THE POPULAR CULTURE STUDIES JOURNAL

SPECIAL ISSUE
Stan Lee and the Marvel Universe

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BOB BATCHELOR

> con·text (käntekst) noun: context; plural noun: contexts …
> Definition: The circumstances that form the setting for an event,
> statement, or idea, and in terms of which it can be fully understood
> and assessed.

Over the last handful of years, content marketing has become the rage among public relations, advertising, and marketing professionals as a method for engaging with consumers. In a social media-dominated world, content marketing is viewed as a way to creep around the public's often hair-trigger "being sold to" monitor.

From a strategic perspective, content marketing works and is a hot topic because it is basically a fancy term for storytelling. In other words, do not "sell" customers on products, goods, and services, tell them stories that illustrate and exemplify values, emotions, and ideas that relate to their lives. People like stories; human beings are hardwired for storytelling.

One of the keys to storytelling is that it enables us to put events, ideas, and issues into context. For my money, I think the context aspect is more important than the actual story. For example, I find the story of Donald Trump as a person significantly less interesting than the context – the "why" questions – surrounding his candidacy and appeal to countless millions of people.

The relationship between topic and context is critical for people deeply engaged in interrogating popular culture. Often the icons, music, films, literature, and ideas we study and write about have countless fans and critics who all weigh in on whether or not they like or dislike something.

As a result, social media basically exists for two reasons: provide a quasi-public platform for people to react to popular culture and to sell things. This relentless environment that constantly judges everyone and everything is the consequence of our "thumb's up, thumb's down" society. People crave constant recognition: look at the way "news" organizations now quote Twitter and other social media feeds as sources or validators on stories.

Our value to the broader conversation is to introduce and illuminate the context, pushing ideas past the "gut reaction" that drives so much professional and layperson commentary today. Providing the "why" is what separates us from the common criticism that popular culture scholars have faced for decades – that we are just glorified fans, masquerading fanship as scholarship.

Yet, while many popular culture scholars are really good at tearing down and assessing an issue or topic, many become so fixated (or stuck within) their disciplinary silos that they have difficulty understanding or conveying context. The plea for thinking about context is more than just a veiled quest for interdisciplinary, that administration-pleasing notion that is shouted from the Ivory Tower rooftops, but much less frequently accomplished. Rather, it is an appeal to look at all the factors that surround a specific or group of films, television shows, actors, and topics to really probe the larger and/or related issues at hand.

For example, no author is simply the content of her book, just as no actor is his specific role. Both are actually mini-organizations. They rely on other organizations to produce content, from the designer who creates her book cover to the public relations agency that works to set up his radio and television interviews. On an even more intimate level, she is edited by one or many people at her publisher's office, while he is coached, directed, and edited. In either case, the best bits could end up in the deleted ether or cutting-room floor without the creator having much or any say. Imagine, asking for example, who is *Mad Men's* Don Draper…Jon

Hamm, the actor; Matthew Weiner, the director; one of the dozens of writers; someone else; all of them?

As we go about our business of researching, writing, and contemplating popular culture topics, my plea is to not forget context. Our analysis and ability to provide that work to audiences is crucial. Content marketers have much at stake in the phrase they have popularized: "Content is King." However, as popular culture scholars, we know that really "Context Rules."

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Before signing off, I would like to thank Jennifer Dunn for her wonderful work as *PCSJ* Book Review Editor. Over the last several years, Jen has produced the finest set of popular culture book reviews anywhere on the planet. Often, such editorial work can feel like a task more than a reward, but under Jen's steady hand, the book reviews in this journal have been a treasure (as our readers would attest). If you happen to see Jen at a conference or have the opportunity to chat with her, please don't forget a warm, well-deserved "thank you."

"It's All About the Dress!": An Examination of 150 Years of Cinderella Picture-Book Covers

LINDA A. ROBINSON AND SUSAN M. WILDERMUTH

This project was born as we sat in the first author's home, surrounded by her collection of 300-plus Cinderella picture books. As the second author looked through the books, she starting singing, "A dream is a wish your heart makes." Sitting nearby were the second author's two daughters. The four-year-old was dressed in a Disney's Cinderella princess costume, and both girls were wearing crowns. We were three groups of women, from three different eras, all connected by a shared fascination with a simple fairy tale. And we are not alone in our enchantment with this story. As Linda T. Parsons states, Cinderella is consistently reported as the best-known and most-loved of all fairy tales, with over 700 documented versions dating as far back as 850-60 China.

Karlyn Crowley and John Pennington claim that Cinderella's popularity comes from her elasticity; her rags-to-riches story can be tweaked to fit any cultural norms or values, and as a result, her story has become one of the most enduring of all cultural narratives. In fact, Marcia K. Lieberman asserts that Cinderella has achieved mythic or god-like status. The impact such a pervasive cultural narrative may have on the people who consume it is likely to be quite significant. As Lieberman notes, children and adults are culturally conditioned by the stories they read and hear. For example, Thomas Crisp and Brittany Hiller establish that children aged three to five internalize gender stereotypes and can differentiate between "masculine" and "feminine" roles by the time they enter kindergarten. Crisp and Hiller argue that because story-telling is "a

primary means of transmitting cultural values from one generation to the next," children's literature plays a key role in this gender-role socialization (197-98).   Gender role socialization, then, is just one reason it is essential to examine the influence cultural narratives such as Cinderella may have on their audience.

The goal of the current study is to provide a comprehensive descriptive analysis of the illustrations in Cinderella picture books and to examine how or if those illustrations have changed over time.   By documenting the differences and commonalities in Cinderella images over time, we can draw conclusions about how portrayals of Cinderella may have been shaped by the social forces of a given era and how they, in turn, may have shaped the norms and values of audiences in that era.

To accomplish this goal, we first provide a brief history of the Cinderella story.   Then we argue that picture-book illustrations are especially important to examine and that such research to date has been limited. Next, we argue a case for our research questions and summarize the methodology we used to collect and analyze our data.   Finally, we provide a descriptive analysis of the images in our data set, identifying trends over time and their possible implications.

History

The Cinderella story has existed in world-wide folklore for at least 1000 years. When Charles Perrault wrote his story in the 1690s, he was probably aware of earlier versions, in which Cinderella, often aided by her dead mother, struggles not to find a husband but to regain her lost status, and does so by actively using her wits and seeking out the help she needs. The fairy godmother who arrives unexpectedly and transforms a pumpkin into a coach – and who bestows on Cinderella her ballroom finery – was Perrault's creation. Thus, in Perrault's telling, Cinderella's agency is significantly diminished.   Perrault's Cinderella is sweet, gentle, self-

effacing, and physically lovely, reflecting the "ideal '*femme civilisée*' of upper-class society": a "composite female [who is] beautiful, polite, graceful, industrious, and properly groomed and knows how to control herself at all times" (Zipes, *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion* 40-41).

In the mid-1800s, Perrault's Cinderella was adopted by British publishers to the effective exclusion of all others.   Bonnie Cullen posits that Perrault's Cinderella "won out" over other versions because "the market for fairy tales in England was increasingly urban and middleclass[,]" and such "'polite' readers were concerned about 'improving' young minds to function effectively in society" (73).   In short, Perrault's demure and passive Cinderella fit best with the Victorian feminine ideal.   As a result of this publishing choice, Perrault's version has dominated English-language Cinderella books ever since and is the version told in nearly all the books examined here.

Value of Illustrations

Researchers who examine the Cinderella story tend to focus on the text and explore the possible effects of the narrative on its audience.   For example, Lieberman and Parsons conduct a feminist analysis of the gender roles demonstrated in the text. Similarly, Jane Yolen criticizes four American versions of the tale, published between 1879 and 1950, for their ever-more-passive heroine. Lori Baker-Sperry and Kay F. Stone examine children's reactions to the Cinderella story as evidence of its effect on gender roles. Bruno Bettelheim performs a psychoanalytical analysis of the text, and Elisabeth Panttaja analyzes the text in terms of class. Max Luthi interprets the Grimm brothers' Cinderella tale, perceiving it as an expression of universal human experience.

In contrast, the current research focuses on illustrations, arguing that they are as important to understand as the text.   Emilie Sitzia contends that because of their prominent place alongside the text and because of

their instant effect on a reader, illustrations are often powerful additions to the narrative.   Indeed, Nodelman argues that pictures illicit emotions, spark imagination, and communicate how things look in ways words alone cannot ("How Picture Books Work").

This is especially true of fairy tale illustrations. Luthi argues that the universal appeal of the fairy tale's text is attributable in part to its lacking detail; the fairy tale's principal actors are not individuals but simply figures. While Luthi contends this stylized quality gives fairy tales a strong symbolic appeal, it also creates the space for the interpretation and particularization that illustrations provide.   Indeed, illustrations are often what distinguish one published version of a fairy tale from another.

Further, Françoise Forster-Hahn, as quoted by Sitzia, has recognized that all illustrators apply contemporary pictorial conventions to their work, thus manifesting "'links to the political and cultural fabric of [the illustration's] own period'" (Sitzia 160).   Relying on Tony Gheeraert's contention that illustrations not only comment on and refer to the time of their production but are also "'interpretations of the text as it was [then] read and understood,'" Sitzia argues that "the illustrator's aim is to translate the text into his/her contemporary cultural, social and political environment to adapt it for his/her readership" (160).   Illustrations, then, provide insight into how the text was received and interpreted in a particular sociocultural environment.

Despite the potential importance of illustrations in understanding the impact of iconic stories such as Cinderella, very few scholars have examined Cinderella illustrations. While a considerable amount of excellent criticism has addressed the Cinderella tale in general, Ségolène Le Men charges that its illustrations have been shockingly neglected. Exceptions are the work of Sitzia, Le Men, Nodelman, Joseph H. Schwarcz, and Irene Whalley; however, none of these studies was comprehensive.   Sitzia analyzed only Gustave Doré's 1862 Cinderella illustrations, while Le Men briefly traced the changes in illustrations of

Perrault's fairy tales (including Cinderella) from their original publication in 1697 to Doré's version two centuries later.   Nodelman has compared the illustrations of three versions of Cinderella in a critical assessment of the illustrations' artistic influences and effect (*Words About Pictures*). Schwarcz focused on two key scenes in Cinderella, examining how 50 picture-book illustrators after 1945 presented those two scenes.   Finally, Whalley's study examined a sample of Cinderella books published between 1794 and 1919, and traced the changes the books made to the original story during that time.   In sum, previous examinations of illustrations in Cinderella have been based a small sample size, have looked a narrow slice of the illustrations, and have examined the illustrations from an art history background.   Further, none have examined Cinderella illustrations produced after 1980.

In contrast, we look at Cinderella illustrations for both breadth and depth. We examine cover illustrations for changes across decades and explore how trends in those covers both reflect and affect cultural norms and values of particular eras. To do so, we propose four research questions.

Research Questions

The first two research questions focus on identifying the iconic images present in Cinderella cover illustrations over time. While one might expect great variety in Cinderella illustrations, given the dramatic, poignant, and even humorous moments in the basic Cinderella plot, illustrations of the tale tend to depict a standard set of narrative moments. As George Bodmer has established, once illustration choices are made and published, some images become canonized, and image evolution slows down significantly. The art of illustration is "extremely conservative and almost always alludes to earlier illustrated versions" (Le Men 19).   New

artists often inherit a repertoire of scenes from earlier illustrators that they are not willing or not permitted by publishers to abandon.

Yolen has identified the common elements of the Cinderella story as (1) an ill-treated but worthy heroine in a Cinders-disguise; (2) the aid of a magic gift by a bird/mother substitute; (3) a dance/festival where the heroine comes in radiant display; and (4) recognition through a token. Similarly, Cullen notes that over its history of publication, the Cinderella story has acquired a fixed set of signature images: Cinderella sitting in the ashes; Cinderella working as servant; the fairy godmother appearing to Cinderella; Cinderella arriving at the ball; Cinderella running from the ball; Cinderella trying on the slipper; and Cinderella and the prince getting married. The first research question seeks to confirm that our sample of Cinderella covers includes the standard iconic images.

RQ1: What are the iconic images portrayed on Cinderella covers?

Illustrations often reflect the political and social fabric of the time period in which they were created. Thus, fairy tales and their associated illustrations are usually culturally specific and evolve according to the values and norms of the societies that produce them (Parsons). This indicates that the iconic images might change over time. Our second research question explores this possibility.

RQ2: Have/How have the iconic images on Cinderella covers changed over time?

Another factor important to explore is how Cinderella herself is depicted via such illustrative choices as her hair color, skin color, gown color, and degree of attractiveness. Trends in Cinderella's hair and skin color may reflect trends in ideals of female beauty. Further, Cinderella is repeatedly described in the text as beautiful, both inside and out. Thus, Cinderella illustrations are likely to portray her in ways that meet the standards of

beauty established by the culture of her reading audience.   Additionally, beauty is often seen as correlated with virtue, while ugliness is correlated with evil or bad temper (Zipes, "A Second Gaze").   Thus, we can predict that Cinderella will be portrayed to fit cultural expectations of beauty so as to convey that she is good (Parsons).

Cinderella's portrayed age also promises to be significant. Bodmer notes that in the texts of traditional fairy tales, few details of the heroine's age are provided because she must start out as a girl and be married by the end of the story.   However, illustrations, by their very nature, must depict Cinderella at a particular age.   Previous work has indicated that there is great variety in those depictions.   For example, Schwarcz found few books where Cinderella is a child, but 25 versions where she is depicted as a girl between the ages of 7 to 12 years and 21 books where she appears to be in her upper teens to early 20s.   These potential variables lead us to our third research question.

> *RQ3: How is Cinderella depicted on the covers (hair color, level of* beauty, age, etc.)?

A follow-up issue is how (or if) depictions of Cinderella have changed over time.   If Cinderella illustrations portray her as a reflection of the cultural ideal of female beauty, then, as beauty ideals change, depictions of Cinderella should also change. Additionally, Baker-Sperry's work suggests we may see significant changes in depictions of Cinderella after 1950, the year in which Disney's *Cinderella* was released.   Zipes argues, in fact, that our modern understanding of the Cinderella fairy tale is so closely linked with the Disney film that the two are inseparable (*Happily Ever After*). Cullen also contends that the Cinderella depiction that has eclipsed all others is Disney's blond, blue-eyed, slender young adult. This leads to our fourth research question:

> RQ4: How do (or do) depictions of Cinderella on covers change over time?

Methods

The covers of 315 Cinderella picture books, published in the United States and Great Britain between 1800 and 2014, are the subject of this analysis. While these books constitute a representative sample of Cinderella books published during these years, they are a private collection, and thus caveats must be noted. Because of the diminished availability of older books, the quantity of books examined here that were published between 1800 and 1900 is smaller than the quantity published after 1900. For the same reason, the collection contains more books published in recent decades than in the early decades of the twentieth century (see Appendix D).

Moreover, the books examined here consist entirely of traditional versions of the (primarily Perrault) Cinderella story and do not include any "new" retellings of the story now available to children. Thus, "alternative" English-language Cinderella picture books such as *Cinderella Skeleton* (2004), *Seriously Cinderella Is SO Annoying!* (2011), or *Cinders: A Chicken Cinderella* (2013) are not included; neither are recent picture books telling versions of the Cinderella tale from non-Western European ethnic and indigenous cultures. Finally, the data set includes only three Disney books.

Second, the current study examines only cover illustrations from the dataset. Because individuals usually glance at a book before reading it, the cover is the most significant source of their expectations for the story, and it influences their response to the book before they even open it (Nodelman & Reimer 278). Maria Nikolajeva and Carole Scott observe that a picture book's cover image is often what the author or publisher

considers the story's most dramatic moment.   The importance of the cover, then, has led us to focus solely on cover illustrations in this study.

A number of steps were involved in creating the dataset for this analysis. First, all covers were scanned to create digital copies of each image. Second, researchers examined each cover for manifest content variables (Potter & Levine-Donnerstein), including elements of Cinderella's appearance (hair color, skin color, gown color, and dress (ball gown or rags)) and the story events pictured (e.g., Cinderella running away from the palace, Cinderella dancing with the prince). Cover images were coded for each of these manifest content variables. As the content was non-subjective, intercoder reliability on these variables was 100%. Third, researchers examined each cover for two latent content variables (Potter & Levine- Donnerstein). Latent content variables are variables requiring coders to engage in somewhat subjective interpretation to categorize content.   The two latent content variables of the study were Cinderella's age in the image (child, early teen, young lady) and Cinderella's attractiveness (unattractive/attractive).   The three coders each coded a subset of approximately 10 % of the covers. Intercoder reliability was alpha =.91 for Cinderella's age and alpha =.92 for Cinderella's attractiveness.   Once all the images were coded, a database was created that allowed the researchers to sort images by multiple variables. For example, the researchers could pull up all images published in the 1930s that showed a blond Cinderella running down the stairs. This allowed the researchers to explore relationships between illustrations across time.

Results

RQ1 asked, "What are the iconic images portrayed on Cinderella covers?" The coding scheme for this question included the iconic images already identified in previous research. Additional categories were also evident in the images. The final coding scheme included ten categories (see

Appendix A).   Twenty percent of the cover images showed Cinderella running away from the ball and losing her glass slipper. Fifteen percent captured the moment of transformation when Cinderella's rags are magically replaced by a beautiful ball gown. Another 14% percent of the cover images showed Cinderella sitting in the ashes, and 10% showed Cinderella doing housework or helping her stepsisters dress.   Another 10% of cover images were of Cinderella first encountering or helping her fairy godmother, while 9% of the images showed Cinderella riding in her coach to the ball, and 8% percent showed Cinderella dancing with the prince.   Five percent of the cover images showed Cinderella trying on the shoe. Three percent of the cover images depicted Cinderella and the prince getting married, and a final three percent were simple portraits of Cinderella. In sum, Cinderella in the ashes, Cinderella having her gown transformed, and Cinderella running away from the ball were the three most used cover images at 14%, 15% and 20% of all images, respectively.

RQ2 asked if the images depicted on Cinderella covers changed over time.   By examining which images appeared most often in which decades, the researchers were able to answer this question (see Appendix A). An initial finding is that covers showing Cinderella sitting in the ashes or working at chores exist in every decade.   This indicates that Cinderella in her "Cinders" role is an iconic image. However, while initially (1800-1880), images of a downtrodden Cinderella made up a significant portion of covers, by the 1950s, fewer and fewer covers show her working or sitting by the fireplace. From 2010 to 2014, a downtrodden Cinderella appears on only 11% of covers.

Perhaps in relation to the above findings, cover images showing Cinderella's gown transformation did not exist in the early years of this study. The early covers showed Cinderella only in rags.   However, by the 1900s, images of Cinderella during the magical moment her gown is transformed started to emerge, and, over time, that moment appeared more

and more frequently, such that, by the years 2010-2014, 27% of cover images depict the gown transformation.

Another trend indicated by the data was that Cinderella running away from the ball was the most popular image overall. This image did not appear until the 1890s and was used only sporadically until the 1970s, but it began appearing consistently each decade thereafter, and in the years 2010-14, Cinderella running down the stairs was depicted on 41% of all covers published.

RQ3 examined how Cinderella looked on covers, specifically: her age, her hair color, her skin color, her dress (rags or ball gown), the color of any ball gown, and her physical attractiveness.

Age. Portrayals of Cinderella's apparent age varied. In 11.5% of the data set, Cinderella appeared as a pre-adolescent child, in some cases as young as five or six years old. In 12%, she was depicted in her early teens, approximately thirteen or fourteen years old. In over three-fourths of covers (76.5%), however, Cinderella appeared as a young lady in her late teens or early twenties.

Hair Color. The most dominant hair color for Cinderella was blond, appearing on 71% of the covers. Second most prevalent was brown (16%), followed by red (9%) and black (4%).

Skin Color. Across the data set, only two Cinderellas were non-Caucasian (.06%).

Dress Color. When Cinderella was shown in a ball gown, 25% of the gowns were pink and another 25% white, 14% were blue, 14% yellow, 5.5% purple, 5% gold, 3% red, and 2.5% green.

Rags/Splendor. In 44% of covers Cinderella wore rags, while in 56%, she wore a ball gown.

Attractiveness. The cover illustrations could be divided into two broad categories in terms of Cinderella's attractiveness, a distinction that arose primarily from illustration style. The dominant illustration style in the dataset was representational, depicting human characters with

"realistic" proportions, that is, with bodily and facial proportions approximating those of actual human beings. On these covers, regardless of skin color, hair color, or age, Cinderella was portrayed in a manner consistent with Western conceptions of facial beauty, which studies have established consist of mathematically symmetrical faces including a high forehead, small chin, small nose, short and narrow jaw, and high cheekbones (Buss; Fink and Penton-Voak; Perrett et. al.). In contrast, on other covers, illustrators employed more experimental and deliberately "unrealistic" illustration styles in which characters, including Cinderella, were roughly drawn, physically disproportionate, or cartoonish almost to the point of abstraction. On these covers, "ugly" Cinderellas were shown, for example, with disproportionately large heads containing tiny or asymmetrical facial features or with stick-like arms and legs. These "ugly" Cinderellas often resembled drawings that very young children would produce. Across all the 315 covers, 17% were coded as unattractive and 83% as attractive.

RQ4 asked if the look of Cinderella changed over time.

Age. Cinderella's apparent age changed across time (see Appendix B). From 1800 to 1889, all images were of a young-lady Cinderella. It was not until 1890-99 that images of a younger Cinderella, approximately thirteen or fourteen years old, first appeared. This early-teen Cinderella enjoyed a strong degree of popularity from the turn of the twentieth century through 1939, making up 37% of the cover images in those four decades. The first child Cinderella appeared in the 1900s, and during the first four decades of the twentieth century, child Cinderellas appeared on 16% of covers. However, across all decades, Cinderella was pictured most often as a young lady in her late teens or early twenties. In every decade of the data set, Cinderella appeared as a young lady on at least two thirds (and, in some decades, 100%) of covers – with two exceptions. First, the 1920s was the only decade in which young-lady Cinderellas were in a minority, appearing on only 33% of covers, and in the 1930s,

she appeared on just over half (54%) of covers. In these two decades, the teen Cinderella reached her peak, appearing on 53% of 1920s covers and 31% of 1930s covers, thus surpassing her early popularity in the 1890s (28%). Second, in the 2010s, the frequency of young-lady Cinderellas fell below two-thirds, to 61.5%, for the first time since 1939; this was a drop from an average of 85.6% per decade from 1940 through 2009. This time, however, it was the child Cinderella whose appearance increased in comparison. The percentage of child Cinderellas began to rise in the 2000s; she constituted 15% of covers during that decade, compared to an average of 8.5% of covers in the immediately prior three decades. In the 2010s, at 25.5%, she appeared on a greater percentage of covers than in any other decade. Thus, although the young-lady Cinderella dominates over time, the 1920s/30s and the 2000s/10s demonstrate two turns toward younger Cinderellas.

   Hair Color.   While blond Cinderellas dominated the cover illustrations across all decades, there were interesting trends in Cinderella's hair coloring over time. Before 1860, Cinderella was portrayed only as blond.   However, beginning in the 1860s, other hair colors began to emerge, and in the decade between 1860 and 1870, 66% of the covers had brunette Cinderellas, while only 33% of the covers had blondes. From 1870 to 1890, 50% of the covers showed Cinderella as blond, while the other 50% showed her as brunette. From 1890 to 1940, blond Cinderellas dominated, but brunette, red, and black-haired Cinderellas still appeared in each decade.   In the 1950s, however, alternative hair colors disappeared, and for almost 20 years, all covers in the data set were of blond Cinderellas. Alternative hair colors started to slowly re-emerge in the late 1970s, and in the decades from 1980 to 2014, the average number of covers with blond Cinderellas per decade was 71%, with the other 29% being made up of a mix of brunettes, red-heads, and black-haired Cinderellas.

Skin Color. The two covers where Cinderella is not Caucasian did not appear until the 2000s, indicating only a recent and minimal breach of the traditional tale by non-white Cinderellas.

Dress Color. Cinderella's ball gown appears to reflect the colors in fashion at particular time periods. Pink was popular across many decades but is especially prominent post-1990, making up 31% of all ball gowns on covers published between 1990 and 2014. Likewise, while purple was not a popular color overall (only 5.5% of all ball gowns were purple), purple has appeared more often in recent years, making up 8.5% of the covers in the 1990s and 12% of the covers from 2000 to 2014. Blue and yellow have remained constant at approximately 14% of the ball grown colors across the decades. However, red, gold, and green have decreased in popularity, such that from 1990 to 2014, they each accounted for 1% or less of the colors chosen for Cinderella's gown. White has experienced a few periods of great popularity. While making up only 15% of the ball gowns since 1990, white was the dominant ball gown color in the 1920s, at 57% of the gowns in that decade.

Rags/Splendor. While there was a fairly balanced distribution between Cinderella in her rags and Cinderella in her finery, choices about how Cinderella was dressed varied across time (see Appendix C). From 1800 to 1889, 100% of the covers portrayed Cinderella in rags. Starting in the 1890s, images of Cinderella in splendor then began to emerge, although Cinderella in rags still dominated through the 1920s. In the 1930s and '40s, Cinderella in rags and Cinderella in finery were almost equally represented. In the 1950s, Cinderella in splendor jumped to 83% of covers, but from the 1960s to the 1980s, the distribution was again more balanced, with slightly more images of Cinderella in rags in these decades than of Cinderella in splendor. Starting in the late 1980s, however, splendor steadily began to gain ground each decade, until, in the covers from 2010 to today, Cinderella in splendor appears on 81% of covers and Cinderella in rags on only 19%.

Attractiveness.   How attractively Cinderella was portrayed also changed over time. From 1800 to 1960, there were no covers with unattractive Cinderellas, as the illustration style used was consistently representational. From 1960-1989, there were only four "ugly" Cinderella covers. Starting in 1990, however, covers employing abstract, cartoonish, or child-like illustration styles became more common. Seventeen percent of the covers from 1990-1999 showed "ugly" Cinderellas, 47% of the covers from 2000-2009 were "ugly," and 46% of the covers from 2010-2014 featured "ugly" Cinderellas. In sum, since 1990, 50 out of 133 covers (or 38%) portrayed Cinderella as unattractive. Thus, while "ugly" Cinderellas are not common, those that do exist appear almost exclusively on books published in the last 25 years.

Discussion

So what do these results mean? What might explain why we found what we found? And what might our findings say about the messages these books are sending?

    As a preliminary matter, the cover images examined here confirm the existence of, and conform to, the core iconic images from the Cinderella story previously identified by scholars. However, one of our major findings is a marked shift over time in the story event presented most frequently.   As noted, these covers exhibit a transition from an early dominance of Cinderella sitting in the ashes to a later dominance, especially in recent years, of Cinderella running away from the palace. This trend indicates that Cinderella is recently depicted more often as an active character than a passive one; a character in motion rather than a static one.   This is a change which at first blush may suggest her construction as a more empowered character than in decades past. However, while Cinderella is running in these later images, she is only *reacting* to the midnight hour and not *acting* on her own behalf.   As

Cinderella's flight from the ball is an exciting moment of drama, it is more likely that its regular appearance on later covers reflects the increasing presence of visual media (such as movies, television shows, and video games) in modern culture – and the increasing competition that such media poses for print in the lives of modern-day children.   These covers depict *movement* rather than empowered *action* on Cinderella's part; the former, however, is equally cinematic as the latter, and this is, in fact, the only event in the tale that offers the dynamism publishers today may believe is most likely to "sell" a story to children and their parents.

The more comprehensive conclusion to be drawn from our findings is that Cinderella picture-book covers, over time, have shifted from showing Cinderella downtrodden and in rags (see Figures 1 and 2) to Cinderella dressed in splendor (see Figures 3 and 4).   This transition seems to both reflect and contribute to the "princess culture" being marketed to girls today.   As Peggy Orenstein has established, much of this "princess culture" may be laid at Disney's feet with the launch of the Disney princess merchandising line in 2000. As of 2011, this princess line (featuring predominantly Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, Ariel, and Belle), had *26,000* items on the market, and by 2009, sales had reached $4 billion. Disney's line was followed almost immediately by Mattel's 2001 launch of its Barbie princess line and by other similar ventures, such as Viacom's 2004 release of Magic Hair Fairytale Dora the Explorer (15). Consistent with such "princess culture" marketing, the trend toward images of Cinderella in her ball gown on picture-book covers demonstrates a turn to spectacle and, in particular, to a construction of Cinderella herself as a dazzling visual display.

The majority of covers picture Cinderella as conventionally pretty or beautiful, albeit "pretty" or "beautiful" as those terms were understood and depicted at the time of publication (for examples, see Figures 5 and 6). Reflecting consistency in cultural stereotypes of female beauty, Cinderella is overwhelmingly represented as Caucasian and blond.   Moreover, when

Cinderella is pictured in her ball gown, the trend in recent years has been toward pink and purple gowns.   This turn toward pink and purple is consistent with what Orenstein has termed twenty-first century "girlie-girl" culture marketed toward little girls, whereby girls' toys – even such items as baseball bats – appear to be almost uniformly produced in pink and/or purple. (In like manner, while a growing number of pop-up and moving-parts Cinderella books since the turn of the millennium suggests an effort on publishers' parts to create products that can compete in visual (and interactive) appeal to the entertainment offered by DVDs and video games, the increasing use of such eye-catching features as glitter, gilt, and padding on Cinderella covers, albeit reflecting the same concern, attracts attention in particularly "pretty" and "girlie" ways).   The result is a narrowing of the pleasurable visual experience offered by these covers and by Cinderella's "prettiness," both of which conform to and reinforce the girlie-girl "princess" ideal girls are invited to consume.

In only one subset of these covers is this iconic prettiness undermined: those in which Cinderella is unconventionally portrayed in an abstract, crude, or cartoonish style (for examples, see Figures 7 and 8).   These "ugly" Cinderellas began to appear in the 1990s, simultaneously with picture books recounting alternative Cinderella stories – in which Cinderella is an animal, a boy, or the "villain" of the story or ones in which Cinderella chooses an occupation or a working-class boy instead of the prince – and picture books providing children versions of the Cinderella tale as told in cultures around the world, with corresponding illustrations, instead of Perrault's version. Thus, "ugly" Cinderella covers appear to be part of a general cultural impulse, presumably the result of the women's movement of the late twentieth century, to counteract or subvert the conventional Cinderella tale that had dominated English-language picture books for the previous century.

In particular, this subset of "ugly" Cinderella picture books undermines the beauty imperative at the heart of Perrault's tale by

portraying Cinderellas who are drawn as crude cartoons or as abstract, even distorted, versions of the human form.   Although these covers depict the same iconic moments in the story as appear on more traditionally "pretty" covers, they invite a reading of the story that is more humorous than romantic or magical, which again works to downplay the beauty-is-paramount message of Perrault's tale.   These "ugly" covers also reflect broader artistic trends toward increasing abstraction, simplification, stylization, and caricature.

This child-like pictorial style intersects with another trend in Cinderella's cover depictions that may suggest an important move in the construction and marketing of Cinderella to little girls: a small but growing shift toward representing Cinderella as a child (for examples, see Figures 9 and 10).   Throughout the twentieth century, Cinderella was occasionally depicted as a pre-adolescent child, but, until 1990, these child Cinderellas appeared on two or fewer books per decade.   The number of child Cinderellas began to rise in the 1990s and 2000s, however, and in the 2010s, the child Cinderella was depicted on more than a quarter of covers. This upswing in the frequency of child Cinderellas may be one approach to "selling" Cinderella to younger and younger children.

On one hand, the child Cinderellas since 1990 often take the form of "ugly" Cinderellas produced in a cartoonish or child-like drawing style. Indeed, half the child-like Cinderellas in the 1990s, all in the 2000s, and over slightly over half in the 2010s fall into this category.   These "ugly" child Cinderellas may be perceived by children as characters they themselves could have drawn, so that the pleasure they offer may be a sense of "ownership" of the Cinderella tale and of Cinderella herself, suggesting experiences of Cinderella as a form of coloring play. Moreover, many of the books with "ugly" Cinderella covers are board books, targeted toward very young children, or early readers that sometimes include instructions for parents to follow in sharing the books with their children.   While the crudeness and simplicity of the cover

illustrations on the board books arguably reflects the common belief that very small children relate best to pictures made up of basic shapes and containing little detail, the use of "ugly" Cinderellas in books specifically designed for parents helping their children learn to read suggests a belief in the desirability of downplaying Cinderella's physical beauty (even when it remains an element in the text) for five- and six-year-old girls.

On the other hand, when these child Cinderellas are portrayed as attractive and appealing (as they often are) in the same manner as more mature Cinderellas published during the same time period, they offer young children the same pleasures of "prettiness" and identification with an idealized image. Making these idealized images appear closer in age to the young readers themselves offers the possibility that this sense of identification may be more immediate and intense. Thus, the most significant aspect of both the "ugly" and the pretty child Cinderellas of recent decades is that they are, in fact, *children* and not adolescents. In this small but growing percentage of Cinderella books, Cinderella is her readers' peer – someone they could *be*. And with only a handful of exceptions, this is a phenomenon that began in the late twentieth century and is occurring more often as the twenty-first century progresses.

Thus, our results reveal a continuous and arguably intensifying emphasis on female beauty and display in books that, in recent decades, have increasingly invited younger and younger readers to delight in visual pleasure and to identify with Cinderella. The growth in this trend in recent years reflects shifts in the market to which children picture books are pitched. In children's publishing, the primary markets for trade house picture books – those that, often in hardback with dust jackets, sell for $15.00 to $20.00 in today's bookstores – were originally libraries and schools, venues which favored books that offered children pleasure of an "elevated" or educational nature; a second type of children's book publishing, occurring simultaneously, was the inexpensive parental-impulse buy, introduced in the 1940s with Western Publishing's Little

Golden Book at a price of $.25.   In the 1980s, following severe cutbacks in funding for schools and libraries, the primary market for all children's publishing became parents, a shift which coincided with the baby boom generation's becoming parents and with an increasing cultural emphasis, particularly among the American middle class, on the value of early childhood learning (Marcus).   Thus, on one hand, the continuing dominance of "prettiness" in Cinderella covers since the 1980s suggests that this is the manner of presentation of greatest appeal to parents and grandparents who buy books for children.   At the same time, of course, such buying practices are likely to be self-perpetuating; if these are the books little girls are given, they may well become the books little girls desire.   Indeed, the fit of these books within the "princess culture" being marketed to little girls in recent years suggests that, even if adults buy these Cinderella books, the books' primary market today, and hence the market to which their visual appeal is directed, are the girl readers themselves.

Moreover, these books, particularly in the trend toward representing Cinderella as a child, also promote the sense of identification at the heart of today's "princess culture," especially as conceptualized by Disney.   As the company's first foray into selling merchandise separately from a movie release, Disney's princess line sells little girls the *experience* of being a Disney princess; its originator, Disney executive Andy Mooney explains that "all we did was envision a little girl's room and think about how she could live out the princess fantasy" (16).   Moreover, this line consists of both products (e.g., costumes and accessories, dolls and figurines, books and DVDs, backpacks and school supplies) and experiences for girls lucky enough to actually travel into Disney territory. For example, one Disney World attraction is the Bibbidi Bobbidi Boutique, where, for fees ranging from $55 to $195, little girls are treated to princess "makeovers," being dressed up – and made up – as their favorite Disney princess.   Casual observation indicates that most girls

choose to become Cinderella, but whichever princess a young girl selects to be "turned into," the Boutique *experience* is one that, in her fairy tale, no princess but Cinderella has: that of being transformed from an "ordinary" girl to a princess. Moreover, that transformation is accomplished solely through appearance – through the donning of shiny, glittery *splendor* that automatically and instantaneously makes the little girl someone not only beautiful above all others but *special.*

This growing "princess" culture marketed to little girls, in fact, is reflected most strongly in – and is simultaneously promoted by – the cumulative shift in recent decades in Cinderella book covers from depicting Cinderella in story moments where she is dressed in rags – sitting in the ashes, performing housework, first encountering her fairy godmother, trying on the glass slipper – to those where she is clad in her ball gown splendor – experiencing the transformation of her rags into the ball gown, dancing with the prince, running away from the ball. This transition suggests a fundamental change in Cinderella's intended role in her readers' lives. The very first books published for children date to the late seventeenth century and were primers, intended for both scholastic and moral instruction. As Joyce Irene Whalley and Tessa Rose Chester demonstrate, children's books throughout the eighteenth century retained a strongly didactic character. Even when London publisher John Newbery and Boston publisher Isaiah Thomas introduced children's books designed to amuse in the 1740s and the 1780s, respectively, the belief that reading should be fun was accompanied with the intent that it should also instruct (Marcus). As we have seen, Perrault intended Cinderella to serve as an exemplar for the ladies of the French nobility, and the Victorian choice of Perrault's Cinderella over all others stemmed from her value as a role model for middle-class children. Thus, it is likely that Cinderella's frequent appearance in humble rags on the covers of books published in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries reflects, at least in part, a general cultural belief in the virtues she exhibited: patience and

forbearance in the face of injustice, hard work and diligence in contrast to sloth, and uncomplaining endurance of undeserved hardship.

Another appeal of this imagery, which may explain its continuing use on Cinderella covers to the present day, is cultural attachment to the underdog tale; this is the appeal of being unfairly persecuted, albeit with the implicit, certain promise of ultimately being vindicated, rewarded, and acclaimed. But while put-upon characters in other popular culture vanquish their oppressors through their own ingenuity, talent, and effort, Cinderella's triumph is simply bestowed upon her, a reward for her having put up with mistreatment without protesting or taking any action on her own behalf.

With the late-twentieth-century shift to an average of nearly three-quarters of picture-book covers depicting Cinderella in her ball gown, something different is being celebrated, and a new message is being communicated to the books' readers. The growing emphasis in these covers is no longer on the behavior for which Cinderella is rewarded; rather, the focus is now on the reward she receives. Interestingly, despite the oft-expressed critique of Cinderella as a character who passively waits for the prince to save her, the covers in this data set do not present the prince as that reward; he is, in fact, a minimal presence overall. The prince does not appear on any covers until the 1920s, and he appears in 10% or fewer of covers in each decade thereafter. Thus, Cinderella covers increasingly suggest that, rather than the prince, Cinderella's reward is the splendor itself: a beautiful dress, by which the heroine is made the object of attention and admiration.

This recent dominance of Cinderella in her ball gown splendor, even on covers in which Cinderella herself is depicted as "ugly" or funny-looking, is a continuation of the long-standing ideal of the feminine as an object on display, what Laura Mulvey has defined as the quality of to-be-looked-at-ness. At the same time, however, existing within and contributing to broader "princess" marketing to young girls, it invites

identification with that feminine object, offering not only the pleasurable viewing of splendor but the pleasurable desire to *experience* it.

Hence the particular significance of the growing popularity of one subset of the "splendor" images on Cinderella picture-book covers: that of the "gown transformation," a story event that was not one of the core iconic illustration images previously identified by scholars. This is a moment that did not appear on book covers until 1910, and it was featured only on an average of 15% of covers from the 1910s through the 1960s and on no covers at all during the 1970s and '80s. However, it has averaged a *full quarter* of books published since 1990. It is second only to Cinderella running away from the ball in its frequency during this time period. What these particular covers sell to little girls is Cinderella's *transformation* – from the downtrodden to the elevated, from the shabby and plain to the glorious and extraordinary. This emphasis reflects the popularity of the transformation or makeover narrative, as seen in such popular reality TV shows as "What Not to Wear" or "How Do I Look?" which promise to transform a woman's life with the new hairstyle, make-up, and wardrobe that turn her from an ugly duckling into a swan. Moreover, the magical transformation of Cinderella's appearance – which is, of course, the magical transformation of her fate as well – represents the current popularity of "lottery" thinking: the desire for immediate riches and gratification without having to work for them. This emphasis on Cinderella's magical splendor is consistent as well with other manifestations of a narcissistic turn in popular culture, as demonstrated, for example, in reality TV shows such as "Toddlers and Tiaras," where girls as young as two or three are "glitzed up" with make-up, false eyelashes, hair pieces, and elaborate, flouncy dresses to become "little princesses," and "Say Yes to the Dress," where, surely not coincidentally, brides shopping for wedding dresses often express a desire to "be a princess" on their wedding day or self-identify as "princesses" in their everyday life.

The transformations of the Cinderella book covers examined here, particularly in the years since 1990, both demonstrate and contribute to this siren's call to become a princess. The call of Cinderella picture books in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was to emulate Cinderella in her virtuous qualities. Today, the call is to *be* Cinderella – to be a beautiful blond Cinderella in a gorgeous pink ball gown. Moreover, it is a call being made to younger and younger girls, and one Orenstein suggests they are taking up to the exclusion of all others (22). And despite alternative and cultural diverse retellings of the Cinderella story available to girls in books other than those examined here – even despite artistic efforts within this data set to make Cinderella appear ordinary or funny-looking – the continuing and repeated appearance on "traditional" Cinderella covers of her splendiferous transformation and the visual dominance of her dazzling, "sparkilicious" finery indicate a solid entrenchment of this fairy-tale dream, one cemented in place by the potent combination of cultural appeal and marketing savvy.

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Figure 1: Rags Cinderella Cover, 1888

Figure 2: Rags Cinderella Cover, 1915
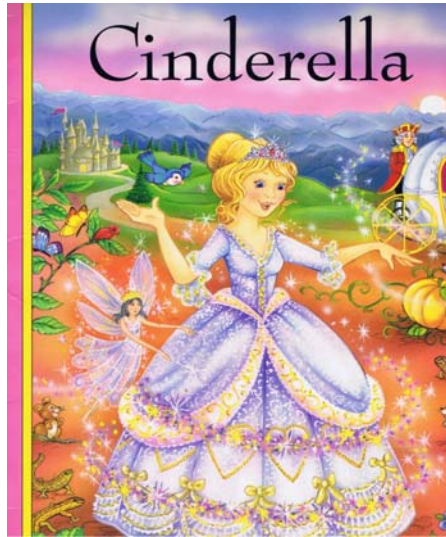
Figure 3: Splendor Cinderella Cover, 2004
© The Book Company Publishing Pty Ltd.
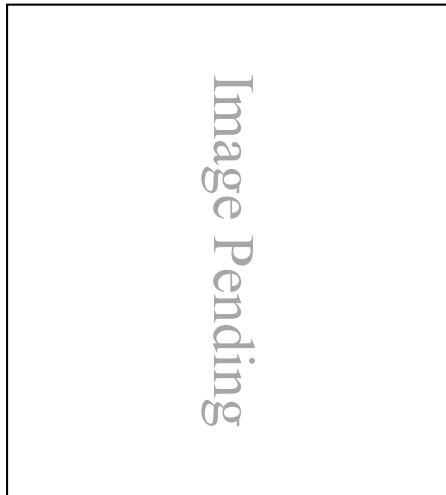
Figure 4: Splendor Cinderella Cover, 2013
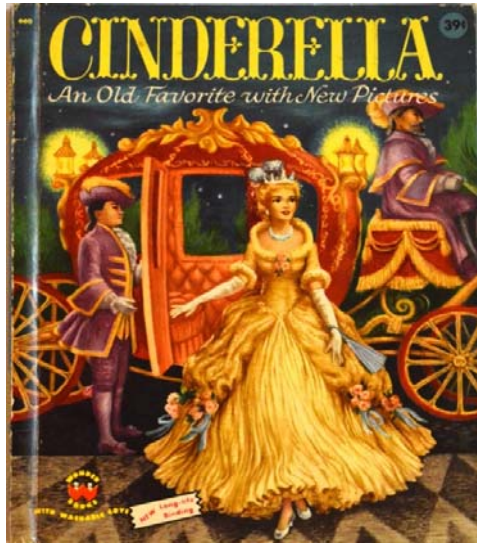
Figure 5: Pretty Cinderella Cover, 1954
Cinderella: An Old Favorite with New Pictures by Evelyn Andreas and
Ruth Ives. Used by permission of Penguin Group (USA) LLC. All rights
reserved.

Image Pending

Figure 6: Pretty Cinderella Cover, 2000

Figure 7: "Ugly" Cinderella Cover, 2007
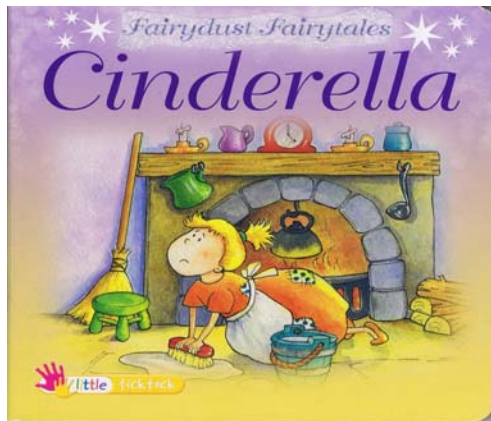
Figure 8: "Ugly" Cinderella Cover, 2009
© ticktock Media Ltd
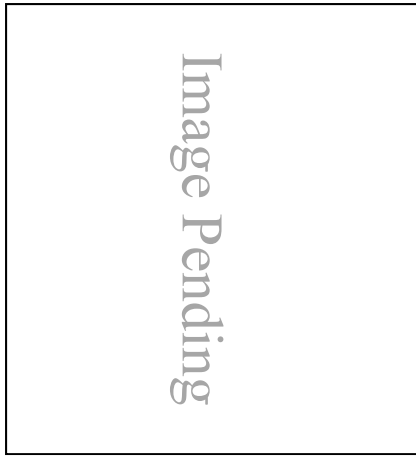
Figure 9: Child Cinderella, 2012

Figure 10: Child Cinderella, 2012

Appendix A: Percentage of Iconic Images Used on Covers per Decade

	Ashes	Work	Gown	Carriage	Ball	Stairs	Shoe	Happy After	Pumpkin	Portrait
1800-1860		100%								
1860s	50%								50%	
1870s	50%						50%			
1880s	40%	20%					20%		20%	
1890s	12%	6%		29%		18%	24%		6%	
1900s	33%	33%		17%					17%	
1910s	38%	12%	12%	12%					25%	
1920s	6%		12%	12%	6%	6%	13%	6%	37%	
1930s	50%		17%		8%	8%			8%	8%
1940s	18%	18%	14%	5%	9%	23%			5%	9%
1950s	8%	15%	15%	31%	15%	15%				
1960s	33%	13%	20%	7%	7%			13%		
1970s	28%	5%			5%	14%	19%	5%	5%	
1980s	13%	17%		7%	3%	23%	7%	7%	10%	7%
1990s	5%	10%	29%	3%	5%	24%	3%	8%	8%	5%
2000s	2%	12%	19%	12%	12%	27%	2%	2%	10%	2%
2010s	8%	3%	27%	5%	5%	41%		3%	5%	3%
Total	**14%**	**10%**	**15%**	**9%**	**8%**	**20%**	**5%**	**3%**	**10%**	**3%**

Appendix B: Percentage of Cinderella's Ages on Covers by Decade.

Decade	Child	Teen	Young Lady
1800-1889			100%
1890s		28%	72%
1900s	17%	17%	66%
1910s	22%	11%	67%
1920s	13%	53%	33%
1930s	15%	31%	54%
1940s	4%	8%	87.5%
1950s			100%
1960s	12.5%	6%	81%
1970s	9%	4%	87%
1980s	7%	10%	83%
1990s	10%	7%	83%
2000s	15%	7%	78%
2010s	25.5%	13%	61.5%
TOTAL	**11.5%**	**12%**	**76.5%**

Appendix C: Rags and Splendor Cinderellas by Decade

	Total percentage of decade in rags	Total percentage of decade in splendor
1800-1889	100%	
1890s	57%	43%
1900s	100%	
1910s	71%	29%
1920s	56%	44%
1930s	50%	50%
1940s	48%	52%
1950s	17%	83%
1960s	60%	40%
1970s	59%	41%
1980s	59%	41%
1990s	34%	66%
2000s	25%	75%
2010s	19%	81%
Total	**44%**	**56%**

Appendix D: Number of Books by Decade

Decade	#of Books
1800s	1
1810s	1
1820s	2
1860s	1
1870s	3
1880s	6
1890s	18
1900s	6
1910s	9
1920s	15
1930s	13
1940s	24
1950s	12
1960s	16
1970s	23
1980s	30
1990s	41
2000s	54
2010s	39
Total	**315**

A New, Screen-based Aesthetic

ERIC K. HATCH

Humans see the world by reflected light, and until recently visual representations of the world have been made on reflective media, whether painted on walls or printed on photographic paper. Art (here, broadly meaning visual representations of the artist's world or viewpoint) was most commonly accessed by seeing the paintings or etchings or rotogravures hanging in one's home, or by picture books, or by the art on display in local museums or one's church. This is no longer the case.

Over the past 25 years, the concurrent emergence of electronic screens and the explosive growth of digital cameras have greatly changed the way we see and represent the world. This change is fundamental and so profound as to represent a new aesthetic, almost a new notion of reality, and arguably a cultural shift on a huge scale. LED-powered billboards now blaze across the highway, distracting drivers with the intensity of their images, and Jumbotrons show fans in the stadium a world they do not see with their own eyes. This article explores the profound influence screens are having in shaping a new aesthetic.

Reflected vs. transmitted light

Reflected light is the normal way for humans to view the world around them, in a spectrum that runs from the very near infrared to the near ultraviolet.

Figure 1: Cincinnati Art Museum has replicated many of the
characteristics of screen-art in this display of "Museum Treasures." High
luminance contrast, saturated color, and bright subject are characteristic of
today's ubiquitous screens — yet this is a live display, with a real oil
painting, and real people (not mannequins). Photo by Hatch Photo
Artistry, LLC. Used by permission.

Reflected light is light which has struck a surface and is differentially absorbed by the surface. What returns from the subject to our eyes has differing wavelengths and energy, which we interpret as differing color and brightness.

Reflected light can never be 100% of the source light; if we look into the sun we see nothing but dazzle, void of detail. As it is, reflective surfaces (paper, walls, blackboards, newspapers, Picasso portraits and daVinci ceilings) all return but a small percentage of the source light to our eyes. By their nature, oil paintings, drawings, and photographic prints are, relatively speaking, dark and subdued.

Transmissive light sources, on the other hand, pass light directly to our eyes. Stars are transmissive. Light bulbs and LEDs transmit light, but objects seen in that light are seen in reflected light. Stained glass is transmissive (though very imperfectly so); so are images seen on electronic screens.

As will be seen, there are physical, emotional, and cultural consequences of seeing reality rendered via the extended (and ubiquitous) use of screens.

Screen-Watching is Ubiquitous

Modern screen-based electronics are more than wide-spread in America, and America only ranks 6th in daily screen use. Figure 2 (Meeker, 2014, 96) shows worldwide usage of screen devices in various nations of the world (as of May 2014). In the Unites States, usage of such devices (TV, laptop/pc, smartphone, tablet) averages 444 minutes PER DAY. In other words, we were bombarding our eyeballs for 7.4 hours every day. By 2016, Meeker finds that Americans are not looking at screens for 9.9 hours a day, and that over 3 billion photos are uploaded daily. (Meeker 2016, 90)

Daily Distribution of Screen Minutes Across Countries (Mins)

Country	TV	Laptop + PC	Smartphone	Tablet
Indonesia	132	117	181	110
Phillipines	99	143	174	115
China	89	161	170	59
Brazil	113	146	149	66
Vietnam	69	160	168	69
USA	147	103	151	43
Nigeria	131	80	193	39
Colombia	114	123	165	35
Thailand	78	96	167	95
Saudi	102	99	189	43
South Africa	115	126	127	63
Czech	111	122	119	70
Russia	98	158	98	66
Argentina	104	114	166	30
UK	148	97	111	55
Kenya	132	65	174	33
Australia	125	102	132	37
Spain	124	97	122	53
Turkey	111	109	132	39
Mexico	93	103	163	32
India	96	95	162	31
Poland	98	132	90	61
South Korea	127	94	144	14
Germany	129	77	137	36
Canada	104	97	124	51
Slovakia	95	106	98	52
Hungary	98	112	90	48
Japan	125	68	135	15
France	134	83	79	30
Italy	89	85	109	34

Screen Minutes: 0 — 100 — 200 — 300 — 400 — 500 — 600

■ TV
■ Laptop + PC
■ Smartphone
■ Tablet

Figure 2: Daily distribution of screen minutes across countries in May, 2014 (Meeker 96). Used by permission.

Starting with TV, Americans have been watching electronic screens of one sort or another many hours a day for more than 60 years. But this article looks at the last 25 years since 1990 because there are differences between pre-digital TV and modern computer screens – today's screens are even brighter and are viewed at closer distances than the old living room TV of the 60s and 70s. They also emit more blue light than pre-digital TVs. With the advent of the PC/ laptop in the 1990s, almost two full generations Americans have been close-up screen-watching for much of their waking lives.

Nor is the use of screens restricted to the financially well-off. As of 2011, even the poorest families (those below the Federal poverty line) in America did not lack for screens. Of the poor,

1. Half have a personal computer, and one in seven have two or more computers.

2. More than half of poor families with children have a video game system, such as an Xbox or PlayStation.

3. 43 percent have Internet access.

4. One-third have a wide-screen plasma or LCD TV. (Rechter and Sheffield)

Screens are not only ubiquitous, they have been developed for maximum impact.

Screen Development Stressed Brightness, Contrast, and Color

Initially, screens were fuzzy and hard to read. Screens were optimized to overcome this problem by making them brighter, more colorful, and more contrasty. There were practical reasons for screens to be developed for those characteristics. The goal was legibility, and brightness, contrast, and color all contribute to legibility.

In their study on the effects of luminance and color contrast on the search of information on display devices, Finnish researchers (Ojanpää and Nasänen) concluded that for black-and-white alphanumeric information, the speed of visual perception decreases with decreasing contrast. In other words, the greater the contrast, the easier it is to read text on a screen. In their research, they found that luminance contrast (dark vs. light) between background and subject (text or numbers) was more important than color contrast in enabling test subjects to read text and recognize numbers.

However, color contrast still plays a role in discriminating whether what we see belongs to background or subject. In research oriented more

towards arts than towards screens, researchers Dresp-Langley and Reeves determined that when luminance values of background and subject are the same, color contrast makes the difference in determining which areas of a painting or drawing belong to foreground and which to the background. Less saturated colors appear less "colorful" than saturated ones, and their results "point toward a hitherto undocumented functional role of color saturation in the genesis of form, and in particular, figure-ground precepts. (Dresp-Langley and Reeves, 1)

In other words, if the background and subject are uniformly bright (luminous), color saturation plays a strong role in helping humans discriminate objects as being subject or background. This in turn helps us identify what it is we are looking at, whether a painting of a bull on a cave wall, or a Picasso drawing of a yellow cock, to use two of their examples.

With this research in mind, it is not surprising that screens are generally optimized for intense color and strong contrast. Early screens suffered from low pixel count and imprecise control of contrast. In short, they were blurry and hard to read. As monochrome gave way to color, this problem only intensified. Accordingly, screens were designed to maximize contrast and to heighten visibility, even in bright rooms. Today's screens are vastly more refined, with higher resolutions making images clearer, yet the predilection for intense color, bright luminance, and high contrast remains. By now it is a way of life, the way things are supposed to be. This has been the state of affairs for at least 25 years, and is by now a paradigm — a normative value most people are never even aware of or think about.

Physiological and Neurological effects

The bright, contrasty, colorful screens of today have powerful psychological and physiological effects. To some extent, as Marshall Macluhan proclaimed 50 years ago, the medium IS the message — and the

message is that the stimulus provided by screens is strong, even at a physiological level. Extended screen watching affects various brain functions, acting primarily as a stimulant. Some of the effects are content-related: gaming, for instance, releases dopamine and stimulates cravings and may contribute to screen addiction (Dunckley). But other effects are related to the screen's emissions, regardless of the content.

For instance, getting on the computer before bed, or reading your Kindle or other tablet device, affects your ability to get to sleep and negatively affects REM sleep, which starts later and last less time. Apparently, the overall blue light emitted by such devices persuades your brain that the sun is shining and you ought to be awake! Incandescent lighting does not have this effect, nor do earlier fluorescent tubes (Chellapa et al.)

It turns out there are three kinds of sensors in our eyes, rods, cones, and a third type, discovered in 2002, called "intrinsically photosensitive retinal ganglion cells." These can't pick up on extremely low-level light, but they do signal changes in ambient light. They tell the cells in your brain which control the pineal gland to start and stop the release of melatonin, which in turn regulates sleep. These retinal ganglion cells are most sensitive to blue light (the light associated with daylight), which is why blue light is bad for your sleep (Meeri). And the closer to your eyes the blue light is, the more stimulating it is – a simple matter of physics. Two hours of tablet use can decrease melatonin levels by 22% -- keeping your body revved up and alert when it would otherwise be sleeping. (Beil).

Blue light has other effects on the body. Sustained exposure to screen light (and any light source emitting in the blue to near ultraviolet portion of the spectrum) can contribute to or even cause macular degeneration. (Sunnex 1).

Screen Addiction A Growing Phenomenon

Many people can't leave their devices alone. Today, people pick up their smart phones an average of 150 of times per day, according to experts interviewed on NPR (Zomorodi and Goldmark). That rate is increasing. Internet addiction has been recognized since 2005, (Janssen) even though it has not yet been included in the new edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-V), the standard reference tool put out by the American Psychiatric Association. This non-inclusion is a matter of intense debate.

The concept of internet addiction has been broadened to include screen addiction in general. It appears there is a cluster of elements at play. One element is related to the types of activities performed on screen devices (gaming, sexting, texting, social media interaction of all sorts, editing and viewing photographs). Gaming, for instance, shows that dopamine increases during play and that carvings or urges for gaming prduces brain changes that are similar to drug cravings. (Dunckley, para.7). One element is related to the content being watched (nature of images, YouTube movies, instructional videos, pornography). And the third element, one may surmise, is the screen itself, glowing, alluring, stimulating, and addictive.

However, this article is not about screen addiction. The point is that extensive screen use can create a desire for MORE — more content, more stimulation, more intensity— and that this craving continues to feed the extended screen watching habit worldwide. This addiction is reinforced by the physical and design characteristics of screens in use today.

So far, this article has shown that the world is awash in screens, and that screen-watching can have profound effects on physiology and psyche. The design and evolution of screens may have had other profound effects as well. The author contends that technological evolution and proliferation of screens have created a pervasive paradigm.

Digital Photography and the New Aesthetic

At the outset of this article, it was observed that the rise of screens and digital photography are linked. Since digital photography requires electronic screens , the linkage is automatic. Digital cameras capture photons and store events as binary data, but the computer — whether inside the camera or the one data is downloaded to (or both) — makes decisions about how to interpret the data and display it.

Although many digital cameras have exposure controls (ISO value, aperture, shutter speed, focus, exposure compensation, and lens focal length), other common controls (white balance controls, color intensity controls, contrast controls) affect not the capture itself, but the interpretation of the recorded data. What you see on the camera back is a compressed JPEG image, created by algorithms in the camera's motherboard. The visible image is the result of the screen characteristics and the computer's judgment of what looks best, not just to human eyes, but to screen-watching humans in particular.

What the computer thinks looks best is, more often than not, bright, colorful, and contrasty. Just like the screens people have been watching many hours a day for 25 years. Camera manufacturers develop RAW (uncompressed data) interpreters and look-up tables which favor intense, luminous images and use these to create the JPEG images you see on screen.

Camera display screens are intentionally designed to be bright, contrasty, and colorful. Why not? They are built to resemble their larger cousins, and are optimized for the same sorts of values. The vast majority of these images are never printed, they are only captured, then uploaded, either to a photo site or a social media site, and "shared" with hundreds or thousands of screen-watchers around the world.

This article contends that screens have become the chief means people have of seeing art in general and photography in particular. And the

characteristics of those screens (with their physiological effects) are guiding our collective notions of what the world looks like.

An additional set of circumstances lends weight to this opinion. Increasingly, the only way many young people get to know art, or anything about art history, is through their screens. There are visual art classes, but most of these concentrate on activity and skills, not on aesthetics or art history. Art appreciation and art history classes are reserved for college, and in the rush to prepare for a paying job, fewer and fewer people attend them.

Screens have become the primary way photographic "art" is viewed

As of 2010, there were approximately 47,000 visual art teachers teaching K-12 in the United States. Most taught 7 different classes in a week, averaging 22 students each (Parsad and Spiegeleman). That's 7.4 million students getting some exposure to art – not just visual art. Given that the student population in 2010 was over 54 million, it is plain that only a small percentage of children are getting exposed to art in any form. The days when schoolrooms had books of paintings by the masters are gone. One hour of art instruction per week cannot have as much influence as 7.4 hours of screen watching per day.

Compare that dearth of exposure with the flood of images being taken and uploaded. Worldwide, as of 2014, the total number is in excess of 1.8 billion images per day uploaded and shared (Meeker 62). Few of these are art by any stretch, but all are attempts to capture some aspect of reality that appealed to or was meaningful to the photographer.

Using art in its broadest sense, art is being learned and known primarily on screens. And the bulk of todays "art" is photographic. The world being depicted in on-screen photographs is vastly different than the world of print photography – and the on-screen version is affecting what

are considered to be high-quality prints. One look at what's online or on TV, tells the story. The world is being presented as "Claritin clear," as if that really were what the human eye perceives.

Even among serious photographers, photographers who consider themselves artists, photo competitions are now largely held on-line, by submitting small JEPG images for evaluation. There are thousands of such competitions, most money-raisers for the sponsoring body. Even print competitions mainly work this way, with electronic images being used to "jury in" images which will later be judged as prints.

There is some taste of this in professional competitions, such as those run by the Professional Photographers of America. In these competitions, physical prints must include a digital reference print, and digital submissions are now allowed.

Conclusions

It seems reasonable to conclude that after 25 years of being bombarded by screens, with their intrinsic bias towards the bright, contrasty, and colorful, young people without other ways of knowing, would take it for granted that what they see on screen IS the visual and artistic reality that the whole world (so far as they are aware) shares. What you've experienced for your whole life is normal for you.

The shift from reflective to transmissive communication of visual information has, we believe, conditioned Americans for so long and with such intensity, that it has in fact created a new, probably pan-national, notion of the beautiful — in other words, a new aesthetic.

Implications

There are several implications for reflective or traditional art inherent in the new aesthetic. First, in the on screen world, subtlety is out. It's technically possible to produce subtle images on screen, but they are not valued. This spills over into the reflective art world, especially

photographic prints. Prints on metal, metallic papers, pearlescent papers, and other specialty surfaces ape the saturated colors and steep contrast curves seen in on-screen art. "Regular" prints are processed from digital files by labs which automatically boost color, etc … unless one is working with a fine art printer. Ordinary images get the "enhanced" treatment as a matter of course.

A secondary effect is that existing reflective art may look dingy to youthful eyes. Works which have acquired the patina of age, or which have simply faded, simply don't impress – even experienced eyes may see reflective works differently after a couple of decades of working on computers.

A third implication has to do with the permanence of art. Computer screens recreate the image thousands of times per second; but the image does not exist when the power is turned off. File storage technology changes completely about every 10 years. It does not take long before files must be move to the new medium, or become lost. Slides? Gone. Videotape? Historical? Floppy disks? What are they? CDs – hard to find a CD player. DVDs? Going the way of the Cloud.

Today's inks and papers, ironically, are extremely light-fast and durable. They require no electricity or high technology to view and appreciate. Two hundred years without significant fading is not an uncommon standard, provided UV-resistant glass is used in frames or storage is in acid-free covers.

Finally, this paper has made every effort to be dispassionate, reporting on the new aesthetic as a phenomenon, not as a deplorable or laudable shift in taste. One may speculate, however, that it may not be long until the "Claritin clear" view seen on screens makes the outer world itself look flat, stale, and unprofitable, and "virtual reality" appear endlessly more appealing than the drab and ordinary view out our urban windows. What is certain is that this bell will not be unrung until display technology changes yet again.

Should the interconnected world be disconnected, reflective art, and unconditioned human eyes, may yet regain their prominence. So the new aesthetic may be a temporary one, lasting only as long as the interconnected world endures.

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Common Queer Readers Band Together on YouTube

JOHN PRUITT

In an ironic nod to queer bibliophiles (*queer* the antithesis of *heterosexual* in this instance), blogger Dave White encourages men both happily gay and literate to accept their isolated fates:

> If you're a reader and queer, you've sentenced yourself to a marginal, neobohemian […] existence. You're on your own. Outnumbered. You'll always be single and you'll have to dust a lot. So get used to it and learn to be happy. And if being happy alone isn't your bag, you could scour the earth for a boyfriend who likes to read too, trap him, train him, and then seclude yourself. (55)

White's cautionary tale reminded me of Douglas, my gay student who asked for recommendations for summer reading. I suggested Armistead Maupin's *Tales of the City*, the pioneering serial-turned-novel starring some of the most memorable characters in (gay) fiction. Douglas admitted later through e-mail that he confirmed the novel's positive contemporary reception before committing: "Thanks for that recommendation! I saw that the book got good reviews when it came out, and I wanted to make sure people still like it so I went online to see, and now I know they do, otherwise I probably wouldn't read it."

I respect that decision to seek out popular opinion, for many do look into the reception of new novels before cracking their spines. Of course, publishers print only positive reviews on book jackets: as I browsed through my local public library's lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) book collection, I noticed that David Leavitt's novel *The Two Hotel Francforts* includes accolades from Pulitzer Prize-winning critic Michiko Kakutani and publications including *The Guardian*, *The New York Journal of Books*, and *The Daily Beast*. Although I respect these evaluations and enjoy Leavitt's writing, I also investigated *Francfort*'s reception among queer readers. By doing so, I retreated to the comfort of trusting those voices feeding into my cultural identity but who also may assign higher ratings to books by queer authors and with queer protagonists based only on those criteria. Edmund White, a pillar of gay authorship since the 1970s, added to the dust jacket's list of compliments; author Ken Harvey shared on *Lambda Literary* that "*The Two Hotel Francforts* stands with [Leavitt's] very best work"; and the novel became a finalist for both a Lambda Literary Award and for the Publishing Triangle's Ferro-Grumley Award for LGBT Fiction. Its attachment to *Lambda Literary* lends significant credibility because of the organization's reputation among the LGBT literati. From the inception of the *Lambda Book Review* in 1987 and the Lambda Literary Awards in 1989, to the founding of its Writers Retreat for Emerging LGBT Voices in 2007 and the LGBT Writers in School program in 2012, the organization has confirmed its mission statement that "Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer literature is fundamental to the preservation of our culture, and that LGBTQ lives are affirmed when our stories are written, published and read."

Aside from the professional authors and publishers who contribute to *Lambda Literary* and other online venues catering to LGBT bibliophiles, ordinary readers who identify as queer expose their audiences to both new

and classic titles via channels on YouTube's BookTube network.[1] *Letterbomb*, for example, seeks to "spread understanding, tolerance and acceptance—as well as good books, of course"; Nicole, who maintains the *Woolfs Whistle* channel, feels "passionate about LGBTQ+ representation in every form"; and Chris Vigilante's channel "features videos on Books, Music, Writing, and music. Usually all very queer." *Paris Review* editorial associate Sarah Fay, however, disapproves of accepting reading recommendations from such neophytes. Writing in *The Atlantic*, Fay bemoans the dramatic decline of the book review perfected by George Orwell and Henry James, which evolved into the contemporary creative criticism of Michiko Kakutani and Geoff Dyer. In fact, Fay argues that the genre has atrophied in the digital age with the prolific rise of the customer review: "The idea, of course, is that every book is reviewed, regardless of quality, and that 'the people' get to have their say. In theory, customer reviews are quick, easy, egalitarian, and make the 'consumer' (as opposed to the reader) feel in control of his or her reading choices." However, these customer reviews, "heavy on opinion and light on insight," leave much lacking.

   Although such elitist rhetoric deems ordinary readers incapable of astutely recommending reading materials, interactive BookTube channels have contributed to transforming reading from a solitary, isolated experience into a vivacious social activity. As platforms for computer-mediated communication, BookTube and other participatory networks serve as testing grounds for LGBT users to develop and affirm both individual and collective identities and to separate their experiences and sensibilities from those of heterosexuals, such as by documenting their sexual awakenings (Bennett) and critiquing the impact of state politics and

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[1] For the purposes of this article, I use the term "queer" to refer to these subjects because they identify as such in their biographies and videos.

social structures on legislation affecting the LGBT population (Mitra). At the same time, drawing from Cynthia Selfe's pioneering work on the contributions of marginalized groups to public discourse through digital technologies, Jesse Fox and Katie Warber confirm the existing research through their interviews with queer users of Facebook: "the voices of visible LGBT+ individuals may be silenced in many heteronormative networks on mainstream SNSs [social networking sites] as closeted individuals remain silent; those who are partially out voice their support but often do not clarify their identity; and those who are out self-select out of these networks" (93-94). In other words, language application in SNSs provides opportunities for queer participants to capture the complexity of the lives, trends, reading habits, and perspectives on the power dynamics between themselves and the heterosexual population. By drawing attention to the discourses of gender and sexuality as channels for establishing and challenging power relations, scholars working with language and gender continue to consider how "sexuality and sexual identity are represented linguistically in a variety of discourse genres" (Cameron and Kulick 12). Through this lens, I consider how queer readers who maintain BookTube channels both produce and shape a literate culture through their definitions of "queer literature" and their vitriolic censure of heterosexual readers who present that literature poorly.

Of course, these channels alone fail to represent the entire spectrum of online LGBT book discussions. Rather, their hosts serve as members of a larger discourse community of common readers who create shared meaning through reading and conversing. According to Geoff Hall, "readers reading literature are not just constructing interpretations of books in a vacuum or as an end in itself, they are also (for example) co-constructing identities in contexts of reading and booktalk" (334). Studying ordinary, unprompted readers gives license to scholars to focus on "questions of *meaning* and *value*" in naturally occurring and spontaneous discourse:

> Taking the reading process as it comes forces the researcher to
> follow the research participants' lead, learning about the
> preoccupations evident in their discussion rather than imposing an
> alien agenda upon them [….] Moreover, this learning process is
> actively facilitated when research participants respond to texts […]
> in their own way, rather than being restricted to a stereotyped set
> predetermined by the researcher. (Swann and Allington 249)

Therefore, through the interactive, collaborative nature of BookTube, queer bibliophiles become agents in the continuing formation of their sexual identities as they engage with the books, with one another, and with those who comment on their videos. Brian Jackson and Jon Wallin call this mode of communication the "back-and-forthness" of rhetoric, "the *actual* dialectic" inviting continual writing and responding "in an argument that could potentially go on forever" (W375-76). Through this "back-and-forthness," enthusiasts of LGBT fiction come to their literary experiences through a rhetoric seeking to both educate and separate from heterosexual readers.

The Cultural Capital of Literacy among the LGBT Population

My curious turn to recent LGBT self-improvement books counseling readers about seeking out mentors and allies, coming out at various ages, and securing healthy sexual relationships distressingly reveals that they overlook reading fiction as a means of positive self-fashioning (see, among others, Belge and Bieschke, Dawson, Hardin, Huegel, Isay, and Teich). As Deborah Brandt argues in the opening of her study exploring the literacy-learning experiences of cross-sections of Wisconsin's population, "To think of literacy as a staple of life […] is to appreciate how central reading and writing can be to people's sense of security and

well-being, even to their sense of dignity" (1). Ignoring this aspect disregards acquiring and using literacy as salutary and intimate acts in which to engage.

To add a scholarly perspective, New Literacy Studies (e.g., Gee, Street, and Lankshear and Knobel) and feminist rhetorical scholarship (e.g., Long, Radway, and Royster and Kirsch) advance an ideological model of reading establishing the nature of literacy practices as dependent upon negotiated social practices. Thus these schools of thought demonstrate that leisurely readers promote and personally respond to their reading materials in the sense of *consuming* texts: By drawing from Michel de Certeau's theories of consumer capitalism, Ted Striphas suggests that readers actively and committedly produce both self and society as they use the content of books to understand and further their everyday interests and personal experiences in order to "make do in unique and unexpected ways" (179). In both theory and practice, then, readers adopt these texts in order to develop the figured elements of their identities by refusing to accept their reading and other educational practices indiscriminately, choosing instead to use these texts for expediency and self-preservation. Influencing this argument, Certeau referred to such actions as "tactics" and detailed how reading as a tactic encourages one to "poach" ideas or beliefs for such purposes (174). Thus Certeau lends credence to the roles of choice and interest in reading as facets of everyday life, that is, as communicative and cultural forms giving shape and meaning to quotidian domestic and social existence and interactions.

Specific to the adult LGBT population outside of formal academic settings, literacy levels and reading habits remain a general mystery. In fact, the dearth of information about their diversions beyond screen and speaker draws primarily from ethnographies of public library patrons and book discussion groups, revealing that these readers often investigate their interests, differences, and political allegiances through the intersection of

text and conversation (see Greenblatt, Pruitt, and John Vincent). For example, while interviewing a cohort of five middle-adulthood gay men about turning to fiction as a "refuge from a dominating heterosexual logic" during their primary school years, educational researcher Mark Vicars found that they discovered that "Literacy became a powerful tool for exploring our sexuality and for discovering about being gay without the fear of reprisal" (320). Among this group, "textual encounters" became a means by which they understood themselves as readers and ascribed the cultural significance of their literacy to their social and personal identities (314). The complexities of identity formation through literacy practices and patterns in reading habits thus become visible through interactions with others and the values or mindset forged during those interactions.

In this context, literacy practices and events drive readers to challenge and reinforce power dynamics both inside and beyond traditional and nontraditional learning environments. Contributing to an understanding of this relationship between books and their readers, Jim Collins links contemporary literacy practices with the nontraditional learning environments of popular culture venues. Through a number of changes contributing to a thriving reading public, readers determine what they should know in order to be considered literate from cultural authorities such as the film industry, bookstore displays, televised book clubs, and online vendors. This progression of becoming (culturally) literate, according to Collins, emphasizes continual social processes of self-making, self-transformation, and self-actualization in conjunction with others in personal, public, and digital settings, "Delivery systems [that] provide not just the books but also the sites, the talk, and the sense of belonging to a community of readers" (12). In this respect, multiple desires to learn, escape, and form social connections contribute to a lucrative reading experience.

Collins' emphasis on *community* is pivotal to understanding interactive identity formation through literacy events: As reading communities have

expanded and taken global form through digital media, many LGBT readers find variants of their experiences and cultures as members of an extensive social readership. In his historical account of gay and lesbian communication networks in the mid-twentieth century, Martin Meeker recaptures the moment when often isolated gay men and lesbians challenged the sluggish dissemination of information by creating and connecting through social networks via the circulation of print (15). For example, the San Francisco-based Daughters of Bilitis, a lesbian political rights organization, compiled, mimeographed, stapled, and distributed *The Ladder* newsletter nationally between 1956 and 1972 as a means of increasing visibility and sharing resources in order to acquire stability, power, and recognition. Likewise, as mass-market paperbacks emerged in the 1950s, lesbians turned to both fiction and nonfiction such as Ann Aldrich's memoirs *We Walk Alone through Lesbos' Lonely Groves* and *We, Too, Must Love*, whose circulation contributed to her receiving more than six hundred letters from women seeking additional knowledge and resources. While such networks gradually overcame obstacles as communication channels expanded and improved, these innovations "established a clearer set of guidelines instructing people how to connect and what engaging in that process might mean for one's sense of who they were and what they might become" (Meeker 256). As mechanisms for welfare and security, these communication networks contributed to an awareness of belonging through shared reading.

 With thousands of books published annually by both small and large presses, the search for titles reflecting personal tastes may become an exercise in seeking out the advice of other queer readers through such communication networks. One can begin with commercial websites such as *LGBTbookshop* and *That Gay Site*, which simply sell books without recommending that their customers read them. However, exchanges on vlogs such as those on BookTube provide a variation of book club dialogues inviting multiple perspectives. Drawing from Lauren Berlant's

concept of the "intimate public sphere," the sense of shared community among even disconnected readers, Danielle Fuller and DeNel Rehberg Sedo identify participants in mass reading events as "citizen readers" (211). That is, book discussions, author readings, and other means of showcasing literacy in public venues connect readers through common experiences. In this respect, conversations published in online forums themselves become public events inflected with ideas about the socially transformative effects of reading.

Following these ethnographic leads, I ventured onto BookTube in order to determine how the following queer readers go about discussing LGBT texts and instructing their heterosexual peers about how to follow suit:

Joseph: *The Boy Who Cried Books*   **Josh**: *Letterbomb*
Ivan: *thedragonshoard*   **Luce**: *Things Lucy Reads*
Nicole: *Woolfs Whistle*   **Adriana**: *Perpetual Pages*
Danika Leigh Ellis: self-titled channel

Such reading, writing, and communicating contribute to the development and refinement of what Jonathan Alexander terms one's *critical sexual literacy*, which "asks us to take seriously the sexual and sexuality as significant dimensions through which we can understand the relationship between literacy and power" (17). As Alexander analyzes how markers of sexual identity are complexly articulated within the lives and discourses of student writers, I contribute by exploring how common queer readers challenge normative identity categories through a separatist ethos critiquing narratives of domination or oppression by the cisgender and heterosexual literary marketplace. By calling them to task for policing sexual orientation, queer BookTubers advocate for themselves and their peers by instigating public discussions centering on the metaphor of the closet, the "defining structure for gay oppression of this [twentieth] century" (Sedgwick 71).

The Separatist Ethos of Queer Reading

On April 4, 2016, Ivan uploaded a grievance against "cishet authors" and "cishet reviewers," that is, heterosexuals whose gender identity matches that of their sex assigned at birth. Currently transitioning from female to male, Ivan has reached a tipping point. Among several objections against their pedestrian writing, he vilifies them for neglecting to alert readers immediately to the sexual orientation of LGBTQIA+ characters, that is, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, intersexual, asexual, and so on, choosing instead to base the work's suspense on revealing that identity marker. He also encourages them to interview members of the LGBTQIA+ population in order to avoid portraying these protagonists both inaccurately and insensitively, and he challenges them to render plots other than coming-out stories because "sometimes you just need to see characters who are like you being able to rise up and save the day." The result became "The Angry Queer Book Tag," which concludes with an invitation to his queer BookTube peers to follow suit under the same title by disrupting heteronormative centers of power in the book industry through their own literacy practices.[2]

I begin with this diatribe because of Ivan's unapologetic rhetoric calling for queer readers to challenge heterosexual discourse and to amplify their voices collectively. Before addressing specific grievances, he clarifies that the title of this post is not "'angry *comma* queer,' it's the 'Angry Queer,' all one thing." Then, in a separatist turn, he warns his audience that "if you are a cisgender, heterosexual BookTuber, I really do

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[2] To date, only Chris Vigilante has uploaded the same tag, but because of poor sound quality, I was unable to follow.

not want you to do this tag. Because it's not for you. It is for queer BookTubers to talk about queer lit. Just let us have this space." Kate O'Riordan and David J. Phillips write in their introduction to *Queer Online: Media, Technology, and Sexuality* that scholarship analyzing queer representation in digital media "highlight[s] the ongoing importance of place, space, embodiment, and everyday life in the construction and production of queer techno-practices" (4). By using first-person plural pronouns as one of the collectively marginalized—queer BookTubers— and imperatively addressing his viewers, Ivan claims this space by imagining an audience disrespectful toward literature written by and for those with whom he identifies and toward the misuse of his affirming identity category: under the illusion of camaraderie, the misappropriation of queerness actually erases the radical potential, the differences, the political struggles, and the anger.

Scholars have problematized "queer" across the disciplines to the point that it seems to have lost both its force and its meaning, especially among those separate from the academy's abstruse theories of sexuality. In his introduction to the spring/summer 2008 issue of the *Massachusetts Review*, John Emil Vincent reminds the magazine's readers that academics usurped the term only after it had been popularized by activists, the "poets, fiction writers, video artists, theorists of many stripes, historians, essayists, and lumping them all together in a category: thinkers, feelers, and, well, writers" (9). In fact, Vincent continues, these same activists "vibrated very pleasantly to the term for over twenty years before we were told that the garage door was closed, the car parked, and us, sitting in it, idling" (9). This "idling" took place as scholars such as Eve Sedgwick, Judith Butler, Michael Warner, David Halperin, and Teresa de Lauretis shaped and developed Queer Theory, a school of thought building upon challenges to the idea that gender constitutes part of the essential self and esoterically complicating the intersections among gender, sexuality, and other identity constructs. Thus, through this issue of the *Massachusetts Review*, Vincent

and the activists reclaim "queer," reinforcing its meaning as "ALIVE: inventive, thoughtful, artful, delighted and delightful" (9), but not angry.

Vincent curiously omits readers from this list of *queer* activists equally able to create textual meaning, but Ivan and his fellow readers reinvest in the term as the empowering antithesis of *cisgender* and *heterosexual*. Rather than problematizing *queer*, they find solidarity and safety under its comprehensive aegis. In his post "Queer Fantasy TBR," for example, Ivan asks his followers to understand that he uses the term "queer" in his reviews when "I don't know whether the character is specifically gay or bisexual or any other of those sexual orientation labels. It's just I don't know their sexual orientation specifically and 'queer' is an overall umbrella term for the LGBTQIA+ community." With similar language, Joseph explains in "Queer Lit! Importance of Representation!" that "people use 'queer' as an umbrella term because it's easier than saying all those letters." Those who prefer the letters, however, rely on particular classifications. Adriana identifies as a "23 year-old queer Hispanic vlogger," more specifically as "Pan[sexual]/Aro[mantic]/NB [non-binary]." Similarly, Josh, a *Letterbomb* contributor, eschews the umbrella term in order to identify as panromantic, agender, demi-androsexual, admitting that "It's a bit complicated but we'll go with it." Through both a conflation and a parsing out of identity markers suitable for explicating their complex sexual orientations, these BookTube personalities critique the heteronormative, binary categorizations of *gay* and *straight* by articulating fluid, even multiple sexual identities made sense of through additional categorizations of sexual desires and practices determined through critical reflection.

While defining sexual orientation requires a particular terminology, defining preferred reading material appears much simpler. According to "What Is LGBTQ+ Literature?" narrated by Nicole, "The only books that you can count as LGBTQ books are the ones that have a queer protagonist or are the ones that have a lot of point of views, and one of the characters

that has a point of view is queer." By accusing reviewers of egregiously referencing popular series such as *Harry Potter*, *Throne of Glass*, and *Mortal Instruments* because of the mere presence of queer characters, she argues that "Naming these books as works of LGBTQ literature is quite a bold move." Joseph concurs. In his list of favorite "Queer Side Characters," he directly references Nicole's definition, that "'queer literature' is a book with a queer main character—a queer protagonist specifically—and a book that has a straight main character but with a side character that is queer, that is not a queer book." Still, he finds comfort in unexpectedly discovering queer side characters such as Aech in Ernest Cline's *Ready Player One* and Chandresh and Tsukiko in Erin Morgenstern's *The Night Circus*, for "not only is it a good book, also it's freaking representing me in a little way." In light of the complex theories seeking to determine how and why readers identify with fictional characters, Jonathan Cohen states it well, that "*identification* is a mechanism through which audience members experience reception and interpretation of the text from the inside, as if the events were happening to them" (245). Such direct identification both haunts and comforts readers seeking out meaning from LGBT novels. In this way, Joseph forges vital attachments to other queer readers by demonstrating how these interactions influence the relationship one enjoys with a book. For him, a sense of self is at stake in his reading.

For Nicole and Joseph, the overt representation of queer protagonists with whom to identify defines the genre, while Danika Leigh Ellis problematizes the definition by turning directly to the author. Addressing in "Diverse Characters vs. Diverse Authors" her personal challenge to read books only by people of color throughout 2015, Ellis ponders over the criteria by which to identify such novels. In a compelling epiphany, she realizes like Nicole and Joseph that she defines *queer literature* by content alone, but her apprehension lies in authentic portrayals of the characters. While reading novels with queer female characters, Ellis trusts

her intuition: "I am a white lesbian, so when I see depictions of lesbians and of queer women in books, I feel like I'm informed enough to know whether it's an offensive depiction." Conversely, she must commit to the self-identification of authors of color in order to establish their credibility, for "I would rather read books where people are representing themselves in some way because even if it's not their exact life, which it probably isn't, it still seems less likely to rely on cheap stereotypes." This trepidation cuts widely across demographics, for readers often avoid novels that differ from them ideologically or culturally (see Barstow and Long). Indeed, Ellis cedes that male and/or heterosexual authors *may* portray her sexual orientation accurately and unoffensively, but she doubts her own ability to draw that conclusion.

On June 16, 2015, BookTuber Charr Frears uploaded the video "I Don't Like Reviewing LGBT Books," which articulates a similar argument about reviewing ideologically challenging novels. Frears' anxiety stems from how to approach unfamiliar subjects such as "transgender, LGBT books that a lot of us are reading these days, a lot of us are commenting on, and my personal opinions and awkwardness when it comes to reviewing those types of books." This video was inspired by Simon Packham's young adult novel *Only We Know*, whose transgender protagonist, Lauren, maneuvers through school without the expected negative social consequences. For Frears, this portrayal of Lauren "came across as very trivialized, and it didn't highlight the suffering that people go through, the unacceptance, the bullying, anything like that." Thus the novel falls outside of the realm of Frears' reality, a reflection of her own world in which transgender subjects certainly contend with both physical, social, and psychological obstacles. Invoking Louise Rosenblatt's definition of the aesthetic process taking place during reading, when "the reader's attention is centered directly on what he is living through during his relationship with that particular text" (25), Frears distances herself from the unfamiliar by denouncing her inability to identify with the non-

heterosexual: "I *can't* really comment on the transgender perspective, I *can't* really say what it's like because I haven't experienced that myself." She thus abandons her agency as a reader by refusing to comprehend the text. While not addressing Frears specifically, Ivan condemns such thinking and the reluctance of misguided readers to empathize in "The BookTube Code of Silence towards LGBTQIA+ Lit": "What dystopian governments have you overthrown? What wizarding schools have you gone to? If you're not going to review something because you haven't experienced the same thing as a character, then you're just saying that you're ignorant and you're not going to do anything to educate yourself about it." In this ethical challenge, he rejects Frears' proposed weakness for understanding a subject position contradicting her own.

Although inherent in her complaint lies the conviction that queer authors and readers have specific and possibly enigmatic ways of knowing and behaving, none of the thirteen comments responding to her confession condemns this professed shortcoming. Rather, they encourage her to enjoy, learn from, and discuss LGBT novels with LGBT readers. In fact, Nicole assures Frears that "the worries that you have are completely normal and should be present in all people's minds, when they do or say anything, because purposefully hurting anyone around us is not only ill-mannered, but also unpleasant to ourselves." She also reminds Frears of BookTube as an open forum, indicating that "You have a wide variety of people watching you, so communicating with them is the way." In other words, Nicole reinforces Frears' anxiety: audiences will easily gain access to the reviews that Frears posts, reviews disseminated widely and publicly via YouTube, thus exposing her vulnerability to critique.

At the root of Frears' complaint lies a question of difference: heterosexual readers often locate LGBT fiction at the margins of mainstream literature, but queer readers celebrate that difference. In fact, Joseph revels in it. In a "Booktube Partner Tag!!! w/ WoolfsWhistle," who asked him to identify the category of wizard to which he would belong in

the *Harry Potter* universe—muggle-born, half-blood, or pure-blood—he proposes muggle-born because

> you know how when you're gay, you, like, get like, the random lottery, like of being gay, and everyone else in your family is pretty much straight? Well, I feel that would be, like, muggle-borns, right, like they would randomly win the magical genes and they would be a wizard. Well, I randomly won the magical genes, and I am gay.

Further emphasizing the debate between difference and universality, Josh reveals in the introduction to his "Classic Queer Books | UK Edition" that he disapproves of labeling novels for particular audiences:

> I don't quite like the term 'queer book' or 'LGBT+ book' because it implies that they are only for members of the queer community while every other book is for everyone, and that's not quite right because an excellent book should be there to be read by absolutely everyone regardless of their gender or sexuality or lack thereof.

Thus he and his peers confront the paradox stated by Frears: LGBT novels, replete with tensions and conflicts, afford numerous prospects for appreciation and social action among all readers.

The erasing of such differences, however, sparked a hostile lashing toward the "BookTube Code of Silence," initiated in early 2015 by Luce. Reflecting on the past year of posting and listening to reviews, she struggles to understand "why people are so hesitant to say that a book is a queer book. Is it because they're afraid they'll lose followers if they openly admit to liking a book with a gay character or a queer character? Why, why is this a thing?" These rhetorical questions contributed to lengthy paraphrases by both Ivan and Adriana, with all three invoking the metaphor of the closet. For Luce, refusing to divulge sexual orientation

equates to "forcing that book into a closet that it was never meant to be in in the first place. You don't know that one of your followers isn't being raised in the worst kind of situation possible for a queer person, you don't know that they might need that book desperately because it might be exactly the kind of book that relates to their life." In similar language, Ivan asserts that these reviewers are "putting that book in a closet, and something that the LGBTQIA community really needs right now is recognition, it needs visibility." Adriana adds that "failing to mention a character's sexuality or identity would just further promote closet culture, which dictates that people in the queer community have to come out, and it has to be a big reveal, and we have to sit down our friends and family and send out a post on social media." For these three BookTubers, hiding sexual orientation denies queer participation and representation in mass culture.

The issue, it seems, often centers on politeness, on the unwillingness of readers to ruin a plot by revealing the important narrative twist of characters unveiling their queerness. For example, TeaLeavesAndBook Bindings confessed following Luce's video that "The biggest two reasons I've not mentioned queer characters were 1. They were side/background characters (*Ruin and Rising*, *Heir of Fire*, *Dreams of Gods and Monsters*) or 2. I thought it might spoil the book (*Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe*)." It's true. With Benjamin Alire Sáenz' *Aristotle and Dante* as a test case, I listened to nine BookTube reviews and discovered that none referenced the sexual orientations of the eponymous protagonists, only their "developing friendship." In such a review, Sophia, who maintains *thebookbasement* channel, assures her audience that "This review is going to be spoiler free" (also see videos posted on the channels *RemusReads*, *cloudsofbooks*, *Bookish Wardo*, *frandalfthegrey*, *leaninglights*, *jennaclark*, *RecMeBS*, and *Thoughts on Tomes*). Similar respondents to Ivan, such as 1book1review, do admit that "While it may help you and others who are looking for queer characters find them, the

whole book and twist of the book might be spoiled," and frankly, "I know I am bad at mentioning that there is a queer character in a book also when it is not part of the twist. And I am trying to change that, but like you said, sometimes it doesn't register with me as special." But for Ivan and his peers, suspense built simply upon disclosing an identity label demonstrates poor writing: "To me, and a lot of other queer readers, a character's SO [sexual orientation] /GI [gender identity] is on the same level as their favorite color or food—it's just a part of who they are and it's something that shouldn't need a big reveal. When authors do make some big reveal of a character's SO/GI, it doesn't feel genuine."

Especially emerging from these posts come better understandings of diversity within the queer community through the multifaceted composition of LGBT characters and the enigmas of identity politics. Introducing his audience to Sáenz' *Aristotle and Dante*, Gabby Rivera's *Juliet Takes a Breath*, and Lucina Stone's *Santa Muerte* in "Seeing Ourselves Culturally in Books!!" Joseph considers his reading practices from the perspective of a queer Latino. Specific to *Aristotle and Dante*, for example, he reflects on his identification with Dante, who struggles less with his gay identity than with his Latino identity. For Joseph,

> It's not, like, a problem or questions of identity with the Mexican-American identity, it's, like, not because of shame or anything, it's just I hadn't felt Latino enough or Mexican-American enough […] It was a very big problem for me and that's just, like, a very specific problem for a young queer Latino to have.

Adding to the turmoil, Daniela, the Mexican/Italian protagonist of Stone's *Santa Muerte*, travels back in time from 2030 to 1923, because "you don't really get to see someone who's not white go back in time because, mainly, because who freaking wants to go back in time when you're not white because that's just not gonna be fun." However, one means of addressing past convictions about sexual orientation, through historical

fiction, invites readers to contemplate the complexities of and respond emotionally to contemporary social issues. Nicole encourages her audience to read queer historical fiction because "to see yourself or to see concrete people like yourself in history is an extremely important experience." Furthermore, in an homage to lesbian historical fiction and romance, Nicole enjoys the irony of these authors who borrow tropes from heterosexual romance novels, tropes such as arranged marriages, cross-dressing, and violations of sumptuary laws, in order to explore themes of sexual expression in repressive settings "and make it logical, and own it." Such novels encourage debate about nationality, class, race, and other social constructs shared by members of the LGBT community, all complemented by literary merit and the urge for others to share in the artistic fashioning of meaning.

