusal stung, coming only a few days after he had seemed enthusiastically supportive. Nathan and I decided to pull money out of savings and take the trip anyway.

* * *

It is still dark outside as Lucy and I slide into the backseat of our friend Chad's car for a ride to the airport. Lucy holds up sparkly fingers and says, "I hope my nail polish stays on long enough for the princesses to see." Chad catches my eye in the rear view mirror, and looks at me with raised eyebrows as he and Nathan share a chuckle in the front seat. The morning of our flight is icy and cold in Omaha, and we are happy to leave our coats in the car and scurry into the terminal in t-shirts to begin our Disneyworld adventure. Nathan and I decided to pull money out of savings and take the trip anyway, and my parents jumped at the chance to meet us there so they would not miss Lucy's first Disney experience.

After we arrive in Orlando and locate ground transportation, a greying 50-something man checking our tickets exclaims, "Hello Princess!

Are you going to Disneyworld?" Shyly, Lucy whispers yes. "You have a wonderful time!" he enthuses, as he points to the proper line for the bus to the French Quarter resort. In the two minutes it takes for us to reach the front of that line, our bus arrives.

This time, a blonde female 30-something employee says, "French Quarter?"

"Yep," I answer.

"Right through this door," she gestures. Then adds, "Have fun, Princess!" to Lucy. This time, Lucy flashes a broad smile and waves goodbye.

We drop the luggage at the cargo area, and board the bus. There is no driver sitting in the seat to shout "welcome Princess" as we climb up the steep stairs. I am not sorry about Lucy missing out on that greeting.

During what seems like an unbearably long drive from the airport to the resort, Lucy whines, "When will we get there?" At least half a dozen times. As I dole out the last precious snack I had packed in my carry-on bag, the driver announces, "Ladies and Gentlemen, welcome to the French Quarter Resort!" We eagerly look out our windows to see lush Spanish moss-draped trees and multicolored New Orleans-style buildings appearing on either side of the road.

After we grab our luggage, we enter the reception area and encounter a man dressed as a Mardi Gras jester. He bends down to Lucy and says, "Hi there, Princess! Welcome to the French Quarter Resort," while placing a strand of shiny green beads around her neck.

"Thank you!" she answers him. Then she bounces with excitement toward the registration desk. "Everyone keeps calling me Princess! I think it's because I look so pretty!" Nathan and I exchange a look.

"Yeah, honey, isn't that neat?" I muster.

"But pretty isn't the most important," Nathan reminds her.

"I know, I know," she sighs with exasperation. "Smart and kind and brave are important," she drones while rolling her eyes. Clearly, she's memorized the message. But has she internalized it?

* * *

More quickly than Lucy has ever moved before or since, we drop our luggage in our room and are back on another bus to the Magic Kingdom, where we will meet my parents in a few hours. As the bus approaches the park and the driver announces our arrival, I feel goosebumps crawl up my arms. Lucy climbs up on Nathan's lap to get a better view out the window, squealing, "I want to see! I want to see!" We step off the bus and walk with the crowd toward the main gate security line. So many lines.

We walk to look at the Mickey Mouse flower bed and hear the sounds of parade music. "There's Tiana!" Lucy exclaims and starts clambering for me to pick her up.

"Um, Nathan, can you pick her up?" I asked. He looked at me quizzically, so I remind him, "Because, you know, no lifting more than 20 pounds." We saw a + sign on the home pregnancy test the morning before our trip, but are keeping the news to ourselves for now.

"Oooooh, yes, of course, come here, honey," he says as he hoists Lucy up on his shoulders. No need to worry that she would ask what we are talking about. She is completely enraptured. "Tiana waved at me! She saw me!" Lucy squeals with wide-eyed excitement.

"Where are these tears coming from?" I wonder, as I furtively wiped the corners of my eyes with my fingers. It could be hormones. But I think Orenstein (24) would call this "wondrous innocence," a term coined by Cross to explain the joy parents seek from the reactions of their children to the things we buy. Having an academic term for these tears makes me feel a little less silly, as if a citation allows me to remain a critic instead of only a consumer.

Nathan and I have some time to ourselves one day, as my parents entertain Lucy on their own. I drag him to Cinderella's castle for

uninterrupted observations of the goings on around the Bibbidi Bobbidi Boutique. Four year olds in high heels. At an amusement park. Yikes. I can tell the difference between the disheveled "do it yourself" princesses wearing tennis shoes with their Halloween costumes from home and the Bibbidi Bobbidi Boutique customers, who uniformly sport glittery makeup, carbon copy hairstyles, and fancier dresses. But mostly, it is the Miss America style Bibbidi Bobbidi Boutique sash that set them apart. The Magic Kingdom has become a place to put yourself on display instead of a place to be carefree and play and enjoy, at least for these girls. They do not look all that different from contestants on *Toddlers and Tiaras*, frankly, as they walk regally about the park, waiting for people to notice them.

As I raise my camera to my eye to take a photo of the Boutique in the interior of the castle, an employee rushes over with raised hands, yelling, "Sorry, ma'am, no photos! Do you have an appointment?"

"Uh, no, I just wanted to have a look before I bring my daughter back later," I lie.

"Well, you can definitely bring your camera back then," she says, as she ushers me out into the crowded vestibule.

I rejoin Nathan on a bench outside the entrance to the top secret castle. One mom drags a scowling Princess Belle of about five or six years of age by the wrist and forces her to sit on a bench near us as she bends over her, hissing, "Now you listen to me. Daddy and I paid a lot of money for you to get your princess makeover. So you will stop this sass and cooperate for pictures with your sister when she's done or you will go to bed without swimming tonight. Do. You. Understand?" Compared to the more carefree atmosphere just a few hundred yards away in Fantasyland, this area is a no-nonsense zone.

In her work on *Toddlers and Tiaras*, Orenstein (76) raises the question of whether there isn't a little bit of stage mother in all of us. Most of us look at toddler beauty pageants and see them as extreme, but where is the

line? The little girls who I saw getting made over were mostly ages two to maybe seven or eight. It's possible that some of those older girls have heard about the Bibbidi Bobbidi Boutique from peers and requested the experience, but my guess is that most little girls are introduced to it by the adult women in their lives. What are mothers getting out of their daughters being princesses?

Though as an Aca/Mom, participation in that particular part of the princess culture seems a bridge too far, I was willing to take Lucy to breakfast with the princesses. Seeing the pure joy on Lucy's face as she posed for photos with Ariel and Belle and Cinderella and Snow White made me forget my objections for a blessed moment. Getting caught up in the experience as a fan and forgetting my feminist critique felt, well . . . magical.

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We're all pretty quiet during our last breakfast of Mickey Mouse waffles and sausage. After breakfast, my parents take Lucy to the resort playground to allow Nathan and I time to finish packing up. But when Lucy sees me approaching with our carry on backpacks, she cries, "Noooooooooo!"

"C'mon Lucy," my dad says. "It's time to go get on the bus."

"I don't WANT to leave! I want to stay!" She yells loudly from the top of the play structure. "Just one more day!"

"Sorry, honey, but we need to go. Daddy's waiting for us on the bus with our suitcases," I reply sympathetically.

"I won't!" she screams, as she scrambles down the slide and then crawls underneath it in an attempt to hide.

"Do not make me crawl under and get you or you will be in big trouble," I hiss. Louder crying is her only response. "If you come out right now, you can have a treat when we get to the airport," I plead.

"I DON'T WANT A TREAT AT THE AIRPORT," she screams back. My sympathy reserves are officially dried up now as I ponder

having to get down on my hands and knees to drag her out from under the slide. She is not an easy target for an overweight, 40-year old, slightly pregnant woman. As she writhes and screams, I managed to drag her out by the legs. People are looking. God, they probably think I'm kidnapping her. I manage to get my arms around her and lift her up on one hip as she screams. No lifting more than 20 pounds, I know – but I don't have a choice. As I tote my sobbing child to the bus, I regret every second of this research/vacation. Nathan sees us through the window and gets off the bus to help, and by the time he takes Lucy into his own arms she has given up the fight and cries more quietly now into his shoulder.

"I can't really blame her," he says.

Exhausted, I exchange quick goodbyes with my parents and board the bus, still fuming. Lucy waves out the window to her grandparents, who smile and blow more kisses than I feel she deserves. I sit by myself and breathe deeply, as Nathan speaks softly with Lucy about how sad it is to be leaving. He can be nicer to her right now than I can. As the bus pulls away and a recorded official Disney message plays over the loudspeaker, my head swims. I was supposedly here as a part of my sabbatical project, and I am wondering what I have learned.

I guess I needed more time here, too.

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When does a study of the princess culture end? Certainly not at the end of my sabbatical semester, as planned. It turns out that getting pregnant at the beginning was not the best idea, productivity-wise. All that time to write turned into time to be sick, take naps, and sort through old baby things. Life has continued, new princesses keep coming, baby Clara was born, Lucy expanded her interests, and Clara developed interests of her own. Any ending of an article about the princess culture risks missing THE NEXT BIG THING.

I sit in the darkened theater, wiping tears from the corners of my eyes. With Lucy by my side, and toddler Clara in my lap, we watch and listen

for the first time as Elsa stops hiding and instead embraces her power, belting out "Let it Go!"

Admittedly, tears during a Disney movie are not uncommon for me. I can be manipulated to shed one or two when a parent dies or during the "happily ever after." But these are not typical Disney movie tears. They are tears about a princess becoming empowered and fighting the patriarchy. As I sit here, I realize that this song could become an anthem for gay people stepping out of the closet, or people with anxiety overcoming fears, or for anyone bravely being themselves in the face of judgment. Maybe even for Aca/Moms.

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Disney, you have changed your trope. Sure, you've been tinkering with the princess genre for some time. As Do Rozario argues, the princesses of the late 80s and early 90s (Ariel, Pocahontas, and Jasmine) were already becoming more proactive and autonomous than Snow White, Cinderella and Aurora (57). More recently, Tiana is intelligent and a hard worker with dreams of opening a restaurant, and Merida is independent and refuses to be forced to marry. But *Frozen*, while not beyond critique, truly feels like a game changer with its plot revolving less around romance and more about sisterly love – not to mention its warning about the folly of love at first sight.

Clara, who is more than five years younger than Lucy, is now becoming sucked into the princess culture. But it's a different world. For Clara, princesses are adventurous and devoted sisters, not simply beauties who marry to find happiness. Yes, they have glamorous dresses and hairstyles—at least some of the time—but they are smart and funny and flawed and their relationships with men are not primary to their identities. As my daughters dress in their Elsa and Anna Halloween costumes and reenact scenes from the movie, they focus on bravery and devotion

between sisters. After more than five years mucking around as a mother in the princess culture, Disney has won me over. At least a little.

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But…

What about the chubby cheeks? That concern is coming from somewhere, and it is not Vogue or Cosmo. The cultural dominance of beautiful princesses is not going anywhere, and perhaps encouraging creative play and continuing to consume the films with empowering storylines that include brave princess heroines is going to be more effective in the long run than trying to drag my children away kicking and screaming. I remain concerned about my daughters' focus on appearance, and yet I know that is the world they live in and will continue to live in as they get older. I can't protect them from this completely, but can I strengthen them enough to navigate it? That's probably going to take more than repeating, "pretty isn't the most important."

In 1984, Radway contended that women reading romance novels did so for escapism and also with active resistance. She encouraged feminist scholars not to dismiss these texts out of hand. A decade later, Jenkins argued similarly that fans are "textual poachers" (24) who create their fan cultures to suit their own desires and purposes, rather than simply and uncritically swallowing media content. More recently, Manning's work that argues viewers are capable of drawing on the positive and dismissing the negative to shape their own identities vis-à-vis television characters is similarly reassuring. More pertinent to children, Wohlwend argues that while artifacts created for children (whether media texts or things like toys or clothing) carry "anticipated identities" (59), their influence is not unidirectional. Children, in play, are capable of improvising with character and plot and use princess stories in more creative and transformative ways than we parents may presume possible. It seems that even children are capable of both creating their own desires and of resisting intended meanings.

When Lucy reports that she and her friends at school play "Mermaid to the Rescue" or "Princess Superheroes," she is articulating how they are actively resisting the dominant narrative, "textual poaching" if you will, in favor of creating identities that are more in keeping with the way *they* want to view the princesses—as strong and brave young women. A recent "vampire princess" Halloween costume included a tiara and fangs—not quite what Disney had in mind.

And counter to Linn's concerns about the princess culture thwarting imagination, Lucy and her friends exercise unlimited creativity in their princess play, mixing mermaids, vampires, superheroes, fairies, wizards, and all manner of talking animals into their games and stories. And sometimes, they decide to ditch the prince, skip the ball, and dance with each other – demonstrating Forman-Brunell and Eaton's argument that girls are "able to maneuver between gendered expectations and more daring identities" (340).

This active audience perspective also implies that Disney marketing genius (or evil, depending on your vantage point) is not the only creator of the princess culture. There is something going on in child culture, and in parent culture, that has made us partners with Disney in the rise of the princesses. The recent success of *Frozen* seems to suggest that Disney has stumbled upon a new consumer-driven feminist version of the princess narrative that is pleasing to a wider audience of parents and children. Will Elsa and Anna be absorbed and become subsumed by the group? Or will they transform it?

I was not sorry to learn, during the course of my sabbatical research, that Pretty and Precious has closed its doors. Though I now feel more prepared to mother Clara through her own negotiations with the princess culture, and I am confident that she will not emerge from her first big foray into popular culture uncritically swooning for her prince, I am glad that she will be skipping the princess factory. As I continue to navigate parenting

as an Aca/Mom, I do so in a way that is slightly more relaxed. As a feminist mother engaging popular media with my daughters, I embrace the hope Manning expresses, that we can use these texts to better understand our own journeys (96). Rather than futilely attempting to shut out the princess culture, I have embraced my role of engaging it seriously, and encouraging Lucy and Clara to question some of its messages.

<center>* * *</center>

"Finish brushing your hair, girls, it's almost time for the party," I call from the bathroom as I apply lipstick before my niece's princess birthday party. Three-year old Clara, dressed as Anna, appears in the doorway.

"What are you doing, Mama? Just putting on lipstick?" she asks.

"Yep, but I'm all done," I answer. "Should we do your braids?"

"Nah, I don't want braids today," she insists. "But can I have some of your lipstick? Pleeeeease?"

"No, honey, you look pretty the way you are. You don't need lipstick," I reply. I'm glad that Clara is not nearly as strong-willed as her sister and is thus more likely to accept my "no" without a scene.

"So do you, Mama, you don't need lipstick either!" she chirps.

This stops me for a second.

"Thanks, Sweetie," I reply. "That makes me feel good to hear."

Later, as my own little princesses jump in a birthday party bounce house and sweat in their sparkly gowns; and then even later as they exchange gowns for bathing suits to unselfconsciously run squealing through the sprinkler – well, the princess culture seems innocuous once more. At least for this afternoon.

And at this party, we all enjoy our cake.

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Pretty Pretty Princesses: Hegemonic Femininity and Designated Masculinity

GARY T. STRAIN

"I look so pretty," I utter, looking at myself in drag for the first time. Looking in the mirror at my drag mother's quick makeup job, I realized I had maybe never felt completely that way before: pretty. This was not an issue of low self-esteem or an absence of support regarding my physical appearance. Instead, I was articulating language that wasn't meant for me. From birth, I was swaddled in blue and given action figures, Matchbox cars, model tractors, wrapped in the language of the masculine – "he's so handsome!" "Oh, he loves the ladies, doesn't he?!" "He *really* likes the *blondes*!" The differences in the language I articulated looking at the beginnings of my alter ego Rosie's face – the irony of a wig that is both *blonde* and *pink* is not lost on me – and the narrative I was expected to fulfill through K-Mart trips down the "Blue Aisle" and baggy boys' bootcut jeans were striking. My exclusion from my sister and cousin's "Girls Only" hangouts coupled with my belief that my glances down the "Pink Aisle" had to be stolen and fleeting informed me from an early age about my side of the gender binary: I was a boy. By extension, pretty wasn't for me.

In dealing with this pre-formed exclusion, I want to stress how moments in which I was able to express a seemingly foreign femininity were impactful temporalities that laid a foundation for a more permanent embodiment and understanding of femininity. In doing so, I'm careful to articulate my understanding that a single femininity does not and cannot exist. Additionally, the femininities I witnessed, aspired to, and took on in

crafting my gender identity do not exist in a vacuum. Although I strive to interrogate the dissonance felt between birth-assigned sex and gender identity/expression, it is central to my analysis of hegemonic femininity that any presentation of femininity be understood as raced, classed, and otherwise constituted by various axes of identity. In the scope of this project, I am most immediately at war with the femininity that is presented as "acceptable," a hegemonic feminine aesthetic and way of being that is white, straight, moneyed and cisgender – for all intents and purposes, "normal." My idolization of this mass-proliferated femininity is indicative of the dyadic presentation of masculinity and femininity, which, while not excusing some of my buy-in to a singular femininity, situated me in a monolithic category that lacked the texture of an intersectional approach to identity.

In considering my culturally specific access to and embodiment of femininity as a "designated-male-at-birth" (DMAB) person through the temporal sites of the 1990 board game *Pretty Pretty Princess* and drag performance, I consider the unseen cultural logics at play for the boy(?)-child to grow into femininity, even as it excludes him. In intermingling these two sites, I build off the assertion that *Pretty Pretty Princess* and the popular princess culture which surrounds it display and expect a narrow femininity that is intentionally classed and raced, thereby creating an exclusionary femininity. When accessed by the DMAB person, a certain sifting is required, a working within a feminine framework to create a renewed understanding of what femininity can mean. Though I initially engaged with *Pretty Pretty Princess* and drag as sites of gender performance and identification, my cultural position outside of femininity as determined by my sex designation at birth has allowed me to consider how the hegemonic femininity – constructed first by *Pretty Pretty Princess* - I engaged with continues to prevent access to others who fail to meet rigid feminine expectations.

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"Is there any way I can help?" My mother repeats her refrain over the phone as I begin to explain my autoethnography. It is a gesture that indicates her support yet understands her removal from the realm of my academic work. When I reply, "Yes," I know she's taken aback. I explain that as I will be taking a look back at my childhood for part of this article she might be able to fill in my gaps of memory. When I had the chance to visit home in April 2015, a drive back from the Detroit Metropolitan Airport became notably tenser as I detailed the work I was doing. As I relayed my preliminary discussion of those parts of my childhood that are incongruous with my gender identity, she was quick to interrupt: "Did I do this to you? Were you unhappy?" In that moment, I could not find the language to explain to this woman who raised me what it felt like to be a gender outsider in a binary gendered world.

Kate Bornstein says it best in *Gender Outlaw*, describing the cultural gender system "as a particularly malevolent and divisive construct, made all the more dangerous by the seeming inability of culture to *question* gender, its own creation" (12). The "original gender outlaw," Bornstein's perspective highlights the tension of being an invisible or incomprehensible outsider to a paradigm that avoids naming itself so as to reify its certainty. In my conversation with my mother, I don't believe *Gender Outlaw* would have been the easiest starting point, though I wish I could have articulated the murkiness of gender as Bornstein does. Where my mother was troubled by how her individual actions might have affected my journey to my gender, I have found myself dealing with "a world that insists we are one or the other - a world that doesn't bother telling us what one or the other *is*" (Bornstein 8). To remove the onus from my mother, I would have needed to articulate the system that invisibilizes itself by maintaining the requirements of binary gender as a matter-of-fact construct outside of human creation. I still work to disentangle myself from this rigid and insidious policing of gender. In the moment of uncomfortable silence before we altered our topic of

conversation, I ruminated on my approach to this project as well as those facets of gender policing that might remain blind spots for me.

Perhaps an introduction to privilege via someone such as Peggy McIntosh would be most useful to my mother, but our exchange and the internal questioning I began regarding my analysis left with me an obvious go-to. In *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*, José Esteban Muñoz is concerned with how the universal fiction of identity is more easily understood by the minoritarian subject, those subjects needing "to interface with different subcultural fields to activate their own senses of self" (5). Muñoz's articulation of the unique (dis)placement – understanding the location of the minoritarian subject as being one both of presence in one's "place" and distance from the majority – proves more useful than a discussion centered only on privilege or identity formation. This perspective deals with the complex and often-contradictory actions minoritarian subjects must undertake as their processes of identity formation are held within and work against oppressive, hegemonic logics of identity and access.

In detailing how minoritarian subjects work through cultural logics, Muñoz builds upon an identity-in-difference model utilized by radical women of color and Third World feminists. Through this model, Muñoz sees these identities "emerge from a failed interpellation with the dominant public sphere…predicated on their ability to disidentify with the mass public and…contribute to the function of a counterpublic sphere" (7). In his dissection of identities-in-difference, Muñoz utilizes Norman Alarcón's reading of a shared perspective that exists in the vein of radical women of color writing, noting a future-looking quality that follows the recognition of one's imperfect present (7). A recognition of the imperfect present and a hopeful look towards the future are apparent in Muñoz's framework, as the act of disidentifying through performance carries with it complicated formations of identity with/in-between cultural logics, but also a pushing back against these forces. A breakdown in the one-way

communication from the dominant cultural logics on the part of the individual, such as Bornstein's keen awareness of a system that does not explicitly define its parameters regarding gender, has the potential to incite a transformational and transgressive performance against these logics.

Considering my performance in *Pretty Pretty Princess* as disidentificatory is dangerous. Concerned as Muñoz's work is with an intersectional approach to identity that critiques the barriers to accessing identity created by monocasual, normativizing protocols—e.g., woman=white woman; black=black male—filtering my own childhood experience through the lens of disidentification must be engaged with a careful interrogation of the cultural logics at play (8). As Muñoz is heavily concerned with a queer of color perspective, my application of his theoretical framework is grounded in a critical awareness of the barriers to identity I have experienced. Further, my approach is concerned with those I have not experienced and how they are made visible through the backwards-looking perspective of a scholar. Muñoz cautions against blind spots regarding race in the fields of queer theory and those branches of cultural studies not built around racial identity. My analysis cannot include race (and the entangled notions of class that come with "royalty") as an afterthought if it is to avoid that myopia, but must instead have intersectionality at its core.

Approaching the genre of autoethnography, then, I find myself most immediately situated in the "queer autoethnography." In "Telling Stories: Reflexivity, Queer Theory, and Autoethnography," Adams and Holman Jones discuss the methodological possibilities created by the intersection of the autoethnographic and queer theory disciplines. In doing queer autoethnography, Adams and Holman Jones argue that it is a reflexive process of (re)turning, in which "we revisit, shift, and refigure earlier iterations of our queer work, showing what it means to be reflexively queer…tracing the importance of using reflexively queer autoethnographic work for socially just means and ends" (108). (Re)turning to both my

childhood performance during *Pretty Pretty Princess* and my young adult donning of drag regalia, I have to understand the initial allure and embodiment of femininity as being disconnected from my current understanding of what constitutes a disidentificatory performance. Yet, from these experiences I can turn out a new, nuanced understanding of how both performances are informed by/inform their cultural locations at the moments they occur. It is Adams and Holman Jones' usage of reflexivity that grounds this approach, a practice of "listening to and for the silences and stories we can't tell—not fully, not clearly, not yet; returning, again and again, to the river of story accepting what you can never fully, never unquestionably *know*" (111). This process of re(turning) resonates with Muñoz's usage of a future-looking politics, but also serves to ground my use of disidentification, the prominent silences regarding race and class in my own story as a white, middle class individual highlighting those stories I cannot tell. It is with this key distinction that I proceed in interrogating the multiple silences surrounding hegemonic femininity.

A disidentificatory lens is inherently queer, and although I am choosing to re-examine my childhood performance as an "earlier iteration of my queer work," I hesitate on making my queerness/non-binary identification ahistorical. Existing within Muñoz's intentional distancing from "nature/nurture" discussions as a key part of the practice of disidentification, I am keen to avoid saying, "I was always this way" or pointing to these experiences as directly shaping my current embodiment of femininity. As I will be considering the site of *Pretty Pretty Princess* as a moment of feminine performance, I am more concerned with my identification with mass-marketed femininity and its implications in my specific gender journey. I am not here to analyze my childhood self to discover the origin of my identity. Instead, I want to consider my identity as having a history that is chronicled through a long "coming into"

femininity and carefully dissect how that femininity has been co-constructed with my racial and class identities.

On its own, *Pretty Pretty Princess* is a relatively simple board game, requiring players to collect four different pieces of plastic jewelry in one of four player-specific colors and a singular crown to win. Play begins by assembling the board game, which "will go together only one way," according to Hasbro's official instruction booklet, removing the double-sided spinner/mirror lid of the circular jewelry box, and placing the open box with jewelry in the center of the game board (1). In addition to four jewelry collection spaces (ring, earring, bracelet, necklace) one can land on, there are also spaces which require the player to "put one [piece of jewelry] back" or pick up the black ring (1). Similar to the "Old Maid" in the card game of the same name, the black ring prevents a player from winning and can only be removed by landing on the "put one back" space or another player being forced to take it from the first player after landing on the "black ring" space. Two spaces on the game board facilitate interaction between players: the special jewelry collection spaces of "crown" and "take any piece," both of which allow the player to take the non-color specific victory piece of the crown from another player. Once a player has constructed the complete princess look, Hasbro directs them to "turn over the spinner and look at the Pretty Pretty Princess you see in the mirror," utilizing the mirror on the lid which was previously hidden so the spinner could be used (2). Although I think the dynamics of the game allowed the young DMAB child a certain amount of feminine-coded dress up play, I also want to consider how the game delineates the "correct" femininity that formed much of my early feminine aspirations.

