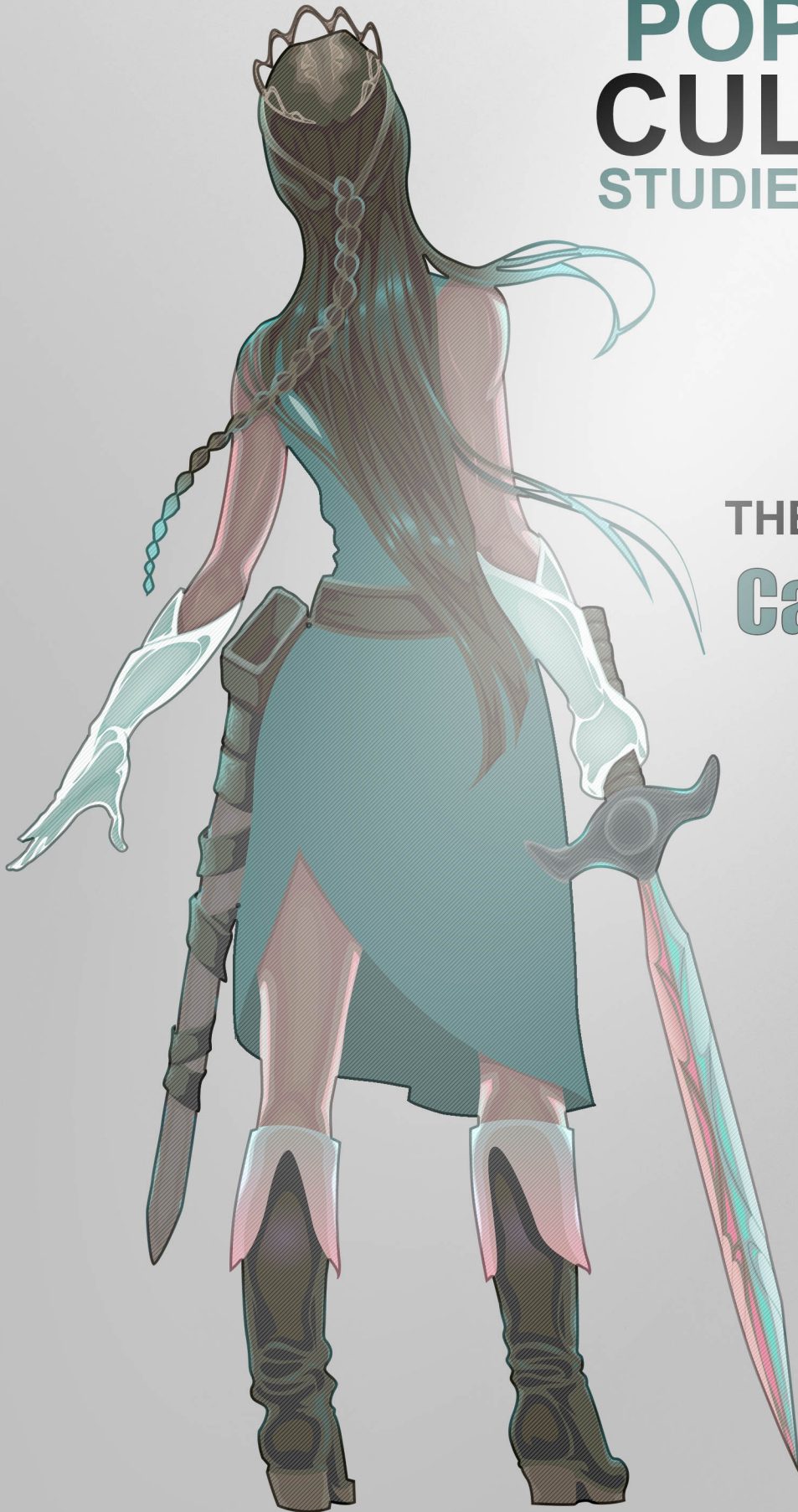


THE  
**POPULAR  
CULTURE**  
STUDIES JOURNAL

THE PCSJ INTERVIEW  
**Carolyn Cocca**

SPECIAL SECTION  
**Thoughts on  
Wonder Woman**



# THE **POPULAR CULTURE STUDIES** **JOURNAL**

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# THE **POPULAR CULTURE STUDIES JOURNAL**

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# Editorial: Being Different

NORMA JONES

This story of the introduction of Popular Culture into academia...is sometimes sad, often aggravating, the story is nevertheless always optimistic and pleasurable because it charts a movement which is pushing back some of the impediments to a proper American education, cracking some of the shells of the holy of holies about education, and rewriting forever some of the myths and rituals about American Academia.<sup>1</sup>

Ray B. Browne

Studying popular culture makes us different from, perhaps, some other more established and traditional disciplines. What we do, by nature, crosses several boundaries in terms of what we research, why we research, and how we research. In short we are different.

When my mentor and advisor, Bob Batchelor, mentioned that he was starting this open access journal, I was beyond enthusiastic. I could follow in my parents' footsteps of being different. My father was one of the first television producers in Taiwan to launch a show in a banned dialect. He was different. My mother started one of the first bilingual Chinese/English magazines in the U.S. She was different. I could leverage what I learned from them (writing/editing/production) and from my corporate experiences to make this journal a reality. I wanted to be different.

In 1989, our intellectual forefather, Ray B. Browne, wrote that Midwest PCA/ACA was one of the more effective and active regional chapters of the national association (91). I hope we can continue to carry

<sup>1</sup> (Browne 3)  
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that mantle by challenging what is holy and taken for granted. I hope to celebrate that difference now, as well as in our upcoming special issues centered on professional wrestling, monstrosity, as well as Asian American & Pacific Worlds.

In this current volume, I hope we challenge the way we re/consider popular culture. Sarah Symonds LeBlanc invites us to investigate Princess Leia and consider her as an alternative to Cinderella feminism. Mary Rosner and Scott Rogers gives us a different understanding of space as they guide us through the Muhammad Ali Center in Louisville, Kentucky. Karen McGrath shows us how a non-lead character in a comic book series can challenge social norms. From there, Kristy Tucciarone shows us the importance of celebrities in popular culture in a different higher education environment. Together, I hope we are starting conversations about being different.

\*\*\*

Before I sign off, I want to offer my appreciation to a few important individuals. First, I wish to thank the Executive Council of MPCA/ACA for allowing me this chance to continue to make *The Popular Cultural Studies Journal (PCSJ)* different. I would like to thank Bob for creating such a wonderful forum for scholars and broader audiences to engage with popular culture. Bob has not only been an amazing mentor for me, he has also been a champion and ally on my behalf. I would like to thank Kathleen Turner for her continued friendship and service. She is moving on after this volume. I feel great sorrow that Midwest PCA/ACA and higher education, are losing such a formidable teacher, planner/organizer, and researcher.

I also want to acknowledge our new editors. My special appreciation goes out to Julia Largent for taking on the mantle of managing editor. She has been an amazing partner in organizing this volume. I can honestly say

that this volume could not have existed without her. I would also like to thank Garret Castleberry for starting as our assistant editor. Maja Bajac-Carter was also, initially, an assistant editor. As this year progressed, she moved out of academia. This is another profound loss. Lastly, I would also like to thank our new copy editor, Heather Flynn for her keen eye.

This is also the first year that Malynnda Johnson is taking on the role of editing reviews. She, with the assistance of Jessica Benham, has put together an amazing array of reviews that span from broadly ranging encyclopedias to specific popular culture texts. I look forward to Malynnda expanding this section in future volumes to include more than printed media.

Lastly, I want to thank my partner/husband for taking time out of producing television, to once again make a one of a kind and special cover for us. He has been here since the first volume, and an important part of making *PCSJ* unique among a sea of academic journals.

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# Taking Back the “P-Word”: Princess Leia Feminism, an Autoethnography

SARAH SYMONDS LEBLANC

We dodged the raindrops as we exited the theater after viewing *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*; my heart hurting, my mouth hanging in a frown, and my eyes fighting the tears after watching Han Solo die at the hands of his son.

“I can’t believe he is dead,” I whined to Matt, my husband, as I settle into the car and he turns on the heat.

Kylo Ren: “I’m being torn apart. I want to be free of this pain. I know what I have to do, but I don’t know if I have the strength to do it. Will you help me?”

Han Solo: “Yes. Anything.” (*Star Wars – Episode VII: The Force Awakens*)

Then Ren takes his lightsaber, stabs Han in the stomach, and he falls over the railing down into the darkness.

I gasped. Twenty minutes later, I am still in shock.

As a child of the late ‘70s and ‘80s, I grew up with the original *Star Wars* franchise. I was told *Star Wars: A New Hope* was one of the first films I saw in the theater, but I have no memory of seeing the film or even *The Empire Strikes Back* I recall standing in front of a theater when I was waiting with my sisters, Abby and Emily, to purchase our tickets to see *Return of the Jedi*. And later in life, for at least two Christmases, my family would open presents and then unite in front of the television, watching the original three films back to back to back.

Han Solo: “This ain’t like dusting no crops, boy” (*Star Wars – Episode IV: A New Hope*).

There was just something about Han Solo--or even Harrison Ford--that just stuck with me.

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Han Solo: “Tell Jabba I have his money” (*Star Wars – Episode IV: A New Hope*).

He played the bad boy, the rebel of the rebellion and the Empire, but also demonstrated he had a heart.

“They killed Han. I can’t believe they killed Han,” I moaned as we navigated the back roads of Bangor, Maine, heading to Matt’s parents’ cabin, where we were staying for winter break. “And did you see Leia’s face? Her face alone communicated the anguish that nearly every female who loves Han Solo felt. And now I can’t talk about it because I will spoil the film for others.”

While I mourned the passing of Han Solo, I also focused on Leia, wondering how did she transform from being a “Princess” to a “General”? Sometime during the end of *Return of the Jedi*--as the surviving members of the Rebellion celebrated the demise of the second Death Star and the end of the Empire--Leia went from having the newfound knowledge of being a Jedi to becoming a General, marrying and separating from Han, and having a child, Ben, who becomes Kylo Ren.

When *The Force Awakens* was released in December 2015, a big deal was made over the new female heroine Rey, a scavenger on the nearly abandoned planet of Jakku. Garber reports that Rey was dubbed *Star Wars*’ “first feminist protagonist” (par. 2).

As a repeat viewer of the original three episodes of the *Star Wars* saga, I disagree. Bowman defines feminism as “an institution that insists upon an equal footing for both sexes” (162). While I strongly agree that the character of Rey fits this definition of feminism, I believe that Princess Leia was the first feminist in the galaxy.

The purpose of this article is to explore Princess Leia as a way of arguing that she was the first feminist character of *Star Wars*, while also developing and introducing a new type of feminism, *Leia Feminism*.

First, I examine the princess culture’s current climate. Jones, Adams, and Ellis contend that autoethnography captures “how individuals live” and highlight one’s experiences to the “culture they live in” (21, 22). I use a popular culture “princess,” specifically, Princess Leia, to juxtapose the Disney popular culture stereotype of princesses, specifically, Cinderella. I set out to define and explain **Leia Feminism** as a contrast to Battaglia, Cordes, Norris, and Banuelos concept of *Cinderella Feminism*. Battaglia et al. suggest that *Cinderella feminists* want it all: the glass slipper, the Prince, the fairy tale lifestyle, and the connection (153). I

argue that *Leia feminists* want the adventure, equal power, but also autonomy, and then love. By defining what I mean by Leia Feminism, I seek to juxtapose the Leia feminist to the Cinderella feminist.

Next, I explore the character to demonstrate how Princess Leia was the first feminist protagonist in the galaxy far, far away. Manning and Adams assert that researchers “use personal experiences to write alongside popular culture theories and texts” while criticizing, writing against, and talking back to the texts (200-01). While viewing the original three films and making notes of character development and actions, I talk back to the characters, critique Leia’s actions and the actions of others towards her, and make notes of actions that could be deemed “feminist-like behaviors.”

Finally, Batchelor views “popular culture as the connections that form between individuals and objects” (1), while Manning and Adams assert that researchers serve as the audience to popular culture (195-196). Manning also believes that autoethnographers can use popular culture texts to better understand our own journeys (58). As an avid viewer of films featuring strong princess archetypes, it wasn’t until I had to explain why I didn’t want others to use the word *princess* towards my daughters that I realized that some princesses were, or could be considered, feminist in nature. This paper delves into my struggle to overcome my disdain for the word *princess* by examining Princess Leia and why she would be an acceptable princess for my daughters to emulate.

## My First Introduction

I crawl into the bed, snuggling up with my mom on July 29, 1981, to watch “the” royal wedding. We laid in her queen-size bed, waiting, watching the crowd, my head snuggled nicely on her shoulder. A roar rose from the British crowd as a horse-drawn carriage emerged. A few minutes later, Prince Charles and Princess Diana emerged from the cathedral, waving at the crowd, while Diana clutched her bouquet, her flowing, over-sized white dress train capturing the attention of the crowd and the television-viewing audience. We watched as they entered the carriage and then as the carriage made its way through the streets of London towards the palace, Diana beaming and waving the whole time.

Diana’s wedding to Prince Charles was my first memory of an introduction into the “princess culture.”

I was a victim of the 1980s version of the princess culture, which is nothing like Shuler examined for today's young female generation. The princess culture of my generation was a mixture of real-life Diana and Grace [Kelly], Linda Carter as Wonder Woman, and Disney's rereleases of their popular Disney films *Cinderella*, *Snow White*, and *Sleeping Beauty*.

Much like the cultures described in research (Do Rozario; Henke, Umble, and Smith; O'Brien; Rowe), I became a victim of the Disney princess rhetoric. Henke, Umble, and Smith write, "Disney stories present powerful and sustained messages about gender and social relations," especially when it comes to what defines a princess and how to behave like a princess (230). Even one of the most recent Disney/Pixar releases, *Brave*, characterizes what it takes to be the perfect princess:

Queen Elinor: "A princess must be knowledgeable about her kingdom. She does not doodle. . . . A princess does not chortle, does not stuff her gob, rises early, is compassionate, patient, cautious, clean, and above all, a princess strives for...well, perfection." (*Brave*)

A princess does not get to have any fun.

Disney films portray the "perfect girl," but don't give her a voice or even provide her fewer lines than her male counterpart (Guo); the girl sacrifices her dreams (Henke, Umble, and Smith 242); and the girl has beauty but others in the village are jealous of it (Henke et al., 237). As I aged and outgrew the charm and frilliness of the Disney princesses, I grew cynical about the "prince charming" and "happily ever after." I was no longer symbolically boasting (Manning 142) with the princesses on the Disney film. I no longer dreamed of being a "princess."

### Cinderella Feminism

In describing taking her daughter to her first princess party, Shuler explains that her eight-year-old daughter spent the previous five years obsessed with all things princess: Halloween costumes designed like Disney princess dresses, ice shows featuring Disney princesses, and even a new Disney baby line directed to new mothers. Like Shuler, my biggest concern is "how might they [princesses] shape their [my daughters'] ideas about what it means to be female in this world?" (463); which is why I don't want the word used to describe or compliment them.



As an academic and a realist, I know I can’t stop my daughters from being exposed to the Disney princess culture, but it doesn’t keep me from trying. One day I arrived at day care to find my oldest daughter wearing an Ariel dress over her clothes.

“Why is she in that dress?” I asked the intern, since she was the closest teacher to me.

“Oh! She saw another little girl wearing a dress and wanted to wear it.”

“Oh. I was hoping I had a few more years.”

“What do you mean?” she asked. By then, Paula, the room teacher, approached with Caroline.

“I want to keep her from getting the wrong idea about princesses; in fact, I hate the word. But since she asked to wear the dress, that’s different. She’s too young to understand the symbolic meaning behind it.”

As her mother and a feminist, how can I make sure my daughter is exposed to the right kind of princess without having her feel left out or teased by her future classmates?

Am I struggling between being an academic and a mother?

Leavy struggled with reconciling her “feminist standpoint, [her] own personal references, and [her] parenting of a preteen girl” (31). In communicating her views to her family, such as teaching her daughter to hate Barbie, Leavy received ridicule from family members. Like Leavy, I, too, received some backlash from family members, with a bright pink onesie saying, “If the Crown Fits,” arriving in the mail from one family member, a Cinderella newborn Halloween dress arriving from another family member, and a princess rocking chair arriving from yet a third.

Battaglia et al. might suggest that I want my daughter to find a balance between Cinderella fantasies and real-world expectations, but truthfully, I want my daughters to have more. Battaglia et al. define Cinderella Feminism as females that have the glass slipper, the fulfilled dream of marriage, families, and careers, but also co-exist in a “happily homeostatic state” (153). Under the concept of Cinderella Feminism, females adapt their behavior in order to conform to more mainstream heteronormative romantic paradigms. When hearing the phrase *Cinderella Feminism*, I think of Cinderella, as characterized by the Disney Corporation, and see a female in distress, unable to escape her stature, depending on a male to rescue her, with woodland creatures doing the work to make that happen. She is dependent on others in order to succeed. But Battaglia et al. assert

that the phrase captures the essence of the second wave of feminism since it builds upon Friedan's argument of females wanting it all but just not at the same time.

Can I recapture the word *princess*, provide a new meaning, and allow my daughters to dress up in hand-me-down princess dresses?

## Introducing Princess Leia

In preparation for the release of *The Force Awakens*, and eventually, *Rogue One*, I decided I needed a refresh on the original *Star Wars* saga. I knew I could do without the first three episodes released in the late '90s as I could barely stand the first one. I find *A New Hope*, *The Empire Strikes Back*, and *Return of the Jedi* to be classics, timeless in their messages, character development, and plot lines. Plus, there was the on-screen chemistry between Han Solo, Princess Leia, and Luke Skywalker.

In a galaxy filled with mostly male characters, Princess Leia stands out for not only being a female but for her actions and one-liners (Bowman). Bowman describes Leia as brave, having tenacity, and an overall strong female; but the argument is also made that "while Leia is awesome, she can't represent every aspect of a woman's experience" (163), much less all the aspects of feminism. Leia is tough as nails, as viewers observe in *A New Hope*, lacking the dainty qualities that many would stereotype as a princess behavior.

We are first introduced to Princess Leia at the beginning of *A New Hope*, as the Empire led by Darth Vader intercepts her ship in the hopes of retrieving the plans for the Death Star. Little did Vader know, though, that Leia placed the plans into an R2 Unit, who left the ship through an escape hatch. When Leia is brought to Vader, she argues:

Leia: "Darth Vader. Only you could be so bold. The Imperial Senate will not sit still for this. When they hear you've attacked a diplomatic--"

Vader: "Don't act so surprised, Your Highness. You weren't on any mercy mission this time. Several transmissions were beamed to this ship by rebel spies. I want to know what happened to the plans they sent you."

Leia: “I don't know what you're talking about. I am a member of the Imperial Senate on a diplomatic mission to Alderaan--”

Vader: “You are part of the Rebel Alliance and a traitor! Take her away!”  
(*Star Wars – Episode IV: A New Hope*)

She is taken prisoner and placed in a holding cell on the Death Star; and we do not see Leia for quite some time, instead watching as Luke sees her as a hologram clothed in white, saying the phrase, “You’re my only hope.” Luke goes with Obi-Wan in the hopes of rescuing Leia, as her image portrays her as “the princess in peril” (Dominguez 115), a damsel in distress.

“Governor Tarkin, I should have expected to find you holding Vader's leash. I recognized your foul stench when I was brought on board,” Leia informs the Governor as she is marched onto the bridge of the Death Star and the audience gets to see Princess Leia again. Of course, the “foul stench” is not the only line that Leia has in the film:

Leia: “I don't know who you are or where you came from, but from now on you'll do as I tell you, okay?”. . . .

Leia: “Well somebody has to save our skins. Into the garbage, fly-boy!”. . . .

Leia: “Someone get this walking carpet out of my way.” (*Star Wars – Episode IV: A New Hope*)

Only Leia could be so bold with her witty but sometimes sarcastic one-liners, but as Bowman points out, Leia can be vocal because of her [princess] position.

It is through the Tarkin scene that the audience learns that this particular princess is “never a damsel in distress” (Hayes, [birthmoviesdeath.com](http://birthmoviesdeath.com)); a complete contrast to the princesses in Disney films or even how Luke perceives her earlier in the film. Hayes takes the “anti-damsel in distress” characteristic further, arguing that we understand that Leia has been on her own willful, dangerous mission to destroy the Death Star and prevent potential acts of terrorism. Leia’s commitment to a greater good comes with painful sacrifice, as her refusal to give in to the enemy results in the destruction of her home planet ([birthmoviesdeath.com](http://birthmoviesdeath.com)).

It is in the moment when Leia shrieks, “What? They are a peaceful planet!” to General Tarkin as he orders his troops to destroy the planet with the Death Star that I see the depth of Leia’s love and loyalty, especially to the people of her home planet. “You are too trusting,” Tarkin informs her. As the once peaceful planet of Alderaan is blown into a million tiny pieces, we all gasp, shocked just like Leia that the Death Star had the power to pulverize the planet.

And while she is upset, she never once sheds a tear. She stands stoic, her hands cuffed in front of her, the white garment spotless.

She places agency (Burke) in herself and for those who are unable to help themselves.

Later, Leia defies the stereotype of “damsel in distress” further. As Luke enters her cell, dressed as a Stormtrooper, the audience may expect Luke to remove his helmet and give Leia a kiss to awaken her, much like the Prince in both *Snow White* and *Sleeping Beauty*. Instead, Leia awakes on her own, utters the line, “Aren’t you a little short to be a Stormtrooper,” catching Luke off guard (*Star Wars IV, A New Hope, 1977*; Dominguez). A few minutes later, she takes control of her own rescue, ordering Luke, Han, and Chewbacca into the garbage shoot. Leia’s actions clearly defy the definition of a “damsel in distress.”

As the final credit music begins to fill the air and the credits begin to roll, I realize that Leia was not introduced for a princess to find a husband or to have a male rescue her from the clutches of the Empire. Rather, Leia was the catalyst for moving the rebellion forward (Bowman 163), fighting back against the Emperor, Darth Vader, and the Evil Empire. Without Leia receiving the plans of the architecture of the Death Star, placing the plans in R2D2, and ordering him to find Obi-Wan, and Luke finding the droids and Obi-Wan, the Empire would still be in control of the universe.

## Princess Leia’s Iconic Image

In the period between the release of *The Force Awakens* and *Rogue One*, the *Star Wars* franchise released adult pajamas styled after iconic characters and costumes from the original three films. As I pushed Caroline, my eldest daughter, around TJ Maxx, I came across the Princess Leia outfit and then pictured Caroline wearing buns, now that her hair is long enough, and the outfit, despite it being an adult size.

The iconic image of Leia in her white sheet dress with her hair in buns has been with me my whole life, but it was only when I started analyzing why I hated the word *princess* that I went back to review the films and noticed the symbolic meaning behind the dress and the hair. For years, feminists have been fighting the sex-symbol dress of female clothing (Dow and Wood, 24), but we don’t see that in Leia in the first film. She isn’t wearing a low-cut dress like Cinderella or even a ball gown off-the-shoulders like Belle. Her hair isn’t flowing down her back, but rather is tucked up in nice, tight buns, as not to impede her even as she doesn’t realize that help is on the way.

As I progressed through the original three films, I began to note how Leia wears pants and her hair in an updo during a battle; the “sexiness feminine side” of the princess comes out when the film is portraying a time of peace or when she is “forced” to exhibit her female side. But more importantly are the accessories Leia carries. Leia yields a gun like her male counterparts, firing at will to keep the Stormtroopers from capturing her and Luke, as they race around the Death Star in the hopes of getting to the Millennium Falcon and escape.

She is a liberated princess (Wildermuth 92). She is strong, an antithesis of a damsel in distress, waiting for rescue and to be freed from some evil spell.

She is no one’s eye candy; much less, she does not see herself as a sex symbol.

Liberated, strong, and not sexually objectified. Are these three traits all it takes to be a Leia feminist? And will these characteristics continue throughout the other two films?

## A Princess Icon?

A few days later when my husband and I can’t find a good football game to watch, I pop in *The Empire Strikes Back* to continue our preparation for the release of *The Force Awakens*. As the DVD heats up, I am already finding it more difficult to get sucked into the film, as *The Empire Strikes Back* is not my favorite in the series. But when the Millennium Falcon and its crew arrive at Cloud City, my attention span perks up and I pay careful attention to the action.

Leia maneuvers the hallways of the Cloud City, trying to stop Boba Fett, the bounty hunter, from taking off with the carbonized Han Solo and shooting at the

groups of Stormtroopers who pursue her. The look in her brown eyes is one of determination: to save Han, but also to escape the evil clutches of the Empire.

“Now there’s a princess I can support our daughter idolizing,” I say to Matt as we sit on the couch. (At the time of the release of *A Force Awakens*, we only had one daughter.) “Leia is a fighter.”

“Hm-mm,” he replies, not really into the film as I have now become.

I dig in the cushions, extracting the DVD remote, and hit pause as I look Matt in the eyes.

“I’m serious, but at the same time, I am worried. I have control over what I expose her to at home, but what if she learns about all those Disney princesses at day care or school? What if she comes home and says, ‘I want to be Cinderella,’ or acts like a helpless female who believes she needs a man to rescue her to live happily ever after?”

“Do you honestly believe that is going to happen?”

“Yes.”

“Sarah, think about it. With you as her mother and me as her dad, she is not going to be become Rapunzel and need rescuing from a tower.”

I contemplate Matt’s words, as I hit play and rewind back to the first few scenes at Cloud City, when Han, Leia, Chewbacca, and C3PO arrive and are greeted by the city’s administrator, Lando Calrissian.

“You are never going to get through the film if you keep hitting rewind,” Matt informs me.

“I know but I fear there are some significant lines in here about Leia. I have spent so much time analyzing her dress and actions that I feel like I am missing some lines that are directed towards her.”

“Hello, what do we have here?” Lando directs toward Leia as he approaches the crew. The six words carry a connotative meaning of Lando finding Leia attractive. I later realize that this is the first time Lando subtly refers to Leia’s appearance.

Later in the film, Leia stands in front of the window of the room where the group, Chewbacca and Han, have been assigned to when Lando enters the room.

Lando: “You look absolutely beautiful...you truly belong here with us among the clouds” (*Star Wars – Episode V: The Empire Strikes Back*).

I hit pause.

“Did you hear that?”

“What?”

“How Lando compliments Leia on her looks. I swear this is the second time since they arrived in Cloud City that he has said something about her looks.”

“Hmmp,” he grumbles back, clearly not paying as much attention as me.

We are two-thirds through *The Empire Strikes Back* and this is the second time Leia has been complimented on her looks by Lando. Is Lando trying to sexually objectify Leia, make her into a sex object? Is this part of Lando’s character, or are the producers hoping to keep young men interested in the film by using lines that portray Leia as a sex object?

In contrast, Han never says anything about her looks. In going back to review Han’s lines about Leia after their first meeting in *A New Hope*, Han says to Luke, “Wonderful girl. Either I’m going to kill her or I’m beginning to like her.” Is it Leia’s actions that Han finds attractive about her? Her intelligence? Her bitchiness?

Henke, Umble, and Smith point out “girls conflate standards of beauty and standards of goodness by learning to pay attention to their ‘looks’ and by listening to what others say about them” (231). Princesses are known for their beauty as, at one point, Disney’s *Sleeping Beauty* was considered the most beautiful of the princesses, being compared to Barbie, as she epitomized the statuesque blonde (Solomon 47). In 1991, Gaston sings of Belle in *Beauty and the Beast* as “the most beautiful girl in town” and “don’t I deserve the best” (Ashman and Menken). Yet when Lando makes remarks about her beauty, Leia pretty much rolls her eyes and closes the proximity between her and Han. Leia does not pay attention to her looks, nor does anyone ever say, “You’re a princess, you shouldn’t do that.” It is as if her looks are not as important to her, or even Han, as they are to Lando.

You can be a princess and not be vain. Is that what Leia is communicating?

I sigh as the beginning of the carbonite scene begins to play. As Han is led to the machine to be a test product before Vader’s planned carbonation of Luke, Chewbacca gets upset. Han calms him down by saying, “Chewie, you have to take care of the princess.”

Why does Princess Leia need taking care of?

Hasn’t she been pulling her own weight?

Did Han just relabel her as a “damsel in distress”?

Or were his words merely an indirect way of calming his friend?

The machine heats up, Leia looks Han in the eyes and says, “I love you.”

“I know.”

The anguish Leia feels floods her facial features; a glaring contrast to her facial features in *A New Hope* as she watched her planet blown apart. It is in each clip of this scene that Leia portrays the female as weak and broken-hearted, clinging to Chewbacca, hiding her face in his fur, and her emotions clearly coming across her facial features. But just as quickly as the vulnerable side of Leia comes to the surface, it is gone, as Vader orders the Stormtroopers to escort her and Chewbacca to his ship.

It is during *The Empire Strikes Back* that we begin to see Leia display more feminist as well as feminine-like qualities. She is a leader and speaks back, or even stands up, to Han, but also acts on her female side, showing emotion, saying her feelings, and seeking comfort in the arms of a Wookiee.

“In *Star Wars*, she acted a bit like a bratty teenager,” my older sister explained as we discussed whether Leia was a feminist.

“In *Empire*, she came into her own.”

In *The Empire Strikes Back*, Leia demonstrates her athletic skills, continues to hone her shooting skills, and also excels at leadership qualities. She also does not use her “princess” title as much when questioning Han’s decisions. She sees herself, and others see her, as an equal. Therefore, Leia Feminism incorporates self-sufficiency, an authoritative tone, equality, and leadership skills without being bitchy, along with the previous mentioned qualities of liberated, strong, and not sexually objectified.

## Return of the Bikini

When we first see Princess Leia in *Return of the Jedi*, we don’t know it is Princess Leia. She is dressed as a bounty hunter, touting Chewbacca as her prisoner. She offers to trade Chewbacca for the carbonized Han Solo, but Jabba the Hutt responds that he could not part with his “favorite piece of art” as he gestures towards Han. In the dark of the night, Leia releases Han from the carbonate, but the reunited lovebirds are quickly captured and they both become prisoners of Jabba. It is during Leia’s imprisonment that her sexual objectification climaxes with the introduction of the well-known bikini outfit with a chain around her neck.

The bikini became the icon of young men’s sexual fantasies; the bikini also became an antithetical symbol of female empowerment (Jacobs). Bowman argues



that the bikini scene is a moment that showcases Leia’s sexuality as “she becomes a representative of the power of female sexuality” (166).

I sit there watching the scenes take place in Jabba’s lair, paying particular attention to Leia. When Luke first enters the lair, he makes eye contact with Leia but no words pass. Is he making note of her outfit, or is he sending her the message that everything will be okay?

When Luke is battling the giant monster in the pit, Leia leans over to watch from her spot in front of Jabba, Jabba constantly pulling the chain around her neck to keep her back, as if he doesn’t want her to see the action taking place below the lair. The pulling of the chain could also symbolize male control, as Jabba has control of how far Leia can move and what she can and cannot see. As he pulls on the chain, Leia uses her fingers to try to keep the collar, connected to the chain, from digging into her neck, this movement is a subtle notion of females trying to prevent complete male control.

Later, after R2D2 helps Luke Skywalker escape death in the desert, Leia uses the chain as a weapon, strangling Jabba with all her bodily strength until his tail stops flapping and he collapses dead. Leia takes control over her sexuality by using the chain as a weapon instead of it being a symbol of men’s control over females (Bowman 166). Dominguez writes that while the scene “is rife with titillation for the primarily young male audience of the films, it can be read as a moment of great empowerment for the females in the audience” (117). Leia’s actions alter the symbolic meaning behind the chain, using the very element that represent her enslavement to escape Jabba.

As the rebels reunite on the small aircraft, I look at Caroline, who is snuggled next to me on the couch, and say, “Violence isn’t always the answer,” as she applauds the explosion, the firing of the guns, and the sounds of the light saber. “And never wear anything that you don’t want to wear.” I didn’t know how else to explain, especially when she is still a toddler, the bikini and how Leia was forced to wear it by Jabba the Hutt.

Carrie Fisher explained, “In *Return of the Jedi*, she [Leia] gets to be more feminine and affectionate. But let’s not forget that these movies are basically boys’ fantasies. So, the other way they made her more feminine was to have her take her clothes off” (Asher-Perrin, “Carrie Fisher’s Sound Thoughts on Princess Leia in 1983”). But the bikini was more than just about sexualizing the female body. Fisher knew that Leia would never pick the outfit herself, but rather the forcing of Leia to wear it symbolizes the patriarchy in Jabba’s lair, while

simultaneously fulfilling the fantasies of young boys (Asher-Perrin, “Carrie Fisher’s Sound Thoughts on Princess Leia in 1983”).

“You know in 1983 I didn’t think anything about the bikini. I think it was one of the rare times that we are reminded that Leia is a girl. Then it came up again in an episode of *Friends* as the outfit in Ross’ sexual fantasies. That is when the meaning of the outfit began to change for me. It went from having no meaning to being a sexual fantasy,” I explained to Matt.

“Why does it matter what she wears?” Matt asked.

The bikini matters, as it has been a catalyst for debates since *Return of the Jedi* hit theaters. As recently as November 2015, parents were in an outrage because only Leia action figures clad in the bikini were available for purchase (Jacobs).

How do I teach them to fight back against the very culture that enslaves them because of their gender?

That you can be a feminist, fight for what you believe in, and still show skin?

That clothes don’t make the female?

Leia Feminism incorporates the power to fight against the system that sometimes holds females back.

## The Softer Side of Leia

*Return of the Jedi* is the film when Leia’s growth as a character is complete, well, until I watched *The Force Awakens* and saw more character development. During *Return of the Jedi*, Leia was

“[. . .]forced to be a sexual object for a crime lord? Choke him to death and got outta dodge. Find out the stealth party was spotted by the enemy? Hunt them [the enemy] down with their own vehicles. Meet a strange new species that doesn’t speak one’s language? Share food and make friends.” (Asher-Perrin, “Can We Talk About Why We *Really* Love Princess Leia?”)

“Watch this…” I say to Matt.

It is the scene where the Stormtroopers approach Han and Leia as they are attempting entry to the outpost.

“Hands up,” the Stormtrooper commands Han, as Leia pulls her legs in trying to hide. Han makes eye contact with Leia, and she smiles as she shows a blaster she has hidden under her cloak.

“I love you,” Han says.

“I know,” Leia returns, just before she turns and blasts the Stormtrooper.

I pause the film.

“Did you ever notice Han freaks when Leia gets shot?” I ask Matt.

“No.”

“Well, he does. When he sees Chewbacca, he says, ‘I need you. The princess has been shot.’ Then he says, ‘No, wait!’ As he makes eye contact with Leia again, he says, ‘I have an idea.’ Meanwhile, Leia is acting like it is a flesh wound. And did you see where Leia homed in more on feminine-like qualities in this episode, showing tears when she tries to persuade Luke not to go after Vader but rather to run away.”

“I think you are seeing way too much into this,” Matt says.

“Maybe. But the tears are just another step in Leia’s evolution. She went from needing rescue and acting tough, to becoming a leader who leads a rescue, to a female who can still shoot but can also shed tears. She shows that you can be tough but also share your emotions. She cares for her friends. And while she knows she can be a leader, she also knows when to defer the leadership role. She is the epitome of the definition of *princess* that I can handle. Maybe the ‘p-word’ doesn’t have to be a bad word in our house after all.”

## Defining Leia Feminism

During my viewing of the original *Star Wars* saga and reading the research I found on Leia, I had hope of developing a contrasting definition to Battaglia et al.’s concept of Cinderella Feminism.

Leia is a *hero* without losing her gendered status; she does not have to play the cute, helpless sex kitten or become sexless and androgynous to get what she wants. She can be strong, sassy, outspoken, bossy and bitchy, and still be respected and seen as feminine. (Dominguez 116)

As a result of reading Dominguez’s analysis of Leia and my own analysis of the scenes, actions, and words of Leia, my definition of Leia Feminism has morphed

into “liberated, strong females who demonstrate leadership qualities, fight back against being sexually objectified, stands up for themselves, while balancing between being a bitch and sharing their emotions.”

By the time we left the theater after viewing *The Force Awakens*, I had watched nearly 12 hours of *Star Wars* films, analyzing each Leia clip with more scrutiny than I could have ever imagined. But in re/watching these films from the perspective of needing to accept the word *princess*, I saw what Battagli et al. were trying to illustrate with their concept of Cinderella Feminism, yet I also believe the authors fell short.

Yes, like other girls of my generation, I imagined riding off in a carriage pulled by four white horses with my prince by my side. I also imagined myself as Lady Jane of *G.I. Joe* fame. But until reviewing the *Star Wars* trilogy, I didn't think my daughter would have a “ying” to the princess “yang.” Princess Leia has proved me wrong.

Leia Feminism is being able to speak your mind, take control of the situation, and give orders with authority, but also balances falling in love and showing one's emotions. It is about chasing your dreams while keeping those who matter to you close. Even in *The Force Awakens*, Leia still feels for Han, even though he is the one who left when their son went to the Dark Side. The anguish on her face when she knows Han is dead was deeper than any anguish shown in *A New Hope* or *The Empire Strikes Back*. She takes a moment to grieve and then goes back to work.

I am sure that in the coming years, especially now that we have two girls, princess dresses will wind up in at least one closet. I just hope my girls will understand that it is not the dress that makes the princess, it is the character of the female who does.

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# Striking Combinations: Transformation and Dissonance at the Muhammad Ali Center in Louisville, Kentucky

MARY ROSNER AND SCOTT ROGERS

Display halls can be seen, in part, as polemical fortifications meant to hold through the artful presentation of words, pictures, sounds and objects, the hearts and minds of visitors. (Luke viii)

We visit museums for different reasons: to be moved, to be instructed, to be entertained, to be inspired. But regardless of our reasons, experiences in museums are always mediated by the sights and sounds, the exhibits and their arrangements, the labels and narratives that surround us there. As Eilean Hooper-Greenhill explains, in museums “objects are used to materialize, concretize, represent, or symbolize ideas and memories, and through their processes objects enable abstract ideas to be grasped, facilitate the verbalization of thought, and mobilize reflection on experience and knowledge” (111). Of course, individual experiences also depend in part on “personal biography, cultural background, and interpretive community” (Hooper-Greenhill 119), which shape the stories each of us finds. But museums tell their own stories as well, providing visitors with designed “invitations to meaning” (Dickinson, Ott, and Aoki 87). These invitations give coherence and unity to the displays and encourage “collective values and social understandings” (Luke xiii). At times and for various reasons, the sites that Timothy Luke describes in the epigraph above can fail to hold our “hearts and minds”—sometimes because of the “artfulness” of the presentations that overwhelm the

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museum's narrative and sometimes because the details of the narrative itself weaken its "fortifications."

