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The Talking Texts: What Pop Culture Really Has to Say

Adrianne Clark
Stephen F. Austin State University, adrianne.claire33@gmail.com

Madilynn Dewell
Stephen F. Austin State University, dewellm@jacks.sfasu.edu

Thomas Harrison
Stephen F. Austin State University, harrisontj1@jacks.sfasu.edu

Artasia Jackson
Stephen F. Austin State University, artasialynnae@gmail.com

Tyler Jones
Stephen F. Austin State University, jonestc5@jacks.sfasu.edu

See next page for additional authors

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The Talking Texts: What Pop Culture Really has to Say

Morals? Gender roles? Money? Power? What is the media really trying to tell me?
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A Supernatural Plight Of Gender Roles: Feminism in Pop Culture

By: Kameron Rymer

One of the most important aspects of a feminist analysis is the gender messages the main female characters embody. The way media portrays women provides significant clarification into the degree a text supports or opposes hegemony. Because the supernatural genre often carries anti-feminist ideas, careful examination of texts within the genre is necessary to be a critical consumer of media. Buffy the Vampire Slayer, the Twilight Saga, and Stranger Things are all perfect candidates for this type of analysis. The main female characters in Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Stranger Things oppose hegemony while the main female character in Twilight reinforces it.

Buffy the Vampire Slayer features the eponymous Buffy Summers as its hero. Karras later elaborates that “Buffy has an agenda: she is the prototypical girly feminist activist, intentionally slaying stereotypes about what women can and cannot do, combining sexuality with real efforts to make the world a better and safer place for both men and women” (Karras). Buffy actively subverts hegemony by being a competent female hero without losing her feminine qualities. Empathetic yet unwavering in her morals, Buffy saves the day time and time again. Francis Early explains this concept further by showing that “[the] woman warrior theme in Buffy - as presented through the mixed genre of fantasy/horror/adventure - represents an attempt to demystify the closed image of the male warrior-hero - not merely by parodying through comedic means this powerful stereotype but also by offering a subversive open image of just a warrior” (Early). She uses her intelligence and natural wit to her advantage. In one episode, “Helpless,” Buffy loses her supernatural strength and must fight a monster through her cunning alone as a test of her true potential as a Slayer. Although initially terrified, Buffy overcomes the massive obstacle and proves to herself and the world that she is more than just a pretty face or a warrior-like machine. As one of the first television shows of the supernatural genre to ever take a pro-feminist, Buffy Summer set the stage for many texts to follow.

By sharp contrast, Bella Swan, the main protagonist of Twilight demonstrates several harmful stereotypes about women. Christine Jarvis, writer for the Children's Literature in Education journal explains, “[Bella’s] successes resonate to [her] more as the victories of a wilful adolescent who manipulates patriarchy to find a way to gratify her desires, rather than those of a post-feminist agent.” Instead of serving as a positive role model for the teenage audience that follows her, Bella lives her life in a selfish and helpless bubble. Simultaneously, Bella Swan is both entirely useless as a hero, yet the entire world revolves around her. Although she complains about being “average,” both in physical appearance and in talent, the narrative contradicts her by describing her in only flattering terms, creating a bizarre juxtaposition where Bella is simultaneously unremarkable in her own eyes yet extraordinary to everyone else. This attitude of self-deprecation leads to destructive behaviors towards self-image for Twilight’s readers. She also treats people in her life poorly, such as her loving father Charlie, who she consistently disrespects and only addresses by his first name. Her friends from school, outside of the Cullens, she ignores or outright insults in her thoughts despite her human friends' repeated attempts to show kindness to Bella, the new kid at their school.

Similar to Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Stranger Things features strong female leads. Two of the most prominent female characters featured in the television
series are Eleven and Joyce Byers. Joyce Byers is an excellent example of strong heroine. Raising her two sons by herself, she works at a local general store to provide for her family. When her younger son Will disappears, Joyce immediately responds to the call to action and puts all her effort into finding him despite the rest of the town's scorn. She refuses to give up on her morals and those placed in her care. In fact, Joyce concludes that her son is trapped in the Upside Down before the rest of cast catches on. It is her ingenuity that creates a way for Will to communicate with those in the regular world through her Christmas light and painted letter system.

Cast of Stranger Things
http://thenerdstash.com/stranger-things-characters-season-1/

Although she takes on a completely different role in the narrative, Eleven also serves as a strong female protagonist for Stranger Things. As the most powerful character in the series by way of telekinetic powers, Eleven shines as another dynamic female hero. Beginning her journey as a chaotic, lonely laboratory experiment, she grows into an independent and selfless girl worthy of respect. At the end of the second season, Eleven gives up a life with her long-lost sister in the city to return to a dangerous town to save her friends. Her continued character development creates the perfect model for children her age to emulate.

In conclusion, the female characters of Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Stranger Things are feminist models while Bella Swan of the Twilight Saga embodies negative messages about gender roles.


A Feminist Analysis of the Borderlands Video Games

By: Heath Pyle

Borderlands, is a video game series developed by Gearbox Software and published by 2K Games. The first game titled Borderlands follows the player’s adventure on the outlaw world of Pandora which is ruled primarily by anarchy. The player gets to choose one of four possible playable characters to explore Pandora and search for alien treasure troves called “vaults”. The series overall follows the story arc of the first set of playable characters from the first game using the additional characters from the other games to build upon the first character’s stories.

Anita Sarkeesian, creator of the YouTube channel: Feminist Frequency who “…faced death threats as a result of her work” (Carter 2) created a video series titled “Tropes vs Women in Video Games”. In this series Sarkeesian discusses various tropes found in video games that appeal to the “male gaze” and have a disempowering cumulative effect upon the female audience. These tropes addressed in the video series includes “damsel in distress”, “all the slender ladies”, “lingerie for armor” and many more. The trope of “damsel in distress” is when a woman becomes an object in need of rescue in some form from an evil force or individual (Sarkeesian). “All the slender ladies” refers to how, in video games the female characters are often thin women (Sarkeesian). In addition, if a female character isn’t thin or attractive they are often portrayed differently from the others in a negative way. The trope of “lingerie for armor” is when game developers create armor for the female characters that is purposefully skimpy and revealing, while offering little if any actual protection (Sarkeesian). Feminist content creators like Sarkeesian come under constant harassment, such as death threats for exposing these sexist themes found in our media sources.

The purpose of this analysis is to view what Borderlands as a video game series does to discourage gender roles and typical gendered tropes, as well as what the series does to promote these roles and tropes. This analysis will address how video games often try to mask
these tropes with excuses. When viewed within the vacuum of their individual game these excuses seem logical but when viewed from a broader perspective of video games they become petty. The Borderlands series is indeed progressive for videogames, but it still has many glaring signs of the developers appealing to the male gaze. The term “male gaze” in the context of videogames simply means that the developers created the game and its characters to appeal to a heterosexual male audience (Sellnow). The results of these messages upon the players as they play games with these tropes over time results in a cumulative effect upon the player’s perception of real world situations and can affect the actions of players in the real world.

One of the most obvious tropes in Borderlands in “Lingerie as armor” where you have female characters wearing revealing clothing, even in combat roles, which wouldn’t provide any substantial protection from both the environment or weaponry (Sarkeesian). This contrasts to what the men in Borderlands wear; which is either actual armor or other reasonable clothing for the active combat roles of a vault hunter. The case might be made that because the characters use shields they might not need armor, but again the activities that vault hunter perform in their daily routines would make the clothing worn by the female characters highly impractical. In other words, this trope portrays women as sexual objects first rather than individuals. In addition, it desensitizes the audience to women wearing skimpy clothing.

In the context of these video games, these tropes seem very minor if not harmless. However, this game is not a vacuum by which gamers get all the experience they will encounter throughout their lives. There are so many games and in most video games there are these tropes brought up which is why they are considered tropes within video games (Sarkeesian). Which means if we just looked at the underdressed women with the Borderlands series we wouldn’t pay that much mind, but if we looked at fifty different video games with female characters, a clear majority would share the “lingerie as armor” trope. This results in a cumulative effect upon the audience that makes masculine audiences believe that they should view women as sexual objects to be lusted after. It would also make female audiences think that they should be objects for males to lust after. In the case of the “all the slender ladies” trope; it would have us believe that women should all be thin women with an hourglass figure. This means that anything less than an hourglass figure would not be deemed satisfactory or beautiful.

“The All the Slender Ladies: Body Diversity in Video Games.” YouTube, uploaded by feministfrequency, Sep 1, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qbqRtp5ZUGE&index=4&list=PLx4oob_5_tEaZWITXc7VKIFheMSEp1gbq.

