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The More Things Change...

NAVIGATING
POPULAR CULTURE
ACROSS TIME

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On Time and Popular Culture

CARRIELYNN D. REINHARD

Time is an interesting phenomenon. It is both an objective aspect of the nature of our universe and a subjective experience of our universe. We humans shape time through different forms of measurement, bending the rotations of our planet to our social, cultural, political, and economic needs. We speak equally about the past and the future as if they are concrete entities that continue to exist in our universe and shape our lives, while simultaneously referring to something called “the present” — although by the time we have labeled it as such, it has already become the past. We quip idioms like “time changes everything,” “time heals all wounds,” or “time flies by” that anthropomorphically ascribe agency to time while also lamenting the dearth of time we have in our daily lives and the entirety of our lifespans. Quixotically, time exists both in abundance and in scarcity, with an ambling gait and far too much rapidity, in ebbs and flows yet with regular circularity that makes people’s heads spin while also forgetting that what has happened before is likely to happen again.

Time is both subjective and objective. Similarly, popular culture exists in this dual state and in the tension between the states. We construct popular culture by, literally, determining what texts and practices are popular, for anything from a short window of time — putting the “pop” in “pop culture” — to spanning eons and generations and moving from niche cult to globalized culture. Because we construct it, popular culture is inherently subjective, based entirely on preferences and tastes and thus able to exist in plurality with many others. Yet popular culture also objectively exists outside of us, in the material texts and ideological practices that constitute it, allow it to transverse space and time, and impact individuals and communities. And in the tension between the purely subjective and purely objective lies all the “stuff,” both material and ideological, of popular culture studies.

All things change, but the more things change, the more they stay the same? The articles collected in this issue demonstrate how popular culture both changes, and does not change, across time. In this collection, contributors consider how ideas about feminism and gender, race and ethnicity, sexuality and intersectionality have all shifted in some way, perhaps challenging our past conceptions about societies, cultures, theories, and popular culture studies itself. Research considers the popular

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culture of the 1950s, the 1970s, the 1960s, the 2000s, and today. Analyses of older media and newer media exist in this collection, providing different, yet similar, perspectives on celebrity, genre, fandom, and education. The fantasies of horror and superheroes compare to the realities of war and imprisonment to show just how much our world has progressed, and how much remains to be done.

In looking at popular cultures across time, we can learn more about our current state, and perhaps better understand our connections to past states. We can both see the patterns that have repeated across time and see the past in light of how we see ourselves today. The past is not some foreign world wherein the inhabitants act in ways so counter to our own. The past was us. We are their future. We will be the future's past. We are not wholly unique entities, but manifestations of complex networks, more alike than different, and more complex than we perhaps like to think. Understanding popular culture across time can better help us understand these connections and complexities, and perhaps provide new insights to help those who follow us, to both learn from our mistakes and build on what we have constructed.

There's No Place Like *Home*: Arlene Francis and Domesticity in Doubt

CAROLINE ARGRAVE

In February 1954, NBC spent \$1,000,000 on advanced promotion and advertising for the March 1 television premiere of *Home*; the appropriated amount was the largest in television history for a single program (“\$1,000,000 *Home*”). At NBC’s request, major weeklies ran two-page ads, such as one in *Variety* that read: “March 1, 1954. Remember this date. In the future it will be known as the day that *Home* had its premiere” (“House that”). Between 1954 and 1957, *Home* became the middle note of NBC President Sylvester “Pat” Weaver’s *T-H-T* creation, or the *Today, Home, Tonight* triad. While *Home* did not enjoy the longevity of *Today* or *Tonight*, it was the first major effort by a national network to capture the daytime audience of women. Live for an hour every Monday through Friday, NBC delivered the “queen” of homemaking shows with Arlene Francis as the first female “editor-in-chief.”

During an episode of *The Mike Wallace Interview* in 1959, Wallace declared, “television burns up writers, comics, and personalities the way a forest fire consumes trees. Frequently all that is left is the smoke and remembrance of things past. An outstanding exception is Arlene Francis. She is fireproof...one of the most successful women in television” (Wallace). For nearly thirty years, Francis appeared regularly on television alongside Mike Wallace, Edward R. Murrow, and Jack Paar, and thus helped establish the concept of television talk shows. Francis also achieved the rare position of being contracted to all three major networks. Among early television talk-show hosts, only Edward R. Murrow is represented by more programs at the Museum of Television and Radio (Timberg 40). In 1954, the

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July 19 issue of *Newsweek* called Francis “the first lady television,” declared hers “the most recognized face in America,” deemed Francis as important as Mamie Eisenhower and Eleanor Roosevelt, and asserted that “Arlene is to television viewers what Willie Mays is to baseball fans” (“Quick Queen” 23-4).

From 1949 to 1984, Arlene Francis maintained an unparalleled career that crossed network boundaries, connecting her to millions of Americans through the media of radio and television. Throughout her long career, Francis maintained a status that was almost exclusively reserved for men, yet most television histories fail to mention her impact. The reason for this is a culmination of two points. First, the history of television is primarily written through an institutional lens, concerned with which companies were running what or as the history of prime-time male stars. Here historians, whether coming from a textual, personal, or national approach shape television history for the United States solely from the network or executive perspective. Therefore, a great deal of the history of early television is documented in studies of technological history, and the history of men and the institutions they ran. Sweeping histories and encyclopedias such as *The History of Television 1942 to 2000* by Albert Abramson and *The Box: An Oral History of Television 1920-1961* by Jeff Kesseloff make significant contributions to the understanding these men and the early years of television but offer little gender analysis. Gary R. Edgerton’s monograph, *The Columbia History of American Television*, offers a selective history that focuses on network heads David Sarnoff, William Paley and Pat Weaver, offering a top-down history of the industry. *That’s the Way It Is: A History of Television News in America* by Charles Ponce de Leon also offers a similar analysis of television. Ponce de Leon traces the history of television news from the grim seriousness of Edward R. Murrow and Walter Cronkite to the snarkiness of John Stewart and Bill O’Reilly. By strictly focusing on evening news programming, Ponce de Leon subverts the significance of day-time news programming that was often headed by female personalities.

Such studies offer a wealth of invaluable information but are often written outside of critical and cultural discourses. This history is so isolating that in “Innovating Women’s Television” Marsha Cassidy and Mimi White argue that American audiences have forgotten a number of pioneering women (32). The television histories that do expand across the lines of gender, often tell women’s entertainment history inaccurately. For years, articles and interviews have examined *Tonight* and comedian Joan Rivers’ impact on the show. Yet, these histories fail to mention the dozens of women who tackled late night before her.

Women such as Virginia Graham, Betty White, and Arlene Francis sat in for Jack Paar years before Johnny Carson or Joan Rivers sat behind the desk. Francis was Jack Paar's favorite substitute, hosting a total of thirty-six times, and took over the position as host for a week during Paar's departure and Carson's instatement (Timberg 295). The lack of readily available information about women's work in the early days of television, allows for inaccuracies to creep into the historical record.

Second, Arlene Francis is an uncomfortable person to examine. Hardly a feminist heroine, she urged women to stop domineering men and declared that a woman's main role in life was to cater to and serve her husband. While at first glance Francis seems to have fulfilled the female stereotype of the 1950s, if viewed from another angle, she constitutes an important stepping-stone toward a more enlightened time. Her life echoes the constrained and often suffocating lives of white women in the 1950s, while also showcasing the sensitivities, depth, and tensions of the era. As feminist history emerged alongside the Women's Liberation Movement, figures like Francis were pushed aside because they failed to exemplify the values of a feminist hero. Early feminist historians worked to move women's stories from outside the confines of their homes, and through this process marginalized the histories of women who existed within and supported domestic spheres. While Arlene Francis and her contemporaries both benefited from and contributed to feminism, in a way, feminism is responsible for writing Francis and her achievements out of history.

In the 2013 documentary *Makers: Women Who Make America*, Gloria Steinem declared, "I don't remember any actual serious, smart women in television" in the 1950s (00:07:37-00:7:45). Steinem articulated the common assumption that 1950s television put women in a certain category, the perky mom in heels and pearls. That assumption is incorrect. During this period, Francis and her contemporaries set forward the idea that men and women were intellectually equal. Francis achieved unmatched power because her multifaceted identity reflected the disparities between pre- and post-war gender values. While she outwardly supported "domestic containment," she was highly educated and aware of her own capabilities as an intellectual.

Home: An Electronic Magazine for Women

Home was one of the most intelligent and lively mixes of daily journalism, information, and political discussions ever aired. *Home* provided Francis a platform, one in which a cultured, articulate woman shaped and exercised control over her own enterprise. NBC marketed *Home* as an electronic magazine for women with every show operating as a new, independent issue. The show drew a daily audience of three million viewers, had forty sponsors, received 500 phone calls a day, had a production budget of \$50,000 a week, received 5,000 letters a week, and employed seven female editors (Stole 137-9). *Home*'s technologically advanced set was created to attract women who were bored by other television shows. Pat Weaver, the show's creator, said, "*Home* was a show built for the women who were not watching soaps, game shows, daytime stuff" (Broughton 215). To woo female viewers, NBC built a \$250,000 rotating set. The innovative, circular set measured over sixty feet in diameter, and was "packed with electronic gadgets, stage turn-tables, platforms that moved up and down, and other well-publicized technological trickery" (Cassidy 150). The March 29 issue of *Time* described how the round set was divided into wedges that served as the program's multiple departments, while the camera and crew were stationed at the circle's center. One "wedge" housed *Home*'s musical performers, the Norman Paris Trio, while others were set up to resemble a kitchen, bedroom, garden area, and news station. The February 4, 1956 edition of *TV Guide* joked, that the title *Home* was a misnomer, "There never was another place like this" (9). The unique set also housed a \$30,000 remote controlled "monkey" camera, the first of its kind. Built on hydraulic extension booms, the camera suspended from the studio's ceiling and could "extend to 29 feet in any direction, revolve...360 degrees" ("\$200,000"). While the groundbreaking set drew millions of housewives to viewership, Arlene Francis maintained that *Home* should offer substantive content.

For Francis, *Home* allowed her to connect with millions of women around the country, as she hoped to share "the pleasure of living when you have knowledge" (Wallace). To accomplish this feat Francis used *Home* as a platform to connect housewives with America's best and brightest. In addition to interviewing entertainers like Ethel Waters and Jerry Lewis, Francis interviewed the first American woman to win the Nobel Prize for literature, Pearl S. Buck; author and activist Helen Keller; architect Frank Lloyd Wright; American lawyer and chief counsel for the United States Army during the McCarthy hearings, Joseph N. Welch; Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright, Thornton Wilder; Chief Justice William O. Douglas; United States Attorney General Herbert Brownell Jr.; Pulitzer Prize-

winning poet, Carl Sandburg; Vice President Richard M. Nixon; American evangelist, Billy Graham; U.S. Treasurer Ivy Baker Priest; pioneer of sex research, Dr. Alfred Kinsey; and Massachusetts Senator John F. Kennedy and his wife Jacqueline.

Other than Edward R. Murrow's *Person to Person*, which took audiences into the homes of entertainers, *Home* was the first show to "go on the road" (Timberg 41). Francis traveled so that viewers isolated in their homes could access people and cultures outside of their own. *Home* took its viewers everywhere from Gimbel's Department store in New York City to the A-bomb test in Yucca Flats; from Carl Sandberg's North Carolina estate to the New Year festivities in Japan. Together, Francis and her viewers attended Grace Kelly's wedding in Monaco, rode up the Eiffel Tower with Jean Seaberg, went underwater in Nassau, and on top of a catalytic cracker oil processor in Cleveland. An elaborate series entitled "Hometown U.S.A." brought *Home* audiences to Nevada, California, Boston, Washington D.C., and Philadelphia where Francis aired live from various historic buildings. Live on *Home*, she was the first woman to open the New York Stock Exchange, "I blew the whistle and all these men came charging out of their offices and started making money" ("Perils"). In D.C. Francis interviewed Senator Margaret Chase Smith of Maine in the first national telecast from the Department of Justice. Francis commented that Smith "has invaded a man's world, but, having invaded it, remains very much a woman" (Cassidy 143). This one statement echoes Francis' concerns about her own career and image. Her son, law professor Peter Gabel, argues "She wanted to portray herself in a man's world, but as a woman—a powerful woman in a man's world" (Gabel).

From 1954 to 1957 *Home* and Francis were voted the top women's program and top female personality by *TV Radio Mirror*. During this period, Francis became one of the highest paid television personalities. Prior to *Home*'s premiere, Francis signed a contract guaranteeing her a weekly salary of \$2,000 with \$3,500 in potential earnings depending on weekly sponsorship ("Inside"). *Variety* reported that she signed a percentage deal in which she could earn \$100,000 a year from *Home* ("\$1,000,000"). Francis was already the highest-earning game show panelist on television. She appeared on the panel of CBS's *What's My Line*, making more than both her male and female counterparts. It is estimated that she earned \$1,000 per episode; the standard was \$500, making her a "financial enterprise" ("TV Pay"). In 1957, *Time* reported Francis' earnings as upward of \$250,000 a year, and that she "makes trips to the bank in an armored car" ("Perils").

Yet, her power was limited; Francis had no financial control over *Home* or any other shows in which she appeared. In a world where women were essentially hired hands, they were required to do the bidding of the men in charge. Despite *Home's* focus on women, the real power holders were men and their failures contributed to the show's early demise. Male executives and staff members began taking advantage of *Home's* large budget and began employing unnecessary additions. Hugh Downs, *Home's* announcer and co-host, recalled that one low-ranking producer employed six secretaries (Downs 00:03:25-00:06:42). Male critics began printing unfavorable reviews about *Home's* female-centered agenda. Jack Gould wrote in *The New York Times* that the show's pace "begins to drag, at least for masculine ears" ("Home"). Anton Remenih commented in the *Chicago Tribune* that "from a man's point of view, *Home* is one of the most dangerous programs on television" ("TV's New"). Ultimately, internal tensions between Pat Weaver and NBC administrator Robert Sarnoff resulted in Weaver's firing. To the shock and dismay of Francis and her millions of viewers, *Home* was cancelled in late 1957. Francis believed the cancellation was caused by the show's "ambitious, educational programming" (Wallace). After a whirlwind four years, the final episode of *Home* aired on August 9, 1957.

Home is often noted for pioneering the "magazine" concept of advertising in which broadcasters and not advertisers are placed in charge of editorial content. However, critics argued that *Home's* editorial content became overwhelmed by commercialism and contributed to the show's demise. This is true, as many segments placed heavy emphasis on new commercial goods and how these purchasable items could ease the daily lives of housewives. Jack Gould feared that *Home* "might become a television department store" ("Home"). Yet, sponsors praised Francis for her abilities to "integrate programming content, personal charm, and selling" and coined her "Saleswoman of the Year" (Cassidy and White 41; Efron 24). Inger Stole argues that *Home* failed primarily because of the show's inability to provide consistent content that appealed to the diversity of American female audiences (115). Women began to feel that they were being preyed upon as consumers. One viewer commented "I have been very distressed that NBC...is thrusting *Home* on me" (Stole 114). In contrast, Marsha Cassidy argues that despite being called *Home*, the show and Francis offered "a striking validation of nondomestic behavior" (149).

Home's short-lived success and heavy emphasis on commercialism should not detract from the remarkable ways in which Francis and her editors worked within

their constraints to deliver quality information programming to female audiences. Francis used *Home* both to praise domesticity and to undermine it. The show and Francis showcase the struggle between power and passivity. This duality expressed the unresolved conflict between the ideals of an earlier time of activism, during which women struggled for political representation and the vote, and a revised set of norms for the 1950s that attempted to collapse women's political ambitions into the performance of domestic duties. Overall, her efforts offer insight into how white women managed their internal conflicts and negotiated power for themselves within male-dominated spheres. While accounts of television's history have long acknowledged the significance of the durable *Today* and *Tonight* shows, *Home's* early cancellation branded the program an inconsequential failure, and its historical importance has only recently been examined (Cassidy 133).

What's Her Name?

When selecting a personality as *Home's* leading host, NBC wanted "a pleasingly attractive middle-aged woman," as only an experienced woman could be trusted with serious content (Miller 106). Two hundred women, including Betty Furness, Myrna Loy, and Irene Dunne, were under consideration, until one executive mentioned Francis. She embodied exactly what the network wanted; she was "intelligent enough to handle an ad-lib show but simple and sweet" ("What is Her line?"). Francis' successes in radio and television resulted in her already being a household name, as audiences were drawn to her wise, witty banter, her "Wurlitzer" laugh, and "beautiful speech pattern" (Efron 23).

Arline Francis Kazanjian was born in 1907 in Boston, Massachusetts, the daughter of Leah and Aram. Her father, an Armenian immigrant, was a portrait photographer and her mother, a housewife. When Arline was seven, the family moved to Manhattan, where she began to express her wild desires for the stage. Concerned by his young daughter's "exhibitionist tendencies," Aram sent Arline to Mount St. Vincent Academy in the Bronx, New York, where she would learn to be a proper girl and good wife (Francis 9). During her stint at this Academy, Arline developed deep insecurities and a fear of rejection that would plague her for the rest of her life. Being the only Armenian and non-Catholic student, and insecure that her "nose [wa]s too long" and legs "too skinny," she set out to transform her personality and become "fun to be with" (Wallace). "I would lie awake nights trying to think of ways to make myself acceptable to the children so they would

like me,” she said. “I want to be appreciated,” she continued, “and I don’t care where or by whom” (Francis 15). In this environment, Arline learned the price of being different, became fearful of saying “no,” and put all her energy into being affable and agreeable.

Despite her father’s wishes to “find a nice rich feller and get married,” Arline Kazanjian became Arlene Francis, and set out for the theater and radio (Francis 21). In 1932, she made her film debut in *Murders in the Rue Morgue* playing opposite Bela Lugosi. Francis had a few early breaks doing voice-over work for radio advertisements. Her knack for eloquent, natural deliveries and easy characterizations landed her roles on several serials, many of them running concurrently. In 1938, she became the first female host of the radio show *What’s My Name?*, a show in which she would imitate famous personalities, a role that she would hold for eleven years. That same year she became a member of Orson Welles’ distinguished acting troupe, the Mercury Theater, performing in plays like *Danton’s Death* and *Horse Eats Hat*. In 1940, she began playing Betty opposite to Van Heflin’s Bob in the soap opera *Betty and Bob*. Three years later she became the first female game show host, as host of the radio show *Blind Date*, a live audience show in which service men vied for a date with a woman. Francis became known as radio’s “oomph girl” for her voice and her ability to express her warmth and charm across the airwaves (Gabel).

In 1946, Francis married fellow Mercury Theater actor Martin Gabel. In 1947, the Gabels welcomed their only child, a son named Peter. Gabel, famed for his radio voice-overs, worked as both an actor and producer in the theater, often producing plays that starred his wife. Gabel directed his wife on her business affairs, and Francis always sought her husband’s advice. When preparing for an interview with a powerful male leader, Francis urged Gabel to write the interview questions for her (Gabel). “Meeting so many generals, admirals, and powerful men is a little overpowering for a girl,” she said (“Home Away”). Throughout her life she insisted that it was Gabel who helped form her “public person.” *TV Guide* best described the Gabel-Francis marriage, “He treats her with a fatherliness that is not in the slightest way condescending, but with respect for her views...she treats him with a kind of flirting awe” (Gehman 28). In 1961, Francis and Gabel were selected as the “Husband, Wife Team of the Year” by the National Father’s Day Committee, for “the respect and affection in which they are held as a couple and as individuals by the public and by others in the entertainment profession” (“Arlene Francis, Martin Gabel”). It is unclear how much of their public relationship consisted of conscious

manipulation or was constructed to model “traditional” marriages, but Gabel consistently and publicly enumerated Francis’ successes and declared her “a national treasure” (Francis 66). When he accepted his Tony award for *Big Fish, Little Fish*, he said, “This is the first prize I’ve won since Arlene Francis consented to be my wife” (Francis 66). Francis and Gabel remained married until Gabel’s death in 1986.

By the fall of 1948 ABC, CBS, and NBC made the transition to television. Most people who had experience with live radio situations were men. These men transferred well as the unstable world of television mirrored the unpredictable atmosphere of radio work. Men like Fred Allen, Jack Benny, George Burns, Arthur Godfrey, and Milton Berle were considered captains who could anchor this complicated ship. Speaking with Mike Wallace, Francis noted her fears concerning the rise of television: “I know that when television started, I went to my manager and said well I’m finished. There’s no place for me in television, I’m a radio personality” (Wallace). However, in 1949 the producers of *Blind Date* decided the show would transfer well to television, and that Francis would remain “mistress of ceremonies.” Coming from both radio and theater, Francis entered the world of television with crucial experience in being a personality in front of a live audience and with, therefore, a high level of credibility with audiences at home. Despite Francis’ appeal and success, she existed within a society that confined women into their roles as wives and mothers. By existing outside of this prescribed role, Francis faced emotional struggles that are difficult to understand from a modern perspective. Her complex and enigmatic life proves that to ignore the complexity of 1950s women is to lose a more nuanced view of American feminism. If the society of that period reduced and did so little to reinforce women’s strengths, even these small combats must be strong statements.

The Career Woman-Housewife of 1955

Arlene Francis primarily promoted herself as a mother and wife, devoted to family and home, even though her professional trajectory was at odds with this public presentation. “Arlene is not exclusively a career woman,” noted *Look* magazine in 1956. “With her, husband and child come first” (“Arlene Francis”). Female personalities of the 1950s existed within a complex world; they were celebrated for achievements, but only as they connected to their ability to maintain their image as wife and mother. In “Pioneers, Girlfriends and Wives: An Agenda for Research on

Women and the Organizational Culture of Broadcasting,” Patricia Phalen chronicles the career experiences of women in television and radio broadcasting; “I think the role of women inside these systems...follows the same damned definitions: pioneer, girlfriends, wife, mother” (230). Phalen asserts that by applying the concept of “gender culture” to television broadcasting, that the experiences and needs of men determine the processes of television production. She notes that women in media organizations must adapt to structures that reflect the priorities of men; therefore, women’s value is determined by the success of their homes.

Nearly all of Francis’ publicity from the 50s and 60s glorified her “frantic” schedule and her ability to master both the domestic and non-domestic spheres. Yet sources continued to assert that “regular” women did not have career desires. The *Saturday Evening Post* continuously assured its readers that few housewives ever dreamed about any life other than that of a full-time homemaker, and that their occasional “blue” moods could be easily assuaged with a few words of praise or a new hairdo (Coontz 23). The March 7, 1960 issue of *Newsweek* downplayed the unhappiness of women by commenting that the American woman was “dissatisfied with a lot that women of other lands can only dream of” (Friedan 68). For more than fifteen years, American psychiatrists, sociologists, women’s magazines and television shows portrayed the post-World War II housewife as the happiest person on the planet (White 25). To the extent that women believed this to accurately describe everyone else, they felt alone and inadequate.

In February 1955 *Chic* magazine dubbed Francis the “Career Woman-Housewife of the Year,” and printed her demanding schedule that began at 4:30 in the morning and generally lasted until about 1:00 AM. While these puff pieces and interviews were meant to display the exceptionality of Francis as a wife, mother, and entertainer, in reality, they show the staggering demands placed upon female leads in television. By her own account, Francis read two newspapers a day, two or three books a week, studied a dozen magazines a week, attended every Broadway opening, saw seventy-five percent of all movies and attended half a dozen cocktail parties a week (Zolotow 57). In any spare time, she obsessively prepared for interviews. This excessive need for preparation shows that Francis, whether it was conscious or not, recognized her needed to work harder than her male counterparts. By continuously pointing out Francis’ “unique” qualities and “unusual” stamina, these pieces suggest that only she could achieve harmony at work and at home, and that most women would not be capable of these feats. Her level of success was

specific to her and her isolated set of skills. Because of these qualities, Francis was trusted and respected by men, in a way that other female personalities were not. An unidentified high-ranking television performer, said, "It's true. A lot of us didn't treat women as equals in those days. But not Arlene. She was different. She was the best" (Beverly 19). Yet the definition of "the best" was gendered, as is clear from other expressions of admiration from her colleagues. To Steve Allen, she was the "wittiest and prettiest in television," while to Virginia Graham she "made it wonderful to be a woman and especially to be a lady" (Graham 246). Most importantly, for those watching at home, she was "the personification of everything that is lovely in a woman" (Efron 23).

Aside from calling Francis a "career girl," no article or interview detailed the significant strides she made as a woman in television. Instead, interviewers asked her about the existence of jealousy between her and other female personalities, how she managed to stay so thin, and what meals she prepared for her family. Francis, moreover, played into these tropes. For a *TV Guide* shoot, she wore a "waist-trainer" over her dress as she cut vegetables for her family's dinner ("How I Manage"). And in nearly every interview, she insisted that her family, career, and life were glorious. Within these interviews, Francis' quiet struggles appear as she repeatedly contends that both her child and husband are well cared for. Despite Francis' instance that her duties as wife and mother were always more important to her than her career, her son Peter Gabel argues that his mother valued her career as much as she valued family life, but that the times did not allow for her honesty. He notes that his mother was extremely conscious of the "constraints of the second sex," and knew what public image she needed to project (Gabel).

Yet with all her satisfactions and with her great successes, there existed a basic area of conflict that Arlene Francis was never able to resolve: her role as a wife/mother and her role as a performer. The first stems from her conception of the ideal woman, one who is completely devoted to her husband, child, and home. It is not apparent how much of this conception Francis believed, or whether this is an example of her being conscious of her constraints. In January 1956, Francis went to Tokyo to film a series of programs for *Home* dealing with the Japanese New Year. Awed by the Japanese women whom she met, Arlene told her audience that American women could learn much from them about holding on to their husbands. "You can search America backward and forward," she declared, "and not find a woman as comforting, pleasant, and feminine as the Japanese woman. She caters to her man, which American women have forgotten to do" (Zolotow 58). At times,

it seems that Francis actually believed this, and that she thought the ideal woman was one who did not fight for equal rights, accepted this as a “man’s world,” and was happy to defer to masculine power. Perhaps, at times, she cherished a vague dream of becoming a soft, quiescent Mrs. Gabel, receding against the background of her husband’s artistic and social positions. But her desire to hold her own favorable position remained strong, and she never surrendered to the temptation of giving up her multitudinous television, radio, film and theatrical commitments to become this “ideal woman”.

In two intriguing interviews from the late 1950s, Francis revealed some of the complications and contradictions of her public and private life. In a piece published in *TV Radio Mirror*, she described being a wife and mother as her “most important job,” but also noted that being a housewife “doesn’t give me an identity, a place in the world comparable to that of the career woman or working girl.” She continued, “the happiest homes I know- and my own is one- are homes in which the wives and mother have interests other than those contained within their own four walls” (Hall 72). In a second interview with Mike Wallace on ABC’s *The Mike Wallace Interview*, Francis struggled to stay on script as charming and subservient, and gave a series of answers that contradicted one another:

Wallace: What happens to so many career women that makes them so brittle? That makes them almost a kind of third sex. You never find yourself losing your identity as a woman in the, let’s face it, male-dominated world of television?

Francis: [taking a long pause before answering] Well, if I do, those are the times that I’m disappointed in myself. What happens to some of the women, who have these qualities you’ve just spoken of, is that I suppose they feel a very competitive thing with men, and they take on a masculine viewpoint. They forget primarily that they are women...they become aggressive and opinionated. (Wallace)

With this reply, Francis chastised the ways in which women worked toward powerful positions and equality within society and ignored the distinct power and advantages that she had as a wealthy, educated, white woman. Yet moments later she questioned her own assumptions: “Maybe men are not as all-knowing, all-seeing, and all-everything as they think they are. And I think what blundering mistakes they might make are very often covered up by the fact that a very wise woman is behind them to handle it and help them” (Wallace). Towards the end of the interview, she retracted her previous statements by declaring, “I do not think

that it is a woman's position to dominate. I think the admirable thing is when there is compromise and give and take" (Wallace). She found a middle ground, which often was the safest place for a woman in the 1950s.

While the 1950s is considered a period of conformity, where both men and women were expected to observe strict gender roles and comply with societal expectations, in *The Way We Never Were*, Stephanie Coontz notes that the supposed "golden age" of family values, the male breadwinner family of the 1950s, was a short-lived invention. As many Americans view present-day family and gender relations through the foggy lens of nostalgia, they are examining a mostly mythical past. Eugenia Kaledin depicts a more realistic history in *American Women in the 1950s: Mothers and More*, in which she analyzes the importance of women's contributions to society. Women should not only be seen as housewives, but also as active individuals who played a vital part in the construction of cultural life and social activism. Yet, when American families settled down to their favorite evening programming, contented homemakers such as June Cleaver, Harriet Nelson, and Donna Reed dominated. In *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal*, Lynn Spigel argues that early female, television personalities were fantasy women who represented what producers called "morning sex" (81). These women were designed to provide a role model for ordinary housewives, educating them on the "good life," while still appearing down to earth. These shows portrayed the primary roles of white women as wives and mothers. Women were encouraged to stay at home if the family could afford it. Those who chose to work when they did not need the paycheck were often considered selfish, putting themselves before the needs of their family. While society believed women should conform to this role, it is necessary to note that few women assumed this role completely. Sociologists and social commentators argued that by leaving their homes, women were in fact endangering the family by not being there for their children and husbands. Political figures argued that by removing women from the marketplace and having them create a secure home environment, it helped maintain democracy, that there becomes a clear separation of the home sphere and the work sphere. Historians argue that the formulation of these divisions can be attributed to the end of World War II and the emergence of the Cold War.

World War II provided an opportunity for many women to participate in the workforce, but its ending allowed for employers to reestablish the prewar sexual division of labor. In *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960*, Joanne Meyerowitz argues that in order to justify discriminatory

practices against women, popular culture began to create the concept of the proper role for women; “government propaganda, popular magazines, and films reinforced traditional concepts of femininity and instructed women to subordinate their interests to those of returning male veterans” (Meyerowitz 3). The Cold War also provided an impetus for constraints placed on women. In *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*, Elaine Tyler May illuminates the history of “domestic containment;” “It is clear that in the years of the Cold War domestic ideology and Cold War militance rose and fell together” (216). In 1948, Francis defied postwar mores by leaving her husband and eight-month-old baby in California to resume her professional life (Francis 83). Arlene Francis never conformed to the typical homemaker ideal, but she was the woman who indubitably related to discontented housewives. Perhaps this is because Francis struggled to align herself with both pre- and post-war gender values.

While post-World War II America stressed the importance of a one-income household, and, in Elaine Tyler May’s coinage, “domestic containment,” Francis was raised and educated in pre-World War II America. In the 1920s and 1930s American women constituted nearly fifty percent of college students, Francis being one (“Postwar Gender Roles”). After graduating from Mount St. Vincent’s Academy, Francis enrolled in Finch College, a private liberal arts college in New York City. Like many other white, upper-class women, Francis was primarily educated for one reason: to make a great party guest, to be able to hold substantive conversations with men, particularly, of course, her husband. Many women of the 1930s often had education, careers, and sought personal fulfillment. However, after World War II, even this restricted role narrowed. By the mid-fifties, women made up only thirty-eight percent of university students, as social expectations for what constituted a woman’s proper role stressed domesticity (“Postwar Gender Roles”). The majority of television audiences in the 1950s began seeking television shows and personalities that echoed the importance of domesticity, and despite being “non-domestic,” Francis worked to align herself with these beliefs.

As someone who spent her life concerned with pleasing others, Francis faced deep emotional distress. She disclosed that her “frantic” schedule was an “unending chase for lost self-love.” “I very seldom clash with people, because I have trained myself for years” (Francis 75). Francis’ inability to express herself resulted in two great regrets. In the early 60s, she was offered the part of Martha in Edward Albee’s original production of *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* The role promised a weekly salary of \$5,000. An ecstatic Francis told her mother of the offer, who replied,

“Arlene, please don’t ever do a play like that while I am alive” (Francis 26). Even as a self-sustaining, married woman with a child, Francis feared making choices that would garner any disfavor, so she turned down the role. The second great regret happened around the same time. NBC executives approached Francis about hosting *Today*, with Hugh Downs as her co-host. Fearful that the job would cause “too great an upheaval in my relationships with family and friends,” she turned it down (Francis 160). The position went to a then little-known Barbara Walters.

It was not until the late 1970s that Francis expressed any regrets, fears, or distress. In her memoir, she revealed the pains she felt as a mother when a young Peter declared that he wished she were Jewish, like he and his father, so that she would not “go to the studio tomorrow, it’s Rosh Hashonoh [sic],” and when he cried that she had “too many works” (Francis 68). After nearly 30 years of projecting a blissful marriage in which her husband encouraged her confidence and helped mold her stardom, she revealed that the magnitude of her celebrity and her financial power complicated matters. As a child, Peter remembers, “every man that spent more than five minutes with [Francis] wanted to marry her” (Gabel). Despite his own successes, the elder Gabel publicly lived in the shadow of his better-known wife. “In *Who’s Who*, you’ll find me in the Fs- married to Arlene Francis,” he once said (“Actor Martin Gabel”).

The true extent of Francis’ inner turmoil was disclosed during an appearance on *Tonight* with Johnny Carson in 1978. There, she recounted a recurring dream that she experienced for most of her adult life: “I pick up a phone to make a call, and discover it has no mouthpiece. I seek another phone, and it is the same- there is no mouthpiece. In panic, I go from phone booth to phone booth, in and out of rooms, unable to find a telephone with a mouthpiece, frantic in my drive to communicate with someone, anyone.” Francis went on to unveil the transparent conflicts that produced the dream:

I presumed it represents my anxiety about my career as an actress. In a flash of understanding I realized how deeply my inability to express myself...My “don’t makes waves” philosophy had inhibited my life to an incalculable extent. For in my desire to keep things peaceful all the time, I had forgotten that a few waves are necessary to keep the water from becoming stagnant. (“Bert Convy”)

Writing decades later, Francis reflected on the period in which she and *Home* were nominated for Emmy Awards, when she was cited as the most influential woman

in America, and when she saw continuous employment. She had this to say about her unwillingness to fight:

What I've learned...is that if you pull all your energies into being affable and agreeable, it's true that you're going to make a lot of friends, and that part is good. BUT, it is very costly in terms of emotional repression, and that part is bad. I wish somebody would have told me when I was a little girl that the whole world doesn't have to think you're adorable. (Francis 42-3)

Peter Gabel believes that towards the end of his mother's life she "began to see how there could be something important in even the challenges of feminism to her culture," even if she, herself was not suited for radical opposition (Gabel).

Conclusion

Arlene Francis negotiated a place for herself within the gendered hierarchy of American culture, and yet she has largely fallen out of the historical narrative. The Arlene Francis that television viewers watched in the 1950s represented a series of contradictions. She was ambitious and by all accounts achieved four highly successful show-business careers in theater, radio, television, and film. Francis proved that it was not just younger women who could command a national audience in daytime talk, and that the palette of women hosts on the air could include one who operated as an intellectual body. However, she did not march or mobilize, because she was too caught up in the rigidity of her times and too fearful of making enemies. But in her own subtle ways, she helped readjust women's roles in primetime television.

As historians push towards making space for histories that have been overlooked, there appears to be little room for the stories of white, upper-class women. Their assumed lack of struggle keeps their stories hidden. However, when Betty Friedan began writing *The Feminine Mystique* and looking to solve "the problem with no name," she observed women just like Francis, those who were educated, wealthy, but simply encouraged to be the "perfect" housewife. These women were given access to all the wonders of the world, but told they should prefer to stay at home with their children. While these societal ideals did not keep Arlene Francis from success, they greatly impacted the decisions she made, the stories she told, and her problematic self-image. By allowing the fact that these women were privileged to influence whether their history is told, we ensure that

women remain a subset of history rather than integral components. The stories of white women of the 30s, 40s, and 50s do not echo the realities of their male counterparts.

Luckily, historians are no longer dismissing these decades as the “dark ages” for women, arguing that important feminist work happened on both local and national levels (Cassidy 134). But the “wave” metaphor is reductive and problematic when examining these histories. By restricting 20th century feminists’ movements to the first, second, and third waves, it suggests that mainstream feminism is the only kind of feminism there is. It reduces each wave to a stereotype and suggest that there is a sharp division between generations of feminists. Despite this, Barbara Ryan has long argued that “the rebirth of feminism can be traced to the family-centered years” of these decades (41). The women of the 30s, 40s, and 50s were building off of feminism’s first wave and working towards the second, proving that the waves are neither incompatible nor opposed. While Arlene Francis argued against feminism, her existence as a “modern woman” was both influenced by and contributed to the work of the feminist movement.

In this way, Arlene Francis is symbolic of her time and her life offers a nuanced view of the roles of white American women in the 1950s. The fifties did not create sexism or rigidly stratified gender roles, but the time did pressure women to an incalculable extent. The development of the Women’s Movements in the sixties muddled women’s understandings of themselves. After investigating how American society constructed and idealized women, it is possible to understand why Francis partook in this idealization process. Nevertheless, for Francis, like millions of American women, the role of the perfect wife and dedicated mother seemed both unsatisfying and at times disappointing. But not all women made the transition from committed housewife to militant feminist, and their work can still operate as an example for modern women.

Arlene Francis is best remembered today for her nearly twenty-five years on the panel of the game show *What’s My Line?* However, Francis was much more than a game show personality; she was a pioneer and a trailblazer. What Francis achieved in career, far eclipsed her familiarity with guessing occupations and mystery guests. Every woman on television who has fought for an anchor chair or the right to be recognized as a credible voice owes a debt of gratitude to Francis. She helped write the rules for women in television when none existed and suffered immeasurable emotional costs along the way. When Robin Roberts says “good morning” on ABC’s *Good Morning America*, or when Savannah Guthrie sets the

stage for a menu of guests on *Today*, they should offer a salute to Arlene Francis, who walked through the doors and set the stage for every woman in broadcasting who has since followed her.

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Unmasking the Devil: Comfort and Closure in Horror Film Special Features

ZACHARY SHELDON

While a viewer or critic may choose to concentrate solely on a film's narrative as representative of what a film says, some scholars note that the inclusion of the supplementary features that often accompany the home release of a film destabilize conceptions of the text of a film through introducing new information and elements that can impact a film's reception and interpretation (Owczarski). Though some special features act as mere advertising for a film's ancillary products or for other film's or merchandise, most of these supplements provide at least some form of behind-the-scenes look into the production of the film. Craig Hight recognizes the prominent "Making of Documentary" (MOD) subgenre of special feature as being especially poised to "serve as a site for explorations of the full diversity of institutional, social, aesthetic, political, and economic factors that shape the development of cinema as a medium and an art form" (6). Additionally, special features provide the average viewer access to the magic of cinema and the Hollywood elite. The gossip or anecdotes shared in interviews and documentaries in special features provide viewers with an "insider identity," that seemingly involves them in their favorite films beyond the level of mere spectator (Klinger 68).

This phenomenon is particularly interesting in relation to horror films, the success of which is often predicated on a sense of mystery or the unknown pervading the narrative so as to draw out visceral affective responses from the audience. The notion of the special feature, which unpacks and reveals the inner workings of the film set and even the film's plot, seems contradictory to the enjoyment of what the horror film sets out to do. Just as everybody knows that there is no quicker way to ruin a joke than to explain it, it seems to follow that exploring

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the background of a film monster or villain would have the same consequence of dispelling the aura of mystery or terror that the film narrative seeks to cultivate, rendering moot the film's overall effect. Yet the horror genre in particular has nurtured an extensive culture of fans who rabidly enjoy any and all background information on a film that they can get, including information that seems to thoroughly spoil the actual experience of viewing the film (Kendrick, *Hollywood Bloodshed* 158-69). How then to reconcile this paradox?

My argument is that horror film special features specifically serve a broader function than simply providing background information about the production of a film. Instead, horror film special features fulfill a unique role in service to the genre by providing the audience comfort and closure for issues that the narrative itself may leave unanswered. In this way, horror film special features are fundamental to the genre's successful functioning. Beginning by examining various ways that the horror genre has been defined and theorized, this article proceeds to look at the development of special features and their relation to the horror genre. Finally, the article analyzes the rhetoric of the special features produced by two horror film distributors to understand how they have worked to construct the context of the film and its production to aid in the psychological and philosophical work of assuaging audience fears.

Why Horror, Indeed

Various philosophers and theorists have set out at various times to answer the question of just why audiences watch horror films. There is seemingly a paradox in the foundational characteristics of the genre: these films feature horrific imagery, gore, and unrelenting tension. None of these are things that most individuals willingly subject themselves to routinely, so why are some seemingly normal people so willing to engage with films that expose them to such sights and put them through deliberate emotional trauma? There are, of course, a wide variety of answers to this question.

Noël Carroll's seminal look at the philosophy of the horror film attributes viewer's' fascination with the genre to fear of the unknown and a fascination with mystery: "horror attracts because anomalies command attention and elicit curiosity" (195). Importantly, Carroll notes that horror's mysteries are so compelling because they are unknowable, refusing to fit into conceptual schemes that might make sense of them. Others have offered more nuanced, psychological

explanations for audience attraction to the genre. Robin Wood sees horror as an expression of surplus repression in society, so that the act of watching a horror film is a way of assuaging one's own anxiety through raising repressed elements to the level of consciousness and then settling them back down into our subconscious via the resolution of the film's narrative, where a happy ending signifies "the restoration of repression" (68). Likewise, Barbara Creed locates in the horror film a cultural obsession with abjection, such that the horror film operates as an artistic expression in which abjection is confronted symbolically and so dealt with as much as it can be via the microcosmic form of the film (1986).

What each of these perspectives have in common seems to be that they recognize that the horror film helps viewers to "deal with" something. For Carroll, the fascination of the horror story is that it helps us to confront the unknown through the unfolding of the narrative's mystery, fascinating viewers by teasing questions and answering some of them, providing some semblance of control even as the horror's fundamental unknowability prevents a total return to stability. For Wood and Creed, horror films help to put repression or abjection back in its place, to comfort viewers amidst troubling times and help them to feel as if they have dealt with something significant even if that subconscious fear is never truly able to be resolved. Looked at this way, it seems to appear that the horror narrative may be characterized as therapeutic, using things like shock and tension to alleviate fears that the audience actually has — or that they might not even know that they have. Stephen Prince summarizes many of the primary theories and paradoxes of horror films by articulating that "the anxiety at the heart of the genre is, indeed, the nature of human being [...] the experience of horror resides in this confrontation with uncertainty, with the 'unnatural,' with a violation of the ontological categories on which being and culture reside" (2). Resolving this confrontation, then, becomes a primary goal in watching horror films.

When put down in plain language, such a perspective seems to make sense, and when explained in these terms, the narratives of horror films can easily be seen to fall into these categories and to function in this way. But as any viewer of horror films knows, these academic and psychological understandings sometimes fall apart when subjected to the irrationality of the real world. Most (if not all) moviegoers likely have some story of a film that scarred them as a child or even as an adult; there are some films whose monsters, gore, and imagery have developed a reach that stretches beyond the confines of the narrative and into the real lives of viewers whether in waking life or in nightmares — or sometimes both. Though a

film's narrative may be constructed in such a way as to lay to rest the fears that it stirs up over the course of its duration, not all viewers are sure to respond to the film in this way and may leave the theater more terrified than they were during the actual film itself.

What this points to is that theories of how audiences deal with forms of psychological and cultural trauma through the horror narrative may be insufficient when placed in a real-world context. Something more may be necessary to aid viewers in dealing with the topics and images to which they have been exposed to. One candidate for fulfilling this requirement is special features. While universal across nearly every genre of film, special features function peculiarly in the horror genre, ultimately helping viewers in ways they might not even know they need.

The Making of Special Features

Though perhaps most prominent and widespread in their digital guise as supplementary content on DVDs and later Blu-Rays, "special features" have a long history in the industry. Studios in the early development of cinema were obsessed with how their stars were perceived in the public eye and would work hard to cultivate particular reputations for their stars through the careful release of publicity materials, including interviews and other materials surrounding the making of certain films (Shingler 140-2). This later evolved into the intentional capturing of behind-the-scenes footage on movie sets to show off the actual production of a film. Some of these were used in theatrical settings to advertise for upcoming films, and still others ended up being shown at odd times on television (Ravenhill).

Initially, it seems that such materials were only produced sporadically, but this changed with the introduction of home video and the development of the LaserDisc format. The format's technical advantages led to the popularity of the format for "special editions" of movies, including some, such as the Star Wars trilogy box set, released by major studios ("LaserDisc Database: Star Wars Trilogy"). Most importantly for cinephiles, the LaserDisc format was the beginning of the Criterion Collection, "the most significant archive of contemporary filmmaking available to the home viewer" ("About Criterion"). Established in 1984, the Criterion Collection was an early innovator in the home video market, recognizing that there was an audience for home editions of films that respected the art of the film through seeking to closely replicate the theatrical experience. The company has often worked alongside directors to give their films the most accurate home video

presentation possible, typically with extensive supplemental features, including “audio commentaries by filmmakers and scholars, restored director’s cuts, deleted scenes, documentaries, shooting scripts, early shorts, and storyboards” (“About Criterion”). It is also noteworthy that Criterion was responsible for pioneering the concept of the audio commentary, a feature that quickly became a mainstream component of most later home DVD releases (Kendrick, “What is the Criterion?” 128, 134).

And while the LaserDisc as a medium did not specifically catch on, many of its innovations were foundational in directing the development of the format and design of DVD’s — including the presence of supplemental special features. The overall success of DVD’s and DVD special features may in turn be connected to several external factors. Barbara Klinger argues that the presence of special features enabled studios to market special editions of their movies in such a way as to elevate them to the realm of high art, cultivating viewers to see themselves as cultured cinephiles (61, 66-8). Additionally, the rise of the DVD coincided with a time of rapid technological growth in the film industry. Although Even as DVD would not break out into wide success until the late 1990s, filmmakers were experimenting with digital technologies in filmmaking in the earlier half of the decade, with new techniques in computer generated imagery (CGI) rising to the fore with films like *Jurassic Park*, *Forrest Gump*, and *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*. New technologies meant new mysteries for filmgoers who were often curious to know more about the techniques that had brought such incredible imagery to life, an itch that could easily be scratched by the inclusion of special features and MOD’s dedicated to unraveling the mysteries of a new area of cinematic production (Klinger 72-3).

The democratization of the cinematic medium via DVD not only led to more individual collectors of films, but also paved the way for the rise of independent and specialty film distributors. In addition to the aforementioned Criterion Collection, a smattering of other entities entered the DVD publishing game alongside the major studios. Some of these smaller companies worked to produce or acquire a wide catalog of titles to make their name, while others narrowed their focus to specific niche markets. For some companies, the name of the game was availability of otherwise lost or forgotten titles, simply working to transfer the films to the digital medium for release. Other distributors, however, became known for the quality of their releases, going so far as to give their rather niche, relatively unknown films a treatment not unlike that of the Criterion Collection, with high quality packaging and original supplemental features.

This is particularly interesting given James Kendrick's observation that the aura of quality and authority cultivated by the releases of the Criterion Collection positioned the distributor as "a heuristic for understanding film as culture, rather than simply film as art" (126). Criterion releases, for instance, treat films as more than mere narratives, seeing them instead as providing insight into cultural ideologies and trends no matter the genre, style, or nation of origin. Kendrick elaborates:

The fact that [any film included in the Criterion Collection] was produced in a specific sociohistorical juncture and its textual and extratextual elements allows us to get under the skin of that specific time and place. If a film is important enough to be included in the Criterion Collection, that importance is related only to the extent to which that film offers us a particular viewpoint — a means of knowing something larger than the film itself. Each and every film included in the collection is a piece of culture — that is the Criterion. The culture referred to here is that of the cinema and of the world. ("What is the Criterion?" 138)

Understanding the Criterion Collection in this way begs the question of just what kind of heuristic for understanding or assessing film is offered up by other distributors. Though it includes a diverse array of films, the Criterion Collection is not inherently representative of even all cinematic cultures. For instance, fans of particular genres or niche films are often looking for a different experience of the film than some other viewers might be and seem to care about particular information aiding their appreciation of these films. I.Q. Hunter, for instance, notes that with "offbeat" or "cult" films — a term which applies to many horror films — supplemental features on home releases may be seen as aiding appreciation of the films themselves (486). Backstory to the film's production expands the pleasure horror and cult film fans get from the film, and in some cases can ultimately have more value than the film text itself (488).

Of note is that the horror genre has had a long and more detailed relationship with the idea of special features than many other film genres. A notable milestone is the rise and popularity of the magazine *Fangoria*, first published in 1979. The magazine was known for its in-depth interviews with horror directors, stars, and even makeup artists, with a particular emphasis on the splattered gore of 1980s slasher films. Kendrick argues that these interviews and the accompanying pictorial spreads were fundamental in establishing a culture in horror fandom that treated makeup and effects artists as auteurs in their own right (Kendrick, Hollywood

Bloodshed 159-69), and which showcased the value that horror fans had for special features, a value that transitioned naturally to visual media through LaserDiscs and, later, DVDs.

Unmasking the Devil: Anchor Bay Entertainment and Blue Underground

To explore the prominent place of special features in the history of horror and the functions that such features perform, I examine the rhetoric of special features surrounding horror films released by two home video distributors specializing in horror films: Anchor Bay Entertainment and Blue Underground. I specifically focus on the strategies employed to situate these films within the discourse of horror to show how such discussions philosophically fit into academic dialogue surrounding the genre through reducing audience uncertainty to assuage psychological and cultural fears.