As Carole Blair and Neil Michel explain, most public sites that commemorate individuals or groups invite some form of thoughtful reflection. For example, the Astronauts Memorial at the Kennedy Space Center in Florida honors "U.S astronauts and test pilots who have died in the line of duty" (Blair and Michel 32). Careful readers like Blair and Michel notice how the Memorial "provokes questions about the character and value of the human's relationship to the machine. It offers no clear answers; rather, it seems to maintain a studied ambivalence about the issues it poses, inviting visitors to decide for themselves" (38). However, visitors often fail to observe the reflective mission of the Memorial because the details of its design too closely echo the nearby Walt Disney World theme park, which privileges "comfort" rather than "confrontation." These echoes enable visitors to avoid "interrogat[ing] [their] experiences and [them]selves in relation to the memorial's discourse" (Blair and Michel 36-7). Rather, they can forget the deaths of the astronauts and pilots, and see the Memorial as a "happy place."

A similar conflict between invited meaning and interpretation seems to be at work at the Muhammad Ali Center (MAC)<sup>1</sup> in Louisville, Kentucky, where design choices obscure the power of the exhibits and the transformative values they represent. In this case, design not only protects visitors from unsettling messages, it also promotes idealizations that interfere with the work of the Center. Much of Ali's story there shows him rising from obscurity to fame; in presenting episodes in Ali's life that tell

<sup>1</sup> The authors would like to thank Jeanie Kahnke and Becky Morris from the Muhammad Ali Center for their help supplying resources and images for this project.

this story, the Center's choices obscure its main narrative: to rewrite Ali's legend and to inspire personal and social change.

This essay examines how MAC's message of transformation and social justice is compromised by complexities of design, narrative focus, and content. First, we suggest that the design of the facility reifies Ali's larger-than-life persona resulting in Ali—not his values or, more broadly, not a life driven by culturally approved values—becoming the star attraction. Second, we demonstrate that chaotic and confusing layouts make any narrative of transformation largely inaccessible. Like a boxer using combinations—a series of punches, usually related in some way, in which the boxer shifts his weight as he quickly alternates jabs, hooks, crosses, uppercuts to throw off his opponent, body leaning in and out, feet moving quickly in different patterns, right hand and left hand, right and left, ideally ending with a final knockout—MAC overwhelms visitors with different kinds of “noise.” Finally, we claim that the difficult subjects tied to Ali's experience—most notably racism and disability—make the social justice mission a tough sell to those who come simply to see a monument to “the greatest.” Ultimately, Ali's legend, MAC's “disorienting” design (Nichols 134), and its difficult subjects make it too easy for visitors to ignore the complex racial, social and political histories on display and, thus, unlikely to directly pursue the personal or community change MAC calls on us to make.

### An Invitation to Re-Interpret Ali

Located in downtown Louisville, overlooking the Ohio River, the Muhammad Ali Museum and Educational Center opened in 2005. According to Susan Shaeffer-Nahmias, its original curator, Ali insisted that the Center be built in his hometown, and Ali and his wife Lonnie read every text used in the Center, saw every image, approved all architectural features so they could be assured that it would fulfill their primary

purpose: to extend the influence of Ali's values (Shaeffer-Nahmias). As Ali said,

I am an ordinary man who worked hard to develop the talent I was given. I believed in myself and I believe in the goodness of others. . . . I wanted more than a building to house my memorabilia. I wanted a place that would inspire people to be the best they could be in whatever they chose to do and to encourage them to be respectful of one another. (*MAC Presskit*)

In Lonnie Ali's words, the Center's aim was to be "a place that would shape, teach and inspire people" (Lockwood). In grander terms, the official description calls MAC "both a destination site and an international education and cultural center" that "reaches beyond its physical walls to fulfill its mission" (*MAC Fact Sheet*).

These walls are the product of collaboration between architectural firms Bleyer Blinder Belle, Lee H. Skolnick Architecture + Design Partnership, and the Bravura Corporation.<sup>2</sup> MAC's Executive Designer, Lee Skolnick, explains that the facility reflects "embodiment," with its design carefully integrating both form and function. As an architectural philosophy, embodiment encourages designers to "infuse their core mission, themes and concepts into *all* aspects of their sites, buildings, and exhibits, thereby instilling a sense of specificity, an organic rightness

<sup>2</sup> Since its opening, MAC has been widely heralded for its design. It has won many awards, including: Best Museum Environment, Silver Design Awards, Event Design Magazine (2006); Best Places List, Pathfinders Travel Magazine (2006 and 2007); Best New Attraction Award, North American Travel Journalists Association (2006); Media and Technology Award/Exhibit "The Greatest"; Bronze MUSE Award for Video, the American Association of Museums (2007); Official Best of "Best Cultural Attraction" in the State of Kentucky (2011) (Muhammad Ali Center).

unique to their situations" (emphasis added, Skolnick 123). Embodied design generates "harmony" between built space and the narratives embodied by the site (123). For MAC, this means integrating Ali and his values into every aspect of the Center. About MAC, Skolnick writes:

[T]o honour and further the humanitarian achievements of 'The Greatest, 'the Muhammad Ali Center in Louisville, Kentucky, had to embody the strength, power, lightness, speed, and grace that Ali brought to 'the ring' and to the field of human empowerment, respect and understanding. . . . On a substantive experiential level, the story of Ali's evolution as a professional, as a world ambassador and as a man is traced through a spatial organization that uses the timeline of his life as an armature. Along it are hung both the key moments in his development and the broader themes that they represent, and that tie his experience to the lives of each visitor. In ascending through the space along with Ali, we are all encouraged to be the greatest we can be. (129)

By employing embodied design, MAC attempts to close the distance between Ali and visitors so that they are encouraged to *become* "the greatest." Of course, Skolnick's intention is but one piece of the larger rhetorical puzzle and we would echo Greg Dickinson, Brian L. Ott, and Eric Aoki, who suggest that examining designed invitations to meaning does not necessarily amount to intentional fallacy. In fact, exploring a facility's purpose and history can help to clarify the forces that shape both construction and function (Dickinson, Ott, and Aoki 87).

Skolnick and his team want to create a metonymic relationship between Ali and MAC. The two should be largely inseparable in exhibits that embody the success story of Ali organized in stations around each of his core values of *respect, confidence, conviction, dedication, giving, and spirituality*. Invited to reconsider their positions as citizens of the world in light of his life story, visitors are prompted first to identify with Ali and

then to move beyond mere identification and toward *transformation*, a term used by Kenneth Burke to describe an adaptation or “self-immolation” in which one’s identity may be “reborn” as something new (11). More specifically, transformation reflects a “desire to *transform the principle* which that person *represents*” (Burke’s emphasis, 13), to recreate or resurrect the person entirely, aligned and identified with a revised set of principles. MAC achieves this transformative goal for the “Louisville Lip” as we see him evolve from brash fighter to tireless humanitarian. But while this depiction of an evolving Ali is powerful, it does not necessarily lead visitors to their own transformations. Can it? Should it? Should *his* values become *their* values? Should his choice to define his life by values be imitated? These questions emerge from a problematic gap that we see between theory and practice in Skolnick’s plans for the facility.

Such transformations are always difficult. In “Doing Identity Work in Museums,” Jay Rounds explains that visitors undergo transformation via identity creation, a process by which “we construct, maintain, and adapt our sense of personal identity, and persuade other people to believe that identity” (33). The museum, according to Rounds, is a “low risk” environment where we can try on personas, re-shaping and refashioning our own identity, and exploring perspectives that may be vastly different from our own. More importantly, we “can act as . . . ‘objective’ observer[s], without risking being tainted by participation” (Rounds 146). This notion of “identity work” demonstrates a double bind for MAC and Ali as the curators want education and social justice to be the Center’s priority while visitors often want only to see Muhammad Ali. In essence, visitors want to “try on” *his* stardom, *his* philanthropy, without necessarily having to transform themselves, an action that would implicate them in both his experiences and his values.

Perhaps if Ali’s life had been simpler, a story leading to transformation could have been more clearly and convincingly told. But both his life and

the relationship of his values to his life suggest a complexity that cannot be easily presented and even less easily assimilated. In fact, simplifications of Ali's story lead to idealizations. While MAC reputedly represents both Ali's virtues and his flaws, the focus is ever on a heroic man. For example, Michael Ezra explains that the facility does not foreground moments where Ali has "veered . . . from his supposed core tenets of respect, confidence, conviction, dedication, giving, and spirituality" (190). He points to Ali's taunting opponents and the apparent contradictions in Ali's beliefs about race relations and the status of women. Ezra's harshest criticisms suggest that MAC papers over the negative aspects of Ali's life in order to prioritize a version that is both "accessible" and acceptable to a broad public. This version of a heroic Ali is rendered throughout the facility, beginning with its exterior where a giant mural shows Ali's face and boxing figure in action to suggest the power and strength of the man. The gently folding roof of the Center recalls Ali's famous 'float like a butterfly.' The five-story aluminum cone evokes the torch carried by Ali in the 1996 Olympics. From the moment we approach MAC, this massive and very public Ali obscures the more complex and value-based Ali we are meant to experience inside. Instead mythic figures like the Ali displayed here often hold sway over cultural memory. Jeanne van Eeden, working from Roland Barthes' notion of cultural "myth," explains how mythologies function as "go-to" reference points for cultural memory, particularly in the context of painful histories. She says "the apparatus of myth naturalizes, renders innocuous, and legitimates social constructions. Mythic discourse invariably reduces things to the simplicity of essences or stereotypes, and 'freezes into an eternal reference' that which it wishes to justify" (Van Eeden 20). Ultimately, it is easier to see Ali as a myth fixed in history, as only and always a celebrity, despite the fact that MAC offers extensive commentary related to subjects like global education, race and social justice, and human rights.

To better understand how visitors interpret the Center's invitations to meaning we turn to comments they left at MAC and online. The voices of visitors have been notably silent from scholarship about museums, even in *Museum Studies* (Kirchberg and Trondle). While these voices do not tell the entire story—visitor comments represent a very small and highly interested population—they are helpful in illuminating narrative threads that circulate between designer, subject, and audience.<sup>3</sup> In the end, they give us a place to begin analyzing how designed space is or is not being interpreted. And there is some precedent for this sort of work. Blair and Michel explain that “real audiences” often constitute unfamiliar ground for rhetorical critics (46) who are generally more invested in theoretical nuance than audience reaction. However, visitor reactions can suggest how meanings may be lost when a text fails to evoke the right cultural cues and codes.

In our analysis of visitor comments, we observed that individuals access the facility through a number of distinct, but often overlapping, interpretive lenses. For some patrons, MAC is the literal embodiment of Ali; they refer to him by name in their comments, aligning the structure with the man himself. For example:

<sup>3</sup> We examined comments left in the MAC visitor books, along with comments posted to the popular consumer rating websites Yelp and TripAdvisor, in order to observe rhetorical invitations and the interpretive lenses through which individuals view the facility. Examining 243 total comments, we identified several, often overlapping themes. This method of examining unstructured visitor comments is useful for not only considering what visitors bring to and away from museum spaces (Macdonald; Noy); it also helps us consider how visitors make meaning from the various invitations available in the exhibition.

Well worth traveling 7000 miles! You are my idol and always will be. Keep up your good work, you are an inspiration to all! Thanks a million!—Peace. (Muhammad Ali Center)

Others see MAC as a conventional history or sports history museum and leave disappointed that there isn't more memorabilia:

Despite its beautiful location, excellent organization and inspiring focus, the Ali Center didn't exactly blow me away. As other reviewers have said, the museum didn't include nearly as much memorabilia as I'd hoped they would. Part of the reason I love visiting museums is having the opportunity to see history in person. I find it very, very hard to believe that the Ali museum didn't have access to more championship belts, robes, trunks, pairs of gloves, fight posters, contracts, etc. After a while I felt like I was reading a book rather than visiting a museum. (In fairness, it was a very engaging book!) ("Muhammad Ali Center" Yelp.com)

Still others interpret MAC as a memorial to Ali's life, as a human rights center, or as an educational facility.

Thanks for all the wonderful memories. I've enjoyed your fights. You're still the greatest of all time. Just stopped by to visit your center. It's a great representation of your life and what champions are made of. (Muhammad Ali Center)

Very impressive building but sadly lacking on the whole essence of the legend that is Muhammad Ali. I agree with the previous reviewer that the main focus appears to be on Human Rights and whilst this is a very important subject I felt it was not the best venue and it detracts from the greatness of the big man himself. ("Muhammad Ali Center" TripAdvisor.com)



While it can be argued that MAC is or could be all of these things—a monument, a museum, and a human rights forum—the lack of continuity between invitation and interpretation is fundamentally at odds with MAC's articulated mission: “to preserve and share the legacy and ideals of Muhammad Ali, to promote respect, hope, and understanding, and to inspire adults and children everywhere to be as great as they can be” (*MAC Find Greatness Within*). In fact, visitor comments demonstrate that during their time at MAC, most patrons only grow in their reverence for Ali, they feel like they learn a great deal about his life, and they are inspired or touched by his experiences. However, because the design offers several stories but no overarching theme beyond Ali's greatness, many patrons revert to an iconic reverence for Ali as the embodied presence in the facility rather than seeking out Ali's and Skolnick's stated goal, “to be the greatest *we* can be” (*our emphasis*).

### A Walking Tour of MAC with “Noise”

Ali's heroic story starts near the top of the Center on the fifth floor. To reach it, visitors ride a long narrow escalator from the main lobby that deposits them at a small exhibit on “Ali the Artist,” where videos, voices, and large posters remind us of Ali's creativity—his magic and his rhymes: “Only last night I murdered a rock/Injured a stone, hospitalized a brick/I'm so mean I make medicine sick.”

Nearby, an Orientation Theater presents images of uplifting highlights from Ali's boxing career shown on several screens simultaneously. At the same time lines are read from Rudyard Kipling's poem “If”—“if you can dream. . . yours is the earth and everything that's in it”—suggesting that something special in Ali led him to the dream that defined him. Beyond the Orientation Theater are interactive stations that demonstrate how the values of respect, confidence, conviction, dedication, giving and spirituality (as well as hard work) informed Ali's life. Here, as in the

theater, visitors experience the complexity of the events and of the man, with stress on his most admirable actions.



**Figure 1: Layout of Fifth Floor (Muhammad Ali Center Visitor Guide and Map)**

In defining Ali and his life, these stations use short films, TV stills, photos, newspaper pages, and cartoons; Ali’s voice, commentators’ voices, actors’ voices, even James Brown’s voice singing “Do It to Death”; colors, lights, shadows, and various kinds of activities performed not just by the Champ but by visitors who often find themselves both

acting as and being acted on by Ali. For instance, at various times and in various places, visitors are invited to touch a replica of the stolen bicycle that led Ali to begin boxing; to go into a reproduction of a diner and, like young Ali, hear the owner refusing to serve them because they're "nigger[s]"; to enter a boxing ring to "train with Ali," practicing some of his moves, hitting and being hit by punching bags in order to understand how much strength the bag demands and to know what a punch by Ali feels like. In walking with Ali visitors are faced with a quandary. Ali is heroic; his achievements and accomplishments are everywhere. But MAC fails to demonstrate how visitors can become like him, and its design elements give them little time and space to try.

Attention to Ali's boxing continues down to the quieter fourth floor where visitors can choose to watch clips of Ali's greatest fights edited to 15-20 minute highlights on small consoles. But there are non-boxing exhibits as well: a 55-foot by 10-foot "Hope and Dream" mural of tiles created by children; and "Global Voices," a large floor display representing original poems, messages, and drawings solicited by the Center in response to "What are your hopes for the future? Who is special in your life? What is your wish for the world?" Visitors also find a cabinet with the various awards Ali has received as a peacemaker and as a representative of Parkinson's, and a "Lighting the Way" exhibit with projections and torches that represent the courageous Ali carrying the torch during the Summer Games in Atlanta.

Nowhere is this distance between Ali and museum visitors greater than in the section focused on Dedication. Divided into two areas titled "Train to Win" and "Building Strength and Endurance," this station seems to define "dedication" solely in terms of young Ali's (Cassius Clay's) commitment to being a champion boxer by training, eating carefully, studying other boxers, etc. This definition makes it difficult for viewers to take away any personal messages they can relate to their own lives except that—in this case—hard work has led to the achievement of a goal. But

since most of us have had experiences contradicting this message, transferring Ali's successful story of dedication to ourselves is often not possible.



**Figure 2: Dedication Station (Muhammad Ali Center)**

Moreover, the Dedication Station, like all the stations, overloads the senses. No guide exists through its chaos except for the announced theme of “Dedication.” Sounds within this station and in adjacent stations assault visitors: someone hitting a punching bag; Howard Cosell’s voice commenting on an Ali fight; other voices, some representing quotes from the wall, some unintelligible; all the while, syncopated music of drums and cymbals continuously playing. Sights are similarly chaotic. The station is made up of a series of differently sized orange/brown and black panels—each panel combining different sized pictures, commentary, and quotes with sources (commentary and quotes distinguished by type) which force visitors’ eyes to shift again and again as sizes and typefaces change.



**Figure 3: Dedication Station (Miller)**

Competing with DEDICATION on the first panel is a larger-than-life image of young Ali (with jump rope) in sepia tones. Over the lower parts of the figure are boxes of text with white type on brown-orange background, with some lines longer than others. Here, and throughout this station, quotes are centered, bold-faced, and larger than the commentary that is always justified at the left; source information is right-justified below the quotes. Visitors see the identified words of Odessa Grady Clay, 1975/*I Am King*; Joe Martin/*Sports Illustrated*, September 25, 1961; Hunt Helm/*Louisville Courier-Journal*, September 14, 1997; Angelo Dundee, 1967/*Black Is Best: The Riddle of Cassius Clay*; Robert Lipsyte, 1967/*The Contender*, and so on. Both the quotations and the commentary are presented in short lines that suggest free verse, lending seriousness and status to what is being described.

Often the commentary and quotation supplement each other as in a short panel that follows an image of young Ali in mock argument demonstrates:

The young athlete had a tremendous appetite: on the amateur circuit “he would eat enough food for three or four other boys,” said Joe Martin. But he was particular about his diet and careful about his health.

**At Central High in those days, Clay was known as the kid who drank water with garlic, who drank milk with raw eggs, who wouldn’t smoke, who wouldn’t drink even carbonated soda pop, who ran and shadowboxed as often as he walked, who was very shy, especially around girls . . .”**

Hunt Helm,  
*Louisville Courier-Journal* September 14, 1997

In other cases, the quotation and the commentary don’t seem to match. At the same Dedication Station we see the following quote from Ali:

**“Champions are made from something they have deep inside them— a desire, a dream, a vision.”**

Muhammad Ali, 1975  
*The Greatest, My Own Story*

This quotation suggests that Ali believes that the dedication that makes champions comes from something intangible, from a “dream” within, and not from something the champion does; it’s that internal “desire” that makes him such an extraordinary individual. In contrast, the commentary that follows Ali’s quotation begins by suggesting the importance of hard work, “endless hours of practice,” as a means of making a champion.

Set your goal. Focus. Drive. Deliver. Dedication to a goal demands diligence, grinding effort and endless hours of practice. Visualize success. When you reach that goal, the thrill of your triumph will propel you to the next one.

*Champions aren’t made in gyms.*  
Championship springs from a glowing spark within—“from something deep inside.” Every single day effort pushes towards excellence, over obstacles, and through setbacks. Others can help you, but the achievement is your own.

“I’ve never fought anyone with a will so strong,” said Joe Frasier of Muhammad Ali. The young man with a dream became the Heavyweight Champion of the World—not once but three times. An achievement in the ring proved to be just the *first* dream to which Ali dedicated himself.

These short lines, with non-technical language very like Ali’s own quoted throughout MAC, identify first a kind of mental or imaginative effort (“Dedication to a goal”), then a physical effort (“grinding effort and

endless hours of practice”), then a return to the mental (“Visualize success.”), then a denial of the role of the physical (“*Champions aren’t made in gyms.*”), and finally a move from the voice of the anonymous commentator to the authoritative voice of boxer Joe Frasier who testifies to Ali’s strong will. But nothing in the panel acknowledges this back-and-forth development; readers are left to try to make sense of the relationships presented. Is the champion driven by something “deep inside” or by hard work, pushing “towards / excellence, over obstacles, and through / setbacks”? One or both? Under what conditions? The end of this panel, with Joe Frasier’s quote, returns to the idea of something intrinsic, “a will so /strong.” But the “will so /strong” that defines Ali also seems to limit those that he can influence through MAC. Do visitors inevitably have a “will so /strong” like Ali’s? And do no other factors matter in the achieving of dreams?



**Figure 4: Dedication Station (Shelter)**

The Dedication Station continues with panels filled with full and half-sized blocks of texts and photographs. At one point, visitors arrive at an



oversized screen with videos of the young boxer training; here, commentary competes with the always-present sounds. And then more panels, pictures, scripts, voices. The boxer *as he is presented here* is so energetic and active and engaging that visitors are unlikely to reflect on Ali's growth as an argument that they might embrace for themselves. And at least one panel—the third panel (from left) in Figure 4 above—discourages ideas about transformation with a confounding image. In a mock argument, Ali is apparently yelling and shaking his fist at what appears to be some kind of artificial construction in his other hand. Visitors can recognize the typical brashness represented by Ali's posture, where he seems to be competing "word-for-word" with the inanimate object he faces, but what is that object? Is it papier mâché? Foil? Paper? Is it art? A child's toy? A "doggie bag" from a restaurant? Some may see the photograph as incomprehensible and walk by; others may stand and try to make some sense of it, perhaps seeing in the picture an example of Ali's comic side, a self-parody. (A later photograph in the same station shows the young boxer jumping rope while looking at himself in the mirror, a pose which suggests he is acknowledging and making fun of the egotism attached to him.) But it's not clear here what visitors are to make of the "argument" photo, what it has to do with dedication, or whether they are even supposed to puzzle over it.

### On "Difficult" Subject Matter at MAC

MAC's exhibits end quietly, with a transition to the older Ali, displays of medals and honors he won for various social causes, leading to Ali holding the torch at the Atlanta Olympics in 1996. The curator intended this ending to emphasize Ali as a moral hero (Shaeffer-Nahmias), and it certainly does represent courage in spite of age and widely held respect in spite of/because of actions taken when healthy and when ill. The exhibit is also intended to cause visitors to look within:

[A]s visitors take hold of [individual Olympic ‘torches’], they will be amazed to find themselves on screen . . . a powerful . . . motivation to find purpose and strength in their own lives”—a reflection which, unfortunately, the technology does not currently support. Instead, Ali is our model here. Just as he found fulfillment, we’re told that “each of us . . . [can] reach our personal goal, discover greatness in ourselves, and become shining beacons of life” (MAC Presskit).

We were certainly moved, moved for what he has become and for what—in spite of age and Parkinson’s—he still represents. But neither of us was moved enough to change our lives. And comments left by other visitors suggest that we’re not the only ones who leave failing to embrace the “ideals of Muhammad Ali” and failing to be inspired “to be as great as [we] can be” (*MAC Find Greatness Within*) beyond any commitments we had prior to our visit.

While our analysis has, thus far, focused on design characteristics and the dominance of Ali’s mythic image, a third complication potentially makes transformation problematic for many visitors: Difficult subject matter is everywhere on display at MAC, though, again, visitors are rarely given time or space to think it over. The story of Ali indicts generations of Americans who have done little to alter the lives of young men and women unable to transcend poverty and discrimination the way Ali has done. According to Elizabeth Carnegie, difficult subject matter is an essential problem for museum designers because people do not like to engage with distasteful histories. For Carnegie, the museum experience is tied to memory. If the memories evoked by the displays, atmosphere, or artifacts are memories of turmoil, shame or conflict, then it is only



**Figure 5: Ali at the Atlanta Olympics (Muhammad Ali Center)**

reasonable that visitors are more likely to resist or reject their part in this narrative (80). The result, according to Marilyn Hood, is that visitors will “stay away” from certain kinds of museums if they feel the content is at odds with their desire for certain kinds of experiences (54). And those who do visit may simply “shut down” in response to difficult moments in their tour. To accommodate a tendency on the part of visitors to resist subjects that may implicate them in ongoing (rather than historical) inequities, museums will often focus on what Victoria Gallagher identifies as an educational mission in her analysis of The Birmingham Civil Rights Institute. In this case, the teaching of history is meant to correspond with and support a *remembrance* function that “argues against forgetting the past” (312). The larger objective for such museums, according to Gallagher, is to balance the “pastness” of the injustice with its contemporary legacy so that visitors become educated about historical movements but also come to understand that the inequalities these movements challenged remain active in civil society.

As we have noted, one explicit goal at MAC is to see this process of education and remembrance embodied in the life of Muhammad Ali and to inspire visitors to learn from his experience how to battle social injustice. However, MAC's design makes it easy for visitors to displace racial tension back onto Ali and away from their own lives when exhibits define racial discrimination as one more hurdle overcome by the great man. He encounters racism growing up in segregated Louisville. He encounters it in his refusal of the draft and in his embracing of Islam. MAC's vision of Ali is so powerful and so purpose-driven that even the evils of pervasive, systemic racism could not hold him back. African-American visitors especially may have a unique connection to Ali's battle with racism as James Throgmorton discusses in "Inventing the Greatest." He tells a story about a young African American family who enters the lunch counter exhibit, ostensibly in the segregated Louisville of Ali's youth. The family hears a disembodied racist voice shout "Hey, what are you doing here?" When the children in the group ask their mother about the hostile voice at the lunch counter, she recounts some of the history of race relations in the city. Throgmorton explains that, while visiting the same exhibit, he felt a "twinge of fear and rejection" but nothing like the "embodied memory" that would have been evoked for the mother in this family (250).

Some visitor comments suggest the importance of the exhibitions, and of MAC more generally, for civil rights history and for those who still experience daily the effects of what Eduardo Bonilla-Silva calls the invisible "grammar" of racism (1). One notable example describes Ali as "the Black Inspiration":

To the Ali Center-Thanks for honoring Ali-----the Black Inspiration for our youth and race. He never gave up when he was fighting in the ring and he hasn't given up now. God blessings to Ali & his family. (Muhammad Ali Center Visitor Book)

Other comments celebrate Ali's role in the history of civil rights and the educational value of learning "how things were" when Ali was breaking down racial barriers. But moving these racial dynamics to the present is an altogether different proposition, particularly for white visitors. Within African American and other non-white communities, this discourse is active and vibrant. However, an implicit goal of MAC is to make this problem of ongoing discrimination and inequality one that we *all* acknowledge and work to solve. Hinging the struggle for change to a larger-than-life Ali—who, we say to ourselves, battled racists rather than systemic racism (in which we are all complicit)—makes it too easy for even sympathetic visitors to reject their complicity or to avoid altogether an encounter with exhibits that prompt a powerful remembrance.

While race is the most prominent difficult subject on display, a second challenge haunts MAC's narrative: the experience of living with illness—in Ali's case, Parkinson's disease. This disease, which we have seen dramatically reduce Ali's physical and verbal capacities, is generally depicted as one more hurdle for Ali to overcome. While his struggle is admirable and inspiring, minimizing its influence on his life again perpetuates the cycle by which visitors may dissociate the ill/authentic Ali from the mythic Ali. The result is that lessons about illness and our attitudes about illness go un-interrogated. This displacement of illness from the dominant narrative of the Center is perhaps most notable in marketing materials produced for MAC.

For example, during a 2012 rebranding campaign a temporary landing page posted on the MAC homepage depicts an aged Ali in his fighter's stance, still vigorous and engaged despite the illness that has long disabled

him.<sup>4</sup> The accompanying text reads, “Now My Life Is Really Starting,” implying that this Ali is different. He is embracing his role as humanitarian, he is leaving behind the celebrity tied to his sporting achievements, and he is courageously battling Parkinson’s disease. This “new” Ali is pictured through a dark photo of the aging man in a stance that echoes the brash and youthful boxer he was in the past. This engaging image succeeds in appealing to our fascination with Ali but undermines how we might value or understand him now. After all, the “new” Ali—the hero, the myth—is a much easier pill to swallow as he saves us having to consider our assumptions about illness, as well as our own inevitable encounters with age and decline.

For most of our time in MAC, we experience *his* exciting and attractive story—the man who boxed with “speed and grace” and who spoke with cleverness and wit; the man who was refused service in a Louisville diner after he returned with Olympic Gold; the man who articulately argued against induction into a “war of domination of slave masters over the darker people of the earth” (MAC); the man whose civil protest caused him to be stripped of his title; the man who became known by superlatives: the “Athlete of the Century,” the “Sportsman of the Century,” the “Sports Personality of the Century,” the “World Sportsman of the Century.” We enjoy seeing his most popular moves, reliving his greatest battles, and finding him translated into art. The energy, the poetry, the articulateness, the ethics and the achievements of that larger-than-life Ali are indisputable. It is because he dominates the Center visually and vocally that the diminished and diseased Ali who defines the last exhibits is dramatic in its difference. Unfortunately, both versions of the man seem

<sup>4</sup> Due to branding conflicts, the Muhammad Ali Center did not grant permission to publish this image.

to undercut the broader purpose of the Center: the larger-than-life Ali makes any ethical or moral journeys we might take in imitation of him seem trivial, while the diminished Ali makes them uninviting.

## Conclusions

Ultimately, MAC's design choices result in a failure to achieve larger objectives tied to personal and social change. While these sorts of failures are not uncommon and do not apply to all visitors equally, we think they merit particular attention given the important goals that the facility has set for itself. Museums—like schools—are among the few places where large numbers of citizens come into contact with complex and sometimes difficult subject matter in a context that is meant to promote reflection and transformation.

We have offered this critique of MAC for two reasons. First, we lament the lost opportunity to generate conversation (if not change) related to issues of social justice, community activism, and human equality. Second, we feel that increased attention to how design of museum messages can undermine their rhetorical value might contribute to a larger conversation about refining and reinforcing such messages in other contexts, and particularly in settings where peace, justice, and equality are at the heart of a museum's mission. In fact, and quite separate from this analysis, MAC has undertaken a rebranding initiative that suggests it has arrived at similar conclusions about the failure of its message to reach more. Beginning with the hiring of new CEO Donald Lassere in 2012 and followed by a revised marketing campaign, MAC has fundamentally shifted its public ethos from Ali to Ali's values. The new site and logo remove the heroic image of Ali and replace him with the silhouette of a butterfly (see below), a simple reference to one of Ali's great lines.



**Figure 7: New MAC Site (<https://alicenter.org>)**

When Ali does appear in this new documentation, it is the contemporary Ali rather than the brash young fighter. This is a man more like us; he struggles and he fights, but he does not always win. The butterfly logo evokes Ali in his prime, of course, but it also redirects the attention of visitors from Ali’s sporting life to the philanthropic goals of the center, particularly those focused on transforming young people with revised MAC programming emphasizing four core themes: education, gender equality, global citizenship, and youth leadership through the Generation Ali program (Frassica).

While Ali remains a draw to the Center, the facility is now operating as two distinct but related spaces: a museum of Ali history and “an incubator for national and global change” (Frassica). This dual mission has taken on an added importance in the wake of Ali’s passing in June 2016. The Center must now do the work of maintaining both mission *and* memory. And while Ali’s core values are still central, MAC, in its latest incarnation, calls on us to “Be Great” and to “Do Great Things,”



suggesting we are no longer meant to passively live, walk, and talk in Ali's imposing footsteps (footsteps we could never hope to fill). Instead, we are challenged to "be" and to "do" things that we define as "great." MAC takes as its revised mission "helping people reach their personal goals" and "the betterment of the community around them" (Graham). We are still meant to transform—to redefine our own lives—but Ali's story is a demonstration, an example, rather than a template. Our values will be contingent on our own social, political, or spiritual interests; they will be designed with and for our own communities. We are now simply encouraged to be "great" in our actions, not to be "the greatest."

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# Challenging or Embracing Heteronormativity in Fictional Riverdale: An Analysis of the First Gay Character in *Archie Comics*

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In 2000, Linda Holtzman, sociologist, told us that homosexuality had been a difficult issue in American culture for many decades (beginning with its negative reception in the early 1900s and it continues today). Through the early decades of the 1900s, public discourse about (homo)sexuality was described as “repressed” and it wasn’t until the Stonewall Riots in 1969 that a Gay Liberation Movement clearly emerged.<sup>1</sup> Since the early 1970s, despite more social awareness, many homosexuals have continued to suppress their homosexuality in fear of personal and professional repercussions (*After Stonewall*; Kendall). From there, it wasn’t until the American Psychological Association removed, in its *Diagnostic Statistics Manual*, the word “disease” from its descriptions of homosexuality in 1974 (some conditions remained until 1987), and, more recently in 2013, removed the word “disorder” from the description of “gender identity disorder” that some GLBTQ rights were secured; since then more people have “come out” to others (Cameron, par 1).

Surely their struggle is ongoing and, as many scholars note, “coming-out” is a lifelong process of acceptance and rejection (e.g., Bacon; Dow;

<sup>1</sup> See *After Stonewall*; Felluga; and Foucault.

Gorman-Murray; Kendall). However, “coming out” stories “offer valuable insights into how to solve the dilemma of being absolutely sure of identity at the same time as being keenly aware of one’s relativity to all others in one’s class or group. This will make them a central element in any academic discourse about gay and lesbian studies and research” (“Coming Out Stories,” par. 9); it is also “through interpersonal contact and the media, persons who are ‘coming out’ search both interpersonal and *media* environments for clues to understanding their feelings and sense of difference” (Fejes and Petrich 396; emphasis added).

Therefore, media discourse is a place where these stories and GLBTQ characters are presented to audiences in support of and/or as a challenge to assumed social norms present in public discourse. This article contributes to the public discourse with a focus on a fictional gay<sup>2</sup> teenager in the *Archie* comic book series *Veronica* and its embedded miniseries “Kevin Keller” (*Veronica* #202-208). Specifically, the author uses Connell and Messerschmidt’s “process of social embodiment” and “dynamics of masculinity” to analyze this gay character in a heteronormative comic book culture while also suggesting how doing so offers a much-needed reshaping of hegemonic masculinity that appeals to critics and readers alike.

<sup>2</sup> Although the terms *homosexual* and *homosexuality* are used early in this essay, the author acknowledges that those terms are considered “derogatory and offensive by many gay and lesbian people” and will not be used in the remainder of the essay (“Glossary of Terms” 6). The context early in this paper necessitated their use.

## Literature Review

While much comic book research exists (e.g., Goulart; Lowell; Trushell; Wright), none has had the opportunity to explore the presence of an explicitly gay character in *Archie Comics*. According to Archie Comics Publications, the comic series began in 1939 and is still running strong, despite announcing its “Death of Archie” in the last issue of *Life with Archie* series in 2014, where he stands up for his gay friend and pays the ultimate price (“The Death”). Not surprisingly, *Archie Comics* has prided itself on dealing with current issues throughout the decades, including bullying, drugs, Vietnam, and introducing diversity through depictions of African-American and Hispanic American characters on a regular basis in the 1970s and 1980s (“Archie Comics Publications, Inc. History”; Heater). However, it was not until September 2010 in *Veronica* (#202) that *Archie Comics* presented another type of diversity: sexual orientation (Gustines, “A New Character”; Parent, “Isn’t It Bro-Mantic?”). In this first issue, we meet Kevin Keller, the first openly gay character in Riverdale, who also happens to be White, has blonde hair and blue eyes, and is athletic; thereby reflecting the series’ Caucasian focus and the privileges that come along with being a White male in today’s society. In Battles and Hilton-Morrow’s article from 2002, they discuss how gay characters are often depicted as “handsome, muscular, and physically fit,” all of which are reflected in Kevin Keller and emphasized in his performance of masculinity (90).

While some academic research has analyzed gay and lesbian characters (e.g., Astor; Dennis; Diaz; Lowry; Mangels; Palmer-Mehta and Hay) in comic books, graphic novels, TV series, film, and comic strips since 2010, none has focused on gay non-superheroes in comic books, like the gay character analyzed here. Despite the positive tone set by the publisher, some loyal readers were against this character’s development and threatened to end their subscriptions. Eventually, only about a dozen



subscribers cancelled their subscriptions, with overall subscriptions increasing by 1000%; the issue actually sold out and had to be reprinted to meet public demand (Phegley3). Clearly, as Pellerito, a president of the company, notes, most readers were ready to have a gay character enter *Archie Comics* discourse, to better reflect the social discourse (Phegley 3). This is evidenced by the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation's (GLAAD) nominations of Dan Parent (writer and illustrator) for Outstanding Comic Book in 2011 for *Veronica* #202, *Veronica* and gang as allies for the GLBTQ community, *Veronica* #207 in 2012, and Parent again in 2013 ("24<sup>th</sup> Media GLAAD Awards"). Clearly, an analysis of Kevin Keller in *Archie Comics* is necessary.

### Heteronormativity

With such hubbub surrounding this new gay character, Kevin Keller, the focus of this analysis is on several *Veronica* issues and the early issues of the "Kevin Keller" miniseries (Gustines, "Gay *Archie*"; Parent, "Meet Kevin Keller"). Specifically, the author uses two elements of Connell and Messerschmidt's hegemonic masculinity framework, "process of social embodiment" and "dynamics of masculinity," to assess the heteronormative culture of fictional Riverdale and Kevin's position in that culture. To draw conclusions about the heteronormative culture of *Archie Comics*, the author identifies the following: Kevin's hypermasculinity that emerges when readers are presented with his presumed "fault" or "weakness" (his being gay) in his masculinity, as defined in a heteronormative culture; the contradictory, yet plausible, meaning of his absence and then renewed presence in *Veronica* following

his “coming out” debut issue (#202); and the self-empowerment depicted in his “coming out” story (#207).