Borderlands, 2K Games, Oct. 2009
Borderlands 2, 2K Games, Sept. 2012
Borderlands: The Pre-Sequel, 2K Games, Oct. 2014

Wonder Woman: The Fictional Feminist

By: Madilynn Dewell

There has been a long debate over whether or not Wonder Woman is a feminist icon. This debate is important since she is the oldest and longest lasting major female superhero. Wonder Woman is also an important piece of popular culture because she is an example of how women can be strong without losing their femininity and having to adopt mostly masculine features. She has the potential to influence girls into believing that they can be beautiful and strong enough to protect themselves and not feel that they must rely on a man to support them or sacrifice their femininity to be strong. I will be analyzing the movie Wonder Woman to see if she is truly becoming a feminist icon or if she is falling short of the role.

Because of their passion and "emotional" responses, Diana and the Amazons, who are based on the fierce all-women nation of warriors of Greek mythology, are significant in cultural feminism. Women are often stereotyped as being overly emotional and too compassionate, and are often portrayed making illogical choices because of their emotions. Diana repeatedly shows that her emotions and compassion do not weaken her, but rather motivate her to help others and be more selfless. She never seeks glory or fame; her goals are only to help others and protect them. Her compassion is evident when she sees the wounded soldiers and crosses No-Man's Land because innocent people were starving and being enslaved on the other side.

Wonder Woman

The way Wonder Woman and the Amazons are presented visually is also relevant to feminism because they are shown in ways that add to their strength and make them appear more realistic. Firstly, the story is narrated by Diana, who is telling the audience about how she was introduced to humanity and how she lost her ignorance of humans being innately good unless they were under the influence of Ares. The audience also never sees her naked or in the process of changing clothes so she does not appear vulnerable. There is also a scene where Steve is completely naked, and while the audience’s view is blocked from seeing all of him, it is obvious that Diana does see him completely naked. The audience is meant to feel slightly uncomfortable or amused during this scene because it is rare for an audience to see a man at the mercy of a woman in such a vulnerable position. As Marilyn Fabe explains it, "we see the action through a male’s eyes, and what he is looking at is often the figure of a sexy woman" (Fabe). There are many scenes throughout film history of men, fully clothed, watching a naked woman but it is rare to see the reverse situation, and while seeing the former would likely not cause discomfort, the latter does cause the audience to sympathize with the man who has been made vulnerable. Steve, along with appearing naked, is
also shown changing clothes and was saved from drowning by Diana. He was even embarrassed when Diana told someone that she saved him.

Another common film practice is that specific pieces of a woman are shown, such as just their hands, to allow men to pick apart a woman to make them appear as less of a threat (Fabe). Wonder Woman is only shown in pieces when she is finally revealed in her costume and the focus of each shot is a piece of her armor or a weapon, not her. This scene is not presented in a way that breaks her down but instead builds her up. The scene shows her armor and weapons in order of shield, bracers, boots that cover her knees, lasso, "tiara"/helm, and then shows her from head to toe in her armor. After her armor is revealed, she charges into battle and saves the town of Veld from its German occupants.

While appearing functional, Wonder Woman's armor is still meant to be visually appealing while not being too revealing. The design of her armor reminds the audience that while she is stronger than a man and a better warrior than most, she is not a man and does not need to dress like one to be stronger. Jacob Held explains that, "the masculinity of Batman and Superman befits them as heroes, as strong, powerful, and righteous. By contrast, the femininity of Wonder Woman complicates matters" (Held 1-2). Director James Cameron's says in an interview, "[Wonder Woman is an objectified icon, and it's just male Hollywood doing the same old thing"] when asked about Wonder Woman (Freeman). He goes on to compare Wonder Woman to one of his strong female characters from Terminator 2 who had extremely masculine characteristics. In response to Cameron, Patty Jenkins, the director of Wonder Woman, tweets, "if women have to always be hard, tough and troubled to be strong, and we aren't free to be multidimensional or celebrate an icon of women everywhere because she is attractive and loving, then we haven't come very far have we" (Chow).

Historically, Wonder Woman has not been a feminist icon. However, in Wonder Woman she is treated as such and becomes one. Wonder Woman and her story embody radical, liberal, Marxist, and cultural feminism. As such a new movie, Wonder Woman is an important part of pop culture and can change how women are portrayed in film and potentially increase the number of strong female roles throughout all kinds of popular culture text. Wonder Woman has the potential to be a good fictional, feminist role model that changes how society views women.


The Effects of Award Shows

By: Sara Salazar

In 2017, it is not uncommon to hear of people meticulously planning and organizing viewing parties for major awards shows such as the Oscars, Golden Globes, The Emmys, etc. Indubitably, if you were to ask any given person when the peak season for these aforementioned shows are, you’re likely to receive a response of “September through March,” or maybe even more specific, down to the exact date and time. With this amount of attention being focused on award shows and the celebrities in attendance, it is crucial that these individuals that are carrying the burden of fame present themselves and their actions in a way that will make a positive change in society.

The Oscars Award Show

One example of the misuse of celebrity influence is Jennifer Lawrence’s 2013 Oscars speech in which she won Best Actress for her role in Silver Linings Playbook. In the show’s airing of her acceptance speech, the eye is immediately drawn to the ostentatious...
formal wear being worn in the sea of celebrities in the crowd. One very important theorem within Neo-Aristotelianism, according to Shen, is the “encoding and decoding [of communications],” the encoded dress code that is being sent from the producers of the show to the entire assembly creates a strict monotonous structure which, when decoded by audiences, comes across as serious and austere (Shen 142). The audience's reaction when hearing Lawrence’s name being announced may also give us a clue as to how presumptuous the Oscars really are. Rather than a hollering cheer from the crowd we hear a small, calm rumble of claps. No yelling, no air horns, no standing ovations. A congratulation you would expect to find from a poetry slam or book signing… or in this case a highly reputable award show. In terms of the actual speech, the Oscars do enforce a strict time limit for all speeches given. However, in Lawrence’s case, she did not meet nor reach anywhere near the 45 seconds that were allotted for her address (which in and of itself might add to the basis of this argument) and gives us reason to believe all that she intended to say, was said. Lawrence’s speech was as follows:

“Thank you. You guys are just standing up because you feel bad that I fell and that’s really embarrassing but thank you. This is nuts. Thank you to the Academy and thank you to the women this year. You were so magnificent and so inspiring and not just those of you in my category. And it’s been so amazing getting to know you and you’ve been so nice and you’ve made this experience unforgettable. And thank you to the best producing team: Bruce, Donna, Jon and to my team at CAA and IDPR. And Bradley, and our entire cast: Chris, Jacki, Bob and our crew. My family. Happy birthday, Emmanuelle. Thank you so much. Thanks.”

As you can see, aside from her remark about her falling down on the way to the stage, the speech is mostly “wow’s” and “thank you’s,” the typical acceptance speech phrases. Paying attention to her joke near the beginning of the speech, this could have been a tactic in creating a sense of shared humor between her and the audience. This “inside joke” tactic was short lived though, when she quickly reverted back to more “thank you’s.” Also, one more thing to notice in Lawrence’s speech is her acknowledgement of the other women nominated for this category. Her empathy towards her female counterparts and compliments to their character shows humility within herself. This act of kindness shows audiences how humble she is in receiving the award and creates a bond between themselves and Lawrence. The more an audience can connect with the speaker and the more trustworthy the speaker seems only makes Lawrence’s speech more influential.

It is of no surprise to hear that over 47% of the world’s population has access and uses the internet in some way every day. In order to spare you the math, that is over 3 billion people. Those using the internet can log on to any journalism website and literally track celebrities’ footsteps in real time. This sets actors, musicians, or really anyone of any influence on a pedestal making everything they say/do (and everything they do not say/do) into a spectacle. For this exact reason, both of the speeches we have previously anatomized are impactful to each of their respective audiences. Lawrence, although she was extremely humble and thankful, not using all of the time given to her sends a message that speaks only for the award and the show itself rather than for making impact towards a purpose. We obviously cannot change how individuals choose to perceive the media and its messages, however, with all the attention being placed onto certain individuals it is crucial that they use their position to change how they deliver said messages.


