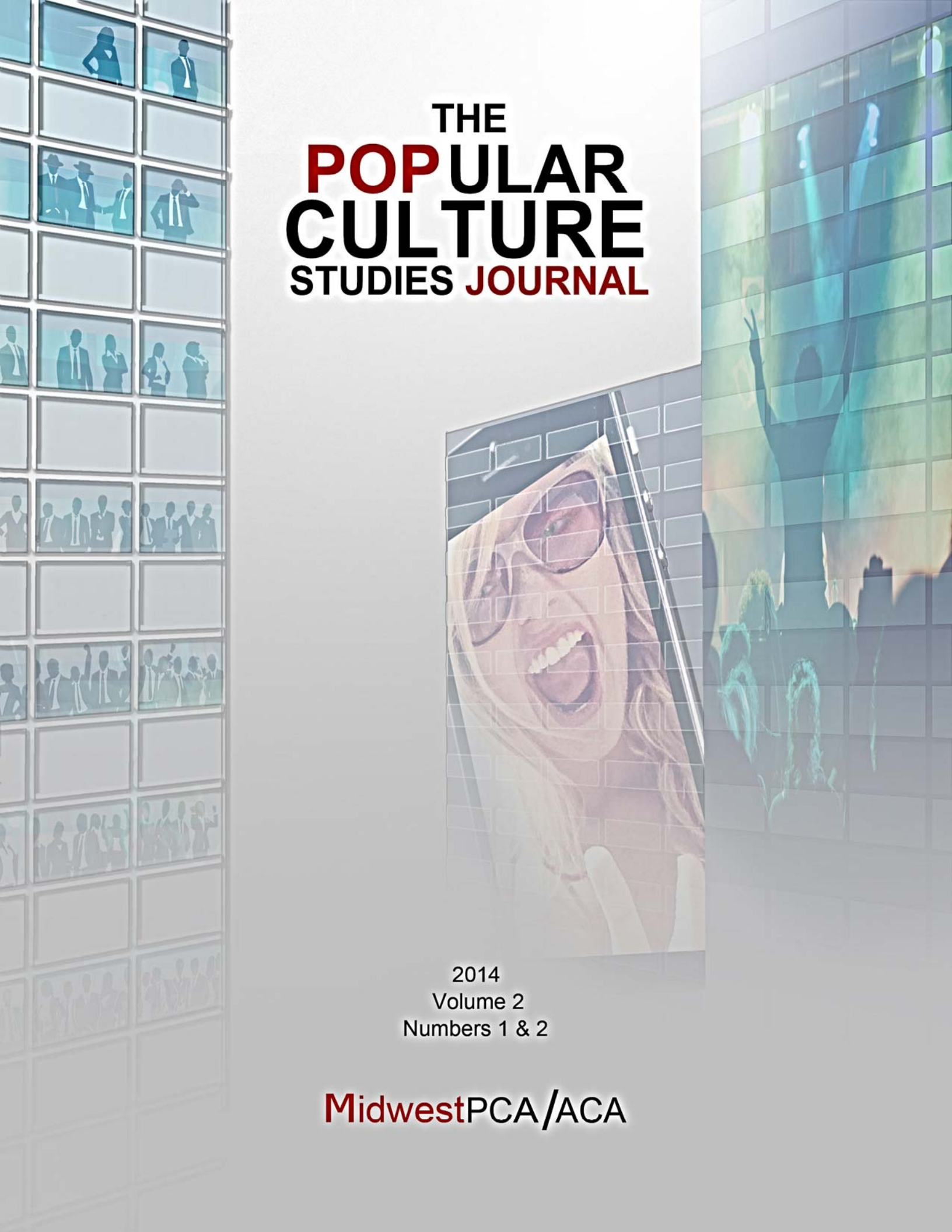

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All Me…All the Time

BOB BATCHELOR

Choose your own adventure:

A. We live in a selfie world. Rampant consumerism, omnipresent capitalism, and undying self-love merged into a kind of evil triumvirate aimed at your pocketbook, fueled by unchecked narcissism.

B. We live in a selfie world. Technology innovation enables people around the globe to connect in an instant to share ideas, experiences, and culture like never before. People's willingness to link together via social media is an expression of the world becoming more open, humane, and compassionate.

Whether one takes path A or B or charts a different course, the fact that we are in a selfie world seems clear. From the new ABC television rom-com "Selfie" to the recent controversies surrounding the release of nude pictures supposedly hacked from iCloud of movie star Jennifer Lawrence and others, the evidence is overwhelming. As an astute friend recently exclaimed, "Facebook is nothing more than one big selfie."

While I began this editorial using a choose your own adventure concept, the frank question is whether or not an alternative exists. If one follows Internet privacy arguments and the issues raised by Edward Snowden's release of secret government documents, a case could be made that all electronic communications are being gathered, assessed, and saved. The challenge goes beyond what Facebook is collecting to what

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seems like a global initiative to use technology to justify possibly peeping into every aspect of a person's life.

It is not just Lawrence and other celebrities that have been hacked. In a widely publicized story from this past summer, Snowden claimed that National Security Agency workers are sitting in their office looking at your naked selfies too. Not only that, they share the best ones among themselves. From passing around to downloading, takes how many clicks?

What brought the selfie idea to my own doorstep in a glaring way is watching my nine-year-old daughter, Kassie, and her third and fourth grade friends take imaginary selfies on a recent fieldtrip to a local pumpkin farm. Huddling together to ensure they were all in the pretend frame, they smiled and held up their arms as if they had cellphones. They even took turns taking the photo, gently rearranging themselves and giggling throughout. These are the true digital natives! The idea that one would not want selfies to exalt a significant moment or event is preposterous.

Now imagine this: four or five decades from now Kassie or one of her Montessori school friends is running for public office, maybe even for president. What if someone who has access to Facebook's or Google's or Vine's servers (or whatever entity owns the equipment in that distant future) uncovers embarrassing or controversial photos or instant messages that could stop the candidate in her tracks? Is there any good reason to think that this may not be part of our electronic future?

I am not a prude, nor do I advocate eliminating or regulating social media organizations to ensure that this potential future does not take place. Heck, I have posted selfies and watched in fascination (and sometimes horror) as people I know, brands I use, or celebrities post them too. What I would rather point to is that as popular culture scholars, we help audiences – from college students we teach to those we may influence – understand that there is context related to social media. The act of posting is not the

end of the equation and what comes next could matter in personal and significant ways.

The Internet and social media provide a platform. People use the electronic megaphone to facilitate constant recognition and acknowledgement that what they are doing, saying, feeling, and presenting holds meaning. It is as if the act actually is meaningless until it is posted. But, let us remember the context, the bigger picture, the possibility that what is posted today may haunt one tomorrow or next month or next year or fifty years from now.

For words of wisdom in our quest to make sense of technology and its complexities, I turn to a founding father of popular culture studies, Fred E. H. Schroeder, who wrote long before the Internet became ubiquitous:

> Grown-ups think, and that's why they are incapable of boredom. Grown-ups do not confuse lack of sensuous excitement with lack of stimulus. Grown-ups think, and analyze, and compare, and contrast, and store up, and do not make a decision only on the basis of the report of the first precinct. The lively arts have value only insofar as they contribute to the art of living, only insofar as they become part of the living. (139)

Think, analyze, assess, acknowledge, reflect…these are the cornerstones of what we do day in and day out. Life is one enormous choose your own adventure game. Selfies are now part of that choice. But, whether one engages or not, the path can be navigated more skillfully if it is measured and well-thought-out.

* * *

Before ending this opening salvo, it would be illogical and inattentive not to acknowledge that it can be very difficult to lead the life of the mind given the current anti-intellectual, anti-education climate. Too many of our colleagues and friends are underemployed or unemployed, facing

challenging paths to tenure, and struggling to find one's place. At times it seems as if the odds are stacked against success.

Thus, I think it is essential that we continue to support one another on our collective journeys. Let's help one another find jobs, get published, create new courses, find internships for our students, teach well, and grant one another wisdom in our administrative duties. Collectively, we can help one another find success (however, it is that one defines that term). As a matter of fact, we do not spend enough time celebrating our milestones, particularly when it is so easy and convenient to be critical.

The power and foundation of the Midwest Popular Culture Association / American Culture Association has always been a commitment to the good of all popular culture scholars and enthusiasts. Let's look to one another for strength, compassion, and wisdom as we carry on toward our goals and aspirations.

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Relational Aggression on Film: An Intersectional Analysis of *Mean Girls*

MICHAELA D. E. MEYER
LINDA M. WALDRON
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Youth violence has long been a topic of interest among journalists, politicians, educators, and academic scholars, yet the popular construction of "Mean Girls" is a somewhat recent phenomenon (Gonick). Where much of the research on youth and media violence has focused on physical violence—fighting, killing, guns, and knives—in the late 1990s and early 2000s the discourse seemed to shift not only from boys to girls, but from physical violence to a different kind of bullying and aggression. Researchers refer to this behavior as relational aggression (Mikel-Brown), social aggression (Underwood), or alternative aggression (Simmons). This behavior is marked as a female phenomenon and is labeled as catty, vengeful, deceitful, manipulative, back-stabbing, or just plain mean. Perhaps the most shocking incidence of girl violence in media occurred with the national release of a 2003 home video of a hazing incident in the suburbs of Chicago. The incident took place at a powder-puff football game where high school junior-class girls were seen sitting on the ground as mainly senior girls and a few boys saturated them in feces and urine, throwing pig intestines, and fish guts at them. Approximately 100 students were present as the girls were punched and kicked. In the end, five girls were hospitalized, 32 were suspended, and 12 girls and three boys faced

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misdemeanor battery charges (Chesney-Lind and Irwin). Today, a simple search of "girl fighting" on You Tube yields hundreds of similar videos.

Research has suggested many reasons for the growing trend of "Mean Girls," but perhaps the most common popular explanation rests in U.S. media culture. Images of both real and fictional accounts of female aggression contribute to a cultural impression that films, television, music lyrics, video games, and the Internet are culprits of normalizing violence for young adults, partially through shifting images of girls as victims to girls as fighters (Mikel-Brown). "Think *MTV*. Think Britney Spears. Think Paris Hilton. Think Christina Aguilera. Think *Fear Factor.* Independent access to television is one of the principal vehicles for exposing young girls to the socially toxic elements of American society" (Garbarino 70). Best-selling books such as *See Jane Hit* (Garbarino), *Sugar and Spice and No Longer Nice* (Prothrow-Stith and Spivak), *Odd Girl Out* (Simmons) and *Queen Bees and Wannabes* (Wiseman) galvanized attention to this type of violence, particularly as their contents were covered in media outlets.

News journalists also contribute to this discourse through real life stories of "girls behaving badly" with headlines such as *USA Today's* "Bully-Boy Focus Overlooks Vicious Acts by Girls" (Welsh), the *Boston Globe's*, "Shocking But True: Even Six Year Old Girls Can be Bullies" (Meltz), the *Associated Press'* "Girls Getting Increasingly Violent" (W. Hall), and an article featured in *Time*, "Taming Wild Girls" about programs aimed at teaching young girls how to avoid fights (Kluger). At the box office, the success of films such as *Heathers* (1989), *Cruel Intentions* (1999), and *Thirteen* (2003) further popularize this depiction of girl aggression.

Perhaps the most commercially successful example is the film *Mean Girls* (2004), a teen comedy exploring the darker side of adolescence and high school cliques. Inspired by Rosalind Wiseman's pop-sociology dissection of teen hierarchies in *Queen Bees and Wannabes*, *Saturday*

Night Live alumnus Tina Fey created the screenplay for *Mean Girls*. Directed by Mark Waters (who also directed the remake of *Freaky Friday*), the film hit theaters in 2004, starring Hollywood party girl Lindsay Lohan as Cady, a new girl at school who is quickly transformed into a "Queen Bee." The film grossed nearly $130 million at the box office (The Numbers) as well as received high praise from audiences and critics. The success of the film was quickly attributed to the fact that "teen girls want to see movies that speak to them on their level, rather than giving them a sanitized way of life" (Puig) and that adults never forget "what it's like to be a teenager; it's a subject that's much more satisfying to revisit than to live through" (Zacharek). As film critic Philip Wuntch declared, the film "underlines the teen crises that virtually everyone experiences with varying degrees of intensity." With dialogue for Lohan such as, "I know it may look like I was being like a bitch, but that's only because I was acting like a bitch," the film's sarcastic and twisted look at the nastiness of high school girls offered a fictitious exploration of contemporary public concern about girlfighting and aggression. Studying visual images of girlfighting, even those that might be fictitious in nature, is important because as Lyn Mikel-Brown observes:

> TV and movies project a "normal" range of acceptable girl behaviors against which media-savvy girls are pressed to compare or distance themselves. Girls' friendships and peer groups, influenced by the media, are entwined and laced with anxiety and expectations that have little to do with their everyday experiences. (8)

Given current cultural discourses about "meanness" among girls, *Mean Girls* provides a salient, extended visual example of relationally aggressive behavior.

This essay begins with a comprehensive summary of studies on youth aggression, especially among girls, to critically analyze *Mean Girls* for its

representation of relationally aggressive behavior among young women. In *Mean Girls*, girlfighting and aggression are represented through the formation, maintenance and/or destruction of relationships, and the dual-function of the body as a weapon/target in this enterprise. In the film, Cady's journey up the social ladder of "girl world" is directly linked to learning the rules of competition among young women through understanding how to use girls' bodies to increase popularity and desirability. Moreover, the film presents relational aggression as a racialized construct, created and perpetuated by white women as a means to maintain hegemonic and heteronormative control over their school environments. The creation of a popular media space where "meanness" is labeled and tamed through hegemonic reconstructions of gendered and racialized assumptions about aggressive behavior offers a variety of feminist implications. To expand on current research and cultural discourses of "meanness," our essay interrogates these representations and offers suggestions for future research linking girl studies, the body, and popular media.

Violence and Aggression Among Girls

Placing best-selling books, news media accounts and popular films in the context of a growing body of research on aggression can help explain the recent phenomenon of "Mean Girls." Many communication and feminist scholars have investigated the nature of gender and interpersonal aggression, particularly its effect on relationships (see Alder and Worrall; Artz; Bright; Burman; Burman, Batchelor and Brown; Merten; Mikel-Brown; Putallaz and Bierman; Remillard and Lamb; Sikes; Steffensmeier, Schwartz, Shong and Ackerman). These researchers try to place female aggression within the cultural, political, historical, and material lives of young girls rather than focus on the problem as merely individual girls

acting badly. Unlike many journalists and authors, however, not all scholars agree that girl violence is actually on the rise.

Research on youth violence tends to focus on the most extreme forms of violence, such as aggravated assault and murder, with the most common measurement of youth violence being arrest records. According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), about 15% of the more than eight million arrests were of juveniles under the age of 18, most of which were of adolescent boys. According to school violence statistics, there has been an overall decline in the last decade in terms of the prevalence of carrying a weapon to school or taking part in a physical fight, but overall, boys are still more likely than girls to engage in these kinds of behaviors (National Center for Education Statistics). As Michelle Burman and colleagues argue, "Numerically and statistically insignificant, female violence is easily dismissed as inconsequential compared to the problem of male violence" (443).

Some researchers suggest that rates of female violence may be changing. For example, from 1990 to 1999, the rate of aggravated assault rates for girls under the age of 18 increased, while decreasing for males (Garbarino). Christine Alder and Anne Worrall as well as Darrel Steffensmeier et al. argue that it is a problem to suggest that girls are simply becoming more violent based on increasing assault charges. Instead, they argue that the cultural perception of an increase in female violence can be attributed to a shifting definition of violence. For example, minor and major assaults are now counted equally in published statistics on violence. The majority of arrests for assault by girls actually involve a less serious form of assault, most without the use of a weapon. Thus, it may be somewhat inaccurate to argue that "violent" behavior among girls is increasing.

Other researchers argue that studies of girl violence need to move beyond simply counting instances of physical violence. Although girls are not as quick to use physical violence, they do witness a significant amount

of violence. Michelle Burman finds that 98% of girls report witnessing some form of interpersonal physical violence, which may contribute to a perspective among girls that violence is "normal" or even "unremarkable." Beyond physical violence, research also indicates that non-physical forms of violence are a prevalent problem for youth. Marla Eisenberg, Dianne Neumark-Sztainer, and Cheryl Perry found that although the prevalence of peer harassment can be difficult to estimate due to a variety of behaviors that may constitute harassment, most research indicates that about 75% of youth experience some form of harassment. According to a national report of eighth to eleventh graders conducted by the American Association of University Women Educational Foundation (AAUW), 83% of girls and 79% of boys reported being harassed in schools. One in four students reported being sexually harassed "often."

In the 1990s, researchers began to shift from looking at girls as victims of aggression and violence to examining girls as perpetrators of aggression and violence (Ringrose). Developmental psychologists in particular began using the term 'relational aggression' to examine how girls exploit relationships to intentionally hurt their peers (Crick and Grotpeter; Remillard and Lamb). Relationally aggressive acts can include gossiping, spreading rumors about someone, excluding a friend from a play group, name-calling, making sarcastic verbal comments towards someone, using negative body language, threatening to end a relationship if a girl does not get her way or threatening to disclose private information about a friend as a way to manipulate and control (Mikel-Brown; Remillard and Lamb; Ringrose; Simmons; Underwood). It can be direct and overt, such as telling a friend she can no longer sit with you during lunch, or it can be indirect and covert, for example discretely convincing your friends to not sit with a particular person at lunch. In particular, this research has found that girls engage in this type of aggression more so than boys (Crick and Grotpeter), and that girls' relational aggression increases in adolescence and early adulthood (Crick and Rose). Direct and indirect forms of

relational aggressions are often constructed as "rites of passage" among girls that will eventually be outgrown (Mikel-Brown). In this regard, "meanness" is seen as a phase that girls are supposed to simply transcend (Merten). Thus, parents and teachers often dismiss this kind of behavior by calling it "normal" girl behavior.

Feminist scholars argue, however, that relationally aggressive behavior has very serious consequences for girls' self-esteem and self-confidence. This type of aggression has been found to cause distress, confusion, fear and overall psychological harm (Crick and Grotpeter; Owens et al.; Remillard and Lamb; Simmons; Underwood). Girls tend to define verbal abuse as more serious, hurtful and damaging than physical abuse (Burman; Remillard and Lamb). Although large groups of both boys and girls report experiencing harassment, girls are also more likely to report being negatively affected by it. According to the AAUW:

> Girls are far more likely than boys to feel self conscious (44 percent vs. 19 percent), embarrassed (53 percent vs. 32 percent), afraid (33 percent vs. 12 percent) and less self-assured or confident (32 percent vs. 16 percent) by physical or non-physical harassment. (38)

Girls also report that being a victim of harassment has led them to talk less in class, get lower grades on tests, cut class, lose their appetite, and even stop eating. A survey of more than 700 girls found results similar to the AAUW study, noting that 91% of girls reported being verbally intimidated by offensive name-calling, threats, taunts, or ridicule, and that this form of harassment increased feelings of humiliation, anger and powerlessness (Burman; Burman, Batchelor, and Brown). Almost 60% of these girls reported "self-harming" behavior – such as not eating, over-eating, making herself sick, physically hurting or cutting herself – directly after instances of verbal abuse and harassment (Burman). Additionally, this type of harassment was rarely a one-time event, but rather an ongoing part

of their everyday life. “Girls showed great awareness of the effectiveness of verbal abuse and intimidation as a means of self-assertion and of inflicting hurt on others” (Burman 87). Moreover, these offenses crossed economic, ethnic and cultural divides.

The importance that girls place on dyadic relationships, popularity, and peer pressure can directly influence the use of relational aggression. Girls tend to fight other girls largely to defend their sexual reputations or their connection to a boyfriend; thus, girls’ popularity, self-worth, and social capital are both produced and reproduced by their relational links to boys (Artz; Mikel-Brown). As a result, girls tend to compete with each other for male attention, which in turn defines their identity in relation to their female peers. Aggression within the friendship circles of girls also differs greatly from male aggression, because boys are more likely to aggress outside of their friendship circles, rather than within them, while girls are more likely to compete with immediate peers groups (Dellasega and Nixon; Merten). Since girls recognize that maintaining popularity requires the support of unpopular girls, popular girls (particularly as they grow older) tend to act nice around their peers and instead direct their meanness and aggression towards the members of their own clique, all the while quietly gossiping about their unpopular peers (Adler, Kless, and Adler; Eder; Merten). Thus, gender significantly impacts the types of relationally aggressive behavior exhibited by youth.

Given the literature on relational aggression, it is important to interrogate mediated narratives that perpetuate a cultural discourse of relational aggression, specifically among young women and girls. These narratives “exploit public concern over teenage girls, depicted as living in turbulent worlds of manipulation, betrayal, crime, violence [and] sexual exploitation” (Ringrose 408). *Mean Girls* is a prominent example of how this discourse is culturally articulated. Its commercial success combined with its continued influence on popular culture warrants scholarly consideration.

"Man Candy, Hot Body and the Army of Skanks"

Mean Girls chronicles the experiences of Cady Harron (played by Lohan), the sixteen-year-old, home-schooled daughter of a pair of research zoologists who relocate to suburban Illinois after spending twelve years in Africa. Upon returning to the United States, Cady enrolls in high school for the first time, and learns that "girl world" has a complex set of rules, unlike the basic rules of nature. Cady is quickly befriended by Janis and Damien, a pair of eccentric students who warn her about "The Plastics" – Regina George, Gretchen Weiners, and Karen Smith – who are the most popular girls in the junior class. Regina plays the role of the Queen Bee to Gretchen and Karen as she manipulates those around her to maintain her status atop the social hierarchy. When Cady is invited to join the Plastics for lunch, and later extended an invitation to join their group, Janis convinces Cady to play along in the hopes that she can enact revenge on Regina for socially isolating her. Cady agrees, and enters the world of the Plastics. In a voiceover, she comments, "Having lunch with the Plastics was like leaving the actual world and entering girl world, and girl world had a lot of rules." These rules include purposeful relationally aggressive behavior that emphasizes horizontal violence, (hyper)sexuality, heteronormativity and white privilege.

Relational Aggression as Horizontal Violence

Among girls, relational aggression is a form of horizontal violence (Freire), or struggles between members of a marginalized group for power and dominance within cultural constructs of oppression. In essence, girls take out their own failures to meet cultural ideals on other girls because they have limited power to address cultural assumptions about female behavior. Mikel-Brown argues that girls effectively become "handmaidens to insidious forms of sexism" by enacting horizontal violence that utilizes "negative stereotypes about femininity against other girls, they do so to

distance themselves and thus to avoid being victimized by those stereotypes in turn" (149). In the film Cady laments, "The weird thing about hanging out with Regina is that I could hate her and I still wanted her to like me," observing ultimately that it was "better to be in The Plastics, hating life, than to not be in at all."

Throughout the film, the Plastics enact relational aggression that codes as horizontal violence. In terms of direct aggression, the film uses "three-way calling attacks" where one girl calls another to have a conversation, all the while, a third girl is listening in quietly. When Cady develops a crush on Regina's ex-boyfriend Aaron, Regina calls upon her Queen Bee status by involving Cady and Gretchen in a three-way calling attack where Regina is talking to Cady with Gretchen silently listening in. Regina discloses that she knows Cady's "secret" and that Gretchen was responsible for this knowledge. She then prods Cady into agreeing that Gretchen's behavior was "bitchy," only to then reveal to Cady that Gretchen is listening in. Once made aware of this tactic, Cady uses it later on Regina in the film to alienate her from Gretchen and Karen in order to obtain information that will help further damage Regina's reputation. Indirect aggression also comes into play when Regina misinforms Aaron that Cady writes, "Mrs. Aaron Samuels," in her notebook and saved his tissue for an African voodoo ritual. Regina then kisses Aaron, with Cady looking on. Instead of confronting Regina directly after witnessing this betrayal, Cady acts as if she did not see the kiss. Moreover, Regina avoids direct confrontation by asking Gretchen to talk to Cady about her own rekindled relationship with Aaron, and Cady adopts Regina's indirectly aggressive tactics, insisting that she is fine with the situation.

With Regina's goal to undermine Cady's crush on Aaron achieved, an infuriated Cady devises a meaner strategy for combating Regina by agreeing to Janis' plan to undermine Regina's power. The scene where Cady realizes, "I knew how this would be settled in the animal world" depicts physical aggression – showing images of girls jumping on and

hitting each other with animal noises in the background. The scene stops, however, when Cady voices, "But this was girl world. And in girl world, all the fighting had to be sneaky." Cady's alliance with Janis mimics the exact behaviors Regina uses to maintain power and control of her own clique. Cady and Janis launch a series of social attacks on Regina, such as disguising foot cream as face wash, passing weight gain bars as weight loss bars, and purposefully turning people against Regina. Thus, although the narrative may encourage viewers to interpret Regina's behaviors as unacceptable, Cady and Janis enact the *exact same behavior* when trying to gain control of the situation. These behaviors are purposeful, and are used specifically to cull power within the confines of the high school experience.

Perhaps the strongest example of competing horizontally for power and control is the Burn Book where Regina and her clique write nasty and degrading messages about other girls in school. On her first visit to Regina's house, Cady and the Plastics thumb through the book, where insults are almost always tied to the body and/or sexuality: "Dawn Schweitzer is a fat virgin;" "Amber D'Allesio made out with a hot dog;" or "Janis Ian—Dyke." The Burn Book stands as written evidence of indirect aggression, and becomes directly aggressive later in the film when Regina loses control over her clique. In a ploy to regain her status as Queen Bee, Regina copies and distributes pages of the book throughout the school, then tells the principal that Cady, Gretchen, and Karen created the book. The Burn Book exists as a physical manifestation of the "hidden" behavior, thus, being the only means by which the girls are exposed outside of their horizontal competition for power.

(Hyper)sexualized Bodies and Heteronomativity

Obviously, horizontal violence is the primary focus of the film's plot, yet the aggressive behavior depicted in the film also reinforces (hyper)sexualized and heteronormative behaviors. Deborah Tolman,

Renée Spencer, Myra Rosen-Reynoso, and Michelle Porche argue that girls are more likely to be popular if they unquestioningly adopt and voice a heterosexual script whereby boys desire and girls are desired; boys are central and girls are marginal. Thus, all girls are judged through the male gaze (Mulvey), ultimately encouraging women to cultivate bodies that are desirable for male audiences. The Plastics exhibit early on that they believe their bodies are their best weapon – and that maintaining the body as a site and object of sexual desire is central to their social and cultural capital. For example, one scene has the girls calling out their physical weakness such as "God, my hips are huge!," "I've got man shoulders!" "My hairline is so weird!" and "My nail beds suck!" The main course of action for the girls to remedy these perceived bodily problems is through maximizing their sex appeal.

Thus, Cady's body is central to her transformation. As her schemes become more complex and successful, indicated by her increased popularity, her clothes—the body's main ornamentation in high school—become sparse and sexy. In the beginning of the film, she wears loose fitting shirts and comfortable jeans, which are replaced with tight mid-riff and cleavage-baring tops and incredibly short skirts. In fact, one of the first things Cady does with the Plastics is go shopping. Cady observes early on that if she is going to survive "girl world," she must play by the rules of adorning the body, a lesson she learns the hard way when appearing at a Halloween party. When Cady arrives in a costume that covers her entire body and distorts her facial features, she finds that all of the popular girls are scantily clad, dressed in overtly sexual outfits. Cady laments, "The hardcore girls just wear lingerie and some form of animal ears. Unfortunately, no one told me about the slut rule." These patterns extend to their everyday dress as well, as each of the Plastics wears short skirts and low-cut tops on a daily basis. The result is a group of young women who dress as sexually provocative as possible. Perhaps the most hyper-sexualized example occurs when the four Plastics enter the winter

talent show and dance to the carol “Jingle Bell Rock” in Christmas lingerie – red halter tops and mini-skirts with fuzzy white trim, black leather belts and knee-high black stiletto boots. Cady’s taming of her body to conform to the rules of the Plastics directly correlates with her rise in popularity.

Thus, the body becomes an outlet for sexual expression *and* a means of policing desirable behaviors. Mary Jane Kehily explains that body policing among peer groups in schools can serve as “important sites for the exercise of autonomy and agency within the confined space of the school” where social norms are not dictated by “teachers, parents, politicians and policy makers” (p. 214). As leader of the Plastics, Regina polices the bodies of her followers by imposing a dress code dictating her clique’s body representation. The dress code stipulates that each girl must wear pink on Wednesdays, can only wear jeans or track pants on Fridays, cannot wear tank tops two days in a row, and can only wear their hair in a ponytail once a week. Moreover, each girl has to consult the rest of the group before doing anything that might be against the rules. Any girl who breaks the rules is not allowed to sit with the rest of the group in the cafeteria. Thus, when Regina wears sweatpants on a Monday, the group disallows her access to their lunch table, forcing Regina to realize that she cannot abide by the rules she created. She discloses to the group that the rules “aren’t real,” yet the girls in the group shun her for failing to follow them. In this way, the girls maintain and regulate policing behaviors over the body, reifying that the body is a girl’s most central and cherished identity possession.

When girls fail to conform to these rules of bodily adornment, socially aggressive attacks move from the more general concept of body image to explicit (hetero)sexuality. Ultimately, Janis’ need for revenge stems from the fact that Regina had “uninvited” her to a pool party in eighth grade because she believed Janis was a lesbian, thus starting a school-wide rumor about Janis’ sexual orientation. The fact that her only friend is a

theatre-obsessed gay male serves to perpetuate this rumor even further. Janis was denied entry into the clique because of a perceived deviation from a socially acceptable heterosexual script. This underlying questioning of Janis' sexuality offers a potent example of what happens to a girl who does not conform to cultural standards of heteronormativity. In fact, Simmons and Wiseman both claim that the term lesbian can operate independently of actual sexual orientation among girls' peer groups, serving more as a marker of masculine traits, rather than of sexual preference. Moreover, given the current visibility of same-sex relationships and civil rights in the U.S., the use of *lesbian* as a socially stigmatizing marker is a way for the girls in the film to maintain their own purity by defining themselves against the "other" – "bad girls" who shun and reject men as central to feminine existence. The term *lesbian* rhetorically functions as yet another means of policing behavior to conform to a heteronormative script. When Janis "lands" a boyfriend near the end of the film, her sexuality is no longer questioned.

Moreover, when Ms. Norbury (Tina Fey) discovers that Cady is purposefully failing math to impress Aaron, she advises Cady, "You don't have to dumb yourself down to get guys to like you." Cady's reaction to Ms. Norbury's comment is to complain to the Plastics, saying that Ms. Norbury is failing her, claiming she was "so queer" when talking to Cady after school. The Plastics encourage Cady to address this "queerness" by writing about it in the Burn Book, leading Cady to creating the rumor that Ms. Norbury is a drug dealer. In other words, Ms. Norbury's direct rejection of the heterosexual script elicits coding from the girls as "queer."

Racial Coding and Relational Aggression

Beyond the issues surrounding sexualized coding, the film also participates in the racial coding of relational aggression as decidedly white and middle class. This is accomplished through the segregation of students of color in the film, and a representation of their behaviors as "violent"

rather than aggressive. Patricia Hill Collins and bell hooks have referred to this as dichotomous thinking where people, things, or ideas are characterized in terms of their difference from one another. "Objectification is central to this process of oppositional difference. In either/or dichotomous thinking, one element is objectified as the Other, and is viewed as an object to be manipulated and controlled" (Hill Collins 69). This is introduced in one of the first scenes of the film, when Janice describes the social groupings of the school to Cady:

> Where you sit in the cafeteria is crucial. You have your freshman, roxy guys, preps, JV jocks, Asian nerds, cool Asians, varsity jocks, unfriendly black hotties, girls who eat their feelings, girls who don't eat anything, desperate wannabees, burnouts, sexually active band geeks, the greatest people you will ever meet and the worst. Be aware of the plastics.

As Janice goes through the list of students, it is clear that students are sitting according to specific social status groups (i.e. burnouts or band geeks), but when describing these groups the use of racial markers is only done for students of color. This kind of "othering" creates "white" as the norm, where race is used as an adjective for groups that are "other than" white. Although Janice describes the Plastics as the "worst" group, in the social hierarchy at the school, they are most certainly the dominant group. Hill Collins argues that domination involves attempts to objectify the subordinate group and this is done not only by the Plastics, but also by students who internalize this kind of objectification of "others" as well.

In the film, the significance of race is not just that groups of students self-segregate, but rather that the narrative of the film promotes a "color caste system" (Sahay and Piran) where whiter/lighter skin becomes the ideal symbol of status and power. The Plastics—Regina, Gretchen and Karen—are at the top of the popularity hierarchy and all of them are upper-class white girls. In essence, these white girls control the standard

of beauty and popularity, and anyone who does not conform to this standard (be it other white women, or women of color, or women of a lower socioeconomic status) cannot be considered "beautiful" or "trendy." As Christine Crouse-Dick notes:

> We seek the input of our friends, family, and cultural surroundings to give us indication of whether or not we are pretty enough or sexy enough to be considered a member of the group society calls "beautiful." In the midst of these questions, we (and others) compare ourselves with the standard representations of what is beautiful (popular culture stars, for instance) and with those women who surround us. If our image more closely resembles the standard socialized representations of beautiful and if those women who surround us fall shorter than we of resembling that standard, we sense we have achieved power, status, and control. (p. 27-28)

This is exemplified throughout the film in scenes where Regina, the Plastic Queen Bee, is held up as the standard of beauty. For example, shortly after Cady meets Regina, she refers to her as the "Barbie Doll I never had." By regulating the standard of beauty and popularity, the Plastics promote what George Lipsitz calls a "possessive investment" in whiteness. Lipsitz argues that this power of whiteness is not just about white hegemonic control over other separate racialized groups, but the power to manipulate "…racialized outsiders to fight with one another, to compete with each other for white approval, and to seek the rewards and privileges of whiteness for themselves at the expense of other racialized groups" (3).

The film reinforces this construction of white girls as "mean" and minority girls as "violent." Moments of the film where aggression becomes physical, the codes for behavior become decidedly "other than white." Throughout the film, there are distinct references to Cady's childhood growing up in the "jungle of Africa." After the Burn Book is

distributed and all of the girls begin fighting in the hallway, the girls are represented as "wild, African beasts," clawing at each other as sounds of wild animals plays in the background. On the DVD chapter menu this scene is called "Jungle Madness." Essentially, the message of the film is that when girls engage in physically violent behavior, it is analogous to the behavior of those who live in the uncivilized jungle of Africa. It is not the kind of behavior that "good white girls" engage in, which is further reinforced by the fact that the scenes with physical fighting include more African American, Latino, and Asian American girls than any other scenes of the film. Henry Giroux argues that, although violence appears to cross over designated borders of class, race and social space, representations of violence in popular media are "portrayed through forms of racial coding that suggest that violence is a black problem, a problem outside of white, suburban America" (59). This is represented through the construction of the Plastics as simply "mean" whereas the "unfriendly black hotties," and "cool Asians" become physically violent during the school fight.

During the "Jungle Madness" scene, negative stereotypes about minority students and violence are reinforced through the characterization that this type of physical fighting might happen in urban schools, but should not be occurring in suburban schools. Mr. Duvall, the African American principal played by Tim Meadows, comes out into the hallway with a bat in his hand to try and stop the girls from fighting. After he gets kicked by a girl he remarks, "Hell no, I did not leave the South Side for this!" – then hits the fire alarm, setting off the sprinkler system, as one African American girl screams, "My hair!" Edward Buendia and colleagues argue that citywide constructs such as "West Side" or "South Side" are "socially constructed boundaries that divide areas geographically along racial, ethnic, class and religious lines" (833), but these terms are also embedded in social practices that influence how educators view students and curriculum. The message in this scene is clear – Mr. Duvall came to a white suburban school because there was an expectation that

students would be "civilized," unlike the minority students he used to teach at his "South Side" school, the implication being that violence is expected of students of color.

The metaphor of Africa not only reinforces an "uncivilized" violent stereotype, but is also used in a reference to sexual behavior. When Cady visits a mall for the first time, she witnesses a multitude of public displays of affection among teen couples. Cady thinks to herself, "Being at the mall kind of reminded me of being home in Africa, by the watering hole, when the animals are in heat." She then imagines her peers running around like monkeys, as roaring sounds of lions and elephants fill the background, implying that teens engaging in sexual behavior are uncivilized African beasts. This is equally problematic because Africa is clearly being coded as Black in the film. For example, in the first scene, the teacher announces to the class that there is a new student from Africa in the class, and then says "Welcome" to an African American girl in the class, who comments, "I'm from Michigan." Later, when Cady meets the plastics, Karen asks her, "If you are from Africa, why are you white?" The use of Africa as a metaphor for both violent behavior and sexual behavior reinforces negative stereotypes of not just Africans, but of African Americans as well.

Racial stereotyping transcends a black-white dichotomy in the film. In particular, the oversexualized geisha stereotype becomes most prevalent among the "cool Asians." According to Stuart Hall Asian women are often stereotyped in media as faithful, submissive and self-sacrificing, colonial representations that are characterized by a structure of ambivalence from the dominant gaze. Moreover, scholars observe that media representations of Asian women as prostitutes are prolific, and that this practice "perpetuates a colonial group fantasy, in which the Asian woman embodies 'service,' especially for the white man" (Ling 294). This comes to bear in the film when Coach Carr, the white physical education teacher, is exposed as having a physical relationship with two Vietnamese

students, Trang Pak and Sun Jin Dinh. The use of Vietnamese women fighting over an older white man not only reinforces the colonial fantasy, but also links the girls' behavior to sexual servitude. Furthermore, Pensri Ho observes that Asian Americans know White individuals often assume they do not speak English, and thus, often resort to native tongues or remain silent as a passing strategy (167). Even at the end of the film, as many girls are resolving their conflicts, the dialogue between the two girls perpetuates their isolation and hyper-sexualization. When Trang Pak says, "Why are you scamming on my boyfriend?" Sun Jin Dinh replies, "You're just jealous because guys like me better," to which Trang Pak retorts, "N*gga please." As the conversation takes place entirely in subtitles, the white women in the scene, particularly Tina Fey, are shown as dismissive of the conflict between the Asian women in favor of resolving the white girls' "mean" behavior.

Decidedly absent from the film are Asian and African American men, aside from two main characters, Principal Duvall and Kevin Gnanapoor, an Indian boy who, in stereotypical fashion, heads the math league. In addition to being the brains behind the math league, Kevin's role is one that is distinctly tied to race. To begin with, he states early on in the film that he "only dates women of color." In the dance scene towards the end of the film he comes up to Janice and asks, "Puerto Rican?" She responds, "Lebanese," and Kevin says, "I feel that," which ignites a relationship between the two. Kevin is also a MC and during the talent show does a rap that starts out, "All you sucka' MCs got nothing on me…" It is interesting to see how one of the only Asian males in the film appropriates black culture as part of his identity, which can also be applied to the previous example of the Asian women appropriating the term "N*gga."

Implications of Representing Relational Aggression in *Mean Girls*

Examining *Mean Girls* offers several critical implications for feminist scholarship, particularly with respect to media representation and relational aggression. One of the most disturbing implications of the representation of relational aggression in the film is that these are innate, biological urges that girls simply cannot avoid and must be outgrown. Mikel-Brown observes that, "Girlfighting is not a biological necessity, a developmental stage, or rite of passage. It is a protective strategy and an avenue to power learned and nurtured in early childhood and perfected over time" (6). Yet, the film represents meanness as a phase. Ms. Norbury holds an intervention for the junior class girls and suggests "exercises to express…anger in a healthy way." In doing so, she helps the girls realize that they contribute to this cycle of aggression, illustrating that nearly all of the girls in the film felt harmed by relationally aggressive behaviors. This "happily ever after" ending depicts the girls as making up and moving on, causing "girl world" to undergo a radical transformation. Cady claims that, "All the drama from last year just didn't matter anymore." In the film's final moments, she deems "girl world at peace," suggesting that it is the older girls' responsibility to keep younger girls from engaging in this detrimental behavior. When a new set of shiny, white, beautiful freshman girls is introduced just before the closing credits, viewers understand that the first clan of Plastics has moved on, but the younger generation must still navigate the normative boundaries of (White, upper-class, heterosexual) girl world.

This idealized ending works to oversimplify the impact of relational aggression for girls, reinforcing the cultural myth that meanness among girls is simply a phase, a rite of passage, and something that girls will eventually outgrow. On the contrary, research suggests that "girl world" is rarely, if ever, at peace. In fact, Wiseman observes that overt

communicative behavior (for example, the scene where one girl apologetically says, “I’m sorry for calling you a fugly slut”) cannot erase actual inflicted emotional damage young girls experience as a result of meanness. Culturally treating relational aggressions as a “rite of passage” falsely implies that this behavior among girls is unavoidable – perhaps even desirable, necessary, and innate – ultimately denying the potential communicative effects of such actions. Being a victim of these forms of relational aggression has been shown to decrease confidence and self-esteem among girls, negatively impact their academics, increase levels of depression and emotional distress, and increase the likelihood of engaging in self-harming behavior (AAUW; Burman; Dellasega and Nixon; Remillard and Lamb).

Moreover, as a direct result of relationally aggressive behaviors, girls frequently fail to directly discuss what went on between them to make one another angry, hurt, or upset. Thus, girls are not provided the communicative tools to resolve conflict, and even when they are, they are socialized not to employ them. Although the final scene of the film attempts to enact a form of conflict resolution, it is done so in a way that merely glosses over effective strategies for lessening meanness and completely neglects to explain why girls engage in this kind of behavior in the first place. This again naturalizes the behavior depicted for most of the film. As a result, it does not recognize that girls tend to harbor their feelings of anger and resentment toward those who have wronged them for years, even into adulthood. For example, Mark Leary and Christine Snapp find that behavior classified as hurtful conveys relational devaluation, and that the effects of this devaluation are felt quite strongly by women throughout their life spans.

In addition to the implications offered by the representation of relational aggression, the film solidly contributes to a discourse of body image crisis among girls. Relational aggression in the film is enacted via the body and sexuality. Ultimately, “Mean Girls” know that their body is

their best weapon. Part of the film's narrative closure comes from Cady's realization that being "Plastic" is not as desirable as she originally believed and that her newly acquired command of her body is merely a false agency. Cady's participation in the Mathletes team opens her eyes to the importance of valuing mind over body. While her friends are busy adorning their bodies for the Spring Fling dance, she dresses in khakis, her Mathletes shirt, and pulls her hair back into a ponytail. During the competition, she struggles to balance her aggression with her desire for her old self. When sizing up her opponent, Carolyn, as unattractive she realizes, "Making fun of Carolyn Craft wouldn't stop her from beating me in this contest. Calling somebody else fat won't make you any skinnier. Calling somebody stupid doesn't make you any smarter." Cady's successful metamorphosis lies in relinquishing her ties to the body as a weapon/target and re-embracing her intelligence and problem-solving capabilities. This further serves to reinforce that "Plastic" behavior, aligned with relational aggression, is actually a product of the body – it is biologically constructed and therefore unavoidable without embracing the power of the mind.

When Cady attends the Spring Fling dance after her competition, she learns that she has won the Spring Fling Queen competition. Upon accepting her crown, adorned in her khakis and Mathletes shirt, she tells the crowd:

> To all the people whose feelings got hurt by the Burn Book, I'm really sorry...I think everybody looks like royalty tonight. Look at Jessica Lopez, that dress is amazing! And Emma Gerber, I mean, that hairdo must have taken hours – you look really pretty. So, why is everybody stressing over this thing? I mean, it's just plastic. Really just. [Breaks it.] Share it.

The physical breaking of the plastic crown is representative of a symbolic breaking of the pledge of the Plastics' enforcement of rigid rules through

mean, bodily behaviors. Throughout the film, the use of the title "Plastics" reifies the notion that the girls lack agency – "plastic" bodies are not women's own, rather, they are commodity objects based on heteronormative Western beauty ideals (Bordo). Given cultural discourses concerned with body image and eating disorder issues among girls, as well as the proliferation of plastic surgery, the scene serves as a metaphor of young girls' attempts to break free from the unyielding, plastic structure of "girl world."

Given the film's problematic representations related to race and ethnicity, combined with this discourse of plasticity, relational aggression should be understood as an intersectional issue. The film invests in a culture of whiteness, while "othering" non-white characters. Lyn Mikel-Brown observes that "white girls are especially seduced by the status quo because it affords them special protection and security. That is, good white girls who play their cards right are promised good white boys, the eventual power brokers" (97). The film's representation of whiteness as the center of relational aggression is ultimately problematic in that the behaviors are correlated *with whiteness* rather than as a byproduct of cultural discourses of aggression that label non-white individuals as violent and deviant. In fact, although the majority of the relational aggression in the film occurs between its white protagonists, the women of color in the film are also shown as bound up in this "Jungle Madness." Clearly, the white women in the film have the most amount of power. For example, when Janis tries to compete for visibility and power unilaterally and horizontally, her attempts are further marginalized by the ambiguous discourse surrounding her sexuality and her ethnicity.

Gretchen's eventual ascension to the Queen Bee of the "Cool Asians" also shows that relationally aggressive behavior can colonize the Other and perpetuate a possessive investment in Whiteness (Lipsitz). In fact, the Asian women's experiences with relational aggression are ignored entirely by the teachers in the film, mostly because they are communicated in a

language other than English. It is particularly disturbing given the cultural history of the Vietnam War that the two most prominent Asian characters are under-aged Vietnamese girls fighting over having sex with a white male teacher. Thus, despite the problematic nature of relational aggression, the non-white girls try to co-opt this behavior, but as a result of their marginal status, are less successful in their execution of relational aggression.

While our study contributes to popular discourses surrounding intersectionality and film representation, future research is needed that interrogates the ways in which relational aggression is culturally understood. We suggest three avenues for future explorations that would increase our understanding of *Mean Girls* as a text and of relational aggression as a whole. First, scholars should examine how youth and emerging adult audiences read the film for its depiction of relational aggression. A qualitative audience study that allows respondents to articulate their conceptualization of agency as it relates to aggression in the film would offer much to the literature on relational aggression.

Second, the film is clearly intended as a parody, and this structure may contribute to the representations as they occur in the film. As scholars, we read the parodic content as culturally relevant to specific discourses of relational aggression, and as such, imbue the films' representations with a certain cultural value that scholars studying comedy or parody may read differently. Finally, scholars could study the film in its relationship to other teen films through a more historic analysis. Whereas teen films of the 80s emphasized the teen's place in a particular clique and culture, and teen films of the 90s touted a sarcastic and disconnected approach to high school, an entire cadre of teen films in the 2000s, including *Saved*, *Napoleon Dynamite*, and *American Pie*, among others, offer this "happily ever after" ending where teens can all get along. Is this a reactionary move to the continued publicity of the "real" research on teens throughout the later half of the 20th century, or potentially a byproduct of a teen universe

where life no longer ends at high school and where these are not "the best days of our lives?" Future research could benefit from examining these issues more extensively and interrogating the convergence of research, popular culture, and interpersonal communication.

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No Face: Implied Author and Masculine Construct in the Fiction of Junot Díaz

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In the lead story of his first book, Junot Díaz presents the masked man as a construction of masculinity that pervades all three of his books, especially the novel *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. The concomitant fear of unmasking or emasculation results in a hypermasculine1 repudiation of queerness2 that drives Yunior, the narrator of the Díaz universe. By imputing his fictional universe to his narrator Yunior, the implied author3 of these texts also wears a mask. Yunior's mask-trope is most salient in his treatment of the character Oscar in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. Oscar is coaxed into wearing the mask of anti-queer masculinity and then killed off. If one accepts Yunior's unreliability, that he does not represent the implied author's worldview, then the appropriate way to read the actual author Díaz's fiction is as highly engineered hipster sexism,4 utterly ironic in its depiction of Yunior's point of view, reflecting an implied authorial mask that ensures ironic distance and aligns with those writers whom David Foster Wallace describes as "entertaining and effective, and...at the same time... agents of a great despair and stasis in U.S. culture" (49).

The Masked Man

The juxtaposition of Yunior's sexual molestation by a man on a bus and the unmasking of Ysrael in the short story "Ysrael" suggests a symbolic

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relationship between these two events, centering on Ysrael's mask and Yunior's decision to keep the molestation to himself rather than risk his own unmasking. This story begins the narrative journey of Yunior, the narrator for all three of Díaz's books, including the very first story, "Ysrael." While on a bus with his older brother Rafa, Yunior is molested by a man who acts as though he is trying to help Yunior get a stain off of his pants:

> You have to watch out for stains like that, the man next to me said. He had big teeth and wore a clean fedora. His arms were ropy with muscles. These things are too greasy, I said. Let me help. He spit in his fingers and started to rub at the stain but then he was pinching at the tip of my *pinga* through the fabric of my shorts. He was smiling. I shoved him against the seat. He looked to see if anybody had noticed. You *pato*, I said ... You low-down *pinga*-sucking *pato*, I said. The man squeezed my bicep, quietly, hard, the way my friends would sneak me in church. I whimpered. (*Drown* 12)

Yunior does not tell his brother about the molestation. Instead, he hides it and dons his mask of anti-queer hypermasculinity. When Rafa sees Yunior crying about what had happened he accuses him of being weak: "Rafa took off his shirt and fanned himself and that's when I started to cry. He watched for a moment. You, he said, are a pussy. I'm sorry. What the hell's the matter with you? We didn't do anything wrong. I'll be OK in a second" (13). Rafa has no idea what has happened and mistakes Yunior's crying for his fear of getting caught for not paying the bus fare.

Rafa literally unmasks Ysrael, who "when he was a baby a pig had eaten his face off, skinned it like an orange" (7), not long after the event on the bus, signaling the symbolic connection.[5] The implication is that Yunior is afraid that like Ysrael he may also be unmasked, mistakenly thinking that he has been tainted by the man on the bus. Diaz writes,

> my brother brought his arm around and smashed the bottle on top of his head. It exploded, the thick bottom spinning away like a crazed eyeglass and I said, Holy f*cking sh*t. Ysrael stumbled once and slammed into a fence post that had been sunk into the side of the road ... Rafa kicked him in the side ... Rafa took off his mask and threw it spinning into the grass. (18)

The molestation and subsequent unmasking exists as perhaps the seminal occurrence in the Díaz universe, influencing Yunior's worldview and defining the masculinity that informs much of the work. Just before Ysrael is unmasked, Yunior identifies with him: "Ysrael had his kite in hand ... Where did you get that? I asked. Nueva York, he said. From my father. No sh*t! Our father's there too! I shouted. I looked at Rafa, who, for an instant, frowned" (16). Rafa, planning to unmask Ysrael, recognizes Yunior's identification with Ysrael and does not approve. John Riofrio notes, "'Ysrael,' the first story of Díaz's collection, sets the stage for the picture of masculinity which will reveal itself throughout all ten of the stories" (26). This definition of masculinity informs all three of Díaz's texts. Riofrio continues, "Ysrael's disfigurement places him in the same category as the feminine ... That the neighborhood boys' goal in chasing Ysrael is to feminize him is a concrete manifestation of what they already know: in their world weakness, disfigurement, and non-conformity are all vulnerabilities which are to be exploited and castigated" (31). The boys respond violently to Ysrael's queerness and vulnerability in order to prove that they are not like him.

In the penultimate story Ysrael has transformed into a sort of superhero named No Face, a masked man with special powers who continually runs from the threat of unmasking: "We're going to make you a girl, the fat one says and he can hear the words echoing through the meat of the fat boy's body ... You ever been a girl before? I betcha he hasn't. It ain't a lot of fun" (Drown 156). Yunior has transformed Ysrael into No Face as a projection of his own mask and sense of power to defend himself

from emasculation: “He runs past the water hose and the pasture, and then he says FLIGHT and jumps up and his shadow knifes over the tops of the trees” (153); “No Face! a few yell out but he has no time for them” (154); “He has his power of INVISIBILITY” (155); “He says STRENGTH and the fat boy flies off him” (156). Instead of Ysrael taking off his mask and facing his pursuers, he has transformed from his disfigured and feminized former self into No Face, a masked man who has capitalized on his hidden identity.

The superhero No Face evolves in the novel *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* into a signifier of the hypermasculine dictatorial violence that befalls the Cabral family, ultimately signifying *fukú* itself, a force of hypermasculine evil. Before particular members of the Cabral family, Beli, Socorro, and Oscar, experience terrible state-sanctioned violence, they are paid a visit from No Face, who instead of wearing a mask, has no face at all: “our girl could have sworn that a man sitting in a rocking chair in front of one of the hovels *had no face* and he waved at her as she passed” (135); “the faceless man was standing over her husband’s bed, and she could not scream, could not say anything, and then the next night she dreamed that he was standing over her children too” (237); “Oscar could have sworn the dude had no face” (298). At other times facelessness represents sheer patriarchal hypermasculine violence: “her ‘father’s’ face had turned blank at the moment he picked up the skillet” (261). Finally, the image of the superhero itself represents hypermasculine violence: “One heavyset *cibaeño* even demanded his underwear, and when Abelard coughed them up the man pulled them on over his pants” (239). The latter image evokes superheroes who wear some kind of different color underwear over their bodysuit.