Prior to the analysis, it is important to note how heteronormative culture<sup>3</sup> is present not only in fictional Riverdale but also in the U.S., since there is often a symbiotic relationship between societal and media discourses. History suggests that gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transsexual or transgender (GLBTQ) culture did not publicly emerge until after the 1969 Stonewall Riots and the commencement of the Gay Liberation Movement in the 1970s. Readers may also know that someone would not have to be liberated if s/he was not oppressed, and that this oppression occurred, and still occurs in some instances, in the workplace, social venues, privacy of one’s home, and the general public discourse, such that many GLBTQ people repress their true identities. Therefore, when Kevin Keller is introduced into *Archie Comics* culture, where few minorities reside and no members of the GLBTQ community are openly present (thus oppressed and repressed), this is a major step forward in the world of pop culture, and specifically, *Archie Comics*. Unlike other comic book characters (e.g., the Green Lantern’s Alan Scott or Marvel’s Northstar) and research articles about gay superheroes (e.g., Bartlett; Kornfield), it took 71 years for an openly gay teenager, Kevin Keller, to “arrive” in Riverdale (*Veronica* #202; entitled, “Isn’t It Bro-Mantic?”). Here, Kevin is introduced to Riverdale’s heteronormative culture and all of its gender expectations with masculine confidence, when the female lead character, Veronica, assumes from the outset that Kevin is heterosexual and thus available as a romantic interest. He is clearly labeled the “Hot New Guy”

<sup>3</sup> “. . . the institutions, structures of understanding, and practical orientations that make heterosexuality seem not only coherent—that is organized as a sexuality—but also privileged” (Berlant and Warner 1722).

for Veronica to pursue, which supports Battles and Hilton-Morrow's claim above about gay leads and their female counterparts. Kevin Keller is relentlessly pursued by Veronica as a viable boyfriend in heterosexual Riverdale until she learns of his sexual orientation. The writers position Kevin as part of this heteronormative framework, but do so to allow character development and for Veronica to learn about his sexuality over time, which then also allows readers time to embrace this new character.

Additionally, hegemonic masculinity guides Kevin's gender performance until Veronica learns he is gay. Connell and Messerschmidt offer a thorough investigation and criticism of prior research on "hegemonic masculinity" and explain it this way:

Hegemonic masculinity was understood as the pattern of practice (i.e., things done, not just a set of role expectations or an identity) that allowed men's dominance over women to continue . . .  
Hegemonic masculinity was not assumed to be normal in the statistical sense . . . but it was certainly normative. (832)

These researchers use this normative component when reformulating hegemonic masculinity in four key areas: gender hierarchy, geography of masculine configurations, the process of social embodiment, and the dynamics of masculinity. For analytic purposes and publishing constraints, this author employs both the "process of social embodiment of masculinity" and "dynamics of masculinity" as the analytic framework for how Kevin Keller is depicted within this heteronormative culture and how one gay character initially embraces hegemonic masculinity when it is desirable, but also distances himself strategically from hegemonic masculinity at other moments; thus allowing readers to note that he is not a hegemonic male and that he may have to reshape assumptions people have of masculinity before being accepted in Riverdale.

## Analysis

The “process of social embodiment” and the “dynamics of masculinity” are keys to Kevin’s success as a (gay) teenager in heteronormative Riverdale. First, Connell and Messerschmidt explain how the process of social embodiment emerges in many contexts:

In youth, skilled bodily activity becomes a prime indicator of masculinity . . . [b]ody practices such as eating meat and taking risks on the road also become linked with masculine identities . . . involve specific patterns of internal division and emotional conflict, precisely because of their association with gendered power (851-852).

With Kevin Keller, the process of social embodiment includes, among other things, events in which he partakes, the physicality of his body, and the ways in which he comports himself in public, ranging from his risk-taking behavior in coming out to Jughead to his run for Class President, his sports prowess (track and field), and to his “competitive eating,” formally via pie-eating contests and informally with Jughead. Connell and Messerschmidt discuss how the eating of meat, especially in large quantities, is a reflection of masculinity in hegemonic culture, and Kevin Keller is no exception. Also, his physicality is emphasized by his competitive edge so that when other boys threaten him or others, he challenges them to a sports-related event or directly confronts them, sometimes verbally and other times through practical jokes (e.g., a locker full of pudding). Kevin also embodies an alternative masculinity when he “comes out” to Jughead and others throughout the series and does so as a matter of course, not as an exception in the culture.

For example, Kevin announces he is gay to Jughead on page six of *Veronica* #202 and then to the Archie gang later in the first issue; which in comic book time and space is relatively short, especially for a new

character or any introduction into a social group. He “presents” himself as a confident, young gay man to a new male friend without fear of consequences, which is quite unexpected for readers and many GLBTQ youth. It is at the end of the first issue that Kevin’s sexuality is revealed to others in the community through Jughead’s ploy to embarrass Veronica, the lead female and his nemesis. Jughead does not address or discuss Kevin’s pronouncement when it is revealed to him, but he intends to use this information to set up Veronica, whom he knows is romantically pursuing Kevin. When others, such as Betty and Archie, Veronica’s friends, learn of Kevin’s sexuality, they too treat it as a nonissue and no member of this new core group of friends further questions his sexuality pronouncement or his masculinity; instead, he is readily accepted by his social peers.

However, when Veronica learns Kevin is gay, her response was one of surprise and also great relief that his not liking her as a girlfriend was not about her after all. With dramatic effect, she falls to the ground in disbelief as she hears Kevin’s news. When she sees Kevin giving Jughead the candy heart she actually offered to encourage *him* to be *her* boyfriend, she is depicted as angry as she says “I’ve lost boys to Betty! That I can deal with. And to Cheryl Blossom! Which is tough indeed! But when I start losing to Jughead—! AARGH!” (Parent, “Isn’t it Bro-Mantic?” 22).

The readers then notice that within three to five frames of Kevin’s sexuality being revealed to her, she and Kevin become fast friends. This assures the readers that Veronica’s anger was not directed at Kevin for his being gay but with the apparent disappointment she felt in “losing him” to her frequent male nemesis, Jughead. Clearly, Kevin’s homosexuality now becomes secondary to Veronica’s tense relationship with Jughead. Specifically, Kevin’s sexuality is a nonissue for Veronica, except that she wants to develop her newfound friendship with Kevin, which is one way the comic book offers positivity towards the gay community. Similarly, like many other gay male leads and their female cohorts, Kevin and

Veronica are later portrayed as BFFs (best friends forever) and ultimately become the “lead couple;” which fits the pattern Helene Shugart discovered in her article “Reinventing Privilege: The New (Gay) Man in Contemporary Popular Media,” where being a “lead couple” supports heteronormative culture and practice.

Additionally, in being part of this heteronormative culture, we also see the dynamics of Kevin’s masculinity, where his masculinity seems more like the masculine stereotypes than the representations of his being gay and are often at odds in the social discourse. Up to the point where Veronica discovers Kevin’s sexual orientation, Kevin and Jughead have been serious food competitors, comic book lovers, and friends. Kevin, just like Jughead, is a serious food competitor, which is just the beginning of his performance of masculinity in the series that positions itself against traditional gay male stereotypes of gay men liking musicals and engaging in feminine activities and behaviors. Readers actually “see” how Kevin’s masculinity has developed over the years. For example, in Parent’s “The Write Stuff” (the second issue of the miniseries), we see a younger Kevin relating his childhood idolatry of his military father into the receipt of the superhero cape from his father so younger “Superhero Kevin” could battle dragons, dinosaurs, witches, and wizards as other boys typically do (7). In this same issue (#208[2]), readers then see a slightly older Kevin being bullied at various times in middle school, where his masculinity is being questioned; he does not retaliate or engage these bullies like a superhero would until the story and dialogue focus on how Kevin was teased by two boys in his previous school. The boys say, “Look! Keller’s trying out for track! Isn’t he one of them Girly Boys?” (11). Here his masculinity is directly attacked and his sexuality directly questioned. Yet, he stands up to these bullies and challenges them to an athletic competition, which heightens his masculinity through sports and once again reminds us of Battle and Hilton-Morrow’s claim about gay characters being physically fit and Connell and Messerschmidt’s reminder that sports prowess can

“establish relations of distance and dominance over other men’s bodies,” which are part of the heteronormative culture and its hegemony (852).

In the frames that follow in this same issue of “The Write Stuff,” Kevin also emphasizes his athletic prowess, challenges the boys to a running race, and verbally puts them “in their place” (perhaps even a type of bullying itself), which is a form of hypermasculinity that occurs when males embrace and go beyond stereotypes of masculine behavior to further their own masculinity in the presence of others. Kevin finds his behavior acceptable and empowering as he wins the race against these bullies and then says to them, “If I’m such a Girly Man, and you can’t keep up with me—what would that make YOU?” (11). Here Kevin belittles the bullies by using their own words against them and making them “guilty by association,” thus “Girly Boys” too by their own definition.

However, this author notes that Kevin “ups the ante” when he uses the word *man* instead of *boy* in his response to the bullies and emphasizes their identity with a capital lettered *YOU*, thus further empowering himself and placing more distance between him and these boys, and thus also “upping” his masculinity in the moment (11). In doing so, he engages in the “culture of cruelty,” where boys who don’t measure up are ridiculed or beaten up in order to secure one’s own masculinity in the heteronormative culture (*Boys Will Be Men*). Even more so, we see Kevin move from not defending himself to defending himself and then to defending other boys in his current high school (Parent, “The Write Stuff” 12). This supports the idea that he now understands how the dynamics of masculinity have become about defending himself and providing a space for him within the heteronormative culture.

Moreover, in this same issue (#208[2]), Kevin witnesses a smaller-sized high school boy, Sydney, being bullied by other boys and having his belongings knocked to the ground. He assists Sydney in gathering his things and tells Sydney he will report the bullying, but before doing so he gets revenge when he puts pudding in one of the bully’s lockers and tells

him, “I suggest you take your bullying *elsewhere!* Because *I’m* on the case, moron!” (12-14; emphasis added). Here we once again see his hypermasculinity displayed in the vision of manhood defined by being the aggressor (*Tough Guise: Crisis in Masculinity*), yet we also see its opposite when Kevin assists Sydney without worrying about the “boy code” present for most males in American culture, where boys must defend themselves and always be “real men,” not “women” or “gay,” as (stereo)typically defined in our culture (*Boys Will Be Men*). It is clear that Kevin is now not afraid of what the other boys think, and so he defies the “boy code” that emphasizes not caring about others who don’t measure up and also finding boys who rescue other boys “guilty” of not measuring up as well.

Kevin cares about what happens to Sydney and defends him which is both hypermasculine yet not, and provides an alternative to hypermasculinity and traditional masculinity, thus demonstrating the process of social embodiment of masculinity and dynamic nature of masculinity that Connell and Messerschmidt put forth. Ultimately, we see Kevin grow from confident little boy who idolizes his “superhero” military Dad, to weak and silent junior high school student who is bullied from school to school in the “culture of cruelty” (*Boys Will Be Men*), to confident, physically able, caring Kevin Keller we meet in high school, even though his confidence often borders on bullying others. Yet, Kevin’s hypermasculine behaviors are necessary in order to balance his interest in more traditionally “feminine” things that he and Veronica do appear to have in common, as evidenced below. In other words, Kevin sometimes offers even more alternatives, changing dynamics, to his performance of masculinity.

For example, once Veronica is aware of Kevin’s being gay in #202, Kevin suggests that he and Veronica have a lot in common and that they should go to the mall, which is a shift to a gender assumption about his apparent masculinity or lack thereof (Parent, “Isn’t It Bro-Mantic?” 24).



Kevin's invitation assures Veronica that her feminine prowess and beauty were not at fault for his lack of romantic interest in her, thus securing her own femininity and making them the perfect "lead couple" to which Shugart refers in her research.

In this case, Kevin can like feminine things but still be masculine; in a sense, Kevin has more gender fluidity than most other young men his age because of his confidence and ability to physically and athletically prove himself to others when questioned. In fact, his invitation to Veronica seems to lessen the harshness of Kevin's "bullying" of others by reminding the reader that he is a man who does appreciate some feminine behaviors and interests, and does seem to care about others who may not be able to defend themselves. His appreciation of these traditionally feminine things lessens his hypermasculinity and yet also maintains his alternative masculinity, thus assuring readers of the dynamics of masculinity. In support of Kevin, Veronica is shown to appreciate his performance of masculinity and his interest in some feminine behaviors and activities, thereby allowing her to embrace him as her friend at the end of this issue, ultimately making him one of the Archie "gang," and in a later issue, her very own BFF.

However, before developing this relationship with Veronica, Kevin, like many GLBTQ people, becomes somewhat "invisible" as he is backgrounded for a few consecutive *Veronica* issues. This author believes that the publisher may have been concerned about the aforementioned pressure some subscribers expressed about having a gay character—don't do too much too fast.

In #203, the fourth installment, readers encounter a BFF challenge focused on Veronica and Betty; therefore Kevin is absent (as are all regular boy characters from the series), because Betty is her true BFF in Riverdale. Then in #204, Veronica has a new goal: identify the second rich kid in Riverdale. On page four of this issue we can see Kevin sitting with other students at a cafeteria table in the background, but she says nothing

directly to him, and he in turn is silent, which acknowledges the issues of absence and presence for GLBTQ people. On page five he is shown holding a hamburger up to Jughead in Pop's Diner, reminding us of his masculine competitiveness, but once again he is silent. So, the few frames where Kevin is present, he is silent, even silenced through his presence as a new primary character in the series, and it is not until later that he is once again given "voice." He is also shown with the Archie gang at Pop's Diner where they, Kevin included, invite Veronica to join them at their table despite her bad behavior evident throughout the issue (Simmons 21). Finally, Kevin says of the rich guy, "He's won me over," when that character orders pizzas for everyone (Simmons 22). Kevin's reference to the new kid is about that character's wealth and pizza offering, not his attractiveness; and Kevin's remark reminds us once again that eating is masculine behavior and a focus for him within heteronormative culture.

In summary, Kevin is absent from #203 and appears sparingly throughout #204, but is back to his "eating and competing self," thereby re-embracing his masculine performance in the presence of others by the end of #204. It appears that assumed subscription pressures, if existent, were short-lived for this comic book series as Kevin returned in full presence and focus. However, the fact that he "disappeared" for largely two issues (which in comic book subscription time is a long time) raised suspicion and questions: Had *Archie Comics* introduced a gay character only to identify him in his absence and his silence? Had his lack of presence allowed readers sufficient time to get used to him as part of the group in a general way, rather than emphasizing his character and what it means to be a gay teenager in Riverdale? Since he becomes a focus again, this author's concerns are quelled and also emphasize the importance of Kevin Keller's experience in Riverdale and the *Archie Comics* universe. Perhaps Archie Comics Publications soon recognized the danger of Kevin's absence and fears about the pressures of heteronormative culture dictating the storyline.

In his reintroduction issue, (Parent's "The Buddy System," # 205) the publication directly acknowledges Kevin's absence in the previous issues and now makes visible what was invisible for largely two issues by labeling the front cover *Veronica: Kevin Keller Returns*. Suddenly, Kevin and Veronica are BFFs (usually reserved for referencing women in our lives) while Veronica's friend Betty feels left out of her best friend's life and complains to Archie, the lead male heterosexual character both Betty and Veronica desire, about this situation. Archie<sup>4</sup> quickly dismisses Betty's concerns when he says he likes when Veronica is with Kevin because he does not have to worry about her "seeing other guys.... since he's gay" (Parent, "The Buddy System" 11). Then, readers witness Kevin's portrayals of alternative performance of masculinity when, for the first time in *Veronica*, a fashion spread appears in #205 (and again, in #207). In these fashion spreads, readers see Veronica's and Kevin's fashions on a two-page centerfold. Here, Kevin is identified as fashion conscious, which reflects his more feminine, non-heterosexual side identified in previous issues, or as coined in discussions of *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*, his "metrosexuality"<sup>5</sup>:

<sup>4</sup> This is the first time the leader of the "gang" in Riverdale, Archie, makes Kevin's sexual orientation obviously present in his own discourse since Kevin came out (Parent, "Isn't It Bro-Mantic"). In fact, Archie, the primary lead character of the self-named publication, has no prolonged conversation with or about Kevin in the comic book issues until he is giving Kevin dating advice in the first issue of the Kevin Keller miniseries, which raises some interest for this reader in knowing how Archie feels about Kevin and his being gay (18). Archie clearly feels secure in his own masculinity since Kevin is gay and not a direct competitor for Veronica in the heteronormative culture in Riverdale. But, he seems to only engage in conversation with or about Kevin when that characteristic is made clear in dialogue.

<sup>5</sup> Although Kevin is not heterosexual, his performance of hypermasculinity allows this reader to claim the use of "metrosexuality" since the heteronormative culture of Riverdale has not yet tackled homosexuality in more detail up to this point.

“[m]etrosexuality” is defined as a male heterosexual who “is said to endorse equal opportunity vanity through cosmetics, softness, hair care products, wine bars, gyms, designer fashion, wealth, the culture industries, finance, cities, cosmetic surgery, David Beckham, and deodorants. (Miller 112)

His performance of this alternative masculinity in this heteronormative culture resurfaces in this issue and others and also challenges traditional notions of masculinity. First, he is shown using the phone to call “Ron” (his nickname for Veronica), thus interrupting her BFF time with Betty. The women are shown watching the *Laguna Hills* marathon on TV (an obvious reference to a recent Orange County TV show) and it is atypical for young men to show open public interest in this type of show or discuss it with their male friends, yet Kevin engages in a discussion about the show with his BFF, Veronica. In fact, the amount of time Kevin and Veronica spend “chatting” or “texting” is the initial focus of this issue and certainly brings to light their status as “lead couple” as Battles and Hilton-Morrow previously suggested.

Then, to reassure the reader that Kevin is not “too gay” and to thus challenge a gay stereotype Veronica holds about gay men, he directly scolds Veronica in a discussion about the soundtrack for *Phantom of the Opera*: “As a matter of fact, I hate musicals” (Parent, “The Buddy System” 15). She questions Kevin’s statement and says, “That’s impossible.” He responds with a bit of anger when he says, “Why, *Oh!* I see . . . enforcing old stereotypes . . . eh?” She quickly apologizes and says, “Sorry you got me!” He then smiles and says, “I’ll forgive you this time” (Parent, “The Buddy System” 16).

So, readers see traditional stereotypes about gay men exhibited through Kevin’s chatting on the phone, liking certain drama TV shows, and embracing fashion shoots early in the issue, but then the reader sees a direct questioning of a more obvious stereotype of gay men liking musicals by the gay male character himself, who in turn controls his

interaction with Veronica, such that he corrects her and her faulty assumptions in a verbally aggressive manner. Thus, reminding us of his hegemonic masculinity within a heteronormative culture; ultimately, as Shinsuke Eguchi suggests in her research about gay men in straight worlds, Kevin is clearly negotiating his masculinity in a “straight,” heteronormative world that embraces current and expected hegemonic masculinity in U.S. culture. While being a BFF to Veronica allows him to present his more stereotypical “feminine side” or “metrosexual side,” it is when he is confronted with one stereotype he does not embrace that he is empowered as a gay man to “call her out” and correct her assumptions in a verbally aggressive, hypermasculine way.

Clearly, Kevin represents some gay stereotypes and refutes others through his alternative, dynamic masculinity, which enables readers to encounter the complexity of being gay and in performing masculinity, without assumed contradictions. In #205, Kevin is now quite visible and demonstrating that gender performance is complex and fluid, and therefore, the performance may not accurately reflect assumed societal stereotypes. This is a positive depiction of gender fluidity connected to sexual orientation presented in the series and supports Connell and Messerschmidt’s argument for reshaping masculinity: process of social embodiment and dynamic masculinity.

As the *Veronica* series progresses to #206, Kevin is once again absent, as are other male regulars like Archie and Jughead, while Betty and Veronica “rekindle” their BFF status as superhero agents (Parent, “Spy Girls”). However, noticeably, Kevin’s upcoming four issue special series as part of the *Veronica* subscription is well advertised in this issue. He gets the focus from an ad on the inside cover, where readers learn that Kevin will take center stage in his own series and that two covers will be released. He draws attention from *Veronica* with a subscription insert for the four-issue miniseries, followed by another reminder later in the issue on a two-sided advertisement for readers. Clearly, the publication wants to

make Kevin more present and challenge heteronormative pressures from some subscribers by providing more background on Kevin and his family. This is where his character is further empowered and heteronormativity is again challenged in *Archie Comics*.

Then, in issue #207 Kevin is brought into full visibility by being foregrounded on the cover, while the others are placed in the background. To begin, we are reminded of Kevin's competitive side as he is shown with a devilish look and smile when competing with Jughead. Then, an abrasive exchange occurs with two strangers, where one new male character calls Kevin "pretty boy" (an expression of homophobia) and they both move physically closer together as though prepared to fight, but instead they begin to laugh aloud because the strangers are actually Kevin's old friends from his previous hometown, Wendy and William (Parent, "Meet Kevin Keller" 3). Readers may recognize them as Kevin's friends with whom he has exchanged quick texts in one of the previous issues, but the Archie characters were not privy to these exchanges.

Veronica then quickly assumes that since William and Kevin are *best* friends, they must be "an item" or a couple. She awkwardly asks, "So, how exactly did you and William meet. . . What I mean is . . ." to which Kevin sets the record straight about their friendship (4). Wendy then tells Veronica of her long-held crush on Kevin and how in her high school Kevin explained that he wanted to be friends with her but that he was interested in boys (12). Wendy, as was Veronica in issue #202, was immediately relieved that no girl would ever take her place with Kevin (12); both women are now secure in their femininity since neither is rejected because of looks, but rather because of sexual orientation, which ultimately reaffirms the heteronormative culture. However, Kevin's sexuality becomes more problematic and socially difficult when current social issues are raised for the readers.

For example, in that same issue, Kevin and Veronica have a discussion (13-14) about Kevin's desire to be in the military and be a journalist, and

she worries about him being hurt or wounded (14). But, at no point does she raise the conundrum of his being gay and being in the military, which were still clearly at odds in our culture (“Don’t Ask Don’t Tell” and its repeal have not resolved the rampant homophobia, despite the legal rights of our GLBTQ military members). Yet, Kevin then points out that his dad, his highly decorated military idol, supports his son’s sexuality, which counteracts a societal assumption held by many people that men in the military are homophobic, by saying, “And he’s proud of his son, gay or straight” (18). Kevin further negates this societal assumption when he tells his original “coming out” story; this is an act of empowerment for him and some readers in the heteronormative world who want to “come out” to their friends and family.

During his story, readers and his Archie friends learn that Kevin tells his mom first because he saw her as someone who would be understanding of his sexuality, but for fear that he might paint his military idol father in a bad light, clarifies this by saying, “Even though I knew my Dad would *accept* me . . . I was still scared to tell him! So I let my Mom pass the word on” (19; emphasis added). One downside to this part of the story is that the reader can only assume the “why” of Kevin’s being scared. But, Kevin doesn’t discuss why he is afraid of how his dad’s response would be manifested, especially from a man whose masculinity itself has been at least partially defined by the hypermasculinity often found in the military.

Ultimately, Kevin’s empowerment in coming out to his mother is initially short-lived when his mom accepts and supports his sexuality, but then lessens when he thinks about telling his dad. Kevin salvages his own fear in telling his dad with his Archie friends by clarifying how his dad supports his son’s sexuality and other goals, such as Kevin’s military aspirations, by remembering that his dad said, “I don’t want this to stop you! It takes a special person to serve their country! Someone with heart and courage! And that’s you, Kevin! To a tee!” (21). This supportive comment further empowers Kevin to be the best military recruit and son

despite some negatives in the heteronormative discourse on gays in the military and in society.

Clearly, Kevin's coming out narrative in this issue (# 207[1]) is empowering to him and perhaps many of his readers despite the reality that not all coming out narratives have the same result. Here, *Archie Comics* clearly allows the reader to see that coming out to one's friends and family doesn't always lead to negative repercussions or the denial of one's personal dreams and goals. Readers may also note just how masculinity can be quite complex when heteronormative culture is primary.

## Conclusion

Overall, *Veronica* provides a formidable representation of the issues many young gay men face today within heteronormative culture. In telling Kevin's story within *Veronica* and his self-named miniseries, the writers depict him as a confident young man who is proud to be gay and male, yet sometimes uses hypermasculine acts to offset traditional gay male stereotypes that emphasize the "culture of cruelty" young men experience growing up today (*Boys Will Be Men*). Kevin's process of social embodiment of masculinity and dynamics of masculinity are sometimes restrictive and gender stereotypical, but also varied enough at other times to offer alternatives which Connell and Messerschmidt suggest is necessary for a reshaping of hegemonic masculinity in the social discourse, and now, particularly, in *Archie Comics*.

Clearly, *Archie Comics* has offered positive depictions of gay men and enhanced current media and public discourse surrounding the GLBTQ community. Perhaps Kevin Keller can continue to be a role model for other GLBTQ readers and their allies, while *Archie Comics* can continue to be an ally to this community by representing masculinity in nuanced ways that appeal to critics and readers alike.



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# Following in the Footprints: Influence of Celebrities to Generate Community College Search

KRISTY TUCCIARONE

Community colleges have an impressive number of celebrity students (Giang): Walt Disney (innovator of motion pictures and creator of Mickey Mouse and Disneyland), Ross Perot (businessman and former presidential candidate), James Dean (actor and cultural icon), Clint Eastwood (actor, film maker, composer, and politician), George Lucas (film director), Billy Crystal (actor and film director), Jim Lehrer (journalist), Benjamin Cayetano (Governor of Hawaii), Nolan Archibald (CEO of Black & Decker), John Walsh (TV personality, victims advocate, and hotel developer), Jim Wright (Texas congressman and Speaker of House), Nolan Ryan (CEO of Texas Rangers and former major league baseball pitcher), Tom Hanks (actor and director), and Eileen Collins (NASA astronaut and space shuttle commander). Also, these community college celebrities may have more attention-getting power for high school students and soon-to-be graduates because of their Hollywood box office blockbusters: Arnold Schwarzenegger, Terri Hatcher, Eddie Murphy, and Halle Berry (Kohli). Following in the footprints of celebrities who attended a community college gives the institution ethos and a sense of connectedness, which is more times than not only bestowed to universities. As one research participant explained about a celebrity spokesperson, "It shows prospective students that community colleges are

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not always worse than universities; [community colleges] produce successful people too."

Celebrity appeal is not a new advertising strategy for convincing consumers that a brand is worthy of their attention. Celebrities can perpetuate product conversations and engage consumers in a narrative that is desired by consumers because they are an integrated part of the brand's message. A recent study of celebrity endorsements indicated ". . . that sales for some brands increased up to 20 percent" (Crutchfield). Consumers are exposed to over 3,000 advertisements each day through multiple channels (e.g., apps, billboards, magazines, radio, social media, television, and web sites). One hundred and fifty of the 3,000 advertisements reach the subconscious mind with approximately 30 percent reaching consumers' conscious mind (Crutchfield). Featuring celebrities endorsing a brand ". . . dramatically accelerate[s] the potential for your brand to reach the conscious mind of the consumer" (Crutchfield). Community colleges can reap attention using celebrities in advertisements. This study investigates how community colleges can increase its popularity and its attention given by potential college students by featuring celebrities who attended the college in advertisements.

Currently, there are 1,655 community colleges across the United States vying to get the attention of potential college students (U.S. Department of Education). Community colleges offer different benefits to students than four-year institutions. These institutions are respected for their open access and equality, comprehensive program offerings, commitment to teaching, community-based philosophy, and dedication to life-long learning (American Association of Community Colleges). More specifically, aside from the cost-effective tuition offered by community colleges, students can move at their own pace, balance personal and academic needs simultaneously, receive personalized attention from faculty and staff, and earn an associate's degree and then transfer to a four-year institution (Boyington). Although the traditional age of a community college student

is 29, many students who attend this type of educational institution later graduate from four-year institutions. According to a recent study by the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, ". . . 46 percent of all students who completed a 4-year degree had been enrolled at a 2-year institution at some point in the past. . . ." (Smith).

Traditionally, community colleges have been perceived as academically below four-year institutions. "Teens often consider community colleges to be undesirable and inferior" (Boyington). The president of Pasadena City College in California, who contends this depiction of community colleges, suggests that students view those attending community college as not being good enough for enrollment at a four-year university (Boyington).

Gaining the attention of high school graduates is at the forefront of community college admissions officers for several reasons. One, community colleges continue to feel competition from the for-profit sector. Two, selected programs, such as health care, also offer pressure because of competition. Three, community colleges are perceived as a place of departure rather than arrival. Students tend to feel affinity for the university that they graduated from rather than the institution that started their path to advanced education (Bellafante). Higher competition within education, as well as traditional notions about community colleges' image, are keeping many admissions representatives on the prowl to find ways to garner attention. To propel the search process among high school graduates to college choice or enrollment, celebrities can give these soon-to-be college students the opportunity to "follow in the footprints" of celebrities.

A 2012 study concluded that millennials were twice as likely than Gen Xers (aged 35-49) to be influenced by celebrities, four times more likely than boomers (aged 50-69), and ten times more likely than silents (aged 70 and older) (Barton, Koslow, and Beauchamp). In addition, celebrities appeal to millennials and bolster relationships, because both talk in the



same language. Millennials see elements of their personalities in the celebrity, which creates a personal connection (Hoffmann). Millennials will support and share a product when they feel a personal connection. The sense of personal connection is key as millennials are bombarded with more advertisements than they can pay attention to overall.

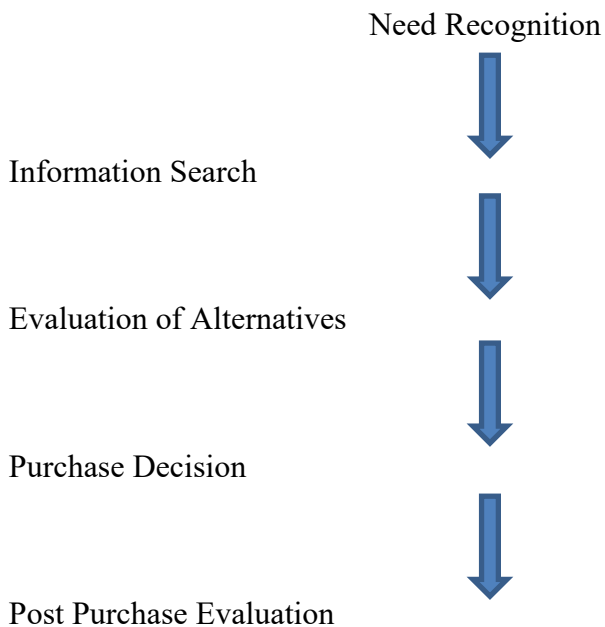
The advertising market for millennials can be oversaturated due to their exposure to all types of media. It is important to reach potential college students in ways that grab their attention and will be perceived as relevant to their lives. In the current research, which addressed how community colleges can gain the attention of prospective students by using the star power of celebrities, all the participants who attended community college were asked if they paid attention to advertisements when searching for community colleges to attend. Eighty-three percent of the participants said they did not recall advertising from community colleges. For the 17 percent of participants who did recall advertising, the community college message did not add to the decision-making process. "I think there isn't too much that separates community colleges, so anything to differentiate the college would be beneficial," declared a male participant. "Community colleges really aren't as popular or noticeable as a university. Advertising can get them noticed," shared a female participant.

## Literature Review

Currently, there are approximately 1.8 billion millennials (those born between 1980 and early 2000s) in the world. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, of those 1.8 billion, 25 million are aged 12-17, 31.5 million are aged 18-24, and 42.5 million are aged 25-34 (qtd. in "How Influential Are Celebrities?"). These ages represent the greatest proportion of aspiring college students. Millennials will outpace boomer earnings by 2018 as well as education ("Tiffany Makes Inroads with Millennials as Hepburn

Era Fades”). Millennials are the most educated generation in American history; meaning far more members of this generation are going to college than those of past generations (Patten and Fry).

Millennials are continuing their education after high school, but the question needs to be asked: How do they decide which institution to enroll? The list of influential factors affecting high school graduates' college choice is lengthy because higher education is defined as a "high involvement" purchase (Moriarty, Mitchell, and Wells 118). Consumers will go through a series of steps when making a purchase, better defined as the Consumer Decision Making Process (Moriarty, Mitchell, and Wells 151). For high involvement purchases, the process is sequenced as follows:



**Figure 1: Consumer Decision Making Process**

Need recognition is when a consumer identifies a need for a product or a service. The degree of the need varies in terms of importance. Information search is when a consumer seeks out information about products and/or services. Information search for high involvement purchases, such as higher education, is critical, as the risk of making a bad decision has greater monetary repercussions. Evaluation of alternatives is when a consumer compares features of products and/or services within a brand category. Upon conclusion of evaluation, the consumer will reduce the list options to a reasonable number. Purchase decision includes two parts: The first part is when the consumer takes a reasonable number and narrows the purchase to one brand. Once one brand is selected, the consumer decides where he/she will purchase the product and/or service. Post purchase evaluation is the last step in the Consumer Decision Making Process. During this stage, consumers will reconsider and/or justify the recent purchase. High involvement purchases are re-evaluated in deeper depth because of the greater financial investment.

As previously stated, higher education is a high involvement purchase. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, the average annual price for undergraduate tuition, fees, and board for the 2014-2015 academic year was approximately \$16,188 at public institutions, \$41,970 at private nonprofit institutions, and \$23,372 at private for-profit institutions. Deciding which institution to enroll requires an in-depth information search (see Fig. 1: Consumer Decision Making Process). Influential social factors include: reputation, graduates get good jobs, financial assistance, cost, social activities, campus visit, campus size, graduates accepted to master's program, percentage of students who graduate from institution, proximity to home, college website, ranking in national publications, parents' college choice, first college choice too expensive, early decision and/or early action, aid not offered at first college choice, advice by high school counselor, recruited by athletic department, relatives' college choice, religious affiliation, advice by

teacher, and ability to take online courses (Morse). Social forces can influence behaviors because they provide information, offer a means of comparison, and lend guidance (Wells, Moriarty, and Burnett 134).

Advertising initiatives are another pivotal force driving how students learn about college options. It is reported that only three percent of millennials think advertising is boring (Bruell). They are the first generation to be part of the brand's message, which allows them to be involved. Involvement offers millennials the opportunity to be co-creators of messages and not bystanders. College websites, a form of advertising, enables current students and alumni to share their college experience, while inviting prospective students to chat online.

One brand that consumers are willing to share passionately is where they went to college, as higher education is a brand. "Academe and the corporate world share many characteristics," and prospective customers, just like prospective students, have many choices of brands from which to pick (Lockwood and Hadd). A brand consists of a name, logo, tagline, color palette, architecture/design, and sounds. Community colleges tout brand identity elements to differentiate one college from another. Colleges offer community, culture, and connectedness. A college with a defined brand "transfers" to those looking to attend, those attending, and those who have graduated.

Community colleges have struggled with maintaining a solid brand because community colleges have developed in multiple directions. To date, community colleges have several varying institutional directions, such as comprehensive community college, academically orientated two-year college, community-based learning center, or postsecondary occupational training center (Townsend 316). Community colleges can amplify the brand experience by offering brand ambassadors (i.e., celebrities).

Brand ambassadors put a human face not only on brands and corporations, but on higher education too. The brand ambassadors for

higher education are current celebrity students or celebrity alumni. Millennials relate to celebrity students because the celebrity is relevant to the brand; after all, the celebrity picked this community college among hundreds of others to attend. The celebrity is not simply marketing a product (i.e., community college) but also *use* the product.

Brand ambassadors, or endorsers, represent a brand in a positive way. They embody the corporate identity in appearance, demeanor, values, and ethics; essentially, they are the brand. Brand ambassadors are a hybrid between public relations and human resources. Public relations practitioners develop relationships and human resource representatives educate. An effective brand ambassador is the walking and the talking embodiment of the product he or she represents. Brand ambassadors understand the brand as much as the manufacturing company; they are well versed in the brand history, brand identity, brand differentiation, and brand promise. A brand ambassador illuminates the product with human aspects, as well as the lifestyle that accompanies the product. Endorsers are individuals who are well known to the population because of the publicity associated with their lives.

There are three types of endorsers: expert, celebrity, and lay (Tellis 180). Experts are individuals or organizations that the target population perceives as having specialized knowledge in a field (for example, Bill Gates for Microsoft and the American Medical Association). Celebrities are individuals who are well known to the population because of the publicity associated with their lives. Examples of celebrity endorsers are entertainers, athletes (sports), businessmen and business women, politicians, reporters, consumer advocates, and religious leaders. Lay endorsers are unknown or fictitious individuals or characters. It is important to note that an endorser may be in more than one category. For example, Michael Jordan is an expert for basketball shoes and a celebrity for Hanes underwear. Brand ambassadors, or endorsers, are key to influencing college search, and ultimately, choice, because they "set the

mood [and reason] to bond over a universal human experience" (Hoffmann). Most four-year institutions invest in brand ambassadors because they explain what the institution does, differentiate the institution from others, and keep the brand's message consistent.

Currently, community colleges do not invest large amounts of dollars into the advertising budget, especially if enrollment is up. The mentality is that community colleges do not need to advertise in traditional ways for brand recognition, noting that most people know their local community college exists (Moltz). However, advertising is critical for top-of-mind awareness with key audiences (Moltz). In addition, advertising can combat the perception that community colleges are academically inferior to four-year institutions.

The key to featuring celebrity endorsers in advertisements is relevance. The celebrity must have a connection to the brand ("How Influential are Celebrities?). Celebrity community college students have the strongest connection possible to the brand; after all, they picked the college. To gauge this effectively, Ace Metrix, a company that measures celebrity ads, uses a tool called Ace Score. Ace Score measures how a commercial performs on voluntary consumer consumption and desired response from the advertiser. Ace Metrix reports that, ". . . those [ads] that out-performed had a strong connection to the endorsed brand . . ." ("How Influential are Celebrities? (updated)").

These examples illustrate the search and the enrollment power for community colleges using pop culture. The intellectual penguins from *Madagascar* featured one penguin in the third movie articulating his future, which included attending community college to later become president of the United States. Community college student Tom Hanks and A-list actress Julia Roberts appeared in *Larry Crowne* featuring an out-of-work middle-aged man returning to community college to hone his skills. Sitcom *Community* takes place on the campus of a community college. The trailer for the sitcom refers to a community college as a ". . . a

place where anyone can begin again" (Osborn). Pop culture is touting community colleges, and so are celebrities.

