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Editorial: On Media Literacy, Power, and Representation

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On Media Literacy, Power, and Representation

As popular culture scholars and enthusiasts who recognize the usefulness of media in all its forms, we know the stories we tell and those we consume are always complicated by questions of power and representation: How we choose to narrate such stories (including who gets to tell these) matters. How can we be responsible consumers and creators of media? And how can we, as educators, simultaneously draw on media sources as teaching tools to help students relate to abstracted topics while complicating and problematizing media? As Stuart Hall (1981) notes,

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

This profound statement underscores the responsibility we hold as consumers and creators of media. Media is not only a reflection of society; it is a powerful tool for shaping perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs, and often functions to naturalize hegemony.

Thus, media literacy must extend beyond mere the use of popular culture or other media sources to ground theory. Though this, in itself, is important as media can and does help us reflect on how theory connects to our lives and communities. In the classroom, the inclusion of media can help make topics more relatable and tangible for students. We also have the opportunity, and indeed the obligation, to critically analyze media content, understand its underlying messages, and recognize its impact in maintaining or resisting norms and hegemonic ideologies. By doing so, we can become more informed consumers of media, as well as responsible creators and advocates for a more inclusive and representative media landscape that can shape culture towards more just futures. As teachers, this also elevates our task from simply using media as a teaching aid to engaging with it as an important instrument for social change. Classrooms can be sites of imagination and resistance. As such, our classrooms become critical laboratories for exploring and challenging the dynamics of power and representation in media, fostering a generation of learners who are equipped to navigate and shape the ever-evolving media-saturated world they inhabit.

The articles featured in this issue explore the very possibilities and tensions of engaging the intersections of media literacy, power, representation, and pedagogy. In our first featured article, "‘This is music!’: What Stranger Things’ Eddie Munson Reveals About the Power of Metal," Ashley Butterworth Brumbelow argues that though "The wide reach of digital technology has further diversified student perspectives in the contemporary classroom... this diversity is often not reflected in school curricula." Butterworth Brumbelow thus makes the case for integrating more media, and more diverse forms of media, into classrooms as potential windows to subjugated perspectives that invite disruptions to the status quo. In particular, this article explores the potential for challenging conventional social norms, engaging marginalized students, and teaching themes of nonconformity and social justice through a case study where metal music from Stranger Things is integrated into secondary English curricula.

Perez & Vado

In our second featured article, “Gender, Age, Class, and Racial Stereotypes and Power Relations in Television Ads: 2011-13 vs 2021-22,” Thomas Clark and Julie Stewart provide a helpful framework and resources that faculty and diversity, equity, and inclusion experts can use to dissect and teach about how advertisements create and reinforce social stereotypes. By analyzing stereotypical depictions of gender, class, age, and race across eight television ads from 2011-2013 and 2021-2022, Clark and Stewart draw on the concepts of intersectionality and intercategory complexity “to help gain a deeper understanding of how various stereotypes operate and intersect in specific ads over time.” In so doing, Clark and Stewart reveal the enduring power and ubiquity of stereotypes in media and importantly call for their disruption and undoing vis-a-vis the power of critical interrogation.

In our third featured article, “Three Years of Misinformation: A Case Study of Information Literacy Methods,” Elizabeth Zak emphasizes the importance of adapting media literacy to keep up with constantly evolving media. Zak delineates how misinformation evolves alongside the internet, challenging the effectiveness of information literacy methods like the CRAAP test, RADAR framework, and SIFT method. Zak’s study emphasizes the need for ongoing research to understand trends in misinformation, counteract increasingly sophisticated forms of misinformation including visual deceptions like deepfakes, and predict potential future threats.

Finally, in our fourth featured article, “The Art of Inclusion: Theatre’s Contribution to Popular Culture Literacy for Students with Intellectual Disabilities,” Catherine R.P. King provides an example of how to integrate popular culture in the classroom through their study on integrating theatre into special education curricula. King uses case studies to examine the versatility and effectiveness of using theatre in special education to empower students with [dis]abilities. Integrating theatre into special education curricula can not only provide students with opportunities to learn social and life navigation skills but also enable students to engage with popular culture in critical and meaningful ways. As such, King argues that integrating theatre into special education can have a transformative effect on students.

The diverse perspectives and methodologies presented in these studies collectively emphasize the vital role of media literacy in resisting and transforming systems of power. Media literacy can equip us with the critical and adaptable tools necessary to navigate our complex and ever-changing media landscape. Each study, in its unique way, contributes to a broader understanding of how media shapes and is shaped by societal norms and power dynamics. The studies also show that by incorporating varied forms of media into our curricula, we can not only enrich students’ educational experience but cultivate a generation of critical thinkers and change-makers who are capable of using media to challenge norms and contribute to the creation of a more equitable and just society.

Barbara Perez
Managing Editor

Karina Vado, PhD
Associate Editor

A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR IN CHIEF:

With this issue, I am delighted to share with you the expansion of our Editorial Team. We are honored to have Karina Vado take on the new leadership position of Associate Editor. Her expertise in popular culture and pedagogy has added significantly to Dialogue's commitment to research and conversations around popular culture and pedagogy. Additionally, we have brought on two excellent colleagues to the team. Barbara Perez joins us as Managing Editor and brings specialization in Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, as well as Latinx Environmentalisms in comparative studies. And Tyler Sheldon joins us as Assistant Managing Editor bringing specialization in poetry and popular culture, taking on the

If you would like to join us, feel free to reach out with ideas regarding innovative and emerging directions for popular culture and pedagogy (e.g., Video Game Editor, Film Review Editor, Podcast Review Editor). Looking forward to hearing from you!

Anna CohenMiller, PhD

Editor in Chief

Co-Founding Editor



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