The Film Titanic and Its Relevance Today

By: Amanda Thornton

The movie Titanic receives its title and subject matter from the tale of the R.M.S Titanic which “on the night of the 14th April, the ship struck an iceberg at 11.40 pm sustaining a 300-foot gash to the hull, sinking within 3 hours at 2.20 a.m. on 15th April with the loss of 1514 lives...” (Addley 165). The gross income of the film was approximately two billion dollars with showings in over three thousand theatres, ranking it ten years later as one of the top five highest grossing movies of all time. Over the past ten years the film has reached many audiences of all ages and continues to be relevant today by frequently being shown on popular television networks such as TNT and TBS. Seeing that the film is based upon a true event in history it gives viewers a glimpse into the early twentieth century and what life was like during that era. Many of the similar studies that have been previously conducted have focused on the gender roles of the era, including “Women and Children First” which, according to Elinder, is known as “...the unwritten law of the sea” (Elinder Erixson 13220). While other studies have focused on social class, nationality, and the other factors that gave individuals traveling on the Titanic an increased chance of survival on the night of the ship’s sinking. This essay will expand on these ideas by analyzing the film through the Neo-Marxist rhetorical lenses and answer certain questions that many viewers have including but not limited to: What is the underlying meaning of the blue diamond, “Heart of the Ocean” necklace? Why did Rose hold onto it for so many years then drop it into the ocean so carelessly? For the purpose of this essay the analysis will answer these questions and clarify their importance to the film and history. By examining the social and economic norms that are displayed in the film, it is clear that they play a crucial role. This is shown not only in the portrayal of characters but also throughout history since the film presents ideas that are still stereotyped today in the 21st century.

When analyzing the film from the Neo-Marxist perspective, Rose and Jack would be models because they both display qualities that viewers appreciate. Rose refused to differentiate between classes keeping her heart and mind open to those of other classes which allowed her to meet and fall in love with Jack. From the moment that they met, Jack put his heart on his sleeve and displayed a genuine love to Rose that no one, especially her mother and Cal, had ever before. Kendrick states that, “because their characters are from strongly divergent class backgrounds (Jack being a penniless bohemian and Rose being a heiress...), their characters are easily viewed as symbolic of the sides of the prototypical Marxist class struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie” (Kendrick 42). Social class is defined by Cohen as “...objective resources (such as income and wealth), esteem and deference commanded by social roles (such as occupational prestige), education (important for human capital and networks), moral values (defining the kind of people I do vs. do not want to be associated with), style of life, taste, and caste (derived from ascribed group membership)” (Cohen 1531). The first class creates a stereotype that men are deemed to be the head of the house and provide for the family, which creates conflict when Rose becomes interested in Jack. During the nineteenth century it was not typical for a first-class woman to be seen with a third-class man. The film reinforces hegemony by setting up the social norms that were accepted during the time period especially dramatizing relationships between the same social class as critical. The film then opposes the norms by putting Rose and Jack in a relationship together.

According to scholar Zoey Schmalz, “While on board the Titanic, passengers are constantly reminded of what class status they hold and are continually forced to worry about their appearance and who their acquaintances are...” (Schmalz 9). Material things tend to be very important to the first class, making objects as well as social position a prominent economic metaphor throughout the film. This is seen in the clothes they wear...
(which is why it was so important that Jack had a tuxedo to wear to the first-class dinner). Other metaphors that can be included is the difference in rooms of first and lower classes, as well as their possessions. “The Heart of the Ocean” blue diamond necklace is a staple possession seen throughout the entire film. It was given to Rose at the beginning of the movie as an engagement gift from her fiancé, Cal. This blue diamond necklace symbolizes wealth in the time of economy they were in and is just one example of many demonstrating how Rose is “bought” or controlled as if she has no emotions. As a viewer it can be puzzling why Rose dropped the necklace so carelessly at the end of the film. A theory by Kramer states that “by letting the diamond drop into the ocean, she confirms that she has given her own heart to the very ocean in which her lover rests and with the diamond sinking to the ground like her lover once did and like she had originally promised to do, she can now die herself...” (Krämer 610).

In conclusion, this film allows viewers to peek into the social norms during the 1900’s by establishing what was considered as “normal” for men and women and their roles in society. At the time it was expected to marry within your same social class where the man is the primary source of income. The relationship between Rose and Jack opposes the social norms during the time but it also creates a moral that social class or monetary value has no affect on who you love when it is meant to be.


work with others, but yet he is always trying to get a partner in his killings. So not only has Dexter killed many people in his time, but has attempted to train four other people to help him in “fighting crime” in Miami.

While the people committing the act may change, for the most part Dexter will follow a strict ritual. He will always drug the person he is killing and wait for them to wake up, just to show them pictures of who they have killed. Dexter didn’t start doing this, but through different trials determined that showing these pictures made the people feel worse about themselves. Then he ties them down with plastic wrap and will cover his “kill room” with plastic bags so he will not leave a trace of him being there. Then he will talk to the person and again remind them of why they are there. Then Dexter, being infatuated with blood, will make a small cut on their face and put a drop of blood on one of his blood slides as a trophy. This infatuation with blood is common among most serial killers. With studies showing that “Most (Serial Killers) are aggressive and have an insatiable preoccupation with death, blood, and violence” (Knight). Finally, Dexter will pull a knife out of his set of knives, and deliver one fatal strike. After the kill Dexter will then cut up the body and take down all the plastic he has used, and put it in trash bags. To get rid of the bodies, he takes the bags onto his boat and tosses them into the ocean. If Dexter does not do this ritual the killing feels less meaningful to him, and does not help with his inner darkness, which is the main reason he does kill to control that darkness.

The purpose, seems to change quite often based on who he is killing. For most of his kills, he explains that they are murderers and because of that he kills them, believing he is saving more lives by killing these murderers. On some occasions when people are looking into him being a murderer though, he will kill them. In many of these killings, the victims do not fit Harry’s code, and are only killed so that Dexter will not be caught.

Dexter’s motives for killing tend to change as well. Usually, it is to get murderers off the street and to calm his inner darkness, but again he will just lash out when he is stressed or worried about getting caught. Even when he is cleaning Miami of murderers, he will rush the kill, because of the darkness within himself. Which does not make sense, because when Dexter kills a copycat killer he tells the audience “I don’t need to kill you, but I have to.” He killed him because he claimed the copycat killer was not attempting to clean the streets, but enjoyed killing people. Which is ironic, since Dexter gets a sick thrill from killing people.

With my analysis of Dexter, you see that, Dexter does not value human life. He will kill anyone, who is in his way and find a way to make it seem justifiable to himself to not break the Code of Harry. This narcissistic type of thinking is normal for serial killers, thinking they are somehow superior to everyone they encounter. This is not any different with Dexter, thinking that he is important enough to the world, that he is allowed to kill whoever he wants.


A Narrative Analysis of Calvin and Hobbes

By: Logan Willhoite

Comic strips have always been stuck on the backburner when it comes to being taken seriously for rhetorical analysis. However, over the past decade many writers and scholars have started to see their full potential in influencing our society with the messages they carry.

One popular comic strip that has many messages about school is Calvin and Hobbes created by Bill Watterson. In Watterson’s comics, he describes the adventures of the dynamic duo
from the perspective of Calvin, a uniquely spirited 6-year-old boy, and his stuffed tiger Hobbes, who Calvin has imagined into his world. The stories told in these comics are amusing and sincere as they are shown from the perspective of the young Calvin, but that doesn’t mean the stories have any less of a message in them. As it is shown through many of the strips, Calvin’s attitude toward school is clearly not a fond one. In one of his many show and tell comics, Calvin brings a single snowflake into class for his item. He explains how the snowflake was so interesting because it was different and special in the way that it had crystallized. The teacher is very interested in what Calvin is saying until he goes on to say, “I think we might all learn a lesson from how this utterly unique and exquisite crystal turns into a boring molecule of water, just like every other one, when you bring it into the classroom” before promptly attempting to leave the room (Watterson Feb 4th, 1993). Calvin’s distaste for school is not veiled here in the slightest. Like most children his own age, Calvin prefers to be engaged with things he likes. Does this mean that Calvin does not like learning? Well his dad asks Calvin this very same question when he realizes that he is not doing so well in school. His dad explains to him that he must love to learn because he has read and memorized every dinosaur book he can get his hands on, so he asks him why he is not showing that same level of interest in school to which Calvin simply replies, “they don’t read about dinosaurs” (Watterson Oct 18th, 1989). So, it is clear that Calvin enjoys learning about things that he is interested in, but sadly there seems to be nothing at the school that interests him. This argument is even further solidified in one of Watterson’s later strips when Calvin is taking a test. He responds with the correct answer to one of the questions, but then goes on to make the note that “As you can see, I’ve memorized this utterly useless fact long enough to pass a test question. I now intend to forget it forever. You’ve taught me nothing except how to cynically manipulate the system. Congratulations” (Watterson Jan 27th, 1994). This strip shows that Calvin can succeed in the school’s test, but shows that it also won’t have any lasting effect on him. All he had to do was memorize information for a day or two and now that he doesn’t need it any more he is simply going to forget it. This is much different than how he deals with the information pertaining to things he likes such as dinosaurs, of which he can conjure up at any time he desires. This is because he has actually learned it as opposed to momentarily memorizing it.