Queerness

The prominent male gaze through which Díaz's world is filtered reflects hypermasculine homosexuality and anti-queerness. Queerness in this sense represents any sort of anti- or non-patriarchal behavior. *Elena Machado Sáez* writes, "I find Juana María Rodríguez's definition of queerness useful for fleshing out its function in Díaz's novel: 'it is a challenge to constructions of heteronormativity' and 'creates an opportunity to call into question the systems of categorization that have served to define sexuality'" (524). Queerness also represents behavior that threatens hegemonic masculinity, including traditional femininity. Riofrio notes that for much of Latin American "crafting a masculine identity is profoundly connected to the daily struggle to keep the feminine at arms length thus enabling ... boys to rightfully claim their masculinity" (29). This Latin conception of masculine identity is, in part, based on Octavio Paz's idea that "the ideal of manliness is never to 'crack,' never to back down. Those who 'open themselves up' are cowards. Unlike other people, we believe that opening oneself up is a weakness or a betrayal" (30). Consequently, the feminine is the vulnerable, the open, the submissive, *the queer*, opposed to the closed and aggressive masculine.

The macho or machismo while being anti-queer and anti-feminine is not necessarily heterosexual. Luis Alberto Urrea notes, "I also learned an unspoken lesson about machismo. All the toughest males, every *muy macho chignón* from deep Mexico who entered my house, was obsessed with forcing the younger children to suck his d*ck. Each one wanted to push his hard-on up the asses of the boys and girls of our family" (105). Homosexual acts among machos are unexpected considering as Ilán Stavans notes, "Among Hispanics, homosexuals are the target of high-well insurmountable animosity" (154). One in this sense is only homosexual if one is the submissive bottom, if one takes another man's penis anally or orally, or assumes the submissive role to another's aggressive. Stavans

goes on to write, “Despite the stigma, homosexuals have been a ubiquitous presence in the Hispanic world ... They are the other side of Hispanic sexuality, a shadow one refuses to acknowledge” (155).

Perhaps this paradox in part explains why machos are so violently concerned with maintaining their exulted masculinity. Machismo seems to be at once queer *and* anti-queer, the queer masked and hidden. Stavans further asserts, “The Hispanic macho goes out of his way to keep up appearances, to exalt his virility, but he often fails. Sooner or later, his glorious masculinity will be shared in bed with another man. Who is gay among us? It’s a secret. We simply don’t want to talk about it” (156). By linking macho homosexual masculinity with the repudiation of queerness one enters into a dangerous queer space that is both violent and homoerotic. Sáez points out, “Robin Wood summarizes one of Sigmund Freud’s stages of paranoia as ‘the Don Juan syndrome where homosexuality is denied by means of obsessive pursuit of women’” (546). Perhaps Yunior, a hypermasculine, bisexual, and anti-queer character can be diagnosed as having the Don Juan syndrome, overcompensating for his ambiguous border masculinity in a country, the U.S., where even a top is considered queer.

In two of Diáz’s short stories, “Drown” and “Miss Lora” the tension between homosexuality and anti-queerness bears down on Yunior. In “Drown” Yunior engages in a homosexual relationship with the very macho character Beto. Raphael Dalleo contends, “Beto emerges as a model of masculine behavior, a courageous and unemotional trickster. His name serves to emphasize the ‘beast’ of hypermasculinity that Beto enacts” (80). While Beto exemplifies the macho ideal, Yunior offers, “He’s a *pato* now but two years ago we were friends and he would walk into the apartment without knocking ... We were raging then, crazy the way we stole, broke windows, the way we pissed on people’s steps and then challenged them to come out and stop us” (*Drown* 91).

Yunior assures the reader that he and Beto only fooled around “Twice. That’s it” (103). On both occasions Beto appears to assume the submissive role. Díaz writes, “What the f*ck are you doing? I asked, but he didn’t stop ... I kept my eyes on the television, too scared to watch. I came right away” (104). And later: “We sat in front of his television, in our towels, his hands bracing against my abdomen and thighs. I’ll stop if you want, he said and I didn’t respond. After I was done, he laid his head in my lap” (105). While Yunior accepting a hand-job and oral sex does not render him a homosexual based on the Latin idea of masculinity as merely a closed system, the two experiences clearly concern Yunior, maybe because he is an immigrant in a country that does not share his definition of hegemonic masculinity or heterosexuality: “Mostly I stayed in the basement, terrified that I would end up abnormal, a f*cking *pato*, but he was my best friend and back then that mattered to me more than anything” (104).

Another gendered conflict for Yunior centers on reconciling his relationship with Beto *and* taking the place of his father as breadwinner. His relationship with his mother mirrors that of a husband and wife within a classical patriarchal system: “We arrive at the mall and I give her fifty dollars. Buy something, I say, hating the image I have of her, picking through the sale bins, wrinkling everything. Back in the day, my father would give her a hundred dollars at the end of each summer for my new clothes and she would take nearly a week to spend it” (97). Yunior feels inferior to his father who gave his mother one hundred dollars where he can only give her fifty. His masculine insecurity then is agitated further by his relationship with Beto, who in a way functions as “the other woman,” the mistress to his wifely mother.

This would not matter if Beto were female largely because many of the men in these stories cheat on their wives. The problem of course is that Beto is a man. The story ends with another image of Yunior assuming the role of husband to his mother: “I let her sleep until the end of the movie

and when I wake her she shakes her head, grimacing. You better check those windows, she says. I promise her I will" (107). Yunior not only rejects Beto in order to better provide for his mother and take his father's place, but he also lashes out at other homosexuals in his community. Dalleo points out, "the desperation of the men's attempt to connect with these women is further accentuated by their performance of violence against homosexual men. The men go on ritual excursions to harass the men at gay bars" (81). Yunior, in this story, constructs a sort of masked hypermasculine incestuous homosexual persona that is at the same time violently anti-queer.

In "Miss Lora," Yunior engages in a queer relationship with an androgynous woman and struggles to convince himself that he is just like his brother and father. The story is full of homosexual references and Yunior feels insecure about Miss Lora's gender ambiguity. He initially needs to assure himself that his brother Rafa would approve since he is the first man Yunior feared might unmask him: "Years later you would wonder if it hadn't been for your brother would you have done it ... how skinny she was, no *culo*, no titties ... but your brother didn't care. I'd f*ck her. You'd f*ck anything, someone jeered" (*This Is How* 149). Yunior finds comfort in being a player like his father and brother: "Both your father and your brother were *sucios*...*Sucios* of the worst kind and now it's official: you are one, too. You had hoped the gene missed you, skipped a generation, but clearly you were kidding yourself" (161). Rather than Yunior really hoping the gene missed him, he is glad and even heartened that he is like his other male family members. He seems to be making an argument, trying to convince himself, hiding the mask that can be taken away, for Miss Lora is not like the girls and women his brother and father chased:

> Miss Lora was too skinny. Had no hips whatsoever. No breasts, either, no ass, even her hair failed to make the grade ... what she was most famous for in the neighborhood were her muscles. Not

> that she had huge ones like you—chick was just wiry like a motherf*cker, every single fiber standing out in outlandish definition ... Always a bikini despite her curvelessness, the top stretching over these corded pectorals and the bottom cupping a rippling fan of haunch muscles. (154)

Miss Lora's childlessness further marks her as a queer character: "Something must have happened, your mother speculated. In her mind a woman with no child could only be explained by vast untrammeled calamity" (153). She allows Yunior to orgasm inside her, suggesting that there is no possibility that she will get pregnant: "This time you don't even ask about the condom. You just come inside her" (162). She also enjoys anal sex: "even though she is falling asleep she lets you bone her straight in the ass. F*cking amazing, you keep saying for all four seconds it takes you to come. You have to pull my hair while you do it, she confides. That makes me shoot like a rocket" (163). These sexual preferences threaten patriarchal heteronormativity by empowering a woman to enjoy sex without the threat of pregnancy.

The story hints that Miss Lora's masculine body has a history of attracting gay men. She says of a former boyfriend, "To this day I think he was gay" (164). The kids at the school in which she teaches tease another teacher also seeing Miss Lora: "They say Mr. Everson likes to put on dresses. You think she straps it on for him? ... She probably does strap it on" (167). Miss Lora's androgyny concerns Yunior, further evincing the masculine insecurity that fuels his anti-queerness and firmly preserves his hypermasculine homosexual mask.

Latin Masculinities

One pervasive symbol of Latin masculinities seems to be a mask, a mask to close off and ensure one's masculinity, a mask to guard against homosexual exposure, and a mask behind which to simply hide. Paz notes, "The Mexican, whether young or old, *criollo* or *mestizo*, general or laborer or lawyer, seems to me to be a person who shuts himself away to protect himself: his face is a mask and so is his smile. In his harsh solitude, which is both barbed and courteous, everything serves him as a defense: silence and words, politeness and disdain, irony and resignation" (29). As a result, according to Paz, "He is condemned to play his role throughout life, since the pact between himself and his impersonation cannot be broken except by death or sacrifice. The lie takes command of him and becomes the very foundation of his personality" (42).

While the mask of Latin masculinity ensures the perpetuation of the macho, and guards against queer exposure, some Latin male thinkers suggest that the macho functions as a means to fight oppression and to be heard. Martín Espada argues, "'Macho,' as employed by Anglos, is a Spanish word that particularly seems to identify Latino male behavior as the very standard of sexism and violence ... In nearby Holyoke, police officers routinely round up Puerto Rican men drinking beer on the stoop ... as a means of controlling the perceived threat of macho volatility on the street" (87). Espada further contends:

> While Latino male behavior is, indeed, all too often sexist and violent, Latino males in this country are in fact no worse in that regard than their Anglo counterparts ... Yet, any assertiveness on the part of Latino males, especially any form of resistance to Anglo authority, is labeled macho and instantly discredited. (88)

The idea that the macho signifies not sexism and male aggression, but rather the empowered voice of the oppressed is shared by Omar S. Castañeda:

> Everyone is equal in macho oratory and has an equal right to make assertions, ask questions, doubt, challenge authority, and, most important, to be wrong. Entering the word is vigorous and invigorating, and is a communal appeal to higher aspirations. It invites participation, passes judgment only on those who pass it first or wield it unfairly, and asks for reciprocated dignity. That's something to praise (49).

In this sense the macho equates agency through language.

In Díaz's novel *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, the notion of the macho as literary agency is undermined by definitions of macho as mere masculine aggression and violence. On two occasions Díaz notes writers who attempted to expose the violent and oppressive Trujillo regime through language, Latin men who entered the word, and were put to death:

> Much in the news in those days, Jesús de Galíndez was a Basque supernerd and a Columbia University grad student who had written a rather unsettling doctoral dissertation ... [about] the era of Rafael Leónidas Trujillo Molina ... Galíndez got gagged, bagged, and dragged to La Capital, and legend has it when he came out of his chloroform nap he found himself naked, dangling from his feet over a cauldron of *boiling oil*. (96-97)

On another occasion Díaz mentions a grade-school boy who wrote a paper stating, "I'd like to see our country be a *democracía* like the United States. I wish we would stop having dictators. Also I believe that it was Trujillo who killed Galíndez. That's all it took. The next day both he and the

teacher were gone. No one saying nothing" (96). Alternatively, the novel seems to glorify the macho as misogynistic, violent, sexist, racist, and homophobic.

The glorification of the macho in the novel starts with Trujillo, of whom Díaz says, "If you think the average Dominican guy's bad, Trujillo was five thousand times worse ... the regime would have been the world's first culocracy" (*The Brief Wondrous* 217). While on one level Trujillo is presented as evil incarnate, on another level he is romanticized: "if you were of a certain class and you put your cute daughter anywhere near *El Jefe*, within the week she'd be mamando his ripio like an old pro and *there would be nothing you could do about it*" (217); "Trujillo is not a man. He is ... a cosmic force ... He belongs to ... the category of those born to a special destiny";[6] "Rafael Leónidas Trujillo Molina, the Dictatingest Dictator who ever Dictated" (80).

Even his death is equated with an archetype for romanticized gangster hypermasculinity, Tony Montana from the 1983 film *Scarface*: "He could have ordered Zacarías to turn the car back to the safety of his capital, but instead he goes out like Tony Montana" (155). And yet Tony Montana with a twist: "For a while, I hear, that stretch was the haunt of what El Jefe worried about the most: los maricones" (155). Trujillo, the quintessential hypermasculine, violent, anti-queer force in the novel, also shares in Latin homoerotic masculinity: "if you think the Trujillato was not homoerotic, then, to quote the Priest, *you got another thing coming*" (215).

Perhaps the most egregious example in the novel of Yunior glorifying a bad man is The Gangster, a man who nearly kills Oscar's grandmother: "By the time he was twenty-two he was operating his own string of brothels in and around the capital, owned houses and cars in three countries" (121); "In the forties the Gangster was in his prime; he traveled the entire length of the Americas, from Rosario to Nueva York, in pimpdaddy style, staying at the best hotels, banging the hottest broads ... dining in four-star restaurants, confabbing with arch-criminals the world

over" (121); "He was a true gangster, gully to the bone, lived the life all those phony rap acts can only rhyme about" (122). The Gangster displays an absolute disregard for Beli's humanity, and yet Yunior says, "it was he who taught her all about her body, her orgasms, her rhythms, who said, You have to be bold, and for that he must be honored, no matter what happened in the end" (127). One could argue that the book itself is an example of the macho entering the word, yet in Diaz's novel he makes it clear that "The reign of Trujillo was not the best time to be a lover of Ideas" (214). The definition of the macho that is celebrated in the novel is clearly the same one used to oppress Latin men. And it is also the same definition that compels one to wear the mask.

Narrative Control

By examining the narrative power structure in Díaz's fiction, one can establish that the controller of the Díaz universe is a masked man. In Díaz's fictive universe, Yunior is a *self-conscious narrator* aware of his control of the text according to Wayne Booth's definition:

> Cutting across the distinction between observers and narrator-agents of all these kinds is the distinction between *self-conscious* narrators ... aware of themselves as writers ... and narrators or observers who rarely if ever discuss their writing chores ... or who seem unaware that they are writing, thinking, speaking, or 'reflecting' a literary work. (155)

At times Yunior hubristically asserts himself and comments on the text:

> In my first draft, Samaná was actually Jarabacoa, but then my girl Leonie, resident expert in all things Domo, pointed out that there are no beaches in Jarabacoa. Beautiful rivers but no beaches. Leonie was also the one who informed me that the *perrito* (see first paragraphs of chapter one, "GhettoNerd at the End of the World") wasn't popularized until the late eighties, early nineties, but that was one detail I couldn't change, just liked the image too much. Forgive me, historians of popular dance, forgive me. (*The Brief Wondrous* 132)

While Yunior appears to control the text as the narrator, one must be aware of the implied author: "The *implied* author (the author's 'second self') ... creates an implicit picture of an author who stands behind the scenes, whether as stage manager, as puppeteer, or as an indifferent God silently paring his fingernails" (151). The implied author is Díaz, but one must realize that Díaz, the implied author, is different from Díaz, the actual author: "This implied author is always distinct from the 'real man'—whatever we take him to be—who creates a superior version of himself, a 'second self,' as he creates his work" (Booth 151).

Because there appears to be consistency in the hypermasculine homosexual anti-queer masculinity espoused in *Drown*, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, and *This Is How You Lose Her* and embodied in the narrator Yunior, I have chosen to conflate the three implied authors of the three books into one implied author, Díaz. Booth contends, "The *narrator* may be more or less distant from the *implied author*. The distance may be moral" (156). In terms of who is responsible for the worldview in the text, one must determine what *kind* of narrator Yunior is. Booth asserts, "I have called a narrator *reliable* when he speaks for or acts in accordance with the norms of the work (which is to say, the implied author's norms), *unreliable* when he does not" (158-59). At no

point in the works does Yunior claim to "have qualities which the author denies him" (159).

Yunior delivers: he is apparently a very good writer and a consummate ladies' man. These seem to be the two qualities that he boasts about most, or of which he is desirous. That he is at times deceptive is not enough to call him unreliable. As Booth claims, "It is true that most of the great narrators indulge in large amounts of incidental irony, and they are thus 'unreliable' in the sense of being potentially deceptive. But difficult irony is not sufficient to make a narrator unreliable. Nor is unreliability normally a matter of lying" (159). Yunior is reliable in that he seems to embody the spirit of all three works. He is a catalyst, a Watcher, even perhaps the hero of all three works. Notably, of all the characters in the Díaz world, Yunior seems to fare the best, his only real conflict being his confessed and self-inflicted heartbreak. Richard Patteson believes, "Lola, who narrates two sections of *Oscar Wao* in the first person ... slightly [reduces] the totality of Yunior's control over the text" (12). Yet as Gerard Genette notes,

> the narrator of the second narrative is already a character in the first one, and ... the act of narrating which produces the second narrative is an event recounted in the first one. We will define this difference in level by saying that *any event a narrative recounts is at a diegetic level immediately higher than the level at which the narrating act producing this narrative is placed* ... writing ... is a (literary) act carried out at the first level, which we will call *extradiegetic*; the events told ... are inside this first narrative, so we will describe them as *diegetic*, or *intradiegetic* ... the events told in ... a narrative in the second degree, we will call *metadiegetic*. (228)

The narrative situation of the Lola chapters are metadiegetic and recounted under the controlling aegis of Yunior's second level intradiegetic narrative. Thusly, Yunior, as a reliable and parallel extension of the

implied author Díaz, controls all three texts and all the characters in those texts.

Díaz, the actual author, notes about his third book, *This Is How You Lose Her*: "the book we are reading is not directly from me. It's Yunior De La Casa's book. He, at the end of the book, is seen writing the book that now we realize that we have been reading" (Wolinsky). In this interview Díaz appears to shirk the responsibility for the text, placing it instead on a fictional character who obviously cannot explain himself. Díaz goes on to say in another interview, "The book is a highly wrought object. It's engineered. It may seem casual. It may seem conversational or vernacular, it may lead people to believe that this is my voice but if I read a page, you would begin to realize how artificial the experience is" (Rodriguez). If the book does not reflect Díaz's *voice*, whose voice does it reflect? Díaz goes on to say, "Fiction is an artisan that convinces its reader that it's real. The voice is the book, while it may have tone and highlights directly from me, this voice is highly artificial. It doesn't really represent the way I speak." Again, Díaz evades ownership of his work leaving readers to wonder how a writer, who can create an object that through his own admission, has virtually nothing to do with the creator.

Sáez suggests, "If readers accept Yunior's narrative without question, without interrogating Yunior's narrative authority, without asking how Yunior's desires and values shape the moral lessons implied by the ending, then we are left with a curse of our own—the curse of ignorance concerning how our own desires leave us vulnerable to the dictations of others" (551). Indeed, perhaps not only must we interrogate Yunior's narrative authority, but maybe we ought to interrogate the implied author's authority. Or even the actual author's authority. I certainly would not break the cardinal rule of literary criticism and implicate the actual masked man.[7]

Oscar as Yunior's Narrative Project

If one were to think of all three of Díaz's books as one long narrative of Yunior's life, then one might see that by *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao,* Yunior is at the height of his hubristic powers as a writer and as a character. Patteson finds, "The few details that Yunior reveals about his family and his past life confirm that he is the same Yunior who appears in Díaz's memorable first book, the short story collection *Drown*. In the novel, Yunior presents himself as almost the opposite of his awkward friend Oscar: fit, muscular, in every way the 'typical' Dominican male" (8). What we find out in *Drown* is that Yunior is motivated by his brother Rafa. In *Drown* he describes Rafa as an unparalleled lothario: "He'd take the campo girls down to the dams to swim and if he was lucky they let him put it in their mouths or in their asses" (5); "Later, while we were in bed listening to the rats on the zinc roof he might tell me what he'd done. I'd hear about *tetas* and *chochas* and *leche* and he'd talk without looking over at me ... I was too young to understand most of what he said, but I listened to him anyway, in case these things might be useful in the future" (6).

In *This Is How You Lose Her* Rafa is depicted as having the same influence as in *Drown*: "Before we even swung onto 516 Nilda was in my brother's lap and he had his hand so far up her skirt it looked like he was performing a surgical procedure. When we were getting off the bus Rafa pulled me aside and held his hand in front of my nose. Smell this, he said. This is what's wrong with women" (34). Rafa, who Yunior once feared might unmask him like he did Ysrael, functions as Yunior's role model in all three books: "I always followed Rafa, trying to convince him to let me tag along" (*Drown* 6). In *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao,* Yunior appears to have followed his brother's lead: "Me, who was f*cking with not one, not two, but three fine-ass bitches *at the same time* and that wasn't even counting the side-sluts I scooped at the parties and the clubs; me, who had p*ssy coming out my ears" (185).

While Yunior's moniker as The Watcher is accurate in that the novel is filtered through his hypermasculine homosexual anti-queer gaze, it is not accurate in terms of Yunior simply reporting events from the sidelines. Anne Garland Mahlter suggests, "Yunior, the narrator of *Oscar Wao*, refers to himself numerous times throughout the novel as 'The Watcher,' which Díaz expressly states is based on the character of Uatu the Watcher from Stan Lee and Jack Kirby's comic series *Fantastic Four* ... In *Fantastic Four*, Uatu the Watcher lives on the moon where he monitors the activity of humans on the Earth and is under a sworn oath to never interfere" (123). Yunior not only directly interferes with the characters in the text, but he actually silences the other characters, especially Oscar, in an attempt to save him from his own queerness, inadvertently creating another No Face.

Yunior introduces the character Oscar de Leon as a deeply flawed queer character in need of fixing, whose problems mostly stem from his unfortunate weight: "He was a stout kid, heading straight to fat, but his mother kept him nice in haircuts and clothes, and before the proportions of his head changed he'd had these lovely flashing eyes and these cute-ass cheeks, visible in all the pictures" (12). Oscar's queerness, Yunior points out, is all the more troubling since Oscar is Dominican: "this is a Dominican kid we're talking about, in a Dominican family: Dude was supposed to have Atomic Level G, was supposed to be pulling in the bitches with both hands" (24). Yunior likens Oscar to an X-Man, a mutant: "You really want to know what being an X-Man feels like? Just be a smart bookish boy of color in a contemporary U.S. ghetto" (22). Yunior seems to suggest that Oscar's bookishness is a result of his queerness rather than a quality worth cultivating. Sáez holds, "While Oscar is endearingly inauthentic, Yunior's mission to identify him as a representative subject who can embody the Dominican diaspora leads him ultimately to silence Oscar's points of queer Otherness—his virginity and

sentimentality" (524). Echoing these sentiments in the text, Yunior announces, "I decided that I was going to fix Oscar's life" (175).

Before Yunior attempts to fix Oscar's life, he removes the threat of Oscar entering the word and vying for narratological supremacy: "when I got up he'd already be at his computer ... [claiming] he was in the middle of this amazingly important chapter. Write it later, bitch" (177). Yunior, a writer himself, queers Oscar's literary aspirations in order to thwart them: "I couldn't believe how much he looked like that fat homo Oscar Wilde, and I told him so" (180). Yunior seizes and appropriates Oscar's writing, altering it to his own advantage: "Was I really reading my roommate's journal behind his back? Of course I was" (185). Yunior at times even points out where Oscar's written version of the events that Yunior is narrating differs from his official published version: "In Oscar's version, I raised my hand and said, *Mellon*. Took him a second to recognize the word" (200). Finally, Yunior ensures that only his version survives by destroying Oscar's version and then pretending he never received it. Yunior reports that Oscar has written a book that has been lost:

> Told her to watch out for the second package. This contains everything I've written on this journey. Everything I think you will need. You'll understand when you read my conclusions. (It's the cure to what ails us, he scribbled in the margins. The Cosmo DNA). Only problem was, the f*cking thing never arrived! Either got lost in the mail or he was slain before he put it in the mail, or whoever he trusted to deliver it forgot. (333-34)

If Oscar indeed located the cure to what ails him and his family, then perhaps he traced the curse of *fukú* to the Latin mask of hypermasculine homosexual anti-queerness, something that Yunior cannot allow. Instead, Yunior destroys Oscar's version and creates his own in which Oscar dons the mask and then is martyred for a cause inconsistent with his character.

Late in the novel while Oscar is attempting to learn how to create a meaningful life outside of traditional definitions of Dominican masculinity: “the fat, the ugly, the smart, the poor, the dark, the black, the unpopular, the African, the Indian, the Arab, the immigrant, the strange, the feminine, the gay ... in every one of these ... he saw himself” (264), in an instance of *deus ex machina* he falls “in love with a semiretired *puta.* Her name was Ybón Pimentel. Oscar considered her the start of his *real* life” (279). Yunior relates that Oscar told him that “Ybón actually *f*cked* him. Praise be to Jesus!” (334). For this brief foray into normativity, Oscar is first beaten within an inch of his life, then mercilessly killed. Yunior views this as a resounding success story: “You should have seen him. He was so thin, had lost all the weight” (312); “He had gotten some power of his own” (319); “they would sense him waiting for them on the other side and over there he wouldn’t be no fatboy or dork or kid no girl had ever loved; over there he’d be a hero, an avenger” (321-22). Once again Yunior has transformed a queer character into a masked superhero symbolizing a specific and mythic construction of masculinity that is dangerously hypermasculine, homosexual, and anti-queer. Mahler notes,

> While recovering from the beating he received from the *capitán’s* guards, Oscar undergoes a transformation. The superheroic nature of this change is anticipated by the fact that the guards, Gorilla Grodd and Solomon Grundy, are named after DC comic villains ... From this point forward, in which Oscar curses the curse that has haunted him, Oscar begins to transform ... into someone more courageous, powerful, and even more slender—someone more like a superhero. (128)

Oscar’s death completes his transformation from queer other to No Face, evidenced in Yunior’s dream after Oscar’s death: “Sometimes I look up at him [Oscar] and he has no face and I wake up screaming” (325).

According to Yunior, Oscar accepts the violence he endures in exchange for sex with a retired prostitute and subsequently kisses and tells Yunior all about it: “He reported that he’d liked it, and that Ybón’s you-know-what hadn’t tasted the way he had expected. She tastes like Heineken, he observed” (334). Yunior’s version of these events is difficult to accept given that on a couple of occasions Oscar’s defiance of Yunior slips through the cracks of Yunior’s narrative. On one occasion Oscar confronts Yunior for cheating on Lola: “Why do you cheat on her then? ... Maybe you should try to find out” (313). On another occasion Oscar chastises Yunior and his friends for calling one of Oscar’s love interests a bitch: “Don’t call her a bitch, he said darkly. Yeah, Melvin imitated, don’t call her a bitch” (183). It simply does not square that at the end of the novel Oscar would essentially become another Yunior, another hypermasculine Dominican anti-queer macho, insulting what he now views as the savior of his life by telling Yunior in the most “dude(ish)” way that his girl’s vagina smells like a high-end import.

Simply put, the kind of yarn Yunior wishes to tell is not that of a triumph for queerness less this triumph inadvertently unmasks him. Sáez contends, “The novel’s conclusion supposedly resolves the ambiguity of Oscar’s sexual identity as a virgin since he engages in a heterosexual act, having sex with Ybón. But in light of the fact that his act (like the novel as a whole) is a fiction constructed by Yunior as narrator, the motivation for ‘resolving’ Oscar’s queerness is tied to the threat which that identity represents to Yunior’s own sexuality” (548). In effect, Oscar’s queerness becomes more than anything the ultimate threat in the novel: “By isolating sexuality as the site by which to recuperate Oscar, Yunior also identifies queerness as the most threatening point of difference embodied by Oscar” (549). The best way to thwart that threat is to silence Oscar and then fit him with a mask of his own.

Hipster Sexism and Irony

Paz notes that concomitant with the mask of Latin masculinity is acute sexist thinking: "Women are inferior beings because, in submitting, they open themselves up. Their inferiority is constitutional and resides in their sex, their submissiveness, which is a wound that never heals" (30). True to Paz's description, "Yunior's language often reduces women to disposable objects of desire. Demeaning terms—'p*ssy,' 'bitches,' 'sluts,'—infest the habitual patterns of his speech. Yunior inherits his hateful view of women from his father, brother and the world of men they inhabit" (Alford). Even Lola, whom Yunior claims to respect and care for, he objectifies: "She was a girl it was easy to care about ... bitch was almost six feet tall and no *tetas* at all and darker than your darkest grandma. Like two girls in one: the skinniest upperbody married to a pair of Cadillac hips and an ill donkey" (*The Brief Wondrous Life* 168). That Díaz's work is replete with misogyny and sexism is perhaps obvious. What is not obvious and in fact quite baffling is that critics and even Díaz himself insist that his work aligns *with* the feminist struggle. Díaz claims in an interview, "The question was always, for someone like me: What is the role of the male artist in the feminist struggle? We can't be feminists, I think. Our privilege prevents us. We can be feminist-aligned in some way. And so the women kept saying to us dudes, the best thing you can do is draw maps of masculine privilege. You can go places we can't. Draw maps so when we drop the bombs, they land accurate" (Alford). Maybe even more flabbergasting is that some critics seem to agree:

> My own reading of *This Is How You Lose Her* was unimpeded by my feminism because none of the women were held out as examples of success: these characters were actors in their own tragedies. Also, this is the baldly juvenile, wannabe macho Yunior's story to tell, and the inner lives of these women are not depicted, with the exception of the narrator of 'Otravida Otravez,'

> who is certainly more than a *culo*-and-titties construct. In addition, the women depicted are complicated and involved in power struggles of their own. (Murray)

So, let me get this straight: Diaz's work is not sexist because A: the women are not romanticized for the oppression they endure, and B: because this is Yunior's story and somehow a story told by a sexist character cannot be sexist? And C: the women are "complicated and involved in power struggles of their own." Are not these power struggles with the very men who oppress them? Nevertheless, for these reasons Sabina Murray thinks Díaz's work "does have a feminist ring to it, because the sense of the piece is that there is something unjust about the inequity." It seems to me that nowadays membership requirements for the feminist movement have grown lax indeed.

Díaz himself has suggested in interviews that "I had an idea for Yunior at the beginning ... I wanted to talk about gender. I wanted to talk about masculinity" (Wolinsky); "There's not a lesson that I'm sort of asking my readers to walk away from but more of an encounter and a conversation that I'm trying to encourage" (Rodriguez); "What I was most committed to was using this male Dominican experience to wrestle with, to encourage my readers to wrestle with, larger questions about masculinity" (Rodriguez).

If we are to believe that Díaz presents Yunior as a straw-man illustration of an issue that needs to be addressed, then there is no real difference in Díaz's work and the notion of hipster sexism. Allisa Quart reports, "Today, there's a raft of ads, photographs, television shows, films, and T-shirts, which represent young women being defined, but always ironically—and with a wink and a nod—by their sexuality and/or bodies. I think we should call this new strand of culture Hipster Sexism." In other words, hipster sexism, often exemplified in internet memes that are so egregiously sexist that one cannot help but realize that the producer is aware of their sexist nature, is supposed to demonstrate a sophisticated

form of satire that indicts sexism even as it ostensibly perpetuates it. One could also describe hipster sexism as just plain old sexist humor, which Julie A. Woodzicka notes "functions as a 'releaser' of prejudice" (182) safeguarded within the hip context of sophisticated literary discourse.

Díaz is a popular writer who perpetuates stereotypes of Latin hypermasculinity and gross sexism under the masked guise of irony. Does he suppose that the masses pick up on the subtleties of his irony? Or is he merely reinforcing the patriarchal experience of his readers and telling a ripping yarn? Further, if he is so critical of Dominican masculinity then why is his work so celebrated in the DR? The worst part might be that, like the dynamics of hipster sexism, perhaps consumers think that they are on the right side of the argument, pointing out the troglodytes instead of realizing they are one.

In *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, rather than unabashedly criticizing the culture of homosexual hypermasculine anti-queerness, Díaz appears to revel in it. As Ignacio *López*-Calvo notes, "The recollection of so many of the rumors, anecdotes, and legends about what Yunior humorously calls the 'worlds first culocracy' ... undoubtedly responds not only to the fascination of Dominicans with this larger-than-life historical character but also to that of the author" (80). As a result "what Yunior succeeds in doing is merely reinstating the very standards of masculinity and Dominicanness that alienate Oscar and himself" (Sáez 552).

Perhaps the proof is in the unabashed warm reception of the book by the very folks Díaz claims to criticize. Aligned with other novels by Latin writers that critique Latin culture, Díaz's work earns suspicion: "Take the case of John Rechy, whose 1963 novel, *City of Night*, a book about hustlers, whores, drugs, and urban criminality, garnered him accolades and a reputation as one of the most promising Chicano writers of his generation. Shortly thereafter, Rechy's book was categorized as a 'gay novel,' a stigma that tarred the book for Hispanic readers in the United States" (Stavans 156). Díaz's work is the opposite of a "gay novel."

Díaz's novel is more like those institutions that attempt to pray the gay away, a queer corrective. Further,

> Considering this unfettered portrayal of Dominican society, and especially if we take into account the harsh reception that Julia Alvarez's *In the Time of the Butterflies* (1994) had in the Dominican Republic, it is somewhat surprising that on May 1, 2008, the Dominican *cámara de diputados* officially named Diaz "cultural ambassador of the Dominican Republic in the world" and that he was also acknowledged by the *Secretaría de Estado de Cultura* during Santo Domingo's International Book Fair. (*López*-Calvo 77)

This is the problem with employing irony as your single most important literary device. Those who might benefit most from its putative tertiary meaning do not get it, or simply refuse to. Instead they appropriate its face value. According to David Foster Wallace,

> irony's singularly unuseful when it comes to constructing anything to replace the hypocrisies it debunks ... It is unmeaty ... an ironist is *impossible to pin down*. All U.S. irony is based on an implicit 'I don't really mean what I'm saying.' So what *does* irony as a cultural norm mean to say? That it's impossible to mean what you say? ... Anyone with the heretical gall to ask an ironist what he actually stands for ends up looking like an hysteric or a prig. And herein lies the oppressiveness of institutionalized irony, the too successful rebel: the ability to interdict the *question* without attending to its *subject* is, when exercised, tyranny. It is the new junta, using the very tool that exposed its enemy to insulate itself. (67-68)

In the end it does not matter what Díaz *intended* to do. As Slavoj *Žižek points out,* "The cynical subject is quite aware of the distance between the ideological mask and the social reality, but he none the less still insists upon the mask ... they know very well what they are doing, but still, they are doing it" (*29). Further, "even if we do not take things seriously, even if we keep an ironical distance,* we are still doing them*" (33).*

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* the word *hip* "comes from a story of a fisherman warning young fishermen never to wade in deep water without hip boots on because they could run into trouble. So, when you hear the words, 'I'm hip' or 'I'm booted' it's said to let you know they have no fear of trouble or that they understand what's shaking [i.e., happening]." There is no doubt that on some level, the implied author Díaz was wearing his hip boots while writing the three books under examination. It does not matter. These three works espouse a construction of masculinity symbolized by the masked man No Face, who hides his queerness by adopting a hypermasculine anti-queer pose. The implied author's construction of Yunior as narrator and chief creates yet another mask. In this case Yunior is the No Face representing the hidden identity of the implied author. In this employ, Yunior thwarts Oscar's queerness and welcomes him into the martyred realm of No Face masculinity. Ultimately then, Díaz's work is only so much hipster sexism, involuted bravura, not unlike a really clever internet meme.

Notes

[1] Michael S. Kimmel defines hypermasculinity as a form of U.S. American masculinity based on racism, sexism, and homophobia and marked by violent rapaciousness (191-92). Riki Wilchins equates hypermasculinity with "emotional toughness and sexual virility" (114). Charles P. Toombs notes, "super-masculinity" stems from "the

dominant culture's superficial and inauthentic definitions of manhood and masculinity," resulting in "a lack of tolerance, respect, or acceptance of difference" (109-10).

[2] I am using Wilchins' definition of "queerness," meaning "things like power and identity, language, and *difference*" (5, emphasis mine). In this sense any behavior that challenges white patriarchal heteronormativity is *queer* behavior.

[3] Wayne Booth defines this term as "always distinct from the 'real man'… a superior version of himself, a 'second self,' as he creates his work" (151).

[4] "Hipster Sexism consists of the objectification of women but in a manner that uses mockery, quotation marks, and paradox" (Quart). The ostensible goal is to underscore the egregiousness and ridiculousness of sexism itself rather than to simply perpetuate it.

[5] The similarity in the names "Ysrael" and "Yunior" is worth noting.

[6] This quote is from the epigraph in the novel *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao,* just before section two.

[7] It would be interesting for someone to explore the similarities between the work of Ernest Hemingway and Junot Díaz in terms of both authors possibly employing macho archetypes ironically. The similarities in the titles *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* and Hemingway's short story "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber" is unavoidable. Hemingway nearly lost his canonicity due to the macho zeitgeist that pervades his work, a charge that was later challenged by new readings of *The Sun Also Rises, To Have and Have Not,* and especially his posthumous works. Perhaps Díaz will experience a reverse fate.

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Frankenstein Performed: The Monster Who Will Not Die

JEANNE TIEHEN

At first there is only darkness. The sound of a loud heartbeat fills the theatre. In a flash of light, there is a glimpse of what appears to be a naked man suspended from the ceiling. Before the eyes can make sense of what they are seeing, the stage goes dark again. There is another flash of light. The man-like creature groans painfully as he struggles to free himself. He finally succeeds, and he falls to the floor. He appears unable to stand. Blood seeps from his multiple sutures. He cowers on the floor. It is dark again. The London audience anxiously waits for another flash of light to witness the Creature come to life in the National Theatre's 2011 production of *Frankenstein*.

Nearly two hundred years after Mary Shelley first anonymously published her novel *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*, playwright Nick Dear and director Danny Boyle created a new adaptation of *Frankenstein* for the National Theatre. Despite countless film and stage dramatizations of *Frankenstein* the production created a "high-decibel buzz" that led to advanced ticket sellouts, due in part to Boyle's return to directing for the stage and the alternation of leading parts between actors Jonny Lee Miller and Benedict Cumberbatch (Brantley). Critics unanimously praised the show, claiming it achieved the "truly spectacular" by taking the familiar Frankenstein tale and making "the old story seem fresh" (Spencer). In their reviews, critics did not forget Shelley or the play's indebtedness to her characters and story. After all, Shelley crafted an engrossing novel composed of complicated characters, strange events,

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and philosophical questions about what it means to be human. Mary Shelley wrote, “And now, once again, I bid my hideous progeny go forth and prosper” in an introduction to her 1831 text, years after she saw the novel capture the public’s imagination in numerous stage adaptations (“Introduction” 25). She could not have anticipated that her story would continue to “go forth and prosper” in such a celebrated fashion. The story of Frankenstein, much like the Creature itself, has taken on a life of its own

There is something particular about the story of Frankenstein. Playwrights and screenwriters claim that their adaptations are based on Shelley’s novel. However, early adaptations immediately diverged from the novel and created unique patterns that recur throughout the history of dramatizations. The 2011 production owes as much to previous *Frankenstein* plays and films as it does to Shelley’s novel. Even more so than retellings of *Jekyll and Hyde* and *Dracula*, Frankenstein as a story has often undergone severe modifications in its many incarnations. The story is staged year after year, but there is no singular or established adaptation. Instead the story has shifted over time, responding to variations in popular taste, medium, and to the world outside the theatre doors. Each adaptation has made changes to the narrative of the novel, and Dr. Frankenstein and his Creature are often uniquely characterized through each major adaptation.

The question remains: why is *Frankenstein* continually dramatized? I contend it is the mythology of Frankenstein, perpetuated by the fears of progress, which continues to give the story its relevance and potential for new dramatic reinterpretations. Comparing Shelley’s novel with trends in dramatizations and utilizing Roland Barthes’ *Mythologies*, it is evident that adaptations have perpetuated a fear of progress and created a myth that we culturally understand and embrace. The very word Frankenstein conjures distinct images: the mad scientist, the strange laboratory, the unstoppable Monster, and a path of destruction where fears of progress are

based. Through these components, the story of Frankenstein reflects social anxieties and mirrors a hope for returning to normative conditions through the demise or punishment of the Creature and Dr. Frankenstein in almost every adaptation. By explaining the mythic relevance of Frankenstein, it will be apparent why adaptations have continued to transform the story and why *Frankenstein* will resurface on our stages and screens for years to come.

Paul O'Flinn in his essay "Production and Reproduction: The Case of Frankenstein" writes, "There is no such thing as *Frankenstein*, there are only *Frankensteins*, as the text is ceaselessly rewritten, reproduced, refilmed, and redesigned" (22). Despite the absence of a definitive adaptation of Frankenstein, the 1930s Universal films *Frankenstein* and *Bride of Frankenstein* perhaps possess the most iconic hold on the public's imagination with Boris Karloff's monster. Yet, the silent monster Karloff crafted was indebted to the Frankenstein plays that were performed in England and France nearly a hundred years prior. In 1823, five years after Shelley published her novel, Richard Brinsley Peake's adaptation *Presumption; or, The Fate of Frankenstein* became a popular success on the London stage. By 1826 there were over fifteen different stage adaptations of Shelley's novel performed in England and France. The public excitedly devoured the popular story of Frankenstein as a dramatization.

The early melodramas were an immediate departure from Shelley's controversial novel, particularly in the characterization of Dr. Frankenstein and the Creature. Over the past two hundred years, writers and literary theorists have analyzed Shelley's novel. In Harold Bloom's examination of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* he writes, "it is only a strong, flawed novel with frequent clumsiness in its narrative and characterization," but it possesses "one of the most vivid versions we have of the Romantic mythology of the self" (4). Bloom's use of the word "vivid" is striking. Where Shelley's novel may fail in technique and consistency, she makes

up for by creating a story that is vivid, experimental, and exceptionally inventive. The story's very liveliness invites it to be embodied through performance.

For those familiar with dramatizations of *Frankenstein*, it comes as a surprise that the novel follows the three narrators: Frankenstein, the Creature, and Walton. Robert Walton, the young captain who leads his crew and ship into the uncharted regions of the Arctic sea, is absent in almost every dramatization. In the novel, it is through Walton that the reader first meets Victor Frankenstein. Paul O'Flinn describes the narratives of Walton and Frankenstein as "present[ing] two models of scientific progress" (26-27). Whereas Frankenstein dies in the pursuit of chasing his "discovery," Walton survives. O'Flinn argues the contrast between the two men lies in the fact that Walton's ambition to discover unknown regions of the world is curtailed by the democratic presence of his crew. Walton can never forget that failure will cost the lives of other men. Frankenstein, working independently and in secrecy, has no one to stop his unrelenting determination to succeed. In losing Walton, the comparison of different models of progress is absent, thereby allowing morals to be quickly applied to the story: man should have limitations in pursuit of knowledge or he will suffer. Shelley's *Frankenstein* portrays Dr. Frankenstein as a man driven to discover the secrets of life, but failing to envisage the consequences of his actions. After experiencing the destruction of his creation, Frankenstein tells Walton, "Learn from me, if not from my precepts, at least by my example, how dangerous is the acquirement of knowledge" (Shelley 35).

Many adaptations begin with the creation scene, losing the prior explanation as to why Frankenstein ever wanted to create life. The diversity of creation scenes on stage and in film illustrates the dramatic and exciting possibilities in staging the scene, including the unique interpretation by the Edison Film Company in 1910 where Dr. Frankenstein watches through a caldron window to observe the Monster

rapidly recomposing from a skeleton. The novel keeps the creation description brief and ambiguous. Marilyn Butler describes Shelley as a populist concerning scientific ideas, and that she had "to use what the public knew" (xxx). It is speculated Frankenstein uses Galvini-like methods for animation; however, the reader only learns that Frankenstein collects "the instruments of life around [him], that [he] might infuse a spark of being into the lifeless thing," and then sees the "the dull yellow eye of the creature open" (Shelley 38-39). Victor instantly feels repulsed by the reality of the hideous creature before him. His immediate reaction of disgust and horror, as if he is awakened abruptly the second the Creature's eye opens, becomes a recurring pattern in many adaptations. The Creature is left alone in the laboratory as Frankenstein flees. Shelley describes a creation of "yellow skin…hair…of a lustrous black…his teeth of a pearly whiteness" and having a "gigantic stature" (Shelley 39, 56). When the Creature reencounters Frankenstein, he tells him of the brutal alienation he felt, "half-frightened as it were instinctively, finding myself so desolate" (Shelley 80).

Escaping the laboratory, the Creature ambles through the wilderness, learning to trust his awakening senses, discovering how to live, and terrifying those who stumble across his path. In adaptations from the 1820s, early films, and the 2011 adaptation, these scenes of discovery are charming and effectively simple. The Creature evokes audience sympathy as he struggles to make sense of the world he is confronted with. Eventually, he becomes consumed by vengeance and kills Frankenstein's family and friends. The novel details the complex emotions experienced by Dr. Frankenstein as his repulsion is replaced by guilt, understanding he had a responsibility to the Creature he failed to acknowledge. Comparatively, the Creature is characterized as a complicated and observant human whose monstrous behavior is spawned by his inability to connect with another human. Shelley constructed her novel as a

remarkable modern narrative, vast in its scope and devoid of religious intervention.

It should be of little surprise why such a story would lend itself to dramatic adaptation. Yet, entertainment purposes alone do not explain how Frankenstein has endured or why it has been significantly modified over time. Turning to Roland Barthes's *Mythologies*, we can understand the transformation of Shelley's novel into a lasting modern myth.

Over the last two hundred years, the introduction of many ideas involving science, morality, politics, and religion have been woven through the Frankenstein story by numerous writers. The incorporation of these ideas and their hints at ideology are understood by examining Barthes's *Mythologies*. Barthes discusses how myths are comprised of a form, concept, and signification in a "*second-order semiological system*" (114). In his first-order semiological system, a signifier and signified construct a sign. In the case of *Frankenstein*, let us assume the Creature is a signifier and the signified is danger. The sign would then be the "dangerous Creature." In the second-order semiological system, the "dangerous Creature" becomes a signifier, or form, which is robbed of its prior meaning. The character of the "dangerous Creature" no longer exists simply in its original shape in Shelley's novel, representing a fictional being. When this form meets a concept, the form takes on an entire new meaning. What has frequently happened with Frankenstein in adaptations, political cartoons, and news stories is the form of the "dangerous Creature" unites with the concept that progress may produce uncontrollable and destructive results.

Going a step further, this concept (the dangerous Creature) attached to the form (progress equals destruction) creates an ideological signification or myth that progress, scientific or otherwise, should therefore be strictly monitored by social and/or governing bodies. Through this myth construction, which is reiterated by dramatizations and repeated in media sound bites and political cartoons, the word *Frankenstein* and/or the image

of the Creature are conflated and remind us of the risk of progress. For example, the term *Frankenstein* is used consistently today by news media and political leaders in the argument for limitations of progress, usually claiming a moral or ethical imperative. I recently received an email asking me, as a member of the social body, to sign a petition to stop the U.S. from allowing genetically modified fish, or Frankenfish, to be harvested and sold in grocery stores. Jon Turney's book *Frankenstein's Footsteps: Science, Genetics, and Popular Culture* investigates this phenomenon in recent history. He discusses several examples of how frequently the term *Frankenstein* has been thrown around to arouse fear in the public against scientific advancements. Of course the world today is not what it was in Shelley's day; therefore, the progress reflected and feared has evolved. If anything, this illustrates the durability of Frankenstein. Whatever progress creates anxiety and is currently relevant shapes the adaptation, both as a written and performed work.

Returning to Shelley's novel, in 1818 many societal circumstances appear to have influenced Shelley. After the French Revolution, many in England feared that riots and revolutions would occur within the country. By the time Shelley wrote *Frankenstein* fears of uprisings were still lingering. Johanna M. Smith says the Creature has often been viewed as Shelley's response to the plights of the poor. Smith describes the Creature as emblematic of "the rebellious working class: he has no right and no claim to the recognition he demands from his superior" ("Introduction" 16). Shelley's novel demonstrates justification of the Creature's anger as he is ignored and shunned by society and Dr. Frankenstein. The path of destruction made by the Creature accentuates the failure of Frankenstein to provide for the Creature, just as the government and aristocracy failed to provide for the poor, working class in England. Prior to the 1832 Reform Bill, the lower class populations in England were disenfranchised, demanding voting rights and better wages, and creating anxiety for those in power in the shadow of revolution. The Creature reflects an underlying

anxiety about the social progress of giving power to those below who demand it. The progress the Creature represents in Shelley's novel is largely social, but as the story developed, so did the dangerous Creature's application as a warning against progress.

Peake's dramatic adaptation, *Presumption; or, the Fate of Frankenstein*, opened at the English Opera House on July 28, 1823. In response to the moral criticisms given to Shelley's story, Peake and other playwrights who adapted the novel in the 1820s rectified the absence of morality in the story. Fred Botting writes of *Presumption*: "Not only did the production supply [the story with a moral and start] the popular tradition of silencing the monster…it also signaled *Frankenstein*'s transformation into a modern myth" (3). The Monster, as the character is aptly referred to in Peake's dramatization, is silent. Any justification for his actions and motivations are assumed or ignored. With the silence of the Monster, the complexities of Shelley's character are erased, leaving behind a character that is more monster than human as he perpetually pursues Dr. Frankenstein, usually kidnaps a woman or two, and sets a cottage on fire from which Frankenstein's family barely escapes. The now underdeveloped character has similar sensory experiences that the novel presents, such as a "sensitiveness of light and air," burning his hand in a fire, expressing "surprise and pleasure," and being soothed by the harp playing of the kind, blind man, De Lacey (Peake 146). These experiences provide opportunities to show the vulnerability of the Monster. Nevertheless, without the ability to talk, the increasing anger and violence of the Monster is more alarming than understandable. Steven Earl Forry writes, "Melodramatizations, concerned as they were with action, did not really desire to exhibit the mind of the Creature coming into Lockean awareness" (22). Silencing the Monster makes the character unsympathetic. The condemnation of his evil actions is easy.

In these early adaptations, which also include the successful play by Henry M. Milner titled *Frankenstein; or, The Man and The Monster*, we

meet a Dr. Frankenstein who feels tremendous guilt about his creation despite the monster's largely ineffective path of destruction. Frankenstein declares, "What have I cast on the world?," and "I am the father of a thousand murders" (Peake 43; Milner 198). His statements appear to solidify the moral tone of these plays, rather than illustrating significant despair, which is evident by how quickly his guilt dissipates through the course of the play. The moral ambiguity and guilt of Dr. Frankenstein is eradicated in the 1820s stage adaptions as he becomes driven to stop and kill the Monster. Unlike the novel, the melodramas show the evil Monster and his overly ambitious Creator dying abruptly, leaving the normal status quo intact and minimally affected. Neither character possesses a self-awareness that allows them to explain their failures before death as they do, eloquently so in Shelley's novel. Instead the playwrights depict the characters' actions as inherently corrupt and immoral. The question of morality in these early plays is not whether the Creature is threatening, but the act of even daring to create and experiment is dangerous and socially unethical. The early melodramas establish that society has no place for ungoverned progress and unbridled ambition. The lesson was clear: experimenting in such an immoral way is wrong theologically and socially, and it will bring terrible consequences for those who do so. This might include death by volcano, as seen in *The Man and The Monster*, when the Creature jumps into a volcanic crater after stabbing Dr. Frankenstein.

Through the rest of the nineteenth century, Frankenstein and his Creature appeared on stage in melodramas and burlesques. There were several parodies including *Frank-in-Steam*, *Frankenstitch*, and the 1849 *Frankenstein, or The Model Man* by Richard and Barnabas Brough. The Monster in this parody quickly speaks and even sings a song, much like we see in the film and musical *Young Frankenstein*. By play's end the Monster is a dapper, cleaned up gentleman, and Frankenstein tells him, "Come to my arms you wild young rascal do, I don't mind saying I'm

proud of you" (Brough 249). The story of Frankenstein had gained enough cultural currency that these parodies were understood as clever deviations from the novel, but they showed the Monster could only be tolerated if it were comedic and non-threatening.

During this time, the Monster also became a political cartoon favorite used to "lambast the passage of the Reform Bill, labor unrest and the Irish Question" (Forry 43). In the evolving mythology of Frankenstein, fears of progress by many social and political factions of the population became equated with the monstrous and unstoppable Creature that needed to be suppressed. Strangely, the early political cartoons conflated Frankenstein and the Monster. In many images the Monster is renamed Frankenstein. Today it is still hard to see an image of the Creature, often bearing a resemblance to Karloff, and not call it Frankenstein. George Levine is one of many to address the frequent "doubleness" of Frankenstein and the Creature. He writes, "So pervasive has been the recognition that the Monster and Frankenstein are two aspects of the same being that the writers…assume rather than argue it" (Levine 15). Levine adds that the confusion replicates the story's theme of "the divided self," where "Frankenstein's obsession with science is echoed in the monster's obsession with destruction" (15). Although part of the elision of the Creature and Frankenstein is due to their shared ambition, it is worth noting the characters similarly share parallel feelings of overwhelming isolation and loneliness. This very duality of Frankenstein and the Creature was engagingly played within the 2011 production where two actors alternate between the roles. In the developing mythology of Frankenstein and its recurring use as a warning against progress, both the image of the dangerous Creature and the word *Frankenstein* have become equal forms linked to the concept that progress may produce uncontrollable and destructive results. The Creature and Frankenstein may be viewed as "two monsters," equally complicit in the terror of progress (Smith, "Contextual" 191).