The Future of Queer Reading Communities

Reinforcing Charles Schuster's definition of literacy as the "ability to make oneself heard and felt, to signify," so that literacy can be "the way in which we make ourselves meaningful not only to others but through ourselves to others," queer readers use novels to organize and share their experiences across geographies and cultures (227). But even more so, by engaging in social practices unique to the digitized spaces of contemporary life, these bibliophiles disappoint Sarah Fay, who, as indicated earlier, regrets that digital spaces invite democracy boldly into the public sphere. These discussions nevertheless provide a medium of social exchange helping these readers define themselves and formulate responses to the larger world. Indeed, their insights into and reflections on gay culture through these vlogs created by common readers entice us to re-examine who has the right or authority to participate in knowledge-making processes.

Because members of book discussion groups share meanings and stories in order to build and perpetuate communities, even online, Ken Plummer's thesis proves useful, that "for narratives to flourish, there must be a community to hear; that for communities to hear, there must be stories which weave together their history, their identity, their politics. The one—community—feeds upon and into the other—story" (87). Just as solitary readers find themselves in concert with their social contexts and processes, they achieve self-awareness and self-improvement from their social interactions. By putting cultural production in the hands of ordinary readers, BookTube enables participation in online discourse production, consumption, and dissemination plus the cultivation of imaginative and critical skills. In this respect, the literary production and reception of LGBT culture occurs in an often propitious, occasionally cacophonous space enabling readers to recognize shared experiences in works of fiction and to confront definitions of that experience.

Still, on January 1, 2012, Natazzz, who maintained the blog *LGBT Reading*, thanked all participants who contributed to GLBT Challenge 2011. Although fifty people contributed by writing and posting at least one review, "not enough people indicated they wanted to continue the LGBT Reading Challenge for another year. Thus, this is the final post you will read on here." Sad but true—to date, no one has since posted on this site. To be the good gay citizens that authors and readers want us to be, we shouldn't keep our reading to ourselves.

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Shakespeare, Digeridoos, and Samurai Cowboys: Remixing National and Cultural Identities in *Sukiyaki Western Django*

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In the 21st century, pop culture has gone global, and it is taking audiences with it. Thanks to the advancement of communication technologies, audiences around the world have access to an increasing amount of media and popular culture, including much that originates from outside their own national and cultural borders. As such, audiences appropriate and assimilate national and cultural signifiers from around the world into their own national and personal identities. According to Mark Poster, cities and neighborhoods tend to be defined by particular ethnic groupings, but mass media can destabilize local customs, making people more aware of other ways of life and socialization (751). Producers of mass culture artifacts also appropriate national and cultural signifiers from around the world, which they then recontextualize into new hybridized contexts that contain elements of the original identities but remain separate from them at the same time.

The film *Sukiyaki Western Django* (Takashi Miike, 2007) serves as a prime example of the phenomenon described above, because it depicts a hybridized transcultural identity created through the act of appropriating, remixing, and recontextualizing no fewer than three separate and distinct cultural/national identities. The term transcultural (or, more accurately, transculturation) was first coined in 1947 by Fernando Ortiz. He argued that transculturation was a better descriptor for the process of acculturation

because the "result of every union of cultures is similar to that of the reproductive process between individuals: the offspring always has something of both parents but is always different from each of them" (103). Transnational, meanwhile, refers to the act of crossing or extending national boundaries, and this idea particularly applies to cinema, which has become increasingly transnational in the early part of the 21st century. Given that *Sukiyaki Western Django* (henceforth *SWD*) contains elements of at least three different national identities, it embodies both concepts. As Vivian P. Y. Lee observes, the film "exemplifies the complex entwinement of film cultures in global cinema today" (153). Such entwinement is increasingly common in the postmodernist media landscape of the 21st century, but more than most films *SWD* functions as a purely transcultural text largely because of how it remixes and recontextualizes national and cultural identities along with elements of film cultures.

Sukiyaki is a stew made up of many different ingredients, much like how director Takashi Miike's film features a variety of cultural and filmic elements. Equal parts samurai film and Spaghetti Western, *SWD* contains elements of Japanese, American, and Italian national and cultural identities. Thus, the film puts a new spin on an old cinematic paradigm wherein directors remix elements of other films to create something new. In this case, Miike remixes and recontextualizes cinematic notions of national and cultural identities to create a new hybridized transcultural identity that reflects 21st century globalization. Miike conforms to Jim Smith and D.K. Holm's notion of the "director as DJ," but rather than simply remixing filmic signifiers into a new context, *SWD* also remixes and recontextualizes national and cultural identities via the language of cinema itself. From this process, Miike created a film that challenges and transcends notions of national borders, colonialism and cultural imperialism, because the national and cultural identities all exist onscreen more or less equally in *SWD*.

American National Identity and The Western Genre

No cinematic genre exemplifies the American national identity quite like the Western. Michael Coyne asserts that the Western represents "the quintessentially American melodrama" (2). This assertion is supported by the fact that the Western has been a part of the United States' cinematic landscape since the medium's earliest days. For instance, one of American cinema's earliest existing narrative films, *The Great Train Robbery* (Edwin S. Porter, 1903), is a Western. Similarly, genuine cowboys such as Tim McCoy and Civil War veterans like General Nelson A. Miles served as advisers and actors on early Western films (Langman xiii), providing a connection between American history and the myth of America produced by Hollywood. While Western films draw from historical fact, they nevertheless depict an idealized and often mythologized version of the westward expansion of the United States, at once creating and reinforcing an idealized version of the American national identity.

With over a century of reinforcement via popular culture, the national and cultural identity of the United States has become synonymous with images of cowboys wearing white hats and riding horses into battle against the twin evils of bandits in black hats and rampaging hordes of Native Americans decorated in face paint and feathered headdresses. According to Coyne, several American political figures have attempted to court the favor of American citizens by appropriating Hollywood's image of the rugged cowboy. Coyne's examples include George H. W. Bush showing off his cowboy boots while on the campaign trail in 1992, Bill Clinton naming *High Noon* (Fred Zinneman, 1952) as his favorite movie in interviews, and, most notably, Ronald Reagan's almost total appropriation of Western imagery into his own personal identity (2). Even the more recent presidents have engaged in such appropriation and reinforcement; like Reagan, George W. Bush crafted a public persona

based largely on the cowboy myth, while Barack Obama frequently donned a cowboy hat on the campaign trail in an effort to gain favor with conservative voters. Coyne argues that examples such as these illustrate and reinforce the close links between Western iconography and the American national identity. Hollywood and other cultural gatekeepers then package and market this identity, and subsequently export it to other nations and cultures outside of the United States in the form of films, television programs, comic books, and novels.

Remixing the American West

Herbert Schiller contends that American mass culture represents a form of global imperialism, because it often invades and imposes itself on the popular culture of other nations. Jane Stadler points out that this process is not a one-way model, but rather that cultural interplay "suggests movement from a pure cultural form to something increasingly hybrid and devalued" (685). The Western represents possibly the perfect vehicle for transmitting messages about the American national identity to other cultures, due to the genre's association with the American national identity, albeit in a heavily mythologized form. This notion of national identity sometimes becomes appropriated by people from nations outside of the United States, and this can result in the creation of hybridized transcultural identities that contain aspects of both cultures, but remain separate and distinct from either of the original identities. For instance, Andrew C. McKevitt argues that non-Japanese fans of Japanese anime often appropriate and assimilate Japanese cultural signifiers into their own individual and cultural identities through the act of engaging with anime texts.

   Similarly, producers of mass culture artifacts frequently appropriate national and cultural signifiers from around the world, which they then remix and recontextualize into new hybridized transcultural identities that

contain elements of the original identities but remain separate from them at the same time. Rennett argues that directors increasingly appropriate and recontextualize their filmic inspirations into something new and different, much like a DJ remixes music samples. Rennett contends that Smith and Holm's concept of the "director as DJ" especially applies to the directors of the French New Wave and the Hollywood Renaissance, as these were cinematic movements "comprised of practicing cinephiles, individuals with a strong affection for cinematic history" (406). Rennett cites Quentin Tarantino as a prime example of a "director as DJ," but he acknowledges that such activity has become increasingly common in the 21st century, a time when intertextuality marks a vast array of films and television series.

Japanese director Akira Kurosawa also engaged in a type of intercultural cinematic appropriation; Kurosawa remixed stylistic techniques used by Hollywood stalwarts such as John Ford and Howard Hawks, and applied them to films like *Seven Samurai* (1954) and *Yojimbo* (1961), both of which exemplified the Japanese cultural identity. Similarly, starting in the early 1960s, the national cinemas of several European nations openly appropriated the generic tropes and signifiers associated with the Western, as evidenced by the rise of Westerns produced in countries like Germany and Italy. Even the former Soviet Union got into the game, producing a handful of "Red Westerns" or "Easterns." With films like *White Sun of the Desert* (Vladimir Motyl, 1969), *The Seventh Bullet* (Ali Khamraev, 1972) and *At Home Among Strangers, A Stranger at Home* (Nikita Mikhalkov, 1974), Soviet filmmakers attempted to marry the "traditional Soviet and Revolutionary adventure film and the equally traditional American genre of Westerns" (Riabchikova 228). This tendency to remix and recontextualize the Western genre becomes particularly interesting when considering the various levels of cultural appropriation that occur within each text. For example, *A Fistful of Dollars* (Sergio Leone, 1964) is a Western produced

in Italy, but is ostensibly a remake of the Japanese film *Yojimbo* (Akira Kurosawa, 1961), which was itself inspired by the novels *Red Harvest* (1929) and *The Glass Key* (1931), both written by American author Dashiell Hammett. Thus, an Italian director appropriated the cinematic notion of American national identity while simultaneously remaking a Japanese film that is itself a loose adaptation of two American novels. The result is a film that remixes and recontextualizes all of these national identities into a distinct hybridized transcultural identity.

In the early part of the 21st century, other nations have produced their own Westerns that appropriate the tropes and signifiers of the American national identity and recontextualize them into entirely new hybridized transcultural identities. Such films include *Tears of the Black Tiger* (Thailand, Wisit Sasanatieng, 2000), *The Good, the Bad, the Weird* (South Korea, Kim Jee-woon, 2008), *Blueberry* (France, Jan Kounen, 2004), *The Proposition* (Australia, John Hillcoat, 2005), and *Yahsi Bati: The Ottoman Cowboys* (Turkey, Ömer Faruk Sorak, 2010). The directors of each of these films could be considered a "director as DJ," because they all appropriate elements of filmic and cultural signifiers and remix or recontextualize them onscreen. Yet, of all these international Westerns produced since 2000, only *SWD* truly melds aspects of the American national identity with those of other national identities (such as Japanese and Italian) to create a hybridized transcultural identity that reflects the impact of 21st century globalization.

Transnational/Transcultural Identity in Japanese Film

Darrell William Davis asserts that after World War II, the Japanese national identity was represented cinematically by the monumental style. Rooted in the propaganda films of the 1930s, the monumental style was a response to prewar Japanese cinema, which was highly Westernized and existed on the cusp of Japan's emergence as a modernized and

industrialized nation. The monumental style canonized the past to present a uniquely Japanese national identity, one based on traditional Japanese cultural aesthetics that emphasized hierarchical family dynamics that followed the patriarchal structure of bushido, or the way of the warrior. Yet, as Davis notes, the intent of these films becomes complicated when considering that the technology used to make them was developed primarily in European nations, and Japanese cinematic techniques were appropriated largely from a Western (read: Hollywood) stylistic idiom.

While Japanese filmmakers of the era utilized Western technology and cinematic techniques, they nevertheless conveyed thoroughly Japanese messages meant to create and reinforce a Japanese national and/or cultural identity rooted in tradition and nativism whereby "the institutionalized production methods were specific to Japanese social customs" (Russell 24). Catherine Russell explains that culturally specific gender dynamics, personnel hierarchies, financial decisions, low-tech production methods and even pre-production drinking rituals distinguished the Japanese film industry from its Hollywood counterpart. Andrew Yang, however, argues this national identity arose "through friction; it is only through such subversions that greater inclusion and change may occur" (447). This idea recalls Stuart Hall's contention that identity is only truly defined in relation to the Other. Indeed, much of Japan's cinematic history has been defined by various frictions or tensions, such as those between Eastern production methods and Western production technology. Thus, the Japanese national identity has long been defined in relation to various Others, from cultures to time periods.

Russell, however, argues that Japanese classical cinema already constitutes a sort of transnational cinema in and of itself, and thus points to the existence of a transcultural, globalized identity. She asserts that new contexts of reception such as art house cinemas, theaters dedicated to international cinema, television broadcasts, and the advent of DVD have marked the Japanese cinematic identity as unstable and uncanny (30). In

cinematic terms, these new historically delocated contexts of reception have rendered the Japanese national identity fluid and mutable. This mutability will only increase as communication technologies continue to advance and open up even more contexts of reception, such as digital downloads and online streaming services like Netflix and Hulu. Furthermore, this new context of a mutable cinematic identity applies to other national cinemas, not just that of Japan, and the lines between national cinematic styles will become increasingly blurred as long as communication technologies continue to advance and allow for the bridging of different cultures. As Russell writes, "Within a transnational model, local histories of theatrical representation might be seen to cross boundaries, languages, and cultures precisely with the cinema as its narrative language" (32). A film like *SWD* is constructed in such a way that it actively crosses cultural and linguistic boundaries while existing firmly within the context of cinematic rather than cultural or national language. Indeed, such films point to the creation of new hybridized transcultural identities that directly result from the forces of globalization and the spread of mass culture.

Olivia Khoo notes that a film like *SWD* "complicates the boundaries of national cinema" (92), and she argues that both the global and regional reception and the circulation of these films represents an important factor in the creation of a new category of Asian film, as newer films like *SWD* were created with a global, rather than local, audience in mind. Yet, by positioning *SWD* within this broad category of Asian cinema, Khoo downplays the film's significance within the specific discourses surrounding both Japanese cinema and the idea of a Japanese national identity. More importantly, such positioning appears to ignore how the Japanese national identity becomes recontextualized when it encounters other cinematic conceptions of national identities and how those identities in turn become similarly recontextualized when they encounter the cinematic conception of the Japanese national identity. Furthermore, while

Khoo acknowledges the film's multiculturalism, she does not consider how this attempt to appeal to a globalized audience points to the creation of a new type of a hybridized transcultural cinematic identity that results from 21st century globalization.

A textual analysis of *SWD* reveals how a "director as DJ" like Takashi Miike appropriates elements from mass culture texts produced both inside and outside the borders of his own national and cultural identity, and remixes and recontextualizes them to create a hybridized transcultural identity. The next section examines how the elements of Miike's film compare to those found in Westerns produced in the United States and Italy. Additionally, the analysis also reveals how *SWD* recontextualizes elements of the traditional Japanese national identity, and then combines them with the other national identities Miike has appropriated. This analysis reveals how Miike appropriates different national identities and then remixes and recontextualizes them into a globalized, transcultural context to create a hybridized transcultural identity.

Hybridized Transcultural Identity in Sukiyaki Western Django

In *SWD*, an unnamed gunman rides into Yuta, Nevada, a rundown mining town controlled by two rival gangs, the Genji (whites) and the Heike (reds). The gunman wants to find the Heike gold rumored to have been buried there several years back, but he quickly learns that he can earn more money by playing the two gangs against one another. With the help of some of the townsfolk, including Ruriko (aka the fabled female gunfighter known as Bloody Benten) and her grandson, the mute Heihachi, the gunman soon puts his plan in motion. When he falls for the beautiful but tragic Shizuka, however, the gunman soon loses his focus, and the vicious Boss Yoshitsune of the Genji clan jumps at the chance to take out this new rival.

To understand how *SWD* appropriates, remixes, and recontextualizes the American National identity as established by the Western genre, it is first important to define the Western by identifying the genre's tropes and conventions. These include, but are not limited to: Stetsons (aka cowboy hats), usually of the white and black variety to signify good guys and bad guys respectively; horses, stagecoaches, and/or covered wagons; desert vistas filled with scrub grass and tumbleweeds; tribes of savage or noble Native Americans (routinely referred to as Indians); frontier towns with ramshackle buildings; and hardened men wearing six shooters at their hips. Occasionally, such films also include depictions of emerging technologies, such as telegraph poles and steam trains, or even automobiles. While none of these generic tropes and signifiers are exclusive to the Western, their combined presence usually indicates that the film can be classified as such (for more, see Altman; Smith; Bordwell et. al.).

Much like how the dish sukiyaki contains many different ingredients, *SWD* contains elements of various cultural and filmic ingredients. The film includes iconography traditionally associated with Westerns, albeit in a recontextualized, hybridized form: six-shooters, cowboy hats, and tumbleweeds all appear within the text, although they exist alongside signifiers of other nations and cultures. First, the film reinforces the creation of a new hybridized identity through costuming. The bad guys in *SWD* all wear outlandish outfits that combine elements from both traditional samurai and cowboy apparel—albeit with a modern punk aesthetic—as established by popular culture. The wardrobe of both the Genji and Heike clans is comprised of an eclectic mishmash of dusters and kimonos, blue jeans and sandals, and this melding of styles represents an appropriation and hybridization of both the American and Japanese national identities.

Similarly, the film's setting displays elements of remixing and recontextualization. While the action takes place in the fictional mining

town of Yuta, Nevada, the ramshackle buildings of the American West have nevertheless been replaced by Buddhist temples and other examples of Japanese architecture, and Mount Fuji looms in the background of several shots. Indeed, while the streets of Yuta might resemble those of Hadleyville in *High Noon* or even Flagstone as presented in *Once Upon a Time in the West* (Sergio Leone, 1968), the presence of *kura* storehouses, minka-style farmhouses, and other forms of Japanese architecture destabilizes the traditional Western setting. At the same time, the Western tropes and signifiers serve to prevent the establishment of an entirely Japanese aesthetic. Instead, *SWD* suggests a melding of styles that results in the creation of a hybridized identity comprised of elements from both the Japanese and American national identities.

In addition to the costumes and setting, the film also establishes a hybridized identity through staging and performance. For instance, Japanese actors play all of the characters, yet they speak phonetic English and use American colloquialisms such as "y'all" and "lily-liver" in another nod to the American national identity. Khoo observes that Miike's decision to have all of the Japanese actors speak in heavily accented English provides the film with a sense of displacement, and serves to "disrupt otherwise unmarked dominant cinema" (92). At the same time, this decision feels like a conscious homage to the linguistic conventions of both the original Hollywood Westerns, which were all shot in English, and the original Spaghetti Westerns, which were frequently dubbed into English (depending on where they were shown). Yet, rather than attempt to situate the film within some sort of broad category of Asian cinema by distinguishing itself from the American or European films he appropriates, Miike instead engages in an act of remixing and recontextualization. As Stadler writes, *SWD* speaks "the global language of genre cinema with a distinctively Japanese accent" (686). Drawing on Dimitris Eleftheriotis's work, Stadler goes on to explain that like the Spaghetti Westerns it

references, *SWD* transcends both national and cultural boundaries and therefore exists within the context of national cinema.

The staging and performances also draw on ideas of Japanese national identity and cultural traditions. *SWD* frequently appropriates elements of *Noh* and *kabuki* theater into its narrative. According to Richard Hand, *kabuki* plays often featured outrageously violent scenes of torture, self-mutilation, sadism, and elaborate fight scenes. *SWD* also includes such content. For example, late in the film, members of the Genji clan beat and torture the gunman in a scene that evokes both *kabuki* theater and similar sequences in Spaghetti Westerns like *A Fistful of Dollars* and the original *Django* (Sergio Corbucci, 1966). *Kabuki* also features actors striking exaggerated poses and facial expressions. (Hand). Such stylized performance techniques also feature heavily in *SWD* thanks to Miike's strategic use of freeze frames and close-ups throughout the film. Along with the exaggerated facial expressions of Boss Kiyomori, leader of the Heike clan, the film includes a comedic action sequence in which the gunfighter leaps out of the second story window of a bar to escape the vengeful Genji clan, and Miike pauses the action during a dramatic moment to heighten the tension.

The film also references early Japanese cinematic traditions; prior to World War I, Japanese films functioned as part of a larger performance that combined elements of live theater and film known as *rensageki* or "chain drama" (Bordwell 6). This becomes most evident during the film's opening sequence, which unfolds on an obvious soundstage, complete with a beautiful painted backdrop that appears to reference the woodblock prints featured in Katsushika Hokusai's "Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji" series. During this sequence, a cowboy named Piringo (played by Quentin Tarantino) relates the tale of the Battle of Dannoura to an audience of gunslingers who have come to kill him. This sequence recalls the Japanese cinematic tradition of using a live commentator known as a *benshi* who would provide narration and dialogue during screenings of silent films,

and help Japanese audiences make sense of the film. Miike uses the character of Piringo (whose name is likely a reference to Ducci Tessari's classic 1965 Spaghetti Western, *A Pistol for Ringo*) to not only establish the film's story from the outset, but also as a way of easing the audience into the film's highly stylized cinematic world. Thus, in addition to the Western elements described above, *SWD*'s stylistic conventions also appropriate and remix the Japanese national identity.

This appropriation of national identities also manifests in the film's themes. Thematically, Westerns typically concern the conflict between the modernity of civilization and the perceived savagery of the lawless frontier (see Altman; Smith; Bordwell et. al.). Westerns often explore this theme by focusing on the conflict that exists between the past, represented by the wide open frontier, and the future, embodied by civilized society. According to Coyne, this theme most often emerges in the form of the contentious relationship between the notion of community and the idea of the odyssey. In essence, the community represents safety and comfort, but can also seem quaint or dull. Meanwhile, the frontier remains intimidating because it represents an unknown space, but this mystery also renders it alluring. The hero exists at the intersection of these two ideas, keeping one foot planted firmly within the realm of civilization and the other in the lawless and savage frontier. His internal conflict therefore reflects an inherent dichotomy within the American national identity itself: community serves as an example of what citizens within a democracy can accomplish when they work together toward a common goal, but it nevertheless contradicts the idea of Americans as rugged individualists capable of accomplishing anything on their own if they only set their minds to it.

The hero of *SWD* embodies this distinctly American conflict, as the gunman exists on the boundary between civilization and the lawless frontier. The gunman is a quiet loner who exists outside of the community, more at home sleeping under the stars than in a bed under a roof. Much

like the characters played by John Wayne and Clint Eastwood in numerous Westerns produced in Hollywood and elsewhere, the gunman is a powerful, stoic individual who lets his actions speak louder than his words. However, the gunman must occasionally still rely upon the community, as he learns late in the film when members of the Genji clan viciously beat him and leave him for dead. Members of the community nurse the gunman back to health, and they go on to assist him in his quest to find the Heike gold that was buried outside of town years earlier. Thus, the film depicts the tension between individualism and community that lies at the heart of the Western genre.

At the same time, however, *SWD* also evokes traditional Japanese cultural values. According to Susan J. Napier, values such as "purity, self-sacrifice, endurance, and team spirit" have been "historically regarded as quintessentially Japanese" (289). The gunman embodies the spirit of endurance, particularly when he nobly attempts to save Shizuka and Heihachi from the clutches of the Genji clan, and in response must endure a vicious beating at the hands of the vicious Genji thug, Yoichi. Despite embodying such distinctly Japanese traits, however, the gunman does not necessarily belong to the community. He still belongs to the wide open frontier, as evidenced when he leaves the gold to Heihachi at the end of the film and rides off into the sunset alone, presumably to seek out other adventures. This turn of events suggests that he does not completely conform to the notion of "team spirit," and therefore does not embody the communal disposition often associated with Japanese culture. Instead, the gunman is the very definition of the traditional individualistic Western hero, even though he clearly possesses some Japanese ideals.

Furthermore, much like the Spaghetti Westerns that inspired it, *SWD* abandons the black and white morality of traditional Hollywood Westerns in favor of a murkier type of morality. Only a handful of Stetsons appear onscreen throughout the film, but they are all black, including the one worn by the unnamed gunman who ostensibly fills the role of the "good

guy." White hats do not appear anywhere in the film, and thus there is no clear distinction between morality and lawlessness. The film's protagonist embodies this murky morality; the gunman is more anti-hero than straight up hero. Initially, he is only interested in one thing: finding the gold rumored to have been buried there by the Heike clan years earlier. He has no interest in liberating the townsfolk from oppression (at least, not at first). Spaghetti Westerns routinely featured morally dubious "heroes" as a way to deconstruct the myth of the American West presented in Hollywood Westerns (see both Frayling and Hughes for more on the tropes and conventions of Spaghetti Westerns). Like the protagonists in *A Fistful of Dollars* (Sergio Leone, 1964) and *Django*, the gunman in *SWD* exists within a moral gray area. He is ultimately a heroic figure, but at the same time he willing to engage in duplicitous acts to further his own agenda. The gunman will lie, cheat, steal, or even kill people if he can benefit from such actions. Moreover, he is not above putting the citizens of Yuta in harm's way to achieve his goal. By referencing Spaghetti Westerns—themselves a combination of American and Italian national identities—Miike appropriates an identity that has already been hybridized and recontextualized, and this in turn informs the new transcultural identity presented in *SWD*.

The film's inspirations also reflect this notion of transnational and transcultural identity. *SWD* is partially inspired by *Yojimbo* (Akira Kurosawa, 1961), which was itself partially inspired by the novels of Dashiell Hammett, in particular *Red Harvest* and *The Glass Key*. Both books feature gritty crime stories that present an idealized and mythologized version of the American national identity, though one that is somewhat different in tone from the one created and reinforced by Westerns. Nevertheless, *SWD* clearly recontextualizes *Yojimbo*'s story, suggesting another level of appropriation due to the nature of that film's transcultural origins. Miike openly acknowledges his appropriation of *Yojimbo* by having Benkei of the Genji clan speak the line, "No doubt

about who's going to be the last man standing, best you don't get any ideas about playing Yojimbo." This becomes even more interesting when one realizes that in addition to *Yojimbo*, the line also references the film *Last Man Standing* (Walter Hill, 1996), a Prohibition-era reworking of *Yojimbo* inspired by the same Dashiell Hammett novels that Kurosawa appropriated when creating his film. Thus, Miike acknowledges the debt that *SWD* owes to other films that are themselves the result of hybridized transcultural identities.

Ultimately though, *Yojimbo* is a distinctly Japanese film, representative of the *chanbara* (swordplay) film, which is itself a subgenre of the *jidai-geki* (period) films prevalent in Japanese cinema. *Yojimbo* is firmly rooted within the cultural context of the Japanese national identity, though it is also at least partially informed by the American national identity in two ways. First, the film is based on the two Dashiell Hammett novels discussed earlier. Second, as Davis notes in his discussion of Japanese cinema, *Yojimbo* was shot using equipment developed outside of Japan's national borders and primarily associated with Hollywood and the United States. This informed how the filmmakers conveyed the Japanese national identity onscreen; they were either attempting to emulate Western cinematic styles or specifically reacting to them. Either way, *Yojimbo* represents an appropriation and recontextualization of cultural and national identities, and thus adds another level to the creation of the hybridized transcultural identity depicted within *SWD*.

While *SWD* primarily draws from Japanese, Italian, and American cultures, the film also appropriates and recontextualizes a number of other national and cultural signifiers. The film contains brief allusions to the Australian national identity in the form of a didgeridoo and aboriginal music. Additionally, the film is also partly inspired by the story of the War of the Roses as chronicled in William Shakespeare's *Henry IV*, which represents the English national identity in *SWD*. The appropriation of this national identity becomes evident when Boss Kiyomori holds up a bound

copy of the play, but one that features Japanese kanji characters on the front cover. When Boss Kiyomori demands that his henchmen refer to him as Henry from now on, the film presents a character played by a Japanese actor who speaks in phonetic English and dressed in a mishmash of Western and Eastern clothing casting off his Japanese name in favor of a Western one. This single moment represents a confluence of appropriation, recontextualization, and hybridization, and thus functions as a perfect summation of *SWD* itself.

Finally, *SWD*'s hybridized transcultural nature also manifests in the song that plays over the film's end credits. Composed by Koji Endo, "Django Sasurii" is a cover of the theme from the original *Django*, which was written and performed by Italian composer Luis Bacalov. Whereas the original version of the song is performed in English, the version included in *SWD* is performed in Japanese, and features a range of musical influences from around the world, including Japanese flutes and acoustic guitar flourishes reminiscent of Spanish flamenco music. More importantly, however, the song begins immediately after a climactic scene in which the enigmatic gunman rides off into the sunset, just as text appears onscreen informing the viewer that the boy Heihachi eventually made his way to Italy and became the man known as Django. Thus, the film's closing sequence suggests that the various national identities that exist alongside one another both onscreen and on the film's sidetrack have been remixed and recontextualized into one hybridized identity that reflects 21st century globalization.

Conclusion

Rooted in everything from the historical Japanese theatrical traditions of Noh and kabuki theater to American Westerns to aboriginal music and more, *Sukiyaki Western Django* appropriates the American national

identity while simultaneously adapting two separate Italian Spaghetti Westerns, which themselves appropriated and recontextualized the American national identity. As a result, the film offers insight into how director Takashi Miike remixes and recontextualizes the original texts in the style of a director as DJ, and also how he uses the national identities of the different cultures that produced those texts to create a hybridized transcultural identity rooted in both but nevertheless wholly new and entirely separate from either of them.

Yang asserts that "Cultural nationalism […] tends towards the exclusionary while poststructuralism tends more towards uneasy inclusion" (439). A film like *SWD* exemplifies this idea, because it is rooted in the poststructuralist language of transnational and transcultural cinema and thus transcends traditional notions of national and cultural boundaries. The film is not defined by the tensions that exist between the cultural and national identities it has appropriated, but rather by a sense that these identities have been merged into something new and different that exists independently of the original. Therefore, *SWD* reflects the increasingly globalized audiences of the 21st century. Contemporary viewers have become more comfortable with cultural and intertextual mash-ups thanks to the prevalence of remix culture and mediation brought about by the ubiquity of advanced communication technologies. Miike appropriates elements from the films and cultures that inspired him, and recontextualizes them into a new context that reflects and indicates 21st century globalization; in these new contexts, the meanings of the signifiers become decentered from their origins, creating new meanings that reflect the remix culture that frequently defines popular culture in the 21st century globalized world.

In this regard, Miike shares similarities with other contemporary directors like Quentin Tarantino, Neil Marshall, Kim Jee-woon, Guy Ritchie, the Wachowskis, and Nicholas Winding Refn, all of whom produce distinctly postmodern films primarily informed by the language

of cinema. However, Miike does not simply remix the films that inspired him. Rather, he also appropriates and recontextualizes the national identities that define the films that inspired him, largely because of the link that exists between cinema and national identity. Indeed, the cinematic apparatus often functions as one of the most convenient means of conveying and articulating notions of historical and national identities (see Coyne; Davis). By remixing and recontextualizing several cultural and national identities, *SWD* creates a hybridized transcultural identity, one that contains elements from three distinct national and cultural identities that exist side by side more or less equally onscreen. Therefore, *SWD* offers valuable insight into how national and cultural identities are becoming increasingly connected within a cinematic context. Understanding this remixing could provide better understanding of how international audiences make sense of different national identities through the popular culture they consume on a daily basis, and how they appropriate and recontextualize these identities to create new transcultural, globalized identities.

At the same time, the film can also be read as camp due to the outrageous costumes, extreme subject matter, and over-the-top performances. As Susan Sontag notes, camp emphasizes exaggeration, artifice, and stylization (42-43). Sontag draws a distinction between pure camp (that is, camp ignorant of its own campiness) and self-conscious or self-aware camp, but each serves the same function: to celebrate extravagance and destabilize or challenge the boundaries of good taste. Indeed, camp allows traditionally marginalized groups or those who lack cultural capital to "parody their subordinate or uncertain social status" by mocking both themselves and those in power (Ross 57). Camp often serves as a way to plunder cultural stereotypes in a way that both reinforces and shifts the balance of cultural power (Ross 57-58). *SWD* serves as a prime example of camp, because the film appropriates various cultural stereotypes and drapes them in outrageous costumes that

destabilize these stereotypes and delocate them from their original national and/or cultural connotations. Furthermore, as Lee observes, *SWD* "exploits the superficiality of conventions and stereotypes and thereby unmasks generally held assumptions about cultures and identities" (154). By remixing and recontextualizing cultural stereotypes into a new hybridized, transcultural context, the film resolves the tensions between different national or cultural identities by allowing them to exist more or less equally onscreen and revealing their similarities.

Thus, from the perspective of camp, Miike's remixing serves to comment on past and present cultural imperialism, colonialism, and cultural stereotypes. The new hybridized transcultural identity produced in the film represents an approach to destabilizing traditional boundaries constructed through such imperialism. In *SWD*, no single specific cultural viewpoint has priority over the other in the storyworld's construction. This construction, then, suggests how a transnational and transcultural identity can emerge through engagement with contemporary globalized pop culture spread through advanced communication technologies: no specific nation's pop culture prevails over another's. Therefore, the film's hybridized transcultural identity represents the political potential of other transnational and transcultural pop culture texts to challenge, transcend, and unite across national and cultural boundaries.

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A Pedagogy of Communion: Theorizing Popular Culture Pedagogy

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Teaching [with] popular culture can be rewarding; however, it also is challenging in a variety of ways, not the least of which is that popular culture pedagogy has primarily been studied in terms of specific applications. Designing an individual lesson plan, project, or even unit with/around popular culture is one thing, but to situate an entire course using popular culture is another. At present, popular culture pedagogy has not been theorized in such a way as to find the commonalities that teachers of pop culture share. In other words, pop culture pedagogy is identifiable in application when teachers employ pop culture artifacts, but exactly what it means to teach popular culture is still unclear.

While some theoretical frameworks exist for popular culture pedagogy, these frameworks are highly abstract and philosophical – they do not connect to praxis in a meaningful way. Conversely, many application-based approaches to popular culture pedagogy exist in current literature, but these approaches are rarely grounded in frameworks of popular culture theory. Popular culture theory is uniquely situated to provide insight into a popular culture pedagogy in that popular culture theory centers on the ways in which popular culture itself is pedagogical. By placing popular culture at the center of the theoretical development of pedagogy, we move popular culture from the role of "exemplar" in the teaching environment to the narrative structure and cultural context in which learning occurs.

We employ a case study approach in order to bridge the gap between theoretical development and praxis in the classroom. As Robert K. Yin, noted case study researcher, explained, the researcher's prior experiences in the field of inquiry provides insight to the inquiry. In case studies the researchers are embedded as part of the examination. Yin argued that case studies can address emerging phenomenon, but existing literature and research should provide the theoretical guidance for case studies. Stanford University professor Kathleen M. Eisenhardt developed a theory building approach using case studies which includes enfolding existing literature while examining selected cases that would allow for theoretical development (533). Thus, existing research on the use of popular culture in higher education and popular culture theory provide a lens for analysis of the case study and a means of further theorizing theoretical approaches to popular culture pedagogy.

In response to these gaps, we will use this essay to locate both what is unique to teaching [with] popular culture and to develop a theory of popular culture pedagogy connected to praxis. In so doing, first, we will consider the ways in which popular culture in the higher education classroom has been previously approached, then, we will extend on narrative theory and popular culture theory to develop a theoretical framework of popular culture pedagogy to address gaps in research; and, finally, we will employ a case study to demonstrate the praxis of engaging this theoretical framework in higher education.

Literature Review

Popular Culture in Higher Education

Scholars (e.g., Bowman; Girouz and McLaren; Janak and Blum) have explored popular culture in higher education from both applied and theoretical frameworks. Much of the research on popular culture pedagogy

provides one-off examples of lessons or assignments with little theoretical connection. For example, in the *The Pedagogy of Pop,* Waweru and Ntarangwi made a convincing argument for the need to introduce narratives of African History into high school and introductory collegiate courses, but they failed to provide the theoretical connections to explain how these narratives function or connection to existing limited theoretical frameworks of popular culture and pedagogy (144). Furthermore, the *Lord of the Rings* has been used to examine language and race without providing theoretical framing (Culver, 179). Similarly, Michelle Parke discussed her extensive use of *The Wire, Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, and even video games such as *World of Warcraft* to teach college writing (198). The suggestions for practice and lessons in these types of scholarship of teaching and learning are important for instructors in higher education. However as popular culture and pedagogical scholars, we are doing a disservice to separate the practical applications from theoretical frameworks. A true praxis will blend theory and practice (Freire, 123).

Much of the existing theoretical development regarding popular culture and pedagogy stems from an interdisciplinary cultural studies perspectives. Scholars from cultural studies (Bowman; Giroux, Lankshear, McLaren, and Peters; Giroux and McLaren) have explored the ways in which popular culture can be used in education as a form of politicized cultural theory. As Paul Bowman noted "culture has been theorized as pedagogy" (601). For example, Disney has been used to teach narratives of self-control (Aronstein and Finke, 614) and reinforce traditional gender norms (616). Additionally, digital games function as form of informal learning (Apperley, 42). In *Popular Culture, Pedagogy and Teacher Education,* Phil Benson discussed the ways in which popular culture is educative and mis-educative (17) by using a social constructivist theoretical framework to highlight how popular culture can function to provide alternative narratives for our lives and relationships, explore new choices, and expand our thinking about diversity (21). However, his

discussion frames "popular culture as education" (22) and falls short of providing insight into how to enact or interrogate these narratives into pedagogy in the classroom. Thus, scholars embracing this theoretical perspective tend to provide examination of how popular culture "schools" us rather than the use of popular culture in formalized education systems.

As cultural studies scholar Alan O'Shea explained the theoretical development and debates in cultural studies provides an important argument for the need to engage in a critical pedagogy that can educate students to be active and critical citizens in democratic public life (522). However, O'Shea argued that the connections between the theoretical frameworks and critical critiques of cultural studies need to be more specifically connected to students' personal engagements and bodies of knowledge through instigating activities and written assignments (526-27). Furthermore, Bowman argued for the need to interrogate "specific forms of cultural theory and/or which offers new theorizations of pedagogy by way of analysis of popular cultural texts, practices, institutions, or process" (601).

Edward A. Janak and Denise F. Blum began to bridge the gap between theory and practical applications in their edited volume *The Pedagogy of Pop.* Unfortunately the historical and theoretical chapters presented in the volume focus on historical importance of popular culture; analysis of popular culture; and the popular cultural portrayals of teachers and education and thus do not tie the theoretical frameworks directly to the praxis of pedagogy in the classroom. In the second half of the volume, editorial cartoons were used to explore the connections between theory and practice by examining hegemonic social structures using a social constructionism framework (Ellefritz, 108). Likewise, Ludovic A. Sourdot used *Aliens in America* to engage her students in discussion about student-teacher interaction in a teacher education course (171). While she frames her application based on the cultural studies work of Giroux (166) she falls short of developing or interrogating theory in her analysis. Popular culture

has even been incorporated into pedagogical best practices in health education (Leahy and Gray, 88). However, the implications for practice once again default to suggestions for using popular culture as one off examples (91) and stops short of extending or developing popular culture pedagogy theoretically (94).

In order to interrogate this important connection between theoretical frameworks and practical strategies and applications, we deploy popular culture theory and narrative theory to develop a popular culture pedagogy, which explores the manner in which we can create and re-create communal narratives within a higher education classroom. In order to accomplish the goal of developing a popular culture pedagogy we must foster praxis. Paulo Freire argued in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* that praxis requires both reflection and action and is the means of implementing a transformative liberating education (54). Freire maintained that praxis is found in the dialogue between students and teachers in the classroom. In their dialogue they engage in a co-intentional education in which they come to critically understand reality and co-create knowledge (69). Instructors may facilitate this co-creation using popular culture and a strategic awareness of narrative.

Popular Culture and Narrative

In Ray B. Browne's classic essay "Popular Culture: Notes toward a Definition" he argued for an inclusive definition of popular culture that embraces all culture except elite culture (21). He explored the ways in which popular culture functions as an action or a "thrust" that can use the trivial and profound moments of life to explore the depths of human experience (16-17). As Marshall W. Fishwick demonstrates in "Popular Culture: Cavespce to Cyberspace" that no matter the focus (or time period) of popular culture, people and their collective lives are at heart of the study of popular culture (7). Communities share their collective lives through artifacts, icons, ideas, language, rituals, and symbols (14). In the

first edition of *The Popular Culture Studies Journal* Bob Batchelor argued that, at its most basic level, popular culture is "the connections that form between individuals and objects" (1). These connections trace their history back to early humans who "experienced some kind of emotion, feeling, or information-sharing based on cultural interaction" (2). In order for connections to constitute a form of interaction, the objects being connected with must in some way reflect the emotions, feelings, or knowledge of the person or group who crafted the object. Popular culture exists as the connections between people and *cultural artifacts* – objects that are physical manifestations of the structured experiences of other people. Thus, popular culture is centered on understanding the collective experiences via cultural artifacts that connect us as humans and can allow us as Fishwick stated "to see *underneath* the surface – of our society, our technology, our kitsch – and identify new wellsprings of energy, technique, and faith" (20).

Walter Fisher's narrative paradigm provides a way to understand this relationship between people using cultural artifacts. Fisher considered homo narrans to be the master metaphor in characterizing human nature. To Fisher, all human communication is based on the selection, arrangement, and organization of signs and symbols. Such arrangements constitute narratives. Narratives function as more than just stories they are ways in which we can see underneath the surface to common human experiences. Jay Allison extended Fisher's thought and summarized this argument by defining narrative as "particular structure[s] whereby humans organize experience" (109). Using the narrative paradigm, Fisher reminded us that "humans as rhetorical beings are as much valuing as they are reasoning animals" (376). Both values and reasons, then, are significant elements of human communication to consider. Human communication as narration is "a dialectical synthesis of two traditional strands in history and rhetoric: the argumentative, persuasive theme and the literary, aesthetic theme" (2).

Narrative is a useful lens for understanding popular culture for a number of reasons. First, popular culture, having the ontological quality of existing as a part of relationships between people and objects (and other people) (Browne xii), must be intimately related to communication. Studies in human communication describe relationships between people as they structure and coordinate meaning through signs and symbols. The narrative paradigm is a communicative lens that lends itself to understanding the relationships between people, symbols, and culture. Secondly, cultural objects are literal manifestations of experiences that have been crafted or structured. They are organized experiences that are interpreted and, therefore, again organized, selected, and arranged. Simply put, cultural objects offer narratives. These cultural narratives become popular when they are shared and become connectors between people or groups. To study popular culture must be to study communication through narrative and to teach [with] popular culture must be to teach through the process of story sharing.

In some sense, then, narrative is always what is being shared through popular culture – manifestations of experience being shared with others. Although, the exact meaning of these narratives may be contested. Once a person's experience is externalized and shared, it becomes open to the interpretation of others. Brooker gave an excellent example of popular culture and the contested nature of narration in his book on the cultural history of Batman (17-32). In the book's introduction, Brooker relied on interpretive strategies from Stanley Fish to explain Batman #250 as a case study. In *Batman* #250, several children encounter the superhero Batman and argue about who he is and what he can do (i.e., What qualities constitute Batman?). The fictional children face the same difficulty as true life consumers of popular culture: particularly, who gets to decide what the object of cultural interest means? Batman attempts to describe himself to the children; the children, in disbelief that they are speaking with the real Batman, reject the authorial meaning of Batman (as a symbol or icon).

Brooker noted that "no reading, however absurd it seems to [Batman], can be ruled out. It merely requires, in Fish's term, an interpretative strategy to enable or activate it" (23). Individuals do not make interpretations in a void, though; individuals draw from communicative experiences to understand to make meaning of popular culture. As Brooker explained, "We should also note that all the readings listed… are not generated from a single individual outside of society, but from what Fish calls an interpretive community, or a subject within that community" (25). Again, Brooker highlighted a theme of cultural stories about cultural stories – meta-narration that creates the boundaries of cultural groups.

As with all communication, popular culture gains its significance from being accepted in interpretive communities and being meta-narrated about within those communities. Meaning is not inherent to popular culture, but negotiated among and between the people connected to particular objects. Or as Fishwick explained "Popular culture is a mirror held up to life", but the "great mystery is the audience" (18). The meaning of the cultural object is not held in the object itself, but in the interpretation of the popular culture, the internationalization of the narrative, and the meaning we can find underneath the surface.

Identity, Popular Culture, and Narrative

Not only is the meaning of popular culture negotiated in interpretive communities, but these communities use popular culture to develop their own sense of identity. One aspect of narrative which is significant to pedagogy, but often overlooked in popular culture research, is its relationship to group identity. In his research with community theater members, Kramer used a bona fide group perspective to understand role negotiation in temporary groups. Part of this role negotiation involved determining group boundaries using communication. Kramer found that the formation of social roles among group members involves "social talk" regarding "unique topic[s] of conversation" (157, 158). People use social

talk that is particular to the group role they are playing at the time. Kramer also found that "members [of community theater groups] did not discuss with outsiders the internal working of the group" (168). The reason for limiting communication regarding particular group roles with "outsiders" may be that "the uniqueness of groups… prevents much in depth communication of internal group processes to those outside the group unless the group has a similar function" (168). Similarly, Dougherty and Smythe, in their study of sexual harassment in organizational settings, found that "water-cooler type conversations" – social talk in and, sometimes, about the workplace in the form of informal anecdotes – was significant in the development of group norms and organizational culture (305). Basically, group communication research reiterates over and over again that an important marker of group identity and group boundaries are the stories that are unique to the group. Narration about unique times, places, people, and experiences marks in-group and out-group members for each social role that we play.

As related to popular culture, group identity and association with "popular culture" is formed when people meta-narrate about cultural objects. These meta-narrations constitute communicative relationships formed between people through popular stories. Often this meta-narration is used to interpret and negotiate the meaning and significance of certain artifacts – an important aspect of popular culture pedagogy. We posit that classroom groups may be considered situated in popular culture when one of the class' group identity boundaries is its meta-communicative functions regarding a shared (popular) object or objects.

Popular culture teachers should also consider the processes by which these group identities are developed. A way that people start to communicate identity is through personal narrative – talk about the self. A sense of self-identity is often produced as a result of group membership. In learning communities, the way that students narrate about the self becomes a significant factor in the development of both their personal

sense of identity and their group membership. Sfard and Prusak distinguished between two types of narrative identities: actual and designated. An actual identity extends out of stories that a person tells about the self in the present. Designated identity extends out of future-oriented stories about the self. Wojecki found that narrative identities are significant in learning situations because an individuals' beliefs about the self and their ability or desire to learn (actual identity) influence the way that they imagine their future learning experiences (designated identity). Individuals' imagination regarding the future is also important to their present behaviors by influencing their perception of what they are capable of accomplishing. Other narrative scholars have contributed to discussions on narrative identity by explaining that narrative identity relates to life stories - or narratizations (Allison; Gravley, et al) - which rely on the perception of self in the stream of time. In short, perceptions of the self are based on evaluations of recursively interacting imaginings of the self in a broad temporal field, including the past, present, and future. We make sense of these imaginings through the selection and arrangement of data in narrative form (Allison).

Narratization and narrative identity are noteworthy topics in pedagogical studies because people are more willing to engage in learning activities and imagine their own future educational success if they can conceptualize themselves as capable learners in the present (Wojecki). Further, fictional stories – such as those which may be found in popular culture – provide a space for learners to theorize and conceive of situations in which they may apply knowledge from previous experiences. For instance, Botzakis concluded from his qualitative study of adult comic book readers that comic books involve "an array of meaning making activities that are bound in reading popular culture texts," including "reading practices [that have] critical, moral, literary and dialogic dimensions" (113, abstract). Botzakis found that adult comic book readers "read texts looking for usable parts… searching for answers from texts,

particularly comic books, but… also look[ing] within [the self] to operationalize… found knowledge" (119). In short, "Comic book stories… helped [interviewees] make sense of life events… The interrelated stories and characters created contexts that helped [the reader] reflect on his own social world" (119).

At its best, popular culture pedagogy should turn classes into interpretative communities, bound together by meta-narratives constructed by the class as they make sense of popular culture objects and theorizing about those objects using course concepts. These dialogues should allow students and teachers to draw connections beyond the popular culture artifacts themselves to other contexts. Popular culture artifacts should be operationalized by the instructor to provide space for exploring topics that inspire students to learn about themselves. Such an approach may function as to what educators John Dewey and Paulo Friere called a "problem-posing" technique – an educational situation that challenges students to use previous experiences to solve problems presented to them by instructors. In the case of popular culture, popular narratives may be applied cases that represent social problems for students to theorize about.

Popular Culture Pedagogy

One significant risk of teaching with shared story systems is that the importance of *story-sharing* will be lost in a process of mere *story-telling*. While story-telling may certainly have important social functions and pedagogical potential, the act of story-telling also risks keeping knowledge static and located in the past. After recognizing this "fundamentally narrative character" of most learning environments, critical educator Paulo Freire warned that pedagogical content may "tend in the process of being narrated to become lifeless and petrified" (71). Freire saw the tendency of teachers to emphasize *telling* over showing and dialoging as a "narrative sickness" (71). The problems of mere telling are explained in detail by Freire:

"The teacher talks about reality as if it were motionless, static, compartmentalized, and predictable. Or else he expounds on a topic completely alien to the existential experience of the students. His task is to 'fill' the students with the contents of his narration – contents which are detached from reality, disconnected from the totality that engendered them and could give them significance. Words are emptied of their concreteness and become hollow, alienated, and alienating verbosity."

The teacher who utilizes a "banking model" of education creates narrative sickness by attempting to fill the mind of others with their own thoughts – to replicate the self. Such educators commit violence against their students by attempting to destroy otherness. Freire described the type of education that allows for these sorts of oppressive practices as "necrophilic behavior" (65). When educators force their thoughts on others, they try to replace the consciousness of the other with that of the self, effectively "killing" the other and using them (an act of consumption) as an object instead of treating them as a subject (an act of communion).

We posit that the cure lies in difference between story-telling (consuming the other) and story-sharing (jointly participating with the other). As has been already established, popular culture pedagogy must include acts of narration. However, to be truly successful, popular culture pedagogues must do more than tell. Popular culture pedagogy is a pedagogy of communion: one in which a group becomes attached to particular cultural object[s] and meta-narrates about the object[s] in unique ways – all sharing in the narrative and all sharing in the process of meta-narration. The development meta-narrative takes place in the process of dialogue. One example of a popular culture pedagogy at work may come from a case study of a course that we, the authors, developed with the principles of a pedagogy of communion in mind.

Case Study in Narrative and Popular Culture Pedagogy

Our work as instructors includes teaching an introduction to human communication course – the "basic course" for communication studies at a large, southwestern university. The faculty and staff involved in teaching the basic course employ a critical communication approach (Fassett and Warren). Therefore, in addition to teaching skills such as the basics of public speaking, approaches for interpersonal conflict resolution, and strategies for effective group communication, we also encourage students to think about how power is used and structures of power may be manifested in our everyday communication. We often use popular culture to begin discussion on course topics (e.g., demonstrate interpersonal interactions; power of language; stereotypes; cultural differences). For this study we explored, Frank Miller's Batman: *Year One* to introduce themes of social action and explore conceptions of justice. Additionally, we assigned supplemental course readings on comics theory. The supplemental readings (Langley; McCloud; Rhodes and Johnson; White and Arp) were used to link comics theory to course content.

A comic book story was brought to the class out of a shared belief with Sousanis that, "Stories sustain us and offer spaces of freedom. They let us reach across time and space to share in another's viewpoint, touch another's thoughts, and make them part of our own stories." (95) We agree with Sousanis that "reaching across the gap to experience another's way of knowing takes a leap of imagination" and embrace popular story-sharing in the classroom to engage this mode of empathy (89). Generally speaking, our experience was that students in the "Batman Class" indeed felt more comfortable first discussing critical / cultural topics in the context of fiction and then personal examples than students who just shared personal examples.

We argue that *Year One* served as a semester long case study, problem-posing situation, and context for theorization. As a case study,

Year One was ultimately a popular and commonly accessible narrative that students could refer to for examples of communication concepts throughout the semester. By starting discussions with a common example, we were able to observe that students during the "Batman semester" more easily navigated controversial and potentially painful / difficult cultural topics. Personal stories from students' previous cultural experiences seemed to be more clearly and easily understood if the related communication theory was paired to a common, fictional example before personal self-disclosures began. For example, discussing police corruption and brutality in *Year One* before discussing real-life social conflicts related to #blacklivesmatter and #blueslivesmatter.

In the Batman class, students read *Year One*, theory-based text books, and short articles or excerpts of articles linking questions associated with course content (communication studies) and the shared story. Perhaps the clearest example of these elements at work would be a persuasive speech assignment ("The Hero's Journey") in which students must advocate for action regarding a social issue of their choice. As a way of introducing persuasive strategies, the students read about models of argument – such as Fisher's narrative paradigm, Toulmin's model, and Monroe's motivated sequence – and selected stories and arguments from characters in *Year One* to assess using the previously studied models. Students evaluated both the dialogue of the characters in *Year One* and Frank Miller's overall narrative in *Year One* using the various theoretical models. After this assessment, students were assigned an argumentation model to use when completing the persuasive speech assignment. With the "Hero's Journey" speech, we ask students to narratize (Allison) – tell future-oriented stories – about true-life uses for communication theory. This was, by-and-large, successful as a bridge between the fiction/reality gap in discussion of critical communication praxis. Students were able to interrogate a number of critical social issues including homelessness, poverty, police violence, socio-economic privilege, drugs, criminal violence, racism, and sexism.

Their work demonstrated an ability to critical examine the cultural artifact (*Year One*) and connect their critiques to true-life cultural experiences they had researched and/or personally experienced.

Significantly, students in the Batman class used popular culture artifacts (Miller's book) as a place to make sense of information from the textbook and a space to discuss applications for otherwise a-contextual concepts. The joint story-telling and story-sharing about the popular culture artifact contributed to student understanding of course concepts. In short, we engaged in a popular or communion-oriented pedagogy by being committed to using course content to interpret or relate to a cultural object in order to reach a particular end, such as a class learning objective.

Beyond attention to common cultural narrative[s] and group-development through meta-narration, popular culture pedagogues should be willing to narratize the course based on the common stories in the class. That is, if an instructor hopes to situate an entire course in popular culture, the course should be designed so that students' participation in the communal story-sharing regarding the cultural object will affect how they pursue goals in the class. To return to the Batman class example: the "Hero's Journey" speech is one of several major assignments in the class. Students move from early assignments – such as an informative speech asking, "Who are you and what is your 'superpower'"? – to later assignments that connect dots between concepts (e.g., the "Hero's Journey" speech asking students to apply their "superpower", or special interests and talents, toward resolving a social problem). As the semester progressed, students' interpretation of the popular story evolved and to they could apply course material to new types of problems and contexts.

In popular culture pedagogy, students should rely on what they have learned / negotiated in relation to classmates and the cultural object[s] to complete future class assignments and engage in further class discussion. A class' learning "journey" will be reflected in their ability to make new deductions based on ongoing meta-narration paired with challenging new

educational experiences (i.e., problem-posing situations). Classes situated in popular culture will narratize class goals together based on a shared exposure to popular culture narratives and their meta-communication about them.

Discussion

In this article, we extend on lived narrative theory to develop a generalizable theory of popular culture pedagogy. Particularly, popular culture teachers should engage in a pedagogy of communion to emphasize the unique potential of "popular" stories in the classroom. As a part of this theorization, we hope to highlight specific implications for studies in narrative theory, popular culture, and pedagogy.

First, narrative does not merely act as an abstract concept or lens for understanding – narrative structures are functional pedagogical tools. When classes narratize goals together, they "plot" their future trajectory in a course and apply narrative structure to their life-stories in the class. Instructors and students embody story-living in the process of narratization. Allison explained that, in narratization, a person participates in an "ongoing mediation of his/her own physical and/or verbal actions within a temporally configured field in order to achieve an envisioned but, as yet, unrealized end" (109). In this way, a person - or, as we argue: a class – may live out futures that follow the structures of narratives imagined in the present or that extend from the past. To act out such structures is to participate in a life-story. Instructors in any discipline would do well to consider the ways that their selection of class materials may facilitate joint narratization processes among students. Further, these narratizations should be facilitated in such a way as to work toward course objectives and cultivate understanding of discipline-specific content. While productively facilitating group narratization may be challenging, instructors and classes may benefit from joint enactment of communal

narrative in everyday life as a community building tool. Our "pedagogy of communion" extends on Allison's narratization by realizing new advantages associated with attention to story-living in pedagogy. Specifically, we advocate that awareness of communal narratives allow strategic engagement of them toward productive narratization.

Additionally, the implications of a pedagogy of communion are multi-faceted. This theory is demonstrative of ways in which popular culture narratives function as pedagogical tools by building community through story-sharing. Teachers engaged in story-sharing through popular culture as a method of learning participate in an iteration of Freire's dialogue by establishing an environment of communal exchange. As Batchelor argued, popular culture is the connection[s] between people and artifacts – and these connections may be used to encourage Sousanis' conception of imaginative empathy in a classroom setting. Such pedagogy meets the call of bell hooks – who has written much about her use of popular culture in the classroom – for an engaged pedagogy in which teachers and students "embrace the challenge of self-actualization" and are willing to be vulnerable by disclosing their own subjective experiences (22). Ultimately, we believe that what hooks understood about movies and engaged pedagogy is also true of other forms of popular culture: "folks… go to movies to learn stuff" and "often what we learn is life transforming in some way" (2). From a teaching standpoint, a communal narrative approach to popular culture pedagogy challenges faculty to understand and dissect the narrative structures of our communal experiences in and with popular culture in the development of our curriculum and our dialogue with students.

Finally, we wish to emphasize that a popular culture pedagogy should be aimed toward praxis. We believe a pedagogy of communion may be a useful practical framework for a variety of instructional areas, despite our primary example in this article being a semester-long endeavor. Engaging popular culture as a semester-long situation has clear unique advantages,

as previously discussed, but we maintain that using popular culture may also have positive impacts for instructors in their approaches to individual assignment strategies and unit strategies as well as curriculum design. In each application, the key to productively accessing advantages of popular culture lies in extremely purposeful modification to assignments and content so as to facilitate dialogue through the communal narrative. This strategy stands opposed to pedagogical planning that is driven by textbook selection or commonly discussed topics in a given subject area. Popular culture pedagogy should challenge students to follow threads through communal stories. Given the possible influence of following story threads when discussing topics in class, instructors should treat the selection of a story or stories for the framing of class discussions to be of paramount value. Instructors must challenge our students to look underneath the surface of popular culture (Fishwick) to explore the deeper cultural meanings of these communal narratives.

We argue for three significant characteristics of praxis in popular culture pedagogy: temporal currency, elicitation of relevant topics, and problem-posing potential. Temporal currency is related to students' ability to connect with or understand a particular narrative. In order for a popular culture narrative to effectively engage students, teachers must select artifacts that are timely. For instance, in the "Batman Class," our use of Miller's *Year One* was strategic in several ways. First, *Year One* features a popular American icon: Batman. Even so, not every student is familiar with details of Batman's character; therefore, *Year One* was purposely selected because it is an origin story that gets everyone "on the same page" in terms of understanding Batman's iconic framework. Additionally, *Year One* connects themes from the 1980s – specifically regarding police corruption – to contemporary media discourse and ongoing debate about corruption and brutality in law enforcement. We capitalized on great temporal currency by ensuring that every student was familiar the same story (relevance in the context of the class) and by

facilitating discussions connecting the popular culture material to external discourses (relevance to "real world" interests). In other words: having temporal currency means that a popular culture artifact speaks to students' lived experience and/or the lived experiences of others. Popular culture should be strategically selected to engage student imagination and empathy.

Instructors may also utilize popular culture to engage students through elicitation of topics that are connected to the course learning outcomes. If teachers have a clear idea of what skills and/or bodies of knowledge they would like students to "walk away" with at the end of the course, selection of popular culture artifacts may be used to guide activities and discussions relevant to such skills and/or knowledge. To again draw an example from our "Batman Class," the book *Year One* is an origin story that is concerned with the construction of a hero (or heroes) in the midst of a corrupt environment. The authors designed the course with the intention that students would explore conceptions of what makes a person "heroic" and how they could use communication to advocate for social justice on a community level. Topics such as police corruption, racism, hegemony, and privilege were all interrogated using meta-narration which combined the narrative of *Year One*, the course material, and the individual, real-world examples disclosed by students and instructors. The meta-narration produced in the dialogue from the "Batman class" demonstrated ways in which this approach to popular culture pedagogy elicits Giroux's "counter narratives." Giroux argued that narratives which focus on the othering of groups or individuals in the margins may provide means of engaging in problem-solving projects and discussion of social issues in public arenas (46). For example, in the "Batman class," the students' critical analysis of the behaviors of characters in *Year One* resulted in counter-hegemonic meta-narration in which the class interrogated contemporary social issues of racial injustice and police brutality. In sum, popular culture pedagogy fosters communal narrative by allowing students to draw personal and

social connections between the topics of the course and the course content. *Year One* was employed as a way to begin joint participation in semester long conversations on the relationship between communication and social justice.

Finally, teachers should select popular culture artifacts that offer problem-posing scenarios for students. We extend on Botzakis' findings regarding comics as a space for challenge and for theorization by arguing that all popular culture provides the potential for such space (119). Our argument comes from the place of our own lived experience in using various forms of popular culture in the classroom as well as from the well documented experiences of other teachers using popular culture (e.g., hooks). In our "Batman Class," *Year One* was not merely a case study for understanding content-related concepts, but also a tool for provoking a response from students. Particularly, Frank Miller is a famously controversial writer and his approach to Batman, while perhaps entertaining in some ways, also contains representations that many people may find to be problematic. Therefore, we used course content to highlight both the advantages and the disadvantages of Miller's work in order facilitate reflexive commentary in our course. In other words, *Year One* contained both examples of course theory at work and offered social problems for the class to consider. Following in the steps of Dewey and Freire, we believe that problem-posing education encourages students to theorize on their own and deduce unique applications of that theory. Popular culture seems especially appropriate as a problem-posing tool due to the fact that authors ranging back as far as Aristotle have observed that tension and conflict are inherent in narrative structure. Teachers may tap into the special advantages of popular culture by introducing students to narrative tensions and then facilitating a collective problem-solving. Of course, the challenge is to find popular culture which poses problems related to relevant course content and topical questions.

In summary, we have extended on Allison's narratization by examining phenomenological approaches to group narration as it relates to group goal-setting and story-living, specifically in the classroom. We also elaborated on possible strategic uses of communal story-sharing as a pedagogical tactic related to student story-living. Finally, we concluded that, based on theorizing regarding narrative, popular culture, and pedagogy, there are three important characteristics of praxis in popular culture pedagogy: temporal currency, elicitation of relevant topics, and problem-posing potential.

Conclusion

Popular culture offers many unique possibilities in the classroom. The narrative nature of popular culture contains inherent problem-posing potential as well as a space for class-wide meta-narration and narratization regarding the understanding of course content as well as productive directions for the future of the class. We perceive that such advantages may be best utilized by situating entire courses in popular culture. We hold this position based on our experiences with "one-off" applications of popular culture in which there was limited time for students to engage in dialogue and develop communal (meta)narratives for themselves. However, we believe that limited (single lesson or unit-long) assignments featuring popular culture would still reap some of the benefits of a pedagogy of communion. Limited exposure to popular culture or exposure to various types of popular culture artifacts over time may still capitalize on problem-posing potential and be used to facilitate types of class discussions as related to course content. Even without a semester-long situation in a particular popular narrative, teachers and students may still meta-narrate about popular culture and further develop group identity associated with that meta-narration.

Additionally, even though our case study focused on the use of comics in the classroom, we fully believe other forms of popular culture could easily be situated in a pedagogy of communion and would offer similar advantages to those we experienced in our "Batman Class." Future research in popular culture pedagogy may include investigations of semester-long situating of classes with forms besides comics. Another productive area for future research may be a study of ways in which artifacts may gain or lose temporal currency and how high-currency artifacts go about evoking relevant meaning[s] with students.

We offer a pedagogy of communion as a framework for incorporating popular culture into classrooms – regardless of discipline. Instructors of popular culture are unified in their use of cultural narratives in pedagogical contexts. On its own popular culture is pedagogical (Bowman), we argue when combined with course specific content the power of the communal narratives of popular culture can be fully realized. We hope our theoretical framework may be useful for popular culture scholars to incorporate these cultural narratives into classes on an individual assignment, unit-based, or semester-long level.

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Man Up: Gendered Representations in *Halt and Catch Fire* and *Silicon Valley*

MELISSA VOSEN CALLENS

AMC's *Halt and Catch Fire* and HBO's *Silicon Valley* are two television series set in the context of the technology (tech) industry. Because the series are set in different decades (mid 1980s and mid 2010s) and in vastly different locations (Texas and California), it should be no surprise that *Halt and Catch Fire* and *Silicon Valley* represent gender differently. In addition to variances in setting, there is also a variance in genre. *Halt and Catch Fire* is an hour-long drama on a cable network, and *Silicon Valley* is a half-hour comedy on the premium cable channel HBO. Despite these differences, a feminist reading and comparison of the two reveals surprising and disconcerting similarities; both series reflect a continuing and alarming trend—the perpetuation of certain gender-role stereotypes in the field of computer science.

In both series, the narratives repeatedly reinforce the belief that female characters need to "man up" in order to be successful in the industry. This paper explores how the representations of female characters reinforce patriarchy, with a focus on physical appearance, communication styles, and the ineffective use of humor. After a side-by-side comparison of the two series, readers will see that *Halt and Catch Fire* does a better job overall challenging hegemonic gender-role stereotypes and advancing positive representations of women in the tech industry. Before analyzing these two artifacts, however, it is important to examine the history of women in the field of computer science and their subsequent portrayal in popular culture.

Women in Computer Science and Pop Culture's Gaze

Despite the recent push to recruit women in STEM-related fields, like computer science, the number of women is still alarming low. In fact, the number of women in computer science has been declining. In 2010-2011, according to the National Center for Education Statistics, women earn just 18% of undergraduate degrees awarded for computer science; in 1984, the year in which the first season of *Halt and Catch Fire* takes place, this number was around 37% (Snyder and Dillow).

There are many ideas theorizing why there is a lack of interest and why this drop took place. Steve Henn, National Public Radio, believes the idea that computers are for boys became a narrative sometime in the 1980s when the computing boom started. Known as the best-selling personal computer of all time, the Commodore 64, the hardware centerpiece of the second season of *Halt and Catch Fire*, was marketed almost exclusively to boys (Henn). Henn also cites movies like *Weird Science*, *Revenge of the Nerds*, *War Games*, all of which were about computers and how an "awkward geek boy genius uses tech savvy to triumph over adversity and win the girl." He notes, "[…] it became the story we told ourselves about the computing revolution" (Henn). While there are a plethora of additional 1980s movies that feature boys interested in computer science or science in general— *Can't Buy Me Love*, *Sixteen Candles*, and *Revenge of the Nerds II: Nerds in Paradise*—it is much harder to find movies in which young women are interested in similar topics. The message in the 1980s was clear: boys played with computers and engaged in science-related activities, and girls did not. Although not as prolific, this trend continues today, with movies such as: *Transformers* (2017), *The Social Network* (2010), and *Project Almanac* (2015).

Not seeing girls play with computers in marketing campaigns for computer-related products and women work with computers both in real life *and* in popular culture can be detrimental. In both cases, the lack of

diversity can cause women to question whether or not the computer science industry is right for them. According to Virginia Vailan, "When women and men think they belong and have a good chance of being successful, they are, not surprisingly, more interested in a field" (229). When young girls fail to see successful women in the tech industry, it influences their own interest in the field.

Many academics have studied the effects of the portrayal of STEM-related fields in popular culture and its relation to gender. In their review of relevant literature, Sapna Cheryan, Allison Master, and Andrew N. Meltzoff note that they believe women's choices on whether or not to pursue computer science and engineering fields "are constrained by societal factors, particularly their stereotypes about of the kind of people, the work involved, and the values of these fields" (6). These stereotypes are created and disseminated in popular culture, like in the films referenced by Henn and the television shows discussed in this article. In her book *Sexing Code: Subversion, Theory and Representation*, Claudia Herbst summarizes, "In an absence of an iconography that depicts empowered women developing digital tools, women's role in the defining of software cultures is diminished" (123). The way in which women are depicted in technology-related fields—and their striking absence— has had a lasting impact on the industry.

Stereotypes can have a profound effect. In their study, Sapna Cheryan, Victoria Plaut, Caitlin Handron, and Lauren Hudson asked college students to read a fabricated newspaper article about computer scientists that either described them fitting current stereotypes (as identified by college students in a previous study) or not fitting stereotypes. Women who read the article where computer scientists no longer fit stereotypes expressed more interest in the field than those who read the article that largely drew on stereotypes. The current image of the field is not one that women seemingly want to join. Unfortunately, in *Silicon Valley* and *Halt*

and Catch Fire, some of the representations of female characters may be off-putting to female viewers.

Methods

Seasons one and two of *Silicon Valley* and *Halt and Catch Fire* were screened and analyzed using feminist rhetorical criticism. These two shows were selected for two primary reasons: 1) their recent popularity, as both were renewed for third seasons, and 2) both series' creators have expressed either an interest in highlighting the lack of diversity in the tech industry and / or creating strong female characters. Mike Judge, creator of *Silicon Valley*, has repeatedly responded to criticism regarding the lack of female characters in his show, arguing, "We're taking jabs at them [tech companies in Silicon Valley] for it. It is different than endorsing it, I think" ("Mike Judge"). In a 2014 interview, *Halt and Catch Fire* showrunner Jonathan Lisco stated that he wanted Donna to be a strong, successful woman. He mentions, "We've invested a lot of time in the relationship of [Gordon and] Donna and making her a formidable character in the engineering and in the intellectual IQ level. We don't want her to be an accessory to Gordon's egomania" (Ng). In the same interview, Lisco's colleague, Chris Rogers, said he saw Donna as the anti-Skyler White, a female character that was independent and not portrayed as a wife standing in the way of her husband's dreams (Ng).

According to Sonja Foss, "Feminist criticism involves two basic steps: (1) analysis of the construction of gender in the artifact studied; and (2) exploration of what the artifact suggests about how the patriarchy is constructed and maintained or how it can be challenged and transformed" (169-170). In the remainder of this paper, the artifacts and the construction of gender within each artifact are analyzed. Following the critique, broader cultural implications of these representations are offered.

Episodes were screened multiple times and detailed notes were taken. Through these multiple screenings, three themes were identified related to representation of female characters: the absence of traditional markers of femininity in female characters, including those related to appearance, the communication styles of female characters, and the ineffective use of humor to encourage change within the industry. Through both series, these representations reinforce patriarchal culture and perpetuate gender-role stereotypes, which is particularly troubling given the lack of women in the STEM professions, specifically the computer science industry.

The Artifacts and Their Female Characters

Silicon Valley

HBO's *Silicon Valley* follows a group of programmers who develop incredibly fast compression software that has the potential to revolutionize the music, television, and movie industries. Throughout season one and two, Richard Hendricks and his five male friends work to secure funding for the app they call Pied Piper. Monica, a technology venture capitalist's head of operations, is the only female character that gets a noteworthy amount of screen time. Early in the series, Monica's boss offers to fund Pied Piper, solidifying her significant role on the show and her relationship with Richard's team. Throughout season one, she becomes both a confidant and advisor to Richard, and at one point, a love interest.

In season two, the group hires an engineer named Carla, a welcomed addition to the cast and one requested by fans. When the audience meets Carla, the touch-in-cheek dialogue appears to question and mock gender inequality in the real Silicon Valley. The dialogue between Carla and Jared, Pied Piper's head of business development, attempts to poke fun of Silicon Valley executives who seem to know little to nothing about recruiting and hiring women.

Halt and Catch Fire

In *Halt and Catch Fire*, the first few episodes of the series focus on a fast-talking, charismatic salesperson by the name of Joe MacMilian. McMillian convinces Gordon Clark, husband to Donna Clark, to reverse engineer his former employers' personal computer. With this proposition, Giant, a Cardiff Electric personal computer, is created. In addition to Donna, Gordon, and Joe, the show shadows Cameron, a software developer that Joe recruits, and immediately sleeps with, from a local college. The focus of the entire series shifts, however, to Cameron and Donna in season two. At the end of season one, Donna leaves her job at Texas Instruments to work with Cameron. Together, they form their own pre-internet gaming company, Mutiny. Other than Donna and Cameron, there are no other female characters in *Halt and Catch Fire*, other than minor characters cast as wives or secretaries.

The Stereotypical Female Hacker: Loss of Traditionally Feminine Traits

In *Silicon Valley*, the writers do little to challenge viewpoints and stereotypes related to women in technology-related fields. In *Halt and Catch Fire*, particularly in season two, the writers do a better job creating characters that defy stereotypes, but still fall prey to a common folly: one of their primary female characters is a caricature of female computer scientists. Two of three female characters discussed in the essay lack many traditional markers of femininity, in addition to communicating in a more masculine manner as well.

Dress and Appearance

In both series, two of the three major female characters are presented in alternative, masculine dress. This is a representation seen time and time again throughout popular culture, suggesting to viewers that in order to be successful in this environment or to simply fit in, women need to look a certain way. These representations, void of many female signifiers, reinforce the idea that male signifiers are the norm. Away from Hollywood and in the real Silicon Valley, it has been reported that some females do adapt a more masculine persona in order to fit in. Herbst writes, "In addition to dressing and behaving in a 'male' way, women also report feeling engendered male or neutralized" (21). The representations in *Silicon Valley* and *Halt and Catch Fire* are ultimately detrimental, however, because it prevents many women, who have traditional markers of femininity, from "seeing" themselves in this industry. These representations also fail to encourage companies to create a more welcoming culture for more women, suggesting women must adapt to this "bro culture."

In *Silicon Valley*, when Jared meets Carla, he mutters, "I love *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*" ("The Lady"). While funny on the surface, her character does mirror female leads in the movies *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* and *Hackers* as well as the television series *Halt and Catch Fire*. This is such a common representation that *The Simpsons* poked fun of it in their latest season in an episode called "The Girl Code*,*" in which Lisa changed her appearance after she starts coding and developing an app. The continued absence of traditionally feminine markers of appearance in popular culture suggests to female viewers that in order to be successful in this industry, they must be willing to lose some (or all) markers of femininity in appearance. Ironically, when female characters are not masculinized, they are typically over sexualized, like Abby on *NCIS*. In popular culture, the representations of female computer scientists are polarizing.

In *Halt and Catch Fire*, Cameron's physical appearance is also similar. Cameron wears her hair short (although longer in season two) and dresses alternatively and often in a masculine manner, including military-inspired jackets and white "wife beater" tank tops. Her appearance also perpetuates the notion that feminine markers must be forfeited to be successful as a programmer. Donna, on the other hand, looks nothing like Cameron and Carla. Donna does not fit the mold often cast for women in the tech industry. She would not be described as a punk, goth, or masculine. She is a brilliant programmer, who retains many of her feminine signifiers. She also has the most conflicts with male colleagues and subordinates of any of the female characters. Despite Cameron's stereotypical look, seeing both Cameron and Donna, two very different women successful in the same field, is quite positive and powerful.

Communication Style

In both *Silicon Valley* and *Halt and Catch Fire*, the women are not only expected to dress in a way that mirrors their male colleagues, but they are also expected to use language that mirrors their male colleagues as well. In some instances, the women are unfamiliar with the language; in other instances, the language, although familiar, is degrading and hurtful. Despite demeaning language, female characters are repeatedly expected to embrace this language in order to fit in, and in some instances, prove their worthiness.

From the start, it is clear that Carla fits in well at Pied Piper because she is able to speak the language of her male colleagues. She jokes with Jared, unbeknownst to him, about wanting to invite her friend Cunty to the house. When Jared asks her not to call her friend Cunty, as that violates the company's new harassment policy, she gives him a stone-cold stare and states, "I feel like it kind of violates my rights… as a woman" ("The Lady"). This leaves Jared speechless and perplexed, causing him to retreat. It is here the writers of *Silicon Valley* are attempting to poke fun of

real-life tech companies, and their inability to communicate with women and create appropriate policies in the workplace.

In this episode, Carla takes back the word cunt, a word traditionally used by men, and one that is often used to degrade women or other men that are considered to have feminine traits. In her study, Karyn Stapleton explains that male respondents identified the word cunt as more acceptable for men to use than women. She also notes that the word cunt tends "to be used only in the context of all-male interaction (a phenomenon described by nine men)", thereby marking the term as specifically masculine (31). The way in which Carla uses the word cunt, pointing out how ludicrous it is the company just now, after hiring a woman, established an anti-harassment policy, allows her to challenge her male colleagues. At the same time, the fact that she must use the patriarchal language of the industry in order to be successful and accepted is paradoxical and unfortunate.

In addition to joking with Jared, Carla immediately starts razzing Dinesh and Gilfoyle, tricking them into thinking she makes more money than they do because she knows it would bother them. Her trickery works because the two soon file a complaint with Jared about their new "hostile" work environment. Carla's razzing of Dinesh and Gilfolye solidifies her position in the company. This exchange demonstrates that she belongs in the culture they have created, how inappropriate it may be. If Carla had not acted in this manner or felt uncomfortable with this type of work environment, she may have found herself without a job. The "sexist, alpha-male culture that can make women and other people who don't fit the mold feel unwelcome, demeaned or even endangered" (Cain Miller). While Carla's story is one of success, as she eventually becomes a valued member of Pied Piper, it is only a success because she must succumb, accept, and make, sexist remarks herself.

In her *New York Times* piece on the culture of many start-up companies, Claire Cain Miller notes the problematic nature of how many

of these companies, like Pied Piper, are started. She writes, "The lines between work and social life are often blurry, because people tend to be young and to work long hours, and the founders and first employees are often friends. And start-ups pride themselves on a lack of bureaucracy, forgoing big-company layers like human resources departments" (Cain Miller). Policies protecting employees from harassment are often absent, much like with Pied Piper. In this regard, *Silicon Valley* seems like an accurate representation of tech start-up companies, but this representation is still problematic, as it further perpetuates the notion that women do not belong in this industry.

In *Halt and Catch Fire*, the viewer sees some of the difficulties of being a woman in the computer science industry, particularly for women in charge and for those that refuse to abandon their feminine traits. For example, when Donna and Cameron attempt to secure financing from an investor, Donna is asked if she has or wants children. The investor argues that it is his business, as he "needs to know that [they're] fully committed, even over biological imperatives" ("New Coke"). Upon leaving, Cameron lamented that the investor did not want to hear about their goals or future plans, but rather, he wanted an Adam's apple ("New Coke"). As women, they were expected to have and talk about their children, but these same children were considered a detriment to their work as engineers.

Nurturing

According to Barrie Gunter, traits such as "nurturance, dependence, and passivity are typically classified as feminine, while dominance and aggression are generally considered as masculine" (29). Female characters, particularly those with traditional female signifiers, are expected to exhibit nurturing characteristics, something their male colleagues are not expected to display. If these female characters fail to nurture, they are often criticized. Despite this expectation, when female characters *do* exhibit nurturing characteristics, it often leaves them in

problematic situations. In some instances, nurturing is an inappropriate response to the given situation, even detrimental to their work. In certain situations, it can also cause them to be viewed as less than their male counterparts. This is often the case for Donna in *Halt and Catch Fire*.

Throughout season one, Donna is frustrated with her husband and his inability to complete projects. Donna, who works for Texas Instruments, is also a computer programmer and is considered by many to be a more successful programmer than her husband. She is even responsible for some of the engineering in regard to Gordon's project, as she saves work after a power surge. Unfortunately, in season one, she is not depicted as brilliant, but rather as a nagging wife, who isn't nurturing or supportive. While she ultimately saves Gordon's work, she is cast as a villain of sorts to antihero Gordon—as a woman emasculating her husband. Because she is cast as a villain, and not a supportive, nurturing figure, audiences had a difficult time connecting with her.

Other popular shows on AMC have done the same to their strong and brilliant female characters: Skyler White in *Breaking Bad*, Betty Draper in *Mad Men*, and Lori Grimes in *The Walking Dead*. All three of these characters were met with audience distain. The female lead as unintended villain has become such a pattern that Anna Gunn, the actress who played White, penned in op-ed article for *The New York Times* on the subject. Gunn argues that while Skyler, like her husband Walt, is morally compromised, she wasn't "judged by the same set of standards as Walter" (A21). Murder after murder, many fans stood by Walt, while criticizing Skyler—calling her a bitch and shrew. Donna is also portrayed as the woman standing between a man and his dreams, but the narrative changes in season two.

After her professional split from Gordon, in the first episode of season two, Donna finds herself falling into the role of supervisor, and in some cases, work mother, because of Cameron's refusal to take charge and share some of the leadership responsibilities. The situation clearly

frustrates Donna, as this path is a path she was used to travelling with Gordon. She proclaims to Cameron, "I don't want to be the mom here. Look, I do that at home. I came here to do what I love, and I don't love dealing with the power company. [.…] And I don't love playing wet-nurse to a bunch of coders who act more like kindergartners" ("SETI"). Because of her female signifiers, she is expected to nurture.

In her work on moral development, Carol Gilligan argues that men, or those with masculine traits, are more concerned with issues surrounding justice, whereas women, or those with feminine traits, are more concerned with issues surrounding care and responsibility. Because Donna refuses to play the role of work mother (and Skyler as a dutiful wife), their characters are often met with distain because they are not fulfilling societal expectations. Their refusal to nurture in a traditional-sense is seen as black mark on their character. When they do nurture, however, they are either ridiculed or taken advantage of in some capacity. With Cameron and Carla, because they adopt more traditionally masculine traits, the expectation to nurture in the workplace is not necessarily as strong.

Some may suggest it is Cameron's immaturity that causes her to refuse to take on duties other than coding, to take on any sort of leadership role, but it is clear that Cameron fears she too will be viewed in the same light as Donna. She knows that women in leadership roles are often viewed as bitches or shrews, not simply strong. If they do exhibit any feminine characteristics, they are also expected to nurture. She is fighting to fit in with her employees, even in the early boom of this industry. Her behavior, as well as Carla's, is an example of how these women adapt in order to survive in a patriarchal culture.

Interpersonal Relationships

Often, in popular film and television, female characters have little to no contact with one another. When they do, it is to discuss men. In *Halt and Catch Fire*, however, this is not the case. Despite their differences, and

there are many, most of the scenes between Cameron and Donna are focused not on a love interest or children but work, passing the Bechdel Test handily, a test that measures if female characters talk about topics other than men to each other. While Cameron is involved with Joe in season one, and Donna is married to Gordon, their relationship centers on work, not the men in their lives. In addition to romance not being the focus of the female characters' conversations, Donna breaks the mold in regard to other stereotypes of women in STEM. In her findings, Steinke reveals that depictions that reinforce traditional social and cultural assumptions of the role of women in STEM were often found; most were single and did not have children (51). Donna, however, is married, and has two children.

On the other hand, when women in STEM are involved in relationships, they are often romantically involved with their male co-stars, making the romance a large part of their characters' stories, like Cameron and her relationship with Joe in season one of *Halt and Catch Fire*. In her analysis of popular films featuring women scientists and engineers, Steinke explains that romance is a dominant theme in many of the films that featured female scientists and engineers (49). Many female characters were romantically involved with one of the male primary characters in the films she studied. In season two, Cameron and Joe stop seeing each other, and Donna and Gordon's relationship becomes less important to the storyline.

Throughout the first few episodes, Cameron and Donna continue to clash, but at the same time, have fantastic collaborative breakthroughs. This partnership is surprising, however, given their history together and how they often were at odds in season one. In their first heated exchange in season one, Cameron asks Donna if she has every "worked this close to metal." Donna scoffs and replies, "Well, FYI, I am also an engineer with a degree from Berkeley who's not only created my share of code, but given birth to two real humans" ("Close to the Metal"). This is a theme with Donna. She wants to be respected as an engineer and as a wife and mother.

Despite the tension between Donna and Cameron in season one, Donna helps Cameron recover her lost work, but Cameron does not change. In the first two episodes of season two, Cameron hires two people without consulting Donna, and she also chastises Donna for creating a chat function in their gaming community. In season two, Cameron continues to make irresponsible and rash decisions as well as make snide comments toward Donna, while Donna continues to do significant damage control.

Old Habits Die Hard

Beyond the main characters described in this piece, both series have very few additional female characters. Not only is the lack of women in these shows problematic, but so is also the lack of diversity in the roles that are cast. Female characters are often love interests or in supporting roles, such as administrative assistants. The female characters with smaller roles in *Silicon Valley* perpetuate some of the other common stereotypes of women in the tech industry.

We see a smattering of women at Hooli, the megacorporation that is clearly a parody of Google. Most of those women, however, are either in the background, pictured in a large group of engineers, coders, designers, and lawyers, or are assistants to Hooli administrators. Most get very little screen time. On the other hand, it is important to note that there are several females in *Silicon Valley* that hold advanced, prominent positions in the business side of the technology industry: Monica's boss in season two Laurie Bream and porn website CEO Molly Kendall. Yet, Pied Piper and the programmers they meet with from other tech companies are almost, alarmingly, all male. For example, End Frame, the company that attempts to trick Richard into sharing his algorithm, is 100 percent male.

Satirizing Silicon Valley or Perpetuating Sex Role Stereotypes: The Use of Humor

The writers of *Silicon Valley* use satire to argue that conditions in these tech fields are appalling, and often degrading, toward women. Unfortunately, the humor is often negated, by the very roles in which their female characters are given. In an interview, creator Mike Judge reiterates that his series is satirizing the current working conditions in Silicon Valley and states, "I think if we just came out with the show and every company was 50 percent women, 50 percent men, we kind of would be doing a disserve by not calling attention to the fact that it's really 87 percent male" ("Mike Judge"). T.J. Miller, who plays Erlich Bachmann in the series, echoes Judge's statement, "We're on the audience's side. We're on the side of the people who should be examining Silicon Valley and why there aren't so many women, why it's not very diverse."

When the audience meets Carla, the touch-in-cheek dialogue appears to question and mock gender inequality in the real Silicon Valley. The dialogue between Carla and Jared pokes fun of Silicon Valley executives who seem to know little to nothing about recruiting and hiring women. This type of dialogue is peppered throughout season two. In the first season, there are virtually no women, except for Monica and a few very minor characters, and there was very little mention of women in general. Fans noticed and complained.

Although rhetorical critics such as Burke and Carlson have noted the use of comedic strategies, including satire, to encourage social change, these strategies are ineffective when the use of comedy is at the expense of the women in these shows. While there are clear moments *Silicon Valley* is satirizing current working conditions in Silicon Valley, the show misses its mark in other areas in season two. At one point in the series, Dinesh falls for a woman at a tech convention whom he thinks is an amazing coder ("Proof of Concept"). He later finds out that she has not done the

coding he finds impressive; rather, she had a man do the coding for her. At the end of the episode, Dinesh laments condescendingly— at least she knows how to tweet. Given the small number of women in the series to begin with, using one of the additional female characters to perpetuate the stereotype that woman are incapable of coding, is unfortunate. The laughs at this character's expense reinforce gender-role stereotypes, negating much of the witty dialogue in the show.

"I am an Engineer"

There are other instances in which the satire calls into question the working conditions in Silicon Valley. During her interview Jared proclaims to Carla, "We would absolutely love to have a strong woman working here" ("The Lady"). Dumbfounded by Jared's statement, Carla retorts, "I am not a women engineer. I am an engineer" ("The Lady"). After the exchange, Carla looks at Richard and asks if Jared is just there to try and rattle her, another seemingly tongue-in-cheek reference to the interview process at some of the larger tech firms in Silicon Valley. Carla cannot believe anyone could be so inappropriate and awkward. Richard assures her that is just Jared's nature.

At first Carla seems annoyed, but like the audience, she also seems to be slightly amused by Jared's complete and utter awkwardness and decides to not pursue additional conversation on the subject. This awkwardness, and inability to create a work culture in which women are welcomed and embraced, is what Miller referenced in his interview. Miller quips, "We're trying to say isn't it strange — and what kind of culture do we bring these men up in, where they literally not only have awkward interactions with girls, and computers are their best friend, but they don't have any women to interact with?" (Silman). But Carla's dismissal of Jared's behavior, and our dismissal as an audience, ultimately excuses these conditions and behavior of executives in Silicon Valley.

Conclusion

Halt and Catch Fire is set years before there was much of a tech scene at all, making it impossible to compare it to *Silicon Valley* outright. As mentioned before, they are also two completely different television show genres. What is strikingly similar and important, however, is that both shows include representations of female characters that reinforce patriarchy. The representations in these shows matter a great deal because of their popularity and the fact the showrunners from both series assert they are trying to address some of the concerns surrounding the misrepresentations of women in this industry.

    Halt and Catch Fire, particularly in season one, does use some of the tired tropes we have seen many times before: women as pragmatic dream-crushers of series' male antiheros or women who are good with computers, but are only successful if the abandon many of their feminine traits. On the other hand, Donna is a very complex character and clearly breaks the stereotypical view of a female computer scientist. In addition, her relationship with Cameron is complex, and as stated above, nearly all of their scenes handily pass the Bechdal test. *Halt and Catch Fire's* season two was a vast improvement over the first; the writers seemed to have found a way, at least in Donna, to show the complex nature of that character and the many roles she plays in her life.

    Fast-forwarding over three decades, one could applaud *Silicon Valley* for satirically addressing the gender inequity in the location of the same name. The witty banter between characters, particularly Carla and Jared, demonstrates how women are often treated and othered either knowingly or unknowingly in tech startup companies. Unfortunately, like *Halt and Catch Fire*, *Silicon Valley* also uses many of the same tropes seen in other shows, making many of the female characters into one-dimensional props for the male characters in the series. Even if writers wanted to accurately represent *the number* of women working in Silicon Valley, they could

have worked harder at representing those women in a more multi-dimensional manner, like Donna in *Halt and Catch Fire*. The women in smaller roles, such as Monica's boss or some of the female lawyers shown, are a nice addition, but these characters are rarely developed.

In their pursuit to hire a woman, Jared offers the best line of all, unknowingly summing up the climate in tech startup companies that are heavily populated with male employees and Silicon Valley in general. He quips, "It's like we're the Beatles and now we just need Yoko." While we all can laugh at the joke—Jared is, after all, so pathetically likeable—it is seemingly true. In a world full of male engineers named John and Paul, a woman engineer is still often viewed as Yoko.

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"It's my turn, Babe": Postfeminism and the Dual-Career Marriage on *Friday Night Lights*

J. SCOTT OBERACKER

Perhaps the most interesting fact about the sports-themed drama *Friday Night Lights*, which ran on NBC and the 101 network from 2006-2011 (and remains a popular "binge-watching" choice on many streaming sites today), is that, as TV-critic Alan Sepinwall argues, "it had always been a show about marriage as much as it was about football" (298). [1] Ostensibly focusing on a high school football team in Texas, the show places its emotional center, not upon the football players themselves, but upon the characters of Coach Eric Taylor and his wife, Tami. In fact, throughout the show's five-season run, the fictional Taylors were uniformly lauded within the popular press as "the best portrayal of marriage on television …" (Fernandez). [2] What critics seemed to admire most about the Taylor marriage was its sense of realism and nuance; a result of the producers' decision to eschew overly dramatic narrative strategies and focus instead on the day-to-day struggles endured by married couples (Basinger 331). But while such praise is well-deserved, I would argue that it elides the most important aspect of the Taylor marriage: the fact that it is built upon a progressive representation of gender equality unique within

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[1] Created by Peter Berg, the show is also a remake of his 2004 film of the same name.

[2] Such assessments were echoed within academia as well. In her 2012 historical account of marriage on film & TV, Jeanine Basinger reserved her highest praise for *FNL*: "It's possible that there's never been a more honest and natural marriage portrayed in film and television" (328).

contemporary, mainstream media culture. Specifically, *FNL*'s depiction of the Taylors offers a unique challenge to the ways in which contemporary media depictions of dual-career, heterosexual couples work to reinforce patriarchal notions of gender relations.

