

Teaching and Learning about *Otherness* in Popular Culture

Mass media has played, and is currently playing, a role in the way individuals make sense of their identities, roles and that of society. Through these media outlets—whether in TV, media, and music or in newspaper, articles, and books—people are learning. In other words, we are experiencing daily a pedagogical onslaught of information through popular media that can create conflict within ourselves or elicit great insights for change and acceptance.

Viewing the world around us informs our thinking. As children, there is frequently a lens of awe in seeing new ideas and mechanisms of the world working in unique ways. Each new piece of information is a fact to translate into a growing mental map. For those entering formal education, new ideas tend to come in the form of “texts” intended to show fact and truth about disciplinary learning. The new pieces of information are then often coded within boxes, compartmentalized for instance into learning about science, math, and language. In institutions of higher education, concepts of identity, race, class, and hierarchy persist. Through peer relations, students find commonalities and cohesion or on the flip-side experience “Othering” based upon race, class and gender (Crozier, Burke, & Archer, 2016). Outside the classroom, informal learning through experience (Marsick & Watkins, 2011) presents itself everywhere, allowing students to learn through interactions about how to behave with one another, about identity, about one another, and ones place within a hierarchical world.

But what happens beyond the openminded learning of young children and formal learning within schools? As adults beyond the constraints of educational institutions, we may understand that what we pay attention to informs our understanding of ourselves and of others. Historically, for example, mass media has amplified the presence of heteronormativity of white men in written and visual texts. For those not fitting the hegemonic discourse, they are often depicted as deviant in one manner or another. These depictions have negative impacts for those being objectified, whether through TV shows normalizing sexual objectification of women (Guizzo, Cadinu, Galdi, Maass, & Latrofa, 2017) or popular culture’s perpetuation of the racialization of black bodies (Tate, 2015).

In this issue of *Dialogue: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Popular Culture and Pedagogy*, we are pleased to present six articles speaking to the idea of what we learn from popular culture related to Otherness, survival and hope. Within and across these articles, you will hear about ways in which we need to consider ourselves and what we may have thought to be “the Other.” As such, the authors in this issue provide us with the chance to reconsider language, music, news, and cultural stories. The articles in this issue are divided into three related sections: *Learning about Otherness within the Formal Classroom*, *Informal Learning for Survival*, and *Societal Learning as Control, Conflict, and Hope*.

Across these articles, two address providing new insights to teaching and learning in the university classroom. In *Section 1: Learning about Otherness within Formal Education*, Laura Dumin and Misty Thomas’s works encourage deeper thinking about popular media and its relation to our identity and perceptions of

others. In Thomas's, "I am a Conversation:" Media Literacy, Queer Pedagogy, and *Steven Universe* in College Curriculum," she emphasizes the importance of opening discussion for students to investigate and analyze identity through integrating critical media literacy with queer pedagogy. Thomas demonstrates the importance of actively engaging with popular media, such as articulated through the example of *Steven Universe*, a cartoon show presenting both normative and non-normative identities for students and teachers as a "new approach to the inclusion of media in the university classroom" (p. 1).

In Dumin's "Using News to Start Class: How Small Daily Interactions Affect Larger Classroom Interactions," she shows the ways in which engaging college students in learning and discussing current news stories can enhance learning about one another. Dumin's study highlights how our conceptualization of difference, such as for topics on racial tensions and police brutality, can be addressed, providing intellectual growth through extra credit assignments and encouraging students to open-up and share with one another. With these first two articles, Thomas and Dumin show how pedagogical practice can expand individual understanding of self and others.

In Section 2, we move beyond the classroom into *Informal Learning for Survival* with Sharon Marie Nuruddin's article, "No te voy a dejar nunca" Culture and Second Language Acquisition for Survival in *Fear the Walking Dead*. In this work, Nuruddin illustrates the essential nature of informal learning as a matter of avoiding death. Applying Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory to developing bilingual and bicultural abilities, the author demonstrates how informally learning Spanish and cultural traditions can provide individuals within a post-apocalyptic world with the needed means for survival.

With the final three articles, Tracy Bealer, T. Hunter Strickland, and Scott Haden Church present analyses of literature and music in *Section 3: Societal Learning as Control, Conflict, and Hope*. First, in Tracy Bealer's article, "Consider the Dementor: Discipline, Punishment, and Magical Citizenship in *Harry Potter*," she explores the ways in which "fearsome" dementors can be considered through varied lenses to better understand power hierarchies presented in the texts. Through her analysis, Bealer discusses how dementors are positioned as a feared *Other*, an embodiment of fear at the individual and societal level, intended to teach about maintaining control and order.

Then in T. Hunter Strickland's article, "Zombie Literature: Analyzing the Fear of the Unknown through Popular Culture," he reflects on the ways universal fears can be attributed and portrayed through the genre of zombie literature. Strickland draws from the Russian philosopher, Mikhail Bakhtin's description of *carnival* as a way to describe the paradox of fear and repulsion, along with shock and humor as a way to learn and move through deep-seated individual and societal fears.

The final article in the section also draws from Bakhtin's *carnival*, through the lens of counter culture and breaking of social hierarchies to examine music in the United States. Haden Church presents an interdisciplinary analysis in "Resistance, Race, and Myth: A Survey of American Popular Music Culture in the 20th Century," laying a framework for informing future studies of 21st century popular music by conceptualizing the landscape as a paradox of hegemony and resistance.

In addition to the full-length articles, the concept of *Otherness*, survival and hope can be demonstrated in Tabitha Parry Collin's film review of Michelle Memran's *The Rest I Make Up*. Parry Collin's describes how the film demonstrates how Maria Irene Fornés made a significant impact on playwriting and teaching, yet as a "queer, brown playwright" is positioned outside of normative culture, thus "overshadowed by more mainstream voices."

The six full-length articles in this issue encourage us to expand our scholarship and teaching to consider how individual and societal perceptions and fears are portrayed and overcome. We see how the concept of the *Other* can stand in for an embodiment for fear--creating pressure to act or the potential to change and grow. With the inclusion of the film review, we can see how these works can teach us about our fears, the voices

that are prioritized and ways to continually push to better understand and incorporate pedagogies in popular media.

We look forward to your thoughts on this issue and hope you enjoy, *Otherness, Survival and Hope: Pedagogies in Popular Media*.

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SUGGESTED CITATION

APA

CohenMiller, A. S. (2019). From the news to zombies: Teaching and learning about *Otherness* in popular culture. *Dialogue: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Popular Culture and Pedagogy*, 6(3). www.journaldialogue.org/issues/v6-issue-3/teaching-and-learning-about-otherness-in-popular-culture/

MLA

CohenMiller, Anna S. "From the News to Zombies: Teaching and Learning about *Otherness* in Popular Culture." *Dialogue: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Popular Culture and Pedagogy*, vol. 6, no. 3, 2019, <http://journaldialogue.org/issues/v6-issue-3/teaching-and-learning-about-otherness-in-popular-culture/>