The myth of Frankenstein embraced its most formidable shape in the 1930s Universal Studio films directed by James Whale. Loosely based on Peggy Webling's 1927 play *Frankenstein: An Adventure in the Macabre*, the first film kept Webling's version of the monster as a simple-minded character. From the crackling sounds and lightning strikes of the creation scene, to Karloff's strange appearance and stilted walk, to Dr. Frankenstein's mad cry, "It's alive!," the 1931 *Frankenstein* has left a monolithic imprint on public imagination. Unlike prior dramatizations, in the 1931 film, the Monster is given an abnormal brain. That decision makes the Monster sub-human, and a character incapable of being reasoned with. The zombielike creation, perhaps a sign of the times, can "be interpreted as a premonition of the dangers of the then rising fascist ideology" (Zakharieva 419). The only option to stop the Creature is death. The *Frankenstein* film ends with a lynching mob chasing the Monster into a windmill, which is then set on fire with torches. The dominant ideological belief that social bodies should govern acts of progress is shown in the "traditional and reactionary" vengeance of the angry mob, which is "ambiguously endorsed" (O'Flinn 39). Returning to Barthes, the ending depicts how social bodies should govern acts of progress through communal violence. As Noël Carroll suggested in his book *The Philosophy of Horror*, the ideological significance of the ending shows the norm reconstituted and the Creature "vanquished by the forces of normal" (199). The dangerous progress created by Dr. Frankenstein was no match for the community that collectively acted to preserve society. That is until the sequel proves otherwise.

Frankenstein continued to be dramatized for film and stage through the second half of the twentieth century. If the 1930s films depicted an increasing social isolation and "general disillusion following World War I and preceding the Great Depression," the dramatizations post World War II and in the midst of the Cold War exemplified fears that had been realized (Forry 93). The scientist capable of using his knowledge to create

an act of terror was witnessed in the horrors of the concentration camps and the Manhattan Project. O'Flinn discusses the changes seen in the popular film adaption *The Curse of Frankenstein* where there is a definite "shift in the structure of fears within the dominant ideology" (O'Flinn 42). In the film, Dr. Frankenstein recklessly murders without any sign of guilt, and he enjoys the horrific acts carried out by his pawn, the Monster. The Monster is simply the destructive agent released upon the world by the evil and mad Dr. Frankenstein.

The Living Theatre's 1966 *Frankenstein* also commented on the troubling state of the world, but did so distinctly differently than popular films. At one point during the play Dr. Frankenstein asks the audience, "How can we end human suffering?" (Biner 121). The Creature/Monster is not a character in Judith Malina's groundbreaking play. Instead, the Creature is an assembly of ideas shaped by human experience and visually represented by a group of people and the outline of a head constructed within the stage design. The Living Theatre's *Frankenstein*, with its broad themes of how to end turmoil and suffering, illustrates the damage and authentic anxiety that technological and scientific progress had already caused and could potentially continue to cause. Yet, the Living Theatre's *Frankenstein* portrays a hope for a "new universal humanity, not merely the Faustian power of the creator" (Lavalley 278). The Creature becomes a symbol of the potential for creation and progress to be good, despite cycles where humanity acts otherwise. Albert J. Lavalley writes, "The Living Theater's insight into the positive side of Mary Shelley's novel is perhaps the most striking feature of the production" (279).

Arguably the most common use of the Frankenstein myth in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century is its application to science and technology. What were once scientific fantasies are becoming realities. The ability to create life in a laboratory is no longer an impossibility given the progress in fertility sciences and artificial life. The Creature in response to these advances has returned from characterizations

of being a silent Monster to once again being an intelligent speaking character. This was evident in Victor Gialanella's 1981 failed Broadway adaptation, where Frankenstein states before his Creation, "We stand at the threshold of a new age of man. The dawn of a new species who will bless us as their creators" (23). The machines pulsate, lightning crashes, but the creation appears a failure. The Creature is left alone in the laboratory, but then "sits bolt upright with a deep horrendous scream…sits for a moment, breathing deeply as it recovers from the violence of its birth" (Gialanella 26). As soon as the Creature sets out into the world and is greeted by the terror and hatred of humanity, he resembles Shelley's Creature.

In these later dramatizations, the Creature is once again articulate and thoughtful, developing a sharp awareness that "I am not as other men. I have memories…pain" (Gialanella 41). The Creature seeks answers, help, and companionship from Frankenstein, yet Frankenstein is incapable and unwilling. The complicity of both characters is evident in Gialanella's script, where their lives end in the laboratory, juxtaposing where life began. Despite the adherence to the novel, Gialanella's play was a critical and commercial failure. After closing the day after its premiere director Tom Moore told the *New York Times*, "We didn't attempt to say anything with a message in 'Frankenstein.' We attempted to make a grand entertainment - a spectacle - and we did" (Lawson). Despite it being a Broadway flop, the adaptation continues to be staged in theatres across the country. Of course there are many dramatic adaptations of Frankenstein that have equally failed in terms of quality or commercial success. This has seldom deterred writers from adapting the work again.

The evolution of the myth is apparent in Clive Barker's *Frankenstein in Love*, which retells the story as a post-Frankensteinian world where the evil doctor never stopped creating a series of Creatures. As conventional as Gialanella's adaptation is, Barker's play heads in the opposite direction. The darker, anarchic themes introduced in The Living Theatre's

Frankenstein form Clive Barker's adaptation. Barker, one of the most prolific film directors and authors in the horror genre, crafted the play full of shocking descriptions and gory events, yet it manages to find moments of humor based in its own ludicrousness. Frankenstein, now an old man, never stopped with his first Creature and instead assembled and tortured masses of new beings. The progress portrayed here is ripped from a scary movie: the future could be horrific if the Dr. Frankensteins of the world continue their experiments. If there is a hero in this performance, it is the Creature, named El Coco. The monstrosity of El Coco pales to Frankenstein. Frankenstein has men tear the flesh off the Creature's body, demanding "Unman him, unmake him" (Barker 199). Yet, El Coco survives and sews himself together again. He pursues Frankenstein, as he always does, and reappears before his maker stating, "Couldn't I pass for a man?...And so, appearing to be a man, I claim the right of every natural son: to murder his father" (Barker 238). With new subplots, characters, and a guerilla revolution backdrop, the story's base is composed of the same enduring binary of the Creature and Frankenstein and their strange, unresolvable relationship. Barker's play continues to be popular due to his careful and entertaining manipulation of the Frankenstein story. It is an exciting adaptation due to its originality and its celebration of the horror undertones that have always been present in the novel.

The story of Frankenstein reappears on stages and screens introducing new dramatizations every year. The recent 2012 Tim Burton film *Frankenweenie* demonstrates that Frankenstein still has fruit to bear. The adaptation is a homage to the 1931 film and focuses on a young boy reanimating his deceased dog. The history of Frankenstein as performance shows the endless possibilities as previous adaptations have ranged from melodramas in the 1820s, multiple comedies and parodies, films throughout the twentieth century, and dramatic adaptations in the last half of the twentieth century that are bizarre or conventional. Few other stories have had as many lives as Frankenstein. While some of these

dramatizations are now a mere footnote, they contributed to the lasting fascination of Frankenstein and sustained or created the patterns that dramatizations continue to use. The lively creation scenes, the lowly, laboratory assistant, the maniacal Frankenstein, and the silent Monster are just some of the recurring patterns that consistently resurface in dramatizations that do not appear in Shelley's novel. In the 2011 production Nick Dear and Danny Boyle crafted their play with the history of dramatizations in mind and were aware they owed as much to that performance history as they did to the novel. They created an adaptation that merges patterns with their own originality by placing the Creature as the central character.

The Creature in the National Theatre's 2011 adaptation evolves from a wailing, immobile newborn to a highly articulate and rational Creature who grasps the suffering of humanity. The Creature is frustrated by the inability to explain his own existence in the world, "I discover how much I do not know. Ideas batter me like hailstones. Questions but no answers? Who am I? Where am I from?" (Dear 22). The Creature is introduced to a world that continues to bombard his senses as he slowly develops the ability to walk and speak. He is incapable of relating to people because he does not look, walk, or speak "normally." At one point "*He stands and addresses us: a speech of confusion and sometimes distress, but without actual words*" (Dear 8). With no one to talk to and no one to care for him, the Creature pieces together the world he encounters. With De Lacey, the Creature forges a friendship that lasts for months, unparalleled in previous dramatizations. The Creature is fascinated and repulsed by the ways of man. He questions De Lacey why people choose to live in cities, why humans are good but massacre each other, and why De Lacey has to live a life of poverty.

Dr. Frankenstein in comparison is a cold and naïve scientist who is urged to create a companion for the Creature after the Creature appeals to his egotism. Victor is an arrogant, single-minded man who may have been

drawn to science given his complete incompetence in understanding human beings beyond their organic matter. Frankenstein, unable to confide to anyone the cause of his anxiety, appears cold and "cruelly distant, arrogantly self-involved" (Taylor). Frankenstein in the many films and plays has appeared in a range of characterizations from the faulted hero, to the guilty but crazed scientist, to the man with no remorse at all, and to the overwhelmed youth who cannot forgive himself for his creation. Here Victor is keenly intelligent, calculatingly composed despite moments of terror and anxiety, and never entirely remorseful given his pride and inability to reach emotional depths. His loneliness is obvious, but appears as a result of his natural demeanor.

Boyle and Dear knew the Creature in past dramatizations had been relegated to a one-dimensional monster, or as Boyle says, "a dud" (Boyle and Dear). The largest consideration for Dear in adapting the story was placing the Creature in the center to add vitality to the story. The explanation of Victor Frankenstein's interest in his experiment, his connections to his family and friends, and the empathetic appeal of Frankenstein are in many ways reduced to the background. Michael Billington writes that the focus on the Creature "downplay[s] some of Shelley's themes," and Victor's "initial hubris in animating lifeless matter is minimized." Focusing predominantly on the Creature shapes the audiences' perception and inevitably loses aspects of Victor's history and relationships. Nevertheless, as Billington argues, "If there are loses, there are also huge gains." In the history of dramatizations the myth perseveres. The hopes of these writers and directors is that what is lost is not mourned, and what is added successfully brings a new life to the story. Dear and Boyle attempted to try something different with *Frankenstein*. They succeeded.

The play interestingly ends unlike many before. The two characters remain alive. Dear and Boyle's play ends with both men exiting into the "*icy distance, the Creature prancing in front of Victor, who struggles after*

him" (Dear 80). There is no rewarding redemption or punishment of death for either. The ambiguous resolution, where both characters live their last days in a mixture of dependence, loneliness, and hatred, exemplifies the confusing times in which we live. Paul Taylor describes the last scene as a "luminously ice-green Arctic" where both men "survive, umbilically linked in the kind of perpetual deathly symbiosis that would pass muster in Dante's Inferno" (Taylor).

As stated previously, endings of Frankenstein dramatizations often provide what Noël Carroll has described as a reconstitution of norms. The death of one or both characters resolves the harm caused by them, and the characters embody what happens when man crosses too many boundaries. If an ideological message can be derived from the 2011 ending, it would seem to reflect that man has perhaps passed the ability to be governed in his ambitions of progress. Today our fear of progress is realized. The progress in industrial development in the last two hundred years has led to devastating pollution and global warming. The push for financial dominance, fostered by greedy individuals, banks, and corporations, seems unstoppable despite the recession and slow recovery. Despite our progress in technology, anxiety rises as certain countries develop nuclear weapons and we are uncertain how they will use them. We hear words like bioterrorism, and we do not know all the ways 'scientists' are working on experiments with unknown catastrophic consequences. Our fears of progress are justifiable, given how progress can create long-lasting and damaging results. Critic Charles McNulty for the *Los-Angeles Times* watched the 2011 play and reflected on how Frankenstein still speaks to our culture. McNulty writes:

> But the story of a scientist rivaling God for earthly dominion seems to me uniquely pertinent at a time when the costs (economic, political and ecological) of mankind's breathtaking scientific advances have never been more evident.

The story of Dr. Frankenstein and his Creature continues to find resonance as the myth continues to adapt to the times. The story has proven to be malleable to the many additions writers have made and the public adheres to and uses the myth of Frankenstein. In reflection on Barthes's explanation about the making of myths, Frankenstein has transformed into a collectively owned myth with a multitude of uses. In many ways Frankenstein has become unilaterally applied to so many moments of progress and anxieties that the story is "evolving in ways which are hard to pin down exactly" (Turney 26). George Levine acutely summarizes that the myth "has achieved its special place in modern consciousness through its extraordinary resistance to simple resolutions and its almost inexhaustible possibilities of significance."(18).

The fear of progress the myth conjures has been focused primarily on the scientific and technological in the twentieth century, but the rogue scientist who refuses to listen to government in 2011 is parallel to the rogue monster who represents the disenfranchised working class in the 1800s. Both represent a fear of the individual who acts in a potentially disruptive way that counters socially accepted norms. The use of the Frankenstein myth as a tool to frighten the public embodies a Barthesian-constructed ideology. The actual complexity of the Frankenstein story and the Creature's reasons for being destructive are lost when the word *Frankenstein* is used to reference potentially uncontrollable manmade disaster. Barthes analyzed how history is transformed into nature by mythologies: the idea seems natural by now that *Frankenstein* is something to fear. Maybe this is why the story is continually performed. After all, every time Dr. Frankenstein animates his Creature the entertained audience is not surprised but still curiously awaiting to see what happens next.

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Discipline and Policing: HBO's *The Wire* as a Critique of Modern American Culture

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It has approximately been seven years since the final episode of HBO's *The Wire* aired in March 2008. From 2002 to 2008, critics hailed the wildly successful series as accurately depicting the harsh realities of black, inner-city, urban life in the midst of the decaying and postindustrial city Baltimore. Yet, despite critics' praise that *The Wire* is an aesthetic production most closely aligned with social realism, our analysis focuses on how *The Wire* attempts to not only remain faithful to the everyday conditions and situations that individuals face in inner-city of Baltimore, but it also provides a firm critique of the institutions that the show depicts. The cultural distinctions dividing show characters from modern, American institutions reveal that, at the heart of *The Wire*, lays a critique of the institutions that shape the American, cultural landscape driven by the capitalist project.

J. M. Tyree, in "*The Wire*: The Complete Fourth Season," notes that the moral universe of *The Wire* is structured like a Greek tragedy, but that the series ultimately has more epic qualities that align it with Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* (36). Given the praise *The Wire* received from critics, it's no surprise that the series has sparked the interest of academics who are now putting the series under the same analytic scrutiny as classics in American film and literature. Most academics are using *The Wire* to expose problems within contemporary

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culture in regards to issues of race and economic inequality. For example, the University of Michigan dedicated an entire conference to the series in January of 2009 entitled "'Heart of a City': Black Urban Life on *The Wire*." In the conference, presenters included a range of topics from sex trafficking and neoliberalism to *The Wire* and Barack Obama. *The Los Angeles Sentinel* also reported, in December 2010, that the 60-episode series would be used as a "textbook" for a course at John Hopkins University in which students explored the economic and social problems faced by big cities. And shortly before that course was designed at John Hopkins, Harvard Kennedy School professor and prominent American sociologist, William Julius Wilson, announced that *The Wire* would play an instrumental role in his class on urban inequality in an article for *The Washington Post* (Chaddha and Wilson 1).

The impact of *The Wire* also made its way into Capitol Hill. In a recent article from *The Atlantic*, Ray Gustini reports that attorney general Eric Holder "will not rest until HBO brings back *The Wire*." This was a statement made after the attorney general invited three actors from *The Wire*-Wendell Pierce (Det. Bunk Moreland), Sonja Sohn (Det. Kima Greggs), and Jim True-Frost (Roland Pryzbylewski)–to join him on Capitol Hill to announce his newly constructed anti-drug public relations campaign ("Eric Holder Will Not Rest" 1). Show creator, David Simon, responded to Holder's statement in *The National Journal*: "I've spoken to Ed Burns and we are prepared to go to work on season six of *The Wire* if the Department of Justice is equally ready to reconsider and address its continuing prosecution of our misguided, destructive, and dehumanizing drug prohibition" ("The Wire Creator David Simon has a Counter-Offer" 1). However, despite academic and political interest, there still remains an extremely limited amount of published scholarship compared to its level of praise. To our knowledge, an edited collection by Tiffany Potter and C. W. Marshall entitled *The Wire: Urban Decay and American Television* and Rafael Alvarez's *The Wire: Truth Be Told*, are the only full-length

books on the series and only a handful of scholarly articles have been published regarding *The Wire*.

Our goal, then, is to add to this limited body of scholarship in a fashion that does not reduce the series to hard-boiled social realism or deterministic American naturalism. The journal *Criticism* recently dedicated two issues to *The Wire* that helps develop this new critical frame. In the Fall and Summer 2010 issue, Fredric Jameson notes in "Realism and Utopia in *The Wire*" that the "realism" presented in *The Wire* is not simply a realist narrative. Instead, "*The Wire* can be observed to be ceasing to replicate a static reality or to be 'realist' in the traditional mimetic and replicative sense" (Jameson 365). In the same issue, Leigh Claire La Berge argues in "Capitalist Realism and Serial Form: The Fifth Season of *The Wire*," that the series, and realism itself, need to be understood in terms of the dynamics of capitalism. She calls this "capitalist realism," and defines it as "the realistic representation of the commodification of realism" (La Berge 552).

In a similar light, we argue and demonstrate that *The Wire* may be understood as nothing short of a critique of modernity's institutions and, by extension, a critique of the broader American culture itself. In fact, it is not a stretch to suggest that each season critiques a prominent phenomenon that is rooted in modern America: policing and technological surveillance, unionization vis-à-vis capitalism, democratic politics, public schools, and print media. In this way, the piece at hand interacts with Anmol Chaddha and William Julius Wilson's "'Way Down in the Hole': Systemic Urban Inequality and *The Wire*," which analyzes political and social systems within *The Wire*, but ultimately tilts in favor of presenting brilliant and convincing sociological data. Thus, we want to strike a balance and show how these institutions are represented within *The Wire*, while augmenting the scenes discussed with sociological data. We draw lightly on Michel Foucault and focus on Season Four to disclose *The Wire's* critique of statistical analysis – the science of the state – and

technologies of surveillance in policing, a discussion further situated by the disciplinary tactics in public schools that resemble the prison industrial complex.

Season Four of *The Wire*

Season Four of *The Wire* introduces the viewers to Baltimore city schools. It is important to understand that the institutions of modernity are never dealt with in isolation, rather, they are understood in relation to other institutions. Throughout the course of the introduction sequence, we see shots from the city of Baltimore. The sequence begins with images of drug runners and eventually moves to show a glimpse of a murder scene. The introduction continues from images of "corner boys," who appear to be very young (somewhere around 10 years old), to a shot of the two hit men, Chris Partlow (Gbenga Akinnagbe) and Felicia 'Snoop' Pearson (Felicia Pearson), which eventually transitions to show politicians and then a political debate with Thomas 'Tommy' Carcetti (Aiden Gillen). The final shot of the introduction is triggered by a school bell and shows a crowd of students in maroon uniforms being ushered into school. Here we see the show trying to disclose the tight connection between life in the inner-city and the knowledge produced in the school. Thus, in this season, *The Wire* explicitly critiques the idea that a city can maintain a viable and successful school system while life outside of the school is partially constituted by murder, drugs, and corrupt and opportunistic politicians who ultimately leave schools severely underfunded.

Critique of the School System

The Wire is not simply critiquing modernity from the standpoint of failing schools, but is also suggesting that schools cannot help but fail against the

backdrop of the daily reality these kids face combined with the underfunding of schools in general. As a result schools operate as a space that warehouses youth in preparation for prison, as there is little room for them in a society governed by the mandates of capitalism. This is made most clear by Howard 'Bunny' Colvin (Robert Wisdom) in "Corner Boys." In that episode, the "corner kids" targeted in the pilot program practice adverting trouble in school so as to avoid trouble in the street. In one scene, Bunny tells Namond Brice (Julito McCullum) to put his magazine down and to focus on the day's instruction. Bunny adds: "You know, we're givin' them a free education. 'it ain't even mine,' it was just laying here when I came in. You know this right here, this whole damn school, the way they carry themselves; it's training for the street. The building is the system, we the cops" ("Corner Boys").

Ideally, American schools embody the physical location for transmitting cultural values, thus making it possible to leave the streets behind in order to obtain enough cultural capital to join the American enterprise. However, we see the reverse occurring; the schools have become, as Bunny stresses, "training for the street." Schools now function as revolving doors in which the troubles on the streets continually press on the school. As a result, schools merely become sites to process and train future criminals as schools take on the disciplinary logic usually reserved for prisons. In other words, students are being pushed out of schools and into prisons.

The first episode of the fourth season, "Boys of Summer," explicitly makes the connection between the harsh reality of the street and the mentality it breeds. The school itself no longer provides a viable means for improving the conditions of West Baltimore's youth due to the daily realities of black urban life and the failed attempts by schools to "educate" American citizens. About a third of the way through the episode, Namond makes a request to his drug lieutenant, Preston 'Bodie' Broadus (J. D. Williams), to be relieved early from work so he can go shopping for back-

to-school clothes. In reality, Namond and his friends are planning a prank to fill water balloons with urine to get back at those who attacked Duquan 'Dukie' Weems (Jermaine Crawford) on his way back from school. In response to Namond's request Bodie says, "What do you need back to school stuff for? Your ass stay suspended. If it wasn't for social promotion your ass would still be in Pre-K, mother*cker. Probably daycare out this bitch. You owe me extra time tomorrow" ("Boys of Summer"). This particular instance not only reveals Namond and Bodie's lack of concern for education and also the school's lack of concern for its very students, but it also suggests that Namond is learning and working more on the corner than he is school. In addition, the scene levels a critique against conservative punitive disciplinary policies arguing that zero-tolerance disciplinary measures deprive kids of their education, forcing them into illicit means to earn a living, and failing to make schools a safer place (Gonzalez 282).

Culturally, value is exclusively located within measures of productivity, regardless of what is being sold. Hence Bodie quips after granting Namond's request: "pay this late-to-work, early-to-leave motherf*cker out" ("Boys of Summer"). The embrace of capitalism on behalf of the youth, in particular criminals, appears throughout *The Wire*, demonstrating the ways in which American culture remains bounded by capitalist intentions and how the desires capitalism produces can lead to illegal activity to obtain those ends. For example, the sociopath and criminal Marlo 'Black' Stanfield (Jamie Hector) embraces a common capitalist adage when he tells Michael Lee that "the early bird gets that worm, yo" ("That Got His Own"). Within this embrace of capitalistic bureaucracy, however, lies a scathing, albeit implicit, critique: urban inner-city youth are willing to work if they are afforded other means and more inclusion in the capitalist system. Through this formal technique *The Wire* uses the logic of capitalism to attack the culture of capitalism itself

by arguing that marginalized and displaced individuals are necessary (by)products of the capitalist machinery.

That the school functions like a prison is further crystallized about a third of the way through the sixth episode, "Margin of Error," as Namond responds to the assertion that these students have repeatedly proven that they are not ready for a regular classroom. He says, "Ready for gen[eral] pop[ulation]. This is prison, yo. And we're in solitary and sh*t." Bunny replies: "That's good, son. This is solitary. This is a hole up in here." In this scene, we see explicitly that the school is being critiqued for resembling prisons by taking on its measures and tactics for disciplining subjects. The school is essentially training those deemed as "bad students" for prison life, not for school. *The Wire* calls attention to the problem that modern schools often function as institutions that work to contain children in a prison-like fashion, instead of preparing them to be academically successful and socially viable.

In essence, we see a breakdown in the American dream because the school now functions as a pipeline to prison. *The Wire* truthfully depicts the reality of schools concerning the broader social concerns in the United States where 37% of African American male high-school dropouts are incarcerated (Pettit and Western 13). In fact, as Michelle Alexander argues so persuasively, "The nature of the criminal justice system has changed. It is no longer primarily concerned with the prevention and punishment of crime, but rather with the management and control of the dispossessed" (188). Such management, what Alexander defines as the "New Jim Crow," finds its localized expression in the schools, which now function in places like Baltimore to manage the transition of bodies from a place of education to a warehouse of the "dispossessed."

The classification of subjects by experts exercises itself in a more individualized fashion in the seventh episode of season four, "Unto Others." Foucault suggests that there are no longer individuals; there are only "types" of subjects – "the delinquent" or "bad student" for example –

who have been classified as objects of knowledge to be categorized and disciplined by experts. After Namond tells Miss Duquette (Stacie Davis) that he did not wear his uniform because he felt that such clothing was no longer necessary outside the normal classroom setting, one of the experts tells Bunny that "Darnell has a drinking problem, and Namond, we believe, suffers from conduct disorder issues." Also, after Chandra Porter (Na' Dric Jennings) acts in an unruly manner after being criticized for doing her hair, the experts continue with their classification of her: "oppositional defiant personality. An extreme case" ("Unto Others").

In this instance, the producers are attempting to make an extended critique regarding how individual behavior is shaped and structured by one's material surroundings. This claim can be extended to argue that *The Wire* also seeks to show the futility of addressing what are essentially social (read: structural) problems at an individual level, and are thereby suggesting that the only real solution is broad based socio-cultural changes that address greater problems (such as the decaying city, failing schools, and ubiquitous violence). Thus, *The Wire* discloses how such practices become self-fulfilling prophecies because the teachers do not expect much from the students, and in turn, the students accomplish very little. Namond is aware of this tension and attempts to exploit it to his advantage by purposefully acting out so that he can be suspended from school. The classification and utilization of experts is not isolated to this particular episode, nor is the critique of institutional attempts to identify and pathologize psychological "disorders."

In "Corner Boys," the eighth episode, this connection is made explicitly clear when Miss Duquette separates erroneously "corner logic" from particular disorders. After realizing that their program is a success yet at the same time uncharted territory, Miss Duquette and Bunny express concern about how to continue and move forward:

> Miss Duquette: The ones with deeper problem, they opted out.
>
> Bunny: Deeper problems?
>
> Miss Duquette: We're not just up against corner logic in there. I'm seeing oppositional defiant disorders, clinical depression, post-traumatic stress. And with the girl Chandra, borderline psychosis, maybe. ("Corner Boys")

Not only does Miss Duquette divorce "corner logic" from the particular "disorders" that she locates and uses to construct the subjects under her gaze, but she also places the types of disorders in a hierarchy when she appears to be stunned by Chandra's mental state. This is apparent through her pause and hesitation before she states her diagnosis to Bunny and Professor David Parenti (Dan DeLuca) that Chandra might suffer from "border line psychosis." Again, we see the experts separating "corner logic" from particular "disorders," the social from the psychological, the structural from the individual, thereby indicating that the problems inner-city youth face can be dealt with on a case-by-case, individualized basis, as opposed to acknowledging that it is precisely the "corner logic" (social structures determined by unrestrained capitalism) that may in fact be responsible for the disorders themselves. With this in mind, we argue that *The Wire* itself levels a critique against American culture by addressing the problem of arch-individualism that characterizes the modern project by showing that individuals are in fact byproducts of the conditions that produce them, in this instance "corner logic."

Foucault also gives significant consideration to the role of the examination as a unique disciplinary tactic that works to not only order and hierarchize individuals by ranking them, but also as a ritualized tactic that turns students into objects of knowledge. In his *Discipline and Punish,* Foucault says:

> The examination enabled the teacher, while transmitting his knowledge, to transform his pupils into a whole field of knowledge… in this space of domination, disciplinary power manifests its potency, essentially, by arranging objects. The examination is, as it were, the ceremony of this objectification. (186)

The Wire clearly details how the Maryland State Exam (MSA) turns students into objects of knowledge by putting their performance under the gaze of expert administrators. This is articulated by the assistant principle of Edward J. Tilghman Middle School, Marcia Donnelly (Susan 'Tootsie' Duvall), in the ninth episode of season four, "Know Your Place." In this episode, while in a meeting with faculty members, the administrators noticed that only 22% of students meet the state's minimum requirement in reading and math. In turn she proposes "curriculum alignment" that will teach the test directly to create a 10% improvement rate. *The Wire* also discloses the ritualized nature of the exam in the tenth episode of the same season, "Misgivings," when Grace Sampson (Dravon James) tells Det. Roland 'Prez' Pryzbylewski (Jim True-Frost) that "From now 'til they're done, everything is about the test," suggesting that he move to 90 minute block classes and focus solely on Math and Language Arts. However, *The Wire* analyzes the role of the exam in schools only to provide a critique against its implementation.

The critique comes through in the twelfth ("That's Got his Own") and thirteenth ("Final Grades") episodes. In "That's Got his Own," Parenti, a professor of Sociology, poignantly acknowledges that the "Test material doesn't actually speak to their world." More acerbic critiques of the exam are shown in "Final Grades," when Prez appears to be excited by the fact that 38% of students met state requirements, only to be disappointed when he discovers how easy it is to manipulate the stats of the test. In this episode Prez learns that 'proficient' means two grades below actual grade level, and that 'advanced' indicates at grade level or just below. The

manipulation of statistics is thus ongoing in *The Wire*, and plays a crucial role in The Wire's critique of statistical policing that situates both the school-to-prison narrative and corresponding politics of season four.

Critique of Policing and the War on Drugs

Nowhere is the critique of policing and the war on drugs more evident than in the mayoral election during season four, when we see a reliance on police value, influence, and public-safety success. We are first introduced to Tommy as a Baltimore councilman, when he takes affront with the high crime rates presented by then Acting Commissioner of Police, Ervin H. Burrell (Frankie Faison) in "All Due Respect." Both Tommy's career path (from councilman to mayoral candidate to mayor to candidate for governor) and the decline of Ervin's career revolve around an imagined relationship between statistics and public safety/police success. Both exemplify the problematic careerism and statistical abuse of the modern political bureaucrat, embodied most aptly in season four by the incumbent mayor of Baltimore, Clarence V. Royce (Glynn Turman). As made increasingly clear throughout this season, the relationship between career success, perceptions of improvement, and statistical indicators becomes possible only within a modern ideology that determines who and what is valuable through statistical analyses. In this way, statistic-based policing unveils the social violence of relying on modern statistical measures as indicators of political and social achievement.

Consequently, whereas the show powerfully captures the constant battle to survive in Baltimore, we want to complicate Jacob Weisberg's interpretation that

> What ultimately makes *The Wire* uplifting amid the heartbreak it conveys is its embodiment of a spirit that Barack Obama calls 'the audacity of hope.' It is filled with characters who should quit but

> don't, not only the boys themselves but teachers, cops, ex-cops, and ex-cons who lose their hearts to them (1).

Such an interpretation, veiled as it is by a cultural mirage of progress and hope, ultimately fails to capture how American institutions, determined and justified through statistical measures, can fail populations, often with exceedingly violent and racialized results. Mired within a critique of free market capitalism, Simon creates a season that exposes the ways in which the instruments of the state sequester "a place where the deprivation is so deep that it challenges our conception of what America is" (Wallace-Wells 48). In doing so, *The Wire* suggests that the focus and methodology of modern policing functions according to a racist logic seeking to jail people as quickly as possible to bolster police effectiveness.

By emphasizing the political battle between Clarence and Tommy, the fourth season directly addresses the political game of statistics, capturing how bureaucratic decisions between career politicians do next to nothing in addressing the daily reality of "corner boys." Accused by Clarence during the first mayoral debate of stoking fears and playing on people's imaginations regarding the streets of Baltimore, Tommy captures the sense in which statistical measures of policing function politically, often ignoring real socio-cultural and economic concerns in favor of numbers that determine one's worth and value within the institutions of America ("Soft Eyes"). In a moment of honesty, Tommy responds by highlighting the corruptibility of statistical policing while implicitly affirming its value:

> Any statistics coming from the police department cannot be trusted because under this mayor the police are more concerned with protecting Clarence Royce politically than fighting crime. There's no leadership, and morale has never been lower.

During a strategy session the day before the debate, Tommy responds to concerns that he cannot overcome the reality that even if he beats Clarence

in the debate, he will "still wake up white in a city that ain't." This captures the malleability and politicization of statistical policing. Furthermore, when discussing his strategy, Tommy states:

> He comes at me with race and some bullsh*t crime stats. I ignore the race thing and counter by noting that homicides are up 15% even though other violent crime stats are down 12%. I point out this does not make sense unless Royce is cooking the crime stats making robberies, rapes and assaults disappear. I suggest the mayor is not telling the truth about crime in the City. ("Soft Eyes")

Tommy's essential strategy, however, indicates how even critiques of the statistical processes of modernity often function in, and are filtered through, the same institutions that elicit the criticism. This narrative, while propelling Tommy to the mayoral office, ultimately traps Tommy as well because to operate through statistics requires bold, measurable results, and when reality does not accord with promises or perceptions, then these tools of the state often devolve into endless spirals of manipulation and further regularization ("Soft Eyes"). In the place of progress and improvement, *The Wire* remains circular, capturing the constant negotiation between forgotten people and quantifiable political progress.

The relationship between political office and quantifiable results, consequently, dissolves the daily experiences of a people or place into a mere statistical indicator, equipping politicians and modern social scientists with a way to "track" failures and successes, thereby legitimating a method to proclaim, and "measure," degrees of improvement. Yet as the episodes in season four make clear, such indicators simply veil or hide daily conditions, allowing for the manipulation of populations, the ability to "juice" or "cook" the numbers and, most insidiously as all five seasons emphasize, the forgetting of a people and a place. *The Wire*'s critical intervention into the mechanisms of modern biopolitics and modes of governmentality, thereby, reveal the

menacing underbelly of statistical analysis as it manifests in American culture.

Beyond mere numbers, *The Wire* depicts bodies in action—or bodies acted on—in order to expose a double-bind; in its preoccupation with bodies that betray America's expectations of them, the show also reflects a persistent mythology of autonomy in an era of paradoxically increasing discipline, regularization and unchecked capitalism. By bringing to life the varied experiences of bodies within this grand statistical machine, *The Wire*, to borrow from Jason Vest's recent chapter on the show, ultimately "reveals the exhaustion of American confidence in 21st-century bureaucracies that demean, diminish, and degrade the lives of average citizens" (Vest 171). As creator and executive producer Simon himself writes in his introduction to Rafael Alvarez's *"The Wire": Truth be Told*, the show captures what America has lost through the instrumentalization of everyday life, critically demonstrating "what we have left behind in our cities, and at what cost we have done so" (8). The show becomes, in the end, a slow funeral march, Simon continues, for "the other America… ex-steelworkers and ex-longshoremen; street dealers and street addicts, and an army of young men hired to chase the dealers and addicts; whores and johns and men to run the whores and coerce the johns" (Alvarez 8). This irrelevancy, captured so powerfully in *The Wire*'s depiction of the politicking behind Baltimore City's ComStat, is fortified by the constant negotiation between numbers that "speak," numbers that "lie," and numbers that can, and often are, "cooked."

This abject reality becomes most evident following Tommy's election. Portrayed as sincerely concerned with the reality, versus appearance, of crime in Baltimore, Tommy initially sets out to overcome the destructive use of statistical policing. Believing that cooked numbers only function to cover-up the severity and extent of crime in Baltimore, in "Corner Boys," Tommy is rudely introduced to the rip-and-run approach to policing that often accompanies—or worse defines—law enforcement tactics within the

statistical state. This tactic, in which police pursue low-level arrests to bolster stats and thus appear active and effective, does little to nothing in responding to the issues, circumstances, and institutions that construct the daily cityscape of West Baltimore. And it is within this critique that *The Wire* most adeptly draws out the violence of statistical policing. Riding along with officers, Tommy experiences firsthand the tactical implementation of ComStat as undercover officers arrest a man on his way to work who helps the officers procure crack-cocaine in exchange for a small payment. Neither a user, nor a dealer, this man is subsequently arrested by three patrol cars, who celebrate their statistical entrapment by turning to Tommy and declaring "One down" ("Corner Boys"). This perception, that an arrest, regardless of its merit or long-term value, achieves a public safety end, remains just that, a perception enflamed by the equivocation of numbers with police worth and public safety.

The Wire, constantly stressing the repetition that accompanies the modern moment, furthers its concern with this problematic police tactic. Following the celebration of "one down," Tommy witnesses a second arrest in which four police cruisers circle a young man with three-pills. After admitting they are his and that he is a user, the officers threaten the young man with a three-year sentence for dealing on a pre-indicted corner unless he gives up his stash. After repeatedly denying his involvement in the drug trade, and reiterating that the pills are his, the arresting officers continue to berate and threaten the young man with the prospect of being raped in prison. As the young man is led away, the same police officer from the first arrest turns to Tommy and adamantly, and proudly, states, "that's two" ("Corner Boys").

These scenes capture the cultural clashes that embody America's War on Drugs, which produced a 600% increase in the United States' prison population to 2,340,000 inmates, of which 60% are of racial minorities (Provine 49). On the one hand, police officers who care little for improvement and only seek to boost statistical measures of effectiveness

and, on the other, a culture of addiction that is further ostracized by tactics that have made such people expendable. Tommy, enraged by the faulty sincerity of the police he rode along with, confronts Deputy Commissioner William Rawls (John Doman) in the hope of better understanding how petty arrests reflect improvements in public safety. Problematically, as William "honestly" explicates, the modern practice of fusing police success with statistical indicators, and directly correlating these measures with job security, strips the bureaucratic cage of any true morality, and by consequence, an unbiased understanding of justice.

As this scene plays out, *The Wire* relates the statistical reduction of human lives, the ways in which career bureaucrats remove the quotidian from its manipulated image ("Corner Boys"). Confronting William, Tommy states,

> They basically entrap some poor bastard on a bet; haul in $20 worth of drugs. Now they've got to process him, feed him, property voucher his bike. Next thing, they're working on some 14-year-old smoke hound like he's Bin Laden. The big haul there is three vials of cocaine. I mean, are you with this?

Tommy, more concerned with the relationship between the severity of a crime and the resulting cruelty of the punishment, is quickly reminded of the relationship between racialized law and statistical policing. William, always concerned with the representation of policing, completely overlooks Tommy's broader concern. He transfers the conversation from the equity of crime and punishment, to a manipulated system in which career politicians become exclusively concerned with the *image* of public safety, and thus overstress increased street arrests, which, in turn, leads to projects of mass incarcerations as signs of a more secure city/state. To this William, while duplicitously hiding his own reliance on juked numbers, states the odds of the modern, police game:

> It's a numbers game and numbers games breed more numbers games. You need a 20% hike in the hiring of black officers to keep up with the city demographic… Gotta show arrests are up 15, 20%. We'll worry about the quality later. So what you saw out there, it's a con game, a Band-Aid on cancers. So no, I'm not with this, but I do follow orders. ("Corner Boys")

It is precisely this "one down" logic, which has focused on low level street dealers, that has led to 1,100% hike in drug imprisonment since 1980 (Provine 49). Also, because of this racially insidious logic, the United States imprisons more citizens per capita than any other country at 762 per 100,000 (Pettit and Western 9). Referencing continued racial biases and problems of police careerism, this depiction of William captures more than a simple reliance on numbers. It shows the racialized nature of the drug war in its entirety by revealing how police target minority neighborhoods as sites to execute this damaging war because it is easy to make arrests (Provine 49).

Much like its critique of rip-and-run policing, *The Wire* challenges the viewer to accord unedited scenes of violence with a police tactic revolving around monitoring and maintaining the urban landscape, all while patterning local conditions. Rather than deal with the structural problems that help produce and situate forgotten areas, the Broken-Windows Theory contends that aesthetically maintaining material well-being–of physical properties not people–helps prevent the escalation of crime. However, by failing to account for the institutional structures and inequities that predetermine social environments and delimit impact, the Broken-Windows Theory remains surface level only. It represents no more than a figurative, and literally practiced, façade that simply seeks to maintain the permanence of the façade itself. More insidiously, statistical policing, and the ways in which *The Wire* consistently toys with problems of statistical manipulation, can produce any façade desired, regardless of daily realities. What matters are not simply stats that speak, but stats that speak quickly.

In this case, public loitering and open-containers, due to their rip-and-run nature, gain precedence over the quotidian violence *The Wire* portrays in regards to street life in West Baltimore. By objectifying daily experiences into statistics that can be measured, the show illustrates the failure of modern American policing to deal with real structural problems, instead emphasizing that a simple increase or decrease in "perceptible" crime determines the extent and focus of police action. In this scenario, physical violence and real crime remain hidden, veiled behind self-enclosed institutional structures.

As the fourth season comes to a close, *The Wire* turns full circle, situating the structural problems of modern American culture within an endless repetition of symbolic progress. Rather than policies that seek to ameliorate the socio-economic and political realities that banish West Baltimore to statistical manipulation and figurative governance, *The Wire* captures how modern forms of controls operate in destructive circles. Season four of *The Wire* begins within the imagined livelihood of the school and ends with the school as an adapted morgue. In truth, the fourth season of *The Wire* forces the viewer to reconcile the seemingly irreconcilable. In the name of progress, instrumentalization, and rational control, the modern practices of policing and politicking have trapped the subjects of Baltimore and Baltimore itself. This illustrates how systematic disenfranchisement of populations result in cycles of violence that begin, and end, within the very structures and institutions designed to give everyone an "opportunity" to participate in, and benefit from, American culture. These benefits, however, never reach those populations deemed expendable within the modern, capitalist cityscape.

From education to the morgue, from a place of perceived learning to a warehouse for the dead, *The Wire* exposes the ways in which the cold rationality of statistically driven policing and politicians is echoed, and materialized, in the cold rationality of the streets. *The Wire* depicts the very lack of morality that seems to necessarily correspond within this

violent juxtaposition. Yet, while life is held loosely, season four of *The Wire* refuses to situate this amorality as a function of the people; rather, the capitalist driven rationality that drives the modern system finds its ultimate microcosm in West Baltimore's drug trade.

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Performing Ordinary: Politicians, Celebrity, & the Politics of Representation on Entertainment Talk

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> The politician could be authentic but he prefers artifice, simulating to the point of dissimulating. He creates for himself a persona that gets attention and strikes the imagination. He plays a role. Thus we often speak of politicians in a vocabulary borrowed from the theater, referring to 'stars' on the 'political stage' who captivate the 'public' with their 'act' (Gérard Schwartzenberg 8).

> Entertainment celebrity is an imperialist phenomenon, moving into new arenas and making them over in its own image (Gamson 191).

During the 2012 U.S. presidential election, incumbent Barak Obama's Republican challenger, Mitt Romney, took the path less traveled by avoiding the talk show circuit. He did, as we might expect, send his surrogates: his wife, Ann to do his bidding on *The Tonight Show*, *The View*, and *Good Morning America*, and his five sons who chatted with Conan O'Brien on *Late Night*. In actuality, Romney had been scheduled to appear with Ann on the all-women daytime talk show *The View*, but canceled, leaving his wife to diffuse his conspicuous absence by telling a joke. During the now infamous private fundraiser dinner (the 47% video released by *Mother Jones*), Romney said that he did not want to appear on *The View* because the hosts were "high risk and sharp tongued." When

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Barbara Walters opened the discussion by questioning Ann on this comment, she quickly retorted, "No, he said 'sharp and young!' "

Undoubtedly, Romney's handlers could anticipate that such clever word play would do double duty by winning Ann a disarming laugh from the hosts and audience alike, as well as by fending off the actual question. Romney also turned down the requisite invitation to appear on *Saturday Night Live* (*SNL*). He explained that while it was desirable to appear as a "fun" and "good person," being part of the late-night sketch comedy television show was risky because of the "potential of looking slapstick and not presidential." More to the point, Romney's comments that evening were in response to the suggestion made by one of his dining benefactors that he should appear on talk shows more often so that he could "reach a lot of people," and they, in turn, could see how he *"really" was* (*Mother Jones Videos*). However, Romney did not lose the presidential election because he refused to appear on entertaining television. Instead, he lost, in part, because he failed to present himself as someone who could appear on entertaining television.

In twenty-first century US electoral politics, campaign stops on shows such as *The View*, *The Tonight Show*, *SNL*, *The Daily Show*, have become practically mandatory, even for incumbents. For example, Obama set the greenroom precedent by becoming the first sitting US president to take the entertainment talk show appearance in stride.[1] In addition to simply appearing on soft news and entertainment talk formats, some politicians have also participated in the shows' signature skits, delivered punch lines, or subjected themselves to the brunt of jokes. Some have also used these entertainment platforms to announce their presidential candidacies, as Rick Santorum and Ron Paul did on *Good Morning America* in 2012, and as John McCain did on *Late Night with David Letterman* in 2007.[2] Notwithstanding recent noteworthy examples, Romney's decision to evade televisual soft political formats illustrates the predicament national electoral politicians must overcome in contemporary politics. Candidates

must seem both presidential, or *extraordinary* and thus deserving of executive office. Additionally, they must appear as familiar and authentic, or *ordinary*, that is, as they "really are," and thus not too far removed from the popular electorate from which they are seeking to win votes.

Downplaying formality and socio-economic distance through mediated talk, body language, and dress reframes the candidates' class privilege. The folksy style of George W. Bush, for example, linguistically marked him as more of a Texan, and common man, instead of an elite Washington insider. Similarly, Romney's disclosure to the press that he purchased his shirts at Costco can be seen as an effort to show that he is in touch with the so-called 99%. Another way to shrink the perceptual distance between elites who run for national office and the common populace who elect them is to employ the devices of celebrity production, or what Graeme Turner calls the "celebritisation of politics," to help win elections and forward political agendas. It is "probably a commonplace observation," Turner remarks, "to point out that the systems used to produce celebrity in the entertainment and sports industries are very similar to those now used to produce the public persona of the politician" (130). Indeed, by virtue of the fact that established politicians move easily through the celebrity infrastructure of cultural production, they are commonly perceived as celebrities in both popular and academic presses.

With this in mind, in this article, I examine the politician *performing ordinary* in what appears as a benign cultural dimension to politics—that is, the entertainment talk show format. As I have argued elsewhere ("I'm Not a Celebrity"), what politicians do when they inhabit spaces of celebrity production should not be perceived merely as opportunities for the candidates to personalize their style or for constituencies to discover the authentic self behind the candidate. Instead, it should be considered foremost, as strategy that has become critical to electoral politics in mediated popular culture. I wish to show how these appearances on entertainment talk work to aestheticize political representation by

foregrounding ordinariness as a troupe of authenticity. I will discuss how politicians, when appearing on these televisual formats, mark themselves as ordinary in three interconnected ways: (1) by appropriation of the spaces of celebrity production wherein the individual's relation to the real self is "revealed" through mediated intimacy; (2) by positioning the self as public servant who represents (as in speaks for) the democratic electorate; and, (3) by signifying affiliation to the same socio-economic class as the one spoken for.

That politics and political information are inextricably linked with popular culture is not at issue here. Whether one sees politicians' relation to celebrity culture as signaling a "politics of distraction," as Timothy Weiskel (393) charges, or the potential for more "intuitive, expressive, and holistic" ways of gleaning political information, as Dick Pels (51) counters, the mechanisms of representation in entertainment talk conspire to leave unexamined one mode of cultural power at play. The politics of representation on entertainment talk works to negate these appearances as political propaganda by mixing popular culture with performative politics to obfuscate not only the distance between powerful politicians and their powerless constituencies, but also the material stakes of the electoral process.

There's no business like political show business

The deployment of personal political style, as a campaign strategy, became especially noteworthy when US politicians began to use it to challenge the balance of control over the televisual delivery of political messages in the 1992 primaries (Diamond and Silverman 4-5). Candidates started appearing more prominently on what I call *soft political formats* (SPFs), which according to journalists covering the campaign, allowed the politicians to circumvent serious interview segments in print or on broadcast channels with traditional (professional) journalists covering

political news (Dooley and Grosswiler 39). By SPFs, I refer to televisual or audio programming wherein candidates appeal to select audiences that are tuning in for entertainment or light political talk. These include daytime talk shows, entertainment radio interview programs, late night entertainment shows, television magazine news shows, fake news or satire television, various prime-time appearances and cameos, reality television, MTV, as well as any vehicles of new media whose uses are coded for entertainment.[3] A familiar crossover point that marks the "personalization of politics" is exemplified by Bill Clinton's infamous saxophone performance of "Heartbreak Hotel" on *The Arsenio Hall Show*, and later that same month, his town hall appearance on MTV (during which he was asked whether he preferred boxers or briefs).

In the UK, Clinton's generational counterpart, Tony Blair, soon employed his own popular cultural capital to exhibit his "cool" style (and his hip background as a former rock-n-roll musician) by appearing on more talks shows than any of his predecessors (*Intimate Politics* 52). But Clinton's strategic appearances had the effect of inverting election news coverage because the appearances became news highlighted on traditional television news programs, and in the prestige press and print news weeklies. His successful use of SPFs to side step the press corps opened the floodgates for other US candidates to follow suit, making appearances on daytime talk and late-night variety or comedy shows a routine tactic for reaching youth voters (Cogan and Kelso 106).

The celebrity politician does not begin with Clinton or Blair. However, their attention to the mediation of their political style illustrates John Street's contention that political communication's longstanding emphasis on the commercial marketing metaphor (as in "packaging the presidency") might be misplaced in the contemporary moment. The metaphors of show-business in which "the currency is celebrity and fame, and the products are stars and performances," provide a competing (and compelling) perspective to explain mediated politics ("The Celebrity Politician" 86).

For Street, the celebrity *politician* is "the traditional politician who emerges from a background in show business or who uses the techniques of popular culture to seek (and acquire) elected office" ("Do Celebrity Politics" 347).[4] In contrast with entertainment professionals who run for public office (*celebrity* politicians), political candidates become celebrity politicians when they indulge in staged photo ops designed to associate themselves with entertainment celebrities, or when they rely on techniques and industry professionals from the cultural industries to control, limit, or otherwise enhance their exposure to the public.

There are wider processes that help explain the context out of which the celebrity politician emerges and makes sense. These processes include structural changes in the media environment affecting broadcasting and conventions of journalism (e.g., consolidation, deregulation, narrowcasting, tabloidization or infotainmentization of news, mediatization of political campaigning, media convergence, etc.). "The 'styling of the self' in politics, the projection of political persona," as Corner and Pels argue, "is partly a matter of choice (a conscious 'branding' exercise designed to sharpen profile) and partly a required action to the terms of media visibility that now frame and interpret political action in many countries" (10). At the same time, politicians in liberal democracies are restyling their strategies of representation in response to what Henrik Bang identifies as conditions of governance in late modernity: shifting modes of governing and party politics; changing forms and conceptions of what counts as political participation; more fluid understandings of the nature of identity; newfound attention to the importance of the discursive as a representational mechanism for shaping opinion and policy (Marsh, 't Hart, and Tindall 326). Politicians would be remiss not to address the electorate in ways that are amenable to these structural changes in politics as well as the mediated nature of political representation across various platforms of self-presentation, message delivery, and celebrity journalism.

Politicians then, like Hollywood celebrities, construct personas for the management of their political performances across various media platforms. For example, US political conventions function as live media events that invoke a rock concert/star aura. This is supported by a coliseum spectacle which includes professional staging, lighting, and sound design; Jumbotrons; and a mass of screaming fans in the audience. In a similar way that the rock star produces solidarity with the adulating crowd, the politician's aura is constructed from the privileged center of the stage. She is visible, but not accessible, to the chosen delegates whose volume and emotive fan-like behavior signifies for the audience at home the charismatic leader's extraordinary qualities, as well as her right to represent the people. For P. David Marshall, the convention is guided by a mode of "affective power" that connects the leader and the people at the core of the legitimating process for political leadership, and in which the former houses (or embodies) the democratic sentiment of the latter, much like the popular music celebrity houses the affective sentiments of her fans.

The entertainment talk show, conversely, serves as a location in which politicians situate themselves as celebrities in order to benefit from what Marshall calls a "politics of familiarity" (214). These performances are of the front stage, to borrow from Erving Goffman, but they are constructed as ordinary in contrast to the politician's more formalized performances as political leader (such as the spectacle of partisan conventions, public addresses, or political advertising that emphasizes the politician's extraordinary qualifications for leadership). On the entertainment talk show, politicians project themselves as qualified candidates, but also as ordinary people who work in politics and also have commonplace interests, hobbies, responsibilities, and vices (as spouses, parents, weight-loss participants, sports enthusiasts, music lovers, etc.). Similar to the reproduction of celebrity, one's political performance promotes a potential audience subjectivity well cultivated by the commercial entertainment

industries—that is, the positioning of audiences in terms of fans seeking the pleasurable activity of discovering the real or ordinary person behind the celebrity image.