From its founding in 1995 to its closure in 2017, Anchor Bay Entertainment was markedly diverse in terms of the titles it distributed, and the partnerships it had with major studios. While eventually moving into the distribution of mainstream titles like *Silver Linings Playbook* (2012) and *Django Unchained* (2012), the label got its start by focusing primarily on horror films, with a particular deference towards cult horror and franchises like *Halloween* (1978) and *Hellraiser* (1987). Though building their reputation on films that many may consider to be disreputable, the company in time became known for its “custom handling” of each and every one of its products, from “auteur pics to fitness videos” (Ault 111).

Blue Underground brands itself as “the entertainment company dedicated to guilty pleasures for adventurous movie lovers” (About Blue Underground). The company’s description of itself goes on to emphasize that the films it releases are those likely to appeal to a niche audience, those lured as much by the “reputation of an obscure director, the talents of a notorious star or even the promises made by an amazing poster” as the “psychopaths, cops, robbers, zombies, cannibals, madmen, strange women, and more” who fill such films (About Blue Underground). Unlike Anchor Bay, Blue Underground has elected to remain entrenched in the cult, specializing in making available notorious and obscure of films in editions that are as definitive as possible given the nature of their releases: “These will be definitive discs of some remarkable films, all fully restored, remastered and packed with the most mind-blowing extras in the business” (About

Blue Underground). The films themselves may be a major component of the initial draw to one of the distributor's products, but the special features may be just as intriguing, if not actually the primary interest of some viewers.

Interestingly, with such a statement Blue Underground positions themselves as the equivalent of the Criterion Collection for important cult and trash films that the more respected label would be unlikely to include in their catalog. For Anchor Bay, in contrast, given the newness of the DVD medium at the time of their founding (relative to the history of cinema) and the type of small-budget, seemingly inconsequential films that they were releasing, it is notable that the distributor would work to include any supplemental features at all in their early releases.

For the purposes of this article, I focus on some specific horror releases from each company which demonstrate the common themes and elements that comprise the special features accompanying such releases. From Anchor Bay, this analysis specifically looks to early DVD releases of *The Wicker Man* (1973/2006), *The Hills Have Eyes* (1977/2003), *Halloween* (1978/2007), *Hellraiser* (1987/2000), *The Evil Dead* (1983/2002), and a later Blu-Ray release of *Children of the Corn* (1984/2009). Blue Underground is represented here by *Suspiria* (1977/2007), *Opera* (1987/2007), *The Crazies* (1973/2010), and *Zombie* (1980/2011). There is a notably continuity between the format of the features produced between these two companies, which naturally lends itself to a thematic and rhetorical analysis. The common ideas addressed in supplements for both companies reveal specific shared concerns centering around the genre of horror, the producers of horror, the fans of horror, and finally the films themselves.

Across the two distributors, most of the featurettes share a standard format, beginning with opening credits identifying the distributor and the production company responsible for making the feature. These featurettes almost all focus on extended interview segments with cast and crew interspersed with footage from the respective films. "Long interview segments" here means that in most instances interviews with multiple participants are not typically intercut with one another to provide a more comprehensive understanding of one particular topic; instead, each interview participant is focused on individually, providing an extended look into their perspective before moving on to someone else (e.g. *Zombie*'s "All in the Family"), though there are deviations from this formula in some longer form featurettes (e.g. *Zombie*'s "Zombie Wasteland").

In this way, these features may be looked at more as parts of an oral history of the making of the film than an all-inclusive look into its creation. The form of these

small documentaries supports such a claim in that most of the non-interview footage shown in them is from the film they are talking about, hardly ever including any behind-the-scenes footage, with only a rare photographic glimpse into the production. This has the consequence of elevating the status of the memories of making these movies above any kind of archival or documentary evidence. That this is so may not be particularly surprising — given that the films under discussion were low-budget productions to begin with (a fact many interview participants acknowledge), it is likely that no behind-the-scenes footage or photographs were shot in the first place, necessitating a concentration on the reminiscences of prominent cast and crew members.

The content of these interviews revolves around several standard themes. First is the origin point of the film and people's involvement in the projects, establishing a timeline and narrative for the film's development: for instance, *Children of the Corn* producer Donald Borches talks about his appointment as the vice president of a production house and his love of Stephen King; director Fritz Kiersch elaborates on how Borches brought him into the fold of the production, and star Linda Hamilton then discusses what considerations drew her to the project and how and why she was cast (Felsher, *Stephen King on a Shoestring*; Martin, *Harvesting Horror*; Felsher, *It Was the Eighties!*). Likewise, interviews with the cast and crew of *Zombie* paint a comprehensive picture of the state of the Italian film industry at the time of the film's production and, illuminates how each star was recruited into the picture, and what each crew member or technician brought to the table (*Zombie Wasteland*; *Deadtime Stories*; *World of the Dead*; *Zombi Italiano*). *Suspiria* co-writer Daria Nicolodi pinpoints the beginnings of that film with director Argento's boredom with the thriller genre and a desire to transition into the horror genre. Nicolodi notes that "I had this story ready which I thought fell between a thriller, a detective story and the 'fantastique.' So, we thought, 'Why not go for it'" (Hertz). Argento himself notes that the film's style emerged from travels taken for other film projects, which took him through the "European Capitals of Magic" associated with academies founded by the purported Satanist Rudolf Steiner (*Suspiria 25th Anniversary*, 2001). Such stories ground these film texts in the larger narrative of the economics and machinations of their respective national systems of film production. Even though these horror films are smaller and independent, the notion of setting up a production company or doing preproduction or casting is still a foreign process to the average viewer, such that even discussing such terms

provides these independent films with an aura of legitimacy as products of Hollywood or some other foreign cinematic entity.

Second, the working relationships between prominent cast and crew members are given some attention, with smaller nods to other members of the production team and (in the case of *Children of the Corn*) the communities in which the shoots were occurring. Most often these discussions center around the enjoyable nature of the production, such as when actress Ashley Laurence, who played Kirsty in *Hellraiser*, notes the connection that she felt between herself and the director, Clive Barker, which gave her creative freedom in her role (Levatino and Mendoza). Likewise, *Halloween*'s Jamie Lee Curtis praises the production of that film as a whole:

I wear my Halloween pin with great pride. [...] I always say that it was the best experience I ever had, up until *True Lies* it was the best part I ever had. [...] I always try to point out the irony that in these exploitation movies I was intelligent, forthright, fought back against adversity, and was the lead in these movies for that role. (Cerulli)

Other times actors or even crew members rather plainly discuss their dislike of certain other members of the production, such as when *Zombie* star Ian McCulloch rather frankly calls out director Lucio Fulci for misogynistic and abusive practices, while also condescendingly commenting on the sex, drugs, and rock and roll attitude of the set as a whole (*Zombie Wasteland*). Additional comments are typically made about the difficulties associated with making these films, including working around budget limitations and tough schedules. Participants in interviews for the MOD *The Wicker Man Enigma* spend a significant amount of time decrying the film's recutting by the studio and the shoddy effect this had on distribution. Actor Edward Woodward notes that the studio "fiddled about with it like mad and took it out of the director's hands," which was "sort of a kick in the teeth to everybody, really" (Gregory, *The Wicker Man Enigma*). Eventually, the film's cult success is what brings these issues into a kind of perspective that helped to make the film the unique experience that it was. Screenwriter Anthony Shaffer notes that

Business, as you know, are mostly run by zombies who are overpaid and are so timid that all they can do is reproduce something that's already been done a billion times, and so we were very fortunate that this picture, which had not been done a billion times — had only been done once — succeeded. (Gregory, *The Wicker Man Enigma*)

Star Christopher Lee concurs, stating, that “I have said over the years that I think it’s probably the best film I’ve ever been in,” which is emblematic of a tinge of nostalgia that seems present throughout the special features of these different films, even when recalling difficult moments and circumstances. Though most participants are happy to have moved on from these low-budget horror films, they still recall the experience of making them with fondness, if only for how these films opened doors and pushed careers in new directions.

Third, these special features give extended consideration to some of the more prominent or even infamous moments of gore and violence in these films. Features included in Blue Underground’s release of *Zombie* here serves as a helpful example. Stuntman Ottaviano Dell’Acqua is celebrated for his role as the iconic “zombie with worms in his eyes” in that film and provides details regarding what it was like to be buried up to his neck at times for different takes, and some of the hilarious and disgusting consequences of working with real worms that he could not always see crawling on his makeup (*Zombie Wasteland*). Another major moment that gets a fair amount of screen time is a rather shocking moment early in the film when an actress’s eye is impaled on the splinters of a doorframe in a nearly unbearable close-up shot; the cinematographer and make-up effects designer both discuss how this was done through the use of multiple cameras for quick-cut editing to hide mistakes, and a hastily-compiled model of an eye made with clay, latex, and egg whites (*Zombi Italiano*).

Finally, and perhaps most tellingly, consideration of a film’s reputation and legacy is given in the case of each film looked at here. Linda Hamilton finds it incredible that people are still talking about *Children of the Corn* after all these years, and even notes her surprise at having been asked to give an interview about a film from so early in her career (Felsher, *It Was the Eighties!*). Such comments are not uncommon in these types of features. Dee Wallace from *The Hills Have Eyes* mentions that what the film meant to her was “a big break,” and her costar Susan Lanier later remarks that the film only “got a better response as the years went on and it became a cult, somewhat, classic” (Martin, *Looking Back at “The Hills Have Eyes”*). Film director Bill Condon notes that there are only a few films that touch you each decade, and he puts *Hellraiser* alongside Wes Craven’s *A Nightmare on Elm Street* as one of the defining films of the 1980s (Levatino and Mendoza). The cast of *Zombie* are interviewed for the DVD mostly in conjunction with their participation in a horror convention in Ohio, and many express that they had some initial hesitations in coming but were surprised and warmly welcomed by

the fans; some even express shock that anyone still knew about these films, or cared about them (*Zombie Wasteland*). While not explicitly focusing on her role in George A. Romero's *The Crazies*, actress Lynn Lowry is asked in her interview to reflect on a career spent in cult and exploitation films, and notes her surprise that such films are now considered "classics" when she and many other actresses and filmmakers were wondering at the time whether they should even be making them (Gregory, *The Cult Film Legacy of Lynn Lowry*). Jessica Harper's reflection on *Suspiria* attributes its longevity to its importance as "a very unique and high quality film [...] that a lot of filmmakers have been influenced by over the past 20 years," leading her to also determine that "I think it'll be with us for a long time" (Hertz). Reflections such as these emphasized the renewed interest that is being shown in older, cult films, as well as surprise at the level of care and attention afforded such films by the community of fans perpetuating their legacy. Though such comments on the part of cast and crew members can be seen as inflating a sense of self-importance surrounding a film text, more often they come across as humbly surprised at their legacy, prompting speculation relating to what has given these films such longevity.

Collectively, these four primary themes of the special features from Anchor Bay and Blue Underground — the history of the film's production, cast and crew relationships, gore, and a film's legacy — work to argue for each of these films as an artifact of a particular time and place in culture and history. The difference between what is done here and what is aimed at with features from the Criterion Collection is subtle but important. Films chosen for inclusion in the Criterion Collection are picked for their iconic, special status, oftentimes being considered illustrative and indicative of the film culture or trends of a particular time and place, director, or genre. The focus is on contextualizing these films as objects that are representative of specific cultural or historical trends. The emphasis in the catalogs of distributors like Anchor Bay and Blue Underground, however, are far more insular, considering the films themselves with little consideration of their place in history, or how cultural trends led to their production. Instead, these films are positioned simply as artifacts of the cultural and historical trends that Criterion releases and features illuminate in detail. If *Night of the Living Dead* is held up by the Criterion Collection as a "claustrophobic vision of a late-1960s America literally tearing itself apart," then Blue Underground's release of *The Crazies* provides viewers with simply another opportunity to see what kind of art that cultural climate produced ("Night of the Living Dead").

While acknowledging that such films are never created in a vacuum, none of the features for releases by Anchor Bay or Blue Underground ever look to distinguish their subjects as high art or significant pieces of cultural capital, but rather showcase them for being exactly what they are: horror films that are considered cult or kitsch yet cherished by many fans. These documentaries position producers and actors as industrial producers knowingly involved in the creation of products intended to be consumed and enjoyed by audiences. The horror genre itself is sometimes given intellectual reflection, but is more often spoken of in affective terms, with filmmakers and actors speaking extensively about the fear they hoped audiences would have, or the translation of the intense experience of making the film to the tension of the final product.

It is clear that the approaches taken to special features in general by the Criterion Collection and Anchor Bay and Blue Underground are fundamentally different. Important for this study, however, is that these features are specifically related to horror films. In this article's final section, I return to considerations of the definition and purpose of the genre to illustrate how even though these distinct kinds of special features differ in their execution and depiction of culture and history, both are necessary in supplying — for good or for ill — the psychological comfort that audiences need in the real-life aftermath of the horror film experience.

Restoring the Repressed

Special features are by no means a popular component of movie-watching for most audiences. They are a niche product, designed, as Barbara Klinger has pointed out, for the specialist consumer, a distinction that has only increased as home media has matured and subsequently declined with the advent of online distribution platforms. In the era of Netflix, RedBox, and shrinking DVD and Blu-Ray sales, it seems that special features may become a product of a bygone era, reserved for specialty releases or, in many cases, simply not produced at all (Singer; Stamm). Given that watching special features is predicated on having already purchased a disc, studios are turning their attention to the production of materials more explicitly dedicated to marketing films prior to release, something that has become easier and easier with the distribution mechanisms of the internet. For some, the death of the special feature may go by unnoticed; for others, the decline of such a readily available archive of production details is a huge loss to film history. Such a loss would also be of particular interest to horror fans and scholars, who have a long fascination

with background details and the making of notable films within the genre. Worth considering, then, is what reduced exposure or availability of such features does to the genre by examining their function in relation to the theories that have already been explored regarding horror's cultural and psychological functions.

Noël Carroll's consideration of the horror film as fundamentally a mystery provides a useful starting point. Horror films, he argues, are predicated on the fear and fascination that we as viewers have with the unknown. The most obvious way in which any film's special features alter the experience of a film is through the revelation of the artifice of the constructed narrative. Behind the scenes footage can showcase the complexity involved in making even "simple" shots look or work right in a film, and interviews with cast members in particular force viewers to recontextualize the actor in relation to their character within a given film. Horror special features directly dispel the horror of a particular film or scene through depicting the making of the moment, showing that there is nothing to be scared of because none of it is real.

This was, in fact, the justification that *Fangoria* editor Bob Martin offered for the magazine's publication of graphic images:

Our pictures, however grisly, are accompanied by articles that stress the men behind the scenes — screenwriters who conceive the horrors, the makeup men who produce the illusion, and the directors whose job is to convince us — just for a moment — that the illusion is real. Our message is that even the most terrifying film is only color, light and sound. (quoted in Kendrick 163)

James Kendrick notes that this tendency to reduce the significance or impact of screen violence and gore resulted in *Fangoria* adopting a lighthearted, "jokey" tone in their reporting and captioning of gory photos. Thus, Kendrick argues, "*Fangoria* strove to disassociate the affect of horror film violence from the kind of psychological, mythical, or social work attributed to it by film scholars like Carol J. Clover and Robin Wood. [...] [These photos] were actually performing the conservative function of downplaying any social significance of horror violence by focusing on the 'magic' of its production and insisting that it's all just 'good fun'" (Kendrick, *Hollywood Bloodshed* 164-5). In considering the relationship between the horror film text and the real world, such photos and the eventual special features accompanying home video releases of horror films also performing this conservative function, but not entirely in opposition to the psychological work suggested by Clover, Wood, or Creed. Instead, special features and revelatory

information, both serious and humorous, are actually a significant part of putting the repressed and abject back in their place in a way that the horror narrative alone cannot.

Wood's understanding of the horror film as relating to societal surplus repression is perhaps the clearest illustration of this concept. In *The American Nightmare*, Wood argues that the basic structure of the horror film is normality threatened by the monster, with the monster being considered Other and so threatening. These Others signify the return of repressed elements or ideas that characterize a certain society, so the hero's battle against the Other and the ostensible happy ending function to return the repressed to its accepted cultural state of oppression (Wood 68). This explanation is conceptually sound and may be seen demonstrated in a number of ways in various films, but also ignores at least two typical features of the horror film. First is the tendency of many films to lean towards an ambiguous ending that thus thwarts attempts to reinstate oppression (*Halloween*, *A Nightmare on Elm Street*). Second, Wood's explanation rests entirely on the symbols and structure of a film's narrative while ignoring the audience's affective reactions. As argued previously, horror films do not merely exist on the screen, but also often follow viewers home through images and ideas that leave significant marks on people's minds. As long as this is true, the repressed has not been entirely dealt with.

A similar claim may be made of the abject, à la Creed. Abjection is the notion that there are things which are in total opposition to the way that we have ordered and defined our lives in polite or even popular culture. Things like corpses, disrespect for the law, or monstrous maternal figures make viewers uncomfortable in that they are aspects of life and society that are seemingly omnipresent, never able to be gotten rid of. Though we can confront the abject and its symbolic constructs, we can never be fully cleansed of our struggle to understand and reconcile the abject with the fact that it effectively exists within us, unable to be separated from ourselves at some fundamental level (Creed). The same problems that exist with Wood's psychological understanding of horror exists here: ambiguity in narrative may bring the abject back to the fore, as can the lingering images and affective reactions viewers may have had to a particular film.

Much like Carroll's argument for the horror film to be defined by mystery and the presence of a monster, my argument for the role of special features in horror films is rather simple. Because special features offer explicit explanations for the events that occur in a film, and often give new perspectives on images that may

have been considered to be particularly haunting or shocking, these special features are the actual mechanism by which the abject is (by definition temporarily) laid to rest, and the repressed returned to its oppressed state. There are surely some who are not truly afraid of the things that they witness in horror films, for whom the narratives themselves complete the necessary cycle of raising the viewer's levels of fear or anxiety and then returning them to a level of stasis or stability. For others, however, an extratextual understanding of the film may be necessary to remind them — as in the tagline for *The Last House on the Left* — “It's only a movie, only a movie, only a movie” (Craven).

I have already articulated that the Criterion Collection and specialty distributors like Anchor Bay and Blue Underground offer two distinct approaches to this therapeutic practice, but ultimately both have the effect of reducing the uncertainty that the horror film introduces to audiences, both in terms of plot and the relationship between the film and the viewer's real life. With this in mind, though, it is worth asking whether one of these approaches is better than the other. Ultimately, I think not. Both supply viewers with significant and helpful extratextual information that can significantly reduce uncertainty and strain in the relationship between the film, the viewer, and reality. No matter which way these special features assuage fear and provide comfort, they are effectively and importantly fulfilling their function of returning the repressed to its oppressed state, and temporarily abating our objections to the abject. Whether or not this is a good thing is debatable — but I do believe this phenomenon is occurring nonetheless, and as such special features in horror may be seen as a fundamental part of the process of psychologically unpacking and dealing with cultural insecurities as expressed via the horror film.

One final question remains: if horror special features disappear alongside most other special features, what happens to this mechanism of comfort? Some may in fact see the ostensible death of special features as a good thing, as it would force viewers to remain uncertain and insecure, with no chance of calming down or fully understanding their fears. Interestingly, another perspective may be found in the contemporary horror film's “incessant desire to explain” (Kendrick 251; emphasis in original). Kendrick goes on to note that, “While many horror films of the '70s and '80s were content with ambiguity and mystery, especially as it pertained to their depictions of monstrosity and evil, post-9/11 horror, despite its despair and sometimes outright nihilism, is frequently consumed with showing us how and why” (251). Connecting this to our culture's desire to know more about the

terrorists following the attacks perpetrated on September 11th, Kendrick's argument suggests that modern horror actually tends to assuage uncertainty within the details of the narrative, not merely in the narrative's overall form as suggested by Wood. What this suggests for my argument here is that the burden of assuaging uncertainty that special features may have previously shouldered has been consequently shifted off of the extratextual material and onto the texts themselves.

Though pure theories relating to horror films may hold a significant and essential place for ambiguity, it seems that in everyday life such uncertainty is, in many instances, untenable. As such, the various ways that horror film special features present and explain horror may be seen as an essential final step in the process of reducing uncertainty, re-oppressing the repressed, and tamping down our objections to the abject, ultimately enabling audiences to receive comfort and achieve closure.

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“Once with a Knitting Needle, Once with a Hanger”: Reckoning with and Reworking Carol J. Clover’s Final Girl in *Halloween* (1978) and *Halloween* (2018)

PEYTON BRUNET

In the three decades following the publication of Carol J. Clover’s seminal essay “Her Body, Himself: Gender in the Slasher Film,” an entire generation of horror fans, filmmakers, and scholars have entered the world with fresh eyes and ideas about how gender functions in the slasher subgenre. Many of these fans have never known a world without the Final Girl, or, more accurately, without Clover’s conception of the Final Girl. The sole female survivor has long been a staple of the horror genre, but it was not until the 1987 publication of “Her Body, Himself” in *Representations* that this archetype entered public discourse and came to be known by Clover’s term: the Final Girl.

Though most casual horror fans have likely never heard Clover’s name, it is not a stretch to say that it is her definition of the Final Girl that remains at the forefront of every discussion of the figure and her characteristics. To briefly summarize Clover’s Final Girl: she is not sexually active, unlike her friends, though she does not always have to be entirely chaste; she is far more watchful and cautious than the raucous, carefree teens who surround her; and when backed into an often literal corner, she is able to defend herself using whatever is available to her (204). Above all, however, she is “inevitably female” (201), but nevertheless a figure of gender ambivalence and complexity. Despite this, the audience can identify with and cheer for her because her modest femininity conceals the tomboyish tendencies that allow her to survive but never obstructs them.

Still, Clover describes the Final Girl as “boyish [...] not fully feminine” (204) and states that she undergoes a process of “symbolic phallicization” (219) in her defeat of the slasher. She is clear in her assertion that the young woman who is to

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become the Final Girl is always masculinized, and even clearer in her belief that the Final Girl's survival and eventual defeat of the slasher does not automatically constitute feminist empowerment. Despite this, the Final Girl is both widely celebrated as a feminist figure and widely critiqued for embodying regressive, essentialist gender norms. "Her Body, Himself"—indeed, nearly all of the writing, both academic and popular, about Final Girls—relies on the continued assumption that the Final Girl's source of strength is always the "masculinity" she embodies and therefore perpetuates a certain amount of gender essentialism and binarism that is no longer satisfactory.

Few serious attempts exist to advance an image of what an updated or alternative Final Girl could look like. Though women have ostensibly gained rights and become further empowered in the United States, many representations of women continue to be tainted by hegemonic expectations of womanhood, and representations of non-binary, trans, and gender non-conforming people are all but nonexistent in most mainstream releases. This is not limited to the horror genre. If, as Clover argues, the slasher subgenre is particularly reflective of current attitudes toward sex and gender because it is "[u]nmediated by otherworldly fantasy, cover plot, bestial transformations, or civilized routine" (188), then the scholarship and theory used to analyze the genre must be similarly indicative of current social and cultural understandings of gender. As it stands, slasher scholarship leans heavily on the work done by scholars like Clover who were writing in the 1980s and 1990s, at the height of the genre's popularity. How American society and culture understand and talk about gender has changed in the decades following the publication of "Her Body, Himself" and other seminal texts.

While horror has evolved to include changing conceptions of gender and femininity (see films like *The Final Girls* [2015], *The Witch* [2015], *Raw* [2016], *Suspiria* [2018], and *The Invisible Man* [2020]), the scholarship used to analyze the genre has stagnated. Along these lines, the slasher remains repetitive in its narrative structure and thematic content, even as audiences have come to expect more equitable representations of women; after all, "a particular example [of a slasher] may have original features, but its quality as a horror film lies in the way it delivers the cliché" (Clover 190). In other words, audiences may demand that contemporary slashers portray strong female characters, but the expectation remains that these strong female characters take the shape of a recognizable Final Girl.

The trope, in this case, need not be left behind, but the scholarship about slashers must reckon with the variety and increased complexity of new formations

of the Final Girl that exist alongside the old. Using *Halloween* (2018) and its trio of Final Girls as a case study, this essay aims to address how the conventions of the slasher subgenre can be improved upon by pushing past the limitations of individualistic conceptions of feminist empowerment and binary approaches to cross-identification and gender expression within the Final Girl.

Clover’s Final Girl, Audience Identification, and Feminist (Mis)Readings

One of the most common critiques of the horror genre is that its gleeful depictions of violence against women prioritize identification with psychopaths, rapists, and murderers over sympathy for their victims. In “Her Body, Himself,” Clover attempts to reconcile with this critique by examining with whom—and through what mechanisms—the presumed young, male audience of the slasher film is asked to identify. Drawing on Laura Mulvey’s assertion that the male gaze in popular cinema conditions audiences to identify against female characters, Clover asks, “how are we then to explain the appeal to a largely male audience of a film genre that features a female victim-hero?” (207). She argues that it is only through the symbolic “manning” of the Final Girl and her adoption of the “active investigating gaze” that is “normally reserved for males” that male spectators can engage sympathetically with her as a female victim-hero (210).

All of the characteristics of the Final Girl that set her apart from the slaughtered teens who do not make it to the end of film—her sexual reluctance, her hypervigilance, her ability to fight for herself—serve to “de-girl” her and transform her into a more accessible figure for male audience members. Still, she is “the first character to sense something amiss and the only one to deduce from the accumulating evidence the patterns and extent of the threat; the only one, in other words, whose perspective approaches our own privileged understanding of the situation” (Clover 207). To put it simply, the Final Girl is the only character the audience, regardless of gender, can reasonably identify with because she is aware of the same dangers the audience is aware of. Although the language used here to discuss gender is more rigid and binary than is acceptable today, Clover contends that “masculinity and femininity are more states of mind than body” (188) and insists that it is the “compromised” femininity of the Final Girl that allows spectators to identify across gender lines despite the differences in their subjective, societal positions.

On this level, cross-gender identification within slasher audiences can be read as an indication of an audience's willingness to accept deviance from gender norms. Clover is nevertheless clear in her assertion that the Final Girl and the tangled dynamics of gender in the slasher genre do not constitute an inherent feminist victory or subversive bent. The positioning of the Final Girl as a straightforward feminist figure that some scholars, fans, and critics have been inclined toward is, in Clover's own words, "a particularly grotesque expression of wishful thinking" (214). If the Final Girl's ambiguous or compromised gender identity accomplishes anything significant, it is in service of non-normative masculinity. She concludes "Her Body, Himself" by stating that

One is deeply reluctant to make progressive claims for a body of cinema as spectacularly nasty toward women as the slasher film is, but the fact is that the slasher does, in its own perverse way and for better or worse, constitute a viable adjustment in the terms of gender representation. That it is an adjustment largely on the male side [...] is of no small interest. (221)

Still, certain scholars have continued to oversimplify Clover's arguments about the Final Girl's adoption of the active/predatory gaze and so-called masculine traits, which are key elements of her ability to triumph over her victimizer.

Kelly Connelly, for instance, misrepresents the Final Girl's assumption of the gaze—which Clover only specifies as the male gaze when introducing Mulvey's theory and quoting others—as a blanket victory, writing that "[i]t is through the adoption of the gaze of the male monster, in addition to his other masculine characteristics, that the female is able to both empower herself and to survive" (14). Conversely, in his comparison of several slashers and their modern remakes, Ryan Lizardi concludes, "all of the horror remakes embody and embellish both physical and psychological elements of misogynistic torture," even when the Final Girls are granted the ability to take brutal revenge on their slashers (120). A particular, enduring impulse occurs in slasher scholarship to cast the Final Girl as either unquestionably feminist or irredeemably misogynistic. "Her Body, Himself" is inherently about ambivalence, difficulty, and the lack of a tangible solution to an already intangible problem; the desire to find an unambivalent and easy solution to the Final Girl's gender troubles is understandable. However, attempts to unearth a definitive categorization for the Final Girl fail to look for answers beyond the basic shape of the trope (solitary, moralistic, and feminine but not too feminine) as it already exists.

Previous endeavors to rethink Clover have offered up the more proactive Final Girls of the 1980s and 1990s as examples of what feminism in the slasher can look like, but they ultimately offer a limited picture of empowerment. In their analyses of Nancy Thompson (Heather Langenkamp) of *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984) and Sidney Prescott (Neve Campbell) of *Scream* (1996), Sarah Trencansky, Kyle Christensen, Valerie Wee, and Alexandra West make a broad argument in favor of a Final Girl who, to put it crudely, pulls herself up by her bootstraps. These Final Girls mirror, in many ways, Anita Harris’s “can-do girl,” the young woman who, she argues, embodies “the idea that good choices, effort, and ambition alone are responsible for success” (16). Although Harris is writing in the context of young women’s integration into contemporary labor and consumer markets in the early 1990s, the can-do girl’s narrative of individualism and personal improvement overlaps with the characteristics of the empowered Final Girl that scholars like Trencansky, Wee, West, and Christensen outline. Harris argues that “the processes of working on the self and competing with others, especially other women, to be perfect in self-presentation have extended so that improving oneself is necessary to success” (19). In her analysis of the Final Girls who appear across the *Nightmare on Elm Street* franchise, Trencansky argues, “These texts [...] are remarkably consistent in characterizing the heroine’s battle as a fight for agency against a monster that inadvertently provokes their independent transformations” (66-7).

Taking his analysis a step further, Christensen draws a direct contrast to Clover’s original Final Girl by arguing that Laurie Strode (Jamie Lee Curtis) of the *Halloween* franchise, whom Clover identifies as a turning point for Final Girls, is not “pro-woman” but actually antifeminist (27). Instead of accepting Laurie as the Final Girl who has come to define the trope, he advances Nancy of *A Nightmare on Elm Street* as the more radical, active Final Girl who therefore makes for “the first and best model of feminism” for the slasher subgenre (30). He returns repeatedly to the argument that Nancy’s feminist power is located in her ability to think her way out of any predicament, stating, “Nancy uses the powers of her alert, paranoid mind and will (not violence) to defeat Freddy and transcend his domineering masculinity” and “defies stilted constructs of violent heroism by using her mind and willpower [...] instead of a knife, axe, or other standard phallic weapon” (31, 41). By casting Final Girls who take up weapons to defend themselves as masculinized vehicles of patriarchal violence, Christensen narrows the already-restrictive boundaries of acceptable expressions of feminine rage.

West's and Wee's respective examinations of *Scream* come closest to identifying a new model for the Final Girl, arguing that the film's self-conscious engagement with slasher archetypes lead to less punitive expressions of femininity. West argues that the arrival of the 1990s brought with them a new cycle of slashers that attempted—perhaps succeeded—to reignite interest in the slasher by centering the stories of young women. The Final Girls of these slasher films, she writes, “were the products of third wave feminism, 90s alternative culture and the more mainstream ‘Girl Power’ which allowed the focus to shift to the female protagonist, her friends and their survival” (para. 3). Wee, in turn, praises Sidney and her sometimes-foe, the reporter Gale Weathers, for their shared ability to “not only triumph against their persecutors but [to] eventually transcend their terrifying experiences to emerge [...] as independent, (relatively) well-adjusted, functional individuals with a place in society” (59). Because Sidney defies slasher conventions by engaging in sexual activity and living to tell the tale, *Scream* “offers a reprieve from the thinly worn character traits of the slashers of the 1970s and ’80s, allowing a young woman to take control of her narrative, body and effectively dismantle what Laura Mulvey termed the ‘male gaze’ of the camera” (West para. 20). These claims are not entirely convincing, however. Though Sidney does not pay for her sexual activity with her life, she is nevertheless punished for it, just as the helpless teen girls of the maligned slashers of the ‘70s and ‘80s are. Christensen similarly argues that Nancy Thompson’s relationship with Glen (Johnny Depp) progresses “on her own terms” (33), yet she trusts him to aid her in her pursuit of Freddy and is repeatedly let down. In a crucial faceoff with Freddy, Glen fails to rouse Nancy from her slumber because he has selfishly fallen asleep. While Nancy is ultimately able to rescue herself, Christensen’s assertion that she learns from the mistakes she makes in trusting the men in her life is not accurate, given that she relies on her father to play a key role in her escape from the final showdown with Freddy.

If scholars measure feminist value against sexual activity, independence, and subservience to a patriarchal figure, then Nancy is hardly any more liberated than Laurie Strode. In this respect, Sidney Prescott does represent an evolution, an updated version of the Final Girl who is aware that “sex = death” is a misogynistic standard, but she also falls short of revolutionizing Clover’s theory. The issue is not that these texts celebrate the Final Girl as a feminist figure, but that they celebrate the Final Girl as a feminist figure without questioning why her empowerment must be defined by individual responsibility and choice. The cruel irony of these analyses is that though these Final Girls neatly perform can-do girlpower, their slashers do

not care, and continue to victimize the Final Girls and their friends according to the rules of the genre: do not drink, do not do drugs, do not have sex, and do not ever say “I’ll be right back.”

I’ve Waited for Him: *Halloween* (2018) and Hope for a New Kind of Final Girl

Set in the quiet town of Haddonfield, Illinois, on Halloween night, the original *Halloween* follows Laurie and her friends as they are hunted and killed by escaped mental patient Michael Myers (Nick Castle). As one of the first, if not *the* first, “active” Final Girls, Laurie alone is able to strike back at Michael, “once with a knitting needle, once with a hanger” (Clover 193). In all, the original *Halloween* spawned eleven sequels and remakes, including the 2018 release *Halloween* (David Gordon Green), a direct sequel to the original *Halloween*. In “Her Body, Himself,” Clover names Laurie as the Final Girl who signaled the moment the final girl became the Final Girl, the moment the Final Girl learned to actively defend herself instead of passively fleeing the slasher and waiting for rescue (202).

While certain scholars take issue with the canonization of *Halloween* 1978 as the turning point in Final Girl history (Christensen 29), a marked shift occurred in how Final Girls appeared on-screen following the film’s release. In many ways, the teenage Laurie Strode of the original *Halloween* is the template upon which most—if not all—Final Girls have been modeled. Her aversion to sex and juvenile delinquency is coupled with a sharp sense of self-preservation and self-defense. As Clover describes her, the Final Girl engenders audience identification across gender lines by symbolically “manning” herself and “unmanning” the killer in their final face-off (210). While Clover is sure to note that the Final Girl is not merely a “figurative male” (215), her victory is only possible through the reversal of gender between victim-hero and killer and the triumph of “masculinity” as embodied by the Final Girl.

The notion that strength can only be channeled by “masculine” or “manned” characters is regressive and misogynistic, and the Final Girls presented in *Halloween* (2018) (herein referred to as *Halloween* 2018) confront and correct the wrongs of its predecessor. The sequel returns to the town of Haddonfield and to Laurie Strode herself, forty years after the events of the original film. Unlike previous sequels, *Halloween* 2018 casts aside all previous entries in the franchise and the mythology established within them. The plot is essentially the same as that

of the original *Halloween* (herein referred to as *Halloween* 1978): Michael escapes from his state-mandated confinement and goes after Laurie, slaughtering anyone who stands in his path. This time, however, Laurie is not the only Final Girl he must defeat.

Like the original *Halloween*, *Halloween* 2018 signals a possible shift in the Final Girl trope; its Final Girls do not need to resort to an aping of hegemonic masculinity in their ultimate showdown against Michael Myers, nor are they required to face him individually. While still very much Laurie's story, *Halloween* 2018 is also a story about her estranged daughter Karen (Judy Greer) and her granddaughter Allyson (Andi Matichak). It is a story of shared trauma and shared healing for three women who experience cruelty at the hands of the same man. Laurie no longer has to bear the burden of being the typical Final Girl, the template, by herself. Key to Clover's original configuration of the Final Girl is her isolation. That she alone survives tells the audience that she alone was fit to do so. She alone was virtuous enough, smart enough, tough enough. In other words, those who did not survive deserved to die because they did not act in accordance with an arbitrary set of social standards. *Halloween* 2018 refuses to perpetuate these standards by not requiring Laurie, Karen, or Allyson to stand on their own against Michael and, by extension, refusing to elevate one expression of womanhood or femininity over another. The Strode women's bond as grandmother, mother, and granddaughter is key to their survival, but their reliance on one another does not stem from an individual weakness in any of them. *Halloween* 2018 recognizes Laurie's trauma and allows her to step away from the trappings of both hegemonic femininity and masculinity without sacrificing her strength, and Karen and Allyson learn to take Laurie's failure to "move on" seriously through their own confrontations with Michael.

Despite its adherence to the generic conventions of the slasher, *Halloween* 2018 and its Final Girls stand in direct defiance of both the regressive aspects of the Final Girl archetype and the seemingly benign expressions of misogyny that plague everyday life. The three Final Girls are a reminder that conceptions of gender and sexuality have changed in radical ways in the forty and thirty years, respectively, since the release of *Halloween* 1978 and publication of "Her Body, Himself." Laurie, Karen, and Allyson embody elements of Clover's Final Girl to varying degrees, but ultimately transcend the trope as it has historically been understood. None of the three women can defeat Michael Myers (Nick Castle/James Jude Courtney) on their own—a stark shift away from what has traditionally been

accepted and expected of the Final Girl. This is not because they are too weak, inexperienced, or unintelligent to do so, however. They work together because the film refuses to isolate and Other these women the way victims are so often Othered in everyday life. Throughout the film, Laurie is shown interacting with a number of characters, including law enforcement officials, who repeatedly diminish the trauma she experienced forty years prior. Early in the film, both Karen and Allyson express frustration with Laurie’s not just inability, but outright refusal to let go of, move beyond, and heal from her traumatic past. They express great disdain for the home she has turned into a booby-trapped fortress and affinity for heavy weaponry. In the end, of course, it is Laurie’s intuition, weapons expertise, and preparedness that saves them all; it is clear that *Halloween 2018* wants its audience to take Laurie, her pain, and the pain of women in general seriously. Her suffering is not mere spectacle.

Allyson, too, must learn through trial and error that the world at large does not always take women’s fear and suffering seriously. She is, in many ways, the prototypical Final Girl—an honor student with a handsome boyfriend (with whom she never does anything sexual) and strong will. She is the moral compass of her friend group, and, accordingly, is one of the few prominent teen characters to make it through Halloween night alive. While still an important character, Allyson’s narrative is secondary to Laurie’s ongoing battle with trauma, alcoholism, maternal guilt, and the constant fight to survive. It would have been easy for *Halloween 2018* to abandon the aging Laurie and focus its sights on Allyson as the new star of the franchise. As a partial sequel, partial reboot of the franchise, *Halloween 2018* very well could have introduced this new Strode woman to take Laurie’s place. She possesses all of the traits of the quintessential Final Girl with all of the passion the slasher demands, but an impassioned Final Girl who does nothing to move beyond decades-old archetypes is, apparently, no longer enough.

Much like Nancy Thompson, her relationships are on her terms, but unlike Nancy, she knows when to walk away from men who do not have her best interests in mind. Her boyfriend, Cameron (Dylan Arnold), is very quickly revealed to be a cheater and liar, and her closest male friend, Oscar (Drew Scheid), attempts to kiss her directly after she breaks up with Cameron. Instead of apologizing to her for violating her boundaries, he begs her not to tell Cameron and makes excuses for his behavior (he was drunk, he was horny, etc.). The men of *Halloween 2018* continually prioritize other men’s feelings and opinions over women’s lives, and the film itself condemns this by showing Oscar’s murder directly following this

scene. Ultimately, Allyson can only trust her mother and grandmother to protect her. Even her father endangers the three Final Girls in his last moments, as he leaves the front door of Laurie's home wide open when he goes to investigate a noise outside. Allyson's father is repeatedly shown brushing off Laurie's concerns, and his negligence in this moment is an extension of his flippant attitude toward her trauma. But even when placed in danger, Allyson, Karen, and Laurie can work together to save themselves. Although the three women begin the film in opposition with each other, they realize through their individual confrontations with Michael that their only hope for survival is to work together.

Despite the closeness the Strode women share at the end of *Halloween 2018*, Laurie is portrayed through *Halloween 2018* as a woman who struggles to balance her desire to lethally protect herself and her loved ones with her more maternal duties. She is not powerless in the face of the fear she feels for her family's lives but rather active almost to a fault. She is a divorced alcoholic, estranged from her only daughter, who offers strangers access to her deeply-rooted emotional trauma for money. She is, for much of the film, the kind of woman horror audiences have been conditioned to fear or even villainize. We learn early on that Karen was taken from Laurie by Social Services when she was 12-years-old because Laurie was deemed to be an unfit mother due to her obsession with survival and her insistence that Karen be able to defend herself (with guns and heavy artillery) should the need arise.

In many ways, the Laurie of *Halloween 2018* grapples with the complicated notions of gender Clover's Final Girls are always seen to embody. The centrality of motherhood to her character's survival and Michael's defeat signals a move away from the trope of the masculinized Final Girl/Woman. However, her status as an "unfit mother"—along with all of the more traditionally "masculine" aspects of her character, such as her proficiency with power tools and weaponry—could be read as contradicting that forward progress. But *Halloween 2018* is insistent that Laurie and the other Strode women not be categorized or boxed in because they are someone's mother, someone's girlfriend, someone's wife, and so on. In one of the more lighthearted scenes of the film that takes place before Allyson learns of her boyfriend's infidelity, she and Cameron arrive at the school Halloween dance dressed as Bonnie and Clyde. Allyson, of course, in male drag as Clyde, and Cameron sporting a skirt as Bonnie. These are just costumes, but they also point toward a willingness to play with the materiality of gender. Allyson and her boyfriend need not adhere so strictly to the vestments of their "usual" genders

because this kind of play, transgression, and disregard for hegemonic norms is not just commonplace but also celebrated in this time and place.

Klaus Rieser’s “Masculinity and Monstrosity,” though now nearly two decades old, understands the Final Girl and her victimizer to be linked through their shared gender transgressions. Specifically, he argues that the Final Girl is not so much a figure of appropriated masculinity as she is “lacking in traditional femininity, mostly asexual (with an androgynous name, interstitial (between a girl’s world and heterosexual one), sometimes a tomboy” (377). And while Rieser’s assessment of the Final Girl’s complicated relationship with traditional femininity applies, in some ways, to the adult Laurie, he goes on to argue that slashers rarely show their Final Girls performing tasks outside of their usual gender (Rieser uses the example of jumpstarting a car) and says that phallic weaponry is typically only a last resort for women backed into corners. “Most of all,” Rieser writes, “the final girl lacks the ultimate signifier of masculinity, by holding virtually no institutional or social power” (378). While it is true that none of the three Strode women hold any real institutional or social power, *Halloween 2018* seems to be keenly aware of this. In lieu of institutional power, the Strode women are shown to be physically and emotionally empowered. Adult Laurie Strode is very much a master of those signifiers of masculinity that Rieser insists the Final Girl rarely demonstrates. Clover’s definition of the Final Girl, and Rieser’s expanded definition, once again fall short of adequately describing how a character like the Laurie of 2018 fits into all of the established notions of gender, sexuality, and power in the traditional slasher.

Laurie’s resistance to categorization—a resistance that outdoes even Clover’s resistance to categorizing the original Final Girl—makes her such a dangerous and powerful character. Although she is very much an embodiment of traditional femininity in that she is shown to be a fiercely protective mother and grandmother, her two failed marriages and the lack of emotion she displays when discussing them reveals that she not only does not need men in her life, but she also does not want men in her life. She is portrayed not as a bitter divorcee but a woman who has learned that men won’t protect her the way she can protect herself—and other women. Still, *this* Laurie, riddled with PTSD and alcoholism and haunted forever by Michael Myers, is exemplary of the way in which the Final Girl is always marked as Other by her trauma. Even though Laurie goes on to fulfill what is expected of her as a woman (motherhood, marriage—twice) between the original

Halloween and the 2018 sequel, something within her, we find out, remains disconnected. Jack Halberstam writes,

Gender is monstrous in the horror film and it exceeds even the category of human. The genders that emerge triumphant at the gory conclusions of a splatter film are literally posthuman, they punish the limits of the human body and they mark identities as always stitched, sutured, bloody at the seams, and completely beyond the limits and the reaches of an impotent humanism. (Ch. 6, par. 12)

The Laurie that exists in the interim between 1978 and 2018 is the bloody, sutured thing; she is marked by many characters within the film as an inadequate or nontraditional mother and does not express her gender in a way that makes sense to those around her, including, and especially, her family. Others view her as dangerous because she knows how to defend herself and actively seeks revenge for the pain Michael has inflicted upon her.

Still, it seems that no one in her life can sympathize with her until the final confrontation between Michael and the Strode women. The lack of sympathy and understanding for Laurie's character is made clear in a scene between Laurie and two investigative journalists who claim to want to get to know who Michael is as a human being. Laurie, bemused, says, "Michael Myers killed five people. And he's a human being we need to understand? I'm twice divorced and I'm the basket case?" (00:12:55-00:13:09). *Halloween* 2018 wants its audience to be aware of the absurdity of prioritizing a psychopathic serial killer's narrative over that of an articulate, intelligent woman no one has attempted to listen to for several decades. Even as individual characters within the film seem determined to assign a certain amount of monstrosity or psychopathy to Laurie herself, *Halloween* 2018 demands that the audience keep in mind that she is both victim and hero here.

If Clover's Final Girl can only survive and triumph over her slasher by adopting his tools and his investigative, predatory gaze, then the Final Girls that *Halloween* 2018 presents to its audience are something else entirely. Clover writes that the Final Girl "addresses the killer on his own terms" (210), not the other way around. She must assimilate into his traditions and practices to defeat him. At several points throughout *Halloween* 2018, different characters make clear that Laurie is understood by many to be monstrous in her own right. The two investigative journalists who set the story into motion ask themselves, "Could it be that one monster has created another?" (00:09:06-00:09:11). The hostile attitude toward Laurie many characters in the film adopt, including Karen and Allyson, initially,

makes clear that Laurie’s active, involved desire to be able to defend herself and find peace through violent revenge have transformed her, in the eyes of many, into a monster of Michael’s caliber.

Halberstam, however, understands the process of the Final Girl transforming from a passive to an active participant not as an act of last resort but as an act of empowerment. He writes, “[W]e witness the becoming-monstrous of a woman which does not automatically mean that she must compromise herself, sacrifice her voice, or give up her hard-won gains to a man” (Ch. 6, par. 10). “Monstrousness,” perhaps, is not always inherently bad, and Laurie’s rejection of pacifism does not inherently have to be monstrousness. Likewise, Laurie’s defiance of traditional femininity does not have to be automatically understood as an embrace of masculinity. In the final confrontation with Michael, Karen seems to panic and lose the ability to protect herself and her daughter despite the years of training Laurie forced upon her. Sobbing and holding a shotgun in her shaking hands, she cries out to Laurie, “Mom, mom, I can’t do it, I’m sorry, I can’t do it!” (01:37:08-01:37:20). She and Allyson are in the basement of the house, Michael stalks through the kitchen above, and it seems that Laurie is going to, yet again, lose everything. When he steps into frame at the top of the stairs, however, Karen snaps into focus, levels the shotgun, and shoots Michael in the shoulder.

The moment Michael looms over the stairs is a startling one, not only because it so perfectly captures him as The Shape, but because Karen’s crying and shaking ceases immediately. She knew how to play the part of the inept, weak woman perfectly, fooling both Michael and the audience, and knew with even more certainty how to save herself and her daughter. This willingness to embrace the uglier parts of the self—to engage with that monstrous self, perhaps— that the Strode women display in their self-defense sets them apart from previous incarnations of the Final Girl. Furthermore, *Halloween 2018* alleviates the burden of cross-gender identification by offering three Final Girls who navigate gender and empowerment in different, sometimes messy and contradictory, ways.

These new Final Girls that *Halloween 2018* proposes meet their slasher on their grounds, using *their* tools—which are diverse, interdependent, and strengthened through uniting against a common monster. Literally, Michael must navigate the house that Laurie and her daughter (prior to being taken by Social Services) constructed as an elaborate trap for Michael. As Laurie tells Officer Hawkins (Will Patton) and Dr. Sartain (Haluk Bilginer), she has prayed for the night of Michael’s escape because she has prepared to kill him. Although Laurie sometimes uses

Michael's tricks against him, she is not forced to the emotionless, impersonal, and compulsive depths of his monstrosity. She is driven by a desire to protect herself and her loved ones, and every action she has taken in the past forty years has been informed by this desire. She, Karen, and Allyson are, therefore, in ultimate control.

Conclusion

Halloween 2018 ends with the three generations of Strode women being driven to safety and away from Laurie's burning house, away from Michael, in the back of a truck. The image of Allyson, blood spattered, traumatized, and clutching a knife recalls the final image of Tobe Hooper's *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre (1974)*, another slasher Clover writes on extensively. In that final image of *Texas Chainsaw*, the Final Girl, Sally, is rescued by a kind stranger, just as Allyson, her mother, and grandmother are. Allyson is decidedly less ecstatic in her escape, but the image is undoubtedly a nod to the iconic moment from *Texas Chainsaw*. In addition to the plethora of references to the original *Halloween* and its various sequels, *Halloween 2018* is a film deeply invested in the horror genre and its history at large. Because of this, its departure from the Final Girl formula is all the more surprising and radical. Although, like most slashers, it adheres to a familiar narrative structure, its triumvirate of Final Girls and their complicated, sometimes contradictory, sometimes competing gender formations and relationships present audiences with something wholly new and challenging, even as each character still embodies Clover's original Final Girl to some degree. Within the narrative of the film, each Strode woman is situated within a specific history and lineage of trauma; likewise, the Final Girl as Clover conceives of her is situated within a very specific place in horror history.