This aspect is crucial because, as many scholars have argued, we are currently living within a "postfeminist" media age (Gill; Levine; McRobbie; Negra; Tasker and Negra). Here, postfeminism is defined as a hegemonic process that undermines feminist gains, not through direct opposition, but rather through discursive tropes that pay lip service to notions of female empowerment and "personal choice," while simultaneously re-framing those concepts in ways that present traditional gendered relations as the only legitimate options.[3] More often than not, it is through mainstream media narratives that such postfeminist logic is cultivated and reinforced.

For instance, Diane Negra has described a host of postfeminist tropes that have arisen across the mainstream film & television landscape, from domestic "retreatism" to "housewife chic," in which well-educated, successful female protagonists find personal fulfillment by "choosing" to pull back from their careers and return to lives of domesticity (*What a Girl Wants*). Such tropes represent what Negra calls "canny distortions of feminist dogma," in which the feminist concept of "choice" is now utilized towards traditionalist ends, encouraging women to "opt-out" of their professional careers and back *into* the domesticated life that feminism has purportedly left behind ("'Quality Postfeminism?'").

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[3] Here it is important to point out that the term, postfeminism, has been hotly debated by scholars in recent years. However, Levine argues that "a consensus is beginning to emerge" around "the increasingly widespread usage of 'postfeminist' to describe the hegemonic gender politics of contemporary western culture …" (139-140). For a more detailed accounting of the term's various definitions, and a defense of the definition employed here, see: Gill.

As Sarah Whitney argues, the problem with such tropes is not simply the notion of "choice," itself, but rather its rhetorical (re)framing. As she explains:

> It is my contention that in post-feminist rhetoric, the framing of choice with regards to occupation is undergoing a significant shift in meaning. *Being able* to choose your vocation, while still important, is being nudged aside in favor of the idea that a choice *between* career and family is inevitable.

In this way, the discourse of postfeminism transforms "choice" from a right, to an *imperative*. More than this, however, it is an imperative *only* for women: "Choice has historically been an occupational wedge word, squeezing between 'career' and family' on the presumption that, for women, only one may be successfully sought" (Whitney). Such framing only serves to reinforce a gendered double-standard in which women *must* choose between work and family, while men have an implicit right to enjoy *both*. In this way, postfeminist discourse celebrates a particular notion of female autonomy while simultaneously deflecting any real engagement with the concept of gender equality.

Such discursive strategies, of course, help to define the cultural context within which *actual* women must negotiate their everyday experience. For instance, a recent study of Harvard Business School graduates revealed that, even for married (heterosexual) couples involving two professional partners, traditionalist notions of gender relations still held sway. The study found that the male partner's career usually took precedence, while the female partner slowed her professional ambitions to provide the majority of childcare labor (Ely, Stone and Ammerman). The study's authors suggest that one reason such traditionalist arrangements continue to endure has to do with the ways in which popular discourses influence how we think and talk about gender:

At a certain point the belief that a woman's primary career obstacle is *herself* became conventional wisdom. From "opting out" to "ratcheting back," the ways we talk about women's careers often emphasize their willingness to scale down or forgo opportunities, projects and jobs. The very premise seems to be that women value career less than men do, or that mothers don't want high-profile, challenging work (Ely, Stone and Ammerman 108).

Thus, while the authors don't invoke the term, "postfeminism," their study suggests the real-world consequences of this discursive structure. As Diane Negra puts it: "the overwhelming ideological impact that is made by an accumulation of postfeminist cultural material is the reinforcement of conservative norms as the ultimate 'best choices' in women's lives" (*What a Girl Wants* 4).

It is within and against such postfeminist discourse that I situate this analysis of *Friday Night Lights*. Specifically, I argue that the depiction of the Taylor marriage offers an important challenge to postfeminist logic; especially where contemporary television is concerned. Television, of course, has often been a space within which popular forms of feminism have taken root through the representation of strong, professional female characters, from the likes of Mary Tyler Moore and Murphy Brown, to Carrie Bradshaw, Sidney Briscoe and Carrie Mathison (to name but a few). However, as Amanda Lotz has argued, the vast majority of TV's feminist heroines have shared one specific attribute: being *single* (88). And while representations of strong, single women have provided what Diane Negra calls a crucial corrective to the mainstream media's "pathologization of single femininity" ("'Quality Postfeminism'?") Lotz argues that this tendency to embrace *only one kind* of feminist heroine threatens to, once again, impose constraints upon women in terms of gender identity:

> The uniformity with which [these characters] work outside of the home and in most cases are unmarried establishes a new construct of what women should be rather than increasing the uninhabitability of confining gender roles. Is it impossible for a dramatic character to have a meaningful, committed, romantic relationship? … Are feminist characters and married characters mutually exclusive? … Regardless of the old rules and frameworks, such uniformity should require concern and debate (173).

Indeed, the exclusionary nature of such a representational strategy threatens to reinforce the either/or choice (career vs. home) that undergirds postfeminist culture in the first place. In addition, I would argue that such a dichotomy (single vs. married) can often serve to sidestep the part that *men* have to play in challenging and transforming contemporary gender relations – a convenient slippage that patriarchal logic is only happy to oblige.

Which brings us back to *Friday Night Lights*. Ultimately, I argue that *FNL*'s depiction of the Taylor's relationship makes the unique contribution of challenging postfeminist logic from *within* the institution of heterosexual marriage. It does so through a series of narrative strategies that overturn four contemporary narrative tropes indicative of today's postfeminist culture: the trope of feminine "retreatism" (Negra, *What a Girl*); "masculine crisis" (Beynon; MacKinnon); the "new momism," (Douglas & Michaels); and the "rhetoric of choice" (Vavrus "Opting Out Moms"; Whitney). In so doing, I argue that *Friday Night Lights* helps to widen the range of possibilities for feminist media representations beyond those offered within the contemporary context of postfeminist culture.[4]

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[4] Of course, it should be noted that the show's progressive depiction of a dual-career marriage should not be taken as evidence of a newfound commitment on the part of

A "Working" Relationship: FNL as Anti-Retreatist Narrative

As many scholars have argued, one of the basic hallmarks of postfeminist discourse is its reframing of the notion of "choice" (Whitney; Vavrus 2007). According to this logic, second-wave feminism's work is complete; the ability for women to choose their own life-path has resulted in full-equality and the obliteration of gender-discrimination. However, such an emphasis on the "freedom to choose" masks the discursive context within which women must make such choices. More often than not, those choices are defined as *between* career and home; *between* professionalism and domesticity (Whitney). As such, the message is clear: while men have always enjoyed an authoritative presence in both the professional and domestic spheres, women have to choose. They can't, as the saying goes, "have it all."

Moreover, as Diane Negra has argued, the postfeminist response to such stark pronouncements has been to move in the opposite direction: if second-wave feminism focused on the freedom to pursue a career, postfeminism would focus on the freedom to return home. The result, she argues, has been the rise of female-centered narratives within popular film

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network executives to challenge television's history of deploying gender stereotypes. As Jennifer Gillan has detailed, NBC liked the show for different reasons: its sports-themed generic elements created synergistic opportunities through which to cross-promote NBC Sports programming such as the Super Bowl and the Olympics, for which they had recently acquired the rights. At the same time, the show's relationship-driven narrative elements helped reinforce NBC's brand identity as a "prestige" network, offering critically-acclaimed dramas (Gillan). It wasn't until the show began to struggle in the ratings that NBC shifted its marketing strategies to emphasize those relationship-driven aspects over the football, in an explicit attempt to attract more female viewers (Ryan). That said, the show's creators have always maintained that the depiction of a realistic "marriage of equals" was central to the show's initial vision (Mays). Indeed, creator Peter Berg sites the transformation of Coach Taylor's wife away from the much more stereotypical version found in the original film as one of the key elements to the show's original conception (Mays).

and television that revolve around a fantasy of "retreatism," in which the heroine "unlearns the insights of feminism" (Negra). Such characters are often depicted as jaded, regretful professionals who rediscover their true selves only by returning to domestic settings and the familiar roles "of daughter, sister, wife or sweetheart" (Negra). Thus, while the feminist notion of "choice" is upheld, one particular choice is clearly idealized over any other. Through narrative strategies such as this, gender equality is rendered in distinctly unequal terms, as femininity is repeatedly equated with the domestic sphere, *even when* female characters work outside it.

This is the perfect place to begin a consideration of the gender politics of *Friday Night Lights* because, in many ways, the narrative arc of Tami Taylor turns the tables on such retreatist narratives. Throughout the show's five seasons, Tami's storyline sees her move from the role of "devoted coach's wife" into the positions of guidance counselor, high school principal and, finally, college dean. Thus, while many postfeminist texts focus on women rediscovering the joys of domesticity, *FNL* focuses on a woman for whom "domestic bliss" is clearly not enough. But what makes Tami's anti-retreatist journey so unique is that the show does not depict her career simply as a choice she makes for herself, outside (or against) her familial role. This represents an important shift in the way that dual-career marriages have typically been represented on mainstream TV. For example, in his analysis of 1990s television, Robert Hanke argues that when female characters left the home to work, such decisions were usually construed in *personal* terms, depicted as something women chose to do *for themselves*, rather than as an integral facet of the couple's life and well-being (81). In this way, a woman's choice to pursue a career did not threaten the traditional gender norms governing heterosexual marriage; husbands retained their patriarchal position of authority via their status as household provider, while wives were allowed to "dabble" in careers that

were defined as existing outside and apart from the traditional family structure.[5]

Such is not the case for Tami and Eric Taylor. Instead, the show makes clear that Tami's choice to pursue a career is a *family* decision that has a crucial impact on the Taylors' fortunes. For instance, the first time we visit the Taylors in their home comes in the second episode of Season One ("Eyes Wide Open"). Eric storms into the kitchen to tell Tami that the AC is broken and he can't fix it. "Sugar," replies Tami, "I think it's time for me to get a job." This scene establishes the fact that, while Tami is certainly following her own professional ambitions, she is also taking a job out of financial necessity; the Taylors can't make ends meet on Eric's salary alone. This move works to challenge the either/or logic of career vs. domesticity. Rather than frame Tami's career as somehow against or "outside" the family structure, it is articulated from the outset as being integral to the Taylor family, itself.

Perhaps more importantly, however, such a depiction also challenges Eric's patriarchal claim to familial authority by allowing Tami to step into, and ultimately take over, the dominant financial role in the family. As the series progresses, the power dynamic between the Taylors shifts dramatically in terms of which partner commands the role of "breadwinner." Over the course of the show's five seasons, Eric experiences what can only be described as a downwards career trajectory; briefly breaking into the ranks of Division 1-A college football, only to quickly return to the high school level in Season Two, be subsequently demoted to a bottom-tier school district at the end of Season Three, and ultimately let go towards the end of Season Five. As such, *Tami's* career progression – from guidance counselor, to principal, to Dean – positions

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[5]In fact, this is not unlike the arrangement the Harvard Business School study found within contemporary dual-career marriages; women who downgraded their careers to focus on child-rearing while their husbands' careers took precedence, both in terms of familial importance *and* personal ambition.

her, unambiguously, as the primary financial "provider" for the Taylor family.

But more than challenge Eric's role as patriarchal provider, Tami also challenges his *symbolic* position as head of household. No where is this challenge more overt than in the series' final episodes, when Tami receives the offer to become Dean of Admissions at (fictional) Braemore College, an elite Liberal Arts school halfway across the country in Philadelphia ("The March"). The Braemore offer comes at a moment of professional precariousness for Eric, who has just been let go from one coaching job and forced to take another with an administration he doesn't trust. As such, the Braemore job offers the Taylors the kind of financial stability Eric can no longer provide – crucial for a couple just starting to raise a second daughter. But perhaps more importantly, the job also offers Tami the kind of professional prestige that *Eric* had long enjoyed as beloved town football coach; prestige he would now have to relinquish were he to follow his wife to Pennsylvania.

Initially, this is a reality that proves too painful for Eric to accept. He regards Tami's desire to take the job as a personal threat, even accusing her of "rooting against" him ("Texas Whatever"). But to the show's credit, it does not let Eric off the hook for such a response. Tami ultimately prevails during an emotional conversation in which she defines the issue, not simply as one about geography and finances, but ultimately about equality and fairness: "Its my turn, babe," she tells him. "I have loved you, and you have loved me, and we have compromised. Both of us. For *your* job. And now its time to talk about doing that for my job." ("Always"). Here, Eric's initial response, and Tami's rejoinder, are crucial for the way they reveal a certain underlying truth often masked by the kind of dual-career narratives presented on mainstream TV: that Tami's ability to pursue her professional dreams *will necessitate* Eric's relinquishing of his own patriarchal privilege. And this is precisely what he does. The series

ends with Eric giving up his job to follow Tami as she pursues hers; a far cry from the retreatist fantasies of today's postfeminist culture.

Perhaps the most important aspect of their dual-career marriage, however, is the fact that, for most of the show's five season run, Tami's job is located within the same local high school for which her husband coaches. As such, Tami's work-life becomes a central aspect of the Taylor's home-life. This move is crucial since the distinction between *home* and *work* has always been central to the maintenance of traditional gender relations, and a central tenet of postfeminist "retreatist" narratives. As Diane Negra argues, retreatist narratives often focus on a kind of "epiphany in which the professional woman comes to realize that the self she has cultivated through education and professionalization is in some ways deficient unless she can rebuild a family base" (*What a Girl Wants* 21). These narratives reinforce a traditionalist notion of "essential femininity that is deemed to only be possible in domestic settings" (72).

Such a depiction is rendered impossible on *Friday Night Lights*, given the fact that many of Tami and Eric's interactions happen at work, rather than at home; and more often than not, in *Tami*'s office. Throughout much of the first season, Eric is shown vying with his own players for a few minutes of "Ms. Taylor's" time, while many of their subsequent conversations take place across Tami's desk, with Eric sitting in a chair usually reserved for her students. Indeed, given her role at the school, Eric often finds himself in a position of subordination to Tami, such as when she discovers his star fullback has been cheating and Eric is forced to beg her for "leniency" ("Nevermind"); or when Tami unilaterally decides to reroute a large sum of money earmarked for the football program towards academic needs instead ("I Knew You When"). Ultimately, what these workplace narratives do is construct an image of marriage based upon an ideal of collegiality – a type of relationship that exists outside the kinds of gender norms that so often define married life for heterosexual couples.

The most poignant example of this comes early in Season Three when, agonizing over whether or not to replace his veteran quarterback with a younger, more talented player, Eric drives Tami over to the local bar for some good old-fashioned venting ("Hello, Goodbye"). The location of this conversation is crucial for, in the parlance of *Friday Night Lights*, "the bar" is specifically coded as masculine; it is the place where football players come to drink, team boosters come to gloat, and where Eric usually comes to engage in "man-to-man" talks with the likes of Buddy Garrity (a former football player and friend). As such, the natural way in which Eric and *Tami* now occupy this space, as both husband and wife *and* as professional colleagues, represents a unique image of gender equality; one that is not often seen on mainstream television.

The Coach's Wife and the Principal's Husband: (Re)Mediating "Masculine Crisis"

The affable sense of collegiality that develops between Tami and Eric exemplifies another important shift in the way that *FNL* portrays gender relations against today's postfeminist culture. As many scholars have argued, patriarchy has often responded to feminist challenges made against its authority via a narrative of "masculine crisis." This is a trope with a long cultural legacy, perhaps best exemplified during the mid-late 1990s, when a spate of popular "male paranoia" films arose, that sympathized with male characters who found their masculine authority under attack by newly professionalized women (MacKinnon 46-7; Beynon 84). The narrative of masculine crisis was also prevalent on mainstream TV, though depicted in a somewhat more benign form, through a series of well-worn tropes such as that of the sensitive "new man," often found in 1990s sitcoms like *Home Improvement* and *Coach* (Hanke). Such shows purported to satirize notions of hegemonic masculinity through a "battle of the sexes" motif in which "macho" males like Tim Taylor and Hayden

Fox reacted to the mild feminism of their wives and girlfriends by trying –
(usually halfheartedly, and without much success) to get in touch with
their "sensitive" sides. Such depictions hardly encouraged male viewers to
give up patriarchal notions of gender identity, however. As Robert Hanke
argues: "these shows articulate a particular discursive strategy … which is
to reverse neocynicism (popular feminism from below) into its opposite,
cynicism (the male power bloc tells the truth about themselves and denies
any ability to do anything about it)" (3).

Such cynicism has only become more overt in recent sitcoms, as
evidenced by shows like *Two & a Half Men*, which openly mocked the
"new man's" sensitive turn by contrasting it with a more powerful,
hegemonic version (Hatfield); or marriage-based shows such as *Everybody
Loves Raymond* and *King of Queens*, which are built around what Jennifer
Reed calls the trope of the "beleaguered husband and demanding wife."
Through such representations, the narrative of "masculine crisis" is
reinforced, giving the impression that "true" masculinity is under attack by
demanding, powerful women; and undermined by acquiescent, sensitive
men. Of course, as many feminist scholars have argued, the very notion
that a loss of masculine authority represents a "crisis" to be resolved is, in
and of itself, a hegemonic strategy geared towards recouping that very
privilege (Beynon 94). All such narratives do is allow male characters to
"perform their anxiety, irritation and exhaustion" over women's increased
power (Reed). It would therefore seem only natural for a program like
Friday Night Lights to exhibit a similar tendency; offering up Eric Taylor
as the quintessential "man in crisis."

But while Tami's job at the school certainly leads to tension between
the Taylors, it never leads to any kind of gendered anguish on the part of
Eric. Nor is his willingness to let go of his masculine privilege depicted as
a form of masculine capitulation to be satirized and/or ridiculed. Instead,
the Taylor's ability to negotiate an egalitarian relationship (both at home
and at work) represents an important shift away from the "masculine

crisis" mentality that has so often defined narratives about contemporary gender relations within the mainstream media.

This shift becomes apparent during one of the most dramatic narrative arcs of the series, in which Eric's assistant coach makes a racist comment to a local reporter. Struggling with the decision of whether or not to fire him, Eric goes to Tami for advice, clarifying that what he needs is not spousal support, but her professional opinion: "I want to talk to the guidance counselor, not my wife" ("Black Eyes and Broken Hearts"). This is a verbal game played by the Taylors at various times throughout the series, as when, in Season Three, Eric vents his frustration with Tami by saying: "You know who I miss? The coach's wife." To which she replies, "You know who I can't wait to meet? The principal's husband" ("How the Other Half Lives"). Such conversations belie the tension felt by Tami and Eric as they negotiate the shifting nature of their relationship; but their playfulness also reveals a willingness on the part of each to accept and work through their complicated relationship together, as co-equals.

This is especially important given the fact that, as indicated above, in Season Three, Tami becomes the school principal, making her Eric's *boss*. Such a development would have been ripe for a narrative of masculine crisis, but Tami's promotion is never portrayed as afflicting Eric's sense of masculine pride. Instead, Eric assumes the role of support system – carrying out her executive decisions at work, while commiserating with her professional frustrations at home. In an ironically apt metaphorical sense, Eric becomes Tami's biggest cheerleader.

This relational development is perhaps best exemplified by the aforementioned storyline depicting Tami's decision to reallocate funds away from the school football team and towards academics, where the extra money is sorely needed ("Hello, Goodbye"). Her decision puts her into direct confrontation with the town's local Boosters organization, who are fiercely protective of their local football team's well-being. But more importantly, it also puts her into direct confrontation with Eric, himself, as

the team's head coach. In a typical mainstream narrative, such a move would likely have been depicted as *emasculating*. Tami is clearly pulling rank on Eric, the football team and, by proxy, the entire cult of masculinity that is often built up around high school football in towns like Dillon, Texas. But rather than view her decision as a threat to his own sense of masculine pride, Eric responds in collegial fashion, siding with Tami against the boosters. In a powerful scene, he gives Tami a pep talk:

> You're right, and they're wrong. … They're gonna get the JumboTron [eventually], and in that sense you lose tomorrow. But you stood up for what you believed in. And in that sense, you win tomorrow ("Hello, Goodbye").

What is especially touching about this scene is that Eric's impromptu pep talk with his wife sounds identical to any number of talks we've seen him give his football team over the course of the first two seasons. Thus, the masculine logic of the locker room is transferred to the Taylor bedroom, where it is now used to buttress Tami's heroic bid at challenging masculine authority. Thus, by refusing to pit the Taylors against one another in a stereotypical "battle of the sexes," *FNL* rejects the trope of "masculine crisis" that so often frames television depictions of strong, professional women.

Ultimately, within mainstream media narratives the trope of "masculine crisis" often works as the mirror image of the trope of feminine "retreatism," discussed in the last section. In both cases, the freedom for women to choose is framed within a logic that legitimizes only *one* particular choice; to remain in traditional gender roles. To choose otherwise, it is implied, will only lead to feelings of inadequacy and anxiety on the parts of *both* partners. By refusing such narrative tendencies, *FNL* offers the unique depiction of a dual-career couple whose rejection of traditional gender roles is not portrayed as a threat to their relationship, but rather, as the key to its very strength.

Meanwhile, Back at the (Raised) Ranch: Tami Taylor and the Trope of the "New Mom"

Of course, the mere fact that Tami and Eric manage to negotiate a relationship based upon an equivalent work/life balance is not the end of the story. Negotiating such a relationship with a partner is one thing, but doing so with *children* is quite another. The issue of parenthood isn't as pronounced in the first season of *FNL*; the Taylor's daughter, Julie, is in High School and thus, in many ways, fairly independent. But all that changes in the final episode of Season One, when it is revealed that Tami is pregnant, much to the surprise of both herself and Eric ("State"). As such, Season Two takes its depiction of gender relations one step further, as childcare suddenly becomes the Taylor's primary concern, and greatest obstacle.

Of course, this is an age-old dilemma that, once again, threatens to reinvigorate the professional/domestic divide so central to postfeminist culture. For, as many scholars have pointed out, women's (provisional) victories regarding equitable treatment in the workplace have hardly translated into a comparable shift at home. While the number of men actively involved in childcare has certainly increased over the past two decades (Douglas & Michaels 321), many studies indicate that women are still expected to do the lion's share of child-rearing, not to mention housework, despite their heightened access to the workforce (Beynon 101; Hochschild; Offer & Schneider; Petrosky & Edley; West 6).

Such a situation has been reinforced by another hegemonic trope cultivated by the mainstream media – what Susan Douglas and Meredith Williams have termed the "new momism." According to Douglas & Michaels: "The new momism has become the central, justifying ideology of … 'postfeminism,'" asserting that:

> no woman is truly complete or fulfilled unless she has kids, that
> women remain the best primary caretakers of children, and that to

be a remotely decent mother, a woman has to devote her entire
physical, psychological, emotional, and intellectual well being
24/7, to her children (4).

Douglas & Michaels document the initial rise of the "new momism" in the
late-80s/early-90s, especially on television, where working moms, such as
the yuppie wives of *thirtysomething* and the famously-single Murphy
Brown, found true happiness only by rediscovering their maternal
instincts. But this discursive logic has only solidified over the years, they
argue, becoming ubiquitous in the current tabloid obsession over
"celebrity moms" (Douglas & Michaels 16-17) and the popularity of stay-
at-home-mom websites (314). As Diane Negra sums it up:

The postfeminist celebration of mothering [has] reache[d] heights
that would have been unimaginable a generation ago. In a range of
films and television programs, in journalism, and in advertising,
motherhood redeems, it transforms, it enriches, it elevates (*What a
Girl Wants* 65).

This constant romanticization of the motherly-bond makes it increasingly
difficult to imagine a woman who *wouldn't* welcome such a role. And it is
here that *Friday Night Lights*' is, perhaps, at its most transgressive.

Far from redeeming, transforming and enriching, newborn Gracie
Bell's arrival creates an enormous amount of emotional tension, stress and
turmoil for Tami, especially since Eric has recently accepted a university
job in Austin – a plane ride away. The very fact that the birth of their
second daughter creates emotional *tension* for Tami, rather than feelings
of maternal joy and fulfillment, is extremely significant, for it works
against the romantic function of birth in many mainstream narratives in
which "women repeatedly discover themselves when they experience an
immediate and powerful sense of enchantment with their newborn"
(Negra, *What a Girl Wants* 66).

Turning the new momism on its head, the surprise arrival of Gracie Bell is not represented as an opportunity for self-discovery through mother/child bonding. Instead, her arrival represents a serious destabilization of the Taylor family structure, with Tami's career in danger of becoming the collateral damage. In order to highlight this tension, the writers introduce a new character to the narrative; Glen, the science teacher who has been tapped to take over Tami's counseling duties while she is on maternity leave. Stressed and overwhelmed, Glen arrives at the Taylor home, just days after Gracie's birth, to beg for Tami's advice. Up until this point, Tami has been depicted as harried, exhausted and anguished; the house is a mess, her relationship with Julie is fraying at the seams, and she seems to have lost the self-assurance we have grown accustomed to seeing her exude. That is, until Glen enters the picture, at which point Tami regains some semblance of her old, confident self. Despite having a baby on her arm, Tami slips effortlessly back into the professional guise of "Ms. Taylor," calmly doling out professional advice ("Bad Ideas").

Through scenes like this, it becomes apparent that *FNL* is not going to paper over Tami's personal anguish with a romanticized depiction of motherly instincts trumping all. Instead, the only activity that seems to re-center Tami, emotionally, is a return to her professional life. This point is underlined in a scene that depicts Tami responding to a panic attack at home by literally *fleeing* to her office. Clearly at her wits end, Tami races through town – on foot, in 100-degree weather, stroller in tow – finally arriving at her office with a clear sense of relief ("Bad Ideas"). The fact that Tami finds peace in her office chair – rather than the rocking chair – represents a clear shift away from new mom discourse.

The character of Glen also fulfills a second function. Beyond standing as a cipher for Tami's lost professional identity, he serves as a kind of Greek Chorus for what traditional society might have to say about Tami's struggle with motherhood. For, while Glen is clearly more than happy to

accept Tami's professional aid and advice, he also espouses normative gender assumptions that criticize Tami's reaction to motherhood, thus bringing her emotional struggle into high relief. For instance, when Tami bursts into her office in the scene referenced above, Glen seems appalled, rather than grateful, that Tami has returned:

> You just walked all the way from your house?!? It's105 degrees out there. That's completely insane! … You're profusely sweating; you've got a new-born baby; you're walking in 105 degree temperatures. I mean … I might need a little bit of help … [But] I think what's more important is your behavior. You're bringing this baby here … ("Bad Ideas").

Here, Glen espouses the popular, traditionalist critique of working mothers that arose alongside the new mom discourse (Cobb; Douglas & Michaels). As Douglas & Michaels explain, as representations of working mothers began to proliferate within the mainstream media, so too did troubling depictions of the "effects" such a choice would have upon a family. According to this narrative, the freedom for women to "have it all" was leading to exhausted, stressed-out mothers, as well as neglected kids. Such a pronouncement, of course, contained a kernel of truth; the notion that one parent can and should "do it all" is patently absurd. However, the blame for such a scenario fell not upon the myth, itself, but upon the women who strove to achieve it. Suddenly, the media was filled with accounts that villified high-profile women (such as O.J. Simpson prosecutor Marcia Clark and British physician Deborah Eappen) for making the decision to pursue both career and motherhood simultaneously (West 7). Thus, while the new momism romanticized traditional notions of natural motherhood, it also cultivated a full-throated backlash against working moms who were shamed for putting their own careers and desires before their kids.

It is just this kind of shaming discourse that Glen articulates when he espouses shock and dismay that Tami would come to work, despite having a newborn at home. Tami, however, has none of it, firing back:

> I'm sorry – I don't need you talking about my perspiration … I came here to talk about the *job* – which, it seems to me, *you* might need a little bit of help with. … So I don't appreciate you going on and on about what a bad mother I am. OK? … Don't you go and judge me – on what kind of mother I'm being! ("Bad Ideas").

Thus, by having the character of Glen voice such traditionalist assumptions, to Tami's shock and dismay, this scene brings the unfairness of her situation into high relief. Furthermore, Tami's subsequent accusation that Glen is "judging" her reveals the way in which postfeminist discourse delimits women's options by pre-judging the choices they make. By aligning viewer sympathies with Tami, through a clear enactment of the frustrations that motherhood has wrought, *FNL* undermines the new momism, revealing it to be nothing more than an elaborate guilt trip foisted upon women who dare desire something apart, or in addition to, the "natural" joys of being a mom (Akass 57; Cobb).

"Where in the hell is your father?" Gender, Choice, and (Shared) Responsibility on FNL

Of course, the real problem with Tami's situation is not simply the difficulty of balancing a baby with a career – it's the fact that she has been forced to do so *alone*, despite the fact that she is in a committed relationship. This theme is foregrounded in the opening moments of the second season's first episode, when Tami goes into labor. The birth scene is cross-cut with images of Eric belatedly trying to get back home from Austen, prompting Tami to exclaim to Julie: "Where in the hell is your father?!?" ("Last Days of Summer"). This narrative decision – to combine

Eric's absence with the baby's arrival – allows *FNL* to challenge one of the most troubling, yet powerful, concepts underlying postfeminist logic: what many scholars have dubbed the "rhetoric of choice" (Akass; Vavrus 2007; Whitney).

As Sarah E. Whitney explains: "'Choice for women' is the concept trotted out in post-feminist culture as the major accomplishment and legacy of feminism." This concept stems from the legacy of second-wave feminists who "opened walks of public life once reserved only for men." However, as Whitney argues:

> in post-feminist rhetoric, the framing of choice with regards to occupation is undergoing a significant shift in meaning. *Being able* to choose your vocation, while still important, is being nudged aside in favor of the idea that a choice between career and family is inevitable.

It is this framing of choice – as an "inevitable" decision every woman must weigh – that opened the door to the kinds of neo-traditionalist narratives discussed in previous sections. However, it has also served to reinforce a pernicious double-standard that conveniently leaves men off the hook when it comes to enacting change. According to the postfeminist rhetoric of choice, not only do women have choices when it comes to balancing family with career, but it is *women alone* who must choose; and most importantly, the consequences of those choices will be theirs, alone, to bear.

In Tami's case, her "choice" has left her at home with a baby on her arm and a career stuck in limbo, while Eric is off in Austin pursuing his dream job, unfettered by such heartrending decisions. As such, Season Two frames Tami and Eric's struggle around the postfeminist rhetoric of choice – but in a way that reveals the political bankruptcy of such a notion.

For instance, shortly after Gracie is born, Eric receives a call from TMU informing him that he must cut his paternity leave short. Rather than balk at such a request, Eric simply accepts it as natural, bluntly telling Tami: "The fact of the matter is, I don't have a choice" ("Last Days of Summer"). Here, Eric's claim, that he "has no choice" when it comes to work/home balance, implies that Tami *does*. Gracie Bell's arrival means that there will have to be some sacrifices made within the Taylor household – but what those sacrifices are, and how they will be enacted, is Tami's problem to figure out.

Eric's casual adherence to such patriarchal views literally leaves Tami speechless. The conversation ends with Eric simply walking out of the house, leaving Tami alone in tears on the living room couch. Given the Taylors' established propensity to continuously talk through their problems, her silence during this scene is deafening. Once again, viewer sympathies are clearly aligned with Tami, who bears the brunt of this unfair double-standard. Thus, as with the earlier scenes depicting Glen's caustic espousal of traditionalist values, these scenes between Eric and Tami work to reveal the hypocrisy inherent within the postfeminist rhetoric of choice.

The only equitable solution to this dilemma is for Eric to relinquish such patriarchal privileges and beat his own sort of "retreat" back home. To the show's credit, this is precisely what he does. Three episodes into Season Two, Eric quits his job at TMU to reclaim his old high school position in Dillon ("Are You Ready For Friday Night?"). Importantly, however, Eric's choice to return home is not depicted as an heroic one. For, to lionize Eric's return as a benevolent "sacrifice" on his part would be to reinforce the notion that he was giving up something that was naturally his by virtue of his gender. Mary Douglas Vavrus (2002) has made this point clear in her analysis of "Mr. Mom" narratives; stories about the rise of stay-at-home-dads which became trendy within mainstream news media throughout the 1990s. According to Vavrus,

while these news stories sought to legitimate "feminized practices of nurturance and domesticity" within representations of masculinity, they also focused intensely on the difficulties stay-at-home dads had with taking on such a "feminized" role, thus reinforcing the notion that "stay-at-home parenting is simply not 'natural' for men" (365). Indeed, as Vavrus points out, "the very appearance of stay-at-home fathers as *news* items suggests that their activities deviates from what is typical for parents" (365).

But on *Friday Night Lights*, things are different for Eric. There are certainly no moments in which Eric is congratulated for returning home to "pitch in," and we are spared the to-be-expected plotlines involving Eric "comically" trying to negotiate diaper changes and naptimes. Instead, Eric's presence in the home is depicted as typical and routine; a fact emphasized by Tami's nonchalant reaction to his return. For example, when Tami gets ready to go out with her colleagues for the first time in months, Eric tries to play the martyr, exclaiming: "Well, I do have to work tonight, but [instead] I'm babysitting!" To which Tami replies: "It's not babysitting when it's your own child, sweetheart" ("Seeing Other People"). Such matter-of-fact reactions to Eric's return home help to normalize a notion of shared familial responsibility where parenting is concerned. Eric isn't "sacrificing" his masculinity by taking on an equal share of the child-rearing; he's simply holding up his end of the bargain.[6]

This ideal of shared familial responsibility is finally solidified towards the end of Season Two when it comes time for Tami to go back to work. As Tami prepares to send Gracie Bell to daycare, she finds herself with a

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[6] Tami isn't the only character to treat Eric's duty to be home as a matter of common sense. Humorously, this idea is set up the episode before, when Eric unsuccessfully tries to have a phone conversation with Tami while taking one of TMU's star football players to a legal hearing. When Eric gets off his cell, the young football player looks at him incredulously and says: "I just want to ask you one thing. What you doing in the car with me when you got a new baby at home?" ("Bad Ideas").

severe case of separation anxiety. Eric responds to her anxiety in telling fashion: "There are other options," he says. "One option could be, say, a leave of absence – that's one possible option" ("Who Do You Think You Are?"). The language Eric uses here is crucial, for it is an almost word-for-word articulation of the popular postfeminist phrase: "opting out." This phrase became popular around 2003, when the *New York Times Magazine* ran an article entitled "The Opt Out Revolution," describing the large amount of professional women choosing to leave careers for motherhood and domesticity (Akass 53). Of course, the notion of women "opting out" was nothing more than a variation on the postfeminist notion of "choice." As Joan C. Williams puts it: "It is clear that any decision to 'opt out' is made within the constraints of a system that 'pulls fathers into the ideal worker role and mothers into lives framed around caregiving'" (quoted in Akass 53). As such, Eric's claim that Tami has the choice to opt out is just a subtle dodge of the fact that this is an option *only Tami* might consider.

But, true to form, Tami calls him out: "Uh-huh. A leave of absence from my job which I love." When Eric tells her he's not going to fight about it, she responds: "Well you don't have to fight with me, do you? 'Cause you can just sit there in judgment and know that you will never be threatened to leave your job which you love and worked so hard for!" ("Who Do You Think You Are?"). Here, Tami cuts to the heart of postfeminist discourse by revealing the patriarchal privilege such a logic enables.

What is most important about this confrontation, however, is its ultimate resolution: in the end, Eric gets it. It is at this point that Eric comes full-circle and fully embraces the notion of co-parenting. As such, he takes it upon himself to convince Tami to go back to work. "Let me tell y'all something," he says towards the end of the episode:

> One of the reasons that you and I gave up that job down at TMU is
> that so you didn't have to give up your job. … And I was just

inside on the computer, and you know what I found out? I found out that separation anxiety is completely normal. We get over it ("Who Do You Think You Are?").

It is instructive to note the pronouns used by Eric during this: "*you and I gave up that job*" … "*We* get over it." It is at this juncture that we see Eric leave his outmoded notions of gendered parenting behind to embrace a vision of shared responsibility that he articulates in his own, colloquial way: "We stick together, it all works out." The episode ends with an image that underlines this new commitment in poignant fashion: Tami and Eric bringing Gracie Bell to her first day of childcare together.[7]

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[7] Of course, at this juncture it is necessary to point out that, like most mainstream television narratives, the Taylor's mutual decision to send Gracie Bell to daycare is an individualized solution to a structural problem of inequality. For, while the Taylors do not appear to be wealthy, it is clear that they can *afford* daycare; an option from which too many working families are priced out. As many feminist commentators have argued, true gender equality can only be achieved alongside substantive policy changes, such as universal healthcare and paid family leave, that would support parents attempting to balance career and children in an equitable fashion (Traister). However, such structural changes are unlikely to be made within a postfeminist media context that continues to stoke the flames of maternal guilt for working-moms, while their male counterparts are let off the hook. Indeed, Douglas and Michaels make this argument when considering the historic lack of public support for publically-funded daycare within the U.S. One of the reasons the idea has never truly taken off, they argue, has been decades of media stories detailing the "negative effects" of daycare on children (and marriages), which have worked to attach the worst kind of connotations to the very concept: "If you sent your kid to day care you were warehousing her, depositing her someplace with the same care and attention you would devote to dropping off your drycleaning. Even stories emphasizing the desperate need for more or better day care often contained this little burrowing worm of accusation" (241). In this way, the Taylor's decision to send Gracie Bell to daycare – and especially Eric's research explaining the sheer *normalcy* of "separation anxiety" – seems to be an overt attempt to counteract such connotations. Thus, while *Friday Night*

Thus, while Tami spends much of the first two seasons demanding her right to make choices, she *also* demands that Eric take responsibility for helping create a familial structure within which those choices are made possible. For Tami, "having it all" does not mean having to *do it all alone*. If the Taylors are going to have an equitable, committed relationship, then Tami's ambitions and desires must become Eric's responsibility, too. Indeed, it is through narratives like this that *FNL* not only challenges the postfeminist rhetoric of choice by laying bare the gendered double-standard upon which it rests; it also replaces this concept with a different one – the much more equitable notion of shared *responsibility*. This is crucial because, where the concept of choice is inherently individualist, responsibility is social. We make choices for ourselves, but we are responsible for – and to – others. As such, the notion of responsibility pulls *men* back into the equation, in a way that makes them accountable.

Conclusion: "What am I going to tell my daughter?" FNL's Feminist Legacy

By the time Season Four arrived, the Taylors had already worked through a series' worth of marital turmoil and tension, and the show seemed content to allow their relationship to recede into the background a bit, as it focused more intently on its younger characters. Indeed, one of the most refreshing aspects of the last two seasons is the way in which *FNL* depicted Tami and Eric's collegial relationship (both at home and at work), in a manner that reframed such a partnership as normal – even mundane. Thus, not only did the show invite viewers to work through a

Lights certainly does not offer a full-throated critique of the structural inequalities that undergird gender discrimination within the U.S., it does, at the very least, offer a pointed counter-narrative to the kinds of postfeminist tropes that can distort and discourage critical thinking on these issues.

critical reassessment of postfeminist values, but it also made the bold statement that heterosexual marriages could exist – and, indeed, flourish – beyond traditionalist notions of gender identity

However, given the show's commitment to wrestling with issues of gender, marriage, choice and responsibility, it was perhaps inevitable – and entirely appropriate – that it returned to these themes in the show's final episodes. It does so through the storyline discussed earlier, in which Tami fields the surprise offer from Braemore College, located in Philadelphia, to become their new Dean of Admissions ("The March"). The ensuing struggle over whether or not to accept the offer, ending with Eric's ultimate decision to follow Tami as she takes her dream job, serves as a fitting coda to the progressive depiction of gender relations cultivated by the show.

What is perhaps most important about this final narrative arc, however, is the *way* in which Eric finally comes around. When Tami makes her final argument for taking the job, she invokes not only herself, but their daughter:

> "It's my turn, babe. I have loved you, and you have loved me, and we have compromised. Both of us. For *your* job. And now its time to talk about doing that for *my* job. Because otherwise, what am I going to tell our daughter?" ("Always").

Here, by invoking *Julie*, Tami completely reframes the Taylor marriage in terms of its generational consequences. She reminds Eric that the stakes involved in their relationship are not simply personal, but political (to use an old phrase). Specifically: their personal decisions will help to create the social reality within which their own daughters will have to live.

This point is driven home a scene later when Jess Meriweather, a High School student who has been acting as Eric's student-assistant, tells him that she will not be back the following year because her family is moving away. As a young girl who dreams of becoming a head football coach,

Jess's story has its own feminist arc – and one that has been engineered, in part, by Eric, who agrees to let her assist him throughout the season. In a touching moment, Eric tells her that she will be missed and offers to call the coach of her new High School to recommend that she be taken on as his assistant. In many ways, Jess acts as a kind of surrogate daughter for Eric (just as his players often act as surrogate sons). As such, this moment seems to remind of him of the question posed by Tami: *"What am I going to tell my daughter?"* In his very next scene, Eric is shown rushing from school to find Tami at the local Mall, to tell her that he has decided to leave Dillon, the Panthers, and his own patriarchal privilege behind for good. "I turned the contract down," he tells her. "It's your turn. I want to go to Philadelphia" ("Always").

This decision – to reframe Eric and Tami's marriage in terms of its consequences for their daughters (both real and symbolic) – is crucial because, as many scholars have argued, postfeminist logic is defined by a profound amnesia regarding the *connection* between past, present and future generations. In today's postfeminist culture, the gains of the feminist movement are not so much rejected, as relegated to an antiquated past; postfeminism assumes that the feminist movement has already succeeded and, hence, can be forgotten (Levine; McRobbie; Tasker & Negra). Eric seems to espouse a similar view in the final season of *FNL* when he tells Tami that the issues they have worked through are settled and long behind them. But Tami (and Julie, and Jess) remind him that the politics of their personal lives are never settled; and matter not just to them, but to their children. In this way, *Friday Night Lights* ends not on a note of feminist "triumph," but on the much more provisional note of steady, ongoing commitment. True equality is an ideal to be cultivated and maintained, not won and then forgotten.

Thus, by challenging and overturning a number of traditionalist narrative tropes that have become ubiquitous within today's postfeminist media culture, *Friday Night Lights* offers a unique depiction of

heterosexual marriage based upon progressive principals of gender equality; principals not usually emphasized within the mainstream media. In so doing, it helps to expand the range of possibilities for reimagining dual-career marriages outside the gendered norms of patriarchal relations.

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Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of Anita Loos: *A Girl Like I* as Prequel to *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*

LESLIE KREINER WILSON

Introduction

The same year that Derrida presented the lecture "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,"—1966—screenwriter and novelist Anita Loos published her first autobiography *A Girl Like I*.[1] On the one hand, the book seeks to be "free from freeplay," gesturing toward the presentation of a totalizing history, a fixed origin story, a signified, her history, her biographical story—objective and factual.[2] On the other hand, the dream of a "full presence, the reassuring foundation" slips away from

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[1] Jacques Derrida first presented "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" as a lecture at Johns Hopkins University in 1966. It was subsequently published in *Writing and Difference* in 1967.

[2] Biographers have challenged Loos's factual claims in terms of her age and length of her first marriage, among other points in her autobiography; nevertheless, we recall Heidi L. Pennington's encouragement to be "more attuned in our independent close readings"; thus, "we will also learn to value the nonfactual truths of a life as equally important to the cold, hard facts" (37). Likewise, Timothy Dow Adams asserts, "As fundamental as truth is to autobiography, modern readers have increasingly come to realize that telling the truth about oneself on paper is virtually impossible. Even if writers could isolate 'the truth' of their past, how could they know it would remain true as they wrote, much less in the future?" (53).

the reader due to the lingering presence of her bestselling novel *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, the silent film screenplay, and the musical adaptation, all molding the narrative.

In his lecture, Derrida argued that a "rupture" and a "redoubling" occurred in mid-twentieth century cultural history and thought; following Yeats, he might have added that the "centre could not hold." Derrida goes on to state that the "repetitions, the substitutions, the transformations, and the permutations are always taken from a history of meaning"; thus, "the whole history of the concept of structure…must be thought of as a series of substitutions of center for center." This new "absence of a transcendental signified extends the domain and the interplay of signification *ad infinitum*" (Derrida). For him, "the history of metaphysics and its concepts had been dislocated"; European culture could no longer consider itself "as the culture of reference"; similar assaults from Nietzsche, Freud, and Heidegger further destabilized meaning and resisted totalization (Derrida). In Derrida's estimation, we had been caught in a double-bind: "There are thus two interpretations of interpretation, of structure, of sign, of freeplay. The one seeks to decipher, dreams of deciphering, a truth or an origin which is free from freeplay and from the order of the sign, and lives like an exile the necessity of interpretation." He continues, "The other, which is no longer turned toward the origin, affirms freeplay." Loos's autobiography illustrates this latter movement.

In *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson argue that "the remembering subject actively creates the meaning of the past in the act of remembering" (22). Likewise, in *Living Autobiographically: How We Create Identity in Narrative*, Paul John Eakin notes this "phenomenon": "the construction of identity that talking about ourselves and our lives performs in the world" (x). This "narrative self-fashioning" constitutes "an evolutionary, adaptive value" (Eakin xi)—in this case establishing Loos's identity as the bestselling novelist and screenwriter of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*. Indeed,

one could argue, the autobiography selects such events that it reads as a prequel to the novel with Loos cast sometimes as Dorothy, the wise-cracking brunette interested in a good time and a laugh—and in the musical, good looks—rather than chasing the millionaire of Lorelei Lee's ambitions—but Loos also casts herself as childlike and impoverished—qualities very much attached to Lorelei.[3] As Judith Butler argues in *Giving an Account of Oneself*, "The 'I' has no story of its own that is not also the story of relation—or a set of relations…The 'I' is always to some extent dispossessed by the social conditions of its emergence" (8). In other words, Loos has written no single "I" autobiography; rather, *A Girl Like I* exhibits what Mikhail Bakhtin has termed "polyphony," containing the "dialogic" voices of Anita, Lorelei, and Dorothy (6, 14).

In some ways, then, *A Girl Like I*—an iterated quote of Lorelei's—reads as a marketing, advertising, or promotional tract for sales for the novel. In other ways, we find that the design of the autobiography—the structure, sign, and play of it—has been somewhat dislocated from Loos's life and is instead dictated by her bestseller and film adaptations.[4]

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[3] In "Clara, Ouida, Buelah, et al.,: Women Screenwriters in American Silent Cinema," included in the collection *Reclaiming the Archive: Feminism and Film History*, Giuliana Muscio states, "Even Anita Loos, who could claim legitimate literary fame and intellectual frequenting, enriches her autobiographies with detailed descriptions of the clothes she would make for herself (not just drawing them, but literally sewing them), and of such frivolous interests as hairdos and makeups [sic], for instance her famous visits at Coty, in Paris, according to the Lorelei-like character she had created for herself after the success of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*" (293). In the musical—adapted by Charles Lederer—Dorothy only chases men for their looks—another kind of frivolous interest. Lorelie explains to Gus Esmond as he settles her on the cruise ship, her friend is "always falling in love with someone because he's good looking. […] If they're tall, dark, and handsome, she never gets around to vital statistics."

[4] One of the great ironies of the autobiography is its celebration of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* as a high point in Loos's life. In "Aunt Anita's Romances and Friendships" from *Anita Loos Reconsidered*, niece Mary Anita Loos recounts a walk along the beach

Concomitantly, the reader discovers that the events Loos chooses to recount likewise provide the *raison d'être* for the plotline, themes, and characterizations in the novel and adaptations. I argue *A Girl Like I* could never exist without *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* always already influencing Loos's autobiography. An obvious corollary assertion follows: if the novel is "experimental modernism" (Tracy 118), as critics assert, then the autobiography published four decades later may well be the next incarnation in literary movements: the Derridean postmodern text. To state it another way, Anita Loos, the premier modernist writer, showed postmodern tendencies in the last few decades of her work.

Loos as Lorelei

In the first chapter of *A Girl Like I*, Loos recounts the early successes of her grandfather as a northern California gold prospector. Quoting from an old newspaper interview with him, Loos supplies his words: "As I was making my way along a creek, I noticed some gravel on the opposite side that looked favorable for gold. I crossed the creek, scooped up a shovel full of gravel and in two minutes washed out five dollars' worth of gold dust. I immediately staked out a claim and began mining" (qtd. in Loos, *A Girl* 5). According to Loos, "By the time his hoard ran out, George Smith had amassed enough to be considered rich" (5). Here, in the opening pages, she establishes a thematic strand involving a brand or type of gold-digger, perhaps the defining characteristic for her protagonist in

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in Santa Monica in which Loos admitted about her failed marriage to John Emerson, "Lots of things could have broken us up. But…it was *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* that did it…I was suddenly internationally famous…Poor middle-aged John could not bear the fact that everyone wanted to know me, be with me, quote me. He felt he must seek self-satisfaction, and he became desperately mental" (182).

Gentlemen Prefer Blondes, Lorelei Lee—"mistress of her own grand confidence game" (Cella 47).

As Liz Clarke notes, "female writers, producers, and directors flourished in this era and the star system was rising to dominance, further entrenching women's power within the industry" (173). Anita Loos was one such screenwriter who rose to prominence in the early years of Hollywood. As we know, studios gravitated toward adaptation in order to maximize profits by tapping into the success of the source material. Citing Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, Damien Sutton describes the "impossible object" movie moguls sought to create—more than the film, the entire web of "discursive practices" that the "network" of "identity" manifests (4-5). Executives were ever-mindful of the psychological systems that existed to "ensure that a film [got] made, anticipated, seen, enacted, and remembered" (Sutton 13). Capitalizing on the sociocultural phenomenon that was the novel, Paramount purchased the film rights and hired Loos to adapt it. While filmgoers understood that "[n]o film version of a novel would be able to function as a presentation of the whole story" (McGurk 38) due to time limitations as well as the restriction of the Studio Relations Committee followed by the Production Code Administration, several interesting connections among the silent film adaptation, which Loos scripted, and the 1953 musical, scripted by Charles Lederer, do exist. (According to Gary Carey, Loos's biographer, she felt Lederer "had done a grand job" and admitted his script "was an improvement on her own libretto" for the stage version [231].)

   In the 1928 adaptation—the silent film is considered lost, but the screenplay for the film has been preserved, archived in the Paramount collection at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences Margaret Herrick Library—Loos very literally adds the Southern family history into the plotline. Lorelei's grandfather digs for gold in Arkansas— unsuccessfully, however; thus Lorelei must come into the family business as she too digs for gold, so to speak, among the wealthy Americans and

Europeans she meets on her adventures.[5] In the 1953 musical, Lorelei (Marilyn Monroe) and Dorothy (Jane Russell) *both* come from poverty in Arkansas. In one of the most popular song and dance numbers, they don red sequin gowns and sing: "We're just two little girls from Little Rock. We lived on the wrong side of the tracks."

While Sarah Churchwell has convincingly argued that "Lorelei is the negative to Loos's positive"—"blonde where Loos is brunette, dumb where Loos is smart, amateur where Loos is professional, prostituted where Loos is virtuous, vulgar where Loos is cultured, and ignorant where Loos is *cérébrale*" (137)—the autobiographer parallels many aspects of Lorelei to her own life as well, including the protagonist's impoverished background. Unlike her grandfather, Loos's own father provided very little in terms of the family support, working alternately as a theater manager and promoter as well as an occasional writer. Her mother "with her marriage, began the lifelong heartache of being in love with a scamp" (Loos, *A Girl* 18). When Loos won a jingle competition for wax, Pop "instantly borrowed" the five dollars (33) and "gradually Pop's disappearances from home became more frequent and of longer duration" (35). He seldom sent money, "so Mother was forced to carry on alone" (35). Loos recalls "one Christmastime when Pop was far away (nobody knew where) and there was no turkey in our larder. Mother concocted a platter of dressing out of bread, milk, and herbs and, with superhuman cheerfulness, tried to dramatize it so we wouldn't notice that the big bird was missing" (35). When Grandpa Smith died leaving Mother an heiress,

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[5] Note the clever shift in characterization Loos wrote for her protagonist in the silent film adaptation: aware of the increase in censorship as well as the fact the majority of her audience would be female, the screenwriter showed the poverty of the family (motivation) as well as dismissing the gold digging as a mere inherited trait from the grandfather. These two changes increase audience empathy and support for Lorelei. For more on spectatorship, audience, and gender in the 1920s, see Mulvey (22). For more on characterization, see *How to Write a Photoplay*: Loos and Emerson state, "[b]e sure your audience is stirred to real sympathy" and "throw that sympathy to the star part" (26).

"Pop proceeded to get rid of the…inheritance as rapidly as he could. Since he was an expert, it didn't take Pop long; soon everything was lost" (40).

Like Lorelei, we learn, Loos too was an outsider without status—but one who hoped to attain it. The writer's passages regarding a southern California hotel relate this element of the autobiography's plot. Loos explains: "The Hotel Del Coronado was a famous winter resort for rich people from the East. I had read fascinating items about it in the society columns, seen pictures of it in rotogravures. Clearly visible across San Diego bay, it sparkled in the sunlight, a white structure of the 'casino' type with acres of red roof. I could hardly wait to explore a paradise that was so near" (*A Girl* 47).

The morning she and Pop chose to tour the hotel, Loos donned a Paris gown sent as a cast off by her wealthy Aunt Nina. The writer explains, "I finally settled on a black velvet model from Paquin, with a wide band of brown fur around the hem" (Loos, *A Girl* 47). She thought she was in "high fashion" only to realize that "the grounds were so pretentiously well kept the plants looked snooty," and "the lobby was filled with rich pleasure-seekers, many of them dressed for yachting, tennis, or polo" (48). As she "watched those sophisticates," her "courage rapidly oozed away" (48). She realized her dress appeared "tacky" next to the crisp white linen of the "Coronado ladies of fashion" (48). Like Lorelei, who aspires to associate with those of the upper classes, Loos "began to suffer the qualms of a trespasser" (49). Both Loos and Lorelei share a "profound hunger to be fully accepted into society," which is "at odds with their outsider's recognition of society's deeply entrenched moral hypocrisy and ethical trickery" (Barreca vii).[6] Both the silent film script and the musical retain this theme central to the plot of the novel.

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[6] While Loos recounts her relationships with scamps and gamblers, she also takes great care in *A Girl Like I* to convey the fact that everyone wanted to know her after the publication of her bestselling novel. The book introduced her to princes, geniuses, Aldous Huxley, Aimee Semple McPherson, Edwin Hubble, Lord D'Abernon, Colette, George

As the scent of a perfume she could not afford drifted over to Loos—a metaphor laced throughout the narrative representing the finery of the wealthy—she began to covet the good life—a passion perhaps incited by Nina's hand-me-down couture and the diamond ring given to her by a grifter uncle. In the novel, Lorelei replicates this passion in Paris: "And when a girl walks around and reads all the signs with all the famous historical names it really makes you hold your breath. Because when Dorothy and I went on a walk, we only walked a few blocks but in only a few blocks we read all of the famous historical names, like Coty and Cartier and I knew we were seeing something educational at last and our whole trip was not a failure" (Loos 52). Like the L'Idéal of Houbigant drifting through the bar at the Hotel Del, awakening Loos's senses to the opulent, Lorelie too lusts for the trappings of the monied class. When Gus Esmond (Timothy Noonan) gives her an engagement ring in the musical, he asks her, "Is it the right size?" She responds, "It can never be too big." Once they get to Paris, Dorothy and Lorelei ride around in a taxi, overwhelmed by the sights of the cosmopolitan city. The score reprises the "Two Little Girls from Little Rock" number from earlier in the film, reminding the viewer of their rural, destitute roots. The girls then go on a shopping spree—shown to the viewer through a montage of designer storefronts: Schiaparelli, Dior, Lucien Lelong, and Guerlain Purfumeur.

   In the novel, Lorelei feels ashamed of Dorothy when she says or does the wrong thing; Loos likewise feels "ashamed of Pop," his artless "derby hat," his "spineless stogie" as they walk around the Hotel Del (*A Girl* 49). "Right then and there," she asserts, "was born a desire to get

Santayana, Edith Hamilton, Ralph Barton, and so on (274-275). The novel also became an annuity and assured Loos the trappings of wealth she had so long desired. "I unpacked the chic Vuitton luggage I had acquired in Paris" (267)—she tells us—and "filtered" a lot of the money "into the dress salons of Mainbocher and Balenciaga" (273). "In the entertainment world," she boasts, "my heroine was portrayed by its two most eminent blondes: Marilyn Monroe of the movies, and Carol Channing of the stage" (272-273).

away from the raffish milieu of our home" (49). The novel, screenplay, and musical all involve a trip to Europe where Lorelei hopes to improve her position in society. Moreover, Dorothy continues to embarrass Lorelei who does not share her values. In the musical, for example, Lorelei asks, "Where's Dorothy?"—as Esmond settles her in her cabin on the ship. He replies, "I don't know. Someone whistled at her and she disappeared. I hope she's not gonna be a bad influence on you." Lorelie finds herself in the position of defending her friend. "Oh no, lover," she reassures him, "Dorothy's not bad." When they arrive at the hotel in Paris, the manager asks if he can help. Dorothy replies, "You certainly may. Show me a place to take my shoes off. My feet are killing me." To which, Lorelei scolds, "Dorothy, please, a lady never admits her feet hurt."

In another example of the story's influence on the autobiography, Loos, like Lorelei, navigated among villainous aristocracy. For Loos, he was Sir Herbert Tree. For Lorelei, Sir Francis Beekman. The writer relates an anecdote about Sir Tree's time at D.W. Griffith's studio—scenario supervisor Frank "Daddy" Woods discovered they could just call him Herb—Herb, like Beekman in the novel, had "an unceasing interest in the ladies" (Loos, *A Girl* 110). In Britain, "he had fathered a number of distinguished illegitimate children, but in Hollywood Sir Herbert began to favor the undistinguished young ladies who were available as extras" (110). Loos explains that a "crisis developed when Pasadena's most eminent hostess was inspired to give a dinner" in his "honor" (110). Herb was not interested, but Daddy intervened: "for Pasadena had held the movies in such contempt that the occasion might serve to bolster relations between the two cities" (110). Fearing he might be bored by the Pasadena socialites, Herb requested a date. Daddy searched the extra girls, but finally chose a local waitress, "a girl whose sex appeal was so moderate as not to bring turmoil to Pasadena" (111). The girl was taken to wardrobe where they "put a damper on her taste" and "got her properly rigged for the occasion" (111). The waitress was well behaved, "[b]ut not Sir

Herbert" (111). When it was time to leave at the end of the evening, he asked the hostess where his companion might be. She answered, "I believe she's 'round behind" (qtd. in Loos, *A Girl* 111). "Ah yes," he replied, "But *aren't we all?*" (111). Then, to punctuate his remark, "he gave his hostess a slap on the behind that finished Hollywood's chances to break into Pasadena society for many another year" (111).

In the novel, Lorelei calls Sir Francis "Piggie," a name that in itself suggests critique. He laughs at his own jokes, which are not funny; he drops names of his wealthy and powerful compatriots such as King Edward; and he has the reputation of a miser (Loos, *Gentlemen* 40-41). Lorelei even resorts to sending herself orchids to train him to give her gifts (44-45), but she soon tires of the self-absorption of this failed raconteur: "But I really wish Piggie would not tell so many storys. I mean I do not mind a gentlemen when he tells a great many storys if they are new, but a gentleman who tells a great many storys and they are all the same storys is quite enervating. I mean London is really so uneducational that all I seem to be learning is some of Piggies storys and I even want to forget them. So I am really jolly fed up with London" (47). Lorelei's phrase "I even want to forget them" suggests off-color or at least boorish remarks that offend and annoy her—much like Sir Herbert Tree's rakish and unwelcome joke as well as lewd gesture to his Pasadena hostess.

In the musical, the lawyer for Lady Beekman (Norma Varden) comes to the Paris hotel where Dorothy and Lorelei are staying and demands the tiara be returned. Lorelei argues that it was not stolen and suggests they ask Lord Beekman (Charles Coburn) who had given it to her as a gift. The lawyer responds, "We've already done so, Miss Lee." He continues, Lord Beekman "denied knowing anything about it and departed for the interior of Africa." Lorelei is shocked to learn that he would betray her in this manner and says, "Piggie wouldn't do that," knowing full well that he had indeed.

Throughout her autobiography, Loos refers to her figure as "childlike" (48). "I was grown up now," she wrote, "having attained a stature of four feet eleven and weighing ninety two pounds (measurements which are still the same today)" (48). Moreover, of all the pictures she could have chosen to include of herself in the first photo section of the book, she chose a sketch by Ralph Barton—who had done the caricatures in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes.* The image features Loos with large eyes, short hair, wearing a huge childish bow on her dress, in an oversized chair that has the effect of making her look like a baby in a highchair—her feet dangling nowhere near the floor. In the second photo section of the book, Loos stands with a wolfhound; the back of the white dog reaches to her waistline likewise emphasizing her adolescent stature as well as demeanor. When Loos narrated her first encounter with D.W. Griffith, she underscored the fact that both he and his assistant Dougherty overlooked her as a mere child and introduced themselves to her mother who had chaperoned her on her first visit to the Biograph Studio in Hollywood (78). Daddy Woods decided it would be safer for Loos to live on the lot since she was a "runaway bride"—having abandoned her husband after their wedding—he might try to "whisk" her away or even "shoot" her (89). All of these scenarios put Loos in the position of a child who must be looked after, protected, and cared for.

When she met the director John Emerson—whom she would later marry—she reported the same reaction as mentioned earlier with Griffith and Dougherty. Emerson had found some of Loos's material in the Biograph files that he thought would be good for Douglas Fairbanks. When he met with the author, "his reaction…was typical of others'; he was amazed that any creature who looked fourteen, at the most, could have so profoundly ironic a slant on life" (99). The ironic slant was pure Dorothy—which I will discuss later—but the images of adolescence, juvenilia, youthful oblivion throughout the autobiography are all Lorelei—in all her incarnations.

Chapter 2 of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* is titled "Fate Keeps on Happening."[7] Like her protagonist, Loos too presents an aura of fateful events or luck determining the course of her life. When still a child—as mentioned earlier—she won a jingle contest for F.P.C. Wax, which set her on her course as a writer (33); then she won a contest in *The Morning Telegraph* relating a "humorous anecdote about life in New York"— although she had not even been there (46). Loos stated: "No doubt it was beginner's luck, but I usually succeeded with a first effort. It might be followed by failure, but I was able to say I did it once and can do it again, perhaps. After winning the contest, I continued to send short paragraphs to *The Morning Telegraph*, which accepted the majority of them and paid me two and a half cents a word. So that at thirteen years of age I became a journalist on a New York Daily" (46).[8] Adding to her beginner's luck anecdotes, Loos tells her readers that Biograph accepted her first attempt at a scenario, *The New York Hat*, and paid her twenty-five dollars for it. D.W. Griffith directed it, and none other than little Mary Pickford starred (56).

So too does fate keep happening to Lorelei in the novel. While on the boat to Europe, she runs into the District Attorney Mr. Bartlett who prosecuted her after she found out her benefactor Mr. Jennings had other girlfriends. Lorelie says, "I had quite a bad case of histerics and my mind was really a blank and when I came out of it, it seems that I had a revolver in my hand and it seems that the revolver had shot Mr. Jennings" (Loos, *Gentlemen* 25). The "childlike reasoning," Maureen Turim argues, has the "same force" as Mark Twain's characters who ridicule the "surrounding society" (101).

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[7] As evidence of the importance of this phrase for Loos—"fate keeps on happening"— Ray Pierre Corsini edited a collection of Anita Loos's new and previously published work—both fiction and nonfiction—called *Fate Keeps on Happening: Adventures of Lorelei Lee and Other Writings*, which was released posthumously in 1984 – Loos died in 1981.

After being acquitted of the crime by the gentlemen of the jury, Judge Hibbard bought her "a ticket to Hollywood" (25) and changed her name to Lorelei "who became famous for sitting in a rock in Germany" (26). Working in the "cinema," she "met Mr. Eisman" who, she explains, "took me out of the cinema so he could educate me" (26). This turn in her life led her to the boat and a new friendship with her old nemesis from Arkansas, Mr. Bartlett. So eager to prosecute her after "Mr. Jennings became shot," they now forge a friendship on the boat to Europe.

Then on the train to the "Central of Europe"—where Eisman wants her to go to keep their rendezvous low profile—Lorelei meets the man she will eventually marry, Mr. Henry Spoffard—from one of the wealthiest and oldest families in America. Thus we find that "fate keeps on happening" to both Loos and Lorelei throughout both texts. We also find that the "reassuring foundation" of Loos's origin story has slipped away from the reader who finds Derrida's "substitutions" and "freeplay" at work in the autobiography—"the absence of a transcendental signified," the presence of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* instead. As Smith and Watson explain it, "The multifacetedness inherent in autobiographical writing produces a polyphonic site of indeterminacy rather than a single, stable truth" (16). They further remark that the "authority of the autobiographical, then, neither confirms nor invalidates notions of objective truth" (16). In their view, autobiography "tracks" multiple "previously uncharted truths of particular lives" (16).

To return one last time to the concept of Loos as Lorelie, the autobiographer worked on several occasions to differentiate herself from her heroine as well, which ironically works to support my argument here. If Loos had not blended her past with Lorelei's, she would not need to differentiate the two lest she be considered a dumb gold-digger. For example, Loos pauses to discuss her reading lists at the local library, highlighting Baruch Spinoza who wrote, "Intellectual love is the only eternal happiness" (qtd. in Loos, *A Girl* 61). The author discovered that

she was a cérébrale: "any interest in sex stemmed directly from the brain" (61). After her father got a job publishing a paper for the Hotel Del Coronado, the family moved into Tent City on the compound. Surrounded by the Pacific "sun-kissed shore," "burnished gold of dried palm leaves," and "chintz curtains of jungle green," Loos wrote, "A girl who couldn't hook a millionaire in such an environment would have to be a gargoyle" (65). There, Loos tried several times to marry just such a wealthy man only to discover she did not have the temperament for it—although one "halfwit" did inspire Henry Spoffard, the man Lorelei marries in the end of the novel (74). The wealthy class had failed to impress Loos, however, after she discovered, to her "disgust, that they were merely human" (85). In addition, the love letters she got paled in comparison to studio letters with checks enclosed for her scenarios. Unlike Lorelei, Loos would work to support her family and many of the men in her life.

Loos as Dorothy

As Smith and Watson remind us, "The stuff of autobiographical storytelling…is drawn from multiple, disparate, and discontinuous experience and the multiple identities constructed from and constituting those experiences" (40). They also encourage us to "read for these tensions and contradictions in the gaps, inconsistencies, and boundaries breached within autobiographical narratives" (40). For them, "autobiographical acts take place at cultural sites where discourses intersect, conflict, and compete with one another, as narrators are pulled and tugged into complex and contradictory self-positionings through a performative dialogism" (164). Similarly, Nancy K. Miller in But Enough About Me: Why We Read Other People's Lives observes, "The power in life writing in its various forms depends upon a tension between life and text that is never fully resolved" (xiv).

This tension is underscored as Loos differentiates herself as the model for Lorelei by aligning herself more with Dorothy at times. The most blatant moment of this alignment occurs when Loos outright proclaims, "when at long last the truth dawned I gave in to being the model for the unrewarded brunette of my major opus: a girl who would always pass up a diamond for a laugh" (*A Girl* 68). The "Dorothy style" of irreverence and sardonic views litter the autobiography, perhaps most notably in the section describing Griffith. Loos writes, "Despite his genius…he had a naïveté about sex in particular which sometimes took an incredible turn" (122). For example, he would not allow his star actresses—Dorothy and Lillian Gish—to kiss any man on the mouth on camera, yet advised actresses never to wear underwear as it "was a detriment to a girl's sex appeal" (123). Griffith committed other acts that replicate a Dorothy-type response from Loos throughout her autobiography. In one instance, he rigged extra girls in white robes and wings then lifted them on wires into the air "to produce the effect of flying angels." Utilizing her classic ironic twist, Loos explains, "In no time at all most of the angels got seasick, and the scene ended in embarrassing nausea" (123).

This flippancy of Loos defines nearly all of Dorothy's remarks in the novel. When Lady Francis Beekman comes to get her tiara back from Lorelei, Dorothy quips that the Lady looks like Bill Hart or "more like Bill Hart's horse" (Loos, *Gentlemen* 57). After Lady Beekman threatens to drag Lorelie into court and ruin her reputation, Dorothy throws a dart at aristocratic dignity and charges, "You have to be the Queen of England to get away with a hat like that" (58). Lorelei reflects on her friend's behavior, "I mean I always encouradge Dorothy to talk quite a lot when we are talking to unrefined people like Lady Francis Beekman, because Dorothy speaks their own languadge to unrefined people better than a girl like I" (59). As the argument escalates, Dorothy shouts, "Lady, if you go into a court and if the judge gets a good look at you, he will think that Sir Francis Beekman was out of his mind 35 years ago" (59). As the Lady

leaves, Dorothy yells down the hall to her, "Take a tuck in that skirt Isabel, its 1925" (59). Note also that Dorothy protects her friend here as well. Feminist critics Lucie Arbuthnot and Gail Seneca argue the 1953 musical—their comments apply equally to the novel—"can be read as a feminist text" (112); they are "deeply moved by" Dorothy and Lorelei's "connection with each other" (119); and they view the story as a "celebration of women's strength" (119). In fact, Lorelei counts on her friend to be the heavy as she "embraces etiquette" and "good manners," using "its rules to climb the social ladder" (Coslovi 109).

In the silent film script, Dorothy defends Lorelei by telling Lady Beekman, "You could no more ruin my girl friend's reputation than you could sink the Jewish fleet." In the musical, Lady Beekman tells Lorelei, "You'll find that I mean business." Dorothy quips, "Yeah, then why are you wearing that hat?" As they leave the hotel, the private detective Ernie Malone (Elliott Reid) tells Dorothy where he is staying in case she needs any help. With one hand on her hip and one hand on the doorknob, she retorts, "You hold your breath till I call"—and pulls the door shut between them.

As we know, Loos had an equally sharp tongue—the same tongue I am arguing that inspired her dialogue for Dorothy. When the author first met Griffith, he took her and her mother to lunch at the corner drugstore where she "proceeded to sound off with some intellectual name-dropping" (Loos, *A Girl* 81). She "had recently discovered Voltaire, and Griffith wanted to know something about him" (81). The writer explained, "Voltaire's cynicism, as expounded by A. Loos, didn't necessarily convince Griffith, and he remarked with a benign smile that the human race might possibly be nicer than that arch pessimist conceded" (81). Loos then felt comfortable denigrating Griffith's own intellectual favorite: Walt Whitman. She "impudently argued that Whitman was hysterical" (81). She went on to assert, "Hysteria has no place in great writing…Shakespeare is never hysterical, neither is Goethe. Walt Whitman is as uncontrolled as

Ella Wheeler Wilcox!" (81). Loos reported that "Griffith laughed and was probably as much amused by my impertinence as I was intent on trying to set him straight" (81). In fact, Loos distinguished herself from her sister Gladys by stating, "No two could have been more different than we were. Gladys was a heedless tomboy, always in the middle of things, whereas I remained on the sidelines, making *impudent* comments" (34, emphasis mine). This impertinence and impudence imbues much of Dorothy's persona as well.

According to Susan Hegeman, "Dorothy functions primarily as a counterpoint to Lorelei's comic reversals of convention: she is a critic, a truth teller, and the voice of liberated, unhypocritical moral authority" (529). For this scholar, the brunette, like Loos herself, "embodies the authorial presence even to the extent that Dorothy gives up a date with the rich and amorous Eddie Goldmaker…to have lunch with none other than Mencken"—whom Loos herself entertained (529). Scenes like this one earned the novel the label of the "great American satire" (Blom 47).

Indeed, Loos explains in her second autobiography *Kiss Hollywood Good-by* that "to fight off chagrin" due to her "husband's neglect," she "drifted into a set of intellectuals" with high IQ, led by Mencken himself (12). Ever the highbrow, she was inspired to write the story about a "flirtation" he was having with a " stupid little blonde" thus she "wrote a skit poking fun at his romance" (12). Dorothy and Loos share this "mental snobbery" (*A Girl* 134). Upon the author's first receipt of ardent fan letters as well as her first trip to New York with Griffith to promote *Intolerance*, her mother feared for her honor. But Loos's self-confessed elitism always kept her from going "astray" (134). She dreamed only of "Byron, Pushkin, and Heinrich Heine," lovers "whose sardonic attitude would complicate the whole affair; one who would whisper bittersweet things to me like those which Heine used to pour into the ears of his Mathilde in Montparnasse" (134). In New York, Loos insisted on staying at the Algonquin so that she could mingle with the literary elect of the city, but

eventually tired of their pretensions.[8] She carried an elitist's condescension even toward the elite.

While Dorothy may not have had such aristocratic taste, she is characterized with the same intellectual superiority complex in the novel, telling Lorelei the blonde's "brains reminded her of a radio because you listen to it for days and days and you get discouradged" (Loos, *Gentlemen* 65). Dorothy also reflects Loos's disrespect for the wealthy dimwits mentioned earlier. When Henry Spoffard assures the brunette that Miss Chapman "came from a very very fine old family herself and she really had a fine brain" (80), Dorothy replies, "If she really has got such a fine brain I bet her fine old family once had an ice man who could not be trusted" (80). What Lorelei perceives as unrefined in Dorothy is actually her mental acuity and sharp tongue—characteristics aligned with Loos.

Both Loos and Dorothy aid others with trickery as well. For example, the author helps Mae Marsh seduce poet Vachel Lindsay by ghostwriting letters for the actress: "Thus I developed into a small Cyrano de Bergerac, sending the poet some much more emotional thoughts on life and love than I ventured in my own purely intellectual correspondence with him. Mae copied my innermost thoughts in her own handwriting, and Vachel's replies became increasingly ardent. In no time at all he was falling madly in love with Mae" (*A Girl* 135). When the three met in New York, Vachel shifted his passion to Loos, eventually even proposing after they had spent

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[8] The literary elect had mixed reactions to Loos's fiction. Faye Hammill explains, "In combination, the responses of Loos's eminent contemporaries demonstrate that the reception and literary status of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* during the interwar years was, to say the least, ambiguous. The contrast between the admiration of Huxley, Joyce, Wharton, Santayana and Empson, and the contempt of Lewis and Leavis indicates this clearly enough, while the equivocal remarks of Faulkner and Mencken contain this ambiguity within themselves, as does Loos's own tendency to celebrate her own intellect whilst deprecating her literary achievements. All these responses are determined not only by the personal taste of the writers involved but also by a complicated set of factors relating to literary value, mass culture, contemporary morality and the status of women writers" (44).

weeks tramping through Central Park and Greenwich Village. Loos never told him about the chicanery with the letters, and she hedged as well as changed the subject when he spoke of marriage (141).

Dorothy enacts frauds with equal panache. When Lady Beekman hires the private detectives Louie and Robber to retrieve her diamond tiara from Lorelei in the novel, Dorothy and her friend buy a paste copy. Dorothy then arranges to sell the fake to Louie then later to Robber (Loos, *Gentlemen* 70-71). Eventually, they all arrange to give a paste copy to the Lady, so Lorelei can keep the genuine article.

Similarly, in the 1925 silent film screenplay adaptation, Dorothy instigates a ruse in order to get Sir Francis Beekman out of their hotel room as others are arriving.[9] Knowing his abstemious nature, in a title card, Dorothy calls out, "Lorelei, they're sending up some packages C.O.D." Her stratagem works; Beekman "looks at his watch" and stammers in a title card, "I – I'm sorry, but I have an important engagement. I must be going right along." Dorothy, like Loos, outsmarts those around her. Also, like Loos, "Dorothy is a master of language, one who uses it subversively as ironic commentary" (Hefner 115).

In the musical, Dorothy dresses up as Lorelei and turns herself in to the French court to stand trial for the theft of the tiara. She dons a platinum wig, softens her voice, and imitates the syntax of her friend—all the while eyeing the clock to give Lorelei a chance to get the money for the tiara from Esmond, her on-again, off-again fiancé. "You see judge, sometimes life is very hard for a girl like I, especially if she happens to be pretty like I, and have blonde hair," she explains. To distract the lawyer who suspects

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[9] Both Hefner and Laura Frost also point out that Loos's novel was influenced by her work as a screenwriter. In other words, Loos created "distinct forms of vernacular pleasure" by using a script's tools in her fiction and vice versa (Frost 292). Likewise, John T. Matthews explains that both Loos as screenwriter and Lorelei as diary writer "embod[y] the emancipatory potential of fresh forms of writing" (211). By doing such work, "women of the post-war generation" found "new spaces for imaginative activities" (220).

her identity and to stall for more time, Dorothy throws off her fur coat to reveal a scant, shimmering costume and launches into Lorelei's signature song and dance routine "Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friend." While back on the stand, she tells Malone—while still acting as Lorelei—that Dorothy loves him, thus seducing him into withdrawing his testimony. Malone also resigns as the private investigator for Mr. Esmond Sr. (Taylor Holmes). Her subterfuge results in Lorelei's freedom as well as the triumph of true love in the marriage finale.

Conclusion

Both Derrida and Jean-François Lyotard critique universal, grand, meta, or "master narratives," deconstructing the concept of "'Truth' with a capital *T*" (Lyotard 37; Smith and Watson 204). In *Simulacra and Simulation,* Jean Baudrillard argues, "The territory no longer precedes the map, nor does it survive it. It is nevertheless the map that precedes the territory—precession of simulacra—that engenders the territory" (1). Much like Derrida, he goes on to assert that postmodernism constitutes the process "of substituting the sign of the real for the real" (2). In his third order of simulacra—that of the postmodern period—the representation not only precedes but actually *determines* what is real. The connection between reality and representation has been lost; only the simulacrum exists. More to the subject of this article, Loos's autobiography follows her successful story—substituting the sign of the story for the real (her actual, lived life).

Moreover, ideas related to autobiography as a "unified" account, representing a "coherent self" are merely "myths of identity" anyway (Smith and Watson 61). No "unified, stable, immutable self" even exists (61). As mentioned earlier, Bakhtin's observations regarding heteroglossia in Dostoevsky's novels apply here as well: Loos's book "is constructed

not as the whole of a single consciousness…but as a whole formed by the interaction of several consciousnesses" (18).[10]

In *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Fredric Jameson defines the postmodern work of art as one embodying less parody, more pastiche (16-17). *Gentleman Prefer Blondes*—in all its incarnations—even the film musical penned by Lederer, but so influenced by Loos's previous works—affected the content of *A Girl Like I*, which blooms into a postmodern text even going so far as the "cannibalization of" her "styles of the past" as well as the "play of random stylistic allusion" (Jameson 18).

For Loos, her past only exists and remains relevant if it bears a relationship to the writing, publication, and success of her bestselling novel and its various adaptations; her autobiographical scene selection pares down to pastiche, highlighting that very accomplishment. Thus we can also draw the conclusion that while criticism has long assigned Loos to the modernist camp, her first autobiography reveals that she trended toward postmodernism in her later writing.[11]

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[10] See also Smith and Watson on Bakhtin, 204.
[11] Monica Latham notes that "current postmodern cultural and literary practice […] manipulates the real as well as plays with different layers of truth and pluralism of realities" (355-356).

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The Taming of Homosexuality on the Popular Sitcom, *Will & Grace*

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Will and Grace is an Emmy Award-winning sitcom that originally broadcast on NBC from September 21, 1998 to May 18, 2006 for a total of eight seasons. Re-runs of the show are still on television today. The show takes place in New York City and focuses on Will Truman and his best friend Grace Adler. Will is a gay lawyer and Grace is a straight Jewish woman who owns her own interior design firm. Karen Walker and Jack McFarland are Will and Grace's friends. Karen is a bisexual rich socialite, and Jack is a struggling gay actor/singer/dancer/caterer or waiter. The show brought homosexual characters into the picture, and was a huge breakthrough because it was one of the first times we saw gay men as main characters. Before *Will and Grace* there were a few shows that portrayed homosexuality. Bonnie Dow states:

> As Foucault has noted about sexuality in general, the history of sexuality in prime-time television is not one of absence and repression, but, rather, one that has followed clear norms for different kinds of silence and speech. Representations of homosexuality have existed since televisions earliest days, although, of course, in limited number (129).

The show earned 16 Emmy Awards and 83 nominations during its eight-year time period on television. *Will and Grace* was a staple of NBC's Must See TV Thursday night lineup and was in the Nielsen Top 20 for

half of its network run, and still to this day remains the most successful series with homosexual characters. The finale of the show had over 18 million viewers making it the most viewed episode of the final two seasons.

Even though homosexual characters were portrayed on *Will and Grace*, we need to question how the constructions of gender and sexuality on the show impact norms and the status quo. This paper asks how *Will and Grace's* construction of gender and sexuality impacts the representation of homosexuality. On *Will and Grace*, homosexuality is tamed by the creation of the queer vs. normal binary, opening up the status quo box, while still being exclusionary and utilizing homo-voyeurism to grab viewers' attention. Homosexuality is made more acceptable on *Will & Grace*, while oppressing queer and anything that does not fit into a narrowly acceptable gender mold.

Representations of Homosexuality through History

Different media have included portrayals of homosexuality including early comedian Milton Berle and *The Jack Benny Show*. During the 1950s, many dramas cast homosexuals as villains, which added an aspect of deviance to gay characters. Many drama series such as *Midnight Caller, Marcus, Welby, Hunter*, and *Police Woman* all utilized the homosexual character as the villain during the 1970s and 1980s.

The gay rights movement in the 1970s pushed for more positive representations of homosexuality in media. The new wave of media in the 70s focused on treating homosexuality as a problem. For example, in 1972, *That Certain Summer* was produced featuring the main character, a gay man, who had to effectively tell his son he was gay. This movie played into the new concept of portraying homosexuality as a problem. *A Question of Love* in 1978 portrayed a lesbian mother fighting for the custody of her son. In 1985, *An Early Frost* was the first movie made for

television about AIDS. The film was about a man coming out and communicating that he was infected with AIDS to his family. Television shows such as, *The Golden Girls, Designing Women, Rhoda, Barney Miller,* and *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* showed homosexual characters as one-time appearances. The homosexual characters would only be included on the show once, not over an extended amount of episodes. Homosexuality character traits were always framed as a problem and a situation to overcome. Their sexual orientation issue was represented by its impact on the heterosexuals in the shows. Dow states, "homosexual characters are rarely shown in their own communities, homes, or same-sex romantic relationships but are depicted in terms of their place in the lives of heterosexuals" (129). During this time period, sexual desire or sex in general, is not shown in relation to homosexuals.

The 80s and 90s changed some of the typical formats of gays and lesbians in media. Instead of just being featured in comedies, gays and lesbians were represented in both comedies and dramas. *Dynasty*, a soap opera that aired in the 80s, discussed a bisexual male character that fought the battle between choosing male or female partners. *Heartbeat,* also from the 80s, focused on a lesbian nurse who worked in a women's health clinic run by feminist doctors. With this show, it only ran for one season and her sexuality was only portrayed in two episodes. In 1992, a college student coming out to his conservative, traditional family was portrayed in the film, *Doing Time on Maple Drive.* In the 90s, an episode of *L.A. Law* featured a quick kiss between a bisexual and heterosexual woman. Dow explained:

> The Reverend Donald Wildmon's American Family Association brought its wrath to bear on NBC, threatening product boycotts (as it had done with *Heartbeat*), and NBC responded by disclaiming any attempts to create a continuing lesbian storyline (130).

By the end of the season, both women were sleeping with men. In 1998 and 1999, recurring gay and lesbian characters were featured on shows such as*, Chicago Hope, ER, NYPD Blue*, and *Spin City.*

Hart looks at the representation of gay men on American television shows, specifically from the 1960s until present day. *Will and Grace* is specifically discussed by focusing on the representation of homosexual male main characters and the extreme differences between the two. Hart explains:

> Will remains so low-key about his sexual orientation that it has become almost inconsequential to the show, while Jack is consistently presented as the stereotypical flamboyant queen. In other words, Will and Jack are extreme opposites on the spectrum of possible media representations of gay men (60).

Even though both of these men are homosexuals, their representation, character, and lifestyles are very different. It is important to look into the differences and the constructions of these two males on the show and how this impacts homosexuality. Ideologies about groups of people are constructed through thought and communication and then represented in mainstream media through producers and writers. Representation of gay men on American television is the focus specifically and in relation to *Will and Grace*. The representations of groups such as gays and lesbians impact how our culture views the group. Some people believe that media does not impact them; however, everyone is impacted by constructions, stereotypes, character development, environment, et cetera. As viewers, we learn and identify with characters we see in media, and we cultivate thoughts about particular groups, places, events, and phenomenon. Homosexuality is once again viewed as a problem that needs to be solved or fixed. This is a recurring motif for homosexual characters in American television. Long-standing homosexual characters were not very often portrayed before the 1990s. When they were featured, they were often the

bad guys or constructed as a problem. *Will and Grace* bucks both of these trends but still relies on masculine-feminine binary and the hetero-homo binary, both of which are critiqued by queer theory.

In general, the media representations of groups, and specifically in this case, gay men on television, have the ability to influence the beliefs associated with gay men and the images create perceptions of gay men and their lifestyles. There are different types of representations of homosexuality in media. Negative representations can lead to prejudice, decreased levels of social tolerance, and homophobia. Positive representations can function to decrease stigma associated with homosexuality. The representation of groups can take a positive or negative face. There has been progress made throughout American history in the representation of gay men in the media, but more progress needs to be made. The idea of binaries is prevalent in all of the research on representations of homosexuality in media. The gay man/heterosexual woman couple pairing is important.

Homo-voyeurism

Media representations of homosexuality are usually done in conjunction with the masculine-feminine binary, and have increased recently. With the increase of homosexuality in our media, homo-voyeurism has also increased. Imagine if *Will and Grace* was just another typical sitcom we have already seen. Adding the two gay male characters, gives the viewer a sense of the unknown and a "secret" lifestyle, as discussed previously. Tapping into the concept of homo-voyeurism allows viewers to see what the lifestyle of gay men entails. Manuel looks into the representation of gays and lesbians in television programming, and the increase of heterosexuals watching queered programming. Since the amount of queered programming has increased, she looks at how homo-voyeurism works as a tool of cultural consumerism. Manuel (2019) states:

> Viewers watch the lives of others with the television functioning as a safe barrier between themselves and the subject. The television is a tool to invade the lives of others, making public spectacle those lives of the observed while the observer is kept ''private'' from meaningful interpersonal interaction between themself and the sexualized Other (278).

This encompasses the idea that we watch people of different lifestyles and demographics on television as entertainment and a spectacle without actually having to interact or get to know them in real life. The television functions as a commodity of consumption, and the viewers partake in voyeurism because they utilize it as an escape. The viewer functions as the voyeur and is impacted by the images and representations crafted and communicated via television. That is, viewers or voyeurs' attitudes and beliefs are impacted, changed, shaped, or reinforced by mainstream media. According to Manuel:

> Homovoyeurism can also be likened to what Kuhn (1985, 71) refers to as a ''view behind'' the subject, or a ''voyeuristic view'' of the character that suggests pleasure is taken in the very activity of the gaze. The homovoyeurism is enticed to ''become'' any of the characters, or to simply remain the outside observer (279).

Homo-voyeurism allows the viewer to be empowered. The viewer utilizes the homosexual characters as a form of spectacle; they can form attitudes about the characters with no comment or intervention by others. Overall, Manuel (2019) claims that heterosexual viewers become homo-voyeurs through their consumptions of queer imagery as spectacle and entertainment, and that barriers are still up for meaningful interaction across homosexual and heterosexual identity boundaries. Queered programming opens up a space for cross-sexual identity, but does not break the communication barrier. *Will and Grace* is known for having gay

male main characters, but there are criticisms. Homo-voyeurism ends up displacing gay and normal binaries to queer and normal and gay and straight binaries, and tames homosexuality on *Will and Grace*. While media representations of homosexuals are a good thing, theory has recently called attention to queer, which deconstructs the gay-straight binary.

Homo-voyeurism also comes into play with the construction of gender and sexuality on *Will and Grace*. People tuned in and still tune into the show because the main characters are gay. If the main characters were not gay, it would just be another typical, sitcom about living in New York City. *Will and Grace* entices us with homo-voyeurism, and then tames the homo while laughing at the queer. The show taps into the cultural belief that homosexuality is non-normative and even scandalous. Including the homosexual males as main characters appeals to a lifestyle that typical mainstream media did not portray and it plays into homo-voyeurism by allowing us to watch homosexuality on our televisions. While the show does promote homo-voyeurism, the show also portrays gay as normative as long as one is not queer. *Will and Grace* says one thing while doing another. It taps into homo-voyeurism by exploiting gay differences for spectacle and sensationalism, while also taming homosexuality. Will is crafted as the masculine, normative, could be straight, gay man the audience is supposed to identify with, while Jack is the flamboyant, feminine, not responsible, gay man the audience is supposed to laugh at. *Will and Grace* does include gay male characters as main characters while functioning within the realm of hetero-normativity by saying that it is okay to be gay, but not okay to be queer. Overall, *Will and Grace* tames homosexuality by tapping into the typical popular culture norms of what it means to be homosexual. The show opens the status quo box of homosexuality while still being exclusionary through many different techniques discussed in this paper.

Situation Comedies / Sitcoms

Fouts and Inch (2005) looked at 22 television situation comedies to determine the incidence of homosexual characters, their demographics, and whether they verbally comment about sexual orientation. The authors' state:

> Situation comedies (e.g., Friends, Will and Grace) were of particular interest because they are the most watched programs by adolescents and young adults and, thus, are the most likely to influence viewers who are at the stage when their body concepts and identities are developing (37, citing (Blair & Sanford, 1999; Fouts & Burggraf, 1999; Steele, 1999)).

These situation comedies have a large impact on our culture and view of homosexuality. Since there are not many positive images of homosexuals in media and in our culture, many young homosexual adolescents do not have role models with whom they can identify (Fouts and Inch, 2005). Homosexual characters are also under-represented in mainstream media. The authors (Fouts and Inch, 2005) think this phenomenon occurs because, "the absence of homosexual characters may serve as a metaphorical model for hiding one's sexual orientation, the message being that if such characters are hidden from view on television, then perhaps homosexual viewers should do the same" (37).

The article also delves into what Dow discusses in her article. She focused on the coming out of Ellen DeGeneres, and that homosexuality is crafted and viewed as a problem that needs to be solved in the media. Since homosexuality is portrayed as a problem or issue that needs to be fixed, heterosexual characters are less occupied and discuss their sexuality less than homosexual characters. Homosexuality is then made more of an issue in mainstream media and is discussed more often than heterosexuality. Since heterosexuality is the dominant, normal, and

socially accepted sexual orientation, characters do not need to talk about their experience. In their content analysis, the authors found that, "only three of the 125 characters (2%) were homosexual; there were no bisexual characters. The homosexual characters appeared in two programs, *Will and Grace* (both Caucasian) and *Spin City* (a Black individual)" (40).

Battles and Hilton-Morrow (2002) look into how *Will and Grace* places "homosexuality within safe and familiar popular culture conventions, particularly those of the situation comedy genre" (87). Even though *Will and Grace* portrays homosexuality, the show still falls within the popular conventions. By utilizing feminist and queer theories, Battles and Hilton-Marrow look at what happens when media relies on familiar situation comedy conventions. Will and Jack are both gay men, but are both very different. In the past, media has utilized the comic frame to portray gay men. In *Will and Grace*, Jack takes on this comedic and feminine frame, while Will's character can be read as masculine and straight. The authors state, "Unlike his feminized counterpart, Jack, Will fits well into a mainstream model of masculinity, being handsome, muscular, and physically fit" (90).