Upon first glance, the idea that celebrities incorporate a sense of their ordinary lives into their commodity form may seem counterintuitive. After all, it is the passage into the mythic "mediated center," to borrow Nick Couldry's notion, that marks entertainment celebrities, or "media people" as extraordinary in some context (whether in formal performance on the filmic or televisual screen, or on the mediated coliseum stage, etc.). The "non-media person," on the contrary, is marked by being "*merely* ordinary" (56), or unmarked which means that he or she is undeserving of attention outside of habitual and routine patterns of everyday life. For Couldry, the media/ordinary distinction is a case of misrecognition that is made possible through the naturalization of a symbolic hierarchy in media framing. Nevertheless, celebrity's commodification processes rely precisely on the pleasurable tension (and paradox) produced in mediation of being both extraordinary and ordinary. Simultaneously, it is also an authenticating form of play critical to celebrity's reproduction and one that also benefits the celebrity politician who understands this relationship.

Elsewhere, I have explained mechanisms of celebrity reproduction by referring to the celebrity distribution infrastructure as *celebrity place*. By this I mean the aggregate of media space that is devoted to celebrity coverage by the cultural industries ("Making the Most").[5] For example, the seat next to Jay Leno, or opposite Jon Stewart, and the feature story in celebrity print and online publications signify and reproduce celebrity in symbolic and material senses of the commodity form. These sites are critical to the reproduction of celebrity because they are where celebrities promote current projects (the cultural commodities or texts that house celebrity in formal performance such as films, television shows, live appearances, all of which constitute celebrity as part of a product). They also function to constitute celebrity as a product in and of itself—wherein

the extraordinary/ordinary paradox of star authenticity theorized in cinema studies (Dyer 49) is played out. Put another way, celebrity place is the infrastructure that gathers audiences for ostensible authentic exposure of the individual behind celebrity as "real," such as celebrity presses or fan sites, intentional televisual or live appearances, or unintended news about celebrities, including sightings and scandals.

Celebrity journalism happens here, but so does media exposure not expressly produced for this purpose (e.g., prestige press news, televised news by mainstream outlets, internet sites and social media outlets, etc.). To be sure, the measure of good celebrity journalism across media outlets is based on uncovering the private or behind-the-scenes truth of the star. This may appear as real and ordinary, and sometime perhaps scandalous. But celebrity reproduction also depends on an assurance that celebrity's status is warranted by formal (professional) performance, so that the ordinary image is re-constituted continuously as extraordinary, and thus affirming for the fan that the performer is authentic and deserving of stardom.[6]

Although celebrity is constructed differently across distinct sectors of the cultural industries (e.g., film, television, music), the play around identity and authenticity—that is, the search to discover the celebrity's real self—is consistent as a system in relation to celebrity from its historical manifestations to its contemporary ones. It is the circulation of meaning around celebrity, Marshall argues, "the connections between celebrities 'real' lives and their working lives as actors, singers, or television news readers" that essentially "configure the celebrity status" (58).[7] Through their various reception practices, audiences make sense of all the ways celebrity is circulated, whether in terms of pleasure or distaste, as distracted viewers or affectively playful, or in sociality. These processes influence celebrity's exchange value, which suggests that celebrity's value can also be measured in terms of gathering audiences whose attention ultimately determines the reproduction of celebrity status.

If, broadly speaking, celebrity is a "mediating frame" through which a public persona is created, distributed, and upon which the public's recognition depends, as Drake and Miah suggest (51-52), then the entertainment celebrity is a mediating process. This process involves a host of industry professionals performing an array of functions designed to enhance such recognition as a perceptual relation between the real and the image of the person, held in tension by the individual's constructed persona. For audiences, a good measure of the pleasure in celebrity consumption involves access to an intimate sense of who the true person is, even if such a realization invokes a certain *schadenfreude* or a love-to-hate-celebrities form. Pleasure comes from authenticating that the celebrity really deserves (or does not deserve) his or her fame for being extraordinary.

The point of this brief foray into celebrity production is to propose that the play around authentication for the politician in the context of entertainment talk is similar to that of the entertainment celebrity, as is the symbiosis of the exchange. That is, when politicians show up on SPFs, they enter into an existing infrastructure critical to celebrity's reproduction. As they abide by the conventions of the format, they benefit from the structure of the exchange by personalizing their style of self-display in ways expected from entertainment venues. Moreover, just as politicians need SPFs to target certain demographics of their constituencies, the television entertainment business needs bookings to fill broadcast schedules.[8] Political candidates, particularly national ones, attract audiences, although from the producers' point of view, their value as talk show guests is stratified (as is entertainment celebrity's) and based on the guests' national profile and media expertise, as well as the current headline news. Politicians who get media attention because they are newsworthy are also talk show-worthy to varying degrees.

Personalizing political style on entertainment talk

The entertainment-style talk show has long been a site for celebrity watching. The earliest discussions concerning its cultural significance in this respect highlighted its role in television's construction of its own "personality system." John Langer, for example, positioned television against film to show how the former constituted a condition of intimacy with its own ideological effects. If "stars" and the star system belonged to the domain of cinema, then television produced its own personalities whose mode of being is situated in the everyday and coded to produce immediacy, familiarity, regularity, predictability, and ordinariness. News-readers, moderators, talk show hosts, and program characters make up television's personalities, while outsiders (celebrities from non-entertainment fields, experts, politicians, and ordinary people) are recruited as personalities into the medium's formats.

The talk show provides a forum constructed through its "carefully orchestrated informality, with its illusion of lounge-room casualness and leisurely pace" for the host to chat with guests. The guests are "predictably 'drawn in' to making certain 'personal' disclosures," so that audiences perceive that they are seeing celebrities as they really are (J. Langer 360). In other words, it is the televisual equivalent of the fan magazine, whose historical function has been to invite authenticating play with stardom. The format and the medium's properties also promote what Horton and Wohl (1956) coined "para-social interaction," or the illusion of face-to-face communication such that audiences relate to television as if it is a mode of interpersonal communication.

The various lounge/living room settings and camera techniques are designed to blur the line dividing the studio and access to it from the audiences at home. They function, in effect, to shrink the social distance between performer and audience such that the so-called ordinary person behind the celebrity is revealed. To be distinguished from the political

interview, Bell and van Leeuwne describe the talk show as involving "the talker in a performance of his/her cultural role or status, albeit a performance marked as 'real' or revealing in ways that invite audience members to see the celebrity [politician] as like themselves" (189). The talk show, through the production of mediated intimacy, sets up the conditions for an audience subjectivity that responds to a media person or celebrity as if the relationship is a familiar one; that is, as if they "know" the celebrity as one does a friend or close acquaintance (Meyrowitz 120).

For politicians versed at personalizing their political style, appearances on entertainment talk shows are useful. First, these shows are part and parcel of a media environment through which candidates must navigate, and which is characterized by an entangled nexus of politics, news, and popular entertainment. As previously mentioned, it is not only structural changes in journalism and broadcasting that explain the terrain of mediated politics that now dominate television schedules. New perceptions of governing and political participation that privilege the cultural dimensions of citizenship have come to fore. Politicians (or their political handlers) are responding to the contemporary ways in which people engage with politics. These engagements are increasingly perceived as discursive, fluid, and connected to other concerns, pastimes, and pleasures in the everyday. Jeffrey Jones, for example, in his analysis of what he calls "new political television" (e.g., *The Daily Show, Real Time with Bill Maher*), argues that this genre functions, in part, as a forum for political knowledge and civic activity. By mixing entertainment celebrity guests with politicians, academics, journalists, and popular writers, such shows trade in humorous and serious subjects by moving between popular culture and politics.

To recognize that politics happens in a multitude of televisual sites, where fact and fiction are blended, is to also acknowledge that people's relationship to politics includes ways of seeking pleasure. Delli Carpini and Williams show that when people talk about politics and political

opinion, they draw from their store of political knowledge, which includes references to popular culture. SPFs more generally, offer viewers politically inflected content not drawn from conventional news and political talk. This allows SPFs to be more appealing and accessible. Hence these shows reach a potentially large segment of the public that is less likely to tune into traditional political talk and news to learn about political candidates. Such changes in the cultural boundaries of what counts as political have led to "more personalized forms of democratic representation and participation" (A. Langer, 47).

Second, as John Corner argues, politicians must operate out of different domains of action in the construction of their political personas, which then require appropriate strategies. Corner describes these overlapping spheres as: 1) the sphere of "political institutions and its processes" where politicians perform the official procedural duties and exercises of political office; 2) the sphere of "public and popular" where political identity is performed to be mediated across media platforms, formally and strategically; and, 3) the "private sphere" where a politician's private life is put on display as a peek into the backstage region deliberately, or as a "journalistic revelation" when it is framed as scandal or gossip. With respect to the public and the popular, the identity of the politician, as a person of qualities, is most emphatically and strategically put forward, with inflections towards what are perceived as the contours of popular sentiment or sectional value (for example, the youthful, the ordinary, the thoughtful, the cultured, the funny) (75). The candidate's optimal political self masters a certain fluidity among these behavioral domains. This suggests that the popular is no less important than the public and formal insofar as it is also an unavoidable space of building or breaking a reputation and political career.

Third, if electronic media have challenged the nature of publicness by dissolving barriers between public and private/personal as well as fundamentally changed how political leaders manage their visibility, as

Meyrowitz and Thompson have argued, then entertainment talk involves what Ana Inés Langer notes as "strong incentives and opportunities in contemporary politics to make strategic use of the personal" (52). Although personalization of politics discourses situate this cultural transformation in broader terms than the technological, the role of electronic media is significant. The entertainment talk show illustrates some of the ways in which performance of personal style is instrumental to electoral politics. Thompson uses the term "mediated quasi-interaction" to describe the form of self-presentation that occurs in this context: when "some individuals are engaged primarily in producing symbolic forms for others who are not physically present, while others are involved primarily in receiving symbolic forms produced by others to whom they cannot respond, but with whom they can form bonds of friendship, affection, or loyalty" (*Media and Modernity* 84-85). Put another way, electronic media produce opportunities for mediated intimacy because self-disclosure as a form of self-presentation does not rely on the co-presence of the communicators.

This projection of the self on entertainment talk, despite its back region impression, is performance of the front stage constructed as ordinary. Such a space allows politicians to "present themselves not just as leaders but as human beings, as ordinary individuals who [can] address their subjects as fellow citizens, selectively disclosing aspects of their lives and their character in a conversational or even confessional mode" (*Political Scandal* 40). Personalizing one's politics as a defining feature of contemporary politics constructs not only the personal lives and character traits of politicians, but arguably broader conceptions of leadership. As Langer suggests, the extent to which "going personal" underscores a politician's humanness (as when one's normality is on display as vulnerable and emotionally reflexive) may work to authenticate one's political and policy positions as "*more real, more genuine* if related to personal experience" (A. Langer 54, emphasis in the original).

Lastly, appearances on entertainment talk shows take advantage of a mutually beneficial arrangement. The shows entertain their audiences with celebrity guests in a manner consistent with the conventions of the genre, while candidates have opportunities to reach audiences outside of traditional political locations by showcasing their personal styles and selves in a "positive light, without having to face hostile questioning from jaded political reporters" (Baum 215). As Baum concludes from his analysis of entertainment talk shows during the 2000 US presidential election, entertainment talk show hosts are less likely to alienate either their political guests (whose bookings are desirable) and their viewers (who are tuning in for entertainment), so hosts tend to interview candidates in a far less critical or partisan style. Lauerbach points out that interviewer style on "celebrity talk shows" differs significantly from more traditional "hard" news or current affairs programs by tending to be more deferential toward the guests, and because they are designed to produce a "feelgood" atmosphere in which the hosts' role is to elicit "biographical detail in a series of narratives, anecdotes, jokes, and gossip" (1394). Similarly, Eriksson argues that these hosts skillfully manage the talk itself such that its performative character is highlighted through the dramatization of personal narratives and its potential for humor (545)

Politicians also stand to gain from reaching a much larger audience share that is also less likely to tune into traditional political talk and news. Demographically, viewers of entertainment talk tend to be less attentive to politics in general, less educated, typically younger, and female. Such viewers also tend to find opposition party candidates more likeable. They are also more likely to cross party lines than their political "hard" news viewing counterparts who are more likely to react to candidates in ways that reinforce existing attitudes (Baum 230-31).[9]

This is not to suggest, however, that the performance of self on the talk show is necessarily uncomplicated, easy, or without risk. Because politicians are not trained in performance in the same way that

entertainment professionals are, engaging in small talk or banter may result in verbal gaffes or embarrassment. Going personal or performing cool can backfire if audiences perceive performance as disingenuous or awkward. The risk of appearing un-presidential can outweigh the points earned for good humor, as Romney himself noted, particularly when stretching the candidate's aptitude for such forms of play. In their study on Dutch and German politicians appearing on talk shows, van Zoonen and Holtz Bacha suggest that such guests "speak" from different social locations (as politicians or personal selves) using different types of language appropriate to the specific (public or private) domain. To "construct themselves as likeable," which is requisite to how their political personas are perceived, the politicians must use personal discourse skillfully. Only those politicians who effectively maneuver across these registers can shift the personalized discourse expected of talk shows toward "personalized political discourse" in such a way as to highlight one's policies and personality (55).

For female politicians, the convergence of political and personal on entertainment formats poses an additional challenge because "the celebrity treatment of the private lives of female politicians tends to exacerbate the public-private dimension on which women's marginal position in politics is built" (van Zoonen 91). Celebrity politics privileges males with an easier possibility of mixing occupational and private domains. Conversely, female politicians are represented as if their political lives must be at odds against their personal lives. Opportunities for women to develop political capital are stunted by celebrity culture because they are overwhelmingly framed as outsiders and thus relegated to the private or domestic sphere. If performing ordinary calls attention to a non-conventional occupational choice for women—that is, the private rejection of traditional gendered domesticity in favor of public service—then women risk being perceived by the public as "as 'others' to dominant images of femininity while

remaining ‘others’ in the political sphere, due to their minority position” (van Zoonen 298).

Perhaps most threatening to political candidates is unintended personal disclosure. For James Stanyer, the term “intimization” best describes the process in which a US politician’s “personal sphere” (his preferred term for Corner’s private sphere but further developed by spatial, relational, and individual distinctions) is publicized as a “revelatory process,” either by consensual or nonconsensual means (*Intimate Politics* 14). Such mediated intimacy, in the case of political embarrassment or scandal, poses problems for politicians who perform ordinary under conditions that are not of their choosing. Because transgressions, treated as scandal, tend to have an “open-ended narrative structure” as they undergo continuous narration across a variety of media outlets (including late-night entertainment talk/comedy shows), politicians may try to use the media to reframe their stories in personal terms in order to influence public opinion directly (Thompson 76-77). Typically, in the US, this has been done on such programs as *60 Minutes* or Sunday morning news talk, as Gronbeck illustrates with the Flowers-Clinton scandal. On SPFs, we are more likely to find damage control for embarrassing situations, such as Sarah Palin’s appearance with Tina Fey on *SNL*, after her disastrous Katie Couric interviews, or John McCain’s plea for forgiveness to David Letterman who made him a late-night joke after the candidate lied about why he abruptly canceled a previously scheduled appearance. In these situations (as with news formats dealing with scandal), politicians appeal to commonalities such as human fallibility to frame media exposure. Getting in on the joke suggests that one is not too far removed from being able to take a joke.[10]

To be or not to be ordinary: that is the question in (re)presentation

Just as talk show hosts promise audiences a peek into the supposed ordinary lives of entertainment celebrities, the format also affords politicians the same strategic space to enhance their visibility. However, when politicians appear on entertainment talk, they are not there to publicize products of the cultural industries or to maintain their celebrity status as asset capital (two ancillary conditions of celebrity production particular to celebrity place). Rather, they appear on such shows for the purpose of winning support for their campaigns through intimate, strategic and direct displays of their personalities. Entertainment talk appearances are *strategies* designed to negate the appearance itself as performance. Politicians chat and joke with the host(s) off-script, about policy and agenda (perhaps some of the time), but also, consistent with the format's conventions, about personal or family issues, habits, hobbies, and tastes, current news, popular culture, in short, the stuff of ordinary everyday life.

Also unlike the entertainment celebrity (whose personal autonomy is based on an ability to transgress or surpass his or her screen type), the politician must project his or her persona with a certain consonance across the spheres of activity defining political life such that a "natural link" is established between the individual and the office he or she seeks (Marshall 231). In other words, whereas an actor's autonomy and measure of talent are marked, in part, by the disparity between the character types he or she plays and the real person, a politician's persona must project a coherent narrative (if not also contradictory) of democratic exceptionalism in which the individual is equally situated but also naturally deserving. Thus, politicians construct themselves as people who work in and are qualified for governance, but also as individuals who are not too far removed socio-economically from the electorate they purport to represent. While the spectacle of partisan conventions and other formalized modes of public

address construct an aura at a distance, which also signifies a political candidate's extraordinary qualities and entitlement to represent the people, televisual codes of entertainment talk provide an alternative venue by which to construct a familiar sense of an ordinary self. Politicians on entertainment talk are not unlike celebrities because they "simultaneously celebrate effort and achievement as the open democratic routes to success and hold up for admiration the celebrity elite, successful because of inborn, extraordinary qualities" (Gamson 195).

In effect, politicians mark themselves as ordinary in the idealization of democratic participation, which belies the restricted nature of American electoral politics along socio-economic class lines. By this I mean to say, in the first place, that performing ordinary functions ideologically to suggest that political office is accessible to all. Politicians must appear as though they represent the assurance of democratic participation at the highest levels of governance, not by de facto class privilege, but through nondiscriminatory meritocratic measures.

Second, the ideological promise of American socio-political mobility negates the uneven distribution of privilege and resources that skews American politics into a centrist two-party system favoring dominant hierarchies of institutional and elite power. C. Wright Mills preferred the term "power elite" to describe the US ruling class (corporate, political, military and social elites), which he identified as a homogeneous social type stemming from backgrounds sharing similar ethnic, social, religious, and educational affiliations. For the most part, Mills argued, the power elite derive from the upper class strata of American society and are characterized as white, male, wealthy, professional, urban, Ivy League educated—the exception in some cases being the elected "party politician" whose rise in politics may derive from more humble and self-made circumstances. But the minority figure of a professional politician is subject to the "reciprocal attraction" that such a fraternity of common values produces, which also insures "a certain unity" (281). In other

words, structures of interaction and interchangeability at the top subordinate the elected politician to corresponding values and policies among political, military, and economic domains of dominant power. "Nowhere in America is there as great a 'class consciousness' as among the elite," writes Mills, and "nowhere is it organized as effectively as among the power elite" (Mills 283). For Mills, internal distinctions between political parties characterize different methods of governing in the technical sense, but such divergences are largely subsumed by the "internal discipline and community of interests" binding the political elite (283).

Similarly, Pierre Bourdieu's discussion of political *doxa* (or habitus operating in the political field) speaks to this sociological phenomenon. To the extent that politicians "play by the rules of the game" in order to operate successfully in the field of politics, they share a political culture that structures the competencies by which they successfully compete for political capital (or the currency that affords power to say and do things in the political field). Bourdieu's field theory, however, suggests that politicians act more in direct correspondence with the structure of the political field itself than with the interests of their constituencies. Such an "internal dynamic of self-referencing among political professionals" shapes their behavior in ways that entail "more posturing to differentiate positions or enhance their scope of representation than responsiveness to the direct interests of their constituencies" (Swartz, 148-49).

This is not to suggest that politicians can operate without any sense of shared identity and interest with their constituencies. Rather, they must deploy symbolic power (by virtue of their habitation in the political field) to enact a minimum of legitimacy in order to maintain their position within that field. More to the point, the political field, like any field, operates on the basis of how resources (forms of capital) are mobilized in struggle to produce a particular configuration of power that is accepted as legitimate, which as symbolic power imposes particular representations on

the social world. Moreover, political *doxa* works to constrain and limit political expression and representation by denying entry and access to outsiders.

Although Bourdieu makes this point with respect to the French political and intellectual elite, the empirical evidence on recruitment into the US governing class also bears out the claim (also in France, Britain, Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands) For example, Aberbach, Putnam, and Rockman report that political recruitment is biased toward those from middle and upper socio-economic class backgrounds. This typically includes a university education that accompanies such privilege, although in the US, the effects of social class on education are relatively weaker than in other countries, making education more accessible to political aspirants. In the 113th Congress (2013), 93% of the House members and 99% of Senators hold bachelor's degrees (compared with 84% and 88%, respectively, in the 97th Congress in 1983). Holders of law degrees dominate 38% of the House and 57% of the Senate (Manning 4-5).

Historically, most national Congressional politicians have backgrounds in law and business, including farm ownership. The congressional tenure was limited, for the most part, to one or two terms. However, since the twentieth century, this tenure pattern has reversed; by the 1950s, over half of the representatives served for ten years or more (Nagle 97). Currently, US national politicians are predominantly from the business class, including the law profession, and public service occupations, the latter of which includes local governmental office. Representation from wage-laborers is virtually absent. In 2011, the Center for Public Integrity reported that based on disclosed assets alone, that 47% of Congressional representatives are millionaires (Biegelsen). If not in the 1% of wealthy Americans, these representatives are in the top decile of American income distribution by "dint of their congressional salaries alone" (Gilens 235).

In short, US politicians regardless of their party affiliation and policy positions belong, for the most part, to an affluent political class that is exceptionally privileged. Such membership at the national level is inscribed through personal wealth, social status, and the requisite campaign financing that further narrows the interests constituting candidacies, particularly presidential ones. Yet, politicians claim to represent, or *speak for,* wide constituencies. For the purposes of winning elections, constituencies must constitute a swath of the democratic electorate that is much larger than the constricted interests that are financing the campaign. At the same time, politicians re-present or *portray* themselves as though they are not removed from the same socioeconomic class they purport to speak for, but to which they do not belong. Such conflation between "proxy" and "portrait" (Spivak 276) finds seemingly benign slippage in popular cultural outlets lending themselves to the performance of ordinary. Candidates who can work within the rules of SPFs benefit from playful opportunities to deny the ideological apparatus that make their campaigns possible. They can appeal to popular trust on the basis of their shared concerns as ostensibly ordinary, unexceptional (un-privileged) persons.[11]

I am not suggesting that the traditional means of party and policy representation (e.g. conventional political journalism, formal interviews, press conferences, stump speeches, convention appearances, etc.) have been displaced or somehow rendered less relevant in relation to appearances on SPFs. On the contrary, the ideological disconnect resulting from the reality of representational inequality in politics and a politician's re-presentation as ordinary tends to be subsumed by party strategy at the formal level of managed media discourse and spectacle. We expect our political leaders, after all, to be exceptional, as evidenced by their access to the center of media power, and we know that they do not trade in political rationality without affective forms of popular appeal.

When politicians situate themselves as celebrities on entertainment talk, the strategic projection of one's authentic (ordinary) self is designed at once to (1) metaphorically dissolve the real distance that separates political leaders from their electorate, which has real (policy) consequences, and (2) to position audiences as contented fans seeking pleasure in discovering the real person behind the candidate. Such play in authentication suggests that "real unities of power, class, prestige and interest can continue relatively intact and unexamined" (J. Langer 364). What is being offered is a benign and familiar notion of meaning for the sake of audience pleasure as is expected with forms of commercial cultural consumption. Such mediated intimacy may indeed by pleasurable, even affectively productive, but it is also instrumental. SPFs are only one location where politicians conduct their campaigns—perhaps the least obvious site, and therefore one likely to be misrecognized for its mode of cultural power at play.

Notes

[1]Although Obama has embraced entertainment talk as a common place campaign stop, George H. W. Bush made an appearance on *Nashville Now* back in 1988 when he was vice-president, and then again in 1992, at which time both presidential candidates Bill Clinton and Al Gore also appeared. Nearly thirty years ago, Margaret Thatcher as sitting Prime Minister also appeared several times on chat shows during her term in office.

[2]Notable candidacy announcements include Senator (and actor) Fred Thompson on *The Tonight S how* in 2007, Jonathan Edwards on *The Daily Show* in 2004, Arnold Schwarzenegger on Jay Leno's *The Tonight Show* in 2003, and businessman Ross Perot, who inaugurated the practice, on *Larry King Live* in 1992.

[3] Soft political formats (SPFs) as I am using the term also includes what some have referred to as "soft news" formats, but since this argument is concerned less with rigid distinctions between hard and soft news and between information and entertainment, I use the term SPFs to cover an array of outlets that mark themselves as distinct from the traditional or "hard" news outlets that dominated political campaigning prior to the 1990s because SPFs are largely or primarily coded for entertainment. By virtue of the fact that politicians appear on them, they are or become a political outlet to showcase a campaign strategically. As I am using the concept, SPFs does not signify a genre, but rather presents itself as an organizing category helpful for thinking about how politicians, celebrity, and entertainment television converge.

[4] Street designates the celebrity *politician* (CP1) in contrast to the *celebrity* politician (CP2), the latter of which he defines as the entertainment professional or star of popular culture who uses his or her fame to represent issues or groups and to impact public opinion ("Celebrity Politicians" 437-38).

[5] Su Holmes's reference to "intertextual circulation" refers to this idea similarly (157), although celebrity place is meant to denote the intertextual circulation aside from the cultural products (or texts) that house the entertainment professional as a component of the commodity form.

[6] Of course, authentication processes are not a uniform proposition because celebrity value itself is highly stratified. There are A, B, C, and even D list celebrities, among whom the A-list ones are most commonly referred to as "stars."

[7] Ponce de Leon puts it similarly when he defines celebrity in its broadest sense as a person from any field (e.g., entertainment, politics, business, education, science, etc.) or non-field, such as socialite or the unremarkable person upon whom media attention is bestowed and framed in terms of an "illusion and exposure" of the person's supposed real-self (7).

[8] According to the only estimate I am aware of, some 4,500 bookings were required to fill television schedules in the late 1990s (Greg 1).

[9] It should be noted that Baum's argument is attentive to decades of media research that suggests exposure to political persuasion such as during elections tends to reinforce what people already think or believe rather than significantly change their attitudes or partisan positions. This has to do in no small part to the habits of people in tuning into or relying on media outlets and formats that produce news and editorials that are

consistent with their own standpoints for the most part. Baum's point is that audiences of entertainment talk have been a neglected demographic both in the study of political communication and in terms of formal electoral strategy by political campaigns, which suggests they may be more likely to change their opinions than viewers of more traditional political news.

[10] In McCain's case, his confession to Letterman and his audience—"I screwed up. What can I say?" —was as if to say, "I'm only human." Former New York Democratic Governor and Attorney General Elliot Spitzer represents a notable exception to the historical divide between media outlets and the level of transgression. Although he resigned from political office in 2008 due to his involvement in a prostitution scandal, Spitzer's recent bid for New York City Comptroller and publication of his book lead him to appear on *The Tonight Show*, *Late Night*, and *The Colbert Report* where his newfound media skills as a talk show host himself allowed him to humorously field the (largely friendly) treatment by his fellow celebrity hosts.

[11] Romney's inability to mobilize perceptions downplaying his extraordinary wealth so that he might have appeared as more common-man was more significant in his campaign than the fact of his financial net worth. In contrast, we may recall that third-party presidential candidate Ross Perot, whose wealth is approximately fourteen times that of Romney's, won over a fair share of the American electorate on *Larry King Live* with his downhome demeanor and plain folks southern talk akin to his successor candidates Bill Clinton and George W. Bush.

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Communication Deficiencies[1] Provide Incongruities for Humor: The Asperger's-like Case of *The Big Bang Theory's* Sheldon Cooper

KAREN MCGRATH

Since 2007, CBS's *The Big Bang Theory* has captivated audiences who wait each week for "nerds" Sheldon Cooper, Leonard Hofstadter, Rajesh (Raj) Koothrapalli, and Howard Wolowitz to interact with Penny (and now also Bernadette and Amy) (Albiniak "Big Bang Begins"; Albiniak "Big Expectations"; Grego; Guthrie; Rickman). It is the quirkiness of their interactions that drive this comedy because it reminds us that communication is often funny when it is outside the expected social norms. While some may disagree, one presupposition of this paper is that much of the behavior in comedies is non-normative behavior which creates humor. For example, of the aforementioned characters, Sheldon is clearly the most outside the norm due to his communication difficulties in social situations and is often the "fish out of water" necessary for this sitcom (Smith 33). Leonard, Sheldon's physics colleague and roommate, actually teaches Sheldon how to be more socially appropriate. While Leonard is also a bit socially awkward, he is not always the "fish out of water" that Sheldon is and that Smith suggests is necessary for a good sitcom.

Howard is a Jewish engineer who lives with his mother until he marries Bernadette in season Five, and Raj is from India and has selective-mutism or "severe shyness or other social anxiety" when around women (Rickman 208). Penny is a struggling, promiscuous, actress from Omaha,

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Nebraska who works at The Cheesecake Factory and lives across the hall from Leonard and Sheldon. She and Sheldon are often at odds over the other's behaviors and their interactions provide fodder for the show as their "odd coupling" is often humorous (Smith 3). While all of the characters have their necessary idiosyncrasies, Sheldon is the focus here. Just as *Seinfeld* succeeded in making Kramer the "odd ball" to Jerry Seinfeld, so *The Big Bang Theory* succeeds with Sheldon and the others with whom he interacts. However, the difference is that Sheldon's behavior is often discussed by many Autism and Asperger's specialists and bloggers as Asperger's Syndrome, and many argue Sheldon is on the autism spectrum (Andraya; Collins; Keller; Patch; Sepinwall; Soraya). Therefore this article uses the characteristics of Asperger's to compare Sheldon's behaviors to assumed communicative norms and then addresses implications for pronouncing Sheldon "on the spectrum." However, the bases for humor need to be addressed forthwith.

Humor

Fodder, raw material derived from character interaction and difference used for comedies, is a necessity in sitcoms. Because Sheldon and Penny are apparent opposites, their beliefs, values, behaviors, etc. often conflict and provide humor. While other characters' behaviors and beliefs are also fodder, Sheldon is the focal point in this ensemble cast because his lack of both social acuity and social awareness (his communicative deficiencies) are most severe. Sheldon views himself as superior to everyone in his peer group because of his genius IQ; his identity and status in his peer group are clear to him, but differ from how others view him socially. For example, he tells Penny that Leonard is a "homunculus," calls Wolowitz "Mr." because he does not have a Ph.D., berates Penny for her lack of academic background and acting "success," and reminds Raj of his failures of being a good "Indian" (e.g., not liking Indian food).

Much of the humor in the show therefore arises from Sheldon assuming others have inferior intelligence thus making his own character's assumed superior intelligence and identity a premise for humor (humor studies' superiority theory). However, people who believe they are better than everyone else typically are not and in Sheldon's case his superior intelligence does not obscure his communication deficiencies, it emphasizes them for his friends and the viewers. Therefore, it is Sheldon's communication inferiority that viewers, and sometimes his friends, laugh at since his behavior in social interactions is incongruous with expected behavior in social situations (humor studies' incongruity theory). However, laughing at people's differences is key to successful comedies, even if it borders on the marginalization of those with diagnosed differences.

It is the prominence of these incongruities, these apparent "role reversals" Smith identifies as key to successful comedies and with which Sheldon is ill-equipped to deal, that assist in making this a successful comedy. Successful comedies are derived from the presence of humor theories in action[2] and the two aforementioned theories (superiority and incongruity) dominate the series. Smith notes how most jokes or funny situations are characterized by "incongruity . . . surprise . . . truth . . . aggression . . . brevity" such that tension is established, built, and released (11-16). And, he also notes that comedies often "write characters into a world where they don't belong, and you will end up with a mix of individuals who have dissimilar social skills, cultural traditions, educational backgrounds, religious points of view, intelligence levels, and even eating habits" (33). His key points clearly reflect the comedic formula for Sheldon and the others, and emphasize two dominant humor theories, especially incongruity theory. Although the male characters don't belong to assumed social normalcy for their age group, Sheldon is even more "abnormal" based on his assumed superiority to those around him, which provides much fodder for the comedy. Since incongruity is a basis

for the comedic process, and is present in this show, the presence of incongruity theory of humor is hereafter assumed in this analysis based on his communication deficiencies identified below.

Specifically, while humor studies have focused on a variety of comedies, peer-reviewed literature from 2007-2012 reveals that only two articles are directly related to an analysis of the show and its characters (Bednarek "Characterisation"; Hu). While many other researchers have studied TV shows in the past (e.g., Bednarek "Expressivity"; Quail), no study of this sitcom, or others, has its focus on communication differences as the incongruity necessary for humor in sitcoms or uses Asperger's characteristics as an analytic framework; therefore, I do so here. The focus is on Sheldon Cooper, who is the self-claimed, smartest of the group, but whose lack of social prowess and acuity demonstrates that he is the least communicatively skilled, has the most to learn about social interactions, and is often the humor focal point. Below I use examples from seasons one through five, with specific focus on season one, episodes one and five; season two, episode five; and season three, episode eight to analyze how Sheldon's communication "deficiencies" (differences) provide fodder for this comedy and use the Asperger's characteristics to identify said deficiencies.

Briefly, and with no claims to professional or clinical expertise, Asperger's is currently recognized by the American Psychological Association's Diagnostic Statistics Manual as a disorder and, until recently, consisted of a separate diagnosis from autism (Falco). Beahm, and also Welton in an earlier work, suggest that Asperger's is characterized by the following: social impairment, narrow interest, compulsive need for introducing routines and interests, speech and language peculiarities, nonverbal communication problems, and motor clumsiness (38). Clearly, these characteristics stand in contradistinction to assumed Western cultural, communicative norms thus Beahm's and Welton's observations about people with Asperger's provide the analytic

framework below.[3] In just a few episodes with Sheldon, the similarities are striking. Sheldon's Asperger's-like characteristics remind us that comedies often "offer a mix of individuals who have dissimilar social skills, cultural traditions, educational backgrounds, religious points of view, intelligence levels, and even eating habits," and this show is no exception (Smith 33).

Analysis[4]

As a reminder, Asperger's characteristics used here include: social impairment, narrow interest, compulsive need for introducing routines and interests, speech and language peculiarities, nonverbal communication problems, and motor clumsiness (Beahm; Welton). Analysis affirms that Sheldon exhibits these characteristics, which are the bases for comedy.

Social impairment, the most prominent of Sheldon's Asperger's-like characteristics, includes "extreme egocentricity" (Beahm 38), where knowledge of and adaptation to other people's beliefs, values, and behaviors or the social norms of the situation aren't pertinent. People exhibiting this characteristic may often "find being with a group stressful and confusing" and may also be perceived as "unfriendly" because they may "misunderstand what people are doing and why they are doing it" (Welton 22). From the first episode ("The Pilot"), Sheldon's social impairments are present when meeting Penny for the first time:

Penny: Oh, hi!

Leonard: Hi.

Sheldon: Hi.

Leonard: Hi.

Sheldon: Hi.

Penny: Hi?

Leonard: We don't mean to interrupt; we live across the hall.

Penny: Oh, that's nice.

Leonard: Oh… uh… no… we don't live together… um… we live together but in separate, heterosexual bedrooms.

Penny: Oh, okay. Well, guess I'm your new neighbor, Penny.

Leonard: Leonard, Sheldon.

Penny: Hi.

Leonard: Hi.

Sheldon: Hi.

Penny: Hi.

Leonard: Hi. Well, uh, oh, welcome to the building.

Penny: Thank you, maybe we can have coffee sometime.

Leonard: Oh, great.

Penny: Great.

Sheldon: Great.

Leonard: Great. Well, bye.

Penny: Bye.

Sheldon: Bye.

Leonard: Bye.

In this exchange we encounter Leonard and Sheldon both exhibiting some impairment in expressing a simple greeting, "Hello." They watch her for a moment, and it is not until Penny sees them and says "Oh, Hi!" that they engage her. Both repeat the word twice and then Penny says it a second time as a question, "Hello?" This exchange is more repetitious than usual and is incongruous with our own experiences of a greeting. Two men seem not to be able to have a conversation with a woman and appear to be the "fish out of water" in this exchange (Smith). The same thing occurs upon saying "Great" when Leonard says it a second time, which also reminds viewers of the social awkwardness of this situation. However, in this scene, Sheldon says almost nothing. The brevity of his remarks in most of the exchange is surprising, which Smith suggests makes for funny situations. In fact, he only mimics Leonard's and Penny's utterances, and Leonard even tells Penny Sheldon's name. Sheldon's lack of verbal utterances is initially incongruous to our expectations because prior to seeing Penny, he was talking at length with Leonard about many topics while walking up to their apartment; this situation clearly makes Sheldon uncomfortable, and it is Leonard who suggests that they invite Penny to their apartment for lunch:

Leonard: Should we have invited her for lunch?

Sheldon: No. We're going to start Season Two of *Battlestar Galactica*.

Leonard: We already watched the Season Two DVDs.

Sheldon: Not with commentary.

Leonard: I think we should be good neighbors, invite her over, make her feel welcome.

Sheldon: We never invited Louis-slash-Louise over.

Leonard: Well, then that was wrong of us. We need to widen our circle.

Sheldon: I have a very wide circle. I have 212 friends on MySpace.

Leonard: Yes, and you've never met one of them.

Sheldon: That's the beauty of it.

Leonard: I'm going to invite her over. We'll have a nice meal and chat.

Sheldon: Chat? We don't chat. At least not offline.

Leonard: Well it's not difficult, you just listen to what she says and then you say something appropriate in response.

Sheldon: To what end?

Leonard: Hi. Again.

Penny: Hi.

Sheldon: Hi.

Leonard: Hi.

Penny: Hi.

> Leonard: Anyway, um. We brought home Indian food. And, um. I know that moving can be stressful, and I find that when I'm undergoing stress, that good food and company can have a comforting effect. Also, curry is a natural laxative, and I don't have to tell you that, uh, a clean colon is just one less thing to worry about.
>
> Sheldon: Leonard, I'm not expert here, but I believe in the context of a luncheon invitation, you might want to skip the reference to bowel movements.
>
> Penny: Oh, you're inviting me over to eat?
>
> Leonard: Uh, yes.
>
> Penny: Oh, that's so nice, I'd love to.
>
> Leonard: Great. ("The Pilot")

Sheldon is obviously uncomfortable with Leonard's suggestion to invite Penny for lunch because they had plans to watch *Battlestar Galactica* and also because they had not extended a similar invitation to their previous neighbor. Sheldon clearly doesn't understand why this invitation needs to be extended to Penny and when Leonard says he will invite her to lunch and they'll "have a nice meal and chat" Sheldon replies, "Chat? We don't chat. At least not offline." Here Sheldon acknowledges that both he and Leonard don't typically converse with strangers except in online environments, which now makes the 212 MySpace friends reference funnier. While online activity is important to many people, most can also chat with others in person, so Sheldon's comment comes as a surprise to first time viewers. However, viewers also come to learn throughout the series that the truth of this statement is what makes many future interactions comedic.

Leonard continues the conversation and tells Sheldon it is easy to chat because they just say something appropriate after listening to what she has to say, thus offering him a communication rule for interaction. But, Sheldon is still confused by this when he says, "To what end?" Clearly, he does not view the invitation as a polite way to get to know your neighbor and instead believes that Leonard is doing this in order to increase his chances of "sleeping with" Penny (which he references several times in the episode) and as a way to avoid their planned afternoon. However, Leonard is not off to a good start with Penny because a simple invite such as "Would you like to eat lunch with us?" becomes a long explanation about "stressful" situations, including reference to a "clean colon." However, it is Sheldon who responds, "Leonard, I'm not expert [*sic*] here but I believe in the context of a luncheon invitation, you might want to skip the reference to bowel movements." The truth of Sheldon's claim makes the obviousness of Leonard's attempt and Sheldon's correction grounds for humor as Sheldon's comment aligns with what we have learned thus far about his character: he typically lacks social expertise and directly acknowledges that lack in the exchange. However, from Sheldon's correction, Penny realizes that they have invited her to lunch which was obscured in Leonard's "request." Leonard's and Sheldon's social impairments in such social situations are certainly incongruous with their high IQs mentioned in the opening scene (and later in the episode) and are confirmed in the next scene.

Penny is now shown in their apartment and has commented on their whiteboards that contain many equations. While they argue about the quality and veracity of their own whiteboards, Penny sits down on the very end of the right side of the couch (from the viewer's perspective) and wants to begin eating. However, Sheldon is noticeably uncomfortable:

Penny: Uh, do you guys mind if I start?

Sheldon: Um, Penny, that's where I sit.

Penny: So, sit next to me.

Sheldon: No, I sit there.

Penny: What's the difference?

Sheldon: What's the difference?

Leonard: Here we go.

Sheldon: In the winter that seat is close enough to the radiator to remain warm, and yet not so close as to cause perspiration. In the summer it's directly in the path of a cross breeze created by open windows there, and there. It faces the television at an angle that is neither direct, thus discouraging conversation, nor so far wide to create a parallax distortion, I could go on, but I think I've made my point.

Penny: Do you want me to move?

Sheldon: Well.

Leonard: Just sit somewhere else.

Sheldon: Fine. (Wanders in circles, looking lost.)

Leonard: Sheldon, sit!

Sheldon: Aaah!

In this social exchange, Leonard has told Penny to make herself comfortable, and she has chosen an empty seat. But, Sheldon tries to claim his personal space when he says, "that's where I sit" and "I sit there"; Sheldon does not know how to react to this change in his routine. Penny

invites him to sit next to her, but he declines and explains in detail why this is his preferred seat. The fact that Sheldon gives a long explanation is a surprise to Penny and the viewers, but not to Leonard who prefaces Sheldon's next utterance with "Here we go," indicating to viewers and Penny that what follows is typical of Sheldon. Here we see brevity is not Sheldon's strength, and in providing long explanations, he makes both Penny and Leonard uncomfortable. Leonard then tells Sheldon to sit elsewhere and viewers now see Sheldon looking "lost" as he approaches several spaces in the room to identify a replacement seat. When Leonard demands that he "sit!", Sheldon takes a space on the couch on the opposite end from Penny and expresses "fake comfort" by saying "Aaah!" His facial expressions and behaviors are outside social expectations and the way he says "aaah" actually expresses his discomfort, while also appeasing Leonard and Penny. But, a few moments later, Penny leaves her seat to get a tissue and Sheldon jumps into her seat and expresses a very pleasing smile to indicate he is now "truly" happy in "his seat" and his behavior creates humor.

To further clarify Sheldon's social impairment, in season One's "The Hamburger Postulate," viewers are once again invited into Sheldon's socially naïve world. Leonard, in response to Penny's current disinterest in him, has coitus with Leslie (a colleague). The scene opens with Sheldon scuttling out of his apartment to ask Penny for help, and he says, "I need your opinion on a matter of semiotics" (Lorre and Prady, "The Hamburger Postulate"). However, Penny doesn't understand his request. Sheldon and Penny then go to Sheldon's apartment and toward Leonard's room where a necktie is located on the door (the semiotic conundrum at hand):

Sheldon: Well?

Penny: Well what?

Sheldon: What does it mean?

Penny: Oh, come on, you went to college.

Sheldon: Yes, but I was eleven.

Penny: Alright, look, a tie on the doorknob usually means someone doesn't want to be disturbed because they're, you know, getting busy.

Sheldon: So you're saying Leonard has a girl in there.

Penny: Well, either that or he's lost his tie rack and gotten really into Bryan Adams.

Leslie (voice off): Oh Leonard, you magnificent beast.

Penny: We really shouldn't be standing here.

First, Sheldon's use of the word "semiotics" in his initial request for assistance is such an odd choice. He could just say, "Penny I need your help" but instead chooses a more complex word and a follow-up explanation that is even more confusing to her. Finally Sheldon says "Just come with me." Penny then tries to explain to the "genius" what the tie on the door means by saying "oh, come on, you went to college" but Sheldon reminds her he was eleven when he was in college. She then offers a simple explanation and Sheldon confirms his understanding by saying, "So you're saying Leonard has a girl in there." Here viewers witness Sheldon's naiveté; his college "age" is a surprise that offers fodder for the comedic situation, while also simultaneously confirming his claims to being a genius, thus his resultant naiveté about this situation provides insight into why he might be lacking social prowess and acuity.

As Penny and Sheldon move away from the door, they have another brief exchange about whether this situation happened before, and Sheldon tells Penny, "Oh, yes, but there's usually planning, courtship, and advance

notice. Last time I was able to book a cruise to the Arctic to see a solar eclipse." Penny says, "Wait, you had to leave the state because your roommate was having sex?" And Sheldon replies, "I didn't have to, the dates just happened to coincide." The humor in this exchange arises from the explicit truth of the coincidence and the incongruity of the "advanced notice" Sheldon says has come before. Penny is surprised that Sheldon booked a cruise to avoid the situation but then he says it was a coincidence therefore the incongruity between "advance notice" and "coincidence" provides fodder for the exchange.

After Penny and Sheldon figure out the woman is Leslie, Sheldon says he does not know the situation protocol, which once again sets up his lack of social expertise, and viewers then witness Sheldon's obvious discomfort. He sits in "his spot," keeps awkwardly looking toward the bedroom area, and finally dials a number on his cell phone and says "Hi, Leonard. It's me, Sheldon. In the living room. I just wanted you to know I saw the tie. Message received. You're welcome. You carry on. Give my best to Leslie." Clearly, Sheldon's lack of expertise in this situation bothers him, but knowing that Leonard is having coitus with Leslie does not prohibit him from calling and offers fodder for humor (as is the fact that Leonard answers!).

While many more examples demonstrate the presence of his social impairment, but I now move to the second characteristic of Asperger's, narrow interest, which occurs when people have only a small handful of things with which they want to participate (Beahm; Welton). Once again, the first episode provides cues about Sheldon's narrow interest, largely his own interest in science and science fiction, as he tells Leonard that they are to watch *Battlestar Galactica* only this time "with commentary." We also learn of Sheldon's primary interest in physics with his whiteboard prominently displayed in the apartment (Leonard's whiteboard is off to the viewer's left, and is not the focal point upon entry into the apartment). In later episodes and seasons, viewers are frequently reminded of Sheldon's

primary interest in physics, and his limited social interactions are always centered on his special interests (e.g., paint ball or comic books).

For example, in season three, episode 14, "The Einstein Approximation," Sheldon is all-consumed with a physics formula on his whiteboard. He doesn't sleep for several days and spends every waking moment trying to fix the equation, which negatively impacts his communication. Bernadette (Howard's girlfriend) convinces Sheldon to get some sleep, so he can be more logical and rational, and Sheldon "agrees." Viewers then see Penny and Leonard asleep and Leonard's phone rings. A security guard at what appears to be something equivalent to a Chuck E. Cheese Restaurant has called to ask Leonard to "retrieve" Sheldon from an establishment he has illegally entered. Leonard now is much like a parent who must pick up a child when s/he has done something wrong and the incongruity of Leonard having to take care of Sheldon is observed. Upon his arrival, Leonard thanks the security guard for not calling the police, and the guard says, "Oh, hey, it's no big deal. My sister's got a kid who's special," which is a clear reference to Sheldon's Asperger's-like behavior. Viewers then see a well-established physicist in his pajamas in a children's ball pit, and such incongruity draws initial laughs. However, this laughter is exacerbated when the comedic situation intensifies. Leonard tells Sheldon to get out of the pit, but Sheldon refuses and tells Leonard to come get him by saying, "You can try, but you'll never catch me" and disappears under the balls. Leonard enters the pit and Sheldon repeatedly pops out of the pit yelling "Bazinga!" each time. The surprise of Sheldon playing a child's game of hide-and-seek and yelling "Bazinga!" is irrational for a man his age and incongruously funny because we do not expect that Sheldon would play children's games, and because now there are two well-established physicists in a children's ball pit. Clearly, Sheldon's physics interest fed his determination to fix the equation and led him into an awkward, though

socially-amusing, situation where others must take care of him, mainly Leonard.

Sheldon's interest in science is also foregrounded in one episode with Amy Farrah Fowler, his (girl)friend. In season 4, episode 20, "The Herb Garden Germination," Sheldon and Amy conduct an experiment about gossip. They concoct two false statements, "Sheldon and I engaged in sexual intercourse. In other news, I'm thinking of starting an herb garden" in order to experiment with the spread of gossip in social groups. Their research confirms their beliefs about which news will travel faster (sexual intercourse). The fact that Amy and Sheldon want to test this social hypothesis coupled with the two contrary and disconnected statements they initially use are so incongruous as to be funny. After all, the friends have commented on Amy and Sheldon's relationship throughout their courtship and in previous seasons have discussed Sheldon's disinterest in dating anyone. Therefore, had Sheldon "recognized" their interest in his sexuality earlier, he would not have been surprised by the findings of this experiment. The first statement in the experiment clarifies the quandary about Sheldon's sexual orientation for the group and would certainly move faster in a social group of 20-somethings where dating and romance are prominent.

In addition to physics and science, Sheldon has a second interest in comic books and superheroes. Sheldon spends much of his time reading comic books, debating comic books and superheroes, and visiting the comic book store. Furthermore, Sheldon is often seen wearing superheroes t-shirts, such as the Green Lantern and The Flash. In fact, much of Sheldon's salary appears to go toward the purchase of collectibles, as well as attending Comic-Con (or medieval festivals) and comic book signings ("The Excelsior Acquisition"), and dressing up as superheroes for various events or parties (e.g., "The Justice League Recombination"). But, while Howard, Raj, and Leonard engage in these behaviors, they exhibit other interests that are more socially appropriate. However, Sheldon's primary

interests do not typically deviate from physics or comic books, or his other specific routines. The fact that a 20-something successful researcher has limited interests and that he does not view his own behavior as incongruous to the social expectations of 20-somethings because of his perceived superiority precipitates humor and reflects many behaviors of those with Asperger's.

An analysis of the third characteristic of Asperger's, a compulsive need for introducing routines and interests, demonstrates that this group is an exemplar. Each night has its own designated routine, from food to events, and deviations from them cause much discomfort for Sheldon. For example, Sheldon designates each night's routines, such as Wednesday is comic book store night, Thursday is old video game night, Saturday is laundry night, etc. While the others engage in these routines, they are not uncomfortable if routines change. A clear example occurs in season one, episode five, "The Hamburger Postulate," where viewers witness Sheldon's first Cheesecake Factory experience. Since Sheldon has never been to this restaurant, he is uncomfortable and can't order because he doesn't know what is good. Penny says the burgers are good and recites the various offerings, but Sheldon is still flummoxed. How can he order a burger when he knows he likes the Big Boy burger? Penny says the barbecue burger is like the Big Boy burger, and Sheldon replies, "Excuse me, in a world that already includes the Big Boy, why would I settle for something like a Big Boy."

Clearly, Sheldon's taste for cuisine is limited by his need for specified routines and food. Changes in either or both cause great discomfort, much like the discomfort experienced by those with Asperger's who have breaks in routines (Welton). However, since most viewers are superior to Sheldon in this case because they can eat at new establishments without much difficulty, this is an apparent incongruity; Sheldon's difficulty with a new restaurant and food are exacerbated by the focus of the dialogue and repeated reference to the "The Big Boy," which also emphasizes

Sheldon's behavioral difficulty in the situation. Sheldon's clear discomfort and assumed superiority in the situation lay the grounds for incongruity in the scene and again precipitates humor.

Season two, episode five, "The Euclid Alternative," where Leonard has to work nights and cannot take Sheldon to and from work, which is written in the "roommate agreement,"[5] is another example of a compulsive need for routines and establishing communication norms. Sheldon doesn't understand why Leonard won't abide by the agreement and take him to work. Suddenly, Sheldon is shown knocking three times on Penny's door (another routine) to ask her to take him. Penny reluctantly agrees, and on their way to the university, Sheldon says, "You're going up Euclid Avenue?" Penny affirms this, and he says, "Leonard takes Los Robles Avenue." Viewers begin to see how uncomfortable Sheldon is with a new route, and he provides Penny an explanation for why Los Robles Avenue is better. Eventually, reminding Penny of his regular routines with Leonard and his overt, repeated concern about her "reckless nonchalance regarding the check-engine light" in her car annoy her so much, she leaves Sheldon by the side of the road. The fact that Penny is doing him a favor by driving him to work is obscured by his desire and need for routines. Penny's command for Sheldon to exit the vehicle comes as a surprise, but the fact that he can't understand the situation or notice that Penny is disinterested in his typical routines provides the fodder for the scene, especially since his need for routines has left him stranded.

Later in the episode, Sheldon falsely assumes Leonard will take him home from work and then has Howard take him home on the back of his Vespa where Sheldon is shown screaming, "Oh God, not Euclid Avenue" (5). This is humorous because viewers are reminded of Sheldon's trip into work with Penny, the apparent speed bumps on this road, and his need for routines. In the next scene, Raj picks Sheldon up where Howard has left him and tells Sheldon he is taking him home, but Sheldon says,

> Oh, but I'm not going home. It's Wednesday. Wednesday is new comic book day, we have to go to the comic book store. And then, we have to stop at the Soup Plantation, it's creamy tomato soup day, and Radio Shack, there's a sale on triple-a batteries. Plus, we have to go to Pottery Barn and return my Star Wars sheets.

In these few scenes, viewers observe that Sheldon's first Asperger's-like characteristic, social impairment, does not allow him to see that his friends are doing him a favor and his requests and behaviors are inappropriate and annoying. This, coupled with his discomfort in breaking routines, makes this scene extreme in terms of expectations for friends and provides the grounds for comedy. Sheldon assumes his friends will do things for him and is unable to recognize how he is violating social norms by pushing the limits on requesting favors. Even Raj gives up and drops him at the apartment building where Sheldon is now shown asking Penny if she can drive him to Pottery Barn, which she refuses by simply shutting the door. Sheldon's compulsive need for routines and his lack of social prowess and acuity in these situations make these interactions funny. The fact that he can't understand these situations because his routines blind him to others' courtesy is another incongruity that indicates he is clearly a "fish out of water" (Smith 33).