Halloween 2018, as a sequel to one of the most iconic horror films of all time, understands its place within that lineage, but nonetheless uses its Final Girls to push and prod at the limits of tradition and accepted notions of empowerment. This new formulation can be understood not as a rejection of Clover's Final Girl, but a reconfigured and updated figure who more accurately reflects and interacts with contemporary attitudes toward gender and generational trauma. As this figure of sutured, splattered, messy femininity, Laurie is the most challenging of the three Final Girls; however, juxtaposed with Allyson's embodiment of a femininity that most closely resembles Clover's Final Girl's, she emerges as a sensible and sympathetic figure in the film, especially given that the final showdown between

the Strode women and Michael Myers makes clear that no one woman can do it for herself. All three need each other, and this solidarity and community of different femininities is their strength. *Halloween* 2018 presents its audience with the possibility of a Final Girl—or Girls, or Women—who both defy and embrace traditional conceptions of gender and accepted definitions of the Final Girl. That Clover’s definition of the Final Girl does not adequately describe the Final Girls of *Halloween* (2018) does not mean that it is useless or should be rejected, only that room needs to be made in horror scholarship for other, more complex, and fresh readings of female characters. There will never be a single, perfect Final Girl, but the 2018 sequel to the original *Halloween* makes a compelling argument against the assumption that the Final Girl need be “single” or “perfect” at all.

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HBO's *Band of Brothers*: Countertendencies and the World War II Combat Film Genre

JAMIE BOWEN

Torben Grodan defines “genre” as a category or set of characteristics given to describe a piece of fictional work (162). These fictional works are complex and can be analyzed and categorized in different ways, therefore making it difficult to have one-size-fits-all categories (genres) in which to place fictional works (162). The War film genre is no different, which has led to the creation of subgenres, such as Prisoner of War (POW), war as propaganda, antiwar, and the World War II (WWII) combat genre. Some even argue that the war genre is the “most difficult” of the genres to characterize (Solomon 242).

A great example of this is the renowned WWII docudrama *Band of Brothers* (2001). At first glance, and according to many viewer and film critic reviews, the miniseries follows the traditional glorified and heroic genre characteristics of a WWII combat film while simultaneously guiding the audience through an authentic portrayal of the horrors of war. It transcends the genre by balancing between it and its antithesis, the antiwar genre. This paper argues that *Band of Brothers* is truly unique in that it goes beyond the traditional scope of either the antiwar or WWII combat film by showing the complexity of human nature and its propensity for both good and evil. WWII was perhaps the last war that was highly publicly favored. The soldiers were viewed as the “good ole boys” or the “greatest generation” and war was romanticized in popular culture. WWII popular opinion has even been used by political leaders to justify their own desires to go to war in the modern day (Morgan 26). *Band of Brothers* pulls back this façade, validating the soldiers of WWII by showing both the heroics and horrors of war and not just the romanticized

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parts. By breaking from the status quo, it gave space for post-9/11 war films to transcend specific war sub genres and make more complex and nuanced stories. *Band of Brothers* was a key turning point for how war is viewed today in popular culture and American society. *Band of Brothers* has certainly been examined in other ways by scholars (see Glen; Ramsay; Schatz; Zapatero and Ramos), but scant academic literature exists considering it through this specific lens, therefore leaving a void in the scholarly record.

Band of Brothers aired on HBO in fall 2001 as a 10-part TV miniseries co-produced by Steven Spielberg and Tom Hanks. The series is based on historian Stephen E. Ambrose's book, *Band of Brothers*. The series portrays the experiences of the paratroopers who served in "Easy Company" of the 101st Airborne during WWII. The story follows the soldiers from basic training in Georgia to them parachuting over Normandy during D-Day, all the way to the capture of Hitler's mountaintop fortress, Eagle's Nest. The series chronicles the horrors of war from the failure of Operation Market Garden in the Netherlands to the soldiers starving, frozen, and at their wit's end during the Battle of the Bulge in Belgium. Overall, the miniseries is a realistic portrayal of soldiers at war. The critically acclaimed series won the Golden Globe for Best Miniseries or Motion Picture Made for Television and was nominated for two other awards (Band of Brothers).

Jeanine Basinger created the widely accepted WWII combat film genre after examining more than 100 WWII films. Basinger defines the genre as following a group of military personnel led by a hero while exhibiting the theater of war: death/sacrifice/loss, military forces involved, relationship to history and the objective (178-9). Although Basinger examined a wide range of WWII films in defining the genre, the renowned WWII docudrama *Band of Brothers* (2001) was not amongst them.

This paper will employ a close-reading examination of all ten episodes of *Band of Brothers*. Using close-reading and textual analysis, this analysis will focus on cinematography, dialogue, and acting in this series to assess techniques and characteristics employed by the filmmakers to determine if these features fall in line with characteristics and techniques used in the WWII combat and antiwar genre or go beyond them. To gain a thorough understanding of how *Band of Brothers* falls into line and differs from the traditional subsets of the genres it is attributed to, background will be given of the war genre and the WWII combat genre.

The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate how *Band of Brothers* exhibits overarching characteristics of the WWII Combat genre and realistic depictions of

war as illustrated in the antiwar genre. However, it goes beyond both genres in exhibiting the atrocities of soldiers during war time by dehumanizing American soldiers, which solidifies Stanley J. Solomon's notion that the war film is "the most difficult of all genres to define" (242).

The War Genre

According to Matthias Grotkopp and Hermann Kappelhoff, the war genre answers the question of "Why do we fight?" According to the authors, the war genre "includes the presence and memories of stocks of images on the one hand and the attachment to a set of values, the mythology of sacrifice and guilt on the other" (34). The typical war film creates an emotional experience, and "It is on these grounds that the war film performs its function, modulating the emotional experience of the audience and so shaping the process of living memory and compassionate relation" (34). The war genre has several subgenres, thus making it hard to lump any one film, let alone a ten-part miniseries, into one category. Therefore, this study employs two war subgenres, the WWII combat film and antiwar, to analyze the docudrama, *Band of Brothers*.

The WWII combat film genre, as created by Basinger, follows a group of men with the hero as the leader. The group of men come from different areas of the U.S. and from various backgrounds and socioeconomic status. The story is narrated by an observer, usually a man keeping a diary or a man who thinks or talks out loud. The leader/hero is forced into leadership, and the story unfolds as "a series of episodes [...] which alternate in uneven patterns the contrasting forces of night and day, action and repose, safety and danger, combat and noncombat, comedy and tragedy, dialogue and action" (Basinger 176). The episodes feature deaths of group members, battles, and growth as a group. The genre portrays the enemy either close-up or faceless, and, in the end, the conflict is resolved after much sacrifice, loss, discouragement, and hardship (Basinger 177). The genre is also propagandistic in its portrayal of war.

Antiwar films and "glamorized" war films are both propagandistic, but with differing results. "Glamorized" war films romanticize war through "illusions about valor, liberty, and righteousness." Antiwar films illustrate how war is full of "death and desolation" (Solomon 250), and depicts "war as hell" through "interesting evidence to document the truism" (Solomon 251). The antiwar film "operates mainly in a realistic mode that serves to deglamorize the romantic elements

associated with fighting for a cause, for freedom, or for the attainment of noble or heroic ends” (Solomon 252).

This study will analyze the themes and characteristics from both the WWII combat genre, highlighted above, and the antiwar genre as observed in *Band of Brothers*. It will call attention to the realistic and deglamorized portrayal of war, which goes in opposition to the traditional WWII combat genre. This analysis is important to not only cement that the war genre is hard to define by having an artifact falling under two contrasting subgenres simultaneously, but to pull back the façade of the romanticized/glamourized WWII narrative in popular culture by representing all war as hell, even the popular ones.

Findings in *Band of Brothers*

This study finds that the docudrama, *Band of Brothers*, exhibits various overarching themes from the WWII combat film genre, as well as, characteristics of the antiwar genre and beyond. The analysis was carried out through a rhetorical analysis of dialogue and filmic language to show how it aligns with WWII combat and antiwar films to produce a complicated representation of war.

Propaganda. Pro-military propaganda is employed from episode one, featuring training at jump camp and introducing the audience to the group of soldiers the series follows. The viewer sees Easy Company (the overall group) chant together as they run up and down the mountain Currahee, which is a drill used to exhaust the soldiers and weed out those who do not belong in the military. Although the soldiers are running three miles up and down the mountain, their chanting together and working together exhibits the brotherhood of the military.

Throughout the episode, the viewer gets a sense that training is tough through close-ups on individual soldiers going through drills and their reactions to commanding officers treating them poorly. A close-up is used on one soldier as he is being told that he is going to get kicked out of the military unless he can run six miles in fifteen minutes, up and down Currahee. A wide-shot shows him struggling to run, and then the whole company shows up to run Currahee with him in full gear, further demonstrating unity and brotherhood. Propaganda is further employed in two other episodes: in episode two, where a successful operation is carried out and fast editing and continuous shots are employed as propaganda to show excitement of war; and in episode five, where an entire company of SS soldiers is taken by surprise by Easy Company and are killed and captured, showing the enemy as weak

and underprepared in comparison to the U.S. military. By exhibiting the brotherhood of the military, exhibiting the excitement of war during battle, and the superiority of the U.S. military, war is romanticized and therefore propagandistic.

Past Life Pieces. Rituals from the soldier's past and present lives, such as celebrating holidays, reading mail, and discussing postwar plans, are exhibited in the episodes. In episode one, soldiers are successful at doing their jump. A close-up shows them happy as they celebrate at a local bar by drinking and having fun by insulting their commanding officer and trainer, Herbert Sobel. In episode two, the soldiers are seen watching movies while waiting to jump on D-Day and picking up their laundry from a local English woman. In episode three, a wide-shot of five soldiers shows them gloating to each other about the different souvenirs they had found while combing through the battlefield. In episode six, various close-ups exhibit soldiers in their fox holes during the Battle of the Bulge, where they are portrayed making coffee, discussing what they are going to do when they get home, and singing on Christmas Eve. In episode ten, a wide-shot depicts many soldiers playing baseball, and close-ups reveal a sense of relief to not be at war anymore.

Enemy Portrayal. In episode one, Sobel, the company's commanding and training officer during paratrooper school, is portrayed as an enemy to his soldiers. This is first evident through a close-up of Sobel investigating his soldiers, trying to find things about them that would not be considered by others to be a big deal. He uses his findings of lint, rust, and wrinkly trousers as an excuse to revoke all weekend passes. This is further indicated when Frank Perconte complains that he had a crease in his pants when Sobel said he did not, making him feel like he was unfairly judged by Sobel. Sobel functions as an enemy who brings the soldiers closer together as they deal with his misgivings and absurdity as a unit.

Throughout the remainder of the series, the German soldiers were portrayed as the enemy, mainly in a faceless way. During battle scenes, wide-shots portray the enemy at a distance, and during D-Day and the Battle of the Bulge, the enemy is present but not seen by the audience. The enemy is seen close-up during episode 3 when company soldiers encounter some enemy soldiers after they parachute into France. This is further exhibited during episode six, when Winters encounters a group of SS soldiers and he kills one up close.

Hero/Leader. In episode two, Richard Winters is cemented as the hero/leader of the group. When he lands in France, he is calm in demeanor when others are scared, which is exhibited through close-ups on his face. This is further illustrated as he maneuvers himself through the battlefield, collecting lost soldiers, using his

savvy survival skills to lead them to safety. In episode five, Winters is portrayed as a good leader after he carried out a mission that killed or captured an entire company of SS soldiers. This is portrayed through a wide-shot of him running in front of his soldiers, leading them to the battlefield. When he arrives, he is taken off guard by a young SS soldier and an entire company of SS soldiers standing around. A close-up shows him, without hesitation, start firing at the company even though he is alone, having arrived earlier than the rest of the company. In episode seven, the hero changes from Winters to Ronald Speirs as a wide shot shows him take charge during the battle of Foye when others were overcome with fear.

Death/Loss/Sacrifice. Death and loss are evident in many of the episodes and become an overarching theme of the series. Company soldiers are injured and are either sent back to the battlefield or sent home. Lynn (Buck) Compton, who is injured during a battle in episode four, is one of those soldiers who is sent back and forth after being injured. By episodes six and seven, the company has lost many members and loses three key characters in Compton, Joseph Toye, and William Guarnere, all exhibited through close-ups during the Battle of the Bulge. Furthermore, the great sacrifices these soldiers faced during this same battle are evident as the camera portrays them in close-ups on their fox holes as they are starving, frozen, and at their wit's end from being undersupplied during the siege. The deaths or losses of beloved characters weigh heavily on the company as they maneuver through the war, to the point that the soldiers fear they will not make it home either. This is best illustrated in episode eight by Donald G. Malarkey when he is asked to run a mission in enemy territory. A close-up on his face shows that he is disheartened at the need for him to carry out another mission. Malarkey is later taken off the mission by his commanding officer, and a close-up on his face shows the relief of not having to go out into battle again.

Countertendencies. Countertendencies are characteristics, methods, and themes that are counter to what would be traditional to the, in this case, war genre or WWII combat genre. In episode one, countertendencies such as dissent, anti-hero, and anti-group are seen throughout the episode and portrayed through the lack of support for Sobel. Sobel is portrayed as incompetent in the field of battle during practices in Georgia because he makes bad decisions and fails to listen to his supporting officers. His decisions result in 95 percent of his unit getting fake killed during the drill. Similar results occur during drills in England, showing his incompetence. The dissent is further demonstrated when Lewis Nixon worryingly says, "He gets jumpy and you get killed" (00:30:46-00:30:48), referring to Sobel's

incompetence. Additionally, this is instilled when some soldiers are talking about Sobel:

Roy Cobb: "You gotta admit, he's got no chance. Either the Krauts will get him, or one of us."

Joseph Liebgott: "Who? Sobel?"

Darrell (Shifty) Powers: "He screwed up one maneuver."

Joseph Liebgott: "Ah, you know, I'm always fumbling with grenades... Would be easy if one went off by accident, you know..."

Darrell (Shifty) Powers: "Well, they must have put him in charge for a reason."

Joseph Liebgott: "Yeah, 'cause the Army wouldn't make a mistake, right, Shift?" (00:31:40-00:32:00)

In a refusal to follow Sobel into combat, some of the soldiers create a mutiny by writing letters of resignation to their commanding officer. A close-up on their faces shows stoicism and frustration. Though it is treasonous to resign, they are ready to face the consequences to survive in battle.

In episode two, sticking to the anti-hero countertendency, American soldiers are portrayed as inhuman or evil. This is exhibited when William Guarnere disobeys orders and kills the German soldiers relentlessly during battle. A close-up on his face shows how angry and remorseless he is as he puts round after round into the enemy. This shows that some U.S. soldiers treat the enemy inhumanely by brutally firing upon the enemy when they are not returning fire. Furthermore, the enemy is portrayed as human during the episode instead of evil. This is illustrated when Malarkey comes across some German POWs and finds out that one is from Oregon. Malarkey asks the soldier why he is in the German army, and he says that he answered the call to come back to the fatherland to serve the Germans. This humanizes the enemy by showing that they are just answering the call like the U.S. soldiers and can even be from the same neighborhood. Immediately following this scene, Speirs gives all the POWs cigarettes, seemingly as an act of empathy, but then shoots them all. This makes some U.S. soldiers look like they are just as evil as the enemy, although not every soldier agrees with Speirs' action.

In episode three, unintended consequences of war, such as mental health issues, are portrayed. This is first illustrated from the opening scene when Albert Blithe is staring into the air. A close-up shot reveals that he is confused, signifying shell shock or mental health problems due to the battle. Blithe is seen throughout the battle of Carentan hiding and then gets hysterical blindness, which takes him out of

battle. Throughout the whole episode, Blithe is hysterical and cannot compose himself in battle. In one scene, a close-up of Blithe in a foxhole shows him screaming during a firefight. Furthermore, Speirs' character is portrayed as too calm during battle, to the point of desensitization. In one scene, he is talking to Blithe about how he sees war as just a game: "Yeah...It's a game, Blithe. That's all. Hell, we're just moving the ball forward one yard at a time" (00:32:32-00:32:40). Speirs then says:

Speirs: "You know why you hid in that ditch, Blithe?"

Blithe: "I was scared."

Speirs: "We're all scared."

Speirs: "You hid in that ditch because you think there's still hope. But, Blithe, the only hope you have is to accept the fact that you're already dead.

And the sooner you accept that, the sooner you'll be able to function as a soldier's supposed to function...without mercy. Without compassion.

Without remorse. All war depends upon it." (00:37:47-00:38:20)

This demonstrates the psychological dissonance many soldiers go through in order to cope during war, and further demonstrates that Speirs is desensitized. This in turn dehumanizes him because he is now functioning as a soldier without mercy, compassion, and remorse, which demonstrates why he killed the German POWs. Additionally, looting and dehumanizing traits are seen throughout episode three. Perconte steals multiple watches off dead bodies, which demonstrates a lack of respect for the dead and is dehumanizing. A close-up later shows him again taking a watch off a dead man's arm as if it was a typical thing to do.

In episode four, the lines of morality are blurred as soldiers are seen looting and laughing about it, as if looting is acceptable because they are at war. Later, the ineptness of the U.S. military is demonstrated when the U.S. soldiers are dominated during the battle, which is counter to propagandistic techniques, showing the enemy as superior. Furthermore, this episode is the first time the theme of individual survival is featured. Denver (Bull) Randleman gets stranded behind enemy lines after the battle. During this time, he hides in a barn with a Dutch father and daughter when a German soldier investigates the area. A close-up on Bull reveals him having to kill the German soldier with a knife to avoid drawing attention to his location. A close-up shows disgust in the face of a Dutch girl as she sees what Bull does. This demonstrates the consequences of war (having to kill the enemy in a brutal way) and the individual desire to survive, instead of focusing on the overall team survival, which is typical in a WWII combat film.

In episode five, mental health consequences of war are exhibited. This is illustrated through a close-up on Winters when he is on the subway in Paris. He sees a boy and then has flashbacks to the SS boy he killed in his last combat mission. Winters is dazed from thinking about the flashback, and the boy finally has to tell him that the train has come to its last stop. This clearly demonstrates psychological trauma from his actions during missions. It is further demonstrated when Winters talks with Lynn (Buck) Compton during a movie and he seems out of it mentally. Buck had been shot in the previous episode and was not the same, which was visible in a close-up on his face revealing a blank stare, showing him as a shell of a human. In the final scene of the episode, Easy Company is preparing to replace soldiers on the front line in Bastogne. When they pass by the soldiers returning from the front line, close-ups reveal these soldiers as disheartened, defeated, and traumatized as they walk slowly with their heads down, and one soldier simply says with desperation to them to “get out of here” (00:49:11), illustrating that he has gone through hell and was warning others of what awaits them in Bastogne.

In episode six, the glory and heroics of war are removed, and the episode slowly builds to questioning the war, exhibited through the medical staff. The first example is after Renée Lemaire, a nurse, is complaining to Eugene Roe, a medic, after losing a patient:

Roe: “You're a good nurse.”

Renée: “No. I never want to treat another wounded man again. I'd rather work in a butcher's shop.”

Roe: “But your touch calms people. That's a gift from God.”

Renée: “No, it's not a gift. God would never give such a painful thing.”
(00:42:45-00:43:20)

A close-up shot shows that Renée is visibly upset. The nurse, who has an important life-saving skill, has become so desensitized to the violence and gore that she no longer sees it as important or life-saving. Though she isn't overtly questioning the war efforts, she is questioning the necessity of her skill set and obviously feels hopeless because she compares it to a butcher shop, where the animals have one fate: death. The juxtaposition between her hopelessness and Roe's optimism and apparent belief in the war effort is powerful.

The buildup of questioning the war continues through the eyes of Roe when he brings his friend who is paralyzed to the nurse. A close-up on Roe shows him standing, blank-faced, as a fellow soldier asks him what happened to the soldier and Renée asks him if he is okay. He finally answers the soldier after being asked

several times, but he never answers Renée. This, with fast edits between the shocked look on his face and the large amount of wounded and dying soldiers, exhibit his bewilderment of how little help the soldiers are getting from the U. S. military. It is as if it is the first time he is seeing the scope of the human damage and loss. The next scene is the climax of this notion of questioning the war where the company is gathered around to listen to Col. Robert Sink read a letter from General McAuliffe to the company. During the letter, a wide-shot shows Roe sitting up against a tree with a disconnected look on his face while his fellow soldiers are laughing at the content of the letter. The letter reads:

Col. Sink: “General McAuliffe sent a message to the entire division. Thought maybe your people'd like to hear it.”

Col. Sink: “Men...General McAuliffe wishes us all a ‘Merry Christmas.’”

Col. Sink: “‘What's merry about this all, you ask? Just this: We've stopped cold everything that's been thrown at us from the North, East, South and West.’”

Col. Sink: “‘Now, two days ago the German commander demanded our honorable surrender to save the U.S.A. encircled troops from total annihilation.’”

Col. Sink: “‘The German commander received the following reply: 'To the German commander: Nuts!’”

Col. Sink: “‘We're giving our country and our loved ones at home a worthy Christmas present, and being privileged to take part in this gallant feat of arms, we're truly making ourselves a Merry Christmas.’”

Col. Sink: “Merry Christmas to you all and God bless you.” (00:51:22-00:52:24)

During the reading, the camera zooms in on Roe’s face after cutting between the company and back to him, ultimately getting a medium close-up of his face. Roe’s face appears disconnected, gazing into the distance, in disagreement with the light-hearted reaction of his fellow soldiers to the letter. He sees this “privileged” and “gallant feat of arms” as coming at a great cost, similar to what Renée called a “butcher’s shop.”

In episode seven, we see more negative consequences of war (specifically mental health) as well as anti-hero themes portrayed by incompetent leaders putting soldiers in harm’s way. This is first illustrated in the interviews (with the actual soldiers being portrayed in the miniseries) at the beginning of the episode when one soldier talks about how he had trouble in later life because the events of Bastogne

would come back in dreams and he could never forget them. When the episode begins, the mental health of Compton is explained when he sees Joseph Toye and Guarnere get blown up by an enemy shell. A close-up on Compton shows a look of disbelief. The viewer later sees a close-up on his face showing him crying, as well as a close-up of him at the aid station laying down and depressed. This montage illustrates the consequences of war: depression.

Furthermore, Norman Dike Jr. is portrayed as an incompetent leader whom no one can trust. This is portrayed through various comments from Carwood Lipton during the episode. Lipton says that Dike would disappear for hours without anyone knowing where he was, he was seen as a "bad leader" because "he made no decisions," and the company had "no confidence" in him. Lipton even complains to Winters that Dike is "gonna get a lot of Easy Company men killed" (00:51:29-00:51:31) when they invade Foye. During the battle of Foye, Dike goes against Winter's order and almost gets a number of soldiers killed. During the battle, slow motion cinematography employs extreme close-ups of the soldier's faces as they frantically ask Dike to make a commanding decision. Instead, an extreme close-up on Dike's face shows him wide-eyed and stressed as he tries to make a decision.

In episode nine, overarching themes of humanizing the enemy, questioning why they are still fighting, and excessive looting by Spiers are exhibited. This is first demonstrated during the interviews with the real-life soldiers talking about the end of the war. They talk about how they were fighting for their country, and the Germans were no different. In the very next scene, a close-up on some violinists and a cellist playing Beethoven while the German people clean up their bombed town humanizes the German people. This is further illustrated when 300,000 German soldiers are marching past the U.S. troops after surrendering. Winters says about the German soldiers, "Look at them, even in defeat they know how to march with pride" (00:28:09-00:28:14), which shows a reverence for the enemy in their surrender, which is humanizing, instead of mocking or demonizing them.

The questioning of the war effort is illustrated in this episode when Nixon talks to Winters about the failed parachute mission they made earlier that day. At this point, Easy Company is in Germany, and many German soldiers have already surrendered, so the end of the war is near, and any further loss of U.S. life is practically a waste. Nixon seems frustrated from the sarcastic tone of his voice as he discusses how their plane took a direct hit and he and two other soldiers made it out, but the rest of the company died over Germany somewhere, "Boom." Winters gives his condolences, and Nixon sarcastically agrees that it is terrible and says at

least he did not die. Nixon then laments that he has to write all of the letters home to the soldiers' parents letting them know that their kids never made it out of the plane, essentially saying that they died for nothing. Winters tells Nixon to write that the soldiers died as heroes, and Nixon asks Winters, "You really still believe that?" (00:13:08-00:13:10). Winters replies with a yes and asks Nixon the same question, but Nixon just brushes it off. Nixon appears frustrated at the pointless loss of life, which furthers the questioning of the war effort.

Discussion and Conclusions

Although *Band of Brothers* exhibits overarching characteristics of Basinger's widely accepted definition of the war genre, countertendencies eclipse these narrative conventions. Many countertendencies are realistic depictions of war as illustrated in the antiwar genre, such as soldiers questioning why they are fighting and unintended consequences of war. These realistic characteristics were referred to in many user reviews of the miniseries on imdb.com, as well as from professional film critics from *Variety* (McCarthy, *Variety*), *The New York Times* (James, *The New York Times*), *The New Yorker* (Franklin, *The New Yorker*), and *BBC News* (Hill, *BBC News*). For example, the miniseries was portrayed as a balance between "the ideal of heroism with the violence and terror of battle, reflecting what is both civilized and savage about war" (James, *The New York Times*). However, some countertendencies, such as the dehumanization of American soldiers and enemy humanization, go beyond both genres in exhibiting the atrocities of soldiers during war time. Only one professional film critic referenced these countertendencies, stating that the soldiers, "the good, the bad and those in-between—are exposed in their glory and their flaws" (Clinton, *CNN*). By discovering the countertendencies in *Band of Brothers* to this definition, it further cements Solomon's notion that the war film is "the most difficult of all genres to define, even though the idea of war is obvious enough" (242).

Accordingly, cinematic characteristics of the WWII combat film genre were evident in *Band of Brothers*; however, there were various countertendencies exhibited as well. The textual analysis revealed overarching themes of Basinger's war genre throughout the entire ten-part series. A group of military men (Easy Company) is led by a hero (Richard Winters) to carry out various military objectives. The group is composed of men from various backgrounds and ages. As the series unfolds, contrasting forces are seen throughout "night and day, action and

repose, safety and danger, combat and noncombat, comedy and tragedy, dialogue and action” (Basinger 176). The enemy is seen throughout the series, sometimes close and sometimes faceless. Rituals of the past and present are enacted throughout the series, such as celebrating at the bar, singing, reading mail, doing laundry, playing sports, celebrating Christmas, and discussing post war plans. Various battles take place that create learning and growth for the group, and many members of the group die or are injured.

The textual analysis also exhibited various countertendency characteristics in the docudrama, which fall in line with the antiwar genre. These are soldiers questioning why they are fighting and unintended consequences of war. These elements fall within Solomon's two goals of antiwar films: “[to operate] mainly in a realistic mode that serves to deglamorize the romantic elements associated with fighting for a cause, for freedom, or for the attainment of noble or heroic ends;” and “[to employ] an iconoclastic approach to debunk heroic warfare” (252).

The textual analysis revealed two countertendencies that go beyond the WWII combat genre and antiwar genres: enemy humanization and dehumanization of American soldiers. Propaganda is an overall theme of the WWII combat genre, and propaganda tends to portray the enemy in a negative light. According to visual propaganda theory, propagandists (those who are facilitating in the creation of propaganda) often diabolize the enemy or dehumanize them to help justify their actions and rationale towards the enemy during war (Bryder 103-6). Additionally, the core of the war genre comes from the character's attitudes toward the enemy, “the heroes are motivated to defend their side against an oppressive or totalitarian enemy, usually depicted only from the heroes' point of view, if depicted at all, as a source of abstract evil” (Solomon 244).

By concluding that *Band of Brothers* transcends the traditional scope of both the antiwar or WWII combat film, it has validated the soldiers' experiences in WWII by portraying both the heroics and horrors of war and not just the romanticized parts. Additionally, it has given space for post 9/11 American war films to transcend specific war subgenres and make more complex and nuanced stories. *Band of Brothers* was a key turning point for how war is viewed today in popular culture and American society.

Although this study demonstrates that *Band of Brothers* goes beyond the typical WWII combat or antiwar film in its realistic portrayal of war, further research is needed to demonstrate if this is evident in its sister WWII docudrama, *The Pacific* (2010). Additionally, this research is limited because it is applying film war genre

characteristics, which are reserved for a filmic medium, to a war miniseries, which is made for television.

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Lessons from Litchfield: *Orange Is the New Black* as Netflix Feminist Intersectional Pedagogy

HAYLEY R. CROOKS AND SYLVIE FRIGON

“Sometimes I think this whole world/ Is one big prison yard/ Some of us are prisoners/ The rest of us are guards” - Bob Dylan

“I am here because I am no different from anybody else in here. I made bad choices. I committed a crime and being in here is no one's fault but my own” (“WAC Pac” 00:6:16-00:7:01); *Orange Is the New Black's* protagonist Piper Chapman says this to her mother when she visits Piper for the first time at Litchfield Penitentiary. White, middle-class privilege is made visible through Piper and used as a comedic narrative vehicle to critique, as bell hooks would put it, the white supremacist capitalist patriarchy that structures the prison-industrial-complex (PIC). *Orange Is the New Black (OITNB)* was one of Netflix's first original content productions to stream exclusively on the platform. The massively popular and sometimes contentious depictions of incarcerated women in the series do important cultural work by subverting the mainstream popular culture depictions of women in prison. Through hyper-visible and acerbically comic representation of white privilege, series creator Jenji Kohan employs a complex flashback structure to represent marginalized women often invisible in popular culture: women of color, poor and working-class women, queer women, older women, and women with disabilities.

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Piper's well-intentioned ownership of her situation when describing her experience of incarceration to her mother reveals a gaping omission: Piper is also the most privileged character we encounter at Litchfield. *Orange Is the New Black* is an imperfect show that makes large strides in rendering visible the faces of women bound up in mass incarceration. The series is also directly connected to the increasing visibility of the trans rights movement through the character of Sophia (played by activist Laverne Cox).¹ The word trans is used throughout this article because the character of Sophia, and the actress and activist Laverne Cox who plays her, do important work in popular culture for advancing visibility and rights for folks who identify as trans. We use the term trans throughout this article to address the unique political fight that trans inmates, particularly women of color, continue to face every day within popular discourses of feminism, popular culture, and the prison-industrial complex (PIC). Through Piper's white privilege and bleakly comic interactions with the realities of racialization in the PIC, the text of *OITNB*, albeit in a limited way, works to subvert popular post-racial discourses popularized during the Obama presidency.

This article suggests that *OITNB* challenges post-racial discourses, particularly as they intersect with debates around the PIC and representations of prison in the media. While it is tempting to dismiss *OITNB* based on previous representations of women in prison, in doing so, viewers may miss how the series repurposes many of the clichéd tropes of the women-in-prison (WIP) genre. Namely, the narrative use of white privilege in the series and its innovative use of flashback and point-of-view shots serves as feminist intersectional pedagogy for a mass Netflix audience (Crenshaw; hooks). *Orange Is the New Black* employs white privilege as a comic and pedagogical strategy rendering white privilege visible and uses mise-en-scene and flashbacks to represent the human stories of individual women navigating interlocking oppressions that lead to their conflicts with the law. Finally, toward the end of the article, the dialogue unfolding between academic and public feminisms initiated by and through the series is examined to show how this flawed yet productive text offers a mainstream platform for broader social activism. Moments like the exchange above between Piper and her mother reveal the self-

¹ The word trans can be claimed by a diversity of folks with nuanced identities. For example, trans can include genderqueer, non-gender, third gender, two-spirit and more. We use the word trans in this text when referring to the character Sophia and the actress Laverne Cox because both Kohan and Cox center trans rights in public discourses around the show. We resist any discourse that would purport one prescriptive system of trans identity (Clements).

reflexive use of white, middle-class privilege mobilized through comedic strategies in the show to critique the dynamics of race and class oppression embodied in Litchfield.

Many scholars and critics have swiftly and rightly problematized the insidious elements of the show, such as the clichéd ethnic and racial tropes that it often reproduces. This article provides a qualitative textual analysis of *OITNB* through an intersectional feminist media lens. It draws on textual analysis to conduct a discourse analysis of the larger cultural conversation around the criminalization of women of color of which the series is one part. This text examines significant moments from the first four seasons of the popular series when public discourse around the show — and its engagement with mass incarceration — was at its peak. In this article we apply an intersectional feminist media lens to the textual analysis of sequences from *OITNB* to demonstrate how the series subverts the WIP genre. This textual analysis situates the series within a larger cultural conversation about the racialized, classed, and gendered dimensions of the prison-industrial complex.

Theoretical Underpinnings

Intersectional Feminism. Legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw's article, *Mapping the Margins*, in which she coined the term intersectionality, signaled the formal introduction of intersectionality to academic feminism. Crenshaw, along with Collins and hooks, developed the theory from black feminisms. Intersectionality is a crucial addition or corrective to second-wave feminism. Intersectional theorists hold that gender is not the primary structuring principle of women's lived experience. Instead, gender is one identity factor that intersects with other categories of social location such as racialization and class producing asymmetrical impacts of structural oppression on individuals. Crenshaw's original paper included dozens of cases detailing how black and immigrant women's experiences continue to be ignored by both feminism and the anti-racist movement. For example, Crenshaw examines the complexities that non-English speaking women, women of color, and immigrant women face while trying to access rape crisis and shelter services.

Applying an intersectional lens to a text means that readers must confront how different prejudices are connected and inform each other. As Laura Bates argues, intersectionality is crucial to contemporary feminism as it is a tool that allows people to examine how discriminatory practices such as homophobia, transphobia,

ageism, and ableism stem from the same cause (293). People who face prejudices such as racism and homophobia are experiencing the impacts of being considered “Other” from the dominant position. Just as sexism partly springs from placing men as the norm from which women deviate (Bates 294), racialized folks, sexual minorities, or those living with a disability face being considered an “Other,” who deviates from normative identities.

News anchors and talk show hosts in the United States mass media often mobilize the term “post-racial” to assess the “measure of progress in the Obama Era” (Coates para 1). The examples of public pedagogy from *OITNB* analyzed herein exist alongside other contemporary art practices that critique post-racism. *Orange Is the New Black* represents a critical approach to empty notions of “post-racial” equality and, we argue, draws mass audience attention to the raced, gendered, and classed inequalities of the PIC. Attending to the way the series subverts post-racial discourses is crucial because, as Catherine Squires notes, “popular television can inspire moments for confronting race and racism” (136). Jenji Kohan repurposes the WIP genre and employs subversive feminist humor, building human characters whose personal stories highlight the pains of imprisonment (Sykes). These characters walk viewers through the prison complex so that the viewers understand how the PIC functions through a logic of white supremacy, sexism, and advanced capitalism.

In other words, *OITNB* mobilizes flashback and comedy in its representations of women in prison to render visible the way that Litchfield functions as a microcosm of the PIC. *OITNB* highlights the relationship between the PIC and the informal but ongoing racial segregation of the United States and North America. *Orange Is the New Black* offers a corrective to the “post-racial mystique” (Squires) of television shows that represent racialized characters but fail to represent how racism structures lived experiences. Instead, flashbacks in the series portray Litchfield's occupants navigating the racialized, classed, and gendered prisons of larger society before landing in Litchfield. These flashbacks demonstrate how the series represents the criminalization of women's experiences that happen long before they enter prison. Flashbacks lay bare how the PIC operationalizes systemic racism. Kohan's use of the WIP genre works as a corrective to the historical legacies of the genre, built on sensationalizing and profiting from the representation of women in prison.

The Women in Prison Genre and the Post-Racial Myth

Film historians and media theorists often place women in prison films within the “sexploitation” sub-category of exploitation films (Clark). Exploitation films (sometimes referred to by film historians as Grindhouse films or B-movies) included biker films, zombie movies, and WIP films. Hastily made B-movies made cheaply — often looking grainy — ran in “grindhouse” theatres that stayed open all night (Stevenson). While films set in prison were popular as early as the 1930s, these were usually set in “penal institutions for men” (84). B-movie producers latched onto the idea of the women's prison setting in the 1940s after realizing “the lurid appeal of a movie set in a women's prison,” (84) and by the 1940s and 1950s several of these films were being produced including many that take place in reform institutions for girls (Clark). These movies spawned a series of WIP television series in North America, England, and Australia. Clark points to *Girls in Prison* (1956), *Reform School Girl* (1957), and *Girl's Town* (1959) as examples. *The Big Doll's House/Women's Penitentiary* (1971) is cited as being the first film of the WIP genre which emerged from the genre of films known as blaxploitation.

Locating the original roots of the WIP genre in blaxploitation helps us see how representations of incarcerated women are informed by historical legacies of American anti-black racism, specifically, racist depictions of black femininity. To be sure, a growing number of TV shows incorporate what Rachel E. Dubrofsky, in “Jewishness, Whiteness and Blackness on Glee: Singing to the Tune of Post-Racism” refers to as “hipster racism.” Shows that employ “hipster racism” obfuscate racist premises by mobilizing explicitly racist jokes supposedly for satire (87). “Hipster racism” ridicules racist stereotypes without actually unpacking the underlying structure of the racist stereotype itself (Dubrofsky 87). In some sequences, *OITNB* slips into a post-racial ethos. For example, Piper's exchange with her mother that opens this article blurs the line between Piper's detachment from her privilege and the show's internal logic. For example, this scene is structured to elicit sympathy for Piper, thus shoring up her relationship of privilege with the viewer. However, *OITNB* also makes significant strides toward challenging post-racial discourses by ridiculing the myths of color-blindness and racial equality that bolster the United States' PIC (Enck and Morrissey 303). The critique of post-racial discourse is particularly apparent in those moments where the show represents the intersection of gender and incarceration.

Methodology

In the following sections, textual analysis is applied to subversive sequences from the first four seasons. We approach these sequences through an intersectional lens and analyze discourses advanced by *OITNB* as elements of social practice. (Fairclough). We apply film theory (Bordwell and Thompson) and representation studies (Giroux and McLaren; Hall) to carefully read sequences, narrative strategies, and mise-en-scene of a sample of episodes and flashbacks. This approach was chosen, coding for the themes of “privilege as pedagogy” and “challenges to post-racial discourses” to elaborate upon how the series functions as intersectional pedagogy for a mass audience. This article draws on data from the text of the hit series, as well as from paratextual content about *OITNB*, including industry and production crew interviews about the program.

Series Summary. *OITNB* is an original series comedy-drama on the digital streaming platform Netflix. With seven seasons, it was Netflix’s second original series and the most streamed of its original content as of 2019 (Ha; Wallenstein). This analysis concentrates on moments from the first four seasons as they generated a significant amount of substantive conversation in the public sphere around gender, race, and incarceration. Piper Kerman's memoir *Orange Is the New Black: My Year in a Women's Prison* is the inspiration behind the series. In the first season, viewers meet Piper after a drug charge from over a decade ago comes back to haunt her. This charge disrupts Piper's white, blonde, middle-class life in Manhattan, with her fiancé Larry (Jason Biggs) and catapults her into Litchfield Penitentiary. The first season showcases Piper's extreme privilege and ignorance as she blunders her way through acclimatizing to prison life. Throughout the first four seasons, Piper's role becomes increasingly less central, and viewers learn about the lives and circumstances of the diverse group of women that are in Litchfield Penitentiary.

Marginalizing Representations or Representations of Marginality?

Karlene Faith notes, in *Unruly Women: The Politics of Confinement & Resistance*, how media representations of women's crimes are often exaggerated. Faith argues that "the monsters serve as the sick/bad backdrop for potential normalcy" (Faith 259). Smart notes:

legal, medical and early social scientific discourses intertwine to produce a woman who is fundamentally a problematic and unruly body; whose sexual and reproductive capacities need constant surveillance and regulation

because of the threat that this supposedly "natural" woman would otherwise pose to the moral and social order. (8)

While certain representations in *OITNB* often play on racial stereotypes -for example, the depiction of Suzanne's (Crazy Eyes) hyper-embodied-ness and obsession with white femininity- it also humanizes the women in conflict with the law.

The characters' backstories developed through flashback invite the audience to literally and figuratively witness the constraining (outside world) circumstances that preceded (literal) incarceration and continue to inform the women's lives in Litchfield. Despite the more harmful elements of Suzanne's characterization, the flashback that structures her story contextualizes her (inter)personal struggles. For example, the depiction of the racialized power dynamics in her family and, by extension, broader society suggests how Suzanne arrived in this social location. For example, viewers see Suzanne desperate to fit in on the day she is taken to the hospital to meet her new sibling. Suzanne's deep disappointment with her hair not sitting flat — and her white parents' evident transition toward treating her as an annoyance — clearly illustrates how her white family cast her as “less-than” upon the arrival of their long wanted biological child. For example, viewers see background narrative in film and television stories, which, just as in the solo numbers in musicals, flesh out information about a character's emotions. Backstories give life to characters and insight into their inner world to offer ways for the viewers to connect with a character. Usually, an absence of these types of backstories shore up depictions of people of color as one-dimensional, thereby re-centering white characters who are more fully drawn (Ono and Projansky). The oppressive legacies of minstrelsy can still be seen in popular culture portrayals of people of colour through one-dimensional stereotypes (Sammond).

The flashback structure of the show is more than just a clichéd tool used to reveal background information, as it is used in many television shows. *Orange Is the New Black* does reproduce many of the same assumptions underpinning the legacy and image bank of representations of criminalized women. However, in specific instances, such as the prison election in the episode "WAC Pack," the text of the series advances a critical analysis of the inequality and power relations inherent in mass incarceration. For example, the depiction of Pennsylvania's victimization in “A Tittin’ and A Hairin,” and the nuanced representation of trans inmate Sophia in the episodes “Lesbian Request Denied” and “Don't Make Me Come Back There” add to the contemporary visual archive of the pains of

imprisonment (Sykes). Moreover, it addresses the underrepresented issues that women in prison contend with daily. In episodes from season one such as “Tit Punch” and “The Chickening,” Piper's bumbling leads viewers through the world of the PIC.

Kohan uses POV shots to create the most visceral and significant images in season four. For example, in “Toast Can’t Never Be Bread Again” Daya ends up holding a gun dropped by one of the officers during a peaceful protest that turns into a riot. The viewer looks at the male correctional officer on his knees from Daya's POV before a spiraling dolly shot codes the anger and upheaval unfolding in the cafeteria. Poussey suffocates to death after being trapped under the weight of a correctional officer during this protest. As the camera moves up toward the ceiling the viewer is forced to witness Tasha “Taystee” Jefferson’s (Danielle Brooks) excruciating grief as she clings to her dead friend on the floor of the cafeteria as correctional officers look on (“Animals” 00:57:16-00:58:35). At the end of “Toast Can't Never Be Bread Again,” the viewer sees an additional flashback sequence from Poussey's brief and vibrant life. She dances in a club with folks in drag (00:40:09-00:42:20) and has a meaningful conversation with a “pretend monk” overlooking New York City's skyline by the water's edge (01:07:24-01:08:11).

The episode closes with the series' first glance into the camera from a character. A tracking shot pans down over the New York City skyline and pushes into a close-up of Poussey in her pre-prison life. Poussey is laughing and looking out over the water toward the city. Poussey then turns to stare directly at us, the viewer, smiling broadly; she looks happy and free (01:15:10-01:15:32). In this sequence, the viewers have come a long way from season one in which the impacts of mass incarceration on the black female body remain at a distance, out of focus. At the close of season four, the devastating effects of mass incarceration on women of color are made visible without reducing women of color to a monolithic group identified solely through victimization. The flashback structure such as this one in “Toast Can't Never Be Bread Again” does so much more than break up the prison interior mise-en-scene for the viewer. Instead, Kohan's use of a flashback structure to give full humanity to Poussey shows us how Poussey’s identity took shape in the outside world. Poussey’s life outside of prison, like the flashbacks reveal of so many characters, contain as many obstacles and cultural barriers as Litchfield itself.

The flashbacks do meaningful work that extend beyond the narrative of the first four seasons of *OITNB*. For example, the show quickly dispels any stereotypes viewers may have of what constitutes a 'queer' upbringing in Big Boo's flashback

sequence in “Finger in the Dyke”. Rather than a stereotypical troubled childhood, the viewers see a stable, upper-middle-class home. Big Boo, as a little girl with a short haircut and wearing boy's clothes, is arguing with her mother, who is pleading with her to wear a feminine dress with a lace collar for picture day at school. Her father finally promises Boo a root beer if she will put on a dress so that her mother will have a picture of Boo that “won't give her a stroke” that her mom can show to her grandmother (“Finger in the Dyke”. 00:06:39-00:07:30). In moments like this, the series pushes back against one-dimensional tropes of criminalized women. In “Finger in the Dyke” the viewer sees *OITNB* re-purposing the WIP genre and creating representations of female prisoners that offer mass audiences an introduction to how women's lives are shaped through intersecting oppressions. The series' careful use of flashback elicits empathy for the women in Litchfield (Tillet) allowing for representations of the women's experiences of confinement before and after they enter prison.

The flashbacks create whole people, including the people on the outside of Litchfield that struggle to maintain relationships with the women inside and guards who contend with domestic challenges. For example, we see corrections officers struggle with their low incomes and the challenges posed by the increasing privatization of vital services. While many of the characters portrayed on the show at first appear to be stereotypes it is through the backstories that each and every character comes to life in full, complex and nuanced ways. For example, Taystee consistently speaks in African American Vernacular English (AAVE). It is well documented that AAVE, especially when written into television dialogue by white creators, is often inaccurately portrayed and linked to harmful stereotypes (Ruzich and Blake). In *Orange Is the New Black* however, Taystee's brilliant use of humour as a political tool that highlights systemic racial oppression, is communicated through AAVE. Danielle Henderson's commentary on the character Taystee neatly summarizes the radical work that *OITNB* dialogue does at its best.

See, I loved Taystee right away. One of the funniest aspects of my life as a black feminist is noticing how quick white liberal media (and white liberals in general) are to classify women of color as singular entities. You can be a paralegal, but you can't use African-American vernacular English. You can use African-American vernacular English, but that means you work retail or in a fast-food restaurant. In my life, people do both, and are way more fluid in terms of how they adapt to different situations (which is a whole different commentary). So I loved that for most viewers, the assumption

would be that Taystee was the “typical black girl” as they were accustomed to seeing her, but when you listen to what she is actually saying, her intelligence, humor and personality confound the traditional notions of what white folks think they know about black folks. (Doyle)

Flashbacks are employed to narrate Taystee’s entire life of institutionalization moving from foster care to juvenile prison (“Thanksgiving”). As Sophie Gilbert points out in *The Atlantic*, the show does not draw a distinction between “inmates, prison guards, corporate overlords, and family members in its thesis that everyone can do terrible things whatever their background or religion or financial status.” Kohan’s unique intervention, however, exists in the richly drawn characters whose stories highlight the uneven impacts of criminalization on the most marginalized folks such as working-class women of colour.

Even critics who largely dismiss the show praise the representation of the women’s backstories through *Orange Is the New Black’s* complex flashback structure (Dumas). It is through the flashback structure that Kohan demonstrates how often the only thing that separates the ladies in Litchfield from those in the outside world is luck (and privilege). Far from advancing a color-blind approach, many sequences of the show, including entire episodes (“WAC Pack”), are devoted to ridiculing post-racial discourses through a mix of comedy and pathos. This resistance to post-racial fantasy is seen in Suzanne’s “Crazy Eyes” flashback sequence as she sits with her adoptive younger white sister and her sister’s friends at a slumber party. Before the party, her sister tells her not to “be weird,” and when Suzanne adds a dragon to their princess story, one of the white, blond girls says to her “That’s stupid. You’re stupid” (“Hugs Can Be Deceiving” 00:28:28-00:29:02). The logic of *Orange Is the New Black* does not always *operationalize* intersectionality. That is, the series does not use each episode to represent the power imbalances between the women nor does it engage as deeply as it could with racialized embodiments. However, some sequences, while flawed as all popular culture texts are, offer visibility for those often rendered invisible within mass culture broadly and the prison genre specifically. These moments shine a light on race rather than shy away from the racism experienced by these women at the familial, cultural, political, and institutional levels. The series is opening space for public and accessible dialogue around race, sexuality, transphobia, women’s bodies, and incarceration.

OITNB offers up a potential space through which to challenge the “individual and social cost of mass incarceration,” which is “increasingly recognized as

untenable" (Schwan 474). *Orange Is the New Black* performs much needed public intersectional feminist pedagogy through locating individual women's stories within broader narratives of inequality and constrained choice. In this vein, the series is situated alongside "artistic creations and activist scholarship that employ the visual as a way in which to more effectively and poignantly convey the scale, scope and irrational logic of mass incarceration" (Brown 177; Carrabine).

Audiences Prefer Blondes: Privilege as a Narrative and Pedagogical Strategy

As several critics have noted, *Orange Is the New Black* frequently employs many racial and ethnic stereotypes from dominant popular culture as well as the WIP genre. The early seasons center prison life around white femininity and reproduce many harmful tropes linking people of color to deviance and criminal behavior (Mustakeem 324; Wilson). The show downplays the harsh physical and emotional realities of prison to make the series more palatable for a wide viewing audience. However, the series also shines a light on the racialization of mass incarceration and "provides the first real exposure through an online platform for both national and international audiences to consider the often-marginalized lives of women jailed for various reasons" (Mustakeem 323). It is true that Piper, the protagonist, occupies a position of privilege. The many nuanced arguments around the politics of visibility (Hall; hooks) can and should apply to the use of a white protagonist. However, the text of the show weaves her privilege into pedagogy.