This demonstrates that there is a huge underrepresentation of homosexuality in mainstream media. This plays into isolation, marginalization, and invalidation of gays and lesbians in our culture. Adolescent homosexuals have no characters in the media to identify with and develop. Based upon the representation in our media, people may form incorrect beliefs about homosexuals, and negative stereotypes or normal behaviors will be reinforced. The homosexual characters found in the analysis commented on their sexuality more than the heterosexual characters, which imply a huge difference between the two sexualities. In general:

> Only 2% of the 125 central characters were homosexual; thus, homosexuality is significantly under-represented in programs that adolescents and young adults watch compared to actual prevalence

rates of homosexuality in North America (10-13%). All the homosexual characters were male and in the 20-35-year-old age group; this indicates that homosexual adolescent viewers have no peer role models with whom to identify. Homosexual characters made significantly more comments about sexual orientation than heterosexual characters. This suggests that television writers/producers present sexual orientation as a significant theme in the lives of homosexual characters (35).

This plays into the idea that homosexuality is not present in our mainstream media, and when it is, the character's main focus is on their sexuality rather than other things. Situation comedies, like *Will and Grace* provide homosexual characters, but close attention needs to be drawn to the construction of the characters in regards to gender and sexuality. Gay characters in media are a topic that has been discussed more and more over the past decades and many critical, feminist, and queer theorists look at and analyze the representation of homosexuality in mainstream media.

Queer Theory

Queer theory developed from women's studies and queer studies. Influenced by Judith Butler, Eve Kosofsky, and Lauren Berlant, queer theory theorizes about "queerness" itself, and examines the socially constructed nature of sexual identities and acts in relation to gays and lesbians. Queer theory opens up the binary between heterosexual and homosexual to other different or deviant sexuality and sexual acts. Based upon gender and sexuality, identities are not categorized or fixed in queer theory. People are not placed in a single restrictive binary, and it encompasses anything that does not fit into the normative category, which is usually based on the hetero/homo binary. Queer theory, takes a critical approach to challenge heteronormative discourse and focuses on non-

heteronormative sexualities. Derived from post-structuralism, in the 1970s, multiple theorists and authors came together to deconstruct sexual identity and focused specifically on the construction of straight, normative identity. The term was coined in 1990 through Sedgwick, Butler, Adrienne Rich, and Diana Fuss, based upon the work of Michel Foucault. Sedgwick really taps into the creation of homosexuality and heterosexuality in the 19th and 20th centuries and how this time period impacts the constructions today. Sedgwick coined the term queer theory, and the field has grown and impacted many other scholars today. It has made people question and analyze the construction of homosexuality and sexuality in general.

Binaries

Sedgwick's popular book, *Epistemology of the Closet*, is one of the key texts of queer theory. The book incorporates feminism, gay and lesbian studies, gender studies, and queer studies. Sedgwick was one of the "mothers" of queer theory. This theory and her writing come from her heart and from a place of passion for change. In this text, specifically focusing on gay men in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in France, England, and North America, she discusses the challenge between people and their differences, perceptions of sexuality, and each person's independence.

The homo/hetero binary is an important one discussed in depth by Sedgwick in her text, especially in relation to *Will and Grace* and taming of homosexuality. It focused on homoerotic desire around the turn of the century in both American and British culture. She develops her opinions on how this homoeroticism impacts how the ideology of sexuality is constructed and viewed today. She states:

> That many of the major modes of thought and knowledge in twentieth-century Western culture as a whole are structured—

indeed fractured—by the now endemic crisis of homo/heterosexual definition, indicatively male, dating from the end of the nineteenth century (1).

Ideas about homosexuality inform the way men view the topic in the West. The incoherence from the constructed meaning on homosexuality has marked society. Shugart (2003) looks into the gay man/heterosexual women couple configuration as a genre. She explains that the representation of gay men has been made visible by this pairing specifically shown in *My Best Friend's Wedding*, *Object of My Affection*, *The Next Best Thing*, and *Will and Grace.* The gay man's pairing with the heterosexual woman as his best friend heterosexualizes the homosexual male. In *Will and Grace* specifically, the two main characters function more as a couple rather than best friends. They get jealous of each other's significant others, argue like a couple would, live together, and take on the role of soul mates. Similar character development and pairing occurs in the other films Shugart discusses. In the majority of the pairing between the homosexual male and the heterosexual female, there is an aspect of sexual acts between them. For example, in *Will and Grace,* Grace is naked in front of Will multiple times throughout the entire show. The pairing of the homosexual male with the heterosexual female heteronormalizes his sexuality by making him appear to be in a relationship with the female. In general, Shugart (2003) claims that:

> …in these texts, homosexuality is not only recoded and normalized in these representations as consistent with privileged male heterosexuality but is articulated as extending heterosexual male privilege. In so doing, blatant sexism is reinvented and legitimized, and gay male identity simultaneously is defined by and renormalizes heteronormativity (67).

Gendered couples are always portrayed in media and film. Shugart argues that the pairing or coupling of homosexual males with heterosexual females heteronormalizes their sexuality. Other authors also discuss the importance of gendering couples.

Both heterosexual couples and same-sex couples are portrayed on television. Playing into the repeated idea that homosexuals discuss their sexuality more than heterosexuals in media representations. According to Holz Ivory, Gibson, and Ivory (2009): "The media, particularly television, have done much to promote and normalize gendered images of men and women in heterosexual romantic relationships" (171). That is, heterosexual couples are what media producers' craft as normal and acceptable, while homosexual relationships are abstract or non-normative. Media representations of same-sex couples tend to have one feminine and one masculine partner who perform traditional gender roles. Masculinity and femininity are two concepts focused on by researchers of gender role socialization. They utilize personality trait scales to measure masculinity and femininity. When analyzing media, Holz Ivory, Gibson, and Ivory (2009) state: "In analyzing media portrayals, therefore, dominant and submissive behaviors can therefore be used as an indicator of stereotypical gender role behavior" (174). The concepts of femininity and submissiveness and masculinity and dominance are represented in media. Characters that are more feminine are typically submissive while characters that are more masculine are more dominant. Development of attitudes towards sex roles can develop and have been known to develop from representation of gendered media and television shows.

Like many other researchers, Holz Ivory, Gibson, and Ivory (2009) explain the concept of identity and identification. Gay and lesbian viewers may search for representations of their identity in the media. They may learn that one partner needs to be dominant and more masculine, while the other needs to be more feminine and submissive since this message is typically communicated. In relation to heterosexual viewers, who do not

experience homosexuality in their everyday life, the media will be their point of reference for images and perception of homosexuality. Gendered relationships are prevalent in mainstream media. The authors explain:

> The phenomenon of the gendered relationship is also reflected and perhaps perpetuated by television. Male and female television characters are portrayed in stereotypically gendered masculine and feminine fashions, and gender roles are prominent in male and female intimate relationship portrayals (186).

Both heterosexual and homosexual couples on television play into the masculine/feminine binary. Even though, this binary does not ring true in everyday life, it is represented and utilized over and over in media. According to the authors: "This study's findings that same-sex couples on television are portrayed as gendered like heterosexual couples add more support to such claims that television places gay male and lesbian characters involved in intimate relationships into unrealistically gendered roles" (197). Mainstream media places individuals into either the masculine or feminine binary and also genders both heterosexual and homosexual couples. This gendering plays into the binary crafted on *Will and Grace*. Not only does the binary of queer vs. normal impact the taming of sexuality on *Will and Grace*, the concept of homo-voyeurism is utilized to obtain viewers.

Battles and Hilton-Morrow (2002) look into how *Will and Grace* places "homosexuality within safe and familiar popular culture conventions, particularly those of the situation comedy genre" (87). Even though *Will and Grace* portrays homosexuality the show still falls within the popular conventions. By utilizing feminist and queer theories, Battles and Hilton-Marrow look at what happens when media relies on familiar situation comedy conventions. Will and Jack are both gay men, but are both very different. In the past, media has utilized the comic frame to portray gay men. In *Will and Grace*, Jack takes on this comedic and

feminine frame, while Will's character can be read as masculine and straight. The authors' state: "Unlike his feminized counterpart, Jack, Will fits well into a mainstream model of masculinity, being handsome, muscular, and physically fit" (90).

Sedgwick also discusses binaries in her text on opposing terms through an analysis of late nineteenth century philosophical works and literature. Some of the binaries she explains are, masculine/feminine, private/public, new/old, natural/artificial, and majority/minority. She describes the opposition and relationships between each of the pairs in the relation to the questioning of who and what was defined as homosexual during the turn of the century. Based upon this, each of these functions within the homo/hetero binary crisis as defined by queer theory. She discusses that homophobia is the reason for the homo/hetero binary crisis. There are increasing numbers of homosexuals on TV, but that they are typically not queer. They typically fall under a "normal" hetero-homo binary.

The closet impacts Western culture; every structure is impacted and understood by the closet because sexuality is central to how we view ourselves. Sexuality defines a large percentage of life including communication. Sexuality defines our lives, our values, and us. Since homosexuality is viewed as forbidden or "in the closet," then being homosexual is secret knowledge. The construction plays as a mental schema. When one thinks of homosexuality, they think of it as a secret, and when one thinks of a secret in relation to sexuality, they will assume homosexuality over heterosexuality. Hence, why homosexuals must "come out" today, rather than just being accepted like heterosexuals. Sedgwick doesn't think people should have to decide between two binaries, and that people should not have to compromise to fit into one or the other. She discusses the binaries and conflict between fitting into one or the other defines how homosexuality is constructed and interpreted. The "minoritizing/universalizing" and "transitive/separatist" Sedgwick discusses plays into the homo/hetero binary structure. All of these define

interaction, sexuality, and all social situations for homosexual men specifically in this text.

Her discussion of homosexuality stems from the idea that it actually did not exist before the 19th century. Identifying as heterosexual did not come into being before homosexual did. Without the abnormal sexuality, the normal sexuality did not exist. There were sexual behaviors that were viewed as abnormal, but not an entire group of people that embodied abnormality.

Taming Homosexuality

Will and Grace also pairs characters. For example, Will and Grace are paired and Jack and Karen are paired. In these pairings, the characters find their most successful relationships. Battles and Hilton-Morrow (2002) explain: "*Will and Grace* are oftentimes positioned as a couple and Jack and Karen usually operate as "partners in crime." (92). This emphasizes the hetero-social pairings. Hetero-sociality is more valued and shown more in the show, rather than homo-sociality. The close relationships are between the opposite-sexed characters, rather than the same-sexed couples. Jack and Will are actually the two characters that are farthest apart. Jack is classified as the queer, while Will is just the normative gay. *Will and Grace* constructs gender and sexuality to create a queer vs. normal binary through character and plot development. Will and Grace fall under the normal binary while Karen and Jack fall under the queer binary. Each of these characters appear throughout the episodes and are shown in pairs. Will and Grace are best friends and live together, while Jack and Karen are best friends and are shown together a lot. The development of the characters in the show plays into the construction of the queer and normal binaries. The characters fall into the normative and queer binaries. The characteristics of the normative "gay" binary include being monogamous, masculine, likable (instead of comic, steady and

reliable, and having a stable job), while the queer "gay" binary is completely the opposite. The queer binary includes non-monogamous sex, being flamboyant, the comedic factor, not reliable or dependable, and not having a steady job.

Will

Will is a lawyer who studied at Columbia University where he met Grace. They actually dated in college, until Jack accused Will of being in denial about his sexuality. Will proposes to Grace so he does not have to sleep with her, but later comes out to her about being gay. Out of anger, Grace does not talk to Will for a year, but later they run into one another and become best friends. He is obsessed with cleaning and organization, is monogamous in his relationships, and lives with Grace. Other characters in the show joke about Will and Grace being a romantic couple and living together rather than just being friends. Will falls into the normal "gay" binary because he is very masculine, lives with Grace, functions in monogamous relationships, is a lawyer with a steady job, is reliable and dependable.

Grace

Grace is an interior designer, best friends with Will, and has a love for food. She acts as a balance for Will and his uptight nature by being messy and laid back. These two characters live together and function more like husband and wife than friends. Her close bond even frustrates Grace's lovers with Will. They support one another through break ups and judge whom the other picks as their significant other. In the first episode, Grace was about to marry her boyfriend Danny, but Will disapproved. On the way to her wedding, she realizes that Will is right and leaves Danny. She needs somewhere to move, and moves in with Will in the Upper West

Side. They are shown together in pairs throughout the show and make up the normal binary. They each are monogamous in their relationships, are responsible, have good jobs, make a steady income, and are crafted as the characters for the audience to identify with. They are responsible and act as Jack and Karen's role models and parent figures. Both Will and Grace are the normal and acceptable characters of the show.

Karen

Karen is bisexual, married to Stan, and works as Grace's assistant to have time away from him and her kids. She is a multimillionaire, drinks a lot and uses prescription pills, and is closer to Jack and Grace than Will. She actually insults Stan and even communicates that she married him for his money. They end up getting divorced at the end of season 5, and she begins dating in season 6. She sleeps around and does not follow the status quo of what a woman should be.

Jack

Jack is Karen's best friend, superficial, and super flamboyant. He also has multiple sexual partners, jumps from one man to the other, and changes occupations often. He does not attempt to stay in long-term relationships, and even cheats on some of his boyfriends. Jack and Karen are paired together in the show and are crafted as the queer characters. Ironically, Karen and Jack live together even though they mock Will and Grace for doing so. They each make irresponsible life choices, have various sexual encounters, are not faithful to their partners, do not hold down steady jobs, do not have steady incomes, and refer to Will and Grace for help and guidance. Both Karen and Jack make jokes about Will and Grace being sexless lovers and non-romantic life partners. They are created as the comedic characters to make the audience laugh. They are also viewed as

the unacceptable and queer characters of the show. Jack specifically falls under the queer "gay" because he is flamboyant, never gets into a serious relationship, is sexually promiscuous, does not have a stable job, and is not reliable or dependable.

The idea of coming out on television is an important one to look at in this case. In *Will and Grace*, Will comes out in the first season, when he and Grace date in college. He won't sleep with her and finally comes out to her. Jack is already assumed as gay in the show and does not come out. The idea of becoming gay and coming out is not viewed as a problem to be solved or an issue. This reinforces the idea that it is okay to be gay, as long as you are not queer. Both Will and Jack are accepted as homosexuals, but the normative homosexual is accepted over the queer homosexual. This concept also plays into the taming of homosexuality on the show. Other shows stage a large coming out for the homosexual characters, but in this case, Will came out early on in the show, and Jack is already out. This tames homosexuality and reinforces the acceptance of normative and the rejection of queer, once again building into the status quo box and taming of homosexuality and dominance of hetero-normativity.

The situation comedies allow for an emphasis on interpersonal relationships between characters rather than their relationship with the outside world. *Will and Grace* most definitely focused on interpersonal relationships between characters, rather than their connections to the larger social world. Will and Grace are always discussing interpersonal things like relationships and their experiences with one another. Every situation and conversation the characters have focuses on their interpersonal relationships rather than their connection to the larger world. Each character on *Will and Grace* builds relationships by discussing their interpersonal life, rather than their public life or their connections to the world at large. We only hear about their interpersonal problems and successes.

The same structure of homosexuality being viewed as a problem occurs. Grace must always deal with the problems raised by Will being homosexual. The creator of *Will and Grace* said that the show was never created to educate the American public about gay life, but was just made to reach a large demographic of people. Because of all of these things, *Will and Grace* actually reinforces heterosexism and can be viewed as heteronormative because it takes on the typical television frame and convention. *Will and Grace* opens the status quo box of homosexuality, but is still exclusionary. Battles and Hilton-Morrow (2002) explain:

> *Will and Grace* makes homosexuality safe for broadcast television audiences by framing its characters within the familiar popular culture convention that equates gayness with a lack of masculinity and through the familiar situation comedy genre conventions of romantic comedy and delayed consummation, infantilization, and an emphasis on character's interpersonal relationships rather than the character's connections to the larger social world (101).

Will and Grace portrays homosexual men, but they are extreme opposites and live very different life styles. Will takes on the masculine "very straight gay," while Jack takes on the flamboyant gay man. Other authors also study this gay representation phenomenon.

Mitchelle (2005) looks at the rhetorical construction of different in *Will and Grace*. She explains how *Will and Grace* produces containment and what is accepted as gay through the rhetorical construction of Jack and Will. She explains *Will and Grace* as the "new homophobia on TV to argue that the program works to enforce hegemonic social relations of inequity in a broader sense as well." (1052). The representations of characters on the show conform to typical and acceptable social conceptions. They remain inoffensive to the audience. That is, W*ill and Grace* exposes the viewers to a homosexual lifestyle in two very different ways, while still fitting into the hetero-normative box. Michelle explains

how *Will and Grace* does this by saying, "Both the disavowal of politics and the deployment of humor work in conjunction to secure this effect; they create an effective rhetorical stance by which *Will and Grace* can represent the Other while also appealing to a broad audience." (1053).

Will and Grace exposes the life of two homosexual men, which taps into the homo-voyeur aspect, while still remaining culturally accepted enough to appeal to a large audience. The show creates homosexuality as a spectacle while creating what is acceptable and valued as a gay man. Jack and Karen's characters take on the queer and unacceptable role. Both do not hold steady jobs, sleep around, are not monogamous, have little to no responsibility, cannot do much for themselves, and are always asking Will and Grace for advice. Their characters take on what is unacceptable and frowned upon in the queer binary. Each of them is crafted as the characters for us to laugh at and not identify with because they play into everything that is unacceptable. Even though the program has Will and Jack as gay male characters, it still does not break hetero-normativity. Mitchelle (2005) states:

> The program challenges the industry's tendency to construct heterosexuality as the primetime norm through its characters and storylines, for instance. But the program's inclusion of gay identity does not perforce produce antiracist, antisexist, or antiheterosexist counterknowledges that will alter inequitable social conditions (1063-1064).

The show features gay characters that are crafted to not offend the audience, while still getting to viewers through the use of homo-voyeurism.

The Finale

Will and Grace is structured like many other sitcoms in American television. It was taped in front of a live audience, and is structured in a way that tames homosexuality in itself. Eighteen million viewers according to Nielsen watched the finale. It was the twenty-third episode of the show's eighth season, which aired on May 18, 2006. In the finale, Grace has a dream about what her life would be like in fifteen years if she still lived with Will, and is pregnant with her ex-husband Leo's baby. He doesn't even know she is pregnant, but shows up at her door to propose. She accepts his proposal to get married again. Two years later, she lives with Leo in Rome for a year, then they move back to New York to raise their daughter Lyla.

Will and his partner are also raising a child together during this time named Ben. During all of this, Will and Grace are not speaking to one another, because Will is mad Grace got back together with Leo. Jack and Karen set them up to be at the same place at the same time. They tell Will and Grace there is an emergency and they need to be at the hospital. Once they all arrive, Will and Grace realize that Jack and Karen set them up, but decide to talk in the cafeteria anyway. Their relationship is still rocky at this time. Karen finds out that she will have no money due to her bankrupt ex-husband. She also finds this out when her credit card is rejected while eating a meal with Jack. After Will and Grace have a reunion dinner with Jack and Karen they try to plan a time to get together, but Will is busy with his partner Vince and their baby Ben, and Grace is busy with Leo and their baby, Lyla. They decide that faith will bring them together. During this time a rich man named Beverly Leslie, Karen's nemesis, offers Jack all of his money to be his boyfriend. He starts to date Beverly for his money. Beverly ends up dying, leaving all of his money to Jack, and he helps out Karen.

Will and Grace re-meet 15 years later when their kids go to college together. Jack and Karen end up living and growing old together with Rosario, Karen's boyfriend. They discuss how they have outlasted many relationships and marriages. They end their evening with the memorable duet of Nat King Cole's song, *Unforgettable*.

Will and Grace's kids eventually marry each other which heterosexually pairs them further, and the finale ends with Will and Grace watching *ER*, all four of the characters together at a bar to toast their friendship. The finale takes us through the ups and downs of the main characters relationships, but in the end of the episode, they end up together and friends again.

The episode plays into the character development and pairings. Will and Grace are paired and the episode focuses on their relationship, while Jack and Karen are also paired. Both Grace and Will are raising their children with their significant others, while Jack and Karen are both still living together and randomly dating. Karen has no money and no career, and Jack received money from a dying Beverly but also does not have a career. Jack's lifestyle is that of the queer, flamboyant, gay man, Grace takes on the normative, straight woman, Will is the "could be straight" gay man, and Karen is the irresponsible, bisexual, divorced, bankrupt woman.

The normative characters, Will and Grace, are crafted for the strong identification with the audience, while the queer characters, Jack and Karen are crafted as the comedic characters. The normal characters play into the status quo of the dominant culture and society. Will and Grace each are independent, have good jobs, are in monogamous relationships, do not sleep around, and offer advice to Jack and Karen. Jack and Karen on the other hand do not fit into the status quo of society. They continue to have multiple sexual partners, are not in monogamous relationships, do not have a steady income, and go to Will and Grace for positive role modeling. The construction of the queer vs. normal binary is perfectly crafted by the character development and pairing of the four characters.

The show also crafts gender and sexuality to tame homosexuality in the show from the beginning to the finale.

Conclusion

Will and Grace constructs gender and sexuality to tame homosexuality and creates a status quo box of what is acceptable and normal for homosexuals. The status quo box is expanded through Will and Grace, but is still exclusionary. Since this show was one of the first to include homosexual males as main characters it is very important to look into how homosexuality is constructed. Will, the character we are meant to identify with, is handsome, masculine, not overly emotional or flamboyant, has a job as a lawyer, and lives with Grace. When you look at how his life appears, it is as if he is a heterosexual man. This character development tames homosexuality in itself. The homosexual normative character is actually hetero-normative in every aspect of his life. The show does not discuss Will being homosexual often nor is he discussing it frequently. If someone who never knew about *Will and Grace* watched the show, they may even assume he is a heterosexual male dating Grace in some episodes. Even though Will is a main character and is homosexual, we need to be aware that his homosexuality and the status quo box of what is acceptable and identifiable remain hetero-normative in nature.

Media representations of homosexuality are appearing more frequently on television and have an impact on viewers. Media representations influence viewers and how they view and think about particular people and groups of people. Hart (2002, citing Gross, 1994) states:

> The phrase "media representation" refers to the ways that members of various social groups are differentially presented in mass media offerings, which in turn influence the ways audience members of those media offerings perceive and respond to

members of the groups represented. Because mainstream media offerings are typically presented to audience members as "transparent mediators of reality" in the social world, they regularly contribute to the social "knowledge" media users cultivate about the "real world" and the wide range of individuals who live there (60).

In general, the media representation of homosexuality on *Will and Grace* influences peoples' beliefs on what homosexuality is and what homosexuality looks like. The power of media representations is at times overlooked and needs to be given more attention. According to Hart (2002, citing Estrada & Quintero, 1999):

The representation of gay men on American television from the late 1960s to the present has undoubtedly influenced the way the American public thinks about and responds, both socially and politically, to gay men and the issues of greatest relevance and concern to them. Media representations have shaped the way Americans come to understand the phenomenon of homosexuality and, ultimately, they have had a direct bearing on the already complex relationships within and between various social groups in American society (62).

The media representation of homosexuality on *Will and Grace* play into the queer vs. normal binary, and portrays what is acceptable and unacceptable. Sedgwick explains the excluding of the queer by stating:

To alienate conclusively, definitionally, from anyone on any theoretical ground the authority to describe and name their own sexual desire is a terribly consequential seizure. In this century, in which sexuality has been made expressive of the essence of both

identity and knowledge, it may represent the most intimate
violence possible (26).

This plays into the creation of the homo/hetero binary, judgment, and
negative homosexual stereotypes through homophobia. On the show,
queer is excluded while gay is tamed. This is a negative exclusion,
because it excludes many people who would have a chance to identify
with a homosexual character. The show reinforces the hetero-normative,
while excluding the queer, and taming the gay. It creates the status quo
box of what acceptable gay encompasses and what unacceptable gay
entails. It crafts a negative status quo and norms for homosexuals.
Replacing one bad binary with another is not really progress, but just
oppression disguised as progress.

Overall, *Will & Grace* tames homosexuality and excludes the queer by
creating a status quo box of what is acceptable for homosexuals. The show
utilizes three main concepts: first, homo-voyeurism, second, character
development, and third, the queer/normal binary to tame homosexuality.
This paper only analyzed the finale of the episode and did a brief overview
of the episode. It would be advised for future research focusing on the
representation of homosexuality on *Will & Grace* to focus on an entire
season or more than one episode of the show. Analyzing the representation
of homosexuality not only on *Will & Grace* but other shows is very
important and should be conducted more in the future of critical theory,
cultural and media studies.

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Survivor Shows and Caveman Masculinity

JARED CHAMPION

In the past decade, reality television focused on survivor skills and tactics has exploded in popularity. Programs like *Man vs. Wild*; *Man, Woman, Wild; Dual Survival, Naked and Afraid,* and *Survivorman* all depict men (sometimes paired with women) in staged survival situations. In fact, these shows have become so popular that they are among the top programs for a number of networks, especially the Discovery Channel. The genre merges a number of forms including reality television, documentary films, and how-to instructional programs. Each offers viewers the opportunity to see "experts" demonstrate methods and tips for surviving in tenuous situations, yet even a cursory examination reveals a carefully staged construction of survival narratives. In response, masculinity scholars have pointed to the rise of hypermasculinity, like versions found in survival television, as a type of manhood-reclamation for emasculated men through exaggerated survivor narratives. However, the hypermasculinity-as-reclamation thesis ignores the complexity and variations of masculinity, even in "hyper forms.[1]" In response, this essay interrogates the narrative

[1] Peter Tragos' "Monster Masculinity: Honey, I'll Be In The Garage Reasserting My Manhood" offers a compelling argument for the connection between hypermasculinity and reclaiming manhood, but it flattens all varieties of manhood into one cohesive narrative. Instead, I would suggest that hypermasculinity has begun to transform and adapt in two (possibly more) ways: first, traditionally hypermasculine spaces are becoming more open to homosexuality; take, for example, the recent support of gay football player Michael Sam's decision to come out of the closet. This is not to say homophobia has been defeated, merely to say that support of a gay athlete offers a complication to the flattened version of manhood into one cohesive narrative. And second, many of the depictions of hypermasculinity—Chuck Norris jokes or "the most

construction of reality programs geared toward survival and their representation of "caveman[2]" masculinity—marked by dangerous displays of physicality and powerfully carnivorous appetites—to explore a more complicated relationship between contemporary masculinity and a growing respect for women as partners and leaders, a push from homophobic to homoerotic representations of fraternity, and an incorporation of environmental sustainability into notions of mainstream manhood.

Scholars accepted the fictionality of reality or documentary-style television long ago.[3] Like all other reality or documentary forms, these depend heavily on pastiche to create a cohesive narrative complete with plot and resolution. While many scholars accept that reality narratives have been carefully constructed, average viewers are much less ready to accept collage-narratives when it comes to survival stories. In one famous example, the U.K Daily Mail challenged the authenticity of *Born Survivor* (called *Man vs. Wild* (*MVW*) in the U.S.) in an article titled "How Bear Grylls the Born Survivor roughed it – in hotels." This article prompted the producers to issue an apology, saying that, "We take any allegations of misleading our audiences seriously… but Born Survivor is not an observational documentary series but a 'how to' guide to basic survival techniques in extreme environments." But these make very poor how-to videos, often giving viewers dangerous advice. When examining the article more closely, it becomes glaringly apparent that Grylls's biggest offense was sleeping in a posh resort hotel complete with internet access,

interesting man in the world"—are meant to be hyperbolic satirizations of a silly and foolish manhood. I talk more about these later in the essay.

[2] I use the term "caveman masculinity" in an effort to connect this style of physical, carnivorous manhood with other emerging pieces of popular culture like the Paleo Diet, barefoot running, and mud runs like the increasingly popular Tough Mudder.

[3] For more on this, see John Corner's "Performing the Real: Documentary Diversions" and Susan Murray's "'I Think We Need a New Name for it': The Meeting of Documentary and Reality TV."

not his failure to offer a complete or authentic narrative of survival. Rather than pick the episodes apart for their infidelity to the documentary form or even "reality," a more fruitful analysis happens by unpacking the connections between the various constructions of manhood.

These shows allow viewers a form of surrogate masculinity where manhood is asserted by proxy. Still, the point remains: these shows are obsessed with the role of men and questions of male value. The titles are the first indicator that these shows actually focus on manhood as a corollary for survival skill. Far from attacking survivor television for offering a constructed version of masculinity (which I believe to be obvious), the fictionalized narratives serve as an entry point to begin historicizing the increase in their popularity as part of a post-9/11 masculine anxiety; as will be shown, they also reveal a growing acceptance of women as partners and gay access to hypermasculinity. The men featured are all white, middle-aged, and straight. Nearly all connect the survival expertise to military training, and all use a knife as symbolic phallus. Finally, they work to connect masculinity with sustainability through notions of minimalism. While many versions of manhood rely on material products to establish worth—big houses, fast cars, expensive clothing—survivor shows work to reorient manhood within the body, a move that allows for men to be manly and "tree-huggers" simultaneously.

The reclaimed manhood argument does help explain masculinity in an increasingly urbanized global world, but this argument ignores the growing female presence on such programs—to say nothing of the numerous demonstrations of women's expertise—and the counter-masculinities many depict. Rather than offer viewers a form of unified masculinity, survival programs rely on a few motifs of manhood ranging from the practical and cautious seen in *Survivorman* (*SM*) or characters in *Man, Woman, Wild* (*MWW*) *t*o the reckless and brave-to-the-point-of-foolish as seen in *Man vs. Wild* and *Dual Survival* (*DS*). The construction of manhood within the genre reveals the varieties of masculinity at work

and establishes that the there is, in fact, some level of revision to mainstream masculinity at work in the programs.

Staging manhood in a number of ways, fictionalized survival narratives most notably frame knowledge in particular and specialized ways. In an episode of *Survivorman* set in the Sierra Nevada mountains, host Les Stroud explains a common tendency for people in the early stages of being lost to actually accelerate pace, make poor decisions, and panic their way into even worse situations. This scene highlights perhaps the most important piece of information the hosts have that actual survivors do not: the hosts know they are headed into the wilderness with the intention of getting lost. This allows each of the hosts to carefully plan, pack, and research the areas where each episode is filmed. This, of course, is fairly obvious, and a genuine survival narrative would no doubt prove painfully boring; imagine the film *127 Hours* taking place over an actual 127 hours, for example. However, the hosts rarely if ever address the preparation they took before heading into the wilderness, and this omission frames the hosts' knowledge as significantly more extensive and based in experience rather than research.

Most episodes use a voice-over from either the hosts or an unseen narrator. Grylls of *MVW* and Hawke of *MWW* both do the majority of voice-over narration, but the other programs rely on unseen narrators with deep, raspy voices. The narration develops a sense of danger and drama, but more than this, it also fabricates a connection between manhood and knowledge. But not all narration is the same: survivor shows also disseminate this specialized, well-researched knowledge through unseen omniscient narrators, talking head soliloquys from the hosts, and through 3rd person commentary between the hosts. The genre presents a complicated relationship between knowledge and manhood, though, particularly through a decentering of expertise. Rather than offer one, comprehensive expert, survivor shows rely on a myriad of voices to relay techniques, advice, and relevant facts. So when these narrators bring in

very detailed information to explain situations that arise throughout filming, the voice-overs also challenge masculinity in two ways: first, *MWW*'s Ruth who often adds insight and interpretation through both voice-overs and talking head moments; and second, the narrator of *Naked and Afraid* consistently points out poor the male survivalist's poor decisions. The narrator rarely discusses poor decisions made by the female competitor, mostly because women tend to make smarter decisions like not drinking unfiltered water. In fact, one third of the men in the first season drink unfiltered water while their female teammates abstain. These men become violently ill as a result, and the narrator consistently points to this during the final evaluation of the contestants' mental strength (the men *never* score well in this category, in fact). In *NAA*'s "Island from Hell" episode, for example, Jonathan's main weakness is his inability to work with a partner, while Alison's only mental weakness listed is her inexperience working with "hardcore military types." More simply, Alison's only mental weakness is actually Jonathan's. Here, the argument about a reassertion of manhood falls short, particularly because the man in most episodes fails to actually assert his manhood.

Carnivores, Bears, and Foraging: Caveman Masculinity

The shows provide a sensationalized version of "survival," rife with ill-advised practices, overdramatized dangers, and staged futility. Many of these situations feature a caveman-style male who desires meat over foraged plants, hunting over gathering, and even hunted game over trapped animals; the problem, however, is that hunting defies actual survival training. In one particularly telling example from *Dual Survival*, the "Swamped" episode, Dave Cantebury separates from his partner Cody to go hunting in the swamp, only to return with an alligator. Granted, killing an alligator requires some modicum of skill, but it also defies core tenets of survival principals, namely to never separate from your group

and to not actively engage with danger. When Dave returns to camp, Cody chastises him for taking such a careless risk, but in the talking-heads moment stitched into the middle of their fight, Dave replies, "That's what we do here, brother: survival of the fittest." In fact, Dave often turns down food Cody forages because, as he puts it, he *needs* meat. The disagreement between Dave and Cody emphasizes the sensationalism at work. Even Bear Grylls abandons foraging in his "Sierra Nevada" episode in search of "real food," meaning meat. The carnivore-as-real-man motif offers very little sustenance for the viewer hungry for actual survival methods, but it feeds the audience that wants a rugged manhood on display.

In fact, *Man vs. Wild* and *Dual Survival* have more in common with even the *Jackass*[4] series than others dealing with survival, namely because they focus much more closely on primal (or downright foolish) displays of rugged manhood than actual survival techniques. More simply, they offer viewers scintillating narratives that leave a sense of wonder that any human would actually be brave or stupid enough take the risks, eat the foods, or attempt the stunts performed by the hosts. *Man vs. Wild* hardly makes any attempt to obscure this, either: almost every episode opens with Grylls jumping from an aircraft into his survival scenario. Season Two of *Man vs. Wild* even features an entire episode titled "Bear Eats" where the star is shown eating all manner of insect, reptile, arachnid, and amphibian. Here, the episode abandons almost all pretense of survival how-to in an effort to display extreme masculinity at work.

In addition to the reclamation argument, one might also interpret much of this caveman masculinity as an over-the-top critique of masculinity's

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[4] The *Jackass* enterprise has received a great deal of critical attention in articles like Fintan Walsh's, "The Erotics and Politics of Masochistic Self-Abjection." Still, many of these articles—like Sean Brayton's, "MTV's *Jackass*: Transgression, Abjection and the Economy of White Masculinity"—fail to interrogate the complicated relationship between white men, homosociality, and agency. Simon Lindgren and Maxine Lelievre offer a more nuanced reading of the show in "In the Laboratory of Masculinity: Renegotiating Gender Subjectivities in MTV's *Jackass*."

decadence in the contemporary moment. Or, more simply, these shows offer a document of the kind of tough guy who has no place in a modern world. Rather than offer a how-to program, they might be understood as anthropological documentaries more like *Nanook of the North* or even the Chuck Norris jokes, Old Spice Commercials, or Ron Swanson. In this sense, the narratives tacitly criticize meatheads, jocks, and bros by presenting caveman masculinity as unnecessary. The narrative of *Man vs. Wild* in this framework follows an almost hilarious trajectory: "Here's how to survive when you fall out of a plane into the Sierra Nevada, or when you fall out of a plane into the Mojave desert, or when you fall out of a plane into the Everglades." More to the point, Bear Grylls even brought in Will Farrell as a guest host for an episode filmed in Antarctica, and a considerable portion of the episode centered on Farrell's decision to eat a Twinkie without sharing ("The Will Farrell Special"). Survivor shows, especially those engaging with caveman masculinity, function as visual spectacle and do not expect the audience to take the scenes seriously.

The programs sensationalize the different characters' bravery even more by playing up the danger presented by bears, especially black bears, such as how Edward Michael Grylls uses the nickname "Bear." The irony is that black bears pose a dramatically lower threat to humans in the wild than insects like ticks or hantavirus, a disease spread by mouse droppings. In fact, Alaska's Department of Fish and Game literature tells visitors to Admiralty Island to *always* fight back in the event of a black bear attack ("Close Encounters: What to Do"). The "expert" hosts undoubtedly know enough about black bears to offer a more realistic strategy for dealing with bear danger, yet they dress up the threat in order to bolster audience perception of their bravery. In one episode of *MWW* set in Great Smokey Mountains National Park (GSMNP), Mykel tells Ruth that their absolute first priority is to make spears to protect themselves in the event of a bear attack. There are a few problems with this idea, though: first, GSMNP has

one of the largest populations of black bears in the country but there are zero brown bears in the park; second, GSMNP welcomes more than 9 million visitors a year but very rarely is there an attack in the park. Still, the scene that builds a black-bear anxiety, of which almost every survivor series has some version, points to either a failure in expertise or need to establish a tougher-than-reality manhood. In other words: the tendency to sensationalize the dangers presented by black bears reveals a contradiction to the construction of expertise that aims to align manhood with stereotypical gender role of physical dominance.

One such example, *Man, Woman, Wild*, offers what appears at first to be a textbook example of a standard gendered dynamic at work in survival reality television, but *MWW* rewrites much of the narrative as the show continues; or as one internet blogger puts it, "these shows are not about survival; they are about relationships" (Fenzel). During the introduction, Mykel explains to the audience that "[his] military skills will go a long way, but there's no field manual for surviving with a spouse." The line could be read in two ways: either as Mykel teasing Ruth or as his way to emphasize the challenges of working with his wife *as a partner*. Mykel does infantilize Ruth on numerous occasions, but the dynamic between the two is much more complicated than the male host's sexism. Ruth, in many ways, can be viewed as the voice of reason; practical, sensible, and knowledgeable, her character serves as a much more rational foil to Mykel's reckless caveman masculinity.

Dual Survival also plays up a version of reinterpreted gender norms. The series pairs a former Army Ranger, Dave Canterbury, from the mountains of southeast Ohio, with a primitive survival expert, Cody Lundin, from the Arizona desert. More simply, *DS* offers a tough-guy military man and his foil, a long haired hippy who refuses to wear shoes. The series works to align each of the hosts with antiquated gender norms in two ways: first, it draws on a homosocial relationship between the men that borders on romantic, and second, it allows space for a non-normative

model of masculinity. Cody, complete with braided pigtails, plays the voice of reason as a foil to Dave's reckless, caveman masculinity. Of course, Cody also participates in the trope of the caveman through his decision to not wear shoes. His hope, as he repeats throughout the series, is to build up the strength of his mitochondria and even claims that shoes would make him feel like a "fucking ballerina" ("Failed Ascent"). Through his attempt to develop super-mitochondria, Cody literally attempts to become a caveman. He often warns the audience against any attempts to replicate his stunts because they lack his physical uniqueness. While both men reinforce the trope of caveman masculinity, their partnership and disagreement-resolution offer a model of cooperation that complicates masculine independence.

Their different versions of caveman masculinity are further complicated through the ways *DS*'s episodes employ the same framework when Dave hunts for meat while Cody builds the shelter. Dave's carnivorous masculinity contrasts strongly with Cody's domestic masculinity. The homosexual undertones between the two peak during an episode that centers on two ranchers tucked away in the Wyoming wilderness not unlike the men in *Brokeback Mountain.*[5] After Cody builds the two men a new shelter, Dave explains that he is, "unfortunately, almost ready to snuggle." Before the two climb into the shelter, the men sit around a campfire drying their snow-soaked socks. Cody raises one sock to his lips and sucks the water from it. When Dave expresses mock disgust, Cody asks if Dave wants to, "suck my sock." The homophobic veneer draws thin and the two laugh to a near giggle with the next scene features them climbing into their shelter together. The obvious homophobic jokes pair with a more subtle homoeroticism, especially because the very next scene depicts the two men climbing into a shelter

[5] Fran Pheasant-Kelly offers a particularly important analysis of landscape and sexual desire in *Brokeback Mountain* in "Spaces of Desire: Liminality and Abjection in *Brokeback Mountain*."

for the night. Scenes like this reveal the *DS*'s growing acceptance that homosexuality and normative masculinity might not be diametrically opposed. If nothing else, the series also opens space for multiple versions of masculinity, especially because Dave—who aligns closest with normative masculinity—often cedes to Cody's expertise.

The Travel Narrative and Survival

Nearly every survival series produced in the past decade relies heavily on the main character discovering he (or they)[6] is lost and then moving from his initial location. While this narrative makes for better television, it actually breaks the cardinal rule of being lost in the wilderness: stay put. Moving while lost significantly decreases the likelihood that search teams will be able to make a rescue. The travel narrative form establishes another layer to the construction of masculinity that stems from what Eric Leed labels "spermatic travel" (221). According to Leed, spermatic travel references a style of travel that accomplishes the work of gendering, particularly by establishing a contrasting sessile feminine (221). Under this rubric, when women do travel, it either happens in secret or through a masculine counterpart; Ruth, in *MWW*, depends on Mykel's expertise through much of the series, for example.

One show, *Naked and Afraid*, challenges the spermatic travel narrative of the others, most notably by shirking much of the travel narrative and replacing it with a static narrative. The series places two survival experts, one man and one woman, in a remote landscape and requires them to build a home. The two protagonists stay in one place for three weeks, so the teamwork, or lack thereof, pushes the narrative forward. While this still falls short of being entirely progressive in its depiction of women, one

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[6] I use the phrase "he or they" here because only one of the mainstream survival shows present a woman on her own—*NAA* when the male character leaves the show for an illness.

should note that women fare significantly better in a number—maybe even a majority—of the episodes because they spend decidedly less time proving themselves to be cavemen. In the "Island From Hell" episode, the two characters are dropped on the island and the man, Jonathan Klay, suffers a scorching sunburn almost immediately. Meanwhile, the woman, Alison Teal, begins weaving a hat from palm fronds. The hat she weaves, however, proves to be a lifesaver: Alison never suffers a sunburn at all and Jonathan even uses some of her weaved items later in the episode. In one particularly telling juxtaposition of scenes, Alison explains to the camera that she plans to collect coconuts because of their qualities beneficial to hydration. The next scene presents Klay as he expresses frustration about Alison's obsession with coconuts because, as he puts it, "I could care less about the coconuts; I think fresh water is more important." Shortly thereafter, Klay drinks unfiltered water from a trench, which renders him ill with diarrhea; Alison, who sticks solely to coconut water, avoids this fate. This is, of course, another example of a carefully assembled narrative, but the point remains that survivor narratives have begun to challenge the caveman masculinity in lieu of more practical and arguably feminine versions of survivalists.

Even more than this, *Naked and Afraid* actually challenges the validity of hypermasculinity by de-romanticizing independence and replacing it with an idealized domestic masculinity. The first episode, "The Jungle Curse," pairs a woman, Kim, with Shane, a ragingly angry and aggressive chauvinist who spends most of his on-air time pontificating about the failures of younger generations; his sound bytes emphasize his maladjustment and particular distaste for young women. *NAA* challenges the construction of masculine surrogacy, especially because very few people would actually want to be like Shane. Also, because *NAA* teams work to construct makeshift domestic spaces, the narrative reworks the escape fantasy of the survival genre. Rather than offer mountain vistas, *NAA* transitions from scene to scene with close ups of spiders, snakes, and

other menacing creatures. Even though the program presents two people considered to be survival experts, the narrative is one of frustration, failure, and suffering. The combination of threat and suffering with expertise and toughness inverts the escape fantasy so watching television comfortably in the home actually becomes its own escape (i.e. the masculine escape *becomes* domestic).

NAA dramatizes the gender dynamics, but does so by displaying the ways antiquated notions of gender work against the aims of survival. Episode after episode tells of men who mistreat their female partners all to their mutual peril. More than this, the series highlights male pigheadedness by juxtaposing contrasting comments about the roles of men and women. One particularly sexist contestant, E.J., even calls his partner "Squirrel" like he's the lead in an Ibsen play ("Terror in Tanzania"). The episodes all open with a "Primitive Survival Rating" (PSR) which gives experts' assessments of the two contestants' survival ability based on mental, experiential, and technical levels. E.J.'s most sexist comments—that men think logically and women are guided by emotion—are followed by the PSR scene, which tells the audience that E.J.'s partner Kellie actually outranks him. If paired survival shows are about relationships, then *NAA* calls for the death of caveman masculinity.

Though I am hesitant to label *NAA* a feminist series, it is difficult to ignore the show's deconstruction of masculinity. Where other programs offer a nostalgic picture of pre-urban and pre-industrial manhood, *NAA* challenges this narrative by demonstrating the value of women as partners and as leaders. The subtext, of course, is that misogyny only makes life more difficult, especially for men. As a result, most episodes follow a fairly static trajectory where the men quickly expose their own sexism, the women demonstrate expertise, and the show ends when the male figure's misogyny is overcome by accepting the woman's leadership and status as a partner. As the first season progresses, the men also begin the challenges by accepting their female partner more and more equally. In the first

episode, Shane often launches into unabashed woman-hating rants. The second, third, and fourth episodes all show men who believe strongly in either essential male/female difference or at least in separate spheres for men and women. The final two episodes, however, offer men who start the challenge with much more egalitarian comments. For example, the male character from "Breaking Borneo," Puma, explains that he hopes his partner can pick up slack to complement his weakness. The two actually thrive together for nearly the first two weeks of the challenge until Puma drinks unfiltered water, which causes him an illness so debilitating that the producers pull him from the jungle. The final episode, "Beware the Bayou," presents Billy Berger and Ky Furneaux who both begin with hopes of working collaboratively with their partners. This is the only episode where both partners work collectively from the beginning and last the entire three weeks without any major disagreements, just a few minor tantrums from Berger. Unlike the other men, Berger does not direct his frustration toward his partner, though. Throughout the narrative arch of the individual episodes and within the trajectory of the entire first season, the message is clear: men who see women as partners fare decidedly better than those who have yet to make this realization.

The Male Gaze and Spectacle of Survival

As the name implies, *Naked and Afraid* plays into the erotics of the male gaze, but the other shows do, as well. *Man, Woman, Wild* often presents the male star, Mykel Hawke, shirtless and sporting a nipple-piercing. The series also alludes to the sex the couple on *MWW* have during filmings, not to mention the many scenes picturing Ruth's undergarments or other items of clothing hanging from their makeshift shelter. In fact, the series sexualizes both hosts together, further reinforcing the idea that this genre speaks to a growing sense of women as partners. The *MWW* example challenges the existing framework of caveman masculinity through Ruth's

character and her engagement with the gaze, though. For one, Ruth often performs much of the gruesome work that connects figures like Bear Grylls to the previously mentioned caveman masculinity: she drinks urine, eats grubs, and butchers animals. The show fails to be entirely progressive, however: the couple are referenced often as "the Hawkes" despite the fact that Ruth's last name is actually "England," the narrative still builds on her desire for Mykel's approval, and the series occasionally relies on her fear to drive the narrative forward. Still, *MWW* complicates notions of the male gaze by focusing heavily Mykel's body and downplaying Ruth's as sites of objectification. Even the inclusion of the word "woman" in the title is remarkable for a program of this type; Discovery also features another series titled *Yukon Men* about subsistence trappers in remote Alaska—which, ironically, often features women hunting, fishing, and working all without men present. This, of course, is not to excuse the sexism in *MWW*, but is merely to explain that the title helps understand a change in gendered presentations within the context of reality television.

The other programs also engage with the male gaze in unique ways, but almost all rely on a reinterpretation of representation Susan Bordo labels "face-off masculinity." In this version of masculinity, the subject of the gaze refuses to be a passive recipient of the gaze. Rather than welcome the gaze, the subject of the gaze challenges the viewer. In the cover art for Season 6, for instance, Grylls's image engages with the gaze with an aggressive, confident face, but Bordo's explanation of face-off masculinity and subjectivity helps unpack another layer to the notion of surrogacy:

Never reveal weakness. Pretend to be confident even though you may be scared. Act like a rock even when you feel shaky. Dare others to challenge your position. (188)

The genre's popularity speaks more to male fear and anxiety than a sense of strength. These shows offer something more, though: there are two different types of engagement with the male gaze, both of which are unaffected yet aware of the gaze. In the cover art for *Survivorman* Season

2, Stroud poses with his face looking toward a knife affixed to the end of a stick to make a spear. The symbolic phallus is obvious, but rather than create a sense of challenge, the knife adds more to a sense of surrogacy or even homoeroticism, a point reinforced by a Stroud's firm grip on the spear. The image offers some sense that he is aware of the audience, yet he does not welcome the gaze nor does he challenge it. Likewise, the engagement with the gaze on the cover of *MWW* actually offers an example where traditional gender norms break down. Here, the two characters are presented paddling a ramshackle raft through the swamp. This image challenges even John Berger's idea that "men act, women appear." Berger's point, more simply, is that visual depictions of men typically frame the man doing something (an active participant), whereas depictions of women usually display the woman posing (a passive recipient of the male gaze). In the cover art for *MWW*, the photo depicts Ruth paddling, aware of the audience but not objectified or welcoming to the gaze, per se. The image even leaves it unclear as to whether or not Mykel is looking at Ruth or beyond her. If one were to read Mykel's gaze as directed at Ruth, then the meaning is still complicated by the fact that Ruth is *acting*, not appearing, for his gaze. In other words: the male gaze points to her masculinization. More than this, Ruth and Mykel are presented working in tandem to paddle the raft; while it is true that the person in the rear of the raft typically steers, the person in the front provides the bulk of the power. Even though the image still contains echoes of patriarchal control, Ruth's position as *act-er* positions her more as partner and powerhouse than subordinate.

    Similarly, *Survivorman* challenges notions of the male gaze because, more than any of the others, it offers a less sensationalized presentation of manhood. This is especially true because the host who hauls all of his own camera equipment films the majority of the footage. The self-filmed narrative is one of Stroud's particular innovations to the survivor show genre, but this also builds credibility and an imagined connection between

the audience and host. Far from an aggressive face-off with the audience, Stroud coaches his viewers through his monologues. Stroud's self-presentation draws on both feminine and masculine subjects of the male gaze: he simultaneously plays the passive recipient as well as the masculine expert.

The face-off masculinity of survival television goes beyond visual representation; it also engages with the audience through narrative face-offs. This happens often when the survival experts explain their next task by explaining how little the audience would want to do the same. More simply, the hosts will use second-person phrases like, "you don't want to be lost here," "you don't want to be in this situation," or "you don't want to have to do what I am about to do." These statements speak to the very appeal of the programs, especially as they reflect Jane Tompkins's claim about the appeal of Westerns, which is actually quite pertinent to the survival genre, is that the popularity of representations of men stems from the fact that most men do not actually want to take the place of the male protagonist (16). Survival narratives, much like Westerns according to Tompkins, offer a form of surrogate masculinity where viewers see depictions of men dominating nature, which opens a space for a fantasy of essential male difference. Viewers never have to prove themselves as men because the storylines speak to a collective anxiety about the role of men in an urbanized, post-industrial world, so the men portrayed offer assurance that men and male bodies are still unique, necessary, and masculine.

Beyond the obvious articulation of masculinity, these programs reveal a growing anxiety about the perceived loss of male control over agency[7] and masculinity in the age of sustainability and economic recession. In Les Stroud's documentary about developing a subsistence lifestyle, *Off the*

[7] Gender scholars have discussed the perceived loss of male agency at length. For more, see Susan Faludi's *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the American Man* and David Savran's *Taking it Like a Man: White Masculinity, Masochism, and Contemporary American Culture.*

Grid, he talks about the ways modern life constricts the modern man. He explains, "Your water, your electricity, your heat, even the way you walk your dog: everything is controlled by someone else." In a moment when excess (big houses, fast cars, flashy clothes, etc.) often codes for masculinity, Stroud's minimalism pairs with his skill and knowledge to assure men that masculinity and sustainable living can coexist. This idea, of course, is naturally less sensational, so his following is but a fraction of Grylls's. In the documentary, Stroud suggests that sustainable living is a form of taking control of one's own destiny. This form of narrative reflects a complex understanding and construction of masculinity.

Ultimately, survivor programs fragment and refigure masculinity than they reassert male dominance. Rather than assume a brutish masculinity offers "more of the same," scholarship needs to begin considering the ways male representations respond to a broader cultural, social, and political network. Masculinity, as seen in the phenomenon of survival television represents masculinity as a site of gender reconfiguration. Power dynamics built on homophobia, racism, and sexism prove to be much more tangled than the reassertion argument allows. The next step for scholarship is to abandon tired arguments about masculinity in lieu of a more nuanced qualitative analysis of gender revision in an uncharted historical moment.

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Being Forced to Play and Ending the Game: Disengagement, Dissent, Revolt, Rebellion, and Revolution in *The Hunger Games*

JÉRÔME MELANÇON

Introduction

Through the eyes, voice, and internal monologues of Katniss Everdeen, the protagonist in the trilogy *The Hunger Games*, Suzanne Collins presents a series of descriptions of political experiences under the totalitarian state of Panem, which forces teenagers to play to the death in the annual "Hunger Games." Katniss becomes politically aware and engaged only once she is forced to play – that is, when she feels she has no choice but to leave the outskirts of the political world where she could live disengaged from it through avoidance, and enter that political world. There she finds herself confronted with a choice: to play the game – to learn and follow its rules, and later to become a mentor and continue her participation; or to end the game – to either let herself be killed, or to bring an end to the games themselves, along with the authority that underlies them[1].

I will argue that Katniss Everdeen's choice of the latter option casts *The Hunger Games* as a story of refusal and of radical opposition. She enacts different modes of opposition based on the manner in which she is

affected by the Capitol – that is, she acts in response to the ways in which she is forced to participate in a political life that is not her own, and always through her refusal to play the game imposed upon her. In doing so, she can serve as an example of a political actor whose reasons for choosing different kinds of opposition correspond to the kinds of radical opposition we find in political life. By arguing for this thesis, I will provide a philosophical reading of *The Hunger Games* trilogy that uses the novels as a mediation for an analysis of the political experiences of radical opposition, where political actors reject not only the policies of the government and the pursuit of political power to enact policies, but the political regime itself – the rules of the political game. Given that Katniss's personal reflections are not present in the film adaptation, I will solely rely on the novels for this analysis.

Although the narrative of the novels suggests a logical succession where one attitude makes the next attitude possible, most political lives allow for jumps ahead and for movements backwards into past attitudes. As a result, I will be examining each of Katniss' attitudes one by one, rather than as unfolding in a single, necessary direction. Nevertheless, I will follow the narrative of the novels in order to show how we can find the following attitudes that make up opposition in political life:

1. a refusal of the life in District 12 preceding the Games – disengagement;
2. a refusal of the rules and of her role within the Games – dissent;
3. a refusal of her new role in promoting the stability of the Games – revolt;
4. an acceptance of the new role against the Games based on her own rejection of the Games – rebellion;
5. a fight to end the old Games – revolution;
6. a refusal of all Games – disengagement.

Throughout this argument, my use of these words will strive to remain consistent with a larger theory of opposition that is at play in this analysis. This use goes against the uses of "dissent" (*Hunger Games* 24), "rebellion" (*Hunger Games* 79, *Hunger Games* 363), or "rebels" (*Mockingjay*, throughout) by Collins to mean more or less the same thing, that is, an active rejection of the political system.

Reading Katniss: From Character to Experience

The interpretation of Katniss Everdeen's actions and reflections along political and philosophical lines runs the risk of losing sight of her status as a character in a novel as well as Suzanne Collins' status as an author of fiction: neither Katniss nor Collins develops a political theory, and there are no indications in the novels that Collins might have intended for her readers to find a political message, let alone a political theory, embedded within her story. However, the possible pedagogical uses of the books are quite clear to its readers. Pondiscio presents the heuristic and pedagogical potential of the Hunger Games in the context of civics education, where the novels allow students to reflect on their role as political actors, rather than as aligned with a party or an ideology (A17). Along similar lines, Simmons points out the ability of the books to foster both literacy and political literacy, specifically as the fictitious violence against children they depict can be tied to the violence children experience around them and elsewhere in the world (24). Drawing on Freire and Berhoff, Simmons explains how Katniss's fictitious experiences can be used toward conscientization as development of a critical consciousness. More broadly, the novels present a series of "citizenship skills" that can be presented to students as alternatives to electoral politics: loyalty, love, caring, sacrifice, and critical understanding (Lucey et al. 192).

While such readings of *The Hunger Games* tend to use the books for pre-set purposes, I suggest a reading inspired by Merleau-Ponty's notion

of non-philosophy: while most cultural products express dominant, already explicit systems of ideas and philosophies, some cultural products contain ideas that can be made explicit into a philosophy (Merleau-Ponty, *Notes des cours*). Consequently, it is possible to activate ideas that are latent in a work of fiction, such as *The Hunger Games* trilogy, and that serve the concerns of the author regarding the plot and linguistic innovation, but that also present a broader meaning that is yet to be developed, since the author had other goals in mind. As a result, this paper provides the basis of a broader theory of opposition that is latent in *The Hunger Games* – one that will need to be further developed in a different venue, in relation to other experiences of opposition provided for instance by survivors' testimonies, conceptualized by political philosophers, and studied in the context of democratic, authoritarian, and totalitarian regimes provided by political science.

Without developing a coherent theory of her own, Collins does criticize many aspects of contemporary North American societies and her character adopts attitudes that defy current norms as well as the norms of her own society. Politically and ethically oriented interpretations of *The Hunger Games* tend to develop such criticisms, rightly noting that the novels have the potential to help develop the political consciousness and critical thinking of young adult literature readers. Since Katniss regularly appears as defying gender norms and presents the figure of a strong young woman who is undoubtedly at the center of her own adventures, much of the literature focuses on aspects of gender. Mitchell indicates the fluidity of Katniss's gender identity as she displays traditionally masculine as well as feminine characteristics, relying on them depending on context and generally blurring gender boundaries (128-137). Rather than fluidity, Katniss's identity might also be tied to her capacities to wear masks or take on roles and to create relationships and community (Barnes 13-27), or from her attempts to free her self from the performances that are imposed on her (Muller 51-63). These capacities and attempts lead to the strength

of the myth of the Mockingjay; Hansen highlights Katniss's mythological status in her fictitious society as well as in North American popular culture, comparing her to ancient female mythological figures such as Artemis and Philomena, to contemporary interpretations of their stories, and to other works of fiction where female mythological figures are developed (161-178) – indicating notably that Suzanne Collins knowingly referenced Greek and Roman mythology (161) .

However, attempts have been made to be critical of the symbols attached to Katniss and to be wary of the norms she appears to be transgressing: Aitchison (who also compares Katniss to Spartacus) suggests that in *The Hunger Games* as in other similar novels and series, "The protagonists begin as self-assured young women who question their subordinate place in society, but the endings find them less active, less assertive, and reintegrated into society through marriage" (268). That criticism may be unfounded; in spite of Aitchison's claims, Collins gives no indication that Katniss and Peeta are married, and the epilogue to *Mockingjay* can easily be read as presenting a change in Katniss rather than as focusing on her role as a mother: through her willingness to have children, she embraces the world into which she had refused to bring children, a world which consequently offers meaning to human life beyond mere survival and reproduction.

Collins touches on many aspects of the reality that young people, and especially young women, face: Katniss's clothing throughout *The Hunger Games* trilogy shows how her capacity to act is defined and constrained by the garments that are chosen for her (Byrne 43-62). The Capitol uses hunger as a form of social control, and Katniss's early sense of self and awareness of her difference from others around her are tied to her rare ability to provide food for her family (Burke 544-567); it also uses the media, and part of Katniss's effectiveness is her capacity to read subtle messages sent to her and to use the media to her own advantage (Latham and Hollister 39, 42).

It is also possible to follow a different strand and present Katniss through the complex emotional narrative of the novel and the values of care and reciprocity. Focusing on motivations, Mallan mentions an "ethics of care" in Katniss's actions that focuses on maintaining relationships (1-17), while Aitchinson sees her as embodying the values of care and protection (254-274). Similarly, Culver explores this same question by using the concept of reciprocity in terms of the debts she owes Rue and her family, as well as others to whose deaths she must give meaning (90-101). Torkelson rather turns toward Katniss's relationship to her self (41-54), using a hermeneutic framework, and describes in more detail Katniss's processes of self-interpretation in relation to her character, her roles, her circumstances, and the uses of the metaphor of the Mockingjay.

A reading of *The Hunger Games* as presenting a non-philosophy can take us in a direction that is complementary to literary criticism – one that can enlighten us on our own political experiences, or at least those of our contemporaries living under authoritarian states, experiences we might fear for ourselves. While the authors mentioned above focus on Katniss's character and motivations, and while Cettl isolates and develops the critique of liberal democracy that is presented in *The Hunger Games* through its hypertrophic representation in the figure of Panem (139-146), I will turn toward the manner in which Katniss experiences political forms through her reflections, reactions, and actions.

Radical Refusals: Katniss Everdeen's Roles and her Struggle for Self-Determination

Throughout the *Hunger Games* novels, Katniss is confronted with situations she has not chosen and could not have chosen. As a result of her experiences, she loses control over who she is to the various political actors and structures that shape her life. The manners in which her political situation and role are imposed upon her shape the possibilities

and impossibilities for her acceptance or for her refusal of the identity and life that are imposed upon her, following the actions she is required to undertake or represent.

Yet Katniss continuously hides from herself her moments of action and of self-determination, including the moment during which she first defines herself, a moment which allows the entire story to unfold: whereas participation as tribute in the Hunger Games usually takes place through a draw, Katniss is not randomly selected. It is her younger sister, Prim, for whom she has cared for years, whose name is drawn, and Katniss steps forward to volunteer to replace her. From that moment on, her role and even her life are out of her hands – except for moments when she considers her duty to protect her sister and, as the story develops, her need to protect Peeta, the other tribute from her district. That first decision to place her relationships to those she holds dear above the demands of political life and of life itself define Katniss as a protagonist, an actor who creates conflict in an otherwise pre-defined and seamless Game, rather than a passive pawn in a Game she cannot understand or play. Arendt describes political action as a second birth for the political actor: going beyond *what* she is (all the determination she cannot escape or define and towards which she is passive), the actor defines *who* she is through her public words and deeds, thus creating herself actively as the person who accomplished *this* action at *this* time and place (175-181). We can consequently see the act of volunteering not simply as the moment where events are put in motion in the novel, but also as the moment when Katniss defines herself politically, rather than being defined by the regime under which she lives.

However, once Katniss enters the Games, the act of volunteering for her sister takes away her capacity to live in isolation from the Hunger Games and from the Capitol and makes hers a political life, which means she loses the positive agency that comes with disengagement. From this moment on, every minute of her life is planned; every space she inhabits is

prepared for her; every inch of her body is occupied by her stylists; every one of her actions is fixed by the gaze of the Capitol and of the other spectators of the Games – willing and unwilling.

Disengagement: Disinterest and Defiance

Katniss' original attitude toward political life is one of disengagement – and in no way one of apathy, which would be the absence of emotions or caring about politics. As Kemper explains, apathy can result from a feeling of powerlessness, which dampens emotions (64). It is not that Katniss does not care about political life, about the actions and the laws of the Capitol; it is rather that her negative experiences have turned her away from them. She moves between contempt for all things political, disinterest, and defiance through small acts of transgression she knows are not likely to be punished. Her acts of defiance include petty crimes such as limited but repeated poaching, trading on the black market, and trespassing beyond the limits of the perimeter of her district. She explains that "Even though trespassing in the woods is illegal and poaching carries the severest of penalties, more people would risk it if they had weapons" (Collins, *Hunger Games* 5). After all, the Peacekeepers (the police force) are the poachers' best customers, and so they turn a blind eye to their activities, as long as they do not distribute weapons or show them in the District: transgression is possible as a non-political act because a line is drawn between *which* rules are broken, and not between whether rules are broken or respected. In this context, instead of belonging to the political register, transgression is an act that belongs to bare life: Katniss prefers the possibility of a violent death to the reality of starvation for herself and for her family.

In her reflections, Katniss also unveils her contempt for the regime: her family members are safe, but they are starving. She explains the need to hide her contempt and to remain silent in order to keep her family out of

trouble, by keeping her sister from hearing and repeating her thoughts: "I learned to hold my tongue and to turn my features into an indifferent mask so that no one could ever read my thoughts" (Collins, *Hunger Games* 6). Contempt is not the only emotion she unveils; on the day of the Reaping, when contestants in the Hunger Games are chosen, she masks her fears with jokes but thinks: "We have to joke about it because the alternative is to be scared out of your wits" (Collins, *Hunger Games* 8). She also displays for herself (and for the reader) her anger toward her mother, who neglected her and her sister after their father's death; anger also at the unfairness of class divisions, with the poor feeling the need to enter their names in the Reaping in exchange for supplies (Collins, *Hunger Games* 13). The positive emotions made possible by this life of disengagement from politics are limited to care and concern for her family, or to gratefulness at the memory of Peeta having come to her help in a time of need; just how limited these emotions are – and so how limited is the role they can play to motivate her politically – is shown as Katniss places them side by side with the jealousy she feels for the girls who seek her friend and hunting partner Gale's attention and with the loneliness she feels at school, where she finds herself without a group of friends (Collins, *Hunger Games* 12). Fleeting, these positive and negative emotions are overshadowed by contempt, fear, and anger[2]. Her indifference is only an appearance she maintains to protect herself and those around her. It is the opposite of the apathy that would leave her without strong feelings. This passionate disengagement will make her oppositional actions possible.

For such a vivid description of ordinary emotional life under a totalitarian regime, Collins' choice of the metaphor of the fall to explain Katniss's entrance into politics may seem surprising. When Prim's name is drawn, Katniss does not think, reflect, or strategize. She experiences the feeling of falling, and then she simply describes her actions as if they were

[2] Such emotions are the focus of much of the literature on the political role of emotions. See notably Nussbaum for a discussion of negative emotions.

happening to her, as this fall continues: she calls out to her sister, she follows her, she volunteers. This metaphor is apt to show that her world will never be the same, that the life that seemed to be peaceful was already doomed to fall apart eventually, that she has lost something she will never regain, except at great cost. What she has lost is her capacity to turn away from the impossible choices of political life.

This fall is her own – it is not the result of chance, but rather has to do with her sense of self. Katniss separates her attitude from that of Peeta's older brothers, who do not volunteer when his name is drawn: "This is standard. Family devotion only goes so far for most people on reaping day. What I did was the radical thing" (Collins, *Hunger Games* 26). She presents two orders here: the family and politics. The radical thing to do for one's family is to risk one's own sacrifice; the radical thing to do politically would be to risk a response from the peacekeepers, or retaliation against the district. The latter she does not risk: far from refusing the Games or their rules, she decides to play; far from consenting to them, she agrees to them to the fullest extent possible by accepting all their consequences for herself. Yet she does so for reasons that go beyond the Games: not for the political order, but for the order of her relationships to those who surround her. And it is this risk that leads the crowd to take a greater political risk: "instead of acknowledging applause, I stand there unmoving while they take part in the boldest form of dissent they can manage. Silence. Which says we do not agree. We dot no condone. All of this is wrong" (Collins, *Hunger Games* 24). Katniss is engaged because she could not bear to simply consent to the Games, while avoiding their consequences for herself; the crowd of her district is also engaged because it acts on the moral judgment that they cannot help but make, faced with the absurdity of their own consent.

Here we find the difficulties of freedom in a totalitarian regime, the difficulties of just actions in unjust circumstances. Katniss describes silence in the refusal of applause for the Hunger Games as the boldest

form of dissent that is possible for the crowd. No further action is necessary to show that their consent is coerced; while they remain free to rebel, here they can only affirm the parameters of their situation: their silence supports Katniss and echoes her own choice to join the Games in the name of her care for her family, their care for themselves and their families. Repression would bring an end to the effectiveness of this silence – and to the willingness of the crowd to act by remaining silent.

Yet silence cannot be dissent, not even in such conditions: while it is a refusal of consent, it does not affirm anything else. Silence can point to injustice, but only without naming it. Silence leaves others to decide on its meaning, barring only the hypothesis of active and willing support. It can be overlooked by the Capitol, even though it does not fit within the continuous affirmation of the regime that is demanded by the totalitarian state. The same goes for what Haymitch, Katniss's assigned mentor, terms "rebellion": two tributes from the same district holding hands during the opening ceremonies of the Hunger Games, rather than taking on an adversarial position can be felt as solidarity by Katniss and Peeta, and even by their spectators, but it is not expressed as such, and so it can safely be ignored (Collins, *Hunger Games* 79).

Dissent: Refusing the Rules and the Role

Before the Games begin, Katniss is already ill at ease with her own role: "All I can think is how unjust the whole thing is, the Hunger Games. Why am I hopping around like some trained dog trying to please people I hate?" (Collins, *Hunger Games* 117). She cannot understand her own behavior, even though fear would suffice to explain it. And as she tries taking on different public personas to appeal to the public and receive their protection through gifts in the arena, she exhausts herself through these rehearsals and "By the end of the session, I am no one at all" (Collins, *Hunger Games* 118). As Cinna, her stylist, reminds her of how she is

around others, how she won them over, how they admire her spirit, she reacts with surprise at his perspective on her appearance and her self: "My spirit. This is a new thought. I'm not sure exactly what it means, but it suggests I'm a fighter. In a sort of brave way. It's not as if I'm never friendly. Okay, maybe I don't go around loving everybody I meet, maybe my smiles are hard to come by, but I do care for some people" (Collins, *Hunger Games* 121-122). She discovers herself in his eyes, through his words, his trust in her, his attitude, rather than through the image he creates for her.

It is only through this discovery of herself through her appearance to others that Katniss is able to be concerned about what the Games will do to her – about what her action of volunteering as a tribute will make of her. The night before the Games, Peeta indicates that he does not want to be changed into a monster by the Games; Katniss finds herself immersed in strategies for survival and responds, to herself: "I bite my lip, feeling inferior. While I've been ruminating on the availability of trees, Peeta has been struggling with how to maintain his identity. His purity of self" (Collins, *Hunger Games* 142). Yet Katniss does not change her own perspective on herself – not yet, at the very least. She continues to see herself only as a piece in the Capitol's Games, as is shown in this exchange with Peeta: "'Okay, but within that framework, there's still you, there's still me,' he insists. 'Don't you see?' 'A little. Only… no offense, but who cares, Peeta?' 'I do. I mean, what else am I allowed to care about at this point?' he asks angrily" (Collins, *Hunger Games* 142). Rather than staying true to herself, what she cares about is staying alive: Katniss continues to play by the rules.

After another act of transgression – at a time when she should impress the Gamemakers, who conceive the Hunger Games and decide on each tribute's odds, instead of letting them be spectators and showing them her skills from a distance, she fires an arrow at them and brings them into the arena – Katniss feels she has let down others: her family, her district, her

stylists, those who are helping her and those for whose sake she feels she must win. Yet she does not consider having let herself down, or needing to win for her own sake. Her emotions are confused and too numerous to remain stable in the face of the act of transgression she accomplished without thinking[3]. As with her volunteering for her sister, these unthinking moments of action leave her confused and ill at ease. If Katniss is so eager to find her reasons for these actions, it is because she is no longer the same person afterwards: she transformed herself. And she must either reject this transformation and find forgiveness, or accept it and find its hidden meaning – that is, give it meaning retrospectively.

It is her concern for others that will be once again the source of her opposition, this time in the form of dissent, in the form of an Antigonic refusal of the rules of the Games. During the Games, her playing within the margins allowed by the rules and finding an ally gives her the chance to find something of ordinary life, something of the world she has lost. With Rue, a younger girl whom Katniss associates constantly with her sister, Prim, she quickly establishes trust by sharing personal details and information about the Games and by sharing a sleeping bag. They effectively live together for a short period: hunting, gathering, sleeping, learning, laughing. They make a plan for Katniss to destroy the supplies of the alliance made of the strongest tributes, they separate, and Katniss only sees her again once Rue is caught in a net – and Rue is immediately wounded in front of her. They both know that she is dying, and Katniss accompanies her death with a song.

Once Rue dies, Katniss' emotions change to hatred, and she steps out of her role in the Games. For a moment, her goal is no longer to survive or to kill others: "I can't stop looking at Rue, smaller than ever, a baby

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[3] Berezin (87) explains this dynamic proper to emotions, because of which motivation to act might be absent because of weak, unclear, or contradictory emotions. In this case, although we do not see it in the narrative or in the reflection, Katniss seems to act on the basis of her love for Prim – the only unwavering, clear, strong emotion in the book until she develops hatred for the Hunger Games themselves.

animal curled up in a nest of netting. I can't bring myself to leave her like this. Past harm, but seeming utterly defenseless. To hate the boy from District 1, who also appears so vulnerable in death [who killed Rue and whom she has just killed], seems inadequate. It's the Capitol I hate, for doing this to all of us" (Collins, *Hunger Games* 236). She does not move on to her next strategy in the Games; in fact, she suspends her participation in the Games. This refusal of survival *and* of death takes her outside the rules of the Games, to actions that allow her to affirm something else other than the inevitability of the deaths of the youth from the Districts, to enact something other than the might and the revenge of the Capitol against the past uprising of the Districts, a revenge that continues to be felt as the reason for being of the Hunger Games.

Because Katniss came to view Rue as a friend and as family, her death changes her situation: "The brief sense of home I had that one night with Rue has vanished" (Collins, *Hunger Games* 238). Past interactions take on a new meaning. Katniss recalls Gale's radical criticisms of the Capitol, but now she takes them seriously: "Rue's death has forced me to confront my own fury against the cruelty, the injustice they inflict upon us" (Collins, *Hunger Games* 236). She struggles with her powerlessness against the Capitol, but, as a result of her participation in the Hunger Games, she recalls Peeta's words about being more than a piece in the Games and discovers that she is now in a position where she can affect the Games and take revenge upon the Capitol, able "to shame them, to make them accountable, to show the Capitol that whatever they do or force us to do there is a part of every tribute they can't own" (Collins, *Hunger Games* 236-237).

And so Katniss acts: she takes Rue's death away from the Capitol, makes it Rue's own death, hiding her wounds and decorating her with flowers, and makes toward her – and her spectators – the same sign with three fingers that the crowd had made in her direction when she volunteered as tribute and that is an expression of thanks and respect.

Katniss goes beyond the silence of the crowd and her past transgressions: this time, her goal is to reach and harm the Capitol, which is forced to understand the meaning of her action (and to keep the moment off the televised broadcast of the Games). In this moment, she has refused the domination of the Capitol and the truth it affirms about herself and Rue as tributes, as belonging to the Capitol, as expendable. Katniss affirms her own freedom by refusing the actions set for her – kill or be killed – in an act of dissent that serves no purpose within the rules of the Game, and instead serves to reject these rules and the very premise of the Games.

The moment is brief; she quickly moves on to target the tributes guilty of Rue's death, returning to the rules of the Games, yet with a newfound reason to play the Games. Revenge is not the object, nor is it a mean: it is dangerous and goes against preservation and against strategy. It is exactly because her motive stands outside of the rules of the Games that it gives Katniss the necessary resolve and energy to play: she plays the Games, but on her own terms, following her own reasons, which are tied to her sense of self – that is, her interactions and her relationships for those for whom she cares. She also goes beyond revenge: "Something happened when I was holding Rue's hand, watching the life drain out of her. Now I am determined to avenge her, to make her loss unforgettable, and I can only do that by winning and thereby making myself unforgettable" (Collins, *Hunger Games* 242). She has the awareness of a different role she could play. In refusing the murders of tributes and standing for that refusal, she gives herself a new role, a new way to define herself rather than to let the Games define her.

After the Games, Haymitch warns Katniss that the Capitol is looking for an excuse to retaliate against her to make up for the embarrassment she caused, the shame she brought on it (Collins, *Hunger Games* 356-357). Her defense will be to take up another role, that of being in love with Peeta. She realizes that the Hunger Games are much larger than the Games themselves, that they extend to the whole regime. Already, she had seen

that the Games were her future: as the other last tribute is being slowly killed by animals engineered to that end, she explains that "It goes on and on and on and eventually completely consumes my mind, blocking out memories and hopes of tomorrow, erasing everything but the present, which I begin to believe will never change. There will never be anything but cold and fear and the agonized sounds of the boy dying in the horn" (Collins, *Hunger Games* 339). It is Katniss and Peeta's decision not to kill each other, and to suicide together by poison, that ends the Games, making them both victors by forcing the Gamemakers to stop them and change their rules.

Katniss and Peeta had refused the very premise of the Hunger Games: that the will to survive is stronger than the will to be true to oneself, that it is better to kill than to be killed. What they affirmed instead is the relationships and the bonds that make them who they are, their belonging to themselves, their belonging to each other – and not to the Capitol. What is more, since they established their relationship during the Games, as Katniss had with Rue, at a time when such relationships are supposed to be ruled out, what they affirmed was the *capacity* to make new relationships and to define themselves otherwise, in new ways, by taking on roles they define for themselves given their circumstances.

From Dissent to Revolt: The Implications of Responsibility

However, the possibility for Katniss to define her own role is limited to the conditions offered to her in the arena of the Hunger Games: faced with almost certain death, the risks of dissent become smaller than they had been while living in her District, and are smaller than they will be once she leaves the arena. There, the role of dissident she created for herself competes with the new role created for her, that of victor of the Hunger Games, propagandist for the Capitol, representative of its might. Along with that role comes the realization that she killed other teenagers, that she

caused sorrow in their families and districts, as well as the realization that she deceived Peeta by acting as if she loved him in the same manner he loves her. These acts she undertook to survive add to the role of victor created for her, and make her especially vulnerable to the Capitol's demands, undermining her attempt to be true to herself and to those she loves.

Catching Fire, the second volume of the trilogy, opens with a scene of domestic life, which it presents as structured by politics and which is interrupted by politics, that is, by President Snow who erupts into Katniss' house. And here Snow, someone she has never seen – the embodiment of politics, a game she has never played – threatens domestic life:

> If he's made the journey all the way from his city, it can only mean one thing. I'm in serious trouble. And if I am, so is my family. A shiver goes through me when I think of the proximity of my mother and sister to this man who despises me. Will always despise me. Because I outsmarted his sadistic Hunger Games, made the Capitol look foolish, and consequently undermined his control. (Collins, *Catching Fire* 18)

Katniss describes this irruption as he sits at a desk habitually used by her sister and mother: "Like our home, this is a place that he has no right, but ultimately every right, to occupy" (Collins, *Catching Fire* 20). Yet this irruption of political life into her family life is not arbitrary; it is due to her own actions.

Katniss is aware that her attempt at survival during the Hunger Games (preserving her life, as President Snow puts it) had political consequences, which she did not weigh and which didn't enter into her reasoning. She suggests that she did not mean to rebel: "Any act of rebellion was purely coincidental" (Collins, *Catching Fire* 18). In the Marxist vocabulary, she

was not subjectively "rebelling," but she did so objectively[4]. Its meaning for others – its objective meaning – was either defiance or love. Some districts perceived her actions as political; as acts of defiance, they sparked uprisings. President Snow also perceived her actions as political, since pure survival would have led her to kill Peeta and pure passion would have led her to sacrificing herself. He also knows that Katniss does not love Peeta, given that he is aware of her "warm" relationship with Gale. Ultimately Snow, unlike Katniss, is uninterested in her motives: "I believe you. It doesn't matter" (Collins, *Catching Fire* 23). Nonetheless, in terms of her intentions, Katniss neither *meant* to defy the Capitol, nor was she ever in love with Peeta (Collins, *Catching Fire* 25). Having entered political life, Katniss discovers the gap that separates her intentions from the consequences of her actions.

Katniss feels the responsibility that accompanies her two contradictory roles – that of dissident, which she created for herself, and that of victor, which was created for her – since both rest and are developed on the basis of her actions:

> Who else will I fail to save from the Capitol's vengeance? Who else will be dead if I don't satisfy President Snow? (Collins, *Catching Fire* 41)

> I will never have a life with Gale, even if I want to. I will never be allowed to live alone. I will have to be forever in love with Peeta. The Capitol will insist on it. […] there's only one future, if I want to keep those I love alive and stay alive myself. I'll have to marry Peeta. (Collins, *Catching Fire* 44)

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[4] On the contradiction between objectivity and subjectivity, consequences and intentions, and meaning as it relates to the moment when action is being considered or when it is being evaluated after the fact, see the analysis of Nikolai Bukharin's trial at the moment of Stalin's purges in Merleau-Ponty (25-70).

> This is not the time to be making wild escape plans. I must focus
> on the Victory Tour. Too many people's fates depend on my
> giving a good show. (Collins, *Catching Fire* 46)

In these three reflections, Katniss bears the weight of the survival of those
for whom she cares. That weight extends to the memory of Rue and to her
family, as well as to herself, leading to another contradiction in roles. Her
responsibility means that she must be true to herself (or at least to her past
actions, which have defined her) and satisfy her need to thank Rue's
family, which arises from her gesture toward Rue and Rue's gestures
toward her. Her relationship to Rue, she reflects, "will mean nothing if I
don't support it now" and "I must say something. I owe too much. And
even if I had pledged all my winnings to the families, it would not excuse
my silence today" (Collins, *Catching Fire* 60). Here again, Katniss fails to
predict the gap between her intentions and the consequences of her
actions. She chooses her role because she understands the hope and
comfort her dissent brings people – yet she fails to foresee that it will also
inspire others to join in to her dissent and jeopardize their lives. It is only
after she becomes aware of the explosive nature of the situation in the
Districts, of the riots that follow her appearances, and of the possibility of
uprisings that she fully understands the consequences of her actions, the
implications of her role: "If my holding out those berries was an act of
temporary insanity, then these people will embrace insanity, too" (Collins,
Catching Fire 72).

She chooses not to run away from her role as victor as she begins to
understand the political implications of her actions. The question of her
moral identity is tied to her action during the Games and its motives – to
her political identity: "The berries. I realize the answer to who I am lies in
that handful of poisonous fruit" (Collins, *Catching Fire* 118). Unsure of
the meaning of this act and of her intentions at the time, she comes to the
conclusion that she must decide upon it. She discovers that it was an act of

revolt – a refusal of murder and of being murdered, a refusal of the very logic and reason for being of the Hunger Games.

She commits herself to revolt and accepts the consequences (arrest, torture, mutilation, death) because she understands that because of her actions during the Hunger Games, she is already a target, exposed to them, no matter what she does (Collins, *Catching Fire* 122). She also understands that the Capitol has already hurt those around her – killed her father in the mines, starved her district to death. In this manner, she also learns the limits of her responsibility and the impossibility of bearing that burden alone: it is one that is shared by those around her, through their actions, as well as by the Capitol, as President Snow may disregard all her efforts and make them vain. Her sense of injustice is the only motive that can outweigh her fear: "Prim… Rue… aren't they the very reason I have to try to fight? Because what has been done to them is so wrong, so beyond justification, so evil that there is no choice? Because no one has the right to treat them as they have been treated?" (Collins, *Catching Fire* 123). To fight against the Capitol in their name is the only means Katniss possesses to help those around her, to truly care for them, given her position as victor of the Hunger Games and prey of the Capitol, but also given her past history of defiance of the Capitol, her "breaking the law, thwarting authority" (Collins, *Catching Fire* 130). Here again, she discovers herself in her relationships to others; she makes herself and those for whom she fight exist in her revolt against the logic of murder of the Capitol – echoing Camus' foundational reasoning: "I revolt, therefore we are" (Camus 22)[5].

And indeed, this revolt continues even when she must re-enter the Hunger Games arena for the Quarter Quell (a celebration of the 75th Hunger Games where past victors compete), although without her

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[5] While the translation reads "I rebel – therefore we exist" (Camus 22), the translation offered here is more faithful to the French text and its play on Descartes' famous "I think, therefore I am."

instigating it: she accepts the role given to her by Cinna and appears as a Mockingjay (a symbol that will be given meaning through later developments); she accepts the role given to her by Peeta and appears as pregnant; she accepts the role given to her by Haymitch and holds hands with the other tributes, all past victors like herself. Each time, although the appearances are calculated and planned, she is surprised by them – by her reflection in others, by the effect of her appearances – since they are not her own.

Before she says goodbye to Haymitch, he leaves her with a reminder to think about who her real enemy is in the arena. It is this reminder that will guide her interpretation of her fellow tribute Beetee's attempt at driving a knife through the force field that surrounds the arena and electrify it, that will inspire her to try to destroy the arena by shooting an arrow attached to a conductor for lightning into the force field (Collins, *Catching Fire* 379). This she calls her "final act of rebellion" (Collins, *Catching Fire* 380). Yet this act was anticipated by a revolutionary group notably constituted of her mentors (Cinna and Haymitch) as well as Beetee, and part of a plan that was kept hidden from Katniss all along. She can only guess Peeta's plan to sacrifice himself if needed save her. Saving Peeta is her only plan, the only thing she thinks of, outside of the moment when she short-circuits the force field, yet she grasps that something greater is at stake when she revolts and plays her role in the limited plan that was presented to her, if only blindly.

It is the contradiction between Katniss's roles that lead her to revolt. This revolt takes place through a refusal not only of the role assigned to her, but of the roots of her own actions, and so a refusal of the role she created for herself. As a dissident who rejects the rules of the Games, she continued to act within the framework of the Game. Instead, in rejecting the very framework of the Games – the murder of teenagers, the ownership of lives and relationships, *her* murders of other teenagers out of her desire to survive for the sake of others – she enters into revolt.

Katniss's revolt is, however, short lived *as* revolt: she quickly transforms it into rebellion.

Rebellion as a Fight to End the Games

The logic of her actions lead Katniss to question and, at first, to refuse her new role of symbol of the rebellion and to revolt against it; the wider logic of these same actions, when taken together, will lead her to turn even this revolt into her own rebellion. While revolt is her refusal of murder, rebellion is her own, personally-motivated attempt at harming the regime and the institutions that justify and commit murder. Her revolt against murder will keep her at a distance from the revolution, in which her friend Gale and the revolutionaries who saved her in the midst of the destruction of the Hunger Games arena, and live in the until-then dissimulated District 13 take part.

The motives for her new revolt are clear: she likens the way she is treated by her mentors and her new protectors to the way in which she was treated in the Games; she does not trust District 13. She portrays herself as a pawn; she is labelled as mentally disoriented. She knowingly lets others decide what happens to her, without attempting to have a say. Her only motivation for working with District 13 is to find the means to save Peeta, who was taken and held by the Capitol following the destruction of the Hunger Games arena. Gale has the energy and the desire to rebel and wants to ally with District 13 because of the similarities between their lives and their opposition to the Capitol. In contrast, Katniss decides to rebel given her refusal of the Games and given her memories of the blood spilled by the Capitol: Rue during the first Games, Cinna before the second Games began, the uprisings she witnessed between them; given her memory of the solidarity of the victors at the Quarter Quell; and given her interpretation of her new actions: "How it was no accident, my shooting

that arrow into the force field in the arena. How badly I wanted it to lodge deep in the heart of my enemy" (Collins, *Mockingjay* 30).

But she also wants to rebel on her own terms. She demands that President Coin, the leader of the District 13 revolutionaries, announce that she will pardon Peeta and the other tributes, as well as her right to hunt, for Prim to keep her cat, and for Gale to stay by her side, and the possibility for her to kill President Snow. She also refuses District 13's methods. As she and Gale are forbidden to take food from the dining hall, she reflects that "We know how to be hungry, but not how to be told how to handle what provisions we have. In some ways, District 13 is even more controlling than the Capitol" (Collins, *Mockingjay* 36). She is repulsed by their treatment of her prep team, saved from the Hunger Games, and by the standards of beauty she must continue to meet and the appearance that is created for her. She also questions the end goal of District 13. As Plutarch, one of the leaders of the revolution and the ex-head Gamemaker presents it, District 13 aims to create a government of which everyone will be a part: "We're going to form a republic where the people of each district and the Capitol can elect their own representatives to be their voice in a centralized government. […] if our ancestors could do it, then we can, too" (Collins, *Mockingjay* 83-84). Katniss's secret reply highlights that her motives do not have to do with contesting or replacing power: "Frankly, our ancestors don't seem much to brag about. I mean, look at the state they left us in, with the wars and the broken planet. Clearly, they didn't care about what would happen to the people who came after them. But this republic idea sounds like an improvement over our current government" (Collins, *Mockingjay* 84). On more than one occasion, she refuses to follow the orders coming from District 13. And she divorces her interest from the interests of District 13: "I'm sick of lying to me for my own good. Because really it's mostly for their own good" (Collins, *Mockingjay* 118.) Theirs is only an alliance of convenience: the success of their revolution will entail the success of her rebellion.

Her motives are entirely different: Katniss is fighting solely because of the Games – and entirely against the Games, especially once Peeta is rescued. When the idea of a televised propaganda piece on the tributes from each of the districts is brought up, she replies: "'That *is* brilliant, Fulvia,' I say sincerely [to one of the leaders of the revolution]. 'It's the perfect way to remind people why they're fighting" (Collins, *Mockingjay* 109). As a result, when she becomes a soldier and does accepts orders and assignments (Collins, *Mockingjay* 257), it is only because they coincide with her own objectives and will get her closer to having the chance to kill President Snow (Collins, *Mockingjay* 257).

Revolution, Compromise, and Contradiction

When the revolutionaries attack District 2, the closest ally to the Capitol, by causing an avalanche that traps most of their fighting forces inside a mountain base, Katniss is reminded of the mining accident that killed her father, making her question the morality of the attack. She negotiates with herself, and finds a moral compromise: the Capitol is to blame for pitting District against District and for creating the dependence of the Districts, which allows it to control them and secure their allegiance. Likewise, Katniss hesitates when she is faced with the reasoning Gale uses to justify the means to be used to lead this attack through the future harm it may prevent. She rejects arguments that can be used for any reason, arguments as to what is prevented by killing a few that can be used "for killing anyone at any time. You could justify sending kids into the Hunger Games to prevent the districts..." (Collins, *Mockingjay* 222).

This hesitation toward the revolution and the means it entails continues until the very end, even as the revolution succeeds. Snow, imprisoned and condemned to death, tells Katniss that the rebels used the weapons that killed Prim and children of the Capitol, as a way to turn the population against him (Collins, *Mockingjay* 356-7). Confronted with this idea,

Katniss begins her first reflective effort after many chapters where strategy and survival dominated the narrative: she weighs every reason that might lead her to the truth of the event – whether it was Snow or Coin who killed her sister and the other medics – but she also tries to understand the meaning of the event. She realizes that she is isolated from others and that, without them, she cannot find the truth or the meaning of the event: "I badly need help working this out, only everyone I trust is dead" (Collins, *Mockingjay* 361). As for Gale, she cannot raise the issue with him without implying that he would have accepted to kill Prim, even though he may have designed the bombs that were used: once she sees Gale, she knows she will always associate him with Prim's death.

In this isolation where Katniss cannot have her reality confirmed by others because of her isolation, we see at its clearest the logic of totalitarianism as Arendt describes it: "Totalitarian movements are mass organizations of atomized, isolated individuals. […] loyalty can be expected only from the completely isolated human being who, without any other social ties to family, friends, comrades, or even mere acquaintances" (323-4). Yet Katniss finds that she is not, indeed, alone, and her sense of the debt she owes to the disappeared family members and friends maintains her relation to them. She also lacks a sense of belonging to the totalitarian movement – be it that of the Capitol or of District 13 – that would create loyalty to such a movement. It is because of her relational context that she finds herself continually faced with the possibility of opposition to the regime in place.

Struggling with this lack of meaning, Katniss undertakes a reflection that is similar to her first attempt at understanding her actions in the Hunger Games arena. She turns to Haymitch, the sole person still alive and reachable, even if he is not trustworthy, to help her recover from this uncertainty – and from the attack that killed her sister and almost burned her alive. She finds herself reduced to her "patchwork of skin" (Collins, *Mockingjay* 364); before she is prepared to be presented to the public at

the execution, she expresses her surprise at the work of her prep team: "I can't believe how normal they've made me look on the outside when inwardly I'm such a wasteland" (Collins, *Mockingjay* 366). *Who* she is has been destroyed – wasteland internally, patchwork externally – by the actions of others who killed those close to her; by her own actions, by those she killed; by her alliance with those who killed those close to her. This time, it is this alliance with the revolutionaries she seeks to understand, that is, her actions in giving a meaning to the revolution, and so giving it legitimacy, making her a revolutionary in spite of her intentions and desires.