Acclaimed actor and director Robert Redford headlined the 2014 Middlesex Community College Celebrity Forum. According to the community college's president, "Mr. Redford certainly carries the star power with his Hollywood pedigree. But it's his inspirational leadership in taking on causes that help preserve our natural resources, and his championing of the art of independent filmmaking that have helped define him as an icon of our generation" (MCC Blog Admin). Although forced to teach at Los Angeles Trade Technical College as part of his community service, Kayne West has increased enrollment by 40 percent in the fashion design program. In addition to teaching, West offers personal mentoring for students attending his class (Lasane). If following in the footsteps of community college celebrities does not garner attention, then support from a celebrity likely will. Rapper 50 Cent provides scholarships to students at Queensborough or LaGuardia Community Colleges (Kristof). The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has donated \$35 million to community colleges in selected areas in a program called "Completion by Design" (Deprez).

Celebrities enter the Consumer Decision Making Process during the information gathering stage. This is the stage when prospective students are gathering information from various institutions of higher learning. The community college celebrity draws the attention to the institution, making the community college an integral part of the information search. The community college may have been omitted or overlooked if not for the pull-power of the celebrity. Star power is an effective advertising strategy for brands. "Just one endorsement can spell an increase in sales by four percent almost immediately" (Olenski).

Several examples are offered to illustrate the effects of celebrities on sales of products. During the 2017 Super Bowl, Lady Gaga debuted as the new face for Tiffany & Co. as a strategy to gain momentum with young shoppers. Quarter earnings increased to 92 cents a share, which was six

cents higher than analysts projected (Tiffany Makes Inroads with Millennials”). Digestive health boosting yogurt Activia featured Jamie Lee Curtis when the product was introduced. First year sales of \$130 million “. . . surpassed the \$100 million benchmark that qualifies as a new-product success story” (York). Athletic giant Nike entered the game of golf with Tiger Woods. During a ten-year period, the celebrity appeal of Woods generated an additional \$103 million in golf ball sales alone (Chung, Derdenger, and Srinivasan). Sales of products and services is the goal. Before a sale can be made, the product and/or service must generate awareness.

## Theoretical Framework

Nielsen released that millennials are “. . . most responsive to messages that use celebrity endorsement or related characters/themes.” In addition, “. . . they do believe and admire celebrities that are social and engage with their fans, so celebrity endorsements presented in a real/authentic way appeal to them.” Given that millennials respond to celebrity endorsers in a positive manner, there are three theories that articulate why endorsers work: 1) Source Credibility Theory; 2) Source Attractiveness Theory; and 3) Meaning Transfer Theory (Tellis 181-183).

Source Credibility Theory is based on the premise that “. . . acceptance of the message depends on the qualities of the source. Expertness and trustworthiness are two key qualities” that lead the consumer to accept the message (Tellis 181). Tellis defines expertness as the ability of the source (i.e., celebrity community college students) to make true claims. Consumers are more likely to accept the claim if the endorser is perceived as an expert. The willingness of the source to make true claims is part of trustworthiness.

Source Attractiveness Theory defines acceptance of the message dependent on the attractiveness of the source, which is based on



familiarity, likability, and similarity. Familiarity is the audience's knowledge of the source through exposure; likability is affection for the source's physical appearance and behavior; and similarity is the resemblance between source and receiver.

Meaning Transfer Theory is based on the premise that a celebrity encodes a set of meanings, which, if well used, can be transferred to the endorsed product. Meaning Transfer Theory can result in meaning capture. Meaning capture is when consumers buy the endorsed product with the intention of capturing some of the desirable meanings, which celebrities have imbued in the product. The theory assumes that consumers purchase products not merely for their functional value but also for their cultural and symbolic value.

## Conceptual Framework

Hossler and Gallagher's three-stage model of college choice is used in this study. The first phase of the model is called *predisposition*. It “. . . refers to the plans students develop for education or work after they graduate from high school” (Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper 9). *Search* is the second phase of the college choice model. In the search phase, students will explore various college options and gather information about each college's characteristics. The last phase is *choice*. It is at this stage that a student will narrow down his or her college choices and decide to enroll at a specific institution (Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper 9). Since this study examines how community colleges can gain the attention of prospective students using the star power of celebrities, *search* is the most applicable phase. It is during the search phase that college-bound and current students pay attention to advertising initiatives from colleges, which will ultimately determine college choice.

## Methodology

This qualitative study investigates how celebrity star power garners the attention of prospective students at community colleges. Former community college students were asked and agreed to participate in this study because they were recent high school graduates who were engaged in the college search process. Prior to attending college, these individuals were faced with preconceived notions about higher education. Possible questions that lingered for these students before entering institutions of higher learning were “should I attend college,” “which college should I attend,” and “what is college about?” To answer these questions, they browsed solicited and unsolicited information (e.g., brochures, catalogs, and flyers) from colleges. In addition, they may have paid attention to billboard, television, and social media advertisements. Possibly, they visited colleges that appeared to meet their needs, wants, and interests. Furthermore, they may have used their personal computers to browse school literature (Morse), take virtual tours, or chat with current students at the college.

Former community college students, rather than high school juniors and seniors, were also asked to participate in this study because these students understand which advertisements do and do not garner attention. They are keenly aware that advertising messages must be entertaining and engaging to be effective; relevance and connectedness to their world is critical. Research participants were 67 (33 males and 34 females) former community college students who were enrolled at 21 different community colleges in ten different states, ranging in student population and size. The participants were aged 19-22 with various ethnicities. The research participants were enrolled in upper-level advertising courses at a four-year liberal arts institution in Missouri. The institution enrolls a diverse population, increasing the generalizability of the current research findings. The major reasons given for selecting a community college as opposed to

other institutions of higher education were: 1) A+ program; 2) cheaper than university; 3) closer to home and family; and 4) completion of general education requirements.

The qualitative research method used to understand the proposed research question was focus group interviewing, which was selected for several reasons. Firstly, this method encourages subjects to speak freely, completely, and without criticism about their “. . . behaviors, attitudes, and opinions they possess” (Berg 111). Secondly, focus group interviewing creates a “synergistic group effect,” which lends to greater ideas, analyses, and discussions about the given topic (Berg 112). Lastly, and most importantly, this method is based upon interaction. “Meaning and answers arising during focus group interviews are socially constructed rather than individually created” (Berg 115). It is imperative to this type of study to use focus group interviewing because, as in focus groups, the process of selecting a college occurs socially. After the focus group, the researcher bracketed the data (Berg 116). Bracketing allows the researcher to hold the phenomenon (i.e., celebrity endorsers on college choice search) up close for inspection.

As the focus group moderator, the researcher explained the research project to the participants as well as how the focus groups would operate. Participants were told their responses would be recorded and transcribed for subsequent analysis by the researcher. Focus group size was between eight to ten students. The focus groups were conducted in a single session, with duration ranging from 60-90 minutes. To elicit discussion about how celebrity endorsers can garner attention during college search with a relevant message and media, the researcher crafted a series of discussion questions (see below), which is a common practice because focus groups provide a means for assessing intentionally created conversations about research topics (Berg 122). The discussion questions were the following:

Do you pay attention to celebrity endorsers? If so, why?

What media do you use to pay attention to celebrity endorsers?

Do you think a celebrity endorser is an effective spokesperson for a community college? Why?

When searching for higher education, describe a celebrity advertisement specific to community colleges that would gain your attention. Explain what the ad would look like and what the message would communicate.

When searching for higher education, what media are the most effective to receive messages from community colleges? Why?

## Analysis and Results

The researcher analyzed the recorded discussions and identified concepts the research participants deemed as true. Redundancies in the discussion questions prompted the researcher to identify similarities and make connections. It was apparent that these prospective students experienced a level of uncertainty, which brought about nervous and anxious feelings. This is understandable as college seekers desire information about higher education options because “people approaching a choice among unfamiliar options seek information on how to structure the problem” (Wright and Rip 177). Celebrities offer a credible, connectable framework, which will gain and perpetuate a dialogue desired by college seekers.

Sixty-nine percent of the participants reported that they pay attention to celebrity endorsers. "I pay attention [to celebrities], because they are intriguing and capture my attention. I watch celebrities on TV, in movies, and read in magazines. I pay attention to their lives, and I know who they are," said a female participant. The participants follow celebrities because

the celebrities have interesting lives and lifestyles; bottom line, celebrities are entertaining. A female participant majoring in fashion merchandising shared this: "I always pay attention to celebrities in the entertainment industry to see what they are wearing." A 20-year old male participant stated the allure of celebrities best when he said, "There must be a reason they've made it so far. I try to learn and listen to celebrities as much as possible, especially when considering my career goal, which is film making."

The participants in the study overwhelmingly preferred social media to follow celebrities, because it is the most convenient and easy to use. Social media/websites include: Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, Snapchat, Tumblr, and Twitter. As one male participant said, "I usually follow celebrities on social media, because I always have my phone." A female participant uses Instagram every day because she likes to ". . . scroll through the photos."

"The great thing that we know of social media is that it breeds this social intimacy with the star," contends Jo Piazza, author of *Celebrity Inc.* and the newly released *The Knockoff* (Rosenbaum). Sixty-seven percent of the participants reportedly use social media to follow celebrities. Community colleges can harness the power of their social media sites by showcasing celebrity students. A recent study of 7,000 high school students revealed that 68 percent use social media to research schools (Lytle).

Another preferred medium is Entertainment News television (otherwise referred to as E! News). Thirty-three percent of participants cited this medium. This is consistent with 2014 research by the American Press Institute, which concluded that entertainment news is the only topic followed by a majority of younger people.

Sixty-three percent of participants agreed that a celebrity endorser is an effective spokesperson for a community college, with the condition that the celebrity attended the endorsed college. Celebrity relevance to the

brand (i.e., community college education) is critical and influences choice. High school dropout Mark Wahlberg visited T.C. Williams High School in Alexandria, Virginia, to encourage students to stay in school. Wahlberg's message was perceived as influential because he was relevant (Brown). "Community college celebrities get people's attention and help them remember the college every time they see the celebrity endorser," shared a male participant. "I think a celebrity endorser will increase the amount of people who register, considering someone they look up to is acknowledging the academic benefits of the college," declared a female psychology participant. Another female participant said, "People look at celebrities every day, whether they are professional athletes, actors, singers, or politicians. They are all public figures and people are interested in them and what they have to say." The bottom line is that the celebrity has ". . . influential power. Community colleges aren't as popular or noticeable as a university; a celebrity endorser makes you look."

Thirty-seven percent of participants do not think a celebrity endorser is an effective spokesperson. The major reason cited was speculation that a celebrity would attend a community college; which is even more reason for community colleges to boast about their celebrity students and garner attention.

The last two research questions asked the participants to create a community college ad that would gain their attention and the most effective media to communicate the message. "Traveling back in time" is the resounding theme in the participants' responses. Sixty-seven percent of the participants think the connection between a community college education and the celebrity's success would increase search to enrollment. A male participant said,

"I think it would be cool to see an ad with the celebrity making his/her college decision. The TV commercial would show the celebrity weighing out the pros and cons of community college versus a big university. The ad would show why the celeb chose

the community college. Making the decision between which college to go to is hard. It would be nice to see someone well known going through the same tough decision."

Featuring an advertisement with the "traveling back in time" theme ". . . shows the celebrity being a part of the community college rather than just telling about it," declared a participant. A female participant offered this specific YouTube ad, "The advertisement should be a humorous video. The celebrity could be cramming for a final exam or accidentally sleeping through an 8 a.m. class. Show the celebrity going through typical college struggles, but make it a little silly because we all have been there!"

Social media and television were cited as the most effective media for receiving recruitment messages. Potential college students desire information and the need to be entertained during the college search. Social media was cited as effective because we are always connected. A female participant shared this about the "connectedness" factor, "You can share links to the community college's website on your timeline for your friends to see, connect to other students that attend the college, and learn more about the college on their profile." The article, "Six Reasons Your Community College Needs a Social Media Strategy and Not Just a Facebook Page," explains the robustness of one social media platform, Instagram: 53 percent of young adults ages 18-29 now use Instagram, making it very significant for student recruitment (Miller). Television was selected as a medium because of its ability to showcase unforgettable images. Television earns almost 23 hours of viewing each week among those aged 18-24 (Hinkley).

## Discussion

Attracting the positive attention of prospective students is at the forefront of community college admissions and recruitment officers due to

perceived community college image and multiple brand directions. In addition, attention to community college advertising goes unnoticed because of lack of advertising and/or a unique brand message. Attention to community college, as well as ethos and sense of connectedness, can be enhanced using star power. Star power equates to success in which the latter was propelled by a community college education.

Star power is often a strategy touted by universities. For example, the University of Michigan has a section on its website devoted to notable alumni. Community colleges can boast the same, thus challenging the notion that these institutions are less than four-year universities. Showcasing celebrity students and alumni needs to be included in the college's advertising creative executions and budget. Simply being in one's neighborhood does not open a dialogue with prospective students; prospective students need a reason to believe and to relate. Potential college students desire and demand relevance and connectedness to brands they chose to incorporate into their life. By far, college choice is one of the most prevalent brands because of its ability to grow and mature one's mind and sense of being.

To date, community colleges have relied on affordability to attract students to point of enrollment. According to U.S. News, money is the number one reason to choose a community college rather than a four-year institution; community colleges are cost-effective (Mitchell). The participants in this study echoed the same, stating that community colleges are cheaper than a four-year institution.

The greatest limiting factor in this study was understanding the influence of pop culture on community college search and enrollment; only one study could be found, which featured celebrities as a recruitment tool. In 2002, Cuyahoga Community College in Cleveland, Ohio ran a campaign including television, radio, and billboard featuring Alan Ruck of the television program, *Spin City* and the 1986 blockbuster hit *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*, recording artist Gerald Levert, and 1996 Olympic gold



medalist Dominique Moceanu. The celebrities are relevant to the community college because they have local ties to the community and the roles they have played. For example, Ruck, who plays the mayor's chief of staff on *Spin City*, promoted the community college's business and hospitality management program while Levert touted courses in creative fields, such as music, studio recording, theater, and graphics (Mortland).

Showcasing celebrity students and alumni in college advertising will garner attention to the extent of spurring college search. Messages that focus on the celebrity "traveling back in time" and how the community college was pivotal to his or her success offers information and entertainment, which are both equally desired by potential college students. "I'm interested in my community. Knowing that a celebrity attended the community college in my neighborhood would get my attention," expressed one participant. Media needs to be tailored using a mix of traditional and social approaches. Celebrity alumni chose their alma mater from hundreds of higher education options. The celebrity is not simply marketing a product, they have *used* the product. The implications of these research findings are critical to community college enrollment. Community colleges can tout their celebrity alumni, which garners attention from prospective students to the extent of following in their footprints.

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## *The Popular Culture Studies Journal Interview* CAROLYN COCCA

### ABOUT CAROLYN

Carolyn Cocca is Professor of Politics, Economics, and Law at the State University of New York, College at Old Westbury.

She is a SUNY Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Teaching recipient and earned her Ph.D. from New York University. Her latest book *Superwomen: Gender, Power, and Representation* is Winner of the 2017 Eisner Award in the Best Academic/Scholarly Work category and Honorable Mention of the 2017 Prose Awards in the Media & Cultural Studies category. She is also the author of *Jailbait: The Politics of Statutory Rape Laws in the United States* and the editor of *Adolescent Sexuality*.

What attracted you to the areas of politics and law in combination with gender?

In my house growing up, we read the newspaper every day, watched the news every night, went to the library to get books every week, and talked a lot about historical and current events.

That household consisted of just my mother and me. My reality inside that house—two hardworking, capable, independent females—did not match what I was reading and hearing in the paper, on TV, and in books about single-mother households, which were then and still are blamed for a variety of social ills.

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And so, I began to wonder, how have we come to this very political, very gendered, seemingly very simple “explanation” for problems in the U.S.? Who benefits and who loses out when a finger is pointed at women who are raising children by themselves (especially impoverished women, women of color, and women with disabilities), rather than at the people, structures, laws, and norms that have fostered and buttressed a multitude of inequalities in this country?

I don’t think political science—or any single discipline—has all the answers to these kinds of questions. I created my own undergraduate major with courses from different departments, and in graduate school I took a number of classes outside the Politics department: in History, in Social and Cultural Analysis, at the Institute for Law and Society, and at the School of Law.

This is how I came to use insights from feminist and queer theories, socio-legal studies, cultural studies, critical race theory, disability studies, and political economy together with political science to explore why we have so many inequalities in the U.S. today, and what we can and should do to push for real equality for all of us.

Recently, the State of New York passed “Enough is Enough” legislation to protect New York’s college students. Are you seeing any impacts of this on your teaching or scholarship?

This sort of work, at the nexus of gender, politics, and law, is something I’ve been engaged in for a long time, particularly when I was Director of the Women’s Center on my campus and administering a \$200,000 grant from the Department of Justice/Office of Violence Against Women. The grant had four requirements: 1) Create a coordinated community response, across campus divisions, to develop formal policies and protocols for responding to

violent crimes against women. 2) Train campus police as well as other campus units to respond effectively in dating violence, domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking cases. 3) Establish prevention and education programs about violence against women. 4) Establish or strengthen programs to train members of campus disciplinary boards to respond effectively to charges of violence against women, including reviewing and revising the Student Code of Conduct.

By doing all of these things, we basically implemented “Enough is Enough” at my college well before New York State mandated that we do so. It was not easy to get multiple campus units on the same page, many of whom had been doing things the same way for a very long time, and many of whom were not used to communicating with each other. It was also not easy to get students to reconsider their own ideas about gender and sexuality, many of which were based on stereotypes and were victim-blaming.

We reached several thousand students, faculty, and staff over the course of my three years as Director. We had workshops and outreach events daily in the months of October, March, and April, and at least weekly in other months; we went into classes in all the different departments to talk to students; and we made the Women’s Center a safe space, a resource center, and a site of crisis referrals. I created a course called Politics of Gender and Sexuality as another way of institutionalizing these efforts. And my scholarship has always been squarely about these same issues.

We accomplished a lot. But there is more to do. Changing laws and policies is one way to make change. Changing norms, changing hearts and minds, is another. Fostering a culture in which interpersonal violence is seen as unacceptable, in which gender-based discrimination is seen as unacceptable, in which we interact with others under the assumption that we are all of equal worth, is crucial work and we have to keep doing that work until we get to that point.

Why popular culture, specifically, why the study of heroines or female superheroes? How does it relate to your interest areas of politics, law, and gender?

My writing and my teaching and my work at the Women's Center are closely related, in the same way that my latest book (about female superheroes) is very similar to my first book (about statutory rape laws). All of it uses an interdisciplinary approach to investigate pervasive gendered inequalities and stereotypes, how they came to be, how they affect our daily lives, and how we can change them.

Applying this kind of analysis to representations of superheroes sort of puts a button on my life thus far. As far back as I can remember, I was reading and watching and playing superheroes...and noticing that the female ones were much less numerous, much less covered by clothing, and much less nuanced in their characterizations. In many ways, little has changed since then, when I was the girl who played "the girl," while my boy friends got to choose from a bunch of interesting male characters who would each contribute to saving the day. But I stayed with superhero media as I got older: I read against the grain, made up my own backstories for underwritten and underdressed female characters, cross-identified with male characters, and latched onto the stories that resonated and dismissed those that didn't.

After forty years of this, I now find myself having to explain to my own daughter why she rarely sees herself represented as a hero, and why girls of color and queer girls and girls with disabilities see themselves even less. If I was frustrated and angry about this before, I'm even more so now on her behalf. And I figured that there had to be a lot of other people who felt the same way—who held superheroes close to their hearts for the ways in which they embody our hopes for justice and inspire us to be our best selves, but who rarely saw themselves represented as heroes. There had to be a lot of other people who also rarely saw themselves represented in positions of

power in various institutions in our world. The two things are intimately connected, and that's how I approach and write about them.

What were some challenges/benefits you saw in incorporating popular culture into your scholarship?

I am tenured in an interdisciplinary and supportive academic department, in a college whose mission is grounded in diversity and social justice, so I could pursue this research simply because I wanted to. I did face questions, inside and outside academe, about the worth of this kind of project from people who assume that analyzing pop culture is frivolous and has little to say about our world. But these were not people who had any professional power over me, and some of them did come around when I explained the importance of this kind of work. For untenured people, or for those in departments who are strict about disciplinary boundaries, or for those surrounded by old biases about high versus low culture, writing about pop culture is almost certainly more difficult. Hopefully this is changing.

My major challenge was about accessing sources and being as comprehensive as I could: every issue for dozens of titles across decades of comics, every episode of multiple TV shows, and every superhero film; interviews with writers, artists, editors, publishers, and producers; creators' websites, Tumblrs, Instagrams, blogs, and tweets; fan letters, websites, Tumblrs, Instagrams, blogs, tweets, and podcasts; sales figures, TV ratings, and box office sales; and scholarly sources from multiple fields. But all academic work has to confront some version of this problem.

There were so many more benefits than challenges. I made many new professional connections in academic areas I just hadn't been a part of before. I also made a lot of new connections with people in non-ivory-tower spaces, and that pushed me to rewrite and rewrite the book so that it would be scholarly in its methods and framework, but also accessible and

hopefully even enjoyable for superhero creators and fans to read. I've guested on multiple podcasts, I've been interviewed live for radio programs and on camera for documentaries, and I've written some shorter pieces for different websites—none of which I had done before, all of which challenged me in different ways, and I'm glad I pushed myself to do them.

Last but not least, I've had a lot of fun over the last few years while doing this work. I hadn't realized quite how unfun my work had become until I threw myself into this project. I got to spend an enormous amount of time reading and watching and writing about superhero media. And I got to talk about all of it with a lot of people I'd never met before, inside and outside of academe, many of whom have become really close friends.

Your recent book, *Superwomen: Gender, Power, and Representation* is the honorable mention in the 2017 Prose Awards in Media & Cultural Studies and the winner of the 2017 Eisner Award in the Best Academic/Scholarly Work category. What was the inspiration/start of this book? In other words, why did you write it?

The book really started from a conversation with a fellow political scientist who was about to co-edit a symposium on the politics of superheroes for a political science journal and encouraged me to submit something for it. As much as politics and superheroes had always been part of my life, as much as whenever I looked at superhero comics or TV shows or movies I couldn't help but see them through my various academic lenses, it just wasn't something I had really thought about before in terms of scholarship. So, I wrote an article about Wonder Woman, and the symposium co-editors, Kent Worcester and Matt Costello, gave me really encouraging feedback. But I had more to say than would fit in that article. I presented a paper about

Wonder Woman and Buffy the Vampire Slayer at a conference where I met Chris Gavaler and Jeffrey Brown and Trina Robbins, and then that paper became a chapter in a book edited by Norma Jones. It's important that I name all six of these people, because they have been greatly supportive of my work in this area.

I thought about the arc of my life, from playing superheroes and *Star Wars* with the boys in my neighborhood all the way through to talking to my daughter about the still-small number of female superheroes and the still-small number of women in the newest *Star Wars* movies. I thought about my work with the Women's Center, and about the various types of discrimination and ways of making social change that I teach my students, and about my research and writing about gender and politics and law. I thought about the demonization of single mothers and other "others" in pop culture, news media, cultural narratives, policies, and laws. And I thought about how all of these things were connected.

So, I decided to write this book, approaching fiction not as separate from or lesser in importance than the "real world," but as an institution that's part of the real world, that impacts people's lives and their perceptions of themselves and their communities, and that is subject to change by people who are aware, concerned, and organized. I see economic, political, social, and cultural inequalities as all interconnected and reinforcing one another.

Women are underrepresented in all kinds of positions of power in our world, and are still often evaluated in discriminatory ways at home, at school, at work, and on the street. In media, they are regularly portrayed as not even present when important things happen, and if they are present, they're usually shown to be emotional and interested in their own appearance and in hetero-romance; they're almost never portrayed as leaders or professionals or mentors; they're often objectified and their looks commented upon. These types of cultural narratives and media representations of women have been repeated so much and for so long that

they contribute to making it seem as if our real-world inequalities and stereotypes and sexualization are natural and normal. But they're not.

So, while I do hope that readers learn something about individual superhero characters, and how representations of superheroes have changed over time and why, I really want readers to come away from the book with four broader points: 1) That representation matters. 2) That representations of superwomen are one of the many spaces in which we can see inequalities of gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, disability, religion, and class. 3) That representations are changeable and changing them is one way of fostering societal change—not one that I would advocate be used in isolation, but one that can be used alongside other types of collective, direct, political actions for broad-based change. 4) And that inequalities are changeable, and we need to use our power to push for more equity, justice, and equality in every area of our lives.

What are some ways in which scholars can better utilize popular culture and their works?

As I said, I approach popular culture the same way I would approach studying other institutions in our world. In some disciplines, and my own discipline of political science is generally one of them, scholars tend to push aside popular culture as not mattering because it's not "real." But it is real. Pop culture producers and consumers are real people who have knowledge and passionate feelings about cultural moments and events and artifacts that reveal their dreams and their disappointments and their politics. Every piece of popular culture is a product of multiple choices by particular people at a given moment in time. Scholars can and should incorporate pop culture artifacts and their creators' intent (and sometimes corporate strictures) behind them, as well as consumer readings and rewritings of them, into their works as sources.



Popular culture isn't divorced from politics, from history, from psychology, from economics, from law, etc. Cultural narratives circulate around and through various institutions in our world, taking different forms in each place, but quite often reinforcing each other and telling us quite a bit about ourselves in the process. It can be messy, because it's not easy to understand the effects of pop culture works on various groups of people, or various groups of people's exact impact on popular culture, or how popular culture interacts with political and social institutions. But it's necessary work.

What is next for you?

I've been invited to speak at Women's History Month events at two U.S. universities, and to keynote the Gesellschaft für Comicforschung (the German Society for Comic Studies) Annual Conference. I'm also giving three talks on superwomen at my college: one for visual art majors, one for honors students from various departments, and a third that will be open to the public. And I will continue to guest on the *Talking Comics* podcast, as I have for the last few years.

I am currently writing a book chapter, about Supergirl in comics and on TV, for an edited volume. And I plan not only to update my work on the characters already in my book, but also to expand the analysis to other characters who have become more prominently "transmedia" since I wrote the book, such as Jessica Jones and Misty Knight and Colleen Wing. I'm not sure yet whether those analyses will be individual pieces or become parts of a new book.

And I'll keep teaching both undergraduate and graduate students.

In short, I'm going to keep talking about all of these issues and I'm going to keep working for change.

# Thoughts on Wonder Woman

NORMA JONES

Opposition to the status quo always causes anxiety and opposition, but when the issues are clarified often opposition and anxiety melt away...

Ray Browne<sup>1</sup>

The long-awaited release of the *Wonder Woman* (2017) standalone film was surrounded in controversy. The film was banned in Lebanon, Tunisia, and Qatar because of star Gal Gadot's support for and past service in the Israeli Defense Force (Richardson). The Alamo Draft House Cinema in Austin, Texas held sold out women-only screenings that may have violated discrimination laws (Chong). Director James Cameron charged that *Wonder Woman* "was an objectified icon" and she represented "a step backwards" for women in film (Freeman). *Wonder Woman's* director, Patty Jenkins responded in a tweet that Cameron could not understand Wonder Woman. Actress Lynda Carter, who portrayed Wonder Woman on the 1975-1979 television show, added that Cameron's attacks were "thuggish" on her Facebook page.

The film was released in May of this year and the digital/disk versions became available less than a month ago. As such, I submit that we are still in the midst of grappling with several questions about her. Who is she? What does she mean for us? Is she a heroine? Is she a sex symbol? Is she a feminist icon? Is she a good role model? Or is she sometimes more than all, while simultaneously being none of the above?

<sup>1</sup> Cover

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In this section, we aim to start this conversation. Nathan Mizco begins with a discussion of Wonder Woman's transformative experiences. Anita K. McDaniel shares her love letter to Carter, as an off-screen heroine. Katie Snyder concludes this section by addressing powerful women. I am thankful that Nathan, Anita, and Katie shared their thoughts on Wonder Woman with us. From here, I hope we can continue this conversation.

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# Wonder Woman: The Journey of a Female Superhero

NATHAN MICZO

Zechowski and Neumann asserted that the depiction of Wonder Woman as possessing feminine traits, such as love and compassion, that render her morally superior to men “is both progressive and regressive” (136). It is progressive in claiming that women should cherish those traits and not strive to adopt male values, such as selfishness and competitiveness. However, by essentializing those qualities as natural, as inherent to women’s being, it is regressive.

It is perhaps inevitable the success of the 2017 *Wonder Woman* film would raise issues of gender. Yet, what should not be lost sight of is that a string of successful male superhero cinematic origin stories has constructed a narrative whereby becoming a superhero seems to necessitate a transformation of the man’s moral character in the direction toward becoming more compassionate, empathic, caring, and other-oriented. For example, Tony Stark’s compassion for the people of Gulmira is evident in *Iron Man*, and Thor’s willingness to give his life to the Destroyer is an example of sacrificial love. Nevertheless, there is a difference: for these male heroes, those values were the endpoint of their journey. Diana already possesses them. Therefore, comparing her cinematic origin story to that of male superheroes might prove fruitful in addressing the progressive/regressive tension.

Wonder Woman’s transformation experience fundamentally varies from the male superheroes. In the end, though Wonder Woman’s journey differs from her male counterparts (the regressive aspect), the qualities she

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embraces that make her a superhero are the same (the progressive aspect). Those qualities involve not super strength, nor even love and compassion themselves, but a desire to remain in the world and to fight on its behalf. Such a desire should not be tied to either masculinity or femininity, but to humanity.

Joseph Campbell described the hero's journey as a three-stage process. In the first stage, the hero is separated from their ordinary, everyday world. Next, the hero undergoes trials, faces foes, receives boons or magical aids, and experiences a transformation. Finally, the hero returns to their community ready to renew the world. When applied to a variety of cinematic superhero origin stories, this pattern holds up quite well. Consider Iron Man, Batman, Thor, and even Doctor Strange. Although all these men are privileged, they are not inherently different from other members of their societies. They all experience a separation from their community; all undergo trials and experience a transformation of character; and subsequently, they emerge as protectors and heroes. What is particularly noteworthy is that, in all these narratives, the transformation is moral. The everyday world from which these men were separated is depicted as one of self-interest, arrogance, competition, greed, and apathy. Therefore, their transformation involves overcoming these traits in themselves, choosing to care for others and put the interests of the broader community before their own (Miczo).

Wonder Woman's journey differs from this pattern in two key ways. Though Diana is privileged (as the daughter of the queen), she is inherently different from the other women on Themyscira. She has been marked out for a greater purpose since birth. Additionally, the world she inhabits is not a "fallen world," dominated by corruption and selfishness. Rather, "Paradise Island" is a place both idyllic and idealistic. The women there have established a society that appears almost perfect. Rooted in their own history, they have become warriors, valuing military preparedness and keeping in a constant of readiness. What marks the

perfection of their society, however, is the apparent lack of internal dissension. When Odin exiled Thor, it was because he knew that, as future ruler of Asgard, his son would need the qualities of a good monarch, including the wisdom to deal justly with realms that were frequently at odds with one another. Themyscira appears to suffer from no such civil strife. The one disagreement between Hippolyta and Antiope is a nonstarter; Hippolyta knows that her sister is right and that Diana will need training in the martial arts.

Nevertheless, Diana is not trained in the ways of the broader world. Her own mother sheltered her, and her subsequent innocence becomes the main mechanism for moving the story forward. She does not spend the movie trying to make amends, like Tony Stark, or learning humility, like Thor. Rather, she moves through “man’s world” fully confident in her own core virtues, naïve of how that world works. Yet, this confidence is not intended to reflect poorly on Themyscira. The women themselves have, after all, created a “utopian vision of matriarchy” (Franich 24). Diana is inspired by that vision, it provides her a hope and optimism her male counterparts never possessed. But it would make little plot sense for her to return to Themyscira to renew and save it. Her community was not the one needing regeneration. Accordingly, she left knowing she could never return. Her separation from her society is to be permanent.

The second way that Wonder Woman’s journey differs involves the transformation experience itself. Recall that for male superheroes, the moral transformation of their character typically involves a growth or expansion of more typically feminine traits: empathy, caring, and other-orientation. They don’t lose any of their masculinity; instead, they gain a set of motivations and values that render them more well-rounded. Diana already possesses the virtues of peace, hope, and love. Not only does she begin her journey with the virtues that are the endpoint of the male hero, she also starts with the aids and talismans (i.e., the sword, the lasso, and the cuffs) that are often acquired by the male hero along the way (e.g., a

suit of mechanical armor, a powerful hammer, or magical spells). Given this, what sort of transformation can she undergo? In her innocence and naiveté about “man’s world,” her virtues initially serve her well; she changes the parameters of the mission and goes to save the village. This small-scale victory turns out to be short-lived. Evil remains triumphant; Diana could not save the villagers, she is not yet effective. The first step in her reformation, then, occurs when she kills General Ludendorff and the war does not immediately end. Her innocence and naiveté are shaken; her transformative experience involves having something taken from her by “man’s world,” the fallen world. This aspect differs from the male journey, since worldly men such as Bruce Wayne and Tony Stark were never innocent in the first place.

Wonder Woman’s transformation begins with a sense of betrayal. She feels deceived, lied to, her world no longer makes sense to her. Diana realizes what the male superheroes already took for granted: the world is corrupt largely because of human intention. At that point, if Ares had not appeared to tempt her, it is possible she would have gone off by herself and left the world to its own self-destructive devices. Interestingly, Ares’ appearance is consistent with other depictions in which he appears more akin to a Christian devil figure than a Greek god.<sup>1</sup> Here, he tempts her to give in to her despair, to surrender to her anger. However, as with Yinsen’s sacrifice for Tony Stark, Steve Trevor’s sacrifice for the greater good recalls her to her higher self. This is when she experiences the second stage of her transformation. Having lost her innocence, Diana is faced with the decision as to whether or not she will live out her virtues, even if those virtues cannot save the world. In other words, she must act on the virtues of peace, hope, and love because they are the right ways to

<sup>1</sup> In George Pérez’s initial Wonder Woman storyline (“The Princess and the Power”), though all the other Greek gods are depicted in togas and gowns, Ares is shown wearing dark armor, his face a black shadow behind his mask. In the animated film *Wonder Woman*, he is portrayed with horns protruding from his head.



be in the world, not because they might save it. She must integrate her newfound wisdom about “man’s world” with the traits she possessed all along: her feminine traits. Once she makes that decision, she has the ability to be effective on a large scale, successfully defeating Ares and seemingly ending the war.

One of the reasons for the film’s success may be the way Wonder Woman’s journey complements the pattern of many male superheroes. Diana possesses feminine traits and values, and she doesn’t lose those qualities in becoming a hero. In the end, she reaches the same place as her male counterparts: choosing to remain in the corrupt world and fight to protect it as a worthy end in itself. Her journey does not exactly follow theirs, however, and so, this leaves her journey susceptible to different readings. A critical appraisal might suggest the message is harmful. That is, Wonder Woman possesses many “essentially” feminine qualities and hails from a matriarchal utopia (itself, an essentialist notion that women could create a perfect society). In leaving such a society of feminine cooperation and entering “man’s world,” Wonder Woman (and by extension, women more generally) must shed her (their) innocence forever. By that logic, however, the parallel to the women of Themyscira is the group of male leaders who refused to countenance Diana’s arguments. This enclave of ultra-masculinity is clearly meant to be seen as regressive. By this all around regressive reading, masculine and feminine remain divided, and Wonder Woman must leave one world behind forever in order to enter the other.

Another way to read the film, however, is to acknowledge that it reinforces the values of a masculine society. In such societies, women are socialized to be other-oriented, caring, compassionate, and tender (Hofstede). At least in the U.S., we may be ready to accept that Wonder Woman possesses these characteristics because she’s female. Yet, the question is whether or not those values can survive a confrontation with “man’s world.” In other words, the cultural divide between masculine and

feminine cannot be bridged by remaining in separation, in sequestration, but by stepping across the gap. By this read, the women of Themyscira are not less than human because they are female, but because they are existing in a state of isolation from the rest of the world. Themyscira, then, is not just mythical because it is populated by immortal women, but because it depicts women as seemingly lacking qualities that are not just male but are human. It is hard to imagine a society without internal diversity of opinion in much the same way it is impossible to imagine a person without a mix of masculine and feminine characteristics.

Thus, Diana's virtues are not "essentially" female, as much as they are necessarily human. But those qualities acquire their meaning only in connection with the broader world. In isolation, they are just empty words, meaningless gestures. Those virtues must be tested out in the field, so to speak, to guarantee their authenticity, to ensure they are genuine. In this reading, the lesson of Wonder Woman's journey is that isolation breeds illusions and ignorance. Connecting across gender, cultural, and ideological divides can be hard and painful, but it is the only way to stop the spread of evil. Such a message is progressive in its reading. The question then becomes: Can a person espouse the values and live the virtues of peace, hope, and love, and still be effective in a strife-torn world? Regardless of our own answer to that question, Wonder Woman will always answer, "Yes, she can!"

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# Lynda Carter: The Original Wonder Woman

ANITA K. MCDANIEL

On June 2, 2017, the long-awaited *Wonder Woman* hit movie theaters worldwide. Starring Gal Gadot in the title role and Christopher Pine as her paramour, Steve Trevor, *Wonder Woman* is a discovery tale about Princess Diana leaving her home on Paradise Island to fight the God of War during WW1 and claim her mantle as Wonder Woman. According to the website Box Office Mojo, in the opening weekend, the movie made \$103.2 million; it ran for 10 weeks, grossing \$411.6 million in the United States and \$819.5 million worldwide, making it the number one movie of the summer. I saw the movie five days after it opened and loved it. I was thrilled to see her brought to life with humor, enthusiasm, and sincerity.

I have been a fan of Wonder Woman since I was a child, watching her cartoons and live action television show. So, imagine my surprise when I heard women make the following comparisons between the 1975 television Wonder Woman and the 2017 movie Wonder Woman on the radio show *IA*:

Emily, caller: "I never liked the old Wonder Woman from TV. I felt like she was parading around in a bathing suit. . . . I didn't know what I was missing until I felt it . . ."