The series creator explained her use of white privilege in an interview about her motives for using Piper as the central vehicle of the show: "You can take this yuppy white woman and follow her, as like a gateway drug, and through her, you can tell all these other stories as well" (Celebs.com, 00:00:40-00:00:52). The sequences from *Orange Is the New Black* that put faces to otherwise invisible incarcerated women of color exist alongside an expanding visual image bank (Brown; Carrabine). Visual criminology is a corollary of the growing US anti-prison movement (Davis) that is emerging from the work of women of color activists and scholars who approach prison abolition through an intersectional anti-violence lens. The very nature of the prison renders the incarcerated as "disappeared subjects" (Brown 185). In offering a visual representation of a women's prison, the series fits well within a critical visual criminology of prison "through which other social problems become visible" (Brown 184). Namely, OITNB highlights how women

in prison experience the foundations of criminal justice: policing, arrest, prosecution, and sentencing that disproportionately target[s] poor communities and communities of color (Brown and Shept). The show creator Jenji Kohan addresses the rationale behind the intentional use of privilege as pedagogy and unpacks it. She wanted to tell the stories of criminalized women of color and admits, "I could not have sold a show about black and Latina and old women in prison, you know?" Kohan goes on to explain, "but if I had the girl-next-door, coming in as my fish out of the water, I can draw a certain audience in through her that can identify with her" (McIlveen). Kohan's market logic is obviously problematic. Plenty of room exists to critique Kohan's reliance on white privilege as the way to hook a large audience into the story. However, her upfront discussion about how she is mobilizing white privilege highlights a key strategy behind much of the feminist humor in the show (Sochen). *Orange Is the New Black* uses this privilege to create a series of "teachable" moments regarding the intersections of race, class, and gender as they impact the characters' lived experiences.

Many critics are rightly preoccupied with Piper's troubling role as the viewer's eyes and way into the prison space. However, as the viewer sees in the narrative progression of season two, three, and (most notably) four, the audience gets to know and sympathize with the characters in Litchfield. Piper begins to take a backseat in terms of her importance to the narrative. A close reading of this series reveals that the complex ways in which the representations are constructed result in Piper being not merely a privileged viewer but also a viewer of privilege. In other words, many of the episode storylines place Piper in a situation in which she, and by extension, the audience learns about some of the factors (such as systemic racism, child abuse and transphobia) that increase an individual's chances of coming into conflict with the law.

The viewer sees privilege employed as a pedagogical strategy numerous times. For example, in an early attempt to get shea butter from Sophia at the hair salon by offering future payback in commissary goods, Taystee and Sophia share a laugh after Sophia proclaims, "credit denied" ("Tit Punch," 00:31:42-00:32:33). This moment turns Piper's expectations and assumptions rooted in race and class privilege upside down; her credit does not work here, and for the first time in her life, Piper explicitly confronts her internalized sense of entitlement. This pedagogy of privilege weaves through *Orange Is the New Black*, most notably through Kohan's use of a flashback structure. The representation of Litchfield is constructed through the eyes of women who live there. Giving women prisoners POV shots is

not a standard feature of the traditional WIP genre. However, they are used to significant effect in the series by drawing the audience into the women's individual life stories.

Several culture watchers have also noted the importance of reading Piper as a “viewer of privilege” as well as a “privileged viewer.” For example, the talk show host Hari Sreenivasan observed of Piper, “it's almost like this character gives you a lens to look at perhaps how women of color are getting into the penal system” (00:03:30-00:03:40). The narrative and marketing importance of Piper as a way into prison space steadily declines throughout the first three seasons of the show. Kohan's use of Piper as an entry point to more pressing issues is especially evident in the episodes in which Piper is mostly absent from the central narrative (“Thirsty Bird”; “Looks Blue, Tastes Red”). By season three, Larry disappears from the narrative, and Piper's role as the eyes of the viewer gives way to more compelling storylines. The arc of the first four seasons is a testament to the more significant narrative role that Piper serves within the landscape of the series. Since the series has established an audience that is absorbed in these women's lives, Piper as a gateway and tour guide has fallen away.

Throughout season three and four, we are given several examples of how Kohan slowly displaces Piper as the viewer's surrogate or the eyes of the prison. In season three, Piper is just another one of the women of Litchfield. Further, Piper capitalizes on her privilege and is profiting from other inmates. For example, she has them participate in her used-panty business (“Fear and Other Smells”) in the same way that the corporation Whispers is profiting from the manufacture of the lingerie inside the prison while paying inmates one dollar a day. Season three offers numerous representations of how individuals become inculcated in systemic problems rather than being individual ‘bad apple’ characters. The show does well to place criminalized women within broader systems of power inside and outside the walls of Litchfield. For example, in the previous episode (“Where My Dreidel At”) the viewer sees that Pensatucky thinks that when the guard Coates demands that she imitate a dog by fetching a donut, she believes this the beginning of a romantic relationship. Another example of this occurs when a guard rapes Pensatucky (“A Tittin’ and a Hairin’”). Rather than portray Pensatucky's sexual assault through the typical lens of the WIP genre, the flashback sequence places Pensatucky's experience within a broader history of poverty and abuse at the hands of boys, men, and her mother. Piper's questions, particularly in the earlier episodes of the show, are frequently met with retorts from the other women. The retorts play

on Piper's assumptions and, by extension, those of the audience. Moments of feminist humor highlight her ignorance regarding the extent to which her race and class advantages color her expectations.

Sequences like the one discussed above also tear down pre-conceptions about women that come into conflict with the law. For example, one such response is given to Piper by Nicky in the fourth episode of the series. When Piper asks Nicky why she is drilling a hole in the wall, Nicky tells her, "it's uh, an art piece representing the futility of blue-collar labor in a technological age...and vaginas" ("Imaginary Enemies" 00:06:30-00:06:50). These sequences are also sometimes heavy-handed. However, Piper moves into the background of the narrative as the series progresses. By season four, the viewer sees some more nuanced discussions of white privilege and accountability from multiple white minor characters. The second episode of the fourth season called "Power Suit" offers an instructive example of how far the United States of Litchfield is from a post-racial reality. "Power Suit" offers an example of how the series mobilizes a self-conscious white privilege as an anti-racist pedagogy for a mass Netflix audience.

Racial and ethnic divisions in the prison increase as Litchfield becomes increasingly over-crowded. Throughout "Power Suit," numerous white characters, those from working-class and poor backgrounds as well as the affluent Judy King, reference how they read fellow prisoners. Throughout the episode, the viewer sees repeated examples of white characters explicitly and implicitly discussing racism. For example, when Angie Rice says, "there's (sic) so many Mexicans now it's like a Home Depot parking lot in here," Leanne Taylor points out that she should have focused her racial ire on folks from the Dominican Republic saying: "Dominicans... if you're going to be racist, you have to be accurate, or you just look dumb" (00:07:30-00:07:40). They then go back and forth, describing stereotypes of various ethnicities and nationalities until they land on stereotypes of people from the Dominican Republic before Angie says, "yeah, that's right...I hate them" (00:07:40-00:07:50).

Toward the end of the episode, when the famous TV personality Judy (a parody of Martha Stewart) arrives at the prison, Yoga Jones is selected as her only roommate, and Jones confronts Judy about her race and class privilege:

Yoga Jones: "I was living a regular prison life, in my regular prison bunk, and now I'm the 1%. Everyone else is living on top of each other like Petco budgies; this is not fair."

Judy: "I used to be a hippy once I outgrew it..."

Jones: "Healey said you specifically requested a white roommate of the non-threatening variety."

Judy: "I didn't ask for this." [referring to the semi-private room].

Jones: "Well, you didn't turn it down."

Judy: "Well, I'm not going to pitch a fit for my own discomfort. Lord, call me crazy, but I have learned if someone is offering you something nice, you shut up and say thank you."

Jones: "You can't shut up and say thank you at the same time. The two things negate one another."

Judy: "You know what I think, I think you secretly love being in this room away from all the others. You think it's nice, and that has thrown the crunchy parts of you into quite a tizzy."

Jones: "Just because we live together doesn't mean we have to talk."

Judy: [beat, offering Jones a steaming mug of tea complete with mug and saucer] "It's herbal."

Jones: [accepting the tea] "Goddammit." (00:39:22-00:41:57)

This exchange highlights Judy's apathetic attitude in refusing to use her racial privilege to fight inequality. Kohan also represents liberal activist Yoga Jones' susceptibility to accepting the advantages that come with whiteness. Over less than four minutes of dialogue, we see Jones rhetorically rebel against her new room assignment. She explains to Judy that even if she did not choose to be assigned to this room it is not fair to passively accept the privileges that attend her whiteness. Jones, in her conversation with Judy, cites the principle of staying silent in the face of white privilege and then realizes she is going to accept the herbal tea and stay in this semi-private room.

In season four the viewer is offered several examples of how *OITNB* represents whiteness as a privileged status. Whiteness is also represented as an identity actively assumed in different ways by Caucasian women in Litchfield. For example, in "We'll Always Have Baltimore," Danny interrupts a panel discussion on the topic of correction industry purchasing shouting at one of the panelists "why don't you tell us how you doubled the beds, Linda? Or, did you tell them how the food makes everyone puke or how Sophia Burssett is in the SHU for no reason?" (00:39:40-00:40:00).² Danny continues to confront a roomful of contractors at "CorrectiCon" a corrections conference. Interrupting the panel, a second time, Danny shouts:

² SHU refers to a particular housing unit for solitary confinement.

I'm finished with a company that refuses to acknowledge what happens when we monetize human beings. Do you even see yourselves? Lasers and prison ice-cream? This whole thing is a disgusting display of how industry dollars are spent. I used to be like you I would come to this conference every year and never thought about the inmates. (00:40:52-00:41:55)

After mocking the conference's prison-themed ice cream and laser gun demonstrations, Danny continues to confront the room, "this whole thing is a disgusting display of how industry dollars are spent" (00:41:55-00:42:00). Danny completes his monologue by saying, "I was like you a few months ago, I came to this conference every year, and I never thought about the inmates" (00:42:05-00:42:50). The fact that Danny foregrounds the barbaric use of isolation in the case of trans inmate Sophia Burssett underscores the critical work that *OITNB* does in advancing visibility of the unique inequalities and barriers that trans inmates face in the PIC. Moreover, the character of Sophia and Laverne Cox, the actress who portrays her, offered unprecedented representation of the intersecting oppressions shaping the experiences of trans people of color helping to launch the contemporary trans rights movement. For example, *Time* magazine's May 2014 cover story "The Transgender Tipping Point," featuring Cox introduced the trans rights movement to a mass North American audience (Steinmetz).

In season four, Piper is brought face to face with the implications of her persisting blindness when it comes to her racial privilege. In a gloomily comic and dramatic sequence, Piper has assembled a room full of people for a prison advisory council meeting to discuss making the prison a safer place amid increasing crowding. While she seems oblivious to the fact that everybody that is listening to her impassioned speech about being on the lookout for violence and graffiti are white, Piper unwittingly incites racial hatred. For example, Leanne suddenly stands and declares, "Piper is right, you guys, you can't swing a cat around here lately without hitting a dirty Dominican. The viewer watches as Piper's face goes pale while she tries to clarify with a weakly uttered "that's not what I meant" ("We'll Always Have Baltimore" 00:55:15-00:55:33). Again, the viewer is presented with Piper's alignment with a "color blind" approach to egalitarianism than unwittingly leads her to stumble into chairing a meeting that foment white supremacist fervor.

As the episode closes, the viewer sees Piper looking on in disbelief as her "community carers" group becomes a white supremacist gang. Strains of

"Tomorrow Belongs to Me" from the musical *Cabaret* (ironically a popular song at white power rallies)³ crescendo as the women chant "white lives matter" louder and louder in unison. The camera pulls back to a closing shot of the group spiraling into a frenzy while the camera focuses on a Confederate flag boldly emblazoned on the back of one group member's neck then closes in on Piper's bewildered face. The minority group of white individuals in Litchfield feel oppressed because they are an underrepresented group within the prison. This dramatic musical sequence uses comedy to ridicule the feelings of the white minority when they realize that more and more people of color are making their way into this prison space. White people are vastly underrepresented in the PIC. The viewer is presented with this sardonic take on the notion of white "underrepresentation" that makes it clear how racial privilege informs this reality within the phenomenon of mass incarceration.

The irony of this moment in "WAC Pac" underscores Kohan's use of feminist humor. This episode is a useful example of how Kohan built growing complexity into representations of whiteness and privilege in the series while navigating the neoliberal context of media production. For example, a comic sequence between Taystee and Poussey in "WAC Pac" evidences the comedic challenges *Orange Is the New Black* mobilizes, rendering mainstream post-racial discourses and fantasies in the United States visible. During the episode "WAC Pack," the women are choosing representatives for the prison's Women's Advisory Council (WAC). Several African American women are discussing which issues to prioritize when Taystee and Poussey perform an extended impression of "white people politics" (00:19:22-00:20:13). The two women exchange facts about sushi, veganism, and whether they should wear their bangs "straight or in a sweep to the side" (00:19:22-00:20:13). Feminist humor highlights the vast delta between the struggles of white women and those of women of color.

The use of feminist humor is one example of how Kohan resists the myth of a post-racial America. In this lunchroom setting, Taystee and Poussey, who have both navigated lives shaped by systemic racism, do an impersonation highlighting a significant privilege white women have: they can leave race out of their political priorities. The two friends impersonating fictional white people Amanda and

³ The song "Tomorrow Belongs to Me" was written by John Kander and Fred Ebb, in the style of traditional German folk songs, for the stage and film version of the musical *Cabaret* (1972). In *Cabaret*, a Nazi youth sings the song to drum up patriotism for the fatherland. Ironically the song penned by two Jewish lyricists for a musical about the deplorable rise of Nazism in Berlin of the early 1930s, is frequently sung at white power rallies.

Mackenzie banter in response to Sophia's admirable quest to bring trans rights to the prison; a feat that Taystee and Poussey argue might not be possible with white people at the helm. Taystee — portraying Mackenzie — remarks: "Let's talk about health care Amanda" to which Poussey (portraying Amanda) responds "I'd rather not it's not polite" (00:18:50-00:19:20). Taystee then tells her friends about "a documentary about the best sushi in the world" which she "didn't enjoy" as much as she might have since she is now "a vegan" ("WAC PAC" 00:19:22-00:20:13). Media representations are a significant site where power dynamics unfold in popular culture. For example, characters that push the boundaries of what is typically portrayed in popular culture can reveal systems of gender, race, and class domination. As we know, *Orange Is the New Black* is an original series that was created for Netflix and reaches a broad demographic (Matrix), which has already resulted in knowledge translation and real-world offline activism. What Sidneyeve Matrix refers to as "the Netflix effect" necessarily means that video-on-demand content allows viewers to participate in online/offline cultural conversations around content in ways that the broadcast era of television programming did not allow. This participation occurs in fan conversations around *Orange Is the New Black*, which unfold through social networking sites and become tied to digital spaces of activism such as Black Lives Matter and the trans rights movement.

Sophia Bursett: Prison Hairstylist and Intersectional Educator

OITNB's Laverne Cox has embraced the show as a platform for trans rights activism.⁴ Actress Diane Guerrero (who plays Maritza Ramos) used her visibility afforded by the show to write an op-ed for *The Los Angeles Times*, about the tragic and abrupt separation from her parents that she experienced as a child, urging Americans to inform themselves about immigrant rights. Despite heated debate and dialogue around the extent to which this text can be deemed progressive, critics have seemingly found consensus when it comes to the character of Sophia (played by Laverne Cox). Even feminist theorist bell hooks, who is admittedly not a fan of the show, argued that "one of the most compelling images in the series, one of the most progressive images on the show is the character of Sophia" ("Public Dialogue

⁴ Laverne Cox regularly speaks on the issue of rights for trans people, mainly focusing on trans women of color, who encounter disproportionate levels of violence, including homicide. Cox also writes on the topic for outlets such as *Huffington Post*.

at The New School” 00:15:30-00:16:00). The sequence in which Sophia and her wife Crystal have an intensely emotional conversation about their son in “Lesbian Request Denied” is cited by hooks in the “Public Dialogue at The New School” (00:16:50-00:18:10) and others as being unprecedented in the history of television representations (please also see Rosenberg and Henderson). As hooks notes, this conversation between Sophia and her wife is a television first; the scene depicts folks of colour, who are usually represented only through the lens of difference, engaged in a meaningful conversation in which they work through personal conflict (“Public Dialogue at The New School”).

In the third episode of the series "Lesbian Request Denied," Sophia, in a moment of desperation, asks Crystal to smuggle hormones into the prison for her. Crystal's anger and disappointment lead to a complicated and emotional conversation between the two women of color: one, a trans person, and the other her wife. This nuanced conversation between Sophia and Crystal is further evidence of the complexity that *OITNB* offers around the intersections of race and gender as they inform sexual orientation, gender identity, and incarceration. Perhaps the most compelling evidence of broader activism attached to the show is Laverne Cox's work on the issue of rights and visibility for trans people. From producing a documentary film on the human rights abuses of trans individuals to lecturing about violence facing trans people of color, Cox has used the show as an activist springboard. Through her platform on *OITNB*, Cox has transformed transnational conversations on trans rights particularity their intersection with ongoing systemic forms of racist violence such as the PIC.

Some public intellectuals dismiss *OITNB* entirely due to its problematic use of a white, blonde, middle-class protagonist (Najumi; Sullivan). Critics rightly register hesitancy about embracing a show that confronts harmful ethnic and racial tropes head on and often, problematically, slips into them. Although Netflix is streaming seven seasons of the show due to its popularity with audiences, we focused on the first four seasons as they offer productive examples of public pedagogy. The first four seasons of *OITNB* mobilize white privilege as pedagogy and, coupled with paratextual activism around the show, act as intersectional pedagogy for a mass audience. Lastly, textual analysis demonstrates the series' place within a broader cultural conversation around the criminalization of women of color. Piper, as a vapid vehicle for “teachable moments,” is evidenced by her decreasing screen time and visibility throughout seasons two and three.

Conclusion

Whether one loves it or hates it, seeks it out, or purposely avoids it, chances are they have heard about the popular Netflix original series *OITNB*. Chances are even higher that the reader is aware of the conversations around race, gender, and incarceration generated in the public sphere by the early run of the show. *OITNB* became the most-watched show on the platform, which has more than 60 million subscribers worldwide (McClelland). Mass incarceration in the United States is in the public consciousness as an urgent problem. The issue, particularly its link to institutionalized racism, is currently the focus of several prominent public debates and conversations. During the early run of *OITNB* in 2015 *The Atlantic* ran a cover series "The Age of Mass Incarceration" in which Ta-Nehisi Coates investigates the historical legacies and contemporary relevance of the intersection of racism and criminalization. *The New York Times* (2018), *The Guardian* (2016), *The Walrus* (2019) and *The Conversation* (2019) have all recently run stories on the disproportionate number of people of color behind bars in the United States and Canada. With attention to the disproportionate number of men of color in prison, scholars, activists, community leaders, and students have turned their attention and voice to the PIC.

The first four seasons of *OITNB* mark a shift from challenging to subverting dominant discourses around how feminine bodies come to matter in prison. *OITNB* performs the function of intersectional public pedagogy. The show is limited: it cannot do justice to the harsh physical and psychological realities of prison life and is made palatable for a mass audience. However, the show puts faces and bodies to women in prison. Kohan's flawed representations do essential work in showing audiences that these invisible women are not defined by one event or even the systemic inequalities that shape their experience. Women in prison contain multitudes: they are sisters, lovers, professionals, mothers, and friends. These visual representations are meaningful. *OITNB* is especially powerful since mass media and socio-legal constructions of female criminality often emerge from the inability to recognize or reconcile the lived, bodily experiences of battery, constrained choice, and violence that so many women experience. Reading the show through the lens of intersectional feminism may be a productive way to approach the bodies of criminalized women in the age of digital media.

While we are beginning to see a dramatic increase in dialogue around the future of mass incarceration, "the fate of black boys and men funnelled into the carceral

pipeline remains the primary focal point" (Mustakeem 332). However, recent interventions in popular culture, specifically digital media platforms such as Netflix, offer a rare visual representation of the lives of women in prison. Activist and *OITNB* actress Laverne Cox argues that the show is inherently political because it takes place in a women's prison, therefore, necessitating conversations around race, gender, sexuality, and incarceration (New School Public Dialogue). In an interview with *The Guardian* during the early run of the show, actress Danielle Brooke ties the opportunities that *OITNB* offers for social justice to "its ability to reach mass audiences" and Kohan's commitment to "discuss such urgent topics as police brutality, transgender issues, and race relations" (Kirst). Since the series premiere, the depictions of the ladies in Litchfield Penitentiary have garnered strong reactions from critics, fans, public intellectuals, scholars, and activists alike. For instance, Lindsay Beyerstein, Jamia Wilson, Danielle Henderson, Jennifer L. Pozner, and Salamishah Talle have all engaged in public commentary on the series in "Orange is the New Black Roundtable, Part 1: Why, Despite Ourselves We're Watching". *OITNB* shines a very public light on the most rapidly growing population in North American prisons. The fastest-growing demographic of incarcerated individuals are women, specifically women of color (Magnet; Najumi).

Women are the fastest-growing population in North American prisons. For example, in the United States, women's incarceration rate has grown at twice that of men. At the time of writing, more than 231,000 women and girls are incarcerated in the United States (Kastjura). Although women only make up six percent of the incarcerated population in Canada, Indigenous women are disproportionately impacted and account for nearly forty percent of the women who are incarcerated (Correctional Service Canada). Women, many struggling with mental health issues, are often locked up for non-violent crimes. When a woman does commit a violent crime, it is a statistic rarity (Bagaric). Moreover, when women receive convictions for violent offenses, their crimes are often found to be a response to life-threatening or violent abuse. Watching a movie or television show may be the only time many people contemplate the experiences of women who are incarcerated. Nobody would argue that a fictional series alone can cause social change for criminalized women. However, this series garners real empathy for characters through a genre traditionally used to exploit the image of the woman prisoner. *OITNB* continues to inspire conversations around the issues facing women experiencing incarceration that may otherwise remain suppressed in dominant news media, social media, and

popular culture. In a culture and time that increasingly emphasizes "individual freedom, choice, power, [and] ability," even becoming more conscious of systemic racial and gender inequity "is a tremendous achievement" (Bordo 30). The world undervalues women in prison represented by the ladies in Litchfield Penitentiary. Perhaps audiences of *OITNB* are underestimating the progressive potential of the real-world conversations the show is inspiring beyond Litchfield's fictional walls.

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“When the Gunfire Ends”: Deconstructing PTSD Among Military Veterans in Marvel’s *The Punisher*

GRAEME JOHN WILSON

In the field of American masculinity studies, few research topics are as prominent as the military. The military is “an institution populated with men, but it [also] plays a primary role in shaping images of masculinity in the larger society” (Barrett 129),¹ yet “there is [no] consensus among all men and women in any national setting about the ideal man” (Nagel 247). The soldier is an especially enduring archetype of hegemonic masculinity, a concept describing the most currently honored and idealized forms of masculinity in a society (Connell and Messerschmidt 832). The popularity of this archetype can be partially attributed to the extensive representation that the American armed forces have enjoyed in mass media, with the grit, bravery, and heroism of the American soldier being not only celebrated in mainstream news media, but also mythologized in blockbuster Hollywood productions:

Militaries around the world have defined the soldier as an embodiment of traditional male sex role behaviors. From recruiting posters that seek “a few good men” to popular media images of John Wayne fearlessly leading the troops in a World War II battle, Tom Cruise as a “top gun” pilot, or Sylvester Stallone as Rambo single-handedly rescuing American prisoners of war, there has long been an association between the military and images of masculinity. (Barrett 129)

¹ Although women have since been integrated into the military and deployed in combat, the military remains a largely traditional institution “structured along the lines of gender,” with maleness being viewed as an inherent element of soldiering (Herbert 7-8). In particular, “the soldier identity forged during training is focused on the production of an efficient fighting force and involves the acquisition of traits that characterize hegemonic masculinity, such as physical toughness and (at times) aggression” (Emslie et al. 1485).

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Noticeably absent from many such depictions of the American soldier in popular media is either acknowledgment or a realistic portrayal of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), a common condition that affects military veterans. PTSD is defined as “an anxiety disorder that can develop after exposure to a terrifying event or series of events [...] in which grave physical harm occurred or was threatened, causing feelings of intense fear, helplessness, or horror” (Backos et al. 157). Due to the negative feelings it entails, PTSD increases “the odds of unemployment by 150% and marital instability by 60%” (Galovski and Lyons 478). It is conservatively estimated that 11% of veterans who fought in Afghanistan suffer from PTSD, while this number increases to 18% for veterans of the Iraq War (Backos et al. 158). Consequently, the past decade has seen “PTSD in soldiers...become a major focus of the U.S. news media” (Armstrong and Olatunji 55).

Despite the now recognized commonality of PTSD amongst veterans, the condition’s poor portrayal in mass media has only promoted damaging stereotypes. Paul Rieckhoff, founder of the nonprofit organization Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, asserts that veterans who suffer from PTSD are broadly portrayed in news media as psychotic and unstable (Hipes and Kleykamp 348). Similarly, while post-9/11 cinema and television have depicted PTSD with greater regularity, fictional portrayals of the condition remain problematic. Writing for *The Washington Post*, Stephanie Merry observes that:

In the Hollywood take on war, there are basically two types of military veterans [...] The former are superheroic killing machines, like the Navy SEAL played by [Mark] Wahlberg in [the] action hit *Lone Survivor*. The latter are fragile ticking time bombs, like the PTSD-afflicted Navy SEAL personified by [Bradley] Cooper in the Oscar-nominated *American Sniper*.

Indeed, many veteran advocacy groups have expressed concern towards the “media stereotyping of veterans as either victims or heroes, with little in between” (Hipes and Kleykamp 348). The portrayal of soldiers in Hollywood films such as *Jarhead* and *The Hurt Locker* especially “are examples of descriptions of a combat veteran’s experience that may be misinformed [and] can lead to complicated self-esteem issues for PTSD veterans of those wars,” possibly even exacerbating suicidal ideation (McDermott 139). Although “the risk of suicide associated with PTSD exceeds that of any other anxiety disorder” (Galovski and Lyons 478), the hypermasculine nature of military culture often “inhibit[s] individuals from seeking treatment for suicidal ideation” (Braswell and Kushner 531). However, this just

makes the Netflix series *The Punisher* and its commentary on PTSD that much more unique and important.

Adapted from the eponymous Marvel Comics character, *The Punisher* premiered on streaming service Netflix in November 2017, airing two seasons before its cancellation in February 2019. Set in New York City, the series follows combat veteran Francis “Frank” Castle, who adopts the Punisher alias after his family is murdered and becomes a violent vigilante. Castle’s crusade brings him into conflict with numerous antagonists, including domestic terrorist Lewis Wilson, corrupt ex-soldier Billy Russo and, most notably, his own struggles with PTSD. Using Castle as a prism, *The Punisher* highlights issues related to veterans, specifically by increasing awareness of PTSD and its treatment, which continue to be misrepresented in mass media and stigmatized in cultural discussion.

From Page to Screen: The History of the Punisher

The Punisher is a spinoff of fellow Netflix series *Daredevil*, which introduced the Punisher in its second season. Both *Daredevil* and *The Punisher* are set in the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU), an extensive media franchise consisting of various film and television adaptations of Marvel Comics properties (Beaty 321). In both the original Marvel comics and the MCU, Castle is a former United States Marine Corps Scout Sniper. After his wife and two children are killed during a gang war in Central Park, a vengeful Castle uses his considerable military training and firearms expertise to wage a one-man war on crime. This story arc is adapted for *Daredevil* and expanded on in *The Punisher*, in which Castle discovers that his family’s deaths are connected to a larger conspiracy involving corrupt government and military officials and swears vengeance against them.

The Punisher was an immediate hit among readers upon his debut in 1974 and soon starred in his own comic (Browning 972). By the mid-1980s, the character was starring in multiple monthly titles. Comic book writer and editor Tom DeFalco believes that the popularity of violent antiheroes such as the Punisher can be attributed to them reflecting “society’s frustrations [...] they want to see someone actively solving problems instead of just talking about them” (Stevens 131). Many Punisher comics during the 1980s and since have drawn influence from the Western genre, with the Punisher conveying the iconography of the Western protagonist though his isolation and violent capability (Palmer 280). As stated by Keith Dallas:

[The Punisher] is the iconic solitary vigilante, that alluring figure within America's cultural mythology that embodies a frontier brand of individualistic justice. But what the Punisher signifies beyond that depends on his writers and his readers. For some, he is a force of righteousness, remedying the failings of the judicial system by killing criminals who deserve to die. (590)

Notably, the Punisher is extremely popular amongst law enforcement and military personnel for precisely this reason. Others gravitate toward the character "not because they want to emulate his tactics in real life, but because they share his aims of discipline and freedom" (Riesman).

The Punisher's fandom amongst law enforcement and military personnel is controversial, although the character has been no stranger to controversy throughout his history. His 1980s comics were "typified by implausible, steroid-inspired physiques, oversized weapons [and] generous bloodletting" (Stevens 131). Such traits are evocative of toxic masculinity, "the constellation of socially regressive male traits that serve to foster domination [...] and wanton violence" (Kupers 714). "Generous bloodletting" remains a common element of modern Punisher comics, and the character's propensity for brutal vigilante justice has also been criticized as embodying "para-fascist ethics" (Di Liddo 48). Consequently, the character's Netflix adaptation attracted considerable media attention before it even premiered. Prominent television commentator Alan Sepinwall expressed concern that the Punisher's historical portrayal as "an unstable man with an arsenal of automatic weapons" would be inappropriate in the modern sociopolitical climate, which is sharply divided on issues related to gun control and mass shootings. However, as asserted by reviewers such as Abraham Riesman, *The Punisher* does not glorify vigilante violence, with the character "going after corrupt officials in the military-industrial complex and high-level law enforcement [rather than] shooting up mobsters and street toughs." Instead, the 13 episodes that comprise *The Punisher*'s debut season are primarily concerned with providing viewers a rich insight into how PTSD affects veterans like Frank Castle and their reintegration into American society, and how the condition can be treated.

Methodology and Framework

The creator and showrunner of *The Punisher* is Steve Lightfoot, a television producer who was drawn to the project due to his interest and empathy for the veteran experience:

We’re sending these young people to war, year after year, deployment after deployment. We’re asking them to manage these extreme environments and then return home as though everything is fine. [*The Punisher*] is about the drama and the emotional damage that comes with going to war. It’s about the impact of this on the people who do the fighting and the killing. (Illing)

For its method, this essay employs narrative rhetorical criticism to highlight specific dialogue and scenes that best demonstrate how *The Punisher* incorporates Lightfoot’s promised commentary into its narrative. Narrative rhetorical criticism is a submethod of textual analysis, which is harnessed by scholars to delineate “the primary, linguistic meaning of a text’s component parts [from] the secondary, or textual meaning” (Altman 15). Narrative rhetorical criticism specifically is used to identify the themes of a text and how these themes are represented in the narrative (Foss 326-7).

Regarding theoretical framework, this essay utilizes stigma theory, which was originally developed “to explain the behavior, perception[s], and development of the social and psychological self of stigmatized persons” (Bauman et al. 633). Individuals can be stigmatized by possessing attributes “that others see as negative, unfavorable, or in some way unacceptable,” such as PTSD (Bauman et al. 634). Experts assume “that PTSD has been under-reported for veterans of both [the Afghanistan and Iraq] wars to avoid stigmatization” (Backos et al. 158). Harold Braswell and Howard Kushner argue that because “the military ideal of emotional control is inseparable from its notion of masculinity,” the stigmatization of PTSD and mental health care among soldiers “may be tied to a philosophy of masculine self-reliance and emotional detachment” (533-4). This stigmatization of PTSD influenced Lightfoot’s writing, with Lightfoot lamenting that “PTSD has become a label in society, and that’s a problem. It’s almost become degrading in a way” (Illing). According to stigma theory, people can develop conceptions and stereotypes of mental illness “from family lore, personal experience, peer relations, and the media’s portrayal of people with mental illnesses” (Asmussen et al. 1621). While mass media especially has contributed to stereotypes of PTSD, Lightfoot intends *The Punisher* to challenge these stereotypes and promote great understanding of the condition among viewers.

Portrayal of PTSD

In the *Daredevil* episode “Semper Fidelis,” after Castle is arrested for murdering numerous gangsters involved in the Central Park massacre, his legal advisor, Karen Page, suggests a defense based on PTSD. However, Castle flatly refuses:

Page: “We think [PTSD] would greatly help with your defense.”

Castle: “Don’t do that. It’s an insult.”

Page: “Lots of veterans experience it.”

Castle: “I’m not talking about me; I’m talking about them. It’s an insult to them, people who are actually going through it.” (00:08:36-00:08:48)

This line provides particular insight into Castle’s character. Although the Punisher “has an ambivalent relationship to the military, as do many who have served [...] he love[s] his fellow warriors, [and] detests the immoral men who send grunts to foreign abattoirs and ignore them if they return” (Riesman).

Despite his insistence otherwise to Page, Castle *does* exhibit symptoms of PTSD in the MCU, particularly in his own series. The American Psychological Association lists three specific symptom clusters that characterize PTSD: re-experiencing, avoidance, and hyperarousal symptoms. As stated by Rachel Dekel and Candice M. Monson:

Re-experiencing symptoms are characterized by intrusive memories, nightmares, flashbacks, and psychological and physiological reactivity when encountering trauma cues. Avoidance symptoms consist of avoiding thoughts and activities associated with traumatic experiences, inability to recall aspects of the traumatic event, diminished interest, emotional detachment, restricted affect, and a sense of foreshortened future. Hyperarousal symptoms of PTSD include sleep disturbance, irritability/anger, difficulty concentrating, hypervigilance, and an exaggerated startle response. (303)

In contrast to other popular media texts, each one of PTSD’s specific symptoms is both represented and accurately depicted in *The Punisher*, exhibited by not only Castle but numerous other veterans in the program’s ensemble. After Castle, the character whose PTSD receives the most focus is Lewis Wilson, a young veteran who attends a support group led by Curtis Hoyle, a close friend of Castle. Lightfoot wrote Wilson as a tragic character whose own character arc parallels Castle’s, with Wilson being “an extreme example of [...] the psychology of when people are hurting [due to PTSD],” which ultimately claims his life (Li).

Reexperiencing. Veterans suffering from PTSD can reexperience their trauma through nightmares, described as “recurrent distressing dreams,” or flashbacks, described as “repeated daytime images related to an event now perceived as having severely threatened someone’s physical or psychological wellbeing” (Allan et al. 255). Throughout *The Punisher*, Castle suffers from both nightmares and flashbacks that provoke feelings of fear and horror. While PTSD is the product of “exposure to an overwhelmingly stressful event or series of events, such as war,” it can also result from experiencing other “abnormal situations” (Abdolian and Kalayjian 157). In Castle’s case, although he is troubled by his experiences in Afghanistan, his PTSD is also closely tied to witnessing the murder of his family.

After escaping from police custody in *Daredevil*, Castle is now working in construction under an assumed name. In “3AM,” the first episode of *The Punisher*, it is established that Castle continually experiences involuntary flashbacks to his family’s deaths. Castle releases his pain and anger through the physical labor of construction, even to the point of bloodying his palms. Such violent, physical exertion satisfies the hypermasculine ideals of traditional American masculinity (Maruska 239). However, Castle enjoys no respite in sleep either. Throughout the season, he suffers recurring nightmares where he reimagines his family’s deaths. It is documented that “feelings of intense guilt and self-loathing are...common with PTSD” (Backos et al. 157). For Castle, his guilt and self-loathing primarily derive from his perceived failure to protect his family, popularly considered to be the single greatest patriarchal responsibility (Connell and Messerschmidt 839-40).

Wilson also suffers from nightmares resulting due to his PTSD. In the episode “Kandahar,” Wilson relates to the support group that while serving in Iraq, he witnessed an American helicopter kill several of his squad in friendly fire. However, the incident was covered up and reported by the press as an enemy ambush. This event imprinted on his psyche, and Wilson continually relives it while sleeping, much to his anguish. When his father inadvertently wakes him from his sleep, Wilson reflexively draws a gun from his bedside and fires, only narrowly missing his father.

It is confirmed that “higher reexperiencing symptoms are associated with several problematic behaviors,” such as depression, substance abuse, and suicidal ideation (Blais et al. 169). While Wilson does not abuse alcohol, drugs, or other substances in *The Punisher*, the prospect of almost killing his father depresses him further. Wilson subsequently considers suicide in the episode “Crosshairs,” putting his gun in his mouth and daring himself to pull the trigger. Unfortunately, such

ideation is not uncommon among veterans. Suicide rates among the armed services has increased dramatically since 2002, with “the higher rates of suicide among the Army and Marines have been attributed to these branches being significantly more involved in combat in Iraq and Afghanistan” (Braswell and Kushner 530). Additionally, as depicted in *The Punisher*, the trauma veterans experience in service obtains increased lethality after returning home due to “the ready access to firearms characteristic of military life” (531).

Ultimately, Castle and Wilson’s psychic struggles in *The Punisher* function less to fulfill the expected melodrama of superhero entertainment² than to provide an authentic representation of how veterans experience PTSD, particularly in how they “repeatedly re-experience the terrifying event(s) in the form of flashback episodes, memories, nightmares, or frightening thoughts” (Backos et al. 157). In the episode “Resupply,” a sympathetic Hoyle tells Wilson that “when you look in a mirror, you still see a soldier. And out on these streets, that soldier is invisible to everyone else” (00:16:27-00:16:36). This invisibility contributes to the isolation that PTSD imposes on veterans. Additionally, veterans themselves may also figuratively render themselves invisible through avoidance, another recognized symptom of PTSD.

Avoidance. Within the context of PTSD, “avoidance is related to a fear of reexperiencing thoughts and feelings associated with the traumatic event. This pattern of avoiding behavior prevents individuals from effectively processing the traumatic event” (Irwin et al. 176). Avoidance can be divided into internal and external categories, with internal avoidance describing “efforts to avoid thoughts, feelings, [and] conversations,” and external avoidance describing “efforts to avoid activities, places, [and] people” (Allan et al. 255). It is documented that “over half of post-9/11 veterans who served in combat” have experienced difficulties readjusting to civilian life (Hipes and Kleykamp 350). Many of these veterans’ difficulties stem from the avoidance symptoms of PTSD:

The behavioral avoidance symptoms of PTSD can make routine daily activities, such as going to friends, taking part in school parties or kids’ programs, difficult. Emotional numbing, which reflects on the ability of

² While the Punisher lacks the superpowers and strict moral code expected of the superhero archetype, he was originally introduced in a 1974 Spider-Man comic as a foil for that character. In the decades since, Marvel has frequently contrasted “the Punisher’s violent and lethal methods [...] with the more benign methods of Marvel superheroes,” with the Punisher having particularly extensive histories with Spider-Man and Daredevil (Jeffery 121).

those with PTSD to experience and express a range of feelings, can affect attachment to children and intimate partners. (Dekel and Monson 304)

Dekel and Monson’s observation about the impact of PTSD on familial relationships is interesting. While there is considerable literature on how PTSD impacts veterans personally, “there is little written on the impact of PTSD on veterans’ family relationships and the impact of these relationships on healing from trauma” (Ray and Vanstone 839). This makes it even more impressive that *The Punisher* also explores, to great extent, the impact of PTSD on veterans’ families. Although Castle’s family are deceased prior to the events of both *Daredevil* and *The Punisher*, Castle talks about them constantly, as they motivate the actions of his crusading alter-ego. In the episode “Two Dead Men,” Castle relates to Hoyle how his wartime experiences affected how his wife Maria and children perceived him: “That shit follows you home no matter how hard you try. It follows you home, and Maria, she knew it. She knew it, the kids knew it. Sometimes I’d catch ‘em, they...they’d be looking at me and they’d have this look. Look at me like they didn’t even know who I was” (00:11:36-00:11:52). In the episode subsequent “Home,” Castle remembers one of his last conversations with Maria, after he returned from another tour of duty:

Maria: “You’re back but you’re not really here. More and more of you stays there. Where’s home, Frank? Is it here or is it there? I wanna hear you say it.”

Castle: “It’s here. It’s with you, always. You know that.”

Maria: “I don’t know that.” (00:35:55-00:36:32)

Reluctance among veterans to discuss their feelings or emotions, either with their family or mental health professionals, is largely attributed to the military’s “warrior culture.” This averts soldiers “from speaking openly about their psychological and emotional fragility,” thus hindering “the ability of mental health practitioners to recognize suicidal individuals [and] the healing process necessary to overcome suicidal ideation and posttraumatic stress disorder” (Braswell and Kushner 531).

The military’s “warrior culture” is an exaggerated form of traditional hegemonic masculinities. As observed by Anne Cleary, “within this construction of masculinity, admitting to psychological distress presents particular difficulties as it implies weakness and is connected to the feminine domain” (499). Because traditional gender constructions portray women as more inherently emotional and hysterical than men (Carranza and Prentice 269-70), emotional expression “is highly gendered, with males less likely than females to express emotion” (Cleary

499). Castle's attempts to numb his emotions following his service are indicative of internal avoidance, which creates a distance between him and his family. Castle's diminished relationship with his family especially causes him guilt following their deaths.

Castle is also shown practicing external avoidance throughout *The Punisher*. After investigating the government conspiracy surrounding his family's murders, Castle discovers that their deaths were orchestrated by Billy Russo, his former best friend who he served with in the Marine Corps. Russo intended for Castle to die in the massacre, to hide evidence of his own crimes from when they served overseas. In "Memento Mori," the season one finale, Russo leads Castle to Central Park for their final confrontation. Castle, after returning to the location where his family was murdered, is crippled by flashbacks to their deaths, which Russo had anticipated to give him an advantage in combat. While Castle succeeds in defeating Russo and avenging his family, he is still shown to be overwhelmed after being exposed to an external reminder of their murder. Wilson similarly exhibits avoidance symptoms, particularly in "Resupply." Trying to escape his nightmares, Wilson digs a foxhole in his backyard and sleeps outside, despite the cold November temperatures, an action indicative of his struggle to reacclimate to civilian life. When a concerned Hoyle visits him, Wilson explains: "I don't have nightmares out here. I should never have discharged, Curtis. None of it — the heat, cold, sand, noise, 50 guys stinking up a dorm — it never kept me up. Never bothered me. I slept good" (00:14:43-00:15:02). Through the actions of both Castle and Wilson, *The Punisher* accurately portrays the extent veterans will go to avoid revisiting their trauma, even to their own detriment.

Research indicates that the prevalent reluctance among veterans to express their emotions and "disclose emotional pain may intensify distress and put them at higher risk for suicidal behavior. These beliefs and practices...emerge from a socialization that teaches boys the importance of projecting strength and concealing emotions and pain" (Cleary 499). Braswell and Kushner thus argue that a reconfiguration of military masculinity is necessary in order to reduce the stigma of emotional expression and consequently discourage suicidal ideation (535). However, avoidance is not the "engine that drives other symptoms" (Doron-LaMarca et al. 411). Rather, that engine is the hyperarousal symptom cluster.

Hyperarousal symptoms. The hyperarousal symptom cluster encompasses hypervigilance and exaggerated startle responses (Allan et al. 255). Research into PTSD indicates "that hyperarousal symptoms may play a particularly important

role in both the development and maintenance of PTSD [and] influencing later symptoms” (Doron-LaMarca et al. 411). Castle displays such exaggerated responses, even before his family’s deaths. A flashback in “Two Dead Men” depicts Castle taking his daughter Lisa and son Frank Jr. on a ferry trip to the Statue of Liberty, although the trip soon turns sour:

Lisa: “I read at school that [the statue] represents everything good about America.”

Castle: “That’s about right.”

Lisa: “Is that why you have to go away and fight?”

Frank Jr.: “Dad goes away so he can kill lots of hajjis. How many have you wasted anyway, Dad?”

Castle: “Hey! Don’t you ever say anything like that again. You got that? Do you got it?” (00:01:12-00:01:28)

Castle grabs his son’s face, barking this demand at him. Both Lisa and Frank Jr. recoil in fear at their father’s anger, and the trip ends in silence. In the subsequent episode “Gunner,” Castle sadly admits to Page, who has since become a close friend and confidante, that this was not the first time he had physically intimidated his children. Castle recounts an incident where he came home early from deployment and discovered his son had painted a crude soldier on the living room wall, prompting him to lose his temper:

I dragged him outside. I put him on the ground. I had a finger in his face [...] I said, “What the hell were you thinking?” He looked up at me, like a little man. He said, “Marines scare off bad guys, Daddy. When you’re not here, it’s my job to protect our girls.” They were better off without me, Karen. (00:21:49-00:22:22)

Castle’s love for his children is undeniable. However, his hyperarousal symptoms are established as provoking extreme, agitated responses that often frightened them, despite his best intentions and much to his regret. Braswell and Kushner observe that veterans’ attempts to bottle their emotions, “combined with the aggressive character of military socialization, [can] lead to violent outbursts” (534), some of which even manifest in familial abuse.

Wilson similarly scares his own father through his display of these symptoms. His reflexive firing of his weapon after waking from his nightmare in “Kandahar” is an example of the hypervigilance associated with hyperarousal symptoms. However, a more extreme example of Wilson’s hyperarousal symptoms occurs in “The Judas Goat.” After learning that O’Connor, another attendee of Hoyle’s

support group known for his extremist rhetoric, has been lying about his military background and never actually saw combat, an enraged and insulted Wilson attacks and kills his former friend, stabbing O'Connor in the stomach with a knife.

O'Connor's legacy in *The Punisher* is a dark one. His extremist and conspiratorial political views,³ such as “the real persecuted minority in this country today [being] the Christian American patriot” and “liberal, do-gooding assholes [wanting] to take our rights and our guns” (“3 AM,” 00:16:42-00:17:16), ultimately influence Wilson to become a terrorist, crafting pipe bombs to attack media centers in Manhattan. This brings Wilson into conflict with the Punisher, who is motivated to protect New York citizens, and ultimately results in Wilson's suicide in the episode “Virtue of the Vicious.” Despite his gradual evolution into an antagonist, Wilson is still portrayed in a sympathetic light. As stated by Lightfoot, “we really tried to show how someone like that — a young and alienated veteran — can get radicalized when he comes home and feels his life empty and purposeless” (Illing). Ultimately, *The Punisher* ruminates at length on the effects of violence on the psyche of the American soldier, and how PTSD can manifest in self-destructive action without proper intervention.

Conclusion

Today, “estimates of the psychological toll of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan indicate that approximately one in five service members is classified as suffering from PTSD following service” (Dekel and Monson 303). However, despite its recognized ubiquity, the depiction of PTSD in popular media is often skewed and oversimplified. The frequent presentation of PTSD-afflicted veterans in popular film and television as “fragile ticking time bombs” (Merry) has greatly contributed to their stigmatization among the general populace. Such prevalent stereotypes towards PTSD have raised concerns that “if the public socially excludes veterans because of a generalized concern over PTSD, [then] stigmatizing treatment may in fact lead to the onset or exacerbation of mental health problems among veterans”

³ O'Connor's beliefs and rhetoric are characteristic of the alt-right, a white supremacist political movement whose members have conducted numerous killings and mass shootings in recent years (Morlin 6-7). Punisher iconography has been appropriated by members of the alt-right, but the series makes clear that Castle does not share their values, and in an interview with *Esquire* Jon Bernthal, the actor who portrays Castle in *The Punisher*, famously said “fuck them” in reference to the movement (Rodrick).

(Hipes and Kleykamp 365). This is precisely why *The Punisher*'s nuanced commentary on PTSD, masculinity, and the American soldier is so important.

In an interview with *The Washington Post*, Jon Bernthal, the actor who portrays Castle in the MCU, explains that he extensively communicated with military veterans before filming, in order to deliver an authentic, respectful portrayal of the American soldier:

One thing I've heard from a lot of people who have gone through severe trauma in combat is that, when the fight's on, and when you're on mission, your training kicks in and you know exactly what you're doing and you're moving forward [...] But it's when the mission ends, it's the quiet afterwards. It's going to sleep. It's returning home. That's when the war inside begins. (Betancourt)

This “war inside” is depicted in *The Punisher* through Castle and Wilson's struggles to reacclimate to civilian life. Due to the isolating effects of PTSD, doctors strongly recommend group behavioral treatments for veterans struggling with the disorder, noting that “group treatment is particularly useful for combat-related PTSD because military training and combat operations are group experiences and traumatic experiences in the military typically are managed in the context of the group” (Backos et al. 158). However, a prominent factor that exacerbates veterans' mental health problems is the “link between the military's masculine culture and the denial of trauma and, more generally, mental healthcare,” something that has “been openly acknowledged by military personnel attempting to address the current problem of military suicide” (Braswell and Kushner 533).

The reluctance that not just veterans, but men in general, have in expressing their emotions “has been one of the most frequently discussed but controversial topics in the study of masculinity” (Rochlen and Wong 62). This “inability to express emotions, especially distressing emotions, has been cited as a risk factor for suicide, and this is linked theoretically with the idea that particular constructions of masculinity endanger men's health” (Cleary 499). Superhero fiction is notably a strong arena for discussions of masculinity in society, with Jeffrey Brown observing that the construction and performance of masculinity is a major motif in the genre:

Classical comic book depictions of masculinity are perhaps the quintessential expression of [American] cultural beliefs about what it means to be a man. In general, masculinity is defined by what it is not, namely

“feminine” and all its associated traits — hard not soft, strong not weak, reserved not emotional, active not passive. (26-7)

Although such a presentation of masculinity is still persuasive in superhero fiction, many modern superhero characters and stories have sought to expand constructions of masculinity, and *The Punisher*, both in comics and television, is no exception. The character occupies an interesting niche, originating from the superhero fiction of the Marvel Universe but also embraced by law enforcement and military personnel as one of their own. His eponymous television series, despite its roots in superhero fantasy, presents a realistic depiction of PTSD and offers commentary on the treatment of American veterans. This is not without precedent, as superhero narratives have a long history of addressing contemporary societal issues (Johnson 2).