Disengagement and the Refusal of All Games

Once the armed phase of the revolution is over, Coin, now president of the entirety of Panem, presents an alternative to killing all the citizens of the Capitol, beyond those already tried for their direct participation in the Capitol's rule: that a last installment of the Hunger Games take place among the children of those who had the most power. Coin takes ownership of the idea: "It seemed to balance the need for vengeance with the least loss of life" (Collins, *Mockingjay* 369). She then orders the seven surviving victors to vote for or against it, with the group collectively bearing responsibility for the decision. Katniss votes yes for Prim, reflecting to herself: "All those people I loved, dead, and we are discussing the next Hunger Games in an attempt to avoid wasting life. Nothing has changed. Nothing will ever change now" (Collins, *Mockingjay* 370). She takes on the position for which she criticized Gale, against Peeta's principled refusal. Haymitch, the last to speak, breaks the tie by agreeing with Katniss – perhaps indicating that Katniss has hidden motives for acquiescing to the decision, or that he trusts that she will act for the best. Yet minutes after the decision, as she is sent to execute Snow, she kills Coin instead. Peeta stops her from ingesting the poison pill issued

to her earlier. Detained in a hospital, she remains bent on suicide: "The surveillance makes almost any suicide attempt impossible. Taking my life is the Capitol's privilege. Again" (Collins, *Mockingjay* 375). She concludes that: "What I can do is give up" (Collins, *Mockingjay* 375). She stops eating, ingesting only the drugs to which she has become addicted.

Faced with the thought that her captors will try to use her again, she refuses to play any further role, to follow any further instructions: "they will never again brainwash me into the necessity of using [their weapons]. I no longer feel any allegiance to these monsters called human beings, despise being one myself. […] Because something is significantly wrong with a creature that sacrifices its children's lives to settle its differences" (Collins, *Mockingjay* 377). She steps back from politics, unable to find common ground with anyone who takes part in it, and struggles to find meaning in everyday life. "Truth is," she concludes, "it benefits no one to live in a world where these things happen" (Collins, *Mockingjay* 377). Yet she realizes that only some of "these things" continue to happen, and that the Hunger Games are over, once and for all. Without the Games to threaten those she loves, she lost her reason to engage in politics; given her experiences with those who are in power, she finds further reasons to engage in politics. Confined to living in District 12, she finds a transformed version of her old life, along with a transformed version of herself, now that she is cut off from everyone who was dear to her in the District, but also now that she realizes her love for Peeta – who, like her, was transformed into something other than human by the Capitol. She returns to an everyday life tortured by her loss and memories, but also full of the life of her own children, which will not be taken away.

Conclusion: Who is Katniss Everdeen?

At critical points throughout the novels, Katniss is presented or presents herself as "the girl who was on fire" (until she very literally is set on fire),

that is, as playing a role that was pre-defined for her by the Capitol, with her full awareness; by the rebels close to her, without her knowledge; and by the revolutionaries, as a compromise she accepts reluctantly. Yet the manners in which she represents herself in her reflections are better (if less poetically) described as "the girl who is ending the Hunger Games," that is, as a political actor seeking to achieve a specific political result for the sake of others, of humanity, and of future generations; as well as a focal point in her relationships that bind her to those she loves. Who Katniss Everdeen is then depends on the state of the contradictions between these roles and relationships.

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The Popular Culture Studies Journal Interview with RANDY DUNCAN

WITH NORMA JONES

About Randy

Randy Duncan, Ph.D., is a professor of Communication at Henderson State University. He is a pioneer in the study of the comic arts and continues to lead the way in how this area is being examined:

- Co-founder the Comic Arts Conference, the nation's first annual academic conference devoted solely to the study of comics. This conference runs alongside Comic-Con in San Diego and is in its 24th year as a staple of annual programming.
- Co-author of the *Power of Comics*: *History, Form and Culture* (in its second edition) at powerofcomics.com
- Co-editor of Icons of the American Comic Book: From Captain America to Wonder Woman
- Co-editor of Critical Approaches to Comics: Theories and Methods
- Co-author of Creating Comics as Journalism, Memoir and Nonfiction

What were the early days of the Comic Arts Conference like?

The first year of the Comics Arts Conference we had only a handful of panels and very modest attendance for our one-day event. However, it is still one of the high points of our soon to be 25-year history. The

presenters for that conference included some really extraordinary people: Will Eisner, Bob Harvey, Scott McCloud, Leonard Rifas, and Steve Bissette. If you wanted to have substantive debates about comics in 1992 that was a pretty good group to bring together.

There was a wine and cheese reception the evening before the conference. There were only six or seven of us there and we watched Scott and Bob engage in a friendly – but lively – debate about whether or not a comic had to have more than one panel to qualify as comics. The next morning Bob showed up with a single panel cartoon, he had drawn the night before, depicting a series of juxtaposed actions in a sequence. But I don't think Scott was convinced. I think the debate continued for years after that.

The other thing that comes to mind from that first year is that Scott gave a slideshow presentation with excerpts from a book that was soon to be published – *Understanding Comics*. We didn't have the expression OMG in those days, but that was definitely the look on our faces as those few of us in the audience exchanged glances with each other.

After that first year the conference grew steadily. When we celebrated our tenth anniversary with a "Will, Scott, and Bob Ten Years Later" panel the room was packed.

The Power of Comics: History, Form & Culture (Continuum, 2009) stands as one of the first textbooks in this area. What early challenges did you and co-author Matthew J. Smith face with the book and the study of comics in general?

Years before we published *The Power of Comics*, I had sent out a few queries and talked to editors at conferences. There was no enthusiasm for an introduction to comics studies textbook. When Matt and I merged the books we had been preparing separately our first challenge was

convincing a publisher it was a good idea to publish a book for a course
that did not actually exist yet.

Continuum (now Bloomsbury) wanted to be at the forefront of what
they believed would be a rapidly developing field of study. They had
already published comics scholarship by Will Brooker, Geoff Klock, and
Danny Fingeroth. It did not take much to get Continuum to buy into our
"build it and they will come" vision.

The next challenge was the scope of the book. Continuum was
cautiously enthusiastic. We had to create a text within a fairly conservative
word count. We decided to focus on comic books in the U.S., but many of
our observations about form would apply to virtually all comics.

In the first history chapter, we discussed comic strips as one of the
roots of American comic books. Then, we had a chapter that gave brief
overviews of numerous national comics traditions. Even with our
relatively narrow focus, there was so much history we had to skim over
and so many talented creators we never mentioned. For the second edition,
published in 2014, we got a few more pages to work with, and Paul Levitz
joined the writing team to revise and expand the history section.

The Comic Arts Conference just celebrated its 24th year as part
of the Comic-Con International programming. Do you feel that
the study of comic arts has gained a new sense of legitimacy in
academia? In other words, how have we grown as a field of
study in and within popular culture?

The field of Comics Studies is not yet at a point where we can take for
granted acceptance throughout the academy. I have heard many recent
stories about comics scholars having their publications or research
agendas belittled by colleagues or administrators. However, to invoke MC
Hammer, we are at least "too legit to quit."

We have established strong beachheads in terms of journals and conferences. In the last decade of the twentieth century, it was pretty much just the Comics Arts Conference and then ICAF (International Comic Arts Forum). The number of new comics-specific academic conferences that have been created in the twenty-first century is astounding. And perhaps more importantly, comics scholarship panels are regularly accepted at long-established conferences such as MLA (Modern Language Association) and NCA (National Communication Association). The recent formation of the Comics Studies Society gives the concept of a Comics Studies field a concrete, institutional presence.

Not all universities are hostile or even resistant to the presence of Comics Studies. Henderson State University has supported my teaching and research for decades. Recently, we created a Comics Studies Minor. There are now a handful of U.S. universities with similar minors or certificate programs. I think we will see a slow but steady increase of such programs in the coming years.

We are seeing more scholars engage with comics in their examinations. Also, the second edition of the *The Art of Comics: A Philosophical Approach* was released just last year. As such, as a field of study, where do you think we are headed? Where would you like to see us headed? What are some future challenges?

Growing a field that has no discipline to call home will, for some years to come, be a difficult journey. It is not a path for the faint of heart to travel.

There are probably still many tenure and promotion committees that consider comics scholarship to be a mere sideline – not to be valued the same as a professor's "real" research agenda. For most comics scholars,

the majority of their teaching load is comprised of the courses traditional
to the particular disciplines in which they received their degrees. For many
academics, simply getting to teach a comics course is a rare treat. That
was true for the first twenty-five years of my teaching. Now that we have
instituted a Minor in Comics Studies, I teach at least one comics course
each semester.

As we struggle to get the tangible benefits of acceptance – such as
promotions, grant funding, etc. – we can strengthen the institution-wide
support for Comics Studies by evolving from being a multidisciplinary
field into a truly interdisciplinary field. That means initiating collaborative
projects with colleagues in various disciplines. These kinds of
collaborations will educate people about the nature of comics scholarship
and create allies that might serve on committees that make decisions about
those tangible benefits.

In *Critical Approaches to Comics*, you and co-editor, Matthew
J. Smith, offered several ways to approach the study of comics
in terms of form, content, production, context, and reception.
As this field is growing, what are some new ways, in terms of
theories and methodologies, you think we can approach
comics? How might we generate new theories in this area?

In the U.S. some of the pioneering comics scholarship of the 1960s and
1970s came out of Media Studies and Communication departments. As a
communication professor, I would like to see a resurgence of work that
uses communication approaches to study comics.

There are scholars from rhetoric programs who are doing some
wonderful work with critical theory approaches, but I would also like to
see communication scholars resurrect some old school approaches. For
example, perhaps an anthology of essays applying Kenneth Burke's

theories to comics. I think I floated this idea with you and Garrett Castleberry years ago. You and Garrett need to put together that proposal and submit it to the *Routledge Advances in Comics Studies* series that I edit with Matt Smith.

I think interdisciplinary collaborations are going to be one of the best means of generating new approaches to studying comics. Pascal Lefèvre points out that the scope and diversity of comics is such that we risk slipping into dilettantism when we our scholarship ventures beyond our familiar methodologies and the comics traditions of our native culture. Pascal is a strong advocate for teams of researchers collaborating across borders and cultures. He believes such an approach will not only generate innovation, but also clarity. Working individually, we can sometimes allow ourselves to be a bit fuzzy about the methodology we have devised, but when you are part of a research team you feel more pressure to be precise and clear.

You also work with comic book artists in your publications. For example, the second edition of *The Power of Comics* was co-authored by Paul Levitz, with an introduction by Mark Waid. In many areas of media studies, we do not reach out to the artists and producers. Also, your new book, *Creating Comics as Journalism, Memoir and Nonfiction* (Routledge, 2015) was written to help readers develop and create graphic nonfiction stories. How has engaging with comic book artists and developing content to help new artists informed your studies. Are you also creating graphic stories?

I am definitely not an artist! All the valuable advice for artists in *Creating Comics* comes from one of my co-authors – art professor David Stoddard.

Years ago I did some writing for an APA (amateur press alliance) and I got to collaborate with some pretty talented artists, including Davey Jones (not the Monkee), John Dennis, and Rafael Rasado. Rafael drew the recent *Giants Beware!* And *Dragons Beware!* graphic novels.

As for engaging with comics professionals, I have been very lucky in that respect. Over the years I have had the opportunity to become an acquaintance, and perhaps even a friend, to some of the some of the most talented, and nicest, people working in comics in North America – Will Eisner, Scott McCloud, Trina Robbins, Paul Levitz, Mark Waid, David Mack, and others.

Sometimes, I met them at cons, and sometimes, I did not get to know them until they visited the HSU campus. Every spring for the past couple of decades, we have had at least one comics creator on campus (Joe Sacco, Eric Shanower, GB Tran, Colleen Doran, etc.). My classes and the Comics Club have talked to dozens of comics creators by phone (Denny O'Neil, Paul Levitz, Paul Gulacy, Cullen Bunn, Kelly Sue DeConnick, etc.).

These interactions have been valuable for me as a scholar; it can be useful to have one's theories grounded by people who engage in the practice. They have been absolutely inspirational for some of my students. This past spring we had an embarrassment of riches – Scott McCloud, Andy Warner, and Sonny Lieu were all on the Henderson campus. I'm afraid my students got spoiled. I had to keep telling the sophomores that it wouldn't be like this every semester.

Creating Comics and the second edition of *The Power of Comics* were just released last year. What is next for you?

Matt Smith and I are in the process of shepherding a big, really big, book to press. It is *The Secret Origins of Comics Studies*, and it is the story of

how many individual enthusiasms and efforts coalesced into an academic field.

The main essays are written by respected comics scholars, such as Ann Miller, Henry Jenkins, Gert Meesters, Ian Gordon, Julia Round, and Chris Murray. Charles Hatfield provides a thought-provoking introduction. Many of the people who are written about, the pioneers of the field, provide their own perspective on the past and speculations about the future in sidebars. We have sidebars from David Kunzle, John Lent, Wolfgang Fuchs, Maurice Horn, Tom Inge, and more. It has been exciting to read the work has it has come in.

We hope *Secret Origins* will be valuable for graduate students who want to learn about the seminal works in the field. It should also help professors put together reading lists for said graduate students. It could become one of the first stops to make when putting together a literature review, for example. We also hope that such a history will help Comics Studies be recognized as an established field of study.

Stan Lee and the Marvel Universe

BOB BATCHELOR

Welcome to the *Popular Culture Studies Journal* special section "Stan Lee and the Marvel Universe." As Stan might exclaim: "Face front, true believer!"

Shelves have been filled with books about comic book history, Marvel and DC specifically, and the many writers, artists, and executives responsible for developing this uniquely American form of mass communication. Given the ubiquity and global reach of the Marvel and DC films over the past several decades and the aggressive release dates for superhero films well into the future, you can safely bet that comic books and superheroes will continue to be a popular source for a long, long time.

Jumping into the fray, the scholars that bring their ideas to life in the following pages take a critical look at Lee and the Marvel Universe in a manner that I feel deserves closer attention. And, make no mistake – this special section simply scratches the surface! I view this work as a jumping off point…perhaps a catalyst for others to join the hullabaloo. We simply cannot exhaust a topic with the kind of dark matter-like impact on contemporary popular culture around the globe.

What follows is a set of scholarly articles by Alan Jozwiak, Joseph P. Muszynski, and Peter Cullen Bryan that examine and assess Lee's early work and its consequences for the history of Marvel Comics. These thoughtful and interrogative essays delve into the relationship that Lee established with readers, a key aspect of his efforts in beating "Brand Echh" (as he jokingly called DC Comics) and the relationship between Lee and eminent artist Jack "King" Kirby that produced the

groundbreaking *Fantastic Four*. Readers familiar with Marvel's early history will find much to enjoy in these articles, while "newbies" enter a world of insight and intrigue that will certainly set them on a course to comic book scholardom.

The centerpiece of the special section is a series of "think pieces" written by some of the – again in Lee style – "The World's Greatest Popular Culture and Comic Book Scholars!" We lead off with Arthur Asa Berger, a popular culture titan (see PCSJ Volume 1 for an in-depth interview with Berger), and one of the first scholars to study Lee and comic books as a serious art form. Then, Jeff Massey, Brian Cogan, Jeff McLaughlin, Joseph J. Darowski, John Kenneth Muir, Robert McParland, and me take on Lee and the Marvel Universe from a variety of perspectives, ranging from interactions with him and his work to examining his life as a writer, sometimes-actor, and creator of heroes.

"Stan Lee and the Marvel Universe" rounds out with a series of comic book, graphic novel, and television reviews of Marvel-related material. This section, which includes essays on the hit television shows *Agent Carter* and *Daredevil*, presents a different perspective that takes the Marvel Universe through and beyond Lee. The reviews also include assessments of the wildly-popular *Ms. Marvel* series and the ever-important *X-Men*, as well as Mark Millar's *Civil War*, one of the moments that utterly reformed Marvel and set the stage for the MCU on film. I want to thank Norma Jones and Kathleen Turner for their wonderful work on this section.

As mentioned earlier, my hope is that this special section ignites or re-ignites some people's interest in Lee and Marvel. Like much of contemporary scholarship, however, a great deal of comic book studies has gone the way of literature, history, and the social studies – focusing on postcolonial and non-Western subjects, as well as cultural studies topics based on race, gender, and sexual orientation.

From these vantages, Lee and Marvel might seem antiquated as topics for exploration. Yet, I believe that a great wealth of information still needs researched. Lee is a creative icon – one of the most significant writers in American history – and Marvel resides at the center of the Disney empire, releasing blockbuster after blockbuster film with no sign of slowing down.

Onward, friends! Excelsior!

Template for Tomorrow: *The Fantastic Four* Lee/Kirby Partnership that Birthed the Marvel Age of Comics and, Ultimately, the Marvel Universe

ALAN JOZWIAK

Out of all of the superheroes that populate the Marvel Universe, none has a richer history than The Fantastic Four. Launched in September 1961 with a cover dated November 1961 (Maslon and Kantor), *The Fantastic Four* comic book series changed the nature of comics and inaugurated the modern age of superheroes. The Fantastic Four are made up of "Dr. Reed Richards, a brilliant scientist. Sue Storm, the woman he loves. Johnny Storm, Sue's kid brother. Ben Grimm, one of the country's top test pilots" (Kraft 4). All four decide to test an experimental rocket that will hopefully take mankind to the moon. As they are about to reach orbit, their rocket hits the cosmic storm area above the Earth's atmosphere and is bombarded with cosmic rays. As a result of the bombardment, the rocket crash lands back to Earth (or as the narration diplomatically puts it, the rocket has "a rough, but non-fatal landing") (Lee and Kirby *Essential*, vol. 1.1 11). The cosmic rays have unanticipated effects on the team: Reed Richards is able to stretch his body to any dimension, Sue Storm can make herself invisible at will (and later, be able to exert force fields around herself and others), Johnny Storm is able to clothe himself in flames and fly, and Ben Grimm develops super strength and a hard rocky skin. Concerning Grimm's transformation, Sue remarks in *The Fantastic Four* Issue 1 that Ben has

"turned into a—a—some sort of a Thing! He's strong as an ox!!" (Lee and Kirby *Essential*, vol. 1.1 12).

The Fantastic Four was created by writer Stan Lee and penciler Jack Kirby (with various inkers, the most famous of which is Joe Sinnott). Together, Lee and Kirby were responsible for crafting the first 102 issues of *The Fantastic Four*. Euphemistically proclaimed "The World's Greatest Comic Magazine!" on the cover of the comic by Lee beginning with issue 4, the comic launched the Marvel Age of Comics (Lee's term for what has become known as Marvel Silver Age comics). Despite the "fantastic" sales of the comic, the relationship between Kirby and Lee was not always cordial. They had disagreements with respect to character direction, plotting, and development of characters. These relationship problems came to a head when Kirby had disagreements with Marvel management, forcing Kirby to leave Marvel in March 1970. Yet, the Lee/Kirby partnership was still able to produce a body of work and a cast of characters, antiheroes, and villains that form the nucleus of what today is the Marvel Universe.

The current state of scholarship on *The Fantastic Four* roughly divides between historical studies of the comic and its creators and critical studies of the way that various elements within the series reflect 1960s cultural attitudes, expectations, and/or theoretical constructs. Among the best of the historical studies is Mark Alexander's comprehensive overview of the Lee and Kirby run on *The Fantastic Four* called *Lee & Kirby: The Wonder Years*. This extended issue of the *Jack Kirby Collector* breaks down each issue, explains how that issue connects with the rest of the series, and also provides backstory behind the making of the comic, as well as some of the cultural influences which influenced the comic series. Discussing the history of Marvel in general and how it connects to *The Fantastic Four* is Sean Howe's *Marvel Comics: The Untold Story,* which provides backstory for plot points within the comic series that would not be known otherwise. For instance, Howe reveals that the reason why The

Human Torch battles the Golden Age version of himself is that Marvel publisher Martin Goodman wanted to keep his company's copyright for The Human Torch so that it would not revert back to the hands of its initial creator, Carl Burgos (Howe 76).

Added to Howe's work is a Ph.D. dissertation by Jordan Raphael entitled *Four-Color Marvels: Stan Lee, Jack Kirby, and the Development of Comic-Book Fandom.* Raphael provides a historical overview of the work of Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, even devoting a chapter to the controversy surrounding Lee's contribution and Kirby being wronged by Marvel. This is in line with several books that highlight various historical aspects of Kirby's career, most notably Ronin Ro's *Tales to Astonish: Jack Kirby, Stan Lee, and the American Comic Book Revolution*, Blake Bell and Michael J. Vassallo's *The Secret History of Marvel Comics: Jack Kirby and the Moonlighting Artists at Martin Goodman's Empire,* and Mark Evanier's *Kirby: King of Comics*. Each of these books highlights Kirby's role within Marvel Comics and/or examples of Kirby's artwork during each period of his career. With respect to Stan Lee, Lee has produced a number of autobiographical works related to his life and times with Marvel (including his work on *The Fantastic Four*). The two most recent works are *Excelsior!: The Amazing Life of Stan Lee* and his autobiographical graphic novel called *Amazing Fantastic Incredible: A Marvelous Memoir.*

In terms of the critical studies on *The Fantastic Four*, they fall under three broad categories: domestic/feminist/youth issues, national/urban issues, and miscellaneous concerns. For the first category, much has been written about the family dynamic operating with *The Fantastic Four*. Robert Genter's "'With Great Power Comes Great Responsibility': Cold War Culture and the Birth of Marvel Comics" and Danny Fingeroth's *Superman on the Couch: What Superheroes Really Tell Us about Ourselves and Our Society* talk about the ways in which The Fantastic Four reflect the nuclear family of the 1950s-1960s. Focusing on Sue Storm

and her role within the team, Laura D'Amore has written two articles articulating feminism and the role of motherhood within superheroes. These articles attempt to combat the fact that "scholarship about superhero comics has been overwhelmingly focused on maleness" (D'Amore, "Invisible Girl's"). Echoing these articles is Sebastian Mercier's work on the intersection of American youth culture with superheroes. Using a historical overview, Mercier touches on the family dynamics with The Fantastic Four, as well as Sue Storm's place within the group as both housewife and promoter of family solidarity. According to Mercier, Sue Storm craves the "stability inherent in the family situation of the Fantastic Four" (41).

National/urban issues are the second category of critical scholarship on *The Fantastic Four*. Matthew Yockey's work on connecting The Fantastic Four with issues related to the Space Race provide valuable insights into the ways that the greater issues of Cold War hysteria and Space Race fever influenced the comic's creation. Yockey believes that Kirby's white cityscape in many of the issues can be considered like white spaceships (66) and that The Fantastic Four is an extension of the burgeoning corporate culture that will eventually take over America (76-77). Yockey's white skyscrapers are a perfect segue for Jason Bainbridge's article about New York City and the Marvel Universe. Bainbridge includes in his discussion of Spider-Man and New York references to The Fantastic Four, concluding that the cityscape of New York is "not only the spine of the Marvel Universe, it is a *suture*—suturing the Marvel Universe to the real world" (172). For Bainbridge, it is this suturing of New York City to the real world that allows for superheroes (such as The Fantastic Four) to have realism within the storytelling without delving into specific scientific explanations of a superhero's superpowers.

Lastly, there are miscellaneous articles that approach *The Fantastic Four* from other theoretical constructs, such as through its use of language, the American Monomyth and Marxism. Arthur Berger discusses

Lee's use of various tropes, such as alliteration, irony, and self-parody in his article "Marvel Language: The Comic Book and Reality." He sees that these tropes allow Lee to bridge societal expectations of what comic books can be; he even connects The Fantastic Four with the concept of the epic. Writing in 1972 when comics were not highly regarded, Berger confesses that *The Fantastic Four* is different from other comic books: "in a literary form that is generally seen as trash and seldom taken seriously we find [in *The Fantastic Four*] poetic language philosophical speculation, and the use of the epic form" (172). David Lippert provides an analysis of Issue 12 of *The Fantastic Four*, the initial meeting of The Thing and The Incredible Hulk, in light of a Marxist's view toward power relationships. Lippert asserts that the military had a hard time distinguishing between The Incredible Hulk and The Thing when The Incredible Hulk was being sought after by the military because both characters portrayed the issue of strength, and for the military, they could only see The Incredible Hulk through the lens of strength (41). Moreover, Lippert asserts that the military also views The Incredible Hulk and The Thing as "superhuman," which becomes a metaphor by which these superheroes are to be considered different from the rest of humanity (41).

Finally, Jeffrey S. Lang and Patrick Trimble adapt Robert Jewett and John Shelton Lawrence's work on the American Monomyth and apply it to the Marvel Universe. While they do not specify The Fantastic Four with their article, what they have to say is germane to any discussion of all Marvel Silver Age superheroes. They see superheroes in light of the American Monomyth, which "secularizes Judeo-Christian ideals by combining the selfless individual who sacrifices himself for others and the zealous crusader who destroys evil" (158). Under this new myth embodied by Marvel Silver Age comics, "the redeemed society does not recognize the redeemer as a hero but instead frequently thinks of him as a menace. He is freakish, different, outside society—and therefore dangerous" (Lang

and Trimble 166). One only has to think of The Thing and his problems to see this part of the American Monomyth in action.

By outlining the current state of scholarship, it is hoped that it will be possible to take many of the ideas found within the historical and critical studies of *The Fantastic Four* and create a meta structure so as to see how these studies interact and interrelate to each other. For the purposes of this paper, this structure will be called a template, which is a term used in cognitive psychology as a pattern recognition device or cognitive schema. According to template theory, a template allows us how to perceive a task as being structured as either relating to what is called instrumentalities (meaning that the task has either intrinsic or extrinsic rewards) or as play (meaning that there are no defined rewards) (Sandelands, Ashford, and Dutton 230). Whenever we come across a new situation, we fit it into one of these categories of understanding a new situation. Templates can be used to match up existing data to external stimuli, such as with a computer recognizing visual stimuli (Brunelli).

Not only do templates allow for identification, but they can also act as a structuring mechanism whereby data can be stored in ways that can make it easier to create new works from the basis of the template. This is the basis of how templates are used in word processing programs. In fact, the Wikipedia entry neatly summarizes these lines of thought by defining a word processing template as:

> a sample document that has already some details in place; those can be adapted (that is added/completed, removed or changed, differently from a fill-in-the-blank approach as in a form) either by hand or through an automated iterative process, such as with a software assistant. Once the template is completed, the user can edit, save and manage the result as an ordinary word processing document. ("Template (word processing)")

Such templates are designed to be filled in with any number of different things. The content will differ depending on the document, even though each document uses the same template. Moreover, a template can be augmented, changed, or reworked depending on the situation and the needs of the creators, while a formula is more static. There is a greater possibility of having a postmodern freeplay of ideas under a template. This is why FreeDictionary.com defines a template (definition 2a) as a document that is "used as a starting point for a particular application so that the format does not have to be recreated each time it is used."

By indicating that Lee and Kirby were using a template, this shies away from the use of term "formula" that gets bandied about in the history of Marvel Comics. According to FreeDictionary.com, definition 2 of a formula is "any fixed or conventions method or approach: [as in] popular novels produced by formula." A formula is a more rigid list of ingredients and procedures to follow that produce a specific result. It is static; ingredients cannot be changed without the possibly spoiling the result. It is for this reason that another definition (definition 4a) for a formula states that it is "A prescription of ingredients in fixed proportion; a recipe." The best evidence of the template being used is in the Lee/Kirby creation of The Incredible Hulk (cover date May 1962) directly after creating The Fantastic Four. A formulaic approach to superheroes would mean that the next endeavor of Lee/Kirby should be another superhero team with different powers and abilities. Instead, they take the basic template of the superhero they created with *The Fantastic Four* and played with different elements to create a solo monster-hero, who still had its roots in the structural elements worked out within *The Fantastic Four*.

Considering the literature review in light of the above discussion of templates, it is possible to formulate a thesis related to templates and the work of Lee and Kirby on *The Fantastic Four*. Taking the body of work that Lee and Kirby created during their run on *The Fantastic Four*, this author argues that the 102-issue partnership on the series created a

template whereby later Marvel writers and artists could create superheroes and their corresponding villains with many structural features similar to that of *The Fantastic Four.* The artists would use the template as a whole or make additions, subtractions, and modifications to the template. As a result, this template became the house style of Marvel Comics and gave birth to the wide-ranging world that is the current Marvel Universe.

In asserting that Lee and Kirby had a partnership in creating *The Fantastic Four*, there is controversy surrounding Lee's role in the creation and development of these characters. The popular view is that Lee was the leader of that team, with Kirby being the one to carry out Lee's ideas. Under this view, Lee was the idea man and Kirby was the plodder who obeyed the dictates of Lee in carrying out Lee's ideas. There is evidence that this view is not quite accurate. The controversy starting with the Gary Groth interview of Jack Kirby published in 1990 in *The Comics Journal* in which Kirby expresses his ire against Lee hogging all the credit for Kirby's comic work. In the interview, Kirby asserts that:

> Stan Lee and I never collaborated on anything! I've never seen Stan Lee write anything. I used to write the stories just like I always did. . . It wasn't possible for a man like Stan Lee to come up with new things — or old things for that matter. Stan Lee wasn't a guy that read or that told stories. Stan Lee was a guy that knew where the papers were or who was coming to visit that day. Stan Lee is essentially an office worker, OK? I'm essentially something else: I'm a storyteller. My job is to sell my stories. (qtd. in Groth)

Others have also expressed similar contentions, most notably Mike Gartland in a series of articles in the *Jack Kirby Collector* (1998-1999) entitled "A Failure to Communicate" which highlight all *The Fantastic Four* inconsistencies between Kirby's drawings and Lee's words.

In defense of Lee, Kirby was bitter about his battle against Marvel Comics to gain control of his own artwork (which he was finally able to do, although he had to pay the shipping costs). Kirby was also resentful of all of the press and acclaim Stan Lee received as the "sole creator" of the Marvel Universe. In one damaging article by Nat Freelander of the *New York Herald Tribune*, Lee came off as being "an ultra–Madison Avenue, rangy look-alike of Rex Harrison," while Kirby was denigrated, described as "a middle-aged man with baggy eyes. . .[who] If you stood next to him on the subway, you would peg him for the assistant foreman in a girdle factory" (qtd. in Riesman). Feeling disrespected by the press and also by Marvel management may have caused Kirby to take a more strident stance against his relationship with Stan Lee. Finally, Lee inadvertently let himself open to criticism by the way he wrote his comic stories. In the Marvel Method of creating comics, the penciler drew a comic using an outline rather than a full script like is used today. As a result, the penciler had a greater range to add their own unique spin to a story and set the pacing for that story. After the penciler was done, the writer would then go back and write out the actual script used to explain a scene. This method of working could give a penciler the feeling that he was working solo. In Lee's case, he "had writing chores for as many as eight series at a time and was editor of all of them" (Riesman). Therefore, one could see how the penciler for a book could feel that he had more of a say-so in the direction and creation of stories. As the run progressed, Kirby had more control of the storylines and began to both write and pencil the stories. Lee eventually gave Kirby co-writing credit during the latter part of their run of *The Fantastic Four.*

Both Lee and Kirby did their finest work partnering on *The Fantastic Four.* After the pair parted ways, each of their individual efforts in comics was not as innovative or compelling as what they did together on *The Fantastic Four.* Clearly, some sort of synergistic process between the two of them was operating to allow them to create the series in the way that

they did. This author contends that Lee and Kirby both had a vital role in the creation and development of *The Fantastic Four*, with their contributions being both individual and collaborative. Lee did not create *The Fantastic Four* solely by himself, but needed his partnership with Kirby in order to develop the comic fully. Kirby also needed Lee's input to achieve the artistic excellence that is a hallmark of the series. Instead of trying to determine precisely which of these creators contributed what attribute to which character, a more fruitful line of query would be to discuss the nature of the Lee/Kirby partnership and how the team operated. The word "partnership" is being deliberately used here because there are lines of scholarly thought discussing artistic advances in terms of collaborations and partnerships which could shed light on how the pair operated. Vera John-Steiner, in her book *Creative Collaboration*, sets up the concept of a creative collaboration and provides plentiful examples from both the arts and sciences of creative collaborations at work. The painters Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque, as well as the cultural anthropologists Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson are two examples of how pairs can generate ideas, push each other onto greater success, and produce work that they would not have been able to produce separately. John-Steiner asserts that it is only through collaborative work that "we learn from each other by teaching what we know; we engage in mutual appropriation" (3).

Echoing the work of John-Steiner, Joshua Wolf Shenk's book *Powers of Two* provides a typology of creative partnerships. Shenk discusses the different ways that creative pairs can operate, two of which have a bearing on the Lee/Kirby partnership: a) the dreamer and the doer, and b) the star and the director. Under the dreamer and the doer, Shenk asserts that some creative pairs are divided between dreamers, who "generate ideas, start new projects, inspire others to join them," and the doers, who are "productive, efficient, and dependable, they excel at finishing, have a realistic sense of what's possible, and can set priorities and make

decisions" (85). Using the example of *South Park*'s Trey Parker and Matt Stone, Shenk quotes magazine author Jaime J. Weinman, who looked at fan postings on message boards. Typically, fans complain that "Trey writes every episode and then does the majority of the voices and most of the music while Matt sits around and laughs at Trey to encourage him" (qtd. in Shenk 88). Even though that exaggeration downplays Parker's role, Shenk quotes Weinman again by saying that" while Parker is handling *the creative side of the show*, someone needs to pull together the other elements of production" (qtd. in Shenk 88). In short, Parker and Stone work together well because each is able to address the other's weaknesses through what they do. Stone handles the business end of the show, while Parker handles the creative end. Shenk comments on this dynamic with the phrase "creativity is what happens when the dreamer meets the doer" (89).

Lee and Kirby seem to fit this way of partnering, with Lee being the dreamer and Kirby the doer. When Kirby asserts that Lee was only a "guy that knew where the papers were [at the office]" (qtd. in Groth), he downplays the crucial role that Lee has in supporting Kirby's comic efforts as a general editor. According to former Marvel editor Nicole Boose, a comic book editor is responsible for every detail of production of the comic book, making certain that the artwork, inking, and lettering are done on time and to specifications so as to be delivered to the next person in the production lineup and that the scheduled publication date for the comic book is met (Boose). Lee was in charge of making certain that each issue of *The Fantastic Four* went through this process and that all elements of the production of the comic book was complete and on time. While this may seem like paper pushing to Kirby, it was essential for the legacy that both of them share. Without this mundane work, no one would be interested in the series and the Marvel Universe would never have taken flight. It seems that whenever Kirby collaborated in his career, he was a doer instead of a dreamer. In the same interview where he slams

Lee, Kirby also discloses that in the partnership he had with long-time collaborator Joe Simon (the two created Captain America and the 1940s version of The Sandman), "Joe was the business side" (qtd. in Groth). This would indicate that Kirby was not as familiar with the intricate working of the business end of comics and, hence, his disparaging comments about Lee not doing anything.

Addressing the issue of Lee "hogging the spotlight," Shenk discusses another dynamic within creative pairs, the star and the director. In some creative pairs, there can be a member who is "in the spotlight and another offstage" (Shenk 65). The onstage person is the one that the public tends to focus their attention upon, even though "the pair's center of gravity is often with the one we see less" (66). There are also dangers for the person who is in the spotlight, since they tend to be blinded by the attention and can be lacking in self-knowledge and internal restraints (Shenk 68-69). By contrast, the director type is the person behind the scenes who "often act much like parents, walking the tightrope between patient indulgence and absolute authority" (Shennk 69).

An interesting dimension of the Lee/Kirby partnership is the paternal way that Kirby though of Lee. Being five years older than Lee, Kirby always considered Lee as a kid, with himself as the surrogate parent. In the Groth interview, Kirby said that when he was working at Marvel in the 1940s, the teenager Lee was "the kind of kid that liked to fool around — open and close doors on you. Yeah. In fact, once I told Joe [Simon] to throw him out of the room" (qtd. in Groth). Certainly Kirby's story on how he created *The Fantastic Four* also has paternalistic tone. Kirby recounts that:

> Marvel was on its ass, literally, and when I came around, they were practically hauling out the furniture . . . and Stan Lee was sitting there crying. I told him to hold everything, and I pledged that I would give them the kind of books that would up their sales and keep them in business. (qtd. in Howe 2)

It sounds like a parent trying to soothe a crying child rather than colleagues making comic book history.

In terms of the charge that Lee was hogging the spotlight, Lee's press attention did have a positive effect of setting up in the minds of the general public that comic books could be taken seriously, that they were an art form on their own (which is why Marvel Comics capitalized on the Pop Art Movement and placed a label on the cover of each comic saying that it was produced by Marvel Pop Arts Productions), and that Marvel Comics was in the vanguard of this revolutionary way to tell stories. It is for this reason that Chris Tolworthy makes the distinction between Marvel Comics (upper case c) and Marvel comics (lower case c) with respect to Lee's and Kirby's contributions:

> Lee created Marvel C̲omics. Kirby created Marvel c̲omics. . .Stan Lee was the genius who created most of Marvel Comics: the industry, the cross-overs, the billion dollars of brand value, the fact that you and I have even heard of these characters [The Fantastic Four] and can easily relate to them. That's all Stan. Without him it would just be one more forgotten indie business, full of talented people who make no money and only historians know about them. It is equally true that Jack Kirby was the genius who created most of Marvel comics with a small **"c"**, the characters and stories. (Tolworthy, "Stan Lee and Jack Kirby")

In short, Lee kept Marvel Comics alive so that the work that Kirby did on the individual issues can be appreciated by comic readers decades after they were created.

In setting the foundation of the Lee/Kirby partnership, it becomes possible to discuss the template itself that arose out of their partnership. Lee and Kirby developed this template in stages, with the first elements related to identity showing up early in the run and some elements (such as the element of interactivity) developing more slowly over time. In the

interests of time, the exploration of each of these elements should be thought of as a basic outline to which further research (by both myself and hopefully other researchers) can flesh out and expand in detail.

    1. Identity (a)

    Superheroes have an existential imperative or duty to make the best of the absurdity inherit within their existence and its accompanying freedoms. They must strive for authenticity for who they are as superheroes.

The philosophical movement called existentialism came into prominence in post-World War II Europe with writers like Jean-Paul Sartre, who advanced that existence preceded essence:

> Thus, my existence (the mere fact that I am) is prior to my essence (what I make of myself through my free choices). I am thus utterly responsible for myself. If my act is not simply whatever happens to come to mind, then my action may embody a more general principle of action. (Burnham and Papandreopoulos)

This state brings with it anxiety based on the fact that "human existence is in some way 'on its own'" (Burnham and Papandreopoulos), meaning that there is no God or outside authority that human beings can look forward to as an ultimate authority. Humanity must find within themselves ultimate authority and not through external means. Even science is useless here, since "unlike a created cosmos, for example, we cannot expect the scientifically described cosmos to answer our questions concerning value or meaning" (Burnham and Papandreopoulos). With this recognition of humanity being 'on its own' comes the recognition of absurdity. For the existentialist, "nature as a whole has no design, no reason for existing" (Burnham and Papandreopoulos) and that makes for absurdity. Moreover, we are absurd because "human existence as action is doomed to always

destroy itself. A free action, once done, is no longer free; it has become an aspect of the world, a *thing*" (Burnham and Papandreopoulos). Ultimately, Existentialists strive to be an "authentic being would be able to recognise [sic] and affirm the nature of existence" (Burnham and Papandreopoulos).

Donald Palumbo was the first to see the existentialist connection with Marvel superheroes with his article on Spider-Man who "exhibits nearly all the characteristics of the existentialist hero" (67). However, Spider-Man is indebted to one predecessor from The Fantastic Four who bears the weight of the existential imperative that they live in an absurd universe— Ben Grimm (a.k.a. The Thing). As opposed to the other members of The Fantastic Four, The Thing was turned into a walking rock pile with super strength, but with no way to revert back to human form. He is not like The Human Torch, who controls when he flames on. The Thing has to deal with the absurdity of being a monster within an urban setting. The human world is not designed to fit his frame and The Thing is constantly feeling like a fish out of water. It is for this reason he is forced to wear a trench coat when going out to avoid the taunts and sneers of the Yancy Street Gang of young hoodlums aimed at taunting, teasing, and bullying him at every turn. When he is not fighting superheroes, The Thing sometimes does not know his own strength. His super strength sometimes causes him to accidentally destroy things within the Baxter Building and elsewhere.

The Thing is always struggling with his existence, wishing he did not have to deal with these difficulties. His existential situation is as motivated by isolation and difficulties operating within the everyday world. As a result, Ben Grimm constantly desires to go back and become "human" again and Reed Richards makes it his life's work to accomplish that task (himself feeling angst and guilt over being responsible for Grimm's transformation). However, The Thing learns from these experiences that he cannot escape his problems so easily. In existential parlance, he must strive for authenticity, which is the ability "to recognise [sic] and affirm

the nature of existence. . .[and live] in accordance with this nature" (Burnham and Papandreopoulos).

An example of this comes at the very end of Issue 39. The Fantastic Four defeat their enemies, the Frightful Four, and are caught within an atomic blast, thereby stripping all four of them of their powers. The Thing has returned back to his human form once again. By Issue 40, Doctor Doom takes advantage of their weakened state and takes over the Baxter Building, turning Reed Richards' invention upon the powerless Fantastic Four. Reed responds using a piece of alien technology, the Skrull Stimulator, to give them their powers back.

As he points the gun at Ben Grimm, Grimm says "But—mebbe I don't wanna become the Thing again!! I'm finally normal—like anyone else!" to which Richards replies, "You've no choice, old friend! With Doom still at large, we need all our fighting strength! There's too much at stake!" (Lee and Kirby *Essential* vol. 2.40 13). With that, Richards points the Skrull Stimulator at Grimm, musing "For better, or for worse—the Thing must live again!" (Lee and Kirby *Essential* vol. 2.40 14). This action eventually leads to The Thing falling into the hands of his enemy who brainwashes him so that by Issue 41, he joins forces with the Frightful Four. When Richards is able to bring him out of his trance, The Thing confesses, "And, mebbe, some day you two'll come to my weddin'! Mebbe I won't haveta remain a—a Thing—forever! Mebbe—" (Lee and Kirby *Essential* vol. 3.43 20). The Thing still has to struggle with his problems of existence and, hopefully, will reach a place of authenticity where he will be at peace with the absurdity of his existence, either as The Thing or if her gets his wish to turn back into a human being.

2. *Identity (b)*

A superhero's identity is intimately connected with their psychological struggles to deal with their personal problems and

> *hang-ups. These psychological struggles create individual angst,*
> *which gets worked out through the business of being a superhero.*

Arising out of the recognition of the freedom to be "on one's own" is the notion of angst and anxiety. According to Brunham and Papandreopoulos, angst and anxiety is a byproduct of the recognition of this situation. We cannot rely on any outside source and must rely upon ourselves in order to exist in the world. Added to this existential angst are human "emotions or feelings" which have a significance role for existentialists (Burnham and Papandreopoulos). Emotions or feelings can spring from personal problems and hang-ups and generate their own form of angst. The example with Ben Grimm being turned back into The Thing is one such example in the Fantastic Four comic series. The Thing is known as much for his problems as much as for what The Thing power in battling villains.

Similarly, Johnny Storm deals with the psychological angst from transitioning out of from being a teenager and into adult life. In Issue 44, Johnny soliloquizes to himself about his problems:

> I'm glad Reed and Sis got married, 'n all that, but I never expected
> 'em to live in our HQ till they found an apartment! I didn't enroll
> in college this year because so much was happening! Boy! What a
> boner I pulled! Wotta life! Everything's coming up Dullville!
> (Lee and Kirby *Essential* vol. 3.44 3)

As the youngest member of the group, Johnny always feels like he is being put down by the other members of the team. Aside from the jibes he gives to The Thing, Johnny's powers can be depleted if he uses them too much, thereby putting him into a weakened state where the others have to take care of him. This weakness cuts against his self-image as a man who can handle himself. Johnny also has hang-ups with women. In the Lee/Kirby run, he is stuck on Crystal, an Inhuman with whom he falls deeply in love. In Issue 48, he is forced to let her stay in the Inhuman Great Refuge as it is

covered over with a Negative Zone field. As Reed Richards pulls him to safety, Johnny cries out to Richards in despair, "I've lost her forever! And it's your fault! If not for you, I'd still be there—with her! Crystal! Crystal! I'll come back to you—somehow! Crystal—!!" (Lee and Kirby *Essential* vol. 3.48 6). The problems Johnny faces causes Chris Tolworthy to label their relationship as analogous to Romeo and Juliet, where "Johnny is Romeo, Crystal is Juliet" (Tolworthy, "Crystal, a love story"). After this initial encounter, Johnny and Crystal have an on-again/off-again relationship that is filled with love and despair. Together, these issues define The Human Torch.

The issues of The Thing and The Human Torch are also matched by Sue Storm. After she marries Reed Richards, she often finds herself neglected by her husband while he is busy saving the world. Her way to deal with his emotional distance and neglect is to work on herself, which is why she decides to give herself a new hairdo while The Fantastic Four are flying to the Inhuman Great Refuge to find the Inhumans. She thinks to herself: "With everything that's happened lately, Reed has hardly been acting like a honeymooner towards me! Perhaps a new hairdo would make him realize I'm not one of the boys" (Lee and Kirby *Essential* vol. 3.47 13). When new hairdos do not do the job, Sue has to henpeck her husband to getting him to notice her. Later, when Richards is working on a way to defeat Galactus, she gets rebuffed from Richards after asking her husband to stop work and eat. He curtly replies, "For the love of Pete, girl! Is that what you disturbed me for?" and turns off the video monitor to get back to work (Lee and Kirby *Essential* vol. 3.48 14). She promptly marches down to his lab, demanding that he listen to her, saying, "You're my husband now, Reed Richards! And I want to keep you healthy! The world won't come to an end if you take time out for dinner" (Lee and Kirby *Essential* vol. 3.48 15)—which, of course, it could come to an end because Richards is working with The Watcher on a Matter Mobilizer designed to save Earth. Part of Sue Storm's psychological angst is that her

husband is *actually* saving the world and can be forgiven for being emotionally absent at times because his work literally involves matters of life and death.

Having superheroes with personal problems and hang-ups has become central to the Marvel Universe. It is for all of these reasons that one of the hallmarks of *The Fantastic Four* is that they have been called "down-to-earth heroes with relatable problems" (Peters). Mark Peters notes that their struggles are "intimate and mortal, despite their otherworldly powers" (Peters); the members of The Fantastic Four could have disagreements and arguments like regular human beings. As they developed into a team, they also created a family dynamic, which "was relatable on a level not seen thus far in superhero comics" (Peters). Like regular families, they regularly argue and fight and say hurtful things, but would always come back to being part of the family, part of the team. In fact, this idea became the plot for *The Fantastic Four* No. 15, where each of the members tires of being together and goes off to do their own thing, only to come back together to defeat the Mad Thinker.

3. Identity (c)

Superheroes do not have an identity split between their superhero and civilian identities. Both identities are either conflated or downplayed. There is also a tendency not to try and expose a superhero's "secret" identity.

The third element dealing with identity and superheroes relates to one of the most radical departures from comic book superheroes up until that time—the abandoning of secret identities. Secret identities were the part and parcel of the DC Comics revolution, beginning with Superman disguising himself as mind-mannered Clark Kent. From there, every superhero had to hide their civilian identity for fear of being exposed as a superhero and their ability to operate in the real world compromised. Part

of the revolution which Lee and Kirby adopted was to have the members of the Fantastic Four openly live public lives as superheroes without a secret identity. What you see is what you get; there is a conflation between the superhero and civilian identities to deny "the common trope of the secret identity. . .that the hero is fundamentally bifurcated" (Yockey 70). The Fantastic Four live openly on the top floors of the Baxter Building in New York City and it is public knowledge what their civilian names are, even though they are called by their professional heroic names: Mr. Fantastic (Reed Richards), The Invisible Girl (Sue Storm), The Human Torch (Johnny Storm), and The Thing (Ben Grimm).

A side benefit of removing secret identities as a plot point is that it eliminates the need for comic book writers to come up with every-more creative and bizarre ways to ensure that the secret identity of a superhero remains secret. This was the stock and trade of the DC Universe in which storylines for characters like Superman would be nothing more than trying to keep the superhero's identity under wraps. It is sobering to think that Lois Lane did not finally find out that Clark Kent was Superman until 1990, more than fifty years after she debuted with Superman in *Action Comics* No. 1 (cover date June 1938). By contrast, The Fantastic Four live so much of a public life that they are considered as celebrities within the populace of New York City. Everyone knows that they live in the top floors of the Baxter Building and their lives are so open that Willie Lumpkin, the Fantastic Four's mail carrier, knows each of the members on a first-name basis. In his first appearance in the series, Lumpkin complains about the increasing amount of fan mail the team receives, complaining that "This dad-burned mail sack gets heavier every day! Blasted fan letters!" (Lee and Kirby *Essential* vol. 1.11 3).

4. Reality

The superhero world is a skillful blend of the fantastic and the real. The real elements are selectively chosen based on their

> *cultural relevance to the readers and can reflect the zeitgeist of the*
> *times. The end result of this blend of the fantastic and the real is a*
> *feeling of relatability for readers.*

A central contribution that The Fantastic Four made to comics was the introduction of realistic elements into the field of superheroes. Katherine Kuhlmann discusses this tendency by saying that in the work of Stan Lee, "readers found themselves never truly hating a villain or completely idolizing a hero. They were both incredible, but they were both flawed, much like the average person. Thus, the characters became relatable to the readers, struggling with everyday issues" (Kuhlmann). In *The Fantastic Four* comic series, realistic elements came from all quarters: current events, popular culture, the urban setting of New York City, and even the language that was used.

In terms of current events, Lee and Kirby tapped into the space race fever which had taken over the country for the genesis of the series. In his book *A Ball, a Dog, and a Monkey: 1957 -- The Space Race Begins,* Michael D'Antonio discusses the various attempts (mostly unsuccessful) in getting the U.S. space program off the ground. There were many crashes of unmanned rockets, including several Vanguard rockets (D'Antonio 57, 121, and 142-148). It is no wonder that the rocket within which The Fantastic Four were traveling crashes back to Earth. The U.S. public only saw the first fruits of the space race a few months before the first issue of *The Fantastic Four* was published when Alan Shepard became the first American to get into space in May 1961. His mission was in response to Soviet cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin becoming the first human being into space on April 12, 1961 (Alexander 27). Similarly, Ben Grimm being a top test pilot was in keeping with President Eisenhower's dictate that astronauts should be drawn from the ranks of the very best military test pilots (Wolfe 76). Ben Grimm himself was an Air Force test pilot who was had flown on several dangerous missions ("Thing (Benjamin Grimm)"). Finally, the creation of the villain Red Ghost with his space

apes also reflects Cold War hysteria and fear that the Soviet Union was gaining military parity with the United States. Soviet scientist Ivan Kragoff took himself and three apes to outer space where they were bombarded by the same cosmic rays as The Fantastic Four. Kragoff became able to walk through solid objects, hence his name the Red Ghost. Each of his apes also gained superpowers and this team proved a worthy opponent to The Fantastic Four (Lee and Kirby *Essential* vol. 1.13 5).

Moreover, Lee and Kirby incorporated references to popular culture within the pages of their stories. For instance, in Issue 5, Johnny Storm is reading what he calls "a great new comic mag," an issue of *The Incredible Hulk* (Lee and Kirby *Essential* vol. 1.5 2). When Beatlemania swept the country, the Thing tries on a Beatles wig that the Yancy Street Gang gives him as a gag gift (Lee and Kirby *Essential* vol. 2.34 3). Lee and Kirby also injected a measure of reality by setting their stories in New York City. At first, Lee and Kirby set *The Fantastic Four* in Central City, which was created by the predecessors of Marvel (Timely Comics) as a generic city that was set close to San Francisco near where Stockton, California, is today ("Central City"). By Issue 4, Lee and Kirby moved The Fantastic Four to New York City so that they can live as part of the Manhattan skyline in the Baxter Building, a nod to one of Lee's inspirations for *The Fantastic Four*, Doc Savage, who lived in a skyscraper (Alexander 27).

In his article on The Fantastic Four and New York City, Matthew Yockey asserts that their placement on the top floor of a Manhattan skyscraper was not accident, but represents a connection of the team to corporate America and the space program: "Skyscrapers are as white as spaceships in the 1960s. The primary occupant of the skyscraper, the white corporate male, is mirrored by the sole occupant of the 1960s spaceship" (66). Yockey sees The Fantastic Four as a reflection of America's preoccupation its new found status as an economic superpower, even labeling them a "corporation" because of the fact that their offices are in a skyscraper and they use corporate branding (i.e., putting their

"corporate" logo on their uniforms and vehicles). By doing these things, Lee and Kirby were keeping step with developments in American life and society that shifted towards a corporate way of doing business.

Perhaps the most obvious way the Lee and Kirby interjected reality is through the language that was through the use of the vernacular in the dialogue. While Kirby's wrote with an eye to fleshing out the basic storylines of the issues, it is Lee who creates the ways that these characters speak and the ironic hipness of the narration that appears throughout the series. Abraham Riesman sums this contribution up best when he writes that Stan Lee reinvented the language of comic books, noting that his "rhythmic, vernacular approach to dialogue transformed superhero storytelling from a litany of bland declarations to a sensational symphony of jittery word-jazz — a language that spoke directly and fluidly to comics readers, enfolding them in a common ecstatic idiom that became the bedrock of what we think of now as 'fan culture'" (Riesman). Lee was able to do this by using a variety of different tropes to achieve an almost poetic language, primary among them were alliteration, irony, self-parody, and hyperbole. These tropes within the narration and dialogue of the characters added another dimension to the comic. In praising Lee for these innovations, Arthur Berger feels that "by writing funny credits featuring remarkable displays of alliteration, he [Lee] nods his head to society and convention and is then free to indulge himself in his science fantasies" (170).

Through this balance, Lee felt free to use slang, purple prose, and whatever style of language they felt to convey the story best. A lot of the slang tends to be used for character delineation, so that The Thing can sound different from his peers. The Thing uses the slang battle cry, "It's Clobberin' Time!" instead of the proper English translation, "It's Time to Hand Out a Beating!" The former phrasing has more character and says more about The Thing's personality than the latter phrasing. The Thing also likes to use disparaging labels for himself and others. For instance, in

Issue No. 60, The Thing comes head-to-head in an epic fight with Doctor Doom. He is momentarily stunned and says to himself, "Fight it, Ben . . . Fight it!! FIGHT . . . ya ugly, good-fer-nothin' orange-skinned meathead . . . Fight—!" (Lee and Kirby *Essential* vol. 3.60 11). This use of everyday language allows readers to identify with The Thing more easily that if they were speaking a more formal language.

5. *Technology as a Tool*

Superheroes use technology to create tools that showcase a strong reliance and exuberant faith in technology, downplaying or ignoring any negative consequences or discoveries.

Science and technology are integral to *The Fantastic Four*, despite the fact that one of their creators is ignorant about science. In an interview, Stan Lee confesses that "I am the least scientific person you'll ever know, so I tried to seem scientific with our characters" (qtd. in Kantor). Lee further confesses after providing some examples with Spider-Man and The Incredible Hulk that "if it [something scientific] sounds good, I'll use it. . . The whole trick is to make something seem as if you gave it a lot of thought and did a lot of research about this" (qtd. in Kantor). Through this confession, Lee underscores an underlying faith in technology, that somehow all of the gobbledygook that no one understands means something meaningful and can be important to the plotting of a story. It is no wonder that in Annual 2 within their pinup section, Reed Richards is behind a formidable piece of machinery, but confides in the inscription "Just between us, I don't know what this silly contraption is, either!" (Lee and Kirby *Essential* vol. 2. Annual 2 23).

Reed Richards' life is devoted to building such machinery and he assumes there is always a technological fix to solve every problem. Every time there is a problem that The Fantastic Four encounter, Richards comes up with a machine that can save the day, either creating it himself or using

alien technology discovered during their adventures. He always frames the problems that The Fantastic Four have in terms of technology; he has utter confidence that whatever the problem the team faces, there is a piece of technology that will solve it. The list of machines and scientific technologies that Richards employs is endless, but there are two technological advances that are worthy of consideration because they reveal both the promise and peril that come with technology. The first comes from the Galactus Trilogy with the Ultimate Nullifier that The Watcher sends Johnny Storm to fetch from Galactus' home world. When Johnny returns, he gives the Ultimate Nullifer to Richards, who begins to fiddle with it to figure out how to use it against Galactus. Blinded by his own faith in his technological prowess, Richards does not realize that he is playing with fire. The Watcher warns him that if the Ultimate Nullifer is turned on full power, "it could erase the entire solar system in one microsecond!" (Lee and Kirby *Essential* vol. 3.50 7).

The second technological breakthrough Richards makes is the discovery of the Negative Zone, an antimatter universe Reed Richards uncovers in Issue 51. Reed enters a "Radical cube . . . designed to create a dimensional entrance into sub-space" (Lee and Kirby *Essential* vol. 3.15 3), hoping to explore sub-space to better understand it. However, Richards runs into trouble with the Negative Zone, having gotten lost in it while exploring. Vowing never to use the Negative Zone ever again, he shuts the door on the Radical cube and only opens it again in Issue 71 when the Mad Thinker's killer android meets its end by falling through the door into the Negative Zone (Lee and Kirby *Essential* vol. 4.71 17). Richards' view of the Negative Zone is the same as his view towards of technology in general; he downplays its negative effects. Richards wants to keep the negatives of technology tightly under wraps instead of trying to deal with their negative consequences. By doing this, he is still able to maintain his faith in technology.

6. Teamwork

Superheroes team up and collaborate with one another through a process of conflict and compromise for the greater good of either the superhero team or society at large.

Through the discussion of superhero hang-ups and personal problems, it is natural that there will be conflict whenever superheroes work together in teams or groups. In the case of The Fantastic Four, there have been times when the conflict within the team has been so great that one or more members decide to leave. When that happens, the rupture is not permanent; the separated member of the team always comes back to the team and the team finds ways to compromise by incorporating the difference of opinion of the team member who left. Sometimes, this involves Reed Richards telling Sue he has been insensitive for ignoring her needs or Johnny Storm saying he is sorry for teasing the Thing. The group dynamics that The Fantastic Four exhibit is also echoed in all of the other collaborations they have with various superheroes. With these collaborations, The Fantastic Four can have their ups and downs, but everyone in the team comes back to the central goal of what is good for the group. In this way, these Marvel collaborations resemble real social networks. In their paper on social networks in the Marvel Universe, Richardo Alberich, Joe Miro-Julia, and Francesc Rosselló assert that while they do not completely correspond to real-life social networks, there are some ways that the social networks in the Marvel Universe resembles real-life networks (12-13).

   While the superheroes have different issues they need to address while collaborating with The Fantastic Four, there is always a sense of a common goal, whether it is to save the world, stop a supervillain's plot, or, in the case of Annual 3, to save the marriage ceremony of Reed Richards and Sue Storm. Annual 3 proves a microcosm for how superheroes team up with The Fantastic Four, since all the major Marvel superheroes and

villains put in a guest appearance. Attempting to interrupt the wedding, Doctor Doom uses his High-Frequency Emotional Charger to "fan the flames of hatred in the heart of every evil menace in existence!" (Lee and Kirby *Essential* vol. 3 Annual 3 2). As each Marvel villain tries to foil the wedding, they are met by a Marvel superhero who saves the day and paves the way for the wedding to continue. These include the Puppet Master (foiled by Nick Fury), Mole Man (foiled by the X-Men), the Red Ghost (foiled by Dr. Strange), the Super Skrull (foiled by Thor), as well as Cobra and the Executioner (foiled by Iron Man and Captain America). In each case, the visiting superhero works either by him/herself or in tandem with individual members of The Fantastic Four to defeat the menace and save the day. In short, Reed Richards and Sue Storm could not have been married were it not for the help from the superheroes of the Marvel Universe.

7. Interactivity

Superhero comic book titles have areas of playful or meaningful interactivity by which superheroes interact with the populace of their home city, the superheroes interact with the comic's creators within the comic itself, and the comic's creators interact with the comic's fans.

One of the most interesting developments within *The Fantastic Four* is various areas of interactivity whereby different constituents involved in the creation and consumption of the comic book can interact. There are several areas of interactivity that happen with *The Fantastic Four*, such as when The Fantastic Four interacts with the residents of New York City in meaningful ways that advance the action. The populace of New York City is not so much of a backdrop, but a Greek chorus echoing ideas that resonate with the populace. When The Thing is down about his girlfriend Alicia disappearing in Issue 66, it is the residents of New York City who

aid and soothe him in ways that help The Thing gain a sense of perspective. After the Thing talks with a woman in the park, a police officer sums up the encounter by saying, "You're a lucky man, Ben Grimm! It must be a wonderful feeling to know that people all over think you're the greatest!" (Lee and Kirby *Essential* vol. 4.66 7).

There are also areas of interactivity between the comic creators and the fans themselves. Stan Lee was a master of this part of comic creation, having introduced the Bullpen Bulletin (which Lee discusses new events within the Marvel Universe), Stan's Soapbox (where Lee can address various social and comic issues), and The Fantastic Four Fan Page (where Lee answers fan letters). The last of these is where Lee has the greatest impact, since he was able to interact with The Fantastic Four fans in ways that brought them inside the thought process of the Bullpen, where the comic creators worked. Building on this need to interact with the fans, Lee also was behind the creation of the Merry Marvel Marching Society in which fans could join and receive a five-minute record of Stan Lee, Jack Kirby, and the other members of the Marvel creative team making jokes with one another (Howe 55). The end result of all of these efforts is that the fan felt like they were interacting with the creators of Marvel Comics in ways that almost resemble social media.

As a side note, Kirby benefitted immensely from the interactivity arising from fan interest in *The Fantastic Four*. Richard Polsky observes that through The Fantastic Four Fan Page, fan letters "lavished praise on Kirby, treating him with the same respect afforded a true artist. As they continued to pour in, a funny thing began to happen. Kirby's art grew stronger" (42). Kirby was able to produce comics that would be considered examples of superior draftsmanship, utilizing in his penciling "a dynamic line, beautiful shading, and a sure sense of placement on the page" (Polsky 30). Combining superior draftsmanship with the freedoms inherit within the Marvel Method of creating comics, it is no wonder that

Kirby's creativity reached its full potential on the run of *The Fantastic Four* (Peters).

Lee and Kirby also extended their interactivity by including themselves into various issues of *The Fantastic Four* comic. They appear in *The Fantastic Four* No. 10, where a befuddled Lee and Kirby cannot find a suitable villain for The Fantastic Four to fight. As they are musing on what to do to correct this situation, Doctor Doom suddenly walks into the Marvel Bullpen and tells them that they need to resurrect him for the next adventure that The Fantastic Four will face (Lee and Kirby *Essential* vol. 1.10 5). Similarly, Lee and Kirby also try to gain entrance to the wedding of Reed Richards and Sue Storm. Unfortunately, Nick Fury considers them gatecrashers and does not let them in. Jack Kirby threatens Nick Fury by saying "You haven't heard the last of this! We have ways of getting even!" (Lee and Kirby *Essential* vol.3. Annual 3 23). This breaking of the fourth wall by having comic creators interact with their creation is unprecedented within superhero comics and allows fans another glimpse of the creative process for how the comic's creators create superhero stories.

8. *Action*

Action is the driving force within superhero comics. Everything in the comic book, from the titles to the individual panels, is constantly depicting physical action and/or emotional reaction to events.

Action is at the heart and soul of *The Fantastic Four* comic series. In looking at Kirby's artwork alone, action screams out from all quarters. Even if there are no scenes of superheroes socking villains, there are plenty of shots of emotional reaction within the characters. Turning to some of the various issues, their titles are also action-oriented. Consider the following titles from *The Fantastic Four:* "Death of a Hero" (Issue 32), "A Blind Man Shall Lead Them!" (Issue 39), "To Save You, Why

Must I Kill You?" (Issue 42), and ". . .And One Shall Save Him" (Issue 62). All of these titles are not staid, but point to some form of action (whether it is physical or emotional) that is about to occur or has already occurred through the proceedings of the comic.

One area where action spills out is through the mini-series that populated the storylines of *The Fantastic Four*. As the series progressed, stories would not end with one issue, but would spill out over several issues. In fact, the famed Galactus Trilogy starts with some tidying up of the multi-issue Inhumans saga and ends with another storyline of Johnny Storm going off the college for the first time. In considering the reasons for such actions, Pierre Comtois believes that this was a way for Lee to "tie his growing universe closer together, to develop its own internal consistency and to give it a semblance of verisimilitude" (57). It is for this reason that Comtois calls the period from November 1963 to May 1965 as "The Years of Consolidation" (57). The end result was that the action of the story became larger and the fight sequences longer. Some of the battles within the Inhumans mini-series (Issues 44-48) become the main focus of the storyline, thereby making the mini-series have more action with fewer panels of set-up.

9. *Villains (a) Designer Villains*

Superheroes fight designer villains, crafted for the specific superhero they are fighting.

10. *Villains (b) The Level of Justice*

Superheroes seek their own level of justice in the type of villains they fight, the level of justice being the comfort level a superhero has to fight against a particular brand of villainy.

Lumping the last two of the elements together, both of them deal with what type of villain a superhero will fight. Lee and Kirby perfected the

designer villain idea, whereby a superhero fights a villain that is crafted especially towards that superhero's own powers. Take Doctor Doom for instance. His intelligence is matched against Reed Richards' and the two are evenly pared off. While Doctor Doom might be more powerful physically, he is counterbalanced by Reed Richards' stretching ability, which allows him to defeat Doom either through stretching his body or his intellect (or both). In the same way, the other villains The Fantastic Four fight are also reflections of the powers of The Fantastic Four. Probably the best example is The Frightful Four, who appear in Issue 36. They are comprised of The Wizard, The Sandman, Paste-Pot Pete (later known as The Trapster), and Madam Medusa. The Wizard possesses Reed's superintelligence, The Sandman possessed Reed's morphing abilities, Paste-Pot Pete has paste weaponry which is designed to slow down The Human Torch and The Thing, and Madam Medusa possess hair which can seek out Sue Storm even when she is invisible.

Another consideration that Lee and Kirby had was in building a hierarchy of villainy, which is being called here the level of justice (i.e., the type of villain a superhero feels compelled to fight against and mete out justice). The level of justice has three basic categories: human threats, superhuman threats, and cosmic threats, with a degree of bleed through between the demarcation lines for each category. The human level of justice is the lowest level and deals with dangers villains pose on a city or regional level. Going from lowest to highest are the garden variety Thugs, Goons (i.e., a bad guy who works for a boss), and the Goon Boss. Higher up the villain food chain are the superhuman threats. These villains work on a larger level, either threatening either a region of the country or the entire nation with their villainy. These are villains who a) have superpowers and are willing to use them for evil, or b) humans whose potential level of destruction is so vast that it takes on a superhuman dimension. Going from lowest to highest is Organized Crime, Terrorist Organizations, the Cockroach Villain (arch criminals so named because

they are difficult to catch and operate in the shadows, like a cockroach), the Status Disrupters (arch criminals whose plans aim on massive disruption of some societal system), the Anti-Hero (an arch criminal who can sometimes use his powers for good, but whose moral compass faces the opposite direction), the Nemesis (an arch criminal whose powers and intention for destruction is evenly matched with that of the superhero), and the Big Bad (the chief villain behind much of the lower level villainy).

Finally, there is the level of cosmic threats, which incorporates threats to the planet, solar system, or universe itself. Going up from lowest to highest are Post Human (the genetically modified human who sees humanity as pawns or things that are in the way of their plans), Alien Threats (who threaten to enslave humanity or destroy the planet entirely), and the Nietzschean villain (a villain whose powers are so vast and whose care is so far removed from the petty concerns of humanity that they are—in the world of philosophy Friedrich Nietzsche—beyond good and evil. This villain can be so beyond the petty dictates of humanity that they can be almost considered as a god).

The level of justice that The Fantastic Four seeks out is on the superhuman and cosmic threat levels. They are less interested in your average thug on the street wanting to steal someone's purse. This is in keeping with what type of superhero they see themselves as. Kraft asserts that The Fantastic Four are "humanitarians. They care about people—all people. They fight to save them from oppression. It doesn't matter if that oppression is created by disease, alien invaders, or some earthly dictator" (21). It is this large-scale concern with humanity that makes them at home dealing with the Mad Thinker (an example of a Cockroach Villain), The Sub-Mariner (an example of an Anti-Hero), or Doctor Doom (an example of a Nemesis or Big Bad, depending on the storyline) on the superhuman level. On the cosmic threat level, The Fantastic Four are also more at home with battling Him (as example of a post-Human) and the Skrulls (an example of Alien Threats). When battling the Nietzchean villain Galactus,

he stretches The Fantastic Four's limits for their level of justice. In their first encounter with Galactus, The Fantastic Four do not try to fight Galactus as much as get help from The Watcher to deflect Galactus from destroying Earth. There is no way for defeating a character that some consider a surrogate for God. In fact, Kirby admits that "when I created the Silver Surfer and Galactus . . . I came up with what I thought was God in Galactus; a God-like character" (qtd. in Alexander 81).

With a nod toward 1960s optimism in the space exploration and the future, Lee and Kirby's run on *The Fantastic Four* created a template for tomorrow, a way for Marvel writers and pencilers to create the wide range of superheroes that dominated the Silver and Bronze Age of Comics. Characters such as Spider-Man, The Incredible Hulk, The X-Men, and The Avengers all were created using this same template pioneered within *The Fantastic Four* comic. In keeping with the use of a template, these writers and pencilers creating these superheroes had license to add to, subtract from, and make minor modifications to the template to suit their tastes. This template held sway during the Marvel Silver and Bronze Ages, only to be more extensively reworked by the successful Marvel film franchises during the last decade. Today, few people think about *The Fantastic Four*, except to lambast the latest Hollywood attempt to bring them to the silver screen. However, there would be no Marvel film franchises, no Marvel Comics, and no Marvel Universe without the template for tomorrow created by both Lee and Kirby during their run on *The Fantastic Four*.

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Language and Meaning from The Marvel Universe in Creating an Inclusive Fan Culture

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The marketing strategy of the first two decades of Marvel Comics, delivered to its reading audience in large part through the pen of writer/editor/publisher Stan Lee, made a concerted effort to sound inclusive. Lee's goal was to make each reader feel part of a greater whole. That greater whole was an amorphous group that can be called "Marveldom Assembled." Through various fan club-type organizations, Marvel readers could become official members. The membership was in various clubs, but "Marveldom Assembled" was an imaginal group, as actual people gathered together to celebrate Marvel Comics were rarely assembled for real in the 1960s and 1970s (though this did begin to change during the 1970s at comic book conventions). The strategy was to build identification for the reader with this larger group reading Marvel Comics, though the end goal for Lee and Marvel was to sell more comics.

However, one result for the readers Marvel was attracting, especially younger ones but also including older aged readers (i.e., college age), was indeed to impart positive identification with something bigger, and possibly better, than other groups from their everyday life. Within the activity of reading comics, the language Lee used to sell comics provided an opportunity for such readers to become more positive about themselves as well as more positive about their community. Lee's language and the emotions and actions they suggested, can be seen to be effective in specific examples of readers' language. In letters sent to Marvel Comics

publications, readers' reactions to Lee's writing show they became invested in more than buying comic book entertainment.

From the very beginning of Marvel Comics, upon the publication of *Fantastic Four #1* in November 1961, the Marvel Universe (i.e., the shared mythology comprised of all the Marvel Comics narratives) was being created. The intent was creation of a narrative experience providing a comic book world that more directly matched the reality of the reader's world than comics that came before them did. When Jack Kirby and Stan Lee put together this first team of Marvel superheroes, they desired to add a realistic perspective not often found: the Fantastic Four was not only a team of superheroes, but also a family. Reed Richards and Sue Storm were on a fast track toward becoming husband and wife; Johnny Storm was Sue's younger brother; Ben Grimm, (aka The Thing), was Reed's associate and best friend. The FF even lived together, which importantly meant that they also squabbled together like any family presumably does. The trend toward realism is what Lee aimed for in his writing. The reputation of the stories of the Marvel Universe was built on their realism, creating an exciting buzz among readers about this new Marvel style of comics.

The trend only gathered steam and more interest with the introduction of The Amazing Spider-Man created by Lee and Steve Ditko. Underneath the costume was Peter Parker, a wisecracking teen-ager whose cheeky lines of dialogue were never more noticeable than while he was fighting a villain. Identification with this young hero occurred with young readers but perhaps even more easily with college students experiencing the cultural changes of the ongoing counter-culture. For them, flippancy toward the old way of doing things was a badge of hipness and authenticity.

Efforts to continue the growth of Marvel Comics were successful, but this did not satisfy Lee. He worked relentlessly to promote Marvel, using his now almost ubiquitous hyperbolic style in both his comic book scripts

and in the marketing column he wrote, "Stan Lee's Soapbox." The Soapbox was found on the Marvel Bullpen Bulletins page included in most every Marvel Comic from that era (disappearing for good only in 2001). The Bulletin pages mostly included news about forthcoming comics, but the Soapbox featured Lee's commentary about a range of comic book topics. As Marvel continued into the 1970s, with other writers taking over the writing of the actual comics (Lee's last regular writing for Marvel comic books was in 1972), Lee's focus turned primarily toward marketing. He promoted the comics, but he also displayed a burning desire to place the Marvel comic book characters into films and television programs.

The language of Lee's efforts stayed remarkably similar in every arena and followed directly from the early days of Marvel. Lee's stylistic hyperbole attempted to foster a desire in his readership to identify with Marvel in more personal terms than any comic book readers before them. However, the identification with Marvel he also stressed was equal to how other cultural or social institutions wanted people to identify with them. Early on, when the first Marvel fan club (The Merry Marvel Marching Society, from here "MMMS") was formed, its obvious intent was to build readership, but it also tried to raise those reader's self-esteem. Stressing identification with a set of principles, ostensibly the principles the superheroes in the comics lived by, Lee attempted to allow readers to see themselves as heroes. Transferring the context of heroism from comic books to a reader's own life did not make the reader a superhero, but through such identification the possibility existed of making them better human beings. The MMMS, on a record sent to new members, had its own song, *The Merry Marvel Marching Society Theme Song*, with lyrics illustrating how superheroicism is more than battling villains:

> Stand a little straighter. Walk a little prouder. Be an innovator.
> Clap a little louder. Grow forever greater. We can show you how
> to. Where will you be then? You belong, you belong, you belong,

you'll belong, to the Merry Marvel Marching Society. March along, march along, march along to the song of the Merry Marvel Marching Society. If you growl, if you groan with a dour sour outlook, if you howl, if you moan, you can lose your sour grout by keeping trim and in step with the vim and the pep of the Merry Marvel Marching Society. Be an early riser. Strive to be ambitious. Speak a little wiser. Try to be judicious. Be a good advisor, never ever vicious. Where will you be then? Face front…Lift your head…You're on the winning team…NUFF SAID! (The Voices of Marvel)

The lyrics attempt to provide a growing self-confidence for the listener (and comic book reader) through concrete actions – stand straighter, walk prouder – and also tries to identify the attitudes that presumably make up the comic book heroes – ambition, wisdom, judicial reasoning, and lack of vicious tendencies. Just as Peter Parker/Spider-Man needed to learn how great responsibility comes with great power, the readers here were exposed to a creed. The song described the ways to properly carry themselves, but also how to act toward others. By discovering the traits of heroism in their own lives, and then acknowledging that heroism and being proud of it, readers were then encouraged to feel part of a greater whole, The MMMS (or what we can call Marveldom Assembled). Being a member brought demands, but they were positive demands, trying to influence positive actions.

The MMMS lasted till 1969, when it morphed into Marvelmania International (reflecting hopes of expanding the Marvel fan club globally), lasting under this name until 1971. In 1973, another fan club was started, this time named F.O.O.M., standing for "Friends of Ol' Marvel." This version was notable for including the self-titled pro-zine, FOOM, a fanzine produced for readers by Marvel Comics professional staff of artists and writers. In addition to the FOOM magazine, members received a membership kit upon joining. This included a membership card, stickers,

and most relevant, a Jim Steranko drawn poster that included a creed written by Stan Lee. The language of this is again hyperbolic, but effectively transmits a message, especially for younger readers:

> Stand Tall! Thou Hath Reached The Peak And Plucked The Proudest Prize! Hang Loose! Thou Shalt Flee From Fear No Longer, Nor Suffer Pangs Of Doubt! Face Front! The Past Doth Lie Behind Thee. The Beckoning Future Now Is Thine! 'Tis True! 'Tis True! O, How Proudly We Proclaim: Thou Hath Joined Marveldom Assembled! Thy Name Hath Been Inscribed, Now And Evermore, In The Blessed Book Of FOOM! Come Take Thy Place, Believer, Within The Hallowed Ranks. The Eyes Of FOOM Are Upon Thee. They Behold Thee With Fondness And Favor. The Heart Of FOOM Embraces Thee. The Hands Of FOOM Clasp Thine. For FOOM Hath Summoned Thee, And Claimed Thee For Its Own! Thou Hath Chosen A Creed, A Code, A Way Of Life. And By Thy Choice, And By Thy Faith, The Legends Ne'er Shall Perish! Excelsior!

All this language is directly traceable in the lineage of Lee's writing not only in comic book scripts, but in everything he wrote for Marvel, from editor's notes to Stan's Soapbox commentary.

Read carefully, it attempts to bolster the self-esteem of a reader in multiple ways. First, the reader needs to turn his or her back on doubt and fear, demonstrated by their choice of Marvel Comics. Then, with that choice made, the reader can look to the future and imagine a better life as one of Marveldom Assembled, a group embodying the justice and fair play depicted in the codes of Marvel superheroes in their comic books. Lee's words are over the top, and may seem silly to an adult reading this today. From personal experience, however, I can express these words meant something more important and less silly to an eight year old on whose wall this poster hung for many years. Identifying with "Marvel"

worked at least as far as separating the "Marvel" reader from the "DC" reader in my household, but also in my early conception of the world. The heroic nature of this conception and the responsibility the choice described and demanded was an ideal to live up to, "a way of life," not simply comic book nonsense.

Though this worked well for helping a younger reader discern what was important in the messages of Marvel Comics, Lee also promoted acceptance on a higher level for his revolutionary comic book superheroes. As evidenced in the Marvel Bullpen Bulletins, by the mid- and late 1970s, Lee's focus continued on college students, as well as academia more broadly. He looked to keep readers as they grew older, but also attempted to attract an acceptance for Marvel Comics as worthy of attention and study. In the March 1978 Soapbox, Lee discussed the content of the lectures he gives on college campuses. He lets the monthly comic book readers know his lectures discuss comics in ways that develop a sense of legitimacy about them. He describes his lecture notes, beginning with his history of how Marvel Comics came to be, and in true Stan fashion, "it rarely comes out the same way twice!" (*The Mighty Thor* 28).

A key characteristic of a mythology, including the mythology known as the "Marvel Universe" is that there can be multiple versions of myths. As evidenced by oral tradition, in which myth gets passed along by multiple tellers, though never in exactly the same way twice, myths almost always have multiple versions. Thus, rebooting of comics characters, but also versions of history (such as how Marvel began), are evidence of the creation of mythology. By giving out varied, and sometimes conflicting, histories of Marvel Comics, Lee sowed the seeds of a mythological perspective, not only on his comics, but also for the company itself. Through this process, the Marvel Universe gets created and given additional credence, as mythologizing paradoxically does.

In his lectures, Lee then discusses "the psyches and gestalts" of his costumed heroes. By intentionally dealing with the psychology of the characters, they are imbued with the problems and limitations any real human might have. Referring to his character's "gestalts" directly suggests Lee hoped his writing would create complex beings with conflicting thoughts and emotions. Readers identify with a variety of possibilities because within them are recognition of possibilities in our own lives. Lee ends his lectures discussing "the philosophy of comics […] what's right with them and […] what's wrong with them; why Marvel has a […] flavor all its own […] and what lies ahead…" which is again hyperbolic, but can also be seen to simply acknowledge the growth of a "Marvel Universe" around these visual narratives. The Marvel Universe contains serious narratives for readers to consider more deeply than non-readers might grant to them. If the Marvel Universe is a mythology, the individual stories are myths.

As examples, there is Howard the Duck, a duck who is trapped in a world he never made. Dr. Don Blake, a disabled physician, able to fathom the secret heights of this world to become, not like a god, but a true god, the God of Thunder. Dr. Strange, a damaged physician, who finds his pride is worthless in the eyes of the All-Seeing Eye of Agamotto. Or Captain America, a World War II soldier, awakened in an America that just does not seem to have learned any lasting lessons about the nature of the world. Stories function as myths if they matter to an individual and have meaning. There should be no doubt these stories have that potential. Lee's college lectures seemed to be acknowledging the potential for superhero comics to follow in the human traditions of mythtelling, if readers found them relevant to their lives. As we will see, at least some did.

Because Marvel Comics not only survived, but thrived, we know the hyperbole worked, helping readers identify with the Marvel Comics style, as well as the more amorphous Marveldom Assembled. Lee presented a

language of heroism both personal and communal that was entirely analogous to the language of heroism and moral conduct being taught in churches and schools, as well as through neighborhood and familial and cultural interactions. It's possible to argue such hyperbolic language from Lee was even more positive and life affirming than these more acknowledged and assumedly efficacious avenues of moral and civic education, because we do not have to just imagine the effects of Lee's language. The evidence that Lee's marketing strategy did more than simply sell comic books can be found in the letters from readers sent in and published in various comic book letter columns.

Marvel Comics letters pages were rather unique in comparison to similar columns from their major competitor, DC Comics. The Marvel letter columns, "often contained very long letters in which fans praised, criticized, or offered detailed suggestions. Unlike DC editors, who referred to readers as 'them,' the editors of Marvel's letters pages frequently directly addressed their fans, often using the inclusive 'we' or 'us'" (Pustz). Referring to readers as we or us is obviously in line with the strategy we have seen of presuming the readers to be part of the cohesive whole of Marveldom Assembled and differentiated Marvel from the competition. In addition to praise, criticism, and suggestions for the storylines of their favorite characters, the letters also reflected how the readers felt to be part of Marvel. More importantly, they demonstrated how the self-esteem and community values that Lee constantly emphasized had become part of readers' actual perspectives.

Several Marvel editors have come forward to reveal that some printed letters were faked. There is also evidence of favoritism, since certain readers who wrote in regularly – though presumably about interesting topics – were published frequently. But there are other fascinating letters that reveal real lives being positively influenced by an idea that "Marveldom" was more than just a company that sold comics to kids. Fans discussed the expansive ideals that Lee wrote about. Letter writers

also talked about the heroism of the superheroes in the earlier days of Marvel and how they were inspired by them. When kids could still afford to buy comic books with allowance money and the audience for comics had not yet gotten older to demand more mature and "real" action or reactions from increasingly darkening heroes, the language of heroism that Lee sold was part of why comics were being bought.

As comics grew up, we now expect political and a higher order of moral questions to be asked of superheroes, and deservedly so, as the reading audience skews upward in age. However, early Marvel Comics were written for kids and kids of all ages (by which I mean adults who felt a connection to the ideals of superheroism, like justice and fairness). In these comics, the villains were almost always clearly villains (even when presented sympathetically due to uncontrollable and bad circumstance). Readers of any age can benefit from positive storylines and a welcoming identification with a group – whether real or not – that values a positive outlook and decent treatment of their fellows. The letters found in *FOOM* are especially enlightening as evidence for a profound identification with the hyperbolic language that built Marvel and how that language found a deeper resonance with the readers.

One illuminating letter is found in *FOOM #8*, an issue featuring Captain America. When this issue was published, Captain America was developing problems with his heroic persona in light of the political climate of the day, following from the Vietnam era into the problems of Watergate. In the Captain America title comic, Cap decided to give up his iconic American hero character and opted instead to become the Nomad, a wandering hero without a country. The star-spangled, red, white, and blue costume of Captain America seemed a relic of a country that no longer existed. *FOOM* reader Timothy Stoffregen wrote in with his profound reaction, showing how the narratives and characters of Marvel Comics can become relevant to a reader's life in more serious ways than simply as entertainment:

It is dark outside, and although my room is well illuminated the darkness pervades my soul. I turn to the poster on my wall. The tall man in red, white, and blue stares at me in determination. A feeling of disbelief runs through me: is he really gone?

Marvel doesn't go in for it but I hoped that Captain America #176 would prove an imaginary story. Cap gone. It's hard to believe. The heart of the matter, of course, is the "high government official" who was No. 1 of the Secret Empire. It understandably shook Steve's confidence as similar matters have shaken our confidences. A Soviet newscaster stated that President Nixon's resignation showed the shakiness of democracy. I believe the contrary. A man, a group of men, even an entire administration can be corrupt, but if the system is bad the ideals linger on. Captain America is, was, and always shall be the greatest comic book character in the world because he **does not** represent the government or any specific group other than pure and simple basic ideals of freedom that exist in all men everywhere. It's not that Captain America **should** exist, it's that he **must** exist. Steve Rogers was wrong. He is not a man; he is a living legend and a living symbol. I pity his responsibilities, but I recognize the need for him to take them up.

Captain America's fate rests in the hands of a group of men on Madison Ave. I hope they make the right decision. As for me I sit and wait…I turn from the poster of the tall man in red, white and blue and the dark pervades my soul. The beacon has gone out and it's so very, very dark without it. (7)

The writer's sentiments are a signal that Marvel's hyperbole achieved more than a marketing goal. This reader directly relates the narrative events in the Captain America comic book and the character's mythology

to both real life events and to his personal life. Marveldom Assembled is acknowledged here as being "in the hands of a group of men on Madison Ave," but the letter serves as input as to what should be done with the character based on the character's mythos (i.e., history in Marvel Comics) and what Captain America has meant to Marveldom. Without him, "the beacon has gone out" and "darkness pervades" this reader's soul.

Another perhaps even more personal example of the connection Marvel Comics were able to foster with their readers is demonstrated by the second letter published in *The Human Fly #8* from 1978. *The Human Fly* is a rather unique comic as it was based on a real-life stunt man whose professed mission was to give hope to the sick and disabled. His personal story is one about fighting back into shape after a debilitating accident. His physical stunts were meant to show that one can achieve anything by putting in the hard work while believing recovery to be possible. One can imagine the difficulty writer Bill Mantlo had in writing such a comic. A balancing act is apparent in the nineteen-issue run between the Fly presented as a superhero, but with stories emphasizing that he was *not* a superhero. With very earnest and unique writing, Mantlo's narratives achieve something different in this comic book.

Readers responded positively, at least those readers whose letters were printed. If the letters were any indication, this comic achieved its goal of empowering and encouraging disabled readers. The following is representative of the sentiments being sent in:

> THE HUMAN FLY #5 touched me and brought tears. […]
> Cripple. That must be the most ugly word in the English language.
> Yet, it is a fact that many must deal with everyday of their lives.
> But not all of us are strong enough to help ourselves, and that is
> why there is a man like The Human Fly. […] you have produced a
> beautiful and moving work of art. […] I know how it feels to lie in
> a hospital bed and wonder if the steel in a leg will someday let me
> stand and run again. I understand how it feels to learn how to walk

all over again. But, when I was going through my therapy there
was no Human Fly, not yet at least. (19)

The inclusivity directly promised in the MMMS song and the *FOOM*
poster creed were in evidence, if only in a small way, by publishing *The
Human Fly* comic. The example such a comic book hero provided to the
letter writer is similar to emotions expressed on the comic's letter page in
almost every issue. As the comic had only a short run, we can perhaps see
evidence that the majority of Marveldom Assembled were not ready for
such inclusiveness. However, I think that would be incorrect. The
problems with this comic stemmed from being based on a real person,
whose real exploits were often mentioned in the editorial notes. This came
to a strange culmination when the real stunt man decided to embark on a
musical recording career, which the comic had to include somehow. Such
a strange development could only erode readers' interest. But Mantlo's
writing on this run achieved something rarely seen: superhero stories in
which the narratives directly inspired readers.

 The personal connection between readers and the Marvel comics they
read is evident from the previous two examples of letters sent to Marvel.
An objection can easily be raised that this is irrelevant, because Marvel's
intent was (and is) only to sell more comics. They wanted readers to
identify in these ways only to get them to be long and loyal customers.
And the following November 1974 note (accessed in *Thor* #265), may do
little to dissuade us from thinking otherwise:

We hate to close on a solemn note, but by now you've been hit
with the hard fact that the price of our regular color comics has
risen to thirty-five cents […]. Naturally, we owe you an
explanation […] the answer is already obvious. Ever-spiraling
costs; ever-mounting inflation. Once again we've been faced with
rising printing. Engraving, and paper prices, and once again we've
reached the point where we're forced to make *our* prices reflect

those new costs. We're sorry. […] Your loyalty and support in the past have made us the number one comic book company, and we appreciate it greatly. Now, we're going to be working all the harder to *keep* that loyalty and support, to produce the very best possible comics available…at any price. And that's a promise, pal. (28)

However, such a note, if not selfless and pure, at least suggests recognition of Marvel's attempt to build a real devotion rather than simply a moneymaking operation. Most companies do not plainly write, "We're sorry" after a price increase. And here, they are writing to a presumed audience of young teens, if not children. The issue right before the one in which this appeared was 30 cents. In the perspective of a twelve-year old in 1977, if you were able to get a dollar, you could previously buy three comics at 30 cents each. At 35 cents, you would be a nickel short. That could be a problem.

But Marvel's apology for raising prices – by a nickel – was welcomed. The increase was acknowledged and Marvel had their reasons. It seemed more reasonable for the reader to "be an innovator" and find that extra nickel. The entwined comics narratives became more important as you read more comics. Learning about the Marvel Universe also meant learning more about your own world. Economic lessons of the real world, always part of consumerism, were easier to accept if everyone shared in the changes.

In that real world, one of the hallmarks of being a member of Marveldom Assembled could be an attempt to bring others into the fold. By fostering positive connections between readers, it became natural for them to want to increase the group. And Marvel comic books, with their mission to bring more reality, humanity, and personal emotion into comics, have often been used to try and change the outsiders' views. Those who have not yet "Assembled" were not aware that comics were more than just action tales for young boys. Thus, in *FOOM* #6 from

summer of 1974 we find this letter in "The Voice of Foom!" column, written by one Sari Bitticks:

> Dear Foom Folk, I started reading Marvel some years ago in college and have been a steady fan. I am now employed as a youth worker and Director of Christian Education at a large church here in Worcester. I have found the comics to be of great aid in my work. As a specific example, the set of Spideys dealing with the death of Gwen Stacy were very useful in approaching the whole concept of death and grief. I am convinced that several young people were greatly helped by these episodes. Also, Harry Osborne's encounters with drugs have been well planned and a good basis for beginning discussion. I have also used DD's blindness and Don Blake's lameness as starting points for conversations on handicaps, both for normal and handicapped children. Unfortunately, most people are still laboring under the misconception that all comics are poorly written, grammatical nightmares dealing with escapist themes. I, myself, have been reprimanded for dispensing comics and using them in my work. It has gotten to the point where I am forced to defend my opinions by addressing the congregation on the importance of the comic in today's society. Perhaps FOOM can do all of us fans a favor by doing an article, or better yet, a series of articles dealing with the theme of the value of comics. Such facts as the use of comics for remedial reading programs and other educational purposes could be brought out. Quotes from psychologists, educators and teachers who advocate the use of comics would be of great interest to Foomers. I, for one, am tired of store clerks who make comments when I buy my Marvels. Those of us who enjoy your work and who depend on it for many reasons would appreciate some facts to back up our arguments. I think Foom Magazine would be an ideal place for such assistance. Keep up the good work! Excelsior! (28)

The letter writer is a woman and she is talking about using Marvel Comics to help in her teaching capacity at a Christian church. Though today the group "comics readers" is generally assumed to draw from every possible demographic, in 1974 the assumption was that superhero comics were for boys, even if that was demonstrably not completely correct. Even bolder is her attempt to use Marvel Comics to explore real world issues of death, pain, and disablement, issues churches presumably specialized in.

Though the language of selling the Marvel Universe to readers was often on a personal level, the readers' intent when buying in to such language was to try and aid others (as superheroes do). For this letter writer, defending the comics of Marvel – to both church members and store clerks – was more important than giving in to common opinion. She did not want to give up reading them or hide the fact that she read them.