By virtue of its design, the game requires a competitive race to the feminine ideal of the princess. Although taking to task a board game for requiring and producing a winner is a larger undertaking, the coupling of the feminine coded activity of dressing up and competition frames femininity as a race to the top where only one can win and have the most

correct aesthetic (Pretty Pretty). Femininity becomes defined by the acquisition of material items imbued with meaning in the context of the board game, articulating a pervasive ideology tying femininity to consumption and artificiality. Virtually devoid of strategy, the game constructs victory as a linear path to idealized femininity through artificial construction—it doesn't get much more fake than cheap plastic jewelry— and a win which is capped off by looking at and admiring one's surface transformation. The correct feminine aesthetic and its material foundation do not stop and end with the "Pretty Pretty."

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 "I have everything else you need. Just get a good foundation." I'll never forget the first time I bought Maybelline Dream Matte Mousse, the same day of my "pretty" drag moment. On the phone with my Fraternity Brother/future drag mother, his voice was distracted, focused on painting her own face: "Gurl, go to the Maybelline section and get Dream *Matte* Mousse in a shade darker than your skin tone. Make sure it's the matte one, you have oily skin like me. And get some face sponges. The triangular ones." Rushing around inside Wal-Mart before my first "performance" —a trio number on campus at our Fraternity's drag show— I turned down one of the store's three cosmetic aisles, searching for the brand whose trademark question didn't bear asking for me. I certainly wasn't "born with it." Feeling like an alien in the cosmetic aisle of a small college town Wal-Mart, I was acutely aware of the middle-aged white woman half-glaring/half-confused as I scanned the shelves. My lack of familiarity and the tense air hanging between glaring white light dragged the moment out, until I had my best guess at a shade of mousse and a pack of sponges in my hands. Rushing through the check out and back to my Brother's two-bedroom apartment packed full of drag queens, I withheld my story, remarking only on how much the makeup cost. Punctuating her sage advice with a knowing chortle, Mother remarked simply, "Phish, it's expensive to be a lady."

The connection between material goods and femininity is one that I have found myself intimately acquainted with since. Even as my education encourages me to question my need to spend lavishly on various feminine accoutrements, I sit here typing with freshly gel-polished acrylic nails, a noted hindrance to my clicking on the keyboard. Although I am firmly within the mindset that embodying femininity through hair, makeup, nails, and other ephemera is not mutually exclusive to a complex and empowering understanding of one's gender, these trappings necessitate a conversation regarding the "correct," passive consumption (and who is allowed to consume) as they are entangled with hegemonic femininity, a discourse that also pervades the putting on of "Pretty Pretty" in *Pretty Pretty Princess*.

Recognizing the tension between finding power within a material femininity and being forced to fit within the confines of hegemonic femininity, binaristic thinking encourages the delineation between a "good" or "bad" femininity. Remaining grounded in a queer perspective begs the more pressing question of how that material femininity is understood, as opposed to a limiting moralistic judgment. In "The Boys Who would be Princesses: Playing with Gender Identity Intertexts in Disney Princess Transmedia," Karen Wohlwend focuses her sights on the Disney Princess brand as it relates to childhood play. She is concerned with how the media produced under the Disney Princess brand "circulate[s] a dense set of expectations for children as viewers, consumers, producers, and players" through gendered messaging (594). Wohlwend's consideration of children as having a multiplicity of interactions with gendered media has specific implications for gender variant children and those who are otherwise barred from this pinnacle of femininity. Turning attention first to her articulation of the "dense set of expectations," she describes the Disney Princess as "always-beautiful," with a brand identity that "plays up the glitter and glamour of the princess role and reduces the differences across the heroines to colour variations,"

ultimately creating "a distilled hyper-feminine persona, a set of narrow beauty standards for young girls, and passive roles in damsel in distress storylines" (596). Wohlwend's understanding of the Disney princess is easily read onto *Pretty Pretty Princess*, given the relative dominance of Disney in the field of the princess and the unsurprising Cinderella and Sleeping Beauty versions of the game. (As a purist, I'll try my best to ignore the *Disney Dazzling Princess* game, an attempt to recapture the original *Pretty Pretty Princess*).

Applying Wohlwend's description to princesses of the *Pretty Pretty* variety, the most striking comparison is her issue with color variation, which creates a false sense of individuality among otherwise carbon copy princesses (and princess narratives). Although the board game offers players a choice of four colors, each color has identical jewelry, slightly variant plastic representations of the narrow hyperfemininity Wohlwend takes issue with. This false individualism within the game reaches its apex with the plastic crown, a bastion of strictly designated, ideal femininity that determines a player's ultimate eligibility as princess; the veritable "prize" of looking at one's beauty in the mirrored lid underscores the passivity Wohlwend notes. In fact the dual-sided mirror/spinner provides a clear delineation between activity and passivity, neither able to exist at the same time, one always face down. As the activity of using the spinner dictates movement around the game board, the victor's royal gaze into the mirror removes the possibility of continued activity, the game's end realized in a passive gesture of appearing. The only purpose of activity within the game is the ultimate construction of a feminine look, aligned with Wohlwend's understanding of the narrow princess ideal.

In considering the passive, material princess figure of the game, it is also important to complicate her image by considering what she is not. The black ring is a glaring indicator of "not princess," but why? Dealing with princesses and the uses of color, Francisco Vas Da Silva's essay, "Red as Blood, White as Snow, Black as Crow: Chromatic Symbolism of

Womanhood in Fairy Tales" provides a useful framework for observing the meaning attributed to colors within such spaces. For Silva, colors act as "convenient semiotic markers," creating meaning in such mundane sites as traffic lights and gendered baby blankets (241). Although a division of colors figures heavily into most games, the constant iteration of the matching set of "your color" jewelry as needed for victory and the bolded warning of "but not the black ring" present in the official Hasbro instructions affirms that *Pretty Pretty Princess* has a particular investment in color as it relates to ideal femininity (2). In his analysis of a pre-Disney, Grimm Snow White, Silva establishes white as representing "untainted sheen…for luminous heaven as much as for purity" and open to being "tainted" (245), black oppositely situated with death and the otherworld or a dead bird throughout the Grimm canon (246). Dwelling in his reading of Snow White, her elevation in death from a coffin in the dark earth to a shining coffin lifted to the heavens creates a clear division between black/dark as debasement and white/light as higher order (247). The black ring as a barrier to victorious femininity functions similarly.

　　Returning to my conversation about a particularly raced and classed hegemonic femininity, the symbol of the black ring and its color are infused with the sort of cultural meaning Silva finds in traffic signals and swaddled newborns. An acceptance of black as a "debased" color cannot be removed from understandings of white/black race relations in the U.S., especially as they factor into what is considered desirable femininity. Marked as a deviation from appropriate femininity within the space of *Pretty Pretty Princess* through its coloring, the choice to make the ring black—rather than say, a clear ring—is a particular commentary about the "wrong color," rather than a lack of color. In Richard King, Mary Bloodsworth-Lugo, and Carmen Lugo-Lugo's "Animated Representations of Blackness," they critique Disney's *The Princess and the Frog* for its representation of the franchise's first Black princess. Their critique lies in Tiana's existence throughout the majority of the movie as a frog, adding to

a racist proximity between Black people and animals (396). King et al. additionally take issue with the primary setting of the film as the bayou, particularly the main characters' movement from frogs in the wild to people in civilization thereby reinforcing nature/civilization and animal/human binaries (397). Tiana becomes situated in a similar earthly debasement as what Silva describes, the Black princess perhaps able to be a princess in the Disney canon, but markedly separated from the realms of white princesses. The black ring as a tarnished or less sparkly version of the other rings also speaks to the classist discourse regarding civilized femininity as it is partially dissociated from Blackness—and more broadly any non-white identity—and defined by luminous, visual appeal.

     As a white, middle-class child, these considerations were not immediately on my mind, yet my adoration of the black ring was counter to the game rules and the ideologies that shunned the deviant piece of jewelry. Although I can't deny the allure of a perfectly color-matched set of pastel jewelry, the black ring held a certain allure, and I found myself casually slipping it on in between games, captivated by something I could not name. The black ring, a wrench in the color monolith of hegemonic princess femininity, became an accessory to a child who already jarred expectations. A ring that suggests "not quite right" was the perfect companion to a boy-child aspiring to femininity.

     Discussing queer children, Sedgwick notes their "ability to attach intently to a few cultural objects…objects whose meaning seemed mysterious, excessive or oblique in relation to the codes most readily available to us" (3). Sedgwick also notes how, as children, "we needed for there to be sites where meanings didn't line up tidily with each other" (3). My attachment to the black ring and *Pretty Pretty Princess* follows a similar pattern. These objects spoke to a young me, resonating with hidden desire and the interaction of a feminine-coded text by someone it was not meant for. At these sites of failed interpellation with the dominant logics, the push back against fixed meaning gives way to a more fluid space. In

the process of attempting to "line up," I pushed back against the cisgender white girl-child princess fantasy through my inability to fit the prescribed mold, while simultaneously attempting to articulate how my embodiment of that femininity might look. Avoiding a discussion of my childhood performance as a conscious and transgressive action taken against heteronormative, white-centered logics of ideal femininity, I do believe that such a performance informs/is informed by a later counterpublic performance in the role of Rosie, my drag queen identity. Rosie, after all, looks good in black.

*   *   *

The dim light of the dressing room reflected off Rosie's gaudy silver ring, my eyes fixated on the figure in the mirror. I peaked at her through a mess of tousled dark brown hair, my drag mother expertly pinning a two-wig Long Island housewife to my head. "Always use the jumbo bobby pins for big hair or it won't stay in," she advised, talking through golden pins held in her mouth as the one in her hand ripped through my hair. I'd learned long ago beauty was expensive. Sitting in the upstairs of our local club on "Gay Night" clad in a turquoise bathing suit, tight fur jacket, and stoned purple pumps, I learned beauty was also pain. Satisfied with her pin job, my drag mother urged me to my feet, stepping back to take in how the hip and butt pads she made for me fared under layers of pantyhose and a girdle. "I did you right by those pads, gurl. Your waist is snatched!" Turning me to face the smudged mirror and look at my full body in drag, she proudly remarked, "*That* is a drag queen."

Although the performance in the gay club space seems a far cry from my performance for the *Pretty Pretty Princess* mirror, the constructions of femininity in both moments resemble each other more closely than one might expect. The punctuation of my drag mother's comments about my drag body alluded to a particular femininity I represented. Though she (and I, by extension) maintain that drag is an art form with many different stylings, it is more than common that circles of drag queens within a given

geographic location hold to a limited range of styles/ways of doing drag, and these styles have particular metrics of good/bad drag. In the same way that princess femininity becomes narrowly defined and learned by young girls, so too is drag femininity learned by drag queens.

In "Corsets, Headpieces, and Tape: An Ethnography of Gendered Performance," Rachel Friedman and Adam Jones address the co-construction of drag identity in drag queen communities and the politics of group membership. Observing in part of their study an amateur drag contest, Friedman and Jones describe "an environment where the norms of being a drag queen are learned through watching, observing, and then imitating others" (87). This acquisition of drag knowledge through modeling particular behavior is similar to the regurgitation of the princess identity outlined for players in *Pretty Pretty Princess*, both requiring repeated and realized sets of actions. Friedman and Jones speak to "a certain degree of conforming in both behavior and attitude…an importance placed upon the perception of them to be more similar to one another" (87). Although I do think that the creation of personal trademark styles is important in the drag scene, the idea of group membership as defined through an individualism built around other members' behaviors is critical to a larger logic of gender.

Though I believe drag has the potential to upset and play with gender in nuanced and critical ways, I would be remiss if I subscribed to a utopian idea of drag and failed to mention its reification of feminine norms and gendered binaries. The co-construction of drag identity as linked to fixed notions of acceptable drag creates understandings of appropriate femininity while boxing out deviations; it's not so simple as a black ring clearly delineating the uncrossable line between acceptable and unacceptable femininity. Instead, poorly blended makeup, improperly styled hair, disproportionate "hog bodies" (to quote Adore Delano from *RuPaul's Drag Race*) or masculine body shapes, and the inability to walk in heels can potentially bar a queen from the properly feminized ideal.

Although these "failures" are attributed to a lack of skill, I see them as similarly situated to the black ring, as both suggest a question of access. Though a queen can be taught the "tricks of the trade," her social location determines her access to such a mentor, ability to procure quality resources, and her perception by other queens. Like the player who doesn't fit into *Pretty Pretty Princess*' white, "civilized" femininity when donning the black ring, a drag queen not meeting the appropriate image pre-drag might be at a consistent disadvantage with and distance from performing ideal drag femininity.

<p style="text-align:center">* * *</p>

 "Ladies and gentleman, I'd like to welcome your next entertainer to the stage. She's my sister, and he's my Fraternity Brother: Rosie D. Riveter." Just the tail end of an introduction with consistent misgendering, I put on a smile as the Mistress of Ceremonies at my Fraternity's annual drag show ushers me on stage. I chuckle to myself, because I know her slippage between he and she is meant to mess with the audience, a move that might be appropriate for other performers, but not me. I know she would switch pronouns if I told her, a kind and compassionate queen who I'm lucky to call my Brother, but I remain silent. I posted a status on Facebook a week before the show detailing my use of "they/them," hoping to avoid these sorts of slip-ups. "Maybe she missed the Facebook post," I tell myself walking out on stage to the introduction of Britney Spears' "Toxic." Clad in my "Rosie the Riveter" denim jumpsuit with glossy red belt and shoes, I hit my mark and bask in the applause as the vocals come in. Slowly removing the red bandana tied around my face, I expose my beard, filled in dark and twinkling with silver glitter. Time stops for a second before I hear the uproar of screams and cheers, the crowd drinking in the bearded queen before them. "Maybe *they* don't know what I am, either."

    And suddenly, I'm transported back to the little boy layering on cheap plastic jewelry, gazing at someone who is a princess for a moment. I can almost see the audience on the other side of the plastic mirrored lid, the

boy princess who's wearing one purple and one black ring just as entertaining and as shocking as the queen with her "natural" beard. In both of these moments, I understand my transgression, my grasp at femininity as allowable in the moment of performance. In each of these moments, the rubric for femininity is laid out before me. In the world of young girls and princesses, I'm a boy playing with a "girl's toy," trying on a femininity that seems just a step away. "I wish I was a girl," I hear myself begging, as I try to understand why standing up to "pee" and "looking just like my dad" stop me from getting to be a princess in any other moment but this. I understand what is not mine. In drag, I relish in the femininity, the beauty and the excess. Yet at the end of the night, I wash it off like the other girls, rejoining the world as the boy that I'm told I am, the dissonant underneath that made the whole thing enjoyable for the crowd. And I realize that moving around the game board or dancing on the stage, I only got to be what wasn't mine for a fleeting moment.

    After much confusion, I made the decision to wash off the makeup, but to never stop wearing it. I decided I would keep the cheap plastic jewelry close to my self, pressing invisible indentations into who I would be. I decided to articulate my own image. Pulling from those parts I liked, wading in those parts that made me uncomfortable, and diving into murky waters of an unknown space outside of (un)comfortable sex/gender binaries, I found a new femininity. I am struck by the necessity to consider how I, as a DMAB person, had to sift through the rubble of a broken femininity. For many others, the jewelry I engaged with and the wigs I pinned on may be markers of hegemonic femininity, but by re-purposing these badges of a toxic femininity, I believe there is a possibility for a new understanding of the barriers to femininity that are erected in service to cultural logics about gender, sex, race, and class.

    Understanding my engagement with a 90s pop culture artifact and tracing it to the subcultural phenomenon of drag, their similarities delineate complex, but wide-reaching restrictions on femininity. By

revealing these logics of femininity off of which the role of the "pretty pretty" princess and drag queen function, a re-reading of my queer performances of identity allows me to articulate a performance and embodiment of femininity which is cognizant of the silences around the construction of gender. Navigating these silences, the minoritarian subject—taken broadly—can construct particular sites of disidentification that resist neatly meshing with narrow expectations of gender as it is raced, classed, and placed within a cissentialist paradigm. I find these expectations in revisiting the *Pretty Pretty Princess* instruction booklet or the insidious, unspoken rules of drag. In both of these spaces, these guidelines play the arbiter in one's access to femininity, each demonstrating the rules we must play by to win. Knowing these regurgitated rules can lend itself to victory in grasping at femininity. Yet, for those of us for whom these rules do not line up, we begin to question, to envision and re-create our new femininities, new understandings of ourselves. In this project of questioning and re-fashioning, I remember the little boy who played princess and the college freshman who bought his first jar of Maybelline Dream Matte Mousse. They're both there every time I dab foundation onto my face, every time I put on a pair of wedges. They—and maybe more importantly, we—are there at the places that don't "line up," polishing plastic crowns of a new design.

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Using Celebrities to Teach Autoethnography: Reflexivity, Disability, and Stigma

JULIE-ANN SCOTT

As an empirical qualitative researcher and professor focusing on personal narrative and the performance of daily life, I maintain that thoughtful, careful analysis depends on the ability to listen, observe, and then interpret. Self-reflexivity, the practice of continually questioning one's own interpretations of self and others, is paramount to one's success. Kristin Langellier asserts that personal narrative research is "a story of a body, told through a body that makes cultural conflict concrete." The researchers, as present audiences, "bear witness" to others' stories and must be able to situate their bodies within culture in relation to others (Park-Fuller). The multifaceted nature of impressions can be difficult to learn, because researchers see, hear, and understand through only their individual bodies. For this reason, before interviewing others to create a personal narrative analysis of another's story, I ask students to enact an autoethnography in which they become their own research participants, drawing upon their experiences to create an autoethnographic text to share with one another before interviewing others. In order to provide a subject that students will find familiar, this autoethnographic assignment focuses on applying a critical lens to individual reactions to celebrities in the mass media.

 Autoethnographic analyses of reactions to celebrities in the mass media can make the importance of researcher self-reflexivity and positionality tangible in ways that can transform understandings of human interaction. Within the class I define researcher-reflexivity as the

realization that the event of collecting data as a qualitative researcher is an act of meaning-making, with bodies entangled in cultural discourses that value some identities over others, with shared understandings always vulnerable to reinterpretation. Autoethnography moves beyond autobiography to describe the cultural tensions that enable and constrain our bodies in the daily interactions through which we come to understand others and ourselves. Focusing on our reactions to celebrities we are exposed to through the mass media (i.e. television, film, popular music, magazines, and advertising) enables us to see our interpretations in juxtaposition to others, which can also reveal how our embodied experiences and cultural locations shape our interpretations. This awareness potentially allows students to access researcher-reflexivity on a personal level, rather than simply an accepted methodological position. The students are able to map their bodies' roles in the co-creation of qualitative findings with their classmates.

Finding Meaning through Culturally Recognizable Identit(ies) in Popular Culture

For the purpose of this course, I define popular culture identities as bodies that are largely recognizable because they are widely distributed through the mass media. Students often shorten this description to "celebrities" which works well for the assignment. As cultural members we have repeated moments throughout our lives that involve exposure to celebrities through the mass media. Many of these experiences (the times, locations, and reactions) are forgotten, but some of these experiences remain vivid, and through our comparisons, identifications and contrasts, form who we are compared to these recognizable bodies. In this essay, through moving from memories of a celebrity, to conducting an autoethnography of the memory in the formation of self, to discussing these interpretations face-to-face with others, I describe how I use, and

how I teach students enrolled in qualitative research courses to use, autoethnography to offer insights about popular culture and to map how identity is formed through cultural interactions.

Carolyn Ellis asserts that *"autoethnography* refers to the writing about the personal and its relationship to culture. It is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness" (37). Students are often startled at the idea of analyzing their own experiences as autoethnographic research as opposed to the more familiar practice of interviewing others. The instruction to "place [themselves] in the center of the text" (Giorgio 407) and analyze their understandings of themselves through their responses and reactions to a celebrity they know only through mass media exposure is often unsettling. However, they quickly embrace the assignment, seeing how their understandings of ethnographic field notes and thick description easily translate to autoethnography. They are able to create the first part of the assignment, entitled "The Interaction," with ease.

On the second day, I ask students to choose one to two critical-cultural studies theories—e.g., Gender as Performance (Butler), The Beauty Myth (Wolf), Unbearable Weight, (Bordo), Eating the Other (hooks), Hegemonic Masculinity (Connell), Compulsory Heterosexuality (Rich) and Compulsory Able-Bodiedness (McRuer)—and then use these theories to analyze the interaction and its cultural significance in a column marked "My Interpretation." This step follows Grace Giorgio's instructions to "attend to the cultural and political tensions between lived experiences and their meanings and ethical concerns about representations of self and others" (407). This two-step autoethnography that separates the story from the analysis allows students, as new researchers, to see their stories as data to analyze, to become their own participants and recognize themselves as bodies telling stories entangled in cultural meanings that both facilitate and restrict their interpretations and responses.

On the third day, I assign students to groups to first read their stories and then provide their personal analyses. The conversations gain momentum as they exchange memories of their reactions to celebrities experienced via the mass media and how their understandings of self, formed and reformed through their ongoing references. Students first encounters with peer response are in-person rather than anonymous written evaluations that allow detached, impersonal critique. This classroom interaction is inspired by Craig Gingrich-Philbrook's assertion that autoethnographers must "[navigate] how others encourage them to understand themselves . . . to both see another interpretation but also [resist] the less useful understandings by writing back against the grain of the taken for granted" (617). In their exchanges, students are able to access researcher standpoint as they see how their interpretations of popular culture identities merge and diverge with one another. Sometimes in these struggles, I'm consulted with, asked to weigh in, to use my PhD and title to be the authority on who accessed the correct cultural interpretation of a given celebrity. Although I will clarify the fundamentals of the theories they apply, I continually re-direct them back to their interpretations, reminding them that resisting one another's interpretation does not imply failure, but reveals complexity of positionality, power, and privilege. The shared familiarity with the shared data from mass-distributed popular culture allows them to trace how their personal experiences, contexts, values, and understandings influence their interpretations of a familiar personality in relation to another gains clarity. The importance of their own bodies as vessels of understanding cannot be ignored. Below, I offer my story that can serve an as an example of this assignment, and as a model for researchers new to autoethnography.

1998: The Interaction – Salem Massachusetts

It is October and I'm a new student at a small liberal arts college on the North Shore of Boston. I have been cast in a local street theatre that re-enacts the Salem Witch Trials in a show for tourists. It is my first paid theatre job and I am honored to have been chosen as an improvisational street actor as well as cast in the Fall show as a newly auditioning member of the Theatre Department. I seem to be having better luck in college than high school and feel optimistic about the future. One of the directors/theatre professors, Norm, from my college, calls to me as I'm leaving the dressing room.

"Do you want a ride back to campus? I'm heading there."

"If you don't mind." I say as my face gets hot. I'm blushing. I blush easily.

"Of course not! I want to get to know Ms. Julie-Ann Scott who has just arrived on the theatre scene." I smile, flattered and nervous. My legs are tight from all the walking that day and Norm reaches across to pull me up into his red jeep when I have trouble lifting my foot high enough to gain the necessary leverage to climb in. As I buckle my safety belt I feel small and unimpressive. Norm commands space, with a pock-marked face, steel gray hair, and large smile. He is both approachable and severe at the same time. As a new theatre student I am simultaneously drawn to his warmth and intimidated by his intensity. I also feel deeply indebted to him. Rumor has it that he tends to cast the same actors over and over, so being cast early was good sign for my future in the theatre department and local acting scene. He turns and smiles at me as I'm pushing my hair out of my face that is whipping into my eyes from the open window.

"Has anyone ever told you that you look like a young Terri Hatcher?"

"Really?"

He smiles large. "I go back and forth thinking about which celebrity you resemble. You have moments of Natalie Wood, or maybe Allyssa Milano. You are *unremarkably* attractive, and that's good, you're nice to look at but your face doesn't have a dominant feature. It's not standout so you can morph for characters. You can play a lot." There was a pause as he finished. I wasn't sure what to say.

"Um, thank you. I hope to get cast a lot. So far my luck has been good since I got here." I wonder if standout features might be better, and feel a moment of self-consciousness I work to disregard. I remind myself that if a director sees something he likes, embrace it.

"It will keep being good. You're good. How is your foot doing? Is it feeling better?"

"What do you mean?"

"You've been limping. Did you hurt yourself?"

"No, um, I have spastic cerebral palsy (CP)." He doesn't say anything so I continue. "It's um minor brain damage at birth that affects the signal from my brain to my legs. The message to walk gets to my legs but my movements are like yours would be if someone stuck you with a pin, kind of jerky, not fluid. That's where they get the term 'spastic,' I guess."

"Oh, I didn't realize. I'm sorry."

"Don't be. It's not progressive. It won't get worse. I'm okay."

"You have a great attitude. I admire that." I bask in his large smile that crinkles the marks on his face into a series of charming dimples. I like him. It's okay he knows I have CP. "Do you know what role you'd be great for?"

"What?" I immediately became excited, hoping to hear about an upcoming show.

"Laura in *The Glass Menagerie*. Really, you're ideal. If anyone ever does that one. You should audition."

"Um, yeah. I've heard that before."

"I bet you have." He smiles. His mood hasn't changed.

There is a moment of silence as I looked out the window, squinting from the wind and trying to relax my jaw so he can't see how upset I am. I think of Laura from the Tennessee Williams play, described as slight, delicate, with long dark hair and a limp. There is one hopeful moment in an overall tragic play, when it seems that Laura might find love despite her painful awkwardness brought on by her discomfort with her physical difference. Williams writes at the start of the scene, "a *fragile, unearthly prettiness has come out in LAURA: she is like a piece of translucent glass touched by light, given a momentary radiance, not actual, not lasting*" (102). I wonder about the fragility of my prospects for the stage and if I will continue to be cast in shows now that Norm knows my limp is permanent. Time will tell. He was bound to figure it out eventually.