Group treatment is notably depicted as a wholly positive force in *The Punisher*, represented specifically through Hoyle’s support group, which Castle joins in “Memento Mori” after defeating Wilson and Russo and avenging his family. *The Punisher* thus explicitly rebukes the notion of suppressing distressing emotions, instead endorsing a more progressive model of masculinity in which acknowledging and discussing PTSD and other forms of trauma is normalized rather than abhorrent. The final scene of the season depicts Bernthal, in character as Castle and echoing his interview with *The Washington Post*, highlighting the difficulty of overcoming the quiet after combat and winning the war inside:

I think that might be the hardest part, the silence. The silence when the gunfire ends. How do you live in that? I guess that’s what you’re trying to figure out, huh? It’s what you guys are doing. You’re working on it. I respect that [...] First time, as long as I can remember, I don’t have a war to fight. And I guess, if I’m gonna be honest, I’m scared. (00:51:39-00:52:48)

Notably, many of the attendees in Hoyle’s support group are portrayed by actual military veterans (Gaudette). As explained by Lightfoot, “I thought we needed to find real vets to play the guys in the group therapy sessions [...] I thought it was the right thing to do. Luckily, they were very supportive” (Illing). Bernthal has also related how veterans have approached him and praised the series, noting that “they especially like how he conveys [...] the symptoms of PTSD” (Betancourt).

It is estimated that “30% of people who have been in war zones develop PTSD...the average duration of [which] is ten years” (Backos et al. 157). Therefore, it is important to promote a greater understanding of PTSD among the civilians

whom our soldiers fight to protect, and popular media texts serve as strong educational tools to do so (Giroux 23-4). As stated by Sean Illing, a former United States Air Force paramedic who interviewed Lightfoot for news and opinion website *Vox*: “I’m not sure any pop culture work has captured the chaos and isolation of PTSD as vividly as *The Punisher* [...] I’m a veteran myself and while I’ve experienced nothing like what the characters on this show experience, the way it handles life after deployment resonated.” As indicated by the enthusiastic response to *The Punisher* by Illing and other veterans, Lightfoot and Bernthal have succeeded in their aims to raise awareness of PTSD among mainstream audiences.

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More Than Movies: Reconceptualizing Race in *Black Panther* and *Get Out*

JARREL DE MATAS

In a 2018 interview, the star cast member of *Black Panther* (2018), Chadwick Boseman, declared of the movie that “People are thirsty for it, that’s what you’re witnessing now” (Coyle). Apart from highlighting the desperation for the movie itself, Boseman directs attention to the situational significance of the movie’s production and reception.¹ Jordan Peele, the director of *Get Out* (2017), similarly highlights such significance by drawing attention to the socio-cultural background of the movie. In an interview with Brooke Marine, Peele discusses his movie as contributing to the discourse on racial politics. He concludes that now more than ever, “voices that call out those in power are really needed and really valued” (27). Both *Black Panther* and *Get Out* offer contrasting frameworks that engage with ongoing questions of Black subjectivity, performance, and racial politics. In the process, they bring viewers closer to an understanding of re-imagined race relations.

Ultimately, each film portrays a conscious attempt at contextualizing Blackness as either empowerment or a veiled site of continuous struggle through fantasy and horror genres. In doing so, both films are historically motivated as much as they look forward to creating new paradigms to help understand the contemporary experiences of racialization and systemic forms of subjugation. By drawing attention to ongoing ideologies of race, the films offer parallel evidence from discourses on racial identity, practice, and politics.

¹ As far as its release is considered, the timing could be no more opportune. In the context of the 2013 Black Lives Matter movement, the Charlottesville rally of August 2017, and the January 2018 report of President Donald Trump allegedly using the word “shithole” to describe African nations, I argue that *Black Panther* can be read as an ideologically charged affirmation of Black pride.

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This paper examines the important role of mass media in focusing the spotlight on Black subjectivity and the ways in which Blackness is celebrated and re-conditioned in *Black Panther*. In *Get Out*, the myth of a post-racial America is critiqued for the disguised form of racial hegemony being re-imposed. Intentionally or not, the messages expressed by the movies impact Black consciousness and influence the ways in which Black culture is perceived by the society as a whole. Thus, both directors highlight the ability of film to both maintain and establish ideology by providing insight to the world about people, things, and events. At the center of *Black Panther* is the ideological and historical reworking of African-ness. *Get Out* rides a similar wave of cultural momentum to raise unresolved issues of the appropriation of Blackness, on the one hand, and white supremacy on the other. Whereas *Black Panther* reconceptualizes African histories as undetermined by the transatlantic slave trade, *Get Out* directs attention to new forms of enslavement of the Black body that are subtly enacted through the over-compensation of Blackness as something enviable. In each movie, the representations of Black subjectivity act as a counter-narrative to the ideological and historical constructions of Blackness by challenging whiteness, depicting connections between past and present racisms, and transforming ideology to promote conceptual change.

Black Panther provides a way of examining how Afro-futurism can create a condition which exposes the nature of socially constructed racial hierarchies. It expresses how Black cultural producers, such as Ryan Coogler, expose hierarchies by going beyond binaries and into the realm of unique performances of monstrosity. In *Black Panther*, the enactment of Afro-futurism occurs in the fictional country of Wakanda, whereas *Get Out* exaggerates the monstrous alongside a cult of transmutation. D. Scot Miller's distinction between Afro-futurism and Afro-surrealism is exemplified in *Black Panther*, which, according to Miller, "turns to science, technology, and science fiction to speculate on black possibilities" (114), demonstrating Afro-futurism, while *Get Out*, to use Miller's description of Afro-surrealism, "restore[s] the cult of the past" and "revisit[s] old ways with new eyes" (116). Through this radical version of modern enslavement, Peele provokes a renewed cultural discourse of racism and white supremacy. Each director's perspective of Black subjectivity responds to the social awareness of the status of Blackness, and in the process becomes a bearer of socio-cultural, historical, and political phenomena. The presentation of Black subjectivities in both films involves a condition where the already Othered Black body takes on strategies of subversion to create fantastical and humorous experiences of observing and being observed.

The film study approach as well the discourse analysis of this paper offer discussions on how to think differently about racial constructs in a supposedly post-racial world.

Black Panther Matters

Black Panther represents not only a cultural shift for Marvel Studios but also, more significantly, a celebration of its re-presentations of Africa and African culture as dynamic, heterogeneous, and dominant. Set in the fictional kingdom of Wakanda — the location of which is generally accepted to be in East Africa — depicts a young prince, T'Challa (Chadwick Boseman), who was raised in Wakanda. T'Challa's rite of passage to kingship entails an assertion of Wakanda's sovereignty and individuality as well as an ushering of Wakanda into the global community, where its resources are not hoarded but extended to countries in need. He begins his leadership, however, by retaining his predecessor's policy of isolation. When his cousin, Killmonger (Michael B. Jordan), who was raised in the United States of America, returns to Wakanda and challenges T'Challa for the throne, the rivalry is layered by ideological differences that both men envision for Wakanda.

Through the conflict between both men, *Black Panther* attempts to show that Africa's main antagonist has historically been, and continues to be, a problem of leadership from within. Killmonger's aspirations attempt to isolate Wakanda from the rest of the world. The micro-conflict between both men, made all the more tense because they each embody a particular value-system, is compounded by the macro-conflict of the direction each of the men envision for Wakanda. As T'Challa explains, Wakanda has isolated itself from the rest of the world because of the fear of exploitation: "If the world found out what we truly are, what we possess, we could lose our way of life" (00:34:15-00:34:21). Wakanda has resisted colonization because it has kept its secrets hidden. Though T'Challa and the ruling family consider this isolationism to be a success for the Wakandan people, for Killmonger it is a problem because Wakanda has isolated itself even from those of the Black diaspora.

Different versions of Wakanda's future become the source of conflict between members of the new generation of would-be Wakandan leaders. On the one hand, T'Challa is burdened by the tradition of keeping Wakanda safe by keeping its secrets. On the other hand, Killmonger stands for a break with tradition and a radicalized view of Africa's place in the global order. Their differing perspectives

correspond to what each character represents. According to director Ryan Coogler in his interview with David Betancourt, T'Challa represents "an African that hasn't been affected by colonization," untainted by the uprooting, trauma, and erasure. Killmonger, however, is the antithesis to T'Challa. He is the colonized, Americanized, recriminatory subject burdened by unresolved familial conflict. As a symbol of victimization that has mutated into vengeance, Killmonger is a disturbingly sympathetic character. His intention of a liberated, global Black community is complicated by his tyrannical method, which ultimately succumbs to the democratic and traditional philosophy of Wakanda. Thus, *Black Panther* re-writes the narrative of an African state tainted by poor leadership. The movie is much more than a superhero film because it highlights the struggle of a nation to deal with the threat of domination posed by internal as much as external forces.

With the focus on conflict between Wakandans fighting for their future, both place and people are imbued with an Afrocentric emphasis which grounds the movie's challenge to racialized discourses of Black inferiority and primitiveness. This Afrocentric representation occurs through identification with African visual and vernacular culture and the institutional significance of the mantra "Wakanda Forever."² As a fictional ideal, the integration of the uniquely Afro-polis that is Wakanda signifies for the community a depiction of an ancestral land. More than this, the movie draws parallels between Wakanda and America in order to re-signify the former as a site of power and the latter as a place of cultural loss. In the opening scene of *Black Panther*, the historical account of Wakanda's rise to prominence is expressed akin to the griot tradition of West Africa. This is followed by a scene of boys playing basketball in Oakland, California. The wealth and advancement of Wakanda is immediately contrasted with the poverty of the basketball nets replaced by wooden boards and hollowed-out crates. The setting of this scene is significant because the revolutionary Black Panther Party originated in Oakland with the intention of defending police injustice and other manifestations of discrimination against African Americans.

These opening scenes set the tone of the entire movie when stereotypes concerning the expected metropolitan center and less developed periphery are overturned. Another example of this overturning of stereotypes occurs in the superimposition of the boys playing basketball while the Wakandan spaceship

² *Get Out* also frames issues of African subjectivity through the manifestation of identity, ideology, and institution, though from the perspective of White hegemony. This will be revisited in the second part of this paper.

hovers above the Oakland apartment building. The simplicity of children playing in an American city is overlaid by the superiority of African technology. Inside the apartment, the scene moves from televised L.A. riots of a Black man surrounded by police officers, then to assault rifles and blueprints. As the story progresses, viewers get a sense of a different revolution taking place, one that threatens Wakanda and its values. Introduced in this scene is the nature of threats posed to Wakanda by its own African diaspora. It foreshadows Killmonger, who personifies the sympathetic rage of being a Wakandan who was cut off from the motherland. His internal conflict, which stems from being alienated, matches the internal threat to which Wakanda is susceptible because it has closed its borders to the African diaspora out of fear of being exploited for its resources.

By embedding a story of a place that has retained its indigeneity, *Black Panther* addresses the historical narrative of the continent as a depraved land and further speculates on a possible what-if it had not been colonized. As Lupita Nyong'o discusses in an interview, "Wakanda is special because it was never colonized, so what we can see there for all of us is a re-imagining of what would have been possible had Africa been allowed to realize itself for itself" (*The View* 00:03:39-00:03:52). The movie resists the historical narrative of an African continent being exploited by paradoxically relying on the guise of an impoverished place. Wakanda, which poses as a Third World Country in order to protect its resources from invasion by would-be poachers, such as Ulysses Klaw (Andy Serkis), is exposed to the rest of the world through CIA operative Everett Ross (Martin Freeman), who is tasked with arresting Klaw. When Klaw is captured and interrogated, his conversation with agent Ross reveals the mysticism and mystery that shrouds Wakanda's self-alienation from the world:

Klaw: "Do you actually know about Wakanda?"

Ross: "It's a Third-World country. Textiles, shepherds, cool outfits."

Klaw: "All a front. Explorers have searched for it, called it 'El Dorado.'

They looked for it in South America, but it was in Africa the whole time."

(00.56:03-00.56:24)

Stereotypes of an underdeveloped nation coupled with undermining the significance of their traditions converge in Ross's perspective of Wakanda.

However, as Klaw calls attention to what lies beneath the façade of Wakanda's Third-World guise, a reconsideration of Africa as having a critical role in supporting the world exists. For Klaw, Wakanda holds the technological and social secrets for a progressive and affluent civilization. The likening of Wakanda to El

Dorado reinforces the threat posed by poachers such as Klaw. He is the modern-day conquistador stealing and reselling vibranium, which is indigenous to Wakanda and the basis for its technological advancement. Klaw's desire to invade Wakanda to extract its vibranium contains an embedded narrative that parallels the transatlantic West African slave trade. His unsuccessful attempt to obtain the vibranium, however, implies a consolidation of the continent's ability to defend itself against self-serving intruders.

Juxtaposed to Klaw's contemptuous view of Wakanda is the way Agent Ross enters the continent. After being wounded in Klaw's escape from capture, Ross is taken to Wakanda for treatment. He has to rely on their superior science and medicine for his survival. Although he plays the role of a 'good guy,' it is not enough to warrant Shuri's (Letitia Wright) reaction when he unexpectedly creeps up behind her. She cries out, "Don't scare me like that, colonizer" (01:09:27) It evokes humor as much as it does the looming realization of an ever-present specter of white superiority. Another instance of this is found when Ross attempts to speak to M'Baku (Winston Duke), the leader of the Jabari tribe. It draws fierce howling from M'Baku and the rest of his tribe as a means of intimidation and a signal that those like Ross — a white man — are not allowed to speak out of turn.

Then there is the setting of the museum in Great Britain, an establishment that takes pride in the ownership and curating of African artifacts. Killmonger is introduced for the first time in the movie here and delivers a condemnation of British exploitation of Wakandans, and by symbolic extension, Africans. After correcting a white, British museum curator's inaccuracy of the date and origins of one of the artifacts, he says to her, "How do you think your ancestors got these? Do you think they paid a fair price? Or did they take it...like they took everything else?" (00.16:38-00.16:43). In Casey Haughin's view, "The museum is presented as an illegal mechanism of colonialism, and, along with that, a space which does not even welcome those whose culture it displays." Though shot at the High Museum of Art in Atlanta, the setting is meant to represent the British Museum, which, by extension, symbolizes the influence of the British Empire in curating African civilization. As discussed by Kevin Coffee in his essay on the ways in which museums reproduce narratives of inclusion and exclusion, the museum scene in *Black Panther* functions to maintain the ideology of a social and global status quo based on racial differences. A sense of justice occurs, therefore, when Killmonger steals" — that is to say, reclaims — the Wakandan artifacts from the museum because Wakanda never belonged to the British Empire. Similarly, Klaw's

death adds to the justice dealt to would-be intruders. Though Ross is the only white character who is able to see Wakanda, the movie makes it clear that he is only allowed to do so by the generosity of T'Challa, who in this moment relinquishes resentment and vindictiveness for the "colonizer."

The final scene of the movie extends T'Challa's generosity as a leader. He is seen addressing the United Nations and offering aid to those in need, which is a telling display of national strength and diplomacy from a country that is intended to represent a utopian version of Africa, had it not been stripped of its physical and human resources. Where Mark Dery asks the question, "Can a community whose past has been deliberately rubbed out, and whose energies have subsequently been consumed by the search for legible traces of its history, imagine possible futures?" (190), *Black Panther* answers with a reverential "yes." Costuming, screenplay, and soundtrack — for the most part — bear witness to the movie attempting to re-trace an Afrocentric history. In doing so, the movie substantiates the argument made by Stuart Hall in "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." Hall's claim that "Practices of representation always implicate the positions from which we speak or write — the positions of *enunciation*" (222; emphasis in original). Enunciation, in Hall's mind, refers to the conscious direction that Black diasporic writers are taking in their attempt to overturn stereotypes of cultural inferiority.

This conscious attempt is exemplified in *Black Panther* through Coogler's vision of Africa as a dominant global superpower and not a Third World cluster of undeveloped nations. *Black Panther* shifts the position of enunciation away from the colonizer and toward the previously colonized. Therefore, when Killmonger says, "Bury me in the ocean with my ancestors who jumped from ships, 'cause they knew death was better than bondage" (01:57:54-01:58:08) he aligns himself to a position of power through resisting enslavement. Choosing one's fate is significant because it emphasizes agency, and slavery took agency away. Whereas bell hooks argues that white supremacy has historically framed the Black experience,³ *Black Panther* re-writes this narrative, in the process denying the systematic domination of one group over another. It does this through what Michael D. Harris discusses as "spectacular images that extol the place of Black people" (ix). Such spectacular images in the movie take the form of spaceships, magical elixirs, and a spiritual otherworld which re-connect with a severed pan-African movement.

³ According to hooks, "Opening a magazine or book, turning on the television set, watching a film, or looking at photographs in public spaces, we are most likely to see images of Black people that reinforce and reinscribe white supremacy" (1).

The imagination of an un-colonized African continent with the capacity to be a global superpower has made it possible for directors such as Coogler to examine how power can be re-negotiated and re-configured. In the movie, the symbols of African pride — costumes, chants, music, and language — become infused with the technological advancements enabled by the vibranium. They serve as tools through which African culture is demystified and re-considered in radically different ways that are not determined by racial phenotypes. Wakanda's scientific progress legitimizes the presence of the historically disenfranchised African subjects because they use it to resist domination. It corresponds to the “re-functioning of technology” discussed by Constance Penley and Andrew Ross which, above all else, is used as a strategy to “combat the monolithic picture of the one-way flow of Western technoculture” (x). In *Black Panther*, the uses of technology are culturally inspired, such as with the Royal Talon (T'Challa's personal aircraft), the Talon Fighter (armed fighter jets), mechanized rhinos (representative of the white rhinoceros), and Nakia's (Lupita Nyong'o) ring blades, which reflect the lip plate of the Mursi culture.

The brand of Afro-futurism enacted by *Black Panther* is used to confront and counter hegemonic discourses of Africa as a poor, backward, and deficient continent. Its socio-political subtexts, mediated through the emphasis on technoculture, parallels the relations among countries as much as those between races. Through science-fictional tropes of a technologically advanced society, super-capable humans, and an ideology of the otherworld rooted in Afro-spirituality, *Black Panther* re-works past histories and present contingencies by offering future possibilities. Operating as a place as much as a symbol of the people, Wakanda is a historical model where past, present, and future conceptions of Black culture intersect. As Ruth Mayer argues, “the fantasy space in-between” (556) is often used to explore the treatment of race in Black American culture. *Black Panther* represents this fantasy space most notably through Wakanda, whose veiled presence safeguards against foreign invasion. As a re-invented African polis, Wakanda contains a milieu of aesthetic expressions that transform racial dynamics as well as viewers' understanding of the ways in which they have been historically and technologically altered. T'Challa's address to the UN, in which he implores the council “to look after one another as if we were one single tribe,” (02:06:21-02:06:28) extends the importance of an African presence in the world from a passive receptor to an active enforcer of global change.

Get Out and the New Racism

Whereas *Black Panther* relies on the Afro-futurist trope to speculate a re-imagined African significance, *Get Out* uses what D. Scot Miller identifies as Afro-surrealism: a contemporary speculation of the present (114). Director Peele interweaves social criticism with a disturbingly relatable story of Black subjugation that uses scientific implausibility to reimagine the cause for continuing systems of racial exploitation. With crucial scenes in the movie inspired by actual events, such as the 2012 murder of teenager Trayvon Martin,⁴ and the slogan “A mind is a terrible thing to waste,”⁵ the entertainment value is enriched by the social criticism dramatized in the movie. To emphasize the critique of ongoing systems of racialization which continue to disempower the Black subject, *Get Out* utilizes the horror genre to depict the haunting specter of race relations.

Along with the horrific portrayal of owning the Black body, the movie incorporates symbolism, satire, and socio-historical warping of Blackness to expose the façade of color blindness. Through a narrative of mutated race relations, *Get Out* allows viewers a new perspective of the ways in which race continues to play an instrumental role in deciding who and what is considered valuable. The procedure of altering the Black body is the movie’s underlying horror story and the focus of this section’s exploration of Afro-surreal racial relations. In the movie, Chris Washington (Daniel Kaluuya) travels with his girlfriend Rose Armitage (Allison Williams) to meet her parents. The events that unfold reveal a chilling secret that the Armitage family attempts to keep. The Armitage family runs a cult organization referred to as the Order of the Coagula. This organization kidnaps, brainwashes, and sells Black bodies to be used as vessels for the housing of the consciousness of the white buyers. The theme of exploitation of the Black body draws attention to a broader issue of a contemporary vision of a blind racism highlighted by the movie.

⁴ The opening scene, where the character Andre Hayworth (Lakeith Stanfield) is kidnapped, evokes the murder of Trayvon Martin, who was shot in suburban Florida. Martin’s murder reinvigorated the national dialogue on racially stereotyping Blacks as criminals. In an interview by Jason Zinoman, Peele discusses the opening scene as being inspired by Martin’s death as well as the larger Black Lives Matter movement.

⁵ The slogan was used by the United Negro College Fund, which was founded in 1944 with the specific purpose of providing scholarships for Black students. The irony of using the slogan, however, is that it is used to refer to the mind of the infirm white person, not the Black.

The opening succession of aural and visual scenes in the movie introduce the film's focus on acts of violence against the Black community. The movie begins when a Black character, Andre Hayworth (Lakeith Stanfield), is kidnapped and taken into a white car. The videographic miscegenation of juxtaposed black and white images is reinforced by the subsequent scenes of black and white photographs and then the image of Chris Washington, the Black protagonist, applying shaving cream. The succession of these opening scenes occurs against the background refrain of "stay woke" of Childish Gambino's song "Red Bone." The socio-cultural reference of the phrase "stay woke" is an admonition always to be conscious of white injustice. It foreshadows Chris's initial insecurity when he learns that Rose did not mention his being Black to her parents. The ever-present implication of race being significant to social interaction re-appears in the scene involving the deer. As Chris and Allison make their way to her parents, they hit a deer with their car. When they call the police, the white officer asks Chris for his identification, even though he was not the one driving. The nature of police discrimination against Black people is highlighted here as well as the white privilege shown when Rose demands that Chris not show his identification. It also serves as a marker of disempowerment for the Black character because he is made dependent on his white girlfriend.

The casual treatment of the dead deer reflects the casual usage of Black bodies in the movie. Just as the father, Dean Armitage (Bradley Whitford), later reacts to deer as vermin to be eradicated, so too is Black consciousness treated as a pest that contaminates its only thing of worth: the Black body. In the same way that the father collects the heads of deer to display as trophies, so too are Black bodies hunted, hollowed of their consciousness, and collected. Like the deer's head proudly displayed in the Armitage house, Chris becomes something to collect. As with the curator of the museum in *Black Panther*, the theme of commodification is taken one step further in *Get Out*, where bodies, not items, are the objects sought for possession. Following this is the name Armitage, which bears an eerie resemblance to La Amistad, the nineteenth century slave ship. Like La Amistad, The Armitage family engages in their own albeit modern-day practice of a particular type of chattel slavery. They lure people of African descent, brainwash them, and sell them off to the highest bidder. In the movie, the Black body is considered to be a trophy and the basis for the social critique of racism enacted throughout the interactions between the white characters. It is the reason for Chris being imprisoned both psychologically and physically.

If bodies signify meaning through feeling, movement, and contact, then *Get Out* focuses on a reconceptualization of the body based on the re-negotiation of Blackness as something to be traded and used for the survival of the white characters. As such, the Black body is a contradictory site of subjugation for the Black individual, but a source of perpetuity for the white character. As the blind curator Jim Hudson (Stephen Root), who wins the bid for Chris's body, explains to Chris after the latter is strapped to the chair, the process of coagulation occurs in three phases. Beginning with hypnosis, the method that fuels the madness, the Black body is severed from the mind, or is "how they sedate you," (01:23:14-01:23:16) according to Jim. The schism creates a void whereby control of the sensory-motor functions are taken away from the Black person and given to the white person. In the same way that West African enslavement first denied the West Africans their "self" — their rights, subjectivity, and humanity — as part of the process of exerting control, Chris undergoes a similar stripping of his individualism: memories, emotions, cognition, and perception as part of his coercion. The act of being hypnotized takes on the disguise of a modern-day process of erasure and mental enslavement. Missy Armitage (Catherine Keener) is responsible for hypnotizing the captured African Americans. Her method of hypnosis relegates the consciousness of the captives to what she calls the "sunken place," a void where the dispensable mind is locked away.

Hypnotism is used to possess the Black mind, such as with the character Andre Hayworth. He is deprived of his Black identity and, in its place, adopts the markers of conformity to his white "owners": the top hat, jacket, and speech patterns. When Andre's body becomes possessed by a White buyer, his clothing reflects the taste of the buyer because he has now lost control of his ability to make decisions. According to Carter Woodson, "When you control a man's thinking[,] you do not have to worry about his actions. You do not have to tell him not to stand here or go yonder. He will find his 'proper place' and will stay in it" (xiii). In addition to being under control of the white characters, the movie's gentrification of the Black body also takes place with Georgina (Betty Gabriel) and Walter (Marcus Henderson).⁶ Besides Chris, Georgina and Walter are the only other Black characters who live in the plantation-like household. They function as slaves who must know their places: the kitchen and courtyard, respectively. As we later find out, Georgina and Walter

⁶ This is similar to the gentrification of the mind, discussed by Sarah Schulman, which is "an internal replacement that alienated people from the concrete process of social and artistic change" (14).

are actually the host bodies for Roman Armitage (Richard Herd), Dean's father, and Marianne Armitage (uncredited), the founders of the Order of the Coagula. In order to maintain the ruse of having Black employees, Georgina works as the maid and Walter the groundskeeper. In this way they fulfill the stereotypical roles contingent on their sex as much as their race. Through hypnotism, the Black body is rendered a shell, with the mind being relegated to the sunken place. As Jim explains, in this empty space the subject's existence "will be as a passenger, an audience" (01:24:03-01:24:12). Ownership of the Black body is transferred to the white parasite, which invades the host and assumes primary control.

The sunken place is the movie's overarching symbol to express the marginalization of Black people. Peele describes the sunken place in an interview with the *LA Times* as a "metaphor for the system that is suppressing the freedom of Black people, of many outsiders, many minorities." This structural silencing of subjectivity alienates Black individuals from themselves in *Get Out*. The dark nothingness of the sunken place mirrors the physical marker of being Black. Both are also considered empty voids, with the Black person's mind sent to the sunken place and their body filled with the white person's consciousness. The appropriation of the Black body by the white characters highlights Peele's conception of a white-washing process. Another instance of white-washing comes when Chris is strapped to the chair and forced to watch the television screen. Peele goes to explain that the sunken place functions as a "prison-industrial complex," which magnifies "the lack of representation of Black people in film, in genre." He is bombarded by white characters who determine the parameters of his existence as part of a deliberate attempt to impinge on his individuality.

Part of the method of the Order of the Coagula involves brainwashing the captured Black characters. This is achieved by locking them in a room, strapping them to a chair facing the television, and stripping away their consciousness through repeated sequences of on-screen hypnotism. The imprisonment of their body allows the hypnotism to lock away their mind. Apart from operating as a medium for Missy to hypnotize the captives, the television functions as a symbol for the lack of representation Peele goes on to discuss in the interview with the *L.A. Times*. Peele draws attention to the issue of representation of Black people in film by creatively exploring the process of erasing the Black presence on screen. He says, "no matter how hard he [Chris] screams at the screen he can't get agency across. He's not represented." Both *Get Out* and *Black Panther* ultimately work to create greater representations of the Black presence on screen. However, *Get Out*

is more self-reflexive than *Black Panther* in portraying the screen within a screen. It is also more direct in forcing viewers to consider the representation of a lack of representation of Black subjectivity in television.

As part of the constructionist approach to representation discussed by Hall in “The Work of Representation,” the instances of micro-aggression enacted through communication by the white characters in *Get Out* racialize the protagonist as “the Black guy” and not “Chris.” The physical markers of his Blackness — not his opinions, or what he “wants” — are deemed more important by the white buyers. This manifestation of racializing the African American is enacted through subtle, yet sly, comments aimed at stereotyping the Black body. It is part of the “new face of racism” referred to as “racism 3.0” in Augie Fleras’s study of micro-aggression as contributing to this type of racism. In *Get Out*, racism 3.0 is enacted mainly through micro-aggressive language. The Armitage family, and the prospective white buyers, display micro-aggressions in their casual stereotyping of Chris and other African Americans. Jeremy Armitage (Caleb Landry Jones), Dean’s son, admires Chris’s “frame and genetic makeup” (00:24:36-00:24:39) before attempting to put him in a headlock, and Hiroki Tanaka (Yasuhiko Oyama) asks Chris if “being African-American is more advantage or disadvantage in the modern world?” (00:54:36-00:54:45). The casual tone of the remarks heightens the awkwardness of the interactions between Chris and the others. The micro-aggressions serve different purposes. For example, Dean attempts to mimic Black communication in order to make Chris feel at home, and Jeremy’s admiration of Chris’s genes is envious as well as insulting because it objectifies Chris’s body. Hiroki’s question exemplifies what Fleras characterizes as “commonplace indignities,” such as “offhand comments” and “clumsy curiosity” (7). The “offhand comments” from those like Dean, Jeremy, and Hiroki correspond to what Fleras calls “micro-racial bias.” Fleras goes on to say that racism 3.0 “operates ‘under the radar’ through thinly veiled compliments, aversive (re)actions, and seemingly neutral language” (2-3). Accompanying the subtle expressions of micro-racial bias are the overtly racist practices exercised by the white characters.

The most blatant representation of the Black body as property to be sold is exemplified in the scene where the prospective buyers pretend to play bingo. They use the game as a front for a silent auction wherein they bid for Chris’s body. The silent auction is the climax of the annual gathering hosted by the Armitages. It operates as a modern version of a slave auction, where the wealthy whites can acquire a Black body for their use. In *Get Out*, Black skin is coveted and therefore

made transactional. Chris's Blackness is evaluated based on the desirable qualities worthy of being utilized, such as his physique, and the undesirable qualities that are surplus to requirements, such as his memories and emotions. When Chris asks, "Why Black people?" Jim replies, "People wanna change, some people wanna be stronger, faster, cooler" (01:24:45-01:25:00). The issue of appropriation of the Black body and culture is explored in the exchange between Chris and Jim. Blackness is equated with strength, speed, and style. Gordon Green (John Wilmot) expresses a similar sentiment of appropriating Black athleticism, but not Black skin, in the over-compensation of his admiration for Tiger Woods.

This trophy-casing of the Black body extends to Andre and Chris, who are paraded like breeding horses. To extend the animal symbolism, mentioned earlier in the deer incident, Chris is treated like a show-monkey. He is asked to show his tennis form and his skin is envied for now being 'in fashion.' In a stereotypical manner of hypersexualizing the Black man, a woman asks Rose, "So is it true, is it better?" (00:43:31-00:43:38) The question of sexual prowess, however, leads into the issue of another type of enslavement, one which Rod Williams (Lil Rel Howery) tragi-comically iterates numerous times: the utilization of Black men as sex-slaves. Rod is Chris's best friend and plays the significant role of rescuing Chris. However, he also functions as a source of comic relief in a deeply tragic story. Rod's conspiracy theory of the Armitages turning Blacks into sex slaves may be for comic effect but disturbingly so, because enslaved African men were often reduced to a phallic function. The scene where Rose drinks milk and eats Fruit Loops — colored cereal — separately while searching online images of Black sportsmen is another act of stereotyping based on sexual perversion. However, Rod is right on at least one count: the Black body is enslaved after it is filled with the White consciousness.

Get Out explores the idea of Chris being hypnotized into being a slave as a way of collapsing racial and post-racial distinctions. Therefore, Rose's romantic relationship with Chris is encouraged by her family because it gives the impression of the Armitages being anti-racist. Another example of the Armitage family trying to appear anti-racist occurs when Dean, as if to compensate for white privilege, prides himself on voting for Barack Obama, even for a third term, if it were possible. The reality is that the guiltless suppression of Black freedom still occurs. Practices such as the kidnapping, imprisonment, hypnosis, and erasure of the Black body and mind highlight the suppression dealt by the white characters. The use of the Black body is a warped ideology handed down to each generation of the Armitage family. As Roman says, African Americans are chosen by the Coagula

because of “physical advantages” and other “natural gifts” they have “enjoyed” throughout their entire lifetime (01:14:03-01:14:12). It also echoes Dean’s earlier comment that he enjoys the “privilege to experience someone else’s culture” (00:16:56-00:16:59). The appropriation of Black culture by the white characters in the film is layered with a self-proclaimed right to use the Black body for their own purposes.

The motivation for the selection of African American bodies resembles the warped justification for the use of West Africans as slaves. Critics such as Kenneth Kiple and Henry Rose Carter have strongly argued for an inherited and genetic immunity of the African. This belief has led to justifications of the Black body as genetically predisposed to particular advantages. Such advantages are creatively explored in *Get Out* as being stronger and faster, according to characters such as Jim Hudson and Jeremy Armitage. According to Kiple, “It can be said then, with little fear of exaggeration, that Black-related disease immunities played a crucial role in the wholesale enslavement of the West African” (8). Carter agrees, saying that “the negro [...] has a true racial resistance which is not dependent upon prior infection or exposure” (264). What both critics attempt to argue is that the West African was carefully selected to be enslaved because their bodies brought advantages such as having greater immunity to diseases. Despite more recent theories that disprove Kiple’s or Carter’s thesis,⁷ the very fact that those like Kiple and Carter believed in such a thing as genetic immunity is embodied by the Armitages and the propaganda they spread in *Get Out*.

The coagula is the overriding symbol used by Roman Armitage to explain the co-opting of the Black body as a shell for the white mind. After phase one, hypnosis, where the Black mind is separated from the body, the Black individual undergoes psychological pre-op: phase two. During this phase, the Black individual is mentally prepared through an introduction to the Armitage cult. The mental preparation involves brainwashing them into believing that their bodies are valuable vessels for the housing of white consciousness. Dean Armitage, referring to his white ancestry, declares, “We are divine. We are the gods trapped in cocoons” (01:08:34-01:08:40). Phase three — the transplantation — completes the white-washing, mind-washing process which attempts to achieve a quasi-immortality. The coagula procedure is described by Roman Armitage as a “man-made miracle”

⁷ See for example Steven Feierman and John M. Janzen, eds., *The Social Basis of Health and Healing in Africa*.

(01:14:26-01:14:28). Although the cult of the Armitage Order, as highlighted by Dean, believes in white privilege as divine, the transplantation relies on Black bodies for the survival of white consciousness.

As Peele is careful to dramatize, the villain in this horror movie is the monster of racism and the systemic utilization of the Black body by the cult Order. During the interview with Brooke Marine, Peele describes relationships between the Black and white characters in the film as “an allegory for the way we deal with race” and “the idea of being desired for our [Black] physicality and desired for our culture, but not respected as being equal souls and human beings.” By making the statement that Black lives, not just their bodies and culture, do in fact matter, Peele accomplishes the allegorical subtext of the story.

Conclusion

Get Out is a creative, cultural representation of voicing the illusion of a post-racial United States of America. Peele’s discussion of the socio-political backdrop to *Get Out* is as relevant as the post-racial racialism dramatized in the movie. This type of racism is unashamedly renewed, re-invigorated, and disguised and carries the potential to be equally destructive. It is similar to the “emboldened racism” Peele discusses in an interview with Brooke Marine. This mutation of race relations in the United States of America is described by Ian F. Haney-López as that which “operates as a political or perhaps even an ideological approach toward the continuing astringent of race” (808). Functioning in a similar way to *Get Out*’s Afro-centric perspective, *Black Panther* has done much more than break box office records; it has focused the spotlight on an entire race. Both movies have received exhaustive accolades for their unique perspectives of the need for greater representation.⁸ To do this, they each exemplify the constructionist approach to transmitting meaning. As outlined by Stuart Hall in “The Work of Representation,” the constructionist approach involves “symbolic practices and processes through which representation, meaning and language operate” (25). The films analyzed here are significant for the ways in which they provide a contemporary discourse on

⁸ *Black Panther* is the highest grossing film in the Marvel cinematic franchise and the third highest grossing film of all time in the United States of America. *Get Out* is the highest grossing original debut, and its director, Jordan Peele, became the first Black screenwriter to win an Academy Award for Best Original Screenplay in 2018.

Black representation in and through film, and they are worthy of attention because they offer new interpretations of Black subjectivity in the twenty-first century.

Peele's use of satire to critique the systemic new face of racism in contemporary America is as useful as Coogler's Afro-futuristic speculation of an advanced, uncolonized African continent. In both cases, the directors, whether through Afro-surrealism by Peele or Afro-futurism by Coogler, challenge viewers to think differently about race relations and Black subjectivity. By doing so, the movies offer more than entertainment value. Deep socio-historical issues explored in these films have resonated not only with the African diaspora but also the entire world. Through the constructivist approach to creating meaning, the movies call attention to the significance of representation and why it is needed more than ever to combat the historical disenfranchisement of people of African descent. *Get Out* and *Black Panther* offer a pop-culture reconceptualization of what it means to be of African ancestry through film narratives and genres that are easily accessible while ensuring that the content is socially relevant to contemporary discussion of an on-going battle for greater representation by people of color. The diverse manners of representation found in each film highlight the nuances of Black culture. As such, the films are significant because, through their unique genres, they can represent Black culture and subjectivity in unique ways and thereby draw attention to the ways in which Blackness is creatively imagined.

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Real, Close Friends: The Effects of Perceived Relationships with YouTube Microcelebrities on Compliance

ALLISON M. SALYER AND JULIA K. WEISS

Popular culture — a factor contributing to the evolution of contemporary societies — is a subset of culture where people use performances, expressions, and other ventures to create community and spread cultural information (Danesi 2). This definition of popular culture also posits that “expressive structures” serve to “enhance solidarity, understanding, and transmission of knowledge” (Danesi 3). The website YouTube, the focus of this study, serves as a popular culture hub and within it exist various types of communities that share information with each other through individualistic expression.

YouTube is one of the largest online platforms available today created for video uploading. Since its inception in 2005, YouTube has risen to be incredibly popular; as of 2018, the site hosts 1.8 billion users per day, making it the most popular platform that Google has to offer (Gilbert). YouTube has spawned not only copious numbers of avid viewers but also “microcelebrities” or “YouTube stars,” who entertain these viewers by posting original content to their channels. Popular YouTube stars who have arrived at almost-celebrity status have managed to build connections with their viewers; some of the most successful creators have millions of subscribers. For individuals who are not considered to be mainstream celebrities, their ability to affect such large numbers of people is impressive.

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Of special interest to us was the gaming community on YouTube (i.e. the video gamers' community). While video games themselves were popular at the start of YouTube, posting gaming videos on the site did not exist until YouTuber Blame Truth uploaded a video featuring his gameplay of *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* with his voice providing commentary on the game (Savino). This video was revolutionary in that it sparked many others to post similar gaming videos with their own personal touches. For example, YouTuber Hutch discussed topics such as God and his use of cigarettes in his videos of gameplay (Savino), adding a more personal touch to his videos and allowing his viewers to feel more connected to the man behind the screen. These videos and gaming personalities gave rise to the gaming communities that exist on YouTube today.

It is difficult to understand how these seemingly ordinary people cultivate such large followings simply by posting videos on the Internet. But according to Stuart Dredge, their ordinariness is what makes them appealing to followers. While this sense of "normalcy" can be found in other types of entertainers, it is much more prevalent on YouTube. Trying to achieve a better understanding of how these ordinary people gain a following willing to listen to them and fulfill their requests is the subject that gave rise to this study. Broadly, the topics explored here contribute to answering the questions: what can YouTubers do to gain followers, and how can they influence their followers to perform behaviors they request? Three frequently discussed factors in existing media and popular culture studies literature that can help answer these general questions are: perceptions users have of the YouTubers' authenticity; closeness people feel to the YouTuber; parasocial relationships (i.e., one-sided relationships) followers' form with content creators on YouTube. More specifically, we were curious about whether perceptions of authenticity and closeness would contribute to the formation of a friendship — albeit a false friendship — with YouTube stars, and if this feeling of a friendship could influence the behaviors of fans. We argue here that not only do these false friendships create a psychological sense of community, but also influence followers beyond online interactions.

Authenticity is a media consumer's perception that the media figure they are viewing is being "real"; it is the perception that the media figures are free of influence from others and are portraying themselves the way they really are outside of a mediated reality. It logically follows that if fans of a media persona perceive that the persona is of a genuine nature, there is a greater likelihood that it could be perceived as a friend when compared to a persona that is perceived as inauthentic.

In line with this assumption, the closer or more connected a fan feels to a media persona, the higher the likelihood of developing a feeling of friendship. Finally, it is also likely that this perception of a friendship may lead fans to comply with media figures' requests of their fans such as making a charitable donation or attending a media event.

This study discusses these factors in combination to see their effect on YouTube users' intentions to perform behaviors requested by YouTube stars. Using Markiplier, a microcelebrity on YouTube in the online videogaming videos community as a starting point, this study examines perceived authenticity and perceived closeness as potential factors that gain followers and promote parasocial relationships. This study also observes if these variables, including parasocial relationships, predict peoples' intentions to make charitable donations and attend live events where the YouTuber will make an appearance. Due to the fact YouTube is a giant in the world of mediated communication and popular culture, this study seeks to increase our understanding of the attraction of the platform and the creators on it, and the influence that these creators have on the massive communities they have built.

The Popularity of YouTube

Being that YouTube holds such a prominent place in the spotlight of popular culture, it is important to understand how and why the video-hosting site has become so prevalent in contemporary society. Scholars seeking to understand the craze behind a site like YouTube have pointed to its nature, which is that of participatory culture. One such researcher, Clement Chau, outlines participatory culture on YouTube as being made up of five parts. First, YouTube has low barriers on expression and engagement meaning that it is easy for users to join and interact with others to allow people to grow their online communities (67). Second, YouTube allows for and supports the creation and sharing of original content by its users (69). Third, informal, unregulated mentorship takes place on YouTube allowing users to learn from each other by passing on information (71). Fourth, YouTube operates based on contributions (e.g. video sharing, commenting), and these contributions build community between other users and the creators of the content as well (71). Finally, YouTube facilitates social connections and interactions between people who share similar interests, encouraging connections and collaborations (72). Overall, participatory culture on sites such as YouTube

allow for easy access to engagement, learning, collaboration, and artistic expression that spans an array of popular culture areas (e.g. video games, film, music) making the site incredibly popular.

YouTube as a Community

Although hundreds of definitions of community have been put forth by various scholars, it has been pointed out that when the average person thinks of the term “community” they think of a place where people know each other and provide different kinds of support to one another (Bess et al. 3). We use this definition throughout this work as it is fitting for a place like YouTube. In the cases of YouTube gaming communities, many members provide each other with instrumental support through gaming instructions but may also provide each other with emotional support through encouragement and friendships.

David D. McMillian and David M. Chavis propose a model outlining what gives a person a sense of community which is made up of the following components: membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection. YouTubers who post gaming videos are perhaps then able to create a sense of community with their followers as they fulfill each component of this model. For membership, followers follow the pages and updates of YouTubers and comment or interact with other “members” of that community. Further, there are many people who do not feel that they have a sense of community within their own geographical or place-based communities; therefore, they use membership in online or virtual communities as a substitute (Roberts, Smith, and Pollock 223). For influence, it is known that YouTube stars can make requests of their followers and the followers comply. Why they comply will be our focus later on in this study. For fulfillment of needs, many needs of users are met by becoming members of these gaming communities. Needs that have been cited as being fulfilled by joining these communities and watching gaming videos are being immersed in a game while having friendly company (Petrova and Gross 2), being entertained (4), learning information and tactics to complete games (4), fulfilling information-seeking needs (Sjöblom and Hamari 991), having a substitution for an in-person friend to play games with (Muncy), reliving memories and feeling nostalgia without needing to play a game oneself (Muncy), and tension release (Sjöblom and Hamari 990). Finally, for shared emotional connection, members contact each other through the platform and bond over familiar and similar interests

and events. Overall, YouTube is perfectly equipped to provide its users with a psychological sense of community.

YouTube's Popular Culture and Gaming Communities

YouTube hosts millions of instances of popular culture today and is the perfect venue to do so because this sub-culture is born of new trends favored by massive numbers of people and is ever-changing (Danesi 3). Anyone with video uploading capabilities can contribute to YouTube, making it a hub of varying cultural items. Professor and author of popular culture books, Marcel Danesi, indicates that a highlight of pop culture in 2017 was the increasing popularity of microcelebrities who often came from YouTube, and who contributed to a “global digital village” (Danesi 11), allowing for endless engagement between stars and users.

Gaming is an activity that is easy to form community over and subsequently easy to become engaged in because of the nature of video games; this media type requires that users be active rather than passive such as they are while consuming other forms of media (e.g. television). Games such as massively multiplayer online games (MMOGs) are also home to communities that provide players with social and emotional support (O'Connor et al. 459). It has been argued that games themselves — especially ones that involve role-playing — are so built to foster friendships and community or subculture (Fine 1). Video games often involve picking characters or avatars and interacting with other players in role playing scenarios where these subcultures can be found.

As far as popular YouTube gamers go, they are likely able to create a sense of community in part through parasocial interactions with their followers. A parasocial interaction occurs when a media figure appears to be attempting to interact with a viewer even when they are not directly speaking to that viewer (Horton and Wohl 215). This effect is usually accomplished when the media persona looks directly into the camera to speak, making it seem as if eye contact is occurring, a practice that is very common in gaming videos. These instances of what appear to be communication with the follower make the YouTube star seem close to a viewer and form the basis of what feels like a friendship. In addition to these interactions, YouTube microcelebrity popularity has also been attributed to their humble beginnings; many YouTubers, especially gamers and vloggers, started out using basic webcams (Dredge). This humbleness fosters a sense of intimacy, further encouraging feelings of friendship and community.

As a summary, YouTube is an online platform made up of videos from all areas of popular culture, including video games, and is well-equipped to provide a place where people can form a virtual sense of community. YouTube stars draw massive numbers of people to their pages and postings by fostering a sense of friendship. Being a part of a community means that influence from community leaders (i.e. YouTube stars) can occur, but what specifically drives that influence is a question worth exploring.

Factors Affecting the Popularity of YouTube Stars

Liz Lavaveshskul outlines four factors that potentially contribute to the rise of popular YouTubers. First, content creators with many followers make videos about aspects of popular culture that they are deeply interested in, and they showcase their interest on their channels. Second, they have their particular personalities that they demonstrate through their videos; and they maintain that their personality is “real” rather than “fake” in order to gain an audience. Third, YouTube stars need to interact with their audience in some way through commenting, involving them in new content creation, and so on, in order to engage the audience in their channel. One final, relevant point made is that YouTubers must use the community-building nature of the site to their advantage by staying connected to and giving back to their followers (Lavaveshskul 383-4). In sum, the creators of content on YouTube rise to Internet stardom when they invest themselves deeply in their popular culture topic, let their genuine personality come through in their videos and postings, interact with their audience to foster perceptions of closeness, and attempt to maintain a sense of community on their channel(s).

While several creator-based factors can influence the popularity of a YouTuber, most of their popularity is reliant on the viewers that watch their videos and those viewers’ perceptions of the content creator. That is to say that YouTube stars can perform behaviors such as talking with their followers to increase audience perceptions, but the audience perceptions and behaviors are what gain and maintain followers in the end. Perceived authenticity of and perceived closeness to the creator are two important audience-based factors contributing to YouTube star popularity.

Perceived authenticity and larger, more loyal followings are a pattern demonstrated in the literature on YouTube. For example, Florencia Garcia-Rapp’s ethnographic study of the YouTuber Bubz’s channel concluded that,

“demonstrating expertise and effort, and then consistently following the community rules of self-presentation and engagement with brands and viewers without ‘losing your own self’ is at the heart of the values of YouTube’s beauty community” (120). Throughout this study of Bubz’s videos, comments, and blog posts, Garcia-Rapp noticed the recurring idea of authenticity: the sense of being “real.” The study further revealed that when viewers perceive that a creator is trustworthy, honest, open, and rightfully motivated, they are more likely to consider the creator as “real” (131). For example, in the case of Bubz, her viewers perceive her as trustworthy and authentic because she only promotes products she has used and liked, as opposed to pushing products due to paid promotion. This study demonstrates that when viewers perceive authenticity, it has a positive impact on growing viewership.

Perceived closeness, as defined here, is a viewer’s sense of shared experiences with, somehow being related to, or being known by a media figure. Feeling close to a YouTube star in some way can promote followership. For example, a qualitative study examining race, ethnicity, and identity of four beauty guru YouTubers and their audiences by Samara Anarbaeva showed that these stars connect with followers by forming connections with those who share experiences of race and ethnicity (12). Sharing experiences with a YouTuber means a follower can feel more “known,” as if the star is close to the follower because they share something(s) in common. Studies such as these show feelings of closeness mean that viewers are more likely to return to those particular YouTubers over and over again.

Perceived authenticity and perceived closeness are not only related to the success of YouTubers but are also factors that are intricately related to each other. An example of their relationship can be seen in the case of the YouTuber Zoella, as pointed out by Anne Jerslev. She explains that the microcelebrity status of content creators like Zoella is based on feelings of intimacy and easy accessibility, both of which are related to authenticity. Jerslev states, “Zoella’s vlogs are centered around performances of authenticity, trustworthiness, access, and a temporality of presence and continuity” (5241). This authentic behavior contributed to the perceived closeness of viewers to Zoella, as she did authentic “confessional” videos and directly communicated with her viewers. However, after her YouTube success, Zoella went on to produce a book about her life that was ghostwritten, with no indication of this in press material or the book cover (5245). Followers reported losing trust in Zoella, and ultimately the close connection they had with her, leading to unfollowing her channel. Overall, this breach of authenticity led to a decrease in

perceptions of closeness and a decrease in followers and success. When it comes to YouTube, protecting that sense of intimacy and closeness is imperative to maintaining a large, supportive following.