The mark of the superhero is not just the ability to change the world, but the need and desire to do so. In these earlier comics, written by Lee in a style passed to other writers, the intent of the superhero was never in doubt. There was less reality (i.e., looking at how someone with superpowers would act in the real world) and more expectation that heroes would do the right thing and act like heroes. Not doing so, famously as in Spider-Man's case, leads to tragedy, so this was an era when heroes were heroes. Little discussion over why they might not be was taking place. It is worth noting that the writer here, obviously invested in the comics and presumably a member of "Marveldom Assembled" is asking for aid in how best to convince others of the value of this work.

Being one of the Assembled could be a tricky proposition in the real world. In today's entertainment culture, where superhero films drive the economic engine of Hollywood, discussing comic books and superheroes in public is normal. The stigmatization of being a comic book reader that drove the angst of many a teen reader of comics in the 1970s (and probably all eras) is mostly forgotten. But such a stigma was uncalled for and the readership that was Marvel's audience often proved to be more

forgiving and more empathetic than the outside world. Lee's language of inclusiveness directly translated to the reader's and some of them became the next generation of Marvel comic book writers.

In evidence, there is a letter published in *FOOM* #18. Ellen McMicking from Ontario, Canada, asked questions about the new X-Men team. Addressing the writer of the comic, Chris Claremont, she ends with a broader question: "Why does it seem that people like you and I (who can sympathize/empathize with our band of Homo Superior heroes) are so few and far between, while the narrow-minded bigot is so painfully common?" (18). Such a reader, with such a question, was not found published in many comics, but the new X-Men had a growing number of readers with sympathy and empathy for the new team of misfit mutants. Many women were openly reading the comic and it represented the beginning of a change in how comic book reading would be judged in the world.

However, even more extraordinary than the letter writer and her question is Claremont's response, unlike anything in comics at the time. For me as a youth of 11, this was unlike anything I heard anywhere else either, including in school or in church. Only from the words that created Marveldom Assembled did such a clear message of inclusivity, including the goals and problems with achieving it, appear. Claremont replied, in full:

> Why are there people in the United States who think Adolf Hitler was the greatest man who ever lived and regret the fact that he never got a chance to finish what he started? Why do people love dogs and cats and hate niggers? Or wops? Or dagos? Or spics? Or kikes? Or wogs? Or honkies? Or *anyone*, as characters and as people; I would really flip if, one day, I woke up to discover that the men (note: the X-Men) were "real" people. I would love to meet them. By the same token, I like most people. I don't think of myself as any sort of racist; I guess that makes me a liberal. But, at the same time, I'll find myself on the street in New York and – out

of the blue – something happening around me will provoke a racist thought. A thought is as far as the event gets, but maybe that's enough. Maybe I've been fooling myself all these years and I'm really a closet bigot. Or maybe I'm just human and nobody but a canonized saint should expect themselves to feel, act, think the straight-and-narrow every instant of every day. Then again, maybe the difference lies in the fact that a bigot would think that racist thought and follow through with it, thought becoming action, whereas a non-bigot thinks the same flash-response thought and immediately realizes that it's bullshit, that it has its origin in the psychic framework of a society that's only just *beginning* to come to terms with the racist elements of its heritage. I honest-to-God don't know.

What it comes down to is that Dave Cockrum and I view our characters as people, not as black, white, Asians, Irish, African, Amerindian, German, Canadian, Russian, human, mutant, or *whatever*! People – first, last and always – in the probably vain hope that, sooner or later, everyone else in this screwed-up world of ours will start seeing things the same way. (18)

Though I have not looked for direct evidence, I feel comfortable in suggesting that not even a "canonized saint" would ever have said something like this. Its direct suggestion to use the narratives and characters in the X-Men comics to view the real world in a non-discriminatory way is a modern possibility, probably avoided or at least rare for even the official saints of history.

Based only on the evidence of letters from readers, and the occasional editorial written reply, officially selected and published in Marvel comics and here in *FOOM*, it would seem the hyperbolic language of Lee, exhorting the reader of Marvel Comics to stand tall and be part of a group that also stood tall, worked. Some letters, as we now know, were

faked. However, the majority of letters are specific, imparting the ring of authenticity. One might argue that we cannot be sure though. Are the published letters really representative of every reader? Obviously not, but the argument is whether Lee's language, and Marvel's in general, affected anyone in positive ways we might assume such comics could not. I think we can affirm a positive effect could be the outcome of identifying closely with the narrative myths of the Marvel Universe.

And is Marvel unique to such thoughtful or emotional identification? There probably was similar identification taking place with readers of DC Comics, though there may be different reasons for this. DC had a longer history and such iconic characters as Superman, Batman, and Wonder Woman. This history offers different connections and possible reasons to become invested in DC. Perhaps in the two companies' rivalry to capture the loyalty of the reader, friendly as it often seemed to be, Lee's strategy was to capture his readers' hearts to say "Make Mine Marvel!" whereas DC may have used its icons and relied less on the language of editors and publishers. These are avenues worth exploring further.

But there seems to be no question that Lee's writing – from the earliest Marvel comic books, to his influence on fan club materials and their effort to make the reader feel heroic, to his direct exhortations to make readers heroic as found on the *FOOM* poster, to his efforts to identify Marvel as a company that cares but also one with relevance greater than simply as a publisher of comic books – directly led to Marvel Comics readers finding a personal investment in Marvel. With evidence from their letters, readers were also led to a greater personal and thoughtful investment in the real world around them.

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True Believers: Stan Lee and the Legitimization of the Comics Fan Community

PETER BRYAN CULLEN

A fan community is perceived as an organic, grassroots response to a media property. There is no magical formula to make something acquire a fanbase (though there have been many efforts to create a cult hit, to varying degrees of success), and one film or television series can inspire a rabid following where another similar work can fade quickly into memory. The necessarily elements of the grassroots cannot be simply forced by producers, but must evolve naturally within the social networks of the property's consumers. In the age of Twitter, interactions between fans and creators are more commonplace, but historically the industry often removed barriers between consumers and producers. Comics, perhaps more than any other medium, seem to inspire the creation of fan communities, both around the individual characters and creators, as well as comic book publishers, even back to the earliest days of Richard F. Outcault's Yellow Kid and Buster Brown.

The superhero genre magnifies these tendencies; we are inspired by and aspire to be figures like Superman and Wonder Woman, or perhaps relate to the problems of and identify with Spider-Man and the X-Men. While there is certainly some artifice to how superheroes are created (usually reflecting some aspect of an era's dominant or youth culture), the followings these characters develop tend to be largely grassroots in nature, much like sports teams. It was not some elaborate marketing plan that made Wolverine or The Flash popular, but rather the result of fortuitous timing and quality work. Stan Lee complicates this narrative, however.

Stan Lee's entry into the comics industry occurred more out of convenience than interest. He was not at Marvel (or Timely, as the company was known at the time) from the start, as Joe Simon and Jack Kirby were, joining the company for a steady paycheck more than artistic endeavor. He was a writer and editor, hardly the artistic ideal struck by Winsor McCay, George Herriman, or Will Eisner, particularly in a period when comic book stories were not taken seriously. Moreover, Lee was a workman first; he did not spring from some artistic tradition. Whereas a figure like Carl Barks credits inspirations like McCay's Little Nemo and Fredrick Opper's Happy Hooligan as formative influences, Lee joined Marvel through a family connection with the end goal of collecting a steady paycheck (Raphael and Spurgeon, 19-20).

Lee could not claim to be a long-time fan of comics, as many of his artists and writers would be, but he nevertheless came to perform as perhaps the ultimate comics fan as an editor for Marvel. He served as a tireless cheerleader for Marvel's comics, a figurehead for the company at large, even when he was not in charge. Eventually, he stood at the forefront of the fight for a wider acceptance of comics across society. Lee strikes a complicated figure: it is hard to determine where his public persona ends and his businessman instincts begin, but his influence on the development of comics is clearly visible, and his position as a patron saint of comics is well-recognized within the modern Marvel fan community. Bradford Wright posits: "Stan Lee recognized the wisdom of hip marketing. He cultivated an image of Marvel Comics as a maverick within the comic book field, much like the outsider superheroes themselves. His cover blurbs, house editorials, answers to reader letters...self-deprecating humor, cross-references between titles, and recurring in-jokes" helped Marvel to appeal to a new fanbase, and grow beyond the bonds of comic book readership at the time (Wright 217).

Lee is at once a fan, and a creator, though he is perhaps neither, at least not as the larger community defines the concepts. Lee used his position

and natural talents to become the face of Marvel, bridging the creator and the fan community, and positioned himself as a standard bearer for geek causes. Lee was active as a writer an editor first of all, but utilized the letters page of his comics to interact with his fans, focused on appealing to a wider (and older audience), participated in the fledgling comics conventions, and used his celebrity to push for the acceptance of comics within the mainstream culture. Lee is responsible for both the rise of the Marvel fandom and for the larger acceptance of comic books within the dominant culture, forces inexorably linked with this one man.

Lee may well have been the first comic book celebrity, or at least the one most able to navigate the borders of fandom and mass culture. His is a name known outside of comics fan circles, recognized within a broader cultural context, selling both himself and his work. Jerry Seigel and Joe Schuster were notable enough that newspapers covered Siegel's entry into the military during World War II, but the pair faded into obscurity during the decades of legal battles over Superman's creation that followed. Donald Duck scribe Carl Barks was unmasked in 1960 through the efforts of diligent fans, but he seemed generally dumbfounded that people enjoyed his comics as much as they did. While friendly, he had little interest in engaging with the nascent fan community (additionally, the fans of his various Disney comics tended to be somewhat removed from the fans of superhero comics). There were others who were certainly famous: Charles Schulz with Peanuts and Hal Foster with Prince Valiant, but they were not public figures in the Lee fashion, with their characters being being more famous than the creators themselves. The possible exception is Winsor McCay's Little Nemo, with McCay using his creation as a springboard toward the vaudeville-styled exhibition of his groundbreaking animation Gertie the Dinosaur (though McCay would be largely forgotten by the public as Disney came to define animation). Lee embodied something beyond a mere creator of comics; Jim Sterenko or Joe Simon might be major draws at a convention, but Lee was recognizable to larger

public. He was a showman, selling the idea of comics not only to his pre-established fanbase, but to a public that had not too long before turned against comics.

It is unclear where Stanley Lieber, the man, and Stan Lee, the celebrity, begin or end. We can regard Lee as a constant, consistent performer: there is no clear end or beginning to his half century of social engagement. The dichotomy exists in his role as both a producer of media, and the role he inhabits as a fellow fan of comics (particularly his own). Comics fans by their very nature are insular, as all fan communities tend to be; Pierre Bourdieu reminds us, "taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier. Social subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make, between the beautiful and the ugly, the distinguished and the vulgar, in which their position in the objective classifications is expressed or betrayed" (Bourdieu 502). Lee must carefully negotiate his roles, as both insider (producer) and outsider (fan); if he is unsuccessful, he would be marked as an uncool interloper or as simply another facet of the powers that be. Henry Jenkins reminds us "the relationship between fan and producer is not always a happy or comfortable one and is often charged with mutual suspicion, if not open conflict" (Jenkins 32). The fan consumes and repurposes the media object to their own ends; the producer endeavors to control the object for their own ends (creative, economic, or otherwise). Lee places himself in a privileged position as the face of Marvel (regardless of his actual position within the company), but simultaneously occupies the position of fan, encoding this situation within his various engagements with the greater Marvel fan community. The Marvel fans organize in such a way to grant themselves social power, and thus can select their membership; Bordieu explains: "it should not be thought that the relationship of distinction (which may or may not imply the conscious intention of distinguishing oneself from common people) is only an incidental component of aesthetic disposition" (Bourdieu 505-506).

Lee must negotiate the fan community accordingly; he is marked by his position as existing outside of the fans, and is thus viewed with distrust (after all, he cannot be a fan of his own work, at least not in the manner of Marvel fans at large). This process creates a strange system with regard to Lee; Jenkins explains: "meanings form the basis for the construction and maintenance of this fan community; the expectations and conventions of the fan community also shape the meanings derived from the series and the forms taken by the fan's own artistic creations" (Jenkins 88). Lee is able to cast himself as a fan and ingratiate himself within the burgeoning community, if not as a full member, than as a sympathetic figure within the production process. With his unique position, he is able to voice the opinions of his fanbase, most significantly for a greater acceptance of comics, despite being himself separate from the masses.

The letters column provided a performance space for the comics reading community. It had been adapted from traditions within the pulp science fiction publishing community, which shared some overlap with the comic reading public (Schelly). There, the average reader was given a forum through which to have contact with the writers and artists of given comic, though the tone differed between publishers. Generally, the letters discussed major plot developments or character points, creating a mechanism for feedback on which characters and stories were popular beyond fickle sales figures. Not all letters columns were created equal, however. Matthew Pustz points out: "Marvel letters pages often contained very long letters in which fans praised, criticized, or offered detailed suggestions. Unlike DC editors, who referred to readers as 'them,' the editors of Marvel's letters pages frequently directly addressed their fans, often using the inclusive 'we' or 'us'" (Pustz 167).

While this effort might not be purely credited to Stan Lee, he was editor, and often took a hand in directly answering letters (even for comics he did not directly work on). The encoded message within these columns was that the fans were as much a part of the creative process as writers,

illustrators, and editors, and that their opinions mattered. Lee spoke to them as peers, and his excited energy rarely seemed to flag, referring to his readers as "true believers!" and likely contributing to a response from college-aged audiences: Esquire found letters from more than 225 colleges during a report on Marvel in 1966 (Wright 223). These columns were personalized; Bradford Wright points out in Comic Book Nation that "appearing in each title were Marvel editorials and house news items like 'Stan's Soapbox' and 'Bullpen Bulletins,' all designed to impart that there was more to the Marvel experience than just reading a comic book and throwing it away... Lee also worked to generate reader intimacy with the Marvel staff" (Wright 218). The familiarity and accepting nature of the space allowed for fans to interact with the creators more freely than they might otherwise have.

   Furthermore, these fan letters were not anonymous under Lee, including full names and even mailing addresses, ensuring that the missives were not anonymous (and perhaps striking back at criticisms that letters were being faked in-house). Pustz explains, "in comic books, there is always the potential for fans to interact in sites published, and hence made official, by the creators responsible for the production of the texts themselves. This kind of interaction takes place in the letters pages included in most regularly published comic books" (Pustz 166). The process takes a creative aspect, in the mode of Henry Jenkins, with fans performing their fandom by demonstrating knowledge and expounding on theories, even attempting to resolve plot holes and other uncertainties within comics (success in these endeavors would occasionally be rewarded with the "No-Prize," consisting of an empty envelope, though certainly worth a degree of clout within the fan community writ large).

   Lee, in his position as editor and often author of these columns, could utilize the space to empower Marvel's fans, and offer them a degree of (alleged) agency in dictating how storylines and characters developed over time. Pustz writes: "Marvel's readers were encouraged to suggest story

ideas, as editors emphasized the close ties between the audiences and the creators. The idea that fans – as editors in absentia – and professionals were creating the comics together was central to Marvel's rhetoric" (Pustz 167). By blurring the lines between fans and creators, Lee broke free of the constraints of his position and joined with fans in the celebration, creating a liminal space where editor and reader were rendered equal. Lee explains, "I use the letters to help me edit the magazine. It shows what readers want and don't want. And for the most part I try and follow their dictates because they're the ones that buy the books" (Van Gelder 24). The space reinforced reader relationships with creators; it had been fairly recent that the practice of crediting artists, writers, and others for their work on comics had become commonplace. It also served as a space for Lee himself to secure himself a position as the face of the company; he certainly had legal rights to most of Marvel's popular characters, but the letters column served as space to secure his position in minds of fans. "By devoting space in each publication for a sampling of letters and extending his routine as genial, self-mocking host to his responses, Lee created a secondary level of involvement for readers and promoted the sense that Marvel cared about its fans," said Marvel historians Jordan Raphael and Tom Spurgeon (111-112). The letters column winkingly acknowledged fans in a way that had not been done before (and would not be improved upon until the rise of social media, particularly Twitter), and allowed the readers to feel special. Fans received a certain amount of social capital in getting a letter printed, with Lee as the gatekeeper (and as a fan himself, expounding at length over the events in the comics and the fan letters themselves).

Lee-coined phrases like "Face front, true believers!" and "Excelsior!" entered the cultural lexicon as he continued to cultivate his position as a fellow nerd to his readers. His seemingly encyclopedic knowledge of the Marvel canon placed him as the preeminent scholar of the line. Even in the comics that did not feature his writing, he remained a presence, his work

as editor playing out across the pages of the burgeoning Marvel empire. These efforts ensured that, even as Lee was increasingly removed from the actual production occurring at Marvel, he maintained a position within the minds of fans that no one else at Marvel (and, indeed, with the possible exception of Carl Barks at the time, in comics at large) could possibly match. Lee used these columns to become a fixture at the company, placing himself at the forefront.

In 1972, Lee was promoted to president and publisher of Marvel, removing him from day-to-day production, but allowing him to become the face of the company in the public sphere. Lee further secured a position within the Marvel hierarchy by engaging with the fans in a variety of environments, ranging from becoming a fixture at the nascent comic book conventions of the 1970s to undertaking a series of lectures on college campuses. His engagement with college-aged fans proved fortuitous for the publisher and for the man himself, allowing him to cement himself as a sort of godfather for the Marvel fan community.

The Merry Marvel Marching Society (MMMS) fan club would prove Lee's masterstroke, a reflection of his keen understanding of the company's changing readership, despite the club's relatively short-lived success, lasting until roughly 1976 in various forms. (Ro 84) The fan club, nominally targeted toward readers of all ages, connected strongly with college audiences, who were already voracious readers. Wright explains, "some fifty thousand college students had paid a dollar each to join Marvel's official fan club" (Wright 223). By appealing to college students, Lee was not only successful in expanding his readership, but also retained more deeply invested long-term fans. "Marvel created its own fan community with the Merry Marvel Marching Society. The club crystallized Lee's happy-go-lucky public persona," said Raphael and Sturgeon (112). This quickly allowed for the formation of a deep-rooted fan community, with Lee as its leader; no longer were comics the domain of a few insular collectors, but a space for the discussion of characters,

stories, and the growing Marvel universe. The MMMS allowed Marvel's fans to unite, not simply within a small-scale social-physical space, but within a larger fan community. These readers would in turn follow Marvel's comic line more closely than the typical reader, subscribing to particular series and following along as their favorite characters did crossovers into other lines.

While Lee cannot be wholly credited with the rise of the comic book fan (EC Comics had a small, if dedicated, following during its heyday, and Carl Barks had gained a reputation of note by the early 1960s), he was in large part responsible for creating the Marvel comics fan. Lee cultivated certain currents within the comics reading public to his own ends, growing a particular strain of fan that would become diehard loyalists. His efforts to attract college-aged readers would in turn transform his rhetoric; he became a standard-bearer for the defense of comics even as he began to shift away from direct engagement with the community. The MMMS did not survive the 1970s, but laid the seeds that would soon sprout into a much larger community.

This courting of the college-aged consumer was fortuitous in its timing, coinciding with the quiet shift into the Bronze Age of Comics and the rise of underground, independent label books, called "comix." Lee might have been peripherally aware of the movement, though it was hardly a force in the comics world at that point. Underground comix moved away from the sterility enforced by the Comics Magazine Association of America with its Comics Code stamp of approval and toward more realistic, "mature" stories. Lee had an uncanny ability to recognize the currents. He charted the demographic changes that had allowed Marvel to thrive in the 1960s, and perhaps foresaw comics logical evolution into an art form intended to appeal to an increasingly wide and diverse audience.

The MMMS faded away, but was simply another front of Lee's multimedia efforts, an experiment that yielded several useful results,

including a more direct impact in introducing Lee to a college-aged audience and making him into a major popular culture figure on campuses. Wright argues that "Stan Lee himself became a much-requested speaker at colleges and universities...the Princeton Debating Society invited him to speak in a lecture series that also included Senators Hubert Humphrey and Wayne Morse. At Bard College, Lee's lecture outdrew one by Dwight D. Eisenhower" (223). Lee took these public opportunities to broadcast his own beliefs in the power of comics. Given the opportunity to speak publicly, he came down clearly on the side of his fans, and did not shy away from arguing vociferously on behalf of comics.

In the early 1950s, Lee was an editor at Timely when Fredric Wertham published Seduction of the Innocent. He was well aware of William Gaines's disastrous testimony before the Senate in 1954 that marked the height of moral panic, which resulted in the industry creating the Comics Code Authority. Lee himself was never called to testify; he recalls: "I hated the idea of what was happening with Wertham. I hated the fact that he was tarring every comic book with the same brush, but there was nothing we could do about it. We had to live through it" (Raphael and Spurgeon 48). Lee recognized that the battle against censorship had been lost, and that continuing the fight would have merely resulted in greater trouble for the industry (after all, the Comics Code was a voluntary effort; the alternative was more stringent government regulation). He may not have been happy about the outcome or consequences, but he was content not to buck the system.

Later, in the 1970s, Lee retroactively positioned himself as a great defender against comic book censorship, coinciding with his promotion to president and publisher of Marvel. (Riesman) Raphael and Spurgeon explain that Lee "wrote about a series of public debates between Fredric Wertham and himself. It is a highly emotive buy vaguely phrased discourse, and it appears in the text without the slightest bit of factual confirmation. No record exists of a series of Wertham/Lee debates" (48).

It seems apparent that the debates never occurred (though Lee's writing about them may have served as a cathartic release), though the effort may in part offer some insight into Lee's fan behavior.

With his position at Marvel weakened by the Comics Code, Lee gained some empathy for the consumer, and sought to correct the injustices where he could, inviting fans to contribute in their own ways. While not true fan fiction, this episode has certain hallmarks of fan behavior, particularly in Lee's effort to take control of the narrative and set right what once went wrong. He had been silent in 1954, not that he would have had any great impact on the flow of events (the same as any other creator or fan), and saw a glimmer of possibility in the 1970s to strike a blow for freedom and fandom.

Though Lee may not have engaged in actual debates with Wertham, he nevertheless proved himself a happy warrior. His appearance on the Dick Cavett Show in 1968 marked a crucial turning point in the acceptance of comics by the culture, with Lee leading the charge. Cavett's program was certainly more counterculture-friendly than some of his late night contemporaries, though the television show still existed within the mainstream. Lee used this to his advantage. Given the opportunity to refute the dismissal of comics that had occurred in the early 1950s, Lee happily did so, even offering some subtle criticisms of the Comics Code Authority without calling it out by name. Lee explained that "we try to write [comics] well, we try to draw them well, we try to make them as sophisticated as a comic book can be...the whole philosophy behind it is to treat them as fairy tales for grown ups and do the kind of stories that we ourselves would want to read if we read comic books" (Cavett 15). By putting himself out before the general public (and not simply writing editorials and responding to letters in the back of a comic book), Lee stepped up to defend the reading of comics in a cultural context; he is endeavoring to make reading comics more acceptable. He pointed out several times that "comic books are read by college students," which

reinforced his message of comics being produced for audiences outside of
the child and teenage demographics (Cavett 15). Lee further argued:

> [T]he big thing we're trying to do...is that we're taking these two
> words – "comic books" – which have always been spoken with
> disdain...we've been trying to give them a little more respect...they are
> part of the media today, like radio and television, they are a method of
> communication, and there's really no reason why a comic book couldn't
> be well-written and well-drawn just like anything else. (Cavett 19)

Lee's call might have been self-serving, but it cemented his position as
one of the industry's great defenders, and perhaps one of the first voices to
go on national television to speak on behalf of comics since the
implementation of the Comics Code. He spoke eloquently and excitedly
on the subject, and gave his readers something to rally around (and
perhaps a few talking points for engaging with their parents over the
dinner table). Raphael and Sturgeon remind us "Lee was accessible to the
reporters, was eminently quotable, and, when he started to read what they
were gleaning from his comic books, was able to grasp the essence of
what they were saying and repeat it back to other journalists from other
magazines" (116). Lee was not embarrassed, and navigated the (at times)
dismissive discourse that surrounded comics in the era.

Beyond his efforts within the media blitz, Lee was supportive of the
nascent convention scene. The earliest conventions were side rooms or
panels at science fiction and fantasy conventions, where there was some
crossover between the various fandoms. The first "true" comic book
convention occurred in 1964, either in New York or Detroit depending on
definitions (Duncan and Smith 173). Within a few years, the events had
grown in size and scope, drawing in the industry's leading talents (Will
Eisner, Joe Simon), up-and-comers (Roy Thomas, Jim Steranko), and Lee
himself, who seemed tireless despite being of middle age (Duncan and
Smith 179).

Lee readily engaged face-to-face with fans, much as he had already done, preaching to the choir on the value of comics. Lee keenly understood "the importance of maintaining strong ties with the faithful... the dedicated fans wielded enormous influence through informal networks. Even as he chased the media spotlight, Stan carried on his efforts to build Marvel's readership one fan at a time" (Raphael and Sturgeon, 163). He was not above the common rabble of conventions, but continued to position himself within the liminal space between fan and producer. In interviews, he spoke out in favor of the fans, and made directly connections between himself and his community, explaining, "we writers and artists and editors...were kids not too long ago. But we live in the same world as our readers, and certainly what our readers are concerned with, we are concerned with...we never thought of ourselves as separate and distinct from our audience. We are our audience" (Van Gelder 22). Lee consistently demonstrates a sense of empathy with his audience, despite being removed by age and profession, and speaks confidently for the fans.

Lee further proved a tireless promoter of Marvel's initial forays into becoming a multimedia enterprise, even though his direct contributions to the projects were limited at best. Due to a legal battle in 2004, "[Lee] gets executive-producer and co-creator credits on them...these connections to the Marvel movies are huge for Lee because fame outside the eternally disdained world of comics has always been one of the man's ultimate goals" (Riesman). The recent popularity of Marvel films reflects the ultimate success of Lee's decades of effort, and the general acceptance of comic books (and their fans) into the dominant culture. Riesman remarks "Lee...saved a genre and led his acolytes through the harsh world of mainstream entertainment for decades – only to see his people finally enter the promised land of Hollywood billions without him. So now he stands on the border, smiling and welcoming people in" (Riesman). He

has achieved his goals, but remains in the ether: he no longer has the creative prowess he once did, but his reputation creates expectations.

Lee has transformed himself into a venerated object within the larger comics fan community, and he serves as an in-joke and internal reference point within Marvel films. His omnipresent cameos began with voice work for Marvel's animated series in the 1980s, but took a dramatic leap forward when he appeared in X-Men (2000). By the time that the comic book movies became a dominant genre, Lee secured himself a place at the head of the pantheon of comic book creators, a figure recognizable to fans and the general public. His appearances in the Marvel films were winking nods (at best, he had a line or two), but served a deeper purpose as a sort of seal of approval for the films. Lee has not appeared in every film (though he has appeared in each of the flagship Marvel Cinematic Universe offerings), and his absence was noticed in Fantastic Four (2015). Questioned about the film's failure, Lee posited that "it's probably because I didn't have a cameo in it" (King). While this was said in jest, it does reflect the power of Lee's celebrity, his lack of appearance retroactively served as an implication the film's lack of quality.

Lee remains active in the convention scene, though he has slowed down somewhat at his advanced age (93 in late 2016). He continues to make appearances at various conventions, explaining, "it's the fact that fans still care. I like all the comics conventions: The smaller ones are easier, the bigger ones are exciting" (Cavna). He is in some senses outmoded; his defense of comics as art has become commonly accepted within the dominant culture, while his nurturing of the early comic fandom has faded into memory with successive generations. He has achieved greater victory than he might ever have hoped, though he has now taken on the role of an elder statesman, rather than the brash upstart he performed for decades.

In more recent years, he has founded his own convention in Los Angeles, Comikaze Expo, now in its sixth year of operation. Lee explains,

"these things are important because they keep the fans' interest alive in comics. They keep the fans reading and their imaginations stimulated. We live in a pretty tough world and tragic things happen all the time" (Cavna). He remains perhaps the most famous comic creator of all-time, recognizable to comic fans and the public alike. Lee has a knack for somehow managing to stick around within popular culture, eternally performing the fan for an audience who will never accept it entirely.

Lee, the consummate self-promoter, ensured that he found a place in the shift toward fan communities that unfolded over decades. He was on the forefront, interacting with the burgeoning community and acting as an ambassador between the administrative and creative sides of Marvel and the fan community. Lee witnessed not only the transformation of comics under Marvel's bold new creative endeavors, but also the rise of the comic book fan (as opposed to the comic book reader) that began to take shape in the 1960s. Lee encouraged readers to follow along with winding storylines that became more commonplaces, and became a presence at some of the early comic conventions. He was not the only comics figure to make appearances (artists in particular were in high demand, and could make a decent supplemental salary on the circuit), but he took on the role of his larger-than-life persona, playing up his flamboyant personality for the assembled public. Furthermore, Lee became a fixture within the larger culture, giving interviews to talk shows and newspapers in defense of comics, and taking to the lecture circuit of universities and colleges across the country. He was willing to take to the airwaves with his grand defense of comics, to place himself in the public eye for the opportunity to sell the idea of comics as art, and indirectly support the comics fandom that was developing in earnest. Lee is not some perfect, unblemished figure, but played a crucial role in the acceptance of comics within the mainstream culture, and lent the fan community around them a sense of legitimacy.

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Think Pieces on Stan Lee and the Marvel Universe

Time with Stan Lee Here and There

ARTHUR ASA BERGER

When I read Marshall McLuhan's *The Mechanical Bride* (1951)*,* I came across a chapter titled "Money in the Comics" and there was a photo of Stan Lee, on page 150, smoking a pipe and looking very serious. He had written an article "There's Money in Comics!" McLuhan quotes Lee's article with a passage titled: "Don't Write Down to Your Readers." McLuhan ends his discussion of the comics talking about their lack of pretentiousness and writing: "The great artist necessarily has roots very deep in his own time—roots which embrace the most vulgar and commonplace fantasies and aspirations."

I wrote my Ph.D. dissertation on *Li'l Abner,* and was convinced that popular culture, in general, and the comics, in particular, often were valid and sometimes great works of art (think of *Krazy Kat* and countless other comics) and also useful in that they provided insights into popular values and beliefs. The professors on my dissertation committee regarded my interest in the comics as a bit offbeat and bewildering. In those days, writing about a comic strip read by 200 million people daily seemed beyond the pale. Most of my colleagues in academe considered my interest in the comics to be a sign of immaturity. We are talking about the late 1960s. Now there is great interest in comics and popular culture.

When I decided to write a book on the comics, *The Comic-Stripped American,* if I recall correctly, I contacted Stan Lee and we had a bit of a

correspondence over the years. He sent me a dozen copies of an issue – one of his *Spider-Man* or *Fantastic Four* episodes – that I used in my class on popular culture. I had my students read the issue and then had them over to my house where I brought in a psychiatrist to talk about what he saw in the episode.

I have a chapter in the book on Lee titled "Marvel Comics: Machines, Monsters and the Myth of America," in which I wrote about the significance of the grotesque in Marvel Comics, the psychoanalytic significance of monsters found in comics (and other forms of popular culture), and of the mythic significance of Lee's creations. What we have to realize is that Stan Lee is one of the great mythmakers in American culture and he has been creating mythic figures for around 70 years. I can remember how he struggled to get film companies to make a film of *Spider-Man*, but they were all afraid of doing so. When someone was adventurous enough to make a film with one of his characters, they made a fortune.

In 1984, I was a visiting professor at the Annenberg School at the University of Southern California. I had a class of 200 students in a course dealing with popular culture and the arts. I invited Stan to give a lecture and he was kind enough to do so. At the time he got rather large lecture fees, but he gave this talk for free. What was astounding to me is that after he gave a speech about his work as a writer of comic strip adventures, I opened up the class for questions. Not a single student had a question. I was absolutely astounded. So, I asked Lee a few questions, and then took him for lunch at the Faculty club. This was, of course, years before the first *Spider-Man* movie.

One other amusing thing related to my friendship with Stan Lee. I asked him to write an introduction to one of my books and he was kind enough to write a couple of pages and send it to me. When I told my publisher I had an introduction from Stan Lee, he was unimpressed and refused to use it. I can imagine what was going on in his head: "Who

wants to use an introduction from a guy who writes comics? What kind of a fool does Berger think I am?"

A number of years ago, one of the TV networks did a report on Lee. They interviewed me about him. I explained that in my opinion Lee is one of the most important writers of the last 50 years or so, who has generated an amazing modern sci-fi mythology.

I bumped into Lee in Europe at a conference on comics 10 or 20 years ago. And he came to Sausalito once, for some reason, and we had lunch at a seafood restaurant. That's the last time I saw him.

If I recall correctly, he has a Rolls Royce. So he was right. There is money in the comics.

Face Front, True Believers!: Stan Lee and the Gen X Trinity

JEFF MASSEY AND BRIAN COGAN

Make mine Marvel!

Avoid Brand Echh!

Win a Coveted No-Prize!

Accepteth no substitutes!

Excelsior!

Before Whedon, before Lucas, even before Roddenberry, there was Lieber: world-creator, comic huckster, bombastic barker, and unifying voice behind the early Marvel Universe. Stanley Martin Lieber—better known to the world as Stan "The Man" Lee—gets a lot of flak from comic fans nowadays. And maybe some of that is deserved. He takes a lot of credit; he deserves a lot of it. But even if he only created half of what he claims, he'd still be twice as prolific as any mere mortal. Sure, he's slung the hyperbole a bit thick now and again, and he's nothing if not self-aggrandizing, but it's hard to deny the impact of Stan Lee has had on nerd culture.

In fact, for two New York lads coming of age in the Bronze Age—well, back in the early Seventies, at any rate—Stan Lee was an essential part of what Burt Ward would have undoubtedly called the "Holy Nerd Trinity!": Monty Python, Dr. Demento, and Stan Lee.

Monty Python: the surreal God-Fathers of Comedy!

Dr. Demento: the invisible Voice of Novelty Music!

Stan "The Man" Lee: the two-dimensional Face of Marvel
Comics!

Ahhhh…just thinking about these elder gods makes us want to break out a
long box, crank the TV tuner to PBS, and plug our crumbling earphones
into the old Walkman. True, some Gen Xers also knelt at the altars of *Star
Trek* (1966), or *D&D* (1974), or even *Star Wars* (1976), but Roddenberry,
Gygax, and Lucas remained distant figures subsumed by the glory of their
own creations. Of course, Roddenberry—the man—would oft rub elbows
with fans at cons, but for a self-avowed humanist he was mighty preachy
(if you wanted overt moral lessons, you may as well join a real religion);
"Jediism" may qualify as a religion on census forms nowadays, but fans
revile as much as they revere Lucas (real gods don't revise the Bible *every
five years*, George!); and Gygax—like every good Dungeon Master—was
clearly an evil bastard, when you get down to it (face facts: it's hard to
worship the man who's hurling an endless stream of rabid kobolds at you
from behind a tri-fold screen). Geeks may have adored the worlds that
these three SFF folks created, but we never worshiped the creators
themselves. On the other hand, the mathematically impossible Nerd
Trinity of Python, Demento, and Lee—five British thespians, two
Californians (an animator and a DJ), and a Gothamite ink-slinger—were
inspirational geek gods unto themselves. We idolized them as the modern
gods of the Idiot Box, the Boom Box, and the Long Box.

   The Pythons—six acerbic "Brits"[1] who invaded our televisions
through the magic portal of PBS—were an Olympian mini-pantheon,
recognized as comic gods (or comic rock stars, which is pretty damn
close) in 1970s America; disciples would flock to their live shows like
Ancient Greek petitioners to the Pythian Oracle at Delphi. (And, like the
Delphic Oracle—who breathed in the vapors of the giant python below her
feet—many a Monty devotee approached their altar stoned.) Every

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[1] We know: Gilliam is a weirdo on many levels, least of all his shifting nationality.

Pythonic utterance—received from that ancient holy land (England)—demanded repetition, every sketch deemed scripture to be memorized and recited in endless litanies of "Nudge, nudge," "Ni!" and "This is an Ex-Parrot!!!" As their live shows (from *Hollywood Bowl* to the O2 reunion in London) attest, human disciples of Monty Python often knew the holy writ as well as their creators. Like the Pythian Oracle, the Pythons spoke in tongues, a six-headed god with a legion of voices: Pepperpots and Gumbys and Upper-Class Twits and interrupting Colonels and "so-called" Cardinal Richelieus and Dennis Moores and at least four Yorkshiremen. And though they were six (Chapman, Cleese, Idle, Jones, Gilliam, and Palin) they were simultaneously one (the full Monty): their collective identity revealed their hidden divinity, surely, as the Tiamat of Comedy. In a weird way (is there any other?), the Pythons *were* comedy; all of their humor—even the failed bits—is them: hence the necessary coinage of "pythonesque" to define all such surreal comic antics. They defined their own genre as creator gods whose creations always bear the image of their maker. In short, they were the GOD-the-FATHERS of comedy. Say no more!

As the Pythons were to comedy, so Dr. Demento was to music: from his distant perch out in Culver City, California, Barret Eugene Hansen delivered unto us all the dumb ditties, funky favorites, and kooky tunes that ever existed…even if he had never written a novelty record himself.[2] The Demented One spoke to us late at night, delivering his stereophonic message right into our rooms, echoing off our sci-fi posters, comic books, and half-painted lead figures; fortunately, this voice in our headphones didn't compel us to burn things. Instead, Demento lorded over the nerd-waves, broadcasting esoteric weirdness and bizarre toonage that—simply by being aware of its existence—solidified your status among other nerds. If you could stay up late enough to tape the Funny Five on a Sunday night,

[2] Granted, he released a fine cover of the Benny Bell/Paul Wynn classic, "Shaving Cream." Be nice and clean!

you were A) alone on a Sunday night, and B) hip for the week…among a very limited clique who, like you, were also alone on a Sunday night. The next day at school you collectively sniggered at the hidden innuendoes of "Fish Heads," lauded the acerbic wit of Tom Lehrer, and argued whether that young upstart "Weird Al" would ever get the national recognition he so surely deserved. All those study-hall homilies arose because of the Good Doctor, the VOICE of novelty music, the disembodied disseminator of others' words, the invisible rider on the airwaves: he was the HOLY SPIRIT of novelty music. Python compelled us to repeat the gospels; Demento reminded us to sing the song of our collective passion. And, of course, to always, always, staaaaay deeeeeemented!

Which leaves Stan "The Man" Lee…the final third of our Gen X godhead. In the 1960s and 1970s, Stan made comic books—a medium simultaneously dismissed as "kid's stuff" and reviled as the "seduction of the innocent"—cool again. And it wasn't "just" that he co-created Spider-Man, the Avengers, the FF and every third superhero on the big screen nowadays; Stan was a creator, sure, but he was also the face of Marvel and the very embodiment of Comics Culture.[3] Stan spoke to his legions—the Mighty Marvel Marching Society—from a Soapbox that echoed the self-aware bombast of vaudeville and circus sideshows. He was a hustler and a proselytizer. We knew he sold snake oil, and we lined up before him just the same. He urged us—the shy loners browsing the spinner rack at 7-11—to "face front, true believer!," to join *FOOM*,[4] to receive from him his ultimate blessing: the Mighty Marvel No-Prize! Like any good preacher, Stan even had his own Latin catch phrase: EXCELSIOR! Granted, he stole his grandiloquent sign-off from the New York State motto, but more kids knew it coming from Stan than from any flag hung in

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[3] No one at Marvel's Distinguished Competition came close to the awe-inspiring locution of Stan Lee, as much as "avuncular" Julius Schwartz may have tried.
[4] FOOM = "Friends of Ol' Marvel"—the company's second in-house fan club.

a schoolroom cafeteria. In short, Stan Lee was the mortal face of the comic book creator-god, the alliterative voice of the brand, the shepherd leading the flock. He was, in his heyday, the JESUS CHRIST of comics.[5] I mean, his nickname was "The Man"! What more proof do you need of his demi-divinity? Not convinced? Remember the Marvel Bullpen? Back when the "Big Three" were Jack "The King" Kirby, Stan "The Man" Lee, and "Shy" Steve Ditko? It doesn't get much more Biblical than that, folks. For social misfits born at the close of the Silver Age, the Nerd Trinity wasn't a cult…but it wasn't not a cult, either.

How cool is that? Actually…not very. Not at the time. It didn't make you many new friends and it certainly didn't help your social standing in junior high school. Nerd clout was not cultural currency back then, alas. Geek Guys didn't self-identify so much as we were violently labeled by self-proclaimed cool kids: jocks and cheerleaders and other stereotypical campus dinosaurs. Geek Girls in the 1970s didn't describe themselves as such because the term hadn't even been coined yet. (Comic shops in the Seventies were generally dingy aisles of long boxes reeking of male sweat and female exclusion.) "Geek," "nerd," and "dork" remained pejoratives. Hell, the first significant movie to "get" nerd culture, *Revenge of the Nerds*, didn't come out until 1984. Nineteen Eighty Four! Until then, nerds in pop culture simply didn't win the girl, save the day, or deserve that awesome slow clap. Except in the comics. And that's largely due to Stan Lee.

Much ink has been spilled articulating the ideological differences between Marvel and DC. But when Stan was in charge, Marvel was simply younger, hipper, and more sympathetic than their "Distinguished Competition." The early heroes of the Marvel Universe weren't über-powerful aliens, Amazon princesses, or millionaire playboys. The pantheon that Stan created (and/or co-created: trinitarian theology is hard math!) were overtly human, secretly powerful, openly mistrusted, down-

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[5] Or at least a BRIAN.

to-earth, and god-like…kinda like that Jesus guy. Marvel heroes were regular joes and schmoes (Ben Grimm, the rough and tumble mook from Yancy Street; Steve Rogers, the original 98-pound weakling), awkward teens and college kids (brash rebel Johnny Storm; all those socially insecure X-Men), or overly intellectual types (nebbishy scientists like Reed Richards and Bruce Banner or ironically infirm physicians like Steven Strange and Donald Blake). Compared to flying Boy Scouts, high-born warrior-princesses, and brooding Hollywood hunks, Marvel superheroes were fringe figures at best: dorks and outcasts, the lot of them.

But the key guy, the number one Marvel hero, the cornerstone of the nascent empire, was a nerd *par excellence*: Peter Parker, the Amazing[6] Spider-Man! An intellectual high school nerd, ridiculed by the cool kids (oooh, that Flash Thompson!), rebuffed by the popular girls, fascinated by science, devoted to his elders, broke as fuck and living in Queens…Parker was a *teen intellectual schmoe*: a nerd trinity unto himself, really. It's as though Stan had a camera in the bedroom of every downtrodden geeky kid in America.[7] Parker looked like us (glasses: a necessity for dork-hood at the time—not some lame "disguise" copped by folks with 20/20 x-ray vision); Parker sounded like us (talking "smart" has never been socially cool, kids); and Parker acted like us (always doing one thing while thinking about another). In short, Stan knew geekdom, Stan wrote geekdom, and Stan exalted geekdom. He never stopped selling the word of the nerd—and selling it hard. There's a word for that: evangelism.

Marvel Comics has had many leaders: CEOs, Editors-in-Chief, and ad-men. Some have been comics creators, some have been hucksters, some have been unapologetic business types. None—*none*—will ever inspire the devotion of fans that way that Stan Lee did. Like Demento and Python, Stan delivered a gospel that made us all collectively say: "finally, something made *for us*." For the geeks and nerds and losers and schmoes

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[6] See also: Spectacular! Sensational! Superior!?...well, two out of three, anyway.

[7] But let's be clear, lest the ghost of Herr Wertham rise again: he didn't.

who always knew we had a spark of something awesome in us that no one else got. Stan "The Man" Lee was a geek god come to walk among us in human form, the living embodiment of comic nerdom.

Without Monty Python, nerds of a certain age would have had no unifying rituals to recite, no common gospel to draw us together; without Dr. Demento, we'd have no music in our souls. And without Stan Lee, we'd all still be getting pantsed, swirlied, and noogied. Like the heroes he co-created, like that Jesus guy he emulated, Stan "The Man" came to earth and saved the day. Amen.

Or, as Stan would have undoubtedly, unabashedly, and proudly shouted: **'Nuff said!**

What if Stan Lee didn't change his name? [1]

JEFF MCLAUGHLIN

When we think of Stan Lee, we don't usually think of him being a poet (although I think he really is) but first as the co-creator of Spider-Man and many other superheroes; a writer, and then as a business man, and then as a first hesitant but then a very willing spokesperson for the entire mainstream American Comic book industry. All of this came about after he changed his name. What would have happened if Lee didn't do this and instead achieved his original stated goal of writing the Great American Novel?

Let's begin first with a name…

I wonder what affect changing your name has on you. Are you still the same person as before? Does your sense of identity or self change? Think of all those actors and actresses who have changed their names. Are they putting on a new mask on top of the old one? Marilyn Monroe was born Norma Jeane Mortenson would she be the same sex symbol? Boris Karloff was born William Henry Pratt, would he still be as scary?

Van Damme was born Jean-Claude Camille François Van Varenberg
Mel Brooks was born Melvin James Kaminsky
Gene Wilder was born Jerome Silberman
Sigourney Weaver was born Susan Alexandra Weaver
Sting was born Gordon Matthew Sumner

[1] I hope you appreciate the fun allusion. I don't seriously think that what follows in this paper would have actually occurred…hence the counterfactual question: What if? If you are not familiar with what I am alluding to simply google: What If comics.

And on and on.

The reasons for the name changes of so many famous faces are various. These include making it easier for American audiences to pronounce, to sound less "ethnic" (and more "WASPy"), to be more "interesting," to fit in better with whatever field the person is in, and to not be confused with someone else with a similar name. In many cases a name change became a game-changer.

Many people know that comic book creator and writer Stan Lee changed his name from Stanley Martin Lieber.[2] His brother Larry on the other hand, an extremely talented comic book artist himself, kept the surname. The week before writing this think piece, I happened to be in a grocery store and the cashier remarked, "It's amazing to think that Stan Lee is 93-years old! (Why she said this is another story). I smiled and nodded, then her colleague at the next till over said: "Stanley who?" The response was: "No, Stan Lee, the comic book guy. You don't know who Stan Lee is?"

Although it is somewhat sad for anyone to feel that they have to lose the name they are born with in order to succeed,[3] why would someone adopt a name change so that it sounds like just one name (like Sting perhaps or "Jeff Frey") and thereby create confusion? (I love my last name thank you very much.) Well, given the times in the 1940's; given the disapproval of "non-American" sounding names and given the fact that being in the comic book business was seen as being on par with being in the pornography business, one can understand why one may wish to have a secret identity.

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[2] Stan adopted this as his pen name in 1941 for his first comic book publication: a story in *Captain America Comics* #3. *Stan Lee: Conversations*, edited by Jeff McLaughlin University Press of Mississippi, 2007, xv.

[3] I am assuming that the names people are given are good names, names that loving parents wish to give and not silly names like "treestump" or "34x."

Indeed, other folks who now have legendary status in the comic book field changed their names as well – typically to Anglicize it. Thus Jacob Kurtzberg became Jack Kirby, Nicholas Viscardi became Nick Cardy, etc. Stan wanted to keep his original name, his "real" name for the Great American Novel he was going to write, which suggests that if and when he achieved that level of success, it was the name he was given that he wanted the world to know. He could hide behind "Lee" until then. But which legacy would have been better: the "book book" by Stanley Lieber or the comic book by Stan Lee?

I wish to present a utilitarian point of view that clearly favors the latter. I'm glad Lee didn't write the great American novel because he has contributed more to popular culture than he could have dreamt of otherwise. This assessment in turn leads us to the much bigger question of how do we measure the value of art. And this in turn leads to fun questions like: Would the world be a better place with a Mona Lisa than without? What if the painting was kept in secret and only the person who possessed it knew of its existence? What if knowledge of its existence died with Van Gogh? I will leave these for your consideration at your next dinner party.

As far as I know, the closest Stan Lee has come to writing a serious novel is his long poem "God Woke." Lee is well known for his way with, and his love of, words. He likes how they sound, he likes how they flow and even how they look on a page. Even though he was so busy writing scripts and meeting daily deadlines, he spent a great deal of time picking out just the right text to carry the story forward, to excite the comic book reader, to make everything thrilling, amazing, and fantastic. Once and a while he could have let things slide, but that wasn't his style.

With "God Woke," Lee wasn't putting words into one of Marvel's superheroes for next month's issue. And my evidence for its personally perceived significance comes from his own words as he has referred to this work as his "the most important thing" and "my all-time classic." [4]

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[4] *Stan Lee: Conversations*, 195.

Yet, for some reason, although it was written circa 1970, it wasn't published until some 37 years later; and it had only been recited in public once (by his wife and daughter at "A Night with Stan Lee" at Carnegie Hall in 1972).[5]

Lee imagines God returning to earth to look over His creation. But this God is clearly not the one that fits the typical Judeo-Christian portrayal for His *return* to Earth is due to a *vague recollection*. Having an imperfect memory is not something an all-powerful deity would have, nor would there be any sense of His desire to "return," since this would mean he departed, and yet the Judeo-Christian God is considered to be omnipresent in our affairs:

God Woke
>   He stretched and yawned and looked around
>   Haunted by a thought unfound
>   A vagrant thought that would not die.

What He hears is the constantly disappointing clash and din of selfish human activity:
>   A billion bodies ever bending
>   A billion voices never ending.
>   Give me, get me, grant me, let me, love me, free me, hear me, see me.

This God reflects upon what he sees and is critical of not only it, but of himself:
>   Who else but a fool
>   Would create mortal man
>   And then be expected to tend him
>   Mend him

[5] Ibid., xvii

> Cry for him
> Die for him
> Over and over and over again.
>
> God Sighed.

God views humanity with a degree of spite and anger that seems to be drawn from his disappointment. His disappointments are as lengthy as the poem. And it is a long poem.

Ultimately before He leaves:
> He looked His last at man so small
> So lately risen, so soon to fall.
> He looked his last and had to know
> Whose fault this anguish, this mortal woe?
> Had man failed maker, or maker man?
> Who was the planner and whose the plan?
> He looked his last, then turned aside.
> He knew the answer.
> That's why
> God cried.[6]

Why would someone who has written millions of words leave something that he considered to be so important unpublished for so long; something which seems to ache in its realizations and observations of things gone bad and opportunities lost. Perhaps he couldn't find a proper venue for it. Perhaps it was too controversial. Perhaps it was too serious for someone who was known the world over as "Stan the Man." Before we consider this to be what he might have saved Lieber for, bear with me. I think it could have fit within the Marvel Universe.

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[6] Ibid., 219-226.

Like a comic book aimed at an older audience, the lamentations expressed in "God Woke" could be blended with visually dynamic, Jack Kirby-created character: the Silver Surfer. Here is part of the Surfer's official story:

> Norrin [Radd's] life changed forever when a menacing alien spacecraft pierced Zenn-La's long-neglected defense systems. Convincing a Council of Scientists member to provide him with a spaceship, Radd soon confronted the invader, Galactus, who intended to consume Zenn-La. Radd offered to become his herald and seek out new worlds for him in exchange for Galactus sparing Zenn-La. Galactus agreed, transforming Radd into a silver-skinned, cosmic-powered super-being patterned after an adolescent fantasy plucked from Norrin's memories. Known thereafter as the Silver Surfer because of the silvery flying board he rode, Radd departed Zenn-La with Galactus.[7]

After discovering Earth, and all that humanity is and can be, the Silver Surfer turns against Galactus, who then traps him on our planet. The Silver Surfer then wanders the globe, often victimized himself, trying to both aid and understand human beings. Lee states:

> I was trying to make the Surfer a pure innocent who is trying to help people and is being misunderstood and persecuted for the very things he is trying to do, which are totally good and unselfish.[8]

The Surfer was Lee's mouthpiece. It allowed him to say what he personally felt. So strong was his own personal connection to the Surfer,

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[7] http://marvel.com/universe/Silver_Surfer visited 9/21/2016.
[8] An Interview with Stan Lee, Leonard Pits Jr. in *Stan Lee: Conversations*, 98.

that while he remained at Marvel, Lee passed down an edict that no one would write Silver Surfer but him.[9]

So here we have a being, the ultimate outsider, who has already personally suffered to save his own, visiting Earth making observations and criticisms about how humans are always fighting and this same being is profoundly saddened over the fact human beings don't realize that they are living in a paradisiac world. It sounds much like what the poem attempts to capture. Which only makes sense: Lee is expressing deep concerns and making harsh judgments about humanity in "God Woke." He sees the Surfer as a means to express similar thoughts in comic book form.[10]

Given that the Surfer is personally connected to Lee in ways that his other characters are not (they have their own lives to live, as it were, and as such, are more apt to have their own views), and given that the Surfer's melancholic meanderings and musings sound similar to those of Lee's God, as well as that the Surfer speaks for a Celestial Being (as it were), a "graphic poem" could have been made of *God Woke* that, if tweaked appropriately, could have spoken to a wide audience.

Could this graphic poem as I'm calling it have been Lee's Great American work? Whether it would have been a critical or financial success is of course impossible to tell. For Lee, if it had been successful, it would have been nice, but if it wasn't meant to be, his past behavior shows that he would have just moved on. Lee was constantly creating and co-creating characters and comic book series; if it didn't catch on and sell well, he moved on to try something else. Lee is always looking forward, never behind – this is both a business and creative imperative. He was never one to rest on his laurels. Lee in fact is never one to rest period.

[9] Ibid.
[10] Obviously in no sense am I comparing the Surfer to a deity – he nevers speaks as one, or as some sort of ultimate celestial being (unlike say, The Watcher).

But if "God Woke" were adapted to fit into Lee's creative universe, he surely would have to stick with Lee (and not Lieber), because the former name by itself sells books. "Stan Lee" is a world famous brand,[11] which is why "Stan Lee Presents" appears as a common introduction on page one of all those Marvel comics.

Let's do thought experiment and ask: What would have happened if Lee had stayed Lieber and only wrote the Great American Novel or achieved his goal and then used Lieber like David John Moore Cornwell uses John Le Carre. What would happen? Ideally,

- He'd sell a lot of copies of that book.
- There'd be a time when the book would be read by most everyone in school (or in a university classroom).
- There'd be CliffsNotes written summarizing it for kids who didn't read it and yet needed to write an essay on it by tomorrow.
- There'd be an academic text or two examining it.
- A film and/or theatrical adaptation.
- He'd do a book tour.
- He'd do book readings.
- Book signings and a handful of gushing fans and folks who genuinely were personally affected by the words on the page.
- He might be asked to mentor students.
- He might be asked to write guest articles.
- Doctoral dissertations would be written about the work.
- Professors would give conference papers about it.

Or it might be recognized years after his passing. Or worse: it could be forgotten like so many other brilliant works. It would be like our Mona Lisa never being seen…

[11] Trying to keep up to this high standard must be challenging. 'nuff said.

Ideally, it would be a success, but could it change the world the way he, and his colleagues, and those before him and those after him changed the North American cultural landscape with the lowly comic book? As you can guess, my conclusion is going to be "no" and that the way it changed was in a good way, a way that far outweighs what might have been if the original reason to remain to be called Mr. Lieber had come to pass.

For example, by writing comic books and creating superhero characters, Lee would inspire and facilitate people to let their imagination soar. Children would play games pretending to be the characters. There would be an unending list of spin-offs to continue the sense of joy: toys and all sorts of household items; movies, plays, theme parks. (Well, right now, this sounds very much like the *Harry Potter* books or *Lord of The Rings* trilogy doesn't it? Not that that's bad!) It would provide the means for people to learn how to read and become visually literate, and those who can't, it allows them to follow a story through pictures. It will create a love of wanting to read more (including perhaps those great American novels!) It creates fictional worlds within worlds and a mythology that can be revisited endlessly from many different points of view. It would present an ever changing list of narrative themes. It will broaden one's horizon and open one's mind. It can teach morals where good ultimately wins over evil. It could engage young readers in a way where their own personal favourites would be adopted and followed as if they were real people – real heroes in their lives. It would present different stories and different views of those same favorite characters as they are written and drawn by different individuals. It will make people smile more. It will allow them to escape. It will create communities where people can feel safe for feeling different. It would generate and promote fun! It would explore all topics –

and even save lives![12] And, it would welcome all new comers with open arms.

Obviously, Stan Lee did not do any of this on his own. This is why legacy of the Lee's and the Kirby's and the thousands of men and women in comic books over the decades deserve far greater appreciation for creating and bringing such a "simple" entertainment to the world.

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[12] Craig Yoe and his partner Clizia Gussoni have worked with the soap company Lifebuoy to create a program with Unilever based upon using comics to educate children and distribute life-saving soap through a cast of superheroic characters known as The School of 5.

> These 5 characters are specifically designed taking children's needs in mind to establish a routine of hand-washing that could protect them from death by diarrhea-related illnesses and pneumonia, illnesses which claim the lives of 1.7 million children every year. Spanning 23 countries and 19 languages, The School of 5 reaches children through comics and multi-media outreach and is the largest "hygiene behavior change" program in the world." The School Of 5 Superhero Comic Program Saves The Lives Of Children In 23 Countries – Craig Yoe In The Bleeding Cool Interview by Hannah Means Shannon

Posted July 21, 2014 http://www.bleedingcool.com/2014/07/21/the-school-of-5-superhero-comic-program-saves-the-lives-of-children-in-23-countries-craig-yoe-in-the-bleeding-cool-interview/

Hung Up on Superhero Sex Organs? Why *Mallrats* Remains
Stan Lee's Greatest Movie Role

JOHN KENNETH MUIR

In every one of their big budget movie blockbusters since the 21st
century began, the producers behind the MCU (Marvel Cinematic
Universe) have seen fit to give Stan Lee, the so-called "Father of Modern
Comics," a cameo role.

If you blink, you might miss him, but Lee has been a hog-dog vender
in *X-Men* (2002), a security guard in *The Hulk* (2003), a mail carrier in
The Fantastic Four (2005), and a Federal Express delivery man in *Thor*
(2011), to name just a few of his blue-collar cameos. When Lee isn't cast
as a literal face-in-the-crowd (*Spider-Man* [2002]), he is often instead
made-up or costumed to resemble some other public figure we also
recognize. He was a lookalike of Hugh Hefner in *Iron Man* (2008), and a
dead ringer for Larry King in *Iron Man 2* (2010).

The joke in both circumstances is that a figure of supreme importance
in Marvel Comics' history has been reduced to playing either an utterly
anonymous everyman role or one in which his fame or notoriety is
undercut by Lee's passing resemblance to someone else of the celebrity
class. In virtually all such MCU examples, audiences who recognize Stan
Lee are asked to regard him as the equivalent of a living "Easter Egg."

So even though Lee is known by all comic-book fans – and beloved by
most of them – his creative contributions to the actual blockbuster movies
of the Marvel Shared Universe are minimal. He doesn't direct the films.
He doesn't write them, either. Instead, Lee serves as an "executive
producer" and a drive-by cameo machine. Except on very rare occasions,
his presence doesn't move a movie narrative toward its conclusion, or turn
a tale in a significant way. One might even conclude that Lee appears in

these cameos to satisfy one important demographic group: *the fans*. There is no need to offend comic readers, after all, by failing to pay homage to the (co) creator of the likes of Spider-Man, the Hulk, Iron Man, the Fantastic Four, and The X-Men, right?

Ironically, if one seeks to locate a Stan Lee movie performance that accurately reflects his position and legacy in comic book history, one must search outside the now-ubiquitous MCU. More than 20 years ago, in 1995, Lee had a vital supporting role in director Kevin Smith's slacker coming-of-age comedy *Mallrats.* There, he gave sage dating advice to the film's young, love-struck potagonist, Brodie Bruce (Jason Lee).

Why did this cameo – *one set in a movie filled with fart and dick jokes* – capture the essence of Lee's importance to comic-book history so well?

There are two reasons, primarily.

First, Lee is revered by fans because in the early 1960s he developed superheroes for Marvel who were three-dimensional people. His writing efforts concentrated on characters like Peter Parker, who was going through adolescence, or The X-Men, mutants who felt like outsiders in their own world. Because of this grounded approach in the fantasy genre, the disenfranchised youth and ethnic co-cultures of the turbulent Vietnam Era found themselves drawn to Lee's characters, and to his world view. They found in his comics many characters they could relate to or empathize with.

In the mid-1990s, following the success of his independent comedy, *Clerks* (1994), Kevin Smith cast Stan Lee as himself in *Mallrats.* There, Lee offered the avuncular and funny voice for the same disenfranchised groups. Specifically, Lee was cast as a friend and father figure to the adolescents or young adults. And even though the film's script made jokes about a competition between Stan Lee and Mick Jagger regarding their sexual conquests, Lee's presence and persona were gentle, even sweet. And, his appearance in the film moved the narrative significantly toward

the dramatic denouement. Lee's advice came in handy for Brodie as the young man sought to win back the young woman he had lost.

The second reason Stan Lee's role in *Mallrats* remains significant is that alone among his movie roles, it contextualizes his career achievements in comic-books, and reveals how those achievements have affected "the next generation." Kevin Smith is widely known as a fan of the films of George Lucas, for example. Lucas's first successful film was 1973's *American Graffiti,* a coming-of-age tale which saw a young, troubled man, much like Brodie in *Mallrat*s, seeking to win the love of a young woman – and encountering a pop culture idol on his quest.

In the case of *American Graffiti,* the young man, Curt, was played by Richard Dreyfuss, and the icon who advised him was radio deejay Wolfman Jack (1938-1995). According to author Robert Meyerowitz of *The Phoenix New Times*, the radio personality was considered to have provided the "soundtrack to adolescent longing" for the American generation that grew up with hot rods, and in the tradition of "cruising" in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

In *American Graffiti*, Wolfman Jack implored Curt to see the world, to get out of his small town and experience life before it was too late. In *Mallrats*, Stan Lee similarly represents the voice of wisdom, and his scene clearly alludes to the Wolfman Jack scene in the Lucas film. Specifically, Lee's advice concerns relating to people and honoring an important relationship.

In particular, Lee recounts the story of a lost romantic love, and how his upset at the end of that relationship informed the comics we have loved so much over the last 50 years. Lee talks about Doctor Doom's body armor, for instance, and the Hulk's anger. He relates both of those things to his own emotions, and his feelings about shutting out the larger world after failing in an important relationship. Lee's love story is made-up expressly for the movie, but it nonetheless honors what made Lee's contributions to the medium of superhero comics so unforgettable. We

could always relate to the heroes and villains, and understand that we had the same hurts and pains that they experienced.

Stan Lee's presence in *Mallrats* reveals Kevin Smith's self-reflexive approach to filmmaking, and his penchant for incorporating references to a key pop culture influence (such as *Star Wars* [1977]). It reflects the idea that both Wolfman Jack and Stan Lee, perhaps unwittingly, became important voices for a generation. Adolescents spent time alone in the car with Wolfman Jack's voice on the radio during the golden age of cruising. Other adolescents spent time alone in their bedroom, or in the library, or at restaurants, reading Lee's comics, encountering his characters. Listening to the radio in a car and reading a comic book before going to sleep might both be termed intimate acts. They are one-on-one, immersive activities. It's just us and the voice on the radio, or the words on a comic-book page. A direct connection is forged.

Given Lee's importance to Kevin Smith's narrative, it is not surprising that Lee reported to writer Russ Burlingame of *Comicbook/Marvel* in June 2016 that *Mallrats* is his favorite film performance. In this case, Stan Lee still got to be part of a joke. Only here he is the one telling that joke. And his jokes, rather than being one-off Easter Eggs, remind audiences of what he had achieved at Marvel; how he had used human life experience to render "real" and three-dimensional a whole generation of superheroes.

Lee's role in *Mallrats* is of value too, because Lee, speaking Smith's words, finds a way in his avuncular line readings to both honor the fans and poke fun at their passion. For instance, he notes that Brodie is obsessed with superhero sex organs. That obsession may not have arisen at all, however, without Lee's career long-held edict not to dumb down superheroes or talk down to readers. His reading of the film's dialogue suggests, perhaps, at least a hesitation about the outcome of his life's work. But again, Lee's fans and readers are like the very heroes he created: curious about life and love, and engaged in the difficult process of growing up.

For the next several years, Lee will no doubt continue to pop up regularly – and predictably – in MCU movies, playing throwaway roles, or reminding us he's still with us. But for the fans that grew up with Stan Lee's words and his ideas, his 1995 *Mallrats* appearance best reminds us of his position and importance in the Marvel galactic firmament.

In Praise of Heroes

ROBERT MCPARLAND

Heroes. They are stirred by events into action, summoned to adventure. Fire erupts. Clouds consume. Signals are sent and planes take to the sky. Villains rise from the shadows. Darkness covers the face of the earth. Then heroes appear: strong, brave, and resilient. With determined motion they act, affirming their sense of duty. In those moments that call upon their concern, in those cataclysmic breaks from every-day life – 9/11, December 7, 1941 – they respond with resolve, self-sacrifice, and courage.

In a pragmatic, technological world, the human spirit cries out for wonder and heroism. It longs for imaginative creators like Stan Lee who conjure dazzling archetypal heroes. When the world is too much with us, as Wordsworth once said, a truly imaginative spirit can help us to again see Proteus rising from the sea or hear old Triton blowing his horn. Called into service in 1942, Stan Lee, while mending communications equipment for Signal Corps and later creating military training manuals, fostered the imagination that would bring us Spider-Man, Iron Man, Daredevil, the X-Men, the Hulk, Thor, and other extraordinary heroes. In the coming years, he not only fostered an entertainment enterprise, he enlivened imaginations and lifted our sense of wonder, our appreciation of heroism and uncommon resolve.

There is the seed of courage within us, a mirror of empathy for each other. How else would a mother lift her child from disappointment? Why else would a firefighter charge into a burning building to save a life? What else would prompt a soldier to sacrifice for a comrade in arms? For all our competition, atomization, conflict, and unreason, there is altruism, the pulse of empathy. It puzzled Thomas Henry Huxley, "Darwin's bulldog," who saw it as a means of survival of the species. Altruism, empathy, and heroism seem to run counter to Herbert Spencer's insistence that

biological life is about "survival of the fittest." Yet, our fittest, our heroes, act with honor on behalf of nation and community and ever go beyond themselves.

We need the awesome prowess and vitality of archetypal heroes for they urge among us the best of human possibility: integrity, concern, and a fighting spirit. In all their comic brightness, they sparkle from the ingenuity of the artist that casts them forth. With splash, dash, and drama, they surprise us, awe us, and stir our sense of the sublime.

Stan Lee's archetypal heroes revive the mythopoeic imagination in contemporary readers and filmgoers. They are among our communal stories on bright illustrated pages; the stories we watch and listen to around the fire of the television or movie screen. Sir James Frazer, in *The Golden Bough* (1890) showed us that ancient myths have similarities across cultures. Myths and their heroes, he revealed, were something more than ways to dramatize natural phenomena that could hardly be explained otherwise. The psychologist Carl Jung claimed that these archetypes spring from the collective unconscious. Northrup Frye, in *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957), attempted to relate the underlying forms of comedy and tragedy to themes of death and resurrection in the seasons of the year. The human imagination seems to be constituted in such a way that it works with certain shapes, images, themes, and "elemental ideas," asserted the German ethnologist Adolf Bastian (1826-1905). Joseph Campbell, in his fascinating study *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949) identified "the monomyth," a universal story pattern. The hero is called to adventure, experiences an initiation and rising fortunes, then faces what Aristotle called *peripeteia*, or a reversal of fortunes. Heroes face monsters, twisting plots, fierce conflicts, and they make thrilling escapes. When all seems lost, against impossible odds, the hero emerges. From imminent loss, constriction, or imprisonment he or she breaks free, rises to the challenge, and "saves the day." He brings home what Campbell called "a boon," a gift to society. These are the accomplishments of the grand heroes of

comic book fame, the protagonists of film and story. Perhaps, they are also the quests and potentials within our students, our friends, our neighbors, who may be called at some point in their lives to an unexpected and uncommon heroism.

The novelist Charles Dickens begins *David Copperfield* (1850) with David's voice: "Whether I shall become the hero of my own life, these pages must show." The pages of Stan Lee's life began similarly in New York. Then, on one apparently ordinary day, he wrote notes for Captain America. Soon he had devised that hero's signature: a defensive shield became an offensive weapon to fling at the enemy. Its forceful flight was perhaps paradigmatic of the entry of American forces into the war in Europe and the Pacific. In Signal Corps they designated Stan Lee as "playwright," like Robert Sherwood, or Irwin Shaw. He repaired equipment and telephone poles and he wrote copy for training films. However, behind the prosaic tasks lay a fierce imagination. Spider-Man would one day cross the heights, surmount those wires, and climb into the public sphere.

Stan Lee's characters today are as well-known as any in the public imagination. Recently, I entered a classroom to teach a class and saw on the blackboard, in neat chalk swirls of penmanship, a writing-prompt that the teacher who had been there before me had written: What is your idea of a hero? So, I asked my class that question also and I mentioned Stan Lee and his characters. One of the students then reminded us: some of Stan Lee's characters are injured when they are young. They are thoroughly human, as well as heroic. Daredevil, for example, is blinded while helping someone and he is vulnerable: he gets angry; he falls in love. Yet, he is daring, bold, and tenacious. He perhaps overcompensates, like the Olympic champion who is told she will have difficulty walking, but who faces the challenges and learns to run and runs swiftly and well. The hero is fearless and honorable. Hector appears: a flash from a cloud.

With his shining helmet glittering across the field, he turns to face the mighty Achilles. Heroes fight, despite the odds, with remarkable tenacity.

Even so, some of the most valiant heroes may be flawed. Odysseus makes a bargain with Circe to free his men. The bewitching nymph has turned them into swine and he saves them, but he stays in Circe's bed for years. Odysseus could blind Polyphemus the Cyclops through trickery, insisting that he was "Nobody," but he was proud and Poseidon raged against him. Odysseus was the cunning strategist that the Greeks admired, but he was also the deceptive manipulator Ulysses that the Romans despised. So, what are we to make of our iconic figures? Hillary and Trump, JFK and Ronald Reagan. In a world of love and terror, amid our elections and Thanksgiving and New Year's rituals, can we realize the heroic reminders and the fantastic possibilities of a Marvel universe? How might we rise to the occasion?

Stan Lee reminds us that the hero is not only Thor, Ironman, and Spider-Man. He is also Daredevil, who suggests that fledgling lawyers, or the injured sons of boxers, can be heroes in disguise. Novelists have suggested this too. They remind us that the hero is Jane Eyre, who gets free from abuse and from Lowood and blossoms into a governess and then becomes an heiress, marrying Mr. Rochester. The hero is David Copperfield, the orphan who goes forth into the world. Like Dorothy, the Scarecrow, the Tin Man, and the Cowardly Lion seeking Oz, what they have done is that they have developed what was potentially within them all along. So they are much like that brilliant young man, Stan Lee, repairing communications equipment one day and sending color, imagination, and hope into the world the next: a creator of magic, an inventor of heroes, an entertainer for an appreciative audience. His legacy is that of an artist of enchantment who has touched the world with an unmistakable sense of wonder.

The Clouded Legacy of a Comic Book Legend

JOSEPH J. DAROWSKI

Stan Lee's impact on the American entertainment industry is undeniable. The characters he co-created with talented comic book artists, most notably Jack Kirby and Steve Ditko, influence global popular culture more than 50 years after their first creation. But, despite this, Lee certainly has his critics who argue his influence is overrated. Of course, he also has many fans who have come to know him as the kindly grandfather of American comic books thanks to his film cameos and promotional appearances for comic book adaptations over the last decade. So which version of Lee is the truth? Is he a villain masquerading as a hero, or is he a geek-hero who just has his own tireless critics, ala Spider-Man and J. Jonah Jameson.

Unsurprisingly, in summing up the legacy of a man who has worked in the entertainment industry for 70 years, it's complicated. Stan Lee co-created some of the most popular characters in comic books that have subsequently conquered the small screen and the silver screen (and video games, board games, t-shirts, toy aisles, etc.). As the public face of Marvel Comics, and an irrepressible salesman, did he (purposefully or not) end up with at least the perception of having more to do with the creation of the characters than the artists? Probably.

Of course, there are more problematic layers to deciphering where credit for characters and stories properly belongs. First, there is the famed "Marvel method" of comic book writing. In this highly collaborative style, Lee would give his artists only an outline of a story (sometimes written, sometimes just in conversation) and the artist would then draw the entire issue. After the pencils were done, Lee would add all the text to the issue: dialogue, narration boxes, editorial commentary, etc. And there would be instances where the artist took a much larger role. For example, with

Doctor Strange, Steve Ditko pitched the concept, designed the character, drew the first issue, but then Lee wrote the text for that issue. Are they co-creators, or is Ditko the creator? These issues were trivial when the stories being published by the company were utterly forgettable and made no impact outside of the comic book industry, as had been the case for much of the creative output Lee oversaw in the 1940s and 1950s. When, following the trends of the industry, he and his artists started telling superhero stories in the 1960s there would have been no reason to expect that these creations would one day become literal billion dollar franchises, so who cared who got credit? Eventually issues of credit and compensation led to rifts with Jack Kirby and Steve Ditko.

Another confounding variable in all of this is the nature of Lee's position at Marvel Comics in the 1960s. Unlike his artists, who generally were doing work-for-hire contracts, Lee was a salaried employee. As Alex Pappademas notes:

> He was Marvel's editor-in-chief and de facto art director; later, he was Marvel's publisher. Finally, around the turn of the '80s, he left behind the day-to-day business of comics and moved to Los Angeles to get Marvel's movie and television division up and running. Really, though, he became what we'd now call a brand ambassador. [...] Over the years, Marvel changed hands, went bankrupt, reemerged, restructured. Stan stayed in the picture. Each time he renegotiated his deal with the company, he did so from a unique position — half elder god, half mascot. Administration after administration recognized that it was in their best interests PR-wise to keep him on the payroll. For years, he received 10 percent of all revenue generated by the exploitation of his characters on TV and in movies, along with a six-figure salary.

To put it mildly, this was excessively more favorable than the financial remuneration his co-creators received. Regarding Jack Kirby, Pappadamas

wrote, "Jack Kirby, on the other hand, was a contractor. [...] like most comics creators back then, he was paid by the page and retained no rights to any of the work he did for the company or the characters he helped create; by cashing his paychecks, he signed those rights over to the company. It took him decades just to persuade Marvel to give him back some of his original art, much of which was lost or given away or stolen in the meantime…" The difference in public acclaim, financial reward, and career longevity between Lee and his artistic collaborators is stark.

All of this leaves fan attitudes toward Lee mixed. It is undeniable that he was a major player in the creation of icons such as the Fantastic Four, Spider-Man, the Hulk, Iron Man, the X-Men, and many more. But, while he is now the public face of the early Marvel era and appears on talk shows, at conventions, and in movies, he was not the sole voice behind those creations. And, because of many factors, he not only has received more public acclaim for creating those characters, he has received more financial rewards for these creations than his collaborators. So, what should we think of Stan Lee? He was a creative man who worked with artistic geniuses. He was hugely responsible for marketing Marvel Comics and establishing a tone and narrative style the revolutionized comic books. Due to differing roles and contracts, he ended up with significantly more fame and money than his collaborators. It can reasonably be argued that he did not address unfair systemic problems within the comic book industry, particularly in regards to creators' rights for work-for-hire talent, but those were industry-wide problems. In the end, if you view Lee solely as a hero or a villain, that's probably not fair to the complex legacy of a legitimate popular culture icon.

Works Cited

Pappademas, Alex. "The Inquisition of Mr. Marvel: On the (Surprisingly Complicated) Legacy of Stan Lee." *Grantland.com*. 11 May 2012. Accessed 21 September 2016.

Stan Lee: Thinking About an Icon's Legacy

BOB BATCHELOR

Stan Lee is Marvel madman, mouthpiece, and all-around maestro – the face of comic books for six decades. Without a doubt, Lee is one of the most important creative icons in contemporary American history. 'Nuff said…

Lee shares the same stage that once held Ella Fitzgerald and F. Scott Fitzgerald, as well as Babe Ruth, John Updike, and Norman Mailer. He sits there proudly with Bob Dylan, Toni Morrison, Tom Hanks, Hank Aaron, and Elvis ('cause he just might still be out there somewhere). His legacy is undeniable: Lee transformed storytelling by introducing generations of readers to flawed heroes who also dealt with life's challenges, in addition to the treats that could destroy humankind.

Generations of artists, writers, actors, and other creative types have been inspired, moved, or encouraged by the universe he gave voice to and birthed. Lee did not invent the imperfect hero, one could argue that such heroes had been around since Homer's time and even before, but Lee did deliver it – Johnny Appleseed style, a dime or so a pop – to a generation of readers hungry for something new.

Today, all a person has to do is watch fans interact with Lee to comprehend his significance. Face front, true believer! This is a spectacle, like a continuous Christmas morning for adoring masses. In turn, they give him sustenance and energy. Approaching Lee, most can simply squeak out "thank you." Others walk away dumbfounded. Moments later, delight fills their faces, whether they waited in line at a comicon for four or five hours or briefly shook his hand. This must be what it would be like to meet Santa Claus!

Contemplating an Icon:

** *The Fantastic Four* transformed the kinds of stories comic books could tell. *Spider-Man*, however, brought the idea home to a global audience. Lee told an interviewer that he had two incredibly instinctive objectives: introduce a superhero "terribly realistic" and one "with whom the reader could relate.[13] While the nerd-to-hero storyline seems like it must have sprung from the earth fully formed, Lee gave readers a new way of looking at what it meant to be a hero and spun the notion of who might be heroic in a way that spoke to the rapidly expanding number of comic book buyers. Spider-Man's popularity revealed the attraction to the idea of a tainted hero, but at the same time, the character hit the newsstands at the perfect time, ranging from the growing Baby Boomer generation to the optimism of John F. Kennedy's Camelot, this confluence of events resulting in a second golden age for comic books.

** While people often credit Lee for his role in gradually turning comic books into a more respected medium and establishing Marvel's place among the world's great brands, he is rarely given enough credit simply as a writer. Just like novelist and filmmakers had always done, it is as if Lee put his hands up into the air and pulled down fistfuls of the national zeitgeist. In this sense, he understood his audience the same way Walt Disney did or John Updike, who at about the same time was crafting Harry "Rabbit" Angstrom, the American everyman (a character one could certainly imagine reading comic books). Lee as writer did what all iconic creative people do – he improved on or perfected his craft, thus creating an entirely new style that would have broad impact across the rest of the industry, and later the world.

** Stan Lee's official archive, housed at the American Heritage Center at the University of Wyoming, is filled (in part) with office memoranda, advertising and circulation studies, countless fan letters, human resources

paperwork, and other corporate effluvium that might make most researchers' heads spin(http://www.uwyo.edu/ahc/). From a different perspective, though, what seems like miscellany, actually reveals the depth of Lee's work across the entire Marvel enterprise. His responsibilities not only covered writing, editing, and approving artwork, but extended to general managerial and editorial work that most people do not contemplate. Of course, when Marvel's popularity increased, he hired people to help keep pace, but the archive uncovers a leader fully in charge, despite his carefree persona. Lee created and co-created countless superheroes, villains, and plots, all while simultaneously running the comic book business as it grew from a virtual one-man operation in the mid- to late-1950s to an empire across the 1960s and into the 1970s.

　　　　** When I asked Lee last month how it felt to inspire generations of fans and artists with his flawed hero narrative, he paused for a moment. He isn't the type who dwells on legacy, instead focusing on the next idea. In nearly illegible handwriting, Lee scribbles down these thoughts in tiny 2x3 inch notepads. "It's an incredibly great feeling, when I think about it. I don't have that much time to think about, but when I do…" His voice trails off. Lee isn't used to contemplating his legacy, most journalists and fans ask him who his favorite character is or what he was thinking when he created them. But, with a brief grin and eyes almost sparkling behind his semi-dark glasses, you can see his pride and hear it in his voice. The thing about icons is that they never really stop creating. Thinking about that moment makes my hands tremble and my heart leap. How often does one get to stand in the shadow of greatness?

Marvel Reviews

THE POPULAR CULTURE STUDIES JOURNAL MARVEL REVIEWS

Wilson, G. Willow. Ms. Marvel: Vol. 1 No Normal. New York: Marvel Worldwide, Inc., 2015. Print.

Wilson, G. Willow. Ms. Marvel: Vol. 2 Generation Why. New York: Marvel Worldwide, Inc., 2015. Print.

Wilson, G. Willow. Ms. Marvel: Vol. 3 Crushed. New York: Marvel Worldwide, Inc., 2015. Print.

Wilson, G. Willow. Ms. Marvel: Vol. 4 Last Days. New York: Marvel Worldwide, Inc., 2015. Print.

One of the more celebrated and critically acclaimed comic book series in recent years, Marvel Comic's Ms. Marvel is now out in trade paperback editions of its initial 19 issue Pre-Secret Wars run. It is written by G. Willow Wilson, with artwork by Adrian Alphona—with the exception of Nos. 6 and 7 (drawn by Jacob Wyatt), No. 12 (drawn by Elmo Bondoc), and Nos. 13-15 (drawn by Takeshi Miyazawa)—and coloring by Ian Herring.

Each trade paperback contains between five to six stories from the Ms. Marvel series and also includes stand-alone stories from All-New Marvel Now Point One No. 1, S.H.I.E.L.D. No. 2, and Amazing Spider-Man Nos.

7 and 8. These stand-alone stories feature Ms. Marvel by herself or with other superheroes from the Marvel Universe. As an added bonus, most of the trade paperback editions feature variant cover art by different Marvel artists, as well as Adrian Alphona's initial character designs and page layouts done before coloring.

For those unfamiliar with this character, Ms. Marvel is Kamala Khan, a Muslim Pakistani-American teenage girl living in Jersey City who gains polymorph powers one evening after being exposed to a mysterious mist that envelopes Jersey City. Aided by her friend Bruno, Khan spends her time trying to figure out her powers, her identity as a superhero, and her relationships to her friends, family members, and Bruno—who secretly loves Khan.

G. Willow Wilson is a master at understanding the mindset of teenage girls and is able to echo their linguistic rhythms and interactions with adults. For instance, before she gains her powers in No. 1, Khan is content to write superhero fan fiction which she posts online. When her mother calls her to dinner, she wants to see how her piece of fan fiction where The Avengers save Planet Unicorn from an evil space creature is trending. Khan says, "One minute, Ammi [the word for "mother" in Urdi, the language of Pakistan] . . . there is epic stuff happening on the internet. My Avengers fanfic has almost 1,000 upvotes on freakingcool.com" (Wilson vol. 11:5). When she goes downstairs for dinner, Khan has an exchange with her Abu [the Urdi word for "father"] when she asks to go to a waterfront party where there will be boys and drinking. She pleads and pesters her father like many teenagers: "Come on Abu! I'm sixteen! I promise I won't do anything stupid! Don't you trust me?" (Wilson vol. 11:6), to which Abu fires back "You are excused straight to your room! And stay there until you find your manners!" (Wilson vol. 11:6).

Complimenting Wilson's language is the overall artwork by Adrian Alphona and colorist Ian Herring. Both work in tandem to present the world of Kamala Khan in a way that is appealing to the eye and aids in

telling the story. Alphona's artwork is realistic in tone, emphasizing the individuality of the characters; no one character looks or dresses the same and even the pretty people in Khan's high school are not Madison Avenue cutouts. Alphona has a great eye for detail, both within character costuming, as well as for seemingly insignificant details that act as Easter Eggs throughout the series. In No. 3, Khan is having breakfast and the box next to her says "GM-O's Tasty Cereal. Listen to Your Gut, Not the Lawsuits" (Wilson vol. 13:1). Similarly, in No. 16, Khan is eating at Soul Sonic Franks hot dog stand where under the list of items sold at the stand, there is listed "Panda," with a line through the word as though the stand ran out of Panda hot dogs (Wilson vol 416.1).

In coloring the series, Ian Herring chose a pallet that has more muddied muted earth tones that reflect the down-to-earth nature of Khan and her world. Mostly eschewing bright colors, Herring uses lots of washes, making each issue feel as though it was water colored. The end result gives objects in each panel a greater depth and texture. Objects can also appear to be more three-dimensional because of the wider range of colors that Herring provides with his washes. For instance, this process allows the mist enveloping Khan's kidnapped brother at the end of No. 17 to feel thick and menacing, as well as becoming less dense the closer it gets to the light bulb which illuminates the scene.

In discussing each of the volumes in detail, it is impossible to provide a general plot summary of each issue. Instead, if the stand-alone issues are set aside, each of the trade paperbacks contains a completed story arc that together act like different movements within a symphony providing a meta-structure to the series. Using this symphonic metaphor, here is a brief plot summary for each trade paperback. Care is taken not to reveal too many spoilers.

Ms. Marvel Vol. 1 No Normal acts as an adagio or slow movement to this symphony. Typically, a symphony begins with a faster movement, but Wilson provides a slow pace to the first five issues, setting the

groundwork for Khan's later exploits. The reader is introduced to Khan's world and how it works, from the way she interacts with her best friends Nakia and Bruno, to her interactions with the Cole's Academic High School "cool kids" Zoe and Josh, as well as her parents and brother Amir. After Khan is exposed to the mist that gives her polymorph powers, she has to learn how to control them. Initially, Khan physical appearance while using her powers is that of Carol Danvers, the former Ms. Marvel who became the new Captain Marvel. Part of her journey in this symphonic movement is to find her identity as a superhero outside of Danvers' shadow.

Whether G. Willow Wilson was concerned about the potential outcry against a Muslim superhero within the Marvel lineup or being deliberate in setting up the world for a payoff later in the series, not much superhero action takes place. She confronts Doyle, head b-boy, but does not stop him or the Inventor's plans (the Big Bad in Vols. 1 and 2). After reading this series as a whole, this slow movement pays off in later volumes with more action and a greater development of Khan's relationships.

Ms. Marvel Vol. 2 Generation Why is the fast allegro of this symphony. There is lots of action in these issues, with Ms. Marvel fighting the Inventor's giant alligators with the help of Wolverine in Nos. 6 and 7, being introduced to the Inhumans and their world starting in No. 9, as well as learning about the Inventor's plans in Nos. 9-10. Khan also learns why she developed superpowers and also gets a special guardian from the Inhumans to help her navigate her powers. Going into any more detail would spoil the plot of this action-packed volume.

Ms. Marvel: Vol. 3 Crushed is the allegretto con patetico (moderately fast with deep feeling) dance movement of this symphony and deals with issues of love and balancing that love against her responsibilities as a superhero. A guest appearance by Loki, whom is playfully dubbed a "hipster Viking" (Wilson vol. 312:8), sets into motion Bruno's desire to make his feelings known to Khan. He decides to invite her to the

Valentine's Day Dance at their school. Complications ensue and Bruno's goal of telling that he loves Khan is thwarted. Khan ends up falling for another boy, Kamran, who was introduced to her by her parents. By the end of the volume, she learns the dark truth behind Kamran's seemingly perfect facade.

Ms. Marvel: Vol. 4 Last Days starts out as a presto (very fast) movement as Ms. Marvel has to confront her biggest challenge yet—the possible end of the world as Manhattan and Jersey City looks like they are on the brink of total annihilation. At the end of No. 16, Khan gets to live out her dream of working besides Carol Danvers (Captain Marvel) as they save her brother—and some kittens—from harm. The final two issues, Nos. 18 and 19, changes the tone of the symphony as it goes back to the adagio tempo of the first volume as Khan makes peace with her Ammi, her best friend Nakia, and comes to grip with her relationship with Bruno.

Kamala Khan as Ms. Marvel is a teenage girl with a lot of heart and enthusiasm for life, which makes the series so appealing. Khan is not a perfect superhero, but a fallible one that struggles to be the best version of herself that she can be. It is this striving for the best in herself that makes me want to read this series. Ms. Marvel proves that not all young people are jaded and apathetic and that there is hope for the next generation (a subject discussed at length within the Vol. 2 Generation Why). In short, this series deserves the serious attention of every Marvel comic book aficionado who wants a good read. They will not be disappointed.

<div style="text-align:right">

Alan Jozwiak
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Millar, Mark., writer. *Civil War: A Marvel Comics Event*. New York: Marvel Comics, 2006. Print

Mark Millar and several artists offer a compelling narrative in their graphic novel *Civil War* that was initially published in 2006 as a set of seven core comic books. The storyline is serious and dark, and features artwork that features a similar tone. Each of the major comic book publishers will occasionally feature a story arc that claims to "change everything" for the characters involved in their own self-contained universe and the *Civil War* story was labelled by Marvel Comics in a similar fashion. Millar fulfilled that promise, but approached the narrative from a slightly different perspective as the story was a political drama without a clear-cut hero or villain. While the political aspect may have turned some readers off initially, the overall story played out well and added to the long-standing Marvel Comics mythos.

The initial confrontation of the story centers on a group of new, unsupervised young superheroes that are making a reality television show while apprehending villains. Things go wrong quickly and many innocent people lose their lives, including children. The United States Government steps in and uses this incident in an attempt to initiate a registration act that would make it mandatory for every individual that wants to help people or fight crimes to register their identity. In essence, the superheroes would be government employees with government oversight and could be used as tools to by the government in any way that they deem necessary. This does not sit well with many of the characters that have come to question the morality of the government. This is an interesting perspective and juxtaposition of the early years of Marvel Comics. Many of the first issues of Captain America were supportive of the government, but times have changed and many today question the decisions of the government and the interests that they are claimed to be protecting.

Most of the previous catalogue of Marvel Comics storytelling was written in the classic prose that features heroes pitted against their arch enemies. The heroes are ultimately tasked with trying to protect innocent civilians and their individual freedoms, while defeating the enemies. Millar changes that emphasis and focuses instead on when the heroes' freedoms may be encroached upon and what happens when heroes face off against each other. A morally ambiguous proposal is presented to the heroes as a group and each hero is subsequently forced to make their own decision on where they stand. The final question for readers examining the back splash page of the graphic novel, sets the tone: "Whose side are you on?" Both sides have valid points, but both sides also make terrible mistakes. Millar offers an interesting dilemma for the individuals involved and the reader, while examining how people react when their closest friends do not share a similar perspective. The storyline emphasizes the notion that not all wars finish with a clear winner, while also offering the perspective that wars typically end with everyone losing something. Nobody really wins in this story as lives are lost and long-standing relationships are fractured. The reader will find themselves caught up in this war as well.

As the story unfolds and plot twists occur, Millar continually forces the readers to choose a side. The reader has to come to grips with the overarching moral issue of the registration act, while weighing their thoughts and feelings about characters that they have come to love and hate over the years. Some may find themselves in agreement with the registration act that aligns them with certain characters that they may not like. Conversely, some readers may be against the registration act, while realizing that their favorite characters are on the opposing side of the battle ground. This is a unique position for the reader and offers a moral dilemma in deciding between what they feel is right and their allegiances with the characters that they have come to know and trust. In this way, Millar uses the mechanism of cognitive dissonance to force the reader to

wrestle with this issues and interact with the story in a unique fashion. This is a microcosm of our own understanding of the world. We all have our own perspective through experiences and logic for how the world should operate, until we eventually succumb to the understanding that we do not get the opportunity to see the entire puzzle and how it all fits together.

The way that the story is unfolded is well done, until the ending. The final pages seem a bit rushed and leave little time for individual reflection of the characters and what has transpired throughout the battle. In typical comic book fashion, one side wins and one side loses, but it does not feel that way as the story concludes. As a perfect reflection of war, the conclusion offers evidence that everyone lost something and there is not a feeling of hope and resolution, as though the battle was worth what was lost. Relationships are irreparably changed and beloved heroes are imprisoned for their decisions. The fallout offered a unique conclusion that set the tone for later stories that would have a significant impact of the Marvel Comics universe.

Millar's graphic novel was later adapted and brought into the cinematic universe in 2016 and featured the main premise of heroes versus heroes, but there were great differences as well. The spark that starts the confrontation is quite different in the cinematic version and the revelation of the heroes' secret identities does not play a significant role as well. The graphic novel also offered a truer representation of the lengths that heroes will go to when attempting to protect the rights of individuals and standing up for what they believe is the best decision. The lines of morality are blurred as villains are recruited to hunt down long-standing heroes in order to bring them to justice. This part of the storyline is not found in the movie. In addition, dozens of characters are used in the graphic novel, while the cinematic version centered on less than ten characters per side. The ending of the movie is different from the graphic novel, but the resolution and unresolved questions are similar in nature.