Additional examples of characteristic three might be discussed, however I now analyze Sheldon's speech and language peculiarities, the fourth characteristic. Most people recognize and abide by conversational norms, but because of Sheldon's social impairment, his inability to follow conversational norms on a regular basis also leads to comedic situations. First, he focuses on facts and offers longer explanations than necessary, which is peculiar. For example, in the opening scene of "The Pilot" discussed above, he explains to Penny why her current seat is "his seat," in "The Euclid Alternative" he explains why Euclid Avenue is not the best alternative, and in "The Tangerine Factor" when Leonard says Penny won't talk about her breakup and Sheldon says, "Not surprising. Penny's

emotional responses originate from the primitive portion of the brain known as the Amygdala, while speech is centered in the much more recently developed Neocortex. The former can easily overpower the latter giving scientific credence to the notion of being rendered speechless" (season one, episode 17). His explanations are not socially appropriate in typical conversations, but he does not understand that they are extraneous and thus not welcomed. However, the unexpected lengthy explanations are peculiar enough to be comedic and also quite like those offered by many people who have Asperger's.

Another useful example occurs in a later episode when Sheldon assists Penny after she slipped in the shower and dislocated her shoulder: "Not surprising. You have no safety mat or adhesive stickers to allow for purchase on a surface with a low coefficient of static friction." Penny says, "What?" and Sheldon says, with much brevity, "Tubs are slippery." Here, Sheldon's speech and language peculiarities once again delay her understanding, thus making his second comment funny because it stands in contradistinction to his longer, more confusing, statement. And, later in the same episode, when Penny does not want Sheldon to see her naked, he says, "Oh. Well, that's understandable. You may be interested to know that a prohibition against looking is well established in heroic mythology. Uh, Lot and his wife, Perseus and Medusa, Orpheus and Eurydice." This explanation is superfluous but is something Sheldon does to make himself more comfortable and to make himself appear knowledgeable in front of others. But, in this case, Penny says, "Yeah, great," thus expressing her disinterest, which he cannot understand as disinterest, and he responds, "They always look. It never ends well."

Not only does Sheldon need to offer these superfluous explanations, but he also does not like to be interrupted when offering them. Therefore, he exhibits unique nonverbal communication, the fifth Asperger's characteristic, as he contorts his face and rapidly blinks his eyes. For example, in "The Friendship Algorithm" Sheldon is explaining tapioca

and Howard interrupts, “I’m thinking about growing a moustache” and then he, Raj, and Leonard continue this conversation until Leonard says, “Alright this is cruel, we better let him finish before his head explodes.” Clearly, they know that Sheldon uses long explanations, and they have devised a plan to interrupt him so that they can see his physical response. This, however, is not his only nonverbal difficulty.

Sheldon’s primary nonverbal communication problem is that he cannot read others’ emotions and thus cannot interpret sarcasm. In the aforementioned “The Adhesive Duck Deficiency” where Penny has fallen in the tub, we see just how incapable Sheldon is in reading social situations and emotions. Sheldon asks Penny questions on the hospital admission form, but Penny says what she needs is “comforting.” Sheldon says, “I’m sorry. There, there. Everything’s going to be fine. Sheldon’s here.” Sheldon’s inability to offer comfort until Penny’s direct request is comedic, especially in the way he responds. His insincere “there, there” and the awkward way in which he touches Penny are definite clues to his deficiency. Viewers observe how uncomfortable he is in this new situation (see characteristic one above) and his inability to provide sincere emotional support to Penny in an emergency is the basis for humor in this scene. However, this episode also allows viewers to see some growth for Sheldon in that when a question on the medical form asks, “When was your last menstrual cycle?” And Penny says, “Oh, next question.” He says, “I’ll put, in progress.” Clearly he was able to read her tone of voice and used an assumed stereotype about women and their mood changes during menstruation, thus demonstrating some social understanding and communicative growth.

One other nonverbal communication difficulty occurs when Sheldon is asked to keep a secret in “The Bad Fish Paradigm.” For him, the secret must be plausible, and if he feels he has to lie to others when events are not plausible, he gets nonverbal tics. He describes this himself when Penny asks him to keep a secret from Leonard about her not finishing

community college: "Secret keeping is a complicated endeavor. One has to be concerned not only about what one says, but about facial expression, autonomic reflexes. When I try to deceive, I myself have more nervous tics than a lyme disease research facility." Sheldon acknowledges that his nonverbal tics are heightened when he is asked to keep secrets from others. In fact, when he feels pressured to tell his secrets, he often removes himself from the situation entirely, such that in this episode he moves out of the apartment so as not to reveal the secret. His extreme decision to move out coupled with his nonverbal tics is the basis for humor in this episode. Sheldon would rather tell the truth no matter the consequence than keep a secret because he knows he will nonverbally express it.

However, when it comes to outright lies, he would rather embellish the lie to make it more plausible, so that if someone researched the lie his expressions would be more congruous with the situation. For example, in "The LoobenFeld Decay" Leonard does not want to attend Penny's theatrical performance and lies to her. Sheldon is guilt-ridden, tells Penny about Leonard's lie, and then offers his own, more plausible lie.

> Sheldon: Well, first of all, your lie was laughably transparent, where mine is exquisitely convoluted. While you were sleeping I was weaving an un-unravelable web.
>
> Leonard: Un-unravelable?
>
> Sheldon: Yes, if she Googles Leopold Houston she'll find a Facebook page, an online blog depicting his descent into drug use, and a desperate yet hopeful listing on e-harmony.com.
>
> Leonard: Okay, why would I go to a drug intervention for your cousin.
>
> Sheldon: Ah, because it's in Long Beach, and I don't drive.

> Leonard: We're going to Long Beach?
>
> Sheldon: No, of course not. There's no cousin Leo. There's no intervention. Focus Leonard.
>
> Leonard: Oh, come on!
>
> Sheldon: We just leave the house on Friday night, and we return in the wee hours emotionally wrung out from the work of convincing Leo to go back into rehab.

In this episode, Sheldon realizes that Penny could find out the lie is a ruse, so he concocts a story about his "cousin Leo" and "rehab," and even creates a fake Facebook page to cover his tracks. He would rather the lie seem plausible than have his nonverbal tics give him away. He is aware of his nonverbal communication problems and devises a way to control them in a stressful situation thus making his lie peculiar and humorous.

The final Asperger's characteristic is motor clumsiness and appears to be Sheldon's least prominent characteristic. Sheldon doesn't exhibit this in most instances, except driving vehicles (e.g., "The Euclid Alternative) or when he is stressed about situations. Recall "The Einstein Approximation" above where Sheldon's behavior becomes child-like in the ball pit. When Sheldon has not slept in days, he is shown awkwardly turning his body back and forth toward his whiteboard that holds the troublesome equation. He excuses his awkward motor movements with a scientific explanation about engaging his "superior colliculus," which positions the awkward behavior against his genius, thus making him seem less awkward. However, when Sheldon does feel uncomfortable in situations, such as the scene mentioned above where Penny unknowingly sits in his seat ("The Pilot") or when Penny invites him into her apartment, and Sheldon appears "lost" while trying to find his "spot" in unfamiliar territory ("The Tangerine Factor"), Sheldon's movements become quite exaggerated and

clumsy. When he is stressed or in new situations, these clumsy moments may appear but are often obscured by one or more of the more prominent characteristics described above.

The analysis above demonstrates just how similar Sheldon's behaviors are to people with Asperger's, and it is the similarities that provide fodder and incongruities necessary for this comedy. More examples from each episode, throughout the seven seasons, would further support this analysis, but they are too numerous to include here. However key questions emerge: Why is identifying Sheldon as someone with Asperger's important? And why would the creators avoid such a diagnosis?

Conclusion: Conundrum or not?

As evidenced above, Sheldon's behaviors often align with those found in people on the autism spectrum, particularly those with Asperger's Syndrome, and while many autism and Asperger's bloggers argue for a diagnosis, the creators and writers refuse to label his behavior as anything other than Sheldon just being "Sheldony." From social impairments, narrow interests, discomfort in new situations, violations of routines, the inability to read emotions, and some motor clumsiness, Sheldon clearly exhibits Asperger's characteristics, often several at one time, and provides the incongruities necessary for comedy. Comedies rely on quirkiness and viewers certainly encounter that in this series, so why do creators Chuck Lorre and Bill Prady shy away from labeling that quirkiness when doing so can raise awareness of an identified disorder? Sheldon's social difficulties and/or perceived lack of caring set the groundwork for humorous situations where numerous incongruities arise from the discrepancy between his being an intellectual "genius," which many on the spectrum are, and a socially awkward member of society, which those "on the spectrum" can and do exhibit. The creators identify his genius and emphasize the fact that he is not "crazy" (his mother had him tested) but

what is never directly uttered in the dialogue is what the testing was trying to assess.

Clearly, Sheldon is a focused, diligent scientist and has a keen interest in facts of all types, which also reflect many people "on the spectrum." There was a great missed opportunity in "The Einstein Approximation" above to identify Asperger's, even briefly, when the security guard says to Leonard, "Oh, hey, it's no big deal. My sister's got a kid who's special." In fact, it is Sheldon's assumed superiority over others based on his genius IQ and his success as a physicist that are often the show's most prominent comedic moments; therefore, having Sheldon identify as or be identified as "on the spectrum" would not mitigate situations within which he finds himself or lessen the humor of the show, especially when many with Asperger's exhibit similar social difficulties and are learning to overcome or manage them. The creators would not have to apologize for such a diagnosis and instead would be offering a great public service by increasing awareness. It is clear Sheldon is a work in progress and continues to learn social norms and mores, as do those with Asperger's. And, even though the creators fear that identifying Sheldon on the autism spectrum may lessen the show's success or marginalize people with Asperger's, they are missing an opportunity to acknowledge Sheldon's behavior as "on the spectrum" or even as Asperger's, especially when Clifton reminds us that Sheldon "has distinguished himself in a career that relies very little on social interaction and rewards the ability to engage with inanimate matter," and viewers can celebrate his success while also laughing at his communicative deficiencies (63).

In summary, what cannot be ignored is the fact that at least five of the six characteristics of Asperger's are readily present (one, motor clumsiness, is less prominent) and provide a framework for understanding Sheldon's deficiencies, which are incongruous with Westernized social norms, thus providing the framework for humor; yet, Sheldon is also a "social" work in progress as he learns about sarcasm and its functions,

pulls pranks on others and recognizes that he has done so ("Bazinga!"), and attempts to empathize with others over seven seasons, thus making the timing quite ripe for a diagnosis. We can still laugh at how his deficiencies defy his being a genius because he is "wrapped up in" what he is doing and not focusing on the social or emotional situation (Rickman 10). Perhaps the time is now to have Sheldon embrace his communicative differences and in doing so help audiences better understand Asperger's. As Kinnison notes,

> The popular TV show "Big Bang Theory" puts an obviously hyper-intelligent male Aspie, Sheldon [*sic*], up against the emotionally/socially-intelligent woman across the hall, Penny. Comedy ensues. The show is so popular around the world that it's not out of line to suggest it is single-handedly changing attitudes toward extreme geekery and Aspie traits, much as "Will and Grace"[*sic*] made harmless and acceptable a stereotypical flaming homosexual character, Jack. So not only is the show funny and original in mining super-geek traits for humor, it is probably educating people on accepting and valuing Aspies." (par. 4)

After all, we laugh at fat jokes on shows like *Mike and Molly*, *King of Queens*, and *South Park*, racial jokes on shows like *The Simpsons* and *Seinfeld*, sexual orientation jokes on shows like *Will and Grace* and *Roseanne*, etc. all in the context of the television sitcom, so why not affirm Sheldon's diagnosis and watch him learn and grow over the course of the series as a person with Asperger's Syndrome rather than simply gloss it out of fear of losing an audience? The fear of marginalizing people with Asperger's is real, but comedies often provide opportunities to identify, manage, and discuss people's differences or disabilities. Creators can use their talents to challenge, even subvert, mainstream assumptions in a comedic context, as many others have done and continue to do (i.e., *Modern Family*). In fact, we already laugh at Raj's selective-mutism in

The Big Bang Theory and watched a young Max Braverman on *Parenthood* be diagnosed with Asperger's. The creators of *The Big Bang Theory* are definitely missing an opportunity to affirm Asperger's with a character that has shown sitcom staying power as well as social and relational growth, and who continues to try to understand and apply Westernized, communicative norms. Stereotyping and marginalization are always a fear when creating comedies, but subversion of cultural norms and understandings can't occur without the creators taking a risk.

Notes

[1] The term "deficiency" is problematic because of its association with "disease." However, Westernized communicative norms are the basis for comparison, therefore I use "deficiencies" and "inadequacies" to emphasize the difference. Also, while I'm not certified to diagnose Sheldon, I use the Asperger's characteristics to argue such a claim.

[2] Humor studies are the focus of many TV analyses and help us understand humor and how it is derived in comedies. Humor types include incongruity theory, superiority theory, relief (release) theory, and social identity theory. See Berger, Ferguson and Ford, Gillon, Meyer, Paolucci and Richardson, Senzani, Stokoe, Thompson, and Wright for discussion.

[3] See the work of Frith, Laurent, and Rubin, Rubin and Lennon, and Welton.

[4] Friends know the rules for being friends but do NOT write them down and sign them.

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Influence of Popular Television Programming on Students' Perception about Course Selection, Major, and Career

KRISTY TUCCIARONE

The goal of this study was to understand how undergraduate students perceive the advertising industry and its careers based upon portrayals in the two most recognized television programs featuring an advertising agency – *Mad Men* (2007-present) and *Trust Me* (2009-2010). The proposed research question was "How is the advertising industry portrayed and what are the implications of these portrayals for students' course selection, major, and career?"

This qualitative study used the theoretical framework of cultivation theory, the research perspective of symbolic interactionism, and the research method of focus group interviewing. Cultivation Theory was used because it examines the effect of television messages and how one's reality is defined; symbolic interactionism was used to discover what meanings are found in the data; and focus group interviewing was used to understand the attitudes and experiences of the undergraduate participants. The method of focus group interviewing was used because it encourages participants to speak freely, creates a synergistic group effect, and promotes interaction. Based upon the television portrayals, the research participants perceived the advertising industry and its careers as concerned with personal issues at home and with a spouse, partner, or ex; agency relationships that displayed conflict, stress, frustration, and anger; and

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agency relationships in conflict with the boss. Portrayals of agency offices were also analyzed. However, personal issues seemed to take precedence over work.

Practitioners of advertising education, if they do not already, need to care about what television communicates about their profession because television often "…reflects societal views…and it has the potential to influence societal perceptions" (Duncan, Nolan, and Wood 38). In addition, practitioners of advertising education need to care about television's portrayals of the advertising industry because television communicates to college students. Television programs feature a main character with a specific career, which offers an "insider" look at a specific career and industry. Two, television's portrayal of advertising may not be consistent with the "real" industry. Laker contends that "Many students know very little concerning careers or positions they are interested in and subsequently many of them make academic and career-related decisions that are not based on reality" (63). Three, students searching for courses and ultimately a major, which will result in a career after graduation may use the media for explanation as the media has the ability to sway interpretation of various careers (Laker). Furthermore, practitioners of advertising education need to understand the media's portrayal, as the industry may look attractive to career seekers because it is growing at an exponential rate as a result of the rapidly changing media landscape (Advertising Age; The Creative Group). Finally, as advertising practitioners and educators, one of our responsibilities is to inform students about the industry and the careers. Therefore, this will be "…beneficial to both the students and society if we can ensure new entrants are making informed choices about life-influencing career and degree decisions" (Crampton, Walstrom, and Schmabach 226).

To date, no article has been published that addresses the advertising industry in television programs and its pervasiveness; only the role of film has been examined. Tucciarone revealed how films portray the advertising

industry and its careers based upon six Hollywood films. Using the qualitative research method of focus group interviewing, the following themes emerged: competitive and cut throat, stealing other's ideas, think tank, creative, researching target audience and product, synergy, selling, fun and exciting, hierarchy, lots of money to be made, somewhat mental (crazy), perfection, paid to party, luxurious and glamorous, lying and deceitful, sleazy and slimy, flexibility and freedom, and client rules. This study and the previous study are related because they seek to examine how popular culture may influence viewers' perception of the advertising industry and its careers.

Portrayals of the advertising industry and its careers in mass media (e.g., television) are areas that lack research. It is important to note that the television programs *Mad Men* and *Trust Me* were selected based on the plot, the setting, and significant recognition by the undergraduate participants.

Influence on Course Selection

There are several influencers on course selection. Previous research suggested that parents, friends, faculty advisor, faculty members, course catalog description, and "others" are major influencers on course selection (Kerin, Harvey, and Crandall). Seiler, Weybright, and Stang conclude that course/instructor evaluations influenced course selection. Additional influencers on course selection are personal interest, course content, compatibility with major (Babad) and instructor reputation (Leventhal, Abrami, Perry, and Breen). The medium of television, an unexamined social force for the portrayal of the advertising industry, may also affect students' course selection. Regarding television's pervasiveness, Michael Novak notes, "Television is a molder of the soul's geography. It builds up incrementally a psychic structure of expectations. It does so in much the same way that school lessons slowly, over the years, tutor the unformed

mind and teach it how to think" (qtd. in Vivian 183). Comstock, in *Television in America* wrote, "Television has become an unavoidable and unremitting factor in shaping what we are and what we will become" (123). Furthermore, Schiappa, Gregg, and Hewes conclude that one's attitudes can be "…influenced through exposure to mass meditated messages, particularly via television" (459). As a result of these influencers, it would seem selecting appealing courses and declaring a major that resides with one's passion would be evident.

However, as of 2012, 80 percent of freshman reported being confused and uncertain about their career aspirations, which was hindering them from declaring a major (Simon). The reason for this confusion is attributed to the ever-changing landscape of corporate America and the continuous evolution of jobs; new job titles, such as homeland security, cyberforensics, and brand ambassador. Institutions of higher learning must adapt the curriculum to the evolving marketplace to keep curriculum relevant. Keeping the curriculum relevant means adding new academic programs as well as modifying current ones. It also means that students are even more uncertain about declaring a major, because of the abundance of academic choices. For example, some institutions, such as the University of Michigan and Arizona State University offer an astounding 250 majors (Simon). Institutions attempt to guide students with course and major selection by offering orientation sessions that acquaint students with the institution and student services, provide an informal conversation with faculty members, help them plan a career, and in general, tutor them in skills to survive college, but the downfall is that the sessions are optional (Pascarella and Terenzini) and students may not benefit from this new knowledge.

Furthermore, and critically, when students enter institutions of higher learning they are "…given considerably more control and responsibility in selecting their courses than they previously had in high school" (DellaGioia). Hagedorn, Maxwell, Cypers, Moon, and Lester whose

research analyzed students' dropping and adding of courses, contended that students lack a better understanding of the courses they wish to enroll in and thus, are not making "…more rational choices" (481).

As a result, students may turn to a familiar source of information to make sense of course and major selection – the mass media. What has changed about mass media is branded content. Branded content is a relatively new form of advertising, which blurs distinction between advertising and entertainment by fusing the two elements together to create entertainment content. Entertainment content is used in film, video games, music, Internet, and television and is well received by those aged 18-34. Branded content in television dramas, such as *Mad Men* and *Trust Me*, can lampoon the advertising industry and its careers because the content "...uses a narrative structure, character development, and offer[s] an experience..." (Wiese) about the advertising industry while incorporating familiar brands, such as Dove and Rolling Rock.

Given the images displayed on television, is viewers' reality influenced by what they view? Mae Jemison, the first black female astronaut, studied science in college after watching Lieutenant Uhura in *Star Trek*. Similarly, Nelson Andrews earned a criminal justice degree after being influenced by the case-solving detectives in *Scooby-Doo* (Arenofsky). *I Love Lucy* episodes inspired Shari Cohen, senior partner and managing director of the advertising agency Mindshare. Cohen said, "That show made me realize I wanted to work in television" (qtd. in Linnett ps2-s2). Tim Taylor pointed to a more factual program, *NOVA* by Public Broadcasting System, which influenced his course selection and major. Taylor said, "It presented programs on physics and physical science" (qtd. in Arenofsky 6). Taylor is a chemist for Dial Corporation and invents cleaning products (Arenofsky). Undergraduate public relations students shared that mass media influenced their course and career expectations because the career was portrayed in the media as glamorous (Bowen). Similarly, undergraduate business students rated television or

movie portrayal of the occupation as the most important information source when selecting their major (Crampton, Walstrom, and Schambach).

More recently, forensic science television programs (i.e., *CSI*) have had an effect on campus. "Enrollment in forensic science educational programs across the U.S. is exploding" (Houck). At Honolulu's Chaminade University, enrollment in the forensic science program grew from 15 students to 100 students over four years (Houck). West Virginia University echoes similar spikes in its forensic science program; the program "…has grown from four graduates in 2000 to currently being the third largest major on campus, with more than 500 students in the program" (Houck).

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

The contemporary media effects theories most recognized for understanding the effects of television are cultivation theory, gratification and uses theory, and social learning theory. (Campbell, Martin, and Fabos). Uses and gratification theory examines what audiences will do with the media messages, as opposed to the effects of the message. The theory also attempts to understand what gratification viewers receive from the media message (Anderson and Ross). Bandura's social learning theory contends that people learn from one another by observation, imitation, and modeling. Cultivation effect does not attempt to understand what audiences do with the media messages or what audiences learn; rather, it is concerned with the effect of the media messages and how one's reality is defined. Thus, the theory most applicable to this study is cultivation effect because the study seeks to understand how students define a reality about the advertising industry and its careers based upon portrayals in the

popular television programs *Mad Men* and *Trust Me*, as well as understand how that reality influences course selection, major, and career.

Cultivation theory suggests that watching television over a period of time will "cultivate" the audience's perception of reality. The theory applies to both light and heavy television viewing because "…even light viewers live in the same cultural environment as most others who do watch television" (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, and Signorielli). In addition, even the smallest effects of television viewing can have an effect on one's reality. Shanahan and Morgan define cultivation further: "The process within which interaction through messages shapes and sustains the terms on which the messages are premised" (12). In addition, Gerbner adds, "Cultivation is what a culture does" because "culture is the basic medium in which humans live and learn" (249). Television communicates to viewing audiences through the images and the actor's dialogue. A communicative interaction occurs when viewers respond to the televised message. Hence, watching a television program is considered interacting, while the entertainment industry has control over the mass reception of the cultural stories (television) (Shanahan and Morgan). Gerbner, Gross, and Melody contend that television "…not only [satisfies] but shape[s] a range of attitudes, tastes, and preferences. It provides the boundary conditions and overall patterns within which the processes of personal and group-mediated selection, interpretation, and image-foundation go on" (567).

Research Perspective

The interpretivist process provided the perspective for this research project. Interpretation enables the researcher to untangle webs of meaning that develop when participants are exposed to and interact with different people, places, and ideas. Interpretation answers the question, "What are the meanings in the data?" (Gay and Airasian). Geertz contends that interpretation "…illuminates the meanings and conceptual structures that organize a subject's experience" (27). More precisely, interpretive

interactionism was applied to this research study, because it combined symbolic interactionism and interpretive inquiry (Blumer; Denzin). The combination highlighted a thorough understanding of interpretive thought and the presence of symbolic undertones.

Interpretive interactionism is critical to the construction of reality as humans do not have direct access to reality (Denzin; Mills). Without direct access to reality, humans must interpret experiences that they encounter. According to Denzin, "Reality…is mediated by symbolic representations, by narrative texts, and by televisual and cinematic structures that stand between the person and the so-called real world" (x).

Methodology

Interviewing in focus groups was the qualitative research method used to understand the proposed research question (How is the advertising industry portrayed and what are the implications of these portrayals for students' course selection, major, and career?). Focus group interviewing was selected for several reasons. One, this method encourages subjects to speak freely, completely, and without criticism about their "…behaviors, attitudes, and opinions they possess" (Berg 111). Two, focus group interviewing creates a "synergistic group effect," which lends to greater ideas, analysis, and discussion about the given topic (Berg 112). Three, and most important, this method is based upon interaction. "Meaning and answers arising during focus group interviews are socially constructed rather than individually created" (Berg 115). It is imperative to use focus group interviewing in this study because the process of selecting a course, a major, and a career, like the focus group process, occurs socially (i.e., symbolic interactionism).

The researcher, serving as the focus group moderator, explained the research project to the undergraduate participants as well as how the focus groups would operate. In addition, the undergraduate participants were

told their responses would be recorded for analysis purposes by the researcher. First, the researcher asked the undergraduate participants to write down television programs they recalled that portrayed the advertising industry and its careers. In addition, the research participants were asked to recall television programs of which they had previously viewed multiple episodes or an entire season. In total, the research participants recalled seven television programs that in some aspect portrayed the advertising industry and careers. The undergraduate participants recalled *Bewitched* (1964-1972, ABC), *Bosom Buddies* (1980-1982, ABC), *Thirtysomething* (1987-1991, ABC), *Melrose Place* (1992-1999, FOX), *Two and a Half Men* (2003-present, CBS), *Mad Men* (2007-present, AMC) and *Trust Me* (2009-2010, TNT). Out of these television programs, the most popular and most recognized programs among all the undergraduate participants were *Mad Men* and *Trust Me*. Since *Mad Men* and *Trust Me* had an advertising plot, the setting occurred in an advertising environment, and the television programs had significant recognition by the research participants, these programs were the only ones discussed and analyzed to uncover patterns of meaning (e.g., portrayals). To elicit the most discussion about television programs' portrayal of the advertising industry and influence on course selection, major, and career choice, the researcher crafted a series of discussion questions:

1. How is the advertising industry/careers portrayed in these programs?

2. Explain if you are more likely to enroll in advertising courses after viewing portrayals of the industry in television programs?

3. Explain if advertising portrayals in television programs affect choice of major, which would influence your career outlook.

4. After watching programs that showcase aspects of the advertising industry/careers, what are you learning?

To effectively engage in focus group interviewing and to elicit the most discussion possible to probe for patterns of meaning, the number of research participants allowed per focus group was eight to ten (Moriarty, Mitchell, and Wells). Thus, there were total of seven focus groups. The final data set was 70 undergraduate students.

Participants

Undergraduate participants enrolled in the Introduction to Advertising course spring 2009 and fall 2010 were selected for this study, because they were interested in the subject of advertising. Age and nationality were not considered in this study due to the population of students at this public, 4-year university in Missouri. The university is a robust institution with a rich population of students, which offers more generalizability of the study findings.

Analysis and Results

The data was analyzed by the researcher using the recorded discussions of the research participants. The researcher used systematic analysis by "…analyzing the content of the statements made by the subjects during the focus groups" (Berg 124). More specifically, the researcher bracketed the data from the research participants. The portrayals of the advertising industry (the phenomenon) were held up close for inspection (Berg). According to Berg, bracketing "…unmasks, defines, and determines the phenomenon's basic elements and essential structure" (124).

The salient findings are discussed to reveal how the two most recognized advertising programs aired on television portray the advertising industry and its careers. Both *Mad Men* and *Trust Me* shared

similar portrayals. However, *Mad Men* ranked less favorable by the research participants as a result of the time period *Mad Men* was set – the 1960s. To elicit rich descriptions from the research participants, a series of discussion questions were asked by the researcher. Following is the analysis based upon the undergraduate participant responses to the discussion questions.

- How is the advertising industry/careers portrayed in these programs?

The research participants analyzed portrayals of the advertising industry and its careers in *Mad Men* and *Trust Me* as concerned with personal issues at home and with a spouse, partner, or ex; agency relationships that displayed conflict, stress, frustration, and anger; and agency relationships in conflict with the boss. Portrayals of agency offices were also analyzed. However, personal issues seemed to take precedence over work. Furthermore, and critically, even though both *Mad Men* and *Trust Me* shared similar portrayals, *Mad Men* ranked less favorable by the research participants as a result of the time period *Mad Men* was set – the 1960s.

According to the research participants, the 1960s reflects portrayals of drinking, smoking, sex outside the marriage, and male dominance in the workplace. One participant explained: “Consider the fact that *Mad Men* happened in the 1960s may explain why advertising was underplayed compared to other aspects, such as smoking and drinking. However, I was able to see some aspects of advertising aside from smoking and drinking, such as the interaction between agency and clients, how research is conducted, and branding.” Another female participant commented about male dominance at the advertising agency in *Mad Men*: “I did not like how advertising was portrayed in *Mad Men* and especially the women. Women were not properly treated back then. Women had little or no voice and their ideas were not taken seriously for the most part.” A male participant shared a similar thought, “There are some portrayals of *Mad*

Men that I question would happen today, such as drinking in the office and the womanizing." Another participant echoed positive comments about *Mad Men*, and he said, "Although the characters had many personal issues, their creativity and work ethic was exciting and influenced me." According to a research participant, *Trust Me* showed a more realistic side of an advertising agency and that hard work is involved: "I think it showed a good balance of hard work, fun, and how personal lives can interfere with business (e.g., Sarah's relationship with husband and inter-office relationship between Tony and Denise)." Another participant explained, "Personally, I found *Trust Me* to portray the advertising industry as stressful – working with others, inter-office conflicts, fighting for accounts (heck, fighting for an office with a window), meeting the needs of the client, and creating an attention-getting campaign."

- Explain if you are more likely to enroll in advertising courses after viewing portrayals of the industry in television programs?

A female participant said about *Mad Men*,

> Honestly, viewing the portrayals of the industry on television did not inspire me to want to enroll in more advertising courses because it simply did not give me full details about advertising. The employees in the show were usually playing around or not giving their all to projects (e.g. males' attitude toward the lipstick account). The only employee who inspired me to take an advertising course was Peggy, because she was one of the first women in the agency to land a promotion to junior copywriter – very empowering.

Mad Men also had an influential effect on a male participant: "The show persuaded me into exploring more about the advertising industry through my course work. I would be lying if I said that watching *Mad Men* didn't

get me excited about the industry." *Trust Me* further reinforced one female participant's belief about the industry: "The program is entertaining, but also seems to present the real atmosphere of an advertising agency – hard work along with frustration. *Trust Me* also depicts creative people, and I consider myself to be such a person, so yes, I would enroll in more courses with a copywriting emphasis." An enthused female participant explained,

> After watching the seventh episode of *Trust Me*, I couldn't wait to take more advertising courses. Before watching the show, I really had no clue about the different ad jobs and the hierarchy of an agency. I never have considered which position I would like, because I didn't understand the job descriptions. Now, I have a much better sense of the different ad jobs, and I hope to work my way up to creative director and beyond.

- Explain if advertising portrayals in television programs affect your choice of major, which would influence your career outlook.

After watching season one of *Trust Me*, a participant explained that advertising portrayals in television programs do affect major and career outlook:

> More and more students are getting their ideas and beliefs of the workplace from TV shows. TV shows offer an easy avenue for students to see examples of specific industries. Many students follow a certain career path because of how well it is portrayed on TV. TV shows commonly show the good qualities of a character's life such as money, sex, and leisure as a result of his/her occupation. As a result, viewers want the same life. I think for many kids (I'm talking about myself), TV shows offer a look into working environments that they would never get to see.

One female participant concurred about advertising portrayals in television as influential: "Who wouldn't want the lifestyle of Don Draper? He has everything. He has a cool job, good pay, head of his department, he gets along with most of co-workers (except Peter), and he is friends with his boss."

One participant shared that television programs have been influential on her career outlook since she was a young girl: "I think people (kids included) go into certain fields because of what they see in movies and on television. When I was younger I wanted to be a marine biologist because of the movie *Free Willy*." Another male participant echoed similar sentiments about mass media's influence, "Consumers of the mass media are swayed by such representations; some may think that all colleges are like *Animal House* and every ghost is Patrick Swayze."

In some research, participants' television programs are not influential when choosing a major and career outlook, but the programs do invite an interest. "No, TV shows do not affect my major selection. I love shows such as *Law and Order*, *Grey's Anatomy*, and *House* but seeing those shows do not make me want to be a detective or a doctor. I think TV shows are a good way to have a look into things that you're not doing for the sake of curiosity. The only thing TV portrayals would do for me is spark an interest to find out more," expressed one participant. Another participant shared a similar thought: "No, watching television shows spikes my interest to take a course or two in the subject. But, just to pick my major because of a TV show…I wouldn't do that."

- After watching programs that showcase aspects of the advertising industry/careers, what are you learning?

"Although I find the industry interesting, I am learning that advertising is for young people with little responsibilities – it's too fast paced," declared a non-traditional student after viewing season one of *Mad Men*. Another female student commented about her learning experiences from *Mad Men*,

"By becoming an executive in advertising, I will get to work in big cities like New York, Los Angeles, or Chicago." Regarding *Trust Me* one participant explained, "I was learning through the entire show, as I was putting myself in the scenarios and envisioned what I would have done differently and possibly more effective. Of course, I understand that the show is a drama but being that it is a drama then a comedy allowed the show to offer a variety of conflicts that prepared me for the ones in real life one day." An excited male participant shared,

> Here is coolest part about *Mad Men* and *Trust Me*, interwoven in the personal issues, stress, and conflict I was able to see real ad work like recording a radio commercial for a lipstick account, understanding the impact of the law on cigarette sales for Lucky Strikes, re-branding Menken's department store, researching Right Guard, developing a campaign for a steel company, tailoring a savings account toward a man's private life, creating a campaign for American Airlines after a plane crashes, writing a tagline for a cruise line, squeezing out a presidential nominee, writing taglines for Arc Mobile, researching and developing the Big Idea for Dove, designing the theme for the Olympics, pitching the Rolling Rock account – man, this is exactly what I want to do.

Discussion

The topic of television and its ability to cultivate audience's perceptions of reality is nothing new to the field of mass communication. Whether the information communicated via television is accurate or inaccurate, it provides a lens of insight about how to act, behave, dress, and feel (Winterstein and Page). What is new about mass media is branded content. Branded content in television dramas is effective for promoting industries (i.e., higher learning) and brands (i.e., courses and majors), because of its

ability to integrate the message seamlessly into the story while sharing an intended message with the viewer. Television dramas, such as *Mad Men* and *Trust Me*, can lampoon the advertising industry and its careers because the content "...uses a narrative structure, character development, and offer[s] an experience..." (Wiese). The critical aspect of branded content is willingness to share the content with others. The looming question: Was the content from *Mad Men* and *Trust Me* shared? Indeed, "...many, many people tweeted about the president's reference to 'Mad Men'. The *Mad Men* reference about equal pay for women inspired 33,555 tweets per minute" (Marshall). *Trust Me* inspired content sharing as viewers were directed to a dedicated web site to the "Be A Creative Director" promotion (Chief Marketer).

Branded content is meant to be shared, just like the process of selecting college courses and ultimately declaring a major; the process is not in isolation, it is a collaborative process done with others. This process of collaboration is the new era of advertising because "...brands are interacting with publics" (Goodson). As a result of this new era of advertising, it is urgent to understand how undergraduate students define a reality about the advertising industry and its careers based upon portrayals in the popular television programs *Mad Men* and *Trust Me* as well as understand how that reality influences course selection, major, and career.

Given the analyzed portrayals, the majority of the research participants said these programs would prompt them to enroll in advertising courses. One research participant explained: “I think any type of portrayal, even if exaggerated a bit, is better than being completely blind about what goes on in an advertising agency. By watching various depictions of the industry and the careers, I am able to decide if I would even want to take ad courses and be involved with such an industry.” Even the students who said that viewing portrayals of advertising and its careers would not prompt them to enroll in advertising courses did admit that *Mad Men* and *Trust Me* did pique their curiosity to the point that they would seek more

information about advertising. One student shared, “For me, watching episodes of *Trust Me* intrigues me and makes me more curious.” Students were a little more cautious when selecting a major because of these programs, especially *Mad Men* because of the 1960s time period. The students could relate to the work, but not the drinking, smoking, sex outside the marriage, and male dominance in the workplace. One student expressed his thoughts about popular television programs’ effect on his major: “I would never make a major decision based on a television program. That is not to say that television is not a springboard for ideologies and interests. In all fairness to television, it does make me want to investigate further into the field as I am now more inclined to look at the creative side of the industry." Only one student said these programs would not affect her choice of major. As a non-traditional student, she perceived the industry as one for “young” people.

Television, just like advertising, has durable staying power. According to the Media Comparisons Study of 2010, television reached nearly 90 % of people 18 and over every day. More specifically, *Mad Men* drew record-breaking audiences with 2.7 million viewers during the Season 6 finale; AMC’s highest rated show (Reuters), and *Trust Me* debuted with 3.4 million viewers (Frankel); and these viewer totals do not include shared content. Television has the power to provide insights about subjects, people, and places that may have been relatively unexplored by the viewing audience. As young adults seek options about college courses that will ultimately determine their major and career choice, it is advantageous for advertising practitioners and educators to understand the messages communicated on the “tube” about the industry and its careers. As practitioners and educators, we can capitalize on popular culture's reality by challenging students to think critically and investigate situations.

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Partisan Pop Cultural Awareness: Disclosing the Metaphoric Rhetoric of the "Culture Wars"

Jeremy V. Adolphson

We may have often heard the expression, "Music is what feelings sound like," but rather than pointing out the clichéd banality of this statement, we must first realize that, by and large, these feelings and emotions are often enmeshed, constrained, and guided by our own cultural and political worldviews. In the sphere of contemporary political discourse one does not have to traverse far to become aware by noticing and consuming personal ad hominem attacks, smear campaigns, or outlandish accusations that at once seem preposterous, yet on the other hand, strangely normalized. In fact, over the last twenty-five years, a sizeable amount of scholarship has reported just how polarized and partisan American political discourse has become. Social media has both complicated and accelerated the rate with which matters of culture, sexuality, race, and religion become disseminated. The kaleidoscope of texts, tweets and rants from today's political pundits and public intellectuals reinvigorate the rhetoric by producing never-ending strings of binary classifications framed to simultaneously label and differentiate members as Left/Right, moral/immoral, religious/secular, etc.

I actively encourage my own students to practice critical engagement with the news media, but how many of us in higher education actually practice what we preach? Do these blatantly incomprehensive and irreconcilable categories accurately justify a particular politicized identity? We might even push this question further and ask how well these ideologies represent "our" own lives. If we are susceptible to this type of

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rhetoric, can these inherent inconsistencies ever be resolved? Scholars like James Davison Hunter do not think so. Hunter skeptically remarked: "How well does our democracy mediate disagreement that is seemingly, if not in fact, incommensurable and [ir]reconcilable" (*Before the Shooting Begins* vii). Perhaps, rather than getting lost in such partisan rhetoric (speaking pejoratively), we need to refocus on how their *rhetoric* (e.g., through the Aristotelian lens of *all the available means of persuasion*) works.

The heart of the culture wars argument, for Hunter "was that American public culture was undergoing a realignment that, in turn, was generating significant tension and conflict" ("Enduring Culture War" 13). The culture wars hypothesis rests upon the idea that these warring sides not only fundamentally disagree on matters of politics, family, education, law and the arts but that the strategies employed by both sides isolate and dispel venomous attacks against the seemingly innocuous and unrelated non-politicized ideas, such as where an individual shops, who one considers to be family, the music that we listen to, and even the clothes that we wear. American politics in the early 1990s was rife with a growing unease around a deep and broad cultural divide. As Patrick Buchanan famously remarked during his 1992 Republic National Convention speech:

> Friends, this election is about more than who gets what. It is about who we are. It is about what we believe and what we stand for as Americans. There is a religious war going on in this country. It is a cultural war, as critical to the kind of nation we shall be as the Cold War itself. For this war is for the soul of America. And in that struggle for the soul of America, Clinton & Clinton are on the other side, and George Bush is on our side. And so, we have to come home, and stand beside him.

Regardless of whether your ideological framework agrees or disagrees with Hunter, conservative political commentator Buchanan, or other

public address scholars, this article illustrates that the culture wars are largely a metaphorical war, and hence, a rhetorical war being waged in almost every sector of our lives. The personal is very much political, yet often, these battlegrounds or theatres are largely invisible to the everyday American public. Why is this so? If we contend that the personal is political, then we must relent that the popular – in art, music, literature – can also be read as political.

The culture wars discursively "exist" within public culture. Disclosing the rhetoric of the culture wars provides an opportunity to point out just how largely undemocratic these arguments are. Accepting and recognizing the culture wars hypothesis rests upon two prepositions that have a complex but connected relationship to American political discourse: 1) framing one's position within the strict binary Left/Right, Traditionalists/Progressives eliminates the possibility for choice, change and discussion, all inherent components within a democracy, and 2) the rhetoric of the culture wars are related to arguments of quality and degrees to which one is indoctrinated or invested with actively seeking out political news – not just the general population that Hunter asserted were affected (*Culture Wars*). Explicitly related to these propositions is that the culture wars emphasize values that are only unique to the particular group, rather than locating generalized or universal beliefs, and that which is precious (i.e. certain conceptions of what is a family, definitions of decency, family values) to them. My aim in this essay is to highlight how almost any element of our culture can become the flashpoint for a conflict over opposing political worldview, but such labeling does not automatically become a stage within the culture wars. Rhetorically though, these are powerful, argumentative strategies that both scholars and non-academics can actually engage in and observe.

In this essay I interrogate the overarching rhetoric of the culture wars to provide a theoretical and pragmatic primer for individuals interested in American political discourse, rhetorical studies, or critical consumers of

news. First, I explore the historical precedents of the culture wars by summarizing and outlining Hunter's historical contribution surrounding the sociology of culture. Second, I provide a template for rhetorically situating the culture wars in terms of the metaphorical players, battlegrounds and strategies. Third, I provide a historical example of cultural wars enmeshed within both popular and public culture as a context-driven flashpoint used to ignite the discourse surrounding family values: the censorship and stigma aimed towards heavy metal musicians and fans instigated a national moral panic. Finally, I conclude my discussions of the culture wars to demystify the broad swath with which morality guides our everyday interactions. Largely, my analysis of culture wars rhetoric depends upon what Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca describe as arguments from quality. As already mentioned in this essay, one does not have to go too far to find articles, editorials, or news commentary mentioning the culture wars; however, those commentating upon the issues already have a predisposition towards politics, or are already enmeshed within the struggle that regardless of how they interpret the (oftentimes skewed) stories, thus rhetoric of culture wars will continue on ad infinitum.

Kulturkampf – Historically Grounding the Culture Wars

Kulturkampf literally refers to a cultural struggle. Historically rooted in 19th century Germany, the *kulturkampf* referred to Germany policies regarding secularity and the prevailing interest and influence from the Roman Catholic Church. *Kulturkampf*, as an ideology, has morphed and reappropriated into the current discussions on the contemporary culture wars. Hunter argued that the climate in America produced an intense cultural conflict that few were able to completely remove themselves from. Being both intimately connected to and vehemently repellent against a particular position both fascinated and troubled Hunter: "At stake is how

we as Americans will order our lives together" (*Culture Wars* 34). For Hunter and other proponents of the culture wars hypothesis, "the erosion of a common ground for reasoned ethical debate makes it difficult to resolve politicized moral issues and portends dangerous escalations in levels of social conflict" (Mouw and Sobel 913-914). According to this logic, individuals are inescapably forced into selecting and identifying on a particular side. These specific sides and conflicts are non-negotiable and are perceived to strengthen the cultural and moral order.

In *Culture Wars – The Struggle to Define America,* Hunter argued that the culture wars are not solely relegated to the politically-minded. In fact, Hunter argues "America is in the midst of a culture war that has had and will continue to have reverberations not only within public policy but within the lives of ordinary Americans everywhere" (*Culture Wars* 34). I will come back to this statement, particularly with my critique on the culture wars hypothesis, but for now, scholars like Hunter, have commented on its ubiquitous presence. These cultural conflicts, as identified by Hunter, are not fleeting or temporary approaches to particular topics, but are intimately connected to historical conceptions of moral understanding. According to Hunter, there is a sense of primacy with issues within the culture wars: "They are not merely attitudes that can change on a whim but [are] basic commitments and beliefs that provide a source of identity, purpose, and togetherness for the people who live by them" (*Culture Wars* 42). These warring sides often align along party lines, however there have been a variety of labels that have been proposed to situate where one fits on the continuum.

In Hunter's terminology, the culture wars are fought between the orthodoxy and progressives. The orthodoxy best approximates stereotypical conservative thought through a more fundamental and objective approach to morality, value, and purpose. The opposite worldview is from the cultural progressives who tend to favor both a spirit of subjectivism and rationalism. For the cultural progressives, truth or

morality ought to be viewed as a process, rather than something stable and unchangeable.

John Fonte sought to explore the contemporary culture wars by examining the philosophical leanings of Marxist intellectual, Antonio Gramsci, and political thinker, Alex de Tocqueville. Comparing these two philosophical perspectives, Fonte attempted to map onto Hunter's classifications of the orthodoxy and progressives. From there, Fonte's article is enmeshed within the discourse of culture wars hypothesis, but his classifications provide readers with a sense of the historical importance of the culture wars. According to Fonte, "In the United States of the past few decades, recurring philosophical concepts have not only remained 'in the air,' but have proved influential, at times decisive, in cultural and legal and moral arguments about the most important questions facing the nation" (Fonte 1). Viewing our contemporary world through a Gramscian lens would provide insight to how a war of values would permeate society.

According to Gramscian thought, the powerful elites exert control upon the masses, or ensemble, through the process of hegemony. Hegemonic thought is rooted when the dominant class exerts their values upon the rest of society to further perpetuate the discrepancy between the few and the many. Through the process of hegemony, elites attempt to normalize certain worldviews, which in turn marginalizes and/or demonizes subordinate groups. The culture wars exist for scholars like Fonte "because hegemonic values permeate all spheres of civil society – schools, churches, the media, voluntary associations – [where] civil society itself [becomes] the great battleground in the struggle for hegemony [or] the war of position" (Fonte 2). The culture wars, viewed through a Gramscian lens, promotes that all facets of life are political. There are no distinctions made between the political and apolitical; this is why, according to proponents of the culture wars hypothesis, battlegrounds arise in a variety of locations, from the very personal and intimate to the popular and public. These contested arenas serve to

function as sites for societal transformation. As we will see, music, from a culture warrior is framed and injected with a distinct moralistic rhetoric and becomes discursively viewed as a threat to "proper" and "decent" citizens.

Conversely, contemporary Tocquevillianism represents American exceptionalism as normative values to be embraced and strived for. For Tocquevillians, the culture wars are adamantly defended through a singular American path to modernity. Fonte elaborated, "Americans combined strong religious and patriotic beliefs with dynamic, restless entrepreneurial energy that emphasized equality of individual opportunity and eschewed hierarchical and ascriptive affiliations" (5). This trinity of American exceptionalism is rooted strongly within the Puritan value system and the American Dream whereby individuals have the opportunity to achieve economic progress, and through a strong personal moral character and charitable leaning towards their community, one will live a complete and fulfilled life. Tocquevillians emphasize that America needs to embrace a more healthy civic and moral code, and that only through the renewal and rediscovery of these inherently American mores, can our society and cultural values thrive.

These classifications and categories are purposefully broad enough to embody an ideological leaning, but serve as the basis for contemporary culture wars rhetoric. The shift from progressive to orthodox, subjective worldview to objective truths, secular to sacred, Gramscian to Tocquevillian thought will not occur along a continuum within the culture wars hypothesis. Culture wars proponents recognized that these thought patterns and worldviews are essential to our identity – or in other words…they are us. The either/or dichotomous relationship provide scholars and practitioners with a wealth of information and case studies to analyze specifically how one positions themselves on a wide variety of topics; though, seeking complete societal transformation is out of the

question due to the intrinsic nature of our value systems. Hunter (1994) describes this particular cultural bind:

> The culture war, and the particular controversies that constitute the larger conflict, posit a crisis of legitimacy. In practical terms, this means that people on opposing sides of the cultural divide operate with fundamentally different criteria of legitimacy: what one side regards as good law, the other side regards as bad law, and vice versa. The state, then, is caught in a zero-sum bind. Its legitimacy is contingent upon embracing what others reject as illegitimate, and rejecting what others hold as fundamentally good. (*Before the Shooting Begins* 29-30)

This rhetorical dilemma must be extrapolated to recognize the culture wars arguments cloaked within American political discourse. The dissemination of these arguments occur in a variety of publications and mediums; with the rise of social media, the Internet, and blogs, the spread of religious and moralistic arguments have a greater chance to impact and persuade the indifferent. Fonte noted that "[b]eneath the surface of our seemingly placid times, the ideological, political, and historical stakes are enormous" (10). In order to calculate the enormity of these stakes, we must first disclose the rhetoric of the culture wars.

Rhetorically Situating the Culture Wars

Analyzing the rhetorical and argumentative strategies of the culture war allows us to recognize patterns and tactics employed by both sides. The metaphor "war" has many connotations, all of which can be applied to the contemporary culture wars debate. A quick inventory of the word "war" accounts for a variety of terms: assault, casualty, conflict, collateral damage, scrimmage, hostility, onslaught, crusade, campaign, contention,

wrestle, winner/loser, brawl, calculated, precise, enemy, technical, terrorist, end, "mission accomplished," grapple, disagree, feud, quarrel, encounter, an engagement, tactical maneuver, blueprints, borderlines, the front line, resistance, the trenches, hierarchy, resistance, citizens, soldiers, bystanders, guerilla warfare, pillage, SNAFU, etc. While by no means an exhaustive list of synonyms associated with warfare, the abovementioned list serves a rhetorical purpose for approaching, identifying and interpreting how key slogans and buzz words within public and popular culture become framed within the culture wars.

A majority of culture war arguments are ad hominem attacks against a specific person and/or ideology. These personal attacks are often made without any conscious attempt to engage in a sustained dialogue with the opposition. Culture warriors disseminate their "information" by engaging in a variety of emotional tactics designed to seek identification with likeminded individuals, while distancing the opposition. Hunter recognized that this "negative persuasion has become even more important, for in public discourse, dialogue has largely been replaced by name calling, denunciation, and even outright intolerance" (*Culture Wars* 136). You may ask: Why is this type of negative rhetoric being employed? The short answer is that controversial statements or accusations draw media attention that has the greater possibility to be excerpted and broadcast/rebroadcasted easily and with the simple click of a button. Culture wars arguments have only grown exponentially with the rise of new technologies including blogging, Twitter, Facebook and other social network tools. When Hunter initially wrote *Culture Wars* the main form of communication that culture warriors used was direct mail. As the shift towards electronic media continued to grow in the late 20th century, many organizations went digital and continued their moral crusades on the web.

Any war must have a fair share of viable players. We have already discussed the theoretical, philosophical and ideological leanings of liberals/conservatives, progressives/orthodoxy and any other derivations

of the two warring sides. If America is suffering from extreme forms of partisanship, then the polarization of American culture should be spearheaded by a particular leader. Who then should lead? One can gauge the spokespersons or leaders because they are often quoted as the voice of authority guiding America through a particular dark or bleak time. The spokesperson may be imbued with a special foresight and may also take on particular supernatural and charismatic qualities. The "general" or "prophet" would be applicable names for describing such individuals. We should begin to interrogate the rhetoric of the culture wars by first looking at how each side defines the enemy. Culture wars rhetoric rests upon not only specific definitions but also upon who is responsible for defining: one group's extremist is the other's martyr. The leaders, however, instill upon their congregation/constituents to put their faith in them, assuring that their platform is not only best but right for America.

It should come as no surprise that many of the organizations embroiled within the culture wars have a religious dimension (e.g., the Moral Majority and Religious Right in the times of Hunter; more current interest-groups include the American Decency Association and the American Family Association). Each side of the struggle attempts to monopolize symbols of legitimacy to best depict a normal and naturalized vision of America. The claims made by such groups capitalize consent by using fear-based appeals to identify with a relatively docile population hinging upon their General/Prophet's every word. Things become complicated because both sides use the same rhetorical tactics. For example, one such tactic is rhetorical symmetry: "Both ends of the cultural axis claim to speak for the majority, both attempts to monopolize the symbols of legitimacy, both identify their opponents with a program of intolerance and totalitarian suppression. Both sides use the language of extremism and thereby sensationalize the threat represented by their adversaries" (*Culture Wars* 156). The culture wars, as both a rhetorical and metaphoric war, celebrate minor victories that are often overturned or pushed back on any

given moment. While the culture wars encapsulate a particular moment, culture, itself, does not remain static. Cultural fluidity provides an ever-changing landscape for culture warriors to navigate, stake their claims, defend or attack, move forward, fall back, only to repeat the same processes and strategies all over again.