Parasocial Relationships and Perceptions of Authenticity and Closeness

Parasocial relationships are defined as perceived relationships that arise when individuals are repeatedly exposed to a media persona, and the individual develops a sense of intimacy, perceived friendship, and identification with the celebrity (Chung and Cho 482). This one-sided relationship involves the media persona not feeling the same way about the follower and may not even know of the existence of the follower. Although the follower is aware of this, they still feel as if they are friends with the persona. Two factors that can increase parasocial relationships between viewers and YouTubers are the aforementioned perceptions of authenticity and closeness that lead YouTubers to gain followers in the first place.

Perceived authenticity and closeness, and parasocial relationships have been studied together before demonstrating an important connection between these audience-perception variables and these relationships. For instance, Elizabeth L. Cohen and William J. Tyler looked at how ghost-tweeting affected perceived authenticity and closeness of online personalities, and how this affects parasocial relationships. According to their work, media figures that are perceived as authentic are viewed as such because they “express realistic and genuine emotions” (Cohen and Tyler 343). Therefore, results demonstrated that ghost-tweeting can have a negative effect on perceived authenticity and closeness. This article exemplifies the fact how authenticity is built by genuineness, or in this case, doing one’s own work. When a YouTuber or media figure is not the primary content creator, it creates a sense of separation between the follower and the media figure because they do not seem real or socially accessible. Cohen and Tyler go on to say that the absence of ghost-tweeting reduced the perception of distance, which increased the feelings of the existence of a parasocial relationship (345). In sum, appearing authentic closes the perceived distance between followers and stars, thereby increasing perceptions of a parasocial relationship.

The current study seeks to demonstrate that feelings of authenticity and closeness can foster parasocial relationships between followers of YouTube stars and the stars. Therefore, the following questions are put forth: Does the perception of authenticity of a YouTube star influence the parasocial relationships that viewers

have with that star? Does the perception of closeness of a YouTube star influence the parasocial relationships the viewers have with that star?

Futhermore, evidence exists that parasocial relationships with media figures drive behavioral intent. For instance, Siyoung Chung and Hichang Cho found that when parasocial relationships were present between individuals and celebrities, the positive reception of brand endorsements and brand credibility increased (489). This led to greater purchasing intention for those brands. From the results, it was determined that parasocial relationships with celebrities can occur through social media exchanges through repeated interactions and self-disclosure, and that this can have an impact on purchase intentions of consumers. In another study on parasocial relationships and behavioral intentions, researchers Jessie M. Quintero Johnson and Paula D. Patnoe-Woodley showed that radio listeners felt they had multiple instances of parasocial interactions (i.e. when one perceives a media persona is addressing them directly when they are not) and strong parasocial relationships with their favorite radio personalities. These strong parasocial relationships led to a greater percentage of recall of the brands and products the radio personalities promoted, as well as an increase in the intention to purchase those products (Quintero Johnson and Patnoe-Woodley 44).

In both studies, a parasocial relationship occurred when the individual was exposed to the media personality repeatedly over time. This repeated exposure eventually led to a connection being formed, which led to an influence on the behavioral intentions of the individual. The same may be applicable to YouTubers. For fans of a specific YouTuber, they can opt to be exposed to that person continuously over time. To maintain consistency on their channel, YouTubers sometimes upload new videos weekly or even daily. This repeated exposure to the YouTuber, combined with the perceptions of authenticity and closeness, may lead to a parasocial relationship being formed between the YouTuber and the viewer.

If these parasocial relationships are indeed present, there may be reason to believe that these special relationships influence YouTube viewers' behavioral intentions. Some YouTube stars request that their followers make charitable donations through their pages and others ask that their followers attend conventions or lives shows where they plan to make an appearance. It is proposed here that authenticity and closeness perceptions lead to the development of parasocial relationships with these stars, which in turn lead followers to want to support these stars by complying with their requests. Therefore, the following questions are put forth: Do the parasocial relationships that viewers have with a YouTube star

influence their behavioral intentions to make charitable donations? Do the parasocial relationships that viewers have with a YouTube star influence their behavioral intentions to attend conventions or live shows?

Methodology

The Followers of YouTube Star Markiplier. For this study, the YouTube star Mark Fischbach, known by his followers as “Markiplier,” was examined to answer the research questions. Markiplier’s claim to fame is that he has played videogames all his life and often posts videos about videogame play, among other topics. He rose to fame through his comedic commentary and flamboyant personality, gaining traction in the gaming community with his play-throughs of horror games. He openly discusses and expresses his love for videogames in his YouTube videos, and his viewers are very receptive to this. He has over 23 million subscribers.

Markiplier’s followers were chosen as Fischbach exemplifies many of the aforementioned creator-based factors that make a YouTuber popular. For example, using Lavaveshkul’s points, Fischbach lets his outgoing and loud personality shine on his channel, posts videos for his followers often, and demonstrates care for maintaining his community. Additionally, Markiplier asks his followers to attend live events as well as make charitable donations, which made him a suitable candidate for studying his followers’ behavioral intentions.

Procedure. Through an online survey instrument hosted by Qualtrics, questionnaire data was collected in the spring of 2019 from respondents who were at least 18 years of age and who self-admitted to regularly watching videos from Markiplier on YouTube. Respondents were recruited through advertisements on Reddit (specifically, on Markiplier’s subreddit) and on Facebook. The following questions, in a randomized order, asked respondents about their perceptions of Markiplier’s authenticity and how close they felt to him. Respondents were then asked about various feelings and behaviors they may have exhibited that would suggest a parasocial relationship between Markiplier and themselves. After this, respondents answered the questions about their behavioral intentions regarding charity donations and attendance at events. Finally, respondents answered the demographic questions.

Participants. Of the 118 respondents 26 were deemed ineligible due to missing data. The final sample size was 92. For all demographic items, 3.3% (3) of the sample did not report any information. Of these 92 respondents, 56.5% were female

(52), 34.8% were male (32), and 4.3% reported they were a gender other than male or female (4). This sample was 76.1% White/Caucasian (70), 8.7% Asian (8), 5.4% mixed race (5), 3.3% Hispanic/Latino (3), and 3.3% African American (3). The age range for this sample was between 18 and 41 years old. ($M = 23.76$, $SD = 5.38$). According to responses to other demographic questions, 92.4% (85) of respondents were subscribed to Markiplier on YouTube and 4.3% (3) were not. When asked how long they had been watching or following Markiplier, 51.1% (47) said they had been watching or following him for four years or more, 34.8% (32) said they had been watching or following him between two and four years, and 10.9% (10) said they had been watching or following him for less than one year. The data gathered indicated that 92.4% (85) said they watch or have watched Markiplier stream (non-charity streams) on YouTube or Twitch and 4.3% (4) said they had not watched him stream on YouTube or Twitch. The respondents to this survey reported that 73.9% (68) follow Markiplier on some form of social media and 22.8% (21) did not follow Markiplier on any form of social media. Finally, the responses to the survey showed that 20.7% (19) were paid sponsors or members of Markiplier's community on YouTube while 76.1% (70) were not paid sponsors or members.

Measurements. Most of the survey items were adapted from previous research to increase the likelihood of validity and reliability, except for the scale on behavioral intentions, which was created for this study.

For perceived authenticity, a 16-item Likert scale was adapted from the previously referenced Cohen and Tyler study (344) to measure the perceptions of authenticity that respondents had about Markiplier. The items were related to perceptions of Markiplier in terms of if he appeared "real," if he stood by his values and beliefs, and whether he was his own person free of influence. Sample items from the scale included: "Markiplier seems aware of who he truly is," "Markiplier lets people tell him what to do [reverse-coded]," and "Markiplier always stands by what he believes." Each item had responses that ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The resulting scale had excellent reliability ($\alpha = .85$, $M = 5.90$, $SD = .60$).

For perceived closeness, a 10-item Likert scale was also adapted from Cohen and Tyler (344) to measure the perceptions of closeness that respondents felt they had with Markiplier. The items were related to perceptions that Markiplier was within reach of his followers and if they felt he was attentive to people within his social networks. Sample items for the scale included: "Markiplier seems 'within

reach' of me," "Markiplier is attentive to people within his social network," and "Markiplier would not interact with me on social media" [reverse-coded]. Each item had responses that ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). These items demonstrated excellent reliability ($\alpha = .85$, $M = 3.88$, $SD = 1.01$).

For parasocial relationships, a 15-item Likert scale was adapted from Rubin, Perse, and Powell (1977) to measure feelings and behaviors that may suggest a parasocial relationship between Markiplier and respondents. The items attempted to establish if viewers felt they had a friendship with Markiplier. Sample items for this scale included: "I like hearing the voice of Markiplier," "sometimes I make remarks to Markiplier while watching his videos," and "I like to think of Markiplier as someone who is like an old friend." Each item had responses that ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The items had excellent reliability ($\alpha = .89$, $M = 5.56$, $SD = .87$).

For behavioral intentions, scales and questions were developed to assess whether the three previous variables may affect respondents' intended behavior. To measure respondents' intentions regarding donating to charity through Markiplier or attending events in which Markiplier will be present, two, 6-item Likert scales were developed, one for charity and one for events. Both scales asked whether the respondent will or will not donate to charity through Markiplier or attend an event in which Markiplier will be present in the future. Items for these scales included: "I would intend to donate money in the near future" and "I would not have it in mind to pledge money to the charity" [reverse-coded]; "I would intend to purchase tickets and attend the event" and "I would not plan to attend the event" [reverse-coded]. Each item had responses ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The scales for intentions towards donating to charity ($\alpha = .92$, $M = 5.30$, $SD = 1.18$) and towards attending events in which Markiplier would also be present ($\alpha = .97$, $M = 4.80$, $SD = 1.63$) both showed excellent reliability.

Results

For the first and second research questions,¹ which asked whether authenticity and closeness had an influence on the formation of parasocial relationships, the results showed that both authenticity and closeness significantly predicted parasocial

¹ All research questions were explored using Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression analyses.

relationships. Based on the results, the perception viewers have of a YouTuber's authenticity and the closeness they perceive to that person positively impacts their perception of an existing parasocial relationship between themselves and the media figure.²

For research question three, which questioned whether parasocial relationships influenced respondents' intentions to donate to charities that Markiplier promoted, the results showed that parasocial relationships were a significant predictor of intentions to donate to charitable organizations at Markiplier's request.³ Along with this, the results showed that closeness was a predictor of intentions to donate to charitable organizations. According to these data, feeling a closeness with a YouTuber and feeling as if a parasocial relationship exists between the self and the media figure predicts intentions to donate to charitable organizations.

Finally, for research question four, which questioned whether parasocial relationships had an influence on respondents' intentions to attend events where Markiplier would also be present, the results showed that parasocial relationships were a significant predictor of intentions to attend an event where Markiplier would also be present.⁴ Therefore, according to these data, having a parasocial relationship with a YouTuber predicts intentions to attend events the media figure will be attending.

Discussion

This study was designed to explore if perceptions of authenticity of and closeness to a YouTube star influences the formations of parasocial relationships (i.e. one-way friendships), and if those parasocial relationships influence the intentions people have to make charitable donations at the star's request and attend media

² This overall model predicting PSRs was significant ($F(2,88) = 16.57, p < .001, r^2 = .26$). Authenticity ($B = .28, SEB = .37, \beta = .53, p = .001$) and closeness ($B = .28, SEB = .37, \beta = .21, p = .02$) both predicted PSRs with Markiplier.

³ This overall model predicting intentions to donate to charity at Markiplier's request was significant ($F(3,88) = 17.65, p < .001, r^2 = .36$). Having a PSR with Markiplier predicted intentions to make charitable donations ($B = .38, SEB = .14, \beta = .52, p < .001$) as did having a perception of closeness with Markiplier ($B = .24, SEB = .12, \beta = .28, p = .02$).

⁴ This overall model predicting live event attendance was significant ($F(3,85) = 9.39, p < .001, r^2 = .23$). Having a PSR with Markiplier predicted intentions to attend live events where Markiplier would make an appearance ($B = .40, SEB = .21, \beta = .74, p = .001$).

events at which the star will make an appearance. The existing literature indicates that authenticity and closeness drive people to become followers of particular YouTubers, and that these variables also influence the development of parasocial relationships. The literature also indicates that these relationships can drive behavior in various contexts. This study attempted to establish a connection between these variables specifically on the platform YouTube and explored if the existence of these variables increases intentions to perform particular behaviors requested of followers by microcelebrities on YouTube.

The results first showed that both authenticity and closeness influenced whether respondents felt they had a parasocial relationship with the YouTuber Markiplier. For this study authenticity was defined as a social construct that typically includes honesty, realness, and genuineness (Garcia-Rapp 122). Closeness, for this study, was defined as the potential to be noticed by a media figure (Cohen and Tyler 343). Being that authenticity and closeness were considered viewer-perceived factors for this study, the results demonstrate that viewers' perceptions of Markiplier were an important part of their formation of a parasocial relationship (i.e. a one-sided relationship; Rubin, Perse, and Powell 156) with him. In turn, these parasocial relationships and feelings of closeness predicted followers' intentions to donate to charity. Finally, these parasocial relationships predicted attendance at events where Markiplier would be present.

It is interesting to see that this demonstration of our society's fanaticism with media figures can begin online with microcelebrities; when a media figure appears authentic and gives the impression that they are within reach, the result is that people are willing to do what is asked of them based on a false sense of kinship with that person. In a society filled with overwhelming numbers of mediated messages, knowing how to attract followers is particularly vital if one wants to be noticed and promote social change. It appears if a YouTuber wants to have a parasocial relationship with their followers, to gain and maintain more followers, to establish a sense of community, and to have their request fulfilled by the followers within that community, then it is necessary to appear authentic and close (i.e. within reach) to one's viewers in order to foster relationships.

Popular culture becoming participatory culture is a fascinating area of study because being able to interact with and contribute to pages hosted by media figures is changing the pop culture landscape. Recalling Chau's participatory culture framework (72), a website like YouTube that hosts pages maintained by microcelebrities is the perfect place to form parasocial relationships with fans.

Platforms like YouTube give content creators the ability to express their authentic selves, encourage participation from fans, ask for opinions on cultural items, and create a sense of closeness with followers. To one of Chau's points, YouTube and similar sites may host strong civic engagement (67). Again, for Markiplier, requests were about donations and gaming event attendance, but requests by other YouTubers could extend beyond charity and encourage participation in movements or other social causes.

YouTube is clearly a place where a psychological sense of community can be formed, led by microcelebrities within their own niche communities. Previously, we referenced the McMillian and Chavis model outlining a sense of community and discussed the component of influence. According to their model, people in the community have a perceived sense of influence over other community members. The results of our study show, at least in part, from where that influence stems. YouTube stars such as Markiplier can influence their community members to perform offline behaviors by fostering false friendships with their followers and appearing to be themselves at all times. These results relate back to the style of videos by Markiplier (and other microcelebrities like him); they appear to have parasocial interactions (Horton and Wohl 215) with their viewers and use humbleness to increase feelings of intimacy (Dredge). The fact that any member of virtual communities such as Markiplier's fans can access and view the same videos allowing for similar or simultaneous experiences creates a sense of belongingness in a community — much like the idea of the imagined community (Anderson).

While this study did provide significant results, it had its limitations as well. In retrospect, the closeness scale may not have been the most appropriate scale for this study. The scale items do not exactly line up with the concept of a parasocial relationship. A parasocial relationship should be a one-sided relationship, and the items on the scale leaned more towards a two-sided, real-life relationship (e.g. the celebrity would interact with me). This may explain why, in this study, the levels of reported perceived closeness were much lower than that of perceived authenticity and may explain why closeness had only minimal effect on respondents' behavioral intentions. Second, the sample for this study was very small (92) compared to Markiplier's 23 million subscribers and so this study only represented a small section of those subscribers. However, because Markiplier has such a particular following, and because the means for the authenticity and parasocial relationship scales were so high, it is unlikely that having a larger sample size would greatly change the results. It is likely that although the sample could be bigger, most

respondents would answer in a similar fashion to those who responded to this study. Perhaps the largest limitation of this study is only the viewers of Markiplier were studied. Others should use caution when generalizing the results of this study to other YouTubers, especially those who create different content than Markiplier (e.g. vloggers, beauty gurus, DIY YouTubers).

In future studies, it would be interesting to test this idea of parasocial relationships driving behaviors with other YouTubers or online personalities. Knowing that respondents in this study seemed more willing to comply with Markiplier's request of donating to charity or buying a ticket to an event brings up the question of what other requests individuals would be willing to comply with if they had a parasocial relationship with the personality in question. If the parasocial relationship is strong enough, it may be possible for personalities to get their viewers to comply with many types of requests.

Conclusion

YouTube is, and will continue to be, a giant in the world of media and popular culture. Its unique ability to allow anyone to watch, create, and share sets it apart from other platforms before it, and these features allow users to create and take part in unique communities. As YouTube presses on and continues to grow, so will YouTubers; and these content creators clearly have a significant influence on the individuals that view their content. Knowing what attracts followers, and, further, what encourages those followers to act on request are questions worthy of continued study.

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Marginalization within Nerd Culture: Racism and Sexism within Cosplay

BRYAN JENKINS

Cosplay, short for “costume” and “play,” is a form of expression where people dress as their favorite characters from comics, anime, video games, shows, and movies as a testament to their passion for their favorite properties (Rahman et al. 318). Cosplayers are typically members of the geek/nerd community, which broadly refers to those who are fans of science fiction, fantasy, anime, video games, and comic books (Hill 4). Although wearing costumes is a widely accepted social practice on Halloween, the same cannot be said for year-round cosplayers. Cosplay is often confined to the various geek conventions, as outside of these spaces, cosplayers are likely to be ridiculed and stigmatized (Ramirez 11). In some ways, geeks exist as a marginalized group, feeling that they are outcasts on the lower end of the social hierarchy in society, considered social outcasts for participating in fandom that is not widely accepted (Lockhart 11). Cosplayers, who, next to the major movie studios and celebrities, are the most visible geeks and therefore receive the most media attention at conventions (Jenkins 23) as well as the most scrutiny from those outside of geek culture. But even within a marginalized group there still exists a hierarchy of oppression, as Black people are often subject to racism, and women, sexism, within the geek community (Hill 20; Ramirez 61).

In America, many associate geek culture with White people, and many geek spaces such as comic conventions are predominately White and male (Jenkins 29; Lockhart 12). Also, due to a lack of representation within all forms of media, most characters from TV/film, video games, and comics are White (Ramirez 14). These two factors contribute to the higher level of scrutiny and racism that Black cosplayers receive (Hill 81; Ramirez 49). Black cosplayers are often met with racist

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remarks, such as, “that character isn’t Black.” Beyond racism, women cosplayers are also subject to sexism (Hill 4). Since much of the media within geek culture is both male centered and created, female characters are often created with the male gaze in mind. These characters are often both scantily clad and have unrealistic bodies (Avery-Natale 79). From this derives multiple issues for women. On one end, if a woman decides to cosplay as one of these characters, they can be subject to unwanted and uncomfortable attention from male convention attendees. This can even escalate to unwarranted physical touch, so much so that some conventions post numerous signs stating that “cosplay is not consent” (Romano). Furthermore, since these characters are often animated and have unrealistic body types, female cosplayers are also subjected to more body shaming than their male counterparts are. Incidents like these, although not highly publicized, have been reported to different media outlets (Bever; Gooden).

Exploring marginalization within cosplay is of importance as it is a form of expression that is reflective of geek and popular culture at large. One can easily compare attitudes held towards minority cosplayers with recent controversies concerning increased diversity in popular geek-related properties. One prime example is the backlash the recent *Star Wars* trilogy has received for featuring mostly non-White male characters. A most prominent manifestation being the harassment actress Kelly Marie Tran received for her portrayal of the character Rose Tico. Tran, a Vietnamese-American woman, is the first woman of color to play a leading role in the franchise. Following her appearance in 2017’s *The Last Jedi*, Tran was subjected to an onslaught of racist and sexist comments online from fans upset with her character’s presence, ultimately leading to her temporarily deleting her Instagram posts (Martinelli; Moye).

Similarly, in 2019, controversy stemmed from the latest installment of the Pokémon games with the introduction of their first Black gym leader, Nessa. Although many fans of the series, especially Black fans, were excited to see more representation within the series, many were also bothered by her presence. This led to some fans creating racist fan art or game mods that depicted Nessa as White, and even as a monkey (Gramuglia; Ritzen; Weekes).

These are but two examples that display the negative reactions that often come with including more marginalized characters in geek properties. Those same strong feelings many fans hold about who they want to see represented in their favorite shows, games, etc. are not only directed at the specific property itself but also aimed

at other fans. As this study will prove, these negative attitudes are quite prominent in critiques of fan expressions, such as cosplay.

There is a dearth of work examining the cosplay experience, and significantly less acknowledging the marginalization of Black, female, and non-binary cosplayers. This study hopes to affirm the experiences of these cosplayers while simultaneously highlighting the levels of racism and sexism that exist within the geek community. In order to eradicate marginalization within the geek community, it is important to first acknowledge that it exists and bring these experiences to light. This study aims to provide an examination into marginalized cosplayers' experiences, highlighting why they chose to cosplay and the challenges they face as a marginalized group. This study will be conducted through the framework of co-cultural theory, which is used to examine the interaction between marginalized groups within a dominant society from the marginalized group's point of view (Orbe, "Continuing" 66; Orbe, "Laying" 159; Ramirez-Sanchez 90). The study will also incorporate the uses and gratification theory to examine cosplayers' motivations for choosing to cosplay.

Literature Review

The literature for this research identified various motivations that cosplayers have for cosplaying. It also unveiled experiences of racism and sexism within the cosplay and geek community. However, most cosplay research does not focus on marginalization within the community, especially in terms of race. Most studies center upon either the history of cosplay or cosplay as a form of self and fan expression in general.

Cosplay Motivations. Cosplay scholarship has identified various motivations fans have for cosplaying in general, as well as for picking specific characters to cosplay. Cosplayers often choose to portray characters they feel they identify with to some degree (Grissom 111; McGeehon 58). Other cosplayers may choose characters whose designs they feel will pose a creative challenge to craft (Kane 161; Lamerichs par. 1.6; Rahman et al, 332). An overall greater sense of belonging to a community and developing friendships emerged as a common motivation for cosplayers (Grissom 112; Kane 172; Ramirez 25-6; Reysen et al. 34). Many cosplayers seek to utilize their cosplay to not only express their fandom but also as a form of self-expression, as it provides a sense of freedom and empowerment for them (Grissom 111; Kane 167; Lamerichs par. 5.2).

Some cosplayers identified that they obtained gratification from the smiles and enjoyment that their cosplay brought to others (Kane 165; Ramirez 32). For this reason, many cosplayers are motivated to choose easily recognizable characters and are further motivated to achieve a sense of authenticity in looking as much like the character as possible (Kane 165; Rahman et al. 326; Ramirez 34). The literature also revealed that many people are motivated to cosplay as a form of escapism, sometimes helping them cope with mental health issues, as it is a fun and enjoyable experience (Grissom 112; McGeehon 59-60; Rahman et al. 331; Reysen et al. 34).

Racism and Sexism in the Geek Community. Studies on race and gender within cosplay and the geek community at large identify that geek culture is a White and male dominated space (Orme 404, 414). As a result of such, women, non-binary, Black, and other non-White geeks experience marginalization within this space. Stephanie Orme conducted a study in which she explored the stigmatization that women who identify as geeks face when participating in the culture. In the study, Orme interviewed female comic book readers about their experiences in male dominated geek spaces such as comic bookstores. Participants reported feeling stigmatized by male geeks who tended to act as gatekeepers to the culture, making assumptions that women were less knowledgeable and thus unworthy of participating in a particular fandom. In fear of being stigmatized, some women exhibited a strategy of avoidance and steered clear of places like comic bookstores. However, other participants reported not feeling stigmatized and wore clothing that displayed their comic book fandom (411-3).

In the same study mentioned earlier, Ramirez also identified the levels of marginalization Black and female cosplayers face. Marginalized cosplayers expressed a lack of representation in characters in geek related properties in general as contributing to the limitations on their cosplay options. Female participants stated that most of the cosplay options for them are hypersexualized and that a lack of strong female characters to identify with exists. Conversely, male participants expressed not having an issue finding characters that they identified with. Ramirez noted that gender bending characters arose as a common strategy that women use to cosplay characters that they identified with (42-5).

Non-White respondents also expressed a difficulty in finding characters to cosplay. As most participants of the study expressed gratification from their cosplay being “accurate” and looking as much like the source material as possible, this same sentiment appeared to serve as fuel to further marginalize minority cosplayers (Ramirez 57). This level of marginalization manifested to the extent where some of

the White participants defended the use of blackface in cosplay while simultaneously placing limitations on the characters minorities can cosplay. Ramirez displayed how White cosplayers use the need for “accuracy,” or “canon” as some refer to it, to further marginalize minorities in multiple ways. Furthermore, Ramirez points out that if the accuracy of one’s cosplay creates access to greater cultural capital, it becomes more difficult for marginalized cosplayers to gain the same level of access (Ramirez 52).

Uses and Gratifications Theory. Uses and gratification theory seeks to explain people’s motivations for, and satisfaction received from, using various forms of media (Chung and Kim 14). The theory is concerned with how mass media, whether a particular outlet such as television or specific content on that outlet, meets and satisfies the needs of audiences (Katz et al. 510). This theory is also effective for studying new media and why one may choose to navigate to utilize social media as a source of news versus more traditional means (Baran and Davis 210). While this theory is typically used for examining media consumption, this study will utilize it to examine cosplayers’ motivations for cosplaying and what sort of gratification they receive for doing so. Although the researcher was unable to locate studies explicitly utilizing this theory for cosplay, the literature identified various motivations and gratifications for cosplayers. Considering that the literature lacks the experiences of marginalized cosplayers, this leads to the following research question aimed at determining if there are any additional motivations marginalized cosplayers hold that differ from White and male cosplayers: What are Black/female/non-binary cosplayers’ motivations for cosplaying?

Co-Cultural Theory. Co-cultural theory, developed by Mark P. Orbe, is a communication theory that seeks to explore how “non-dominant” members interact with “dominant” members of society. A number of distinctions exist that could define one as a co-culture, such as race/ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, religion and class (Orbe, “Laying” 158). Studies utilizing co-cultural theory identify and categorize the strategies associated with a co-culture’s communication practices with the dominant culture. The strategies are: emphasizing commonalities, developing positive face, censoring self, averting controversy, extensive preparation, overcompensating, manipulating stereotypes, bargaining, dissociating, mirroring, strategic distancing, ridiculing self, increasing visibility, dispelling stereotypes, communicating self, intragroup networking, utilizing liaisons, educating others, confronting, gaining advantage, avoiding, maintaining barriers, exemplifying strength, embracing stereotypes, attacking, and sabotaging

others (Orbe and Roberts 295-6). Each of these strategies holds an expected outcome of either assimilation (fitting in), accommodation (maintaining one's cultural identity while participating), or separation (staying amongst one's own). Furthermore, each of these strategies can be viewed as either aggressive, assertive, or nonassertive (Orbe, "Laying" 170). This study seeks to define cosplay, and geek culture at large, as a co-cultural group, leading to the following research question: Is Cosplay a co-culture?

Ruben Ramirez-Sanchez expands co-cultural theory by identifying how a co-culture can have a separate co-culture within it. Existing as one of the few studies to apply the theory in this manner, Ramirez-Sanchez identifies punk rock fans as a co-culture, with Black punk fans existing as another co-culture within that group (96). In similar fashion, this study seeks to identify Black, female, and non-binary cosplayers as a co-culture to the cosplay group, as Black people and women exist as marginalized groups in society in general. Therefore, the following research questions aim to excavate the experiences that marginalized cosplayers have that White males do not, as well as how these cosplayers communicate with the dominant culture: What role does race/gender play in the cosplay experience; and, how do Black/female/non-binary cosplayers engage with the cosplay community at large?

Method

This pilot study utilized a qualitative questionnaire intended to test questions that may be included in future, more extensive questionnaires that would be part of a larger ethnographic study. The participants responded to an online questionnaire containing 17 questions inquiring about their motivations for and experiences while cosplaying. Every question was posed in an open-ended format, allowing the participants to make their responses as long as they saw fit. To ensure a diverse set of respondents, the questionnaire link was posted in three separate online geek forums that exist as primarily Black, but inclusive, spaces. These include a chat group associated with a nerd podcast hosted by Black women, a Meetup group for nerds of color, and a Facebook group associated with a predominantly Black geek convention. The questionnaire was open for one week, during which an intended minimum of 10 respondents was met. This study sought to not exceed 15 participants to allow for a more thorough investigation of the detailed responses. Please refer to Appendix A for a list of the questionnaire questions. To protect the

privacy of the participants, the following names included in the study are pseudonyms.

Data Analysis and Discussion

A total of 11 individuals responded to the questionnaire. Of these, six respondents identified as Black and five as White. Seven respondents identified as women, two as men, and two as non-binary; none of the respondents identified as White men. Table 1 below provides more details on the participants' demographics and their responses. From these results, the following 11 themes emerged about cosplay motivations and experiences of marginalized groups.

Participant	Gender	Race/ Ethnicity	Age	Years Cosplaying	Attends Conventions?	Feels Connected to Cosplay Community?	Experienced Racism?	Experienced Sexism?	Believe Racism/Sexism Exists in Community?
Tasha	F	Black/ Caribbean	25	4	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
Taylor	Trans (fluid)	White	37	20	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Shea	F	Black	46	2	No	Yes	No	No	Inconclusive
Josh	M	Black	28	2	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
Hayley	F	White	47	5	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Carol	F	White	66	4	Yes	No	No	No	Yes*
Jamal	M	Black	50	4	Yes	Yes	Yes	No*	Yes
Jordan	Genderqueer	White	23	8	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Brandy	F	Black	22	1	Yes	Yes	No	No*	Yes
Amber	F	White	34	19	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes
Nia	F	Black	45	20	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Table 1. Participant Demographics and Experiential Questions Responses

Motivations for Cosplay

Theme 1: Cosplay is Fun and Great for Connections. Several uses and gratifications themes emerged from the respondents as to why they choose to cosplay. The majority of the responses aligned with the literature in that Black people, women, and non-binary people did not exhibit any distinct motivations for cosplaying from those of White men. Taylor stated that they cosplayed because “when I was a teenager it was just amazingly nerdy and fun. Still is!” Nia expressed that “it just makes me happy.” Both respondents expressed that they found cosplaying to be a fun and enjoyable experience. Jordan said that they find that “Cosplay is a powerful icebreaker because you're wearing your artwork and interests for the world to see. It's really easy to make friends and geek out over

anime and embroidery. It breaks down a lot of initial barriers, and I feel immediately close to people I've spoken only briefly to in-person a few times." Beyond just being fun, Jordan is discussing how cosplay is also great for making connections

Theme 2: Why I Choose to Cosplay Particular Characters. As in the literature, many people stated that they choose the characters they cosplay to receive the satisfaction that derives from being recognized. In response to being asked some of her favorite characters to cosplay and why, Brandy stated "X-men, Avengers, Sailor Moon. (Character recognizability)." While some respondents, such as Brandy, chose easily recognizable characters, others opted for lesser known options for a bigger payoff. Jordan stated they "also like cosplaying lesser known characters like Princess of the Crystal from Mawaru Penguindrum, because people who have watched the show get really excited to see a rare cosplay from it." Jamal stated that he also likes cosplaying lesser known characters, but for a somewhat different reason. He said his "main favorite is Patriot from the Young Avengers because of the character's story and history. Plus, you don't see many people portray a lot of black superheroes that aren't mainstream." These findings could suggest that marginalized cosplayers are less likely than White males to seek out easy recognizability for the characters that they cosplay. Furthermore, it also suggests that they find more joy in showcasing characters who are not typically in the spotlight. There could be a correlation between marginalized groups, who may often feel unseen, relating to and wanting to spotlight characters that are normally overlooked.

Theme 3: Difficulty Level. Also consistent with the literature is that some cosplayers opt for characters that prove to be a crafting challenge, while others opt for costumes they can more easily pull off. Josh stated that he "can do without a lot of specialized parts, like Sith or Scarlet Witch." On the opposite end of the spectrum, Jordan finds it fun "to talk shop with other cosplayers while wearing more elaborate cosplays, because we get to gush over each other's sewing and embellishment techniques." These comments showcase that cosplay motivations based upon crafting skill level can vary depending on personal preference.

Theme 4: Diverse Cons as a Safe Space. Although not originally intended to be an aim of this study, participants' choices in conventions to attend arose as a point of interest. All except for one of the respondents attended geek conventions. Several conventions came up for various reasons, which included the specific fandom (i.e. gaming, anime, etc.) that the convention was tailored to, fun activities, great for

cosplays, and great vendors. Three cons, MAGFest, BlerDCon, and New York Comic Con (NYCC), all appeared multiple times and mainly because of their accepting and diverse environments. Taylor expressed that they attend “MAGFest, because for a gaming convention it has an atmosphere that is the opposite of the normal toxic gaming community. It's inclusive, accepting, and laid back. BlerDCon, an intersectional convention for the minority community of the fandom. Everyone there is just awesome.” Brandy listed “AwesomeCon, BlerDCon, NYCC. Local, very diverse, easily accessible.” BlerDCon also appeared in Nia’s comments as she stated she “will always remember being at the first BlerDCon. It was such a warm, friendly welcoming environment where I didn’t feel out of place.” These comments suggest that marginalized cosplayers favor these more diverse conventions and value them as a safe space for them to participate in geek culture.

Cosplay Experiences for Marginalized Groups

Theme 5: Cosplay as a Co-Culture. In defining cosplayers, and geek culture in general, as a co-culture, existing research on the subject already defines it as a subculture (Hill 19; Lamerichs par. 2.1; Orme 406). It is important to note that the term co-culture is synonymous with subculture, except that it is intended to remove the negative connotation and acknowledge the diversity of cultures (Orbe, “Laying” 158). Although they have transitioned into terms of endearment, “geek” and “nerd” historically have been used in a derogatory sense intended to ostracize a particular group of people for their interests and appearance (McArthur 61). Participants’ statements are consistent with the literature showing that cosplay, and geek culture at large, is a co-culture within the larger society. Brandy said she felt that “some people see it as childish to dress up in costumes as a hobby.” Similarly, Nia expressed that “to many non-cosplayers, it’s a weird thing kids do or people with no life do. They don’t understand the time and passion that can be involved in even the most simple and basic cosplays.” These comments highlight how participants often feel misunderstood and considered to be childish by those outside of the geek community.

Theme 6: Marginalized Cosplayers as a Co-Culture within a Co-Culture. Consistent with Ramirez-Sanchez’s work, the results of this study support the idea that Black, female, and non-binary cosplayers exist as a co-culture within a co-culture. All except for one of the respondents agreed that racism and sexism exist within the geek community, which means that White male cosplayers operate as

the dominant culture within the cosplay and geek community. When asked if she felt that racism and sexism exists within the geek community, Tasha replied “yes. [...] White cosplayers have continued to defend blackface as appropriate. A lot of cosplayers get labeled "Black" or "nigg@" versions of their cosplay.” Tasha’s comments indicate that Black cosplayers are subjected to racism within the community. Nia also agreed, replying “hell yes!!! Men in general, and White men specifically, think they know everything about what I’m doing and need to explain it to me or criticize how I’m doing it.” Beyond just race, Nia expresses how being a woman also makes her subject to discrimination. Responding to the same question, Taylor stated “100% absolutely. POC Cosplayers get far more shit, same with trans. [...] Female cosplayers who show even a bit of skin get called sexually derogatory terms. Sexism, racism, ableism, ageism, it's all over the place in the cosplay community.” Taylor’s comments add that trans and other groups are also marginalized within cosplay. All of these comments support the notion that non-White male cosplayers are a co-culture within a co-culture.

It is important to note that the one participant who did not answer yes to the question also did not answer no. In fact, her response did not answer the question at all and therefore, it was denoted as inconclusive.

Theme 7: Personal Experiences of Racism Within the Community. Although almost all of the participants felt that racism exists within the geek community, only two of the six Black participants reported having experienced racism. Jamal recounted the following story:

I remember meeting a Black cosplayer ... cosplaying as Catwoman (Jim Balent version). [...] A group of White dudes (or boys) walked past her and made comments that Catwoman wasn’t Black and you need to cosplay one of your own characters. I was in my Patriot cosplay and before they walked by, I walked in front of them and said they need to apologize for that comment! One of them said, you need to mind your business you fake Captain America homeboy!

Jamal’s story provides not only a personal account of experiencing racism while cosplaying, but also bearing witness to racism expressed at another Black cosplayer. Nia also shared a personal experience with racism while cosplaying, stating that “before I had a child, I did Morticia Addams and was told 1) I wasn’t sexy enough and 2) ask why I would cosplay Morticia when I was Black.” Nia’s experience is one in which she was subject to both racism and sexism simultaneously.

It is possible that two factors influence the low levels of racism experienced by the respondents. The first is the low level of experience the Black cosplayers in this study hold. With the exception of Nia, who has been cosplaying for 20 years, the remainder of the Black participants have been cosplaying for less than five years, and many of them only for one or two years. In addition, one of the Black cosplayers has not attended a convention yet. It is likely that this low level of interaction cosplaying at conventions has kept the participants from encountering racist experiences with cosplay. The other factor lies within the conventions the participants have attended. As previously mentioned, many of the participants stated that they attended very diverse and Black-centered conventions. One could posit that it would be less likely that Black cosplayers would encounter racism in inclusive spaces.

Theme 8: Personal Experiences of Sexism Within the Community. Of the nine non-male respondents, five explicitly stated having experienced sexism while cosplaying. The participants were asked if they've ever encountered any inappropriate verbal or non-verbal interactions while cosplaying. Nia stated "yes, luckily only some leering and it's disgusting. It makes you feel violated when you just want to have fun and hang out with friends." Taylor's comments agreed with Nia's as they expressed "all. The. Time. As a genderfluid person I have heard some whispered laughs, I've had people ask me 'what am I' and try to reach under my skirt. Some photographers won't shoot me (mostly middle aged cis white males)." Amber shared similar comments as she "had to deal with a lot of 'cosplay is not consent' (inappropriate touching) from men as well as challenges that I'm not a real gamer because I like certain types of games and not others." The responses are consistent with the literature in that non-male cosplayers are often objectified and subject to sexual harassment and assault within the community.

While Brandy stated that she has not experienced sexism in response to the question that asked it directly, she later explained experiences in which she felt somewhat objectified that would say otherwise. The first was in response to being asked if she ever experienced any inappropriate non-verbal behaviors while cosplaying, in which she replied she's "had men take pictures of me that I haven't seen since. That makes me a little uneasy. But nothing wildly inappropriate." The second comment addressed the feedback she received from posting her cosplay pictures online. Brandy said that her online postings receive "overall very positive feedback! Mostly "sexy" from male audiences but generally very positive from everyone." This would suggest that it is possible that a level of internalized sexism

exists that some non-male cosplayers experience, thus making them dismiss some sexist interactions.

Marginalized Groups Co-Cultural Reactions

Taking into consideration the various strategies co-cultural groups utilize when interacting with the dominant culture, three communication strategies become apparent in the participants' responses.

Theme 9: Confronting. Confronting is an aggressive co-cultural strategy in which the user asserts their voice at the dominant culture (Orbe, "Laying" 169; Orbe and Roberts 296). In his story about his racist encounter while cosplaying, Jamal chose to confront the aggressors and demand an apology for their racist remarks. He stated he "walked in front of them and said they need to apologize for that comment! One of them said, you need to mind your business you fake Captain America homeboy! I said first of all, son, I'm 49 years old and I'm n your home boy, second of all, unless you have the balls to cosplay or even put on a costume, don't talk down to those who do have the balls. [...] I said apologize to her." It would appear that participants who choose the confronting strategy are opting to directly challenge the dominant culture to claim their space within the culture.

Nia and Taylor also describe opting to confront aggressors in racist and sexist interactions. Taylor spoke about how they've "had two people attempt to reach under my skirt, many try to hug me without asking, a good share of dirty looks. For the looks, I just stare back at them and make them feel uncomfortable knowing I see them and don't care, for the touches, I forcefully separate them from me." Nia referred to a situation in which she overheard someone making comments about her race, stating "it wasn't said directly to me—someone muttered about 'damn niggers trying to play white characters.' When I turned around to confront the person, no one knew or heard anything." Her comments show that even though the racist comments might not always be direct, marginalized cosplayer may still opt to confront it directly.

Theme 10: Avoidance. Other participants opted to use strategies that were less direct than confronting. In response to a male Sailor Moon cosplayer who, according to Jordan, has a tendency to harass female cosplayers, they "blocked him immediately, but many of my friends have been harassed and bullied by him on multiple accounts." This can be seen as an example of the avoiding strategy, in which one chooses to maintain a distance between themselves and the dominant

culture, typically by instituting ways to prevent interaction with dominant group members (Orbe and Roberts 296). Sexual harassment became so bad for Amber that she adopted an avoidance strategy as well. Amber commented that “touch. Touch was so often a problem that I stopped taking pictures with people in plain clothes. They could photograph me, but not pose with me.” These results suggest that some female and non-male cosplayers adopt measures that prevent them from being harassed and assaulted by the dominant culture, while still allowing them to participate in cosplay.

Theme 11: Communicating Self. It would seem at times even Jamal would opt for a less confrontational approach, as he and Taylor also used a communicating self strategy. This strategy involves marginalized cosplayers interacting with the dominant culture in a manner that showcases their high self-esteem (Orbe, “Laying” 168; Orbe and Roberts 295). Jamal said that “being in the Navy, I can let things roll off my back, because I will not reward ignorance or stupidity with my precious action or response!” Regarding their experience with racism and sexism while cosplaying, Taylor commented that “it doesn't bug me that much in the long run, because I'm very comfortable and happy with who I am, but it happens.” This would suggest that, at times, marginalized cosplayers choose to take what some may call the “high road” and not give any of their energy to racist and sexist remarks from the dominant culture.

Conclusion

The results revealed that marginalized cosplayers typically adopt strategies with the aims of accommodation (confrontation and communicating self) and separation (avoidance) when interacting with the White-male dominant culture within the geek community. Accommodation strategies are ones in which co-cultures are opting to maintain their own cultural identity while still participating in the culture (Orbe, “Laying” 170-1). Sometimes these manifest in the participants directly confronting the dominant culture about their harassment; other times they choose to ignore negative comments and refuse to let it lower their self-esteem. Another tactic, which was only adopted by the non-male participants, was avoidance. This suggests that for some women and non-binary cosplayers, it is best to separate oneself as much as possible from the dominant culture when cosplaying, as they are less likely to encounter harassment and assault when not interacting with men. Not present in the responses are any strategies that represent assimilation as an aim. This would

suggest that Black, female, and non-binary cosplayers are largely uninterested in taking on the dominant culture's standards to participate in the culture.

This study helps to better expose the experiences of marginalized cosplayers. Adding to the growing list of literature that discusses the marginalization of women and minority cosplayers, and members of the geek community at large, will assist in highlighting the need to transform the geek space so that it becomes more inclusive. Often cases are made about the need for more diversity in media, and this study provides an example of the harm this lack of diversity generates. Although cosplaying should be a fun and enjoyable experience, what this study shows is that that is not always the case for marginalized cosplayers. As previously demonstrated with the negative reactions to more diversity in major franchises like *Star Wars* and Pokémon, these same attitudes persist and replicate in more interpersonal settings, such as at geek conventions, forcing marginalized cosplayers to adopt various strategies to either confront or avoid both verbal and physical harassment. Black and women cosplayers have to navigate and cope with the negative attention that their mere presence unjustly generates that those of the dominant culture likely do not even think about. The continued silencing of marginalized voices allows racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression to persist. This study is one of a few that is actively engaged in pointing out and dismantling oppressive structures in geek culture.

Further research that seeks to expose the levels of racism and sexism that exist within the geek community is recommended. Something that appeared within this study that was not an original area of attention was the propensity of the respondents to attend diverse conventions. Many participants listed these conventions as some of their favorites, and the inclusive environment as a major factor as to why. This calls for more research into the positive attributes of having more conventions that intentionally aim to be diverse and de-center White males.

This study faced a few limitations, the main limitation being that it was conducted by way of an online questionnaire. By using this manner of data collection, it was difficult to extrapolate more context from the respondents, as some gave only one to three-word answers at times. The researcher was unable to follow up for clarification with any answers that were unclear, Brandy's aforementioned response being a primary example. The online questionnaire format also made it much more difficult to extrapolate co-cultural communication strategies, as most respondents did not go into much detail about how they interact with the dominant culture. An additional limitation was the lack of experience in

predominantly White and male spaces of the participants. Future recruitment processes should seek to hear from Black and other marginalized cosplayers who hold more experience in less diverse conventions.

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Appendix A

List of Questionnaire Questions

1. What gender do you identify as?
2. What race/ethnicity do you identify as?
3. What is your age?
4. How long have you been cosplaying?
5. Why did you start cosplaying? What sort of satisfaction do you receive from doing it?
6. Who are some of your favorite characters to cosplay? Why?
7. Do you think non-cosplayers understand the cosplay community? Why or why not?
8. What are some of your favorite conventions to attend? Why?
9. Do you feel connected with the cosplay community? If so, how do you engage with other cosplayers?
10. Do you participate in cosplay contests? Why or why not?
11. Please describe any standout experiences you've had while cosplaying.

12. Have you ever been left out of a group photo for a particular character you were cosplaying? If so, how did you feel about the experience?
13. Have you ever experienced racism and/or sexism while cosplaying? If so, can you share a little bit about the experience?
14. Have you encountered any inappropriate non-verbal behaviors (touch, eye contact, etc.) while cosplaying? If so, can you describe the experience?
15. Have you encountered any inappropriate verbal comments while cosplaying? If so, can you describe the incidents?
16. Do you post your cosplay pictures online? If so, what are some of the positive and/or negative comments you've received? How do they make you feel?
17. Do you feel racism/sexism exists within the geek community? Why or why not?

“She’s Awake! He’s Awake! It’s Awake!”: Gender Nonconformity in *A Series of Unfortunate Events*

JESSICA KING

The troubles of the Baudelaire orphans in Lemony Snicket’s (pen name of Daniel Handler) children’s series, *A Series of Unfortunate Events*, begin on a cloudy morning on Briny Beach, where they are given the news that a fire has destroyed their home and killed their parents (*The Bad Beginning*, 8). The children are sent to live with the nefarious actor Count Olaf, setting into motion a convoluted series of plots in which Olaf attempts to steal the Baudelaire fortune. Count Olaf does not work alone; he has a theatre troupe of loyal associates who assist him in his plans.

There was a bald man with a very long nose... There were two women who had bright white powder all over their faces, making them look like ghosts. Behind the women was a man with very long and skinny arms, at the end of which were two hooks instead of hands. There was a person who was extremely fat, and who looked like neither a man nor a woman. (*The Bad Beginning*, 47-8)

The books are popular with children, and offer cynical, dark humor and a bleak outlook not often found in children’s literature (Bady).

In 2017, Netflix picked up the series, dedicating two episodes per book to creating a faithful adaptation of the series. Count Olaf and his associates all appear to make the lives of Violet, Klaus, and Sunny Baudelaire miserable. Several notable changes occur in the adaptation to streaming television, including a closer look at the mysterious organization V.F.D. One particularly interesting change is to the “extremely fat” person, “who looked like neither a man nor a woman.” This analysis uses feminist rhetorical and visual rhetorical approaches to examine how this character is portrayed in the book series compared to the Netflix series. The analysis examines the character’s description, the character’s role in the plot, other characters’ reactions and other context that clarifies how gender-nonconformity is

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handled in the Baudelaires' world between the book series and its adaptation. Adaptations offer a significant area for research because they provide a lens into what cultural changes happen over time and allow a story a chance to adapt itself for a different audience with different understandings. Netflix's adaptation of *A Series of Unfortunate Events* adapts gender nonconformity for the expectations of a modern audience by making a previously nefarious character sympathetic and giving the character a happy ending.

Literature Review

Media Effects and Children's Media. Much research has been done on media effects in children's entertainment. Susan Villani conducted an analysis of the previous twenty years of research, finding that media was shown to have effects on children's behavior (392). Children pick up gender roles from what they see in media, particularly in television (Signorielli 52). Children's literature is another arena for learning. Research suggests that children's books leave much to be desired with regards to gender roles; Carole Kortenhaus and Jack Demarest find that although there are increasingly more female characters in children's media, they are still portrayed in dependent roles (230). Frank Taylor demonstrates that many children's tales, such as those by Dr. Seuss, feature male characters acting, problem-solving and being heroic, while female characters play secondary roles in the narrative (308). In recent years, progress has been made towards varying gender portrayals in children's books; for instance, according to Elsworth Rockefeller, transgender representation has increased in frequency and complexity in young adult fiction (519).

For its part, *A Series of Unfortunate Events* allows its protagonists, and by extension its readers, to break out of traditional gender roles. Tison Pugh notes that "Snicket hypothetically describes a fair exchange: 'If you were bored with playing with your chemistry set and you gave it to your brother in exchange for his dollhouse, that would be a fair deal'" (163). This exchange is one of several instances in the books where Pugh indicates that either the narrator subverts gender expectations or the protagonists do through their broad proclivities and preferences: "For example, Violet hates the color pink and rejects feminine toys such as dolls" (163). Despite subverting gender roles, this reading of *A Series of Unfortunate Events* still reflects the dominant paradigm of gender as a binary system of men and women, with typical actions, likes, dislikes and skills.