Millar's graphic novel adds to the Marvel Comics lineage of great writing. There is a dark and serious tone that is quite different from earlier major event storylines. In addition, the reader is forced to choose sides for or against heroes that they have grown to know and trust over the years, while also having to consider the government's role in regulating superheroes. Millar lays out a great dilemma for the reader that makes one consider looking at events from another perspective. It is a trait that we can all stand to learn how to employ more often.

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Claremont, Chris, and John Byrne. "The Dark Phoenix Saga." *Uncanny X-Men*, 101-108 & 129-138 (1976-1980). Print.

The storyline known as "The Dark Phoenix Saga", written by the legendary Chris Claremont and illustrated by John Byrne, was originally published within the pages of the *Uncanny X-Men* comic book between 1976-1980, in issues #101-108 and #129-138. The story was also revisited and retold for younger audiences between 1995-1996, within the pages of *X-Men Adventures, Season III* issues 3-7 and 10-13, written by Ralph Macchio and illustrated predominantly by John Hebert and Ben Herrera. The storyline revolves around the character Jean Grey, a telepathic and telekinetic mutant and founding member of the X-Men, who is overcome by her incredible psionic powers and develops a secondary personality known as the Phoenix. This storyline is important as it shifts one of the most powerful mutants in the Marvel universe from a force for good, inclusion, acceptance, and right to one of the most powerful and deadly villains of all time, capable of genocide with the wave of her hand. The

impact that The Phoenix has had on the Marvel Universe is so pervasive
that she is listed on numerous lists of the most important and memorable
villains of all time. These include lists by IGN who ranked her as the 9th
greatest comic book villain of all time and Wizard Magazine who placed
her as #38 on their list of the one-hundred greatest villains ever, which
encompassed not only comic books but all of pop culture including, but
not limited to literature, film and television.

   The story begins as Jean Grey and the other X-Men are returning from
a space mission and are exposed to the energy from a solar flare, which
interacts with Jean's abilities in an entirely unexpected manner. For the
first time the reader sees the ultimate fruition of her incredible powers as
she momentarily becomes a being of pure thought and energy. Upon crash
landing in the bay near JFK airport, and after seemingly sacrificing herself
for her friends, she is able to pull herself back together and majestically
rises from the water. Despite her seeming resurrection, she is not as she
was before: she is now The Phoenix a moniker and appearance that
inherently surprises the rest of the X-Men, and the readers, as until now
she has remained the sole member of the team to not adopt a codename.
She then collapses into the water and her team members manage to get her
unconscious body to the shore.

   Jean has little time to recuperate from her ordeal as the X-Men soon
find themselves in the middle of an intergalactic war for the fate of the
Shi'Ar Empire and the rest of the universe. They come to the aid of
Empress Lilandra who is trying to stop her brother Emperor D'Ken from
attaining the incredibly powerful M'Kraan Crystal, an object that the
ability to erase and restructure all of reality. To make a long intricate story
short the M'Kraan Crystal is fractured in the struggle and the only person
who can stop it from consuming all of existence is Jean. In order to do so,
she must embrace The Phoenix Force and allow it to fully possess her at
the risk of completely losing herself. She uses it to syphon the life force

from her friends and repair the crystal. In doing so she saves all of reality, barely managing to retain her humanity in the process.

These events bring her into the sights of a power hungry organization known as The Hellfire Club who posses a mind-tap device that was developed by their White Queen, future X-Man, Emma Frost. The mind-tap allows them to project illusions directly into Jean's mind in an effort to manipulate her into joining their organization. The X-Men are able to thwart their evil plot, but not before causing the enraged Phoenix force to fully encompass Jean, becoming the Dark Phoenix. In an attempt to sever her ties with her mortal life, she attacks the X-Men and leaves for a distant universe. Upon arrival The Phoenix is so drained from the journey that she devours the sun of the D'Bari solar system. This causes a supernova that destroys everything, killing the entire population of their planet of over five-billion people. A nearby Shi'Ar spacecraft witnessed this event and was able to alert the rest of the empire of the impending threat, before they were destroyed as well.

The Shi'Ar in consultation with the rest of the intergalactic council decide that the Dark Phoenix and in turn Jean Grey, must be put to death because of the serious threat she poses to the universe. In order to stop this verdict, Professor X challenges Lilandra to the irrefutable Arin'n Haelar, a Shi'ar duel of honor, with the victors having final say over the fate of The Phoenix. In the duel the Shi'Ar Imperial Guard make quick work of the X-Men. Feeling cornered the Phoenix begins to overtake Jean once again and Lilandra initiates plan Omega, which would ultimately destroy the entire solar system in hopes of stopping The Phoenix. Jean, who is struggling to maintain control, gives an incredibly emotional goodbye to Cyclopes, her lover, and then commits suicide using a disintegration ray, sacrificing herself for the greater good. The story ends with an intergalactic being known as The Watcher saying, "Jean Grey could have lived to become a god. But it was more important to her that she die… a human" (Claremont & Byrne).

This story is where numerous characters made their first or strongest appearance making it even more special to fans. This story introduces future X-Men Kitty Pryde, Emma Frost, and Dazzler to Marvel continuity, all of which were mainstays for years to come. This is also one of the first storylines that brought fan favorite character Wolverine to the forefront of the X-men universe, as he not only confesses his love for our tragic hero, but also finds his place in the team as a whole. The real question that one should ask here is what makes this story so memorable beyond these character introductions and why did its impact transcend time as it has? It is important to not only examine the effect that the story has had on the greater Marvel universe but to also review what the character itself has meant as well. One of the defining features of the Phoenix, not the character per say, but more so the force that consumes her, is that it is not inherently good or bad as it is a delicate force of nature which is "the embodiment of the very passion of Creation – the spark that gave life to the Universe, [and] the flame that will ultimately consume it" (Claremont & Byrne). The delicate nature of the Phoenix force is ultimately one of the major themes that is both exemplified and exploited within the storyline and shows just how easily a force for good can be corrupted into something much more sinister.

It was mainly the ruthless psychic manipulation, at the hands of Mastermind, that left Jean completely under the control of the Phoenix force and what led to her inevitably dark actions. To some this notion resonates as a fear which audiences can relate to for various reasons. The fear of losing control for any reason is one that many people hold. Mastermind's actions can be seen as analogues with rape, not only controlling her mind, but her body and powers as well. Some could even read his actions as equivalent to what takes place upon indoctrination into a religious doctrine, cult, or even in some instances a terrorist organization. In addition to this main theme of control, or the lack thereof, there are also the major themes of human nature and the corruption that

comes with power flowing through the veins of this storyline. The Phoenix is initially established as a source of ultimate and divine power for good, but the story quickly turns her into something dark, hinting to the notion that absolute power corrupts as it did in this case. Though power is a strong element, it is the emphasis on being human that is the most important aspect of the story, because it is Jean's desire to retain her humanity rather than be a goddess that speaks to the human nature in everyone. The idea that human nature always wins out is a powerful one. If sacrificing herself for the sake of the universe is the one thing she can do retain her human nature in the end, than that is what must be done. This is a theme that has resonated through many Marvel stories, and if you think about what really makes these characters so special, it is the emphasis on their human condition, not their powers, that really make them accessible to and memorable for readers.

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Daredevil. ABC Studios, DeKnight Productions, Goddard
Textiles Marvel Entertainment, and the Walt Disney Company,
2015. Netflix Instant.

Originally published by Marvel Comics, the vigilante character Daredevil
sprang from the minds of creators Stan Lee and Bill Everett in 1964.
Blinded by toxic chemicals as a youth, Matt Murdock would grow up to
become a lawyer who defends the oppressed denizens of Manhattan's
Hell's Kitchen neighborhood by day, and dons the Daredevil identity to
fight crime by night. Gifted with a superhuman ability to perceive
everything around him – his radar sense – Daredevil often appears
preternaturally cognizant of his environment, and can seemingly "see"
what his opponents will do before they act.

The character has appeared in various live-action and animated
television series over the years, but mainly as a guest or minor character;
Daredevil would not headline a film until the 2003 movie adaptation
produced and released by 20th Century Fox. When the rights to the
character reverted to Disney-Marvel in early 2013, the media
conglomerate quickly announced that Daredevil would appear in the
shared film/TV universe known as the Marvel Cinematic Universe
(MCU). Around this same time, Netflix successfully launched its own
original television series, *House of Cards*, in early 2013, and was looking
for more original content to expand its library and entice people to
subscribe to its rapidly growing streaming service. Sensing an opportunity,
Disney-Marvel arranged a deal with Netflix to produce and distribute an
original *Daredevil* television series, and the entire 13 episode season
launched in April 2015 to much critical and popular acclaim.

The series' direct-to-streaming nature facilitates a structure more akin
to a miniseries. It also allows the show's creators to incorporate a darker,
more adult tone than that found in the majority of MCU characters and

narratives, which are generally fun, colorful, and family-oriented. This darkness manifests throughout *Daredevil*, which features numerous blood-soaked fight scenes and enough coarse language to make Captain America blush (if he were ever to appear on the show, Steve Rogers would likely spend much of his screen time admonishing the other characters with cries of "Language!"). As such, the series feels more in line with Marvel's defunct Max imprint, which specialized in producing R-rated comic books aimed squarely at adult readers. Moreover, *Daredevil* has apparently established the tone for the entire Marvel Netflix Universe (MNU); both *Jessica Jones* and *Luke Cage* employ similarly adult tones, and the upcoming *Punisher* series undoubtedly will as well (especially given that character's dark history). Thus, the MNU quickly establishes its own identity and thereby sets itself apart from the MCU proper.

The Netflix model allows for longer-form storytelling that recalls the current decompressed model of comic book narrative, whereas the films that comprise the MCU represent more of a compressed style of storytelling (i.e. narratives span multiple films, but stories must be wrapped up in two hours). Indeed, the television series essentially functions as a very long miniseries or 13-hour television movie. In addition, the ability to binge-watch the entire series in one sitting aligns the show with trade paperbacks that collect multiple issues of a single story arc and reprint them in book format. As such, *Daredevil* and the other shows that comprise the MNU recall the source material, while also allowing for a deeper, more mature exploration of the characters and events portrayed onscreen.

The Netflix model allows for a more nuanced depiction of the central character, and for the showrunners to push the boundaries of the Marvel house style. Indeed, the show appears to take most of its cues from Frank Miller's 1979-1983 run on the *Daredevil* comic book, which was marked by adult-oriented stories. Furthermore, this period in the character's history featured several defining moments, most notably the death of the assassin

Elektra at the hands of the villain Bullseye. The Netflix series not only incorporates and adapts many of Miller's ideas, but also apes the grim-and-gritty attitude established by the stories he produced during this period.

By attempting to align the show with Miller's somber take on the character, series creator Drew Goddard and his team ensure that *Daredevil* feels radically different from even the serious-minded MCU films like *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*. Whereas the MCU films have been designed to appeal to a broad mainstream audience of all ages, *Daredevil* is decidedly aimed at an adult audience who would be less squeamish with depictions of intense violence and mature themes. More importantly, the series set the tone for the rest of the MNU, including *Jessica Jones, Luke Cage, Iron Fist*, and *The Punisher*. Yet, the show reflects the overall Disney-Marvel approach to storytelling. *Daredevil* and the other MNU shows recall the way shared comic book universes establish different tones for their different heroes, which has become something of a hallmark of the MCU overall (for instance, *Captain America: The Winter Solder* recalls the paranoid thrillers of the 1970s while *Thor: The Dark World* feels like an epic fantasy or science fiction tale in the vein of *Star Wars*). Thus, while the MNU is noticeably different from the larger MCU in terms of tone, it still reflects this shared universe approach to storytelling.

Disney-Marvel hopes that *Daredevil* and the other MNU series will serve as the foundation for another *Avengers*-style crossover (i.e., *The Defenders*). As such, these shows act as the MCU in microcosm, using the latest entertainment technology, Internet streaming, to reach a specific audience (i.e. affluent young people) and thereby perpetuate the consumption of not just the MCU but the Marvel Universe as a whole. Thus, *Daredevil* represents both a departure from the characterization and storytelling prevalent in the MCU, while also demonstrating how it aligns with the overall transmedia experience established by Disney-Marvel.

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Agent Carter: The Complete First Season. Created by Christopher Markus and Stephen McFeely. Perf. Hayley Atwell, James D'Arcy, Enver Gjokaj, Chad Michael Murray, Lyndsy Fonseca, Shea Whigham, Bridget Regan, and Dominic Cooper. Buena Vista Home Entertainment, 2015. DVD.

Agent Carter: Season 2. Created by Christopher Markus and Stephen McFeely. Perf. Hayley Atwell, James D'Arcy, Enver Gjokaj, Chad Michael Murray, Bridget Regan, Wynn Everett, Reggie Austin, Lesley Boone, Lotte Verbeek, and Dominic Cooper. Amazon Prime Video, 2016. Web. September 23, 2016.

Some regular television viewers might be tempted, on first watching Marvel's recent two-season action-adventure series *Agent Carter* (ABC/Marvel Studios, 2015-16), to write it off as an exercise in mega-corporate money-grubbing, a lower-budget effort to cash in on the spectacular popularity of the ever-expanding Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) franchise, and particularly the *Captain America* films, with which the series is intimately connected. Certainly the comic-book superhero action-adventure sub-genre, despite (or possibly because of?) its popularity, is among those most likely to be ignored come Emmy or Oscar season. And while awards are perhaps not the best indicator of quality for any pop culture artifact, they can serve as an accurate barometer for the seriousness with which the cultural establishment regards the particular artifact in question. Like the original comics that inspired them, mainstream superhero television and cinema productions often seem handicapped by their very popularity, which is regarded by many as an indication that they lack serious literary or cinematic intent.

It would be a mistake, though, to assume that *Agent Carter* is less likely to reward serious critical inquiry than, say, *Mad Men*, *Downton Abbey*, or *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, shows that are known for their popularity among academics. More than just another entry in the recent film and television superhero sweepstakes, *Agent Carter* is an essential chapter in Marvel's virtually unprecedented creation of an integrated cinematic and television universe that mirrors Stan Lee's calculated creation of the comic-book universe in the early sixties. The show functions as an immediate sequel to the MCU film *Captain America: The First Avenger* (2011), which told of the transformation of Steve Rogers (Chris Evans) into Captain America during World War II and of the development of the tragic romance between Rogers and Carter. *Agent Carter* picks up almost exactly where *The First Avenger* left off, following the adventures of British superspy Peggy Carter (Hayley Atwell, reprising her role from the film) in New York and Los Angeles during the two years after the war. Since the American intelligence agency Carter works for, the SSR (Strategic Science Reserve), is the wartime precursor to the Cold War spy agency SHIELD—created for the comics by Stan Lee in 1965 but now a central element of the MCU movies, as well as of the successful ABC series *Agents of SHIELD*—one of the goals of *Agent Carter* is to detail the events that led to the transformation of the SSR into SHIELD and thus to fill in the gaps between Marvel's accounts of the origins of the MCU in *The First Avenger* and the contemporary adventures recounted in the various *Avengers* films (which include the *Avengers*, *Iron Man*, *Thor*, *Captain America*, *Hulk*, *Guardians of the Galaxy*, and *Ant-Man* films, as well as the forthcoming *Doctor Strange* and *Black Panther* films). The series also prominently features Dominic Cooper in his recurring role as the young Howard Stark, father of the tormented narcissist Tony Stark (Robert Downey Jr.), who becomes Iron Man in the parts of the story set in the twenty-first century; *Agent Carter* thus helps connect two of the

central branches of the MCU in an ongoing story arc that appears to have culminated in *Captain America: Civil War* (2016).

Adapting the form of the comic book superhero adventure for television, and blending it with a number of other genres (including Cold War espionage and science-fiction thrillers, war stories, crime dramas, film noir, detective fiction, the classic American Western, and even the meticulous television period drama, which has seen such a renaissance in recent years), *Agent Carter* stages a dialogue between Cold War superhero narratives (pioneered, in this case, in the Marvel comic book renaissance of the early 1960s) and contemporary Age of Terror popular entertainment, revealing itself as a significant performative mirror of our particular historical and cultural moment. *Agent Carter* participates in a broad cultural exchange by which Marvel allows its classic superhero characters to be appropriated and reimagined for an entirely different medium and audience, allowing the show to posit close mythic similarities between the two periods it represents—the immediately post-World-War-II early Cold War setting in which it takes place and the specific post-9/11 setting in which it is written and performed. Though in some ways the show is more closely affiliated with other post-9/11 American TV series like *Smallville*, *Battlestar Galactica*, *Mad Men*, *Fringe*, and Marvel's *Agents of SHIELD* than it is with the comic-book stories and feature films that are its primary sources, the other relevant works that factor into the series include the original Captain America comics of the 1940s and 1960s, the more recent *Death of Captain America* storyline (also from the comics), and the first two *Captain America* feature films.

One of the most interesting elements of *Agent Carter*, from the perspective of comic-book history, is the fact that the producers have depended to a significant extent on the basic situation established by Joe Simon and Jack Kirby in their earliest Captain America comics of the 1940s, in which his "original assignment was to combat spies and fifth columnists in the United States" (Sanderson 15). In 1965, after Kirby and

Stan Lee resurrected the character, they began to tell the stories of his adventures in the European theater during the war; this too is reflected in the setup of *Agent Carter* through its emphasis on her experiences as a World War II combat veteran who fought alongside Cap, particularly in the first-season episode "The Iron Ceiling," which reunites Peggy with her wartime colleagues the Howling Commandos (created by Lee and Kirby in 1963 and brought into the MCU in *The First Avenger*) for a secret mission in the Soviet Union. In essence, the producers have gone back to the situations of the earliest Captain America stories of the forties and sixties and replaced Steve Rogers with Peggy Carter, who is even depicted at one point (in a dream sequence) carrying Cap's iconic shield.

The significance of replacing an iconic World-War-II-era male superhero with a less iconic post-9/11 female one (though Peggy Carter was originally introduced in the comics in 1966) should be fairly obvious. The popularity of the series, particularly among women, reflects a timely interest in female representation in the historically male-dominated field of superhero mythology; and the issues addressed in the series are an accurate reflection of the historical issues faced by career women in the years after World War II, some of which are, unfortunately, still relevant today. These issues include the casual condescending sexism of the male-dominated workplace and the travails of powerful women being forced out of meaningful careers by less competent male competitors returning from their military service overseas, issues that are foregrounded by Peggy's unique status as a female combat veteran.

In addition, like most of the movies in the Avengers sequence, the two long story arcs of *Agent Carter* reflect the particular anxieties and paranoias of contemporary America with plot points and imagery that specifically reference the events of 9/11: the dramatic climax of *The First Avenger* involves Captain America foiling a Nazi attempt to divebomb a giant experimental superjet into Manhattan by taking control of the plane and deliberately crashing it harmlessly into the North Atlantic, sacrificing

himself in the process; just before the plane goes down, he and Peggy have a last poignant exchange over the radio. This scenario is repeated—with, spoiler alert, a happier ending—in the first season finale of *Agent Carter* when Peggy has a similar exchange with a brainwashed Howard Stark, who is about to divebomb a plane equipped with chemical weapons into Manhattan. These situations explicitly recall not just the images of hijacked jetliners crashing into the World Trade Center towers, but also the stories connected with United Flight 93, whose passengers fought back against their hijackers and sacrificed themselves when they prevented the plane from hitting its intended target by crashing it into a field in Pennsylvania. Prominent among the accounts of Flight 93 are the heart-wrenching stories of passengers' final cell-phone conversations with loved ones. The related forms of TV drama and comic book adventure thus address issues both of historical interest and of particular importance to Americans in the 2010s, specific issues having to do with the contemporary struggles of women, veterans, African Americans, and immigrants, as well as more general themes relating to the tensions between personal privacy and national security, individual self-determination and communal responsibility, liberty and authority, trust and secrecy, theatricality and reality, performance and identity.

As of this writing, *Agent Carter* has been cancelled by ABC, with all of its major storylines left unresolved, and not without protest from its devoted fans; a Change.org petition asking Netflix to pick up the show began circulating soon after the announcement of its cancellation, so far to little apparent effect. But whether Peggy Carter returns or not—and there is reason to think that Marvel Studios will find some way to integrate the story of the creation of SHIELD into other parts of the MCU—*Agent Carter* deserves to be seen not only for its sumptuous period production and costume design, its sly writing and acting, its wit and heart, and its essential position as an untold chapter in the ongoing MCU superhero saga, but for its elevation of powerful women in commanding lead roles

and for its emphasis on issues faced by women and veterans in both of its relevant time periods.

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Reviews

THE POPULAR CULTURE STUDIES JOURNAL REVIEWS

Introduction

The reviews for this volume took an unexpected turn when Open Court Press's Popular Culture and Philosophy books started to arrive in my mailbox. What should I do with five books from the same publisher all about particular popular culture artifacts and philosophy? Rather than pick and choose which ones to have reviewed and which not to include so as to have room for other books on other topics from other publishers, I was lucky enough to find authors willing to review multiple books from the series in relation to one another. And then, I realized that so many of the books reviewed for this volume engaged with philosophical issues in popular culture, from the search for meaning in the new millennium to pragmatism and music, and from punishment in popular culture to the role of terror in American popular culture. The prevalence of philosophical issues should give all of us food for thought about the connections between popular culture and philosophy and also urge us to consider where we should go from here.

Two additional themes emerged in the books reviewed for this volume: non-media popular culture – from the Jewish deli to nudism and from bicycles to the folkloresque – and analyses of disability, medicine, appearance, and fashion. While the topics of the former group may be unrelated (other than as popular culture), they are not so surprising, even as the books and reviews are compelling and useful. The fact that issues of disability, medicine, appearance, and fashion were addressed in popular culture books was also not too unexpected. But, the fact that many of these

topics were dealt with together did take me by surprise. The reviews of these books forced me to think about embodiment in different ways and consider the relationships between representation and audience, self and others, and even the philosophical issues of perception and reality.

The final reviews deal with more "traditional" (yet just as important) areas in popular culture, such as race and gender. Even so, these reviews focus on books about topics as diverse as politics, music, geography, aesthetics, marriage equality, privilege, housework, religion, and superheroes. I am so pleased that I had the time and opportunity to work with so many reviewers and include reviews of so many books to help me decide which books I will need on my office shelves in the future.

Time (and the lack thereof) is a reminder of our (my) limitations and opportunities. I definitely do not have the time to read all of these books and after three years as the Reviews Editor, I, unfortunately, do not have the time to serve in this role any more. So, I have decided it is time to pass the job on to someone else. I still believe in the project that is *The Popular Culture Studies Journal*, have thoroughly enjoyed working with Bob, Kathleen, Norma, and especially my invaluable assistant editor, Samantha Latham. I have learned so much about Popular Culture Studies from the plethora of books that have crossed my desk and even more from the reviews I have had the pleasure to read, review, and publish. Even so, I have chosen to take what I have learned in this job and stretch and expand my education by taking a position as Associate Editor at another journal. Since cloning myself is currently impossible and a morally ambiguous (at best) undertaking, I just do not have time to do both. So, it is the moment to give this job and experience to another deserving editor, Malynnda Johnson (University of Mount Union). I wish her the best of luck and hope to serve on the editorial board so that I may continue my education in another capacity. Here's to the best of times for Malynnda in the coming years! Thank you all for your support and encouragement!

Jennifer C. Dunn

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Barkman, Adam and Robert Arp (Eds.). *Downton Abbey and Philosophy: Thinking in That Manor.* Chicago, IL: Open Court, 2016.

Greene, Richard and Rachel Robison-Greene (Eds.). *The Princess Bride and Philosophy: Inconceivable!* Chicago, IL: Open Court, 2016.

Michaud, Nicholas and Janelle Lötzsch (Eds.). *Dracula and Philosophy: Dying to Know.* Chicago, IL: Open Court, 2016.

Book series on popular culture and philosophy are, in the scheme of things, a relatively new phenomenon, having emerged just at the beginning of the 21st century, when Open Court Publishing followed up on the success of its one-off *Seinfeld and Philosophy* with the 2001 publication of *The Simpsons and Philosophy* (subtitled *The D'oh of Homer*). The Simpsons book sold "around a quarter of a million copies" within the first six years of its release (Reisch and Slowik), and one philosophy professor reports receiving six or seven copies for Christmas in 2001, with many colleagues experiencing similar levels of generosity (Asma). Open Court's pop culture and philosophy series really started to take off, though, in 2004, when it published five books in that line. Since then, the series has added no fewer than five books per year, with a median of 8 books per year since 2004. In 2015 it added 11 more, the most since the series started. There are 98 books in Open Court's series as of this writing, with more in progress. Other publishers have elbowed into this territory, with similar series having been initiated by Blackwell,

Wiley, and the University of Kentucky Press, and there are others seemingly eager to get in on the action as well (Malloy). But the place of this kind of scholarship within a larger "ecology" of academic publishing seems to be an open question, and having personally committed an act of pop culture and philosophy (White), I have a stake in the answer.

Certainly, the popularity and commercial success of philosophy and popular culture book series is at least somewhat surprising, given the uneasiness of the relationship between philosophy and popular culture. "The two domains seem like different planets," philosopher Steven T. Asma asserts, "each with an atmosphere hostile to the other." Philosophers, focused on their deep thoughts, are supposed to find the mundane world a distraction at best and a hazard at worst. How, then, are philosophers supposed to engage with popular culture? "Philosophy broods, analyzes, and tends toward the anti-social; popular culture celebrates, wallows, and tends toward the communal," says Asma, perhaps slightly overstating the case. However, the dichotomy he sets up resembles semiotician Umberto Eco's (1994) formula castigating both "apocalyptic and integrated intellectuals" for their failure to seriously engage with the products of mass culture as *messages* embedded within a larger system of "mass communication" (32). According to Eco, the apocalyptic intellectual adopts an elitist position toward culture, maintaining the distinction between high and low cultures. "If culture is an aristocratic phenomenon," he observes, "then even to conceive of a culture that is shared by everyone and tailored accordingly is a monstrous contradiction" (17). The rise of mass culture, from such a perspective, is an "irretrievable loss," in the face of which the only response is to "give an extreme, apocalyptic testimony" that if nothing else consoles the reader, permitting a glimpse, "against a background of catastrophe, [of] a community of 'supermen' capable, if only by rejection, of rising above banal mediocrity" (18).

But the authors who write chapters for book series on philosophy and popular culture are not aghast; quite the reverse, they regard the texts of popular culture as meriting their attention, like Eco's "integrated" intellectuals. To be sure, the authors of these chapters more often employ a *didactic* than an *analytic* approach to the material. That is, they tend to use some aspect of the pop culture text in question to illustrate or elucidate philosophical concepts, rather than employing philosophical concepts to explain or unpack the text. For example, A.P. Mills' chapter ("Keeping It Under Control") in Barkman and Arp's *Downton Abbey and Philosophy: Thinking in That Manor* uses the misfortunes of the unlucky character Bates in *Downton Abbey* as an opportunity to explicate Epictetus's philosophy of Stoicism; similarly, J.V. Karavitis's piece in the same volume ("Finding One's Place and Being Useful") connects a typology of attitudes toward work shown by the different characters in the series to different positions in the philosophy of labor—though we certainly learn something about *Downton Abbey* in the process. Conversely, J.E. Mahon's chapter on vampiric immortality ("The Curse of Living Forever") in Michaud and Lötzsch's book delves into the implications of Count Dracula's Heideggerian "being-toward-undeath" to make sense of van Helsing's statement in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* that immortality is a "curse" for vampires. In like vein, Elsby and Luzecky's chapter ("The End of Inigo Montoya") in Greene and Robison-Greene's volume on *The Princess Bride* draws upon the Aristotelian notion of "final cause" to explore the identity-related consequences of the Spanish swordsman's attainment of his revenge against Count Rugen. Too much can perhaps be made of this distinction, but as Asma points out, it is their commitment to the cerebral abstractions of philosophy that drives these authors. "If their argument about God, for example, starts from a TV show but then moves well beyond that show into conceptual stratosphere and back into the history of philosophy, that's just fine" (B15).

Nonetheless, each of these volumes explores questions related to the thematic focus of the work in question. Barkman and Arp's book on *Downton Abbey* includes chapters that examine the workings of class and the functions of etiquette, manners, and politeness as well as questions of free will and social obligation; Greene and Robison-Greene's volume on *The Princess Bride* spends time on deception, justice, war, friendship, love, femininity, and the miraculous. Michaud and Lötzsch's consideration of *Dracula* includes discussions of the nature of evil, sexuality, and identity. Interestingly, Michaud and Lötzsch include a number of chapters in a section called "From the Dracula Files," that play with the epistolary character of Bram Stoker's novel, for example by inserting historical figures (Maimonides), fictional characters (Camus's Stranger), or even the authors themselves into some sort of correspondence with the Count. These are creatively interesting but perhaps somewhat less straightforward argumentatively than are the other chapters—T. Sexton's "Hoover and McCarthy Meet Dracula," for instance, is presented as a set of (fictional but historically grounded) FBI files recounting the red-baiting inquiry surrounding the making of an Abbott and Costello movie featuring the Universal movie monsters.

Of the three, the books about *Dracula* and *Downton Abbey* seem to reward philosophical interrogation more fruitfully, perhaps because the fictional worlds they examine are more grown-up, for lack of a better word. Some of the chapters about *The Princess Bride* verge on the twee, as with W. Yuen's exploration of annoyance ("Should I Really Stop the Rhyming?"), executed via a superabundance of footnotes.

But as philosophy teacher Daniel P. Malloy (himself a contributor to the *Princess Bride* volume) argues, one should expect the value of these sorts of books to be primarily pedagogical, given that "professional philosophers are not interested in them, and most lay audiences would have a hard time caring less about them" (Malloy 293). The didactic quality of many of the chapters as written suggests that at least some

contributors do indeed see themselves as serving this function, as does the fact that in their contributor biographies, over half (about 53%) describe themselves as teachers. However, the overlap among authors (about one-third of these contributors have written chapters for or served as editors of other books in the series) raises questions about the value that this sort of work has for its authors. It may be that writing about it from an academic perspective may be simply a part of how these scholars engage with and appreciate popular culture—aca/fen (Jenkins) in truth!

In short, the project of philosophy and popular culture is an interesting one from a popular culture studies perspective because of how it grapples with the erosion of high culture/low culture boundaries and how it represents itself within the dialogue of the disciplines. There is material here for a truly fascinating popular culture studies inquiry into the production and reception of these epitexts (Genette). More immediately, pop culture scholars may find useful insights about specific texts within the corresponding popular culture and philosophy volumes, although the prevalence of didactic over than analytic chapters means that some digging may be required. In the classroom, they might prompt interesting and useful discussion of how we interpret and make meaning out of popular culture. Michaud and Lötzsch's collection of essays on *Dracula,* in particular, seems well-suited as a supplementary text in a course about Stoker's novel in particular or Victorian horror literature in general.

<div align="center">
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Greene, Richard and Rachel Robinson-Greene, editors. *Orange Is the New Black and Philosophy: Last Exit from Litchfield*. Chicago: Open Court, 2015. Print.

The long-running FX series *It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia* and the widely popular Netflix original *Orange is the New Black* inspired two recent volumes from Open Court's *Popular Culture and Philosophy* series. Both books unpack the Western philosophical value of two popular cultural artifacts. In *It's Always Sunny and Philosophy: The Gang Gets*

Analyzed, editors Roger Hunt and Robert Arp gathered fifteen essays from scholars arranged in four sections. The text connects philosophical insights to show content, ranging from recognizing Aristotle's Nichomachean virtue in the inability of the central characters to find ethical middle ground, to the prescriptivist approaches of David Hume's Empiricism in Frank's gritty experiences, and René Descartes's rationalist approach in Mac's tendency to expand endlessly on almost any principle. In *Orange Is the New Black and Philosophy: Last Exit from Litchfield*, editors Richard Greene and Rachel Robison-Greene collected fifteen essays from scholars arranged in seven sections. This text makes similar philosophical connections, from Jean Paul Sartre's existentialist notions of dread in the main character's search for authenticity while incarcerated, to Nietzsche's exemplification of the superhuman in Laverne Cox's portrayal of Sophia Burst. Each television series and corresponding philosophical texts provide the foundation for dialog and exploration of historical concepts and societal themes.

The authors of the essays contained in *It's Always Sunny and Philosophy: The Gang Gets Analyzed* provide analysis of the television series that is entertaining, accessible, and indicative of the analyzed content. The show is decidedly crass in subject matter and tone, often celebrating commonly vilified attributes such as greed and selfishness. "The gang," consisting of Dee, Charlie, Dennis, Mac, and Frank, all turn to any practice of villainy to obtain personal gain, recognition, and wealth. Throughout the volume they are considered not so much as people, but as conceptual opposites of our shared values. As a result we never come to understand who the gang is or why they do what they do, but we do come to understand who they are not, according to the text, this is helpful in understanding what we would like to be.

For example, Jason Iuliano, in Chapter Two, correlates hedonist Greek philosopher Aristippus and his followers the Cyrenaics to the actions of the gang as they pursue narcissistic goals. Evoking egotistical egoism and

the pursuit of pure pleasure as ancient hedonist rationale, the dilemma arises when real pleasure eludes each character and we are allowed to see the pitfalls of such thought (30), that pleasure does not necessarily result in happiness. Similarly, Charlotte Knowles in Chapter Six examines how the gang continually defies normality. In their quest to counter societal expectations they are marked as authentic, functioning ontologically in negation, they also are partially structured by the norms they attempt to defy.

The authors of Chapter Seven inquire whether happiness can be universally defined. For the gang it is individually based in short term schemes that ultimately fail to produce anything remotely similar to happiness. In this regard, they are content to fail becoming "reverse role-models" (89). This theme continues in Chapter Eight, "Frank Reynolds, Role Model." Adam Henchke makes the argument that while the rest of the gang suffer from self-delusions that manifest themselves in fantastical self-creations such as Mac's futile pursuit of hyper-masculinity or Dee's unrealistic dreams of success, Frank functions as a virtuous role model. Aristotle notes, a person with practical wisdom has experience and Frank has experience in both the world of restraint and the world of excess he acts out with the gang. Thus, in an effort to locate this ethical middle ground the group continually ask themselves "what would Frank do?" (93).

In Chapter Eleven Ethan Chambers concludes that the five central characters are in fact awful people, as each is a "narcissistic, greedy, unstable asshole with few, if any, redeeming qualities" (123). This theme of the conceptual antithesis persists throughout the text while concurrently discussing why the actions of these characters are meaningful. In this instance, through the lens of Hume who suggests we view behavior with a loose ethical code. This book tries to make sense of four individuals that continually elude responsibility and seemingly exists outside of any moral or ethical paradigm. Written in a deliberately accessible prose complete

with language indicative of the series, this text attempts to familiarize the audience with western philosophical concepts through an examination of the characters and situations contained in the series.

The focus of the next volume from Open Court's *Popular Culture and Philosophy* series receives a similar, yet slightly more nuanced examination. The successful television series *Orange is the New Black* captured 13 Emmy nominations in 2014 and contains many important social issues in America surrounding gender, sexuality, privilege, and the highest rate of incarceration in the world. The series plot revolves around the fictional character Piper Chapman, modeled after Piper Kerman, the author of the adapted bestselling nonfiction book based on her experiences. Kerman graduated from one of the most expensive universities in the nation, Smith College. Shortly after, she flies into Belgium with a suitcase containing roughly ten thousand dollars intended for use in the sale of illegal drugs. Years later she is convicted of a felony and sentenced to thirteen months at the Federal Correctional Institute, Danbury. The facts construct the backdrop of a tragic contemporary comedy indicative of the systemic relationship between The War on Drugs, the Prison-Industrial Complex, and white privilege. Once inside the fictitious prison of Litchfield the audience experiences a scripted slice of these intersecting conditions along with the philosophical implications that come with an examination of prison life. Through the lens of Piper the nuanced lives of historically marginalized and severely under-represented communities in popular television and the social sphere in general are depicted, both embodying and transcending stereotypical roles.

In a rare critical moment, author Christina A. DiEdoardo in Chapter Three directly confronts this conundrum of identity representation within the series. Cox, a transgender woman of color, plays the strong role of Burst. In order to survive, the character is forced to endure, suffer and ultimately overcome, becoming an embodied exemplar of Friedrich Nietzsche's "Ubermensche." Cox's character reflects real challenges in

relation to Piper's apparent privilege, marked largely as naiveté. This requires her to defy various social and physical norms pushing not only herself, but also others to behave in courageous and inventive ways.

The author of Chapter Five examines Jeremy Bentham's panopticon, an ideal prison design that instills in inmates a sense of continual observation. According to Michel Foucault this 18th century conception marks a turn in Western discipline from punishing the body to that of the mind. Prisoners are divided from others and themselves in a context of intense scrutiny and observation, which primarily disciplines psychologically. Various forms of surveillance have become a norm of contemporary discipline, as inmates, like the characters of the show, seldom remain unwatched.

In Chapter Twelve, author Stephen Felder takes us to the opening scene of the first episode as we are introduced to prison life and the main character through a cliché shower scene. The voyeuristic theme of the series is established early as the plot revolves around the suitability of Piper's breasts for television. Ashamed as an object of gaze, Piper looks in the mirror and comes to see herself differently, through the intersubjective lens of the self in relation to others. Maurice Merleau-Ponty in *Phenomenology of Perception* suggests that consciousness takes shape in a world of others (165) and we are introduced to Piper through the eyes of Clara, a fellow inmate, altering her own self-conception. It is in this "relationship between the self, the body, and the other" (157) that the series and this text function, as an intersubjective experience indicative of and available for observers.

Both of these texts offer essays that examine and further discussions concerning two rich cultural artifacts. Using television series to explicate ancient and contemporary Western philosophy, each extends both theoretical thought and introspection of series content, but falls short of providing a socially critical reading. The short and matter-of-course format of the sections and essays are illuminating and exceedingly

readable. Potentially useful for introductory college students in fields ranging from philosophy to communication as well as general reader with interests in *Popular Culture and Philosophy,* these two volumes of the literary series once again offer inviting ways to learn more about and apply philosophy to our shared textual landscape.

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Maloney, Marcus. *The Search for Meaning in Film and Television: Disenchantment at the Turn of the Millennium.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015. Print.

Reading philosophy in the context of popular culture is a precarious balancing act. It poses a need to sustain a critical philosophical outlook without reducing the texts to a narrow, mechanical reading based on an external set of ideas. Marcus Maloney takes on this daunting challenge in *The Search for Meaning in Film and Television* and succeeds in maneuvering the thin line between philosophical criticism and the heterogeneity of popular texts. While the succession of "Philosophy and Popular Culture" books on a wide range of topics from Wiley-Blackwell and Open Court Publishing have opened up interesting conversations across the field, they tend to focus on a specific pop-culture phenomenon as the point of study. In contrast, Maloney's book is an interesting attempt that studies the overall direction of popular culture and society by addressing four diverse texts from the turn of the millennium. It provokes phenomenological and epistemological questions about selfhood in the context of a changing landscape of arts and culture.

The book consists of four chapters, each dealing with a specific popular text— *Toy Story* (Pixar, 1995), *The Dark Knight* trilogy (Christopher Nolan, Warner Bros., 2005-2012), *Sex and the City* (HBO, 1998-2004) and *The Sopranos* (HBO, 1999-2007). The choice of these texts is particularly commendable as it seeks to discuss a variety of genres, audiences and cultural contexts. The author cleverly exploits these genre-defying 'crossover hits' that have captured popular imagination to explore themes of duty, sacrifice, loyalty and identity. Besides these chapters, an introduction and conclusion set up and evaluate the premises of the project. The introduction demonstrates well-reasoned logic as well as reflexive pragmatism, as it outlines the limits of the project from various perspectives of discipline, philosophical and critical approaches, and milestones in the evolution of modern philosophy. The enormous magnitude of the project is coherently streamlined in the introduction as it blends philosophical concepts with narrative and technological histories of cinema and television. Through a careful navigation of key 19th and 20th century thinkers including Nietzsche, Weber, and Camus, the introduction stages the problem of ontology of meaning in a secular world.

Chapters two and three focus on cinematic encounters with philosophy where the search for meaning is reflected in the questing narrative of the hero's journey. The discussion of *Toy Story* deftly captures the meta-textual questioning of selfhood in a literally animated world, while teasing out the philosophical implications about one's purpose in life through Woody and Buzz Lightyear's acceptance of their roles in a Nietzschean, godless world. The chapter on Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight* trilogy takes a different psycho-social approach by exploring responsibility as a response to trauma and grief. It engages with the mythic tropes of justice and transformation in Batman without apotheosizing him. In one of the most compelling sections in the book, Batman's villains are examined as an inevitable consequence of his vigilantism, further complicating the politics and ethics of identity formation.

The next two chapters on television present an interesting juxtaposition between two disparate worlds which are equally obsessed with relationships and perception. While the female identities in *Sex and the City* break away from established conventions of romantic-comedies, *The Sopranos* presents a tongue-in-cheek view of masculinity as an elaborate construction. This parallel between the modern day anxieties of the two texts suddenly reorders the apparently irreconcilable worlds by erasing the boundaries between a socialite and a mobster. In addition to the question of meaning, these chapters also address the issue of mass culture and art. The chapter on *The Sopranos* convincingly argues for the case of television as high art while continuing the trope of a protagonist who struggles for find his place in the world. The chapter on *Sex and the City* examines the subversion of romantic comedy genre conventions that the show enacts in search of identity.

Each chapter provides brief overviews that contextualize and position the critical redefinition initiated by the texts in their respective genres. The textual analysis in these chapters is not restricted to just the content, as it discusses aspects of casting, intertextuality and soundtrack at various points to comment on the overall impression of the text. In this regard, the book stays true to its aim of an interdisciplinary enquiry of meaning in various texts. Considering the widespread popularity of these texts, the aim of adding to the critical conversation without giving in to examinations of various fan-theories and responses is a bold and admirable one. Overall, this book has a clear conception of what it intends to achieve— to raise concerns of contemporary culture through a close analysis of representative texts. Such an endeavor has its inherent limitations that are made apparent in moments where the author spreads himself too thin in trying to tie together the different threads of technology, narrative content, philosophy and criticism. This is most acutely felt in chapter 2, where he tries to position the Christopher Nolan version of Batman in the tradition of comics, superhero cinema as well as

other existing Batman films; threads that do not always contribute to the larger question of 'search for meaning' in the book. However, any resultant unevenness is overcome by his passionate and critical engagement with the texts.

Professor John Shelton Lawrence writes in *Philosophy Now* about the significance of reading philosophy in popular culture as a pedagogical strategy that introduces abstract philosophical concepts to students by encouraging them to critically reflect on contemporary culture. However, he also warns against uncritical identification with the texts that overlooks the corporate politics behind their production. Maloney's book, at times, seems to overlook these political entanglements of production in favor of drawing out discussions about our existence and social relationships through the texts. Instead of reading them as embedded in the social and historical contexts, Maloney regards them as myths that stand outside time and continuity, and thus momentarily loses touch with the ethical grounding of philosophical criticism. And while such a reading stands testament to the significance of these texts as cultural events in popular Western consciousness, it also points to the gap that continues to exist between epistemological and ethical branches of philosophy. However, the lofty ambitions of the book go beyond just critically reading popular culture, as it extends to using them as philosophical modes of reflecting on reality. In that sense, the book positions itself in an intersection that appeals to students, especially undergraduates who find it difficult to see the deployment of critical theory and philosophy in something as broad as popular culture.

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Rose, Phil. Radiohead and the Global Movement for Change: "Pragmatism not Idealism." Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson, 2016. Print.

Radiohead's critically acclaimed third album *OK Computer* is, in former Media Ecology Association President Phil Rose's estimation, quite a lot more than a collection of experimental and muscular alternative rock. In this substantial work of criticism, Rose argues that *OK Computer* is best understood as both harbinger and codicil. To be precise, Rose contends that the album, which debuted in 1997, both presages and illuminates the conditions of our present media era, which Neil Postman described in terms of "technopoly"—the emergence of a cultural climate marked by the surrender of human thought and judgment to technique.

A prefatory disclaimer is in order: Rose is *not* arguing that singer Thom Yorke and his bandmates are ersatz media theorists (i.e., that the band understands the great swaths of media theory that Rose marshals or intended all along to teach listeners something important about technopoly). The intentional fallacy is not a part of this project. Instead, Rose's work relies upon a conception of artistic activity derived from the works of Jacques Ellul, Marshall McLuhan, and Neil Postman. Artists, McLuhan suggested, are best understood as "navigational guides" whose uncommon sensitivity to the limits of a given media environment (perhaps because they find themselves so poorly fitted for it) positions them to construct "counterenvironments"—texts that work to render visible and draw the public's attention to the taken-for-granted dimensions of the

hegemonic media environment that envelopes it. Imagining the artist as antenna and seismograph, Rose argues that in its lyrics and musical content, *OK Computer* points to the shock, dazzle, and alienation that comes hand in hand with our ever-accelerating convergence media age.

In pursuit of his thesis, Rose introduces concepts drawn from McLuhan's writings on media as extensions of human perception and art as counterenvironment; Susanne Langer's work on the presentational symbolic form of music; and Silvan Tomkins's affect-script theory. For many readers of this journal, it is likely that affect-script theory will be the most novel element: the theory, which emerged in the field of psychology, posits that stimuli, conceived in terms of scenes or sets of scenes, elicit a range of affective responses (excitement-enjoyment; shame-humiliation; distress-anguish; disgust; and fear-terror, anger-rage, and dissmell) which are made intelligible through scripts, which link affect to cognition. The result of Rose's bricolage is a complicated theoretical assemblage suited for multimedia music criticism and capable of speaking to the power of music to generate insights and solicit emotional responses in listeners.

Though the title of the volume suggests that Rose undertakes a comprehensive interrogation of the band's corpus, this is really a close exploration of *OK Computer* alone. As he walks readers through each song, Rose argues that the album's contents sensitize listeners to the various attendant symptoms of technopoly. In his hands, Cosmic Man, the subject who emerges from the songs—sometimes heroically, but often less so—appears as a figure overwhelmed by information; detached from the natural world, humanity, and even his self; distrustful of truth and knowledge; and separated from tradition. Often, Rose argues, the songs dramatize the deleterious social consequences of technopoly—the erosion of faith in metanarratives, the shocking reach of the military-industrial complex and the surveillance state, the isolation of individuals from their communities, and rising inequality. All is not dire though; in the album's last song entitled "The Tourist," Rose finds Cosmic Man engaged in a

form of self-criticism, suggesting the potential for reflection and the positive modification of technopoly.

For loyal fans of the band, Rose's thesis will likely generate approval; and its exposition will deepen their appreciation of an already well-celebrated album. For the unconverted, however, the central argument may seem less plausible. Rose is quite generous in his unpacking of music and lyrics that the band members themselves have described as being comprised of inside jokes, slapdash production ideas, and the results of drunken partying (Doheny 62; Randall 214-215). And he sometimes loses the plot in digressions about the overfishing of the oceans, US hegemony in space exploration, and other complications of global capitalism and technopoly. They aren't entirely unrelated to the thrust of the work; but the project would probably be better served if Rose followed Kenneth Burke's practice of escorting such "radiations" to the footnotes in order to keep the reader moving swiftly through the analysis. Those caveats aside, the book offers a trained explication of some of the most significant outgrowths of media ecology and the novel introduction of affect-script theory. It should be a welcome addition to the libraries of scholars of popular music, those interested in media ecology, and all who hope to see affect—a concept in vogue across the humanities as of late—put to use in a sustained critical effort.

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Frith, Jordan. *Smartphones as Locative Media*. Cambridge:
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Nearly 60% of all U.S. adults carry smartphones; their use is growing
rapidly in developing countries (Smith). The ever-changing media
landscape is no longer limited to the accessibility of wires or a fixed
screen, but has expanded to include any place a cell phone may be carried.
It is not surprising, then, that 74% of smartphone users say they use
location-based applications (Zickuhr). As Jordan Frith notes in
Smartphones as Locative Media, mobile telephony, while conceived as
utilitarian, has evolved past the compression of space and time that began
with the steam locomotive and telegraph. Today's smartphones have
enabled new possibilities for relationships and commerce and have
become integral to the ways we make sense of where we are, where we
have been, and where we might be going.

　　As part of Polity's Digital Media and Society series, this book explores
the ways in which smartphones do more than extend people's Internet use;
they prompt us to interact with locations, and in doing so stimulate us to
redefine spatial experiences in new ways. Frith begins with a discussion of
how conceptions of the Internet and life online have changed over time,
and of the "internet disconnect" that characterized many early perspectives
concerning online life. He notes that rather than retreating to a "separate"
online space, today's mobile internet user experiences a hybrid of physical
and online interactions; online activity blends with "real life" to enhance
what would be an ordinary experience of space with location-based
applications and services.

　　Next, Frith moves to a conceptual discussion he calls "the spatial
turn," and this interdisciplinary look at various social theories of place is a

major strength of the book. Notions from McLuhan, Marx, and de Certeau give way to further groundwork laid by Meyrowitz and others; Frith surveys related ideas from media scholars, critical theorists, anthropologists and even geographers (Doreen Massey) to show the roots of "the mobilities turn" of the late 1990s and early 2000s that led to the locative media studies of today.

Chapter Three takes a new direction: it examines the infrastructure of the technology itself. While including an accurate and detailed description of said infrastructure, this section might well belong later in the book, or perhaps as an appendix. Following such a well-written conceptual chapter, most of it appears as somewhat of a detour. The final section of this chapter is more relevant in its focus on smartphones, app stores, and the politics of technology, but could well have been combined with Chapter Seven, which provides a detailed history of the mobile application Foursquare.

Frith returns to his strong conceptual framework in the next chapter, "Wayfinding Through Mobile Interfaces," with a discussion of the political and social aspect of geography and how GPS-based mapping via smartphones can reflect the differing perspectives of governments, programmers, and/or users. Mobile mapping brings an ancient practice into the present and impacts how people move through, and indeed, conceive of, their surrounding space. Some of the most interesting studies reviewed here examine the "wayfinding behaviors" of city walkers led by human guides, paper maps, and mobile mapping applications. Those in the latter group interacted less with, and recalled less about, their surroundings than those traveling with paper maps or human guides. They also developed less-accurate cognitive maps of the spaces in which they traveled. Rather than declare such technological effects "good or bad" Frith encourages a postcognitive perspective – "offloading" cognitive activities to technology is not a problem for those (such as phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty and others) who see cognition

as distributed across the environment and not contained within the individual anyway. Such a view considers individuals and their surroundings as part of the same cognitive network, which leads to an interesting discussion of transactive memory to close what may be the book's most fascinating chapter.

Next, Frith examines the practice of social location sharing, and offers a history of early applications such as Lovegety, Dodgeball, and others. A good deal of space is devoted to now-defunct applications before getting to the discussion of identity. This will please fans of early online history if no one else; this chapter could easily have been combined with the next though, which takes an interesting look at how people "write" space through applications such as Facebook or Yelp, and through geo-tagging on Instagram. They archive it in ways future users may access – through restaurant reviews, safety warnings, photos or just interesting trivia and tips about a place. It is a way of making private user experiences public.

In Chapter Seven, Frith surveys various issues related to privacy and locative media, and highlights the overall lack of legal precedents for many of the issues raised. The reader is challenged to consider the difficulty of dividing information shared with others into the categories "public" or "private" and to consider urban dwellers as both "private" and "public" at the same time. This discussion might well have been bolstered by combining it with Frith's earlier discussions of the impacts of media technologies.

The book concludes with a discussion of the worldwide impact of mobile media, particularly the "leapfrogging" of technologies that has occurred in the Global South as individuals who never had traditional landlines are, in record number, obtaining smartphones that become their first telephones as well as their first Internet-access devices. Issues of global digital inequality and digital customization are also discussed. Finally, Frith examines the future of locative media with a discussion of

how various locative apps may splinter potentially shared experiences of mobile technology users.

In this volume, Frith examines a complex topic well by approaching it from a variety of (mostly) relevant angles. While the deliberately clear thesis sentences and conclusions in each chapter can seem pedantic at times, Frith's writing style is generally relatable and engaging, and he uses examples from his own experiences to help readers see the relevance of his topic. Scholars and graduate students in media and technology fields as well as anthropology should find the book a worthwhile read. S*martphones as Locative Media* is a worthwhile contribution to the study of smartphones in society. Their locative capabilities contribute to how we view ourselves and the spaces we choose to occupy. Frith's interdisciplinary approach to articulating the experience of mobile smartphone use with relevant theory makes this a must-read for locative media researchers and others interested in the impact of mobile media and related digital technologies on society.

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Foster, Michael Dylan and Jeffrey A. Tolbert. *The Folkloresque: Reframing Folklore in a Popular Culture World.* Boulder: Utah State University Press, 2016. Print.

To call Michael Dylan Foster and Jeffrey A. Tolbert's *The Folkloresque: Reframing Folklore in a Popular Culture World* thought provoking is a bit of an understatement. It is one of those rare academic tomes that strikes a responsive chord deep within the reader challenging her or his conceptualizations of the study of folklore, as well as the study of popular culture, through the discussion of how they "mutually influence each other," as well as "how they productively problematize distinctions between them" (4).

What Foster and Tolbert have done in *The Folkloresque* is to create a groundbreaking theoretical perspective with which to analyze the intersection of folklore and popular culture. The most noteworthy aspect of this is the creation and development of their analytical concept of the folkloresque which is that it is at once thoroughly modern yet intrinsically rooted in the past.

In his introduction, "The Challenge of the Folkloresque," Michael Dylan Foster explains what is meant by the term "folkloresque," taking great pains to delineate the position occupied by folkloric elements that serve as integral aspects of various popular culture artifacts. According to Foster, the folkloresque entails the "perception and performance of folklore" (5). Additionally, folkloresque pertains to the consumer's perception of whether or not the popular culture artifact has folkloric origins. In sum, three interrelated concepts unite to create the folkloresque. First, the artifact is perceived as possessing an element of folklore. Second, the artifact is thought to be linked to some external folkloric tradition. And third, the artifact is believed to possess value due to the perception that the artifact has a folkloric origin (5-6).

After discussing what the folkloresque entails, Foster then presents three categories of the folkloresque that will be used to organize the remaining chapters in the book. Each section highlights one of the categories of the folkloresque—integration, portrayal, and parody. Foster's co-author, Jeffrey Tolbert, writes a brief introduction to each section in which he offers a brief explanation of the category and what the essays in that section say about that particular concept.

The first folkloresque concept presented is integration. The integration section deals with how particular folkloric themes are melded together through the use of pastiche and allusion in order to create a bricolage of folkloric motifs found in such popular culture artifacts as Neil Gaiman's novels and Superman comics. Gaiman's novels are filled with references to Celtic, Native American, Egyptian, and Norse mythology which highlight the significant role played by the mythological tradition in modern day storytelling. Mythological elements are also found in the development of comic heroes like Superman whose creation story is based, in part, on Greek mythology. The incorporation of mythic elements into the Superman story and Gaiman's novels not only serves to inform their respective audiences of the role played by myths in modern day storytelling, but also how the mythic tradition continues to evolve and speak to modern day issues and concerns. Portrayal is the next folkloresque concept under discussion. In the portrayal section, the place and position occupied by the folkloresque, in relation to the entirety of popular culture, is assessed. In short, the concept of portrayal is concerned with ascertaining what folklore is, what purpose it serves in society, and why members of society should be mindful of folklore.

In the portrayal section there are essays discussing video games, Eamon Kelly's storytelling, and the Harry Potter novels. The portrayal section focuses on how and why folklore is used in various contexts. For example, in the chapter on video games, players encounter legendary and occult figures that must be dealt in order to win *Fatal Frame*, while in

Eamon Kelly's stories and the Harry Potter novels, the storylines would be nonexistent without the incorporation of the various legendary and mythological figures that drive the storylines. Thus, the use of legendary, occult, and mythological figures in the Harry Potter novels, Eamon Kelly's stories, and *Fatal Frame* allows the aforementioned popular culture artifacts to possess more prestige than other popular culture artifacts that lack such folkloric elements.

A fitting conclusion to *The Folkloresque* is the section on parody as it builds upon the theoretical underpinnings from the sections on integration and portrayal. In order to understand parody in regards to the folkloresque, one must be cognizant of folkloric motifs, know what folklore is, and understand the role and power of folklore in society. In an effort to assess the place parody occupies in regards to discussions of the folkloresque, Foster and Tolbert analyze critiques of jokes and popular science writing to see how the folkloresque influences meta-humor and meta-commentary. Parody does not exist in a vacuum. It requires the folkloresque to achieve its purpose. Whether it is jokes about the Penn State sexual abuse scandal, jokes about other jokes, or the mythological elements found through popular science writing, parody draws upon common folkloric tropes in order to comment on society.

Foster and Tolbert's *The Folkloresque* has managed to do what no other popular culture text has done in the twenty first century. What is meant by this is that despite the concept of the folkloresque coming to fruition in the new millennium, it possesses a refreshingly simple theoretical elegance that imbues it with a retro vibe that makes it seem like the folkloresque has been around for many decades. Another noteworthy aspect of *The Folkloresque: Reframing Folklore in a Popular Culture World* is that it begs for a sequel. In addition to serving as a pithy introduction to the concept of the folkloresque, the book's eleven chapters entice the reader to delve a little deeper into the intersection of folklore and popular culture and to perpetuate the folkloresque dialogue generated

by Foster and Tolbert. For example, branching off from the research on anime, what folkloresque concepts can be found in other feature films and television programs? Also, how does the folkloresque influence musical genres and eras? In addition to folk and neo-folk, what other genres and musical movements incorporate folkloresque elements in an effort to create a connection with their audience? What about popular culture ephemera and accoutrements? For instance, what debt of gratitude does Japan's kawaii culture have to the folkloresque? Is there a global aspect of the folkloresque that can serve as an explanation of the worldwide appeal of Hello Kitty?

In conclusion, Foster and Tolbert's *The Folkloresque: Reframing Folklore in a Popular Culture World* gives the field of cultural studies an invaluable present, namely a new theoretical concept with which to thoroughly enrich the scholarship of the study of both folklore and popular culture.

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McParland, Robert. *Beyond Gatsby: How Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and Writers of the 1920s Shaped American Culture.* Lanham: Rowan & Littlefield, 2015. Print.

The latest entry in Rowan & Littlefield's always thought-provoking Contemporary American Literature series, Robert McParland's *Beyond Gatsby: How Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and Writers of the 1920s Shaped American Culture* is a provocative, much-needed reminder of just how central a role art has played in shaping the modern American psyche.

"Novels," McParland suggests, "are like windows into national consciousness" (xiii), and "by taking classic 1920s novels off the shelves, we are not merely dusting off old relics. Many stories of the 1920s address the human condition, and with them we may also look at our own time, as if in a historical mirror" (xi). While his central focus and chief concern is on long-form narrative, McParland brilliantly contextualizes the novels of Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and Faulkner (among *many* others) by offering fresh readings against the cultural, social, and artistic backdrops of poetry (Eliot), European Modernism (Woolf and Joyce), industrialization (architecture and the assembly line), music (Porter, Gershwin, Rodgers, and Hammerstein), popular culture (Jack Dempsey, Babe Ruth), and history ('29's market crash, the Lindbergh flights).

Organized into succinct chapters, the first section of *Beyond Gatsby* is devoted to placing the literacy scene of the 1920s into a broader global context. Following an illuminating introduction and initial chapter in which McParland contextualizes the musical, artistic, and cultural landscapes of post WWI America, he explores the role Hemingway and Fitzgerald played in shaping the "new American novel" (16). "Artists," he writes, "led the way in their search for a new language, a new sense of meaning and purpose to live by" (41), and McParland offers a contrast between Hemingway's rigid moral code and Fitzgerald's neo-Romanticism. While Hemingway's influence on American literature would, no doubt, prove to be the more transformative, McParland reminds readers of Fitzgerald's unique role in (re)defining the modern.

Next, McParland offers a thoughtful assessment of Faulkner's many contributions to shaping the modern novel. Faulkner, he argues, is a "haunted writer" (45), and "to read [him] is to think with him about the racial problems that troubled him and have troubled the United States" (62). By tracing the influence of European masters (Joyce and Flaubert), contemporary prose stylists (Sherwood Anderson specifically), and cinema on Faulkner's evolving craft through the 1920's (and beyond),

McParland argues that Faulkner's Southern preoccupations have broader American (and, just as importantly, global) applications. His mythic Yoknapatawpha County not only can but *must* be read as a "microcosm of the larger society" (48). In this sense, Faulkner's South *is* America. Interestingly, McParland offers an analysis of Faulkner's work against the cultural backdrop of "the resurgence of Jim Crow laws and the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s" (46). Whether he is exploring matters of race, culture, or the passage of time, Faulkner's wildly-experimental prose and boundary-pushing narrative techniques proved to be (and remain) both groundbreaking and influential.

Far too often, the antecedents of the modern American novel are traced back to Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and Faulkner. In the second half of *Beyond Gatsby*, McParland focuses on the undeniable contributions of "other voices." Taking a largely geographical approach, he thoughtfully reassesses the work of Midwestern authors such as Sherwood Anderson and Sinclair Lewis. The "golden age of 1920's American literature," he suggests, begins with Anderson's *Winesberg, Ohio* (95), and from there he offers a careful reading of the tragically-overlooked Willa Cather, whom he regards as "one of the important writers of the Roaring Twenties" (116). An innovative aspect of McParland's study is the way in which he includes critical assessments of lesser-known (yet influential) writers such as Glenway Wescott, Zona Gale, and Edna Ferber into his narrative.

In the next chapter, "Sounds of the City," McParland examines how the increasing urbanization of the 1920's "is highlighted in the fiction of the period" (123). Here, he turns his critical gaze to such well-known (if frequently overlooked) writers as Dreiser and Dos Passos. A highlight of this chapter is McParland's analysis of Anzia Yezierska, who became "a voice for the voiceless" (135) in her frank exploration of the feminine immigrant experience in the early 20th century. Finally, McParland concludes with a look at William Carlos Williams, John Steinbeck, and Edith Wharton (among others) who helped define the myth of modernity.

In the 1920s, "during a period of rapid change, American writers were concerned with how the present fit in with the past" (156), and ultimately, the modern American novel is the story of this concern. Jay Gatsby's glorious (if doomed) personal reinvention is the metaphoric story of us all. McParland's greatest achievement, in the end, is his extended mapping of this particularly American concern.

McParland's impressive depth of cultural knowledge, sharp analytic eye, and narrative prowess result in a study which offers precisely what the very best novels of the 1920's remain capable of—a vivid sense of place in a chaotic, ever-changing world. In an age of intense (and at times almost suffocatingly claustrophobic) specialization, McParland's text serves as a refreshing reminder of how critically transformative a well-written survey can be. His aim, to be sure, is a broad one. "This book," he explains in the preface, "explores the crucial turning point in American literary history and assesses the literary landscape that the reading audience responded to" (x). Today, as debates about the future of the novel rage on, McParland's study is particularly poignant and potentially transformative. He skillfully shows how the flappers, jazz hounds, and the "lost generation" provide a unique and important but far from representationally complete depiction of the 1920s literary scene. American modernity has deep roots in the South, in the Midwest, and in the inner-cities alike. An invaluable resource for Modernist specialists and scholars seeking to better understand the plurality of voices which defined the 1920s, in time, *Beyond Gatsby: How Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and Writers of the 1920s Shaped American Culture* is sure to become a canonical work on the modern American novel…and rightly so.

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Ogletree, Jr., Charles J. and Austin Sarat, editors. *Punishment in Popular Culture*. New York: New York University Press, 2015. Print.

The popularity of television series and films focusing on crime and law has continued to grow over the past several years. New series, including the podcast, *Serial*, from *This American Life*, and the Netflix series, *Making a Murderer,* focus on specific cases where questions of innocence or guilt remain for the convicted individual. These programs have sparked public debate about our criminal justice system, investigation processes, and punishment. Further, these public debates have seeped into the reality of the criminal justice system in allowing media programs to alter previously made decisions in regards to punishment of convicted prisoners. As Ogletree and Sarat write ". . . we do know that popular culture has 'invaded' law and reshaped some of its most fundamental processes" (4).

Charles Ogletree Jr. and Austin Sarat's edited volume, *Punishment in Popular Culture*, could not have come at a better time for scholars who are interested in how popular culture works to shape our perceptions of punishment through fictional depictions as well as through real-life images. The edited volume is a result of the Amherst College's Charles Hamilton Houston Forum on Law and Social Justice and Harvard University's Charles Hamilton Houston Institute for Race and Justice in 2013. While Ogletree and Sarat have collaborated on other edited volumes focused on justice and the death penalty, this is their first venture into the world of popular culture and how it relates to and impacts views of crime and punishment.

Ogletree and Sarat's edited book sets out to examine the images in popular culture and how these represent our expectations and realities of punishment. Additionally, the volume "seeks to make sense of what happens when mass-mediated images of legal processes like punishment

saturate our culture" (5). The United States has the highest incarceration rate in the world. With this in mind, the authors of the chapters set out to explore a variety of mediated images and actions surrounding crime and punishment. "The way a society punishes demonstrates its commitment to standards of judgment and justice, its distinctive views of blame and responsibility, its understandings of mercy and forgiveness, and its particular ways of responding to evil" (Ogletree and Sarat 1).

There are several strengths of the text for scholars of popular culture, crime, and punishment. First, this is the only compilation of essays on punishment in popular culture without a focus on a particular television series or a sole focus on film. There are several books investigating the images of crime and punishment in *The Wire* (Bzddack, Crosby, and Vannatta; Kennedy and Shapiro; Potter and Potter), *Law and Order* (Dwyer and Fiorillo), and *CSI* (Kompare), as well as books that investigate the issues of crime and punishment in film (Rafter; Rafter and Brown). Ogletree and Sarat's compilation allows researchers an opportunity to view punishment through different forms of media in one text, including films, fictional television series, reality television series, published images, and images shown in courtrooms and on social media. Being able to investigate images of punishment from different media allows the reader an opportunity to gain a breadth of knowledge about how punishment is depicted and how it may influence our society.

Additionally, the variety of analysis offered in the text is helpful to individuals who are well-versed in the scholarship of popular culture as it relates to crime and punishment as well as for those who are new to this area of research. The editors include researchers who are experts in the scholarship of punishment as well as those who are scholars of media studies. Aurora Wallace, a professor of media, culture, and communication from New York University offers the reader an in-depth critical analysis of prison narratives in National Geographic channel's reality television series, *Locked Up Abroad*. Kristin Henning, a professor

of law at Georgetown Law Center provides a look at the moral justifications for punishment in *The Wire*. In an analysis of backlash films from the 1970s-1990s including Clint Eastwood, Charles Bronson, and Chuck Norris films, Lary May, professor emeritus of history at the University of Minnesota, offers the reader an opportunity to understand how collective representations in these films contributed to the rise of punishment in our culture. The diversity of perspectives adds to the breadth of knowledge one can gain about punishment in popular culture.

The only criticism of the volume is that the majority of the chapters investigating images of punishment in film focus on older films. While it is helpful to provide analysis of historical media representations of punishment, more recent depictions would be useful in gaining a broader perspective on the topic of punishment and popular culture. For instance, the only chapter that deals with films in the twenty-first century is Sarat et al.'s chapter investigating images of execution in American film from the 1895, twenty-one second film, *The Execution of Mary Stuart* through to more recent films such as *Chicago* (2002) and *Law Abiding Citizen* (2009).

The chapters analyzing representations of punishment in television provide a more contemporary perspective for the reader. Additionally, the final two chapters that focus on the use of images and how these impact our views of criminals or of punishment allows for a greater perspective on how current media representations are impacting our world today. For those scholars interested in wrongful conviction cases or potential wrongful conviction cases such as those profiled in *Serial* and *Making a Murderer,* Garrett's chapter, "Images of Injustice," would prove extremely useful. He looks at the role images play in criminal cases including images from line-ups, eyewitness identification, seeing a confession, and social media. His chapter shows that images play a significant role in crime and punishment and show how the area of scholarship investigating punishment in popular culture is only going to grow over the next several

years. As Garrett writes, "Popular culture may continue to be a double-edged sword" (282).

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Kavadlo, Jesse. *American Popular Culture in the Era of Terror: Falling Skies, Dark Knights Rising, and Collapsing Cultures*. Denver, CO: Praeger, 2015. Print.

Jesse Kavadlo's attention to the historical precedence of terror and the way he weaves together American cultural history with a wealth of rich literary, television, and filmic texts in *American Popular Culture in the Era of Terror: Falling Skies, Dark Knights Rising, and Collapsing Cultures*, is something I've been wanting to read since I first launched into 9/11 research myself. No other 9/11 or post-9/11 book so aptly traces the pre-9/11 influences that lead to what Kavadlo aptly names "the era of terror." Kavadlo expertly brings together a multitude of cross-disciplinary studies to examine the role of terror, fear and terrorism in contemporary American society and trace how this has impacted our cultural narratives, using examples like Chuck Palahniuk's novels *Survivor* and *Fight Club*, television's *Lost*, and the film *World War Z*.

Kavadlo traces a trajectory through the era of terror, beginning before 9/11. The first four chapters trace the cultural history of terror from before 9/11 into the years shortly after when narrative dealt directly with 9/11 or played with common images and tropes that resulted from 9/11. The first chapter of the book analyzes 1990's literary works of Chuck Palaniuk to analyze domestic terror and examine the ways that his work prefigures 9/11, demonstrating that Americans were already concerned with terror before 9/11. The second chapter analyzes the novels and films that directly address 9/11 events and its aftermath, and how these tales deal mostly with the often futile search for missing family. Kavadlo aptly describes how these 9/11 narratives experiment in forms, discomforting and confronting the reader with attempts to make sense of a tragic event that cannot make sense of 9/11. The third chapter turns to how the "war on terror" has led to a shift in monster stories, including zombies in *World War Z*, vampires in *Twilight*, and aliens in *Avatar*. This chapter also aptly

dives into an analysis of how reading earlier novels about monsters has changed given the shifts in post-9/11 culture and the focus on the "war on terror." Chapter 4 provides an interesting and insightful examination of how *Lost* incorporated and changed the subtexts of 9/11 and the two wars that followed. This chapter provides insight into the show in relation to events in American culture that affected the show's narrative structure. It also discusses how the characters shifts in time and narrative space allows them the ability to return to the past and rewrite history, changing their own terror-filled life events.

The final three chapters of Kavadlo's text expand the idea of terror into several more recent cultural narratives and popular culture phenomena. Chapter 5 analyzes the trope of amnesia that is metaphorical in American culture and literal in film. This case of amnesia is explicated through a special focus on the dystopian world in the film adaptation of Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*. Chapter 6 expands the analysis of dystopia by looking at popular children's literature and film set in dystopian worlds, focusing on Suzanne Collin's series *The Hunger Games*. This chapter examines how dystopian worlds are marketed to younger generations, leaving the superheroes to become stories for adults. Chapter 7 looks closely at the preponderance of superhero narratives aimed at adults, especially in Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight* trilogy. Kavadlo explains how themes and imagery of terror and terrorism infiltrate this adaptation of the superhero story.

Kavadlo's chapters are well-written and thoughtful. I have used some of these chapters in media criticism classes. More recently, I had a television class read his chapter on *Lost*. This is an engaging critical analysis of American culture in the wake of terrorism and 9/11. It not only adds much to the scholarly discussion surrounding terror in our cultural narratives and cultural consciousness, but it is also a book that could add a lot to classroom discussions pertaining to the pervasiveness of American representations of terror, alternative narrative structures in television, or

how culture affects popular culture narratives. His writing is accessible enough for undergraduate students while complex and thorough enough for any graduate student or advanced scholar.

Kavadlo's conclusion brings up interesting questions for all of us. When Americans in the 2010s are safer than ever before, why is terror in popular culture narratives pervasive across our culture? Are we really in danger or just encouraged to believe we are from the narratives that we consume in literature, film, and television? Kavadlo suggests that we think about our current era as an *un-age*, rather than a post-postmodern age, defining this as a time where we can make things vanish, while leaving a trace of it behind, i.e. we can unfriend or unfollow people online. Kavadlo ties in our daily options to undo with the narrative structures in popular media, showing us that narratives unravel and undo themselves within their very structure. While in this final chapter, Kavadlo's analysis of the un-age is an unparalleled and brilliant analysis of the cultural shifts in American culture, I might add to this that we deal best with trauma through stories, and that might be why terror is still so pervasive in American cultural narratives. America is still regaining footing and trying to make sense of a contemporary world where building can crumble in hours and lives that can disappear so quickly without a trace.

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Merwin, Ted. *Pastrami on Rye: An Overstuffed History of the Jewish Deli*. New York: New York University Press, 2015. Print

Ted Merwin's *Pastrami on Rye: An Overstuffed History of the Jewish Deli* provides exhaustive research on the delicatessen and how it became an American institution; the book also provides a cultural history accompanied by anecdotes for understanding the New York Jewish experience through food. Merwin reported in an interview with Christine Baksi about this book, this is the "first comprehensive history of this subject, with a particular focus on the deli as an essential ethnic gathering place for post-immigrant generations of Jews who were shifting away from scrupulous religious observance and looking for more secular ways of building community" (par. 1). The extensive account Merwin delivers in this book, provides readers with a path to navigate the first delicatessens, through the jazz age, on to the Second World War, and after – including the decline of the deli, and its current place in U.S. culture.

Merwin's research included conducting interviews with retired and current deli owners, archival research, and analysis of English- and Yiddish-language books, trade journals, and newspapers. Additionally, the use of photographs, cartoons, film clips, television episodes, and quotations from memoirs, plays, poetry, novels, and short stories lend strength to the discussion of the delicatessen's role in American Jewish culture. In addition to the use of this research, Merwin collected and masterfully used memorabilia such as still photographs of delis or images of advertising cards which enriched my understanding of the history presented. Merwin also included several still-images of movie scenes and other popular culture references to the deli, such as in the film *When Harry Met Sally*, which helps solidify the case for studying the delicatessen within popular culture.

In the first chapter, Merwin introduces us to the first delicatessens in Eastern Europe, as well as the first delis in the United States. In this chapter we learn that American Jews did not bring this "deli culture" with them from the Old World. Merwin carefully explains how deli meats would have been too expensive for poor Jewish immigrants to buy with regularity and that their budgets would have limited their ability to store said meats. Also importantly discussed, is the pressure first-generation Jewish enclaves were under to abandon their food for more "Americanized fare" (36). Merwin then leads us through the establishment of the first delicatessen stores, Kosher food companies, and how the stores later became restaurants, emphasizing the involvement of government, as well as kosher laws in this development. This careful history richly highlights the development of the deli and how it became an important institution, especially for second-generation Jews.

Chapter two presents us with the development of the delicatessen through the Jazz Age and the period between the end of World War I and the beginning of World War II. Merwin attentively links the rise of Broadway and the theatre district with the rising success of the deli and how the opulent nature of the Jazz Age became associated with deli sandwiches in New York. Notably, "sandwiches were all the rage….the sandwich appealed, in one form or another, to everybody, in every social class and occupation in society" and "at these vibrant, humming eateries, ordinary New Yorkers hobnobbed with the rich and famous" (56). The chapter includes a discussion of how the development of non-Kosher delis allowed "for Jews to eat mostly traditional food but to free themselves from the stringency of the kosher dietary laws…and to provide a secular avenue to Judaism" (90) and how the deli survived the Great Depression.

Chapter three leads us through World War II and how it "changed the relationship that Jews had to their own traditional fare, exposing them to other types of food and opening up new vistas for Jewish life in other parts of the country" (112). While delicatessens remained a way for Jews to

connect with and relate to their heritage, wartime rationing influenced Jews and their food consumption. Merwin states, "wartime rationing taught Jews that they could do without delicatessen food" (112). The relationship between food and identity also changed for Jewish soldiers serving abroad. Even as they were being sent hard salamis by their families at home, the soldiers were often faced with "Eating ham for Uncle Sam," and, as Merwin states, "Jews learned that they could do without familiar foods and still maintain their Jewish identity" (91).

In the fourth chapter, Merwin presents strong evidence of the shift in gathering places for Jewish New Yorkers from delicatessens to the non-Jewish ethnic restaurant. They had been exposed to a variety of other cultural cuisines, and Jewish cuisine "was perceived, in the main, as unhealthy, low class, and unappetizing" (160). The deli then, in the early twenty-first century, became associated with "an immigrant or second-generation way of life, in which different values had held sway" (160) and Jews no longer sought out the deli experience on a regular basis, but rather on family occasions.

Merwin concludes the book with a discussion of the nostalgic appeal of delis for Jewish identities, while also acknowledging the fading position and importance of delicatessens in Jewish Culture today. There is also an interesting presentation of the ways in which Jewish food is mutating and how existing delis are using a variety of strategies to maintain success. Delis "will probably never occupy the centrality in American Jewish life that they once did, as they helped to bridge the world of the immigrants and their children with the promise and freedom of America" (189).

Pastrami on Rye is aimed toward an academic audience, while also addressing the mass market. In this approach Merwin merges ten years of extensive research with inviting anecdotes that encourage the reader to better understand the place of the delicatessen in New York Jewish life – not only a culinary center, but a cultural center as well. Indeed, Merwin

makes a solid argument for how the success of the Jewish delicatessen contributed to Jewish assimilation and the introduction of the delicatessen into broader ethnic circles. As such, this book is appropriate for several university courses in a variety of fields, such as popular culture, American culture, history, sociology (especially given the discussion of the delicatessen as a third place), interpersonal and intercultural communication, religious studies, ethnic studies, gender studies (with attention to Merwin's accounting of the delicatessen's influence on the role of the Jewish wife), and, of course, foodways. However, due to the intricacies of weaving rich anecdotes into wide-ranging, copious research, the book may be best suited to advanced undergraduates and graduate students. Overall, this book offers an appealing perspective on "what happens when food takes on an ethnic coloration and then gradually sheds that ethnic connection when it acculturates into America" (Merwin 1).

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Brian Hoffman's *Naked: A Cultural History of American Nudism* disturbed me. Not the topic of his book, but rather how local, state, and federal governmental bodies imposed standards of heteronormativity and used as many cultural, economic, historical, judicial, and political tools at their disposal to thwart the nudist movement throughout its history in America. For what began "as a form of physical and mental healing" quickly became the target of politicians who felt threatened by an unconventional form of familial living and a quest to improve one's mental and physical well-being (6). Hoffman, through rigorous research, compelling stories, and taut writing weaves a compelling historical narrative about a movement that continually faces opposition. For those readers interested in learning how social movements begin, fracture, reconstruct themselves, and struggle to survive, Hoffman has written an exemplar that others can model when studying controversial social movements in America's storied history.

Hoffman begins his story of American nudism in the 1930's, when organized nudism emerged. Both individuals and families sought an outlet for improving their health and for exercising their privacy, and nudism in "a locked gymnasium or an enclosed beach" offered nudists an environment to satisfy their goals (19). Censorship advocates, especially those opposed to the distribution of birth control information, pornography, and vice, quickly characterized nudists as lewd individuals intent on undermining the social fabric of America's cities. Nudism became synonymous with indecent and illicit behavior, and politicians and the courts began combatting nudism in an effort to protect society from abhorrent behaviors. The problem, though, was that nudism as practiced was not lewd, indecent, or illicit; instead, nudism was an emerging lifestyle that was slowly gaining followers, much to the dismay of those

who saw clothes-wearing society as the standard for normality. But by "equating nudism with commercial sex," the nudist lifestyle as practiced in cities such as Chicago and New York found itself in search of a new, more hospitable home (47).

Driven from larger cities and fractured as groups, nudists regrouped and established enclaves in smaller cities throughout America, and the nudist camps that emerged allowed individuals and families to practice their lifestyle with others who shared in their beliefs. Nudism remained a way to improve one's mental and physical health, but freed from the confines of larger and less-welcoming cities, nudism also became a way to engage in recreational activities. From 1930 until 1940, nudism also became a way to strengthen one's religion, a way "to support Christian values by developing the moral character of participants through their naked lifestyle" (73). Unfortunately, nudists still had to battle the "perception that nudism constituted another form of commercial sexuality, encouraged promiscuity, or served as a haven for gay men and women" (81).

Still lacking the respectability that nudists sought, the movement again underwent a transformation to situate itself within mainstream America. To reconstruct the nudist movement as one that did not threaten normative value systems, nudists turned to print media to spread their message and to extol their lifestyle, and they produced and distributed publications that stressed the virtues of nudism. For example, the leading nudist magazine, *Sunshine and Health*, highlighted the benefits to one's health and to one's sexual expression, and readership for the magazine grew, as publication allowed the magazine to reach large audiences, who could read about the nudist lifestyle in the privacy of their homes. While educating Americans about nudism with its articles and stories about the nudist "movement's therapeutic and familial" nature and with the inclusion of more revealing photos of women's and men's bodies, the magazine also became a source of comfort for American servicemen during World War II, where

Sunshine and Health enjoyed a wide readership from an unlikely audience (88). Any respectability gains made through the print medium were short-lived, though, as critics of the nudist movement attempted to block the publication of books on nudism and publications such as *Sunshine and Health* by taking their cause to the courts, asking them to find the publication of nudist materials obscene and therefore in violation of local obscenity statutes. Even the federal government found itself embroiled in a scandal after President Franklin D. Roosevelt appointed Maurice Parmelee, a leading advocate of nudism and author of a book on nudism, as "chief economic adviser to the Board of Economic Warfare" (97). Republican Representative Martin Dies from Texas, the head of the House on Un-American Activities Committee, used Parmelee's association with nudism to threaten President Roosevelt's New Deal initiatives, and suddenly nudism became the scapegoat for all that was plaguing America. Dies' campaign ultimately failed, but with *Sunshine and Health's* explicit photographs now clearly showing completely naked female and male bodies, the United States Postal Service refused to deliver the March 1947 issue in cities such as Chicago, Philadelphia, and New York City.

The seizure of *Sunshine and Health* by the Postal Service began the next wave of opposition to nudism and it further drove the nudist movement from the mainstream of America. In the 1950's charges of obscenity morphed into questions of pornography, and the fate of nudist publications lay before the Supreme Court. Questions of obscenity, sex, and prurient interests became First Amendment battle cries, and for the nudist movement, not only publications but movies as well came under assault at the hands of those looking to censor what remained marginalized in society. *Sunshine and Health* went bankrupt in 1963, and in "the early 1960's, American's turned away from an understanding of nakedness as healthy and familial and embraced nudity in the form of commercialized sex" (208). Even the liberalizing years of the 1970's, 1980's, and 1990's still saw the nudist movement struggling to gain

respectability, and fears of homosexuals hiding among nudists and predators preying on children plague the movement today. For the new millennium, the nudist movement faces its familiar challenges of how to once again reconstruct itself and move out of the shadows and into the mainstream of America.

While Hoffman's book will not save the nudist movement, nor recast the movement as one that is nonthreatening to Americans, his book will appeal to those academics looking for a case study on social movements or to an audience interested in learning about how social movements must continually reinvent themselves to overcome societal prejudices. It will enlighten readers about the challenges that social movements experience in their day-to-day, year-to-year, and decade-to-decade battle to gain legitimacy and respectability. Hoffman's book truly unclothes and exposes how social movements struggle to survive, and I highly recommend it for those who study social movements.

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Withers, Jeremy, and Daniel P. Shea, eds. *Culture on Two Wheels: The Bicycle in Literature & Film*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016. Print.

While this collection is certainly not the first to address the bicycle and its significance in literature and screen, it is, as the editors state, "the first sustained examination to date" of such a vast project (9). Jeremy Withers and Daniel Shea undertake the mammoth task of incorporating several countries and over a century of history to declare that the bicycle is indeed

more than just a form of transportation; it hovers in the background of both literature and screen, waiting to morph into the literal or metaphoric symbol required at any given moment. Their loftiest goal is to present this collection in a way that "avoid[s]…the typical white, Anglo-American contexts…[and] to consider…non-Western literature and film" (11), a facet they believe is lacking in other studies of this type.

The book contains sixteen chapters: the first eight focus on the bicycle in literature, while the ninth provides a smooth transition between literature and film, given that Stephen King's works may function as either. The last seven chapters concentrate on the bicycle in film. The book also contains ten illustrations, spoke etchings between the sections, and cover art by bicycling enthusiast Taliah Lempert. In short, every aspect of this book, from the editors' and contributors' passion for bicycling to the Foreword by well-established bicycle advocate Zach Furness, speaks not only to an audience of avid bicyclists, but also to those interested in literature and film as well.

Chapter one opens in the late 1890s with Dave Buchanan discussing the "literary tourism" (20) of F.W. Bockett and bicycling couple Elizabeth and Joseph Pennell. Peter Kratzke's chapter combines Mark Twain and bicycle manufacturing, proposing that the bicycle follows the "logical sequence for any machine that moves from market introduction to physical implementation to technological obsolescence" (43). In the third chapter, Alyssa Straight examines the health and physiologic misconceptions created by putting a woman on a bicycle during the *fin-de-siècle*. Jeremy Withers's chapter on H.G. Wells's *The War in the Air* discusses the bicycle in terms of the "dizzying pace" (81) at which new technologies are being introduced during Wells's epoch and argues that Wells stalwartly maintains the bicycle's constancy as a reliable form of transportation. Corry Cropper uses French novelist Alfred Jarry's *The Supermale* to explore the relationship between man and his machine, positing that "riders themselves are one more piece of cycling equipment and should be

refined through injections or transfusions and improved just like wheels, helmets, or tires" (110). Utilizing Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*, Una Brogan adds queer feminism to the conversation when she determines that Albertine's bicycle helps establish a "radical new social order…that would embrace not only new gender identities but also subversive sexual orientations" (116). Nanci J. Alder focuses on Beauvoir's *The Blood of Others* and asserts that the bicycle's importance to Hélène "loses its symbolic function" (148) as she matures, eventually being replaced by an automobile. Amanda Duncan's trial-by-fire chapter discusses the bicycle as a "movement of writing" that "rigorously challenge[s] a concept of authorship that subordinates literary language to human knowledge with its illusion of stable ground" (167). In the final chapter of Part One, Don Tresca ruminates on the power of the bicycle to carry adults through childhood trauma showcased in several of Stephen King's novels.

Matthew Pangborn introduces the film section by analyzing the bicycle's representation in *The Wizard of Oz*, employing Julia Kristeva's *Powers of Horror*. Charles L.P. Silet returns us to France, François Truffaut, and the New Woman's representation in French bicycling posters found in *Jules and Jim.* In chapter twelve, Benjamin van Loon analyzes Tarkovsky's *The Sacrifice* and, reminiscent of Withers's chapter, examines the role of the bicycle in technological growth (or stagnation). Anne Ciecko journeys the reader to Iran, Italy, and Saudi Arabia, arguing that "the bicycle serves as a global cinematic emblem of human perseverance" (245). Ryan Hediger's work with *Breaking Away* highlights the bicycle as it relates to social mobility and vital materialism. Jinhua Li, in her treatise on *Beijing Bicycle*, explores yet another interesting aspect to this collection: teenage protagonists. She posits that the bicycle is "simply a means of transportation to the adults, [but] symbolizes something that is dangerously alluring yet mundanely comforting" (282) to the younger members of that society. Lastly, Melody Lynn Hoffman addresses "youth-produced Hip-Hop" (300) and its role in providing young African

Americans an avenue to address the bicycle as "the survival mechanism…[that] is unprecedented in the current context of bicycle activism" (313-14).

By including texts ranging from the 1890s to 2013, along with choosing texts far away from traditional Western locations, the editors successfully meet their stated goals. Combining literature, film, and critical theory, this book does, as the editors hope, "raise awareness of what an amazing and often underappreciated technological and cultural artifact the bicycle is" (xiii-xiv). There is little within these pages to find wanting, with the possible exception of bicycle representation in relation to disability. That being said, if what Shea suggests regarding the bond between the human body and the bicycle is valid, that the bicycle's form is "determined by the nuance of the human corporeal body" (322), then one runs the risk of becoming too emotionally attached to their bicycle. Withers and Shea inspire readers such as this reviewer, recently disillusioned by the loss of her bicycle, to get back on and ride. That, in itself, makes this book invaluable to not only the singular bicyclist but to bicycle advocacy in general. *Culture on Two Wheels* does not limit itself to only those interested bicycling, however; it also reaches scholars interested in literature, film, and cultural studies, as well as those less academically-inclined who simply enjoy music, history, and film.

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Hadfield, Andrew, Matthew Dimmock, and Abigail Shinn, eds. *The Ashgate Research Companion to Popular Culture in Early Modern England*. Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2014. Print.

Andrew Hadfield, Matthew Dimmock and Abigail Shinn's *The Ashgate Research Companion to Popular Culture in Early Modern England* provides a broad overview of early English culture through the lens of historiography. The introduction to the anthology begins with the editors' reading of Joris Hoefnagel's *Fete at Bermondsey*, serving as a strong sample of how popular culture will be examined throughout the remainder of the book. Each subsequent chapter focuses on a specific element of popular culture, allowing for a large scale review of English lifestyles and customs of the early modern period. The editors' set up of the collection encourages the reader to view English popular culture from multiple dimensions thus creating a platform for exploring alternative modes of research.

From the get-go Hadfield, Dimmock and Shinn are clear about the aim of their anthology: looking past the surface value of popular culture to discover the most legitimate uses and values of the practices and cultural objects that infiltrated daily life in England circa 1500- 1700. They argue that the term 'popular' was established during this period as a means of classification for separating the tastes of the upper class from those of the middle and lower classes; the voice of the 'elite' has a constant presence in historical records, one that often dictates how accounts of events are told and influences what details get included (5). This level of influence by the 'elite' establishes a need for uncovering the more authentic voices of the lower working class; a task that the editors take on and succeed in doing through the work presented in this research companion.

The anthology is broken down into three sections, each utilizing a different technique to reach the goal of the overall book. The first section, "Key Issues," aims to excavate the 'popular' from early modern culture while challenging fundamental approaches to how we understand popular culture and establishing a historiography of the field. Chapters in the first section include Edel Lamb's "Youth Culture," Femke Molekamp's "Popular Reading and Writing," and Angus Vine's "Myth and Legend." Section Two, "Everyday Life," focuses on the "routines and practices of quotidian experience" by highlighting creative methods for use by future researchers (7). The chapters within this section include Ian Fredrick Moulton's "Courtship, Sex and Marriage," Helen Smith's "Gendered Labour," and Joachim Frenk's "Games." The final section is titled "Experience of the World." The final essays revolve around larger cultural structures and how people engaged with, challenged or rejected the established norms and hierarchies; focusing on subjects such as "Time" by Neil Rhodes, "Popular Medicine" by Margaret Healy and "London and Urban Popular Culture" by Lawrence Manley.

What is perhaps the most important chapter comes early in the first section of the collection, Arnold Hunt's "Recovering Speech Acts," (Chapter 1). Early in the chapter, Hunt draws a connection between oral and literary cultures and immediately establishes the importance of using literary history to draw out the oral history of early modern England. Since there was no possibility of voice recording during this period, Hunt suggests we turn to written records to reveal themes, attitudes, and behaviors of the everyday person during this time (16). The records he refers to – court records and sermons – were often crafted by the elite, and therefore not always fool proof, but careful readings of these texts can reveal the important details that are left between the lines. Hunt's argument is present throughout the book, with many of the essays referring to legal documents to provide evidence for their claims. For example, in "Food and Drink" (Chapter 9), Phil Withington refers to court

testimony about an incident involving broiled herring to analyze social norms, political economy, and space and place politics surrounding the period's food culture. Additionally, in "Superstition and Witchcraft" (Chapter 21), Simon Davies utilizes interrogation transcripts to supplement details about witchcraft accusations. Turning to historical text for details to build a repertoire for early English popular culture is a theme spread throughout the essays and proves to be a rich area for researchers to explore.