Another interesting observation can be made in the setting. In the strips where Calvin is at school, he is almost never imagining an adventure he is on or having fun in any way. The only time he has fun at school is when he daydreams, but is always pulled back into the harsh reality he lives in. Another important observation is that Hobbes is nowhere to be seen in the vast majority of the school scenes, since the other children at school have made fun of Calvin for bringing him along. This is incredibly symbolic because Hobbes is the full embodiment of Calvin’s imagination. The fact that he is being forced to leave that behind when he goes to school shows how he is slowly losing that childhood creativity that slips away from all of us.

The coherence of Bill Watterson’s strips is part of what makes the strips so entertaining to read. The readers know that half of Calvin and Hobbes’ adventures, and even Hobbes himself, are not real. That is because they are all imagined by the creative mind of Calvin. Watterson does a fantastic job of showing the reality of the world in which Calvin lives by the reactions of the characters around him, but at the same time shows what it is like to be an imaginative child. In this way the story is very coherent because it is not at all uncommon for children to be imaginative and find themselves in
the same types of adventures that Calvin finds himself in. The fidelity of the Watterson’s portrayed morals is humane in the sense that he is using them. He is arguing that the current school system is not acceptable because it destroys the creativity of young minds and forces us to accept whatever the people in power think should be important. This is obviously a humane argument since no one wants to see children’s dreams being crushed. However, at the same time, some may argue that the school system is fine and that children should still be required to learn standard things even if they do not necessarily want to. Therefore, the fidelity of the argument could be one thing or another depending on what the reader’s current viewpoint is. Even if the fidelity of the story could change, the overall narrative rationality of the story is solid as the story itself is able to create a feeling of nostalgia in many of its readers as they are reminded of what it is like to be a kid with an active imagination.


Gender Roles in the Hunger Games Series

By: Thomas Harrison

The Hunger Games is a movie based on the book written by Suzanne Collins about the hunger games, a gladiatorial combat event created in order to help the capital of a post-apocalyptic America suppress the twelve districts after an unsuccessful insurrection. The games require that each district send one male and one female to fight to the death in an arena until only one combatant survives. When the tributes are chosen, Prim, the sister of the protagonist Katniss, is chosen despite improbable odds and as a result Katniss volunteers to take her sister’s place in the hunger games. The male chosen for district twelve is Peeta Mellark who is later revealed to be Katniss’s secret admirer. Shortly after the games begin, an announcement is made that there can be two winners if the victors are from the same district, this message causes Katniss to team up with Peeta and to pose as lovers in order to get sponsors and win the tournament so that they can return home. What are the rules and roles being proposed as normal or abnormal and desirable or undesirable for men and women? What are the potential implications of these messages? This essay will utilize the cultural feminist lens of the feminist perspective to explain how the character Katniss Everdeen opposes or reinforces taken for granted hegemonic beliefs or behaviors for women and men in society.

Katniss Everdeen from The Hunger Games
https://i.kinja-img.com/gawker-media/image/upload/s--LGVPR7uM--/c_scale,fl_progressive,q_80,w_800/huaulzkiyikwj7m60rxe.jpg

The feminist perspective analyzes a text by examining how an artifact expresses gender roles and rules for men and women and how that artifact either opposes or reinforces the dominant hegemony that men are strong, decisive, and protective and that women are emotional, weak, and submissive. By analyzing a text with the feminist perspective, we can understand how the messages proposed can influence the viewers and how the characters either oppose or reinforce dominant masculine hegemony. I chose to analyze the Hunger Games series since the series revolves around characters that do not follow the male dominated hegemony.

Katniss Everdeen is a model of the Hunger Games since she is portrayed as resourceful, independent, and compassionate. When Katniss's sister Prim is chosen to be a tribute for the hunger games, Katniss instinctively volunteers to replace Prim as the female tribute in order to save Prim’s life, despite knowing she will most likely die in the hunger games tournament. Shortly after Katniss is escorted to the tribute waiting room, Prim and
Katniss's mother visit her. During this meeting, Katniss tells her mother what she needs to do and how to care for Prim when Katniss is gone and if Katniss were to die in the tournament and never return. This encounter reveals that Katniss was the head of the household and primary caretaker of the family after her father had died from a coal mining accident. In addition, after her father's death, Katniss began to wear her father's clothes and began to hunt with her best friend Gale Hawthorne. By hunting woodland creatures and selling their meat and fur to the populace of district twelve, Katniss was able to provide for her family. From the cultural feminist perspective this event opposes the hegemony by having Katniss adopting a role traditional hegemony suggest belongs to men by having Katniss being the protector and provider for the family instead of her father. In addition, according to Dubrofsky and Ryalls, Katniss also opposes the traditional hegemony suggest belongs to men by having Katniss dress like a man by wearing her deceased father's clothes and having her hunt. In addition, After the Hunger Games begin, Katniss befriends Rue heals her from her tracker jacker wounds. Eventually Rue is killed by another tribute while Katniss was away. According to Kirby, after killing Rue’s killer, Katniss violates the game’s tradition by giving Rue a ceremonial burial before returning to the games. By doing this, Katniss displays herself as a skilled hunter, a stereotypically masculine gendered characteristic, and compassion by caring for Rue as she was dying, a stereotypically feminine gendered characteristic. Furthermore, later in the series, when Katniss is recruited into the rebel army, she is subjected to a symbolic role despite the fact that Katniss wanted to fight. When Katniss was given the opportunity to fight, she defied her superiors and leaped into the battlefield and fought. From a cultural feminist perspective, this event opposes hegemony by having Katniss defy her superiors’ demands and plunge straight into a battlefield and begin to fight which traditional hegemony suggest belongs to men since men are the ones who fight battles and not women. In addition, when Peeta is rescued from the capital and is discovered to be brainwashed into killing Katniss, Katniss again adopts a caretaker role and does all that she can to rehabilitate Peeta and restore him to his former self. This event supports hegemony by having Katniss adopt a supportive caretaker role which perpetuates traditional hegemony. The potential implication these messages might have on various audiences are that women might be more accepting of adopting traditionally men's roles or practices and men might be more willing to adopt traditionally female roles or practices as well.

Mockingjay symbol from The Hunger Games series
https://resizing.flixster.com/Ddko5BaackIndedVQe4S3mYb9wE=/300x300/v1.aDsxMTMzNjY7ajxxNzU1MTsxMjAwOzk3MzxxNTAw

The purpose of this analysis was to examine what and how the Hunger Games communicate about appropriate and inappropriate roles for women and men. The films promote that Katniss emphasizes that is okay for women to adopt more masculine characteristics. This essay offers something new to the field by examining each character within the Hunger Games series and analyzing what messages each character promotes and what the potential implications of these messages are. These artifacts should also be examined using the Neo-Marxist perspective in order to examine what messages the Hunger Games series promotes about socioeconomic status throughout the series.
Women’s rights and roles have been called into question since the beginnings of the feminist movement in the 1800’s. Their roles and stereotypes have yet to evolve in today’s ever-changing society and are patently depicted through these stereotypes in almost every Hollywood movie. Females are continuously misrepresented in movies in an attempt to remain within the framework of gender stereotypes for a variety of reasons or motives such as box office numbers and profits. The Wonder Woman movie shattered female stereotypes, bringing traditional women’s roles and stereotypes into the feminist conversation.

According to radical feminism, female images have a tendency to “serve as signs of visual pleasure for a ‘male gaze’” (Gilpatrick 735). The purpose of appealing to male gaze is to further promote the movie, guaranteeing maximized profits. Female characters, including those in progressive films, can be “repositioned from subject to object” (O’Reilly 280) through both supporting characters and the camera lens. Wonder Woman is one of the few movies that does not use male gaze, the cause likely being a female director. In the film, the camera lens does not present Wonder Woman as an object to be fetishized nor suggests that she uses her sexuality in order to obtain power and legitimacy, granted that there are no scenes where she is hypersexualized. It is common for action movies to oversexualize the female characters and directly use male gaze whether through male characters or through “eye candy” shots. As the lead hero in the movie there is no need for any shots objectifying her since her purpose, as she states herself, is not for male pleasure; rather she is confident in her strength and abilities. She breaks the radical feminism hegemony by not giving into male gaze. Sometimes females may feel as though their skillset is not enough and rely on their appearance to get what they want. However, it is the opposite for Wonder Woman; she is feminine and confident. It is clear that it never once occurs to her that she must become more masculine or use her sexuality to save the world; and that is one of the lessons that female audiences should take away from this film.