If *A Series of Unfortunate Events* allows its protagonists to move freely and express interests outside of traditional gender roles, why study the series at all? Why study a minor character like the person who looks like neither a man nor a woman?

Feminist Rhetorical Analysis. A minor character can be worthy of analysis, as Jeremy Rosen writes in his description of the popularity of books based on minor characters from the literary canon, because “character narration or first-person narrative is self-justifying, distorting in the interest of self-exculpation, and thus [we ought] not simply to sympathize or identify with the... minor figures” (50). This holds true in Snicket’s novels, where the narrator regularly interjects with thoughts on everything from the villains of the novel to the Baudelaires’ parents to the use of expressions such as “meanwhile, back at the ranch” (Snicket, *The Reptile Room* 127). Rosen writes, “many writers...have indeed endeavored to reimagine socially marginal characters... commentators have consistently understood such texts to be ‘giving voice’ to previously ‘silenced’ characters and applauded them for doing so” (85-6).

The goal of giving voice to the marginalized or silenced is in line with feminist rhetorical criticism, which examines how gender has been used to privilege some voices, communication styles and goals over others. Typically, this means being “concerned with how women have been included or excluded in the study and practice of rhetoric... [and] interested in minimizing the power differences between men and women that result from rhetorical practice, theory and criticism” (Borchers 198).

Some feminist scholars theorize gender as an oppressive force, and rather than seeking to reify it by comparing women and men, they aim to deconstruct it. Celeste Condit, for example, identifies what she terms “dichotomy feminism,” which “portrays male and female activities of being as radically separate from one another and assigns rhetoric to the realm of the male” (92) based on the idea that there is an essential character each gender has, and thus “women” and “men” are unique and immutable (93). Condit critiques this approach, not least because it “it encourages us to ignore the deeply and subtly coercive dimensions of much of [private communication]” (94). Instead, she proposes a gender diversity perspective, which offers “a non-dichotomous understanding of gender” (96) based on the works of other scholars such as Judith Butler. The gender diversity perspective is sensitive to context and allows for individuality while maintaining gender identity as a useful way to examine societal differences. Instead of rhetoric being the place where

gender is displayed, Condit asserts that gender is constructed in the act of rhetoric (104).

Judith Butler posits that the discontinuities of gender can be seen in areas of both the heterosexual and queer communities where “gender does not necessarily follow from sex, and desire, or sexuality generally, does not seem to follow from gender” (173). Instead of being derived from some essential quality, Butler argues gender is a repeated act of performance (173) ascribing meaning onto a given body. Gender performance, in the dominant heterosexual context, is a means of social survival and gaining social acceptance:

Discrete genders are part of what “humanizes” individuals within contemporary culture; indeed, we regularly punish those who fail to do their gender right. Because there is neither an “essence” that gender expresses or externalizes nor an objective ideal to which gender aspires, and because gender is not a fact, the various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all. (Butler 178)

This understanding of gender is significant for this analysis for several reasons. First, it prioritizes the act of gender creation rather than the body as the basis for gender. Gender cannot be assumed from a person’s body, and a person may choose to present their body in a way that defies the strict categorization that the traditional gender binary requires. Second, it presents a lens to understand gender’s significance to a culture: gender exists because a culture has decided (typically to maintain a heteronormative culture) that it exists and is important. When applied to a narrative set in a fictional world, these ideas offer interesting ways to examine whether gender is constructed in that world in the same way it is in our culture. Does the fictional world also understand gender in a heteronormative way, or are different understandings at work in that world?

Working with the view that gender is not an essential quality but is constituted through performance and the act of rhetoric, this analysis draws on Sonja Foss’s definition of visual rhetoric. To qualify as a piece of visual rhetoric (and thus, a communicative act), an image must be symbolic on some level, imply human intervention or creation, and infer the presence of an audience (144). By this definition, Netflix’s *A Series of Unfortunate Events* is an excellent example of visual rhetoric and complements the books for a rhetorical study. To interpret the text, this analysis takes Alan McKee’s view of textual analysis as a post-structuralist sense-making endeavor (10): seeking to understand how both adaptations make sense of gender through the portrayal of a character who troubles

the gender binary. The analysis examines written descriptions of the character, others’ reactions to the character, any dialogue the character has, the henchperson’s role in the plot, and, in the Netflix show, costuming, facial expressions, movements, camera cuts and other visual elements unique to the medium. These instances are read for their tone and what meaning that situation presents; for example, whether they create the character as a fearsome menace or a sympathetic person. Comparing the adaptations directly offers a view into how gender’s construction in a fictional world changes over time and, by extension, what changes the creators anticipate in their audience.

Comparative Analysis

Readers first meet the person who looks like neither a man nor a woman shortly after the Baudelaires are put into the care of Count Olaf. In *The Bad Beginning*, the siblings prepare pasta puttanesca for Olaf and his troupe. Olaf becomes angry that they did not prepare roast beef instead, and is about to drop the infant, Sunny, on the floor from a great height in retaliation when his troupe calls for him. A litany of people marches into the kitchen, including “a person who was extremely fat, and who looked like neither a man nor a woman” (Snicket, *The Bad Beginning* 47-8). The role of villains as actors is an interesting choice, as it implies a certain amount of trickery and deceit, as the troupe is used to shifting from role to role. This is in stark comparison to the Baudelaires who, although they sometimes assume disguises in later books, are often not able to hide their identities and are quickly discovered by Olaf and his associates.

The troupe continues the debauchery throughout dinner — served by the Baudelaires — even applauding when Olaf hits Klaus on the face (Snicket, *The Bad Beginning* 55). Later in the book, when Violet tries to bring some blankets to Sunny, who is trapped in a cage at the top of a tower in Olaf’s house, she encounters the henchperson again:

When night approached, Violet gathered the curtains that had been Sunny’s bed and brought them to the door to the tower stairs, where the enormous assistant of Count Olaf’s, the one who looked like neither a man nor a woman, was standing guard. Violet asked whether she could bring the blankets to her sister, to make her more comfortable during the night. The enormous creature merely looked at Violet with its blank white eyes and

shook its head, then dismissed her with a silent gesture. (Snicket, *The Bad Beginning* 114)

This interaction demonstrates a total lack of human empathy for Violet or Sunny on the part of the person who looked like neither a man nor a woman. This inhumanity is a continuing theme throughout the books, and is emphasized through the narrator's use of the word "it" to express the indeterminacy of gender, rather than the more commonly accepted "they" or even "he or she," as Pugh also points out (104). From the get-go, the henchperson has very little personal agency, appearing only to act under the orders of Olaf, and is mainly mentioned as part of the collective of villains.

The Netflix series introduces the troupe of villainous henchpersons at a similar point in the narrative: the Baudelaires have just returned from shopping for ingredients for pasta puttanesca; however, they are greeted by an over-the-top musical number, where the character can be seen playing the drum and laying on the floor with other henchpersons to spell out letters with their bodies. The henchperson of indeterminate gender, as the character is called in the credits of the Netflix series, has roughly chin-length hair, is wearing a dirty red shirt with a butterfly print and ruffled cuffs (a signature style of shirt for this character), pinstriped black pants, a grey vest and brown, heeled ankle boots. Unlike in the books, where the character says nothing, in the series, the character greets the Baudelaires, and, when Olaf asks, "What are we supposed to do until [dinner is ready]?" offers, "We could wait patiently," suggesting manners and a non-confrontational style of interaction (Sonnenfeld, "The Bad Beginning: Part 1" 00:38:09-00:38:14).

Any ambiguity of gender is not addressed in the introduction to the character in the Netflix series, and the other characters do not seem to notice or respond to it. The character's voice is low and masculine, and their movements are stiff, rather than dainty or feminine. Although intended to be a character whose gender is impossible to determine, on screen the character still reads as masculine. This may be because the actor, Matty Cardarople, presents as a cisgender male, meaning both his gender identity and sex are male, when interviewed about the role (Tietjen) and in his personal Instagram posts (Cardarople), and thus performs the male gender even in subtle ways. In addition, unlike in the books, where the henchperson is invariably described as enormous, the Netflix henchperson is not particularly fat, but rather a normal weight for a person of their height.

Despite the initial campy but sympathetic introduction to the henchperson of indeterminate gender, they are still on the villains’ team. For example, in the dinner scene, the character does nothing to assist the Baudelaires in serving, and, although initially appearing to enjoy the pasta, lets their food fall out of their mouth after Olaf expresses disgust about it. When Olaf rants about the Baudelaires being ungrateful, after becoming angry at being reminded that the children are unable to access their enormous fortune until Violet, the eldest, comes of age, the henchperson of indeterminate gender offers, “That’s what happens with wealthy kids. Money is really a corrupting influence” (Sonnenfeld, “The Bad Beginning: Part 1” 00:42:38-00:42:44). The character’s costume is dingy and dirty, a visual contrast to the bright colors and clean fabrics the Baudelaires and the agents of V.F.D. wear, but in line with the rest of Count Olaf’s troupe. A continual tension is created in how the character reacts to the crueler events of the plot; for instance, when Olaf hits Klaus, the henchperson looks shocked, though they remain silent. This pull between good and bad leaves the audience with the lingering question of how to interpret this character: will they ultimately turn out to be good and help the Baudelaires? Or do they fully support Count Olaf?

Another element of the Netflix series that differs from the book series is the more omniscient perspective. This adds depth to the V.F.D. storyline that is always playing out against the background of the Baudelaires’ woes and lends more of an insight into the dynamics of Olaf’s theatre troupe. These moments add to the complexity of the characters, particularly the henchperson of indeterminate gender. In *The Bad Beginning*, Olaf’s plan to steal the Baudelaire fortune involves marrying Violet in a sham play, and we see the henchpersons come up one by one to report to Olaf on wedding planning, from flower arrangements to cake sampling to the design of the wedding dress. The henchperson of indeterminate gender voices discomfort with the scheme, saying, “I just think, even in a changing context, that marriage is inherently a patriarchal construction that is likely to further the hegemonic juggernaut that is problematizing a lot of genders” (Sonnenfeld, “The Bad Beginning: Part 2” 00:21:36-00:22:00). Olaf seems to ignore this statement, rolling his eyes and leafing through a dictionary to find the definition of “nuptial” before leaving through a trapdoor to the surprise of the henchperson, who asks, “Are you leaving?” (Sonnenfeld, “The Bad Beginning: Part 2” 00:22:00-00:22:08). Other instances exist where the henchperson of indeterminate gender voices discomfort with Olaf’s plots, in *The Wide Window*, *The Austere Academy*, *The Vile Village*, *The Hostile Hospital*, and *The Carnivorous Carnival*.

Though the Netflix series is largely faithful to the plot of the original books, some departures require examining. Notably, the role of the hook-handed man in *The Reptile Room* is swapped out for the role of the person who looked like neither a man nor a woman in *The Wide Window*. This is a key change because one of the most dehumanizing moments for the person who looked like neither a man nor a woman occurs in *The Wide Window*.

In *The Wide Window*, to defeat Olaf's most recent villainous scheme, the Baudelaires have to steal a boat from Damocles Dock to find their Aunt Josephine. When they approach the boat rental shack, they see: "A person so massive that it looked like an enormous blob was in the shack, snoring away with a bottle of beer in one hand and a ring of keys in the other... What frightened Violet was that you couldn't tell if this person was a man or a woman" (134). The character of ambiguous gender is portrayed as frightening not only because of their affiliation with Count Olaf, but also specifically because of their gender ambiguity. This fear is not unique to Violet, either:

"One of Count Olaf's comrades is in the shack," Violet said. "Which one?"

Klaus asked.

"The one who looks like neither a man nor a woman," Violet replied.

Klaus shuddered. "That's the scariest one." (Snicket, *The Wide Window* 135-6)

During interactions where the Baudelaires are contemplating how to steal the boat, they are careful to discuss the person who looked like neither a man or a woman using the phrase "he or she", but once a thunderclap awakens the person, who discovers that the key has been stolen, Violet panics. "'She's awake!' Violet shrieked. 'He's awake! It's awake! Hurry, Klaus, open the gate and I'll try to distract it'" (139). Even the protagonists, who are portrayed as intelligent, polite, resourceful and kind — qualities the child reader is supposed to look up to — are still on some level put off and even frightened by gender nonconformity (Pugh 104).

The dehumanization of the character continues as Violet tries to talk her way out of the situation:

Her heart in her throat, Violet stood in front of the creature and gave it a fake smile. "Good afternoon," she said, not knowing whether to add "sir" or "madam." [...] Without a word the mountainous person grabbed Violet by the hair, and with one swing of its arm lifted her up over its smelly shoulder...the person scooped up Sunny with its other hand and held her

up... Violet was kicking the creature from behind, and Sunny was biting its wrist, but the person was so Brobdingnagian...that the children were causing it minimal pain... Count Olaf’s comrade lumbered towards Klaus... He felt something grab the back of his shirt and he was lifted up in the air. Something slimy began running down his back, and Klaus realized with horror that the person was holding him in his or her mouth (Snicket, *The Wide Window* 140).

The character is not only described as a “creature” as a means of handling gender nonconformity, but the character also literally acts like a creature, using their mouth to carry Klaus, and “lumbering” around the dock (142).

This interaction does not occur in the Netflix adaptation of *The Wide Window*, where the person guarding the shack is the hook-handed man (Sonnenfeld “The Wide Window: Part 2”). Instead, there are deliberately humanizing moments, such as in The Anxious Clown restaurant, where the henchperson of indeterminate gender is seen talking to V.F.D. member, Larry-Your-Waiter, giving the recipe for pasta puttanesca (Sonnenfeld “The Wide Window: Part 2”). In the same episode, the hook-handed man says to Larry-Your-Waiter, “We don’t care what your name is!” and the henchperson of indeterminate gender adds “Or what gender you are!” (00:11:50-00:11:55). This not only removes a very unflattering episode from the henchperson of indeterminate gender’s characterization (no comparable situation is shown with the hook-handed man in the boat shack), but also acts as another example of how the character’s gender identity is constructed. The character is shown to be aware of the ambiguity of their own gender and continues to dress and express themselves as they see fit. In *The Wide Window*, for example, they wear a feminine, long paisley button-down dress, a sleeveless fur coat and pinstripe pants at The Anxious Clown, but a masculine, Gorton Fisherman-style outfit when the troupe is sailing on Lake Lachrymose (Sonnenfeld, “The Wide Window: Part 1”).

Due to the switch in roles for the hook-handed man and the henchperson of indeterminate gender in the Netflix series, one big source of characterization for the henchperson of indeterminate gender occurs in *The Reptile Room* after the Baudelaires’ uncle, famed herpetologist Montgomery Montgomery, is found dead amongst his collection of reptiles. The henchperson of indeterminate gender poses as Nurse O. Lucafont, which astute readers will notice is an anagram for Count Olaf, the coroner.

The character arrives almost instantly after the disguised Olaf claims to have put in a call for help. The henchperson is dressed in a blue nurse’s dress with a

white apron, mask and hat, reminiscent of Nurse Ratchet from *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, buttons that say “nurse” and “totally a nurse” and one with a peace sign; blue stockings’ white Keds; red, upside-down glasses; and pink dish gloves. The character’s hair is long, feminine and curled. When Mr. Poe, the banker in charge of the Baudelaire’s affairs, answers the door, the character is holding a red leather bag in one hand and adjusting their fake breast with the other. Mr. Poe seems uncertain of the character’s gender, asking, “May I help you ma’am? Sir?” (Sonnenfeld, “The Reptile Room: Part 2” 00:09:11-00:09:18). This example of gender ambiguity is interesting because it signifies that presentation is not the end of gender in the Baudelaires’ universe.

Nurse Lucafont has a very feminine presentation, and most of their face is not visible due to the mask, yet Mr. Poe still senses ambiguity and is unable to decide how to address the person. Lucafont speaks using a falsetto, which heightens the gender play at work. This is a curious choice in terms of gender display for the audience, as the falsetto voice implies that this character is not truly of ambiguous gender, but rather is a man masquerading as a woman. In *The Miserable Mill*, we see Olaf do just that as the receptionist, Shirley, in Dr. Orwell’s optical office (Sonnenfeld, “The Miserable Mill: Part 1”). The main rhetorical move done to distinguish drag performance from gender identity is through the henchperson of indeterminate gender’s voicing complex thoughts about gender and social institutions. Rather than a persona that the henchperson takes on and off as it suits them, as with Olaf’s disguises, the henchperson’s gender is constant even as it is expressed in different ways. The implication is that gender nonconformity forces this henchperson’s engagement with a myriad of social issues that cisgender people do not have to confront.

In *The Ersatz Elevator*, the Baudelaires are trying to bid on a mysterious item labeled V.F.D. that they believe contains their kidnapped friends, the Quagmire triplets. Count Olaf, disguised as a foreign auctioneer, talking towards backstage where he believes the women with the powdered white faces are, says, “Ladies, please turn the box around so that everybody can see with their eyes all of the angles.” V.F.D. agent Larry-Your-Waiter walks out from backstage instead, saying, “Actually, I identify as a man.” After this statement, the camera cuts to the henchperson of indeterminate gender who looks incredulous but impressed (Sonnenfeld, “The Ersatz Elevator: Part 2” 00:27:15-00:27:29). This interaction shows that heroes are tuned in to sensitivity and respecting identities, and the

henchperson of indeterminate gender once again is shown existing in tension between the good guys and bad guys.

The henchperson of indeterminate gender also works to undermine other normative gender moments. Whenever Olaf’s henchpersons make comments about his girlfriend, Esmé’s attractive appearance, the henchperson of indeterminate gender brings up some other aspect of her personality, whether that be that she is terrifying (as in *The Hostile Hospital*) or “admir[ing] her for her capabilities,” like in *The Vile Village* (Sonnenfeld “The Hostile Hospital: Part 1”; Sonnenfeld “The Vile Village: Part 1” 00:14:46-00:14:50). When the theatre troupe are vying to have their fortunes read by the mystical Madame Lulu in *The Carnivorous Carnival*, the henchperson of indeterminate gender posits that “the concept of first seems to problematically be centered around patriarchy” (Sonnenfeld “The Carnivorous Carnival: Part 1” 00:08:46-00:08:52). By way of reaction, while reading everyone’s fortunes, Madame Lulu notes, “There’s a lot going on here” to which the henchperson of indeterminate gender responds, “That’s fair” (00:09:07-00:09:12). There is also a friendship that plays out between the henchperson of indeterminate gender and the hook-handed man. This is another way where sensitivity to gender is demonstrated, such as in *The Carnivorous Carnival* when the hook-handed man greets carnival guests with “Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, adolescents of every gender!” (Sonnenfeld, “The Carnivorous Carnival: Part 1” 00:28:55-00:28:59).

The person who looks like neither a man nor a woman is not offered any such opportunities for humanization in the books. The Baudelaires never see the person speak, although it is implied that the person is capable of speech, as in *The Wide Window* when Count Olaf says, “my associate told me you had stolen a boat and run away” (Snicket, *The Wide Window* 183). The pattern of the books usually pairs Count Olaf with one main henchperson (or henchpersons in the case of the white-faced ladies) who assists him in his villainy. The only book where the henchperson of indeterminate gender fills this role is in *The Wide Window*. In the rest of the books, the henchperson is indicated as a part of the collective theatre troupe. Gender ambiguity is presented as monstrous and villainous, and the character goes on to meet a grim end.

In *The Hostile Hospital*, Count Olaf and his associates set fire to Heimlich Hospital to destroy a library of records that contains incriminating evidence against them. The person who looks like neither a man nor a woman attempts to catch the Baudelaires as they race through the hospital, trying to evade capture by a public

that believes the children to be murderers and arsonists. The children lock themselves in a supply closet with a window and, while Violet invents something to lower them safely to the ground outside, the henchperson roars outside and attempts to get in (Snicket, *The Hostile Hospital* 238). Luckily for the Baudelaires, Violet invents a bungee cord to help them safely escape the closet as “the children could see a tiny orange light shining in the hallway and realized that the fire and the associate must have reached the door at the same time” (Snicket, *The Hostile Hospital* 245). The Baudelaires escape the supply closet; the person who looked like neither a man nor a woman does not. Olaf’s assistants voice protests as they climb into the getaway car:

“But your largest assistant is still in the Rash Ward, looking for the brats!” the bald man said... The hook-handed man spoke up... “The Ward for People with Nasty Rashes is entirely destroyed,” he said. “I hope the big one got out O.K.”

“We’re not going to wait around to find out if that fool lived or died,” Olaf snarled. “As soon as the ladies can put the costumes in the trunk, we’ll get out of here.” (Snicket, *The Hostile Hospital* 250-1)

The character’s grisly end fits into the “bury your gays” trope, which notes that fictional characters who do not fit into the heterosexual matrix, especially gay characters, are highly likely to be killed, such as in *The 100*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *The Handmaid’s Tale* and even *The Bell Jar* (Waggoner). This is another noteworthy point where the Netflix show differs from the original books. The same scene occurs in *The Hostile Hospital*; however, the henchperson of indeterminate gender emerges from the hospital clutching an ice pack to their face, and they continue to have a role in the plot into the next book.

The henchperson’s story arc is ultimately played out in the two episodes of *The Slippery Slope*. Throughout the episodes, the character begins serious self-examination after a carnival freak that the troupe picked up at the Caligari Carnival says, “I’m beginning to question my life choices, and frankly, so should you!” (Sonnenfeld, “The Slippery Slope: Part 1” 00:11:54-00:12:01). Later in the same episode, the henchperson of indeterminate gender poses the question “Is a personal philosophy of moral relativism the only way to survive in an ethically complex world, or is it an excuse we use to justify doing bad things?” (00:14:55-00:15:03). The other henchpersons do not want to engage the question, but this fundamental discomfort seems to linger and grow during the episode. The next morning, Count Olaf forces the captured Sunny Baudelaire, who has shown a proclivity for cooking

throughout the series, to cook breakfast. The white faced ladies express enjoyment of the food, despite it being made by a baby, to which the henchperson says “It’s a shame we’re constantly exploiting and threatening her when we could be nurturing her talents for the common good” (00:32:52-00:32:58). The henchperson shows regret for how Sunny is being treated and a sensitivity to the social demands of group living that Count Olaf and his other associates do not always seem to grasp.

This discomfort and tension comes to a head in part two of *The Slippery Slope*. The henchperson, standing and speculating with the other henchpersons, says, “I joined Count Olaf because I thought he could teach me things like how to harness my natural charisma into a career in the performing arts. But I’m beginning to question my life choices” (Sonnenfeld, “The Slippery Slope: Part 2” 00:15:00-00:15:11). The character also looks distressed at Olaf’s latest scheme to gain the riches of many families in the city by orphaning the children and raising them as his accomplices.

The breaking point for the henchperson is when Olaf demands they throw Sunny Baudelaire off a cliff. “It’s a slippery slope,” the henchperson says. “No, it’s a frozen waterfall. Now throw the baby off it,” Olaf replies, annoyed. The henchperson says, “I meant that figuratively. I need some space. I’m definitely questioning my life choices” (Sonnenfeld “The Slippery Slope: Part 2” 00:33:20-00:33:32). This statement is significant because it repeats the idea of self-reflection, and because it shows that the henchperson recognizes the difference between literal and figurative speech — an understanding associated with the educated heroes, and which Olaf and other villainous people in the series are shown to lack. After this final assertion, the henchperson of indeterminate gender leaves along with the white-faced ladies and the tall bald man.

The henchperson’s storyline is given closure in the last few minutes of the final episode of the series, fittingly called *The End*. The henchperson is shown on stage, dressed in a pink and yellow dress with an up do, pale white makeup and bright red lipstick, waving and beaming alongside the bald man and the white-faced ladies. The bald man holds a skull in his hand, suggesting that the former henchpersons have just finished a performance of *Hamlet*. The characters are being met with applause and cheers, as the narrator describes them as “a troupe of actors finding personal and artistic fulfillment, at least for a night” (Sonnenfeld, “The End” 00:45:51-00:46:00).

Through this ending, the henchperson of indeterminate gender is given a chance for growth and redemption and is able to go on to find personal fulfillment after rejecting the toxic environment of being in Count Olaf's employ.

Discussion

The person who looked like neither a man nor a woman, despite their role as a minor character in the *Series of Unfortunate Events* books, offers insights into how gender is constructed in the world of Count Olaf and the Baudelaires, especially when contrasted with the Netflix adaptation. In the books, the person's gender nonconformity is monstrous; the "good" characters are frightened of the person—not in spite of the person's gender but because of it. The narrator consistently dehumanizes that and other characters in the book through the use of the word "it" rather than the more inclusive and equally understandable "they" (GLSEN; Tobia; "Gender Pronouns"). The person behaves in animal-like ways, is described as "blank" or vacant, and is derided for their size. The character contributes to the plot as a part of the collective and on Olaf's orders, but does not have any agency of their own, in contrast to Olaf and his other associates, who regularly voice thoughts and make independent decisions. At the end of the character's arc, about three quarters of the way through the book series, the character is killed in a fire, while the character's boss who put them in such a compromising position in the first place responds with callousness.

In comparison, the Netflix henchperson of indeterminate gender has more agency. The character regularly voices complex thoughts relating to social issues, expresses and ultimately acts on a sense of morality and justice, and develops friendships with other henchpersons on screen. The character is often dressed ridiculously; however, not to a greater extreme than the other villains. The "good" characters display sensitivity towards gender and gender ambiguity, even under duress. Lastly, and perhaps most significantly, the character manages to escape the gruesome fate laid out for them in the books and goes on to personal fulfillment. Instead of being an unambiguously evil and disgusting character that ends up punished through dying in a fire, the character is sympathetic and human. Rather than gender acting as a site for revilement and division, gender nonconformity is portrayed with sensitivity. Gender is not invisible in the Netflix world, but is not the most important trait about the henchperson. Neither Olaf and his troupe nor the

members of V.F.D. treat the character with disgust, only occasional confusion or exasperation.

For young queer children reading the series and then watching the Netflix show, two different images of gender nonconformity emerge over time. The Netflix series, while remaining true to the source material where the gender nonconforming character is a villain, offers a softened, kinder vision of gender nonconformity that allows for friendships, happy outcomes, and redemption without denying that nonconformity. This is in line with Netflix’s socially progressive approach in its other original programming, from *Orange is the New Black*, which offers a counter-narrative to prison stereotypes (Demers 412; Shoemaker, 218); to *Glow*, which offers a diverse array of stories from women of different ages, races and backgrounds; to their *Queer Eye* reboot, which embraces a broader group of people as makeover recipients than the original.

It suggests that a modern audience is increasingly aware of feminist understandings of gender and identity, and Netflix uses its rhetorical platform to construct a new vision of gender nonconformity in a villain by allowing the character to emerge as an ethical person who goes on to find happiness. This change in the adaptation is significant as it allows the core story to be told in a way that honors the original narrative while smoothing out problematic elements, thus reaching two groups: an audience who may be more aware or maybe just more grown up than the past audience and who expect inclusivity in the shows they watch with their families, and it acts as a model for an audience who may be young, or who may not know anyone who is gender nonconforming in their own life. By presenting a narrative that does not end in the character’s misery and demise but instead giving the henchperson a redemption arc, the Netflix reboot says that it is okay to grow over time and to be unapologetically who you are.

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“She’s Awake! He’s Awake!”

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“The Wide Window, Part 2.” *A Series of Unfortunate Events*, season 1, episode 6,
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The *Popular Culture Studies Journal* Reviews: Introduction

CHRISTOPHER J. OLSON

When my predecessor, Malynnda Johnson, asked me to take over as Reviews Editor, I knew immediately that I wanted to continue to include reviews of popular culture texts such as films, television shows, video games, analog games, and more. As Malynnda stated in her introduction to the reviews section in Volume 5, Issue 1-2 of this journal, it is vital to include reviews of such texts alongside reviews of scholarly books because “popular culture is not limited by printed media” (141). As scholars of popular culture, we often use these types of texts in our classrooms or research to illustrate various theories or ideas of the world. For example, I included the films *The Big City* (Satyajit Ray, 1963) and *Wake in Fright* (Ted Kotcheff, 1971) in my class on masculinity and communication because, in addition to being great films, they helped me illustrate gender hierarchies and notions of masculinity in specific times and places (India in the 1950s/1960s and Australia in the 1970s, respectively). Of course, given the nature of our profession, we are often too busy to consume the very thing we study, as teaching, research, writing, and service obligations often prevent us from seeing the newest films, playing the hottest video games, or reading the most buzzed-about comic book series. Thus, it is important that a journal such as ours include reviews of popular culture texts regardless of their release date, as this helps point scholars in the direction of important pedagogical tools they might have missed or overlooked. As Reviews Editor, I am making it my mission to ensure that the reviews included in this section highlight just some of the ways that these texts might be used in pedagogical or scholarly situations.

In this issue, readers will find reviews of two of the hottest films of 2019: *Parasite* (Bong Joon Ho), which made history as the first South Korean film to win the Academy Award for Best Picture; and *Midsommar* (Ari Aster). The former focuses on how *Parasite* expertly uses place and architecture to illustrate the contentious relationship between upper and lower classes in South Korea while the latter considers how *Midsommar* deftly uses horror to explore the paradox between

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attraction and repulsion. Also in this section are reviews of the Netflix original movie *The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind* (Chiwetel Ejiofor, 2019), which examines how the film connects popular culture and postcolonial economy, and the Netflix series *Insatiable*, which offers insight into how the show critiques mainstream beauty standards while celebrating feminine rage. In addition, this issue features more traditional book reviews looking at scholarly texts examining comic books, streaming platforms, film criticism and preservation, viral music videos, and more. The section even features a review of the book *Acid for the Children*, a memoir written by Red Hot Chili Peppers bassist Flea that provides an in-depth historical account of Los Angeles' grassroots music scene of the 1960s. I hope that these reviews point you to some books or texts you may have missed and provide you with some inspiration for how to integrate different popular culture texts into your classroom or research.

Before I sign off, I just want to take a moment to sing the praises of those who came before. I am indebted to both Malynnda and former Reviews Editor Jennifer Dunn for establishing such a solid foundation for this section during their tenures. Their vision and effort helped expand the reviews section from a compilation focused solely on reviews of scholarly books to something that encompasses the depth and breadth of popular culture, thus setting it apart from more traditional reviews sections found in other journals. Additionally, the policies and procedures they developed work so well that I do not need to make many changes, which makes my job infinitely easier. As such, they have my eternal gratitude. Finally, I want to take a moment to introduce my Assistant Reviews Editor, Sarah Pawlak Stanley of Marquette University. Sarah provided invaluable help in preparing all these reviews for publication, and I am thankful she agreed to serve as my second pair of eyes. We both hope that these reviews inspire you to write your own and send them our way. Information about how to submit reviews can be found on the *Popular Culture Studies Journal* website. In the meantime, please enjoy the following.

Book Reviews

Beil, Benjamin, Gundolf S. Freyermuth, and Hanns Christian Schmidt, eds. *Playing Utopia: Futures in Digital Games*. transcript, 2019.

A diverse but tightly consolidated collective effort, the volume *Playing Utopia: Futures in Digital Games* was conceived and prepared for publication at the Cologne Game Lab in Germany. Cologne is famous for the largest video game fair in Europe, *gamescom*. It is only one of the many installments of the Cologne Trade Fair, founded almost a century ago as one of the many industrial World Fairs, initially designed as large-scale futuristic celebrations of progress. Unaffiliated, but situated in the same cultural dimension, is the *Clash of Realities* conference, organized by the Cologne Game Lab. It is a major international game studies conference in Germany with already 10 years of history. The chapters in *Playing Utopia* are from and inspired by a summit at the *Clash of Realities* in 2018; the volume gathers work from scholars based in Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, and the UK, at the time of writing.

The German-speaking school of game studies may not be as large and influential as any of the streams in the English-speaking scholarship. However, many important concepts from game studies originated in it: the universally accepted definition of gamification (Deterding) comes from Germany, and the lesser known (but gaining popularity) understanding of interpassivity in games and arts (Jagodzinski; Pfaller) has Austrian roots. These concepts have been productively discussed by German-speaking scholars in parallel with, or even before, their international dissemination. With that in mind, we are free to speculate which ideas from *Playing Utopia* will travel across continents in the future.

Will it be “hieroglyphs of the future,” as described by Gundolf Freyermuth? According to him, works of fiction do not predict the future, but it can be creatively deciphered from them. Could it be games as “utopian sandboxes,” suggested by Hartmut Koenitz, playful virtual worlds that emulate some of the rules and tendencies of the real world? Anne Dippel offers the concept of “ludopia,” or ludic utopia, inspired by Walter Benjamin’s ideas of class play and revolutionary art. In short, every paper in *Playing Utopia* has something to offer, although there are also some occasional slips of the tongue. For instance, the word “she-male” should

never be uncritically reproduced in academic writing (169). Similarly, all-too-enthusiastic critique of capitalism may lead to curious glitches, such as listing *Monopoly* as an “anti-utopia,” which is used in many languages as a synonym for “dystopia.” Of course, in the words of Andre Czauderna, another author of the volume, “someone’s utopia is someone else’s dystopia” (72).

To understand the future, it helps to learn about the past first. To teach us exactly this, Freyermuth, a renowned German author and a co-founder of Cologne Game Lab, indulges in a 60-page epic, footnote-heavy introduction into cultural histories of utopias and their counterparts, dystopias, in literature and audiovisual media. This is an exploration of utopian thinking that goes from antiquity to *Westworld* and *The Handmaid’s Tale* and then back to the Renaissance, with a little *The Clash* reference thrown in for good measure. Even Vladimir Ilyich Lenin makes a guest appearance to express his famous dislike for utopias. Following Darko Suvin’s studies of utopian fiction, Freyermuth notes that totalitarian systems are taking control of futures, as well as of presents and pasts.

Freyermuth demonstrates how our current conception of the future originated during the Industrial Age; technological and economic advances developed between the late 18th and 19th centuries, while far from unproblematic, created the impression that “the present was in many respects better than former times” (Freyermuth 29). This impression allowed people to assume that the future would be even better. From this perspective, *The Communist Manifesto* should be considered one of the most influential utopian works. Most authors of *Playing Utopia* agree on that, but some of them also remember how attempts to bring the communist utopia to life repeatedly resulted in mass oppression.

In the end, we need the ideal of utopias to move forward, but not to achieve them. From this viewpoint, Benjamin Beil analyzes almost unbeatable “masocore” games such as *Getting Over It* by Bennett Foddy as “a remarkably consistent utopian practice” (324). As Alison Harvey rightfully notes, the game industry has very little to offer in terms of believable utopias of diversity and equity, but utopian thinking provides the much needed impulse for social change. Gerald Farca further explores utopian impulses in the game industry, discovering them even in games with generally dystopian narratives such as *Fallout 4* (2015).

In a broader perspective, the main virtue of this volume is the wide array of distinct and reasonably grounded political thoughts of its authors. As almost all of them state, playing games leads to better understanding of political science. For instance, Andre Czauderna analyzes the political simulator *DEMOCRACY 3* (2013)

to show the educational potential of this game, particularly through its relevance and the multitude of its political choices. As homework, the reader may try to compare game series such as *DEMOCRACY* or *Tropico* to the most recent game from Molleindustria, *Democratic Socialism Simulator* (2020).

Specific case studies are more playful and open for interpretation from any political angle, and they are often not just about games. In his research on *Star Trek*, Tonguc Ibrahim Sezen has counted exactly how many locations and programmed interactive experiences are available in the famous Holodeck. Hanns Christian Schmidt asks whether playing Lego and *Lego Dimensions* may be a utopian practice in physical and hybrid modes of play, and Thomas Hawranke returns to modding, a subversive practice with a long tradition and still present artistic potential, in *Grand Theft Auto V*. Finally, Lars de Wildt explores political dichotomies in the fictional universe of the *Assassin's Creed* series. Taken together, this collection of papers takes us on an encouraging journey from the gloom and doom of current news reports to possible utopias — but also to much more ubiquitous dystopias — in literature, film, TV, and games. As in any game with multiple possible outcomes, there is no single future for all. In fact, *Playing Utopia* shows that it would be oppressive to force everyone into the same future, without the possibility to make one's own interesting choices in the process.

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- Flea. *Acid for the Children*. Grand Central Publishing, 2019.

If The Red Hot Chili Peppers were the last rock band for which you could name all the members, then Flea's *Acid for the Children* is not the book for you. If, however, you were a band geek, or are raising a band geek, or if you buy Andrew Herrmann's argument that we are all pop culture natives, then you might love Flea's memoir.

Flea is the bassist, composer, and founding member of The Red Hot Chili Peppers. Born in Australia in 1962, Flea grew up with a loving grandmother and dog. His earliest memories involve these two equally rebellious and adoring figures. In early childhood, he moved with his mother to Southern California. In this new setting, he struggled to communicate and eventually discovered the public school music programs that once assisted children to stay in school and are now endangered by shortsighted budget cuts. The loss of these programs is a motivation for writing the memoir. Flea fears for generations being raised without access to the programs that saved him.

The book's organization takes the form of a string of memories separated by chapter titles, but not much more. The writing feels fleeting. In terms of structure and sparse writing style, the book evokes *Just Kids* by Patti Smith. Yet this type of comparison fails since Flea has written a book that seems accurate to the nature of memory rather than an autoethnography with a metanarrative purpose such as Smith's work. Flea's chapters are like glimpses into the past rather than a narrative-driven, critical analysis of chronological events.

Recently Scott Bruner argued that, "while great art does come from pushing boundaries, those boundaries are absolutely essential to the realization of great art" (7). Likewise, Flea presents a childhood in Australia and in Los Angeles during the 1960s and 1970s in which popular culture raised kids who in turn erased and challenged social and artistic boundaries. This parenting created Flea's dual persona of artist and child. On the one hand, he is the kid who played trumpet and dreamed of "jazz greats, being in a majestic symphony orchestra, growing into a respected man, cool and distinct" and when he picked up the bass guitar he became the persona of "an animal...a poser at first, but underneath, an animal" (201). In playing music, he was modeling his adventures around the search for joy, pain, and love. As he explains, "I learned that from Kurt Vonnegut" (205). This combination of music and rebellious literature taught him to run from "corruption" and throughout the book it seems his own family, fraught with the troubles of any family, was the corruption and the boundary he most wanted to avoid.

On the other hand, there was the music itself and the corrupting boundaries it offered. For Flea, "Rock music seemed silly, a dumbed-down form, for people who

didn't really care about music, just a bunch of haircuts and advertising." KISS was particularly troubling as was the lip-syncing of KISS songs at the school "talent show." Even all these years later, he still recalls the names of the kids who did this performance. Strangely, it was the lip-syncing that made his own friends want to start playing instruments for real. The urge to not be a poser loomed large (196).

Acid for the Children is not about creating but wondering about the creation. The memoir begins in early childhood and ends in early adolescence. The book may not satisfy fans because it fails to discuss the heights of fame or the recording process. In other words, it is not a book about the creation of art. However, for those who study popular culture, it is an ideal book because it is about the creation of the artist from the kid.

Flea takes readers on a tour of the "dingy" East Hollywood storefronts from Melrose to Edgemont. He rolls a huge tractor-trailer tire down the hill at Palm Street into traffic. He goes out to eat fried rice with his crush Rosa Cha. He explains his fear of punk music and punk bands. There are passages recalling how he and his friends jumped off roofs into swimming pools and their fights with "Rednecks." He learns to drive. For these reasons, in many ways, *Acid for the Children* is also a memoir of place. The focus on the landscape of youth bends Bob Batchelor's argument that popular culture is the "connections that form between individuals and objects" (1). In the case of *Acid for the Children*, the relationship is between the individual and the location.

Los Angeles was a soundscape of grassroots popular music formation in the 1960s and 1970s that challenged the pop music industry created and marketed in the same city. As Batchelor explains and Flea echoes, it is the individual's engagement with the popular culture, in this case from the ground up Stuart Hall-style, that produces the emotional investment the individual feels for the culture. In Flea's writing, it is the emotional investment that transforms the city map, the musical instruments, and the drugs from material/commercial objects into a culture. For this reason, *Acid for the Children* is successful in capturing the rush, the chemistry, the hatred, the attraction, the antipathy, and the love that define popular culture (Batchelor 1). Flea sums it up when, near the end of the book, he writes about the jazz musicians who taught him to play. Their gifts held "the solution to so many mysteries for the willing listener, yet jazz was culturally irrelevant by an increasingly tabloid-and-haircut-based culture" (357). Here Flea distinguishes the commercial from the integral in popular culture. In Flea's hands childhood is more

than an interlude, it is the time and the place that produces a system of identity rooted in popular culture.

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Glickman, Nora and Ariana Huberman, eds. *Evolving Images: Jewish Latin American Cinema*. University of Texas Press, 2018.

Given the success of Latin American films with Jewish topics and/or by Jewish filmmakers at international film festivals and film clubs in recent decades, the book *Evolving Images* is a timely contribution. Edited by Nora Glickman and Ariana Huberman, the book is structured into five sections: "Alternative Identities," "Memory and Violence," "New Themes," "Diasporas and Displacements," and "Comparative Perspectives: North and South American Cinema." Under each of these headings three to four contributions deal with selected case studies. The collection interrogates the images in a selection of films with Jewish characters and within Jewish settings. Furthermore, the book also considers films that offer protagonists who can be identified as Jewish via some narrative clues, even if their heritage is not made explicit, as contributions to Jewish Latin American cinema. The contributing authors examine how Jewish identities are represented on film, both in fiction and documentary. The range of films discussed furthermore goes beyond the divide between documentary and fiction filmmaking with the inclusion of home movies in Ernesto Livon-Grosman's chapter, who introduces readers to

the 8mm films of Alberto Salomón. These movies were of an experimental nature and mix motifs from the private and public spheres, which is why the author argues that Salomón's oeuvre (and other similar films that are yet to be discovered) deserve a place in Latin American cinema history.

Almost all chapters in this edited collection reveal how personal stories of both fictional characters as well as of real protagonists are intertwined with political and social developments in Latin American society. Memories, they show, are informed by one's cultural background and by national upheavals and disruptions, as well as by the need to develop strategies to deal with these issues. Although this understanding of memory permeates many films mentioned in the book, it is perhaps most evident in the section on memory and violence. It contains contributions from Daniela Goldfine and Patricia Nuriel, both focusing on fiction films by director Jeanine Meerapfel, who was born in 1943 in Argentina to German parents and who reflects on this aspect of her biography in her screenplay of *My German Friend* (2012). Mirna Vohnsen provides the third chapter dealing with "Memory and Violence," engaging with a film whose story takes place in the aftermath of the 1994 bombing of an important Jewish community centre in Buenos Aires (*Anita*, Marcos Carnevale, 2009).

Historical events in Latin America, be they further in the past or more recent, either provide the backdrop of many films discussed in the collection or else are repeatedly referenced. For instance, the immigration of Jews to Argentina in the late 19th century or the 20th-century activities of the mothers searching for their children who fell victims to dictatorships are invoked in several Latin American films dealing with Jewish themes or featuring Jewish characters. Questions of belonging and of how to remember and integrate one's own roots and heritage into one's life also frequently arise in the readings of the films presented in the book. The negotiation of how to observe (sometimes hybrid) religious traditions is another theme frequently considered, for instance in documentaries from Peru and Cuba respectively, which Ariana Huberman explores in the section on diasporas and displacement. Interpretations of coming-of-age narratives are found in the "New Themes" section. They address issues of growing up Jewish in Latin America and of generational conflicts. Alejandro Meter, writing on the film *The Year my Parents Went on Vacation* (Cao Hamburger, 2006), additionally reflects on the importance soccer can play in identity formation.

The section headings correspond overall to the themes examined in the respective papers, providing an effective overview of what to expect in this volume.

When I first opened the book, I wondered whether the five categories would turn out to be somewhat perfunctory, as I expected themes to overlap. Yet each contribution fitted in well with the heading under which it appeared. The editors are to be commended for creating a structure that gives insight into specific aspects of Jewish lives and how these are visually depicted in Latin American countries. The largest portion of the films discussed emanate from Argentina, Mexico and Brazil, in line with the proportions of Jewish communities in these countries, but the book also includes analyses of films from Peru, Chile, Cuba, and Uruguay. One chapter includes a film made in Spain (starring, however, two Argentinian actors and co-financed by the Argentinian government), while the comparative last section engages also with North American films. The contributions have a good length, usually discussing one to three films. All are written in an accessible style that makes them a pleasure to read.

Evolving Images is essential reading for anyone seeking to gain insight into Jewish filmmaking in Latin American countries. Those studying or wishing to learn more about how Jewish motives and themes are treated in Latin American film and cinema will find this edited anthology highly informative and engaging. Everyone interested in the depiction of religion, heritage and/or cultural identities on film might also be interested in the collection. It provides a useful tool to help analyze Jewish-themed Latin American films that will come out in the future. In addition, it could possibly offer insight into other films with a Jewish undercurrent or connection from Latin America that have not found entry in the book but might also deserve a closer look. Lastly, this collection is a relevant addition for everyone interested in Latin American cinema studies.

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Hosey, Sara. *Home Is Where the Hurt Is: Media Depictions of Wives and Mothers*. McFarland Press, 2019.

In her new book, *Home is Where the Hurt Is*, Sara Hosey places the spotlight on the often-overlooked figure of the mother in contemporary U.S. film and television. Borrowing from numerous texts across time and genre, Hosey provides a comprehensive analysis of how feminist discourses have impacted the evolution of

the mother in popular culture. While placing each media text in its own sociocultural context, Hosey argues that U.S. media culture constantly strives to negotiate feminist ideals while still trying to hold on to the “traditional, nuclear family” (43). This book is an engaging critical analysis that should be of interest to feminist media scholars engaging with concepts of post-feminism and motherhood. Readers may especially appreciate Hosey’s dedication to a nuanced critique of each text, always recognizing where depictions of women and motherhood both succeed and fail at being politically enlightened.

Home Is Where the Hurt Is consists of two parts and nine chapters, each centering on different themes in the portrayals of mothers and the domestic. The first part, “Hurt,” largely looks at transitional texts where the characters, like the texts, similarly struggle to balance the changing demands of modern motherhood. Chapter 1, for example, primarily focuses on horror texts where the home is made into a literal house of horrors. These allegorical texts, Hosey argues, illustrate how the home can be a place of isolation and harm, as mothers struggle to balance the demands of public life with their roles as mothers.

Chapter 2 continues the discussion of conflicting roles through an analysis of single mothers on television. Exemplified by the sitcom *Gilmore Girls* (2000-2007), Hosey argues that single mothers are often portrayed as young, lively, and attractive while their teenage daughters are more mature, leading to the archetypes of the “girly mom” and “worldly girl” (38). These two archetypes suggest a blurring of the roles of daughters and mothers, where young girls are encouraged to act older, and older women younger. Hosey, however, notes that the girly mom is often still dependent on the support of her own father, assuring the importance of the patriarchal figure even in a single-mother household.

Chapter three features an exploration of the young adult series *Twilight* and *The Hunger Games*. The main heroines of these series begin their narratives rejecting their mothers and the idea of traditional motherhood, yet their stories both end with the women as married mothers of their own. The figure of the mother is simultaneously devalued and yet seen as a woman’s inevitable role. In Chapter 4 Hosey tackles narratives of toxicity and social justice, only to discover that mothers are similarly devalued in the media examined. In films such as *Safe* (Todd Haynes, 1995) and *Consumed* (Daryl Wein, 2015), mothers are silenced and ignored in their fights for social change. Despite the women’s struggles, Hosey notes that the films often praise the mother’s actions when they are justified by their dedication to the

family. Mothers are righteous to stand up for themselves — but only when they do so for the sake of their children.

A mother's dedication to her children becomes an even more prominent theme in discussions of domestic violence in Chapter 5. The films *Enough* (Michael Apted, 2002) and *Waitress* (Adrienne Shelley, 2007), Hosey argues, suggest that women in domestic abuse situations are expected to endure a certain threshold of abuse before they can appropriately fight back; namely, when their refusal to submit is predicated on the protection of a child. Hosey further points out that these films represent an individualistic take on fighting domestic violence, implying that it is a woman's responsibility to fight back on her own. However, these narratives of domestic violence have been challenged in later films and television shows, as focused on in Chapter 6. The films *Personal Velocity* (Rebecca Miller, 2002) and *Madea's Family Reunion* (Tyler Perry, 2006), and the TV series *Big Little Lies* (2017-) all illustrate more complex experiences of domestic violence and center the possibilities of female community and support.

Hosey's analysis of more hopeful portrayals of domestic violence in Chapter 6 operates as the bridging point to the second part of the book, "Hope." Here, Hosey highlights more positive portrayals of mothers, mostly from independent films and TV shows produced through streaming services. As Hosey notes in one of the later chapters, this is not a coincidence. With a wider availability of media that is not dependent on ad revenue, independent film studios and streaming services can take greater risks and create more diverse stories with more diverse directors and writers. For example, Chapter 7 focuses on independent films, including *Tiny Furniture* (Lena Dunham, 2010) and *Obvious Child* (Gillian Robespierre, 2014), which both star and are written by young women. In these narratives, the young women come of age while struggling with their desire to be with their mother and living up to her expectations.

Chapters 8 and 9 focus even more so on questions of the "traditional family." In her analyses of *Tully* (Jason Reitman, 2018) and *The Handmaid's Tale* (2017-), Hosey grapples with how these stories both acknowledge the necessity of non-traditional family structures while still upholding some patriarchal values. For example, she engages with critiques of *The Handmaid's Tale* as in many ways privileging biological relationships and heterosexual families. However, she also points out the significance of the show's side plot involving a type of "found-family" in Canada. In the series, June (the main character)'s husband, best friend, and one of their roommates work together to raise June's baby, despite neither of

them being biologically related to the young girl. Despite the show's dystopian narrative, this makeshift family revolving around baby Nicole can provide viewers with a sense of hope, both within the show and in depictions of parenthood across media.