Overall, *The Ashgate Research Companion* provides a strong overview of early popular culture in England; the wide range of topics allows the essays to paint a broad picture of life for the working class. Authors throughout the book use historiographical research methods to draw into question how the history of popular culture has been studied thus far and most substantially provide evidence of areas that are often excluded from more traditionally told histories. It is necessary to point out that there are some authors that do not make claims but rather just provide historical overviews of a particular cultural artifact. While the chapters containing reviews of a particular topic are intriguing, they fail to reach the same depth of exploration found within the other pieces of this collection. In addition, the only other obvious weakness comes in the form of density; some of the chapters employ language that may cause challenges for an undergraduate student early in his or her academic career. However, the strengths of the companion far outweigh the weaknesses and the anthology would make for an interesting read in an advanced undergraduate course as an introduction to early modern English culture. The advantage to having a diverse range of topics within one collection is that it provides potential for expanded research pertaining to these areas; multiple authors within *The Ashgate Research Companion* make clear that the research they have presented has need for further exploration, creating an opportunity for other scholars within the field to expand upon these areas

or to incorporate these methods and findings into larger conversations revolving around popular culture and early modern England.

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Glenister Roberts, Kathleen, ed. *Communication Theory and Millennial Popular Culture: Essays and Applications*. New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 2016. Print.

Within the popular press and popular literature, millennials are often described alongside their communication orientations and skills. Thus, it becomes important to acknowledge the relevance of communication theories when studying this generation. The contributors to the edited book, *Communication Theory and Millennial Popular Culture: Essays and Applications*, capture the essence of rhetorical, cultural, mass, and interpersonal communication theories in ways that successfully explain abstract theories through popular culture. The authors have intentionally chosen "texts and artifacts they know appeal to members of the millennial generation" (3). By examining several forms of popular culture such as books, movies, musical artists, and television shows, this edited collection of essays provides a critical lens to better understand communication and its theoretical richness in popular culture.

The roots of the communication discipline are grounded in rhetoric. Thus, Part One, appropriately titled "Rhetoric," has five chapters that introduce readers to theoretical concepts related to speeches. In Chapter 1, "Improving Your Speech Delivery with Modern Family and Friends," Nancy Bressler focuses on the four main factors of credibility and the

seven nonverbal behavioral categories of speech delivery. In Chapter 2, authors Jake Dionne & Joe Hatfield use three musical selections of Lady Gaga—"Born This Way," "Applause," and "Paparazzi"—to explore Burke's theory of dramatism with a central focus on the concepts of identification, guilt-redemption, and the pentad. In Chapter 3, Gerald J. Hickly III relies on the work of Kenneth Burke and Cluster Analysis to illuminate the concept of god-terms in the television drama *Friday Night Lights*. In Chapter 4, Kathleen Glenister Roberts focuses on epideictic speech by exploring fantasy literature—*The Lord of the Rings*, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, and *Harry Potter*. Finally, in Chapter 5, with the premise that "understanding the importance of ethos is central to an education in communication," Elena C. Strauman uses Aristotle's three dimensions of ethos to examine two interrelated subplots involving Ned Stark of HBO's series *Game of Thrones* (61).

Authors, in Part Two, "Culture," focus on cultural studies. "Cultural studies, as a field of theories, assumes that culture is not fixed; culture is created by people in interaction" (4). In Chapter 6, "'Let it go, let it go'—Hegemony and Counter-Hegemony in Disney's Frozen," Janelle Applequist examines the elements of traditional hegemony such as the (a) way females struggle for a sense of autonomy; (b) ideal standards of feminine beauty; and (c) ethnicity of Disney princesses. At the same time, Applequist explores counter-hegemony in the film's conclusion including the presentation of women serving as royalty and the portrayal of gender roles. In Chapter 7, "Mockingjays and Silent Salutes—Introducing Semiotics through the Hunger Games," author Claudia Bucciferro provides a clear analysis using both the film series and the original books to examine the main principles of semiotics—the symbolic construction of meaning. Specifically, she conducts a basic semiotic analysis on two main symbols—the three-fingers-up and the mockingjay (88). In Chapter 8, Garret Castleberry turns to Stuart Hall's Encoding/Decoding Model by applying it to the television series *Breaking Bad*. In Chapter 9,

"Postmodern Theory and Hip-Hop Cultural Discourse," Hunter H. Fine explores the concepts of postmodern narratives, identities, and concepts of geography through the use of works by music artists like Lil Wayne, Pusha T., Talib Kweli, Eve, Jean Grae, Lauryn's Hill, Kanye West, and others. In Chapter 10, "Seen but Not Heard—Exploring Muted Group Theory in Pixar's The Incredibles, WALL-E, and Brave," Bruce W. Finklea & Sally Bennett Hardig use the three Pixar films to demonstrate how Muted Group Theory works and how it is prevalent in modern-day media (119). In Chapter 11, "Knope vs. Pope: A Fantasy Theme Analysis of Scandal vs. Parks & Recreation," Krystal Fogle focuses on fantasy themes of setting, action, and character to examine "two very popular government-centered shows that deal with similar themes, but come to very different conclusions about how America's government should be viewed" (131).

Part Three, "Media and Technology," has five chapters that bring media to the forefront. Media ecology treats media as an environment (5). As an interpretive approach in communication, media is affected by language and culture; and in today's age digital technology is a focal point. In Chapter 12, "The Smartphone as Permanent Substitute Teacher," Brian Gilchrist, uses Marshall McLuhan's approach to media ecology to examine how (a) students have less incentive to engage in information-based lesson plans from teachers; and (b) smartphones enable students to replace teachers as guardians of information. In Chapter 13, "Media and Technology—Metal and Mutation in the *X-Men* Films," Paul A. Lucas examines how mass media concepts and ideas, seen in the characters Wolverine and Lady Deathstrike, can help us understand "how technology has become inseparably linked to us and the way we live our lives" (158). In Chapter 14, "Hashtag Television Advertising—The Multistep Flow of Millennial TV Usage, Commercial Viewing, and Social Media Interaction," Andrew Sharma & Chrys Egan examine the new wave of advertising that now must create embedded, hashtag advertisements for

the shows and advertised products in order to generate chatter on social media (169). In Chapter 15, "Zombie Apocalypse, Haitian Vodou, and Media Ecology—A Cautionary Tale for Our Technological Future," Brent Sleasman tackles the question "How can the zombie film genre assist in our understanding of human communication?" (177). Through the use of the work of Walter Ong, the author illustrates that "human communication is based on the physical presence of others, and cannot be reduced to the simple exchange of information" (184). In Chapter 16, "Uses and Gratifications Theory in *How I Met Your Mother*—True Story," Linnea Sudduth Ward illustrates the historical development, key assumptions, and common criticisms of the theory through the television program. The application of the theory capitalizes on the premise that people meet real needs in their lives through their communication and media usage (195).

The book concludes with a focus on interpersonal communication theories. Specifically, Part Four, "Interpersonal Communication," has four chapters designed to highlight the interactions between people. In Chapter 17, "'Don't Open, Dead Inside'—External and Internal Noise in *The Walking Dead*," the authors use examples from the first season of the series *The Walking Dead* to (a) illustrate the concepts of internal and external noise and (b) provide suggestions as to why we should all think about noise in our daily communication with others. In Chapter 18, the MTV series, *Catfish: The TV Show,* which focuses on digital dating, is used to examine deception in relationships. Specifically, the theories of Interpersonal Manipulation Theory (IMT) and Interpersonal Deception Theory (IDT) are used by the authors to provide examples for understanding the principles and strategies of the two theories. The authors maintain that the theories offer ways to think about the role of deception in the relational communication process (220). Chapter 19 uses the series, *Pretty Little Liars*, as the artifact to examine friendships using Communication Privacy Management theory—a theory that focuses on the process of both concealing and revealing private information. Finally,

Harry Potter is used as the artifact in Chapter 20, titled "Social Penetration Theory and Relationship Formation in Harry Potter." Specifically, the relationships between Harry, Ron, and Hermione are examined to help understand Social Penetration Theory, a theory that explains how relationships develop through communication and self-disclosure (241).

Overall the contributors were successful in examining popular culture artifacts in order to introduce a variety of communication theories in a very accessible way. A major strength of *Communication Theory and Millennial Popular Culture: Essays and Applications* is the added voices of millennial students at the end of each chapter. Specifically, each chapter offers a dialogue box "written by millennial students, responding to chapter authors' ideas" (6). As a part of the Peter Lang Media and Communication list, the four-part book of essays is a step in the direction of what Laurence Raw describes as "the kind of productive theoretical reflection that will lead to new constructions of popular culture" (Raw 437). The writers in this book are "interpretive and critical scholars, looking at the qualities of a text or artifact, rather than the numerical outcomes of a survey" (6). Therefore, the book is well suited for undergraduate and graduate students, as well as popular culture and communication scholars. Also, the book would serve as an excellent primary textbook in communication theory courses, and a supplemental book in popular culture courses to help readers engage with the texts and artifacts to identify the theoretical concepts and add their voices to the dialogue.

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Sanchez, Rebecca. *Deafening Modernism: Embodied Language and Visual Poetics in American Literature*. New York: New York University Press, 2015. Print.

In *Deafening Modernism: Embodied Language and Visual Poetics in American Literature*, Rebecca Sanchez presents Deaf theory as a pioneering method for revisiting Modernist art. She highlights the obvious, yet overlooked, power of Deaf theory in its ability to analyze Modernism's experimental obsession with "the intersection of words, bodies, and images," for these are the very elements essential to American Sign Language (ASL) (3). Sanchez invites us to (re)consider Modernist work and its attempted abandonment of the communicative norm in order to express the authentic human experience separate from, and yet beholden to, a rigid set of linguistic expectations. She argues for multiple pathways to communication outside of verbal expression and highlights the struggles of minorities, including the disabled and especially the deaf, in validating their own forms of communication.

Deaf theory, Sanchez states, "involves both cultural and historical recovery—situating literary Modernism in the context of the history of a frequently ignored minority—and a critical lens which I will variously term Deaf insight or Deaf epistemology" (3). She asserts that all people will at one time or another experience disability, thus discovering themselves within the minority. Because of this constant possibility of disability, Sanchez argues that Deaf theory offers readings that genuinely speak to the context in which they were created. She assembles a list of authors (Eliot, Stein, HD) performers (Charlie Chaplin and Josephine Baker), and artists (Demuth) who exemplify the Modernist movement for their utilization and embodiment of textbook modernist qualities. It is this embodiment that Deaf theory has the ability to tease out with its focus on what the layered, mimetic properties of a Modernist work were rather than a definitive verbal-linguistic interpretation of words and phrases. For ASL,

she argues, is, at its core, layered and mimetic, capable of issuing a myriad of signals across time.

The rise of the celebrity poet in mainstream media is a point Sanchez discusses in her first chapter, "Impersonality." Sanchez invokes Gertrude Stein's readings, claiming that "audiences who lined up in their hundreds and even thousands to watch Stein speak, to interact with her as an embodied subject, often had very little interest in her work" (41). She also references Amy Lowell's first public reading in 1915 where "listeners were unable to separate the poem's poetic voice from the woman they saw reading, to identify it as anything other than a confessional account of a sensual experience in which they apparently had no desire to fit the nonconformant body of Lowell, who was derided throughout her life for being overweight" (42). Sanchez argues that there was an impossibility of separating the poet-body from the language much like the impossibility of separating a deaf poet from his or her reading of a work through sign language.

In her second chapter, "Primitivism," Sanchez delineates the connections between the primitivism of the Modernist period with the notion of embodiment in Deaf epistemology. She uses Josephine Baker's performance as Fatou in *La Folie de Jour* as an example of how "Primitivist spectacle created spaces where people could appear to be rebelling against contemporary mores without actually challenging the systems of power embedded in them. The semantic content of language Baker used in performance was superseded by the other forms of communication of her body" (64). Sanchez continues discussing the importance of the primitive in Modernism as it was able to focus on the moment while overlapping with a past of "other-ed" peoples in essence creating a spectacle, something to be viewed (the body) rather than heard (the words).

Sanchez takes on the (con)textual complexity inherent in Modernist works in her third chapter, "Difficulty." The "difficult" Modernists were

manipulating language, attempting to describe authentic human experience in a world where traditional linguistic rules failed. She points out that the First World War had created "newly disabled bodies" that "became the cultural symbol of the alienated, fragmented state many artists associated with modernity itself" (92). Here Sanchez pinpoints one of the most prominent struggles of the Modernist movement—the desire for identity and the power to define the "self."

In chapter four, "The Image," Sanchez claims that in the post-Enlightenment world, "'visible' has become a near synonym for 'verifiable'" (123). Here she is able to ground the usefulness of her techniques, for ASL and Deaf communication are nothing if not visual. And so she believes that the concept of the visual for deciphering layers of meaning is a useful mode of understanding Modernist works. Sanchez deconstructs H.D.'s most famous imagist poem, "Hermes of the Ways" in which a single moment focused on inanimate elements is brought to life through the movement of the words. She explains that if we focus on the visual representation of the poem, we see words in violent motion, caught in perpetuity, much like the Modernists, searching for a way to describe the Sisyphean dilemma in which they were trapped in regards to expression and definition, for the old ways were not sufficient, and a new "movement" was taking over.

Sanchez reveals a future for Deaf theory in her Epilogue as she discusses using this theoretical framework in addressing the Human Genome Project, which has in essence turned the entirety of the human body into text. She argues that it is important to take a look at how this methodology could help us (re)frame our past as well as shape our future.

Deafening Modernisms offers an alternative lens for Modernist scholarship. It would provide a refreshing dialogue to a Modernist graduate course seeking to recover/discover voices inherent in the art. Revisiting Modernism with a *Deafening Modernisms* spin allows for a 21st century approach focused on the human being and its unique method of

expression, something the Modernists themselves sought to articulate, both visually and verbally, and something we still desire today. In a world where verbal communication is diminishing in the face of technology, where the text message is a preferred mode of communicating, Sanchez is hitting a high note with her insistence on deemphasizing the verbal communicative norm. And it seems such an obvious tactic for Modernist studies, which is so in tuned with the marginal, the white space, the thoughts thought but not spoken, to approach the Modernist works from the arena of the (disabled) minority, yet Sanchez underscores an area that is ripe for discovery.

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Merlock Jackson, Kathy, Lisa Lyon Payne, and Kathy Shepherd Stolley. *The Intersection of Star Culture in American and International Medical Tourism: Celebrity Treatment.* Lanham: Lexington Books, 2016. Print.

Moving from the deserts of California to the deep forests of Germany to the ocean coasts of Namibia, Kathy Merlock Jackson, Lisa Lyon Payne, and Kathy Shepherd Stolley take readers around the globe to explore United States celebrities' search for health and well-being through medical tourism. Medical tourism is traveling for the purpose of seeking and receiving health services (1). Initially reserved for overseas vacations to "take the waters" at specialty spas, contemporary medical tourism now encompasses a variety of health and wellness practices, including gender reassignment surgeries, cancer treatments, and alternative therapies.

The authors use case studies to center their discussion of celebrity medical tourism in three sections: (1) celebrities seeking treatment for life-threatening health issues, (2) celebrities seeking care for non-life threatening health issues, and (3) the impact of popular media coverage of medical tourism. The first section presents a "traditional" understanding of medical tourism, seeking care for life-threatening illnesses, such as AIDS and cancer. In this section, the authors tell the stories of some of the most impactful celebrity medical tourism cases, including Steve McQueen, Karen Black, Farrah Fawcett, Steve Jobs, and Rock Hudson. The diverse time span of celebrity medical tourism shows the variety of medical tourism opportunities, as well as the fact that medical tourism has been part of the US celebrity lifestyle for decades. The historical narrative approach used by the authors helps to situate each celebrity's story in a larger cultural conversation, such as the discussion of HIV/AIDS in the 1980s and its impact on Rock Hudson's trip to France for AIDS treatment.

The second section of the book examines cases of non-life threatening health issues. The chapters in this section are much more diverse in health issues, and highlight the different reasons celebrities might journey for health care. The chapters examine gender reassignment surgery, stem cell therapies, arthritis care, reconstructive surgery, and giving birth. These chapters, more than those in the previous section, show the mutual influence of celebrity on health. Especially with contemporary celebrities like Angelina Jolie, Kobe Bryant, and Suzanne Somers, the cases show how celebrity medical tourism can be harnessed to help promote new health and wellness treatments, and how celebrities become health spokespeople. For example, the list of wellness activities and vitamin regiments followed by Suzanne Somers is intense, but touted as effective by Somers as a celebrity endorser (Chapter 9). Kobe Bryant was so vocal about a specialty arthritis treatment, it became known as the "Kobe procedure" (120). One of the true highlights of this section is the case analysis of Christine Jorgensen, one of the first US non-celebrity medical

tourists, who traveled to Copenhagen for gender reassignment surgery (Chapter 6).

The final section is a collection of chapters examining popular media coverage of medical tourism. These chapters span a variety of media, including television (*60 Minutes*) and Oscar-winning dramas (*Dallas Buyers Club*) and documentaries (*Sicko*). All of the chapters in the third section discuss the costs of health care in the US and serve as a major rationale for why average Americans might begin to follow in the footsteps of celebrities and seek out health and wellness opportunities away from home. The one shortfall of the text is that the same complexity in individual narratives is not present in this final section. This may be the result of the book's narrative style which lends itself more to telling personal stories than reporting on popular culture presentations. Although not a focus of these chapters, the authors do highlight the organizing structures which foster medical tourism. These structures, ranging from Thailand's famous Bumrungrad International Hospital (Chapter 11) to the problems with pre-Affordable Care Act health care in the US, help to explain why celebrities turn to medical tourism and showcase the diversity of health care offered in other countries.

The cases presented in this text offer a searing commentary on the impact celebrities have on our health practices in the face of socioeconomic and access differences. As the authors argue, celebrities help to define what it means to "be human" (2) and establish health and wellness standards. When celebrities share their health stories, especially those that result in successful health treatments, they imbue those treatments, procedures, or health care organizations with credibility. Average individuals can trust these treatments because celebrities do. What is not mentioned by celebrities, however, is that the average individual cannot afford these costly procedures, the travel and living expenses, or the post-care required to maintain the new standard of wellness. Steven McQueen, one of the first US celebrity medical tourists,

even discussed the problem of cost and access, stating, "Being rich or poor shouldn't have anything to do with it" (18). The creation of a GoFundMe account to help pay for Karen Black's cancer treatments (Chapter 5) underscore that even cost can be an issue for celebrities. What is fascinating about several of these cases is that they do not involve celebrities who engage in medical tourism; they feature individuals who became celebrities because of medical tourism, such as the case of Christine Jorgensen (Chapter 6) and Ron Woodruff (Chapter 13).

book is perfect for a number of different disciplines, including communication, popular culture, media, sociology, and history. Its accessible writing makes it ideal for upper-division undergraduate and graduate students interested in the intersections of health, medicine, and popular culture. The celebrity cases are an interesting mix of history and cultural studies, complete with the implications of how medical tourism influences how the general public thinks and talks about cancer treatments, alternative medicine, and reconstructive surgery. Importantly, when celebrities share their stories of medical tourism, they help to raise awareness of specific health issues and new treatment options which may not yet be approved in the US (201). This can be helpful in moving public discourse and legislative agendas to be more open to certain procedures or breaking down health stigmas. Beneath it all, this book challenges our understanding of medical privilege and opportunity, highlighting one constant truth: it does not matter how much money or celebrity one has, it cannot save us from our own mortality.

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Ellcessor, Elizabeth. *Restricted Access: Media, Disability, and the Politics of Participation.* New York: New York University Press, 2016. Print.

For a few decades now the internet has drastically influenced our lives. Information is shared faster than ever, and opportunities for collaboration are increasingly becoming the center of focus. Be it globally, locally, or just be between friends, the drive to connect and share in the collaboration of ideas is intertwined into everyday life. "Participatory culture is being co-created every day by bloggers, marketers, artists, audiences, lawyers, designers, critics, educators, and others" (Burgess and Green 108). According to a study run by the Pew Research Center, 72% of American adults have used at least one of 11 different shared/collaboration and on-demand services (Smith). Lee Rainie, the director of internet, science and technology research at Pew Research Center, predicts that within ten years "the internet will become 'like electricity' - less visible, yet more deeply embedded in people's lives for good and ill" (Smith). While physical walls that once prevented information and sharing have been dismantled, the web of connection has inadvertently shielded out nearly anyone who is living with visual or auditory disabilities.

Serving as an assistant professor of cinema and media studies in the department of Communication and Culture at Indiana University, Elizabeth Ellcessor examines media from the perspective of marginalized populations. Ellcessor's book *Restricted Access* delves into the myriad of ways technology intersects body and culture, exposing the manners through which society "positions people with disabilities as an oppressed class" (4). As one of the few books tackling the issue of disability and digital media *Restricted Access* provides an extensive and well researched foundation for understanding the importance of this area of study.

Primarily focusing on power and cultural norms Ellcessor provides numerous arguments calling attention to the accepted discourse

surrounding participatory culture. Ellcessor presents what she calls an "interrogatory kit for the study of access" (19). This kit includes the areas of regulation, use, form, content, and expertise. Within each category the author presents ways to analyze digital media accessibility in relation to the ideologies of ability, neoliberal contexts, and cultural and civic participation. The author presents three to four primary questions guiding each area; for example, under regulation one question presented is "what are the structures that limit or expand access?" These well rationalized questions helped provide comprehensive understanding of each of her "kit" areas, and are supported by previous literature and current research in media regulations, access, disability studies, and media design.

This book provides a groundbreaking discussion of the technical as well as political issues surrounding access and ability. Ellcessor presents a deep and thoughtful narrative into the world of visual and auditory disability, illuminating the many walls that inhibit equal participation within a mediated society. She argues that creators of the vast media platforms begin their development of new technology from the preferred user viewpoint, assuming that everyone knows how to use the technology. Doing so overlooks the gaps between intended use and actual use. Therefore she urges media creators, through a detailed discussion of the politics of the central user position, to shift initial foci from those who can participant to those who need to participate. Ellcessor acknowledges that many technologies have been developed to assist people with disabilities including braille screen interfaces, apps that teach sign language or motor skills, as well as touching on the handful of apps created by Apple to increase accessibility. Ellcessor points out that while technology creators, including Apple and Google, recommend accessibility apps, they do not require these apps to be present in the marketplace. As a result it is expected that fewer than 15 percent of users with disabilities will find accessible apps. Thus a central argument within the text is that there is always a great deal more at play than possibility and access. It's critical

we understand that these "forms of digital media offer affordances and constraints that become opportunities, barriers, or the foundation for further cultural adaptation" (121). From the technology itself, to the content within it, every aspect seems to be accounted for, explained, and well defined. Ellcessor draws from, and explicates on, the marketing of software and technical aspects of how these experiences occur, as well as the legal and political gatekeeping that surrounds the use of media by those with disabilities.

Although, according to the back cover, the book is presented as an ethnographic study of Internet use by people with disabilities, I would argue it would be better framed as a critical cultural text. Interviews with users were included and her emergence within the media is clear; however those experiences only provided a small area of insight into a very complex issue. Often turning to critical/cultural and feminist theories, the vast majority of this book focuses on the technical, legal, and power dynamics encompassing disability and media. As such, the primary focus of the book highlights the number of problems surrounding accessibility. For instance an argument is raised that often the conception accessibility is centered on "content" and "information" prioritizing certain forms of content and ignoring others. Case in point, closed captioning of online videos often simplify, or grossly misinterpret, the content being said, thus the quality is impacted. As a result, those with disabilities, who are seeking informative content are restrained by the abridged information provided.

Overall, *Restricted Access: Media, Disability, and the Politics of Participation* provides an excellent framework and foundation for disability scholars to build from. Ellcessor's strong focus and goals for the book are clearly stated and supported, illuminating a variety of questions few have discussed. Ellcessor has even found a method of unpacking and explaining the technical and political aspects of media. As a result this text is timely, challenging, and a must read for advanced media scholars and

creators seeking the cross sections of media, culture, and disability. While this text is a vital foundation to the issues of media accessibility, it also provides a complicated and dense web of argument, theory, and technology.

<div align="center">
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Rodan, Debbie, Katie Ellis and Pia Lebeck. *Disability, Obesity and Aging: Popular Media Identifications*. Burlington: Ashgate, 2014. Print.

In *Disability, Obesity and Aging*, Debbie Rodan, Katie Ellis and Pia Lebeck undertake an examination of how disability, obesity and aging are negotiated by audiences using televisual and online media. Their objective is to interrogate "the relationship between television, culture and social attitudes towards disability, obesity and aging across a number of television and online texts" (6). The argument made is that media, in its various forms, reflect and construct a normative body and contribute to social disablement – wherein the aging, obese and/or disabled body is seen as non-normative, problematic or undesirable (5). There are, however, a number of areas which require further elaboration and clarification

including a more detailed discussion of Michel Foucault, a more sustained examination of race and gender, and further methodological clarifications around media choice.

The book itself is organized into two parts: the first, "Television as a Social Experience," aims to: one, provide a historical background of popular representations of aging, obesity and disability; two, offer an account of how the symbolic power of television can both reinforce and challenge cultural norms; and three, discuss how identification and disidentification are used by television to construct a relationship of affinity or disaffinity with particular characters. The most salient parts of this section of the book include a discussion of how tacit knowledge around disability, obesity and aging is constructed and the role representation plays in this process. Cultural history, visual and verbal signifiers, socialization and language are fundamental to understanding how disability, aging and obesity "have been subject to symbolic annihilation through the media's promotion of stereotypes and strategies of exclusion" (17). In addition to tacit knowledge, this section of the book also details how television, as a social experience and when coupled with access to official and unofficial Internet forums, productively complicates the viewing experience wherein alternative representations can be debated, stereotypes challenged, and identifications explored. A prime example of this has to do with how the media construction of Susan Boyle (who appeared on *Britain's Got Talent*) as old, fat and disabled and thus outside the norm, was challenged due in large part to online conversations that questioned this kind of essentialism.

In part two, titled *Identifications*, Rodan, Ellis and Lebeck deliver a thoughtful analysis of several case studies of popular representations of disability, obesity and aging. In the chapter, *Obesity Makeover*, the television show *The Biggest Loser* is used to demonstrate how fat bodies have come to be essentialized. Through an investigation of several episodes, the authors show how this program subjects bodies to

disciplining regimes and discursive treatment whereby "thinner people" come to be seen as "happier and freer than obese people" (99). The trope of freedom is socially disabling since "freedom is defined in a very narrow sense," as "dependent only on one's body size according to *The Biggest Loser* discourse" (99).

In the chapter on disability, the authors make an interesting case with respect to precisely how the unidirectional flow of televisual communication has been transformed as a result of new media – specifically by blogs and online forums. Rodan, Ellis and Lebeck draw on the notion of 'narrative prosthesis' to illustrate how disability has been used as a device, crutch or counterpoint in order to reinforce normative positionalities.

They use the example of Alex, a character who has cerebral palsy in the Australian television program *Packed to the Rafters*, to illustrate how disabled characters are oftentimes used as "a narrative prosthesis to convey information about the other characters…" (77). As a result, disability is used by the show as a secondary, non-pivotal symbolic vehicle rather than a central plot point. This chapter points out that through online forums, viewers troubled by this framing of disability, are able to voice their concerns while simultaneously lauding the show for discussing themes not covered by other television shows.

The connections made between meaning-making, television, and online communication is one of its most significant contributions of this book. The author's successfully set a foundation for trying to understand the ways in which online discussions about televisual texts have the capacity to disrupt hegemonic readings through interactive discussion. In the case of *Packed to the Rafters*, the authors illustrate how social media can provide a space in which "people with more experience with disability began to question and critique the construction of disability in the show" (77).

Finally, in their chapter on aging, Rodan, Ellis and Lebeck explore how aging is constructed as a bleak prospect to be feared. They draw on the makeover genre to illustrate the process by which the responsibility for remaining visibly youthful has been personalized. The show *10 Years Younger in 10 Days* is presented as a prime example of how positive aging is constructed through the lens of personal transformation and supported by the lifestyle consumer industry. Yet, online audiences are shown to be quite sophisticated in how they make sense of these programs, "mov[ing] between a process of identifying and disidentifying" (117). In many cases, audience members actively challenge the superficial and normative nature of these shows.

There are however, some areas of this book that could benefit from further elaboration. For example, the authors' use of Foucault's theory of disciplined bodies, as it relates to personal training, could have benefited from a more considered engagement with his primary texts and a more detailed discussion of his approach – particularly with respect to precisely how power and discourse create conditions of normalization through subjectification. Interesting work has been done in this area by Julie Henderson who draws on Foucault's notion of govermentality to discuss the neoliberal conditions that give rise to the personalization of health and the subsequent pathologization of childhood obesity. As well, there are methodological clarifications that should be made. This is particularly the case with respect to the question of which TV shows and websites/social media were chosen, why they were chosen, and under what conditions.

Despite these gaps, the authors do offer a persuasive explanation of the precise *process* by which televisual and online media messages interact with cultural norms to form hegemonic values and ideas about beauty, acceptability and normality through the creation of 'tacit knowledge.' As such, and overall, this book makes an important contribution to the study of how media texts, both online and offline, are engaged with and by audiences in unexpected ways. The fact that Rodan, Ellis and Lebeck are

able ground these engagements in the marginalized experiences of disability, aging and obesity makes it all the more imperative.

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Talley, Heather Laine. *SAVING FACE: Disfigurement & the Politics of Appearance*. New York: New York University Press, 2014. Print.

Saving Face is an insightful addition to a growing body of literature that takes seriously a subject that many scholars have historically ignored as superficial or trivial. Heather Laine Talley's exploration of appearance and the concept of beauty, specifically in relation to the face, is complex and revealing of the central role that one part of the body—or the collection, as she puts it, of eyes, nose, lips, etc.—holds within our daily social interactions. Talley, a sociologist by training, takes on the concept of face and its meaning in public contexts. Building on Erving Goffman's work on symbolic interactionism, she introduces the concept of "facial work" to discuss "a technique of social interaction and a material practice deployed to cope with bodily stigma" (29). The book's central theoretical framework directs attention toward three main areas primarily related to medical discourses of the face: repairing, normalizing, and lifesaving. The latter concept of saving lives through plastic surgery, she admits, may seem somewhat surprising, but is indicative of the way facial work is now "often experienced as requisite for navigating life" (31).

Talley argues that "every face-to-face human interaction is premised on the 'social fact' that our faces tell us something about each other" (13). In some cases, this can literally be a life or death issue, as she points out when discussing the tragic story of Lucy Grealy, author of 1994's *Autobiography of a Face*. Grealy suffered from a cancer that left her severely disfigured and ultimately died of a heroin overdose in 2002, having struggled with her condition and its social consequences for decades. Such tales, which Talley poignantly incorporates into her explorations of facial work, help to illustrate how the face and its associations with normalcy and acceptance can potentially have life or death outcomes within contemporary beauty cultures.

Saving Face deploys a wide breadth of theories, which range from the sociology of Goffman to the feminist psychoanalysis of Julia Kristeva, and concrete examples plucked from television and newspapers to illustrate Talley's understanding of facial work today. She follows the historical trajectory of ideas such as facial normalcy, which emerged in the mid-nineteenth century, and the more contemporary "biomedicalizing" of the face that has now become commonplace. In doing so, she examines procedures as unobtrusive as Botox to the complete facial reconstructions that have propelled certain medical careers in recent years.

Talley begins with an interrogation of ABC's *Extreme Makeover* and its evocations of social death, a concept she builds on from David Sudnow to describe a "point at which a patient is treated essentially as a corpse," when diagnosing and treating the patients on the show (39). Her next chapter moves to the series of procedures known under the umbrella phrase facial feminization surgery (FFS), which surgeons developed in the 1980s and 1990s to "fix" women whose faces did not conform to the gendered understandings of normal female features. She takes the reader through changes in practices and, perhaps more importantly, their discursive treatments, which moved from being understood as elective to necessary in many cases. Her fifth chapter focuses on *Operation Smile*, a

charitable organization working within impoverished communities around the world to repair conditions such as cleft lips and palates. The organization's rhetoric of the smile as an essential and universal feature of humanity demonstrates yet another way the face plays a significant role in conceptions of normalcy and social life/death, which becomes a particularly troubling question in the third world, where large populations cannot afford the relatively basic procedures that many Westerners would have available to them shortly after birth. Talley's final chapter examines the most severe conditions that often lead to new, invasive, and potentially dangerous interventions. These cases, some of which include complete facial transplants, demonstrate the way biomedical understandings of the face, and what doctors can do to it, continue to change. This issue highlights one of the most significant ethical questions to arise in recent decades as surgeons compete to be the first to reach new peaks within these complex and transformative procedures. The stakes of such cases, Talley points out, include "identity crisis, public distrust, chronic illness, and even death" (150).

Ultimately, the strength of *Saving Face* rests in its methodical investigation of facial work in contemporary society, probing psychological, social, ethical, and technological dimensions to address an important issue. Consequently, I recommend this book to anyone who seeks a better understanding of such seemingly surface issues from disciplines including sociology, philosophy, psychology, or cultural studies. As Talley points out, "without face-work, social interaction falls apart" (25). But Goffman's metaphor for the exchanges individuals share on a regular basis becomes significantly more complex when we address the literal face's role in contemporary society. As we ask questions collectively about the troubling discourses presented in popular television shows like *Extreme Makeover*, the necessity of looking like a "normal" woman, the essentiality of the smile around the globe, and finally the fact that complete facial transplants are no longer merely science fiction, it

becomes startlingly apparent that the role of the face is not an ephemeral or superficial consideration, but a crucial one that Talley's book sheds a much needed light on.

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Wissinger, Elizabeth. *This Year's Model: Fashion, Media, and the Making of Glamour.* New York: New York University Press, 2015. Print.

Unlike the early days of modeling, when shop girls doubled as models in the stores where they worked, today's models join an industry that demands intense work practices with only a slim possibility of success. Entering as teenagers, models begin managing their bodies immediately to meet the demands of the "in" look and work around the clock to craft a refined image that appeals to brand managers and photographers. Elizabeth Wissinger's book *This Year's Model: Fashion, Media, and the Making of Glamour* studies the culture of the modeling industry as a highly technical and manipulated space influencing how models understand their bodies and how audiences interpret them. Tracing technology's impact on modeling back to its earliest days, when corsets and cameras molded models into the desired shape, Wissinger bridges these simpler "technologies" with the multifaceted technologies of today's environment, such as photoshop and plastic surgery. Her end result is a text that provides an insightful look at the complexities and challenges facing models today as part of a "blink" culture whose short attention span makes capturing the moment ever more critical (19).

Wissinger approaches this topic from the perspectives of sociology and fashion studies, bringing these fields together to examine how fashion models influence culture and everyday social practices. She argues the model's body has become as an integral part of what she labels "glamour labor" (1). This term references the highly regulated, intensive nature of today's modeling industry, as well as the elite and glamourous nature of something that feels effortless, but is in fact a demanding career. Reading like a history of modeling and, simultaneously, a treatise on the everchanging nature of technology pushing us forward, her book uses chronological organization to frame her argument on the challenges entailed in glamour labor. The end result is a text that is useful beyond her specific research focus. Audiences interested in celebrity, media, fashion, and technology will benefit from Wissinger's in-depth work that closely examines modeling as one arena irrevocably changed by technology dating to the 1800s.

Wissinger writes: "The notion of the biomediated body, which dictates that biology is increasingly framed by technology to make it productive, is a central tenet in my conception of how glamour labor works" (262). She argues that technologies harness the body and its energy to serve material purposes. Beginning with a discussion of the supermodels of the 1980s as a critical turning point in the glamourization of modeling as a career, Wissinger works to demonstrate the "transition to fashion as entertainment" (38). The 1980s changed not only how fashion houses treated models but also how audiences reacted to and understood brands, and models as their ambassadors. Wissinger argues that beauty became power in the age of the supermodels. She then documents key shifts in the cultural understanding of what it means to be a model and how glamour labor became normalized, "making what once seemed optional into something everyone should want to do" (261).

Wissinger contends that modeling transitioned from a haphazard, easy to come by job to one that requires superior professionalism. She works

through the time before and after television, and later digital media, and examines how these shifts subtly changed how models experienced work and what was expected of them. She ends with the claim that technology ultimately shapes how models understand their work and body, and these same technologies push audiences to try to shape their own bodies in similar ways. Yet, as she points out, the invisible nature of technology makes attaining the model's figure virtually impossible for those not genetically gifted. Included in her discussion are analyses of the changes in the model's size and physique over time, the way models engage during the photo shoot, and the increasing value placed in accessing one's own "je ne sais quoi" (235). However, underpinning each shift is the role technology plays, continually pushing industry changes.

Her definition of technology remains loose – including everything from developments in clothing, skin care, and other products to electronic technologies such as television, digitization, and social media. Although this may seem like a stretch at times, she continually summarizes her key points, identifying her interpretations of technology within each topic. The strength of Wissinger's work comes from her deeply rooted ties to the industry, as a New Yorker, a fashion insider, and a professor of fashion studies. Her research draws on interviews with a broad array of fashion industry workers including models, designers, make-up artists, and scouts.

At times, Wissinger dables into topics that could most likely stand on their own, such as the concepts of privacy and photographic rights, as well as the impact of the women's movements on fashion and modeling. However, she is smart to only briefly explore these topics, maintaining her focus on the model's body itself. In the end, the book provides an interesting read on an industry that so deeply shapes our culture. The perspective offers an intriguing argument that technology continues to influence our cultural standards for beauty as dictated by this trendsetting industry. As she concludes, "much of what we deem 'cool' or 'hip' can

traced back to the forces of fashion" (278). By the end of her work, it is hard to disagree.

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Dávila, Arlene, and Yeidy M. Rivero, eds. *Contemporary Latina/o Media: Production Circulation, Politics*. New York, NY: New York University Press, 2014. Print.

In *Contemporary Latina/o Media: Production, Circulation, Politics*, editors Arlene Dávila and Yeidi M. Rivero and contributing authors explore the production, circulation, and politics of Latina/o media in the United States. Their volume is an interdisciplinary, diverse, and much-needed addition to Latina/o media studies because it analyzes the transnational nature of Latina/o media production and circulation. As Dávila notes in her introductory chapter, this edited volume goes beyond the "debates over images and representation that, while important, have tended to dominate discussions of Latino media" (1-2). *Contemporary Latina/o Media* fills a void in Latina/o media studies because it utilizes a transnational focus as a lens through which its authors explore the larger political economy dynamics of Latina/o media including Spanish-language radio, Spanish-language television, and also the state of Latinas/os in mainstream prime-time television. It extends previous academic discussions of Latina/o media by focusing on two separate, yet related Latina/o media industries that are shaped and intertwined by transnational circulation, production, and distribution processes: that with roots in Latin America and that with roots in Hollywood. With this

transnational lens that weaves throughout the well-written and insightful chapters, *Contemporary Latina/o Media* explores and exposes the power dynamics, erasures, inequalities, and cultural politics that shape the production, circulation, and distribution of Latina/o media.

Collectively, these essays address the political economy of Latina/o media from a variety of theoretical, methodological, and interdisciplinary perspectives. The first section addresses issues of Latina/o media production by focusing on changes in production processes, the development of new hemispheric initiatives, and the role of language in (re)shaping media organizations and media programming. In the first essay, Juan Piñón situates the edited volume's transnational focus within an exploration of the concept "transnational" as it applies to the relationship between Latin America and U.S. media. His helpful conceptual discussion of "transnational industrial space" provides the backdrop for the remaining chapters in the first section, which explore the politics of production in news, television, and paparazzi contexts. Rodrigo Gómez, Toby Miller, and André Dorcé transition to an analysis of convergence as it applies to the media relationships between and among Mexican media and U.S. media audiences, and they conclude that Mexican media dominates Latina/o media programming in the U.S. and question Latina/o audiences' future preferences for non-Mexican media. Henry Puente further engages with the theme of transnational production by analyzing whether or not NuvoTV, the first cable network to capitalize on the U.S.' English-speaking Latino/a media audience, will be able to compete with other bicultural and bilingual television cable networks. Christopher Joseph Westgate's chapter carries on the discussion of the role of language American Latina/o media by analyzing how NBC Latino, Fusion, and Fox News Latino create the illusion of integration by evidencing how monolingual media both threaten linguistic pluralism and promote assimilationist principles. Frances Negrón-Muntaner exposes the current state of Latinos in contemporary U.S. media and argues that

campaigns and effective political mobilization can help improve the lack of Latina/o representation in the media. Finally, Vanessa Díaz provides a case study analysis of Latino paparazzi image production and concludes that, although a vital component of celebrity media production, Latino paparazzi photographers are excluded from larger production processes and situated within larger discourses of racism and (in)visibility.

The second section of *Contemporary Latina/o Media* focuses on circulation, distribution, and media policies. It explores both national and local policies that shape Latino/a media distribution and circulation and includes case studies that spotlight Colombian, Mexican, and American media. Chapters include Yeidy M. Rivero's analysis of the television series *A Corazón Abierto* and its protests about Afro-Colombian identities and media representation; Omar Rincón and María Paula Martínez's exploration of how Colombian television production is adapting to American/Latina/o audiences and the (re)creation of Bogota as a location for Latina/o television production; Mari Castañeda's analysis of the effect of media policies in shaping the U.S. Latino radio industry; Dolores Inés Casilla's analysis of the politics of language and race in Spanish-language radio ratings; and Hector Amaya's exploration of Gerardo Ortiz's and Jenni Rivera's convergence in relation to standing in for Mexican identity, authenticity, and place. Taken together, these case studies explore the cultural and transnational politics surrounding Latina/o media representations both domestically and abroad and call into question larger issues of race, ethnicity, language, and power.

The third section focuses on the politics of consumption and reception, with an eye to audiences' responses to Latina/o media texts and redefining Latinidad in the process. This section explores how media consumption and media response is a process highly influenced by one's ethnic, racial, and identity politics. For example, chapters by Deborah R. Vargas and María Elena Cepeda analyze the music of Jenni Rivera, Los Tigres del Norte, and Calle 13 and how these performers market, perform, and create

new visions of Latinidad for Latina/o consumers. Jillian Báez's chapter analyzes Latina media audiences and reactions to representations of Latina bodies in Latina/o media. Chapters by Christina Beltrán, Ed Morales, and Juan González conclude the volume by analyzing the role of and agency of Latina/o activist communities within immigrant rights and media contexts.

This volume makes a valuable contribution to Latino/a media studies by offering a fresh set of perspectives about the cultural politics of Latina/o media. It provides a well-constructed set of strong, insightful, and novel chapters that utilize multiple theoretical and methodological approaches, and its success lies not just in its contribution to popular culture studies and Latina/o media studies, but also in the questions it raises for popular culture and Latina/o media studies scholars more specifically and the future of Latina/o media studies more broadly. It calls into question issues of language (what are the politics of Latina/o media in English, not Spanish?), new ideas about digital media and its ability to shape activist efforts and new constructions of Latinidad, and the larger politics associated with defining, identifying, circulating, and consuming Latina/o media.

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Shonekan, Stephanie. *Soul, Country, and the USA: Race and Identity in American Music Culture*. New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2015. Print.

Stephanie Shonekan's *Soul, Country, and the USA: Race and Identity in American Music Culture* comes to readers and scholars at a pivotal period in American race relations. The massacre by white supremacist Dylann Roof of nine church members at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina has reignited the Confederate flag debate. Daily, American news media viewers are saturated with images and videos of police brutality, too often of white officers beating black citizens. With the Ferguson protests and the "Black Lives Matter" campaign born from the tragic death of Travon Martin, a new discourse has emerged on race relations in the United States. A neo-civil rights movement has begun that illuminates the disparaging gap between the dominant white culture and second-class citizen African Americans and other social minorities. Shonekan enters this discussion from a unique perspective. She approaches the difficult racial discourse through the analysis of music. Specifically, she analyzes connections and disconnections between country and soul/hip-hop music.

Shonekan divides her work into nine chapters beginning with the intertwined history of country and soul/hip-hop music. She chooses to use the terms country and soul/hip-hop music broadly to represent white and black cultural music genres. Interestingly, country and soul/hip-hop music genres share their roots in the impoverished former Confederate South among freed slaves and poor white farmers. Shonekan explains how the music evolved in quality and lyrical depth as well as audience expansion while still holding true to its past with themes of poverty and repression. The work continues by approaching subtopics such as media, race and identity, gender, semiotics, politics, religion, and concludes with a brief overview of each. Each chapter develops the history of the subtopic and

then asks thought provoking questions about modern society's treatment of social classes through the interpretation of music. For example, Shonekan asks the reader to think about the low status of women in modern soul/hip-hop and questions the far-right nature of country music as a symbolic anthem of the political right.

One example of the depth of Shonekan's questions is her discourse on modern society and whiteness. Shonekan makes the poignant statement: "…black music distills the message to forms of black identity and pride, country music can forgo the focus on ethnic identity since the whiteness that prevails there precludes them from the racial discrimination that comes from American hegemonic racial history" (140). Whereas, she explains further down the page, "Country music also carries with it an aura of Southern pride, which can often be read (misread?) as white pride." Shonekan forces a reader unfamiliar with social division to contemplate the ugly and often purposefully overlooked stratified system of white privilege in the United States.

Shonekan balances modern music with traditional music and discusses attempts to bridge genres and racial divisions. She gives the example of Brad Paisley's "Welcome to the Future" as a song from the country genre that directly tackles injustices of the past with a hopeful outlook towards the future. She also discusses the crossover of artists from the different genres, including Eminem in soul/hip-hop music or Darius Rucker in country music. Shonekan believes that while small in number, the crossover artists are beginning to bridge cultural divisions.

While the overall work is thoughtful and intriguing, Shonekan could have developed the concept of hip-hop more vividly. The term is dated amongst youth. I had a lively discussion in several of the courses I taught this past spring and summer about the term hip-hop. The urban students almost unanimously agreed that hip-hop was a term of their parents and grandparents. They view modern urban music as rap and believe it is unique to hip-hop. They believe the term rap is more accurate of young

urban culture with themes that focus on urban conflicts (including racial inequality) and strive to improve their status. Shonekan could, in future works, either incorporate the term rap or clearly add the term to the development of the soul/hip-hop genre.

Shonekan's work is a powerful text. It can be academically challenging, but it is well worth the cognitive effort to gain a clear and in-depth analysis of music as a gateway to a larger conversation about our society and how it is represented. I would recommend this work to academically minded audiences such as critical studies, rhetorical studies, Afrocentric studies, sociology, anthropology, and mass media, amongst many others. This work would be helpful for both graduate and undergraduate students to conceptualize modern social structural problems. I would also recommend this work to a lay reader who may be interested in some of today's social issues as reflected in music. After reading the work and listening to Brad Paisley's "Welcome to the Future," a person could connect to the current larger social divides at hand and conceptualize their importance that lie beyond the audio pleasing lyrical beats.

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Brawley, Sean and Chris Dixon. *The South Seas: A Reception History from Daniel Defoe to Dorothy Lamour*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015. Print.

Few geographic areas in the world are subjected to more receptive gaze than what Sean Brawley and Chris Dixon refer to as the South Seas region

in the Pacific Ocean: the swath of the South Pacific stretching from New Guinea to Hawaii. Ironically, distance makes it so that few actually travel or engage in the South Seas, except through representative narratives and images of the region. This volume on the South Seas intertwines several lines of inquiry on the region; history is dominant and presented through deep analysis of artifacts that center the South Seas at the core of various narratives. Equally compelling is a contextual history of the forces outside the South Pacific that center the notion of escape in cultural productions that rely on myth and calculated misrepresentation of the South Seas. The intersection of these lines of inquiry not only make the book captivating, it serves as a model for historians and media scholars to investigate overlap in geographically-driven research. The book touches on gaze and consumption, as suggested by the title, but the authors also contextualize gender and notions of sexual permissibility, colonialism in the narratives of and representations of exploration, and even ways in which miscegenation and racial complexity were perceived in media artifacts. The volume is dense and covers a tremendous amount of history, but is unrivaled in detail, richness of narrative and inclusion of excellent research including unusual sources such as early drafts of film scripts.

Chapter 1, "Beginnings," contextualizes exploration of the South Seas through the first wave of travel literature tied to the region. The mix of travelogues alongside literature imagining the region, Defoe's Crusoe for example, set precedent for how the space of the South Seas was to be represented for Western consumption. The popular imagination was stoked with descriptions of exotic geographies and tales constructing a soon to be stereotyped trope of South Seas women's sexuality and libido.

Chapters 2 and 3 introduce the American presence in the South Seas and highlight the beginning of literary representations of the region for American audiences. Compared to European narratives, American versions do not become prevalent until the early 1800s, however much of the observational character of American writing underscored notions of

the exotic and of the "noble savage." As commerce drove American enterprise into the South Seas, the authors catalog the transition from missionary impulse on the part of Americans in the region followed by exploration. Each of these transitions was reflected in literary output, both fictional and non-fiction. Remarkably, conduits for Americans to "learn" about the South Seas included American literary luminaries such as Edgar Allan Poe and Herman Melville; Melville's works *Typee* and *Omoo* were considered "instrumental in sustaining fascination with the South Seas" (Brawley and Dixon 36).

Chapter 4 presents insight into the American psyche and its frontier conquering mentality. Brawley and Dixon present a meticulous literary landscape that connects San Francisco as the gateway to American ambition in the Pacific and into the South Seas; the lynchpin figure for this storyline, Scottish writer Robert Louis Stevenson. The connections and intersections between art, networks among artists and writers, and inspiration make this chapter emblematic of how Brawley and Dixon explain the history of the South Seas; dynamic with much interconnection.

Chapters 5 and 6 position externality into the history of the South Seas by focusing on the liminal geography of New Guinea and the Australian experience in the South Seas respectively. Both chapters are important to the narrative of the South Seas, especially in how racialization and jarring literary representations of New Guinea reified the barbarian "other" in contrast to other Pacific cultures.

Chapters 7 through 10 reflect the apex of cultural transmissions from the South Seas to the rest of the world. The spectacle of world's fairs and expositions start the chapters and lead to research that emphasizes the consumption of South Seas' culture in a multitude of forms, these chapters connect the importance of channels such as music, literature, educational platforms and tourism.

The final four chapters of the book focus on Hollywood's role in crafting films about the South Seas. Significant, as the authors suggest, not

only was film experiencing its heyday, the films centered around the South Seas were seminal for "Westerners' understanding" of the region (171). Chapter 11 focuses on the rise of South Seas pictures retelling of infrastructure issues and the meeting of many of Hollywood's pivotal players in those formative years. The films of this early era anchor what becomes a consistent pattern of misrepresentation rooted in Western manipulation of the imagined South Seas. Chapter 12 places South Seas films squarely in the adventure genre; from early scientific efforts to what the authors' detail as films used to evaluate and appraise civilization. The story of the mutiny of the HMAV Bounty, is the core of Chapter 13. The authors present a detailed interrogation of the retelling of the mutiny across many literary works. As film versions of the Bounty story emerged, so did the impulse to escape to the South Seas as a remedy to the maladies of the Depression. Finally in Chapter 14 the authors shed light on the films of Dorothy Lamour, categorizing them as part of the South Seas adventure genre that represented a level of "pedagogical power that was probably unrivaled in the history of the South Seas tradition (251). Gaze and authenticity come to head as Lamour's films influence a generation of people soon to experience the South Seas in combat.

The *South Seas* offers one of the most comprehensive examinations of cultural reproduction and consumption of the South Pacific. One challenge is the broadness of the volume, speaking to the region as a whole, sometimes tantalizing specific island and cultural examples without offering more immersion. The middle and concluding chapters, especially the last four chapters on Hollywood and the South Seas are the gems in this volume and offer tremendous details likely to be of importance to historians of the region and for historians of media studies, whom have not seen such a detailed examination of gender and physical representations focused exclusively on the South Seas.

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Davé, Shilpa, Leilani Nishime, and Tasha Oren. *Global Asian American Popular Cultures*. New York University Press, 2016. Print.

The book *Global Asian American Popular Culture* edited by Shilpa Davé, Leilani Nishime, and Tasha Oren (2016) is an ambitious and rich compilation of research regarding the process of integration, participation, and challenges associated with identity and citizenship of Asian Americans in the United States. This edited volume calls for a critical multidisciplinary study of Asian American popular media culture. It considers how digital technologies and the rise of new media platforms assist with producing and circulating diverse representations of Asian American identities. Moreover, the authors argue that this book provides "[…] a multidisciplinary study of Asian American cultural productions as part of a complex conversation with American history, contemporary mainstream media, and burgeoning digital technologies" (1). Specifically, the book is divided into four parts and twenty-two chapters, progressing from individual celebrities to constructions of Asian American communities to depictions of Asian-ness in mainstream U.S. media to transnational popular culture.

Entitled "Stars and Celebrities," Part One explores different Asian American celebrities within various historical and cultural contexts and how these public figures navigate the politics of identity and representation. Chapter One looks at the role Bruce Lee's movies had on Asian American migrants, discussing the way martial arts represent a positive example of globalization, cultural commodity, and migration. Chapter Two reports the way media portrayed former world-boxing champion, Manny Pacquiao from the Philippines, and how this image helped to build a sense of nationalism, heroism, manhood, and identity in the Filipino community within the United States. Chapter Three discusses the impact that the late James Shigeta, a Japanese American film star and

romance icon, had in breaking stereotypes associated with Asian male sexuality. Chapter Four explores how parenting literature such as Amy Chua's *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* have contributed to public debates related to Asian parenting and its impact on Asian American children. Chapter Five describes the trajectory that Asian American comedian Kevin Wu took from YouTube to CBS's *Amazing Race* and discusses the tensions between alternative media and mainstream media in the self-presentation of Asian identities. Finally, Chapter Six explores Korean American "outsider" artist David Choe's life experiences and dramatic story about immigration and discrimination that inspired the documentary film *Dirty Hands: The Art and Crimes of David Choe*.

Part Two, "Making Community," examines how Asian Americans are influencing U.S. popular culture by using alternative media and other cultural vehicles, such as museums, to consolidate its collective identity and legacy in the United States. Chapter Seven explores the narratives inserted in Asian American rap and hip-hop music, specifically through the songs that Cambodian American singer Sambath Hy uses to find visibility outside U.S. mainstream media and to express his experiences related to racial discrimination. Chapter Eight explores how a Pakistan radio station in Houston is creating a space for the Pakistan community to have access to information directly from Pakistan. Chapter Nine critically approaches the Smithsonian Institution's Asian Pacific American Center, focusing on how U.S. institutions are promoting spaces of affirmation of Asian American cultures. Chapter Ten navigates the blogging world that Asian Americans have been widely taking advantage of, to share food recipes as a mechanism of identification with their motherlands. Chapter Eleven plunges into the efforts that American Vietnamese are making to preserve the historic legacy that in most cases resulted in their migration to the United States.

Part Three, "Wading in the Mainstream," drives the reader into themes related to media representation of Asian symbols and culture. Chapter

Twelve discusses the "tourist gaze" (185), a perspective that Hollywood and U.S. media have developed about Hawaii and supported by "aloha culture" narratives. Chapter Thirteen looks at the U.S. film industry that tends to promote science fiction movies that emphasize the sense of "racialization of technology" (197) through the use of Asian American characters. Chapter Fourteen debates the performance of Asian Americans in rock music. Chapter Fifteen discusses the excellent achievements of Indian American students in the National Spelling Bee Competition. Chapter Sixteen explores the success that Asian American candidates have in culinary competitions promoted by the U.S. mainstream media.

Part Four, "Migration and Transnational Popular Culture," emphasizes issues related to racial codes created to characterize Asian American culture within a transnational space. Chapter Seventeen explores the concept of the "Stinky Indian" (263) built by Urban Dictionary and Google and how this term has impacted Indian Americans. Chapter Eighteen analyzes how Bollywood productions that include references to 9/11 were able to create an alternative and fairer portrayal in comparison to the Hollywood overrepresentation of Caucasian victims. Chapter Nineteen discusses the challenges that some Korean pop (K-pop) singers face with issues of cultural "authenticity" as they promote the hip-hop genre drawn from African American roots. Chapter Twenty discusses Western ideals of beauty that are imposed and culturally assimilated by Asian American women. Deeply analyzed in this chapter is the media facilitation of these dominant narratives of beauty. Chapter Twenty-One explores the impact that virtual fashion has on devaluing the Asian clothing manufacturing industry that for years has been respected and profitable. Chapter Twenty-Two discusses the challenges that the U.S Fillipino/a transgender individuals face when they return to the motherland, focusing on the films *Miguel/Michele* (1998) and R. Zamora Linmark's novel *Leche* (2011a).

To sum up, *Global Asian American Popular Cultures* speaks to the complex and contradictory ways texts, audiences, and media make meanings of Asian American popular culture. Pushing the boundaries of Asian American studies, the collection of essays provides different methods and theories to investigate national, international, and transnational processes of assimilation, integration, and resistance by Asian Americans within the context of media and popular culture. Graduate students and scholars alike interested in Asian American studies, popular culture studies, and media studies will find this edited collection a valuable resource as it addresses a number of issues regarding race, identity, (in)visibility, authenticity, commodification, alternative media, and global contexts that affirm Asian and Asian American presences and contributions to media and popular culture within and beyond the United States.

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Glick, Jeremy Matthew. The Black Radical Tragic: Performance, Aesthetics, and the Unfinished Haitian Revolution. New York: NTU Press, 2016. Print.

Jeremy Matthew Glick's *The Black Radical Tragic: Performance, Aesthetics, and the Unfinished Haitian Revolution* is a complex book that draws on history, political science, memory studies, literature, philosophy, and cultural studies. At times jarring, as when reading Deleuze and Guattari for the first time, Glick also evokes the very best of scholars like Ian Baucom whose work similarly weaves a complex tapestry of high

theory and concern for the political present. This is a work that will be important for years to come as an example of the most theoretically rich combinations of history, race, and critical approaches to capitalism ever presented. Glick's text is divided into eight sections: Introduction, Overture, four chapters, Conclusion, and Coda. The Notes and Index follow and provide a treasure trove of sources and ideas for further exploration. Each section is roughly the same length, and the text is just over 200 pages. In each section, Glick introduces a constellation of thinkers and texts, allowing him to discuss *The Black Jacobins* early in the text and *Hamlet* and Malcolm X in the Conclusion. His wide ranging interests, from Hegel to Hansberry, help make this text more than literary theory or philosophy or history. Glick has produced an interdisciplinary work that will frustrate some readers, but embolden and enlighten many more.

Glick's central argument, or at least the one most important for radicals today, is that there is hope in the present despite, or perhaps because of, history's precariousness. Because, for Glick, pessimism does not mean giving up or retreating toward inactivity. Instead, the danger of revolution, in light of the troubling racial past in Haiti and the United States, and arguably throughout many regions of the world, offer the conditions of possibility for new combinations of historical understanding and political action. This is pessimism as optimism. Glick is sanguine, but not in the sophomoric hopefulness of uncritical optimism. He is sanguine in the face of dire situations precisely because they are so dire.

Glick is also, in some sense, a realist. He understands that revolutions are crushed, dreams dashed, and hope insufficient to carry the day. Glick's ready embrace of failure and of the constant antagonisms inherent in racialized and capitalist structures, mark his critical process as a rewarding avenue in troubling times. Rather than accept that white supremacy has won the day, or offer platitudes about the Hegelian dialectic's eventual resolution of antagonisms, Glick centers the mediation of black singularity

and group identity as the enabling force of resistance. This approach differs from some recent theorizing about revolution that either views the individual or the group as the agent of change. Rather than accept one or the other, as if the individual and group occupied separate revolutionary spheres, Glick seeks progress in the interplay between the two.

A telling tension illustrates Glick's genius. Most scholars of history or black radicalism are well aware of Toussaint L'Ouverture's role in the Haitian Revolution, but fewer know of the tension in thought between he and his nephew Moïse. Moïse was faithful to the masses, more loyal to the people and more anti-capitalist than his uncle who feared the ways in which the black masses might disrupt his power. Toussaint orders Moïse executed, evidence of the breakdown in revolutionary zeal. Moïse stands for fidelity to the revolution, yet it is Toussaint that we revere and remember. In this way the complexity of the black past haunts the black radical present. We remember the least revolutionary of the two in this dyad, the one who did not wish to break up the estates and who did not fully align with the black masses.

This is where Hegel comes up again. For scholars hoping for some fresh, interesting, pithy prose about Hegel and the dialectic, Glick does not disappoint. L'Ouverture is a node in a larger dialectic of black radicalism that is both informative of and eclipsed by modern black radical moments. Glick does not simply trace black radicalism to Haiti, he explains how Haiti exemplifies the complex dialectic of revolution and also that further analysis and investigation can explode the dialectic. This is to indicate, the dialectic need not be finished and is indeed, with the help of scholars and activists of all sorts, always able to be reinvigorated, re-approached, and renewed.

The repetition of the Haitian Revolution in media and culture exemplifies the important role memory has for black radicalism. In the same way that *The Birth of a Nation* repeats Nat Turner's Rebellion (which has been repeated many times) and the poetry of M. NourbeSe

Phillip recreates the Zong Massacre, repetition has long been an important trope of discovery and empowerment. Remembering, recreating, and retelling have always been powerful strategies to embolden the individual and fortify the collective. Glick helps expand the relevance of the Haitian Revolution to our present day, reshaping and remembering it so that today's revolutionaries can arm themselves and carry forward the banner of history's power.

This book is highly recommended for scholars and advanced graduate students. Because of its density, the book will demand more than one read. Paired with Ian Baucom's *Specters of the Atlantic*, *The Black Radical Tragic* would present a complex story of black memories and capitalist control with more than enough material to fill a graduate seminar. Scholars and students will be rewarded by generous notes and a strong index, making the text helpful to graduate students compiling an exam list or scholar's searching for bibliographical details. Glick is to be commended for producing such a well thought out, richly textured, and rewarding book.

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Franke, Katherine. *Wedlocked: The Perils of Marriage Equality (How African Americans and Gays Mistakenly Thought the Right to Marry Would Set Them Free).* New York: NYU Press, 2015. Print.

Using a historical and intersectional lens, *Wedlocked: The Perils of Marriage Equality* presents a timely warning concerning marriage and its

discontents. With *Wedlocked*, Katherine Franke joins a series of other
LGBT scholars and activists reflecting on the unintended consequences of
marriage equality and its uneven distribution of "freedom." What makes
the book unique is her historical approach (full of examples from the eras
of emancipation and reconstruction) and her careful consideration of
intersections of class, gender and race. Franke simultaneously inhabits the
roles of archivist and activist with skill and her argument for
contemporary relevance is stark. Franke is concerned with the role of
marriage in the liberation movements for formerly enslaved people as well
as same sex-couples and the important lessons they have to teach us about
the possibilities and limits of rights. Franke argues that on the one hand we
often fail to understand what marriage really is and what it does while one
the other hand we have also expected it to be a magic elixir to remedy a
host of inequities connected to race and sexual orientation. She asserts that
"a desire for rights should come with an awareness of the costs,
constraints, and hidden agendas they bring with them" (12). So, what does
it really mean to be free and equal and what role has marriage played in
these pursuits? Are we asking too much of marriage? Is it asking too
much of us? *Wedlocked* would have us believe it is a bit of both.

The first four chapters of *Wedlocked* are organized around specific
aspects of marriage framed in the eras of Civil War and Reconstruction.
Chapter one, "Freedom by Marriage," explains how marriage became a
"freedom ticket" for thousands of enslaved women and children near the
end of the Civil War. Marriage, and the emancipation that came with it,
was used as a tool to incentivize the enlistment and retention of black
soldiers, but in doing so women became merely spouses rather than full
citizens. Chapter two, "Fluid Families," examines the kinds of
relationships, connections and kinship enslaved and gay people created
during times when marriage was not an option and asks what sorts of
lessons we can learn from these periods. The chapter also explores the
ways in which marriage precludes certain forms of kinship. Franke

effectively uses the example of previously enslaved persons having more than one spouse and the confusion this created when multiple wives applied for war widow pensions. The point here is that the diversity of romantic and sexual relationships in the heterosexual black community before Reconstruction and the rigid strictures imposed on marriages during Reconstruction share important correlations with non-traditional families found in queer communities today. *Wedlocked* argues that marriage equality puts non-normative types of couplings in peril when they fail to adhere to heterosexual norms.

In Franke's view, not only is marriage not the measure of all things, as it is often implied to be by marriage equality advocates, but it also tends to snuff out the sexual liberties many couples might have been accustomed to. Chapters three and four, "Boots Next to the Bed" and "Am I My Brother's Keeper?" use the historical record to illustrate some of the legal entanglements associated with marriage and how they were used to police the public and private behavior of African Americans during the end of the 19th century. During Reconstruction many southern states passed laws that automatically married ex-slaves and as a result, many African Americans found themselves subject to a host of new legal issues. Gay couples might be wise consider these lessons of history. As Franke points out, "getting married means that your relationship is no longer a private affair since a marriage license converts it into a contract with three parties: two spouses and the state" (121). Not only did previously enslaved African Americans face an inability to organize their intimate lives as they saw fit, but marriage and fidelity were often preconditions to getting particular types of aid. Marriage became a means through which African American communities could be policed from both within and without.

The final two chapters, "The Afterlife of Racism and Homophobia" and "What Marriage Equality Teaches Us about Sex and Gender," unpack the contemporary lessons we can learn and critical questions we want to ask about marriage. Franke is certainly not the first scholar to pose these questions. Feminist scholars and activists have been critiquing the institution of marriage for decades. Over 15 years ago Michael Warner's *The Trouble with Normal* (1999) questioned the wisdom of placing marriage equality at the forefront of gay activism, warning us about the intrusion of state power into queer life. He wrote then that "marriage has become the central legitimating institution by which the state regulates and permeates people's most intimate lives; it is the zone of privacy outside of which sex is unprotected" (96). Franke's *Wedlocked* is a pointed reminder of Warner's concerns about privacy and governmental intrusion in a time when marriage equality is swiftly becoming the new normal.

In the final chapters of *Wedlocked*, we begin to truly appreciate its unique contribution as Franke builds on Warner's work and breaks down the successful arguments made for marriage equality. The rhetoric was essentially conservative in nature, the face of the movement was overwhelmingly white, and the victory comes at a cost to those who decide not to partake in it. Franke asks us to consider whether there is something essentially heterosexual about marriage and whether the rules and norms of the institution are well suited to govern the lives and interests of same-sex couples (209). She presents some compelling answers to these questions and solid legal examples to illustrate them. *Wedlocked* is a stark reminder that inasmuch as marriage can facilitate commitment and kinship, it can also be used as a means to regulate and discipline. It can carry with it unintended consequences for those within it and can also stigmatize those outside of it. *Wedlocked* gives academics, activists and the general reading public a fresh take on some of the problematic strands woven into the ties that bind. It would be a welcome

addition to any course seeking an intersectional approach to issues of sexuality and gender.

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Warner, Michael. *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life.* New York: Free Press, 1999. Print.

Watson, Elwood, Jennifer Mitchell, and Marc Edward Shaw, eds. *HBO's* Girls *and the Awkward Politics of Gender, Race and Privilege*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015. Print.

Girls premiered on HBO in April 2012, a year after I stopped teaching and started deaning. Having long taught courses about the politics of popular culture as well as gender, sexuality, and media, and specializing in studies of embodiment, I pined for the opportunity to discuss this show with bright students who were tuned in to conversations about ideology and representation. Several years later, I still haven't had the chance, but *HBO's* Girls *and the Awkward Politics of Gender, Race, and Privilege*, edited by Elwood Watson, Jennifer Mitchell, and Marc Edward Shaw, helps to fill some of that void by presenting an engaging chorus of perspectives on the cultural work done by the series and its surrounding public discourse. The collection explores the series over its first four seasons, riffing on many of the themes explored in a dedicated 2013

"Commentary and Criticism" section of *Feminist Media Studies* that evaluated on the show just one year in.

The collection's ten chapters are framed by an editorial introduction with a chatty, clubby voice; the book seems to be aimed at educated fans of the series. The editors counter critics who highlight the unlikability of *Girls*' four heroines, arguing that Lena Dunham, the show's creator, often forces viewers into a state of confusion about how we should feel about her characters (Watson, Mitchell & Shaw 3), creating a more complicated relationship between audience and series than can be said of many other shows.

A number of solid chapters explore the series' meaning. Jennifer Mitchell's "She's Just Not That Into You: Dating, Damage, and Gender" compares *Friends, Sex and the City*, and *Girls* as it focuses on the role of damage in dating. In contrast to what she sees as the conservatism of both older series, Mitchell notes that Dunham's decision to regularly depict bad sex and interpersonal failings is groundbreaking in its rejection of the "fairy tale trajectory" to which its predecessors succumbed (22). Likewise, Marc Edward Shaw, in "Falling from Pedestals: Dunham's Cracked *Girls* and Boys," appreciates the cracks and fractures in the constructions of gender that the show reveals (84); he looks, turn by turn, at such fissures in the portrayals of several of the show's characters across storylines.

Some of the most groundbreaking work done by the series surrounds women's embodiment, and the collection offers two chapters that specifically explore these issues. Jocelyn Bailey's "'The Body Police': Lena Dunham, Susan Bordo, and HBO's *Girls*" analyzes the controversy over Lena Dunham's body and frequent nudity through the lens of Susan Bordo's feminist work on the relationship between women's embodiment and subjectivity. In a similar vein, Maria San Filippo's "Owning Her Abjection: Lena Dunham's Feminist Politics of Embodiment" examines how *Girls* repositions women's embodied subjectivity in a maneuver that deploys negative images of women as part of a feminist critique.

Particularly successful chapters move the conversation in innovative directions. Yael Levy's "Girls' Issues: The Feminist Politics of *Girls*'s Celebration of the 'Trivial'" explores triviality as a gendered construct and a form of feminist resistance, noting the series' harnessing of "important" themes (like death) to deliver "trivial" ones (like women and their feelings) (67). (If only this chapter were a bit longer!) Hank Willenbrink's chapter, "Capitalizing on Post-Hipster Cool: The Music That Makes *Girls*," makes an excellent theoretical contribution in its exploration of musical taste as currency and subcultural capital within the post-hipster movement. Willenbrink astutely points out that within the series, "irony not only functions as a way to buffer individuals from being branded (and socially marked) with having bad taste, it also contributes to the consumerism of hipsters by making all cultural materials available to be used if branded as an ironic choice" (94). Finally, in "Lena Dunham: The Awkward/Ambiguous Politics of White Millennial Feminism," Elwood Watson offers a striking critique of the arguments made by some of Dunham's defenders against charges of race-based exclusionary behavior (149). Although Watson does offer Dunham some props for the characterization of Sandy (160), the white main character's Black boyfriend featured during a short arc in Season Two, his chapter stands apart from the others in the collection in the trenchancy of his critiques surrounding the show's racial politics.

An eternal problem with edited collections is unevenness. A *very* close analysis of the underlying meaning of the books that appear on the show (Witherington 127), an investigation of the character Marnie's problematic appropriation of a Kanye West song (Vayo 167), and an examination of the show's messages about Gen X culture (Pace 107), are animated by interesting ideas but deliver a questionable scholarly payoff in terms of compelling new insights.

In addition, given that the series had broadcast several seasons at the time the book was published, there is perhaps too much examination of the

same scenes across different chapters. Some scenes, like the one in which Hannah's boyfriend Adam calls her a "little street slut," are analyzed in many different chapters from slightly different angles, giving a repetitive feel.

On the whole, the collection has a lot to offer readers who are acquainted with the series and want to get a better handle on its ideological underpinnings. Many of the chapters would be usefully assigned for undergraduate reading in courses examining race, class or gender (especially the latter) in media.

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Newman, Emily L., and Emily Witsell, eds. *The Lifetime Network: Essays on "Television for Women" in the 21st Century*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2016. Print.

Given the advertising tagline, "Television for Women," it should come as little surprise that The Lifetime Network has garnered little critical attention in their 30-plus years of programming. But Lifetime continues to be a network that is leading the way in both niche marketing and in the creation of original programming. As one of the most watched networks, a volume like this is long overdue. Previously, the only long-form analysis on Lifetime was a 1995 special issue of *Camera Obscura*, which analyzed the network just eleven years after its premier. As one of the first networks to engage in gender-casting as an approach to the growing market of narrowcasting and in niche marketing, The Lifetime Network should be analyzed for its successful foray into audience targeting and successful

creation of original programming since 1984. Emily L. Newman and Emily Witsell's collection investigates just some of the vast programming and branding approaches that Lifetime has utilized in thirty years as one of the most watched cable networks.

With an insightful introduction, Newman and Witsell frame the long-lasting success and branding changes that Lifetime has had over its first thirty years. They discuss the creation of a network for women and how Lifetime approached creating and maintaining a woman's space across airwaves and in ever-increasing digital spaces. They frame their edited collection in terms of television as a medium that for decades overlooked and under-tapped the audience of women. And they place this collection in a framework of scholarship that has likewise overlooked the importance of a network that began by purporting to be "television for women." Lifetime has grown with technology and popular culture, creating more original episodic television shows, more reality programming, and creating ways for fans to engage with Lifetime content in digital spaces.

The sections in this book analyze Lifetime's reality and internet programming, original episodic programming as well as original movies. The section on reality and internet programming offers an outstanding analysis of the show *Girlfriend Intervention* and its use of stereotypical representations of black and white women, considers the position of gender and race in the twenty-first century, and raises questions about lingering historical conflicts between black and white women. This section also offers an interesting analysis of a short-lived Lifetime online mash-up tool and its relationship to the culture of "vidders" online. Additionally this section has an intriguing discussion of *Project Runway*'s transition from Bravo to Lifetime and how this worked within the system of rebranding that Lifetime was experiencing at the time.

The section on original episodic programming contains one essay that examines the popular, long-lasting show *Army Wives* and a second essay that examines two short-lived speculative fiction shows, *The Lottery* and

Witches of East End. These two essays launch into issues that confront more recent programming on Lifetime, namely examining how shows on the network make strides toward more progressive representations of women and how shows rely on narratives and characters that continue to adhere to the same tropes that have dominated Lifetime's programming. In some ways, these essays touch on what Lifetime is now doing with their original show, *UnReal*, a fictional television show about the production of a reality television. *UnReal* combines elements of progressive representations while adhering to familiar tropes of women competing for a man's attention.

The third section on Lifetime original movies approaches three important topics: eating disorders, kidnapped children, and rape revenge narratives. These essays analyze some of the main themes running through more current Lifetime movies and how they demonstrate shifting perspectives through popular culture narratives. Lifetime has been making original movies since 1990. These original movies have demonstrated a lot of shifting perspectives and cultural changes, they address important issues for women, adapt books geared toward women readers, and present movies based on real events and lives. Given the large variety and many years of movies, including Lifetime's creation of their own Lifetime Movie Network, much more could be addressed on this important topic and the cultural impact of Lifetime as a brand.

The primary value of *The Lifetime Network* is that it sparks future scholarly inquiry, and hopefully this will encourage more studies of this under-examined network. With the ever-expanding realm of cable networks and the growth in narrowcasting, it is increasingly important to look at network presence and branding in cable networks. Even more importantly, scholars need to examine how such networks construct identity when they engage in identity politics, like they do for gender-casting. Examining gender-casting and intersections of gender, race, ability, class, etc., will help us to better understand the changing political

and cultural climates surrounding television programming and also help us better understand the things we are teaching young audiences through this programming.

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Humphreys, Kristi Rowan. *Housework and Gender in American Television: Coming Clean*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2016. Print.

When thinking of housework in television shows, one often thinks of June Cleaver meeting Ward at the door in heels, with a martini in her hand, and wearing pearls. Kristi Rowan Humphreys, author of the book *Housework and Gender in American Television: Coming Clean,* challenges this notion by examining the meaning behind the theme of housework. It is more than just a text for media scholars; scholars of gender, family, sociology, and pop culture will find the text useful in analyzing various family types such as the single-father, single-mother, and nuclear families as well as the role of television in portraying housework, and gender roles.

Kristi Rowan Humphreys is an assistant professor of critical studies and artistic practice at the Texas Tech University. Her research encompasses gender media and popular culture. In writing *Housework and Gender in American Television*, Humphreys challenges the critique that televised housework portrays marginalized females. Humphreys sought to move away from that critique and look for the meaning behind the act.

While wanting to examine the connection between television housework and reality, Humphreys' text "challenges the notion that

housework functions primarily as a mechanism through which characters are marginalized, devalued, invisible, or passive…" (4). Humphreys' analysis spans four decades of television shows and as she progresses through the decades and the shows, she begins to show how housework functions as a way for characters to preserve the family. As early as the 1950s in shows such as *The Donna Reed Show* and *The Goldbergs*, Humphreys determines that housework "functions as normally, lovingly, and generally to preserve the lives of others" (33). It is a way for mothers to interact with their children, communicate with their husband, and demonstrate their love nonverbally. The book begins with a vignette of Humphreys' grandmother interrupting Humphreys as she works on an important paper for school. Her grandmother asks, "Do you need cookies? Need the temperature adjusted? A glass of milk?" At first, Humphreys is bothered by the interruption but soon comes to realize that her grandmother found joy in serving her. This realization about her grandmother, along with watching reruns of shows from the '50s, '60s, and `70s with her mother, sparked Humphreys' interest in housework and how the act is depicted on television versus reality. The book summarizes and highlights acts of housekeeping among characters, both males and females, between 1950 and the 1990s. Humphreys concludes with shows from the 1980s as she argues models of household management became much more diffuse after this decade. The book concludes by offering 20 trends that were established in televised housework during her 40-year examination.

Humphreys' analysis does a superb job of linking her findings throughout different shows throughout the four decades. For example, Humphreys makes note that if a male protagonist of the show is single or widowed, they seek out assistance in the form of a female housekeeper, or in terms of *Family Affair,* a male butler. Humphreys is quick to point out that single females do no such thing, instead getting the family to assist them in the household duties as Shirley Partridge did with her children in

The Partridge Family. Humphreys also makes note of the income disparities between lead male and female single characters. Single male leads often have a housekeeper to make them meals, do their laundry, and clean their home; single female leads, such as in *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* and *Tabitha*, are left to work during the day and then do their housework at night.

The gender differences Humphreys' points out strengthens her initial goal of showing how housework is viewed in the different shows throughout the decades. Humphreys "views the importance of housework as the signification of a commitment to meet children's and family desires for preservation" (p. 4). The commitment to housework duties are portrayed differently by the genders. While Humphreys argues that females perform the act as a way of demonstrating love and has the "potential to empower and fulfill women" (p. 8); the same was not noted about males. Humphreys concludes that television shows where males are portrayed as widowers, "have women or family members come to their rescue to care for their home, or they hire housekeepers" (p. 22). Humphreys' analysis finds that "housework is not easier to accomplish for a single female than a single male, yet television depicts it that way" (p. 22).

Despite the strengths of Humphreys' text, it should not be assumed it does not have its weaknesses. Because Humphreys' attempts to weave the 20 trends she found throughout the chapters, one weakness of her book is its organization. In the earlier decades, she makes note of later shows from the later decades, which provide examples that support each theme, including male housekeepers such as Bud in *My Three Sons*. Then when she discusses the shows in the later decades, the book provides a less thorough of analysis of these shows, since they were mentioned previously. The weakness of organization left this reader wondering if it impacted how Humphreys conducted her analysis. Humphreys' analysis includes just one or two episodes per show, despite her claim that her

research focuses on the entire series. This could leave consumers wondering if the meanings of housekeeping changes during the course of the show.

Despite my critique, Humphreys' text would be useful in television media courses as well as family communication and pop culture courses. It offers a different perspective on housekeeping, a task that both professor and students are aware of. However, it may be difficult for millennials to keep their focus while reading about shows their grandparents watched.

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Hoover, Stewart M., and Curtis D. Coats. *Does God Make the Man? Media, Religion, and the Crisis of Masculinity*. New York: NYU Press, 2015. Print.

One area of inquiry that students explore in the study of communication and gender is the concept of masculinity in relation to the contexts of religion and popular culture. Although there seem to be challenges in discussing religion alongside popular culture, *Does God Make the Man?* by Stewart Hoover and Curtis Coats evinces the succinct connections among media, masculinity, and religion. The authors argue that religious men do not evade the subjects of gender and media. Instead, the authors explicate how men of faith negotiate their masculine identities in the realms of religion, media, and in their roles as husbands and workers.

The book focuses on interviews with Evangelical and Ecumenical Christian men. The interviews shed light on how men articulate

masculinity in relation to religion and media. For these men, media is a discourse that is at odds with their religious identities. The book proceeds by way of men grappling with "elemental masculinity," which is comprised by the three themes of provision, protection, and purpose. Provision focuses on how men see themselves as providers for their family in both material and religious senses. Protection addresses how men feel it is their duty to protect their families from harms in the world, be it physical harm or harm that may come from exposure to media. Finally, purpose hones in on how men see the value of their roles as husbands, fathers, and devout members of their faith. Through the narratives and perspectives from men in the book, *Does God Make the Man?* excels at illuminating the tensions and articulations that religious men experience among the nodes of masculinity, media, and religion.

Chapter 1 details how Evangelical and Ecunemical men draw from their faith in defining and making sense of masculinity. The men of faith interviewed by the authors describe their views and experiences of religion as it pertains to the concept of headship (a frequent theme that encompasses matters of decisiveness and boldness in the context of marriage and family), women's roles in headship, and how gender is used to rethink masculinity in domestic spheres and beyond. A striking aspect of this chapter is how the men interviewed express headstrong commitments to their faith, yet also express a desire to search for resources that help answer the question of what it means to be masculine. Whereas the Evangelical men described their experiences of masculinity and gender as being dependent on "male exceptionalism at the center", the Ecunemical Protestant men provided nuanced considerations of how masculinity, religion, and media work to produce honest conversations about masculinity (55). The latter group of men focused less on the concept of headship and more on broader cultural influences that broaden their views of gender.

Chapter 2 focuses on how men connect their religious and gender identities to contemporary media, specifically through male characters on television programs. The authors asked their interviewees to identify programs and characters that lend to their conceptualizations of masculinity. Shows such as *Friends* and *Leave it to Beaver* were invoked by interviewees while articulating their perspectives on sexuality, headship, and fatherhood. When faced with media that contained sexual and violent themes, men discuss challenges of evaluating the pervasiveness of media as they worked to preserve their masculinity as taught by their religion. Throughout this chapter, the Evangelical and Ecumenical Protestant men never evade or admonish media completely. Instead, both groups of men come off as religiously steadfast individuals who wisely consume or interrogate media in order to address the challenges of putting religion, masculinity, and gender into conversation with one another. This was the case when Evangelical fathers noted how fathers in shows such as *According to Jim* and *The Simpsons* still portrayed their roles as caring fathers, despite their character tropes as lazy fathers. Ultimately, media is articulated as a communicative nexus of beliefs and values that encourages religious men to meaningfully negotiate their masculine identities in relation to the aforementioned principles of provision, protection, and purpose in religious and domestic spheres.

Chapter 3 hones in on how men tend to their masculine identities in their roles as husbands, fathers, and workers. While the chapter takes a step away from direct discussions of media, the men are encouraged to view themselves in relation to their domestic roles, and how such roles help to shape and refine their understandings of masculinity as they carry out their duties as parents and individuals of faith. Having shared their experiences with masculinities, religion, and media, the men reflected on their roles as spouses and fathers in relation to the aforementioned ideas of provision, protection and purpose. This was a reflective labor that pushed them to confront crises of masculinity. From experiencing a calling to a

profession and being a father and leader in the church, to seeing themselves as "culture warriors" when navigating the landscapes of media and masculinity, the authors evince the most effective realms of practice for men to ask pointed questions about masculinity and religion. By bringing attention to masculinity as it pertains to the home, the authors mark a significant gesture by moving their interviewees to reflect on masculinity as experienced "on the ground," rather than purely on the sidelines.

By coalescing the areas of religion, gender and media, *Does God Make the Man?* accomplishes a meaningful inquiry of religious identity in relation to gender and the media. The work in this book points to the reflexive ways in which provision, protection, and purpose encourage men of faith to explore the layers of masculinity, religion and popular media, bringing the discourse surrounding masculinity crises into a more refined focus. It is of importance to note that only one of the chapters directly focuses on the connections that media (specifically from television) has with religion and masculinity. Though this may seem concerning at first, there is great worth to be found in this chapter as it demonstrates how religious men frequently consume more traditional types of media in order to make sense of the narratives surrounding discourses of masculinity.

Overall, popular culture scholars who delve into the areas of gender, media and religious studies stand to benefit from this book and the intersections that stem from exploring the subjects of religion, media, masculinities, and gender broadly. Moreover, it is ideal for religious individuals who seek direct and pointed connections between religion and popular culture, two distinct contexts that can greatly inform one another. The book is a meaningful extension of much needed academic and personal conversations about gender, religion and media.

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Fawaz, Ramzi. *The New Mutants: Superheroes and the Radical Imagination of American Comics*. New York: New York University Press, 2016. Print.

Through a close reading of comics, reader and creator conversations, as well as the historical context, Ramzi Fawaz, an Assistant Professor of English at the University of Madison, Wisconsin, displays that in the three decades from 1960-1990, the superhero was "transformed...from a nationalist champion to a figure of radical difference mapping the limits of American liberalism and its promise of universal inclusion in the post-World War II period" (3). Throughout the book, he analyzes popular comics and maps their resonance with the emergent political movements of the time to display how they serve to "validate previously unrecognizable forms of political community" (5).

In his first chapter, he examines *The Justice League of America* between 1960-1965 as contributors who "transformed the superhero from an icon of American nationalism to a champion of internationalism and universal citizenship" (39). These comics cast their heroes as using scientific ingenuity paired with extraordinary willpower and strength of character in their quests for global justice and to defeat villains who would use science in individualistic pursuits.

In chapter two, he uses queer theory of nonnormativity to discuss *The Fantastic Four* (1961-1967), and displays that the content served as a visual critique of "the relationship between sexual and gender identity and Cold War politics," by imagining new kinds of citizens free of "attachment to narratives of heterosexual normalization and bodily regimentation" (67-68). Essentially, while all of the *Four* start out as paragons of heterosexuality, via their accident they become nonnormative figures: Reed Richards/Mr. Fantastic becomes a representative for the liberal; similarly, Ben Grimm/The Thing comes to represent the neurotic and Johnny Storm/The Human Torch becomes the representation of queer.

Meanwhile Sue Storm/The Invisible Girl *disidentifies* with proper femininity as her invisibility makes her worthy of being seen. Further the group as a whole functioned as an unstable molecular model of the "family" - voluntary membership based on shared differences – conception mirrored in contemporary culture.

Chapter three is a bit divided. Fawaz begins with a discussion of the fan letters' pages of *The Fantastic Four* as constituting what Michael Warner calls a counterpublic, specifically a project of world making. This counterpublic, he argues helped reinterpret Marvel's focus on *The Fantastic Four* as "more than just human," so as to introduce a question of the limits of race and species as they apply to affiliation and solidarity of diverse groups. However, the second half the chapter moves away from the fan forum and into the cosmopolitics of *The Fantastic Four's* storylines in relation to the characters of Price Namor and the Atlantians, the Black Panther and the Wakandans, and Crystal and the Inhumans. When read together, these storylines resonate with a cosmopolitanism Fawaz finds across several contemporary political movements, including Students for a Democratic Society, the Third World Left and the Black Panther Party. While perhaps an extension of the previous argument, this last section seems like an interesting tangent to the discussion of fan/creator interaction.

In chapters four and five, Fawaz introduces two new subgenres: space operas and urban folktales. Space operas are a subgenre of science fiction that "explored how these [characters] dealt with the existential experience of being adrift in a limitless cosmos" (127). Urban folktales (discussed in chapter 5) are a subgenre of folktales more generally, which "used documentary realism to situate superheroes in the everyday circumstances of the most socially and economically oppressed members of American society" (166). In chapter four, Fawaz argues the Silver Surfer may be further sub-classified as a "messianic melodrama," a short-lived formation that "narrated the psychic torture of heroic alien visitors to Earth whose

altruistic intentions are denied by the 'unreasoning hatred' of bellicose humans" (129). This, Fawaz argues, mirrors Lauren Berlant's "female complaint" and is correlated to the rise of environmentalism in the American political imaginary (133). In the second half of the chapter, *X-men* Ororo Monroe/Storm and particularly Jean Grey's transformation from Marvel Girl to the Phoenix in "The Phoenix Saga" are linked to two feminist projects of the mid-1970's: "the desire for female autonomy and self-actualization and the development of alternative intimacies and solidarities outside of heteropatriarchy" (155). While the actions of these two characters resonate with the concept of the space opera and messianic melodrama, the links could be more strongly established.

Chapter five examines the second subgenre, the urban folktale, through a close reading of DC's *Green Lantern/Green Arrow* series (1970-1974), Marvel's *Captain America and the Falcon* series (1974-1975) and *Luke Cage: Hero for Hire* (1971). Fawaz correlates these stories to the producers' own concerns with the corporate restructuring of the comic book industry; however he finds that the stories "ultimately devolved into a celebration of a neoliberal politics of personal responsibility" (198).

The focus of chapter six is on the concept of demonic possession as expressed in the comics post 1979, including *The X-men's* "The Dark Phoenix Saga," (1979-1980) and *Spider-Man's* "The Birth of Venom" (1984-1985; 1989-1991). Such stories "ultimately linked the psychic corruption of their central superheroic characters to the machinations of global capitalism" (202). Fawaz compares these narratives to the argument of the feminist sex wars over the extent to which women can exercise agency in a system of sexuality "fundamentally structured by the logic of patriarchy" (203). The blame in both cases is shifted from personal responsibility to social and institutional forces, capitalism and patriarchy. Fawaz's reading of the gendered depiction of power in these stories is particularly intriguing but perhaps less tenable. For instance, in the description of Peter Parker's encounter with Venom, the symbiotic

parasite penetrates, feminizes and hypersexualizes Parker; however, when Venom takes over his rival Eddie Brock, he is not penetrated, feminized or hypersexualized.

Fawaz's final chapter describes *The New Mutants* (1984) as questioning "What can a superhero *be*?" (235). This series cast the categories of mutant and superhero into new situations that provoked a radical imagination that correlates with the "postmodern anti-identitarian politics of difference…realized in social movements like ACT UP… and third wave feminism" (236). Both the movements and the comics, he argues, "affirmed difference itself as a wellspring for a radical politics based on affinity and shared political values rather than the assumed sameness" (236).

Eye-opening and frequently inspired, Fawaz's criticism is at the same time accessible and well supported by examples. My critiques are that some of the terms introduced early on don't pan out in the rest of the text, and that the epilogue contains a host of arguments and texts sufficient to fill another book. Despite these problems, this book represents a model for clarifying intersections between popular culture and sociopolitical movements that belongs on the shelves of rhetoricians, cultural critics, feminists and queer theory proponents, as well as those interested in popular culture and especially comics.

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Dr. Hatch turned a lifelong interest in art and photography into a new career starting in 2002. He continues to publish in this field. Recent articles include: "When Does a Photo Become Fine Art?" *Aequi* (online arts journal, February 2016); "Risky Business of Managing Risk" *Exhibitions Without Walls*, (blog, April 2015); "We Want Your Body (of work*)" Exhibitions Without Walls*, (blog, February 2015); "Why Should I Pay A Photographer?" *The Photo Argus*, (blog, October-November 2014); "Intentional Photography" *The Photo Argus* (blog, November 2014).

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In 2009, John appeared in the documentary *Nightmares in Red, White and Blue: The Evolution of the American Horror Film* along with John Carpenter, Larry Cohen, Joe Dante and voice-over narrator Lance

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MGM's Switch in Time Did to *Pride and Prejudice* (1940)" in *Adaptation*; and a co-authored chapter with Susan Wildermuth on how "ugly" and "beautiful" are conceptualized and portrayed in Cinderella picture books in the book *Gender(ed) Identities: Critical Rereadings of Gender in Children's and Young Adult Literature* (ed. Tricia Clasen and Holly Hassel, Routledge, 2017).

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THE POPULAR CULTURE STUDIES JOURNAL

AUTHOR INSTRUCTIONS

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 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.

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.

Manuscripts should be sent to Bob Batchelor, Editor, *The Popular Culture Studies Journal* via email: pcsj@mpcaaca.org. A single title page must accompany the email, containing complete contact information (address, phone number, e-mail address). On the first page, 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.

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 or sexist 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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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/

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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 address or email:

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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 Chicago for the 2016 conference. We look forward to seeing you next year in St. Louis!

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