Wonder Woman “attempts to unpack some of the problematic ways in which strong women are represented when they are present” (Brinkman 434). Specifically looking at the “no man’s land” scene in the movie, the producer’s intent with the film is evident. To start off, Steve warns her that no man can cross no man’s land hence the name “no man’s land”, she agrees and decides to cross it as a woman. Through this, Wonder Woman sends the message that although you may be a woman or something is deemed impossible, one should not wait around for a man to do something, instead get up and do it yourself. Gender does not determine what one can or cannot do nor should we allow it to. The camera then captures the moment she angelically takes her hair down right before she leads the men across no man’s land. She is shown in this cliché moment to not play into male gaze or any stereotype, but to instead show females that one can still be feminine while participating in what society claims as non-feminine activities, once again breaking the radical feminist hegemony. Females do not have to give up their femininity in order to attain legitimacy and power in male spheres in order to access male privilege.

The film calls gender roles and stereotypes into question and it offers a solution. It challenges cultural and radical feminism by opposing the feminist
hegemony. Both men and women are equal and society should accept both regardless of whether or not each behaves in cliché gender specific ways. Stereotyping itself cannot ever cease to exist as only new ones are created to replace the old; it is an ongoing cycle that attempts to define certain groups of people in a most generic form. As Escholz suggests, “hegemonic ideological message is embedded in media representations,” and “these outlets are influential in reinforcing perceptions in our culture” (Escholz 302, 304). If audiences want there to be increased equal representation of gender in movie characters that are not presented in gender specific ways, it must quit defining gender by certain roles or tasks in stereotypical ways. And given that media has a tendency to give the people what they want as far as trends and beliefs, does Wonder Woman construct an accurate reality or representation reflective of the view on feminism and gender roles or is it a suggestion to society of what could be? And although more progressive films have been released, are females really breaking gender roles or are they just modified and shown within a new framework so that directors can continue to get away with it without truly changing their portrayals of women?

In conclusion, Wonder Woman challenges how society thinks of women and of superhero movies in general, particularly for female audiences. Wonder Woman is the feminist icon of contemporary feminism. She is “the symbol of feminine power and heroism” (O’Reilly 282). She not only breaks the hegemony and enforces cultural feminism, but also sets out a good role model for women. Wonder Woman is just as powerful and influential as any superhero starring in their own movie, while still showing that she is genuinely and intrinsically good. Her character is inspiring and empowering; and despite all of the wrong and evil she has seen, she is still forgiving, understanding, loving, hopeful, and optimistic. She creates a role model for females and sets an example for society of the modern woman and what could be, thus pushing the feminism movement one step further.


**Religion and Human Decisions in Skyrim**

By: Whittany Myers

Society has placed a huge emphasis on religion, especially in our world today. Religious leaders are automatically deemed more trustworthy than the average person, an ideology debunked by the occasional corrupt priest or what have you. These people are seen as holy embodiments speaking scripture, telling common people, or proletariats as the Neo-Marxist lens calls them, what to do with their lives and how to live them step by step because they are believed to know the will of the gods. Proletariats make up the majority of the population, and therefore have the most representation present. In Skyrim, these common folks range from blacksmiths to innkeepers, and each hold, or city as we would call them in modern day, has different religious standpoints, just as we do today. For example, Riften is home to the temple of Mara, goddess of love and compassion. In order to marry, players are required to go to the temple to obtain the amulet of Mara and wear it around to be publically seen as unmarried and open for marriage requests.
Marriages are carried out in the temple, as it is the only available location to the player for such a ceremony, making marriage a sort of religious experience. Whereas marriage in our world has the option to be held in churches and temples, Skyrim demands that these services be held in the temple, further embedding religion in the lives of the newly wedded couple who may or may not have revered Mara beforehand.

Those most dedicated and outspoken to the hero-god Talos are the Stormcloaks, led by Ulfric Stormcloak; anyone else taking part in his worship pray discreetly and out of earshot for fear of being caught by the Imperial Legion. Talos, god of mankind, might, honor, state, war, governance, law, and man, is highly revered by the Stormcloaks possibly in part to his rebellious personality, as the group is determined to overthrow the Imperial Legion, their rival group in power. The worship of Talos was outlawed by the Imperials as ordained by the emperor with a treaty after the Great War, called the White-Gold Concordat, as they saw Talos as not being a true god, but his worship can still be found in almost every hold. In cooperation with his beliefs, the Stormcloaks consider mankind to be shackled by the Imperials, believing that they run a corrupt government. Looking back at what Talos is considered to be in power of, it is no surprise that the Stormcloaks hold this ideal, using their ‘might’ to free ‘man’ from the unjust ‘law’ and ‘governance’ by using ‘war’ as a ticket to freedom and maintain their ‘honor’. Literally everything they do is a reiteration of what Talos would do if he were walking among them and doing them himself.

Skyrim

In the future, scholars could look back on this paper to support any future studies done on this topic. Religion is always in video games in some way, shape, or form; however, the lack of analyses in terms of religion in gaming calls for more attention to be focused on this topic. In Skyrim, virtually all decisions are made to please the Nine Divines. In the Christian religion, all decisions are made in line with what the Bible says, just as followers of Judaism obey the Torah, and those in the Islamic faith adhere to the Quran. The game shows us that each spiritual group follows a certain path, whether it be similar to each other or not. What Skyrim tells us about our religions is the fact that sometimes we blindly follow what scripture says rather than thinking for ourselves. Other times, we are brought up with a certain ideology, that way when we are older we have already immersed ourselves in a spiritual path, becoming accustomed to it.

Skyrim has shown us how video games reflect that religion influences human decisions, and parallels are easily drawn to real life. The video game calls into question whether or not people make decisions based on personal desire or to maintain an image as an active member of a religious group in society. The game makes the non-player characters easily relatable, effortlessly creating a sense of interpellation throughout the entirety of gameplay. Other lenses that could be applied to this specific question are the narrative lens and the dramatistic lens, as those perspectives have interesting points that can help future scholars analyze this subject further. As far as the narrative lend goes, coherence could be a possible aspect to pull in, as many factors in the game are not necessarily plausible to our world now, such as magic, vampires, and dragons; fidelity could be argued due to the numerous murders the player is asked to commit. The dramatistic lens could pull in the topic of pollution, saying that the Stormcloaks reject the social order, and possibly discussing the fact that the Stormcloaks are acting upon the focus of transcendence.

Hopefully there will be more future research done on the influences of religion on human decisions because the studies mentioned in this paper were intuitive, but further experiments and discussions should help scholars understand the subject more than what we have now. Once these studies have been done, we could possibly see a renewal of individualistic thinking.
**A Feminist and Neo-Marxist Analysis of Steven Universe**

*By Erica Pinkham*

*Steven Universe* is a kid's cartoon show that takes nearly every stereotype in place in the media and TV and throws it out the window. This is most prominent in the Feminist and Neo-Marxist perspectives.

A main part of the Feminist perspective is hegemony, which is basically the gender stereotypes and empowerment of men that media sells to its viewers. And, as seen by many and brought up specifically by Rebecca Martin “over the decades, the norm has remained to promote gender stereotypes in children’s programming” (Martin 15). However, some of the newer children’s shows that are coming out are going against this belief. Looking at *Steven Universe*, it is easy to see how hegemony is portrayed and basically thrown out the window.

Starting off, the entire show is full of models, specifically female models. In truth, almost any character that portrays likable or desirable characteristics are females. Garnet is shown to be incredibly powerful and wise, she has an exuberant amount of self-confidence and patience. Pearl is passionate and is a skilled swords woman. Amethyst has wit and humor and is the one that has the most fun with her life. Female superheroes in general are now being portrayed as “having extraordinary characteristics typically reserved for males such as brainpower, super fighting skills, and superhuman powers” and are becoming more “capable of fending for themselves” (Baker and Raney 12-13). Rose, Steven’s mother, was a great leader who also had amazing compassion and curiosity.