2013: My Interpretation – Wilmington North Carolina

As a Performance Studies Professor who directs two theatre troupes and experimental ethnographic films at a public southeastern coastal university located in a city with a thriving stage and film community, I often have aspiring student actors ask me why I never pursued a professional acting career beyond a few paid roles while attending college. There are many reasons, including my anxious identity's desire for security, my love of writing, teaching, and theory, and the knowledge early on of the sort of schedule I hoped to keep as a parent someday that a university professor position allows and that an acting career would not. However, reflecting back and applying my methodological narrative training that enables me to understand each personal storytelling act as an ongoing co-constitution of identity and meaning between narrator and listener, I know when my story of self changed into its current direction.

My path veered away from professional performance at age 17. With my gait as fluid and appearance as normatively attractive as they could ever be – made possible through the exercise regimen the flexible

schedule of an undergraduate student on scholarship would allow -- I was still disabled. I admit for a moment during that time, being one of the only first-year students cast in a small ensemble as the romantic love interest (that had never happened before or since) had me hopeful that perhaps my physical diligence had masked my disability enough to be a mainstream actor. The conversation on that Fall day in 1998 materialized my cerebral palsied-actor body's struggle over successful acting images as it is defined by the iconic re-appearing faces of the mass media. I decided my body would be relegated to characters defined by deficient bodies, usually riddled with pity or fear. I was not inspired to take on these roles. I'm still not. The portrayal of disability in popular culture is still troubling to me.

When people start to become uncomfortably inspired by me and my disability I will sometimes joke about being Tiny Tim from *A Christmas Carol:* small, limping and smiling a lot. I remind them that CP is no more fatal than life in general and I'm fairly stable socioeconomically so perhaps they should find someone else for the role of that poor, "sweet innocent" inspirational cripple who acts as the "moral barometer" in their lives (Sandahl and Auslander 3). Characters such as Laura are "charity cases," holders of our pity who we can feel so fortunate to have been spared their sufferings. My mild temperament and almost-passing for normal has allowed me to avoid comparisons to an "obsessive avenger" looking to punish the individual who maimed me or the "monster/freak" that elicits horror (Sandahl and Auslander 3). Although contemporary characters such as Flynn White on *Breaking Bad* and Artie Abrams on *Glee* seem to be more complex as they are members of the ensemble rather than a metaphor or place holder, overcoming their hardships is arguably the focus of their roles, making them the "inspirational overcomers" who excel despite their impairments (Sandahl and Auslander 3).

Though disabled actors appear more in mainstream media than decades before, I find their disabled presence somehow still reinforcing of

Robert McRuer's definition of "compulsory able-bodiedness." Just as Adrienne Rich argued that heterosexuality needs homosexuality, and arguably all queer bodies, to function as the margins to the "normal" (heterosexual) center, able bodies rely on disabled bodies to take on the role of human vulnerability, and inescapable mortality that all bodies hold. I didn't want to play that role then and I don't want to now. Despite how time and scholarship have compelled me to take on the role of disability in autoethnographic performance writing, I'm still not ready to take on any disabled character other than myself on the stage of screen, unless it's a script written and produced by me. I remain skeptical of how popular culture will treat my or any other disabled body. Norm drew comparisons to multiple celebrity faces from the mass media (though also noting my own features were not as memorable, which is why I reminded him of so many of them), the reality of my limping body being permanent shifted his comparisons from people to a single character, the created representations of lack in a script rather than an actress capable of taking on any role. This move from actress to character marked by a director/professor who I loved, respected and worked with all 4 years of school (though never again cast as a love interest, but as a child, victim, and a mythical creature), shifted my goals away from the stage and camera. Perhaps (or probably) at some level, I remain uncomfortable with my body as the representation of "not normal" because unlike other actresses playing Laura, my gait would not end with the show. I'm not interested in playing the role of limping tragedy under any name.

The Debrief: Recounting Others' Reactions to my Story

In sharing this story with others, I've had passionate audience members argue that I should not have been discouraged by Norm's comments. I respond that overall Norm is not a discouraging character in my life story. Norm is a huge fan of me and my work. He is one of my favorite mentors

and this interaction was at the beginning of several years working together before I left the Boston area for graduate school. I adore him and I am indebted to him for the acting opportunities and training he provided me. This is not a story of Norm, or a story of Norm and my relationship, but a story of my interpretations to his interpretations of celebrities in relation to my body. His role in my life (as a director and immediate gatekeeper of my performing at the time) is important to this interpretation. Contextual factors such as how, when, why, and with whom we develop relationships can shape our interpretations of self. This notion holds true across human interactions, but becomes readily apparent through the easy access to mass mediated identities because we collectively "know" these identities, often experiencing them through the same video, audio, and still images that we use to make our interpretations. If Norm had compared me to a past student or local actress who others had never met, the story might not have the strong level of resonance, but because Terri Hatcher, Natalie Wood, Alyssa Milano, and the character from a famous Tennessee Williams play are accessible to a mass audience my interpretations become more readily vulnerable to critiques.

Those who resist my interpretation of this interaction argue that I do in fact resemble the actresses he compared me to – they often list a few other popular culture identities, usually actresses with long dark hair and not overly defined features – and I am always flattered by these comparisons though I have yet to agree that I actually resemble any of the celebrities. Others have also argued that, similar to these actresses, I look like the script's description of Laura from *The Glass Menagerie*, who is described as slight, pale, with long dark hair and a limp. I both affirm and resist these conclusions, arguing that it was knowledge of my limp being permanent that brought this role to Norm's mind. Before, my appearance resembled successful actresses of the contemporary era capable of many roles as opposed to a character, whose embodiment is frozen in time through a script. For me, from my location and body, my limp matters in

this conversation. My limp brackets me off from the mainstream, a confined specialty body only suitable for roles in which my deemed atypicality is explained in ways other defining features such as my hair, eye and skin color need not be justified. My abnormality surfaces in the reiteration of compulsory able-bodiedness that marginalizes it by naming it perfect for a role of a delicately pretty, but culturally-doomed limping girl. This experience can be foreign and startling to bodies marked as "normal" and those marked by disability that ascribe to the medical model's view of bodies as diagnosable machines that breakdown and run inefficiently.

As a Disability Studies/Performance Studies scholar, I remember hearing an account by a disability scholar/performance artist who eagerly looked at an actor's legs during a stage play and felt disappointed. A trained disability eye can see if an individual's legs have the stiff, slightly askew, atrophied appearance of an actual wheelchair user. The muscles and forward point of the actor's knees gave him away. He was a *normate* playing disability (Garland-Thomson). Disabled actors have argued to extend the Disability Civil Rights Campaign slogan, "Nothing about us without us," a demand for disabled people's leadership in anything having to do with disability, should extend to the stage. Only disabled actors should portray disabled characters. I do not entirely agree with this argument as biological determinism unsettles me. I'll admit, I was excited when my trained CP eye noticed that Flynn from *Breaking Bad* really had CP, but considering how disability is portrayed in popular culture – as the defining feature of the character – I'm not sure if this emotional confirmation solves my discomfort with the actor/character. Although I'm all for disabled characters getting work, my limp being my one remarkable features that must be explained in the script reifies the compulsory able-bodiedness that demands my presence be the manifestation of "not normal." I would love a starring role in a Tennessee Williams script, but I'd rather not be legitimized by my gait.

The multiple view points and interpretations of my present body in relation to the actresses and character from a famous play allow for the struggle over personal interpretation of a bodies that are familiar to those participating in the conversation. Now that I have shared by experience throughout this essay, as well as an activity about autoethnography I use in many of my classes, I conclude by offering insights about how others have completed this assignment.

For my students, the above debrief happens in small-group workshops in class. I remember a gay student explaining his autoethnographic interpretation of Dolly Parton as an unapologetic show of excess that inspired his own gender performance. Judith Butler's theory of performativity framed his interpretation. Some southern female students argued that Dolly's body reified gender norms they desired to overcome, interpreting her presence in their home growing up as an image of older values and feminine expectations they wished to transcend. Several students of color wove their stories of race and gender with Kanye West, applying bell hooks illustrate how Kanye's performance at a music awards ceremony is entangled in media biases that framed his body (and their own) as dangerous. Some students resisted this interpretation, arguing that Kanye seemed inappropriate and volatile. Racism, White privilege, and physical vulnerability led to a complicated struggle over identity. One student, framing her essay with Christina Fisanek's work in Fat Studies focused her story on watching the movie *Bridesmaids* starring Melissa McCarthy with a group of friends. She felt excited that an actress she physically identified with was starring in a movie, but her performance tleft her wondering if she could ever be anything in a group of beautiful woman but the comic relief. Some thinner students in her group countered back with how uncomfortable they felt being called "skinny bitches" by Megan Trainor's hit song. A discussion of fat stigma and thin privilege followed.

The familiarity of popular culture icons allows for readers to have personal responses to autoethnographic characters beyond the writer's descriptions and explanations. With a focus on popular culture, the audience can decide if their interpretations, apart from the autoethnographic texts before them, affirm or resist the author's account. They are also authorities interacting with the characters in autoethnographic research. Throughout these conversations, students learned that although they never have to replace their own experience with another, the realities of cultural privilege adds complexity to individual moments of isolation and/or inclusion.

In autoethnographies of reactions to celebrities, the vulnerability of story and interpretations dependance on the bodies through which they emerge is tangible, providing evidence that stories are most powerful when they are struggled over by tellers and audiences, challenging understandings of self, others, identity and culture (Pollock). Mass media offers exposure to bodies that become collectively recognizable so that we can incorporate them into our understandings of self without ever meeting them in person. Our (dis)identifications with these identities locate our own bodies in relation to tangible and shared representations of culture. Listening to *another body's* interpretation of a mass-mediated *familiar body* that counters the experience of *one's own body* allows the realization that our varied responses stem from the complexities of individual bodies and experiences entangled in shared cultural meanings. Students rarely disavow their own connections and reactions to celebrities based on others' interpretations, and that is not a goal of this practice. Rather, through this assignment, they acknowledge the reality of others' embodied experiences, even if they resist their own interpretation, and struggle together, embedded in power and privilege, toward social justice.

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Reviews

THE POPULAR CULTURE STUDIES JOURNAL REVIEWS

Introduction

At the start of the first review in this section, Samuel Boerboom writes that Jennifer Cognard-Black and Melissa A. Goldthwaite's *Books That Cook: The Making of a Literary Meal* is a "multi-genre collection that illustrates, often beautifully, how we understand ourselves…through food." In the second review, William Kist notes that he learned about the author, Scott Calhoun's, relationship with the band, U2, from reading *U2 Above, Across, and Beyond: Interdisciplinary Assessments*. While neither book explicitly approached their studies of popular culture via autoethnography, their insights reflect a tension in autoethnography of popular culture. That is, by embracing one's own vulnerability as a researcher for the purpose of understanding how popular culture affects oneself, how can the researcher also engage with the popular culture artifacts and/or experiences in ways that offer insights and connections with others (Holman Jones, Adams, and Ellis)? In the case of *Books That Cook*, what each author shares about their relationships with food speak to societal values and themes of family with which readers will readily connect. These lessons also contribute to better understandings of how popular culture impacts our daily lives. On the other hand, Calhoun's lessons in *U2 Above, Across, and Beyond* seem more focused on what the band has meant to him. While reading this volume will reveal some insights about the band as well, as Kist noted in his review, Calhoun's experiences may or may not speak to a broader audience about interactions with popular culture. As we increasingly examine our selves

in relation to popular culture then, we must also engage this tension to ensure we are speaking not just about ourselves but our cultural practices (Holman Jones, Adams, & Ellis).

The remaining reviews in this section are loosely organized around the various areas of popular culture they address beginning with analyses of material culture (from the politics of hair removal to a catalogue of ethnic dress), then focusing on theoretical developments in popular culture studies (specifically, adaptation studies), followed by various studies of media (including research about literature, advertising, music, movies, television, and media industries). This final section includes, for the first time, a review of the film, *The Interview*, by Christopher J. Olson. Including this review demonstrates my commitment as the Reviews Editor, and of this journal, to pushing the boundaries of traditional journal publishing. As such, I hope we receive more submissions in the future that review a variety of types of popular culture phenomena, not just of books. The only limitation is reflected in this movie review as it does not just review the movie, but engages its contested status as popular culture phenomenon.

I chose to include reviews of the works included in this section as they reflect traditional and progressive perspectives about a variety of areas of popular culture studies. I hope these reviews help popular culture scholars engage with where popular culture studies is now and where it is going in the future.

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Books That Cook: The Making of a Literary Meal. New York:
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Jennifer Cognard-Black and Melissa Goldthwaite's *Books that Cook: The Making of a Literary Meal* marks a novel approach to writing about (and thinking about) the interrelationship between artful writing and making meals. More than just an edited collection of notable writings about foodcraft and the symbolism inherent within it, *Books that Cook* is multi-genre collection that illustrates, often beautifully, how we understand ourselves (or even *that* we can understand ourselves) through food. An actual recipe accompanies each essay, poem, or short story in the collection or is incorporated within the piece itself. This editorial choice compels the reader to negotiate how each recipe contextualizes its corresponding literary piece. Cognard-Black and Goldthwaite note that a recipe symbolizes the "work of cooking" and that "recipes are culture keepers as well as culture makers. They both organize and express human memory" (2). The editors aim this book toward a literary, though not exclusively academic, audience. Scholars can employ this collection to demonstrate the autoethnographic act of considering how one practices foodcraft for oneself and others. Too, this collection provides illustrative examples of authorial voice and how it commands differing and divergent audience responses toward the personal and social dimensions of preparing and consuming food. Not every selection in *Books That Cook* is formally autoethnographic. Nonetheless, scholars of autoethnography will encounter several texts within the collection that both offer helpful examples of autoethnography as well as provide novel ways of theorizing the self's encounter with food.

    Cognard-Black and Goldthwaite's collection addresses with aplomb such themes as the natural environment, cultural critiques, identity, family, and mortality, among others. Most notable are those selections whose

authors incorporate human memory within the autoethnographic endeavor of preparing food for oneself. April Linder's poem "Full Moon Soup with Snow," features a narrator lamenting the lack of fresh ingredients in the midst of freezing winter. Linder writes, "when all the garden's dainty greens/have long wilted into memory" to match the narrator's state of mind with the cold and unforgiving season (43). Later the narrator instructs the reader to "pour yourself a glass of ruby wine" and relish the opportunity to devour that which "lurks in the cellar and refuses to perish" (44). Like the "full moon [hanging] on/pearly as an onion," the reader is inspired to delight in winter food and take from it the lesson to avoid despair for bygone seasons (44).

Nora Ephron's "Potatoes and Love: Some Reflections" serves as another example of the autoethnographic perspective on memory. Ephron's first-person piece explains how the preparation method of potatoes predicts the falling in (and out of) love with another person. She observes that crisp potatoes are superb, but are laborious to prepare. Ephron adds:

> All this takes time, and time, as any fool can tell you, is what true romance is about. In fact, one of the main reasons why you must make crisp potatoes in the beginning [of a romance] is that if you don't make them in the beginning, you never will. I'm sorry to be so cynical about this, but that's the truth (244).

Ephron includes two recipes for crisp-style potatoes which are meant to serve two. The inevitable middle of a relationship, Ephron observes, can often be marked by a partner no longer willing to indulge in decadently-prepared potatoes. It is at this point of a partner's self-consciousness that one can observe of the relationship that "the middle is ending and the end is beginning" (246). Ephron wistfully notes later that, at the inevitable end of a romantic relationship, one should prepare mashed potatoes because they can be prepared as self-indulgently as is necessary, with as "much

melted butter and salt and pepper as you feel like" (247). Quite pointedly, Ephron's recipe for mashed potatoes provides subjective space for interpretation of ingredients based solely on the whims of the preparer. It is meant to serve only one, as the preferences of another eater are immaterial to the preparation. Ephron's piece fits the collection superbly due to its suggestion that our subjective experiences with others informs the meaning of food; that food itself serves an index of the state of our interpersonal relationships.

Intriguingly, some selections in *Books that Cook* suggest that recipes can also restrict culture. In a compelling essay Vertamae Smart-Grosvenor writes about the need to demystify food as if it were art. She notes:

> White folks act like they invented food and like there is some weird mystique surrounding it…There is no mystique. Food is food. Everybody eats! And when I cook, I never measure or weigh anything. I cook by vibration. I can tell by the look and smell of it (253).

Smart-Grosvenor's essay takes pride in the autoethnographic act of acting against a recipe, of turning against the common sense that reflects the ordering and preparation of ingredients within it. The marvelous image of cooking by vibration emphasizes the deeply subjective and local experience of cooking over the standardized version of foodcraft ordered in recipes whose rigid array of ingredients reflects cultural attitudes of superiority, especially on foods considered ethnic or otherwise exotic.

In the book's final selection former Poet Laureate Ted Kooser builds on Smart-Grosvenor's notion of "vibration cooking" in his poem "How to Make Rhubarb Wine." Kooser's poem emphasizes the beauty of imprecision when preparing food and highlights the importance of the subjective, time-bound experience of interacting with a recipe. Kooser instructs, "Spread out the rhubarb in the grass/and wash it with cold water/ from the garden hose, washing/ your feet as well. Then take a nap" (333).

Later he suggests that reader let the fementing mix stand "five days or so/[taking] time each day to think of it" (333). Still later in the poem he writes that the reader/amateur winemaker then taste some of the new wine as she or he bottles it. Regardless of how it turns out, the reader has "done it awfully well" (334). Imprecision, in Kooser's poem, creates a signature experience embedded within the sweet wine itself.

Cognard-Black and Goldthwaite illustrate in this collection the literary essence of documenting food preparation through the recipe format. In the hands of this book, the recipe is an autoethnographic document, a living history of how the self (or the other) recorded the construction of food in time. Food reflects culture and preparers of food renew that culture or remake it in their own image each time food is made. *Books that Cook* offers a new and compelling cultural perspective on the literary value of all books—literary or "mere" cookbooks—that link food to the subjective experience of knowing ourselves, others, and our world.

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Calhoun, Scott, ed. *U2 Above, Across, and Beyond: Interdisciplinary Assessments*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015. Print

The new edited book, *U2 Above, Across, and Beyond: Interdisciplinary Assessment* does, indeed, cross disciplines as it contains scholarship that focuses on the rock band U2 from such disciplines as psychology, musicology, English, and theology. Edited by Scott Calhoun, this volume is made up of papers that were delivered at the 2013 "U2 Conference" which was held in collaboration with the Rock and Roll Hall

of Fame and Museum in Cleveland. Calhoun, a professor of literature and writing at Cedarville University, is the Director of the U2 Conference and is a staff writer for @U2. In his Introduction, Calhoun writes, almost apologetically, that "Fans who reflect on their fandom come to realize the object of their affection mirrors themselves in some way, and as we enjoy and study U2—as we might a great work of art—we do so in order to learn more of ourselves and live a more rewarding life" (xi). Indeed, the chapters in this edited volume are as diverse as the writers themselves, and, if anything, we learn more about them (and us) than we do about U2. While I believe this volume will be of most interest to those who have more than a passing interest in and knowledge of U2, I think it will also be of interest to anyone interested in seeing a model of interdisciplinary pop culture scholarship.

Each chapter uses a distinct lens to look at some artifact from U2's decades of work. In the chapter "Collaborative Transactions," Christopher Wales employs the work of social psychologist Karl Weick to analyze the "sensemaking" that occurred over 20 years ago when the band reinvented itself for the album *Achtung Baby*. Brian Wright, in his chapter on bassist Adam Clayton, takes a musicologist approach, complete with musical notes from the bass lines of "With or Without You," "New Year's Day," and "Beautiful Day" to bolster the image of the band's apparently least appreciated member. "The problem, then," Wright writes, "is not necessarily with Clayton, but rather with the standards being used to evaluate him" (18). Ed Montano's chapter provides a music critic's convincing portrait of how the band's perhaps neglected "excursions into electronica" in the 90s actually presaged the dominance of EDM and DJ culture today. And Fred Johnson uses Henry Jenkins's ideas of transmediation (and then partially problematizes it) to describe the "massive, multilayered" texts that are a part of U2 culture, memorably describing the "expanding ecosystem of U2 artifacts," including "glossy posters and studio recordings, fan snapshots and bootlegged cassettes,

documentaries, cellphone videos, interviews, album reviews, live performances, news reports and song lyrics inked onto shoe soles by distracted students" (71). In fact, both Fred Johnson's and Christopher Wales's chapters pointed me to view the Davis Guggenheim documentary *From the Sky Down* (2011) which provided a fascinating glimpse of the jazz-like improvisation that the band used to create the song "One." What's interesting about Johnson's chapter is that he provides some illuminating criticism of the puzzle-making nature of Jenkins's transmediation model. Instead of making the consumption of pop culture storyworlds like putting together some kind of complex challenge, Johnson suggests that the messiness of U2's random storylines is more in tune with what true transmediation is all about.

  I appreciated seeing *From the Sky Down*, because it helped me see the reality of the improvisatory quality of the band that I think Johnson is suggesting. Seeing the documentary (as calculated as Guggenheim's work might be) helped me to feel in touch with the band itself as I was reading the chapters in the Calhoun book. Weirdly, it began to feel as if some of these chapters could have been written about any fan favorite, from the cult-fave television series *Supernatural* to the fabled Disney princesses. This kind of fan/scholarship devotion makes me think of the girl down the street from me who is named "Presley"—it says more about the parents than about Elvis. Indeed, in Theodore Louis Trost's chapter on the transgressive theology of U2, Bono is quoted as comparing the Biblical David to Elvis. It seems that everything old is new again! Focusing on the band's *Pop* album from 1997 and, in particular, the song, "Wake Up Dead Man," Trost describes the song's and the album's theme that "it is in the common, the profane, the mundane that the uncommon breaks through, becomes recognizable" (99). The theme of the 2013 U2 Conference that gave birth to this book was, indeed, "U2: TRANS—". Calhoun reports that the focus of the conference was "on ways U2 has been an agent of transformation, translation, transgression, and transcendence" (xi). As

Calhoun says, "we are looking at U2 now as we might a great text where the plot, players, and theme of the work point toward affirming and improving the human condition" (ix). Looking at works of art such as the music of U2 can often teach us more about ourselves than about the work or the artist.

I do believe that this volume is an admirable example of the kinds of interdisciplinary scholarship that can be inspired by pop culture. The scholars represented in this book have used lenses from their own fields, and, so, any academic or aspiring academic could learn something from reading these essays about the application of critical perspectives in academic writing. But in the end, I also found myself wanting to go back to the original source material which I did by reading the *U2: The Definitive Biography* (2014). There I learned so much about the lads who got together in high school thanks to an ad placed by drummer Larry Mullen. I learned that Bono was originally named Paul Hewson, and that he was influenced by the television series *Batman* and the Welsh singer Tom Jones. This further deepened my connection to U2 as did the admirable scholarship provided in Calhoun's book. But that's just me.

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Herzig, Rebecca, M. *Plucked: A History of Hair Removal.* New York: New York University Press, 2015. Print.

Over the centuries, people have attributed various cultural meanings to human body hair or the lack thereof. In *Plucked: A History of Hair Removal*, Rebecca Herzig methodically explores mostly western constructions of human body hair from the late eighteenth century to the current time. In so doing, Herzig creates a fascinating historical narrative that implicates issues of gender, race, and ethnicity by tracing the constructed meanings that various peoples have attributed to hair placement, growth patterns, texture, length, and thickness. More specifically, Herzig provides a window into the historic and ongoing desire of people (mostly women and girls) to remove hair from places where its appearance has been culturally reified as ugly, unusual, or even unnatural. *Plucked* is more than a simple history, and Herzig borrows the lens of critical anthropology, sociology, and cultural studies to interpret and critique these practices.

Herzig picks up the story of human body hair and its removal during American colonization, when white European colonists encountered various tribes of native Indians, all of whom appeared to possess smooth, hairless bodies and faces. Herzig describes debates among learned colonists about the nature of Indian's smooth skin: some felt that the native Indians were naturally hairless, while others believed they privately plucked all their body hair. Both positions worked to "other" native Indians by highlighting differences, and as a reader of these arguments quoted directly from their sources, I found myself growing increasingly uncomfortable about the judgments made of these bodies. Undoubtedly, that was Herzig's intention, and she makes quite clear that these deliberations were less about academic curiosity than concerns of power, dominance, and assimilation.

Herzig argues that as the American Indian's conquest became abundantly clear, debates about the meanings behind their body hair or lack-there-of became inconsequential. Upon the publication of Charles Darwin's *Descent of Man* in 1871, debates shifted from differences between people to differences between animals, and most importantly, between man and ape. Then, as now, most Christian devotees rejected a link between humans and animals in favor of Biblical creation, but Herzig describes a fascination in North American popular culture with evolution and the possible connection between man and beast that often centered on body hair. Exceptionally hairy people of color often were written about or displayed in circus-like events as possible "missing links," and Herzig is careful to note that scientists were no less drawn to the spectacles related to evolution as it relates to hair than the side-show grifters.

After completing these thorough histories, which are appropriately peppered with compelling quotes from diverse primary sources, Herzig turns to the growing distaste for body hair and the increasing desire to remove it by twentieth century western women. By 1900, hairlessness was associated with female beauty, and Herzig dedicates a chapter to chemical depilatories made of harmful chemicals sold prior to any regulatory oversight. However, not until the twentieth century did the technological and industrial production of products for beauty and wellness intersect with the increasing cultural desire for feminine hairlessness, with the result being an ever-more hairless ideal for women to maintain. Importantly, the association of hairlessness with female beauty was not propelled merely by fashion, but also by patriarchy and dominance. For example, Herzig notes that political cartoons mocking suffrage activists often depicted them as hairier-than-normal women.