Laura Boyes, guest and film curator for North Carolina Museum of Art: "Wonder Woman was not sexualized [in the movie]. . . . There's no cleavage; she's not wearing underpants like previous incarnations of Wonder Woman. . . . she was not being presented

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to the male gaze in that exact way . . . ” (“*IA Movie Club Sees Wonder Woman*” 00:02:25-00:06:46)

At any given time, there are two versions of Wonder Woman found in popular culture: the original William Moulton Marston and H. G. Peter’s *Wonder Woman* and Wonder Woman, the feminist icon (Berlatsky 3-6). I would contend that at least a third version exists—the “any woman can be Wonder Woman” that exists in our minds. This Wonder Woman exists in any one moment in time as a repository for—or to meliorate—our values and anxieties. Praise for Gadot’s performance notwithstanding, Lynda Carter is the Wonder Woman that exists in *MY* mind.

To appreciate truly Carter’s contribution to the mythos of Wonder Woman, one must accept that the mid-1970s was a different time for women. “Widespread dissatisfaction with being denied routinely admission to higher education, being paid less than men for the same work, and being ineligible for many bank loans and credit cards” (McClelland-Nugent 136) shifted the attentions of the women’s movement away from legal issues, like the right to vote, toward broader social issues, like domestic violence and reproductive rights. “Growing up in a world where traditionally feminine qualities were valued as much or more than masculine qualities, Wonder Woman was an attractive figure for feminists seeking a pop culture analogue for their values” (Levine 137). Douglas Cramer, producer of the 1975 television series, wanted to capitalize on this dynamic by casting a woman “built like a javelin thrower but with the sweet face of a Mary Tyler Moore” (Levine 137) for his new adventure show. Enter Lynda Carter. Not quite understanding this opportunity to connect with second wave feminists, another one of the show’s male producers warned her, “Oh, women are gonna be so jealous of you.” Determined to make the show a success, Carter responded, “Well, not a chance. They won’t be, because I’m not playing her that way. I want women to want to *be* me, or be my best friend!” (“The Enduring Strength of Wonder Woman”).

When I was a kid, I loved Lynda Carter. She resonated with me as Wonder Woman in the same way that Arnold Schwarzenegger did as Conan the Barbarian—both became *the* character in my mind because they looked like the comic book versions without enhancement. Both casting choices facilitated the suspension of disbelief necessary to accept a Nazi fighting, Amazon princess and a barbarian warrior who slays monsters. According to Fingeroth, “The powerful woman who is also a good ‘guy’ is a relatively new phenomenon. Up until the 1990s, in pop culture, if a woman was powerful—*really* powerful—she was either evil, or made evil by the power” (80). The *IA* female caller and its female guest found *THEIR* good guy/powerful woman in Gadot, but, in the process, thought it necessary to dismiss *MY* 1970s version. Many critics reduce Carter’s success as Wonder Woman to her beauty and shapely figure. But Carter is more than what could be seen in a photograph or screenshot; she is what she represented to her audience at the time.

My most vivid memories of Lynda Carter are the occasions when she stood next to men on awards shows and was either taller than they were or could look them in the eye. At 5’9, she was a striking figure. To a 4’5 black girl, she looked like a 6’ tall Amazon giant, an illusion promoted by the show’s publicity team (Levine 137). Again, to me, men seemed to defer to her, and that was rare in the seventies. “Our society’s ideals of fair play demanded there be superheroines. But our society’s ingrained, conflicted, and unconscious feelings toward powerful women made the creation of truly crowd-pleasing superhero women take decades—generations—longer to develop than their male counterparts” (Fingeroth 82). Carter, half Hispanic and half Native American, did not demure to men; she was/is forthright in her speech and direct in her gaze. She was the first to embody the true spirit of the DC heroine (strong, fearless, generous, and a believer in sexual and racial equality) and, for that, was probably my first television role model.

Criticisms of Wonder Woman's appearance are not unique to Carter's portrayal of the character. Gadot has to contend with complaints that her breasts are too small to play the superheroine (Dray). However, sexualizing the narratives of the show and movie inferentially does not mean that the performances of the character were sexualized intentionally. Nor does it mean that the supposed "T + A" overshadowed the feminist themes for every viewer. According to one male fan of the television series,

*Wonder Woman* was on the surface a very typical one-hour action drama on network TV. What made it special was several key elements. The most important was the acting and presence of Lynda Carter as Wonder Woman/Diana Prince. . . . The producers were very faithful to the comics in their portrayal of Wonder Woman in not only super powers and weapons, but also her tough but peace-loving approach to problems. Wonder Woman could kick the bad guy's butt; however, she only turned loose the power after reason and compassion were rejected by the evil doers. This approach and Lynda's portrayal made the "message" imbued scripts of the writers have real impact and immediacy.  
(oxnardboy)

Carter played the superheroine straight. She did not strike poses like a supermodel. There were no gratuitous body cants or displays of submission. Carter claimed, "I never played her as mousy. I played her being for women, not against men. For fair play and fair pay." (Williams)

In 1941, Marston and Peter created Wonder Woman to be feminist, pacifist, and "queer" (Berlatsky). While Carter's Wonder Woman was overtly heterosexual, her performance turned the "damsel in distress" trope upside down. During almost every show she saved someone, and most of the time, it was a man, Steve Trevor. Long after the show had been cancelled and Carter had resumed her singing career, she maintained

a Wonder Woman-like stance on LGBTQ rights. When asked in an interview if she knew she was a gay icon, Carter replied,

“I am? That’s great!” . . . . But as far as being supportive of LGBT equality, I’ve always felt that it shouldn’t even be a question. It’s a matter of basic civil rights and I don’t understand how anyone can see it differently. . . . I have to say it’s such a privilege to be embraced by the LGBT community. To be welcomed by a group that has seen so much discrimination over the years—it’s just an honor. (Peeples)

Carter knew she was not Wonder Woman, but she gladly became the character’s avatar online and in person when advocating for LGBTQ rights and marriage equality. And while Carter’s portrayal of Wonder Woman was a product of its time, she has kept the character’s original values alive on social media for at least the last ten years (Masaki).

Forty years separate the versions of Wonder Woman performed by Carter and Gadot. During the seventies, it was miniskirts, bikinis, and birth control; now, it is smartphones, social media, and calls for diversity. After watching Gadot perform Wonder Woman in *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice*, Carter became one of her biggest cheerleaders. When asked about her readiness to pass the mantle to Gadot, Carter said,

When [the movie] was first given a green light, it would be dishonest of me to say I didn’t have a little pang of “well, here it goes.” But after my first conversation with Patty, I felt I had linked arms with a woman who I would go through the rest of my life with. And then when I met Gal, I linked the other arm with her. The three of us really understand what being on the inside of Wonder Woman’s skin feels like. I mean, so does anyone who ever believed in herself as Wonder Woman, whether it was a little girl or a gay boy—they know, too. (Heil)



Lynda Carter may not have been a perfect Wonder Woman by today's standards, but she was the right choice for that time. She understood Wonder Woman and respected what the character meant to her fans. She was the first woman to carry a one-hour adventure television show when men said it could not be done. She was the first to embody the character convincingly without elaborate special effects or the care and wisdom of a female director. To the female caller and the female guest on the radio show *IA*, "Hey, let's practice the sisterhood that Wonder Woman preaches!" Lynda Carter deserves credit for being a pioneer as Wonder Woman. She has earned the right to be *MY* Wonder Woman.

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## Patty Jenkins' Wonder Woman: "A Bridge to a Greater Understanding"

KATIE SNYDER

At six years old, I remember watching coverage of the 1984 women's Olympic marathon with some surprise and confusion. I knew something about marathons because earlier that summer my family had gone to cheer on my aunt as she competed in a local half-marathon race. I liked running and was proud to say that I was "the fastest girl" in my class.

This Olympic race was historic for many reasons. One, it was the inaugural women's marathon, and two, that one of the competitors took nearly five minutes to stagger around the track and finished in a terrifying conclusion that almost confirmed the long-running fear that marathons were too dangerous for women to undertake. Still, I remember thinking, I ran a mile in my kindergarten Thanksgiving "Turkey Trot." Why would a grown woman not be allowed to run much further?

The Olympics originated in ancient Greece, of course, in a culture where women were mainly treated as slaves to their homes and families. Perhaps it is ironic then, that William Moulton Marston turned to Greek mythology to create a character in the spirit of early 20th century feminism. With her dominatrix-inspired attire and equipment, Wonder Woman, or Diana Prince, has been one of the most popular characters in the DC universe for more than 70 years.

I didn't read comic books as a kid. For me, Wonder Woman came to life in syndication, with Lynda Carter as the confident heroine. But, to be honest, the *Wonder Woman* television show was not my favorite. Carter was beautiful and smart, but I wanted to see how she got so powerful. I

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wanted to see her train for battle and struggle to get stronger, like my favorite movie character – Rocky Balboa.

I was never a fan of boxing, but I identified with Rocky because (yes, like Wonder Woman) he tried to do the right thing and saw goodness in people when others didn't. I probably should have identified with Rocky's love interest, Adrian. Like her, I was quiet and shy. I was female. But I was inspired by Rocky's physical and emotional struggles – that somehow seemed tied together. I wanted to train like him and to know what it felt like to fight and to push myself as far as I could go, with no limits or restrictions.

Athletics have defined my life in important ways. I ran marathons of my own, swam in college, and have remained competitive in other sports to this day. But I have always had a feeling of needing to hold myself back – of not being allowed to be more than the best female in the competition. As a child, I learned that boys didn't like to be bested by a girl in a race. In my experience, men liked it even less.

But I studied the history of women in sport when I was in college, looking for role models and inspiration. I read about Lynn Hill, the first person to free climb "The Nose" in Yosemite Valley, California in one day. I read about Babe Didrickson, arguably the best athlete in US history. I watched footage of Billy Jean King in the "Battle of the Sexes," and I read about women who had won ultramarathons and long-distance swim races outright.

In *Playing with the Boys: Why Separate is Not Equal in Sport*, the authors make the argument that men and women must compete together and against each other. In that case, if we raised our expectations and, at the same time, encouraged women to be as good as or better than men, the gender gap in athletic performance would close (McDonagh and Pappano 3-15).

William Moulton Marston created Wonder Woman in this spirit of women's excellence. Raised in a household of doting women, and with

birth-control advocate Margaret Sanger as inspiration, he believed in women's rights, including their right to physical and sexual freedom (Lepore 1-23). Of course, his conceptualization of sexual freedom was dubious, both in his theorization and actual practice. Wonder Woman's whip and skimpy clothing were never innocent. It was a good effort on Marston's part, but he missed the mark in some ways.

Fast forward to Patty Jenkins, the first woman to produce a superhero movie. Before seeing the movie, I had watched interviews of Jenkins and Gal Gadot. They seem confident, poised, strong. And Robin Wright is one of my all-time favorite actors. But, all of these women are beautiful and thin. So, how was this movie going to be any different from those where the male "gaze" shaped the scope and tenor of the film?

Let me count the ways ...

First, women's physical strength and leadership ground and foreground this story. In the early minutes of the film, we see something that cinema has rarely (if ever?) given us: dozens of very athletic women, the Amazons, fighting and training for battle together—this, overseen by a female general. We move to another scene where Diana is pleading with her mother to let her train with the Amazons, and then another scene where the Amazonian political leaders deliberate about how to protect themselves from the Great War. These scenes are several among many that show women leading the conversation and action in this film, using their physical strength or courageous leadership. What's also exceedingly rare here is that we see women lead in places where they have historically (and still often are) excluded, like politics and war.

Notably, in 1985, comic writer Alison Bechdel argued that movies are so bereft of women's perspectives and dialog, a viewer would have trouble finding a film that includes a single scene where two women talk to each other about something other than a man. Bechdel is now well-known for creating the "Bechdel test," which asks whether a movie has – "1. ... at least two [named] women in it. 2. Who talk to each other. 3. About

something besides a man” (Bechdel). Movies continue to fail this test spectacularly, including super-hero films like *Spider-Man: Homecoming*” and *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice*. *Wonder Woman* passes the test with flying colors (Bechdel).

Second, and contrary to my initial concerns, this film does not participate in “the gaze,” or the sexually-objectified, heteronormative male perspective from which movies are often filmed. When Captain Steve Trevor and Diana kiss, for example, the camera is on him more than it is on her. There is no gratuitous sex scene. Yes, the Amazons’ attire reveals muscled arms and legs – but not in a way that objectifies. On the contrary, *Wonder Woman* spends much of the film covered in a long, heavy cloak.

Diana makes clear, in conversation with Trevor’s secretary Etta Candy, that the Amazons’ attire is designed to provide freedom of movement so they can train for battle. This rationale is important for Jenkins to articulate in the film because it asks viewers to see *Wonder Woman* differently – not as a sex object, but as an athlete and soldier. Also, Diana’s frustration with early twentieth century British women’s fashion provides a comedic moment, but also a fair commentary on how women’s clothing has, historically, served to undermine our athleticism and independence.

In a similar vein, the third way that this film differs in its representation of women lies in the fact that Jenkins gives viewers an alternative version of physical prowess. Some reviewers have criticized the Amazon’s training and battle sequences, calling these pieces ineffective or “humdrum” (Edelstein). I would argue that these scenes suggest that we can value grace as much as we value power, and flexibility as much as strength. But also, these scenes show that physical strength can be tied to concepts like femininity, community, and empathy.

Like *Rocky*, Diana trains and pushes to be the strongest and best fighter. But also, she has a kind of embodied, empathic drive to use her abilities to help those who are suffering. In those scenes leading up to

Wonder Woman's walk into "No Man's Land," we see her struggle to stay on Trevor's mission. After passing horses suffering, soldiers wounded, and children separated from their families, the pleas from a woman to free her village convince Diana to stop holding herself back.

As Wonder Woman climbs the steps out of the trench and into the line of fire, she effectively decouples superior physical ability from masculinity. In Trevor's pleas for Diana to stay on mission, I could hear the echoes from my childhood – "you did great for a girl. That's good enough." Wonder Woman leaves "good enough" at the bottom of that World War I trench, taking machine gun-fire, an act which allows soldiers to break through their year-long stalemate. The scene is wonderfully liberating and cathartic for women who are athletes and for anyone tired of the suggestion that a woman will never be the strongest, most physically capable person in the room, or in this case, on the battlefield.

For all that the movie does well, however, the last quarter of *Wonder Woman* was initially deeply dissatisfying for me in that it seems to convey an old, sexist trope – that a woman finds her real power in love for a man – specifically, in sleeping with a man. I wanted Wonder Woman to remain above that cliché. And throughout the film, I wanted her to be savvier about modern culture and the sources of women's oppression. I also wanted her foe, Ares, to seem like a more even match. For most of the film, Sir Patrick hobbles from scene to scene, talking about making peace and working to establish the armistice. At first, his incarnation as Ares seemed dubious at best. Was this just a reinvention of Bobby Riggs versus Billy Jean King? David Thewlis at 54 is, after all, only one year younger than Riggs at the time of the infamous tennis match.

But, maybe Jenkins is inviting us to view these "flaws" in another way. In one sense, yes, the love story is a cliché. But I am starting to think that reading is shallow and misses the nuance of this film. In the final battle scenes, for example, Ares tries to convince Wonder Woman to aid him in his quest to terminate humans. In a fit of rage at Trevor's death, she



is nearly compelled to do so – until she sees the tear running down Dr. Isabel Maru’s cheek, and sees her three comrades in arms bowed in embrace when they realize death may be imminent. And, yes, she realizes that Trevor gives his life in the name of love, and retorts back to Ares that “love” is what moves her to fight for humankind. But, I think it is important to note that there’s more than one kind of love.

In ancient Greek – in Diana’s culture – there were at least six different words for love – in this case, the most relevant words might be *philia* or love among friends and *agape* or empathy for all people. Certainly, there is also *eros* or sexual passion. But Diana’s actions – not to mention those of those of Trevor’s and his companions’ – are mainly defined by deep friendship and empathy (“Love”).

Of course, Diana makes it clear that erotic love between women was a part of Amazonian life. The fact that she sleeps with Trevor might seem counter to that culture, contributing to a heteronormative narrative. But it is not inconsistent with Wonder Woman’s ethos that she would pursue love wherever it might lead her. Moreover, her judgment is not clouded by this encounter – only Trevor’s judgment is clouded in that he initially prevents her from killing General Ludendorff and doesn’t want her to seek him out in the first place because he says this quest is too dangerous. Both he and Diana know this is an absurd argument because she is a more capable soldier, and less prone to injury than Trevor or any other soldier in the war.

It is true, we see that she is naïve to gender politics and social mores of the early twentieth century – but why shouldn’t that be the case? This is not her culture. Why would we expect Diana to intuitively know that her beauty is something that might be used against her, that her appearance is something that is “distracting” for other people, that her strength and intelligence are shocking on the order of surreal? Jenkins is making the obvious argument here that misogyny, sexism, and women’s inferiority are culturally constructed, and not at all natural.

Maru and Ms. Candy are both examples of what happens to smart, capable women in a misogynist culture. The fate of the war rests on Maru's ability to devise a deadlier gas. But she is fearful, doubting herself when she can't come up with the formula she seeks. Maru works under Ludendorff's supervision. The opportunity to use her chemical genius comes at his pleasure and as a tool of hate in a war of men. In a similar vein, Ms. Candy is stunned at Sir Patrick's proposal that she lead their rogue operation and, at first, doubts her ability.

But shouldn't Diana have faced a more formidable foe? What about Lex Luther or even Superman? I would argue, if we suggest that an "old man" is not a sufficient foe for Wonder Woman, then we are letting ageism and ableism dictate our view of what's possible. More importantly, we forget that the old man body is just a guise to hide a god who literally killed all the other gods of Olympus in his quest to rid the world of human protectors and then humans after that work was done. Let's also not forget that Thewlis transformed from mild-mannered Professor Lupin to a deadly werewolf that nearly took out Harry Potter—the boy who survived death itself. No, Thewlis is not Henry Cavill— but in important ways, his characters are just as formidable.

Who Diana will battle in future films remains an open question, and I will not enter into that debate. The greater point, for me and for many others, is that this new incarnation of Wonder Women is a re-visioning of women's physical strength and power. This is no small feat. Certainly, her physical body does not offer a visualization of all the ways that different kinds and colors of feminine bodies can be strong and powerful. But I believe this film opens a door that more and diverse representations can walk through. As Jenkins reminds us, "There is no 'right' and 'wrong' kind of powerful woman" (France).

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# Reviews

## *THE POPULAR CULTURE STUDIES JOURNAL* REVIEWS

### Introduction

Ever since I was a kid I have been fascinated by the way movies and television could both reflect and shape the world around me. I could learn about a culture or a previous decade simply by turning on the television. At six-years-old I had already developed an obsession with the fifties and sixties. Given my early bouts of insomnia, I watched a lot of early morning television such as *My Three Sons*, *Leave it to Beaver*, and *The Dick Van Dyke Show*. As I did, I began to see that the world was once far different than what I was observing as an eighties kid. The problems of those times seemed so simple compared to what I was hearing my parents talking about, and seeing on the news. Flash forward to today and movies and television continue to both reflect and shape society.

While not a special topic issue you will soon see that many of the reviews written for this issue tackle a number of themes racing across our various screens. Multiple reviews reflect the current climate of resistance and activism, including themes of immigration. While other books examined the challenges created because of the social media we engage with. Finally, texts about visual representations of resistance, gender, and race were reviewed. Each of these books provide insight on complex issues while challenging a variety of social norms.

Beyond these conversations, reviews for this issue also provide insight on how we as scholars are examining popular culture. Linguists, Communication scholars, and Media Critics have provided a wealth of knowledge as they have created encyclopedias, reference guides, and

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detailed examinations of various mediums. Pieces that could serve as texts for a class or simply fantastic references. However, not all the reviews focused on serious issues. The section also includes books on some of our favorite movies, music, and television shows.

Taking on the role of reviews editor has been an exciting and challenging undertaking. Our previous editor Jennifer Dunn created a wonderful foundation and I am grateful for her encouragement and assistance this year. I am also grateful for the immeasurable help of my assistant reviews editor Jessica Benham. Seriously, you are an amazing human! To each of the reviewers, thank you for your service and contributions to the journal. This has been a wonderful experience and I am looking forward to continuing to work with the many people that make this journal possible.

On that note, I am excited to say that, in the near future, the reviews section of *The Popular Culture Studies Journal* will be expanding. We will, of course, continue to review the outstanding books we receive. But given that popular culture is not limited by printed media, we have decided to open reviews to other mediums including films and games. More information and the call for reviewers will be coming soon. In the meantime, enjoy the following. I hope they inspire you to get your own copy of some of these amazing books.

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Jenkins, Henry, Sangita Shresthova, Liana Gamber-Thompson, Neta Kligler-Vilenchik, and Arely M. Zimmerman. *By Any Media Necessary: The New Youth Activism*. New York, New York University Press, 2016. Print.

*By Any Media Necessary: The New Youth Activism* explores the relationship between young people and political engagement due to changing mechanisms for communication. As a critical rhetorician, I appreciate that the book relies upon activists' experiences to broaden our understanding of agency. Rather than simply chart the decay of power within traditional institutions or the potential created from expanding social spheres, this text carefully depicts evolving risks and opportunities from using media. As part of the Media, Activism and Participatory Politics group at the University of Southern California, Henry Jenkins, Sangita Shresthova, Liana Gamber-Thompson, Neta Kligler-Vilenchik, and Arely M. Zimmerman documented five diverse case studies. These accounts help the authors to portray the enlargement of "civil pathways" for political engagement facilitated by the internet and social media (257).

*By Any Media Necessary* bypasses simplistic discussions of activism through a method of storytelling, artifact examination, interviews, and ethnography, which is evident in Chapter Two's analysis of Invisible Children (IC). The researchers initiated their study of this organization three years before they released the film *Kony 2012* on social media, which shot IC to the forefront of public attention by accumulating 100 million views within a week (61). Yet, people critiqued the film for promoting ethnocentrism and counterproductive solutions. At the heart of the conflict rests a tension between creating an entertaining message that easily spreads and retaining the issue's complexity. The researchers' perspective given the longevity of their observations produced a contextual narrative that balances IC's material contributions from working in Uganda and potential flaws (76-77). Although the organization

essentially collapsed, the dispersion of IC's leaders throughout other groups like Giving Keys prompts attention to the opportunities and limitations from films like *Kony* (100).

In chapter three, Jenkins et al. argue that the Harry Potter Alliance (HPA), Imagine Better and Nerdfighter formed new cultural spheres that probe at political issues. These groups “use fictional narratives and imaginary worlds in order to make sense of, relate to, and act upon issues in our real world” (108). Reminiscent of Robert Putnam's classic analysis of civic functions within bowling leagues, the authors' term “fan activism” captures the transformation from a group merely based on a shared activity into spaces for sustained agitation. Following Harry Potter as a series creates the condition for a community, while its characters, plot, and themes provide shared vocabularies and motives. The Harry Potter as a Tool for Social Change workshop organized by a HPA chapter in Southern California is touted by the authors as an excellent example. Similarly, Imagine Better, an offshoot of HPA that resists through storytelling, and Nerdfighter, a group formed around the YouTube VlogBrothers John and Hank Green, provides additional cases that show resistance emerging from non-traditional networks. Yet, this agitation risks inaccessibility for some people. Pierre Bourdieu's scholarship on taste demonstrates the exclusivity of a politics based on shared experiences within a class, which likely explains HPA's whiteness (144).

Communities connected by the Muslim Public Affairs Council and Muslim Youth Group employ storytelling to strengthen bonds between people. In 2009, Bassam Tariq and Aman Ali started the 30 Mosques project, where they toured New York City and collected narratives to share on their blog. Jenkins et al. contends that storytelling activates a powerful force against oppression by problematizing the basis for stereotypes and energizing people to hold onto their culture (166). Yet, expanding digital presence poses constraints. Surveillance, both from rapid governmental expansion post 9/11 and hurtful peer comments, forces

decisions concerning what information to reveal and conceal. These groups operate through a “*precarious* balance between vibrancy and fragility, empowerment and risk, and voice and silence” (150). Jenkins et al. conclude the chapter by suggesting that humor charts pathways for challenging surveillance and fostering community.

Considering the immigration quagmire confronting American politics with Donald Trump’s election, the authors, in chapter five, deliver culturally relevant and politically necessary information by looking at videos of undocumented immigrants coming out. After two representatives introduced the DREAM Act in 2001, a group emerged in support of the bill and expanding opportunities for immigrants. Sharing videos exposing one’s identity, even without concrete markers like a name, holds four functions: catharsis, awareness, unification, and mobilization (199). Jenkins et al. contend that DREAMers face unique difficulties due to deportation. Yet, some activists like Viridiana Martinez or Lizbeth Mateo employ civil disobedience with the intent to be deported. Recordings on YouTube describe the reasoning for their decisions, which activates another channel for creating community and awareness (217).

While most scholars of resistance tend to scrutinize the Left, examining libertarians in the Student Liberty Movement extends focus on political engagement through media across partisan politics. Distrust and concern with institutions thematically connects the Left and the Right, which Chapter Six supports by considering popular memes from libertarian Facebook groups. One example includes an image with Drew Carey as the background and the message “Welcome to politics, where the rules are made up and the votes don’t matter” (240). In lieu of this style for engagement, the Student Liberty Movement uses social media as a form of “DIY citizenship” that changes public opinion to undermine governmental overstretch (248). Yet, the stigma facing other groups within the project highlight the relative cultural privilege accessed by these activists.



*By Any Media Necessary* persuasively walks the dialectic between valuing the potential of new “civil pathways” for participation and crushing agency given equally expanding risks. I particularly appreciated their balance of theory with historical and contemporary cases. Jenkins, Shresthova, Gamber-Thompson, Kligler-Vilenchik, and Zimmerman offer a compelling analysis for readers of this journal since “[p]opular culture facilitates shared affective investments that bond members together, providing a vision of change that is empowering, meaningful, and pleasurable as they conduct the often hard and discouraging work of political activism” (258). This book should find its way into undergraduate and graduate courses with an intriguing digital extension via accompanying website and as a stasis point for future research into (sub)cultures manifesting online, media activism, and political communication.

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Reeves, Joshua. *Citizen Spies: The Long Rise of America's Surveillance Society*. New York, NY: New York University Press, 2017. Print.

The 1964 murder of Kitty Genovese has served as a cautionary tale for concerned citizens and students in sociology seminars for decades. How could a woman's murder in a densely-populated city meet such an underwhelming response from her knowing neighbors? The 2012 killing of Trayvon Martin serves a similarly unsettling example, though for different reasons. What compelled George Zimmerman—a Neighborhood Watch volunteer—to ignore the advice of authorities, pursue, enter altercation, and kill Martin? As these cases illustrate, the often-deleterious effects from modern norms of communication and surveillance culture are wide-ranging.

These cases also function as different points on a continuum of examples explored in Joshua Reeves' excellent book, *Citizen Spies: The Long Rise of America's Surveillance Society*. Reeves' book isn't merely about social living gone wrong, though. It is a study of how modes and habits of surveillance facilitate different performances of public behavior. Reeves, a professor of media and communication studies at Oregon State University, works from the premise that habits of surveillance—including Neighborhood Watch programs, cautionary messages, and technological for reporting crime—help constitute our relations to systems of power and one another.

Using Foucault's concept of "responsibilization," he argues that public behavior is often "both the target *and the technology* of government," meaning state authority is "carried out *through...*citizens' bodies, particularly through their capacities for surveillance and communication" (11). In five analytical chapters, Reeves teaches readers how practices of surveillance have become incrementally and narrowly cast in terms of

“seeing and saying” that reinforces state power at the expense of social cohesion.

The first two chapters explore the power relations that follow from the technological means of reporting crime. Using customs from fifth-to-seventh-century Britain, Reeves argues that contemporary crowdsourcing trends (such as *America’s Most Wanted*) were presaged by community law enforcement. Customs like the “frankpledge” and the later “hue and cry” networks respectively ensured that financial losses from crime were held to all members of a community, and that ordinary citizens often pursued criminals to justice. Such protocols “effectively conscripted the entire English populace into the policing apparatus” (26). Practices changed with new forms of communication (including print posters, telegraphs, telephones, social media, and apps), leading, Reeves argues, to “a loss of local independence,” and “new means for extracting citizen police labor and rechanneling sovereign power through the bodies of its subjects” (33). In each change, policing has become more reactive while citizens are encouraged to function as little more than messengers of crime.

In chapters three and four, Reeves explores how community groups often extend the reach of state control by reinforcing certain habits of seeing/saying. In other words, popular organizations that seek to deter crime habituate participants to see fellow citizens as “information that becomes valuable only to the extent that it...facilitates the determination of suspicious and unsuspecting activities” (92). Duty to the community and its members, in other words, becomes “overshadowed by—and often redefined as—duty to the state” (107). This, Reeves speculates, partially explains the death of Trayvon Martin by the internalization of state surveillance and community suspicion performed by “wannabe cops like Zimmerman” (108). Even widely popular programs like D.A.R.E. (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) function to reinforce “snitch culture”, and encourage children—in an impressionable and naïve stage— “to act like cops” (110-111). The issue for Reeves is not that such programs

encourage awareness, but that they consistently re-route the communicative and disciplinary channels that might otherwise go to parents or peers back to the police apparatus.

Heightened concerns of terrorism amplify the surveillance culture in many unsettling ways. Chapter five informs readers that while fear of terrorism is not new, its threat carries important changes in scope and procedure. When the preferred citizen response is narrowly cast in terms of “seeing/saying as an essential means to protect the homeland” for a threat that “cannot be easily translated into coherent local discourses of risk, responsibility, and prevention,” the result is often unproductive (138-139). As one example indicates, the volume of suspicious activity reports from the Los Angeles Joint Regional Intelligence Center indicate the number and kind of citizen tips submitted are “overwhelming useless for—if not counterproductive to—the gathering of antiterrorist intelligence” (155).

The looming question in the face of this relevant study remains: *what now?* Reeves’ concluding chapter offers three solutions that are admittedly at odds with one another: silence, solidarity, and sousveillance. Silence becomes “a somewhat radical move” (173), Reeves notes, insofar as police agencies rely on citizen involvement. By this reasoning, if the cause is unjust, people should cease participation. Solidarity, by contrast, means finding ways to perform citizenship beyond the confines of surveillance. The neighbors of Kitty Genovese didn’t *fail* to act, as is commonly assumed. Instead, Reeves argues, their misdeed is that they too narrowly “associated neighborly duty with calling the police” (174). Solidarity means exploring “new forms of direct communal action that eschew suspicion, vigilance, and the state’s rechanneling of our social responsibility” (175). Finally, sousveillance can help by watching the watchers—using surveillance technology in such a way that citizens can “turn their gaze against the state,” and “capture and publicize police brutality and other offenses” (176).

Reeves does not land on one solution as preferable to others. Though his study includes ample cases of citizens following—and sometimes rejecting—suspicion and surveillance, the overarching remedy to the problem identified in *Citizen Spies* seems to reside in enhancing public judgment. That is, we need to (re)learn how to properly identify a situation and the appropriate response: when it is appropriate to report to the cops (or record the cops); to fear a neighbor (or fear the motives of Neighborhood Watch); to enact silent resistance (or report crime on a mobile app). Such preparation is a gradual and informal process. Joshua Reeves' book helps us recognize the many ways our habits of language and action help reinforce systems of power, and—maybe—how we can remake and improve such relations in the future.

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Herrmann, Andrew F. and Art Herbig, editors. *Communication Perspectives on Popular Culture*. London: Lexington Books, 2016. Print.

Andrew F. Herrmann and Art Herbig's *Communication Perspectives on Popular Culture* sets out to examine popular culture's integral role in public discourse with the premise that "Popular culture is both a tool for memory and a means for expressing we are in the present" (xi). Herrmann and Herbig admit that each chapter, which focuses on different communication theories, is just a starting point novice and intermediate researchers, introducing them to research using relatable popular culture artifacts. In that vein, some of the analyses seem to be abbreviated or less complex in an effort to nudge readers to think critically and connect the

dots on their own, which makes the text useful in stimulating classroom discussions as well as examples of how to conduct research.

Topics of discussion in this 17-chapter text range from television and movies to video games, music, politics and organizational complexes such as prison, education, and workplaces. Consequently, the analysis includes a good mix of contemporary artifacts, such as *Orange is the New Black*, Coke's advertising campaigns, and *Disney Pixar's Inside Out*, and classic artifacts such as *Alien*, *The Golden Girls*, and *The Cosby Show*. The mix of contemporary and classic artifacts ensures that there's something of interest to everyone regardless of level of engagement with popular culture. Analysis themes appear across multiple artifacts in chapters so if readers are not familiar with an artifact such as *The Golden Girls* they can see how the same themes appear in another, such as *Inside Out*.

Each contributing author quickly establishes useful context for the need to study popular culture and make connections to communication theory as well. The repetition of this formula helps to focus each chapter toward accomplishing the book's primary goal: to better understand public discourse and the role those discourses play in everyday life. This collection of studies takes care to include discussions on intersectionality when examining the prison complex with *Orange is the New Black* and an interrogation of anti-feminism movements, beginning by showing the constraining system of power in affirmative action policies that only allowed black women to file paperwork as a woman or as African American, but not both. The *Orange is the New Black* chapter details one character, Tastee, and her life experiences in and out of prison, constrained to retail and fast food jobs instead of a career. In doing so, Michelle Kelsey Kearn walks the reader through how Tastee experiences racism and sexism in her cyclical relationship with the prison complex. The inclusion of intersectionality in chapters such as this encourages readers to think about how representations of minorities in popular culture creates and

sustains ideologies of inferiority and superiority by focusing in on the lived experience of an African American female character.

One of the most prominent themes that emerge throughout the book is how we interact with popular culture. Whether it's interacting with *Minecraft* or participating in Coke's advertising campaign or engaging with second screen experiences of today's popular television shows, each chapter effectively weaves in our relationships with the artifacts of study. For example, in setting up his analysis of *Alien* Adam Tyma describes "a moment—an experience—that defines what we do and what we are into...It is something that sticks with you" (49). Whether the experience is, as Tyma describes, seeing *Star Wars* for the first time in 1977 with his parents or experiencing a shared gaming culture with a *Minecraft* community, it is our relationships with these artifacts and experiences that shape our understanding and identity.

Expanding beyond our engagement with popular culture, Jimmie Manning's "Rethinking Studies of Relationships and Popular Culture" shines a spotlight on a variety of approaches in studying relationships including dyadic and multimatic interviews, diary methods, and auto ethnography to better understand individual and relational engagement with artifacts. In doing so, it may be easier for young researchers to find which perspectives, if any, are marginalized or completely silenced in relating popular culture to our relationships with others.

The final chapter fittingly discusses the use of popular culture in pedagogy to reach groups of students that may be at a disadvantage (i.e. low-income and first-generation college students). Beyond using popular culture to connect with these students, Kristen L. McCauliff and Katherine J. Denker argue that using popular culture in the classroom creates a space that encourages students to work through controversial ideas that are often discussed and dissected in college curriculum. Moreover, that popular culture helps students to make connections between the political world and their lives, empowering them to not only imagine ways to better the world

around them, but to take action. One of the most significant problems to overcome when examining popular culture artifacts in the classroom is that many artifacts are *too white* and require careful, thoughtful planning to present a variety of examples. In widening perspectives of sexuality, the authors changed from readings and artifacts that focused on Ellen DeGeneres to artifacts that featured Laverne Cox, a transgender woman of color. In doing so, examples resonated more with the students, but one problem still remained: how to move from academic articles about topics to other sources without the nonacademic sources losing authority. Answering such a difficult question takes reflection, a point of emphasis throughout the 17 chapters in this book.

Overall, Hermann and Herbig's *Communication Perspectives on Popular Culture* offers a strong foundation of relevant terms and definitions to begin studying and understanding popular culture from a variety of theoretical perspectives. Building on the foundation, this book also does well to consider intersectionality in its analyses. Because of its desire to be a starting point, there's plenty of room to expand, enhance, and discuss the applications of communication theories on popular culture in the classroom. The text is written for novice researchers. Terminology is accessible, as are the theories and context used to set up each chapter. Consequently, this book is ideal for upper class undergraduate students and beginning graduate students.

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Corkin, Stanley, *Connecting the Wire: Race, Space and Postindustrial Baltimore*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017. Print.

As part of the Texas Film and Media Studies Series, Stanley Corkin provides a deep and detailed analysis of the underlying themes presented in David Simon's HBO Series *The Wire* (2002-2008). After a thorough introduction to the characters, storylines and relationships that make up the show's five seasons, the University of Cincinnati Film and Media Studies professor breaks down each of the seasons by devoting an entire chapter to each. The nearly 200 pages of episodic analysis provide considerable material for reflection, discussion and further study.

The examination prepared by Corkin goes beyond the surface of the television series itself, delving into the geography and exploration of urban life which uses the city of Baltimore as its backdrop. Seeing the show as more than another entry in the crime drama genre, the analysis looks past the city's reigning drug gang and examines how the operations and lifestyle create ripple effects throughout an entire culture. Attention to specific locales and history enables the show's creators to successfully blend reality and fiction into a finished product that provides depth of content which extends beyond the normal prime-time network television offerings. This overview provides the context for the episode by episode breakdown that follows.

The television show is traced back to noir and film gris antecedents such as *Naked City* (1948), Rossellini's *Rome, Open City* (1945) and De Sica's *Shoeshine* (1946). Although *The Wire* may not be considered particularly successful either commercially or artistically (winning a Peabody Award in 2003), this book makes a solid case regarding the value of further study of the production. Corkin points out Simon built on his cinematic treatment of the power of addiction, which he began with an earlier HBO mini-series, *The Corner*, in 2000.

The text provides extensive analysis of not only the thematic and sociological components of the series, but also production aspects such as the camera work and compositional strategy. The coverage of the technical aspects gives the book a film studies aspect to compliment the media studies and popular culture discussion of each season. Although the text does not follow a strict chronological journey through the episodes, it is well organized in regards to themes and common threads within seasons.

As each chapter works its way through a narrative of plotlines, applicable cultural theories, and film production considerations, the author also provides a detailed analysis of both major and minor characters. This analysis and running commentary enables the reader to view the series in a much different contextual light. There is also a focus on the economic situations of the characters and the impact the drug trade and other forms of commerce have on both the local and global economics.