Men, on the other hand, are the anti-models and go against hegemony completely. Greg, while one of the only male models in the show, goes against hegemony because he is the caregiver to Steven. Because Steven’s mom is no longer there, Greg basically takes over this role, something that isn’t necessarily associated with males. Another anti-model in the show would be a character named Marty, who is a dead-beat sleaze bag of a dad to a side character in the show. Marty appears in both “Story for Steven” and “Drop Beat Dad” and both times leaves a less-than-pleasant image of the man in viewer’s minds. Marty is a greedy and materialistic man that leaves his son before he’s even born and treats women like tissues. Any viewer that sees Marty immediately dislikes him and it’s this distinction between how males versus females are seen and how hegemony is treated that makes *Steven Universe* unique.

By offering viewers strong, complex females, they are inspiring young girls that are watching. They show little girls that they can be superheroes and powerful and that they don’t have to be stuck inside the homemaker box. By showing boys that they can be kind and gentle and understanding it allows them to go against whatever media is feeding them. The show also shows what bad behaviors and attitudes look like and that they should absolutely not be followed by showing a skeevy character like Marty.

In the Neo-Marxist perspective, *Steven Universe*, similarly to the feminist perspective, takes everything that society tells viewers to desire and appreciate and flips it on its head. The main models in the show are Greg and the teenagers that live in Beach City. Greg is a simple man that lives in his van and works at the car wash he owns. Most days are spent singing songs and sleeping. And yet, despite the fact that Greg lives a bare minimum life, he still is by far one of the least stressed and most content characters in the show. Nobody treats Greg less than them because he lives in a van or because he has little money. On the contrary, Greg is an upstanding citizen in society who cares about those around him and is respected by the townsfolk. Even whenever Greg gets money in “Mr. Greg,” he finds little use for it after only about two days in the life of luxury. He eventually returns back to the
simple life that suits him far better than fancy suits and marble fountains.

On top of this, the teenagers that live in Beach City don’t look into the future as the potential of having lots of money or living luxurious lives. Most either want to be artists, musicians, or DJs, which aren’t professions necessarily known to bring in the big bucks. Not once do the kids choose their career or do actions that profit for money in any way. The teenagers in the show do what they want and could care less about whether or not they are rich, so long as they are happy. Sadie, specifically, is a teenager that is shown to be one of the only ones that actually works and has a job. In the episode “Sadie Killer”, Sadie becomes overworked with her job and is no longer able to enjoy what a real teenager should, such as hanging out with friends, and is barely even able to relax or mourn over the loss of her best friend. By portraying the business world as something cruel and unforgiving, Steven Universe makes a strong stance that money should take second place to happiness, always.

On the other hand of the Neo-Marxist perspective, there is the anti-models. Mayor Dewey is seen as a lazy and greedy man that has the position and paycheck of mayor but has done little to nothing to help or change the town in return, and any time something goes wrong in the town, Dewey immediately pushes the blame off onto someone else. By showing the only person living the life of luxury in such a bad and undesirable light, the show portrays to its viewers that money only proves to make people greedier and that you don’t need it to be happy.

In conclusion, Steven Universe looks into the future of what it wants to teach its younger audience behaviors, actions, and morals wise. This show is still fairly young and it will be exciting to see how the kids that watch it today will grow up and change in the future.

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Racism: Back Like It Never Left

By: Lynessia Torunski

The racial prejudices and the false claims that racism has ended is considerably maintained through the movies and TV shows we watch. By evaluating the characterization and sequence of events in Get Out, I am certain to broaden and clarify the intentions of the film’s creator to reveal the new forms racism embodies in modern American society. According to Quartz Media, Get Out is the “highest-grossing original debut ever” within less than a year of its release and the film accomplished this without any huge celebrities (Epstein). This is typically unheard of with a low budget film, implying that the thriller is socially creative and strikes racial satire in an unfamiliar avenue.

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Daniel Kaluuya, star of the film, Get Out

Jordan Peele’s social thriller, Get Out, is unique because it goes after post-racial white liberals rather than the typical targets of southern white Americans. By going after this group, Peele did how that racism is still very much alive, although present in different ways than in the past. The true horror of the movie is in the system itself; something that cannot be heroically defeated at the end of a film. The message that the writer wants his viewers to take away from this movie is that race and class will always be a divider between Americans. Jordan Peele, the writer himself, tweeted an explanation of the Sunken Place saying that, “The Sunken Place means we’re marginalized. No matter how hard we scream, the system silences us” (Peele). Although the tweet was merely two sentences, Jordan Peele left us with our jaws on the ground. His use of inclusive pronouns creates a sense of personal sunken-ness and unifies the message sent by the movie in a
comprehensive way. We, the minorities of America, are “marginalized” and Peele wants us to recognize that our current position is no different than that of his character in the Sunken Place. This makes his purpose of the message he is sending clear to the audience and elicits a strong, interactive response, whether social or active.

The “myth of postracialism” is discussed by journalist Brent Staples, who dissects the movie Get Out by analyzing the significant scenes that have deeper interpretations in relation to racial tensions. An example of one of these scenes is the one where Rose (a white woman) is online browsing the half-naked pictures of black men to victimize next, but while doing so, she is eating colorful cereal from a bowl separate from the milk that is in a cup she sips from a straw. This depiction of separation of coloreds and whites while also indulging in the physique of black men behind the privacy of a computer screen illustrates the strange ways in which whites have allowed themselves and others to think their past racial prejudices have dissipated when in reality, they are merely understated because the racial practices are not as “harsh” as slavery and physical abuse. The title of his article (“The Movie ‘Get Out’ Is a Strong Antidote to the Myth Of ‘Postracial’ America”) itself actively showcases that Staples validates the significance of the film and how Peele has embodied the true racial problems through a movie that unfolds the preexisting stereotypes of black and white interactions and relationships.

The overarching paradigm of Get Out’s presentation lies in the whites’ Coagula procedure’s basis of using African-American bodies to implant their brains into and seemingly making even the radicals themselves believe it should flatter blacks rather than be seen as a mockery or deprecation of black culture and suffrage. This concept shows how blacks are supposed to be proud that their bodies would be the chosen vessels, even though this reasserts whiteness through the emphasis on black bodies being used to hold white brains. The movie loops weighty controversies like race and superiority with pop culture centered comedic references to extract positive feedback by young viewers. Not only did the film achieve its purpose of entertaining the audience, but also proved to be a forum for future actions taken in the prospect of racial division and inequality. Combining the thriller of the events with the humor of the situation and characters, scholars agree that “Horror and comedy are similar in that they create a visceral response, an entertainment-based response, and that is the way to affect real change and affect the world” (Stern). Get Out proved to be a perfect balance of the two genres and effectively conveyed the importance and urgency of challenging the rapidly growing dilemma and realness of the bigotry facing America.

One of the most important aspects of Get Out is its confrontation of racism today, not racism as it existed in the past. America is finally realizing the prevalence of the racial tensions. The presidency of Obama, multitude of mass hate crimes, police brutality, and election of Trump force the citizens to search for the root and have made this a prime time to discuss and analyze how media is confronting these issues.
A Dramatistic Analysis of Manhunt Unabomber

By: Tyler Jones

This will be a short look at a dramatistic analysis of the Discovery Channel’s Manhunt Unabomber and its portrayal of Theodore Kaczynski and his beliefs. This is interesting because a dramatistic analysis focuses on rule-breaking acts, and Ted Kaczynski was put on the national stage for his rule-breaking actions. An idea called the pentad, as based on the theories of Kenneth Burke, will be utilized to deconstruct the actions of Kaczynski.

To begin, a dramatic analysis of the character of Ted Kaczynski will be carried out, starting with the pentad. The pentad is a “macrostructural framework for analyzing life as a drama represented in texts,” and consists of the act, agent, agency, scene, and purpose (Sellnow 82). When it comes to Ted Kaczynski, the rule-breaking act is his vicious bombing campaign, which killed three people and injured many others (Amador and Reshmi 367). The agent was, of course, Theodore Kaczynski, a literal genius who attended Harvard at the age of sixteen and taught mathematics at the university level. The agency, which is the materials and tools used to carry out the rule-breaking behavior, consisted of junk pieces and assorted chemicals that were used to create mail bombs. These bombs were made to look like normal packages, and then combusted once they were opened by an unsuspecting victim. The scene is important in Kaczynski’s pentad, as it is the motivation for his rule-breaking behavior. The scene of the Unabomber’s act is America in the late twentieth century, a society that was beginning to embrace technology at an almost alarming rate. It was at this time that Neil Postman released a philosophical piece that focused on the rise of technology and the dangers of its ascendance. In this work, titled Amusing Ourselves to Death, he shared several values that closely resembled those of Kaczynski; for example, Postman said this:

There is no more disturbing consequence of the electronic and graphic revolution than this: that the world as given to us through television seems natural, not bizarre. For the loss of the sense of the strange is a sign of adjustment, and the extent to which we have adjusted is a measure of the extent to which we have changed (Postman 79).