In the last five chapters of *Plucked*, Herzig describes the popular methods of twentieth century hair removal, intersected between discussions of the political and cultural implications for the women (and sometimes men) who engage such practices. More often than not, these

trends accompanied some capitalist interest in establishing cultural norms to sell grooming products. For example, Herzig notes that the Gillette Company was contracted by the United States military to provide razors for daily shaving during World War I, when hairlessness would serve to reduce instances of lice and infestation in soldiers living in the elements. After the war, Gillette created advertising for civilians to promote daily shaving, and soon women were shaving their legs to remove hair that was considered normal only a decade earlier. Herzig provides numerous other examples of hair removal trends and the means used to obtain the desired results. In addition to chemical depilatories and razors, she also explores the use of tweezing and plucking, x-rays and radiation, electrolysis, waxing, laser treatments, and medical treatments focused upon genetic factors or hormones.

Throughout her history of hair removal, Herzig is careful to always consider the political implications of these trends in wellness and beauty. In a powerful chapter called "Unshaven," Herzig traces the ways that second-wave feminists used hair as a sign of resistance to patriarchy, proudly displaying hairy legs or arms as a sign of resistance. Conversely, of course, Herzig is careful to note that those opposed to 1970s feminism also focused upon these women's hair, describing it as an aberration rather than a sign of strength.

Today, Herzig cites statistics that suggest 99% of American women choose to remove hair somewhere on their bodies. While legs, armpits, and upper lips may still dominate the business, Herzig does not avoid discussing the contemporary trend for women to remove some or all pubic hair from the perineum, vulva and anus (and increasingly for men to remove hair from their testicles and anus). She is careful to note that there will likely be a next frontier for hair removal, because the root cause is never removed from culture but is always constructed. Furthermore, these constructions are always accompanied with political implications.

    With *Plucked*, Herzig has written a highly readable and well-researched review of western practices of hair removal, including the varied motivations that inspire it. The text does not attempt to be exhaustive, and while Herzig does mention occasional issues of race or ethnicity, she more consistently focuses upon issues of gender and sex. She does not privilege science in understanding hair removal and instead maintains a consistently cultural frame on the topic. As such, this book would be a useful addition to courses dealing with gender and sexuality, sociology, anthropology and interpersonal communication in addition to American history. Students and scholars alike will appreciate the well-documented research that represents the greatest strength of this effort, and both will undoubtedly learn something new about hair and its removal.

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Falls, Susan. *Clarity, Cut, and Culture: the Many Meanings of Diamonds*. New York: New York University Press, 2014. Print.

Clarity, Cut, and Culture is a truly intriguing text that provides an often-overlooked narrative about diamonds—an item of material culture that has become symbolic of everything from love and romance to class and power. Aside from more conventional interpretations that situate diamonds into a contextual model in which they are merely items of spectacle bound to conspicuous consumption and display, Susan Falls explains, "this book explores what diamonds mean, how those meanings come about, and what our interactions with these stones can tell us about ourselves and our relationships with material culture, especially mass-

marketed, mass-produced, and mass-consumed commodities" (1). Framing this discussion about diamonds at the intersection between meaning produced through imputation and meaning realized through discovery, Falls argues that both forms of meaning engender a rich and diverse story of how these precious stones are part of the social fabric of modern life. Within this framework, Falls employs the semiotic theories of Charles Sanders Pierce, weaving a keen interpretation of diamonds as signs through Pierce's model of the "second trichotomy"—an application and explanation of which Falls should be applauded for, by making often dense and erudite theoretical matter so accessible to general audiences.

At the center of this book's appeal is the way Falls incorporates a host of methods to showcase twelve months of fieldwork with consumers of diamonds and the commercial producers that transform the character of these natural objects into supernatural items of consumption. Indeed, in addition to archival, historical and marketing analysis, Falls brings the real story of diamonds cleverly to life through her narrative-capturing use of ethnography; of which she notes: "Idiosyncrasy, agency, and creativity shape these narratives, which in turn explain, interpret and ultimately make social worlds happen. Our interactions with things such as commodities, simultaneously reflect and reshape our experience" (3). The vast majority of these ethnographic narratives can be found between chapters three and five; at times charming and entertaining—inclusive of her own experience with her grandmother's diamond—and at others so telling and revealing of personal attitudes toward these jewels, that readers may be forced to reconsider their own views on the real human significance of diamonds.

From the perceived scarcity that contributes to their value to the incredible number of cuts that even the smallest of these gems can undergo. *Clarity, Cut, and Culture* is filled with fascinating facts that can lure the curiosity of academic and general audiences alike into pages-upon-pages of thought-provoking material. Perhaps the only real

shortcoming of the book is how very little Falls dedicates to the discussion of the "blood diamond" industry. To be fair, Falls does provide a summative explanation of some social, political and economic tragedies this industry generates, yet only in a handful of pages and, for the further inquisitive, a reference to an earlier 2011 article in which she address this topic in some critical detail. Nevertheless, Falls has accomplished a great deal within a relatively short manuscript—with this in mind, a book like this could easily be used in any number of undergraduate courses or graduate seminars as a supplementary text for enhancing a host of diverse topics, including qualitative research methods; social theories of conspicuous consumption; cultural anthropology; as well as detailed explorations of material culture.

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Shome, Raka, *Diana and Beyond: White Femininity, National Identity, and Contemporary Media Culture*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2014. Print.

When Princess Diana died in a fatal car crash on August 31, 1997, it became one of those moments when you can recall where you were or what you were doing at the time you learned the news. On that day, I remember watching television with my best friend and her extended family when the newscaster cut into the show we were watching to announce Diana's fatal injuries. Eighteen years later, major events such as Prince William's wedding to Kate Middleton and the recent birth of their daughter Princess Charlotte Elizabeth *Diana* of Cambridge help reinscribe the image of Diana in the public consciousness. Still, in *Diana and*

Beyond: White Femininity, National Identity, and Contemporary Media Culture, Raka Shome argues that Diana is more than a prominent figure in popular culture—she is a symbol that permeates discussions of race, gender, class, and nationalism in the construction of the neoliberal state.

Shome divides *Diana and Beyond* into case studies that examine Diana in the contexts of (1) racialized and nationalized motherhood, (2) multicultural fashion, (3) globalized motherhood (4) transnational and Muslim masculinities, and (5) the commodified spiritualization of upper-/middle-class white femininity. She approaches these case studies in a manner that does not look at Diana's biographic representation or the representation of Diana in the public memory as these approaches do not consider how the intersection of race and gender construct a "spectacularization of white femininity" (Shome 2). Instead, the cultural myth of Diana becomes an entryway to the examination of the relationship between the racialized and gendered bodies of white femininity and the production of neoliberal discourses. According to Shome, focusing on the construct of white femininity is crucial to the examination of neoliberal policies within contemporary nationalist narratives and "the Diana case offers an example par excellence through which to comprehend how representations of iconic white women signify shifts in a national common sense" (4). This opens the door for other white female celebrities such as Madonna, Angelina Jolie, and Sandra Bullock to use a flexible subjectivity and a normalized white motherhood to distract from the systematic marginalization of women from the Global South. Therefore, Diana's position as a national symbol for neoliberal politics in Britain and as an exemplar of the contemporary representations of spectacular white femininity in globalized media makes the cultural myth of Diana a significant point of reference.

To begin each chapter, Shome contextualizes the representation of Diana within the framework of the larger case study. In Chapter 1, "White Femininity in the Nation, the Nation in White Femininity," Shome

examines the social currency of white womanhood by situating the cultural symbol of Diana's physical body within the frameworks of celebrity, neoliberalism, and whiteness. Shome's focus on the representation of Diana's body in this first chapter works to contextualize the influence race and gender has on nationalist policies based on neoliberal discourses. In Chapter 2, "Racialized Maternalisms: White Motherhood and National Modernity," Shome argues media create narratives of nationalized motherhood using the representation of Diana as a "can-do" mother performing a "just like us" upper-/middle class white womanhood. Then she expands her discussion of racialized and classed motherhood by focusing on how the experiences of Black Briton mothers differ from the neoliberal narratives of motherhood symbolized by Diana. Through this comparison, Shome solidifies her claim that the representation of upper-/middle-class white femininity reinforces a neoliberal logic that allows the government to restrict the social services needed to support lower class and Black Briton mothers. In Chapter, 3, "Fashioning the Nation: The Citizenly Body, Multiculturalism, and Transnational Designs," Shome focuses on the racialized and gendered implications of Diana's fashion choices. In this chapter, Shome argues Diana was particularly conscious to the ways her fashion choices communicated a connection to the people of Britain. Furthermore, Shome uses Diana as an example of how fashion communicates Britain's political focus on multiculturalism, class, and the fetishization of South Asian culture. Then she expands her discussion of white femininity and fashion by discussing the use of South Asian fashion to represent a superficial concern about multiculturalism that is only obtainable by upper-/middle-class white women.

Yet, using Diana as an example of the case study's framework and then expanding the examination beyond the specificity of Diana does not hold up for all of the chapters. In Chapter 5, "White Femininity and Transnational Masculinit(ies): Desire and the "Muslim Man," Shome uses

the relationship between Diana and Dodi Fayed to make an argument about the relationship between white femininity and Muslim masculinity. Shome argues, the relationship between Diana and Dodi is significant to the national branding of Britain as cosmopolitan and accepting of multicultural relationships. Yet, according to Shome, Britain is able to embrace a national narrative of multiculturalism because it does not have to deal with the implications of living characters. In this chapter, Shome successfully complicates the examination of Muslim masculinity in popular culture by examining it through the lens of white femininity. Nevertheless, this chapter becomes more about Muslim masculinity than the representation of white femininity.

At times, it seems as though Shome is vacillating between an expansive overview of white femininity in media and popular culture and a specific examination of the cultural myth of Princess Diana. Still, *Diana and Beyond: White Femininity, National Identity, and Contemporary Media Culture* is useful for scholars with varying research interests. Primarily, *Diana and Beyond* is useful for researchers focusing on racialized and gendered representation in media. Additionally, researchers in the field of celebrity studies can use Shome's examination of the cultural myth of Princess Diana as a model for examining figures in popular culture. Furthermore, Shome's examination of race, gender, and nationalism in fashion highlights how the systematic construction of white femininity structures popular culture's relationship to fashion and contextualizes the representation of the upper-/middle-class white female body. Finally, those working on mediated representations and the political implications of racialized and globalized motherhood will find *Diana and Beyond* particular useful because Shome dedicates two chapters of her book to the topic.

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Field, Corrine T., and Nicholas L. Syrett, eds. *Age in America: The Colonial Era to the Present.* New York: New York University Press, 2015. Print.

Age in America brings together interventions in American history and cultural studies that establish chronological age as a legally constructed category significantly deployed to manage a subject's relationship to a social contract. Through methodologies deeply concerned with recovering how age was animated in colonial and early America, these essays speak to the self conscious ways in which access to full citizenship was and is maintained through the ideological framework of individual age consciousness and institutional age grading. Organized chronologically, the three sections consider an expansive historical archive and document the shifts in meaning around age, the importance of age as a relevant identity category, and age as a dynamic area of analysis for intersectional studies of American culture. Each essay takes up age-based categories in order to point to the widely different ways in which age has delimited access to citizenship for Native Americans, African Americans, women, immigrants, and Chicanas.

Part I: "Age in Early America" pairs two essays concerned with spatially intimate, but culturally diverse childhoods to draw out the significance of chronological age-based recognition. Ann M. Little's "'Keep Me with You, So That I Might Not Be Damned': Age and Captivity in Colonial Borderlands Warfare" argues that similar conceptions of childhood existed across English, French, and Wabanaki people in New England by drawing on the detailed documentation of age in criminal, civil, and common law. Until subjects reach full citizenship, Little argues, participation in the colonies was determined incrementally through three recognized stages of childhood: one to four, six and seven, and twelve to fourteen-year-olds. Quite differently, Sharon Braslaw Sundue's "'Beyond the Time of White Children': African American

Emancipation, Age, and Ascribed Neoteny in Early National Pennsylvania" uncovers the ways in which the white supremacist ideologies of African American neoteny structured the laws of servitude after emancipation in the state of Pennsylvania. The legally structured extension of childhood for African Americans effectively worked to circumvent the law, and maintain systems of dependency and control.

In Part II: "Age in the Long Nineteenth Century," citizenship is considered through the lens of voting rights, marriage, documentation, labor, and immigration. The essays, taken together, trouble the saliency of political narratives that argue for the neutrality of age-based categories of exclusion. By drawing out the ways in which age is applied differently depending on gender, race, class, and country of origin, these scholars identify the legislative impact on lived experiences. These legal practices, and, as a prerequisite, access to legal knowledge and documentation, defined how subjects negotiated participation in a national culture deeply invested in popular politics. Indeed, these case studies of the long nineteenth century show the development of chronological age itself as a repository for the unease of disenfranchisement set by ambiguous terms that sought to link democracy and maturity. For example suffrage, statutory ages of marriage, military age requirements, and rights to contract all construct different passages from "legal infancy" to adulthood. The gaps recorded in political agency through these intersectional studies challenge the space of childhood itself, drawing the conditions of adolescence into a larger conversation of minority status under the U.S. legal regime.

Part III: "Age in Modern America" offers essays on both adolescence and senescence scripted within the law. William Graebner's "Age and Retirement: Major Issues in the American Experience" traces back the salience of age sixty-two and sixty-five to include the complex web of political, capitalist, cultural, and ideological shifts that are in constant conversation with the age of retirement. Suffrage and the drinking age are

taken up in this section as case studies that vivify the constant tension of minor subjecthood: protection and control. In an essay that provides a necessary contrast to the legal recognition of concern in a majority of this collection, Norma E. Cantú's "A Chicana Third Space Feminist Reading of Chican@ Life Cycle Markers" brings together Chicana celebrations of age with quinceañeras at fifteen and cincuentañeras at fifty. These age-based rituals are embedded within the intimacies of community, and theorized as a recursive transformation, what Gloria Anzaldúa calls *nepantla*. It is in this space of *nepantla* that age-based recognition is both "resistance and affirmation" (297).

This book mobilizes diverse case studies across an expansive period of time through the lens of legal records, church doctrine, family records, and letters. Collectively, these essays contribute to a rigorous excavation of age as a category of identity intrinsic to an intersectional analysis of American culture. While the sections are organized chronologically, the stakes of *Age in America* are not rendered on a normative progression model. Rather, Anzaldúa's *nepantla* speaks to the work as whole as these essays resist binaries such as minor/full citizenship, free/enslaved labor, and child/adult subject.

By interrogating the narratives of those marginalized by age-based discrimination, this collection provides compelling arguments for the ways in which individuals negotiate their families, communities, state governments, and American national culture. Scholars of critical race studies, democracy studies, American studies, and childhood and age studies, in particular, will find this collection of historiographies to be a dynamic compliment of, and challenge to, these fields of study. Taken together, these authors address age-based privileges through an intersectional framework and diverse archives.

Their methodologies for uncovering marginalized narratives draw out the ways in which age consciousness and age grading have changed over

time, and the political, social, and legal currents that provoke a questioning of age as neutral criteria.

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Clampin, David. *Advertising and Propaganda in World War II: Cultural Identity and the Blitz Spirit*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2014. Print.

Popular accounts of the British home front during World War II typically emphasize the famous blitz spirit. Here emerge the stalwart and cheerful citizens who endured the German onslaught with courage and a stiff upper lip, willingly carrying on even as they kept calm in the name of country and king. Such characterizations are legion in scholarship, suggesting that even if some postwar mythologizing has crept in here and there, the image of the defiant Brits under fire is based more on fact than on fancy.

David Clampin's new book, *Advertising and Propaganda in World War II*, presents an intriguing glimpse into vital aspects of the popular culture that undergirded and perhaps even helped foster that blitz spirit. His close scrutiny of scores of wartime advertisements within their original context offers a useful means of understanding the various ways that the British advertising industry served the war effort, its own clients, and—largely behind the scenes—the industry's own future viability. That the well-illustrated book is able to juggle its discussions of these divergent purposes demonstrates how deeply Clampin's research has delved into the time period.

Unlike many existing treatments of the home front, *Advertising and Propaganda* avoids the temptation to treat the war years as a homogenous

mass with no differentiation or variability from beginning to end. Instead, it takes the reader from the outbreak of war through its climax, showing at each stage how the industry struggled to define itself and its mission. Early on, for example, the war was underway as soon as the Germans invaded Poland, but little seemed to be happening, at least from the British perspective. Advertisements naturally reflected that sense of anticlimax, thereby stressing a sense of continuity between the new wartime life and the patterns of old. One November 1939 Guinness ad, for instance, touted the cheer that drinking a wartime beer could bring, asking: "What's the use of worrying?" (91). As the war progressed, though, the industry had to adapt its appeals to new dangers and developments (such as when ads during the Battle of Britain began to depict civilians as being on the front lines). Clampin's book is there at each stage of the conflict, nicely contextualizing these sorts of changes and explaining how they were fitting responses to the war's ongoing trajectory. While a later chapter on gender roles disrupts the book's chronological flow to a degree, the overall sense of progression is welcome, showcasing a home front experience that was not monolithic at all but dynamic at nearly every turn.

A related strength is the book's willingness to consider the numerous propagandistic purposes which a given advertisement could serve. Aside from the most obvious persuasive function of an ad to pitch a specific product or brand for an advertiser, the wartime industry also demonstrated its propaganda value to the British government by continuously using ads to instruct readers on how one should behave on the home front—like the numerous late 1940 spots that emphasized the ideal of fitness for civilians during the crisis (that function was no doubt easier to manage when advertisers of such goods as spark plugs, radios, and stockings found that they had no products to sell but still wanted to keep their brand names alive for the anticipated postwar boom). Underlying both of these propaganda objectives was a third, more covert aim, which amounted to a clever demonstration of the long term, strategic value of advertising itself.

Advertising has always had its critics, of course, but during the war emergency British advertisers faced particularly pointed criticism from those who saw the wartime continuation of the practice as useless and even wasteful, since it seemed to encourage consumption when products were scarce or hard to find. The industry's professionals answered these critics with an "overriding drive . . . to protect their livelihood" (223), highlighting, for example, to their role in educating civilians about effective ways to adjust their consumer habits for the duration. Taken together, these differing kinds of propaganda aims showcase the book's complex conceptual approach, one that enables Clampin to engage the ads in a particularly sophisticated manner.

The book's relatively complete picture of the British advertising industry's propaganda machinations makes it an especially interesting counterpoint to similar treatments of American advertising during the war. As recent books like Inger L. Stole's *Advertising at War* and John Bush Jones's *All-Out for Victory!* suggest, the advertising industry in the United States also served propagandistic purposes for both clients and the government, even as it worked ceaselessly behind the scenes to demonstrate the long term value of advertising. Even so, the differences between the two nations' experiences are often startling. To take one example, U.S. males tended to be militarized in ads, either as soldiers in their own right or, if they were civilian, appearing in favorable visual comparisons to soldiers. But Clampin shows that the males in British advertisements were rarely in the military or even militarized. Instead, they often appeared in domestic contexts and in the idiom of the "ordinary and mundane" (206). In this respect, the ads presented British men in stark contrast to their aggressively militarized depictions of Germans, preferring to show their own side's males in scenes that reinforced that these stoic men "were fighting to protect . . . a 'normal' way of life" (206). There are more such contrasts between the British and the American advertising

experiences, of course, each one pointing to a fascinating cultural divide between the two allies.

To be sure, Clampin's focus is on the British side of that experience, and justifiably so. For that reason, his book will be of greatest interest to readers (including students, professional scholars, and history buffs) who are interested either in achieving a stronger grasp of Britain's wartime home front or, in contrast, in comparing that home front to other nations' home fronts in that same time period. Either way, the blitz spirit and how it emerged is a worthy scholarly endeavor, and *Advertising and Propaganda in World War II* proves to be effective in offering numerous relevant insights. It is a fine debut, establishing Clampin as a scholarly voice on the World War II era who has much of interest to say.

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Best, Joel, and Kathleen A. Bogle. *Kids Gone Wild: From Rainbow Parties to Sexting, Understanding the Hype over Teen Sex*. New York: New York University Press, 2014. Print.

I have to admit—I was a virgin for a *long time.* Partially from the Southern Baptist guilt handed down by my parents, and partially because I truly wanted to wait for "the one." So as my testosterone reared, my desperate virginity became exacerbated by media reports that confirmed my biggest fear—I was the only one not having sex. In *Kids Gone Wild: From Rainbow Parties to Sexting, Understanding the Hype over Teen Sex* (2014, NYU Press), Joel Best and Kathleen Bogle offer a sociological perspective—albeit in an incredibly accessible way—on the widespread panic surrounding teen sexuality and, more specifically, on the cultural fixation we have with the tropes and signifiers (like those mentioned in the book's title) of adolescent sexuality. After reading this book, I can breathe a sigh of relief knowing I wasn't the only teen not getting laid.

 Kids Gone Wild explores contemporary legends about adolescent sexuality and the ways in which they contribute to the perceived downward moral trajectory of American youth. From Miley Cyrus and the morning-after pill, to Romeo and Juliet and child pornography, Best and Bogle investigate some of the most salient examples of and turning points in Western sexuality. Their claim is simple—teen sex is overhyped. The authors focus most heavily on sensationalized media accounts of rampant teen sexuality, which would have us believe that teenagers are engaged in "rainbow parties" (group events where girls put on different shades of lip stick and boys line up for blow jobs in an effort to see who can boast the most colorful rainbow), sexting (sending sexually explicit messages or semi/nude photos via text message), and collecting "shag bands" (different colored, gel-like bracelets which signify willingness to engage in a specific sexual act). Do some of these behaviors likely exist among adolescents? Of course. Can they be proven? Anecdotally, at best. What

then, is our fear/fascination with teenage sexuality? Best and Bogle explore this question throughout *Kids Gone Wild.*

By tracking the trajectory from panics about heavy petting in the 1950s to a new focus on how kids—*girls,* especially—are using their sexual agency, Best and Bogle unpack what they frame as a "contemporary legend"—that is, a sensationalized social conversation about rampant teen sex with virtually no data to back it up (5). They frame the conversation by differentiating between *skeptics* and *believers*—those who use first- or second-hand accounts to verify or invalidate the existence of sex bracelets, rainbow parties, and other sensationalized outlets of teen sexuality. These social commentaries were mined from a host of sources that constitute Best and Bogle's data—from magazines to Facebook and everywhere in between. Upon this data, Best and Bogle rest their argument that teen sexuality today is not all that different from teen sexuality of yesteryear.

Kids Gone Wild tackles teenage sexuality in a frank and honest way. One of the many strengths of the text is its highly accessible writing. While Best and Bogle are no strangers to scholarly research, they do not fall prey to technical jargon in this book. Throughout *Kids Gone Wild,* we are presented with large clusters of data, including interview transcripts and online discourse, among others. Thus, scholar or not, we are able to see the process of deduction Best and Bogle used as they flesh out their overarching argument. *Kids Gone Wild* is a text for everyone—parents, teens, educators, practitioners, and anyone else seeking a well-informed and balanced view of teen sexuality.

Best and Bogle lay an excellent foundation for a much larger social conversation on sexuality—teen sexuality included. There are several themes introduced in *Kids Gone Wild* that are not explored in depth. For instance, Best and Bogle explore the political foundations of sexuality and sex education—a topic with obvious applicability to the argument at hand—but do not engage deeply with the politics of teen sexuality. While

this topic might not have fit within the scope of the project, it presents an opportunity to take critical sexualities scholarship into the mainstream. Additionally, while its breadth is a great asset, *Kids Gone Wild* left me wanting a more critical conversation about intersectional sexuality. The text highlights "white, middle-class" adolescents, but does not discuss the intersections of class, race, sexuality, or other elements which are so relevant to conversations on sexuality. Best and Bogle lay a great foundation for these conversations, as many of the examples they use confirm the white-washed, heterosexual, patriarchal structures of Western sexuality. Perhaps this is not a weakness of *Kids Gone Wild;* rather, it is a testament to the necessity for more mainstream sexualities scholarship like it.

In sum, *Kids Gone Wild* is a wonderfully fun, sometimes maddening read. Best and Bogle are to be applauded for taking sexualities scholarship outside of the lofty halls of the academy and translating it into an accessible, entertaining, and informative work for the mainstream. *Kids Gone Wild* contributes to a much-needed social conversation on adolescence, sexuality, and the forces which drive our understanding of how they intersect.

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Lynch, Annette, and Mitchell D. Strauss. *Ethnic Dress in the United States: A Cultural Encyclopedia.* Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015. Print.

If asked to name a stimulating read, classic literature, drama, and poetry, in addition to some contemporary novels are what typically come to mind for most people. Except for the most hardcore bibliophile, few, if any, would ever contemplate considering an encyclopedia as an interesting read. What an encyclopedia lacks in regards to entertainment, it more than makes up for in terms of knowledge enhancement. Standing in sharp contrast to the vast majority of encyclopedias, *Ethnic Dress in the United States: A Cultural Encyclopedia* offers a little something for everyone, from members of the general public to students and scholars of fashion and cultural studies.

For members of the general public seeking to learn more about various fashionable accoutrements, *Ethnic Dress in the United States: A Cultural Encyclopedia* offers concise descriptions and historical backgrounds of over one hundred items spanning the globe as well as numerous historic epochs. Scholars and students of fashion and cultural studies will appreciate the fairly broad and extensive assortment of sartorial items covered in the encyclopedia ranging from textiles such as batik cloth, buckskin, chambray, calico, chintz, Harris Tweed, and madras cloth to such fashion stalwarts as bohemian dress, Capri pants, espadrilles, flip flops, oxford shirts, and polo shirts.