Despite *The Wire's* run on HBO ending in 2008, many of the themes and topics examined are still relevant today. For example, Corkin's analysis of Season 5 includes a section on "Crime, News and the Neoliberal City". He writes, "While this season presents a critique of the mainstream media, the broader view of the *Sun* is one filled with nostalgia. The name of the larger-than-life *Sun* editor and Baltimorean H.L. Mencken is invoked more than once; and we hear multiple conversations between editors and reporters noting the glory days of the urban press." (p. 162). The book's concluding chapter summarizes some of Simon's perspective on the media as he was winding down production of the final season and elaborates on some of the running commentary in the program on the media, particularly the downfall of the urban daily newspaper.

The author wraps up the final chapter by reminding readers of the significance of the program and HBO's commitment to carrying five full seasons. He sees the show as a reflection of twenty-first-century media, a device that relies on niche audiences and a delivery platform that is not

necessarily part of the mainstream. In this sense, *The Wire* was successful using metrics other than audience numbers or Emmys and may have been ahead of its time. The views of writers Margaret Talbot and David Henry are used to provide a context through which to reflect upon the underlying ideas and concepts present in the show's ongoing storylines.

*Connecting the Wire* provides a comprehensive resource for utilizing the HBO series as a device for further geographic, sociological, and media studies research and discussions. Whether a loyal viewer of the series while it aired, or someone only vaguely familiar with the show (which can easily still be binged watched today), Corkin's treatment of the television show provides depth, insight and context for what the back cover touts as "critically acclaimed as one of the best television shows ever produced". This edition proves to be a strong addition to the Texas Film and Media Studies Series edited by Thomas Schatz.

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Perry, Leah. *The Cultural Politics of U.S. Immigration: Gender, Race, and Media*. New York University Press, 2016. Print.

Leah Perry has centered her research around issues of gender and race as it transgresses borderlines via unstable immigration status. This is illustrated in her previous studies of the rhetoric of amnesty and the interrogation of the liminal space that undocumented migrants of color occupy and the ways in which white ethnics are elevated in the neoliberal moment. She continues to explore the relationship between immigration and neoliberalism in her book, *The Cultural Politics of U.S. Immigration: Gender, Race, and Media*. Couched in terms of policy, Perry highlights the role of the media and popular culture to help reify crimmigration as the

place in which the neoliberal polity values the labor produced by transnational bodies while summarily criminalizing bodies that are marked as “other” through their non-whiteness. Legal scholars assert that crimmigration is the process by which “immigration control is increasingly adopting the practices and priorities of the criminal justice system” and Perry extends their argument in the context of the media (Miller 612). In the milieu of the current political moment under a Trump presidency, Leah Perry’s book is an insightful text that accurately asserts the pernicious ways in which neoliberal crossings are mediated through film, television, newsprint, and news media.

Situated at the intersections of Latina/o Studies, Whiteness Studies and Asian American scholarship, Perry’s text helps to provide a foundation for her comparative analysis of white ethnics and gendered racial projects. The connections between 1980s immigration policy and neoliberalism are key for Perry. They serve as the basis for Perry’s argument that the immigration discourses of the 1980s, not the 1990s as Melamed (2011) avers, “were crucial to the rising neoliberal project because they managed difference in policy, news media, and pop culture” (Perry 219). She makes the case using the term, *neoliberal crossings*, which explains, “the gender and racial formations that cohered and were contested through 1980s immigration discourses in law and popular culture inaugurated the paradigm for neoliberal immigration” (Perry 3). Thus, Leah Perry examines neoliberalism in the context of the tropes of immigration, valuation, and devaluation via the dialectic of the “nation of immigrants” and “immigrants as emergency” to complicate the ways in which we understand the legacy of Reagan era immigration policy both on the congressional floor and in popular culture. Popular culture’s power to maintain and enforce stereotypes is not new; however, Perry challenges us to consider the ways that popular culture promotes and mirrors 1980s political discourse and becomes consumable by U.S. polity, which is a strength of her text.

*The Cultural Politics of U.S. Immigration* explores the various shifts in immigration policy over time and its intersection with popular film, television, and music. In chapter one, Perry discusses the 1980 Mariel Boatlift and the changing language of “nation of immigrants” to “immigrant emergency” with *Scarface* as its primary source text that facilitate the shift in immigration discourse. In chapter two, she explores the policy of family reunification through changing discourse and near-queer family structures in *The Perez Family*, *The Golden Girls*, and *Perfect Strangers*. She examines, in chapter three, the relationships between language and policy about welfare and racially coded media discourse, while, in chapter four, she interrogates the criminalization of Latin America and Latin@s in media, policy debates, and law. In the fifth chapter, Perry uncovers the ways in which “nation of immigrants” conceals neoliberalism’s exploitative and violent structure by examining the “overlooking” and “looking over” of white ethnics and immigrants of color. Thus, immigrants of color are “impossible subjects” (Ngai). Finally, Perry concludes by making the case for rejecting the paradigm of neoliberal crossings.

Perry provides a number of popular culture references that illustrate how audiences consume the rhetoric of immigration, which helps to make sense of the occasionally overwhelming immigration policy presented in the text. The discussion of family reunification and cosmetic, rather than redistributive, equality in overlooking difference are strong examples of the potency of Perry’s argument. In the chapter on family reunification, Perry writes that “the inclusion of people of color, women, and immigrants makes U.S. global hegemony seem democratizing and just despite neoliberalism’s dependence on inequalities” (Perry 87). Perry illustrates this through congressional debates that used diverse immigrant family structures to highlight immigrant economic activity and labor contributions, which provide neoliberal evidence of their value. Moreover, the subsequent popular media spotlights on hardworking immigrants and

television sitcoms help to galvanize support from wider (public) audiences. However, as Perry masterfully argues throughout the text, debates privileging immigrant labor distill human bodies to dollars and cents. Immigrant laborers are then subject to whatever policies are instituted as the need for labor declines and rises, which promote the neoliberal project.

Similarly, Perry investigates the commodification of Selena Quintanilla and Jennifer Lopez and the privilege afforded to Gwen Stefani, Lady Gaga, and predominantly male Irish punk bands. Embedded in immigration discourse, racialized bodies hold value insofar as they are monetarily relevant to the neoliberal agenda. Quintanilla and Lopez's (as well as other Latin@ artists) popularity rose during the Latin explosion, which encouraged the consumerism of products and an economic embrace of Latin America. The racialized and racially ambiguous roles played by Lopez helped to frame Perry's argument in unexpected ways. Lopez's career enabled her to overcome the boundaries of her ethnicity; nonetheless, suspicion surrounding her success guaranteed that her ethnicity was always present. The arguments in chapters two and five are strong because they explicitly explain how society's entrenchment in media results in the consumption of subtle mediated messages without critique. Moreover, the film, television, and music that Perry explores appear to challenge the status quo but, upon closer evaluation, continue to perpetuate the structural inequities in the neoliberal project.

*The Cultural Politics of U.S. Immigration* may be useful for audiences interested in public policy, law, communication(s), race, and gender. Its strength lies in the popular culture analysis, which helps to distill complicated and voluminous policy and law arguments. While the text may leave the reader discouraged, the reader is better equipped to recognize the insidious ways that neoliberalism inflects policy and popular

culture that have material consequences in the lives of immigrants, people of color, and women

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Hitchcock, Jayne. *Cyberbullying and the Wild, Wild Web: What Everyone Needs to Know*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2016. Print.

With our increasing use of social media, Jayne Hitchcock's book is an absolute must-read. Hitchcock argues that as the Internet has become more accessible and provides more opportunities for connections, it also brings out the worst, cyberbullying and cyberstalking, leaving anyone with the potential to become a victim. In each chapter, she provides rich stories of cyberbullying victims and powerful tools to help individuals address

cyberbullying. While the book focuses heavily on children and teenagers, the book offers practical guidelines and advice for anyone who communicates online.

The first part of the book focuses on understanding the impact of cyberbullying. In the first two chapters, Hitchcock opens with stories from cyberbullying victims. She integrates research from websites devoted to cyberbullying to highlight the demographics of cyberbullies, reasons for cyberbullying, and how social media is used for cyberbullying. Through stories from victims, Hitchcock provides a realistic picture for readers to really comprehend the severity cyberbullying. In chapter three, Hitchcock discusses the laws around cyberbullying. She uses accounts from victims in both Canada and the United States to highlight the challenges victims face when fighting back against cyberbullying. These stories reflect the inconsistencies in how law enforcement and schools manage cyberbullying situations. Hitchcock argues that the lack of action taken against cyberbullies stems from both a lack of awareness and education for how to handle online situations. She pinpoints a shared concern, “most experts agree on one thing: some schools ‘get it’ and have cyberbullying policies in place to try to curb it and deal with it on a case-by-case basis whereas other schools continue to ignore it” (29).

After chapter 4, Hitchcock examines specific cyberbullying situations, providing more concrete guidelines for parents of victims and bullies as well as for educators. The remaining chapters fit together by increasing awareness of cyberbullying from different perspectives. Hitchcock changes direction in chapter five by focusing on parents of cyberbullies. To do this, she provides guidelines to help parents identify warning signs that their child or teen may be a cyberbully. She presents practical tips to educate parents, providing them with tools to help them to communicate with their children. In chapters six and seven, Hitchcock focuses on additional cyberbullying situations. Chapter six highlights the ways that cyberbullying victims fight back against their bullies. Hitchcock features



stories of different teens who found ways to deal and support others through songwriting and singing about their experiences. These stories empower readers by showing what standing up to cyberbullies can look like. In chapter seven, Hitchcock shifts the focus drastically, looking at sexting and sextortion.

Hitchcock examines different cyberbullying environments in chapters eight through ten. She looks at how cyberbullies use social media apps and websites (chapter 8), cell phones and smartphones (chapter 9), and online gaming (chapter 10). She provides comprehensive advice about the steps to take for anonymous attacks. While this might seem like common sense advice, these steps serve as an excellent checklist of steps to use social media apps and websites safely. These chapters are an excellent educational tool for parents, raising awareness about privacy concerns online as well as practical tips for safer communication online.

In chapter eleven, Hitchcock focuses on adults as cyberbullies. While most of the material in this book is applicable to everyone, she uses an example of cyberbullying and the ultimate outcomes using a failed online transaction as an example. As the story unfolds in the chapter, Hitchcock takes a close look at the messages exchanged and provides advice for the reader as if he or she was involved in this specific situation. Walking the readers through this chapter with the example helps to pinpoint specific bullying behaviors as well as specific ways to communicate to take a stand against cyberbullies.

In the final two chapters, Hitchcock provides clear tips for educators and parents of both victims and cyberbullies as well as general tips for online safety. She incorporates several online resources that give parents and educators the tools needed to communicate with both victims and bullies. Hitchcock closes the book with a range of tools to educate and empower readers, helping them to take concrete steps to be safer online.

One of the major strengths of Hitchcock's book is bringing in a range of real stories from victims. While readers may know that cyberbullying

occurs, Hitchcock selected stories to humanize the experience, opening her readers' eyes to the different online situations that occur. She provides detailed guidelines and resources to help make internet use safer. In chapter 11, Hitchcock discusses adults as cyberbullies. Hitchcock uses one example of adult cyberbullying and walks readers through the specific online exchanges and messages between the victim and the bully. Hitchcock discusses these interactions and provides guidance for how victims can communicate. This increases awareness and educates readers through tips for safety and communication. In other chapters of the book, it would be helpful to include detailed advice for how to communicate in a range of cyberbullying situations.

Although the book targets educators and parents, as well as middle and high school students, Hitchcock provides tools and resources to make Internet use safer for everyone. She takes crucial step in increasing awareness as well as providing specific advice to help individuals think about how to handle different cyberbullying situations. Her suggestions and resources arm readers with the awareness of what different online situations look like and the knowledge for safer Internet use.

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Courtland, Lewis. *Divergent and Philosophy: The Factions of Life*. Chicago, IL: Open Court Books, 2016. Print.

Could the popular dystopian novel and movie series *Divergent* have deeper applications for modern social and political life? The editor of this volume, Dr. Courtland Lewis, argues that readers can make many valuable connections between the events in the series and current philosophical dilemmas. Dr. Lewis serves as Program Coordinator of Philosophy and

Religious Studies at Owensboro Community College in Owensboro, Kentucky. His area of research interest is the intersection of philosophy and pop culture. He has published extensively on pop culture topics such as Dr. Who, X-Files, and Futurama. He compiled this edited volume to explore the philosophical, ethical, and moral themes to be found in Veronica Roth's *Divergent* series of books, and the subsequent feature films.

The edited volume is described in the introduction as a "textbook for *Divergents*," and would be of interest to *Divergent* fans, scholars, and lovers of popular culture. The common goal of the essays is to draw parallels between plot elements of the *Divergent* stories and modern philosophical dilemmas. The book would be of interest to students of rhetoric, popular culture, ethics, philosophy, and sociology. It would also make an engaging supplemental text for courses in film criticism or political science. The book's content would be suitable for undergraduates.

The book is comprised of 19 essays divided into five thematic sections. Editor Lewis introduces the book with a brief summary of the structure of the *Divergent* stories: in a future, dystopian Chicago, citizens have been divided into five "factions;" Abnegation, Amity, Candor, Dauntless, and Erudite. At age sixteen, citizens take a test to determine the faction to which they naturally belong. In the rare event that a citizen's test results indicate a predilection for more than one faction, that person is labeled as a "divergent," a category that has been deemed dangerous to society. The main character in the stories, Beatrice (called Tris) is a divergent, and the plotlines center around her struggles to balance her multiple abilities while hiding her divergent status from those around her, and from the government, which considers divergents a threat to the social order.

In the first thematic section, "Are You Divergent?," authors Jessica Seymour, Christopher Ketchum, Marjorie E. Rhine, and Laura Mallalieu

explore how we treat divergents in real life, and the ways in which we label one another by “faction.” For example, Seymour’s essay “Drugging the Kids” discusses how our education system often fails children with learning issues or unconventional learning styles. When we treat such children with ADHD medication, she contends, it is a form of societal control over someone who is different from the norm. Like the government agents in *Divergent*, our culture identifies narrow modes of proper behavior, and considers those outside those norms to be a threat to our social order.

The second section, “How to Make Everyone Less Evil,” explores the roles of compassion and neighborly love in the world of *Divergent*. Authors Chad Bogosian, Trip McCrossin, and Courtland Lewis consider the place of selflessness and altruism in a society that values strict obedience to rules and norms. For example, in McCrossin’s essay “Tris’s Compassion and the Problem of Evil,” the author explores evil in both religious and secular terms, and the ways in which living in community with others sometimes demands choosing our actions for the greater good.

In the third thematic section, “Today We Choose,” authors Greg Littmann, Jillian L. Canode, Trip McCrossin, and Nicholas Michaud/Jessica Watkins examine issues of choice and social class. For example, Jillian L. Canode’s piece “Class Warfare in Chicago” encourages readers of the *Divergent* series to view the faction system in terms of social class, and to consider the ways in which the lower classes (particularly the “factionless,” who live on the streets without any social support) become invisible in society. Those who belong to one of the five designated factions are able to live a middle-class life, while those in government positions enjoy higher privileges. This system is in danger of collapse when members of any given class take an interest in other classes; for instance, if a faction member chooses to help the factionless, or to question members of the government “bureau.” The sense of social peace

created by the class system of *Divergent* is only effective if all citizens remain in their designated roles.

In section four, “Wisdom Before Faction,” authors Deborah Pless, Gregory L Bock/Jeffrey L. Bock, and Cole Bowman consider issues of courage and truth telling in relation to faction norms. In “Tell the Truth at All Costs,” Bowman examines the tenets of the “Candor” faction, which values honesty above all else. This faction, which adheres to Kant’s Categorical Imperative, considers dishonesty to be the root of evil. However, the truth-at-all-costs mandate does not allow for the individual to consider the nuances of context, or to develop a personal philosophy of truth and honesty. Thus, the citizen is stripped of a form of personal agency.

The fifth and final section, “Know Thy Faction, Know Thy Self,” encourages the reader to examine their fit with the various fictional factions of *Divergent*, and how they themselves might be a divergent. Authors John V. Karavitis, Jessica Seymour, Jordan Pascoe, and Kyle A. Schenkewitz explore issues of knowing ourselves and identifying our talents. In Karavitis’s essay “What Do We Really Owe Our Parents?,” the author examines how children adapt to, or break away from, their family’s values. In the *Divergent* series, children are raised in the faction of their parents, but when they reach the age of sixteen, they take part in a “choosing ceremony” to determine the faction in which they will live for the rest of their lives. This may be their faction of origin, or a different one, in which case they would no longer have interactions with their family of origin. Karavitis likens this to the life choices all modern young people must make, and the social and emotional costs of those choices.

The book provides both breadth and depth in examining the connections between the dystopian world of *Divergent* and modern America, especially in terms of life choices and the philosophies that ground them. The authors examine a wide range of ethical perspectives and how these are enacted by the characters in the series. The edited

volume provides ground for deeper thought and group discussion of social systems, and the ways our personal belief systems and talents affect how we function in community with others. The drawback to using this book in a classroom setting would be the necessity for students' familiarity with a series of books and/or movies that is less ubiquitous in the media landscape than other dystopian series such as *The Hunger Games*. Students would need to be familiar with at least the first novel in the series for *Divergent* and *Philosophy* to be useful in the classroom.

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Murguia, Salvador, editor. *The Encyclopedia of Japanese Horror Films*. Lanham, MA: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016. Print.

Beyond *Godzilla* and a brief early 2000s fascination that culminated in a pair of sleek Americanized remakes of Japanese horror films (*The Grudge* and *The Ring*), the history, themes, and style of J-horror are largely unknown to Western cinema audiences. *The Encyclopedia of Japanese Horror Films* (2016) offers an accessible starting place for horror fans inside and outside the academy seeking to access decades of Japanese horror cinema ranging from iconic to obscure. It serves as a useful resource for aficionados and film scholars seeking to draw connections across genres, directors, and cultural tropes.

Edited by Salvador Murguia and featuring 199 unique entries from 57 contributors from around the world, *The Encyclopedia of Japanese Horror Films* advertises itself as “the only *encyclopedia* on the English-speaking market that takes up the specific content of the J-horror genre” (xiii), one

that incorporates “virtually every major horror film production made in Japan from the past century to date” (xiii). By approaching its vast subject matter with a wide scope— its definition of *horror* incorporates “comedy horror, science fiction horror, hyper-violence, Japanese cyberpunk horror, ero guru (erotic grotesque), *tokusatsu* horror (live-action special effects), and anime horror” (xiii-xiv)—the text offers remarkable breadth. Consistent with its encyclopedic form, its breadth comes at the cost of depth of analysis across the contents of its 383 pages. That said, in addition to its impressive breadth and its uniqueness to the lexicon of horror literature, its entries and contributors flash impressive critical insight at times. Consuming the entire text is a rewarding experience when recurring themes and figures coalesce into a more holistic understanding of J-horror, if not horror in sum.

*The Encyclopedia of Japanese Horror Films* is organized alphabetically and includes entries for single films, film series, genres and tropes, and significant figures: directors, writers, actors, manga artists, and production houses. Most entries span 1-2 pages. Unsurprisingly, the Godzilla franchise gets the longest accumulative treatment, with 10 pages dedicated to an overview of the series from 1954’s *Godzilla* through the 2014 U.S. reboot, as well as a detailed capsule of the first film in both its Japanese and American incarnations.

A majority of entries are dedicated primarily to plot synopsis for films and biographies for people; these may be augmented with succinct moments of critical insight or reflection on the subject’s place in the larger J-horror lexicon. Films discussed range from those relatively familiar and accessible to Western horror fans — *Ju-on*, *Ringu* (remade as the aforementioned *The Grudge* and *The Ring*, respectively), *Battle Royale*, *Cure*, the Death Note series — to more violent and notorious cult fare such as *Audition*, *Ichi The Killer*, *Horrors of Malformed Men*, *Wild Zero*, and the *Guinea Pig* series. The richest moments to be found among the book’s entries see the writers situate their subject within broader Japanese

culture or draw critical connections across films or genres. Though acknowledging even half of the text's meaningful critical insights is beyond the scope of a single review, the following representative highlights serves as samples of the book's peak informative strokes.

For example, early in the book, contributor Michael Crandol introduces readers to *bakeneko* (ghost cat), a recurring Japanese ghost trope derived from traditional folklore. As Crandol explains, "According to legend, a cat that laps the blood of a murder victim has the power to take on the person's *urami* (emphasis in original) or hatred, giving the animal the ability to seek revenge against those responsible for the crime" (14). Crandol traces cinematic representations to *bakeneko* to the early twentieth century, and this initial overview of the trope is reinforced over the course of the text through capsule descriptions of films featuring *bakeneko*: *Black Cat Mansion*, *The Ghost Cat of Arima Palace*, *The Ghost Story of Saga Mansion*, and the critically acclaimed *Kuroneko*. The *bakeneko* trope is revisited in Crandol's biography of iconic actress Sumiko Suzuki, "Japan's first genuine movie star" also known as "the *bakeneko* (ghost cat) actress" (304-05). Such intersections of actor, film, and genre help the reader situate individual elements of J-horror into the larger picture.

Among the work of recurring contributors, the writing of Jim Harper stands out as particularly insightful. Harper locates the *Bloodthirsty* series of loosely connected vampire films within the larger international vampire genre and comparing them to Europe's Hammer films (28). Later, Harper explains an otherwise lack of slasher films in Japan in his entry on the film *Evil Dead Trap* (70-72) and contextualizes the prevalence of found-footage films in Japanese culture within his entry on *P.O.V.: A Cursed Film* (249-50).

Similarly, informative interpretive work is featured in Yuki Nakayama's discussion of *Blind Beast vs. Killer Dwarf*, in which the author interweaves auteur and genre criticism to explain how "the film



engages with erotic desire that straddles boundaries of beauty and the grotesque” (24). Crandol’s entry on 1959’s *The Bloody Sword of the 99th Virgin* Japan’s primordial take on the “savage, inbred mountain dwellers” genre (29), combines genre analysis and historical critique of the film’s depiction of the real-life tragic plight of Japan’s *Burakumin* subaltern class (29-30). Insight into Japanese racism, this time against Africans, returns later in Carolyn Mauricette’s capsule on 2009’s *Vampire Girl Vs. Frankenstein Girl* (351-52). Japanese attitudes toward gender (*Audition*, 13), family and patriarchy (*Dark Water*, 45; *Kanashimi No Beradonna*, 171-72), and feminine desire (*Ugetsu Monogatari*, 343-44) offer further insight into Japanese art and culture in addition to discussing the plots and particulars of the cinematic texts.

Through succinct and fruitful insights into the Japanese culture as depicted in classic and modern J-horror films, readers glean knowledge of culture, folklore, and history. And for those readers singularly interested in pursuing encyclopedic knowledge of all J-Horror has to offer from *The Birth of Japan* to *Tokyo Gore Police*, *The Encyclopedia of Japanese Horror Films* fulfills its advertised promise, too.

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Neibaur, James L. *The Essential Jack Nicholson*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016. Print.

Talking about freedom and being free—that’s two different things. So goes the renowned recitation of George Hanson (Jack Nicholson) seated around the campfire with Billy (Dennis Hopper) and Wyatt (Peter Fonda) in the summer of 1969 classic, *Easy Rider*. This role gave us our first true glimpse into what Nicholson could be and would become. For more than

five decades, Jack Nicholson has performed tirelessly from stage to screen to become one of the most beloved and recognized actors in film history, including three Oscars and twelve Academy Award nominations—more than any other male actor.

James L. Neibaur's *The Essential Jack Nicholson* maintains a very clear objective: that is, the book is written for mainstream movie fans rather than scholars—for those interested in the nature and nuances of his performances rather than a complete and comprehensive overview of his career. As such, Neibaur not only presents us with compelling glimpses of the movies that have helped define Nicholson's growth as an actor, but also a fascinating foray into the inner workings of cinema history and the multitude of versatile producers, writers, and filmmakers that animate that history, including Roger Corman, Monte Hellman, Bob Rafelson, Mike Nichols, Hal Ashby, Roman Polanski, Milos Forman, Stanley Kubrick, Warren Beatty, James L. Brooks, John Huston, Tim Burton, Rob Reiner, Alexander Payne, and Martin Scorsese, among others.

*The Essential Jack Nicholson* consists of thirty-two chapters, each describing the varied dimensions of the films, from production to critical reaction and commercial reception and accolades that have come to define Nicholson's legacy. Interestingly, Neibaur illustrates that much of Nicholson's potential and greatness is directly connected to the filmmakers and the cultural moments they all inhabited, each mutually benefiting the other to the point it becomes difficult (if not impossible) to determine who helped make whom. The strength of the book, however, is its breadth and resourcefulness. For instance, in highlighting a broad range of his films, highly successful classics alongside marginalized B-movies, Neibaur elucidates both Nicholson and film history simultaneously. In chapters two, three, and four, for example, Neibaur opens an important window into *how* Nicholson developed his craft by focusing on prominent B-film master Roger Corman, who pioneered low-budget guerilla filmmaking and helped propel the early careers of Francis Ford Coppola,

Martin Scorsese, Peter Bogdanovich, Ron Howard, Joe Dante, John Sayles, Jonathan Demme, James Cameron, and of course, Jack Nicholson. In other words, we learn specifically how *The Little Shop of Horrors*, *The Raven*, and *The Terror* set the stage for the next season of Nicholson's career.

Moreover, in chapters four and five, Neibaur offers a fuller picture of Nicholson as both actor and screenwriter by giving attention to his work with Monte Hellman in *The Shooting* and *Ride in the Whirlwind* as well as his collaborative relationship with Bob Rafelson. With *Head*, for example, Nicholson and Rafelson shared screenwriting credit and teamed again with *Five Easy Pieces*. Their subject in *Head* (*The Monkees*) helped Rafelson establish the equity needed to fund the quintessential *Easy Rider*. Overall, the remainder of the book continues to establish credibility for Nicholson's greatness through an exploration of his many memorable characters in films like *Chinatown*, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, and *The Shining*.

In sum, the films discussed include (in chronological order) *The Cry Baby Killer*, *The Little Shop of Horrors*, *The Raven*, *The Terror*, *The Shooting*, *Ride in the Whirlwind*, *Head*, *Easy Rider*, *Five Easy Pieces*, *Carnal Knowledge*, *The Last Detail*, *Chinatown*, *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, *Goin' South*, *The Shining*, *Reds*, *Terms of Endearment*, *Prizzi's Honor*, *The Witches of Eastwick*, *Ironweed*, *Batman*, *A Few Good Men*, *Hoffa*, *The Crossing Guard*, *As Good as It Gets*, *The Pledge*, *About Schmidt*, *Anger Management*, *Something's Gotta Give*, *The Departed*, *The Bucket List*, and *How Do You Know*. In essence, *The Essential Jack Nicholson* is both a proclamation and an invitation. As a proclamation, Neibaur makes a case for Nicholson as a Hollywood icon, someone who challenged industry conventions and caused us to broaden our notion of a leading man. In turn, this declaration becomes an invitation to discovering (or perhaps

rediscovering) the stories that helped make Jack Nicholson one of our most beloved actors.

And though Nicholson unofficially “retired” in 2010, citing, “I had the most chilling thought that maybe people in their twenties and thirties don’t actually want to be moved anymore” (xii), he maintains an aura of esteem among fans and filmmakers alike the likes of which are reserved only for the Hollywood pantheon.

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D’Amico, LuElla. *Girls’ Series Fiction and American Popular Culture*. Lexington Books. 2016. Print.

*Girls’ Series Fiction and American Popular Culture*, edited by LuElla D’Amico, presents a empowering collection of choice, chance encounter and conviction inspired by the literary adventures of more than a century’s worth of admired and spirited female protagonists. Much more than a collection of critical essays detailing the adventures of young female heroines, “Girls’ Series Fiction and American Popular Culture” offers a unique opportunity to better understand the historical, social and political contexts in which their adventures occurred.

The collection offers the historical scholar, of any discipline, a valuable lens into the world of the young female, past and present. The collection, broken down into 14 chapters, is organized and grouped loosely by time period and subject. The breadth of the collection is one of its greatest strengths.

The collection opens with reflections on Louisa May Alcott’s work (*Little Women, Little Men, Jo’s Boys*) and an intriguing review of Susan Coolidge’s work (Katy novels) and the relationship between feminism,

queerness and disability. The work closes with a review of more recent series including *Fancy Nancy* (geared toward younger readers); the *Vampire Academy Series* (and its “fantastical world in which complex characters - humans and vampires - cohabitate” along with “Third-Wave feminism”) (p. 251); and, finally, *Pretty Little Liars and Their Pretty Little Devices* (a 21st century work examining the influences of technology and technological change). This journey through time, shared from the perspective of a dynamic group of scholars (representing a variety of fields and backgrounds) presents, almost by chance, an animated historical timeline of feminist growth and progress. As Nichole Bogarosh observes in her entry titled “Nancy Drew and Trixie Belden”, “[t]hink of the changes that could be made if more people came to identify as feminists and truly embrace the dictionary definition of feminism: the political, social, and economic equality of all genders” (Bogarosh, p. 144). Irrespective of one’s political, social or economic ideals, the historical breadth of D’Amico’s collection offers researchers and readers poignant examples of the females’ long and winding march towards equality.

The collection is just as valuable as a window into the female adolescent’s personal challenges and struggles - those that have persisted and transcended historical periods. The collection of essays, alone and together, support a broader, deeper definition of what it means to be a “girl”. Whereas Nancy Drew, for example, is often thought of as “the definition of wholesome”, Trixie Belden is more often referred to as “wildly imperfect” (p. 92) or “perfectly imperfect” (p. 122). Taking the reader well beyond the “boy-crazy, drama-queen” too often highlighted in the popular culture (Waldron, 2010; Weber, 2014), the collection raises awareness of the depth and complexity of the female adolescent as she grows and transitions towards adulthood.

D’Amico’s collection simultaneously immerses readers in memories of the literature, series or otherwise, that impacted their personal and professional life choices. While our memories of the books are often

“more impressionistic than specific” (D’Amico, p. 137), the very real impact of the series genre on its readers remains without doubt. Presenting a comprehensive review of both the longevity and the variety (with subjects exploring, in part, race, class, gender, and equality) inherent to the genre, the collection offers valuable insights into the influence of girls’ series fiction on generations of young readers.

Perhaps most importantly, the collection is, at its core, celebratory. The work successfully resolves and reconciles any doubts regarding the power of the female protagonist and of the girls’ series fiction genre, both as a voice and a source of inspiration to generations. Whether emulated or rejected (see p. vii), heroines of series books dating back to the mid-nineteenth century are plentiful and powerful. The collection’s essays share a deep respect for the female heroine, a young girl as a protagonist, the unexpected feminist, and a sometimes-unlikely role model. Themes of honesty, curiosity and resilience thread throughout each entry. Essays explore, for example, *Cherry Ames*, *Student Nurse* (complex career-related messages); *Betsy-Tacy* (queries on journaling, self-disclosure and identity); the American Girls series (political consciousness, privilege, social injustice and consumption); and the *Baby-Sitters Club* (one of Scholastic Inc.’s most successful juvenile fiction series, raising questions about the distinction between literature and product) (Mary Bronstein, p. 205) with rich detail and perception. Taken as a whole, the collection serves as a moving reminder of the power, diversity and strength of the female heroine.

Finally, the collection offers its readers a compelling dose of inspiration. *Girls’ Series Fiction and American Popular Culture* opens with an Introduction that astutely describes “the power of the series genre as a guiding influence on [the] future life trajectories” of at least three of our United States Supreme Court justices (Girls’ Series Fiction, p. vii). While the esteemed Justices Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Sandra Day O’Connor and Sonia Sotomayor are cited in the collection’s opening paragraphs

(D'Amico, p. vii), the series genre has undoubtedly served a similar role for thousands of young readers of all genders.

In many ways, the success of the girls series genre is much more than a result or consequence of literary prowess. The achievement, like D'Amico's collection of essays, is also a result of girl prowess, as well as empowerment and complexity. Literary critics argue that the plots are "formulaic", the characters arguably too predictable, the conflicts too contrived (D'Amico, p. viii). In many ways, these traits give way to the genre's grace and power as an empowerment tool. Readers are free to dream, live, and aspire - in an arguably contrived and predictable universe where great achievements are realized. *Girls' Series Fiction and American Popular Culture* celebrates that remarkable freedom.

As the collection closes, I was reminded of a fiery scene in *Feud*, an 8-hour TV series featuring two iconic actresses: Bette Davis and Joan Crawford. In a heated exchange, the two observed that while favored films are cyclical, the actors who wish to star in them are not (NPR, 2017). *Girls series heroines*, in contrast, remain perpetually influential. *Girls Series Fiction and American Popular Culture* successfully shares and celebrates this influence. Whether read in sequence, sporadically, in its entirety or on a whim, the text's readers are challenged to revisit the role of female characters in series novels (past and present) and, at the same time, reflect upon the role such series had on their upbringing and growth. I close with a deep sense of gratitude both to the original authors who had the imagination and the courage to develop such powerful role models as well as to the scholars who continue to explore, debate and acknowledge their impact.

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Aldama, Frederick L. and Christopher González, editors. *Graphic Borders: Latino Comic Books Past, Present and Future*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press. 2016. Print

Comic books have long been a staple of popular culture around the world from their newspaper origins in the 1930s to their position as a mediated powerhouse in today's globalized society. The comic book allows readers to escape through stories of fantasy but also engage in a cultural appreciation of a story's foundations, a dynamic that Aldama and González's collected volume, *Graphic Borders: Latino Comic Books Past,*



*Present and Future*, engages directly. This volume is an essential addition for any reader looking to better understand Latino culture as well as simply learn more about the depth of comic books in general. While the collection itself speaks more to notions of Latino culture and comic books in popular culture, the volume is wisely constructed to convey critical looks toward various dynamics of culture as a whole. The authors open the book with an introduction that lays the groundwork for diverse sets of analysis that the fourteen essays will explore. Aldama and González describe how modes of satire, science fiction and noir are present in Latino comic books, revealing complex dynamics of gender, identity, power, and border rhetorics that guide their collected work. Their opening cleanly sets readers up with the line of popular and academic scholarship their work fits with, segueing into their preview and central premise toward the multivariate dimensions of Latino comic books.

While Aldama and González are a joy to read in their introductory discussion, the book is most valuable to readers through the diverse set of collected essays and the arguments they bring to the volume. Fourteen essays broken into five major parts present a well-organized and careful look into the Latino cultures captured in comic books. Part one of the collection focuses on the critically acclaimed works of Los Bros Hernandez, three brothers whose cartooning and imagination transformed the Latino comic scene. While the collection of works in part one is mostly celebratory in nature, Hamilton and Aldama's pieces argue that their efforts were transformative of the comic medium. The section closes with a contribution by González, who adds to the argument that Los Bros Hernandez shifted the comic book genre as a whole, presenting a utility in comic books that explores notions of sexuality and challenges dominant modes of thinking toward Latino identity. Part two opens a discussion of the body through works focused on baseball icon Roberto Clemente and another on luchadores. González's piece on Hall of Fame baseball and philanthropic icon Roberto Clemente illuminates the visual potency of

bodies toward narrative development. Through both essays in this section we see an argument for the visual power of body rhetorics. The authors in this section notes how dynamic storytelling of the body displayed on a comic panel implicitly argues for dynamics of heroism with Clemente, and challenges to patriarchy through the luchadores.

Aldama and González's text is a step forward in considerations of border cultures, a discussion that occupies much of parts three and four of their volume. In today's contentious understandings of national, state, and urban borders, the use of comic books lays out an intriguing history of these political dynamics. Fernández-L'Hoeste opens this dialogue through a look at the dynamics of identity and assimilation these comic books offer. Coupled with Poblete's essay, readers are presented a nuanced look at the complicated dynamics of border rhetorics and cultural identity. This section is, I would argue, proves to be the richest of the book given its commentary on the struggles of cultural identity and bordering policies presents a critical vision toward Latino culture that is hard to come by in similar texts. This section very much runs in a similar vein to DeChaine and Cisneros' works on the rhetorics of bordering, but approaches the phenomenon through a unique presentation in comic books.

The theme toward history and cultural tensions continues into the fourth part of *Graphic Borders*, where the text approaches the shades of other-ness and subjugated histories that comic books offer. In these works, *Graphic Borders* offers an honest and unmitigated look into the historical experiences of the Latino communities wrestling with perceptions of self. Readers interested in the origins of these conflicts will find immense value in these works, as they shed light on the issue from a medium like comic books, detailing the widespread anxiety to remain true to self but also exist in our constantly shifting world. Sections four and five of the book move our focus into the twenty-first century and beyond, looking at the possibilities of Latino comic books as a series of artifacts that engage Latin culture like no other. These works are optimistic, yet cautious in

nature, divulging the taken-for-granted Latino elements present in comics like *Spider-Girl*, while also reflecting on the hegemonic control over comic book content, and by extension, culture. These authors illustrate how the maintenance toward representing Latino culture in a productive manner is certainly a complex and uphill effort, but as history illustrates, is well worth the effort.

In all, *Graphic Borders* is a collection that deserves consideration on the bookshelf of any reader interested in subjects like Latino culture, comic book history, and mass media as a whole. While the collection holds the depth and content necessary to consider it as a must-have, the abrupt close to the text after Montes' piece on Spider-Man opened a window for discussion that Aldama and González never closed. This critique aside, *Graphic Borders* is a thorough look at Latino culture and comic books that engages subjects like borders, gender, history, politics, and sexuality in a cohesive collection of essays. As such, Aldama and González's work advances our knowledge on the subject of Latino culture and the comic book medium in a way that places it as one of the premier recent texts to consider for popular culture scholars and enthusiasts.

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Calvente, Lisa B. Y. and Guadalupe García, eds. *Imprints of Revolution: Visual Representations of Resistance*. Rowman & Littlefield International, 2016. Print.

The word revolution has a rich connotation that evokes an immediate imagination of a wide range of political, economic, technological, historical, and sociocultural events happening around the globe. This

edited collection of chapters, *Imprints of Revolution*, tells nine different stories about the discursive formations of revolution in a century-long time span and across the borders of countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. The editors of this volume set the discourse of revolution in an intersectional position with the visual representation in order to explore a mutual influence on the struggle over hegemony and the ongoing (neo)colonial(ity) narrative (7). As the editors point out, the concept and the act of revolution grew out of the encounter and interaction between Western empires and the colonized world. Through revolution, the indigenous, the colonized, and the enslaved ruptured and transformed the (Western) modern world that values humanity, freedom, and rationality. In the process of transformation, “visual representations materialized as the impetus for the ongoing processes of decolonization, global revolution, and justice” (5). Therefore, the editors’ intend to examine how visual images contribute to the articulation and interrogation of revolutions in different contexts and help to understand the new colonial relationship in a highly globalized environment.