This work has become one of the most important pieces of thinking on the subject of the rise of technology, and has been reprinted several times since its original publication. Its similarity to Kaczynski’s values is obvious when the quote above is compared with the first line of Kaczynski’s important manifesto, which says “the industrial revolution and its consequences have been a disaster for the human race” (Kaczynski 36). It is interesting to observe that these two well-known thinkers, regardless of the reason for their fame, were both so opposed to the rise of technology at the same time in America’s history. This speaks to some amount of validation present with respect to Kaczynski’s ideas, and shows that it was mainly his rule-breaking act that worked to demonize his views in the public eye.

With this in mind, the last component of the pentad is the purpose, which is “the explanation offered as to why the agent engaged in the rule-breaking behavior” (Sellnow 82). Kaczynski’s purpose behind his bombing campaign was to undermine and get revenge against the growing system in America that was supporting technological innovation and the commercialization of the country’s natural forests.

Another piece of this purpose, which is referred to as motive, denotes the argument that “makes the rule-breaking behavior justifiable” (Sellnow 82). Kaczynski’s motive was to alert the rest of society to the dangers of the process of industrialization, which he thought would end with the enslavement of humanity. This means that Kaczynski was, in his mind at least,
absolved from his guilt by the method of transcendence, which means that he justifies his rule-breaking actions by the belief that he was “following a higher calling” (Sellnow 83). Carmen and Gerald Zuk explored this idea in an article that discussed Kaczynski’s so-called delusion. They held that Kaczynski thought “the widest public must be reached, and any means to reach the widest public is held to be legitimate because of the importance of the message for mankind. Thus one can threaten life and not be personally responsible, in essence, because the end justifies the means” (Zuk and Zuk 331). This follows closely with the popular beliefs of society, which seem to hold that Kaczynski sees himself as god-like in his own mind.

Finally, because Kaczynski was made to pay for his rule-breaking behavior by being completely cut off from society for the rest of his life, he qualifies as a tragic hero, which is an agent who “must be punished in order to reenter society” (Sellnow 85). Kaczynski paid a permanent price for his action, attempting to alert society to the danger that it was getting itself into, and being casted out and treated as a threat.

In this portrayal of Kaczynski, Manhunt Unabomber manages to distance his beliefs from his actions, laying the foundation for a modern, objective reconsideration of his ideals. This may have been prompted by the preeminence of technology in our current society, and could be a starting point for an intellectual revolution on the subject. If society refuses to closely examine its relationship with technology, then Kaczynski’s fears of human enslavement may become reality, a risk that we should not be willing to take.


**Meaningful Rebellion: Analysis of Tiny Glowing Screens**

By: Artasia Jackson

Watsky, a slam poet turned hip hop artist, joined the hip hop revolution for promoting activism in young people through music, which can be seen through the analysis of his songs “Tiny Glowing Screens Pt. 1-3” from his albums Cardboard Castles and X Infinity. The theme for these three songs is finding the will and motivation to live and thrive amongst the vastness of the world in which we exist. Everything fits together like a puzzle, therefore we all matter; some of us just don’t realize it. Hip Hop has always been known as a rebellious art, similar to graffiti, and is on the same level as worldwide marches and protests. The question is then, how do these songs contribute to the Hip Hop/rap genre’s sense of activism and rebellion in young people? The new generation is the future, but it can’t move forward if the old generation is holding it back.


Watsky’s “Infinity” cover art
https://thefischy.deviantart.com/art/watsky-633498028

In order to answer this, the songs must be analyzed through the Illusion of Life (IOL) and Dramatistic lenses. The IOL is used, because hip hop’s influence is more than just what the artist is saying; if that were the case people would simply read poetry. Before the song can really be heard, it needs to be felt

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through the first chord and the prominent bass. It needs to be interesting and catchy, so that it can be remembered, shared, and grow. The dramatistic lens can be used to analyze how Watsky’s songs actually have the potential to influence more people and grow. The dramatistic perspective was the perfect perspective to use, because Watsky is such a divergent wordsmith that his rule breaking is so obvious to analyze and interpret. Death makes people uncomfortable, and depression scares people, but Watsky doesn’t beat around the bush. He comes right out and says it in so many different and creative ways that it’s hard to not accept it as the truth. According to him, the meaning of life is basically what the world, meaning you, make it. Between this idea of the meaning of life, and a beat that gets stuck in your head, hip hop can encourage people to diverge from the norm and connect people from all walks of life. It’s perceived as this great force of nature to a lot of people, but what really is hip hop? According to Jared Green, in his book *Rap and Hip Hop: Examining Pop Culture*, “…ultimately there can be no satisfying answer to gather this culture’s complexities under one single definition” (22). Hip hop isn’t just a genre of music; it’s the creation spawned from blues, jazz, gospel, the African and African American cultures, and the representation of the old transforming into something new and exciting.

![Watsky’s “Watsky” cover art](http://georgewatsky.com/)

The modern hip hop known today started in NYC during the mid to late 1970s as a form of recreation before it was considered “hip hop.” Looking further back, it began in the 1960s as a way to “[respond] to the unsettled times...” and act as slave protest music (Green 32). However, hip hop didn’t just appear during one time period, it was born over time from. During the times of the slave trade music was used as the common language between the African people and the African American slaves taken from their homeland to make them still feel connected to one another. “In slave protest music we find examples of early diasporic antecedents for the style and messages of rap.” (Green 27). These songs were the stories of the homeland, the old culture, and the old beliefs that they didn’t want to be forgotten, so they sung them as they worked in the fields and rejoiced with one another.

As stated above, hip hop is more than just a genre of music, it’s a culture. One that breaks the barrier between old and new. Since it is such a big and influential force in the world there is much debate over the messages it delivers. There is so much talk of drugs and sex in so many different ways. Green acknowledges the widely debated question, does rap encourage these behaviors, simply report these actions, or both? “…the music has emerged as a cultural force...” (80). This is why hip hop needs to be discussed and analyzed. The influence it has over the world is vast, but for some critics it’s hard to get past the violence of it all to see all the good it does, “The rap community gives back to their community more than any music group that you can think of” (Green 81). The more that people learn about and understand the story behind the music, the more positive influences will come from it.

Future questions that can come from this research are: “How do other music genres compare to hip hop/rap?” and “Why would a comparison be beneficial to explaining the gravity of hip hop/rap?” Two other perspectives that could be used to analyze hip hop are the Neo-marxist and feminist perspective, because these focus on the effect it has on the different groups of the population versus the community as a whole. Lastly, something that will be a question for a long time is “What is hip hop?” Hip hop has many layers, and with each question posed one comes off, but as hip hop ushers in a new age it gains more. The essence of hip hop can be seen in Watsky’s songs. They are bold and defy the norms in order to get the audience thinking outside of their personal box and seeing the bigger picture.
Covert Affairs: A Feminist Analysis

By: Adrianne Clark

When analyzing the CIA drama Covert Affairs from a feminist perspective, Annie Walker, the main character, appears to oppose masculine hegemony, or the “taken-for-granted” assumptions in society about typical roles for men and women. Upon closer inspection, however, the show actually represents an oppositional reading, where it supports masculine hegemonies even while appearing to oppose them. Annie Walker is recruited to the CIA even before finishing her training, supposedly because of her prowess with languages, and she seems to gain prestige within the agency quickly because of her abilities. Upon closer inspection, however, Walker is over-sexualized, her abilities are downplayed, and her presence in the agency is largely a ploy to reach her ex-boyfriend. Because of this, Covert Affairs is an example of an occluded preferred reading. The very elements of the program that seem to oppose masculine hegemonies, actually are in support. From the very first scene, Walker is pictured in a red button-down shirt, normally a symbol of power. Upon closer inspection, however, viewers see that her button-down shirt is unbuttoned far down her chest, giving a slight glimpse of her bra. Such is the case multiple times in the program. Whenever Walker is pictured in a power suit or other professional work attire, it is always sexualized, even in a work environment. When her assignment requires her to pose as a call girl, Walker asks her boss if she must wear a costume. Her boss responds that “Hookers in DC are pretty conservative. What you’re wearing now is fine,” overtly implying the sexuality even of Walker’s professional attire (“Pilot.”). Bonnie Oppenheimer from the Mississippi University for Women and her colleagues from Mississippi State University assert that “attire has been a traditional way to assign power or weakness to female characters” (Oppenheimer 164). Walker’s attire assigns power to her while simultaneously sexualizing her. During her second opportunity in the episode to pose as a call girl, Walker returns to the hotel in a tight-fitting but still relatively conservative dress. This time, however, she raises the pitch of her voice, giggles, acts ditsy, calls herself a “good girl” and even pats one of the detective’s backsides. This behavior provides her a way onto the crime scene and a believable cover. There are many more instances in the show where Walker is sexualized. As she walks off, one of her coworkers groans and remarks how he loves the “kitten heels.” She even drops to her knees in front of a detective to retrieve her shoes, but his face shows he might have thought of something else. Though the show presents all these instances as necessary for her performance in her job, supporters of radical feminism find fault with the hegemony regarding women’s bodies being necessarily sexualized for their jobs.