In the last chapter, Hosey continues her discussion of hopeful depictions of non-traditional families in *Orange is the New Black* (2013-2019) and *Transparent* (2014-2019). In both shows, trans women struggle with balancing their roles as fathers in the past with becoming mothers in the present. Hosey argues for the value of these shows, as they not only make the narratives of trans parents visible, but also illustrate how parenting roles often change over time. As Hosey does with all her examples, she engages with feminist critiques of these shows, while still holding on to moments of liberating potential.

Overall, *Home Is Where the Hurt Is* showcases a broad yet nuanced take on how portrayals of motherhood and the domestic have changed over the last few decades in U.S. popular culture. Hosey's work, like many valuable texts in popular culture studies, reminds us of the back-and-forth relationship between public culture and media texts as always in conversation. She ends her book on a hopeful note, using a discussion of *Jane the Virgin* (2014-2019) to reiterate the progress that has been made in depictions of women and mothers. However, she also importantly reminds us that even when media representations fall short, seeing our struggles on screen can make us feel a little less alone.

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Lobato, Ramon. *Netflix Nations: The Geography of Digital Distribution*. New York University Press, 2019.

As a regular user of Netflix, going back to its pre-streaming days as a DVD rental-by-mail service, I do not think too much about how the platform works. After a long day of teaching, I come home, turn on the television, log into Netflix, and watch away. That is the experience of millions of Netflix users, along with users of other streaming services, worldwide. However, what goes on behind the scenes when the user hits play? That is the task Ramon Lobato, Senior Research Fellow in Media and Communication at RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia, explores in *Netflix Nations: The Geography of Digital Distribution*.

The book is anchored by an event in January 2016, the annual Consumer Electronics Show, held in Las Vegas. Netflix CEO Reed Hastings took to the stage to announce that Netflix, previously confined primarily to a few Western countries, was now a global television service, being “switched on” in 130 new countries, including India, Vietnam, Russia, Poland, Singapore, and more. As Lobato unpacks, such a “switch on” is not so simple. While theoretically Netflix, being a digital service, could be the same worldwide, the global switch-on has nevertheless proven to be anything but easy, seamless, or neat.

Lobato grounds his work in a long tradition of television studies, specifically scholars and media theorists who study how television (including satellite television) stations have attempted to expand beyond one country’s borders into another. Transnational and global television distribution is not new; while not the perfect analog to Netflix (in some ways it is like television; in other ways it is very different), this research connects Lobato’s findings to something bigger. This book is not just a study of Netflix; such intense focus on one streaming service, to the exclusion of dozens of others, could be seen as shortsighted. Instead, Netflix’s version of global television is one iteration in a long line of global television systems, an iteration that has enough specifics and differences from other television systems to justify such a deep focus as Lobato provides.

As an American, I have little to no understanding of how Netflix works in other countries: why would I need to know that? It turns out that my perspective was quite naïve. The strongest parts of Lobato’s book are when he discusses how Netflix operates in other countries, with case studies on India, Japan, China, Europe, Canada, and Lobato’s home country of Australia. In some parts of the world, the America-heavy catalog of cinema and television offered by Netflix is appealing to local users; in other parts, local content is in high demand. Some countries regulate how much local content streaming services must carry; others take a more *laissez-faire* approach. In some countries, users accessed Netflix years before the global switch-on using VPNs and proxy services, which allowed users to bypass technical restrictions to get access to American or European Netflix catalogs, despite not living in those countries. Netflix has proven quite popular in some countries. Yet in many examples, Netflix arrived late to the streaming party in those countries: countries like China, India, Japan, and others already had robust streaming services, featuring a wealth of local content, which makes for an uphill climb for Netflix to establish a foothold with audiences.

Some of the most interesting discussions in the book, which unfortunately take up very little space, concern content differences around the world. Netflix is not the same everywhere. While the streaming giant has invested billions of dollars in recent years to create movies, television shows, documentaries, comedy specials, and more, most of this content is targeted toward American audiences, which does not always appeal to international users. Netflix is starting to correct this, realizing that audiences want to see shows in their own language, with actors they recognize. Time will tell whether Netflix has the stamina — and the cash reserves — to build up original local content in other countries the same way it has in America. Lobato briefly touches on censorship and how Netflix operates in a regulatory gray area in many places, skirting censorship laws by which traditional television must abide. However, as these countries build up their own regulatory systems, it is likely that Netflix will soon come into conflict with such systems as local regulators seek to shape how an American company operates within their borders.

Lobato's scholarship is guided by two questions: "How are global streaming services changing the spatial dynamics of global television distribution, and what theories and concepts do scholars need to make sense of these changes?" (4). Lobato succeeds in answering these questions as they relate to Netflix. However, more scholarship is needed to understand the vast array of streaming services, not only those currently on the market, but those yet to come that are unimaginable to us today. Lobato's research guides readers' thinking on digital streaming services and lays an effective theoretical foundation that can be used by others to study such services, from Hulu to Amazon Prime to the myriad services operating in other countries.

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Lucia, Cynthia and Rahul Hamid, eds. *Cineaste on Film Criticism, Programming, and Preservation in the New Millennium*. University of Texas Press, 2017.

Launched in 1967, the long-running film journal *Cineaste* (originally *Cinéaste*) sought from the start to provide readers with smart, accessible writing about the art and politics of cinema. With each issue, *Cineaste*, currently one of the oldest

quarterly film publications in the United States, brings readers intelligent and engaging articles regarding all aspects of cinema, including such topics as film criticism, repertory programming, and archival preservation. More importantly, perhaps, these articles remain refreshingly free of what *Cineaste* editors Cynthia Lucia and Rahul Hamid refer to as the “esoteric, jargon-laden language of 1970s French-influenced structuralist film theory” (10). Therefore, the journal’s offerings appeal to a wide range of readers, from harried grad students toiling away in doctoral programs to cinephiles who possess a deep knowledge of cinema history but no formal academic training. As Lucia and Hamid state in the introduction to their edited collection *Cineaste on Film Criticism, Programming, and Preservation in the New Millennium*, the journal’s editors believe that film criticism should be “well written, with ideas — no matter how complex the level of argumentation or analysis — made accessible to readers who should find *pleasure* in reading” (3, emphasis in original).

This dedication to bringing thoughtful film writing to a variety of readers proves increasingly important during the first two decades of the twenty-first century, as cinema undergoes seismic changes at every level, from production to distribution to exhibition. Indeed, many of these changes feel like upheavals thanks to the introduction of new digital technologies and distribution platforms that leave scholars, critics, and amateur film fanatics pondering the very nature of the medium, as well as its future. This collection, which brings together six symposia and five interviews originally published in the pages of *Cineaste* between 2000 and 2011, interrogates many of the issues that arise from these changes, offering valuable insights into the various challenges and opportunities facing film criticism, programming, and preservation in the early years of the digital age. The book’s focus makes it perfect for use in an Introduction to Film classroom or a seminar on archiving, but the clear, comprehensible prose and engaging subject matter mean that the collection will also appeal to anyone interested in film and film culture, no matter their level of education.

Split into three sections, each with a different focus, the book gathers together several symposia that feature introspective musings from prominent film critics, programmers, and archivists, along with a handful of interviews with significant figures in each field. The book’s first and most substantial section centers on a discussion of the evolution and ongoing necessity of film criticism in the era of the internet. This section, titled “Film Criticism in the New Millennium,” gathers four symposia and two interviews that collect the thoughts of film critics from around

the world, primarily functioning as a meditation on both film criticism and culture in various national, cultural, and technological contexts. Across the three symposia *Cineaste* editors posed questions such as “What does being a film critic mean to you?” and “How do you assess (or combat) the perceived globalization of the film industry?” to several leading critics, including David Ansen, J. Hoberman, Meenakshi Shedde, Tahar Chikhaoui, Karina Longworth, Richard Schickel, Roger Ebert, and more. Their responses highlight numerous issues facing film criticism in the digital age, including the distinction between reviewing and criticism, nostalgia for the film culture of the 1960s, the dominance of male voices, and readers’ newfound ability to speak back to the critics and their opinions.

This section also illustrates the enduring importance of writers such as Serge Daney and Robert Warshow to film criticism while uncovering several issues that have arisen to alter the field in recent years. The first symposia, which considers film criticism in the United States (and takes up the bulk of this section), ends with a characteristically grumpy essay from noted contrarian Armond White, who sidesteps the editors’ questions in favor of grouching about what he considers the sorry state of cinema at the turn of the millennium. Yet White also offers a thoughtful discussion of the effect of capitalism on film criticism, noting that in the early years of the twenty-first century especially, “To be a mainstream journalist has come to mean one’s complicity with this [Hollywood] system rather than a detached view of it” (89). Ultimately, this first section grapples with the meaning and nature of film criticism in the new millennium but also demonstrates how the field of film criticism often favors the voices of men (an issue acknowledged by the editors), as it includes essays from just a handful of women; in addition to Longworth and Shedde, the symposia on film criticism also contain essays from Manohla Dargis, Stephanie Zacharik, Farran Smith Nehme, but few others. The section also demonstrates the primacy of US critics, as the symposium titled “Film Criticism in America Today” runs 74 pages while the other three symposia combined run just 127 pages.

Despite all that, the symposium on international film criticism provides some meaningful discussion surrounding issues of colonialism, particularly in the response of Japanese film critic Tadao Sato, who notes that “American films crowd out others, and the values and the world views promulgated by Hollywood have been invading the world” (125). Meanwhile the symposia devoted to film criticism in the age of the internet offer vital insights into how advanced communication technologies and new media (such as blogs and social networking sites) have

impacted the delivery and consumption of film criticism and reviews. Though somewhat slighter than the section on film criticism, the sections that collect symposia and interviews looking at programming and preservation still contain valuable considerations on how new digital technologies have changed the distribution, exhibition, and archiving of film, as well as on the challenges now facing those involved in each field. For instance, according to Margaret Bodde, executive director of the nonprofit Film Foundation, archivists deal with issues related to funding, the preservation of born digital texts, and questions of access and availability, all of which existed before the advent of the internet but have nevertheless grown more complicated due to the influence of digital technologies.

In addition to the symposia, the book also features lively interviews with Pauline Kael, John Bloom (the man behind the Joe Bob Briggs persona), Peter Von Bagh, Mark Cousins, and George Feltenstein, who all offer valuable insider perspectives on each field. Overall, the book highlights the importance of materiality in a digital age, with most respondents stressing the importance of physical film, while balancing hopeful optimism for the future of cinema with a somewhat grim acceptance of the ways that new digital technologies have changed both the medium and the industry. Along the way the collection provides a fascinating look into how film criticism, programming, preservation, and cinema itself have evolved to meet the changes wrought by the rise of the internet during the early years of the twenty-first century. Therefore, *Cineaste on Film Criticism, Programming, and Preservation in the New Millennium* should be of interest to scholars, students, and anyone seriously interested in film.

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Mangaoang, Áine. *Dangerous Mediations: Pop Music in a Philippine Prison Video*. Bloomsbury, 2019.

Virginia Woolf has said “[s]tyle is a very simple matter; it is all rhythm” (Woolf). Rhythm includes movements marked by a regulated chronology of opposing or different conditions (The Shorter Oxford Dictionary). The *Dangerous Mediations: Pop Music in a Philippine Prison Video* title reflects the “problematic, precarious and potentially perilous nature of today’s media culture’s ‘YouTube-ification’

(Vernallis 2013: 14)” (Mangaoang 2). Author Áine Mangaoang embraces Woolf’s remarks on style with a comprehensive flair and a compelling sense of movement.

Dangerous Mediations manifests both style and rhythm as Mangaoang (a musicologist by training) unites the music of language with the music of popular culture to produce a movement marked by opposing conditions (individual-society, freedom-constraint, and participation-subjugation, among others) in a compelling and reflective media text. The work embraces the musicality of what are dominant and complex political and cultural movements represented by a multifaceted interplay of expression through musical and digital platforms, systems of incarceration, and those incarcerated — all while grounded in the context of traditional Philippine history and an increasingly digital present.

The work, part of the “New Approaches to Sound, Music, and Media” series, explores the meaning of the Dancing Inmates’ *Thriller* video, initially recorded in 2007 at the Cebu Provincial Detention and Rehabilitation Centre (the “CPDRC”) under the direction of then prison warden Byron F. Garcia, to both those involved in its creation (the Filipino Dancing Inmates, prisoners housed at CPDRC) as well as the millions involved in its viewing. The work explores the message and meaning reflected in the rhythm and viral transmission of video itself, as well as the impact and implications of the video (both as a matter of practice and theory) within and without the prison system.

Woolf has also written that “[n]othing has really happened until it has been described” and recorded (Nicolson 2). In *Dangerous Mediations*, Mangaoang describes and documents, with care and reflexivity, to memorialize and humanize the Dancing Inmates’ *Thriller* video both as recorded and lived. The text is dedicated “[t]o the dancers — past and present — of the Cebu Provincial Detention and Rehabilitation Centre,” but speaks to a wide audience that includes populations united through digital platforms, technology, and shared interests in musicality, human rights, history, colonialism, and/or freedom or the lack thereof. In sum, the work speaks (practically and musically) to all.

The text merges, in rhythmic form, existing scholarship on popular music and the music video with emerging scholarship on digital era practices in general and YouTube specifically. The work focuses on the interactions of music, media, and power with an aim described as two-fold: to add recognition and understanding of the complexities of YouTube (as both a site of commercial enterprise and cultural citizenship) and of those described and/or defined as prisoners. The text explores these dual aims through the lens of a CPDRC-based ethnographic case study, yet

its impact extends broadly to marginalized and controlled populations of all varieties. Its themes (musical mediations of power and subversion; prison, subjectivity, and spectacular entertainment; and music and mediation in postcolonial Philippines) extend broadly, as well. The text is itself a movement and a labor of love (with research spanning more than a decade). The work is structured as seven interludes, each with an accompanying chapter. Each interlude serves as a prelude to the narrative and the research presented in the accompanying chapter.

Through rhythm, research, and recordings, the work raises a curtain on potentially dangerous dynamics inherent in digital streaming platforms and highlights the “significance of historical contexts, ideologies and power relations often not visible at first glance; but without which such mediations would be impossible” (2). What might otherwise present as a “seemingly innocuous” YouTube video — one of the billions watched on a daily basis, (“37 Mindblowing YouTube facts”) — is revealed as a complex system representing “a myriad of questions regarding pop music entertainment, postcolonialism, government policy and prisoner agency” (Mangaoang 2). The complexity and possible subversion extend to and include those constituted as subjects (for example, inmates who are “compelled” to dance in a prison yard) as well as YouTube audiences who spend hundreds of hours scrolling and clicking through the millions of uploaded videos (6).

Music is widely accepted as a powerful, often bonding, form of communication which can “yield cross-cultural emotional” connections (Higgins 118). At the same time, Mangaoang appreciates and acknowledges music’s long-established role “in places of conflict and its use as a powerful weapon” (3). While the text explores music’s function in society and culture and its associated possibility for danger, the inherent power of music — “not simply a source for power, but power in and of itself” (5) — is “powerfully” communicated. Power, distinct from music, is a persistent theme.

Dewey writes persuasively on the importance of awareness on teaching and education. Mangaoang’s work is an instrument that raises awareness and prompts reflection on both the consumption and production of music. Dewey describes people who have been disconnected from communal, social, and political bonds as “lost individuals” (Mason 75); The Dancing Inmates (and incarcerated populations more broadly) arguably fit this category and this case study promotes greater awareness of this often overlooked and disconnected population. Mason writes “that Dewey’s conception of the lost individual and his proposed solutions for

reconstruction can help both schooling and society address problems of depoliticization and individualization” (76). *Dangerous Mediations* works similarly, largely through its effort to raise awareness in the manner Dewey has argued.

In sum, the work promotes reflection on an ancient question of the relationship between the individual and society and whether we can (or should) separate and distinguish individuals from the associated sociocultural and structural issues of which they are a part (see Fuhrman and Bailey). It is well established that the relationship “between individual and society” is “very close” (Hossain and Ali 130). Mangaoang educates readers at both individual and societal levels by uniting the abstract and the sensory as conveyed through digital music platforms, often in viral form. Fuhrman and Bailey explore limitations associated with traditional approaches to an examination of individual-society relationships in that they “do not contain a rich enough sense of the relationship between the individual, society, and nature” (2). Mangaoang furthers this inquiry in timely and current ways.

Closing, aptly, with a focus on “a crossroads” at the intersection of music and digital technologies that shift “the mobility of what can be considered presence, and what might be the present” (181), *Dangerous Mediations* inspires further inquiry on power and power structures. Despite increasing access to technology, digital media, and music, freedoms (and access of self) remain significantly limited. The prisoners of CPDRC represent the complex dichotomy of presence and the present, mobility and constraint, speech and silence, control and freedom of expression. *Dangerous Mediations* highlights how a population can be both part of the public conscience, often in pervasive ways, and simultaneously a silenced segment of society. Mangaoang’s rhythm is one of reflection and encouragement. The work invites readers to consume, listen, and engage with music, digital platforms, and participating parties with more critical inquiry and analysis to include cases inspired by, but transcending beyond, the CPDRC’s Dancing Inmates.

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Mizejewski, Linda and Victoria Sturtevant, eds. *Hysterical! Women in American Comedy*. University of Texas Press, 2017.

The portrayal of the woman in modern Western culture is becoming a hotly sought-after field of research within the humanities. With much research focusing on these portrayals in literature and film, the concept of the woman in the American sitcom is one which, until recently, evoked little scholarly research. Seeking to fill this void, the edited collection *Hysterical! Women in American Comedy* examines the influence of various comediennes on the U.S. comedic scene, often considering the work of these women in fictional comedies and as hosts and stand-up comediennes in their own right.

With each author exploring the work of a different comedienne, the chapters in this collection link together, as the work of the following woman is often inspired from that of the woman examined in the previous chapter. All chapters consider the role of the female anatomy in invoking comedy, revealing that the comedic elements shared by women from Lucille Ball to Ellen Degeneres often stem from the female body, filling a gap in the comedic market that men would simply be unable to emulate. The notions of women as "shape-shifters" and women in drag feature heavily throughout the collection, suggesting that, for women to succeed on

the comedy circuit, they have to be able to perform as “traditional” women, non-traditional women, and, in some cases, men (Leonard 198). Playing on the dual meaning of the word “hysterical,” the authors of this collection explore the way women throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have turned men’s view of the female anatomy on its head: reclaiming the term “female hysteria” to reflect their comedic abilities, rather than any alleged pitfalls of life in the female body. Experienced in the field of popular culture studies writing, co-editor Linda Mizejewski has previously produced works titled *Pretty/Funny: Women Comedians and Body Politics* and *Ziegfeld Girl: Image and Icon in Culture and Cinema*. The concept of female body politics in the work of female comedians forms the overarching strand of *Hysterical!*, with this expertise combining well with Victoria Sturtevant’s writing for the edited collection, *Hetero: Queering Representations of Straightness* (ed. Griffin). Together, Mizejewski and Sturtevant create a collection which thoroughly explores aspects of the body, gender, and sexuality in American women’s comedy, shedding light on the fact that, to appear funny to men, women often find themselves making fun of their own bodies and sexual experiences in a way most male comics do not.

As mentioned, the essays in this collection cover the works of a range of American female comics from wartime to the present day. Though the range of media studied varies between comics and — more notably — between eras, one thing remains consistent throughout the analyses: the study of how the female body is used to address common societal perceptions of femininity in a humorous and satirical way. From Fay Tincher’s typically masculine and domineering frame serving to subvert pre-war and 1920s gender norms (Rapf 69) to Lena Dunham’s willingness to expose her naked figure on screen for comedic purposes (Sulimma 379), it is clear that women in America are and always have been capable of gaining recognition for their work largely when their body is exploited for entertainment purposes. Lori Landay’s examination of the works of Lucille Ball and Rebecca Wanzo’s exploration of comedic devices used by Whoopi Goldberg demonstrate that it is not merely the exposing of the body itself that these women use to gain credit in a comedy circuit dominated largely by men, but also the concealing of the body. Landay notes that much of Lucille Ball’s charm derives from her wearing of disguises for mischievous ends, and her performance of “half clown, half character” (137; 152). Wanzo takes a more racialized perspective when examining Goldberg’s feminine comedy, focusing on her use of drag in the racialization of gender identity

— two concepts which I had not previously connected in considerations of drag and gender performativity (254).

While the collection studies a satisfying variety of female comedians across several American decades — covering a range of ethnicities and sexualities — the detours into drama that the essays often take are jarring and stray from the expectations provided by the title and introduction. Though the background of these comediennes is undoubtedly valuable in providing an explanation for how they came to develop their comedic styles, lengthy explanations such as that of Fanny Brice's struggles on the dramatic market (Wagner 112-8) seem somewhat unnecessary, with sections such as this perhaps benefitting from being shortened in favor of further analysis of the derivation of her comedy and links to the concept of “hysteria” that the title of the collection would seem to suggest.

This said, *Hysterical!* remains coherent throughout; the chapters link together by comedic style, and the organization often reveals how the work of one comedian influenced or relates to that of another. For instance, Landay's examination of the works of Lucille Ball precedes Mizejewski's chapter on Carol Burnett, both of which consider the use of the home and domesticity in the comedic works of these women. Furthermore, the repeated themes of the body, women in drag, and the “unruly woman” (Mizejewski and Sturtevant 16-7) serve to highlight societal expectations of the American woman throughout the ages, while demonstrating the ways women have sought to reclaim these expectations, satirizing them and using them to gain acknowledgement on the comedy circuit and within the wider media. In conclusion, *Hysterical!* is a thorough collection of essays on the works of women in American comedy, focusing on themes relating to the body, sexuality, and expectations of women in society. While not touching as much on the use of “hysteria” as the title may indicate, the collection does an effective job of covering female comics from across the age, race, and sexuality spectrums, ultimately demonstrating that regardless of their place across these spectrums, female comics have a universal experience with male expectations of their bodies and use this to unite other women through humor based on these shared experiences.

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Seelow, David D., ed. *Lessons Drawn: Essays on the Pedagogy of Comics and Graphic Novels*. McFarland Press, 2019.

As comics studies becomes more prominent in higher education, a common barrier that scholars are encountering is building a “comics canon” in the curriculum while pushing beyond the foundational “big three” texts: *Understanding Comics*, *Maus*, and *Persepolis*. Although these texts are integral to understanding the comics medium and its effectiveness in remediating stories, their dominance often leaves comics curricula feeling stagnant. *Lessons Drawn: Essays on the Pedagogy of Comics and Graphic Novels* not only acknowledges this issue but provides examples and templates on how to work through it. This book features seventeen essays authored by multidisciplinary comics scholars who have dedicated their academic and personal investments to the comics medium. The value that comes from their experience is immeasurable and *Lessons Drawn* successfully demonstrates this, proving the need for continued inquiry into the place of comics within the classroom.

This collection of essays celebrates the journey that comics have taken in the classroom while also acknowledging the hurdles that they have yet to overcome. *Lessons Drawn* is an insightful read on incorporating comics in the classroom and moving beyond treating them as a (pardon the pun) graphic novel-ty. Chris Murray writes in his chapter that “In the past, comics scholars were smugglers, sneaking bits and pieces of comics teaching into the curriculum wherever we could” (114). Murray, a key player in the discussion of comics in the classroom because he piloted the Masters of Comics curriculum at the University of Dundee, Scotland, faced many challenges when creating a curriculum since little to no comics studies degrees existed as a precedent. *Lessons Drawn* explores this issue and several others, including what editor David Seelow terms the “conundrum of coverage” (86), which refers to the impossibility of covering everything about comics in just one course, just as one cannot talk about all of literature in a single semester.

Lessons Drawn addresses the need to allow comics into the classroom and considers how we can use them to shape our assignments in ways that are inclusive, accessible, and community based. While a class on any subject has the power to incorporate all these elements, Derek McGrath's essay highlights how the fan base of comics and graphic novels can be incorporated to allow students to present their work at conventions, to talk critically with fellow fans on blogs and forums, and to edit fan Wikipedia pages of the texts they are reading. Meanwhile, Seelow writes that "A teaching professor needs to participate in learning with the class and not dispense from on high. Learning is a reciprocal loop [...] a classroom should be active, at times noisy" (6). The essays included in *Lessons Drawn* reveal how incorporating comics in the classroom helps facilitate higher learning by positioning students as participants within a community instead of as quiet recipients of knowledge doled out by their instructor. Seelow also emphasizes how instructors can use misconceptions of comics to help guide students through higher-level and critical thinking. He writes, "the stereotype of comics as facile allows the students subconsciously to venture more effort into their reading and analysis than they would with standard prose" (3). Many of the authors included in *Lessons Drawn* address the issue of the changing landscape of students that includes more first-generation students, urban students, and students who grew up learning English as a second language; they conclude that comics helps make reading comprehension more accessible. Not because reading comics is "easy" but because they are approachable.

Almost all the essays in *Lessons Drawn* explicitly promote the use of comics in the classroom as a means of engaging communities and making education more accessible and student-centered. The authors also seemed to all "borrow" from one another and their predecessors to build a "best practice" canon for engaging these concepts. For example, Jessica Baldanzi borrowed Lynda Barry's attendance-taking technique, which involves students sketching a version of themselves every day to take attendance. This method not only gave students a creative outlet to reflect on themselves, but it also gave the instructor the ability to check in on their feelings based on the emotions portrayed in their self-sketch. Similarly, Chris Reyns-Chikuma discusses using Oubapo exercises to have students replace, reduce, or reverse elements in a comic book to play with the medium. Oubapo-style comics introduce some sort of constraint, such as the art being the same throughout with only the text changing (e.g. the long-running *Dinosaur Comics* published at <https://www.qwantz.com/>), or a comic that can be read both forward and backward.

These exercises make students more aware of the elements in the medium but can also help them understand concepts such as metonymy and metaphor, which can then be applied to other contexts.

When reading the “about the authors” section, it was overwhelming to see the amount of work that the authors were involved in that would often be overlooked in academia. Many organize comic conventions, academic panels at conventions, open-access comics journals, academic fan blogs, and other similar endeavors that enrich the comics studies field as well as bridge the gap between the ivory tower and those outside of it. The breadth of activities, concepts, and “further reading” offered by the authors of these essays solidifies the idea that comics studies needs to be seen and the experts in the field need to be heard, or else the field will remain dominated by the voices of those in other fields who want to be inclusive but have not investigated all that comics have to offer.

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Film and Television Reviews

The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind. Dir. Chiwetel Ejiofor. Screenplay by Chiwetel Ejiofor. Perf. Chiwetel Ejiofor, Maxwell Simba, and Lily Banda. BBC Films, 2019. Netflix.

The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind (hereafter *The Wind*) is an inspiring true account of youthful resourcefulness and creative resilience. It follows the story of a Malawian youngster, William Kamkwamba (Maxwell Simba), who constructs a windmill to provide electricity for his community and save them from the scourge of drought and starvation.

A distinctive critical feature of the movie is its connection of popular culture and informal postcolonial economy. One of John Storey's definitions of popular culture is relevant to the understanding of *The Wind* as a text that generates fresh insights into the reading of popular culture:

Popular culture is the culture that originates from "the people." It takes issue with any approach that suggests that it is something imposed on "the people" from above. According to this definition, the term should only be used to indicate an "authentic" culture of "the people." (9)

One problem with this definition of popular culture is its opposition to commercial interference to the people's culture; the definition "evades the 'commercial' nature of much of the resources from which popular culture is made" since "people do not spontaneously produce culture from raw materials of their own making" (9).

In *The Wind*, water scarcity and its accompanying hunger are challenges facing the villagers. William's mother indicates that their ancestors "prayed for rain," a folk culture that was accepted and observed in the past. However, she also notes that as "modern people," she and her husband send their children to school for them to learn modern means of mitigating such ecological issues as the scarcity of water, thereby implying that the old approach is no longer generally acceptable given its non-sustainability. Therefore, there is need to replace the folk culture of praying for rain with a popular culture that involves material practice. The windmill invented by William emerges as the villagers' new material culture, a practice that is sustainable and effective. Yet this practice, even though it is a product of William's ingenuity and the villagers' collaborative efforts, does not entirely originate among

the people. In fact, William's aspiration is met with some obstacles. His neighbors and peers mock him, calling him *misala*, which means crazy, for his strange idea. This strange idea is one that William gets from reading a science textbook titled *Using Energy* in his school library. The failure of his parents to pay the \$80 one-year tuition for William due to the widespread famine that leaves his family in acute lack in 2002 forces William to drop out of school to help his family in the farms. Yet the greatest challenge to William's dream of building a windmill for his poverty-stricken community is his father's opposition to the idea, especially when William requests to use the old man's bicycle — which the latter considers as the remnant of all his prized material possession — to construct a windmill. The construction of a windmill that will provide electricity that could in turn enable the pumping of water is a venture which William's father, Trywell Kamkwamba (Chiwetel Ejiofor), deems a foreign education madness, a strange, total impossibility. When William says to him, "there are things I know that you don't know," William is referring to the foreign education he has acquired from school. When his father later yields, following his mother's emotional intervention and his persistent pleas and assurance that the project will be successful, William assembles metal scraps and bicycle halves to bring the dream of (an amateur but usable) windmill to fruition. The success of the local windmill, and thus the emergence of a new (popular) culture, is therefore facilitated by the fusion of commercial knowledge (gained through education) and communal persistence (which manifests in their pursuance of an informal economy).

In postcolonial economic spaces, "the precariousness of life" (Harris 12) structures the everyday existence of the subject. To survive this precarity and its contingent economy requires of the postcolonial subject to straddle the complex world of "informal, and sometimes illegal, economies" (12). One of the conditions of the postcolonial milieu is the existence of a corrupt neo-colonial government. With the villagers and such government in the city entangled in an economic face-off, the people are left to rely on chance, makeshift economy to survive. William's windmill is an example of a product of such postcolonial informal economy. While this informal economy enables the creation of a new but popular culture among the people, it is William's ability to appropriate postcolonial hybridity that plays a key role in the success of its creation.

The father-child relationship between Trywell and William Kamkwamba serves as a site of engagement bordering on the re-assessment and re-examination of the postcolonial concept of hybridity in this 2019 movie. Postcolonial hybridity refers

to how the clash between old and emerging epistemic orientations, as well as the tension between static rural formulations and urban dynamics, are mitigated in pursuance of economic growth in each postcolonial state. The postcolonial African society of the movie text is Malawi, and in it, we find this sort of clash and tension as mainly conditioned by the absence of the practical value of Western education in the social and economic lives of the postcolonial subjects. These subjects grapple with economic inequality provoked by their disconnection from the government. However, as an embodiment of postcolonial hybridity, William Kamkwamba exemplifies the possibility of refining local commitment and its residual ingenuity with foreign ways of knowing, for the birth of a modern popular practice.

William's story is one of a child prodigy and the youthful zest to triumph amidst a devastating and demoralizing situation. As such, he harbors that hybrid episteme necessary for a successful challenging of the status quo, for the establishment of a new and popularly acceptable way of knowing/living.

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Insatiable. Created by Lauren Gussis. Lady Magic Productions, Storied Media Group, Ryan Seacrest Productions, and CBS Television Studios, 2018.

Netflix's dark comedy series *Insatiable* debuted in the summer of 2018 and attracted immediate controversy based on its ostensible premise: high school senior Patty Bladell (Debby Ryan, best known for girl-next-door roles on Disney Channel sitcoms) is overweight until a homeless man breaks her jaw in a fight over a candy bar, causing Patty to go on a liquid diet and lose about seventy pounds in three months. Suddenly, Patty is skinny, and she assumes that her life will be, as her best friend Nonnie (played by Kimmy Shields) points out in the first season's trailer,

“like every great high school movie ever made.” Initially, this prediction proves true, as Patty attracts the romantic attention of wrestling star Brick Armstrong (Michael Provost) and mysterious rebel Christian Keene (James Lastovic) and becomes a beauty pageant queen at the request of her lawyer, pageant coach Bob Armstrong (Dallas Roberts). However, the longer she remains on the pageant circuit, the more aggressive she becomes, and the audience gradually realizes that *Insatiable* is not just a story about body shaming and makeovers. Over the course of two seasons (the second of which debuted in October 2019), Patty commits five murders; meanwhile, viewers unexpectedly discover that *Insatiable* is a campy commentary on a beauty-pageant-addled town and its deep-seated belief that feminine rage is oxymoronic. *Insatiable* exaggeratedly demonstrates what could happen when young women finally purge the anger they have swallowed to uphold the myths of beauty and propriety, and for that, the show deserves more praise than it has generally received.

As critical viewers, we begin to see the satirical cracks in the series’ superficial promotion of body shaming when we acknowledge its campy aesthetic. Though Susan Sontag famously argues “deliberate Camp [...] is usually less satisfying” than unintentional Camp, *Insatiable* is an example of how deliberate Camp can still work—in this case, how deliberate Camp can urge us to confront the discomfort of a raging woman (6). Visually, everything in the world of *Insatiable* drips of “artifice and exaggeration” (Sontag 1). Nearly everyone in this pageant-obsessed town dresses like a neon-frosted cupcake; District Attorney Bob Barnard (Christopher Gorham) is Hollywood-fit and regularly parades around without a shirt, and housewife Coralee Armstrong (Alyssa Milano) goes into business with fashionable tassels for tampons called “Tampazzles.” This absurdist world winks at the audience and reminds us that almost nothing in this series, including other characters’ bullying of Patty before her weight loss, is meant to be taken literally. Body-shaming and fat-phobic characters are not the implied authors of this series. They are part of the deliberate Camp that asks us to cringe at a cartoonish wickedness which, however exaggerated, resembles the body shaming we may experience away from the television screen. While most of the comedy in *Insatiable* is geared toward making the bully (not the victim) the butt of the joke, its finest moments focus on Patty’s self-loathing and uncontrollable rage, which is never comically framed. In these scenes, the deliberate Camp is starkly stripped away, forcing the audience to contemplate Patty’s pain, this time without their tongues in their cheeks.

With each episode, we watch Patty's story transform from a fantasy in the style of *Never Been Kissed* (1999, Raja Gosnell) to one of Patty's unbridled rage and the guilt she feels for being an angry pageant queen. In other words, Patty's rage is at clear odds with her expectations for womanhood. Her inability to reconcile fury and femininity in the same space reaches its apotheosis when, in her pageant gown and sparkling tiara, she pushes her rival, Dixie Sinclair (Irene Choi), off the top of a truck. Afterward, Patty questions whether she can ever be a good person, and the answer is fairly obvious, yet difficult for her to accept: Patty Bladell cannot be a good person until she relinquishes her belief that her body will determine the content of her character. By the second season finale, Patty (adorned again in a tiara) discovers "Nothing tastes as good as killing feels." For Patty, conventional feminine beauty is a prize worth killing for. She still does not admit to her rage, despite her loved ones begging her to seek therapy throughout the second season. Despite the series' overwhelming evidence toward the contrary, Patty still demonstrates a belief that rage is antithetical to (feminine) beauty, and that only the scale matters.

Of all the killings Patty commits, her murder of boyfriend Christian in the first season's finale is perhaps most significant. It is the first time anyone attacks Patty for the deleterious content of her character without addressing her body. No one mocks her dysmorphia or levies it as the reason for her violence. Christian asks Patty to see her anger as part of *herself*, not the shape of her body. "You said it yourself," he says. "There's no demon. That everything bad you've ever done...it's just you." Patty, however, is not prepared to accept this, so she bludgeons Christian with a crowbar, repeatedly shouting "I'M A GOOD PERSON!" at his dying body. As the camera zooms in on Patty's furious face, each splatter of blood on her cheeks a gory rendition of a beauty queen's blush, viewers are confronted with the excellence of *Insatiable*: a story unafraid to question what might happen when we fail to listen to raging women — a story unafraid to question how it feels when a raging woman cannot listen to herself.

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Midsommar. Dir. Ari Aster. Screenplay by Ari Aster. Perf. Florence Pugh, Jack Reynor, and Vilhelm Blomgren. A24, 2019.

Midsommar (2019) is a shroom-induced trip, not just because of the many psychedelic drugs used by the characters throughout the film, but also in the way it exemplifies the deeply rooted paradox in the horror genre between attraction and repulsion. This film, from director Ari Aster, combines an enchanting natural setting with disturbing scenes of death, all while the main character transforms into something monstrous, or perhaps beautiful. The narrative structure centers around the unsettling feeling of the unknown as American students explore the traditions of an isolated Swedish society. Just like the American students that arrive in this foreign Swedish community, the audience is situated in the dark, learning about the peculiar customs of the quaint but highly disturbing commune. The darkest moments in *Midsommar* are not illustrated in the dark, but in the light for everyone to see. None of the horrific mysteries in this society are hidden but revealed over time. The real mystery to unravel lies within the main character, Dani. She experiences intense trauma at the beginning of this film forcing her to cling to her only remaining support system, an emotionally distant boyfriend, Christian. Dani, Christian, and his friends are welcomed into this new society. By the end, Dani is the one who is truly changed by the experience. Her transformation occurs when she confronts the traumas of her past, recognizes the emotional abuse in her current relationship, and frees herself with the support of a twisted but deeply empathetic community.

Dani’s relationship with Christian becomes her lifeline after the sudden death of her immediate family. Dani suppresses her pain because of her constant worry of having too much emotional baggage for Christian to handle. She fears losing another person in her life, forcing her to stay in a relationship where she is not valued. Christian is no longer in love with Dani, yet he stays in the relationship out of guilt and pity. Over time, Dani senses his disconnect and it becomes clear that pity can never replace true feelings of love. Dani is repeatedly silenced while

grappling with the loss of her family on her own and she runs away to isolate herself whenever she is triggered. Dani suppresses her emotions around Christian, making her feel more alone and disconnected than ever. She tries to run away from her pain, but this new community finds ways to allow her to embrace and understand her trauma by refusing to let her be alone. The society reveals everything, willingly putting personal and private aspects of their life on display, including the processes of reproduction and death. All emotions, positive or negative, are expressed together. This community sits, eats, dances, sings, and even breathes together. There is a communal expression to emotions as they experience pain, pleasure, and worry as a united front. Living in unison and community transforms Dani. She is heard, she is seen, and, more importantly, she is held. There is no more hiding. These deep expressions of empathy reveal all that she was lacking in her current relationship. Christian's friend Pelle, a member of this community who invited them to Sweden, comforts Dani as she experiences this revelation. He says, "I have always felt held by a family, a real family. Do you feel held by [Christian]? Does he feel like home to you?" Dani never felt held by Christian. This society eventually becomes her chosen family. They have accepted her, all of her, even the trauma of her past, something Christian could never do.

Realizing her relationship is both emotionally abusive and lacking the support that she needs, coupled with witnessing Christian cheat on her, Dani decides to sacrifice him when given the opportunity. The last shot illustrates Dani's true transformation. Seeing the house that the community burned down with her boyfriend trapped inside, she begins to cry. She turns around and notices she is not the only one; the entire community is wailing in pain. She looks back into the flames and smiles. She is no longer alone, she is supported, and she has a family. Finally, Dani embraces this chosen world and family without fear of ever being too much. These empowering last moments change her forever. She is no longer the person needing to be consoled, constantly apologizing for being too much; she is embraced and held. She is terrifying at this moment as she detaches from any relationship that held her back. She is monstrous in the way she has fully explored the depths of her emotions and acted upon them. Choosing her boyfriend to be put to death for his infidelity while covered in a crown and robe of flowers provides a paradoxical vision of Dani as both monstrous and beautiful. As she embraces her emotions, she becomes frighteningly vulnerable and powerful. All this suggests that *Midsommar* is an exploration of trauma, of finding a new home, and of a woman embracing her power, ultimately leading to her liberation.

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Parasite. Dir. Bong Joon-ho. Screenplay by Bong Joon-ho and Han Jin-won. Perf. Song Kang-ho, Lee Sun-kyun, and Jo Yeo-jeong. CJ Entertainment, 2019.

Director Bong Joon-ho's *Parasite* portrays the polarization of a society where the poor and the rich both live in a strange symbiosis. The film represents this idea through the characters' homes, which serve to reinforce the unfair distribution of wealth and power that exists within in many modern societies. Therefore, *Parasite* appeals not only to Korean viewers but also to audiences around the world as Bong indicates (Chow).

The film opens with a scene showing the Kim family living in a half-underground apartment unit. This home demonstrates the Kim family's in-betweenness. In an interview with *Architectural Digest*, Bong explains,

[the house] really reflects the psyche of the Kim family. You're still half over ground, so there's this hope and this sense that you still have access to sunlight and you haven't completely fallen to the basement yet. It's this weird mixture of hope and this fear that you can fall even lower. I think that really corresponds to how the protagonists feel. (Wallace)

The design of the house not only represents the family's psyche but also their socio-economic status; the structure of the house makes them both visible to and invisible from society, which recalls a parasite's nature.

In the next scene, the Kim family finds their efforts to steal WiFi from their neighbor thwarted by a new password. In the twenty-first century WiFi has become an essential medium and commodity due to its ability to instantly connect people. The new password represents another barrier between the Kims and the outside world. The Kim family's desperation to connect to the outer world is illustrated by a scene in which siblings Ki-woo (Choi Woo-sik) and Ki-jung (Park So-dam) squat next to the toilet, which is situated too close to the flat's low ceiling, while trying to connect to a signal on their mobile phone. The strange structure of the house that forces Ki-woo and Ki-jung to huddle close to the toilet, an item regarded as necessary but filthy, suggests both the Kim family's parasitic nature and their

longing to connect to the outer world and rise above their station. There is no option for the Kim family to access the WiFi other than stealing it through abject means.

One day, Ki-woo's friend, Min (Park Seo-joon), pays a visit to the Kims' house and suggests that Ki-woo take a job as an English tutor for the daughter of the wealthy Park family. Ki-woo eagerly accepts the offer, and upon arrival he discovers that the Parks live in a grandiose and magnificent home, which likewise represents the family's socioeconomic status. Rachel Wallace of *Architectural Digest* observes that "Just like the semi-basement represents the Kims' place in society, [the Parks'] sleek, modern dwelling represents theirs." Ki-woo tries to penetrate this rich family by introducing all his family members as reliable people to the naïve young matriarch, Yeon-kyo. Ki-woo's attempt and desire to infiltrate the rich family, which is another of Bong's intended major themes, clearly shows the Kim family's parasitic nature. The Kims wish to survive in the harsh capitalist society and have no choice but to infest a rich family and suck their wealth.

Bong illustrates the theme of infiltration through blocking. In an interview with *IndieWire*, he states, "if someone is in a certain position, the other character[s] had to spy on them; if someone's coming in, another person had to hide behind a corner" (O'Falt). The Parks' magnificent house offers enough room for the Kim family to secretly breach the body of the host and live inside them without their knowledge.

The twist of the film lies beneath the basement of the Parks' house, and at this point I must issue a spoiler alert as I will discuss this twist in detail. Moon-gwang, the former housekeeper to the wealthy family, surreptitiously hides her husband in a secret bunker below the basement and lives there with him. However, once the Kim family invades the Yeon-kyo family they expel Moon-gwang (Lee Jeong-eun) and replace her with Chung-sook (Jang Hye-jin), matriarch of the Kim family. One day, when the Parks go camping, the Kim family celebrates their successful occupation of the host's house. However, Moon-gwang returns to check on her husband, at which point the Kims realize that they are not the only parasites in the house. A violent fight for survival ensues, during which the Kim family accidentally kill Moon-gwang. They then lock her husband in the sub-basement, thus burying the dark secret that could compromise their occupation of the Parks' home.

In addition to the differences between the two houses, the hierarchy of high and low in the film shows the division of class and wealth. Bong wanted to highlight the class division via cinematic techniques such as lighting: for instance, the Kims have less access to sunlight while the Parks' expansive home allows for more

natural sunlight to enter their lives (O’Falt). Along with the lighting, the different locations show the division of class and wealth. No matter how much the Kims strive to climb the ladder of success and thus rise out of their low socio-economic class, they nevertheless end up trapping themselves in the basement. The Kims try to leave their filthy half-ground basement apartment and move into the Parks’ magnificent house. However, as they discover Moon-gwang’s secret, they must return to the basement, an act that represents the ostracization of the parasites and reinforces the division of class and wealth represented by the hierarchy of high and low in the film, which is too rigid to break.

In the film’s chaotic ending, Ki-taek (Song Kang-ho), the head of the Kim family, kills Dong-ik (Lee Sun-kyun), head of the Park family, after his family’s true and secret nature as parasites is disclosed during an unexpected attack by Moon-gwang’s vengeful husband. Afterward, Ki-taek has no choice but to hide himself in the sub-basement of the house. The rest of the Kim family also end up back in their old half-underground apartment. The Kims, who are positioned as the parasites in the capitalist society, are once again banished to the low and dark house. The rule of the strange symbiosis of the capitalist society allows the parasites to sustain their lives only under the condition of living in their in-betweenness. The film’s ending yields an uncanny reflection of our contemporary society to the audience: Are we the parasites in this society? Or are there any parasites inside our houses?

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POPULAR CULTURE STUDIES JOURNAL

ABOUT

The *Popular Culture Studies Journal* is an academic, peer-reviewed, refereed journal for scholars, academics, and students from the many disciplines that study popular culture. The journal serves the MPCA/ACA membership, as well as scholars globally who recognize and support its mission based on expanding the way we view popular culture as a fundamental component within the contemporary world.

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Popular culture is at the heart of democratic citizenship. It serves as an engine driving technology, innovation, and information, as well as a methodological lens employed by the many fields that examine culture, often from an interdisciplinary perspective. Managed by The Midwest Popular Culture Association/American Culture Association (MPCA/ACA), The *Popular Culture Studies Journal (PCSJ)* is an academic, refereed journal for scholars, academics, and students from the many disciplines that study America and American culture. The journal serves its membership and scholars globally who recognize and support its mission based on expanding the way we view popular culture as a fundamental component within the contemporary world.

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FOR SUBMITTING ARTICLES

The *Popular Culture Studies Journal* is an academic, peer-reviewed, refereed journal for scholars, academics, and students from the many disciplines that study popular culture. The journal serves the MPCA/ACA membership, as well as scholars globally who recognize and support its mission based on expanding the way we view popular culture as a fundamental component within the contemporary world.

TOPICS COVERED:

Based on analysis of the proceedings of the Midwest PCA/ACA and the national organization reveals that most popular culture scholars are interested in American-based:

- Film
- Music and Dance
- Television
- Sports
- Celebrities and Brands
- Literature
- Comics/Graphic Novels
- Games
- Animation
- Theater
- Fashion
- Computers
- Social Media
- World Wide Web
- Mobile Computers
- Professional Wrestling
- Archives and Museums
- Food and Drink
- Fairs, Festivals, and Carnivals
- Toys
- DIY and Crafting

However, many scholars approach these topics from an interdisciplinary perspective, which adds significant value over single-issue or more focused/specialized journals.

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The *Popular Culture Studies Journal* is seeking authors to review works on any aspect of U.S. or international popular culture. In particular, we are interested in books, films, videos, websites, or any other works that critically engage popular culture that have been published, released, or posted in the last two years. We will also consider older seminal pieces that deserve a second look. If you submit a review of the latter, a rationale for the relevance of the review today will be expected.

Reviews should adhere to the ethos of the *PCSJ* and be largely positive with any criticism of the work being constructive in nature. For more information about this journal, please visit: mpcaaca.org/the-popular-culture-studies-journal.

Written reviews should be roughly 800-1,000 words and should be typed, double-spaced with 12 pt. Times New Roman font. Research and documentation must adhere to *The MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* and *The MLA Style Manual*, 8th edition, which requires a Works Cited list, with parenthetical author/page references in the text. Punctuation, capitalization, hyphenation, and other matters of style must also follow *The MLA Handbook* and *The MLA Style Manual*. If you are interested in submitting any alternative form of review, please contact the reviews editor directly with your proposed format. Guidelines will be determined depending on the proposed format.

Reviews should be sent electronically to Christopher J. Olson at olson429@uwm.edu with **PCSJ Review and the author's last name in the subject line**. Reviews should include both the review and the reviewer's complete contact information (name, university affiliation, address and email). Reviews should be sent as Microsoft Word attachments in .doc or .docx format, unless an alternative format has been approved by the editor.

If you are interested in reviewing for the *Popular Culture Studies Journal* or if you are an author or publisher with a work you would like to have reviewed, then please contact Christopher at the following address or email:

Christopher J. Olson, Reviews Editor
Email: olson429@uwm.edu

FOR REVIEWING ARTICLES

Our reviewers are important to us. We appreciate their service as well as the significant role our reviews play in ensuring quality of our publication.

If you are interested in being part of the *Popular Culture Studies Journal* as a reviewer, please complete our online form (mpcaaca.org/the-popular-culture-studies-journal/for-article-reviewers).

For our reviewers who would like a certificate for service, please complete our online form (mpcaaca.org/the-popular-culture-studies-journal/for-article-reviewers).

UPCOMING SPECIAL ISSUES

In addition to *PCSJ* calls for ongoing journal and reviews submissions (above), we are also planning for special issues. In other words, the special issues will appear alongside *PCSJ* articles and reviews in upcoming volumes. If you have an idea of a special issue, please contact CarrieLynn D. Reinhard at pcsj@mpcaaca.org.

OCTOBER 2020: INDEPENDENT SCHOLARS SHOWCASE

APRIL 2021: ROBOTS AND LABOR IN POPULAR CULTURE

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.



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CARRIELYNN D. REINHARD

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