The nine chapters are case studies of revolutionary protests across spatial and temporal axes. The volume begins with Theresa Avila’s discussion of several prints of Emiliano Zapata (1879-1919), the national hero whose personal narrative records the details of Mexico in the process of democratization, such as agrarian reform and rebellions against the decentralized government. By a close reading of these prints, Avila presents and reconstructs a specific periodization of Mexico through the eyes of the revolutionary icon.

In chapter two, Alison Hulme describes the changed rhetoric of industriousness in Mao’s period and the post-Mao era (1949-present) in China by an examination of the posters from different times. Through this description she argues that under different political ideologies, the industrious revolution in China may have changed the economic, social, and cultural environment, but there is always the continuity in the quest

for the good life. Similar to the search for a good life in China, Lisa B. Y. Calvente and Guadalupe Garcia, in chapter three, look for a unifying identity among the Cuban masses. The authors examine the roles various visual arts such as photographs, posters, billboards, and magazines have played in the articulation of the revolutionary meanings in Cuba after 1959, with a particular focus on how these artistic forms have been utilized and transformed in order to fit into the changing political, economic, and international environment.

Brynn Hatton in chapter four examines multiple examples of antiwar arts about Vietnamese revolutionary subjectivity produced in geographically disparate contexts. In her analysis, social categories such as race, nationality, class, and political orientation serve as cohesive rather than divisive factors. She argues that re-visiting the art movement that features global solidarity at a specific historical moment facilitates a better understanding of the power of contemporary visual products. Following the theme of global solidarity, Meron Wondwosen, in chapter five, discusses a variety of paintings, sculptures, posters, and photographs of three critical historical moments of Ethiopia. Such discussion paints a clearer picture of how these public visual representations have reflected the Ethiopians' engagement in different movements and in the construction of a global African identity.

Unlike other chapters that examine revolutions at a given historical moment, Silvia Nagy-Zekmi and Kevin J. Ryan Jr., in chapter six, see revolution as a way to reconstruct power relations. In particular, they argue that, as a commodified heritage site, Peru's world-renowned historical tourist site Machu Picchu has lost its cultural agency. The possible solution is to empower the indigenous inheritors to form the core of the site so as to resist cultural domination in the post-colonialist era.

Chapter seven and eight discuss the use of visual strategies by the empowered and the disempowered. Joshua Frye introduces *iconic associationism*, a visual rhetorical concept, to analyze how the Venezuelan

president Hugo Chavez strategically appropriates the image of the nineteenth-century cultural icon Simon Bolivar to establish and solidify his political power and to reconstitute Venezuela's national identity. In contrast, Leonora Souza Paula analyzes how the activist Grupo de Arte Callejero in Buenos Aires uses signs and symbols to disrupt the norms established by the dominant and to dispel the traumatic past brought by military dictatorship and economic chaos. It is clear that the Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez was imposing his political power on the masses with the help of visual images while the masses in Argentina, led by an activist group, were using visuals to interrogate and challenge the empowered.

The last chapter brings readers back to contemporary Mexico. Nasheli Jimenez del Val examines how Mexican student activists initiated various protests by using a wide range of visual media to interrogate the controversial presidential candidate who had manipulated the media to create his biased public image during the electoral campaign in 2012.

Bloody upheaval and chaotic nightmare may be demoralizing and frustrating, but the overturn of the hegemonic and the ultimate success of democracy can be motivating. Throughout the case studies in this collection, *revolution*, with the aid of various visual images, is reconstructed and rearticulated. Colonialism and imperialism still exist in our world and people still fight for democracy, justice, and human rights. This book collection offers a fresh angle on this ongoing battle.

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Oring, Elliot. *Joking Asides: The Theory, Analysis, and Aesthetics of Humor*. University Press of Colorado, 2016. Print.

In his new book, Folklorist and humor scholar Elliot Oring contextualizes and advances his previous writings on jokes and their function in society. *Joking Asides* contains a compilation of Oring's scholarship integrated with summaries, explanations and analyses of contemporary humor theories. Readers of any academic discipline will benefit greatly from this text that covers centuries of scholarship regarding humor theories and their potential to advance a greater understanding of comedy and its role in public culture. Oring explains the rationale for his new book as follows: "This volume is meant to offer challenges to our conventional understandings of humor; understandings of what humor is; how jokes function; who the targets of comedy are; what the basis might be for the identification of a humorous repertoire with a particular social group; how the subgenres of jokes might be defined; and how jokes might relate to those forms of expression considered to be art" (218).

Oring accomplishes the above and more by providing thoughtful and thorough representations of multiple and ongoing conversations about jokes. Some of the conversations included, but were not limited to, Freud's *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*, the General Theory of Verbal Humor, Blending and Humor, Benign Violations, False Beliefs, Jokes on the Internet, Narrative Jokes, Jewish Jokes, and how joke analyses should more explicitly frame this discourse as an art-form with its own aesthetics. Every chapter benefits from frequent examples of jokes and humorous situations, clear summaries, and even the occasional graph/chart that explain complex and confusing formulas. Oring encourages other scholars to add their voices to these ongoing conversations by explicitly articulating specific areas for future research throughout the book.

A recurring topic across several chapters is Oring's own theory, Appropriate Incongruity, which he both summarizes and applies to multiple examples: "this perspective claims that all humor depends upon the perception of an incongruity that can nevertheless be seen as somehow appropriate [to] capture what is going on in the joke without any precommitment to the categories of a formal theory" (25). Oring's concept is intentionally vague, which privileges the critic in constructing a context to both establish and apply this perspective. Part of this context must be historical, and Oring's excellent work in uncovering the particular myths and assumptions of Jewish humor in Chapter 10 serve as a stellar model for scholars concerned about uncovering erroneous assumptions about jokes and how they function within a specific moment in history. I found the repeated inclusion of Appropriate Incongruity helpful in not only clarifying how this theory can be used productively, but also in noting some of the limits of other theories covered in this volume, notably that Benign Violation Theory is essentially a "clone" of Oring's concept (80). Indeed, Oring's book serves as an excellent showcase for how his theory continues to be productive in contemporary joke scholarship.

However, Chapter 6, "Framing Borat," would have benefitted from *more* inclusion of Oring's concept by noting explicitly how Appropriate Incongruity theory could be used to analyze the provocative faux-documentary, *Borat*. As the shortest chapter in the book, I was left wanting more application of Appropriate Incongruity and how it applies to a work of humor that encompassed two discrete audiences: the cinematic audience aware of the comedic content due to generic form and those individuals that appear within the film as unwitting dupes necessary to advance said comedic content. Given Oring's frequent calls for future scholarship into humor studies, perhaps this is but one more path he identifies; it is up to a reader to begin a productive journey in addressing how awareness and/or consciousness plays a role in humor reception.



The book in its entirety is certainly a must read for any contemporary humor scholar; however, Oring's summary of Freud's writing on jokes is a particular standout. *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* is frequently cited and referenced, but Oring exposes how often people relying on Freud's work fail to accurately depict the contents of the primary text. The first chapter, "What Freud Actually Said about Jokes," is a comprehensive overview that clarifies the relationship between jokes and dreams, the comparison at the center of Freud's book. In Oring's estimation, the differences are more salient than the similarities because jokes are intentional and (potentially) have a socially relevant impact: "In sum, the joke emerges not as a manifestation of unconscious forces seeking release but as a literary construction that authorizes the communication of conscious, though prohibited, thoughts in public settings" (12). Oring frames Freud's book as essentially a *rhetorical theory* of the joke, particularly the practice of tendentious humor. This observation – and the multiple examples of jokes explored to support Oring's viewpoint – was nothing short of enlightening for this rhetorical scholar of humor.

Oring has an obvious agenda with this book: to ensure that those endeavoring to engage in academic scholarship related to humor get up to speed on the past and present of this discipline in order to make their own impact and allow for future progress in understanding that jokes have an important role in public culture. He ends the book thusly: "Meanwhile, the conversation is ongoing and those who would acquaint themselves with the issue, the materials, and previous research are more than welcome to put their two cents in" (219). Oring provides readers with the relevant talking points from this ongoing discussion to facilitate the addition of new voices.

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Ouellette, Laurie and Gray, Jonathan, editors. *Keywords for Media Studies*. New York: New York University Press, 2017. Print.

Modeled after Raymond Williams' 1983 book, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, and very much in its spirit of historicity, dynamism and the cartography of words, the authors address media studies keywords in terms of definitions (some hotly contested or evolving), history and explanatory examples, and salience for future media studies research. The authors are all particularly suited to their subject matters, many already having made substantial scholarly and professional impact in their areas of contribution. The book is structured as 65 alphabetically listed entries of approximately two to four pages each. Of course, no book can be expected to cover every possible important term or to create a definitive canon, as the editors readily admit. Still, the book's authors deftly tackle an admirable breadth of concepts, some of which previously have not received treatment in such a book (e.g., play, intersectionality, reflexivity).

Three of the book's considerable strengths serve here to commend it to readers. First, the authors give familiar terms some novelty in one or more aspects, such as their definitions, significance or future research directions. For instance, what would media studies be without the sustaining food for thought of representation? In this iteration, however, a rich treatment of visibility regarding various groups is juxtaposed with the notion that "representation...must capture...the world as we feel it and as we would like it to be," (175) not just the way it is. To put a poignant fine point on the matter, the author reminds us of children's television host Fred Rogers' assertion, "if you know someone's story, you will love them" (176). Another familiar term, technology, points toward the things that matter in society rather than holding importance in its usual conception as object. Thus, the author urges media studies "away from a fascination and awe of technological things to the more difficult but useful interrogation of

technological culture" (193). As its own popular area of inquiry, memory is integral to media studies, but its definition ("the modality in which the past is made new again and again" 121) coupled with the observation that "remembering and forgetting are not just things that people do, but also things that are done to people," (122) give this brief discussion a fresh feel.

Another asset, essential to a book such as this, is its synergistic treatment of the terms without redundancy. For example, the domesticity entry argues the term is a "foundation for the richness of media" (65) and discusses it in terms of identity politics (gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, and class), ultimately locating it in the realm of the "emotionally fraught" (63). Given the nature of cultural and critical studies, some overlap can and should occur. Yet, related terms such as power and hegemony, audience and public, taste and aesthetics, or commodification and brand, cover productively overlapping terrain from distinct angles, avoiding repetition while reinforcing their centrality to media studies.

Most important is the book's critical interrogation of key terminology, leading in many cases to fruitful future directions. The volume is rife with incisive caveats and conclusions that provide non-intuitive insights, and generally discuss the kind of hidden relationships that media criticism proffers at its analytical best. One such notion is that of reflexivity as harboring the danger of demobilization "because it caters to a debilitating savviness" (171). Similarly, the usual understanding of resistance as being in service to social change becomes a conservative strategy instead, "resist(ing) what is new to conserve the old" (179). The reader learns that resistance "with its eyes always upon its adversary does little to provide a vision of the new world to come" (179). Appropriately, the discussion of play provides a delightful example of how this concept can advance media criticism: from the terse descriptions of its nature (as "doing" and as "being," (138); "as precocious as it is precarious" (138); "unrelentingly fuzzy" (139); and "beyond language" (140)), to the media function of play

("magic circle generators" 139), to the social conditions on which play is predicated ("a leap of faith" 139), there is simply "no media culture without play" (139). Studying play's experiential complexity reinforces the idea that media culture consists of "lived, meaning-making acts" (138). In the end, being open to the vulnerability of play will illuminate ourselves and our media.

Some contributions particularly exemplify all the book's strengths simultaneously. That they are too numerous to mention here is itself a testament to the book's caliber. The four-page entry on celebrity is a case in point. Its connection to media studies seems obvious and natural, yet an examination of the shifting boundary between "exceptionalism and ordinariness," (28) and the democratization of fame posits some keen insights on the changing nature of celebrity, and explores its role in serving a "politics of distraction," (31) enriching but not overlapping with discussions of fandom or the popular.

In barely a page and a half, the entry on irony manages to pinpoint its nature, unpack its mechanisms for creating meaning, and elucidate its utility ("challenging received truths and deconstructing pieties" (115)) as well as its pleasures (e.g., social connection). Its connections to myth, hegemony or play, for example, are stimulating and heuristic.

This is more than an extended glossary. Though short, the entries are complexly rich, so this is far from light reading, and perhaps not intended or recommended to be done at one time. Alphabetic arrangement is extremely useful for quickly locating particular entries, but because many of these terms have relationships among one another, a "see also" listing might be helpful at the bottom of each entry.

With clearly written prose and no presumption of background knowledge, this book is appropriate for students, but generative and analytical enough to appeal to more mature scholars as well. Its explanatory background material, future research directions, and effort to problematize each term and to locate it within the larger cultural studies

project provide thought-provoking intellectual engagement. Thoroughly satisfying and provocatively brevilouquent, this book was found to be far more enjoyable than an academic text has a right to be

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Reinhard, Carrielynn D. and Olson, Christopher J., editors. *Making Sense of Cinema: Empirical Studies into Film Spectators and Spectatorship*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2016. Print.

Editors Carrielynn Reinhard and Christopher Olson have gathered a diverse cast of studies that highlight both the various ways in which spectators interact with and are impacted by specific films as well as the journey researchers take to complete such studies. The collection, *Making Sense of Cinema*, covers a considerable range, taking on everything from *Lord of the Rings* to *Fight Club*, from intense J-horror film festivals to children in the 20s and 30s. The book certainly meets the goals Reinhard and Olson set in the introduction—one of which they describe as such: “[t]he goal is to demonstrate what can be done—what can be studied and how, to what end, and with what benefits and drawbacks—when applying empiricism to make sense of film spectators and film spectatorship” (13). However, in addition to the vivid details of the empirical process, each

study also produced fascinating and sometimes shocking results and told captivating stories.

The book opens with an introduction by Reinhard and Olson in which they outline a brief history of the modern study of spectators's interactions with films and describe the theory behind these studies in a way that is easily comprehensible. In Chapter Two, Annie Dell'Aria takes us to three large cities in order to observe how spectators interact with public art. Jessica Hughes's Chapter Three brings us along to the Fantasia International Film Festival to catch the a few J-horror films and the fans' reactions to the extreme gore. In Chapter Four, Darren Waldron seeks to study how well Spanish and UK LGBTQ audiences can relate to a French film—*Les Invisibles*—which chronicles the experiences of older members of France's LGBTQ community. In Chapter Five, Alexander Geimer asks a group of teenagers to question their lifestyles based on themes found in *Fight Club*. Chapter Six's Martin Baker shares *Lord of the Rings* fans' reasoning behind their favorite characters. Amanda Fleming's Chapter Seven travels back to the 20s and 30s to revisit early studies on children's taste in films and to critique the bias of similar studies. In Chapter Eight, Andrea Russell, Jenny Robinson, Darrin Verhagen, Sarah Pink, Sean Redmond, and Jane Stadler use *Saving Private Ryan* and *Monsters Inc.* to explore how sound affects viewers' gazes. In Chapter Nine, Craig Batty, Adrian Dyer, Claire Perkins, and Jodi Sita investigate how viewers experience an animated film—in this case, *Up*—using eye-tracking technologies. In Chapter Ten, Katalin Bálint and András Bálint Kovács study viewers' attachment to films' characters in two Hungarian short films. Carrielynn Reinhard's Chapter Eleven studies fourteen non-American viewers' reactions to American superhero movies. In Chapter Twelve, Sermin Ildirar tests to see whether or not there are disparities in the abilities to use different cues in art films to understand the film between men and women as well as those who most frequently watch art films and those who most frequently watch commercial films. In Chapter

Thirteen, Thorsten Kluss, John Bateman, and Kerstin Schill use eye-tracking technologies to investigate spectators' visual expectations for romantic comedy, science fiction, and horror thriller films. The book concludes with Christopher Olson's Chapter Fourteen, reflecting on the successes and limitations of the studies in the collection, yet expressing hope that *Making Sense of Cinema* might be able to act as a guide for students and amateur researchers.

Indeed, one of the strengths of this collection is the range of methods presented in the twelve studies it showcases. From found research to questionnaires to eye-tracking technologies, the researchers demonstrate the capabilities and limitations that are part of the journey to understanding (or beginning to understand) spectators' interactions with various films. Together these studies and others in this collection illuminate the timeline and scope of film studies, giving us a sense as to how the field has evolved over time and insight, perhaps, into the future. The studies work together to create not only a collection of valuable contributions to the field of film studies but also various maps for conducting empirical research, which makes *Making Sense of Cinema* invaluable for students and researchers, established and aspiring alike.

However, a collection of tools for beginners would be utterly useless if the tools were made inaccessible through overly technical language. While there certainly are studies that are technical in nature, the process of the study is described in a way that could be not only clearly understood by such beginners but also engage with. Any graphics or tables that appear in relation to data are clearly explained and analyzed; they plainly bolster any points that the author or authors may make. The graphics and tables, too, present a plethora of examples for researchers to draw from when mounting their own studies.

Perhaps one of the most interesting aspects of *Making Sense of Cinema*—which Olson touches on in Chapter Fourteen—is that the studies explore many niches of global society (Chapter Three and Chapter Four),

while also featuring that which the public may be more familiar with, including the public art in Chapter Two and the superhero films of Chapter Eleven. Reinhard and Olson's collection clearly exhibits the variety that our society offers on a global, making it a wonderful representative to those new to the field. The message for young researchers here is clear: whatever you care about, there are always new ways to examine it. Here are some tools; go out and explore.

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Khabeer, Su'ad A. *Muslim Cool: Race, Religion, and Hip Hop in the United States*. New York University Press. 2016. Print.

Su'ad Abdul Khabeer's *Muslim Cool: Race, Religion, and Hip Hop in the United States* examines the connection between young Black and non-Black Muslims through the hip-hop movement. Khabeer argues that regardless of race and nationality, these youth connect as members of the hip-hop generation, engaging and challenging racism in the United States and within their community. *Muslim Cool* is a discussion of the ways Muslim youth utilize Blackness, as typified by hip-hop culture, as a source of identification. While Khabeer employs in-depth analysis to show how their dress, style and even activism is influenced by Black culture, this analysis would have benefitted from more time focused on the youth.

Khabeer's ethnographic study takes place over the course of two years while working at the Inner-City Muslim Action Network (IMAN), a Muslim non-profit community center in Chicago. She refers to the participants as "teachers" and shares not only their experiences, but also her own within the community. Khabeer's thesis is centered on an aesthetic she terms "Muslim Cool." *Muslim Cool* is the demonstration of



Blackness, as defined in hip hop culture, in which young Muslims challenge ideals established by traditional Muslim culture on one side and White American culture on the other. For these young Muslims, their relationship with Blackness is complicated with elements of anti-Blackness. Typical Arab and South Asian communities in America adapt negative attitudes about Black people from white communities that see them as both model minorities and perpetual foreigners. In protest of these ideas, those exhibiting Muslim Cool embrace hip-hop and the cultural stylings associated with the genre. It is clear in their interactions with traditional Muslim youth that they are outsiders by choice. Rather than considering this appropriation, Khabeer asserts that they use this connection to hip-hop to become activists in their own right. While it is not appropriation in its most traditional sense, the connection between the youth and hip-hop seems tenuous, at best. Some of the youth connect with hip-hop culture not in a philosophical way, but as a way to rebel against the mainstream. For example, when asked if hip-hop helps her to become Muslim, teacher Rabia says, “Yeah, imagine if I was listening to Nicole Richie? . . . Well then, Hannah Montana! Imagine if I was listening to that Nickelodeon crap!” (64). Rabia goes on to distance herself from “typical desi girls,” young Muslim women who focus on family, community and school. She is not just rebelling against the dominant white culture; she is defying her traditions as well. While this is not necessarily appropriation, only time will tell if this young woman’s protests will amount to youthful indiscretion later.

In the next section, Khabeer introduces the history of hip-hop and the influence that the Muslim religion has on the genre. This influence is evident through rappers, their lyrical content and their style of dress. In her exhaustive history, Khabeer argues that hip-hop artists who were part of the Nation of Islam (NOI) and Five Percent Nation continue to influence young Muslims today. She connects the lyrics of artists such as Big Daddy Kane and Public Enemy, and speeches from Khalid Muhammed, leader

within the NOI, to underground rappers within the Muslim Cool movement. Her argument is that, while the NOI is not accepted within traditional Muslim sects, it has an influence on hip-hop and has imbued the audience with ideals of Black Nationalism, exceptionalism and a spirit of resistance. This assertion is clearly influenced by Khabeer's history as a self-defined hip-hop head and not traditional Muslim thought, but is also the clearest example of Muslim Cool in action.

For example, within this discussion Khabeer describes a performance by a multi-cultural group of Muslim rappers featuring teacher Man-O-Wax on the turntables titled the Turntable Dhikr. In this performance, Man-O-Wax mixes different audio clips from hip-hop songs that mention Allah. Traditional Muslims in the audience considered the performance to be "haram upon haram upon haram" (79), meaning forbidden on multiple levels. Khabeer recalls that a handful of men stood at the corner of the stage complaining, determined to end the performance because they believed that Man-O-Wax was scratching over the name of Allah, which is prohibited. For the performers, however, this tribute served not only as a devotional, but also as an act of defiance against those traditionalists. This section is one of the strongest in the book. As Khabeer describes the tension in the performance hall, a distinction is made between the traditional Muslim participants and the performers who wanted to push the traditionalists out of their comfort zone. In this instance, the power of Muslim Cool becomes clear.

The timing of the release of *Muslim Cool* in the market is perfect, especially considering the United States' current relationship with the African American and Muslim communities. Khabeer ends the book with a discussion of the Black Lives Matter movement and how it challenges not only the state, but also those traditional methods of protest within the older civil rights community. While impassioned, this coda seems disconnected from earlier chapters. Perhaps including the teachers in the

discussion of Black Lives Matter and how they participate as Muslims within the movement would have helped with this connection.

*Muslim Cool* is a fascinating examination of the intersection between race, religion, and popular culture. While Khabeer's analysis is exhaustive, the book would benefit from more dialogue from the youth teachers. While we are introduced to an eclectic group of young people who offer different experiences crucial to the book's main premise, Khabeer tends to rely on her own voice toward the end of the book. This is a shame because their words could provide insight into the struggles that young Muslims are currently dealing with both within and outside of their communities. In addition, it would be interesting to read the ways in which they navigate the changing world of hip-hop and Muslim identity within it. Despite this departure, *Muslim Cool* is worth reading to gain insight into a fascinating world not often explored.

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Winters, Paul E. *Pressing Matters: Vinyl Records and Analog Culture in the Digital Age* London: Lexington Books, 2016. Print.

*Pressing Matters* is a loose collection of essays about the “discursive formation” of vinyl as a technology and aesthetic form (viii). The subject matter is timely, and the scope of the author's research suggests the possibility of a comprehensive historical argument, although, ultimately, such an argument appears only in sketch form. The author's central question—how and why vinyl made its comeback—seems to have been supplanted by perhaps more interesting lines of inquiry. *Pressing Matters*

instead addresses how listening, consuming, and collecting vinyl produce self-disciplining subjects, among other things. To this end, Winters often cites Foucault, or secondary sources on Foucault, and the phrase “in the Foucauldian sense” crops up throughout the book. The project, however, reads less like a genealogy than an unexpected mash-up of cultural theories.

Several chapters attempt to chart, through often disparate examples and concepts, the advent of sound technology and the corresponding production of subjects. For example, in chapter one, “‘Dogs Don’t Listen to Phonographs: Nipper, ‘His Master’s Voice,’ and the Discourse of ‘Fidelity,’” the author considers how ideas about sound fidelity produced “the listening subject”(2). Winters’ begins with the image of the Victorola mascot “Nipper,” the little dog with cocked head who listens into the “talking machine. “Nipper” and his story will be familiar to those who study early twentieth century sound technology. Winters, however, offers some novel insights about the context of Victorian realism, and makes a thorough pass through secondary literature on notions of fidelity. A different “listening subject” appears in Chapter Two, “The Beatles on itunes and Vinyl Reissue: Aesthetic Discourse and the Listening Subject.” Here, Winters briefly restages the Adorno/Benjamin debates about reproducible art. Benjamin wins this round, and the rest of the chapter ruminates on “aura” and authenticity. In this case, the “listening subject” emerges only peripherally, as an audiophile who imagines that the materiality of vinyl brings him closer to the origins of sound.

Finally, the “listening subject” becomes a more explicitly disciplinary subject by Chapter 6, “You spin me round (like a record).“ Here, Winters moves from the act of listening to other kinds of embodied practices involved in vinyl collection: storage, cleaning, maintenance, etc. (118). The true connoisseur understands that “correct use” preserves the collection and, in turn, the well-preserved collection certifies the

connoisseur. Winters insightfully locates the disciplinary mechanism in the physical and habitual repetitions that vinyl collecting seems to require.

Ultimately, however, Winters fails to illuminate the material and historical conditions that transformed the “listening subject” of the early twentieth century into the fetishistic collector of late capitalism. In the chapters that describe the production of sound subjects, Winters’ scattershot use of theory make his genealogical arguments less cogent. In the first chapter, for instance, Winters addresses the visual dynamics of the “Nipper” advertisement with select bits of John Berger’s *Ways of Seeing* (4). The analysis that follows fails to consider that Berger’s arguments about art and advertisement, particularly when he describes “the gaze,” often refer to *images of women* in art and advertisement, not necessarily to an object like “Nipper.” Lodged inside this paragraph on Berger is also a cumbersome quote about Foucault’s notion of the gaze, attributed to secondary source. These citations are dropped into arguments about the subject of *sound* with little explication or synthesis; both veer from Winters’ otherwise solid argument about how early twentieth century advertising worked to “domesticate” the turntable. While theorists of visual modernity may help to account for the discursive formations produced in part through print advertisement, Berger and Foucault never considered the modern soundscape. Winters might have made more coherent arguments by synthesizing theories about visual and auditory culture, or by omitting some of those theories altogether.

Winters’ genealogical ambitions are best realized in the chapters where textual and material examples ground and limit his use of theory. Chapter Five, “‘Cabinets of Wonder’ or ‘Coffins of Disuse?’: Reissues, Boxsets, and Commodity Fetishism,” stands out for its clear conceptual framework and well-chosen examples. As the title suggests, Winters examines the boxset in the context of its cultural and material packaging. Conversations surrounding two distinct reissues of *Credence Clearwater Revival* make for a rich start to the analysis. Winters also unpacks the

concept of commodity fetishism with a great deal of lucidity. Marx, it seems, works better for his purposes than Foucault. Similarly, the final Chapter, “The Vinyl Anachronist: The Role of Social Media in the Creation of Communities of Vinyl,” finds its moorings, after a lengthy review of literature on cyber communities, in a solid textual analysis of websites used by vinyl collectors. Ultimately, Winters suggests that online communities allow vinyl users a certain degree of self-invention, in tandem with the disciplinary mechanisms that produce the same “listening subjects.”

Despite problems with cogency, *Pressing Matters* makes a contribution to the booming cannon of sound and music studies. Winters offers keen insights about commodity fetishism and the disciplinary collector in the digital age. The theoretical bent of Winters’ essays likely will appeal to graduate students and research scholars interested in the secondary literature on sound and music studies.

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Olson, Christopher J., & Carrielynn D. Renhard. *Possessed Women, Haunted States: Cultural Tensions in Exorcism Cinema*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2017. Print.

In *Possessed Women, Haunted States: Cultural Tensions in Exorcism Cinema*, Olson and Renhard analyze gendered, racial, and ethnic tensions in what they refer to as “the traditional exorcism narrative,” which consists of narrative tropes and metaphors that inform and shape the exorcism film genre. They argue that the traditional exorcism narrative’s two components—the possessed individual (generally women) and the holy

figure in the film (generally a man)—“reflect the tensions and struggles that societies and cultures often face with regard to issues of women’s empowerment” (23). One of the most notable strengths of their analysis is their use of a multi-decade and multi-subgenre framework through which they deconstruct films such as *The Exorcist*, which inspired exorcism cinema and the exorcism genre, and other films including *Kung Fu Exorcist*, *Exorcist II*, *Repossessed*, and more. Utilizing cultural, critical, postcolonial, and feminist frameworks as their theoretical lenses, Olson and Renhard ultimately conclude that the exorcism genre 1) constructs women as problematic beings whose agency, voice, and sexuality threaten the patriarchal, masculine order and 2) constructs and marginalizes racial, ethnic, gendered, and queer minorities as abhorrent, problematic beings that require the white heteronormative patriarchal being—often a white, male priest—to perform exorcisms in efforts to restore the “natural” order.

*Possessed Women, Haunted States* begins with Chapter 1, an overview of the gendered and cultural politics of possession and the main themes that exemplify the exorcism genre, such as the oppression of marginalized groups and the need for a religious male savior to intervene and return her to a pure state. The book then transitions to Chapter 2, which provides a thorough analysis of the groundbreaking film *The Exorcist*. The authors attribute *The Exorcist*’s success to the period within which it was created, namely the late 1960s and early 1970s, and the era’s embracing of free love and sexual freedom and the cultural distancing from the Roman Catholic Church. *The Exorcist* was a cultural goldmine because it provided a cinematic response and moment of closure to terrors of the time, including cultural anxieties about sexual promiscuity, women’s rights, and women’s empowerment. Olson and Renhard demonstrate that *The Exorcist* laid the groundwork for the traditional exorcism narrative because it represented possessed women as active, vocal, and empowered beings who could be saved only by Catholic religious figures who need to restore religious order and thus return women to their oppressed state.

These characteristic tropes and stereotypes that together create the traditional exorcism narrative are then analyzed through multiple exorcism sub-genres and historical periods, such as the 1980s Nixon/Reagan era and the post-9/11 exorcism film boom. The authors analyze sequels for *The Exorcist*, as well as rip-offs and homages to 1970s exorcism cinema in Chapter 3; films that extend the exorcism narrative in Chapter 4; exorcism film parodies, satires, and slasher films in Chapter 5; non-fiction exorcism films and the resurgence of the exorcism genre in Chapters 6 and 7; and the culmination of these films resulting in *The Last Exorcism* and *The Last Exorcism Part II* in Chapter 8. The authors conclude in Chapter 9 by discussing the resiliency of the exorcism genre and its success throughout the past five decades. Through their analysis of these films and sub-genres, Olson and Renhard illustrate how exorcism films continue to follow the traditional exorcism narrative set forth by *The Exorcist* by portraying white women, black women, and possessed men who embody feminine voices and qualities—what they refer to as queer Others—as problematic threats to their families, themselves, and society. For example, in their chapter on how the terror attacks of September 11, 2001 resulted in a resurgence of exorcism cinema three decades after the release of *The Exorcist*, the authors illustrate how this resurgence was a response to post 9/11 widespread anxieties about terror, fear, and the threat of being attacked at any time. Exorcism films that were popular during this period included *Emily Rose* and *Deliver Us*, which had the potential to disrupt the traditional narrative; however, they ultimately aligned with the woman-as-threat trope that has long characterized the traditional exorcism narrative. Although some of these films have the potential to disrupt the traditional exorcism narrative trajectory, almost all of them continue to fall in line with stereotypical representations of minorities, leading Olson and Renhard to conclude that “exorcism films reflect the struggle for power between dominant and marginalized groups in a given society or culture” (167). In other words, even though there is a potential for subversion, the



traditional exorcism narrative thrives because of its Othering of minorities, subjugation of female empowerment, and restoration of white patriarchal authority

While the authors provide a thorough analysis of gendered and cultural tensions in exorcism films, their analysis would have been strengthened by a stronger postcolonial lens, particularly when interrogating the intersections of race, gender, ethnicity, and queerness. Olson and Renhard note at the outset of their analysis that they plan to utilize feminist and postcolonial theoretical lenses; however, the postcolonial lens is used to analyze only a small handful of films. This theoretical lens would have been a fruitful avenue through which to more strongly analyze representations of minorities in exorcism films. Overall, *Possessed Women, Haunted States* is a valuable book for scholars and students interested in media studies, critical/cultural studies, gender studies, and film studies. Its multi-decade historical linkages and situating of the genre, along with its close critical deconstruction of multiple exorcism films, highlights how exorcism cinema continues to negatively construct women and minorities as threats to the existing social order that must be cured.

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Jackson, Neil, Shaun Kimber, Johnny Walker, and Thomas Joseph Watson, editors. *Snuff: Real Death and Screen Media*. New York/London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016. Print.

In 1976, Michael and Roberta Findlay's *Snuff* screened in theaters across the U.S. As part of a publicity stunt, promotional materials claimed that the movie contained footage of real death, that the actors' on-screen

expiration in the final scene transgressed the boundaries of fiction. This claim to authenticity sparked a month-long FBI investigation into its veracity, and despite subsequent failures to find proof of the film's existence, the public were convinced otherwise. The staging of murder in front of a camera, for commercial profit, had become an ontological fact, and reports of nefarious underground rings catering to the debased tastes of rich clienteles surfaced in the U.S. and abroad. Four decades later, the myth continues to live on, this time fueled by the Internet's penetration into all arenas of life, including death.

Featuring 15 original essays by 19 contributors, including a Foreword by *Killing for Culture* (1994/2015) author David Kerekes, *Snuff: Real Death and Screen Media* explores the symbolic meanings of "snuff" and its place within contemporary global cultures. Unlike most academic writings on the subject, which are fixated on snuff's evidentiary basis, on whether or not snuff is objectively real, this interdisciplinary collection is concerned with the origins of the myth, the evolution of the myth, and how its mythical possibility is sustained by the discourses surrounding it. Enlisting a range of theoretical approaches to examine a variety of pop-cultural artifacts, the book wrestles with several tensions and articulations at the heart of snuff—between fact and fiction, ethics and aesthetics, violence and sex, pleasure and horror, mainstream and taboo, old media and new media.

The book is divided into two parts. Part One examines the changing and unstable meanings of snuff, beginning with a chapter by Mark Petley that traces legislation and censorship debates around online images of "real-live death." Following this is an essay by Misha Kavka, who argues that snuff is sustained by its affective charge, by the joint anticipation and horror at the prospect of seeing death. In the next chapter, Simon Hobbs offers an operational definition of animal snuff—the live killing of animals in otherwise fictional texts—which is shaped by cultural attitudes toward non-human life. Clarissa Smith then examines the moral panic

surrounding the linkage of sex with horror by situating “extreme pornography” within judicial and legislative contexts in the UK. A chapter by Nicolò Gallio and Xavier Mendik analyzes the use of theatrical ambiguity in Ruggero Deodato’s *Cannibal Holocaust*, a film that lays (bogus) claims to authenticity by splicing verité techniques with documentary inserts of actual atrocity news reels. In the chapter that follows, Mark McKenna returns to Michael and Roberta Findlay’s *Snuff*, this time tracing the film’s contested distribution history among collector cultures in the UK. Using Dead Alive Productions’ *Traces of Death* series (1993-2000), Johnny Walker then unpacks the relationship between shock fandom and fans of other sub-cultural artifacts, including extreme heavy metal and 1960s mondo films. Part One ends with a chapter by Mark Astley, which looks at the politics of terror in jihadist extermination videos and their aesthetic similarities to realist horror films.

Part Two explores the myriad manifestations of snuff in television and film. It opens with a chapter by Mark Jones and Gerry Carlin, who examine films inspired by the ostensibly lost footage of the Manson Family murders to underscore the paradox of snuff as an absent referent. This is followed by a chapter by Neil Jackson that traces the changing role of the fictional snuff filmmaker and its social and historical contingency. In the next chapter, Xavier Aldana Reyes posits four categories of filmic snuff—films about snuff, faux snuff, snuff mockumentary, and serial killer video diary—and how their narrative and formal conventions differentially shape the viewer’s ethical stance. Shaun Kimber then looks at how Scott Derrickson’s horror film *Sinister* (2012) hybridizes snuff iconography with supernatural elements to achieve palatability and commercial success. A chapter by Linda Badley plays with the notion of cinema *as* snuff by tracing visual media’s longstanding association with death—evident, for example, in German Expressionism’s sublimation of art through “dissonance, hazard, terror, and pain” (245). The penultimate chapter by Tina Kendall explores how the importation of snuff motifs into

extreme art cinema can provoke a reflexive response in viewers, indicting them for their indifference to or appetite for violent spectacle. Finally, in the culminating chapter, Steve Jones uses Shane Ryan's *Amateur Porn Star Killer* trilogy of films (2007-2009) to illustrate how analyses of faux snuff can contribute to our understanding of selfhood—particularly, its narrative, phenomenological, social and embodied dimensions.

The book effectively illustrates how tightly snuff has gripped the human imagination, and how far and deep its tendrils run in global popular culture. Engaging with a diverse assortment of cultural texts, the authors do a commendable job of locating snuff at the intersection of various social, historical, economic, ideological, and sexual formations. The book also strikes a fine balance between a production perspective that is attuned to film form and style, and an audience perspective that takes into account a variety of spectatorial positions. Furthermore, it deftly escapes the trap of fragmentation that has ensnared many edited collections. By citing one another's past and present work, the contributors give the anthology a sense of unity and coherence; rather than talk past one another, they are speaking *with* each other. Lastly, the anthology looks both forward and back, honoring the body of literature that paved the path for its creation, while anticipating the horizons that lie ahead, including the impact of new and emerging technologies on our reception of mediated death.

As one of few book-length treatments of the subject, *Snuff: Real Death and Screen Media* is recommended reading for film and media scholars who are interested in the representational history of death, the ethics and aesthetics of screening death, affective responses to gruesome imagery, and the increasing saturation of our global mediascape with hyperviolent spectacle. As the contributors to this theoretically rigorous volume persuasively argue, the myth of snuff and its continuing existence in fictional narratives implicates us all. Snuff is not merely a debased cultural artifact lacking social relevance and institutional legitimacy. It is a

window through which we can apprehend our role as spectators and our relationship to death and dying, both fictional and ostensibly real.

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Cocca, Carolyn. *Superwomen: Gender, Power, and Representation*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2016. Print.

From the 1940s to the present, comic books have filled our cultural imagination with powerful, though often sexualized or sidelined, superwomen. Carolyn Cocca's book examines the history of superheroines in popular films, television, and comics, arguing that representation of marginalized groups facilitates identification across difference. Cocca's work is divided into six chapters, each of which analyzes a particular female superhero or set of superheroes, selected for their transmedia presence, prominence of comic book publisher, different kinds of heroisms, and diversity of surrounding character identities.