USA Network’s original series Covert Affairs

The Pilot also raises questions of why the CIA recruited Walker at all. On the outside, her abilities seem to justify her recruitment. She is an incredible linguist, fluent in six languages and either proficient in or with a rudimentary knowledge of many more. Also, as shown in the Pilot, she displays incredible ability in other areas. When at the Farm, the CIA training facility, Walker is shown to be the first to volunteer for a dangerous skydiving test, and her trainer tells her that she is the top female scorer in the driving course and the top scorer in
over a decade on the deception course. Though obviously able to perform well, a major plot point in Covert Affairs involves her recruitment as it is connected to her ex-boyfriend, a rogue agent. The first scene of the Pilot shows Walker taking a polygraph about whether her love life will affect her work in the CIA. While she answers, the scene of Walker in a powerful, professional position switches to the image of her jogging on the beach in a bikini with this man. Their sex scene, though not graphic, obviously depicts passion. When he leaves her the next morning, she is pictured heartbroken and crying. At the end of the episode, she fights with a dangerous man who quickly overpowers her and prepares to shoot. Suddenly the ex-boyfriend intervenes, kills the man and disappears before Walker can speak to him. Covert Affairs tries to oppose hegemony by showing how she has risen from the heartbreak to become a successful operative, but it also shows that, as a woman, she needs saving. In a conversation after this scene, her bosses reveal that they need her to keep taking assignments so her ex-boyfriend will keep appearing, making it easier for them to track his movements. Walker is also later pictured reminiscing over her ex while alone in her room. Not only has she not totally overcome heartbreak, but even her job is more closely related to her relationship with him than her personal ability. In her feminist analysis of CSI: Crime Scene Investigation, Carlen Lavigne addresses this phenomenon of using a character “as a means of getting to the male protagonist.” She uses the term “women in refrigerator’s syndrome” created by Gail Simone to show how female characters often play a greater role in relation to a male character than they do individually, as is the case in Covert Affairs (Lavigne 391). Though Covert Affairs seems to place a woman in a strong, capable role, closer inspection proves her position may not be available to her solely because of her abilities.

USA Networks original series Covert Affairs
https://i.ytimg.com/vi/FcI4ptl_sY/maxresdefault.jpg

By placing a female in the lead role of a crime show, Covert Affairs appears to oppose hegemony. When viewers more closely examine the messages sent about females, however, they realize that it displays an occluded oppositional reading. Annie Walker’s outfits, though professional, sexualize her by using her body as a tool for her job. She is also objectified by her bosses, who hired her less for her abilities and more for her connection to her ex-boyfriend. Though the show offers improvement to general aversion to female leads in crime shows, it supports hegemonies regarding sexualization.


"Pilot." Covert Affairs, season 1, episode 1, NBC, 10 October 2017. Amazon Prime, https://www.amazon.com/Covert-Affairs-Season-1/dp/B003VPK1DW.

The Portrayal of women in Game of Thrones

By: Matthew Murphy

Game of Thrones is a popular fantasy show on HBO based on George R.R. Martin’s book series “A Song of Ice and Fire.” The show takes place in a middle age setting with a few twists, some of which are dragons and zombies. The seven kingdoms of Westeros are united under a symbolic and literal Iron Throne, which represents the all-powerful monarch. The show follows various families and individuals in their fight for survival and control the Iron Throne. Due to the fact that
Game of Thrones is one of the most popular television shows at the moment, it has the potential to be one of the most influential shows as well. This potential to influence is what makes Game of Thrones a very important popular culture artifact to analyze. This essay will examine Game of Thrones’ portrayal of women using the feminist rhetorical analysis lens to answer the question: does Game of Thrones support or oppose masculine hegemony? Before diving in to the question it is important to understand the gender roles in the show.

As expressed by Reeves, “Westeros often relegates women to a domestic role, managing the home and tending to the needs of men” (Reeves 5). Contrasting the women, the men are typically the protectors and breadwinners. Various claims have been made regarding whether Game of Thrones is a feminist text or not as is expressed by Ferreday, “Discussions of the show display, then, a certain confusion about what feminism is, and how we ‘know’ if a given media representation is anti-feminist; GoT seems to invoke particularly polarized claims that it either is a feminist text, or that it is extremely antifeminist and oppressive to women (QTD in Frankel)” (Ferreday 24). Differing from the anti-feminist perspective, the feminist perspective can be represented by the quote “GoT shows empowered women with power and political influence, and therefore a big step forwards in media depiction of women. An important aspect around these women is the fact that, despite the misogyny they face in a patriarchal society, they still achieve empowerment ” (Eriksen 55 ). The antifeminist perspective can be represented by the quote “women generally wield very little substantive authority in Westeros” (Clapton, William, and Shepard 10). Using the feminist rhetorical analysis lens to look at Game of Thrones, specifically the female characters, it becomes clear that the show opposes masculine hegemony with the strong, intelligent, and crafty female characters breaking free of oppression.

The first Character we will be analyzing is arguably the most important character of the whole show, Daenerys Targaryen. As stated in Lessons from Westeros: Gender and Power in Game of Thrones, “We suggest that it is precisely Daenerys’ internalization of masculinized features that characterizes her development as a ruler and wielder of authority” (Clapton and Shepard 13). This describes why Daenerys is an example of a liberal feminist; she takes on masculine traits. Being a liberal feminist means that she does not follow the stereotypical gender roles expected of a woman and instead takes on the traditionally masculine behaviors of assertiveness and leadership. Most pop-culture texts do not portray women as leaders of armies or various city-states, but Daenerys is portrayed in this way and very quickly becomes the most powerful person in the world of Game of Thrones. However, she was not always the powerful woman that is seen in the later seasons of the show; she was originally a weak and oppressed child in the shadow of her abusive older brother. In her process of evolving from a weak child to the most powerful person in the world of Game of Thrones, Daenerys goes through her own altered version of the American waves of feminism. The first wave of feminism in the United States was the push for voting rights to give women a voice. Daenerys ’ version of this first wave was becoming the Khaleesi of the Dothraki. By becoming the Khaleesi, she was given a voice and a degree of power over the Dothraki. The second stage of feminism in the United States was the push for equal rights in all regards for women. Daenerys’ version of this stage was her rise to power over the Unsullied and the city-state of Astapor, in which she became the leader of the thousands of people. The third wave of feminism in the United States was the broadening the fight for
equal rights outside of women’s issues to all types of oppression. Daenerys’ version of this was her freeing the slaves and fighting for the end of all slavery. The gradual shift from being weak to powerful is what makes Daenerys not only a character that is likeable and relatable but also a powerful feminist icon. Because Daenerys went through oppression and came out on top, she can be a light in the darkness leading others to believe in themselves and to break free of the chains of oppression.

The question this essay set out to answer was: does Game of Thrones support or oppose masculine hegemony? Overall, Game of Thrones opposes masculine hegemony through the use of strong female characters, namely Daenerys Targaryen. Daenerys Targaryen is a strong symbol of gender non-conformity as she excels in a male dominated role. As Daenerys progressed through her version of American feminist movements (gaining a voice, becoming a leader, and freeing thousands of slaves), her assertive nature and powerful leadership skills were shown to be far better than any other leader in the world of Game of Thrones. If the audience accepts the moral presented that women have a place in stereotypically male dominated roles, the idea of women in leadership positions will become more commonplace, leading to men and women being more equal. Game of Thrones’ opposition of masculine hegemony is a strong addition to the cultivation of the feminist movement’s message of equality for all people.