Even though there is an ever-changing landscape, by isolating the various battlegrounds and strategies we, as *critical consumers of news and media* can assess how they are used to rhetorically best their opponent. So far, we have disclosed that certain "things" are within the culture wars." These "things" can be any number of items, from sexual identity, higher education, low-brow art or popular music. These "things" are also imbued through the lens of a particular type of worldview. Once ascribed with a particular worldview, they become politicized and therefore a target that must be countered by the opposition. The opposition will use everything in its arsenal to neutralize and eradicate any positive associations stemming from the "thing." Since there are no neutral grounds in the culture wars, the battle lines are drawn deeply into the moral character of the individual. It then becomes the duty of citizens to engage in perpetuating a certain lifestyle by voicing their opinions publically and without resolve. These "things" do more than just name a certain political ideology; they negate and demonize. This totalizing effect must go all the way down; visualize Stephen Hawking's turtles analogy, hence the large amount and continuous stream of ad hominem attacks being waged in the media.

Culture wars rhetoric succeeds best through a well-planned calculated event geared to bombard and disseminate their messages to anyone who will listen. Rather than crafting a solid argument backed up by facts, culture warriors make use of the public spectacle. The culture wars rely upon public utterances that exaggerate or overstate a particular point of view. According to Hunter, this rhetoric of distortion

> [C]reates much the same effect as a misshapen mirror at an arcade – elongating, shrinking, or fattening the reality that the speaker is

> attempting to address. Quite literally, it is rhetorical hyperbole whose main purpose is to appeal to the emotional predispositions of the listener. It is not as though these speech acts are technically untrue or unjustifiable by those who give voice to them, but they stretch, bloat, or conflate realities in order to evoke a visceral response for the listener. (*Before the Shooting Begins* 46-47)

In this section I have largely dealt with the rhetoric of the culture wars in general terms. Next, I will narrow my focus toward the discourse surrounding the music culture wars, particularly how moral panics stemmed from listening to heavy metal music.

The Sounds and the Fury – Heavy Metal and Moral Panics

The relationship between music and politics has been a tenuous one at best. Almost any genre of music includes outspoken advocates, pranksters, muckrakers, worrywarts, enthusiasts, activists, and any other derivation of the word that would seem applicable. For example, the rise of punk rock music both domestically and in the U.K. led to a series of disenfranchised youth seeking their own identity by distancing themselves from the mainstream. Throughout ancient Greece, music was an imitative art. For Plato and Aristotle, there was great political importance tied to both musical rhythm and harmony because it fulfilled the primary aim of political and democratic life: producing a strong moral and virtuous character capable to perform noble actions. If we follow this argument and accept the imitative nature music can hold, then it remains perfectly acceptable to grant how certain genres of music may be deemed dangerous, violent, vulgar and offensive. In this regard, the American popular culture wars include a “period of some decades [when] America’s cultural politics involved a debate between the left and the right over whether some popular music tended to weaken society by eroding

standards of personal conduct" (Holloway 1). The music culture wars contained a series of both political and religious crusades to quell the growing tide of America's youth from listening to music that would damage their moral character.

The initial wave of attacks against popular music occurred during 1980s and continued through the 1990s. Even though groups like the Parents Music Resource Center (PMRC) may seem antiquated when looking at the current state of venomous attacks in political discourse, nonetheless, their attacks against the music industry spurred future discussions and battles between music and morality. The attacks themselves have morphed into more individual attacks waged against politicians, such as those using songs at their campaign rallies. The legal attacks directed at rock, rap, and heavy metal music seem much more food for fodder than actual guidelines that both artists and fans fear. It seems as though quite the opposite has occurred in the realm of CD sales.

The normalization of the Parental Advisory Label on an album failed to synecdochically stigmatize a modern-day Hester Prynne, but instead this sticker has transformed into a quasi-badge of honor. Also, Palmieri optimistically exclaimed the merits on the existence of the music culture wars: "It's easy to dismiss these tussles over music tastes as silly cultural divides between progressives and conservatives, but [the music] reflect larger, more meaningful divides in how progressives and conservatives view America" (1) . Arguments over the appearance of artists have been replaced by more overt politicized statements being made by musicians. These comments have ranged from the Dixie Chicks chastising the Bush administration and the Iraq War, Kanye West's 2005 statement at a relief concert for Hurricane Katrina that then-President Bush did not care for black people, to controversies directed at Barack Obama's campaign managers for playing Jay-Z's song "99 Problems" with a not-so-subtle nod towards Hillary Clinton. Thus, the contemporary music culture wars have become more diffuse with the widespread usage of the internet, personal

blogs, and the repeatability of political tweets broadcast across the all-consuming digital ether. Regardless though, the moral panics and political attacks against heavy metal musicians in the late 1980s and early 1990s depict culture wars rhetoric at its best, and ultimately therefore, its worst.

The rhetoric of the culture wars eerily maps onto the creation of moral panics. Moral panics are defined, according to sociologist Stanley Cohen, as

> A condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnosis and solutions. (1)

Societal moral panics are often indicative of events that "do not arise solely as a consequence of a rational and realistic assessment of the concrete damage that the behavior in question is likely to inflict on the society" (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 29). The prevailing discourse posed that society's youth is susceptible and may be corrupted by the threat of immoral and deviant activities.

The rhetoric of moral panics often defines various youth subcultures that seek their own form of authenticity and identity apart from mainstream culture. Hebdige adds that youths' stylistic innovation of choices (music tastes, attire, and attitude) becomes marginalized through the process of recuperation, whereby they are subject to "the labeling and re-definition of deviant behavior by dominant groups" (94). Through the process of recuperation, moral and religious leaders attempt to demonize and/or scapegoat the given subculture through a variety of legal, social, or normative measures. Culture warriors and opponents to heavy metal music amplified the moral panics and folk devils trope with specific charges of Satanism.

Heavy metal and hard rock music was targeted by religious organizations during the 1980s and 1990s for containing violent and sexually aggressive lyrics, anti-religious imagery, and the erroneously charged claims that heavy metal either motivated listeners to commit suicide or would "brainwash innocent youth into becoming criminal Satanists" (Victor 163). In 1985, the PMRC was created to help alleviate the social ills (obscenity, violence, immorality) that plagued the United States. The PMRC was situated as educators and model citizens to expose to parents just how harmful their children's music is, thereby causally linking consumption of rock and heavy metal music and increased social problems such as rape, teenage suicide, and teen pregnancies. Thus, the PMRC was very much embroiled within culture wars rhetoric. In fact, their implication was that "many social evils should have been avoided by a stricter control of certain song lyrics, not because of their contents per se but because they subverted the ideological values of American society" (Chastagner 182).

The most effective way to encourage others about the dangerousness and deviance of this type of music and lifestyle was to create a moral panic and accusations of Satanism, thereby instilling a sense of doubt and identification with those citizens not listening to heavy metal. Creating identification through division served as a specific rhetorical strategy. As Kenneth Burke suggestes through his discussion of terministic screens, "Men seek for vocabularies that will be faithful *reflections* of reality. To this end, they must develop vocabularies that are *selections* of reality. And any selection of reality must, in certain circumstances, function as a *deflection* of reality" (59). The PMRC's worldview, using their culture wars rhetoric targeted on their scapegoat (heavy metal music, and selected the bands, artists, and fans as their representative anecdote) to depict all that is immoral in society.

The PMRC spearheaded a series of personal attacks directed at musicians, including "selling a 'Satanism Research Packet' for fifteen dollars, containing clippings of crimes connected with Satanism and heavy metal music" (Victor 165). On the legal front, the PMRC played a pivotal role in helping pass legislation requiring record companies to place a label over their album should it contain any questionable or obscene materials. The success and distribution of albums containing the explicit materials label lead to what Chastagner refers to as the "chill factor," whereby certain retailers would refuse to carry the products. Rhetorically speaking, in an early criticism of the rock music labels, Robert Cutietta describes how the labeling process requires value judgments:

> Unlike labels used in industries such as pharmaceuticals or tools, labels applied to the realm of art will usually be a reflection of particular values. Regardless of how many people agree with a certain value, there will always be some who do not and for whom the labels are wrong. (37)

Cutietta's comments, regarding the value hierarchies, highlight the flexibility of culture wars rhetoric. While musicians may have suffered a loss of sales because a retailer would not carry their products, some stores did and still do carry those labeled albums. Also, the genre of heavy metal thrives to antagonize certain listeners. So, the labeled albums only fueled the fire in that heavy metal music only became more extreme to respond to these accusations. As Bogue states, "Much of the impetus behind these lyrics is to shock and offend – to offend fundamental Christians with satanic hymns, to offend liberals with sexist profanities, to offend just about everyone with descriptions of putrefying flesh, evisceration, blood and gore…frequently one detects an ironic and at times parodic sense of humor in the excesses of the imagery and the exaggerated postures of the songs' persona" (p. 108).

Conclusion – The End is the Beginning is the End

The question remains: Do the culture wars still matter? As I have suggested in this chapter, yes, because public arguments are being waged about the moral character of Americans. These arguments are often directed at those who lack moral substance. Even though these arguments pervade and invade much of our political discourse, the fact remains that such arguments affect those who already have a predisposition towards politics. Scholars such as Alan Wolfe question whether or not there actually has been a culture war. He argued in *One Nation, After All,* that "the culture war has always existed more in the minds of journalists and political activists than in the lives of ordinary Americans" (42). Contemporary culture warriors often succumb to comical and/or trivial sound bites and/or are incessantly mocked by political pundits on television (such as John Stewart or Stephen Colbert) and across the politico-blogosphere. Hunter's original culture wars hypothesis provided this strict binary relationship that eliminated any form of indifference. Wolfe, however, seeks to ground the culture wars not between two groups of Americans, but rather within the individual. Americans tend to waver on certain issues, which lead to a growing population known as the "moderate middle" who failed to take a strict approach to matters of political discourse. Wolfe expresses the distrust and distancing of the average Americans and these political concerns because the "media and the political class...were fighting the culture war for their own reasons; to the degree that Americans expressed a view about that fight, it was not to take sides but to distance themselves from it" (46).

In the twenty-years since Hunter wrote *Culture Wars,* there has neither been complete agreement nor a complete meltdown of culture at large. In a recent *New York Post* article, Smith suggests that the "morality armies [such as the Reagan-era Christian Coalition and Moral Majority] have failed to inspire their children to join the crusade" (1). The culture wars

suggest a flexible war that potentially, at times, has the ability to draw in supporters, but the degree those issues of morality and legality influence contemporary culture seems to be waning. Extreme forms of partisanship still exist, but to some extent, there has always been certain factions delving into the more extreme forms of life, culture, and politics. Paul Fischer describes his skepticism about the importance of a contemporary music culture war:

> Despite repeated and ongoing instances of opposition to unfettered musical expression in the United States, I do not believe there is a coordinated nationwide campaign being waged against it. Anti-music alliances ebb and flow, but do not seem consistently organized…I do believe that American popular music is so directly a part of the lives and vitality of the people from whom the government's power derives (theoretically), that important non-mainstream voices will continue to be heard in our songs. (13-14)

The moderate middle has yet to definitively be swayed by either side of the culture wars: they still buy, download, or torrent a wide variety of music. Fischer's idea about the ebb and flow of anti-music alliances suggest that American political discourse is not as focused on music style, genre or subculture as it once was. The fluctuations and re-definitions of folk devils and scapegoats suggest, what Cohen refers to a cyclical pattern of moral panics:

I am pessimistic about the chances of changing social policy…[m]ore moral panics will be generated and other, as yet nameless, folk devils will be created. This is…because our society as present structured will continue to generate problems for some of its members, and condemn whatever solution these groups find. (172). Culture war issues change to fit the cultural climate, continually producing new threats and targets to direct their attacks upon. This is why, in the wake of much news on the Trayvon Martin trial and gay marriage, we are beginning to become

inundated with news about a new or revived culture wars that deal specifically with issues of race, sex, and marriage. Scholars and politically-minded individuals are more keenly tuned into picking up additional culture war discourse; others will ignore such statements, protests, and actions as "crazy" without picking up on the historical development and strategies of culture wars rhetoric. Perhaps it is time to throw in the white flag?

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‘Social’ TV: *Pretty Little Liars*, Casual Fandom, Celebrity Instagramming, and Media Life

CORY BARKER

In early March 2013, the teen soap *Pretty Little Liars* (2010-present) graced the cover of *Entertainment Weekly*, accompanied by the headline “*Pretty Little* Phenom.” The that article, Stransky describes the impressive social media profile of the four-year-old series: “It may sound like a teen trifle, but ABC Family’s *Pretty Little Liars* and its stars are changing how the TV industry measures success—one tweet, keek, and status update at time.” Just a few weeks later, after the series’ season three finale, digital analytic company SocialGuide found that Twitter activity surrounding the episode was the highest in television history. An ABC Family press release celebrating this prototypical twenty-first century honor noted:

> [The finale] became the #1 ‘most social’ series episode on record during its airtime according to SocialGuide, and the first series episode to amass over 1 million Total airtime Tweets in TV history, accounting for one-third of all Twitter activity in the hour (1,099, 815; 32.7 share). Including the hours leading up to and following, it generated close to 1.6 million tweets overall. (ABC Family, “ABC Family’s ‘*Pretty Little Liars*’”)

Liars’ social media presence is so large and influential that when ABC Family decided to produce a spin-off series, that news announcement was not made with a traditional press release or via interviews in the trade press. Instead, ABC Family planted a series of “clues” across popular

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social networks (such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and Pinterest) and their release strategy resulted in 369 million social "impressions" (ABC Family, "ABC Family's Exclusive Social Media").

These types of social media reports reflect new forms of popularity for contemporary television programs in which audience activity is more easily visible and sorted into data points. Similarly, the growing importance of Twitter engagement to the media is another example of the kind of active spectatorship recognized by scholars more than two decades ago. However, while social media and other digital technologies make it easier for today's engaged audiences to establish global fan communities and produce their own content, they also allow "less active" fans to participate more casually in ongoing conversations about a given program. Using the television series, *Pretty Little Liars* as a case study, I argue that fan studies scholarship must make room for considerations of the kind of casual fandom that Twitter and other contemporary social networks encourage. Focusing on fan discourses on Twitter, Tumblr, and Facebook, I detail how much of the reported activity surrounding *Pretty Little Liars* is brief, conversational, and less politically engaged than the sorts of fan engagement typically celebrated by scholars. Later, I describe the ways content produced by ABC Family's promotional department and the series' stars often mirror fan material, thus creating a larger *Liars* media experience in which industry, stars, and audiences come together. Methodologically, I draw from fan studies' emphasis on active audiences and the complex interactions between audiences and the media industries, but signal how Mark Deuze's construction of media life helps describe underrepresented fan experiences.

Pretty Little Liars provides an instructive case study in one formation of contemporary fan behavior. Although many fan communities create expansive fan texts, raise thousands of dollars for charity, or bring their favorite series back from the dead, most fan communities—and more importantly, most individual fans—do not have that level of influence.

Similarly, many fan-industry or fan-star exchanges in a new media environment raise crucial questions about industry power and fan agency, but generally, those questions are not on the minds of tweeting fans or Instagramming actors. Thus, the intent of this essay is not to ignore examples of impressive fan action or political concerns regarding industry involvement in new media spaces. Instead, highlighting different experiences elucidates how media brings these different factions together.

From Fandom to a Media Life

Fan activity has long been on the mind of scholars across multiple disciplines. The influence of cultural studies helped to deconstruct stereotypes about fans and the presumed inequalities between media industries and audiences. In his seminal research on *Star Trek* fans, Henry Jenkins helped alter the perception of fandom, moving them away from problematic descriptions that Joli Jenson refers to as "pathological." Jenkins' work inspired others to dig deeper into fan communities, their use of technology, and their various—sometimes-contentious—relationships with industries. Much work has detailed the supremely dedicated or "cult" fans. Though definitions of cult fandom very, these fans are often framed in opposition against "ordinary," viewers and identified as "excessive" (Gwenllian-Jones), "faithful" (Felschow) or "devoted" (Eco). Additionally, these fans are further separated from the "ordinary" because they "drill, practice, and master" (Eco) and establish "deep emotional involvement" (Hills, 73) with beloved texts.

One of the most-discussed catalysts for increased and more visible fan activity is new media. Identifying fans as "early adopters" of technology, Jenkins claims that thanks to technological advances, contemporary consumers have learned how "to bring the flow of media more fully under their control" (18). In expanding Pierre Levy's theorizations of collective intelligence, Jenkins suggests that the Internet allows fan communities to

easily share information and/or work to solve any inner-fandom dilemma (136-140). Of course, new technologies have made it easier for media producers to develop new projects and target the necessary audience segments, further complicating the relationships between fans and industries. Jenkins and Deuze refer to these complications as "contradictory pulls and tugs," explaining that media "creat[es] close, more rewarding relations" as well as "conflict[ing]…constant negotiations of power" between consumers and producers (6-7). Others raise useful concerns about industry forces taking advantage of active consumers' labor for financial or promotional gain (Terranova, cited in Jenkins and Deuze; Murray) or invading consumer privacy (Chamberlin).

Although very little scholarship is shortsighted enough to claim that modern technology fully empowers consumers or conversely argue that it results in unchecked industrial power, the focus is often on exceptional case studies of fan activity or fan repression. What tend to be missing, and what I intend to highlight in this essay, are explorations of more muted fan activity and more neutral fan-industry relationships. Thus, I argue that a big chunk of fan interactions (and interactions with industry forces and stars) on social media represent a media experience that is simultaneously engaged and participatory but also casual and individualized. Activities that might have once been perceived as "excessive" or "devoted"—seeking out fellow fans, searching for information about a program or its stars—are easier and more common than ever. For example, using social media, fans can communicate directly to producers, to executives, and to stars, while those groups also engage in the same ways: directors tweet, stars post photos of their dogs on Instagram, and members of the promotions department operate Tumblrs. There are a multitude of interactions, most of them far from revolutionary, happening at numerous levels and access points.

Still, how do we conceptualize the casual media experience? Ien Ang's research into fans of *Dallas* provides a nice starting point. Ang examines

the diverse, enigmatic pleasure viewers received from *Dallas*, interrogating the conceptualization of "mere entertainment" and how viewers integrated the series into their everyday lives. She explains:

> It is clear that there is not just one 'reason' for the pleasure of *Dallas*, which applies for everyone; each has his or her own more or less unique relationship to the program. What appeals to us in such a television serial is connected with our individual life histories, with the social situation we are in. (26)

Citing work by Jean-Marie Piemme, Ang describes how most television series invite viewers to participate with stories and characters that are easily weaved into the daily experience (29).

Similarly, Hills developed the concept of "just in time fandom," where "The practices of fandom have become increasingly enmeshed with the rhythms and temporalities of broadcasting, so that fans now go online to discuss new episodes immediately after…or even during ad-breaks" (140-141). For the contemporary media consumer, this is even truer. Social media allow viewers to engage in conversations about a series, and sustaining the experience during commercials and after the episodes are over. Also, the television shows, themselves, expand past the weekly episodes, into web-only deleted scenes, transmedia stories, podcasts, fashion blogs, and much more. A series' fictional world can be regularly part of viewers' typical media experience, even for those who do not emphatically seek out additional material.

Deuze's concept of the all-encompassing media life is perhaps the most way to consider the contemporary viewer experience. The media life perspective emphasizes that "Media benchmark our experience of the world, and how we make sense of our role in it" and asks us to accept the idea that we "do not live *with*, but *in*, media" (original emphasis) (xi; xiii). In a media life, we spend most of our time with media without giving it a second thought; we consume, we produce, and we experience life with

media. That is what contemporary fans do; the life of a fan is a media life. Describing fan activity and fandom as excessive, or referring to it as cult-like, suggests that we should be separate from media and we can—or perhaps should—find a world outside of media, suggests that we can eventually learn to control media, and assumes that whoever controls the media has the power. Deuze argues, "we keep convincing ourselves and others that elements of our life in media are either good or bad for us, failing to witness what is already taking place. In other words: people experience the ongoing mediation and mediatization of their lives, but seem to remain blind to its profound potential" (257). Conceiving of fandom as a fundamental and everyday part of media life helps us better understand that individual expressions of fandom can be as important or fascinating as industry-altering moments, and that fans interact with different factions in a more casual fashion.

Deuze and Kathryn Thompson argue that once-excessive fan actions are now normal and that affective engagement with a text "may or may not result in the creation of a separate media text;" engagement happens in multiple ways. Fandom requires individuals to develop core media competencies that they separate into two categories: technical competencies and conceptual competencies. Technical competencies are "specialized, procedural knowledges" that allow fans to produce and distribute their own media objects and access group discourses. Meanwhile, conceptual competencies are "largely interpersonal and interpretive, rather than procedural" driven by an ability to comprehend fan processes like altering textual meaning and contributing to a community's interpretations and discourses. Deuze and Thompson conclude that these competencies help fans be the prototypical adopters of a media life.

I would take these assertions further. Active fan communities might have been the first to embrace a media life, but now, many more people have these competencies. People who would not consider themselves

diehard fans also post about media on Facebook or Twitter. Young stars, having grown up in a world where media is a fundamental part of their lives, consistently inform fans with status updates and behind-the-scenes photos. Media industries extend stories on official web sites or share additional content on Tumblr and Pinterest. Following Deuze and Thompson's term, most everyone is competent—consuming, producing, sharing, and interacting. These sprawling media experiences commonly develop around ongoing television series, and recent shifts in television viewing practices have further collapsed the boundaries between the groups.

Industry Change and *Pretty Little Liars*

After years of trying to ignore and overcome technological innovation challenging its business models, television networks have embraced the Internet and social media. For example, networks now put Twitter hashtags at the bottom of the screen to encourage audience engagement and craft press releases celebrating high volumes of tweets, Facebook posts, and other "social" activity. Ang describes how watching *Dallas* became "first and foremost a practice…. which has much of the nature of a habit: it is directly available, casual, and free" (84). Although access to cable television and an Internet connection are not freely available to everyone, they are indeed even more readily available than in the *Dallas* era. The practice of watching television is now regularly paired with the practice of using social media. For example, recent reports on viewer activity suggest that using social media during television viewing is growing more popular by the year. In a March 2013 *Wired* article on shifting viewing practices notes, Vanderbilt writes that "a full 40 percent of Twitter's traffic during peak usage is about television." Also, an August 2012 study by Ericsson reports that 62 percent of viewers use social media while watching, which is an 18 percent increase from the previous year

(Bergman). While some reports offer contradicting data, it is clear that viewers see multiple and simultaneous forms of media fundamental to their experience. Deuze argues, "The key to the success of a media artifact in people's lives lies in its ability to be lifelike…This discovery of sociability as the basis of media in people's lives runs throughout the history of media artifacts" (54-55). Social media allow viewers to interact with one another, as well as with industry representatives and stars. Thus, it is a perfect example of media "extending the communication and conversation capabilities of their users" (Deuze 55).

One series with substantial fan-industry-star engagement swirling around it is *Pretty Little Liars*. The teen thriller is a catalyst in the shifting ways fans, industry forces, and stars interact through media. By all the traditional measures, *Pretty Little Liars* is a success. The series averages around 3 million viewers and does especially well with viewers (particularly women) in the coveted 18-49 and 18-34 demographics (Bibel). *Liars* is still growing in popularity. The third season pulled in its most consistent viewership with women, helping the series become ABC Family's most-watched original ever. As a result, *Pretty Little Liars* has been renewed through 2015 and ABC Family has also recently announced a spinoff (Andreeva).

Solid ratings, longevity, and spinoff potential make *Pretty Little Liars* a traditional success, yet it is the series' social media engagement that is most impressive—and most representative of how fans, industry, and stars engage in today's media life. *Entertainment Weekly* referred to the series' social media presence as a "colossal digital footprint" (Stransky). As of early August 2013, that footprint includes over 11.2 million likes on Facebook, over 1.6 million followers on Twitter, over 2 million check-ins on GetGlue, over 7,300 followers on Pinterest, hundreds of thousands views on YouTube, and a Tumblr of indeterminate popularity.[1] This data only includes official accounts operated by ABC Family, which are rarely as popular as the unofficial fan-run spaces. A Google search for "*Pretty*

Little Liars Tumblr" returns more than 6.6 million results; fan Tumblrs such as *F*ck Yeah Pretty Little Liars* and *Pretty Little Secrets Hints* appear in the results before ABC Family's official Tumblr. Similar fan-produced content populates Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and Pinterest. The cast and crew of *Pretty Little Liars* are also part of the large digital footprint. The four stars have a combined 5.5 million Twitter followers and 5 million Instagram followers. Their social media content is sometimes related to their work. More commonly, however, Lucy Hale, Ashley Benson, Shay Mitchell, and Troian Bellisario provide snippets into their "real" lives: out at dinner with friends, in the makeup chair obsessing over shoes, working on their nascent music or movie careers, and cuddling up with pets.

This social media activity allows *Pretty Little Liars* to top rankings that consolidate engagement into clear data points. For example, the research company Trendrr ranks "social media activity related to specific television shows (mentions, likes, check-ins) across Twitter, Facebook, GetGlue and Viggle)." *Pretty Little Liars* consistently appears on this list, typically garnering at least 600,000 moments of social media activity per week. The season three finale reached a record-breaking 2.1 million moments of activity, the most ever for one episode of television (Al-Greene). The series is similarly popular in the rankings provided by check-in platform GetGlue, wherein it regularly appears in the top 10 most active cable series (Kondolojoy). In 2012, SocialGuide named it the fifth "most social" of the year (Stransky). ABC Family President Michael Riley called *Pretty Little Liars* the channel's "brand-defining" and "demo-defining" series and noted that the upcoming spinoff will "become another 'must-tweet-TV' series" (ABC Family, "ABC Family's Exclusive Social Media"). Still, *Pretty Little Liars*' social media achievements are less about grand or subversive fan action; they are defined by casual engagement.

Like most contemporary popular culture texts, *Pretty Little Liars* inspires fans to act in a number of different ways. *Liars* fans create their own fan fiction, slash fiction, artwork, and videos. Although *Pretty Little Liars* fans benefit from newer forms of media production technology, resulting in annotated screen captures and GIF photosets on Tumblr, their fan productions, while representative of longstanding ideas of active fandom, are not exceptional examples. Instead, these are typical—though not worthless—expressions of fandom. Nevertheless, certain *Pretty Little Liars* fan products on Tumblr are worth noting in more detail.

Two of the more notable *Pretty Little Liars* Tumblrs are the narrative-focused *Pretty Little Secrets Hints* and the fan confession-focused *Confess Little Liars*. *Pretty Little Secrets Hints* provides illustrated screen captures, bits of dialogue, reader submissions, and anything else that might help the fans discover who is behind *Pretty Little Liars*' latest mysteries. For example, a March 31, 2013 entry features a screen capture from the series' season three finale that draws attention to a few characters looking off-screen, seemingly at someone across a cemetery. The photo's illustrations suggest that this unseen character is the deadly stalker and villain A. The post's author describes how this photo helps describe certain characters' actions:

> Submitted by our amazing follower James: Who are Spencer and Garrett watching at Ali's funeral? So we all have seen the episode where Ali says the girls remember more than they think about "that night" and once told Spence that when she's "gone" the answers would be in her diaries so maybe she told one of them something and one of them helped her out of the ground that night.. we know what drinking did to Em so who knows.. also Spencer was the one outside so maybe it was her who helped her out and Spence recently said "who cares what *HAPPENS to alison" when she first found out toby helped mona*.

Another recent *Pretty Little Secrets Hints* post features a submitted discussion point from user A Kiss Before Lying, who writes: "I know a lot of people are saying Aria has a split personality…And i have to agree! She's a vegan right? Then why did she order a cheeseburger in the pilot?" The Tumblr's operator responds to this thought with "Oooo we didn't even notice this! Good pick up!" (2013). The majority of *Pretty Little Secrets Hints* follows this pattern: simple reader thoughts and theories, with commentary from those in charge of the Tumblr. Here *Pretty Little Liars* fans, empowered by their media access, are able to share important information and work together to decode the series' complex mysteries, embodying collective intelligence (Jenkins 138-140). Steven Jones and Jason Mittell argue that certain texts (*Lost*, *Twin Peaks*, *Battlestar Galactica*) promote a mode of engagement known as "forensic fandom" that encourages "research, collaboration, analysis, and interpretation." Most descriptions of this active forensic fandom refer to series with science fiction, fantasy, or supernatural elements, yet *Pretty Little Liars*, a teen soap/mystery inspires similar interpretation and collaboration. Despite the series' generic backdrop, *Pretty Little Liars* fans find enough intrigue within the narrative that they "drill" downward and share their discoveries with fellow forensic fans (Eco). Furthermore, this drilling is representative of Deuze and Thompson's technical and conceptual competencies. To provide and analyze these clues, fans must understand the series' narrative and community interpretations and need the minor skills to grab, edit, or reproduce content that serves as evidence.

Still, this fan activity, while productive, is relatively mild. Though some of the theories include photographic and annotated evidence, the majority of it comes in short sentence form, such as free-ranging observations. This does not subvert any political meanings, nor does it impact the narrative of *Pretty Little Liars*. Instead, it helps fans organize their thoughts about the narrative, and perhaps reinforces the bonds of the fan community. Leah Lievoruw and Sonia Livingstone argue that media

are infrastructures of everyday life, incorporating "the artifacts or devices used to communicate or convey information, the activities and practices in which people engage to communicate or share information, and the social arrangements or organizational forms that develop around those devices and practices" (23). *Pretty Little Secrets Hints* (and all of Tumblr) provide space where fans communicate and share ideas after each new episode or whenever something comes to mind. Based on the sheer number of *Pretty Little Liars*-related Tumblrs, the platform is clearly a large part of fans' media life.

Whereas *Pretty Little Secrets Hints* features fans working together to crack the series' narrative, *Confess Little Liars* provides a space for fans to share anonymous admissions about the series, characters, relationships, the cast, and themselves. These admissions range from those that are very critical of the series' creative direction ("[Executive Producer] Marlene King does not how to write an episode without death or catastrophe." "The whole janitor thing is so far-fetched, it's insane.") to the more personal ("If you're not gay for at least one of the pll girls, you don't belong in this fandom." "This show gives me an unrealistic image of high school."). Confessions are superimposed on relevant show images with muted colors so that the text (written in white against a black box) stands out more. These images are another example of fan-produced content, but *Confess Little Liars* also reflects how crucial *Pretty Little Liars* is to these particular fans' experiences (Tumblr 2013). Michael Apter argues that our emotional responses to mediated sensations permit us to work through emotions like fear, horror, grief, and delight in a mostly safe environment.

Meanwhile, John Bargh, Katelyn McKenna, and Grainne Fitzsimmons claim that "compared to face-to-face interactions, people are better able to present, and have accepted by others, aspects of their true or inner selves over the Internet" (45). Thus, Tumblr allows fans to work through a number of feelings, some very personal. The variety of posts here show that *Liars* fans view the series as an important part of their daily life, one

that can allow them to work through certain emotional experiences; yet, it also reflects fans' ability to be critical when necessary. One form of media (the series) inspires fans to post, while another (Tumblr) assists them in discussing various experiences. Furthermore, Deuze suggests in a media life, we are aware of "our own private and personal experiences while at the same time living through an involvement with distinct others" (174-175). Submissions to *Confess Little Liars* are publically available yet hidden under the protection of anonymity, making it a safe space to admit personal tidbits, though users are aware that it is a shared space.

Both *Confess Little Liars* and *Pretty Little Secrets Hints* reinforce that for many fans, the *Pretty Little Liars* experience does not end with the week's live episode—maybe it does not even *begin* with the episode. The activity here shows that *Pretty Little Liars* fans have the technical and conceptual competencies to survive a media life and reflects how experience of the series regularly manifests in media. Again, these practices are relatively ordinary; this is how casual fans experience television in a media life. Even still, *Confess Little Liars* and *Pretty Little Secrets Hints* are more dynamic than most fan interaction with *Pretty Little Liars*. These Tumblrs clearly offer communal bonds, but most users engage with the platform on a much more individual level.

One search of series-related tags on Tumblr returns photosets, GIFs, and clips of favorite characters, stars, couples, clothes, etc. These posts are regularly tagged and therefore appear in the search field, but the majority of them seemingly do not intend to engage in a larger or coherent conversation. Returned results on April 20, 2013 offered a number of photos from star Ashley Benson's time at the Coachella music festival, GIFs of popular couple Aria and Ezra, and graphics displaying character names. Few of these posts feature text, and when they do, it is usually brief ("adorable outfit," "love her," or "they are all different"). The series is also very popular on Twitter and Facebook, and the majority of conversations on these social media platforms are similarly casual. A

cursory search of the primary *Pretty Little Liars* hashtag on Twitter ("#PLL") returns tweets such as "I miss Hanna and Mona's friendship <3," "Why can't I have their wardrobe," "I miss pretty little liars so freakin bad #mylife," and "CAN I JUST SAY I SHIP CALEB AND HANNA SO HARD."[2] Similarly, representative posts including or on the series' official Facebook from April 20, 2013 account include "can't wait for june 11th :)," "when is pll coming back?," "I love this show super much," and "52 days!."

On Pinterest, fan activity is unsurprisingly built around photo sharing. *Pretty Little Liars* fans "pin" (share) the same combination of promotional and behind-the-scenes photos supplied by the industry and the more personal photos shared by the cast on other networks like Instagram. However, they also share content that fits more closely within the Pinterest brand: Make-up tips ("Get This Look – Aria Inspired Makeup"), cake recipes, home design, fingernail art, and fashion advice, all inspired by the series' characters and world. Pinterest allows users to like and "repin" individual offerings, but there is very little discussion surrounding that activity. Like most contemporary social networks, individual users implicitly participate in a larger community with things like tags and easy search functions. Nevertheless, most of their pins are to personal boards, saved because of an individual interest in or affection for the series.

These tweets, pins, and Facebook posts, like the Tumblr content, do not reach the level of activity as in the production and discussion *Confess Little Liars* and *Pretty Little Secrets Hints*. They display media competency as discussed by Deuze and Thompson, yet fan affection or interest does not result in detailed scene breakdowns or elaborate YouTube videos. This is how a great deal of fandom manifests in 2013. In his consideration of the purpose of "all the status updates, shout-outs, blurbs, tweets, texts, clips, and snippets of information" we exchange, Deuze cites Vincent Miller's idea of "ascendant phatic media culture," or "small communicative gestures that are distinctly social, but are not

intended to transmit substantial information" (232). Miller argues that this communication is not meaningless; it instead helps establish a community based on recognition, intimacy, and sociability (395). This perspective is useful in thinking about casual fandom.

Following Miller, I would argue that these micro moments of fandom are crucial to the individual fan experience and in the establishment of fan communities. Most fans of *Pretty Little Liars* are going to engage with the series, stars, and other fans on major social media platforms such as Tumblr, Twitter, and Facebook, so that they are not necessarily going to be tucked away in password-protected forums. In her conceptualization of the "social supernet," Judith Donath writes, "Perhaps the basic pleasure that social network sites provide is endless novelty in the flow of new people and new information, and the knowledge that someone is paying attention to you." Whereas many posts do not directly engage other fans, the assumption in using tags on Tumblr and Twitter, or posting on the Facebook page, is that others will see it. They both embody the routine and individual fan experience and still implicitly reinforce the bonds of the larger community.

Of course, this a very small snapshot of *Pretty Little Liars* fan activity. The fans are also active on check-in services such as GetGlue, as well as more established spaces like Live Journal, YouTube, and more. As one of the "most social" series on television, *Pretty Little Liars* fans interact with it all over the Internet and social media. Still, these various examples underscore that in contemporary media life, fandom manifests in a number of different ways. Though a number of fans do produce their own content and explicitly display core technical and conceptual competencies, a good chunk of fan expression and engagement does not involve the production of new materials or require any advanced skills. In a media life, most fans have easy access to devices, platforms, and communities that allow them to express fandom however—and whenever—they want. The media life

perspective moves past the idea that industrial forces define individual relationships with media.

In a discussion of media archives, Deuze argues, "Considering the fact that the vast majority of people's time online (in media) is spent at social networks like Facebook, the many variations of recording, storing and publishing one's life are not only a mainstream pursuit, but altogether more vast and powerful than any top-down registry or archive of citizens or consumers can be" (88). Just as individuals control their Internet archives, they play an active role in what they like, re-blog, re-tweet, or share online. Relatedly, Jenkins (2006) claims that, "Each of us constructs our own personal mythology from bits and fragments of information extracted from the media flow and transformed into resources through which we make sense of our everyday lives" (4). Activity, however minor, on Twitter and Tumblr is especially useful for fans and their relationship with media. However, it is also important to remember that fans are not the only ones contributing to the *Pretty Little Liars* media experience; so too are various industrial forces and the series' stars. In the last portion of the essay, I will detail some of the ways in which other groups participate in this media experience, beginning with the industry.

Industry and Star Activity

Much like fans, the media content provided by various industry representatives online ranges from detailed to relatively ordinary. As I did in the previous section, I will describe examples of industry content that reflect different levels of complexity. One of the big things the contemporary media industries emphasize is transmedia storytelling, which according to Jenkins "unfold across multiple media platforms, which each new text making a distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole" (98). In 2012, ABC Family commissioned the creation of a *Pretty Little Liars* web series, *Pretty Dirty Secrets*. Clocking in at two minutes

each, the eight episodes were meant to bridge the time between the mid-season finale in summer 2012 and the Halloween special (Ng). Although it is impossible to know how popular *Pretty Dirty Secrets* was, it is likely that the small number of fans who did watch the web series also responded to it like they do to the televised series: by posting on Tumblr, Twitter, and Facebook.

However, following my analysis of casual fan activity, I am more interested in exploring some of the low-key industry content online. There are a number of industry-created additions to the *Pretty Little Liars* media experience, many of them clearly in existence to meet already-occurring fan activity. ABC Family operates "official" accounts on all the major social media platforms—Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Instagram, Pinterest, etc.—and provide content that purposefully emulate casual fan products. For example, the official *Pretty Little Liars* Tumblr features a similar combination of photosets, GIFs, and exclamations about the narrative and characters. April 2013 updates include a glamor shot of the lead cast with the short caption "FREAKING OUT AGAIN!! Take a look at another BTS photo of the PLLs at a recent shoot!" a small quote from one of the characters, episodic stills with notes like "Are you looking forward to more Mona when *Pretty Little Liars* returns?" and on-set photos of the series' stars goofing around. The same content is reproduced on the Facebook page and Twitter account: many photos (official promotional and behind-the-scenes variety), links to articles about the series, and simple polls and questions for the fans to vote on and answer. With the tonal and stylistic emphasis on capitalization and multiple exclamation points, and the general emphasis on captioned GIFs and episode quotes, this all recalls fan content. Importantly, *Pretty Little Liars*' social media accounts also share or link to content produced by fans.

It is easy to view this content as just industry promotion interjected into the fan community. ABC Family executives surely hope that even a random Facebook post from a friend might convince someone new to tune

in. Conversely, Gillian Doyle (2010) argues that "the processes of change" in production and distribution do not happen until the industry feels "threatened" by consumer activity (431). Thus, perhaps ABC Family moved into Tumblr because of fan activity already happening there. If the channel did not aggregate promotional videos or behind-the-scenes photos on Tumblr, fans would post them on personal accounts anyway. As a result, it is likely that ABC Family acquired the technical and conceptual competencies that fans previously developed, and in certain cases, were using against the industry. However, more interesting is how clearly this industry-provided content resembles typical daily fan activity. Although there are valuable discussions to have about the power dynamics at play when industry promotion echoes fan content, most fans are not concerned about those dynamics when they access Tumblr or Twitter. When a fan logs onto their dashboards and feeds, the content provided by ABC Family falls right into the stream alongside fan content.

For fans, industry content is pretty well integrated into their daily experiences. However, this move has consequences for the industry as well. Although the multiple *Pretty Little Liars* social media accounts are likely operated by different ABC Family employees, the series' existence mirrors an individual fans' media experience. *Pretty Little Liars* now exists in countless versions of itself online, each similar to the other (Deuze). Through social media, it participates in Miller's ascendant phatic media culture, offering little gestures of content that aim to engage in conversation (and promotion). These multiple *Pretty Little Liars* accounts also allow both the series and its fans to construct and reconstruct an ongoing archive of materials. Deuze argues that personal media archives are complicated when we allow other groups access it, and though ABC Family does not offer open-source access to its official accounts, it provides materials on Tumblr, Twitter, Facebook, et al. with the assumption that fans will repurpose it, constantly altering the larger *Pretty Little Liars* archive (93). This is only some of the industry activity online.

It might have been created to catch up to fan activity, or to promote in new spaces, but industry operates like fans in popular media spaces. Though costly, much of the activity is ordinary: short updates, photosets, and link-sharing. As a result, industry content contributes to the larger media experience in similar ways to fans; content from the groups blends, being shared and reproduced by both. There is another group that engages with both fans and the industry, further adding to the media experience: the stars.

Social media does not just allow fans to engage with one another, or with the industry; it also provides a space where they can access their favorite stars. The cast of *Pretty Little Liars* is especially active on social media. Unsurprisingly, the star-produced content in these spaces ranges from more recognizable promotion to the innocuous and personal. Hale, Benson, Bellisario, and Mitchell occasionally tweet or post photos related to *Pretty Little Liars*. For example, on March 26, 2013, Hale retweeted the official ABC Family account's announcement about the series' fifth season renewal and the *Ravenswood* spinoff; sometime later, Mitchell informed followers about a costume designer's promotional visit to a Macy's location in Maryland. Additionally, the cast regularly provide photos and updates during their downtime on-set, which is, of course, also a form of promotion. Nevertheless, most of the stars' activity represents, or is at least meant to represent, their off-screen lives. Among the renewal and spinoff news, spring 2013 Hale tweet topics include Easter, her ignorance about the Harlem Shake, and news about the unicorn shirt she purchased at Urban Outfitters. Similarly, Benson's Instagram account features some photos of her and fellow cast members on-set between shots, but those photos are intermixed with her out with friends, posing with her coffee, and "selfies" (close up pictures of herself) featuring fake glasses and silly facial expressions. Benson showed her support for marriage equality in similar manner to what many people did in March of

2013: by posting the recognizable equal sign in the red box, along with the hashtag "#marriageequality."

These posts and updates rarely include information that anyone would consider socially or politically relevant. Yet, what is most important is that the posts on the social media accounts of the Pretty Little Liars cast are very similar to those of fans their age, only Hale, Benson, Bellisario, and Mitchell attend more glamorous parties, or drink more expensive coffee, or take selfies while driving in newer cars. All under 30 years old, the stars appear generally relatable to fans, and other than Bellisario (who told Entertainment Weekly that she started her social media accounts to try to stop fake accounts misrepresenting her) they all seem comfortable with sharing details of their personal lives to anyone with access to Wi-Fi (Stransky). Here again, the content flowing into the Pretty Little Liars media experience is small and centered on daily life. The stars might live more glamorously, but that point remains. In her examination of television and Internet web series performer Felicia Day's star identity, Liz Ellcessor argues:

> [T]he Internet facilitates a wide range and large volumes of discourses that work to build a star text, but the success of that star text relies on precisely the intimacy and authenticity considered so central to television celebrity. In fact, Internet celebrity is founded even more firmly on illusions of intimacy, expressed not so much in terms of television's regularity as through perceived access to private, backstage behavior. Internet-based fame depends on the authenticity of a star's self-representation and on the notion of intimacy, experienced through the possibility of interaction rather than through simple familiarity. (51)

The stars regularly foster both authenticity and intimacy with their activity on social media. They provide intimate snapshots of their lives and reinforce that despite their fame, they still enjoy hanging out with family

or discovering Internet memes after they have already become passé. The stars do not reply to many of their fans' tweets or Instagram comments, resulting in feeds that sometimes look like streams of advertising for their series, films, records, and photo shoots and embodying what Alice Marwick refers to as "creative promoters" (56). However, the *possibility* that they will respond to a fan, or at worst, retweet a glowing comment remains.

This social media activity effectively reflects that the cast is not that different from the series' fans: young and interested in documenting large portions of their lives, no matter the banality of those moments. Information about the star's personal lives is not necessarily relevant to the series, but this activity—and fan interest in it—reinforces how the cast and the fans experience everything in media. Even though the stars would theoretically like some level of privacy, they also willingly provide inside looks into their lives. They could do this to present a level of authenticity or to bring fans into another space in which they can promote their work, but the stars' social media activity reflects how fundamental media are to their lives. Speaking of a willingness to share information on social media, Mary Gray describes the relationship between surveillance technologies and recent generations: "While many members of earlier generations may find this level of self-disclosure and showcasing a tad creepy, remember: this is the nannycam generation. These students have been closely monitored and on display since they were in diapers. Is their comfort with online exposition (or exhibitionism) so surprising?" (74). The cast's activity signals that their desires to participate in media and share brief insights of their day-to-day, despite the scrutiny of fans or tabloid culture, are ingrained into their lives.

For fans, interest in the personal lives of the cast can deepen their interest in the series; more often than not, the two interests intertwine. In her work on Dallas fans, Ang describes how the series often create the "illusion" that there is little distance between the actors and their

characters. She claims: “Being able to imagine the characters as ‘real’ people thus forms a necessary precondition for the involvement of viewers and is an anchor for pleasure of Dallas” (30). With actors willing to share their private lives with fans on social media and willing to mix those private moments with promotion for the series, the conflation of actor/character is even more pronounced. Popular fan Tumblrs feature just as many, if not more, photos of the actors out of character as it does screen shots from episodes, suggesting that the series and the star images are equally as important to the Pretty Little Liars fan experience. The series portrays a world where characters are constantly using media to avoid falling under the surveillance of A, or doing some surveying of their own. The series makes technology and surveillance seem like a tool of good and evil, but it also expresses that in a media life, surveillance is inevitable.

Although A’s continual torment of the girls represents the traditional panoptic ideal suggested by Jeremy Bentham, the *Pretty Little Liars* media experience is defined by omnopticism, where everyone exists in a mutual state of surveillance (Jensen 380). Ang argues that entertainment press helped viewers think they knew “everything” about *Dallas*, putting them in a “powerful, omniscient position” (75). This is even truer today, and for all groups of people. Fans, industry forces, and stars can all trace one another’s casual actions across official and unofficial productions and platforms. Star content is often repurposed by the fans and the industry, further reinforcing the lack of the boundaries between the groups.

Conclusion

In this essay, I have attempted to show how much of contemporary fan activity is quite ordinary. Although media allows more and more people to identify as fans and engage with other fans, the industry, and stars, very little of regular fan engagement is as expansive and politically subversive as the case studies provided by most fan studies work. Additionally,

despite typical conceptualizations of fan-industry or fan-star interactions, much of the engagement between these different groups is similarly innocuous. More importantly, on social media platforms, industry and star content regularly mirrors fan content, and as a result, all of this casual content flows together in one large media experience. Of course, I have left politics aside, but more work should be done to detail the power dynamics at play in these casual interactions. For example, in the case of *Pretty Little Liars*, what considerations should we make for gender and the industry's mirroring of a certain kind of gendered fandom? Embracing the existence of these routine interactions and the media life perspective allows us to move past longstanding dichotomies; hopefully, it can also help us further complicate the casual fan experience.

Notes

[1] These numbers are always changing, but see: www.facebook/prettylittleliars; www.twitter.com/abcfpll; http://prettylittleliars-onabcfamily.tumblr.com/; http://pinterest.com/abcfpll/; http://getglue.com/tv_shows/pretty_little_liars.

[2] Select tweets from: https://twitter.com/PLLGlee1/status/325713605939064832; https://twitter.com/savage_py_78/status/325712793678532608; https://twitter.com/Natalie_lam13/status/325712277493907458; https://twitter.com/SamsJam_/status/325712913987952640.

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The Popular Culture Studies Journal Interview with GEORGE EDWARD CHENEY

About George

George Cheney (PhD Purdue University, 1985) is an internationally recognized scholar who has worked at and visited a variety of universities in the U.S., Europe, Latin America and New Zealand. Cheney's primary area of study is organizational communication, and he has helped to broaden the boundaries of that specialty to include connections with culture, the economy, ethics, and social issues as well as to contribute to the internationalization of the field. His major interests center around identity, participation, work life, ethics, consumerism, globalization, and peace. Working solo or collaboratively, Cheney has published 10 books and more than 100 articles. His most recent book is a co-edited anthology *The Routledge Companion to Alternative Organization* (2014), which is the first volume of its kind in bringing together a wide range of examples that challenge our ways of thinking about how to do business and other activities in society. He especially enjoys team-based approaches to research and bringing together scholars and practitioners from a variety of specialties. He has won numerous awards for teaching, research, and service.

Cheney has held several administrative positions, he has helped to develop multidisciplinary as well as communication curricula, and he is an advocate of community-based research and civic engagement. At the University of Utah, he directed both an innovative program in peace and conflict studies, and a human rights center with a strong outreach

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component. At Kent State University, he coordinated and further developed an integrative doctoral program across areas of communication and information.

Cheney is also an associate investigator with the Ohio Employee Ownership Center at Kent State University, USA and a reference professor at Mondragon University in the Basque Country, Spain. Both of those associations relate to his work on employee ownership, cooperatives, and economic solidarity. In addition, Cheney is collaborating with colleagues in Canada and the USA on projects in the arenas of sustainable economic development, emphasizing mechanisms of participation and bonds of solidarity.

He has also visited Denmark many times, where he has collaborated extensively with Lars Thøger Christensen, now at the Copenhagen Business School, on a series of essays on identity, the integration of internal and external organizational communication, and transparency. With Christensen and with two colleagues now at Massey University, New Zealand, Cheney has published and is now revising an innovative textbook on organizational communication. *Organization Communication in an Age of Globalization* (Waveland Press, 2011) book draws from many examples in the cultural milieu surrounding organizational life in order to treat a variety of sub-topics.

Cheney is committed to translating theoretical ideas for popular venues and everyday practice, and he enjoys speaking about a range of issues that include consumerism, career development, and business ethics. In his consulting and partnering with organizations, Cheney promotes high levels of employee participation, group facilitation and problem solving, and shared leadership. In his writings, Cheney tries to be playful with the uses of terms and concepts, recognizing that knowledge itself is a network of concepts and that insights can sometimes occur with making the familiar unfamiliar (take the terms “efficiency” or “corporate

personhood," for example) or juxtaposing ideas in novel ways (e.g., considering the downside of "professionalism").

Currently, Cheney is an adjunct professor in the following units and institutions: the College of Communication and information at Kent State University, the Department of Communication at the University of Utah, the Department of Communication Studies at the University of Texas at Austin, and the Department of Management Communication at the University of Waikato, NZ.

In September of 2014 he will be presenting a paper on connections between health, work, community and wealth at a conference in Denver, and in November 2014 he will be a keynote speaker at a conference on cooperatives and mutuals in Wellington, NZ. Together with Ashley Hernandez, a consultant in Houston, Cheney is completing a study of best practices in worker cooperatives that will flow into the development of a manual on employee ownership.

How did your academic career begin?

I didn't set out to be a professor, and I didn't really know much about the field of communication until I embarked on my master's degree. My journey was from the sciences (I was a pre-med major) to the social sciences and then the humanities. I am happy to have been exposed to so many different disciplines, and to this day I draw upon multiple epistemologies, or ways of knowing, in my work. I was thankful for the long period of exploration that began when I was an undergraduate: there was time to check out different professions as well as to study in a variety of fields. Along the course of my master's work, I realized how much I enjoyed university life and then slid into a PhD program at the same institution, Purdue University.

What areas of study and ideas initially attracted you the most?

In those days, many graduate students in communication came to the field via forensics, meaning debate and individual speaking events. As an undergraduate with many different interests, I had some preparation in both the social sciences (including psychology, sociology and political science) and the humanities (particularly English and philosophy). With extemporaneous and impromptu speaking, which became my favorite events at speech tournaments, I dealt with a lot of contemporary issues (from war and peace, to educational policy, to energy and the environment), and then learned that there was a big discipline "attached" to forensics (as I viewed the relationship then!).

I also developed a strong interest in work and economic issues even though coursework in economics and accounting didn’t draw me at the time. As an undergraduate, I had the opportunity to do research in the community of Youngstown, Ohio by interviewing newly unemployed steelworkers and employed autoworkers. That was a powerful experience that awakened my concern for the many types of people and jobs that comprise our economy. This was the beginning of my academic interest in organizations and the workplace. In addition, because of how questions of identity surfaced in those interviews as well as in observations during my part-time jobs (at a shoe store in a local mall, in door-to-door sales, and on an assembly line), I started to think about what work means to people beyond the obvious paycheck.

You have observed that Kenneth Burke and Max Weber are two of the theorists who have influenced you the most. How do you see their works as relevant today?

They are two of the most important sources of influence on my thinking, to be sure. From Burke, I acquired sensitivity to language and symbols. He captured this well, especially towards the end of his long life and career, in discussing how "literature is equipment for living" and how much we can observe about human relations from relations between *terms*. For example, consider how the notion of “revolutionary” was tied to the left part of the political spectrum before 1980 and then became bonded with the right after that time. The film *Bob Roberts* portrays this symbolic shift very well. Burke also called attention to the fact that while precision is important in many contexts where we use language (think of air traffic control) ambiguity is a major resource in many kinds of communication. This we see especially with words for values and identities, where it is often in people’s interest to be somewhat vague and therefore more inclusive.