While the vast majority of the apparel items detailed in *Ethnic Dress in the United States: A Cultural Encyclopedia* gained prominence during the latter half of the twentieth century, there are discussions of accoutrements that predate the era such as coonskin caps, kilts, kimonos, corsets, and waistcoats, as well as more recent items like Ugg boots. Even so, the editors of *Ethnic Dress in the United States: A Cultural Encyclopedia* have taken great pains to make sure that the encyclopedia does not favor

the clothing contributions of one ethnic group at the expense of all others. Additionally, all facets of clothing are covered including head gear (conical Asian Hat, porcupine roach, sombrero, turban, touque), ties, belts, and scarves (bolo tie, bootlace tie, concho belt, obi, pashmina), foot gear (Birkenstocks, Dr. Martens, jellies, Mexican pointy boots, moccasins), shirts (aloha shirt, barong tagalong, dashiki, dejellaba, kosovorotka), suits and pants (harem pants, Jodhpurs, lederhosen, Mao suit, Mariachi suit) dresses and skirts (cheongsam, rumba dress, sarafan, sari, sarong), sweaters and jackets (alpaca, Mexican tourist jacket, Norwegian, Scottish, Nehru jacket), and religious and ceremonial clothing (hanbok, hanfu Chinese robes, hijab, kimono, yarmulke).

Each entry in *Ethnic Dress in the United States: A Cultural Encyclopedia* features a description of the item as well as a brief history of the item in addition to a separate section discussing the item's use in the United States. Additionally, there are sections detailing the influence and impact of the item under discussion along with information on other items that similar in nature to the item in question. The entries conclude with a short section offering resources for further reading.

Despite the rather comprehensive focus of *Ethnic Dress in the United States: A Cultural Encyclopedia*, there are a few problems with the scope of the book. As mentioned earlier, there is a heavy bias toward featuring items that gained prominence during the twentieth century. While this is understandable given the interests of the vast majority of members of the general public, it does a disservice to scholars and students of material culture and fashion studies because *Ethnic Dress in the United States: A Cultural Encyclopedia* unfairly emphasizes the importance of what is considered modern and/or relatively contemporary dress in the sartorial history of the United States.

Another seemingly problematic issue is the choice of illustrations for *Ethnic Dress in the United States: A Cultural Encyclopedia.* The use of illustrations in an encyclopedia such as *Ethnic Dress in the United States:*

A Cultural Encyclopedia is not only warranted but is more often than not essential because it is often necessary to visually depict the items being discussed in order for the readers to more fully comprehend that which is being analyzed. However, the use of illustrations becomes problematic when certain items are fortunate enough to receive pictorial illustrations in addition to their written descriptions while other seemingly just as worthy items are forced to rely solely upon the mental depictions that one conjures up while reading the textural portrayals. Prime examples of this are illustrations of a Mao suit, a Norwegian sweater, and a poncho and no corresponding visual depiction of a Nehru jacket, an Aran or a Scottish sweater, and a sarape. For those unfamiliar with Nehru jackets, Aran, and Scottish sweaters, and sarapes, it might be somewhat easy to conflate or confuse Mao suits with Nehru jackets as well as conflating and/or confusing Norwegian sweaters with those from Scotland and the Aran Islands, as well as assuming that ponchos and sarapes are one and the same. Additionally, given the fairly recent, relatively speaking, popularity of Ugg boots, one has to wonder why they are illustrated as opposed to a jeogori or a sari.

Regardless of the aforementioned problematic issues, *Ethnic Dress in the United States: A Cultural Encyclopedia* is a welcome addition to the bookshelves of students of both fashion studies and material culture studies as well as members of the general public who are interested in learning the history and meaning behind some of the more familiar everyday accoutrements worn by Americans.

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Bruhn, Jørgen, Ann Gjelsvik, and Eirik Frisvold Hanssen, eds. *Adaptation Studies: New Challenges, New Directions*. London: Bloomsbury, 2013. Print.

Kamilla Elliott's essay "Theorizing Adaptations/Adapting Theories" appears immediately after the introduction to *Adaptation Studies: New Challenges, New Directions*. For good reason: everyone who studies the adaptation of print texts for the screen—big or small—needs to read Elliott's critique of the sloppy and amnesiac scholarship that we have too often produced. Bruhn, Gjelsvik, and Hanssen modestly remark about Elliott's piece, "readers should consider the polemical, thoroughly researched article as a guide to the wide field of adaptation research" (4). I would put it more bluntly: "Drop what you are doing and go read Elliott's essay. Acquaint yourself with the reading list she has given you. Then thank her."

The editors of have compiled a book sure to interest not just scholars of adaptation, but also scholars of the phenomena called intermediality, remediation, and transmedia franchising. The book's self-reflexivity about adaptation studies also makes it a lively discussion of both enduring and new debates within the field, thereby offering a point of entry for newcomers even as it contributes to discourses on more abstruse theoretical and methodological questions. As the editors put it, their contributors "seek to uncover the core features of adaptation as a creative process and the core activity of adaptation studies as an academic endeavor" (3). In this they generally succeed, both performing and critiquing adaptation studies, advancing the theory and methods of adaptation studies as well as providing some detailed analyses of individual texts (mostly films). But Elliott's essay burns brightly enough to outshine its fellows, so it warrants some discussion before we survey the rest of the book.

Elliott criticizes adaptation scholars for their short historical memory and for a habit that this short memory begets — treating their ignorance of previous work as evidence of their own innovation. Scholars of adaptation "often fail to cite prior work upon which they build, exacerbating the sense of scatter and fruitless repetition" (24), writes Elliott. Nowhere is this more salient than in the discussion of the relationship between adaptation and source, which has long constituted the interpretative kernel of the field. "Surveying work published in 2010-11," Elliott writes,

> the most common claim to innovation is that a new publication challenges prevalent fidelity mandates. And yet scholars who have read prior work know that fidelity has always been robustly challenged in adaptation studies…. Indeed, the critique of fidelity has become so commonplace that the critique of this critique is also widely reiterated. (24-25)

In case we have not read the prior work that she means, Elliott supplies a table, "Repeated Claims in Adaptation Studies," which spans three pages. The left column presents the first instance of a claim, while the right presents subsequent occurrences of that claim that do not cite their precursor:

1975: Wagner posits that adaptations function as interpretations of/critical commentaries on what they adapt.	Baum, 1985 Griffith, 1986 Sinyard, 1986 Elliott, 2003

This table represents not merely a tour de force of historical collation within the field; it also gives an overview of the field's strengths and its shortcomings. And, as Elliott points out, this table includes her own scholarship (27). The physician acknowledges that she has suffered from the disease, even as she prescribes the two-part remedy: first, we must pay closer attention to past scholarship (what in pedagogical terms we might

call "doing the required reading"), and second, we must situate new scholarship in explicit relation to foundational or influential works. Elliott's essay is such a work.

The editors organize the book into two sections: the first primarily concerned with theory; the second, with case studies. However, this distinction is less prescriptive than descriptive, and many of the theoretical essays make use specific texts to make their points, just as the case studies often present theoretical descriptions applicable beyond the confines of the texts in question. The work of Linda Hutcheon, Thomas Leitch, Christine Geraghty, and Irina Rajewsky informs the essays in both sections; narratology, genetic criticism, and intermediality signal the influence of Continental scholarly currents that American readers would do well to chart. Although Elliott's essay looms above its fellows in the theory section, others writers make valuable contributions. Eirik Frisvold Hanssen uses André Bazin's ontology of the motion picture image to reconsider the materiality of both the "original" and the "adaptation," and he builds upon Bazin's reading of *Diary of a Country Priest*. Thomas Leitch revisits Pier Paolo Pasolini's claim that a screenplay "wants" to become another text, and he uses actor-network theory to understand the American movie industry's turn toward adaptations of comic books, young-adult novels, and computer games that seem to "want" to become transmedia franchises. Among the case studies, Sara Brinch's essay on *Invictus* (Clint Eastwood, 2009) stands out among the more traditional. Brinch looks at Geraghty's recent work on the unacknowledged, non-verbal sources for films—in this case, archival photos—and uses that work to engage critically with some of Leitch's claims about "true story" films in his earlier *Film Adaptation and its Discontents*. Among the less traditional case studies, Jonas Ingvarsson's essay on the 1938 Mercury Theatre On the Air radio adaptation of *War of the Worlds* wins for studiously ignoring the filmed versions of the novel, instead focusing on

the ways that both the Wells and Welles versions foreground the breakdown of media technologies as the Martians attack.

The book's strengths make it vital reading for anyone who studies adaptation across media, though it has its weaknesses. Like too many collections of original essays, this one suffers from uneven editing: a missing endnote here, a typo there, and some regrettable prose. And like too many books on adaptation, this one includes a couple of taxonomies—as if we needed more. Most of the book's contributors focus on those persons traditionally regarded as the principal agents in the transformation of written texts into movies—writers, directors, and screenwriters—without paying much attention to the marketers, executives, and other corporate agents who, especially in the case of Hollywood, exercise power over which texts get adapted and how. This sometimes leads to a Romantic preoccupation on artistic intentionality and agency at the expense of other forces at work in the media industries. Nevertheless, the book showcases the methodological diversity and theoretical vitality of new scholarship in adaptation; what gaps the book reveals can serve, as its title suggests, as new challenges for the rest of us.

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Derie, Bobby. *Sex and the Cthulhu Mythos*. New York:
Hippocampus Press, 2014. Print.

One could be forgiven for not taking this book seriously based on the
cover, which is a humorous comic of a Lovecraftian horror flashing a
matronly woman and her small dog. This would be a grave error. Despite
its cover, this work is a serious examination of the sexual elements of the
Cthulhu Mythos—the universe and pantheon of gods created mainly by
Howard Phillips Lovecraft. In doing so, Bobby Derie takes on an
ambitious project, spanning the work of many different authors across
multiple media. His aim is genealogical; he traces contemporary echoes of
Lovecraftian literary elements to their source, both in Lovecraft himself
and the stories that he wrote, then explores the myriad ways that later
authors have appropriated, changed, and challenged Lovecraft's fictional
universe. Many have written about Lovecraft, but few have tied his work
to the extensive secondary mythos literature and none have taken such a
serious look at the sexual aspects of these works.

   Derie opens his work by considering how Lovecraft's life and attitudes
may have influenced his fiction. Although one can generally separate the
author from the literature, Lovecraft's life has spawned considerable

speculation. He was married for only two years, and some speculated that he may have been a closeted homosexual or that he had syphilis. Derie refutes these allegations in great detail and explains that one inspiration for this book was the errors of previous biographies (187). Drawing on an impressive array of letters, essays, and interviews, Derie lays the foundation for the book by examining Lovecraft's attitudes on such issues as love, sex, pornography, homosexuality, and miscegenation. In doing so, he argues against the prevailing attitude that Lovecraft was a prude, suggesting that he was simply conforming to the constraints of publishing in the 1920s and 1930s. Still, he was a product of his time and viewed homosexuality as a perversion, although Derie notes that this seemed to have little influence on his friendships with homosexual writers. He also suggests that some of Lovecraft's more troubling personal views, such as his racism and xenophobia, are more than simply personal beliefs; they play a central role in his fiction and help to explain his use of cosmic miscegenation as a plot device.

The next section examines the sexual aspects of Lovecraft's fiction which, with some exceptions, is often limited to miscegenation between supernatural entities and humans. After all, most of the sex in Lovecraft's work is largely implied. Derie provides close readings of the stories and then breaks down specific themes, such as sexual symbolism, the role of women in Lovecraft's fiction, and the gender and sexual orientation of the alien beings. This section also provides important literary context for Lovecraft's work by examining vital influences such as Arthur Machen and Edgar Allen Poe. Derie suggests that Poe's tales "are likely to have influenced Lovecraft's use of sex and gender" and provided him with the twin narrative structure and the "metaphor of the ancestral manse, often in neglect or ruined" (59). Machen, he argues, was a stronger influence, with the figure of Pan in "The Great God Pan" directly or indirectly inspiring Lovecraft's Yog-Sothoth, Shub-Niggurath, and Yig (63) and "The White

People" laying the foundation for Lovecraft's stories of monstrous hybrids "of daemonic paternity" and inspiring the character of Nyarlathotep (65).

Derie then moves beyond Lovecraft into the secondary mythos fiction by Lovecraft's contemporaries and collaborators, as well as those who have simply adopted elements of the mythos. Shifts in the publishing environment, as well as society in general, allowed for more sexually adventurous works as niche presses began publishing mythos literature without the restrictions of outlets like Weird Tales or Arkham House. As such, these works were often much more explicit while still drawing on themes established by Lovecraft, such as miscegenation, the pitfalls of seeking for forbidden knowledge, and his pantheon of gods and occult tomes. Many of the names covered—Ramsey Campbell, Robert E. Howard, Robert Bloch, August Derleth—would be familiar to those with an interest in what many have referred to as "weird fiction," along with lesser known figures. There are also nods to works that specifically explore the potential connection of sex and the mythos, such as Eldritch Blue, Cthulhurotica, and the Cthulhu Sex magazine. In this section, Derie weaves together various strands of the mythos that can sometimes be disjointed and even contradictory. He demonstrates how various authors have paid homage to Lovecraft through pastiches of his work while others challenged Lovecraft's attitudes and style and pushed sexual themes well beyond where Lovecraft would have been able or willing to go. Some of these challenges include Caitlín R. Kiernan's use of strong female protagonists, including lesbian characters, in contrast to Lovecraft's androcentric storytelling, authors in Cthulhu Sex who emphasized the sensuality of sexual union with otherworldly beings rather than the horror, and those who explore themes of rape, incest, necrophilia, pedophilia, and other paraphilias that would have certainly been censored by Lovecraft and his editors. Derie leaves no stone unturned as he draws on an exhaustive range of sources, including stories of limited circulation and works created with different pen names. Rather than making a specific

argument about these stories, most of which he mentions only in passing, Derie seems content to create the definitive bibliography of sexual themes in the Cthulhu mythos.

Finally, Derie examines how the mythos has infiltrated art, comics, film, anime, and even occult practices. The discussion of how Lovecraft borrowed from the occult and how several occultists, such as Kenneth Grant, Donald Tyson, and others, have borrowed from Lovecraft was particularly interesting and unexpected. Other elements, such as Lovecraft-inspired webcomics and films, get much less discussion, but Derie still manages to cover a wide range of works ranging from the well known to the obscure.

For the serious Lovecraft scholar, the overall value is to be found in his close reading of Lovecraft's stories and the biographical sketch found in the first half of the book. The second half of the book seems geared more toward those interested in Lovecraftian literature generally, functioning more as a starting point for the interested reader in contrast to the detailed criticism of the first half. The extensive breadth of works covered in the second half is, paradoxically, one limitation of this book. Derie moves through the material at such a breakneck pace that it would likely be difficult for those less familiar with the literature to follow his arguments. As someone who has read all of Lovecraft's fiction and a considerable amount of the secondary mythos literature, I still found myself wishing for at least a short synopsis of some of the stories under consideration. Moreover, because he covers such a vast array of literature, he sometimes glosses over important authors, although this is something that Derie readily acknowledges (289). Authors must sometimes sacrifice depth for breadth, and Derie chose to focus deeply on Lovecraft while covering the secondary literature as broadly as possible, trying to give each author's work at least a mention. As such, this is a work best suited for scholars already familiar with the broader Cthulhu Mythos beyond Lovecraft's work.

Even with these limitations, this is an excellent exploration of sexuality in the Cthulhu Mythos that demonstrates just how far Lovecraft's tentacles have reached into literature, film, and popular culture in general. I can see this becoming the definitive work on sex in Lovecraft's literature and a starting point for all future explorations of sex in the mythos overall as the literature continues to expand and evolve. This book is essential reading for those studying Lovecraft's works and, because of the broad influence of Lovecraft's work, researchers in horror studies will likewise find this work useful.

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Stevens, J. Richard. *Captain America, Masculinity, and Violence: The Evolution of a National Icon*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2015. Print.

With *Captain America, Masculinity, and Violence: The Evolution of a National Icon*, author J. Richard Stevens offers a comprehensive and altogether definitive look at the history of Marvel Comics, though one that often overshadows his analysis of his primary subject. Stevens sets out to discuss the transformations the character of Captain America has undergone since his first appearance in March 1941, and how these changes subsequently reflect America's shifting ideals and values. Stevens begins his examination by correctly observing that the struggle over popular culture often reflects an attempt to renegotiate prevailing ideologies, which mass culture frequently simplifies for easier consumption by members of the working class. Perhaps more than any other mass culture text, superheroes exemplify this idea; they reflect

historical events and contribute to a culture of conformity that maintains prevailing ideologies even as creators redefine their characterizations in relation to an ever-shifting status quo. Stevens argues that Captain America represents the perfect subject through which to explore this idea, primarily because creators Joe Simon and Jack Kirby intended the character to function as a living embodiment of the American identity. Therefore, Captain America's shifting identity offers profound insight into the American monomyth as defined by ideals rooted in masculinity, violence, and an "ability to reconstruct and reinvent origins" (7). Unfortunately, Stevens occasionally appears more interested in discussing Marvel Comics' history or Captain America's colorful supporting cast, but when he does focus his attention on his intended subject, he offers a wealth of insightful and well-researched analysis.

Stevens draws upon the idea that superheroes represent a decidedly American invention to contextualize his overall argument that the character of Captain America underwent a series of reinventions in the nearly 75 years since his debut, all of which reflect the nation's shifting identity. Stevens notes that like all superheroes, Captain America functions as an open text, and as such the character does not possess a fixed identity, but rather one that constantly shifts and changes as different creators in different historical periods revamp the character to ensure his continued relevance. The superhero genre first emerged in the late 1930s and early 1940s, as young, recently-arrived Jewish immigrants who could write or draw unleashed a torrent of colorful masked heroes, many of whom embodied distinctly America ideals such as individuality and perseverance. Many of these characters endured into the next decade and beyond, and this lasting interest necessitated the frequent reinvention of their identities and characterizations. Stevens observes that Captain America frequently experienced such reconsideration, in large part because America's social mood tends to change often and rapidly.

The book contains nine chapters, each focusing on a different period in the ongoing development of Captain America's characterization. Chapter One serves as an overall introduction to both the character and the theoretical foundation Stevens uses to build his argument, which draws primarily upon Joseph Campbell's work on mythology, Henry Jenkins' work on fandom and fan cultures, and Kenneth Mackinnon's work on men and masculinities. In Chapter Two, which focuses on Cap's wartime exploits, Stevens analyzes the character's first incarnation, which he dubs "The Anti-Hitler Crusader." This chapter contains some of the book's best and most substantive analysis, as Stevens delves into Cap's willingness to resort to extreme violence, and what this means in terms of the American national identity. From there, Stevens follows the development of the character over the next 60 years, from his phase as an overzealous "Commie Smasher" all the way up to his recent big screen appearances in films such as *The Avengers* (2012) and *Captain American: The Winter Soldier* (2014).

While Stevens does offer some excellent insight into Captain America's identity throughout the book, his analysis often takes a back seat to his discussion of Marvel Comics' history. Furthermore, Stevens frequently spends too much time recapping plot synopses and not enough time on his analysis of what the points of these stories actually mean in terms of Captain America's characterization and how it relates to the prevailing ideologies of the period. Of course, Steven's argument clearly requires such contextualization, and it sometimes provides fascinating insight into the character's history (for instance, Stevens reveals that in the 1940s, Cap had a female sidekick named Golden Girl). Yet, Stevens' propensity for recalling details about the company or the stories frequently takes the place of actual analysis. Additionally, Stevens occasionally appears more interested in examining Captain America's supporting cast and Rogues Gallery, and he often foregrounds his analyses of supplementary characters such as Sharon Carter, the Falcon, and the Red

Skull at the expense of discussing his intended subject. However, it should be noted that Stevens' often exemplary analyses of these secondary characters (he offers an extremely insightful examination of the Falcon, for example) do occasionally serve to situate Captain American within the context of larger sociocultural issues such as race or gender relations, and thus they sometimes help to highlight his shifting characterization.

As discussed in the book's final chapter, Disney recently acquired Marvel Entertainment, facilitating a merger of two of the biggest entertainment companies in the world. Following the collapse of the comic book speculator's market in the 1990s, Marvel declared bankruptcy around the turn of the century. The company survived and would go on to become a leading force in the arena of transmedia entertainment, releasing a steady stream of comic books, movies, video games, and more, all featuring some of their most recognizable characters. Stevens uses Captain America's shifting identity to relate the story of the company's tumultuous journey over the course of six decades, and he presents his examination in a clear and concise fashion that will appeal to communication and pop culture scholars, historians, and even comic book fans longing for an in-depth analysis of Marvel Comics. Thus, *Captain America, Masculinity, and Violence: The Evolution of a National Icon* may not represent the definitive examination of the titular character, but it does provides an enjoyable, well-researched, and timely look at one of the most dominant forces in popular culture today.

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Duncan, Randy, Matthew Smith, and Paul Levitz. *The Power of Comics: History, Form, and Culture,* 2nd ed. New York: Bloomsbury, 2015. Print.

In this second edition of *The Power of Comics: History, Form, and Culture*, authors Randy Duncan, Matthew Smith, and Paul Levitz offer a update to their introduction to the comic form. Similar to the first edition, the authors address the history (development, maturation, and diversification), form (creating and experiencing stories, as well as comic book genres), and culture (business, readers, meanings, and international culture) of comic books. They also include a useful glossary of comic terminology. At the end of each chapter, Duncan et al., also provide discussion questions, activities, and recommended readings.

In this second edition, the authors add to all three of the book's sections: history, form, and culture. In the first section, they expand the historical review of comic books to include the rise of the graphic novel and the introduction of the digital comic format. The authors suggest that both the popularity and the rise of the graphic novel format make it possible for readers to access the comic works by a story arc or by volume. Additionally, the graphic novel format allows the characters and stories to reach broader audiences in more mainstream book retailers (such as Barnes & Noble). Lastly, they address how emergent and current technologies are changing the delivery of comic books. This is important to consider as the rise in digital formats signals another shift in how comic books are created, produced, and consumed.

In the second section, regarding the form of comics, the authors add a chapter on memoirs as a comic book genre. The memoir genre documents, in sequential art form, the memories of the significant experiences that shape the narrator's life. This genre helps individuals to share subjective understandings of their own, which extends and influences how (and why) that individual may perceive/identify him/herself in the present. This is

especially relevant in considering autoethnography and popular culture. Lastly, in the culture section, the authors provide theoretical tools to help students critically explore the meaning of comics. Methods include description research (explaining), interpretive analysis (understanding), and critical readings (exposing power imbalances). The relevance of women's images in comics are also discussed, such as the Bechdel Test and problems of representation.

The Power of Comics differs from many others because it includes expertise from comic book creators. Instead of merely offering ways of reading, understanding, and analyzing comic books from purely academic perspectives, the inclusion of Paul Levitz and Mark Waid add a layer of important industry expertise to this book. So, we also gain insight into how comic books are written, created, produced, and marketed. Waid, whose credits include writing for *Kingdom Come* and *Superman: Birthright,* as well as contributing to existing Fantastic Four and Spiderman storylines, pens the introduction. Levitz was a former president of DC Comics and is, perhaps, most well-known for his work on *The Legion of Super-Heroes*.

Our criticism of the power of comics is also broadly applicable towards many academic works regarding popular culture; in general: scholars are ignoring the importance of international markets. Many media and popular culture critics tend to focus on American cultural imperialism, without considering the ramifications of how foreign markets are becoming more influential in the re/production of American media. For example, in *Iron Man 3* (2013), producers significantly toned down the ethnicity of the Mandarin (English accented East Asian, instead of Mandarin Chinese). However, they also added four minutes of exclusive footage for Chinese audiences, where Chinese surgeons successfully remove shrapnel from Tony Stark's chest, while Pepper Potts and James Rhodes observe. This short segment suggests that only Chinese surgeons have the courage, ability, and expertise to successfully operate on Stark. These kinds of adaptations and changes of American comic materials for other national audiences is

not addressed in the book, and that is the one place where it could use more updating. American scholars should seek to carefully examine and consider world influences in global marketplaces on American media products.

Overall, the broad overview that the authors provide is extremely helpful for individuals wanting to examine comic books. The insight provided by Levitz and Waid differentiates this volume from other works that introduce comic books. With regard to specific classes, the updated *The Power of Comics* is useful in introduction and advanced courses regarding sequential art such as comic books. Also, as ever more video media content providers are translating comic books into films and shows, this book will be helpful in media, film, and television studies courses as well.

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Rose, Phil. *Roger Waters and Pink Floyd: The Concept Albums*. Lanham: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2015, Print.

In *Roger Waters and Pink Floyd: The Concept Albums*, Phil Rose uses a unique approach to investigate six concept albums spanning nearly 20 years of music. Combining musical hermeneutics with elements from communication studies, textual analysis, sociology, political economy, and historiography, Rose provides an in-depth, scholarly examination of these

albums to uncover the meaning generated by these musical works and ties those meanings to the historical and cultural contexts within which they were created. While seemingly an unwieldy combination of analytical methods, Rose organizes each chapter in such a way that the reader can smoothly follow his train of thought. Six albums total are analyzed including *Dark Side of the Moon*, *Wish You Were Here*, *Animals*, *The Wall*, *and Final Cut*, all by Pink Floyd, as well as *Amused to Death* by Roger Waters in a solo endeavor. As Rose reveals, everything from the lyrics to the instruments and tonal intervals used are carefully considered so that the intended meanings are created through words as well as through the way the music was orchestrated. In various chapters, Rose also analyzes how visuals for the album artwork and live performances were given the same attention to detail. In the end, Rose relates how the band used synthesizers and recorded sounds to provide additional layers of representation.