The first chapter of the book focuses on Wonder Woman, particularly examining the ways audiences of the character have engaged around race, class, sexuality, and, of course, gender. Cocca finds that, throughout the character's development, Wonder Woman both challenges heteropatriarchal norms and falls into traditional femininity. Wonder Woman is a site for conflict over the very meaning of feminism. Though the chapter overviews the entire history of the character, Cocca's work is unique in her focus on the representations of Wonder Woman since DC Comics' relaunch of the character in 1987.

In the second chapter, Cocca looks at the character of Barbara Gordon, also known as Batgirl. She compares and contrasts the character with Wonder Woman, noting that Batgirl is known, not for strength, but for

intelligence, use of technology, and martial arts. Cocca looks at the role of disability in the development of the character, particularly focusing on the relaunch of the character as Oracle, a wheelchair-using technology strategist, and the subsequent cure of her disability. The chapter does well to use Batgirl as a vehicle to examine the differences between the portrayal of super “girls” and super “women.”

In chapter three, Cocca looks at the women of *Star Wars*, characters who did not initially come to mind when I thought of superwomen. Yet, I think Cocca is right to categorize Princess Leia, Queen Amidala, and Jaina Solo with the other superheroines, when considering the relationship with the Force as a superpower. Cocca is particularly interested in the whiteness of the *Star Wars* franchise, noting the imbalance in cast between men and women and the eventual marriage of all of the white heroines to white men. I appreciated the nod to *The Force Awakens* at the end of the chapter, especially because Cocca responds to the general acclaim of the film’s focus on a young female protagonist to note that the film still barely passes the Bechdel test. I wonder how Cocca’s analysis would apply to *Rogue One*, which contains arguably more conversations between female characters, but nevertheless still marginalizes women of color.

The fourth chapter of the book explores the women of the *X-Men* comics, particularly Mystique, Jean Grey, Storm, Rogue, and Kitty Pryde, but notes that the series is dominated by portrayals of white men. Though the series has, at times, pushed against gender binaries, as a whole, the *X-Men* comic plays to stereotypes about race, gender, and sexuality. Missing from this chapter is even a brief mention of the role of disability in the franchise. While most people think about disability with regard to Professor X, the lens of ability/disability could have been a valuable lens through which to understand Jean Grey (especially as the Phoenix) and Rogue, if not also the others.

In the fifth chapter of the book, Cocca engages with the character of Buffy the Vampire Slayer. Though Buffy appears to be the stereotypical

cheerleader type, the design of the character pushes back against the association of weakness with femininity. Particularly important to Buffy's characterization are the partnerships she forges with other characters, especially women. Like the other superwomen Cocca's earlier analyzed, Buffy is white and most characters of color die shortly after their introduction. While more recent TV series and comics have been diverse, the stories still tend to be overwhelmingly about white, upper-middle-class characters.

In the final chapter of her book, Cocca looks to the characters of Captain Marvel/Ms. Marvel. Though Carol Danvers was, like the others, a white, heterosexual female character, her popularity resulted in the introduction of *Ms. Marvel* in 2014, a series featuring a Pakistani-American Muslim teenager. The late 70s incarnation of Carol Danvers wore a heavily sexualized costume and her femininity was strongly emphasized, but nevertheless she had significant powers. In later iterations of the character, Carol would experience dissociative identity disorder and would rarely have strong female friendships. In 2012, the relaunch of *Ms. Marvel* as *Captain Marvel* would move away from some of the misogynistic portrayals toward renewed agency and new friends. Unlike many of the other characters, *Ms. Marvel* lends itself to critical discussion about race and ethnicity. When Monica Rambeau, a black woman, was written out of the *Avengers*, she was also briefly given the title Captain Marvel and appears alongside Carol in two comic book issues. In 2014, Kamala Khan, a Pakistani-American Muslim woman, would be introduced as the new Ms. Marvel and her series has been selling more than expected, especially in digital copies. Cocca notes that the characterization of Kamala departs from stereotypical portrayals of Muslims.

Cocca's book is particularly effective due to the thoroughness of her data collection and the comprehensiveness of her analysis. Though the title of the book suggests a focus on gender and representation, Cocca employs a more intersectional approach, acknowledging disability and

queerness, among other identities. Potential audiences for her book include scholars of popular culture, media studies, audience/reception studies, gender/women's studies, queer theory, and disability theory. The book might also be quite applicable as assigned reading for a television or media studies class; the text, though Cocca's argument is complex, is approachable for undergraduate students.

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Fischer-Hornung, Dorothea, Monica Mueller, editors. *Vampires and Zombies: Transnational Migrations and Transcultural Interpretations*. Jackson, Miss: University of Mississippi. 2016. Print.

Dorothea Fisher-Hornung and Moniker Mueller have assembled an impressive array of texts addressing the current hegemony of the vampire and the zombie in contemporary global popular literature. The collection fulfills their promise to treat an evolving transnational, transcultural and global cultural imaginary in which monsters, the embodied Other(s), emerge at times of crisis as "imaginative foils for thinking about our own responses to menace." Vampires and zombies are undoubtedly the trendiest of the monsters, both the most human(e) embodiments of the undead and most frequently paired in narrative, cinema and video gaming. These essays locate this phenomenon historically and geographically as well as culturally.

In their opening essay, Fischer-Hornung and Mueller provide a framing introduction to these monsters as transnational in their origins: vampires from Transylvania and zombies in Haiti. Indeed, it's worth



noting that zombies come to Haiti through one of the largest transnational migrations in modern history: the Atlantic Slave Trade. In the past vampires came to us as evil, bloodsucking exploiters while zombies were mindless victims. Contemporary representations of both figures complicate and disrupt that traditional binary opposition of victim and perpetrator, instead introducing “kinder, gentler vampires” and “crueler, flesh-eating zombies.” Their collection ably demonstrates how “mass distribution through film and game technologies” has contributed to these modified representations over time and region.

Each of the four subsequent sections is organized around a central issue or question. Section I-“Migratory Transformations” begins with a question: how do artists in film or narrative introduce zombie or vampire tropes into cultures where these figures are unknown? Katarzyna Ancuta’s “The Smiling Dead; or, the Empirical Impossibility of Thai Zombies,” Sabine Metzger’s “‘She Loves the Blood of the Young’: The Bloodthirsty Female as Cultural Mediator in Lafcadio Hearn’s ‘The Story of Chugoro,’” and Timothy M. Robinson’s “Octavia Butler’s Vampiric Vision: *Fledgling* as a Transnational Neo-Slave Narrative,” introduce the reader to Thai zombies, as well as vampires in both Japanese culture and African American fiction each an answer to that question. The three pieces in Section II – “Non/normative Sexualities,” introduce demonstrations of these tropes to reveal the temporal and cultural situatedness of gender. From Rasmus R. Simonsens’s critique of George Romero’s zombies as the queerest of movie monsters, e.g. beings of uncertain ontological status in “Appetite for Disruption: The Cinematic Zombie and Queer Theory,” to Danielle Borgia’s treatment of gender dynamics in recent Mexican vampire novels -- “Vampiros Mexicanos: Nonnormative Sexualities in Contemporary Vampire Novels of Mexico” -- featuring bisexual, promiscuous vampire couples in league with a network of corrupt allies, and, a vampire love triangle exploring bisexuality and polyamory, and, finally Moniker Mueller’s “Hybridity Sucks: European Vampirism

Encounters Haitian Voodoo in *The White Witch of Rosehall*” features the hybrid figure of the white witch in Herbert G. de Lisser’s 1929 novel; de Lisser synthesizes Haitian voodoo and European vampirism in a European Jamaican creole woman: an “emblem of gender transgressions and abuse of power.”

Section III - “Cultural Anxieties,” as the title suggests, presents readers with vampires and zombies a sources of alien intrusion, embodying anxieties of national invasion and/or the transgression of personal boundaries. Carmen Serrano’s “Revamping Dracula on the Mexican Silver Screen: Fernando Mendez’s *El vampiro*,” tells the story of Spanish vampire films produced in 1930’s Hollywood as part of a transnational recirculatory phenomena in which Spanish crews and Spanish speaking actors would film each night, working with the same scripts and sets as their American “originals.” Then Timothy R. Fox’s critique of Max Brooks’s groundbreaking novel *World War Z*, the first zombie novel to make the *New York Times* best seller list, as expression of current anti-Asian anxiety(ies) in the West. The collection’s final section, “Circulating Technologies,” brings the reader full circle to the editors’ initial discussion of the impact of mass distribution through film and game technologies. These essays demonstrate those ways in which contemporary media circulation of vampires and zombies enables culturally specific conceptions of the “everymonster”: from the translation of LeFanu’s 1872 lesbian vampire “Camilla” into Carl Theodor Dreyer’s 1931 film *Vampyr*, to the influence of 1950’s horror comics -- themselves both a kind of proscribed pornography exploring death and sexuality -- preoccupied with both the Red Peril and the dangers of the atomic age on George Romero and Stephen King, ending with a discussion of horror zombie gaming.

Johannes Weber discusses film technology and film theory, specifically the notion that watching a film is initially a physical experience before becoming a mental process, connects the read back to earlier film discussions in each of the other three sections. Richard J.

Hand's "Disruptive Corpses: Tales of Living Dead in Horror Comics of the 1950s and Beyond," connects the comic strip visuals to zombies as Hollywood rather than Haitian artifacts, "undead every[men] or every monster[s] setting right the injustices of mortal power structures." (15) In the final essay, "Undead Avatars: the Zombie in Horror Video Games," Ewan Kirkland introduces the idea of the gaming avatar as a type of zombie cast in the original Haitian/West African mode, "a human possessed or controlled by an outside intelligence." Collectively these three essays bring a kind of closure to and integration of the broad notions articulated by the editors in their introductory essay.

*Vampires and Zombies: Transcultural Migrations and Transnational Interpretations* amply illustrates the editors claim that vampires, products of the cultural imaginary(ies) are diverse as their human creators, "limitless in their expressions of human experience." Both collectively and individually these essays provide detailed histories of every monster's cultural antecedents framing careful analyses of their contemporary manifestations. It is also potentially useful text for the teaching contemporary literary, cinematic, and cultural theory(ies), applying the familiar – pop cultural manifestations of vampires and zombies – to introduce key concepts of post-colonial, transcultural and transnational intersectionality.

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Beck, Peter J. *The War of the Worlds: From H.G. Wells to Orson Welles, Jeff Wayne, Steven Spielberg & Beyond*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016. Print.

The sheer heft of Beck's *The War of the Worlds: From H.G. Wells to Orson Welles, Jeff Wayne, Stephen Spielberg & Beyond*, promises a thorough examination of Beck's claim that the impact of H.G. Wells's classic resounds in not only science fiction but also in various multimedia venues yet today. The front matter certainly encourages this expectation: tables, lists, maps, seventeen chapters, bibliography, and index promise an exhaustive look into the novel, as well as the audio-visual materials that flourish as a result of the adaptability of Wells's timeless story. What began in the late 1980's, Beck explains in his preface, culminates into a fastidiously researched and well-written book designed to attract a wide variety of readers.

The text itself is divided into five major parts: an introduction, the writing and publishing of *The War of the Worlds*, the multimedia adaptations of the text, the resulting literary heritage, and a conclusion. However, before the reader gets to these parts, Beck provides an abundance of information in the form of two tables of Wells's chronology (both professional and personal), a map displaying Wells's residence in conjunction with the landing of the Martian cylinders, along with a preface, acknowledgments, and a complete listing of the illustrations, tables, and abbreviations. With all of this data, Beck ensures that his reader is up-to-speed on his project.

The first two parts (Chapters 1-9) examine the overarching theme of Wells's personal and professional background leading up to, and including, the publication of *The War of the Worlds*. In chapter one, the author addresses the impact of Wells's novel not only on his contemporaries, but also on modern entertainment buffs and NASA. Beck considers, in chapter two, Wells's "powerful sense of location" (23),

establishes his “geographical mobility” (24) and his “love for the fast-disappearing countryside” (29), while, at the same time, highlights how these real locations, such as Woking, allow for *The War of the Worlds* highly adaptable state. This discussion continues in chapter three with one minor difference: Beck changes his focus to Wells’s sense of time and ponders the significance of the time period in which Wells is writing. Beck covers topics such as evolution, imperialism, socialism, the “Great Mars Boom,” (48), and “scaremongering literature” (42) and determines how these events manifest in Wells’s novel. In chapter four, Beck zeroes in on Wells’s personal history, addressing his fragile health, his calamitous love life, his avid appreciation for bicycling, both for his health and “wellbeing as a writer” (73), and his earlier writings, most notably *The Wheels of Chance* and *The Time Machine*. Throughout chapter five, Beck examines how Wells’s own health and consequential fear of dying, along with financial worries, pushes him to write at a frantic pace (Beck calculates over 140 published texts in 1894 alone) and helps establish him as an up-and-coming writer with editors and publishers; whereas, chapter six looks at Woking in particular as Wells’s “literary factory” (103).

In chapter seven, Beck turns from Wells’s biographical material to the actual text by tracing the novel from conception to serialization to book and, finally, to reception. In chapter eight, Beck includes a thorough examination of the story’s plot and Wells’s methodology while, in chapter nine, Beck concludes his biographical consideration of Wells by moving him physically and authorially into the next phase of his vast career. It is in chapter ten that Beck begins the actual analysis of the “multimedia afterlife” (183) of *The War of the Worlds*, including considerations found in other literature, comics, and graphic novels, as well as discussing how the story’s time and place heightens its plasticity to these areas. Beck continues this theme through chapters eleven, twelve, and thirteen but focuses more on the serialization of the story in *American* newspapers. Within this section, Beck also includes Orson Welles’s infamous radio

adaptation and the resulting attempts to recreate the same “tidal wave of panic” (221) by other countries. Beck then undertakes the cinematic afterlife of Wells’s novel in chapter fourteen by carefully scrutinizing two film versions (Pal’s 1953 version and Spielberg’s 2005 adaptation), before moving on to chapter sixteen and Jeff Wayne’s musical rendering of the Martian invasion. The last two chapters serve to blend the history of the novel with present-day popularity, as Beck contemplates the recent trend of fans seeking out the literary heritage of their favorite authors and how Wells, *The War of the Worlds*, and Woking continue to fit into this niche.

As evidenced by the whirlwind summation of the chapters, Beck’s book is jam-packed with both intriguing facts and basic information most already know about Wells and the novel. Beck also deftly presents obscure, random tidbits that only the most-devoted Wellsians and *The War of the Worlds* fans are privy, such as how Wells’s speculations about Mars and the Martians were launched with the Mars rover Press Kit (3). The extensive bibliography provides a veritable wealth of further sources for the wide-ranging audience of Wellsian scholars and fans, geography and history scholars, those interested in transportation (especially bicycling) and pilgrimage, film scholars and buffs, and so forth.

While Beck does indeed provide substantial background and history, at times, this material becomes repetitive and longer than necessary. Particularly, the chapters concerning Orson Welles and the film adaptations are undeniably crucial to understanding the impact of Wells’s novel in current culture; however, the surrounding chapters seem redundant because Beck’s point is the same throughout: Wells’s text is highly adaptable to all places and eras. Nonetheless, Beck’s outstanding prep work and easy writing style make this text an invaluable addition to any Wellsian, *The War of the Worlds*, or multimedia devotee’s bookshelf.

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Fägersten, Kristy Beers. *Watching TV with a Linguist*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2016. Print.

Critical analysis has a transformative effect on engagement with media texts: it becomes difficult to suspend that critical lens and merely enjoy an engaging sitcom or prime time drama. Reading *Watching TV with a Linguist* is likely to have similar effects, creating an unyielding awareness of what characters say and how they say it.

In the book's introduction, Kristy Beers Fägersten reminds us that television talk is scripted, artificial, and typically rehearsed (3), and she outlines the camps that support and object to the idea of television's language as being authentic. Fägersten notes that the debate about authenticity is not taken up in the essays, but the "volume reminds the reader that that television language is encountered on a regular basis, and thus it is very real feature of our everyday linguistic lives" (5). Discourse on television also strives to be realistic for the sake of narrative coherence: if language does not feel authentic, the whole series will feel inauthentic as well.

The theories of communication scholar Walter Fisher lend a framework to this collection of essays. Fisher proposed the idea of narrative coherence, asserting that we believe a story when it has fidelity (it rings true) and coherence (it holds together). Part of narrative coherence is that the characters in a story continue to behave in ways that audience members expect they will. What characters say to one another is a significant aspect of narrative coherence, yet language choices, dialect, and accent are seldom noticed by the audience unless they fail to meet audience expectations. For example, the television series *The Golden Girls* provides a core group of characters who have very specific uses of language, and their language is a reflection of their cultural backgrounds and habitus. Jean Ann's essay in this collection, "'Back in St. Olaf...': Regional Variations on *The Golden Girls*," offers an extensive variety of

examples. She touches briefly on Blanche Devereaux's use of "y'all" as the second person plural that marks her as a speaker of a Southern dialect; not only is Blanche's use important, but so is the absence of its use by her housemates. If tough-talking Dorothy Zbornak were to come through the swinging door from the kitchen and say, "I made some pancakes...can I fix a plate for y'all?" it would seem not only perplexing, but even comical. *The Golden Girls* is an example of *Watching TV with a Linguist's* use of familiar, often widely syndicated television series to explain linguistic phenomena.

Among other series featured in the essays are *Seinfeld*, *South Park*, and *Friends*. While the essays focus on character's language in these series, the reader need not be acquainted with the series for the discussion of linguistics to be useful. All of the authors provide sufficient background to create a meaningful context, as they would with examples of speakers who are not individuals known to the reader.

Kay Richardson says that her essay "Watching the Detective: *Sherlock* and Spoken Television Discourse" is "intentionally interdisciplinary" (15), a claim that could be made for the entire collection of essays. The authors admirably explain the jargon of their particular disciplinary leanings, rendering the volume broadly accessible to a lay audience or to students of linguistics and other disciplines within the humanities. Part of the collection's interdisciplinary nature is in drawing on theoretical work in both media studies and cultural studies. Here, linguistics also supports cultural studies work that examines race, class, and gender through identity formation and representation. Kristy Beers Fägersten and Hanna Sveen's essay "SaMANtha: Language and Gender in *Sex and the City*" looks at gendered speech communities and considers how the series both challenged and affirmed theories about gender and language. Joe Trotta does similar work with regard to class in his essay "Dealers and Discourse: Sociolinguistic Variation in *The Wire*."



Other essays show that an examination of language can offer insight into television characters and their interactions. In “Word Formation in *HIMYM*,” Jessie Sams shows that part of the popularity of *How I Met Your Mother* is rooted in the unique creation of words by the series’ characters. Examples include Barney’s creation of the “slap bet” and the use of the compound word “re-return” to describe the instance of going back yet again to clarify an embarrassing misunderstanding. Similarly, Matthias Eitelmann and Ulrike Stange use the linguistic field of pragmatics to explore the difference between what characters say and what they mean in their essay “The Pragmatics Explication: Making Sense of Nerds in *The Big Bang Theory*.” One of many examples is a conversation between Penny and Sheldon when he knocks on her door in the middle of the night. Penny asks Sheldon if he has any idea what time it is, inferring that his behavior is inappropriate. Sheldon, however, interprets her question at face value and assures her that he knows the exact time because his watch is synchronized with the atomic clock. This exchange is not only a source of humor but also a source of understanding Sheldon’s character and how his social awkwardness is sometimes rooted in linguistic misunderstanding.

This collection of essays reminds readers that TV is a site of pedagogy. In what is probably still a majority of U.S. households, children learn who and how they should be, how they should interact with others, and what they should and should not say from observing examples of interpersonal interaction on television. Studying linguistics through television is also an exercise in self-reflection, as audiences see their own language phenomena reflected in characters on screen.

While serving as a great means to teach linguistics through known and accessible texts, *Watching TV with a Linguist* also gives the reader a language with which to discuss these linguistic phenomena that are familiar but often not addressed because viewers lack a common language with which to describe them. We unavoidably learn linguistics in the

process of reading these essays, enabling an informal education for the casual reader or a more formal pedagogical space if the book is assigned as part of a course curriculum.

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Srinivasan, Ramesh. *Whose Global Village?: Rethinking How Technology Shapes Our World*. New York: New York University Press, 2017. Print.

In *Whose Global Village?*, Ramesh Srinivasan, the Director of the UC Center for Global Digital Cultures and an Associate Professor at UCLA, makes a significant interdisciplinary contribution in the intersections of ideologies, discourse, and practices between technology, and marginalized peoples. The text is organized around two processes: challenging what we think we know about technology and its cultures and considering new directions, possibilities, and collaborations that respect Indigenous sovereignty and agency. His effort to “de-Westernize a top-down understanding of contemporary technology by sharing stories from across the world of how digital tools have been reinvented to support grassroots aspirations, values, and cultures” is timely and greatly needed (9). In the past year, the world watched as Standing Rock’s water protectors utilized technology to document their struggles and garner support for their cause. Srinivasan’s examination of Egypt’s Arab Spring uprising suggests that technology does not make a revolution or rebellion. Instead, Indigenous peoples appropriate, utilize, and configure technology to their own ends for their movements. Across his case studies, the author stresses the need to engage with technology on a local level and recognize peoples’ agency in their engagement with technology.

One of the strengths of this text is the author’s use of diverse sources. Srinivasan moves his readers through theory, histories, ethnographies,

TED Talks, and other media based sources. He tackles issues of sovereignty, decolonization, representation, access, and inequality and never loses his reader in the process. His ability to weave these sources and substantial issues together in a navigable web is one of the greatest strengths of this text which makes it appealing for a wide range of scholarship. Through his use of auto-ethnography, Srinivasan brings larger issues into the immediate and personal narrative of the author by sharing his personal and professional experiences and growth. While some might expect a text on such large issues to remain theory based, Srinivasan does an excellent job of moving from philosophical explorations to interactions on the ground between individuals and communities. He makes a convincing argument for understanding technology in relation to places, peoples, tools, and systems (10).

In the introduction and initial chapter, he guides readers through a network of technology myths, their historical roots, and their implications today. He establishes that technologies are never neutral but rather “the product of complex and contested sets of values, beliefs, and ideas about how the world should be ordered and articulated” (39). By identifying the common myths of technology’s stability, permanence, openness, and neutrality, he rejects idealistic narratives that assume passive access to technology results in community empowerment. Instead, he lays out the history and practices by Western forces in creating and maintaining power disparities which deny Indigenous and marginalized communities access to technology and ignores their agency “to strategically employ technologies to support their voices and agendas” (18).

In chapters two through four, the author builds on his critical examination of technological myths with auto-ethnographic accounts of his own experience working with Indigenous communities. He emphasizes these local examples and his own personal evolution during his collaborations with Indigenous peoples. The author moves from considering what types of stories can be told when marginalized

communities direct the storytelling in chapter two to exploring ways that networks and databases can be reimagined in Indigenous communities through collaborative designed processes (14). In chapter three, the role of ontology is explored at length and Srinivasan suggests that technology cannot be developed with an average of people's opinions or that Westerns ontologies should be imposed on other communities. Instead, he argues, "our cultural diversities neither can nor should be translated into one another—They can be respected for their differences" (124). A critical concept for Srinivasan is the idea of engaging "fluid ontologies" centered on community driven consensus that shapes collaborative projects. This approach focuses on relationships, an understanding that knowledge is continuously lived and performed amongst a shared group of people, and that knowledge can never be fully represented in any system.

One of the most powerful case studies presented by Srinivasan is the focus of his fourth chapter where he details his work with the A:shiwi A:waiwan Museum and Heritage Center at Zuni. Scholars in museum studies will find this chapter especially important for its considerations of representation. I applaud Srinivasan's honest and open discussions of growth during the project and his clarity in stating that "the only ethical choice" is to follow Indigenous, or in this case Zuni, leadership (170). Surface level collaborations that simply connect a community with a scholar are dangerous. Instead, "the system must also reject any preexisting classifications or categories" and engage each other with a "rawness" of communication (182). Srinivasan argues that knowledges and collaborations must be understood as practices instead of representations. Through the entire process of a collaboration, from design to execution, the experience must be lived as individuals involved embody knowledge and growth. It is a process without end.

Throughout the text, Srinivasan dissects the myths about Indigenous peoples, technology, and relationships between them. He then deconstructs these myths and suggests other pathways for people to

consider. In his final chapter, Srinivasan's brings his arguments and examples full circle by convincingly arguing for readers to consider technologies as "part of processes and relationships" and to "humanize peoples, places and stories" instead of maintaining a blind ignorance to the ways technologies, power, and frames of articulation are connected (214). Across the text, the author consistently issues a call for respecting Indigenous agency, voices, and prioritizing their leadership. "I believe it is time to tip the scales away from world-making," he argues, "and instead to embrace world-listening" (230). Ultimately, everyone has to ask themselves exactly whose global village are we working to build when we think of technology futures.

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# THE **POPULAR** CULTURE STUDIES **JOURNAL**

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and presenting on media representations of various groups, including comic book characters like Marvel Comics' Araña and Kamala Khan, and *The Big Bang Theory's* Sheldon Cooper. Her newest co-authored book, *Brew Your Business: The Ultimate Craft Beer Playbook*, will be published with Rowman & Littlefield in 2017.

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# THE **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.

## AIMS AND SCOPE

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 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.

## INFORMATION FOR SUBMITTING ARTICLES

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

Television

Sports

Celebrity Culture

Technology

Literature

Comics/Cartoons/Graphic Novels

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

All contributions to *The Popular Culture Studies Journal* will be forwarded to members of the Editorial Board or other reviewers for comment. Manuscripts must not be previously published, nor should they be submitted for publication elsewhere while being reviewed by *The Popular Culture Studies Journal's* Editorial Board.

Submissions (three documents, MS WORD, MLA) should be sent to Norma Jones, Editor, *The Popular Culture Studies Journal* via email: pcsj@mpcaaca.org:

1) Title Page: A single title page must accompany the email, containing complete contact information (address, phone number, e-mail address).

2) Manuscript: On the first page of the manuscript, only include the article's title, being sure not to include the author's name. The journal employs a "blind review" process, meaning that a copy of the article will be sent to reviewers without revealing the author's name. Please include the works cited with your manuscript.

3) Short Bio: On a separate document, please also include a short (100 words) bio. We will include this upon acceptance and publication.

Essays should range between 15-25 pages of double-spaced text in 12 pt. Times New Roman font, including all images, endnotes, and Works Cited pages. Please note that the 15-page minimum should be 15 pages of written article material. Less than 15 pages of written material will be rejected and the author asked to develop the article further. Essays should also be written in clear US English in the active voice and third person, in a style accessible to the broadest possible audience. Authors should be sensitive to the social implications of language and choose wording free of discriminatory overtones.

For documentation, *The Popular Culture Studies Journal* follows the Modern Language Association style, as articulated by Joseph Gibaldi and Walter S. Achtert in the paperback *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* (New York: MLA), and in *The MLA Style Manual* (New York: MLA). The most current editions of both guides will be the requested editions for use. This style calls for a Works Cited list, with parenthetical author/page references in the text. This approach reduces the number of notes, which provide further references or explanation.

For punctuation, capitalization, hyphenation, and other matters of style, follow the *MLA Handbook* and the *MLA Style Manual*, supplemented as necessary by *The Chicago Manual of Style* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press). The most current edition of the guide will be the requested edition for use.

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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 Popular Culture Studies Journal* and be largely positive with any criticism of the work being constructive in nature. For more information about this journal, please visit: <http://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, 7th 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 Malynnda Johnson 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 Dr. Johnson at the following email address:

*Malynnda Johnson, Reviews Editor*  
Email: [malynnda.johnson@indstate.edu](mailto:malynnda.johnson@indstate.edu)

## **UPCOMING SPECIAL ISSUES**

In addition to *PCSJ* calls for ongoing journal and reviews submissions (above) we are also planning for three special issues. In other words, the special issues will appear alongside *PCSJ* articles and reviews in upcoming volumes.

### **APRIL 2018 - CHEAP POPS AND POPULAR CULTURE**

Guest Editors: Garret Castleberry, CarrieLynn Reinhard, and Christopher Olson

Call closed

### **OCTOBER 2018 - MONSTERS AND MONSTROSITY**

Guest Editor: Bernadette Marie Calafell

*Bernadette.Calafell@du.edu*

Call for papers follows

### **MAY 2019 - ASIAN AMERICAN WORLDS AND PACIFIC WORLDS**

Guest Editor: Rona Tamiko Halualani

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Call for papers follows

# **CALL FOR PAPERS: MONSTERS AND MONSTROSITY A SPECIAL ISSUE OF THE POPULAR CULTURE STUDIES JOURNAL**

Call for Papers: Monsters and Monstrosity

A Special Issue of *The Popular Culture Studies Journal*

Guest Editor: Bernadette Marie Calafell, University of Denver

Scholars, such as W. Scott Poole and Kendall Phillips, have argued that monsters, particularly those in horror, reflect or correspond to the cultural anxieties of a society. These cultural anxieties are often connected to struggles for power around race, class, gender, sexuality, and ability. Thus, historical context and power are central to studies of monstrosity. Given that we are immersed in what may be considered a horror renaissance, both in film and television, increasing violence against people of color in the U.S., and dangerous and toxic performances of white femininity and masculinity, this is a ripe moment to explore the relationship between monstrosity and popular culture, both literally and figuratively. Thus, this special issue solicits manuscripts that take interdisciplinary approaches to explore the theoretical and methodological possibilities of monstrosity. What can employing monstrosity as a theoretical framework or analytical tool contribute to the study of popular culture? Key questions driving this special issue include: What can monstrosity teach us about Otherness? How can it be used resistively? Conversely, how can monstrosity be used as a tool of oppression? In what ways we can unpack figures, such as Donald Trump, through the lens of monstrosity? What constitutes monstrosity? How might we understand history differently through the construct of monstrosity? What are the necessary future directions for the study of monstrosity and popular culture? Critical rhetorical, critical qualitative (including critical auto-methodologies), and performative approaches to monstrosity are welcomed.

Potential areas of interest include, but are not limited to:

Twin Peaks and monstrosity  
Monstrosity and comics  
David Lynch's uses of monstrosity  
NBC's Hannibal  
Adult Swim  
Monstrous remakes  
History and monstrosity  
Afrofuturism and monstrosity  
Monstrosity and agency

Monstrous bodies  
Monstrous consumption  
Monstrosity and adolescence  
Monstrosity, menstruation, or menopause  
Fatness and monstrosity  
Excess and monstrosity  
Chicanxfuturism and monstrosity  
Celebrity culture and monstrosity  
Performance and monstrosity  
Wrestling and monstrosity  
Intersectional approaches to monstrosity  
Feminist possibilities of monstrosity  
American Horror Story  
Queerness and monstrosity  
Monstrosity and sports  
Disability and monstrosity  
Class and monstrosity  
Game of Thrones  
Monstrous politicians and politics  
The 2016 U.S. Presidential election  
Autobiography and monstrosity  
Monstrous methodologies  
Hybridity and monstrosity  
White femininity and monstrosity  
Monstrosity and military culture  
Monstrosity and toxic masculinities  
Monstrosity and white masculinity  
Monstrosity and religion  
Monstrosity and temporality  
Chicana feminism and monstrosity  
Monstrosity and Orientalism

Questions can be directed to Bernadette Calafell at [Bernadette.Calafell@du.edu](mailto:Bernadette.Calafell@du.edu).

Please electronically send submissions (three documents, MS WORD, MLA) to Bernadette Calafell via email at [Bernadette.Calafell@du.edu](mailto:Bernadette.Calafell@du.edu) by December 1, 2017.

1) Title Page: A single title page must accompany the email, containing complete contact information (address, phone number, e-mail address).

2) Manuscript: On the first page of the manuscript, only include the article's title, being sure not to include the author's name. The journal employs a "blind review" process, meaning that a copy of the article will be sent to reviewers without revealing the author's name. Please include the works cited with your manuscript.

3) Short Bio: On a separate document, please also include a short (100 words) bio. We will include this upon acceptance and publication.

Essays should range between 15-25 pages of double-spaced text in 12 pt. Times New Roman font, including all images, endnotes, and Works Cited pages. Please note that the 15-page minimum should be 15 pages of written article material. Less than 15 pages of written material will be rejected and the author asked to develop the article further. Essays should also be written in clear US English in the active voice and third person, in a style accessible to the broadest possible audience. Authors should be sensitive to the social implications of language and choose wording free of discriminatory overtones.

For documentation, *The Popular Culture Studies Journal* follows the Modern Language Association style, as articulated by Joseph Gibaldi and Walter S. Achtert in the paperback *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* (New York: MLA), and in *The MLA Style Manual* (New York: MLA). The most current editions of both guides will be the requested editions for use. This style calls for a Works Cited list, with parenthetical author/page references in the text. This approach reduces the number of notes, which provide further references or explanation.

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We are happy to receive digital artwork. Please save line artwork (vector graphics) as Encapsulated PostScript (EPS) and bitmap files (halftones or photographic images) as Tagged Image Format (TIFF), with a resolution of at least 300 dpi at final size. Do not send native file formats. Please contact the editor for discussion of including artwork.



Upon acceptance of a manuscript, authors are required to sign a form transferring the copyright from the author to the publisher. A copy will be sent to authors at the time of acceptance.

Before final submission, the author will be responsible for obtaining letters of permission for illustrations and for quotations that go beyond “fair use,” as defined by current copyright law.

**CALL FOR PAPERS: ASIAN AMERICAN WORLDS AND PACIFIC WORLDS:  
FROM SYMBOLIC ABSENCE TO REPLACEMENT (WHITE CASTING) TO  
REPRESENTATIONAL PERSISTENCE (DISNEY-FICATION) - ASIAN  
AMERICAN REPRESENTATIONS AND CULTURAL POLITICS IN POPULAR  
CULTURE**

**A SPECIAL ISSUE OF *THE POPULAR CULTURE STUDIES JOURNAL* (MAY  
2019)**

Guest Editor: Rona Tamiko Halualani, San Jose State University

Publication Date: Issue planned for May 2019 Issue

Due Date: February 1, 2018

With slow-to-change representational histories in mainstream American popular culture, Asian American representations and Pacific Islander representations have traversed the extremes of cultural reification with historically persistent stereotypes (emasculated, desexualized males, oversexualized; passive females, domesticated natives), absences (ala White casting), and adapted, dynamic forms of “authenticated” framings of their own cultural identities. From representations like *The Mindy Project*, *Fresh Off the Boat*, and *Master of None* to the White casting in mainstream films like the *Ghost in the Shell*, *Aloha*, and *Dr. Strange* (and the new *Mulan*) and the deemed “cultural authentication” of *Moana*, critically examining the cultural politics around Asian American representations and Pacific Islander representations has become even more important. Indeed, at this specific historical and political moment, there seems to be an uneven amount of Asian American and Pacific Islander representational material in dominant American popular culture as compared to other historical periods, to even critique in the first place.

In this special issue, we call for original manuscripts that critically analyze Asian American representations or Pacific Islander representations in popular culture in relation to the surrounding cultural politics framing these groups. Several key questions that may guide these critiques could be (but are not limited to) the following:

\*What are the specific framings of Asian American representations or Pacific Islander representations in popular culture today? What specifically defines these representational

framings in this particular historical/political moment? How is this different from past historical/political moments?

\*What are the representational patterns and habits with regard to such groups and in which forms?

\*How does such representation speak to the larger governmental, economic, sociopolitical, and institutional framings of these groups and identities?

We especially welcome papers that engage historical, comparative, or global contexts using interdisciplinary approaches, theoretical perspectives, critical perspectives, innovative analytical methods, and original data.

Examples of potential topics are as follows (but are not limited to the following):

Framings of Asian American femininity and masculinity

Framings of Pacific Islander femininity and masculinity

Representations of LGBT Plus Asian American and Pacific Islander Communities

Asian American Representations (Popular Television, Music, Film, Social Media)

Pacific Islander Representations (Popular Television, Music, Film, Social Media)

Replacing Asians: Shadow (or White) casting in Asian American films

Replacing Asians: Whiteness and heroism in Asian contexts

Replacing Pacific Islanders and White casting

Hawai'i Five-O: Tensions Across a Native Place With Asian America

Mediated Interracial Desire (*The Big Sick*, *Sophie* and *the Rising Sun*)

Representations Impacting Various Asian American Groups

Representations Impacting Various Pacific Islander Groups

Representations of Asian Americans in Specific Genres (Science Fiction, Reality TV, Horror, Comedy, Soap Operas, Action-Adventure)

Representations of Pacific Islanders in Specific Genres (Science Fiction, Reality TV, Horror, Comedy, Soap Operas, Action-Adventure)

Animated Representations

Submission Guidelines and Review Process:

An editorial review board will be created specifically for this special issue. This review board will help decide which submissions should be included in the special issue.

The process is as follows:

- Initial review of submitted papers by Dr. Halualani
- Papers approved by the guest editor will then undergo blind peer review
- Revision of accepted peer-reviewed papers and final submission

All correspondences should refer to “Asian American Representations and Cultural Politics in Popular Culture” in the subject line.

Please send inquiries to Dr. Rona Tamiko Halualani (rona.halualani@sjsu.edu).

- 1) Title Page: A single title page must accompany the email, containing complete contact information (address, phone number, e-mail address).
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# MidwestPCA/ACA

The Midwest Popular Culture Association / American Culture Association is a regional branch of the Popular Culture Association / American Culture Association. The organization held its first conference in Duluth, Minnesota, in 1973. After a five-year hiatus during the 1990s, the organization held a come-back conference in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in 2002.

MPCA/ACA usually holds its annual conference in a large Midwestern city in the United States. In the last several years, conferences have been held in Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Ohio. Upcoming conferences will be held in Missouri and Indiana. The conference typically is held in October.

Anyone is welcome to join and submit proposals for consideration at the MPCA/ACA conference. Membership in MPCA/ACA is by no means limited to those working or living in the Midwest or even the United States. In fact, presenters have come from as far away as Florida and California, and Norway and Australia.

Thank you for those joining us in St. Louis for the 2017 conference. We look forward to seeing you next year in Indianapolis!



**2018 CONFERENCE  
INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA  
October 3-7, 2018**

[mpcaaca.org](http://mpcaaca.org)

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