Weber's insights into the logics of the modern world were amazing, especially considering they were described a century ago. He helped us to understand that rationality is not just one thing, but it is in certain ways relative (that is, there are different types of rationality), just as are relations of authority and power. He also showed us how organizations and parts of them such as rules, regulations, and procedures, can take on lives of their own and move away from their intended purposes.

Who would you describe as your mentors in graduate school, and how did they influence you?

I was very fortunate in graduate school. 1980-85 was an exciting time to be in the Communication Department at Purdue. I had the opportunity to take a wide array of courses and co-author papers with Phil Tompkins and Linda Putnam (both leaders in organizational communication). There were several other professors with whom I learned a great deal there. Plus, I was part of a terrific cohort group. A number of my fellow graduate students are well-known scholars in communication. One of the key things I learned from both my formal and informal mentors is that knowledge itself can be seen as a network and that if we conceive of disciplines and "inter-disciplines" this way it helps us to understand better how ideas and collaborations develop.

What is your philosophy of mentoring, and how does that related to organizational communication?

This is a very important question. I believe in transformational leadership in the sense that the best thing we can do is to encourage and empower others to succeed and become leaders in their chosen areas of study and work. I also believe that effective mentoring is necessarily adaptable to different people, career stages, and situations. I would say that mentoring occurs in a variety of contexts, including small-group discussions and in peer relationships. Finally, I would stress that there is no substitute for collaboration, and that's something too that's very helpful to model because a lot of people don't have ready examples in their experience.

Regardless of the type of mentoring, I think it should be value-driven as well as centered on developing expertise. By this I mean trying to model the highest professional standards and always remembering that the

workplace is inhabited by human beings and not robots or objects. Organizations should be designed to serve people and the world and not so much the other way around. We can apply this same principle to the economy in general, which often seems removed from basic human concerns. In this respect, communication has a lot to say about economics, but that leads us to other questions.

What are some of the major trends in higher ed. you have observed over the course of your career? How do these relate to your primary area of study, organizational communication?

This is of course a huge question, and I'm actually considering writing more about it in the coming years. Two very positive trends, in my view, have been the move toward community engagement in many universities and colleges and the synthesis of theory and practice in the communication discipline. I am happy to have been a part of both of those developments. I'm not a big fan of the so-called "ivory tower," although I would defend the metaphor's relevance insofar as universities and colleges should provide "space" for faculty and students to "stand back" from various parts of the world and then reflect on and analyze them. In both of these ways—engaged scholarship and teaching and the conversation between theory and practice--academe has become more responsive to a broader constituency. That's very positive.

On the down side, from my perspective, the sheer pace of work for faculty and students has accelerated such that extended conversations that provide time to reflect are at a premium. This change is one of the by-products of efforts at greater "efficiency" that are sometimes rather narrow in that the need for reflection about what we are doing can get pushed off the table. Technological developments are double-edged, I feel: on the one hand, there are more opportunities for online and hybrid courses; on

the other, there is a certain clutter in today's communication environment as well as less face-to-face interaction.

Another thing has occurred, predictably but also ironically: the embrace of the student-as-consumer metaphor. There are big problems with this, as several colleagues and I wrote about in the 1990s Among them is that fact that the metaphor places the student outside the process of education much as it places most consumers outside the process of creation and production (although there are obvious exceptions to those through systems that incorporate customers' preferences). The point, though, is that education ought to be a highly participatory, dynamic enterprise of co-creation.

Your work is multidisciplinary in orientation and reach. What are some important works you would recommend to others who would like to understand organizations, work and society?

In terms of understanding how organizations and work developed in the contemporary world, there are no better resources than works by Marx, Durkheim and Weber. A few contemporary writers who bring together work, economy, and culture very well are sociologist Richard Sennett, economist Juliet Schor, political scientist Gar Alperowitz, former corporate executive David Korten, social critic Naomi Klein, climate activist Bill McKibben and scientist-activist Vandana Shiva. These are writers who not only move easily across disciplinary boundaries but also help us to reflect on how different trends work together or may be in opposition to one another. Above all, they challenge us to think beyond the present and inspire us to reconsider our own patterns of living and working in relation to our communities and our planet.

How do you see work and organizations as related to broader cultural trends?

Work and culture are intertwined in several ways, and there are influences in both directions. For example, ideas about competition and success that circulate in the wider society really do affect how people see their jobs and approach colleagues in a job. Think of the work and professional values represented in *The Apprentice* series, as my colleague Dan Lair has examined. The dramatic scenes and catch phrases of that both reflect ideas that are part of popular consciousness—for example, "It's just business" or "You're fired"—and then contribute to discussions that may shape individuals' perceptions of work by either reinforcing existing perceptions or contributing to a sense of irony.

Conversely, experiences of betrayal, exploitation or abuse at work have ripple effects not only individuals' lives but also, for example, in portrayals of work to be found in television, film, cartoons, and websites for career development. Experiences that are retold become part of the pool of symbolic resources that are available to individuals and groups. Consider for example how negative stories about working for some of the Fortune 500 companies are becoming widely known—sometimes to the point that the companies themselves feel the need to polish their images or even change policies. Part of the reaction to trends in the corporate world, of course, appears as catharsis and satire, which may or may not motivate social change. The cult film *Office Space* and the long-running Dilbert cartoons are good examples. Unfortunately, there are probably more negative assumptions and examples than positive ones, and this fact in itself contributes to cynicism about jobs, careers, and work in general. This is why true stories of "success" as defined differently than high status and fat paychecks are so important today.

In your teaching and writing about professional ethics you have talked about connections to culture. What are some observations you would make along these lines in light of conditions in the global economy in recent years?

One of my pet peeves is that with every scandal in any sector--whether in business, politics, organized religion, social services, etc.--the reaction is generally to talk about "bad apples" rather than to examine the bushel or the orchard. The film *The Corporation* brought this out vividly in 2003 and at the same time exposed some of the absurd implications that emanate from “corporate personhood.” Very recently, columns and blog posts have appeared where people have declared themselves “corporations” to emphasize that they might be better off as “legal persons” than “natural persons.” But, that leads us to a whole other discussion of how terms, policies, and even Supreme Court rulings have impacts far beyond anything imagined up front. Back to ethics: especially in the U.S. we tend not to think about ethics in cultural or systemic terms but rather try to identify "good guys" and "bad guys." Also, western ethical theory unintentionally encourages us to see ethics as "abstracted" or apart from everyday life. Ethics is both removed and elevated.

With all due respect to Immanuel Kant, whose theory of ethics I appreciate in many ways, the organized study and lay understandings of ethics often become a set of generalized principles that are seen as either unattainable in practice or insufficiently adaptable to people’s lived experiences. This is fine for certain analytical purposes, but it leaves the formal study of ethics as dry and uninspiring to many students. This is why in our book *Just a Job? Communication, Ethics & Professional Life* (Oxford University Press, 2010) we deliberately take a broader perspective on ethics that sees it as “lurking” in everyday life and in popular culture even when we don't label it as such. Three contemporary examples are the long-running, multiple *Survivor* series, where lessons

about “teams” can be understood both conventionally and ironically; stories of criminals and others who violate ethical principles yet are able to express some set of standards to which they adhere (e.g., the killer in *No Country for Old Men*); and popular writings on and portrayals of the financial system that offer many different conclusions about "the way people are" and should act (think of the various films about Wall Street life).

What are some areas of potential synergy for the study of organizations, culture, and societal problems today?

There are many important opportunities at this intersection. One to cultivate is where popular imagination about work meets pressing social, economic and environmental needs. Now is a time to think about jobs, professions and callings we haven’t yet considered because of the demands facing us. Climate change alone calls for the most extraordinary forms of cooperation our species has ever seen, and we ought to be creating spaces for young people, especially, to do the work needed as we begin to stare catastrophe in the face. This is where popular books on work and careers—and there are many great ones in fiction as well as non-fiction—can play a huge role. The same is true, of course, for documentary film making.

One of the most inspiring and vivid resources in this regard is *Yes!* magazine. I mention this outlet because of how it addresses social problems by placing them in broader cultural contexts and features specific projects. *Yes!*, which appears both in print and online, does not leave one with despair or paralysis but rather says, “Hey, there are things that can be done and are being done about this problem, and here’s how to get organized and talk about the effort in a way that brings along others.” We need more communication vehicles like *Yes!*

When you talk about this type of synergy, the Mondragon Corporation worker cooperatives in the Basque region of Spain come to mind, don't they?

Yes, these are private businesses, founded almost 60 years ago on a commitment to shared equity and democratic control for employees. Today they are the largest single system of worker-owned-and-governed cooperatives in the world. They include industrial, financial, technical, and educational co-ops, with a university that has a program in cooperative development and solidarity economics! I've had the pleasure and honor of investigating and collaborating with the Mondragon cooperatives since 1992, when their encounters with market globalization became more pronounced. These co-ops can be understood on multiple levels, as we would expect for a corporation with more than 85,000 employees and many different constituent companies.

What is especially interesting today is how their struggle over core social values—equality, democracy, and solidarity—reverberates in their host communities, related to their work in other parts of the world (they have offices in more than two dozen countries), and in the financial and other media. There is a mythos surrounding the Mondragon cooperatives and, at the same time, there have been many cynical dismissals of their authenticity. The real answer to how they function and what they offer in terms of lessons for a more just economy is complex. Mondragon remains one of the most experienced, vital and hopeful laboratories for alternative ways to "do capitalism" that we have today. Interestingly, a colleague at the University of Toronto, Marcelo Vieta, is analyzing the prospects for employee ownership and the solidarity economy in part by "reading" important cultural narratives that can motivate communities. This is yet another example of where culture, community, economics, and work come together.

So, what's next?

I'm in a new phase of teaching, researching, and consulting but with a variety of institutional connections and without a single full-time position at the moment. I'm taking something of a break after several years of caring for my parents and full-time academic work. This is an important time of reflection for me but also a chance to consider more direct ways to connect my work to community and environmental needs. Also, I see myself as a facilitator between academic research and sustainable and just economic development. That's why I'm assisting several groups of cooperatives in the U.S., conducting a very practical study on best practices in employee ownership, and coordinating a team that's drafting a manual that will hopefully be of use to many people.

At the same time, my interests in topics like identity are not going away. That topic, along with many others, is featured in the organizational communication textbook that's co-authored with Lars Thøger Christensen (in Denmark), Ted Zorn and Shiv Ganesh (both at Massey University, New Zealand). I try to keep asking question about trends, as in work with Lars at the Copenhagen Business School about how the buzzword "transparency" and associated policies are used and misused in various institutions. I also try to live my commitment to mentoring by helping graduate students and other young scholars shape their research programs. I am fortunate indeed to be able to think about these things and work with so many wonderful people around the world.

Book Reviews

THE STUART HALL FORUM

Stuart Hall: Relevance and Remembrance
An Introduction

A friend and colleague, Adam Tyma, who reviewed Hall's *Representation* for this section, posted this quote from Stuart Hall's "Deconstructing the Popular" on his Facebook wall about a year ago:

> Popular culture is one of the sites where this struggle for and against a culture of the powerful is engaged: it is also the stake to be won or lost in that struggle. It is the arena of consent and resistance. It is partly where hegemony arises, and where it is secured….That is why "popular culture" matters (Hall 453).

I immediately printed it in large font and have it hung on the wall over my desk in my campus office. I posted it there to provide me with a quick and articulate answer to students' and colleagues' questions about why I research and teach about popular culture.

Within a few hours, several questions were posted as comments in response to the quote on Tyma's wall. The one I have pondered since asked: "What struggle?" For me the referent was obvious: "for and against a culture of the powerful," of course. This answer, however, prompts further questions: "What is culture?" "Who are the powerful?" And even,

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considering the two-sided struggle suggested by the quote, "How and when can we tell who wins?" In his book about Stuart Hall, James Porter explains that Hall's post-Gramscian theory of cultural struggle indicates that culture "is a site of *ongoing* struggle that can never be guaranteed for one side or the other" (emphasis added; 1-2). From this perspective then the struggle does not necessary involve a winner nor a loser. Rather, defining such struggles and identifying the players exposes power relations and reveals the values, beliefs, and practices those involved deem important enough to support, resist, and otherwise argue about.

As a rhetorical critic of popular culture, my own struggle "for and against a culture of the powerful" is twofold. On one side is defining what I do for a public outside of academia. Defining the seemingly ancient term "rhetoric" is easy in comparison to how popular culture functions as rhetoric and therefore is important. People intuitively "get" the relationship between rhetoric and public speaking. But, when I start to explain how popular culture contains rhetorical elements and therefore functions to influence us, I often get blank stares. Using the concept of narrative, however, puts these same concepts in more understandable terms. As Linda Baughman contends in her review in this section of "The Narrative Construction of Reality: An Interview with Stuart Hall," Hall reminds us that the stories we tell give meaning to events around us. These stories, what they include and what they exclude, shape how and what we think about these events. Baughman reminds us that Hall's perspective on narrative is still relevant today not just because stories are ubiquitous, but because the nature of storytelling today, especially related to current events, demands theories that help us to understand them. For example, Hall addresses the role of journalists on the ground during the Falkland War in relation to official British news sources. So too can we apply Hall's perspective of narrative and representation to the Arab Spring, Twitter, and new media today. Explaining that film and television, the most common areas of my scholarship, use narratives in similar ways

helps me with my struggle to explain how popular culture operates as rhetoric with non-academic publics.

On the other side of my struggle is validating what I do for those in academia. While there is more recognition of the importance of narrative, rhetoric, and communication for academics, as soon as I mention my research related to reality television, the blank stares reemerge. Too often, I get the dismissive, "I don't watch television." Using the billions of television viewers to establish significance of my work with academics is regularly seen as a disadvantage: if it is so accessible, how can it be academic? Jules Wight's review of Hall's "Notes on Deconstructing 'The Popular'" provides one way such accessibility can be justified as legitimate for academe. She notes that Hall's work was grounded in a time when the Western world was moving from agrarian capitalism to industrial capitalism. She further contends that Hall's research is even more relevant today as a new *informational* capitalism emerges. In this time, Wight argues that Hall's definition of popular culture as "the ground on which the transformations are worked" is essential to understanding the locations in which issues of ideologies are contemplated today. So, instead of asking why they don't watch television, I can draw on Hall's rationale for the necessity of studying popular culture, especially in this age of informational capitalism.

Although it was Tyma's posting on his Facebook wall that prompted me to use Hall's quote to explain my scholarship, Hall's *Representation* has, and continues to be, a text I use in several of my classes to help students understand important concepts like encoding/decoding and circuits of culture. In the final review in this section, Tyma reviews the second edition of this text. He contends, and I agree, that this book is necessary for teaching both undergraduates and graduate students about these concepts and various stages of media. Tyma's reflections on the impact Hall's work has had on him since he was a student will seem

familiar to young and seasoned scholars of popular culture, media, and communication.

Writing the introduction for and editing this section has not given me any definitive answers to the questions prompted by Hall's quote. But, it has made me realize how important contemplating the questions continues to be. I am sorry that we will no longer be able to turn to Mr. Hall for his answers. Even so, his legacy gives us a foundation to build and expand upon for decades to come even as our media and popular culture evolve and expand.

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Considering Hall and Reconsidering Foundations of the Popular

Hall, Stuart. "Notes On Deconstructing 'The Popular'." 1998. *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader 3rd ed*. Ed.

John Storey. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006. 442-453. Print.

In his time-honored essay, "Notes on Deconstructing 'The Popular'," Stuart Hall lays a foundation from which all Cultural Studies research can be understood and undertaken. Not exactly a blueprint of either "popular" or "culture," Hall's essay does explain the ground for any understanding of the "popular" and demands that critical research in Cultural Studies begins upon this foundation. In his definition of the popular, Hall shows that both the "popular" and "culture" grow on (or through) this foundation, which must be studied to fully understand the subtleties of power, politics, tradition, and history moving about popular culture. Following from Hall, it becomes important to always look back, or better yet, to look *underneath* the cultural artifact we are researching to see the foundation. Has the ground shifted, or are there cracks? Is the ground or foundation balanced, or does it fall to one direction or another?

Jayson Harsin and Mark Hayward reviewed Hall's "Notes on Deconstructing the 'Popular'" for the essay's 30th anniversary. Their more extensive article addresses politics, populism, and the popular through a review of how current scholarship, particularly in terms of networked media, can continue to work through Hall's theories in terms of the popular (201-207). However, looking at Hall's essay now, after his death, and at this particular moment involves newer understandings of expansive state digital surveillance and, also, of new markets for information. In his essay, Hall described the movement from agrarian capitalism to industrial capitalism (442). Where are we now at the dawn of a new *informational* capitalism, and what does the foundation of popular culture look like now with both industrial capitalism *and* informational capitalism? While industrial capitalism has thrived from the days of Marx, informational capitalism is a more recent development derived from advances in information and communication technologies (ICTs), bringing with it new

forms of inequality (Parayil 41). I argue that these forms of inequality and the dynamics of this new knowledge-based market of information also bring with them a new urgency to heed Hall's call and re-examine the base or ground of popular culture.

Hall explains that even though there is a constant dialectical struggle in popular culture that, "Popular culture is neither, in a 'pure' sense, the popular traditions of resistance to these processes; nor is it the forms which are superimposed on and over them. It is the ground on which the transformations are worked" (443). While we study the transformations in popular culture – the new versus the old, the lost versus the won – it is not these transformations that determine or define popular culture. Instead, popular culture is the ground or milieu on (or in) which these transformations take place.

There are actually two dialectics in place in Hall's essay. The obvious one is the one that Hall points to and explicates in the dynamics of popular culture. For Hall, popular culture is always a struggle between "containment" and "resistance." These are the two "poles" of the dialectic. Hall states, "There are points of resistance; there are also moments of supersession. This is the dialectic of cultural struggle" (447). This is not necessarily a fair and even struggle. Hall incorporates Gramsci's notion of hegemony to explain how more powerful cultural forces have the upper hand over less powerful cultural forces. Hall refers to the "concentration of cultural power" (447) to explain this, and we see such concentrations in media conglomerates as well as in (the) military industrial complex(es). The second dialectic could, perhaps, be seen more as a binary than a dialectic – the birth and death of cultural formations and what we know as the "popular." Hall explains that as the popular shifts and transforms, older (or current) articulations of popular culture die off and decompose – we *lose* those forms of popular culture. This death of the popular is a direct result of new articulations being "born" or growing out of a complex milieu of political struggle. However, following Hall's use of

hegemony in the essay, there is also a consent occurring in which individuals consent to this loss – this cycle of cultural birth and death – through the consumption and circulation of new articulations of popular culture. In this way, culture is never *solely* dictated, but, instead, the process of hegemony includes a struggle of consent and non-consent that help form the milieu from which popular culture emerges. The question for a society with informational capitalism is whether "consent" still occurs, or whether the technologies fueling this specific form of capitalism have already been *incorporated* into the everyday for many. As Hall suggests, "Cultural struggle, of course, takes many forms: incorporation, distortion, resistance, negotiation, recuperation" (450).

Looking at these two different dialectics in terms of informational capitalism may help to continue and expand on Hall's "popular." Christian Fuchs offers a helpful and descriptive definition of informational capitalism as "a category that is used for describing those parts of contemporary societies that are basing their operations predominantly on information, which is understood as processes of cognition, communication, and cooperation, and on information technologies" (180). This is the capitalism of our networked media – one of dynamic and uneven exchange of information for capital. Informational capitalism provides part of the political struggle underneath popular culture – it is part of the ground or foundation of the popular. However, the industrial capitalism that formed the ground for dialectics of containment and resistance has not faded. Instead, the ground for popular culture depends on political struggles in both forms of capitalism, and there is a corresponding need to reevaluate the dialectic of containment-resistance. Arguably, the informational capitalism of networked media and the Internet may provide new aspects to the ground of popular culture that defy the binary and dialectic. Networked media involves aspects of agency, power, and control on both "sides" of the dialectic. These non-binary and non-dialectic aspects may exist only as possibilities of the

digital, but may also exist in forms of digitally networked protests, community movements, or even personal storytelling. These digital possibilities of course may merely be a part of the containment-resistance dialectic, but they also may be other than binary or dialectical. The agency possible in networked media no longer solely depends on industrial capitalism for circulation, but can instead depend on further agency within the realm of informational capitalism, providing a complexity that may not just be dialectical.

Similarly, as we look at the death-birth dialectic of popular culture, we also see digital residues that evade death or birth but remain always as digital, as entities, and as forces that may resurface in the milieu that provides for popular culture. Considering the continued rise of informational capitalism and networked media, this may be one of those moments of "deep structural change" in which Hall requires us to look underneath the bubbling up of new digital advertising, social media, streamed entertainment, and digital citizenship. This may also be one of many moments in which, for Hall, "Everything changes – not just a shift in the relation of forces but a reconstitution of the terrain of political struggle itself" (444). Govindan Parayil suggests that these political struggles surpass traditional notions of digital divides and instead promote new asymmetrical relations. He explains, "By the time the marginalized group makes any headway in bridging some aspect of these divides, the gap widens to an unfathomable chasm" (42). As digital divides create knowledge and information gaps, it is certain that political struggles change as well. It is up to researchers, in areas from popular culture to critical/cultural studies and from communication to media to follow Hall's call to understand corresponding changes to the "popular" as each change bubbles up from this milieu of dual capitalisms.

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Still Getting Us a Little Further Down the Road

Hall, Stuart. "The Narrative Construction of Reality: An Interview with Stuart Hall." *Southern Review* 17 (March 1984): 3-17. Print.

Critical/cultural scholars the world over keep arguing about the state of cultural studies. While we are busy arguing, we are sure to add, because we are good interdisciplinary scholars, that there isn't one list of the right articles, books, or scholars to read to be a cultural studies scholar. Today, I call "Shenanigans." Because even if the list isn't long, there IS a list; we have an intellectual past. A past that makes us want to, in the words of the

much missed Stuart Hall, "get a little further down the road." At the top of that list, any list (be it based on Marx, Lacan, or those thieves in the night— feminists) is Stuart Hall.[1] We lost an amazing voice when he passed; an extraordinary person. There won't be another like him, so we'd better be sure our students read him.

Originally an interview with John O'Hara for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, Stuart Hall's often overlooked, "The Narrative Construction of Reality: An Interview with Stuart Hall," manages to convey the importance of communication, narrative, and ideology in our understanding of the real, in just fourteen pages.[2] As icing on the cake, he also discusses war, news, censorship, nationalism, and imperialism. This essay is a 'must read' for any undergraduate (or graduate) curriculum operating in the landscape of the critical inquiry of culture. Hall begins by discussing the underlying causes of what looks like overbearing foolishness—media censorship by the British government during the Falklands War—and ends by explaining the importance of narrative on the production of the real.[3] Embedded in this highly readable essay on stories is an excellent discussion of ideology and its foundational power to create the world for us.

O'Hara begins the essay by asking Hall about the media coverage of the Falkland's War. Hall engages with the crucial information gap constructed via censorship by the British government. Hall reminds the reader that British reporting of the war went first to the Minister of

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[1] Hall called out his own blindness to the broadening nature of the project of cultural studies when he spoke about how feminists had to force their way into the conversation, "as the thief in the night" (Hall, "Cultural Studies and its Theoretical Legacies" 282).

[2] For simplification in reading, all references in this essay are to Hall's "Narrative Construction of Reality," unless otherwise noted.

[3] For those readers too young to remember: the Falklands War as a three week tidal wave of British military aimed at Argentina. Argentina attempted to reclaim a small series of islands off its coast, the Falklands. Great Britain took exception to this, having claimed them for God and Country in the late 1600's. When accounting for both sides, over 1,000 lives were lost and the world press of 1982 wondered at the overpowering show of might by Great Britain.

Defense, causing an official information lag of up to twelve days. In the days running up to the official war, censorship was in play about relations between Argentina and England, but journalists on the ground in Argentina could, and did, interview locals about what was happening. These stories were aired without censorship because they were not directly about the rising conflict. Hall explains that this caused an interesting disconnect, where contrary versions (versions that sometimes favored 'the enemy') of the war were being aired by the British media. Hall argues, "…for the first time journalists saw a reconstruction of their own construction of events" (3). This obviousness of the process of story-telling via journalistic voice was noted by audiences as well (Hall 4). Interrogating the disparate stories told by the British media gives Hall the opportunity to discuss the nature of storytelling and its powerful effect. He reminds the reader that events don't have meaning for us until we frame them via representation. Things/events don't mean anything until we settle on the story/stories about them. The variety of alternative stories being told about the Falkland War in Britain created a sort of crisis in storytelling: what was the truth of the events in Argentina? For Hall, the meaning making around the Falkland War was confusing and up for grabs until the BBC began to stitch the various narratives together.

In "The Narrative Construction of Reality," Hall uses media discussions of the Falklands War to examine how narrative structure produces myth. He focuses on how the BBC reconstructed the varied stories being told about the war into a seamless narrative. "Narrative tells a story into which it is impossible to enter or introduce any questions at all" (Hall 4). For Hall, once the BBC connected the Falklands War to other stories about Britain, it was difficult to see a way around the narrative. The BBC naturalized the events of the Falklands War to the point at which they became a part of the larger myth about Britain. The early 1980's under Thatcher wasn't the best time to be a British subject. The economy was dreadful, and the sun was setting on the British Empire.

The Falklands War became a symbol of Britain's continued responsibility to the world; a continued sense of thriving power. The Falkland Islands provided a global sense of Britishness, as they located The Empire beyond Europe, North America, and Australia. Hall recounts how the might and right of Britain during the Second World War was used to justify this war: this was Britain rescuing British citizens from the clutches of the Argentinians, (not a war about island grazing ground for sheep). The story of the 'just war' is a narrative structure into which questions are not required. All over the world, we simply know this story, some wars are good and some are bad. This is what Hall means by the mythic nature of narrative, it doesn't answer questions, it absences them.

In conversing about the power of the myth of the British Empire, Hall examines the power of narrative itself, "Let me make a point that if you tell a story in a particular way you often activate meanings which seem to almost belong to the stock of stories themselves. I mean you could tell the most dramatic story, the most graphic and terrible account of an event; but if you construct it as a children's story you have to fight very hard not to wind up with a good ending. In that sense those meanings are already concealed or held within the forms of the stories themselves" (7). For Hall the power of stories isn't simply in their content, but in their form as well; structures of narratives infuse a version of the world into our way of thinking. Hall likens much common sense thinking of narrative structure to an empty box that we simply fill; he finds this incorrect. Instead, Hall argues the form of a story inevitably becomes a part of its content (7). When we examine form and content together we examine something bigger than a funny story or compelling drama. We find ideology.

One of Hall's most compact and direct definitions of ideology comes from "The Narrative Construction of Reality." Here Hall writes, "we all constantly make use of a whole set of frameworks of interpretation and understanding, often in a very practical unconscious way, and that those things alone enable us to make sense of what is going on around us, what

our position is, and what we are likely to do" (7). For Hall, it is through stories that our society creates dominant meanings. Those meanings become the real for us. They are ideas, ways of experiencing the world that are largely unconscious and absolutely True. Hall neatly encapsulates an entire field of ideological theory when he writes, "When people say to you, "Of course that's so, isn't it?" that moment of "of course" is the most ideological moment, because that's the moment at which you're least aware that you are using a particular framework, and that if you used another framework the things that you are talking about would have a different meaning" (8).

Hall's "The Narrative Construction of Reality" is still an excellent introduction to the power of representation: he offers an introduction to some of the key terms in our field; he offers an example of how to apply those ideas in his discussion of the Falkland war; and he offers us an opportunity to learn how to examine an ideological position. He reminds us that we cannot escape ideology, so Hall offers us two opportunities to examine it: use theory or another ideological position. We use these positions to extract answers to the essential question for our field: who benefits from this sense of experience, this emotion, this version of the world (Hall 10-11)? Trying to answer that question is the way we get ourselves a little further down that road Hall laid out for us when he joined the Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies in 1964. And introducing your students to "The Narrative Construction of Reality" could put them on that road with us.

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Reviewing and Reflecting: *Representations*

Hall, Stuart, Jessica Evans, and Sean Nixon. *Representation: Cultural Representation and Signifying Practices* 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2013. Print.

In full disclosure, and some history as to my relationship with Stuart Hall's work: I was introduced to Stuart Hall during my Master's program in a Media Studies course taught by Mary Vavrus at the University of Minnesota. His article, "On Postmodernism and Articulation," although *technically written* by Larry Grossberg, was not what I would call the easiest reading. In fact, it was quite difficult. However, as I started to peel back the layers, the ideas in that essay began to sink in – so much so that it became one of my "go-to" pieces in the early stages of my research. Something there just made sense to me. More importantly, it is possibly the moment, to which I pinpoint, that changed the way I see things. This is why reflecting on and paying homage to Hall's work is so important. I am grateful for the chance to do so here.

The first time I read *Representation* was after I ordered a used, battered, and well-marked copy of the first edition online. I was in need of a few key citations and other references were pointing this direction. Though I had many of Hall's articles in my "collection" (aka the PDF folder on my desktop), I had never really read through this book. I bought it to help develop my literature review for my dissertation – I kept it because the book (and now its second edition, the version I will be reviewing here) continues to inform the work I do, in new ways every time I open it up.

However, it is the body of his work that has informed me, rather than any one key piece. Across my research, the idea of *articulation* runs rampant, as it helps me to make sense of the (mediated) reality that surrounds us, always reconstructing and reconstituting what we see as "the real" in new and exciting ways. When I teach my students about understanding how meaning making with media occurs, the encoding/decoding circuit is the first concept that my students look at me and say "Oh! I get it!" It never fails that the perceived simplicity and complexity within the concept of articulation invite conversation and interrogation of our media practices and media production (given that I teach in a School of Communication, with the majority of our students in our Journalism and Media Communication major). Articulation, along with the other ideas presented in Hall's work, help to uncover the layers of "the popular" and see where active political resistance exists even within the most mundane mediated texts.

So … why *Representation*? Why, of all of Hall's work, do I want to review essentially a textbook? It is simple, really: Hall was a teacher. It only seems right that we look at his work as teachers AND critics; therefore, ***Representation.*** I chose the second edition because, now that I have spent too much time grounding my own respect for Hall's work, I want to treat this as an honest review of a book that should end up in undergraduate and graduate classrooms for the next wave of media critics,

consumers, and producers. While this review is in a journal centered on popular culture, the book itself is appropriate for areas including media studies, rhetoric, advertising, public relations, even contemporary art courses. As the second edition was published in 2013, it could be argued that it is one of the last educational works with which Hall was involved, before his passing.

Representation becomes a guidebook for the student of our mediated cultures and a touch point signifying Hall's contributions to how we make sense of popular culture (translation: "day to day life and the things that are part of it"). *Representation* not only presents complex perspectives to us, but does so in ways that are accessible and, therefore, useful to a wide range of theorists, scholars, students, and practitioners. In other words, he gives us the tools and then shows us how to use them. These tools are desperately needed, not just for popular culture scholars but for anyone who consumes the texts around them, particularly as our mediated life has become so much more ubiquitous. Hall and his co-authors work to help us understand the cultural signifiers present and all around us, through not just a theoretical lens, but a philosophical one as well.

Like cultural studies and Hall's own work, *Representation* has changed between the first (1997) and second (2013) editions: It (they) evolves as the world does. Hall's central tenets always suggested that the text – who we are as individuals, social groups, audience members, cultural products, and citizens – is never static. We are always in the process of becoming. Therefore, we are fluid, never fixed. It only makes sense that *Representation* has been rearticulated in the updated edition. The majority of the arguments are the same, yet a few have been replaced with more context-appropriate discourse (new chapters include discussions of documentary production for film and television and updated examples throughout).

When I review a text for a journal, or for my class, I do the same thing every time: I read the introduction to get a sense of the text, then I move

into the meat of the book to figure out what kind of "work" the teacher and students will need to put in with it. In this case, the introduction to *Representation* is quite brief, as far as textbooks typically go, but it sets up the reader for what to expect. Immediately, Hall explains that we are looking at this idea of "representation" as part of a cultural system (for him, *a circuit of culture*.) He thanks Paul Du Gay for this concept, and then starts us with his first question: what is the connection between culture and representation? His answer is "shared meaning" (p. xvii). It is this idea – and Hall's typical use of graphics to help his meanings along – that shape the conversation throughout the rest of the book.

The remaining chapters of the book are written by Hall and a collection of scholars who use *Representation* as an opportunity to play with specific concepts that add to our whole understanding of how we are present in our media, represented in our media, and subsumed by our media. The overarching impression to the whole of *Representation* is that it is dense – quite dense. Students and teachers alike will need to be sure they allow time to debrief in the margins of the text themselves and during their class discussions. Each of the chapters provides a near-"Who's Who?" of theorists, ideas, arguments, and approaches to inquiry. I would encourage teachers who assign this book to have their students track the various noteworthy mentions in a reading journal. This will ensure that they are able to not only read the material but also able to speak to it, both in class and in their own writing and critique.

This "review" is as much about *Representation* as it is about what Stuart Hall has meant to my own foundations and those of cultural inquiry in general. For me, it is difficult to easily summarize my foundations, but it seems that *Representation* might be that interesting collection of ideas that actually does so. I have a quote from Stuart Hall regarding the classroom as my email signature: "You have to be sure about a position in order to teach a class, but you have to be open-ended enough to know that you are going to change your mind by the time you teach it next week."

This not only frames Hall's rationale for how *Representation* changed – had to change – between 1997 and 2013, but why we must continue to visit our foundations in order to change with the new cultural realities around us.

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Book Reviews

THE POPULAR CULTURE STUDIES JOURNAL BOOK REVIEWS

Introduction

As the new Book Review Editor, I wanted to take this opportunity to introduce myself and the philosophy I bring to the book review section of *The Popular Culture Studies Journal*. I was in middle school and a competitive gymnast when my father was in law school. So, the two of us would come home at 9:30 at night, he after an 8-hour work day and night classes and me after a full day of school and five hours at the gym, only to have our homework still to do. We would watch TV just to stay awake. On weekends, when many parents would tell their children to go outside, my father would insist I watch old movies like *Cat Ballou* and *The Godfather* with him. I never wanted to admit how much I liked them since I'd been "forced" to do it. To this day, I "coerce" my own students into watching movies they might never have seen without me. Students learn so much about character development by comparing Lee Marvin and Al Pacino's characters evolutions (or de-volution in Pacino's case). The visual composition of *The Godfather* never fails to turn on light bulbs over my students' heads as they begin to recognize how film can be "read." After earning my PhD from Ohio University (2009) in Rhetoric and Public Culture, with a secondary area of study in Feminist Media Studies, I now have the academic legitimacy to call watching all this TV and these movies "work."

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I have always watched television and movies, played sports, gone to Disneyland, listened to music, and joined in games for more than just enjoyment. I am not sure if this something more was because of my identities as middle-class, white, and female; my parents' support of my precocious curiosity; or some innate desire to learn that motived my critical engagement the most. What I do know is that the first time I noticed that more women's gymnastics than men's was televised, that more men played hard rock music on the radio, and that Disney princesses never had jobs was way before I went to graduate school. I also know that it was in the everyday activities in which I engaged, in which millions of people engage daily, that I wondered about how the world worked and how it shaped me.

So, to answer the question: "Why popular culture?" Its ubiquity, influence, and our everyday engagement with it make it necessary to study. When researching new publications in need of review, I look for those that engage in the diverse areas of our everyday lives that contribute to the ways we think about our culture, beliefs, and everyday practices, whether those contributions are theoretical, methodological, historical, substantive, or a combination thereof. There are longer and shorter reviews of current scholarship about popular culture in this issue on topics ranging from comic books to conspiracy theories, from sports to superheroines, and from traditional to new media. What they all have in common is that our reviewers' insights contribute in meaningful ways to our critical engagement with popular culture. Our reviewers have taken the time and exerted the effort to assess current popular culture scholarship to aid readers of *The Popular Culture Studies Journal* in evaluating these works and making important decisions about what to read, buy, and use in their own research and teaching. We are thankful that they shared their insights with us and with you.

Early on in my journey to legitimate my enjoyment of and engagement with popular culture, i.e., earning that diploma, I encountered the writings of Stuart Hall. His theories related to media and popular

culture contributed to my motivation to focus my studies of rhetoric and public culture on media and popular culture in particular. His work (along with Raymond Williams') made me realize that popular culture was a valid (necessary) area for scholarship and teaching. In our continuing effort to provide "New Perspectives on Classic Texts" in *The Popular Culture Studies Journal*, and to commemorate the passing of this legend, our review section also includes three reviews of classic Stuart Hall works. I have written more about Hall and this section in the introduction to the roundtable. What I will say here is that between the reviews of new and classic works there appears a bias. All the reviews are of written works. As our journal hopes to push the boundaries of traditional publications and due to the interdisciplinary nature of the study of popular culture, this section should include reviews of other forms of popular culture, be they exhibits, films, events, or other performances of popular culture. The one limit I would impose as the Book Review Editor is that these reviews be of scholarly engagement with popular culture, not the popular culture performances themselves. One example that demonstrates my point might be that reviewing the film, *Cutie and the Boxer*, would be appropriate for this section, but a review of the Shinoharas' art forms would be more appropriate as an original scholarship submission. The latter may be popular arts (paintings and comics), but the former is critical engagement with their arts (and relationship). For my part, I will be revising the call for "Book Reviews" to reflect and encourage broader submissions. For your part, please suggest reviews of materials beyond books. But, don't stop reading books about popular culture and submitting those reviews as well.

Finally, thank you to Samantha Latham, Graduate Instructor at Utah State University, for all her help reading and reviewing the book review submissions. I could not have accomplished all that I did with this section without her assistance.

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Sotirin, Patricia, and Laura Ellingson. *Where the Aunts Are: Family, Feminism & Kinship in Popular Culture*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2013, $34.99 (paper), 252 pp.

Patricia Sotirin and Laura Ellingson's comprehensive overview and analysis of aunts in popular culture is an insightful and extremely well written guide to an under studied and under-appreciated but well-known character. The aunt, whether on TV, in film, selling products or hosting websites is both everywhere and invisible, and Sotirin and Ellingson do an impeccable job of bringing her to light. Their approach to reading media, which underscores the importance of transgressive characters, offers readers a way to see the aunt as more than just "like a mother to me" but as her own unique character with inherently feminist characteristics.

The book opens by asking, "What's up with aunts?" and through this question the authors argue that aunts are "surprisingly unconventional and progressive" "double agent(s)" who play secondary yet vital roles (2). Sotirin and Ellingson suggest that the aunt has a capacity to advance social justice through her ability to transgress normative feminine roles, to reinvent feminine kinship systems by breaking down hegemonic notions of the nuclear family, to revalue caring and caregiving, both economically and culturally, and to "articulate progressive visions of families of choice" (12). In order to support these arguments, Sotirin and Ellingson revisit their initial claim that aunts are more than characters who are "like a mother *but not a mother*" (15, italics original) in their astute survey of aunts throughout television and film history. From Auntie Em (*Wizard of Oz*) to Aunt Viv (*Fresh Prince of Bell Air*), readers begin to see the profound impact these non-mother care-givers have on their families. Because aunts offer a "nonprocreative model of family life based on extended kin relations and emotional commitments of choice rather than on institutionalized sexual and marital relations" (20) they become a "rallying point for recognizing and reclaiming nonnuclear familial

relationships, extended kin-care arrangements, and same-sex and non-procreative parenting partnerships as valid social forms" (21).

Beyond revisioning kinship systems, aunts also become the loci for racial social justice. In chapter two, Sotirin and Ellingson survey the "othered" aunts through characters such as Aunt Jemima and Aunt Sarah (*Uncle Tom's Cabin*). These two women symbolize "not only the contradictory logic of racist violence but also the ways in which racism and sexism intersect literally within the bodies of women of color" (49). These aunts also become sites for subversion. For example, Aunt Jemima has the potential to go beyond the claims of a postgender, postracial, postfeminist climate and act as a subversive character in three distinct ways: she "speaks up" about America's history of racism, she challenges stereotypes about black women and she exemplifies a strong black woman in the face of cultural silencing of black women's realities (50). As such, these "othered" aunts work to change the way we understand race and gender, and it is this transgressive potential that Sotirin and Ellingson so thoroughly highlight.

The authors also show how the malevolent aunt, i.e. the "bad mother," has the potential to be more than what is initially seen within her character. Analyzing texts such as *Raising Helen*, *No Reservations* and *Mostly Martha*, the work of chapter three demonstrates the ways in which women who are childless by choice – bad mothers – can not only become good mothers when needed, but also "radically undermine the need for heterosexual reproduction" (68). These aunts' transgressive nature, as argued by Sotirin and Ellingson, works to support LGBT rights by showcasing more diverse notions of family and parenting as well as what it means to have families of choice.

In chapter four, we come to some of the most well-known aunt characters, the ones full of wisdom and witchcraft. Aunt Clara (*Bewitched*) and Aunts Zelda and Hilda (*Sabrina the Teenage Witch*) are used to continue the argument that aunts have the ability to center "intimacy and

caring in female relationships" and extol "a flexible, voluntary, communal model of kinship" (93). For example, while Sabrina and her aunts may initially be read as having little narrative depth and existing within a postfeminist dreamworld, Sotirin and Ellingson argue the family works to reimagine neoliberal ideas of the family unit as well as position women's power at the forefront of family. Combined, the aunts "take up the ongoing feminist struggle to assert the value of women, girls and feminine identity" (87).

Chapter five brings readers to the "eccentric" or "crazy" aunt, and here Sotirin and Ellingson highlight aunts such as Auntie Mame (*Auntie Mame*), Aunt Augusta (*Travels with my Aunt*), and Aunt Josephine (book 3 of *Limony Snicket's A Series of Unfortunate Events*) to showcase the ways in which the exaggerated styles of these women invite readers/viewers to "protest against the strictures of conventionality" (102). In fact, the authors suggest that these women offer transgressive camp performances, which support the idea that femininity is a "strategy of gender struggle and survival rather than a pregiven, essentialized identity" (102). The mad aunt inspires creative reflections that introduce ambivalences into the binds between women and domesticity.

Chapter six explores the life of the e-aunt and the commodified aunt. Using a popular search engine, Sotirin and Ellingson quickly found over 33 million links when they searched the term "aunt." Their sample study produced an abundance of commercial sites concentrated on products and services for domestic and leisure industries. An analysis of the language in the "About Us" section of each website produced the reasons and qualities for the aunt's appeal. Online aunts promote care, nostalgia, asexuality, whiteness, traditional middle-class values, and "bounteous goodwill" (126). They also point to a social need for intimacy, albeit at a distance. These online aunts are by far the most troubling characters for Sotirin and Ellingson for they unearth an "unreflective consumerism" that "facilitates

instrumental relations with others that render the consumer hardened to the humanity of the other and concerned with nothing beyond the self" (130).

In all, *Where the Aunts Are: Family, Feminism & Kinship in Popular Culture* is a fascinating text that gives much attention to an often ignored character. The transgressive capabilities of the aunt, as described by Sotorin and Ellingson, are fascinating and provocative. *Where the Aunts Are* would be an excellent addition to any media studies course as well as courses on gender and/or sexuality, family communication, and interpersonal communication. The accessibility of the writing combined with the in-depth analysis lends itself well to all levels of college students. The only criticism of this book is that there should be more. The aunts who are discussed are illuminating, however, they are also limited. While Sotirin and Ellingson acknowledge their collection is only a sampling of aunts, and the appendix of mediated aunts is undoubtedly helpful, more aunt analysis would strengthen their argument and the overall text. Other than a desire for more, which is in many ways the best criticism possible, there is little lacking from this book. Sotirin and Ellingson set out to find aunts in popular culture and reimagine what they mean within a postfeminist society and they have done just that.

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Henderson, Lisa. *Love and Money: Queers, Class, and Cultural Production.* New York: New York University Press, 2013, $75 (cloth), $23 (paper), 224 pp.

"Every Queer Thing We Know," the third chapter of Lisa Henderson's *Love and Money: Queers, Class, and Cultural Production*, opens with a simple yet profound question: "How to live?" (60). The question is integral to the chapter it introduces, but also serves as an entry point to a holistic understanding of Henderson's 2013 book project. Throughout the introduction, six chapters, and conclusion, Henderson explores the entanglement between queerness and social class. Convinced that queerness and class are not mutually exclusive, but rather mutually affecting and reproducing, she cautions against failure to recognize the discourses' interplay. Henderson urges readers to envision solidarity between queerness and class, and to strive for alliances between and among people living at the queer/class crossroad. Various cultural texts are taken as exemplars that illustrate the book's prominent motifs of solidarity and alliance, and demonstrate the ways that these ideals lead to a spirit of repair imbued with the potential to redistribute current modes of thinking, doing, and being. Located at the intersection of queered and classed identities and communities, *Love and Money* articulates hope for a way of living that moves beyond shame, exclusion, and antagonism.

Among the cultural products Henderson employs are films (for instance, Kimberly Peirce's *Boys Don't Cry* [1999] and Miranda July's *Me and You and Everyone We Know* [2005]), television programs (including the ABC's *Brothers and Sisters* [2006- 2011] and Showtime's *The L Word* [2004- 2009]), and the literature of award-wining contemporary author Dorothy Allison (examples are *Bastard Out of Carolina* [1992] and *Two or Three Things I Know for Sure* [1994]). In addition to this empirical material, Henderson provides autobiographical

anecdotes, which serve as threads of continuity that allow readers to seamlessly move between the varied cultural texts.

At the crux of Henderson's thesis is the need to adopt an augmented definition of social class—one that moves beyond a Marxist economic frame and includes cultural production. As *Love and Money* argues, such an expanded conception of social class enables both academic and popular conversations that integrate queerness and class as a symbiotic discourse. Chapter 1, "The Class Character of *Boys Don't Cry*," centers upon the based-on-a-true-story movie about the murder of Brandon Teena, a transgender male. Henderson convincingly suggests that "at the nexus of queer and class, is the displacement of the trauma of one category onto the trauma of the other" (25); her reading of the film discusses queerness and class in tandem by highlighting the film's working-class environment (rural Nebraska) and the working-class and queered identities therein. The chapter is shorter than the subsequent chapters, but it effectively introduces readers to the book's major theme about the interconnectedness between queered and classed identities. Because the film's climax centers upon Brandon's murder, the book's investigation of "how to live?" is poignantly introduced by the first chapter.

Chapter 2, "Queer Visibility and Social Class," uses television programs to expose "comportment, family, and modes of acquisition [as] the class markers of queer worth" (34). Here, Henderson revisits her earlier attention to trauma and expands her analysis to engage themes of exclusion and shame. Henderson expresses wariness of the cultural productions that attach body, normative institutions, and consumerism to the creation of good, enfranchised queers. The chapter asks readers to imagine "a queer class future of love and solidarity" (59), and heralds a reparative spirit that becomes increasingly woven into the book's dominant narrative.

Chapter 3, "Every Queer Thing We Know" focuses upon the work of Miranda July, particularly *Me and You and Everyone We Know*. The film's characters are "people whose lives are open to attack" (Henderson 68). Henderson draws a parallel between the film's characters and real world queers, both of whom are marked as Others. However, the film has gentleness and a quirkiness that Henderson suggests is largely missing in academic scholarship and, more generally, "in these mean times" (69). *Love and Money* takes the film as a pedagogical tool that articulates the possibility for repair. Chapters 1, 2 and 3 bring exclusionary practices, shaming, and antagonism to the forefront, and the cultural products Henderson employs helps us understand how those marked as Others might themselves begin to enact change, heal, and repair.

Chapter 4, "Recognition: Queers, Class, and Dorothy Allison," articulates the class/queerness interchange through a study of Allison's own story as a "class escapee" (Henderson 77). The chapter also incorporates stories elicited during interviews between Henderson and Allison's fans. Recurrent in the chapter are narratives of recognition and misrecognition that Henderson distinguishes as the starting place for the socializing, displacing, and calming of "class and queer shame" (100). From this starting point emerges the potential not only for class escapism (or upward mobility), but for the potential benefits of alliances between social classes, an idea explored more fully in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5, "Queer Relay," responds to the longstanding strict dichotomy between corporate filmmaking and queer independent filmmaking, industries that have often struggled to, as the saying goes, play nice. As the chapter's title suggests, the proposed alternative is queer relay, which imagines "not two opposed groups but contiguous cultural spaces whose borders are open" (120). Liza Johnson's *Desert Motel* (2005) is taken as an exemplar to anchor the assertion that filmmaking is a cultural process that can incorporate relay to foster alliance, rather than antagonism among peoples, organizations, and institutions—specifically

queerness and social class. With queer relay, we see filmmakers from different financial circumstances working together; the film industry, then, acts as a metaphor for society at large. Readers are encouraged to cross identity borders (be they classed, queered, or otherwise) and work together to repair the divisiveness that has long prevailed.

Chapter 6, "Plausible Optimism," solidifies the thematic trajectory that distinguishes *Love and Money* from most academic scholarship, which rarely extends criticism to locate positive ripostes. The chapter compares *By Hook or By Crook* (a 2001 movie made on a proverbial shoestring budget) and *Brokeback Mountain* (the 2005 blockbuster) to delineate the powerful, affirming queer attachments—be they sexual or friendly—that enable "queer openings" (Henderson 154). At the heart of the chapter is the assertion that even tragic narratives have entrance points to queer happiness and healing. Just as in Chapter 1, Henderson explores a film that tackles the complex intersection of rural and queer identities, and climaxes with the murder of a homosexual character. However, in this chapter, Henderson asks readers to recognize the positive elements of tragic narratives and to adopt an optimistic outlook on the possibility of repair, solidarity, and love.

Henderson's quest to find a way to live, to approach class and queerness, and to repair is brought full circle in "Conclusion: A Cultural Politics of Love and Solidarity." The book speaks to the current moment in which sexual and class Others continue to navigate a cultural landscape that produces shame, trauma, and exclusion. *Love and Money: Queers, Class, and Cultural Production* is best suited to academics and the graduate classroom, but its major themes and emphasis on popular media will resonate with those beyond the academy who take interest in LGBT and class-based issues and, especially, those who have or are hoping for optimistic alternatives. Henderson's hope—indeed, her reparative spirit—inspires the same love and solidarity she sees in cultural production.

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McLeod, Kembrew. *Pranksters: Making Mischief in the Modern World*. New York: NYU Press, 2014, $29.95 (cloth), 364 pp.

The Scholar Who Japed

A single line in *Pranksters: Making Mischief in the Modern World* sums up not only the point of the book, but also the academic career of Kembrew McLeod: "a clever deception can help generate an honest discussion" (264). Indeed.

McLeod came to most of our attention through a sly stunt: in 1997, he trademarked "freedom of expression," making a point about ownership and Intellectual Property that eventually led to his 2007 book *Freedom of Expression©: Resistance and Repression in the Age of Intellectual Property.* This book has, in turn, contributed to the continuing discussion of concerns over ownership of intellectual (or any) thought and expression.

McLeod has never been simply an observer. He has been involved in the types of activities he studies in in *Pranksters* since his days as an undergraduate at James Madison University a quarter of a century ago. In terms of studying popular culture, this gives him a distinct advantage, for he is not writing as an outsider, a self-styled impartial student, but as an enthusiastic participant. This provides him a connection to his material that the traditional "objective" scholar cannot attain, a connection particularly appropriate and useful in the field of cultural studies.

McLeod is trustworthy as a scholar for two reasons: First, he owns up to his deceptions, giving his readers confidence that they know exactly where he stands, when he is joking, and when he is not. In *Pranksters*, he is not joking, but is seriously examining "everything from political pranks, silly hoaxes, and con games to the sort of self-deception that fuels outlandish belief systems" (3). Second, he always highlights his agenda,

making clear to everyone just where he is trying to go and his own relationship to it. He begins his last chapter with, "I have a confession. The subject matter in the previous chapter is very close to my heart" (254). Further, by refusing to distance the scholar from the person, he banishes the distrust that stances of objectivity generate in this chary age. "Everyone has an agenda" we grumble as we watch the news or read the latest pontification. McLeod, refreshingly (and importantly) refuses to hide his agenda, making what he says much more reliable than the latest attempt to, say, undercut a hated enemy in the field through a putative impartial stance.

McLeod dates his "modern world" to the Enlightenment or even before, starting his study with the Rosicrucian hoaxes of the early 1600s. He twists his way from there through shadowy worlds of con artists, conspiracy theorists, "Satanists," and more, ending with the contemporary world and with a wish that, as he says in the last line of the book, "we won't get fooled again" (285). Like the pranks that he likes the best, he writes with a certain and clear purpose.

As I was reading *Pranksters*, my mind continually returned to the fiction of Philip K. Dick, particularly to his short 1956 novel, *The Man Who Japed*. Dick's protagonist Allen Purcell becomes a trickster to save the world, creating a prank in which, on television, the claim is made that the founder of the society of the novel was a cannibal. The joke—or jape—is an attempt to shock the world out of a repressive social system.

Purcell is deadly serious about his prank, just as McLeod has been about the trademarking of "freedom of expression," remaining so even as he writes about other pranksters. Purcell, like Dick himself (who built contradictions into his work, sometimes accidentally, sometimes to make a point), is just the sort of prankster McLeod appreciates most. He has a real fondness for all of his jokers, but especially for the ones, like the Yippees, who were out to change the world. Though he examines characters as

different as Benjamin Franklin and P.T. Barnum—and more, both before and after their times—it is the prankster with a purpose that he loves best.