In the first chapter, *Dark Side of the Moon*, Rose examines Waters' use of the sun and moon as symbols of light and dark and discusses how the music and lyrics work together to show how the pressures of day-to-day living can lead one to madness as "You race toward an early grave" (Pink Floyd). Everything from socio-economic ideologies to psychiatry and the use of brain surgery is critiqued in these songs. In contrast, Rose explains how *Wish You Were Here* is both ode and elegy to Syd Barrett as well as a critique of the music industry's commercially-oriented practices that privilege regular output over the creation of musical artwork. Rose goes on to show how Barrett's demise into drugs created a schism within the group – a schism reflected in the band as well as their work.

The third chapter examines *Animals*. Here, Pink Floyd's music and lyrics serve as a Marxist critique of capitalism and consumer society. References to Orwell's *Animal Farm* are made clear with allusions to social class rooted in the ideology and hegemony of the capitalist system. Pigs, dogs, and sheep (all in the song titles) respectively represent the

bourgeoisie, middle class, and proletariat who all play their roles within the capitalist system where a hypercompetitive existence only allows for limited mobility, or at least the artifice of mobility, between social classes.

Fourth is *The Wall* – easily the longest chapter and the longest of the six albums. Not only does Rose complete his normal analysis, but he also includes more information focused on the film and stage show given Pink Floyd's emphasis on visuals with this release. This approach is needed for a more complete understanding of the work, but Rose does choose to follow the film as opposed to the album, which contrasts with the other chapters. This is a minor difference though that does not detract from the quality of the chapter. More importantly, Rose grounds his analysis in psychodynamic object relations theory, which stresses the importance of formative relationships. Given the subject matter addressed in *The Wall*, this theory works well as a lens for examining the main protagonist, Pink Floyd. In the music and film, Pink is a rock star who lives in a depressed state due to the loss of his father at an early age and an overbearing mother. Alienation is once again a theme as Rose shows Pink's retreat into himself, eventually leading to madness.

Rose's fifth chapter investigates *The Final Cut*. Here, alienation comes from government, specifically in the form of betrayal. Rose reports that Waters was unhappy with the war that broke out between Great Britain and Argentina over the Falkland Islands in 1982. Waters' fears relate to the loss of the dream of a more compassionate world following World War II. Rose also connects the album to the historical events surrounding the war, and demonstrates how Waters' critique of the government's decisions are made clear.

Finally, Rose moves away from Pink Floyd and looks at Waters' third solo album entitled *Amused to Death*. In this chapter, Rose draws on Neil Postman's work, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*, from which the album's title is borrowed, and media ecology theory. Rose shows how Waters is concerned with how

technology impacts "the matrix of feelings, value, and behavior" (195). Furthermore, the power of the artist to influence society is likewise investigated. As a result, this final album-centered chapter serves as a fitting bookend. Waters' work in each of these concept albums has often served to raise societal consciousness whether or not he intended it to do so.

In addition to the six chapters of analysis, Rose includes the transcript from a Roger Waters' interview which reveals from where some of Rose's insights were gathered. Additional insight into Waters' thoughts and work process are accessible in this intriguing interview. Finally, Rose concludes with full album details including production information, track titles, and basic copyright material for anyone interested.

Scholars will find Rose's work an excellent example of how mixed methods can provide a deep textual reading. Rose's combination of musical hermeneutics and components of communication studies, textual analysis, sociology, political economy, and historiography blend well for a thorough analysis. A fascinating read, *Roger Waters and Pink Floyd: The Concept Albums* is well worth the time of any person interested in Pink Floyd and Waters' work or even the more casual fan interested in Waters' artistic process, the music industry, and the link between art and life.

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The Interview. Dir. Evan Goldberg and Seth Rogen. Screenplay by Dan Sterling. Perf. James Franco, Seth Rogen, and Randall Park. Columbia Pictures, 2014. Netflix Instant.

In November 2014, *The Interview* ignited a geo-political firestorm and quickly established itself as a pop culture phenomenon rather than simply another sophomoric "bromance" movie. In fact, the buzz surrounding *The Interview*'s apparently controversial content became the primary focus of the film's coverage, which is a shame since the film's narrative and themes definitely merit discussion. While never quite living up to its reputation as "the film North Korea really doesn't want you to see" (as a *Rolling Stone* headline proclaimed), with satire more akin to late-period *South Park* than *Dr. Strangelove*, *The Interview* still offers a funny and surprisingly sweet perspective on current global politics (Eells). At the same time, the film lampoons contemporary notions of masculinity, subverting the idea of "alpha males" and "bro" culture by laying bare the homoerotic undertones of each. Thus, what emerges from the din of cybercrime, controversy, and subsequent media storm is a slight film that does not quite deserve the label of "pop culture phenomenon," but nevertheless contains enough substance for those prepared to judge it on its own merits.

Prior to the film's release, parent company Sony Pictures was the victim of a high-profile cyber-attack. This attack released consumers' private information and secret company emails, and even forced studio head Amy Pascal to step down from her position as co-chair of the studio (Siegel). This wide-ranging cybercrime also drew the attention of President Barack Obama, who condemned Sony's initial decision to pull the offending film from distribution after terrorists threatened attacks if the film was distributed (Dwyer). The studio eventually granted the film a limited theatrical run before releasing it to various streaming platforms. While the true culprits behind the cyber-attack have not been identified,

evidence suggests North Korean operatives most likely perpetrated the hostilities in a bid to prevent the film's release.

In *The Interview*, tabloid talk show host Dave Skylark (James Franco) and his producer/best friend Aaron Rapoport (Seth Rogen) attempt to establish their credibility by securing an interview with North Korean dictator Kim Jong-un (Randall Park), who happens to be a huge fan of their show, *Skylark Tonight*. Learning of the interview, the CIA recruits Dave and Aaron, and their trip to Pyongyang turns into an assassination mission. Unfortunately, Skylark and Rapoport are completely unqualified to carry out such a dangerous job, and their incompetence threatens to derail the mission before it even begins.

Anyone expecting a biting satire of contemporary global politics will likely experience disappointment. Instead, the film primarily functions as a vehicle for Rogen and Franco's signature low-brow-yet-secretly-smart hijinks. While the setting could easily lead to racist humor, the film wisely directs much of its comedy at Skylark's obliviousness and self-absorption and Rapoport's blustery incompetence and tendency to overcompensate for his shortcomings. As such, *The Interview* feels more like a parody of stereotypical obnoxious Americans who travel abroad rather than a satire on North Korea's people or political situation.

Much of the controversy surrounding the film focused on its representation of Kim Jong-un, and many critics worried that the filmmakers exercised poor taste and judgment. Indeed, it would be easy to mistake Park's emotionally vulnerable yet cartoonish portrayal of Kim Jong-un as an attempt to humanize a man widely considered a petty, vicious tyrant who oppresses his people, but that is not necessarily the case. Nor is it an entirely mocking portrayal. Much like director Oliver Hirschbiegel's masterful drama *Downfall* (2004), which faced similar criticism due to a not entirely unsympathetic depiction of Adolf Hitler during his final days, *The Interview* offers a fully formed character rather than a broad caricature. In fact, Park's characterization of Kim Jong-un is

far more nuanced than a coarse "bro" comedy like this probably deserves, and it is a performance seemingly designed to challenge the assumptions of those who would rather think of the world in more reassuring black and white terms. At the same time, however, the film does not excuse or gloss over Kim's brutality; it simply acknowledges that even the most high-profile dictator is sometimes a multi-faceted individual rather than a one-dimensional comic book villain, and this is perhaps the most refreshing aspect of *The Interview*.

In addition to complex characters, the film offers a multifaceted approach to masculinity and male relationships, while mining a great deal of humor from both. Skylark's relationships with both President Kim and Rapoport function simultaneously as a spoof and an affirmation of the homosocial bonds presented in contemporary bromance films like *Harold & Kumar Go to White Castle* (2004) or *The Hangover* (2009). The film comments on the homoerotic undertones of such relationships in Skylark's burgeoning friendship with President Kim, which is founded on a mutual love of Katy Perry and margaritas, both of which carry feminine connotations in this film. In this way, the film initially appears to mock bromance conventions rather than embrace them. At the same time, *The Interview* celebrates these tropes in the context of Skylark and Rapoport's relationship, which is presented as a loving and openly affectionate bond between two heterosexual men who care deeply for one another. Thus, the film appears to challenge the sort of hegemonic heteronormativity prevalent in mainstream American cinema, and this is another way it subverts expectations.

Ultimately, it is a shame *The Interview* was almost completely overshadowed by the controversy surrounding its production and release, because its emergence as a pop culture phenomenon caused the film to become a victim of this hype. Indeed, when approached as a pop culture phenomenon *The Interview* invariably falls short. In fact, few films could have lived up to the unreasonable expectations of the designation "the film

North Korea really doesn't want you to see," especially when it's a toothless and coarse confection that never quite tackles its subject matter in any sort of substantive fashion. When viewed as a goofy, smart, even sweet "dudebro" comedy more interested in making fun of its two high-profile stars rather than a dictator and his entire oppressive regime, *The Interview* succeeds.

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Williams Jr., Roland Leander. *Black Male Frames: African Americans in a Century of Hollywood Cinema, 1903-2003*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2015. Print.

In *Black Male Frames: African Americans in a Century of Hollywood Cinema, 1903-2003*, Roland Williams, Jr. traces the generational oscillation between two predominant black male stereotypes in popular

American film, the shaman figure and the scoundrel figure. Williams constructs the shaman figure along the lines of the "contended slave" archetype, a black man who "exudes piety and deference" and "lives to serve others" (24). On the other hand, the scoundrel is premised upon the "wretched freeman" archetype, a black man who "exhibits pomposity and defiance" and is "dying to serve himself" (24). Williams blends historical analysis, biography, film analysis, and study of audience reviews to ground his argument that prominent black actors were rewarded for playing into stereotypes that would address the perceived racial anxieties of their generation. Charting this movement through the exploration of the work and reception of five prominent black actors (Sam Lucas, Paul Robeson, Sidney Poitier, Denzel Washington, and Morgan Freeman) Williams contributes to film and race scholarship by revealing the enduring presence of stereotypes of black men from the development of slavery in America through the first 100 years of Hollywood film production.

Williams begins by charting the historical trajectory of color-coded racialization and stereotype that primed the first century of American film production. Williams outlines various means by which Black men were excluded from the heroic mythos of early colonial American establishment. Even as the first two generations of captive Angolans brought to the colonies were theoretically included into the egalitarian mythos of figures like John Smith, a confluence of "Old World habits" (5) limited this leading role to white men. Restricted by the English language that translated all Africans into the color of their skin, black men were defined "as a twofold species marked by a common complexion" (12). Furthermore, the work of English playwright, William Shakespeare, prepared colonists to understand Africans as coming in two styles: either the obliging and noble Othello or the obstinate and dangerous Caliban. Picked up in early American literature and blackface minstrelsy, these

stereotypes continued to train the public eye to understand black men as either deferential or defiant.

In the central chapters of *Black Male Frames*, Williams moves through five generations that constitute the first 100 years of American film, isolating the ways in which audiences and filmmakers produced images of black men that reduced social anxiety. Each of the core generational chapters are broken into three sections which roughly cover a historical trend in African American social movement, a consideration of the predominant style of Hollywood film, and a close analysis of a series of films and reviews from the predominant black male actor of the generation.

In the first generation of Hollywood cinema (1903-1919), Sam Lucas, following the Niagara Movement, became the first black film star in his role as Uncle Tom in the silent film, the *Tom Show,* in 1914. Along with the Harlem Renaissance, Williams' second generation (1919-1943) brought Paul Robeson to the forefront of film as audiences reveled in his performances of black defiance and Hollywood studios typecast Robeson into roles of black men as primitive figures. Sidney Poitier's "selfless and sexless" (114) oeuvre and Academy Award amid the Civil Rights Movement represents a predominant return to the shaman figure in Hollywood in Williams' third generation (1943-1963). Developing along with the Black Power movement, Williams argues the fourth generation (1963-1989) saw Hollywood expand the roles for black men defiantly resisting white society, epitomized in the work of Denzel Washington. In the final generation of the first century (1989-2003), multiculturalism and a new wave of shamans, led by Morgan Freeman, became the predominant frame of black manhood in Hollywood. Throughout each chapter Williams highlights the ways in which black actors were regulated to peripheral roles, and takes particular care to identify the ways in which racial and sexual politics intertwined in ways that restricted the imaginative potential of black masculinity in American film. Even as black actors faced severely

restrictive casting over the first century of American film, Williams labors to identify the ways in which black actors managed to exceed those limitations and challenge overdetermined readings of black actors performances.

In his short conclusion, Williams argues the legacy of restricting black male actors to performing either the shaman or scoundrel has been to the detriment to the American public and continues apace today. As with other professions, the restrictions on African American equal participation in acting "were applied at a cost to society" (168) and "produced public losses" (168). Williams warns of a second century of color coded casting that restricts black male actors to simplified stereotypes and pessimistically notes that at this point there is not a "hint of reason to wait for a regular serving of films led by a black star that saves the day" (172). In order to make space for Hollywood to break from the bracketing of black maleness to performances of deference or defiance the American movie going audience would need to consider such characters on their own terms, "without regard to his color" (174).

Extending classical work on Hollywood stereotypes of blackness, such as Donald Bogle's *Toms, Coons, Mulattos, Mammies, and Bucks*, Williams deftly adds depth to the study of the central place of the Tom and Buck figures in American film by linking their production and performance with generational social change. While Williams' work focuses on black male images in melodramatic roles, further efforts could extend his generational analysis by taking into consideration the role of comedic cordoning of black actors and the confinement of black women in the first century of Hollywood filmmaking to develop an even more robust picture. As Hollywood continues apace into its second century of filmmaking, Williams' generational oscillation provides a valuable analytical framework to continue to understand the ways in which the proliferation of black actors on film are confined by the stereotypical legacy of the industry. In all, *Black Male Frames* would be of use for

those with interest in American film, African American popular culture, and United States racial politics.

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Frayling, Christopher. *The Yellow Peril: Dr. Fu Manchu & The Rise of Chinaphobia*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2014. Print.

It's virtually impossible, as an adult in modern times, to read the popular fiction of late Victorian and Edwardian writers such as Sax Rohmer, 'Sapper,' Edgar Wallace, and H. Rider Haggard without an acute sense of discomfort about their representations of race. While they all spin a rollicking good yarn, I now look on their books as 'guilty pleasures,' the existence of which can only be legitimized (if indeed it can be legitimized) by the historical and national context from which their characters and narratives arose.

Yet these authors' most popular creations have endured long after the collapse of the British Empire – perhaps none more so than Sax Rohmer's influential Chinese super-villain. "Dr. Fu Manchu, progenitor of Ming [the Merciless] and Dr. No, lingers in the popular consciousness more than any

other twentieth-century villain," Frayling argues, "whether or not the generation of 2000 can actually put a name to him" (15). Nevertheless, the 'Devil Doctor's recent centenary (he made his first appearance in 1912) passed with relatively little fanfare. The evolving racial politics of recent decades have all but erased him, in name at least, from library shelves and movie screens. Despite occasional recent cameo appearances, he hasn't been a leading character in a film spin-off since Peter Sellers' ill-conceived and poorly received 1980 'comedy,' *The Fiendish Plot of Dr. Fu Manchu*.

Frayling's approach evinces a sensibility not unlike my own concurrent enjoyment of, and discomfort with, the outpourings of Rohmer and his ilk. His interrogation of the cultural context that engendered and sustained them can be seen as an attempt to exorcise the casual racism absorbed from their 'yellow peril' adventures and naively perpetuated in the schoolyard. His analytical perspective is self-consciously that of a white Englishman of a particular generation trying to unpack the racial stereotypes that permeated his upbringing.

Although taking in many topics, Frayling's book centers on the cultural context from which Sax Rohmer's work emerged, and the ways in which it contributed in turn to popular representations and understandings of Chinese culture and character. These have, as he makes clear from the outset, little to do with genuine 'Chineseness,' being instead an issue of Western fantasies. "The stories were about 'us' – they were not really about China at all" (10). The Yellow Peril is, as Frayling characterizes it, primarily an English fantasy, closely connected with the rise and fall of the Empire. It combines fear of the possible outcome should the countless 'yellow hordes' be roused to war and (then, as now) more immediate anxieties associated with immigration.

While Frayling's discursive style often freewheels between topics, his book's overall arc is roughly as follows. Early chapters outline Rohmer's biography, traditions of the British music hall in which he first made his

name, and popular English representations of London's Limehouse district (in which the first three Fu Manchu novels are set). Frayling's account of the contributions made by other Western nations to the cultural imagination of Chineseness is relatively scant, although he pays occasional lip service to influential international texts.

These include the 1919 American silent film, *Broken Blossoms* (286-87, 310-11), and French novelist Octave Mirbeau's *Torture Garden* (1899, which inspired, we learn, some of the fiendish torments depicted in the 1932 Hollywood film, *The Mask of Fu Manchu*) (306). That these foreign influences remain underdeveloped is, perhaps, a product of Frayling's somewhat autobiographical approach. As surely as England was the center of the Empire, so Frayling's self-identity as a 'cultural product' lies at the center of his meditation on Fu Manchu and the Yellow Peril. The 'us' of which he writes is a very English 'us.'

In later chapters, Frayling turns to close analysis of Rohmer's prose, and thence to the ways in which representations of Fu Manchu changed through the course of his stories and books (produced intermittently between 1912 and 1959) and the movies they inspired. He notes, in particular, the transformative influence of shifts in British political alignments during two world wars, and the growth of Rohmer's American readership in the 1930s. In a somewhat bizarre illustration of this trajectory, by the final novel, *Emperor Fu Manchu*, this towering embodiment of the 'Yellow Peril' and his fanatical arch nemesis, Nayland Smith of Scotland Yard, become comrades-in-arms against Russian Communism (76)!

Though wide-ranging and erudite, *The Yellow Peril* is not framed as a primarily academic study (in contrast to Michael Diamond's *'Lesser Breeds'* (2006) or Ruth Mayer's *Serial Fu Manchu* (2013), for instance). Indeed, Frayling's courtship of a broad audience outside the academy is signaled from the outset by his eschewal of the term 'Sinophobia' in favor of the fictive but easily grasped 'Chinaphobia.' In accordance with this

populist approach, Frayling's citations of prior scholarship are usually framed in vague and superficial ways (e.g. "it has been argued that"), and the text flows undisrupted by call-outs to his nonetheless admirably detailed endnotes. Moreover, lacking a bibliography, *The Yellow Peril* is neither a self-contained handbook nor the ideal facilitator of further research.

What Frayling provides is a consistently engaging overview of representations of 'Chineseness' located within, or deriving from, a specific period of British culture, interspersed with a pleasurable and often illuminating cornucopia of tidbits, relayed in a lively, conversational style, and attractively illustrated in black-and-white and color. While he only partially succeeds in answering the questions laid out in his preface, namely "What were the origins of Yellow Peril thinking? How did they come to be distilled into one fictional character, Fu Manchu? Why has the Yellow Peril proved to be so resilient over the last 150 years?" (16), and a further question posed on the dust jacket, "What do the Chinese themselves make of all this?", is barely addressed at all, the material he presents is seldom less than fascinating.

Despite my various quibbles, *The Yellow Peril* will almost certainly prove both informative and enjoyable for serious cultural historians and pleasure seekers alike. Although unlikely to secure a reputation as the definitive text about either Sax Rohmer, Fu Manchu, or twentieth-century Sinophobia, its value is without question in an era when Rohmer's fiction is no longer widely read but the racial stereotypes it perpetuated and helped to shape retain an insidious grip on popular consciousness.

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Govil, Nitin. *Orienting Hollywood: A Century of Film Culture Between Bombay and Los Angeles*. New York: New York University Press, 2015. Print.

Even books focused on independent and indigenous film acknowledge the impact of Hollywood films as a globalizing force that overshadows most of its international/independent counterparts yet Hollywood films are a small fraction of India's massive annual box office (e.g., 3-8% until recently) (Govil 6). Nitin Govil's work argues that Hollywood and Bollywood (colloquially) are constituted in actuality and in the imaginary in part through a history of exchanges. Although both industries have place-specific names they surpass simplistic constructs of place and space. Govil contends, "At the heart of this study is what happens when one industry takes from another and how this exchange is both transactional and constitutive" (191). Govil posits a multilevel and multidirectional interrelationship between the two through an ongoing history of narrative, ideological, interpersonal, social, cultural, and economic exchanges.

Govil uses archival, interview, political economy, discourse, and textual analysis to consciously disarticulate "the classic text-industry-audience triad that has structured much media studies inquiry" (35). This "text-industry-audience triad" perhaps references popular culture theorists like John Fiske who have promoted tri-level analysis methods. While I appreciate the value of triad/tri-level approaches, I applaud Govil's extending of the circuit of inquiry into political economy (e.g., how (post)colonial business relations, post-independence India's legal context and global forces are influenced by the film industries as they also shape them).

The book frames the relationship of exchange between Bollywood and Hollywood in four interconnected chapters with different topics bookended by an introduction and conclusion. The introduction provides historical and cultural context and lays out the structure of the book.

Govil's introduction juxtaposes the origins of each country's film industry, reflecting how Bollywood, thanks to protectionist post-independence laws, escaped Hollywood's expectation of it as a secondary, exotic, Orientalized other instead growing into a dominant cultural force. Chapter 1, Framing the Copy Hollywood, questions whether the US's work to police film piracy in India is not as much to support Bollywood as it is to make India dependent on the West. Govil also challenges the view of Bollywood as a recycler of Hollywood film. Govil argues, "Hollywood is one of the many ingredients in the spicy mixture of the 'masala' film" (70). For instance, Govil notes how the Indian film *Kaante* uses the basic narrative of the US film *Reservoir Dogs* to develop its own culturally specific content relating to Indian identity and familial obligations. Govil argues that underlying charges of unauthorized recycling is Hollywood's faulty assertion of their own originality that then positions Bollywood as a faded copy. This echoes US media critics like Brent Lang who challenge Hollywood's assertions of originality in light of its self-destructive love affair with film sequels and formulaic filmmaking.

In Chapter 2, Managing Exchange, Govil discusses India's current investments in US film and media companies. Govil discusses how historically, after India achieved independence in 1947, it enacted laws blocking Hollywood from repatriating most of their profits. As a result Hollywood initiated some its first partnerships (e.g., foreign co-productions, theatre renovation loans, location shooting) as a way to put their profits to work in India. Today the economic exchange includes Hollywood outsourcing its technical and special effects work to India of which Govil argues there is a "execution/creativity divide" (112) whereby Indian digital film artists execute routine and repetitive tasks while American digital film artists execute creative tasks. Postcolonial scholar Radhika Mohanram conceives the colonial relationship as a mind/body divide where colonial Whites represent the mind (i.e., work involving

thought, organization, and administration) while Natives represent the body (i.e., work requiring physical but little or no mental effort).

In Chapter 3, The Theatre of Influence, Govil describes the modern cinema multiplex as, "Part sanctuary and part spaceship … [prioritizing the] design, utility, cleanliness, order, and rationality … that are supposed to be absent in the chaotic world of everyday life in the Global South" (116). The multiplex reifies class and caste divisions in modern India at the same time that it shields patrons from harsh social realities. The multiplex has been allowed to thrive due to tax and similar relief schemes offered to multiplex developers by the government just as earlier government policies that blocked the repatriation of Hollywood profits helped with loans to renovate theatres. Govil begs the question of what will happen to the multiplex when these relief schemes run out.

In Chapter 4, Economies of Devotion, Govil begins by noting that early Indian filmmakers sought Hollywood experience while today Hollywood pursues Bollywood. Govil counters the argument of early US critics who deemed Bollywood *the Hindu Hollywood* noting, "Bombay cinema opened up a fluid linguistic space that only partially reproduced the contentious Hindu-Muslim politics of [the 1940's]" (171). This argument is intriguing and could use more support. Interestingly, India's caste system was created by and for Hindu elites and film critic Rachel Dwyer notes that Bollywood film frequently depicts caste differences negatively but does not use caste language (given various explanations) leading many in the urban middle class to say that caste differences are unimportant. However, almost all of the new middle class comes from the three upper caste groups despite being a small portion of the population. This section does effectively address Hollywood's (and the US's) racism towards Indians and Indo-Americans while Govil notes how in post-WWII US film writers who criticized Hollywood's social hierarchy would do so by comparing it to to India's caste system (i.e., India's small elite group of Brahmins ruled Indian society as Hollywood revolved around its small

elite group of stars). This allowed US film writers to criticize the social inequalities of Hollywood while also avoiding using Marxist vocabulary (e.g., bourgeois, wage labor, trade-union) as using such vocabulary could get a writer branded a Communist and thus end their career in the era of Senator Joseph McCarthy.

Ultimately, Nitin Govil's book succeeds by contextualizing individual case studies within an overarching discussion of the social, cultural, global, legal, and economic forces surrounding both Hollywood and Bollywood. This book will appeal to senior undergraduates and graduate students as well as current scholars in critical, cultural, communication, and film studies. Additionally this book contains content relevant to those studying the history of cultural representation and exchange as well as political science, and international business as this book speaks to to how nation building and global business partnerships take an active role in shaping and strengthening the global film industry.

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Samuels, Ellen. *Fantasies of Identification: Disability, Gender, Race*. New York: New York University Press. 2014. Print.

In her highly thought-provoking book, *Fantasies of Identification*, Ellen Samuels establishes that a crisis of identification emerged in the mid-nineteenth century, and has somehow continued to organize how diversity is interpreted across several disciplines. As the discursive regimes that emerge around such categories of identification as disability, gender and race, develop within a variety of institutional frameworks—not the least of which are turn-of-the-twentieth-century eugenics, racist ideologies, early notions of deviant behavior and an evolving criminal justice system—Samuels's subject matter is bound to an exploration of the controversial. How one comes to understand the *other* and the *differences* that such an other may present, can be a contentious area of research; yet Samuels treats it with sensitivity, seemingly taking into consideration the controversial subject matter, while still managing to deliver a striking critique of how knowledge of classifications is created, affirmed and maintained.

For Samuels, a discourse emerges that deals directly with this identification crisis, engendering a dependence upon fantasy for arriving at conclusions about difference. This discourse, according to Samuels, launches into circulation during the mid-nineteenth century, eventually organizing a broader, and often misinformed, discussion about bodies and identities within the twenty-first-century. As she explains, "*fantasies of identification* seek to definitively identify bodies, to place them in categories delineated by race, gender, or ability status, and then to validate the placement through a verifiable, biological mark of identity" (2).

Of particular relevance to popular culture is chapter three wherein Samuels explores what she refers to as the "disability con" in both American film and television (67). Samuels notes that "these elaborate filmic portrayals of 'real' and 'fake' disability, which seem to proliferate

at times of social crises about disability rights and benefits, function to stage or forecast fantasies of disability identification and thus provide a crucial context for understanding modern efforts to define disability and its corresponding legal and economic structures" (67). Exploring this real/fake dynamic through a typology identified by Stephen M. Fjellman (1992), Samuels adopts his "real fake" category to characterize this disability con, or the "masquerade of a non disabled person who deceptively and deliberately performs disability, often for material gain" (70).

Contextualizing her analysis, Samuels addresses this disability con in both the turn to the twentieth century film industry, as well as examples of this phenomenon in contemporary film. In the former, Samuels focuses on the 1898 Thomas Edison short film titled *The Fake Beggar.* In this less than 60-second film, two presumably disabled males, one an adult and the other a child, are soliciting money from passersby on the street. The adult, wearing a sign that reads, "HELP the BLIND," is meant to be this fake beggar posing as blind for profit, while the child is actually a real above-the-knee amputee. As an individual drops a coin in the area of the disabled adult, the supposed blind man reaches out to gather the money and is spotted by a police officer—the implication being that the blind adult would not be able to locate the money without the sense of sight. The adult then flees on foot, while, in what Samuels views as a peculiar aberration, the amputee is intentionally removed from the scene and vanishes from the remainder of the film. It is both this amputee's presence and sudden absence that Samuels notes as provocative. Showcasing the complexities of this real/fake dynamic, Samuels describes how the film involves both real and fake disabilities—neither of which are completely independent of each other, but instead complementary in the service of conveying disability to audiences. That is, the real con is depicted as fake only when juxtaposed with the real disabled, and moreover projected as a con only in the sudden disappearance of this child that is in fact disabled.

When addressing the instances of the disability con within contemporary film, Samuels seems to suggest that the use of this trope was associated with a political pushback against sociological gains accrued through President Lyndon B. Johnson's social reforms. Indeed Samuels notes that there was a pronounced moratorium on the use of the disability con in film and television for some seventy years into the early 1980s and up to the present that began with President Ronald Regan's informal repeals of the social benefits legislatively secured for the disabled during the 1960s. Surveying such movies as *Trading Places* (1983), *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels* (1988), *The Usual Suspects* (1995), and *Confidence Man* (2001)*,* Samuels outlines how the depictions of the disabled provide informative case studies in the fantasies of identification. Although the organizing of discursive regimes around gender and race—two topics that are addressed in detail throughout the rest of the book—are certainly important and interesting, especially in terms of their intertextuality, this chapter that deals with the intersection between the entertainment industry and how disability is depicted on screen, is particularly germane to the study of popular culture. Indeed, Samuels's exploration of these two topics may be one of the first critical analyses to address the entertainment industry and disability in tandem.

This is a well-researched text; incredibly thorough allowing room for the discussion of some of the most minor of details. Thus, this is a must read for any student of the body politic, regardless of foci in race, class, gender, disability, or even sexuality. As the overall topic of how the reality of both social and natural scientific discourses are cloaked in fantasy, Samuels's work is of the utmost importance in revisiting the discussion of inequality as it relates to diversity.

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Larsen, Darl. *A Book about the Film Monty Python and the Holy Grail: All the References from African Swallows to Zoot.* Lanham: Rowan & Littlefield, 2015. Print

Monty Python and the Holy Grail is an ingenious film that continues to influence audiences. At its core, the film is an experiment in pastiche and sketch comedy from the famed British troupe (*Monty*). Despite the popularity of Python's work, a skeptic might ask about the utility of an annotated, 578-page tome about the movie. What can such a study reveal?

Darl Larsen has mined the breadth of Python's influence with previous work on the intertextual relationships between Shakespeare, the Renaissance, and Python's *Flying Circus*. In many ways, a book about *Holy Grail* is a natural scholarly segue. With this latest work, Larsen sets up the film as a text worthy of study due to the multiple worlds that it primarily converses with: the Middle Ages, Arthurian literature, and contemporary British culture at the time of the film's production. He has created a Python wiki full of referents that traverse these worlds with careful and methodical extrapolations that are deeply anchored in academic scholarship on the medieval literature, Arthur, Arthuriana, film studies, and more. Few components of the film are left unexamined whether it is a line of dialogue, titles, end credits, scenic locations, props, or camera directions. Larsen unpacks these artifacts with such a refined critical edge that the reader is left impressed even by the occasional minutiae that such an effort produces in the book.

The book is organized as an annotated screenplay, so it progresses in a linear mode in conjunction with the movie. The chapters are divided according to the scenes. The layout is one of the most appealing components of the work. It is not imperative that it be read orderly from start to finish. In fact, one of the best ways to experience the content is by jumping to favorite or memorable scenes; however, Larsen has been careful to provide a rich introduction explaining his methodological

choices and even provides a legend for quick reference to abbreviations contained in the chapters. It would be wise, at a minimum, to start at the beginning before skipping throughout the text. Another intriguing idea is to view scenes or the entire movie with the option to pause and turn the book into an on-demand cinematic docent.

Experiencing comedy from Monty Python can be overwhelming. Viewers can get lost in the sheer speed of the dialogue and miss the depth of a joke or gag. Larsen's strongest moments from the book occur when he patiently unpacks the most innocuous details. For example, the opening credits sequence from the movie contains a number of referents with names such as "Kate Hepburn" and "Gary Cooper" as noted crewmembers. A typical audience assumption is that the Python troupe is merely seeking anecdotal laughs from such name associations to famous celebrities. The truth, as Larsen points out, is that these individuals are real people not fictitious attempts to generate laughs. This truth might read as trivial, but it firmly entrenches the work of Python as more problematic than at first glance. In other words, nothing can be taken at face value.

Another example would be from Scene Four ("Bring Out Your Dead"). Set during a Yellow Plague-inflicted village around 664, this famous scene contains numerous quotable lines of dialogue as when the Cart Driver (Eric Idle) calls for anyone to "bring out their dead" as he hauls diseased bodies away. Not all of the bodies are completely dead yet and an argument ensues between the Cart Driver and two townspeople, one trying to get rid of the second who may not be dead yet, but "will be very soon." The Cart Driver responds by exclaiming, "I can't take him like that. It's against regulations." While this is undoubtedly an oft-quoted funny scene, Larsen directs us towards deeper connectives by tracking guild membership regulations and guidelines for trades and professions documented as early as 1196. In addition, the line is also interpreted as a riposte towards the labor union movement strikes in Britain from 1968-1979 where work stoppages and reduced delivery services were rampant.

Scene Six ("The Black Knight") is arguably the most recognized sketch from the Python canon. King Arthur approaches a bridge protected by The Black Knight. Refusing to join Arthur or let him pass, the Knight engages in combat, resulting in the loss of his arms and legs. Moving amongst the hilarious dialogue (ex: "Just a flesh wound"), Larsen discovers insightful links to Shakespeare, the politics of Vietnam violence, and even Bugs Bunny cartoons.

Holy Grail's episodic narrative structure makes the film read as experimental in form. The film parodies the cinematic experimentation of the French New Wave as well as the Italian Realists. Larsen meticulously frames an argument by highlighting Python's filmic narrative and aesthetic conventions and placing them in conversation with the work of Godard, Antonioni, and Polanski, amongst others of the era. This element is central to understanding *Holy Grail's* role as a text worthy of analysis and under-appreciated in film history.

Studying humor can be a precarious enterprise. Whether explained through back story or not, once humor is decontextualized, it loses some of its purity. For example, once learning that throwing cows and chickens over castle walls was a common occurrence in historical battles, one finds the ending of Scene Two ("Coconuts and Swallows") less of an experiment in improvisational comedy, a reputation Python has accrued. The annotations from the book demystify a kind of Python comedic innocence. The veil is removed.

That being said, the annotations and connectives in the book question whether *Holy Grail* is a medieval film or a film made medievally? Larsen has produced a tremendous resource that vigorously pinpoints the reflective nature of the movie. It converses with other Python productions, but more importantly, it provides a rich lens to examine historical, cultural, and political intersections and divergences. The casual or avid Python fan might be turned off by such divergences. Some fans, for example, don't care for supplemental components that expand a text's

universe. The reaction from fandom culture to the tenor of a book like this would be undoubtedly mixed. That said, faculty of courses in literature or film studies could easily utilize the resources contained in the book. Because the annotations often link to political situations and figures of the 1970s, instructors in history or political science might also find the book an insightful supplementary tool. As an academic tool, the book could easily appeal to instructors and students across multiple disciplines.

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Jones, Norma and Bob Batchelor, eds. *Aging Heroes: Growing Old in Popular Culture*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015. Print.

Aging Heroes: Growing Old in Popular Culture makes theory accessible while maintaining the complexity of the theories discussed. This book applies a wide variety of theoretical frameworks to aging in popular culture, further contributing to its versatility. Each chapter provides an overview of the theories used, drawing from fields such as philosophy, folklore, and communications studies, before delving into

examples from popular culture. While asking how aging heroes are represented in popular culture, the text simultaneously asks how these popular representations of aging impact the way we view and interact with an increasing aging population. This book challenges our perceptions and assumptions about what it means to grow old by highlighting the complexity of aging and examining multidimensional characters who age with dignity, succeed at heroic quests, and challenge aging stereotypes.

The introduction considers the historical and economic effect that the Boomer population has had on popular culture. The central question of this text, how do we define heroes and the heroic in the context of aging, is introduced through Jones' and Batchelor's description of Jeff Bridges as the complicated "newfangled hero," a hero "intricately tied to the aging population that controls and produces mass media" (xviii). While Jones and Batchelor set Bridges up as the consummate hero, each essay in this collection provides a slightly different answer to what heroism means in the context of aging.

The text is divided into four parts; part one, "On the Silver Screen: Aging Heroes in Film Genres," provides a broad overview of aging heroes in film in genres ranging from westerns to action films before considering the off-screen implications of the films analyzed. In chapter one Cynthia J. Miller examines whether the definition of the heroic changes as the hero ages. She contextualizes the modern aging hero with Erik Erikson's social theories of aging where to be heroic is "to live out their days on their own terms" (8). Chapter two considers the effect of aging stereotypes in media on how we communicate with older adults off-screen. Mei-Chen Lin and Paul Haridakis apply communication theory, research on age stereotypes, and research on the impact of media portrayals on identity to representations of aging in Western films, including the lack of older females in such films. Chapter three by Norma Jones provides an overview of Schwarzenegger and Stallone as action heroes, comparing their early works to their current action films. She argues that because "we

see the aging film stars portraying action heroes who are stronger and smarter, and thus defying some aging conventions" these portrayals have a positive impact for off-screen aging (32). In chapter four A. Bowdoin Van Riper considers the intersection of professional space exploration with representations of astronauts in film where the aging astronaut is placed in juxtaposition with a younger crew; each older astronaut dies in space, "find[ing] personal meaning and individual satisfaction in the deaths they choose for themselves" (59).

Part two, "Diversity Concerns: Sexuality, Race, and Gender," contains five essays on sexuality, race, and gender in aging heroes, addressing diversity among aging heroes within and beyond film. Gust A. Yep, Ryan Lescure, and Jace Allen use queer theory and current representations of aging as a way to consider HBO's Behind the Candelabra's portrayal of Liberace as a tragic hero in chapter five. They find that the film "both reinforces the stereotype of gay men as hypersexual and challenges the idea that older adults are asexual" (73). In chapter six Dustin Bradley Goltz argues that gay male characters are typically villainous, explaining that "the aging gay male body has been coded with threat, fear, and as a space of danger" (77). However, these villainous characters created a space for a hero whose journey is "less about defeating sinister villains . . . than deconstructing vilifying legacies in order to live, love, and love living" as seen in the film Beginners (78). Carlos D. Morrison, Jacqueline Allen Trimble, and Ayoleke D. Okeowo use Judith Butler's theory of gender as performance to analyze Tyler Perry's Madea as an aging superhero able to connect to both young and old in chapter seven. In chapter eight, Emily S. Kinsky and Amanda Gallagher consider Maya & Miguel's Abuela Elena as a superhero in the context of children's television as an important means of shaping perceptions of the world. Chapter nine considers women growing old in comics, beginning with an overview of the discourse of aging in Western society, aging male

superheroes in comics, and then the lack of aging superheroines in comics before considering older women in successful graphic novels.

"Being a Man? Masculinity and Aging Heroes," the third part, addresses masculinity in aging heroes. Chapter ten by Patrice M. Buzzanell and Suzy D'Enbeau considers Mad Men's Roger Sterling as a popular culture hero navigating "the tensions that emerge as discourses of masculinity and aging intersect" (132). Nathan Miczo, in chapter eleven, uses social theories of aging to analyze Kingdom Come and Old Man Logan, arguing that "the crux of the dilemma for both heroes is an internal struggle over who they are and what their role is in a changed world" after the heroes have retired (144). Chapter twelve examines the construction of masculinity and "how the masculinities of an aging man are re-established" in The Incredibles (157). In chapter thirteen Guilliaume de Syon presents historical research as a context for understanding the trope of the middle-aged male pilot in advertising.

Part four, "Real to Reel: Individuals Aging on and off the Screen," examines individuals aging within their roles as well as in real life; echoing the introduction's assessment of Jeff Bridges. Barbara Cook Overton, Athena du Pré, and Loretta L. Pecchioni consider women's sexuality on and off screen primarily through their analysis of Helen Mirren in films such as Red, Shadow Boxer, and Love Ranch in chapter fourteen. Chapter fifteen by Anna Thompson Hajdik presents Peter O'Toole as an aging hero on and off screen by considering two films alongside his live talk show appearances. Kathleen Turner considers Betty White's role as a hero, examining criticism of her performances as indicative of sexism and ageism alongside noncanonical texts that transform Betty White's shows and characters in chapter sixteen. Chapter seventeen uses the work of Lévi-Straus and Dick Hebdige to consider the use of bricolage in Danny Trejo's work in film through which Trejo "reinvented the dynamics of aging within performance" (222).

Because of its interdisciplinary approach as well as the straight forward accessible writing in each essay, this text would be a valuable addition to any undergraduate course in popular culture or film. However, the text is also valuable for a more sophisticated audience interested in aging in popular culture, film studies, popular culture studies, or the study of heroes. Because of its interdisciplinary approach, Aging Heroes is able to engage with multiple representations of aging, moving away from outdated stereotypes and considering experiences of aging from a variety of cultural backgrounds in order to highlight the complexity of aging making Aging Heroes an invaluable text for examining perceptions of aging in popular culture.

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Nilsen, Sarah, and Sarah E. Turner, eds. *The Colorblind Screen: Television in Post-Racial America.* New York: New York University Press, 2014. Print.

With media coverage of demonstrations across the United States publicizing police brutality, black poverty, and racial biases against African Americans, *The Colorblind Screen* is a timely book. By examining various topics ranging from iconic figures to television shows to audiences' reception of televisual media, this edited collection provides a critical lens to better understand not only how media frame race and reinforce a myth of a post-racial society, but also how we collectively communicate a colorblind rhetoric that obscures racism and white privilege in America.

The first three chapters introduce readers to essential theoretical conceptualizations of colorblindness and post-racialism. In Chapter One, Ashley Doane offers a clear theoretical framework of the "colorblind racial ideology" (17), exploring how society and media downplay racial inequalities and obscure systematic racism while commodifying racial difference. In Chapter Two, Roopali Mukherjee investigates how Obama's 2008 presidential win became evidence for a colorblind society, a "marker of a new post-racial America" (43). As Mukherjee maintains, while the post-race rhetoric of "no more excuses" appears positive, it does a disservice to racial reform by reinforcing the myth that racism is a thing of the past. In Chapter Three, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva and Austin Ashe examine "colorblind racism" in multiple arenas, identifying key elements of New Racism in America, including "the increasingly *covert* nature of racial discourse and racial practices" (60). They illustrate the seeming invisibility of racial inequality, discussing covert discriminatory housing practices and how colorblind racism is reproduced through everyday talk and in television.

Authors in the next four chapters provide in-depth examples of post-racial rhetorics in pop culture. In Chapter Four, Janice Peck looks at how Oprah Winfrey engaged in "racial breach management strategies" (92), constructing herself as an exemplar of "racial transcendence" to appeal to white, middle-class audiences. Peck maintains that, while Winfrey's message of individual responsibility appears to be empowering, her self-help rhetoric is problematic as it reproduces an "underclass ideology" that locates black poverty as an individual, moral failure rather than a larger component of systematic racism. In Chapter Five, Leonard and Bruce Lee Hazelwood explore how the denial of racism in sports has helped to maintain "a post-racial fantasy" (116), analyzing racial discourses surrounding the 2011 NBA Lockout as well as LeBron James' move from the Cavaliers to the Heat. In both cases, the authors focus on how media simultaneously employed colorblind rhetoric, often appealing to white

paternalism that enforced racist language, and evoked the trope of the angry black man.

In Chapter Six, Evelyn Alsultany identifies various "representational strategies" used by writers and producers of television dramas such as *24* and *Sleeper Cell* to construct more complex portrayals of Arabs and Muslims (144). However, Alsultany argues that while these representations seemingly challenge stereotypes, they actually perpetuate the good/bad Muslim binary by continuously locating Arab and Muslim characters within the context of terrorism. In Chapter Seven, Dina Ibrahim draws upon cultivation theory to investigate audience reactions to episodes of *Curb Your Enthusiasm, Weeds,* and *The Daily Show* with humorous storylines related to Arabs and Muslims. Using focus groups, Ibrahim finds distinct and contrasting interpretations of the shows' content by Arab and/or Muslim audiences and by non-Arab, non-Muslim audiences

The next three chapters problematize popular television's perpetuation of colorblind ideologies. In Chapter Eight, Sarah Nilsen argues that *Mad Men*'s construction of the civil rights movement as "prosthetic memories" (198) preserves a dominant narrative of racial actualization. Nilsen examines how the show centralizes whiteness and white characters by using African American characters as politically correct, one-dimensional narrative devices. In Chapter Nine, C. Richard King explores the ideology of colorblindness by observing an online discussion board of a leading white nationalist website. King's findings offer insight into how white supremacists watch and interpret television, with discussants often lamenting "Jewish control, the overt antiwhite/pro-black biases of the medium, the fundamental dangers of race mixing, the breakdown of tradition, and the corruption of youth" (233).

In Chapter Ten, Sarah E. Turner points to the new trope of the black female best friend in interracial buddy films and television, specifically analyzing two Disney Channel television shows, *Shake It Up, Chicago* and *Good Luck Charlie*. Turner problematizes these racial representations and

their superficial inclusion of racial diversity, arguing that Disney engages in a new colorblind racism by "presenting diversity in such a way as to reify the position and privilege of white culture and the white cast members" (239).

The book concludes with three chapters focusing on representations of interracial relationships. In Chapter Eleven, Shilpa Davé investigates the representation of South Asian American arranged marriages in *The Simpsons, The Office,* and *Miss Match*. Davé asserts that while arranged marriages have been portrayed in stark contrast to American ideals of love and marriage, contemporary American match making practices and the concept of compatibility have allowed for a convergence of "two traditionally divergent marriage philosophies" (280). In Chapter Twelve, Philip A. Kretsedemas extends the concept of colorblindness and proposes a theory of "culture-blindness," (287) one that focuses on discourses that minimize minority cultural identities and erase cultural difference. He interviews fans of the television series *Ugly Betty*, exploring how different ethnic and racial viewers evoke culture blind discourses to make sense of Latino identities and culture in media. In Chapter Thirteen, Jinny Huh analyzes racial passing in *Battlestar Galactica*. While the show does not directly address issues of race, Huh maintains that the *Battlestar Galactica's* Cylons or humanoid cyborgs function allegorically, representing racially coded characters that communicate anxieties of cross-racial mixing in a post-racial society.

Ultimately, the strength of *The Colorblind Screen* lies in the theoretical groundings, with each chapter as a clear case study that draws from critical whiteness studies to examine television's role in articulating, reinforcing, and sometimes resisting colorblind ideologies. Well suited for academics and graduate classrooms, the volume is a valuable resource for media studies, popular culture, and critical race scholars alike.

By interrogating the invisibility of post-racial rhetorics and white privilege in television, the collection extends critical conversations of mediated representations of racial diversity, helping readers to reexamine how we talk about and see race in a supposed colorblind world.

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Mittell, Jason. *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling*. New York: NYU Press, 2015. Print.

Popular culture studies have long focused their analysis on the cultural impact of and representation by mediated texts. Jason Mittel's Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling switches the emphasis and concentrates on how television stories are told. He particularly gives attention to American prime time scripted serial programming with a focus on those produced within the past two decades. In this, the cultural impact is not ignored but rather seen as an indirect influence of television's narrative form. Mittell uses a poetic approach that seeks to ask the question of "how a text means" (i.e., how it works) rather than "what it means" (5, 339).

Mittell references other scholars, including David Bordwell's *Historical Poetics of Cinema* (1989) and Robert Allen's reader-oriented poetics found within *Speaking of Soap Operas* (1985). These approaches help shape Mittell's analytic framework, which considers historical, cognitive, and viewer reception poetics. These poetics emphasize the complexity of television's writing and the demands placed on those who orchestrate individual episodes and series overtime. Actors' lives and schedules must be written around; writers regularly deal with multiple real life scenarios that conflict with television production all while maintaining the continuity of the television narrative. Charisma of certain villains must

be carefully crafted as to not give away future plot developments. Multiple plot lines must also be woven throughout a series in order to create suspense and discussion among fans. Yet, the writing must create intentional emotional responses of its viewers (e.g., the generation of sudden abandonment due to an episode's sudden ending) while ensuring that the audience can manage the information within a specific episode, season, and series overall. Mittell's poetics considers how a media text achieves success (e.g., how it works) in order to explain what it says about the world (225).

For Mittell, how viewers ultimately engage with a television story is perhaps the most telling of a series' success. Viewer practices within today's digital era are considered within *Complex TV*. From a technological perspective, the ability to digitally record and save an episode for future viewing helps to "raise the cultural value of television programming to be similar to playing a book, musical album, or film on a shelf" (37). Additionally, economic engagement is acknowledged in the reward of receiving bonus features only available through product purchase (322). Fandom is also seen in community via various online social media platforms as viewers discuss scenarios and questions left unresolved (65). This active and relational participation in media consumption is touted to be a sign of quality television (211) influencing how television stories are told overtime, which indirectly influences culture, as well (127).

This book offers a commanding understanding of the process of television writing and development. Mittell writes in an instructive yet informal manner so that the seasoned critic and the novice media scholar can appreciate the text. Perhaps this is best seen in his juxtaposition of in-depth analysis with basic and short synopses of modern television series to illustrate his points. Mittell is not shy in pointing out that he is a fan of television and has his favorites, yet he is careful to also reference the series he is not as fond. Readers of *Complex TV* will notice regular

references to *Lost, Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Seinfeld*, *Battlestar Galactica*, *The West Wing*, *24*, and *Alias* to name a few.

Mittell argues that the approach of *Complex TV* is still quite rare outside of media effects research. He pushes for an expansion of scholarship concerning analysis of how a media text works, which includes contextualizing the development and shifts of technology, the industry, and audience reception during the 1990s and 2000s (6). Mittell posits that such consideration and future analysis will allow the poetics he describes throughout the book to flourish and ultimately encourage the academy to "understand the cultural facets of television more fully" (164). In true serial television fashion, Mittell closes his book with the phrase "to be continued" (353), and perhaps it is also fitting for such a review of television storytelling poetics. While this text deserves a high rating for its clarity, application, and furtherance of television analysis, in addition to its ability to push television scholars to consider new avenues of analysis while capturing the novice attention of those who are less familiar with television criticism, the response to and use of Mittell's refined poetics approach by the greater academy is hopefully – "to be continued."

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Bordwell, David. "Historical Poetics of Cinema." *1946- The Cinematic Text: Methods and Approaches.* Ed. Barton R. Palmer. New York: AMS Press, 1989. 369-398. Print.

Wilcox, Rhonda V., Tanya R. Cochran, Cynthia Masson, and David Lavery, eds. *Reading Joss Whedon*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2014. Print.

Reading Joss Whedon is not simply for those interested in Whedon or those interested in popular culture. It is an exemplar of how scholars can tackle the multi-variant works of one creator in our polymediated age. The editors did a remarkable job collecting essays that interrogate diverse topics. Scholars from disciplines as far afield as ethics, feminism, gender, law, narrative, media ecology, popular culture, television production, and others, will find invaluable content here. The topically organized second table of contents is a great resource for researchers.