Ultimately, what McLeod gives us in *Pranksters*, his topic aside, is an example of the best of cultural-studies writing. The book can engage almost any reader; it is not necessary to have been part of any academic "conversation" before picking it up. At the same time, it can be extremely useful to the scholar who *does* want to continue the particular discussion. It is well organized and indexed, and it contains an extensive bibliography.

Dick's Purcell, at the end of his novel, elects to stay on Earth and deal with his culture and the consequences of his act. McLeod, too, sticks to home, to his intellectual and philosophical roots. The result is an engaging book, one as important for the example it sets as for the scholarship it presents.

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Donnelly, Ashley M. *Renegade Hero or Faux Rogue: The Secret Traditionalism of Television Bad Boys.* Jefferson, NC: McFarland. 2014, $38 (cloth), 200 pp.

First, let us get to the primary concern: *Renegade Hero or Faux Rogue: The Secret Traditionalism of Television Bad Boys* is a commanding book, compelling the reader to rethink television's role in contemporary culture. For Ashley M. Donnelly, an assistant professor of telecommunications at Ball State University, the book is a striking debut that pushes her into the vanguard of popular culture scholars, particularly when examining television and its larger implications.

What Donnelly demonstrates is that the male, anti-hero characters in shows such as *Dexter*, *Sons of Anarchy*, *True Blood*, *Boardwalk Empire*,

and *Breaking Bad* (all incredibly popular, critically-acclaimed, and award-winning) actually reinforce traditional (outdated) forms of power, particularly related to race, capitalism, inequality, and patriarchy. Donnelly explains, each show's "narratives are creating ideologies that perpetuate capitalist hegemony and American conceptualizations of Otherness under the guise of difference, rebellion, and progress" (73).

Donnelly's detailed research – drawing from close reading of the selected television programs and weaving in theorists as necessary to draw out new inferences – fuels a skilled assessment of the programs under review, but then extends its analysis to the role television plays in the broader cultural milieu. What is striking in *Renegade Hero or Faux Rogue* is that these seemingly groundbreaking characters – like Dexter Morgan, the serial killer with a heart of gold – superficially appear to be fictional portraits on the cutting edge of the new golden age of television drama but are actually not far removed philosophically from what TV viewers are used to or have seen in the past.

What Donnelly reveals is that American TV viewers are committed to old-school ideals and nostalgic visions of the good old days, even though we dupe ourselves into believing otherwise. Rather than reformulate what it means to be an American, if such a being even exists in the twenty-first century, these programs submit to a canonical vision where white males are the ultimate heroes, women know their place, and minorities are essentially evil. Donnelly explains, "The narratives produced will privilege those who already are privileged in our culture and, with few exceptions, continue to oppress those who face oppression and resistance every day of their lives in reality" (171).

There is little to criticize in this tightly argued, gem of a book. Pressed, however, one might point to the book's title, which is straightforward enough, but not the type that will set the potential book buyer's heart aflutter. The same cannot be said, though, of the cover image, which is a striking photo of Dexter sporting the outline of bloody angel wings. This

may seem a trifling aspect of the book, but in today's cutthroat publishing market a strong title can lead to more buyers, particularly among general and academic libraries.

Renegade Hero or Faux Rogue is highly engaging – analyzing several of the dramatic television series that are considered among the best ever produced – and written in a style that is both scholarly and authoritative, yet will also appeal to a general interest audience. Donnelly's book deserves wide readership and is appropriate for all libraries and as a text in undergraduate or graduate courses analyzing television. This book is the real deal and Donnelly is a popular culture scholar on the rise.

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Lotz, Amanda D. *Cable Guys: Television and Masculinities in the 21st Century*. New York: New York University Press, 2014, $79 (cloth), $24 (paper), 251 pp.

In *Cable Guys: Television and Masculinities in the 21st Century,* Amanda D. Lotz presents a well-detailed argument about how recent television series represent the ongoing gender script negotiations of American men in the beginning of the 21st century following the introduction of second-wave feminism. According to Lotz, the representation of men and their relationships during this time demonstrate men managing their masculine identities in the "post-second-wave" society and culture of the United States. She presents twelve cable and broadcast network series in a textual and contextual analysis to consider how these characters "negotiate prevailing patriarchal masculinities with aspects of a more feminist masculinity" (35). Lotz compares the prevailing

patriarchal masculinities to those hegemonic masculinities in the series by arguing that there are multiple hegemonic masculinities constructed within and reified by the narratives of the series, which may or may not align with the patriarchal masculinities of the larger society and culture. This tension between the patriarchal and the hegemonic masculinities demonstrate the impact of second-wave feminism in popular culture and perhaps the broader society and culture.

Quite correctly, Lotz asserts that not enough scholarship exists on the representation of men on television. The focus of television studies, and media studies in general, have largely examined the stereotypical presentations of women without providing "typologies of archetypes or thematic analyses of stories about men or masculinities" (Lotz 7). However, the problem remains on the issue of gender stereotypes, as televisual portrayals, while traditionally more varied for men than women, support specific stereotyped masculinities as heroic or preferred while denigrating others. Showing masculinities that do not adhere to these stereotypes could provide role models for young men, as the decades' worth of work in representing women non-stereotypically has done for young women. Thus, her goal for this book was to consider such masculinities that were being constructed and represented on U.S. television from 2000 to 2010.

In her analysis, Lotz considers three different types of series, categorized by their representation of men. First are the "male-centered serials," where the focus of the narratives is on the character study of a male protagonist, such as in *Breaking Bad*, *Hung*, *Dexter*, and *Sons of Anarchy*. With these examples, she argues the male protagonists are struggling to express more feminized masculinities while using immoral or illegal methods to meet overarching patriarchal requirements. While the men are depicted as more family-oriented and seeking equality in relationships, their drive to embody the masculine provider role leads to their downfall. In discussing this type of series, she argues that "Many

male-centered serials depict the crisis of inadequate means faced by the middle-class white male in the twenty-first century…" (67). This conclusion can be read as a reference to how these characterizations negotiate the latest male crisis, which was triggered by the global economic downturn of that time.

Second are series featuring "homosocial enclaves" or narrative spaces that are exclusively masculine domains, such as in the firehouse in *Rescue Me*, the diner in *Men of a Certain Age*, the entirety of *Entourage* and the fantasy football of *The League.* In these examples, she argues that characters use jokes and jockey for position to demonstrate the ideal hegemonic masculinities. Of all the analyses she presents, this section is the most evidentially argued: the different positions men take in the series and how they use jokes represent their attempts at negotiating what is proper male behavior within these spaces, presenting the idea that such homosocial enclaves are safe places within which to both challenge traditional patriarchal masculinity while policing the alternatives.

Third are series that feature explicit or implicit "hetero male intimacy" in the relationship between the main male dyad, such as found in *Boston Legal, Scrubs, Psych* and *Nip/Tuck.* Here she argues the series police the boundaries of heteronormativity by directly or indirectly, jokingly or seriously, addressing the homosexual tensions of such friendships. For example, whereas *Scrubs'* non-serious nature may undercut the intimacy being depicted, the jokes in *Boston Legal* can serve to strengthen the normality of the relationship. However, as Lotz notes, the analysis of *Cable Guys* primarily focuses on white, middle-class men. Two of the series analyzed here, *Psych* and *Scrubs*, feature African-American men, but their masculinities are not attended to in relation to their ethnicity. This limitation in ethnic and class identities suggests more work needs to be done, as Lotz herself indicates, on the array of masculinities presented via broadcast and cable television.

Across these analyses, Lotz concludes that while the men are anxious about their masculinity and heterosexuality, they are not depicted as blaming feminism for their anxiety. In this way, the representation of the men's struggles can provide examples of how to address and represent non-patriarchal masculinities. While an important interpretation, Lotz has a tendency to reiterate this argument and conclusion without substantial presentation of evidence for them. More concrete, in-depth analyses of the texts – of what happened, by whom, and when in the series that led her to these conclusions – would help readers better understand her interpretations of the representations. Such discussion would better inform those unfamiliar with the programs how these masculinities were policed, made into tensions, and connected to contemporary society and culture.

Lotz's work is an immensely compelling, well-argued discussion on this emergent construction and representation of masculinities in U.S. television, and as a general discussion of this topic, it is a must read for the fields of gender studies and television studies. Being more preliminary, the analyses of the television series in this book indicate that there is more work to be done to understand televised masculinities, during this time period as well as others. Overall, the ideas expressed in *Cable Guys* are very timely considerations for the analysis of popular culture and the discussion of the media's role in perpetuating or challenging patriarchal and hegemonic masculinities. While she may not see all of the characters she analyzed as role models – especially from the male-centered serials – their ability to struggle with and present different forms of masculinity can be inspirational.

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Howell, M. D., and John D. Miller, eds. *Motorsports and American Culture: From Demolition Derbies to NASCAR.* Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014, $75 (hard), $74.99 (eBook), 248 pp.

On August 9, 2014, sprint-car driver Kevin Ward, Jr., died from injuries sustained in bizarre circumstances, after leaving his vehicle and being struck by another racer. He was a relatively unknown driver, competing on a local dirt track, so his death, however tragic, may not have caused more than a blip in national sports news. This tragedy, however, made national and international news headlines because National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing (NASCAR) driver, team owner, and champion, Tony Stewart drove the sprint-car that took Ward's life. The resulting conflicted media reports ranged from condemning NASCAR as a representation of the breakdown in the fabric of American society to exalting the sport's fans who consider themselves, and the entire racing community, an American "family." Ward's tragic death and the media firestorm it created signals a struggle for meanings of "Americaness" as it relates to motorsports.

With this in mind, it is surprising that in a country often broadly associated with automobiles, muscle cars, and a need for speed, American academics have generally neglected motorsports in favor of more "prestigious" sports such as football, baseball, and even soccer. Mark D. Howell and John D. Miller seek to rectify this lack of academic work in their anthology, *Motorsports and American Culture: From Demolition Derbies to NASCAR*. Although published prior to Ward's death, the discourse surrounding the tragedy poignantly answers, in part, their question: "Why study racing?" Contributors broadly examine motorsports from multidisciplinary perspectives, including gender studies, sociology, media studies, and globalization, and center on four interlocking areas for studying motorsports—meanings for fandom, community identity, gender,

and racing sports stars. Within these broad perspectives and areas, the themes of identity and relationships, with regard to motorsports and American culture, are most prominent.

With these two themes, of identity and relationships, in mind, the contributing authors address demolition derbies, as well as stock car, drag, and land speed racing. For example, James Wright discusses the paradox of NASCAR's increasing popularity when American national identity may be shifting away from the more traditional values associated with the sport. Ehren Helmut Pflugfelder addresses how drivers' identities are created, consumed by fans, and then integrated into those fans' identities. He also examines how American identity is challenged by globalization. Martha Kreszock, Suzanne Wise, and Margaret Freeman trace the history of Louise Smith, one of NASCAR's first female drivers. This entry is important because Smith serves as a model for today's female racers, including Jennifer Jo Cobb and Danica Patrick. Lisa Napoli's chapter on Barney Oilfield describes racing's first multimedia folk hero who paved the way for future sporting media celebrities. Essays examining the sport's early icons are valuable in providing molds that help shape the identities of today's stars.

The primary value of *Motorsports and American Culture* is launching conversations that encourage more in-depth studies in this under-examined field. In other words, the volume offers starting points for research as motorsports becomes increasingly intermingled with broader popular culture domains. These essays help readers further understand, and even critique, the relationships between racing and American culture/national identity.

Interestingly, the editors claim to address motorsports broadly, though at least half of the chapters focus on NASCAR. This may be reflective of the interests in American motorsport cultures, but also reveals that these "other" motorsports are also extremely under represented, thus opening potential new lines of inquiry As such, the collection is most useful for

advanced undergraduate and graduate courses in sport communication, cultural studies, gender studies classes, and even applied coursework in sports management. *Motorsports and American Culture* provides valuable contextual and historical background regarding the intricate relationship between American identity, popular culture, and auto racing.

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Gessen. Masha. *Words Will Break Cement: The Passion of Pussy Riot*. New York: Riverhead Books, 2014, $16.00 (paper), 308 pp.

On February 12, 2012, the feminist art-punk collective known as Pussy Riot entered the largest Orthodox Church in Moscow, the Cathedral of Christ the Savior, and belted out a "punk prayer" lambasting the cozy relationship between Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin and the Russian Church. The protest generated widespread international attention when the band uploaded the video of the protest on the Internet and it went viral. Less than a month later, three members of the group were arrested and charged with "felony hooliganism" (167). On August 17, 2012, all three members were found guilty and sentenced to two-year prison sentences. Commenting on the sentence, Putin declared that the band "undermined the moral foundations" of the nation and "got what they asked for" (Elder 1).

In *Words Will Break Cement: The Passion of Pussy Riot,* Masha Gessen, a Russian-American journalist, provides an impassioned and much-needed account of the rise of Pussy Riot, their protest-art, and the attempts by the Russian government and authorities to control the group.

By restructuring the personal journeys of each woman up to and through their trials and prison time, Gessen's work provides, so far, the most thorough discussion of what the members of Pussy Riot said and what they were trying to accomplish with their art. Early in the book, Gessen begins to formulate the argument that political art can have the power to defeat oppressive regimes by casting light on its entrenched doublespeak, something obviously referenced in the title of the book as well. "Pussy Riot had subverted Soviet-speak," Gessen concludes, "which had perverted [Russian] language" (273). Readers will benefit from the actual correspondence Gessen had with Pussy Riot, including interviews, letters, and other written statements. This in and of itself is a striking accomplishment, considering she only had limited access to Nadezhda Tolokonnikova (Nadya), Maria Alyokhina, and Yekaterina Samutsevich (Kat)—the three members of Pussy Riot who were convicted of "felony hooliganism" and served time in Russia's notoriously cruel and corrupt prison system.

Words Will Break Cement is divided into twelve chapters over three parts. Part one is titled "Becoming Pussy Riot." In this section, Gessen discusses how Nadya, Kat, and Maria came to be a part of Pussy Riot. Gessen not only details the back-stories of the three arrested women, but she also describes the earlier art collective that was the pre-cursor to Pussy Riot, a group that Nadya and Kat were involved with called *Viona* (War). In part two, "Prayer and Response," Gessen focuses on Pussy Riot's controversial performance at the Cathedral of Christ the Savior and the ensuing trial of the three women. This is perhaps the most fascinating portion of the book. Here Gessen transcribes what Nadya, Maria, and Kat actually said in court, something that up to this point in the coverage of the controversy was largely missing. The trial plays out like an absurd drama, as the defendants are locked in a Plexiglas-cage for the proceedings as witnesses for the prosecution described their movements at the church as "devilish jerkings" that were "offensive" and caused great "moral

damage" (175). Scholars of popular music have long been aware of music's potential to cause moral outrage, but Gessen's strategy of stepping aside and instead permitting the space for Kat's, Nadya's, and Maria's arguments is a great resource for anyone interested in how musicians respond to attempts to control or ban their art.

In part three of *Words Will Break Cement*, titled "Punishment," Gessen focuses on the three young women's time in prison after the trial. Separated from one another and shuttled from prison to prison with little-to-no knowledge of where they were going, Nadya, Maria, and Kat were fed rotten food, provided no proper means of sanitation, and forced to work in sweatshop-like conditions. During this time, Kat motioned for a new lawyer who successfully had her two-year sentence reduced to probation by arguing that she did not actually participate in the church performance (she was grabbed by security before the song started). This caused a somewhat uneasy rift between the women, as both Nadya and Maria remained in prison, struggling to survive within a system that conditions other prisoners to ostracize and physically attack those who protest their living and work conditions. Maria's efforts to defend her fellow inmates in her colony met some success, however Nadya's calls for improved prison conditions resulted in her secret transportation to a prison hospital in Siberia after several hunger strikes. Although their time in prison was extremely difficult and inhumane, Gessen demonstrates how the experience transformed the young women, especially Nadya and Maria, into more strategic organizers.

The release of Pussy Riot just prior to the Winter Olympics in Sochi was obviously a publicity move by Putin and the Russian government to improve Russia's image prior to the Games. In their build-up to their much-publicized release, it is clear that *Words Will Break Cement* was rushed into print. Although some may find Gessen's lack of citation and partial access to the women she writes about limitations, there is no denying that her knowledge of Russian art, history, and political dissent is

invaluable in helping to contextualize Pussy Riot's work and the Russian government's attempt to control potentially subversive and controversial art. In addition, Gessen provides a moving case study in which music does have the power to rise above repression and have a lasting impact on public dialogue. While it remains to be seen what will happen to Pussy Riot moving forward, *Words Will Break Cement* is an excellent work that makes a strong case for the power of protest music. Gessen's book is not only a great resource for scholars interested in popular music and moral panics, but it is also a highly accessible text that could be useful to undergraduate students interested in popular culture, world history, and the power of music and social protest.

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Malin, Brenton. *Feeling Mediated: A History of Media Technology and Emotion in America*. New York: NYU Press, 2014, $79 (cloth), $25 (paper), 317 pp.

Brenton Malin's new book, *Feeling Mediated: A History of Media Technology and Emotion in America* gets a smiley face from me. This timely overview of humans and their complicated relationship with mediated communication had me when I realized his Introduction included not only a smiley face, but references to Plato, Socrates,

Guglielmo Marconi, Dale Carnegie, Arnold Schwarzenegger, and Herbie ("The Love Bug"). Indeed, Malin's walk through our tangled mixed-up relationships with technology covers a lot of ground in its 317 pages. Starting in ancient times, Malin points out that even Socrates (via Plato) was worried about the printed word and its potential drug-like effects—"Like a drug, the written word stimulated emotion without a clear source" (7). Malin makes it clear, however, that he wants to be an unbiased interpreter in this book, making sure we understand, in the first few pages, that he does "not take a position on the relative advancement of various 'new technologies' or on whether these technologies enhance or hinder our connections to each other" (10).

Malin's goal is to analyze the rhetorics of emotion and technology, with this analysis allowing "us to think more critically about how we interact with and through the communications media that surround us" (12). Using a lens that he calls "media physicalism," Malin intends to show "some of the ways that notions of assumed technological power get attached to ideas about emotional stimulation during the early twentieth century" (21). In five fascinating chapters, plus a comprehensive introduction, Malin focuses on stereoscopes, radio, motion pictures, and new media of the digital age to show not so much how consumers have been brainwashed, but simply limited by the choices that have been made for them.

Although Malin claims to be nonjudgmental, it seems that social scientists (and, really, the academy in general) take a hit in this book, as Malin continues to point out (somewhat repetitively) that while academics decry the "effects" on human emotion via media consumption, they tacitly promote the power of media over our emotions by continuing to rely upon media machinery to conduct research. Thus, per Malin, not only academics, but advertisers, media moguls, and educators (just to name a few groups discussed by Malin) have served as foils (or dupes?) for the media elites that they are so concerned about to begin with. The result has

been devaluation of emotions and introspection as ways of knowing. Really all of us have bought into the idea of technology as sublime. The fact that consumer radios were set up to be one way communication devices, for example, forced users of radio to take the position of passive audience members. Malin's point throughout this book is that the various media technologies he profiles have been co-opted by various stakeholders to both manipulate the emotions of a passive consumer/user as well as, at the same time, to study (and promote or decry) so-called "media effects."

This book is worth the price of admission alone for the endnotes which contain comprehensive reference lists of books and articles that have focused on: the history of media technology, the field of emotion research, and the history and rhetoric of science. I know that I will place this book on my bookshelf along with other histories of human communication that I admire, such as William Harris's *Ancient Literacy* (1989), Alberto Manguel's *A History of Reading* (1996), Jennifer Monaghan*'s Learning to Read and Write in Colonial America* (2005), and Miles Myers' *Changing our Minds* (1996). What Malin adds is a 21st century spin and an overarching rhetorical approach that effectively compares and contrasts our current digital age to practices and prevailing opinions related to media of the early 20th century. His knowledge of media history, and the history of science and rhetoric is impressive. I can't wait for a sequel, when perhaps he might cover the late 20th century including that 1960s sitcom masterpiece of technology and emotion: *My Mother, The Car*.

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Hunt, Leon, Sharon Lockyer, and Milly Williamson, eds. *Screening the Undead: Vampires and Zombies in Film and Television*. New York: Palgrave, 2014, $28 (paper), 288 pp.

World War Z, a film too recent for inclusion in the excellent collection of essays *Screening the Undead: Vampires and Zombies in Film and Television*, stars Brad Pitt as Gerry Lane whose primary goal is to save his all-American family from the incipient zombie hoards. That he must also spend the second half of the film in locations other than America, and also save the world, seems entirely subsidiary to saving his American wife and daughters. Unlike *World War Z*, however, *Screening the Undead* reminds American viewers and readers, habituated to *World War Z*'s ironic provinciality, Anne Rice's Southern Gothics, or Stephanie Meyer's Washington-based, sparkly Cullen clan, that the undead—and their fans, followers, and filmmakers—traverse wildly across cultures and countries.

Even the decision to include analyses of both vampires *and* zombies represents a kind of border crossing, explained well by the editors in their introduction: despite that the convergence of vampires and zombies "is a recent one," both monsters "share three interconnected proclivities: they *feed* on humanity, they *infect* humanity, and by these means they also *proliferate*" (4). As if to demonstrate this proliferation, like a zombie apocalypse *Screening the Undead*'s geography ranges widely, from Swedish vampire films and Japanese horror to auteur Guillermo Del Toro's movement from Mexican cinema to Hollywood and back again, with other chapters stopping to explore images of the undead in Spain and Italy. Nicola Woodham's chapter in particular offers groundbreaking *f*irst-hand investigative research of "Nollywood": "the video film industry largely based in Nigeria that grew out of a landscape with few resources for investment in the locally produced cinema" (191), where "the vampire image allows for a comment on both colonialism and its legacy" (199).

Like the undead themselves, the collection crosses other kinds of boundaries, not just the national and categorical. The book examines at least a few expected works, such as the Hammer Film Productions, the George Romero franchise, and recent international sensation *Let the Right One In*. But it wisely spends little time on phenomena explored at length elsewhere, like the now-canonical *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* or *Walking Dead*, leaving room for discussions of less frequently explored works such as, say, *Count Yorga, Vampire*, Spanish director Amando de Ossirio's "Blind Dead" quartet, and Miike Takashi's genre-bending film *The Happiness of the Katakuris*. Similarly, the book also includes some strong, if likely, analyses of the undead and race and gender, but also some surprises, like the undead and the counterculture or, separately, homonormativity.

Even the chapters on Anglo-American or well-known films and television shows stand out: Milly Williamson's "Let Them All In: The Evolution of the 'Sympathetic' Vampire," for example, which on the

surface seems as though it's going to cover familiar ground, instead argues that the supposedly recent popular-cultural trend of benevolent vampires in fact has a strong historical precedent. In addition, the essay shows how Gothic literature "was defined as a woman's genre, downgraded in the cultural hierarchy of the day because of the association with femininity, the irrational and the supernatural (which today is echoed in the critical reception of the *Twilight Saga*)" (78) in order then to provide an interesting comparison between *Twilight*'s academic disparagement and *Let the Right One In*'s celebrated indie standing. Jeffrey Sconce's wonderfully titled "Dead Metaphors/Undead Allegories" begins with a thorough psychoanalytic reading of the zombie, from Freud to Zizek (aside from zombies, who love brains as much as a psychoanalytical critic?). But like Williamson's essay, it develops and broadens its themes further, including the novel *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* with other depictions of zombies in fiction and film. The chapter concludes with the ways in which the zombie has infected and spread beyond the screen and into real life, by means of zombie pub crawls, zombie-themed "Run for Your Life" charity marathons, and "perhaps the most literal in articulating this social death drive…several ingenious pranksters have hacked into electronic traffic signs that stand alongside major urban thoroughfares in order to warn: ZOMBIES AHEAD—EXPECT DELAYS…. The sign reminds [commuters] (and us) of the fate that slowly engulfs us all—a zombified repetition of social obligations that does a little more each day to destroy the self and the planet" (110). And Emma Dyson's "Diaries of a Plague Year: Perspectives of Destruction in Contemporary Zombie Film" nicely puts the pseudo-documentary style of many zombie films in perspective: "The notion of fictional 'reportage' is not new to literature—notably in Daniel Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year* (1722)—but in zombie film it may well be a seminal shift in the social critique and reimagining of horror considered a hallmark of the diverse film texts that compromise zombie film" (131).

Encompassing critical theory, historical context, literary tradition, and a truly international outlook (unlike the film *World War Z*), the collection provides insightful commentary on the ostensible subject of contemporary representations of screen vampires and zombies. But like the best analyses of popular culture, it winds up being about much more than film and television. In the end, *Screening the Undead* demonstrates how and why these films and television shows themselves have fed upon, and *are* fed upon by, humanity itself. While the book is ideal for vampire and zombie academics and aficionados, the writing is accessible, and the book provides frequent illustrations and summaries for anyone unfamiliar with a given film or series. Based on the collection, the undead will undoubtedly continue to come back, to infect humanity and proliferate. Humanity, it seems, would not have it any other way.

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Biskind, Peter, *My Lunches with Orson: Conversations between Henry Jaglom and Orson Welles.* New York: Metropolitan Books, 2013, $16 (paper), 336 pp.

My Lunches with Orson, which presents a remarkable series of conversations between directors Orson Welles and Henry Jaglom, is not the first, nor will it be the last of its kind. Publishers Faber & Faber have even serialized the "director-on-director" conceit into its own series (e.g. *Burton-on-Burton*, *Gilliam-on-Gilliam*, *Scorsese-on-Scorsese*, etc.). Yet, 1967's *Hitchcock/Truffaut* has always been the gold standard of director-on-director film discussion. Essentially journalistic in nature, the book was the result of a fifty-hour-long interview containing more than five hundred

questions on Hitchcock's career. Organized by the chronological progression of his films, Truffaut offered extraordinary insight into Hitchcock's directorial career.

In the introduction to the 1985 revised edition, Truffaut states that he was "emulate[ing] Oedipus' consultation of the oracle" by interviewing Hitchcock: he wanted to understand the true parentage of his own filmmaking (14). Unlike Oedipus, who murders his father, marries his mother, and finally gouges out his own eyes, Truffaut was not destined to bring about his own ruin through these meetings with his cinematic oracle. Welles and Jaglom's conversations in *My Lunches with Orson* diverge from the legacy of the *Hitchcock/Truffaut* interviews on this very point: ruin.

Taken over the course of three years of lunches at Welles' favorite West Hollywood eatery, Ma Maison, Welles shows his genius, his accomplishments, but mostly his frustrations. As Biskind says in his introduction, the conversations often feature "Welles as his own worst enemy" (8). Broken into two parts, part one details Welles and Jaglom's conversations from 1983 and part two covers 1984 and 1985. In 1983, Welles and Jaglom's back-and-forth is peppered with funding talk: how to get backers for the various projects Welles would like to direct, all of which exist in various stages of completion. But funding is not the dominate topic at the table. It is Welles' distaste for Hollywood that takes center stage.

In the conversations captured during 1983, Welles shuns Elizabeth Taylor, says Brando's neck was "a huge sausage, a shoe made of flesh," describes David O. Selznick as simply "gross," calls producer Irving Thalberg "Satan," Chaplin and Woody Allen "arrogant," and crudely discusses the women with whom he's slept (38, 59, 46, 37). Welles shows himself to be bigoted, sexist, and egotistical. The wit and cleverness with which he hits his marks, however, still endears us to his conspicuous talents. Innate intelligence is a liability though, when it cannot be

controlled. “The boy genius,” as he was often called early in his career, either could not or would not control himself to play the political games in which Hollywood demanded he participate. Part one of Biskind’s text says as much. With the hopes for funding strewn among near constant criticisms doled out to everyone from producers to chorus girls, Welles unknowingly foreshadows the funding failures he will face in the next two years.

By 1984 and 1985, when the second and final section of interviews take place between Welles and Jaglom, Welles’ despair is apparent. Funding for major projects has evaporated, Welles’ health is failing, and his personal finances have become even more tenuous. Jaglom’s desire to help his friend, a desire that has been a constant throughout their relationship, is on full display when producer Susan Smith from HBO joins their table, but Welles refuses to discuss a potential project with her about a resort in Acapulco after he “senses” her disinterest. Even when Smith states directly, “I want to hear it,” Welles replies to the pitch opportunity with unwavering despondency, insisting, “Her eyes went dead when she heard *resort*” (265-66). As hard as Jaglom works to cajole the project out of Welles, the meeting ends in anger. Welles’ then-statements to Smith become the working doctrines of Part 2: “we’re not getting anywhere,” “I can’t sell,” “I haven’t got anything,” “no use talking about it,” “I can’t,” “I quit” (265-66). By the close of the 1985 interviews, which end five days before Welles’ death, his financial situation has become so dire, he says to Jaglom: “If I got just one commercial, it would change my life!” (279). The man who created the oft-christened “greatest film ever made” is hoping for a television commercial spot, believing it will be the way to turn things around.

If read in the shadow of *Hitchcock/Truffaut*, *My Lunches with Orson* can appear to lack in content and focus. But Biskind’s expertly edited work is not an auteurist examination of Welles’ completed productions. Direct comment on artistic choices in *Citizen Kane*, *Touch of Evil*, etc.,

surfaces only rarely. *My Lunches with Orson* is more accurately categorized as part industry tell-all and part autobiography. In that context, it is simultaneously witty, revealing, and depressing. By allowing Jaglom to record their conversations, Welles gives us a voyeuristic key-hole view of himself: a great filmmaker close to the end of life, who battled with Hollywood for a multitude of reasons—most of which are attributable to the interaction between the industry's increasingly political structure, and Welles' confrontational personality characteristics that are on display here in full.

Whether Welles "lost" his battle with Hollywood is another story. Biskind's text is likely the last treasure trove of Wellesian archival material to be unearthed, and in it no one seems free of blame for all the missteps in Welles' career. But Welles' still gave us "the greatest film ever made" (a title he only recently lost to Hitchcock's *Vertigo*—a film Welles hated). Even with the figure of Kane becoming less and less extricable from the director of *Kane* as the years went on, if a film were ever capable of giving a man his last laugh, it's *Citizen Kane*. *Kane*, however, always plays best with the initiated: those who know the Hearst saga, what Hollywood cinema was doing in 1941, and of what it was thought capable. *My Lunches with Orson* is no different. Welles' projects mentioned in passing, Welles' feuds, and the roles of related industry heavy-hitters are often assumed as pre-requisite knowledge. Welles and Jaglom do not slow down to explain, nor does Biskind offer significant editorial interjection. If names like Selznick, Mankiewicz, Houseman, and the HUAC are unfamiliar, sections of this text will be as well. *My Lunches with Orson*, however, does not purport to be an introductory text on Welles. This is spellbinding (i.e. required) reading for those who have exhausted all the other extant sources of information on Welles and can't believe their luck that one last gem was left to be pulled out of the Great Magician's hat.

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Murthy, Dirajh, *Twitter: Social Communication in the Twitter Age. Digital Media and Society Series.* Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2013, $22.95 (paper), 220 pp.

Twitter: Come On, Tweet Something Clever

Whether through cave paintings, smoke signals, drums, marathon messengers, the pony express, air mail, telegraph or telephones, humans have always sought to communicate. Social media has become the venue to cultivate both private and public messages. In *Twitter: Social Communication in the Twitter Age*, Dirajh Murthy examines Twitter as a social medium where "ordinary people in ordinary social networks can publish user generated news and updates" (8).

Twitter is an individual-to-many internet forum with a variety of capabilities, such as sorting messages by topic, source, time, or hashtag. Murthy describes Twitter as a public friendship where the user experiences familiarity with another person or organization. It has also been labeled a microblog as individual tweets build a larger text. The author examines this technology by assembling its historic applications and potential implications and explores three archetypal utilizations of Twitter: citizen journalism, Twitter activism, and Twitter healthcare

communities. Murthy ultimately attempts to demonstrate the social action leverage of Twitter in community formation and social change.

Murthy incorporates applicable social media theories. Beginning with McLuhan, but focusing on Heidegger, Murthy suggests that Twitter establishes global villages; coalescing individuals through beliefs, interests, or pursuits, creating small virtual communities congealed by common ground. The author also examines democratization, arguing that Twitter allows for grassroots unfiltered information from citizens instead of from highly scripted institutions. Increasingly, tweeters form personal identity through their profiles and tweets posted while also creating an event based society and an update culture. Concepts like homophily, telepresence and synthetic situations partially describe the Twitter experience. However, Murthy focuses on Heidegger's concept of *Herasfordern* which is to call forth or summon to action. But he fails to firmly establish Twitter as causation. While pointing at several conversations and groups hosted by Twitter, the author does not produce an example of a situation in which Twitter users were specifically motivated to meaningful action other than reposting or retweeting, but rather, Twitter as a contributing factor to larger movements already motivated.

There have been several situations in which video cell phone wielding individuals have become citizen journalists by recording, reporting, and uploading to Twitter emerging events of which established media sources were not yet aware. Murthy establishes an atmosphere of "ambient news," or a constant stream of information provided both by news media and citizen journalists. Hashtags and traceable conversations that generate temporary communities surrounding events, opinions, or news items generate a casual survey of global situations. Similarly, news entities utilize Twitter to draw attention to news. However, Murthy does point out that there is a technological divide that excludes portions of the population. Murthy utilizes the examples of disasters that were first

tweeted by citizens that later became news items, in some cases producing citizen journalist celebrities.

The author points out that, in many cases, individual tweets result in only marginal responses. However, if a celebrity retweets the materials, the likelihood of a larger news event increases. Murthy couples this with broader cultural or global concerns indicating that Twitter also serves as a system of activism, perpetuating messages of change to interested followers. Illustrating the point with the Occupy movement and events in Cairo, Egypt, Murthy discusses the difficulties of leveraging a critical mass of individuals. However, it is clear that while the internet played a role in alerting the media to social situations, it did little to gather masses. Only after the internet had been blocked did masses take to the streets. After events such as the revolution in Cairo, Twitter account subscribers increased. Conversely, Twitter generates an ambient news audience where retweeting becomes sufficient activism. This indicates that for many, including celebrities, the momentary act of forwarding information is sufficient to tag themselves with the activist moniker. This concept of rhetorical activism and persuasion by tweet could be useful if interrogated through a rhetorical analysis lens.

Murthy offers a third example of unlikely communities created by Twitter in healthcare. Twitter has given rise to communities surrounding ailments or diagnosis as a common ground or community builder. Murthy cites situations where individuals chronicle their illness, broadcast diagnoses, seek aid, and even prompt researchers to examine alternative medicine through tweets. While some Twitter users have attempted to reach out directly to the healthcare providers, most have cited professional limitations and the need for personal visitations, more than likely to avoid malpractice, rather than offer medical advice online. News and current events demonstrate that increasingly developing countries are using cellphone technology. This technology allows for historically isolated populations to seek healthcare and information via the internet.

While Murthy provides an interesting look at the social construction contributions of Twitter, he fails to provide a solid case for Twitter as producing action, rather than mere armchair activism. Twitter and many other internet interfaces have not been broadly tested in the legal or regulatory system. Perhaps this is the greatest potential use of this text: as a case study on which to base policy or as an examination of popular culture tipping points by virtue of Twitter trending. While Murthy examines three specific communities developed within Twitter, there are a great many other Twitterverses that the author avoids, such as cyber bullying, violence, false statements, and misinformation. As states attempt to protect their youth through anti-bullying legislation, it can only be a matter of time before Twitter is restricted and monitored or if left with minimal regulations, will give rise to litigation as the vehicle of violence perpetuation. Just as the author addresses the altruistic uses of Twitter, he ignores the darker underbelly of unrestricted communication or the inherent inequity of technology divides. However, what is perhaps most telling of this text is that it fails to prove that Twitter is a call, a summons to action as Heidegger suggests technology might become. Rather, Twitter provides a safe distance to encourage public postings and saber rattling without action or real interpersonal human contact.

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Walker, Jesse. *The United States of Paranoia: A Conspiracy Theory*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2013, $24.99 (paper), 448 pp.

In his book *The United States of Paranoia*, Jesse Walker follows in the footsteps of others who have studied the role of conspiracy theories in American culture, but builds on what has been done in the past in provocative and insightful ways while not presuming any particular familiarity with the scholarly work already done in the area.

Like most contemporary scholars of conspiracy theory, Walker situates his treatment of conspiracy theory in relation to the work of Richard Hofstadter's essay "The Paranoid Style in American Politics." Walker's thesis is that Hofstadter was not wrong, but that he did not go far enough. Hofstadter saw paranoid thinking as the hallmark of marginal, minority groups; Walker argues paranoia figures prominently not only in the thinking of a marginal few, but in that of Americans in general, and has done so since the first settlers arrived in the 17th century. It's not that those on the margins are necessarily more likely to engage in such thinking; rather, such thinking is more likely to be labeled "paranoid" when it comes from the margins.

The first half of the book (titled "Primal Myths") lays out a taxonomy of American conspiracy theories, which Walker groups into five categories: the Enemy Outside, the Enemy Within, The Enemy Above, the Enemy Below, and the Benevolent Conspiracy. As Walker notes, these are not mutually exclusive categories, but rather helpful concepts with which to think about the dynamics of conspiracy narratives. Walker devotes a chapter to each of the five categories, starting with a representative example from American history, then fleshing out the category by noting the recurrence of the example narrative's deep structure in other conspiracy narratives over time. The result is a sweeping look at the

history of conspiracy theories in American history not based on chronology, but on typology.

Having established a set of concepts with which to discuss conspiracy theories, Walker moves to the second half of the book (titled "Modern Fear"), focusing on conspiracy theories of the last fifty years. There are a number of topics touched on that are to be expected: Lyndon LaRouche, the "New World Order," Waco, 9/11, etc. But as with the first half, Walker uses specific examples to draw a bigger picture. This proves a more fruitful approach than simply marching the reader through a list of well-known conspiracy theories and sorting them into the five categories laid out in the first half of the book. Relatively obscure con-man/evangelist/conspiracy theorist John Todd is dealt with in some detail as a key player in the emergence of paranoia about Satanism in the 1980s (particularly in regard to rock music). In one of the book's most interesting chapters, Walker traces the growth of specific underground satirical magazines as a way to describe the larger dynamic of conspiracy theory as a form of play (and the permeability of the division between irony and seriousness in the world of conspiracy narratives). What emerges is a clearer sense of the way conspiracy theory serves as a trope with which Americans think and talk about political culture; each specific thread, when pulled, reveals its role as part of a larger network of thought that is woven into our public discourse.

Walker's examples are particularly broad when it comes to looking at how popular culture texts reflect paranoia. Again, some obvious examples come up, such as *The Manchurian Candidate*, *The Twilight Zone*, *The X-Files*, and *The Da Vinci Code*. But Walker also draws on examples of captivity narratives, zombie movies, comic strips, the film *The Stepford Wives*, James Bond, the card game *Illuminati*, and a detailed analysis of the *Rambo* trilogy (to name just a few examples) to illustrate the extent to which the paranoia at work in the stereotypical conspiracy theory permeates much of American culture.

And that is, ultimately, Walker's essential point: while conspiracy theory is often associated in both scholarship (e.g., Hofstadter) and popular imagination with fringe thinking, the evidence is overwhelming that the fears and motifs found in conspiracy narratives are part of the basic cultural currency of the United States. It is in making this point that *The United States of Paranoia* is at its best—showing that paranoia is not the purview of one segment of the population, despite the fact that the "conspiracy theorist" label is often reserved for those on the margins. Yes, in the 1990s, members of the militia movement harbored fears about a "one world government," but the militia movement itself became a target of paranoid narratives used by the government to achieve political aims. Yes, in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, there were theories espoused by African American residents of New Orleans that the government had purposefully blown up the levees to destroy their homes, but there were also paranoid stories circulating that Katrina survivors were behaving lawlessly—committing indiscriminate rape, shooting at those who were trying to save them, and even turning to cannibalism. Yes, 9/11 led to the "truther" movement, but it also caused a paranoid reaction by government and law enforcement officials, who saw jihadists around every corner. Yes, those holding "extreme" or "marginalized" views tell stories of conspiracy, but so do those who have power—but it's usually only the former that get labeled "conspiracy nuts."

There are some omissions that might strike some readers as odd. AIDS, the topic of many conspiracy theories, is barely mentioned, despite being a strong example of several of the dynamics Walker describes. The invasion of Iraq as one symptom of post-9/11 paranoia is not addressed. There is also a lack of explanation on *why* the United States in particular (as the very title of the book suggests) is prone to paranoia. Walker's epilogue points out the extent to which conspiracy theories rely on innately human drives to find pattern and order in chaos, to tell stories to master our fears. As such, they will always be present. True enough, but

how does this relate to the peculiar proclivity of Americans to traffic in such thinking? After painstakingly contextualizing conspiracy theories, this final move oddly suggests conspiracy theory is best explained *outside* of any particular cultural context.

These, however, are minor quibbles with a work that is a useful and much-needed addition to the literature on conspiracy theory. They simply suggest that *The United States of Paranoia* has not only offered compelling answers to interesting questions, but that it shows the need for further work to be done. And that is exactly what one hopes to find in such a book. Written for a general audience while demonstrating familiarity with much of the existing literature on the topic, Walker's contribution to the topic is one that will prove valuable to scholars of American political, cultural, and social history while also serving as a useful addition to the thoughtful discussion of the American penchant for telling stories of conspiracy.

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Joseph Turow, *The Daily You: How the New Advertising Industry is Defining Your Identity and Your Worth*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012, $28.00 (cloth), $18.00 (paper), 256 pp.

Joseph Turow's text is a must-read, whether or not you consider yourself a member of the academic community, as his analysis does much more than simply accentuate the negative consequences associated with individual-level media surveillance on the Internet. Rather, he provides a detailed historical and factual account of the ways in which media buyers and

planners dictate the structure, function, and surveillance practices surrounding the World Wide Web. His central thesis is that media buyers and planners are working to find out how to best connect with and understand individual Internet users, resulting in a consumerist rhetoric focused on data mining and intrusions into privacy that can potentially cause serious social and cultural problems.

Turow starts by historically tracing the rise of so-called "consumer power" beginning in the 1980s, yet the chapter dispels attributions of the sovereign consumer by peeling back the layers of the false power consumers may believe they have in our current digital age. Chapter two, "Clicks and Cookies," intricately describes how "clicks" and "cookies" aid in media marketers performing surveillance on the Internet habits of consumers. Chapter three, "A New Advertising Food Chain," discusses the behavioral targeting performed by media buyers and planners that allowed them to learn more than ever about media users beginning in the 2000s. In chapter four, "Targets or Waste," Turow analyzes current trends of media marketers, including their ability to classify consumers as "targets" or "waste," using their past Internet clicks as predictors of future behavior. Chapter five, "Their Masters' Voices," explores the notion that news and information content on the Internet are beginning to be customized in accordance with characteristics of the type of people advertisers are attempting to target. In chapter six, "The Long Click," Turow addresses conceptions of individual "profiles" being created by individuals online (e.g. via Facebook), and how these profiles allow marketers to quickly increase their advertising initiatives with minimal research efforts, as Facebook profiles perform their work for them. Finally, chapter seven, "Beyond the 'Creep' Factor," offers a normative approach toward digital literacy education, also discussing social and cultural implications of media buying and planning beyond the obvious intrusions into privacy being performed by various companies. The text therefore is very well-structured, with the first three chapters providing

readers with a historical progression of the media buying industry, and the remaining four chapters featuring Turow's explication of the invasiveness of marketing practices and how the tracking of individual behaviors online has serious social consequences.

In the first half of the text, Turow interrogates Nicholas Negroponte's *Being Digital* (1995), which claimed that the Internet served as a form of empowerment or freedom for individual consumers. In reality, Turow suggests, current media buying practices have taken away true opportunities for Internet consumers to have freedom, as opportunities for empowerment have now been replaced by practices of surveillance. By looking "under the hood" of the media buying system, Turow also critiques Henry Jenkins' celebratory view of the digital era written in *Convergence Culture*, stating that Jenkins was correct in his assumption that digital technologies provide people with more tools than ever to produce their own media. However, Turow argues, we must begin to ask how deep this "power" really is compared to the power of media buyers and planners, who are the dictators of cultural and political power via the Internet.

One of the most prominent strengths of *The Daily You* is its ability to tackle a broad topic from a variety of angles. Turow effectively utilizes his text in order to show various representations of the current state of media buying and planning of the Internet, often relying on detailed historical descriptions of media buying and planning for the Internet's progression. Beyond simply arguing that Internet surveillance of consumers is problematic, Turow grounds such broad claims with specific descriptions of exactly how specific industries are operating using the personal data of consumers. This text is most suitable for an academic communications audience, including undergraduate-level classes, Masters-level students, and Ph.D. candidates. Additionally, this work can be beneficial for a more general audience, for example, those who use the Internet on a regular basis would be sure to find interesting information in Turow's writing.

One of the text's most interesting chapters (chapter two) discusses how one click by an Internet user can result in a multitude of data that is stored, researched, and eventually used for advertising purposes. Typically when discussing instances of the Internet storing users' habits, we think of Google's advertising recommendations that pull from our e-mail content or Amazon's ability to create a recommendation list based on our previous searches and buying habits. Turow shows that these instances are the least of our worries, as media buyers and planners are strategically convincing media publishers to allow content to be dictated according to potential advertising power. This means that, beyond recommendations from our favorite websites, the structure of Internet advertising permits its users to be classified as "targets" or "waste," thereby performing a type of social and consumer discrimination, linking with the author's previous work, *Niche Envy*. Turow argues that this discrimination is a result of three important developments: advertisers' obsession with garnering online data about audiences, the significant increase in the number of companies that exist to provide online user data in an accessible format, and the growth in the number of technologies that permit advertising to be selectively presented to individuals based on their stored data.

Turow offers a strong conclusion in *The Daily You*, describing why digital media literacy is so necessary for consumers to adopt and understand. Rather than critiquing the Internet, which is not going anywhere anytime soon, Turow offers specific ways in which the new and ever-popular paradigm can be utilized to increase levels of consumer understanding and awareness. The goal of this text was to explicate how the media buying system is at the heart of the Internet's control, and Turow seamlessly executed this while also offering valid critiques of the ways in which the digital era permits advertising that frames individuals as status symbols, further asserting their positions in society.

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Skloot, Rebecca. *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*. New York: Broadway Books. Print. 2010, $35 (hard), $16 (paper), $9.99 (eBook), 400 pp.

Like millions of other students, college Biology major Rebecca Skloot discovered the term "HeLa cells" in her class textbook, which presented the concept as a fundamental cornerstone of Biological science, like the Krebs Cycle or DNA. While the vast majority of us learned about HeLa cells with little or no thought about the "human" person that might be responsible for that "human cell line," Skloot was struck by a deep curiosity that she could not satisfy. As she attempted to unravel this grand, real-life mystery, what she uncovered was complex, controversial, personal, and universal. The story of HeLa told in Skloot's *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* reveals deep medical, legal, and ethical dilemmas that took Skloot over a decade to uncover. Perhaps most importantly, certainly to the author, Skloot humanizes HeLa and gives voice to her grieving family.

While other sources could relay biographical details about Lacks, Skloot's narrative remains unrivaled in its loving treatment of Henrietta and her family. Skloot notes that Henrietta Lacks was born on August 1, 1920 into a poor African-American family in Roanoke, VA. She was sent to live with her grandfather, where she shared a bedroom with her cousin, David. Henrietta and David began a convoluted relationship in turns as cousins, siblings, lovers, parents, and spouses. They moved to Turner Station, Maryland (Eastern Baltimore) to work at Bethlehem Steel, which placed Henrietta near Johns Hopkins Medical Center, where her now-famous cells were harvested in 1951.

During her fourth and fifth pregnancies, Henrietta became acutely aware of something else growing inside her that she could feel tightening in her cervix. As she confided in her closest girlfriends: "A knot" she said. "It hurt something awful- when that man want to get with me, Sweet

Jesus aren't them but some pains"; this knot seemed different and more frightening than "the bad blood David sometimes brought home after nights with other women- the kind doctors treated with shots of penicillin and heavy metals" (14). Henrietta's aggressive, massive cervical cancer tumor was exacerbated by multiple sexually transmitted diseases and two pregnancies during tumor growth. This combination appears responsible for her cells' unique ability to not only survive in scientific labs when other human cells died, but to become "immortal": continuously growing and multiplying so that her cells could be stored, frozen, and transported successfully to labs around the world.

Although Skloot begins her journey cautiously reaching out to (and initially getting rejected by) the Lacks family, a meaningful connection grows between them. Most profoundly, a deep personal friendship between Rebecca and Deborah, Henrietta's youngest daughter, drives the story as the pair unravels the often painful mystery, traveling the country searching for answers, sharing frustration, anger, tears, and ultimately hope.

Skloot's scientific background grants her the ability to comprehend and convey complex medical information to the uninformed about Lacks' family, from general interest reader to the scientifically educated. She explains that Henrietta sought treatment at Johns Hopkins in the 1950s because it was the only option for her as a low-income African-American woman near Baltimore. While it seems unfathomable today, the standard treatment for Henrietta included sewing radium tubes inside her vagina and sending her home. She continued with this treatment, having cells removed from her cervix without her knowledge, until she passed away in the hospital on October 4, 1951.

The vivid picture of 1950s laboratory work environment Skloot paints includes details like the cat-eyed glasses of the technicians and the stainless steel tables and assortment of live animal specimens. Johns Hopkins gave Henrietta's cells to the research lab of George Gey, a

visionary in the area of cell culturing. Impressive and progressive, especially for the time period, were George's two female associates and lab technicians: Mary Kubicek, who actually cultured the original HeLa cell sample, and Margret Gey (wife of George) who managed the lab. George Gey was a pure scientist, not a businessman, so he altruistically shared HeLa cells with labs around the world and created culturing labs, none of which were monetarily motivated or financially lucrative. However, other individuals and companies realized the huge profit potential of the cells and made millions of dollars, none of which was ever shared with the Gey lab or the Lacks family.

This corporate greed also led to an overuse of the cells and cell contamination, which caused devastating setbacks to cancer research in the 1970s. The wide-spread HeLa contamination lead to a need for *HLA* genetic markers; multiple scientific publications on these markers inappropriately revealed Henrietta Lack's name and medical condition thus invading her medical privacy and her family's privacy. Once the Lacks' family name was released, Henrietta's husband and children were targeted for undisclosed medical testing under false pretenses.

Skloot's scientific and journalism background allow her to evenhandedly cover the interpersonal, legal, and ethical issues of biomedical research, balancing her close relationship with the Lacks family against the scientific understanding that healthcare cannot advance without studying human samples. She includes a sample from the medical waiver Lacks signed, which did not indicate anything about the removal of tissue or procedures for handling or experimenting on that tissue. Even today, medical consent forms do not protect patients from how their tissues are used once removed from the body. A utilitarian philosophy of the greatest good for the greatest number legally overrides the individual rights philosophy of our personal entitlement to basic protections.

Skloot's account holds value for a general readership and for scholars of popular culture interested in representations of the body. Throughout

the numerous invasions of their family's privacy, deceptive harvesting of samples from multiple family members, and multimillion dollar profiting from corporations, the Lacks family has never filed a lawsuit nor requested any compensation. What they wanted were answers, which Skloot provided more of than anyone else cared to do over the past 60 years. After investigating and becoming close to the family, Skloot felt a sense of injustice that the direct descendants of Henrietta were left without medical assistance. Therefore, she used the book's success to launch The Henrietta Lacks Foundation (http://henriettalacksfoundation.org/) which initially provided medical, dental, and education assistance for Henrietta's relatives. Since then, the foundation has awarded 43 grants to under-served people whose bodies have contributed to major advancements in science, even though they were never supported for these efforts. In 2013, when researchers published Henrietta's DNA genome without family consent, the family was finally asked to participate on a regulation committee dealing with Henrietta's cells.

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THE POPULAR CULTURE STUDIES JOURNAL

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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 or outside reviewers.

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The Popular Culture Studies Journal is also accepting book reviews. Please see below for further information. We are seeking reviewers to review books on any aspect of American or international popular culture.

Reviews should adhere to the ethos of *The Popular Culture Studies Journal* and be largely positive with any criticism of the book or author being constructive in nature.

Reviews should be roughly 800-1,000-words and should be typed, double-spaced with 12 pt. Times New Roman font. Research and documentation must adhere to *The MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* and *The MLA Style Manual*, which require a Works Cited list, with parenthetical author/page references in the text. Punctuation, capitalization, hyphenation, and other matters of style must also follow The *MLA Handbook* and *The MLA Style Manual*.

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Book reviews should be sent electronically to Jennifer C. Dunn and include both the review and the reviewer's complete contact information (name, university affiliation, address and email).

If you are interested in writing a review for *The Popular Culture Studies Journal* or if you are an author or publisher with a book you would like to have reviewed, then please contact Dr. Dunn 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 Indianapolis the 2014 conference. We look forward to seeing you next year in Cincinnati.

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