David Kociemba begins at the beginning with *Buffy the Vampire Slayer's* (*BtVS*) first season, investigating thematic foreshadowing that comes to mark the mythology that carries the series through its seven seasons, including gender performance, identity, and individual change. Scholars interested in narrative theory and serialized mythology will find a close reading rewarding, particularly the Cordelia Chase and Xander Harris arcs that foreshadow Spike and Angelus' evolutions from spaces of liminality to heroic later in the series.

For scholars intrigued with narrative and discourse, the chapters by Janet Halfyard and Ananya Mukherjea provide thought-provoking analyses. Utilizing the myths of Orpheus and Eurydice, Halfyard examines the paradox of Buffy's identity, suggesting she is simultaneously the hero sent to save the damsel and damsel to be saved. Examining Buffy's duality, Halfyard disrupts Joseph Campbell's hero's journey monomyth. Similarly, Mukherjea employs the Shakti Hindi myth to analyze discourses of duality at play in *BtVS*, examining how Wheedon's use of metaphor undermines the dichotomies of good/evil, masculine/feminine, animal/human, rational/emotional, and wild/civilized. This leads

characters to an understanding of "both-and" as they struggle to live authentically on the Hellmouth.

The chapters by Rhonda Wilcox and Richard Albright will be of particular interest to communication scholars. Choice and connection are themes of Wilcox's analysis of the *BtVS* episode "Conversations with Dead People." Wilcox interrogates aloneness and solitude in season seven, showing how interpersonal communication in "Conversations" provides a necessary push leading to the promise of power sharing, realized in the series' penultimate episode. Relatedly, Albright tackles the issue of conversational narration within episodes, comparing Faith's bold storytelling to Buffy's sudden incapacity to verbalize – a new dilemma for her. Cordelia's curtness is linked to Oz's succinct, meaningful statements; both analyzed as (very) short narratives. Conversely, she shows how the verbose Xander uses silence as power in "The Zeppo."

Moving from *BtVS* to *Angel*, Stacey Abbott delves into Whedon's cinematic style, including his penchant for long steadicam shots, and how he works around his disdain for over the shoulder character shots. Her breakdown of his treatment in the *Angel* episode "Waiting in the Wings" illustrates how he creates an emotional aesthetic, particularly for the Wesley-Fred-Gunn love triangle. This chapter is especially revelatory for scholars interested in how production techniques impact storytelling.

Cynthea Masson's exploration of existential crisis shines light on one of the most despised *Angel* episodes, "The Girl in Question." She demonstrates how Spike and Angel are stuck remembering the same events and making the same choices about Buffy and their arch-nemesis, The Immortal. As such, they are captives in a self-created hell, an exceptional analysis for scholars grappling with identity and character development, connecting the episode to Sartre's *No Exit* and Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*.

The chapters by Matthew Pateman, Alyson Buckman, and Elizabeth Rambo move us out of the "Buffyverse" and into space with *Firefly*.

Pateman looks at the problematic relationship between Whedon and Fox over *Firefly*, the sci-fi/western mash-up. In an interwoven story, Pateman explores how Whedon's combination of two genres, financial factors, its "two pilots," and the franchise concept led to the series' rapid demise. This chapter serves as a case study for anyone interested in the external and economic pressures that influence how television gets created.

Using Bakhtinian theory, Buckman interrogates the sci-fi and western motifs of *Firefly* through a chronotopian analysis of space and time: how each genre stresses and expresses movement and immobility within characters, narratives, and settings. His analysis of Mal Reynold's development from defeated rebel to anti-hero is a particularly useful exemplar of a chronotopic character analysis, valuable for those interested in identity and dialectics. For scholars interested in the darker side of communication and identity, Rambo examines the textual, intertextual, and extratextual theme of alienation in "The Message," *Firefly's* final episode. She especially considers how communication creates and maintains alienation.

The next chapters focus on Whedon's *Dollhouse,* and will be especially interesting for feminist and gender identity scholars. Using a feminist reading of Ovid, Dale Koontz explores how mirrors, in part a metaphor for the male gaze, fragment/reflect/refract the multiple and singular identities of the "dolls," philosophically exploring what makes a person "a person." Sharon Sutherland and Sarah Swan examine the dolls' identit(ies) from a legal perspective. For scholars interested in social justice and gender equity, whether the dolls have rights is an important question, reflecting the machinations and victimization of sex trafficking, prostitution, and slavery.

Victoria Willis' chapter on *Dr. Horrible's Sing-Along Blog* examines humanism and posthumanism in the Web-based series. Media ecology scholars will be intrigued as she unpacks the audience's posthumanism as they technologically extend themselves through their computers. For the

philosophically minded, she disassembles the hero/superhero, human/posthuman characters of Hammer and Horrible, using Penny as the exemplar of humanism that succumbs to inevitable posthumanity.

Those interested leadership will appreciate Marni Stanley's chapter on the Season Eight comic continuation of *BtVS*, where Buffy finds herself in an upside-down world. No longer *the* Slayer*,* Buffy is the leader of 1,800 slayers, a position for which she is unequipped. Stanley follows Buffy as she learns how to reconnect, to become a leader, and how to make authentic good faith choices that include existential self-regard and regard for others.

Kristopher Woofter and Ensley Guffey provide socio-historical analyses of Whedon's movies *The Cabin in the Woods* and *The Avengers*, respectively, putting the horror and hero genres in perspective. Using *Cabin*'s multi-leveled narrative, Woofter challenges viewers to understand our complicities as audience members that help create both the horror of "reality television" and torture porn. Guffey interrogates the narrative of *The Avengers*. Focusing on the relationship between Captain America and Iron Man, Guffey provides a stimulating historical-cultural answer for why *The Avengers* worked as a hero movie in our age, an age supposedly done with heroes.

Chapters by Lorna Jowett, and Douglass Rabb and Micheal Richardson, will be of particular interest to narrative writers, autoethnographers, and storytellers. Jowett weaves a portrait of how Whedon utilizes flashback as narration to fill in character backstories, including the use of memory to explore Rupert Giles' "Ripper" identity, and how flashbacks flesh out the relationships between Angel, Spike, and Darla. Similarly, Rabb and Richardson explore memory in combination with narrative and narrative ethics, examining moral choice imagination, as characters struggle to become who they will be.

Jeffrey Bussolini navigates Whedon's understandings of the mind and its relationship to identity, examining Spike and Riley's narratives to

understand how identity and freedom of choice are affected by the technological manipulations of a secret government agency. Similarly, Gregory Erickson explores the interconnections between body and the soul, traversing ontological, theological, orthodox, experiential, and posthuman paradigms and how each interrogates what it means to be human. Likewise, Schultz explores how we, male or female, attempt to create our gendered identities within the contours of societal power structures and cultural discourses. These chapters are especially useful for those interested in discourse, power, and technology (and Foucault).

Tanya Cochran presents a living history of Whedon studies, narrating the academic timeline of Whedon studies, from the founding of *Slayage: The Journal of Buffy Studies,* to edited collections, to ongoing conferences. It is an exemplar of how well personal narrative and pop culture are weaved together here to tell a good story.

This review vastly understates the value of *Reading Joss Whedon*. It scratches the surface of the text, and due to space constraints, I left some authors out. The text is invaluable for Whedon scholars. However, *Reading Joss Whedon* is not simply valuable for Whedon "acafans." It stands as an exemplar for popular culture studies, showing intertextualities and interconnectedness by which scholars from different disciplines can interrogate pop culture artifacts, no matter the medium and no matter the topic.

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Dunn, Jennifer C., Jimmie Manning, and Danielle M. Stern, eds. *Lucky Strikes and a Three Martini Lunch : Thinking About Television's Mad Men,* 2nd ed. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2015. Print.

After seven seasons, AMC's *Mad Men* concluded with a jeans-clad Don Draper, a ding, and an iconic American ditty that series creator Matthew Weiner called "the greatest ad ever made" (Lee). *Mad Men*'s writers consistently chose for Don to create fictitious ad campaigns for real brands, which makes the decision to have him dream up the actual "I'd Like to Buy the World a Coke" campaign a novel one—the show's most deliberate, breaking-the-fourth-wall-esque parallel between the ad world of *Mad Men* and the historic reality it was designed to reflect. Such keen connections—between fiction and material history, past and present—are the enterprise of the second edition of *Lucky Strikes and a Three Martini Lunch: Thinking about Television's Mad Men*.

   Lucky Strikes' second edition joins the ranks of several other *Mad Men*-themed edited collections, but stands apart as the most comprehensive examination of the *Mad Men* universe to date, as it integrates material from all seven seasons and accounts for the myriad ways fans and academics are invited to engage with *Mad Men* as more than just a television show (see Edgerton; Carveth; Goodlad, Kaganovsky, and Rushing; and Stoddart). As well, the collection is methodologically diverse: audience research; autoethnography; critical, feminist, and cultural studies approaches to media; historical and rhetorical analyses are among the methods represented. The editors usefully organized the content of the collection thematically, though certain motifs like nostalgia, identity, consumption, the spirit of the white nuclear family, (un)happiness, and (dis)satisfaction course through the whole book.

   The first section focuses on the American Dream's transition from an ideal of economic comfort to a life of consumption, with attention to the

concomitant feelings of isolation, indifference and inadequacy exemplified by *Mad Men* in Michael Dennis and Adrianne Kunkel's chapter. This section emphasizes the complex role nostalgia plays both in the lives of the characters and as the show's primary source of audience intrigue as interrogated by both Bob Batchelor's and Ann Ciasullo's chapters, as well as a means for making sense of our own identities as Jimmie Manning discusses. Section two traces the shift in masculine identity and authenticity in the midst of political strife and social upheaval, pointing to the ways in which *Mad Men* serves as a springboard for understanding 50 years' worth of cultural constructions of gender and identity, and the complex intersection of race, gender, and sexuality. Daniel Strasser and Daniel Lair's chapter connects the "masculinity-in-crisis" narratives of contemporary *Mad Men* and the popular 1955 novel *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*, while Stephanie Young's chapter elicits the show's "white gaze," and Danielle Stern interrogates *Mad Men*'s role in perpetuating the television industry's "primetime closet."

Building crucial connections between *Mad Men* and vintage media, including Betty Friedan's *The Feminist Mystique*, section three engages the lives of 1960s women and national assumptions about postwar femininity. Adrian Jones' chapter is "All About Betty" and the construction, role, and realities of the white suburban housewife. Others in this section examine the multifaceted characters of Joan and Peggy—such as tensions around their femininity and sexuality and their politically productive narratives, which Katherine Lehman assesses, and what socialization, power, and interpersonal factors at play in their narratives illuminate about bonds between working women as Stephanie Young and Jennifer Dunn analyze. Spotlighting the relationship between consumption and culture, section four is all about art and garbage. In Kathleen Vandenberg's chapter, *Mad Men* the show takes a back seat as she traces the transition in 1960s culture from conformity to rebellion in ways both stimulated by and reflected in advertising, such as in Volkswagen's

"Think Small" campaign. Ryan Gillespie connects the old and the new by charting the intersections of art and advertising in the first half of the twentieth century culminating in a discussion about a contemporary "nostalgia for the New." This section ends with Heidi Brevik-Zender's political-economic examination of how the contemporary fashion industry has capitalized on the timeless "*Mad Men*-esque" style of the 1960s.

The fifth section focuses on *Mad Men,* media, and technology: the ways *Mad Men*'s narrative relays the technological media revolution of the 1960s and contemporary transformations in how televisual media is consumed. Specifically, Bob Batchelor's second chapter in the collection examines the woven intricacies of narrative and aesthetic in the series, and the place of these in defining the significance of television as a meaningful cultural form. Surveying AMC's network history as well as the story *Mad Men* tells, M. J. Robinson's incisive chapter highlights the challenges of advertising in the television industry and how they have evolved over the last 50 years into the transmedia, branding, and financial challenges now associated with what is called "Matrix television." The final co-authored chapter in this section takes up one aspect of the fandom side of the *Mad Men* universe, offering an analysis of fan's perceptions of characters on the show and how fan communities construct their stardom.

An exceptional, exciting feature of this collection—and what distinguishes the second edition of *Lucky Strikes* from the first—is the editors' focus on the productive potential of *Mad Men* as a pedagogical resource. Theirs is the most useful text presently available for teaching the histories, artifacts, industries, and politics of US culture—past and present—through *Mad Men*. In addition to all of the aforementioned analysis of content, the editors include an excellent, new introduction by Peggy O'Neal Ridlen and Jamie Wagman (with Jennifer Dunn) that summarizes all of the collection's chapters, explains and demonstrates how one might incorporate them into stand-alone lessons, larger units, or entire courses, and even provides supplemental primary and secondary

sources (books, film, art, etc.) for enrichment. The collection also includes a final section comprised of Jennifer Dunn's chapter devoted to teaching feminisms through *Mad Men* and Rebecca Johnson and Jimmie Manning's chapter devoted to pedagogical materials, including select sample syllabi, and engaging, evaluated lesson plans. These resources demonstrate the adaptability of *Lucky Strikes* to many areas of study, such as Art, American Studies, History, Communication, Cultural Studies, Media Studies, and Women's and Gender Studies.

While there are things left unexamined (fan fiction, spirituality, and drug culture are a few that come to mind), the breadth of content and depth of analysis in this collection is certainly commendable. The editors leave room for future editions, perhaps one which puts *Mad Men*'s ad world in conversation with the hip hop and porn industries of the 1970s, the respective topics of two highly anticipated dramas—HBO's *The Deuce* and Netflix's *The Get Down*—which come riding the tide of television's nostalgic turn precipitated by *Mad Men*. However, as a resource for college or high school level educators interested in bringing the "*Mad Men* experience" to bear on teaching topics like the American Dream, happiness, nostalgia, advertising, fashion, identity, feminism, race relations, art, media, and other aspects of culture in their contextual specificity, one can do no better than the second edition of *Lucky Strikes*. Additionally, more so than the other available collections, *Lucky Strikes* is accessible in both prose and theory, making it an engaging and enjoyable read for those outside of the academy as well as in.

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Carveth, Rod, and Robert Arp, eds. *Justified and Philosophy: Shoot First, Think Later*. Chicago: Open Court, 2015. Print.

Justified and Philosophy: Shoot First, Think Later edited by Rod Carveth and Robert Arp is a collection of essays that responds to and grapples with the FX television series *Justified*. The series is based on Elmore Leonard's novels *Pronto* (1993) and *Riding the Rap* (1995), and his short story "Fire in the Hole" (2001). *Justified,* an award-winning series, premiered on FX on March 16, 2010. The story is set in Lexington and the Appalachian

mountain area in eastern Kentucky and tells the tales of a U.S. Marshal, Raylan Givens as he enforces his brand of justice in Harlan County, KY. The show aired for six seasons before coming to an end on April 14, 2015, after this edited collection was published.

The book is divided into six sections, which include chapters from professors of History, English, Philosophy, Rehabilitation, Women and Gender Studies, Political and Social Ethics, Spanish, and Film Production, as well as independent writers, researchers, and counselors. The combination of these minds and their ideas make this a strong example of a book that speaks to fictional popular culture and real world circumstances. The six sections and eighteen chapters—plus introduction and conclusion chapters—cover a wide-range of issues surrounding the characters, stories, and themes in *Justified*. Due to the number of articles, each piece is fairly short and, in some cases, the arguments are not fully fleshed out. Despite the length, each chapter contributes a new spark and interest in the conversation. The editors, and contributors, believe that *Justified* is more than just another Western set in our contemporary world. Its story and characters are not simply examined in black and white terms, but instead of shades of gray. The series "resonates with its audience because, at its core, it's a series about believable human beings" (viii).

Section I, Vittles 'n' Such, starts the conversation by an examination of location, race, and behavior found in *Justified.* Pulling from Ludwig Wittgenstein's model of "family resemblance" Jon Cotton defines and discusses qualities of "coolness" in his essay "Know Your ABCs (Always Be Cool)" (chapter 1). John R. Fitzpatrick's examines the how proactive policing influences the characters in the *Justified* and in our everyday lives in "Can Proactive Policing Be Justified?" (chapter 2). Clint Jones's article, "The Crimes of Old King Coal" (chapter 3), goes beyond representations of Harlan Country on the screen to further probe the coal culture in the Appalachia. "*Justified*'s Message of White Superiority" (chapter 4) by Rod Carveth notes that with the exception of one (Rachel), all of the

African-American characters are "linked to criminal behavior" as "whites are seen as keeping [them] in line" (42). Cynthia Jones writes, "*Justified* is about whether it's justified to shoot someone," in her article "*Justified* True Belief" (chapter 5), and how justification is often attached to beliefs (51).

The discussion deepens in Section II, Signs from God, as the contributors discuss the influence of religion within the show. Michael D. Jaworski asks his readers and audiences of *Justified* to pass their own judgments on Boyd Crowder's near-death experience as a sign from God or a natural occurrence, or perhaps, a little bit of both in "Was Boyd Truly Born Again?" (chapter 6). By employing the ideas of Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard, Robert Sirvent and Caleb Action, grapple with Billy's faith and sanity in "Handling Snakes with Fear and Trembling" (chapter 7).

Section III, Right and Wrong in Harlan County, dives deeper into ideas of justifications and ethics. Christian Cotton called on therapist, Anthony Palazzo in their chapter, "I Did What I Had to Do" (chapter 8), to examine abusive relationships, specifically Ava's murder of her abusive husband, Bowman. Cotton and Palazzo ask, is there justice in an eye for an eye negotiation? The relationship and tension between Raylan and Boyd is, "one of the main reasons why we keep watching *Justified,*" according to Gerald Browning's "The Ethical Theories of Raylan and Boyd" (chapter 9) (111). The two men juggle right and wrong showing, "what we do results in who we are" (120). Alexander Dick's "Justified or Just Making Excuses" (chapter 10), investigates what it means to be "justified" and the relationship justification has to personal responsibility.

While female characters are mentioned throughout the book, Section IV, Harlan's Feminine Side, narrows the focus by reading the relationships between men and women in *Justified.* Joanna Crosby questions the "male-centric" nature of characters as they emerge from a male dominated writing team and group of directors in her article, "We Are Not Your

Savages" (chapter 11) (133). Cynthia Jones, Sandra Hansmann, Anne Stachura, and Linda English shed light on the violence found in *Justified* in, "Boys Will Be Boys" (chapter 12), expressly violence by men towards women.

Section V, Family Values, studies the role family plays in Harlan County. Paul Zinder looks at the way that fathers have failed to "fulfill the duties of the role, suggesting that traditional Western definitions of masculinity and familial structures are open to question the show's narrative construction in his chapter, "Failed Patriarchs" (chapter 13) (170). Just as Zinder did, Peter S. Fosl's "Motherhood and Apple Pie" (chapter 14) examines the breakdown of families and the challenge to flourish in spite of the corrupt world of Harlan County. In "Family Matters in Harland County" (chapter 15) by Gerald Browning, he argues that the "most complicated and compelling relationships in *Justified* are those forged by blood and kin" (193). It is these relationships, along with character motives and fears that propel the story forward.

The final section (VI), Quite the Characters, is perhaps the most pointed section in its examination of specific character traits. One of the editors, Rod Carveth, proposes another motivation for self-preservation: pleasure. In "Pleasure Über Alles" (chapter 16), Carveth explains how pleasure is the only item on Ava's agenda. Julia Mason demonstrates that Mags will also go to any and all lengths to protect her clan. Motherhood is reexamined through the lens of Stuart Hall in Mason's chapter, "Mags Bennett—Outlaw Mother" (chapter 17). Aristotelian self-restraint is the topic of Nathan Verbaan and Adam Barkman's "Raylan Learns to Restrain Himself" (chapter 18). Many of the characters confront Raylan about his inability, and later his ability, to practice self-control.

The conclusion, "Justified Killings?" makes the connection between the "shoot first, ask questions later" mentality that is found in *Justified* and the "controversial—and, at times, shocking" real-life stories including the 2012 shooting and killing of Trayvon Martin (235). While there are

several commonalities and themes throughout the truthful cases in the conclusion and throughout the collection of essays, one element jumps to the forefront: relationships. The relationships between friends, families, spouses, employees, children, and neighbors each play a vital role in the examination and discussion of *Justified.* I would recommend this book to professors in fields of popular culture studies, American studies, and film and media studies as a way to spark conversation in the classroom with the short introductory pieces of this collection. The contributors employ the thoughts and theories of psychoanalysts, psychologists, philosophers, therapists, and theorists. They applied those ideas to shades of gray in *Justified*.

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Johnson, Derek, Derek Kompare and Avi Santo. *Making Media Work: Cultures of Management in the Entertainment Industries*. New York: New York University Press, 2014. Print.

Representations of management in films such as *Office Space* or in television shows such as *30 Rock* are usually of "suits" that oppose the creative talent of those working for them by trying to enforce bureaucratic rules onto innovative employees to meet the demands of advertisers and corporate shareholders. However, the authors of *Making Media Work* argue that this representation is not reality in media management where management is not separate from the creative media worker, but instead management takes place at all levels even among those creating the product. The editors propose that Foucault's concept of discourses explains how and why management is seen as the oppressive force as well as who identifies as "managers" and who identifies as the "managed" (4).

The editors present media management as "a culture of shifting discourses, dispositions, and tactics that create meaning, generate value, organize, or otherwise shape media work throughout each moment of production and consumption" (2). This definition provides the structure for the book to be divided into three sections (Discourses, Dispositions, and Tactics) though the editors acknowledge many entries could be included in more than one section. The essays as a whole attempt to explain, primarily through a wide range of well-developed case studies, how media managers not only address issues of producing creative work from a typical management perspective, but are also required to play a unique role in cultural and societal shifts that shape the audience desire for the work itself.

The first section of essays titled "Discourses" provides stories or "lore" that surround media managers. The initial essay presents an overall picture of the challenges of researching media management due to lack of both access to managers and theoretical basis. The author advocates for a critical approach including interviews, cross-checks, and connecting managerial practices to the creative goods produced rather than relying so heavily on individual case studies of "great" managers. The other essays in this section (as well as those in the rest of the book) do employ the case study approach, but with broader methods that include this connection of management to the creative product across multiple contexts. The remaining essays in the first section include a look at *The Cosby Show* sales abroad, a two-year study of the BBC's involvement in creating multi-platform content, and a look at US television's reality shows that redefine individuals as self-managers in the "business of making and remaking enterprising selves" (91). Though each of the essays provides an interesting and detailed perspective on the discourses surrounding media management in widely different contexts, there is no clear linkage between these diverse discourses.

The second section of essays is clustered around the concept of "Dispositions" explained by the editors as how individuals are socialized into managerial identities with certain perceptions set within particular communities of class, race, gender, sexuality or nationhood (6-7). The series of essays begins with the growth of music talent scouts in the US after WWI and the negotiation of social and cultural divides required to expand jazz, blues, and country music. The next essay examines the female-dominated role of present day casting directors as "products of sex segregation and feminization of certain types of low-status, extra-creative work in film history" (143), which is followed by an essay on Brazilian cinema's partnerships between local producers and international companies like Sony, Fox, Disney, etc. The final essay in this section examines self-management and image manipulation of a particular individual named Felicia Day, a writer-producer of new media who has positioned herself as a new media auteur (190). These essays as a whole hold together better than the previous section by providing a varied look at the issues of class, race, gender, and sexuality as managers interact with cultural and societal norms to create new media products and simultaneously create the demand for those same products.

The third set of essays in the book is titled "Tactics" which the editors define as the resistant responses of creative media workers to top-down strategies of economic and cultural domination (10). The essays in this section begin with an account of the Top 40 radio rise in the 1950s and the conflicting forces evident at a moment of cultural transition where responses are not only made to economic changes, but those changes are "invented, stabilized, refined and reproduced… disseminated and implanted" in a variety of places (215). A second case study of the BBC, right after it abandoned the "360-platform" efforts described in the earlier essay under "Discourses," looks at the BBC's use of digital media, specifically Twitter, to humanize the brand and to manage the audience's role in maintaining that brand identity. The final two essays explore the

relationship between market research suppliers and the client by exploring the hurdles of timeliness and the shelf-life of products and then strongly advocating for an audience-centered approach that goes beyond mere market research to create collaborations between the academic and industry worlds. From the 1950s fight over radio time to the present day squabbles over the purity of academic research, these essays present a cohesive picture of the centrality of fresh perspectives and innovative thought required by media managers to create and sustain audience demand and move the media industry forward.

Though this book is designed to illuminate the actions of media managers across entertainment industries from the perspective of those who research them, the concepts and case studies presented here are relevant to the study of organizational management on a larger scale as well. Certainly creative media is a sub-context for management as a whole, but those who wish to better understand the complexities of responding to workers in any creative industry while balancing the public appetite for a product and simultaneously creating desire for new products would find the cases presented here insightful. Scholars who are striving to expand methods of examining media managers are not likely to discover uniquely fresh methods here, but will gain added insight into the connections of management decisions to the resulting creative products.

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THE POPULAR CULTURE STUDIES JOURNAL

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MidwestPCA/ACA

The Midwest Popular Culture Association / American Culture Association is a regional branch of the Popular Culture Association / American Culture Association. The organization held its first conference in Duluth, Minnesota, in 1973. After a five-year hiatus during the 1990s, the organization held a come-back conference in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in 2002.

MPCA/ACA usually holds its annual conference in a large Midwestern city in the United States. In the last several years, conferences have been held in Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Ohio. Upcoming conferences will be held in Missouri and Indiana. The conference typically is held in October.

Anyone is welcome to join and submit proposals for consideration at the MPCA/ACA conference. Membership in MPCA/ACA is by no means limited to those working or living in the Midwest or even the United States. In fact, presenters have come from as far away as Florida and California, and Norway and Australia.

Thank you for those joining us in Indianapolis the 2015 conference. We look forward to seeing you next year in Chicago.

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THE POPULAR CULTURE STUDIES JOURNAL

VOLUME 3 **NUMBERS 1 & 2** **2015**

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