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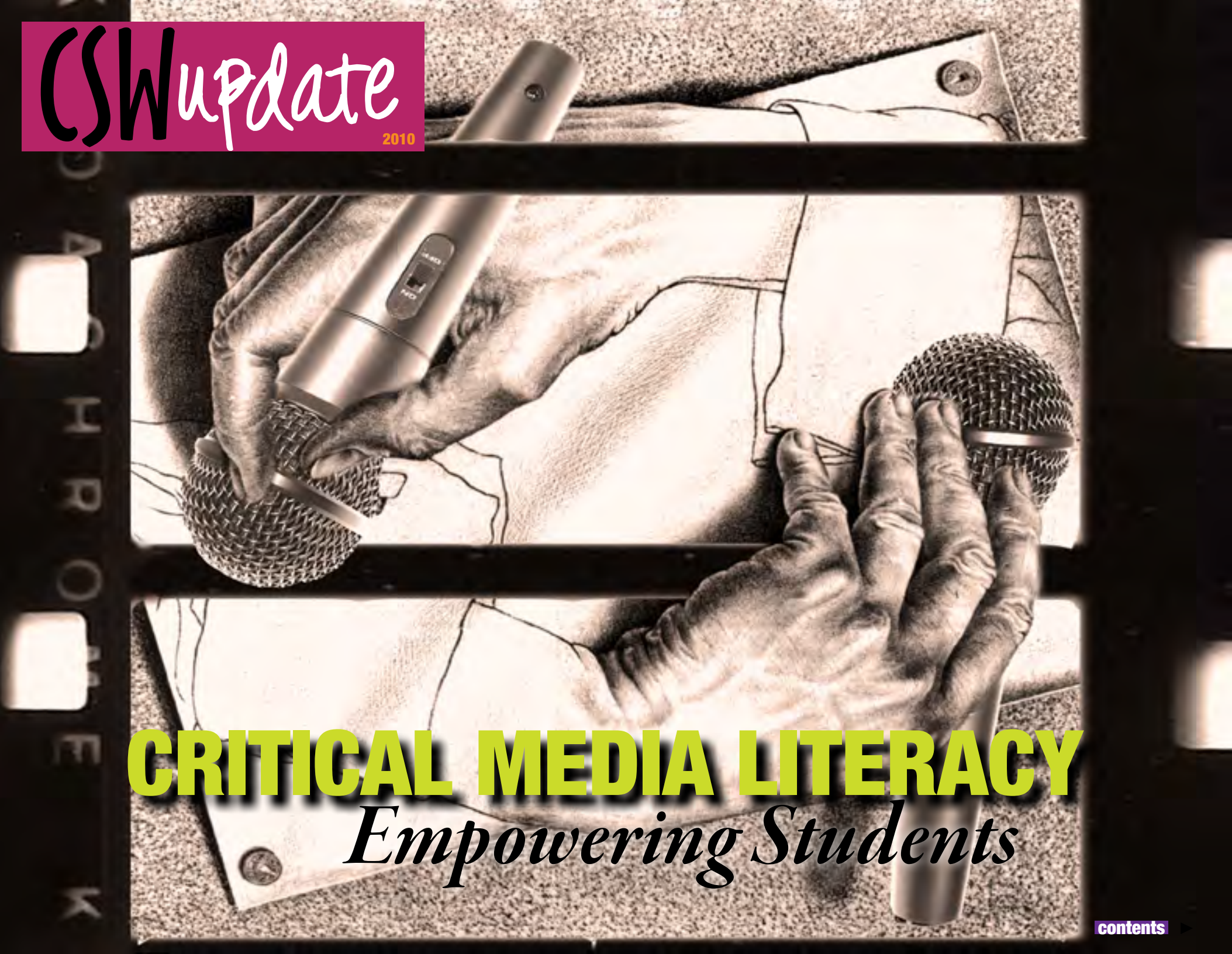

CRITICAL MEDIA LITERACY

Empowering Students

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Empowering Students

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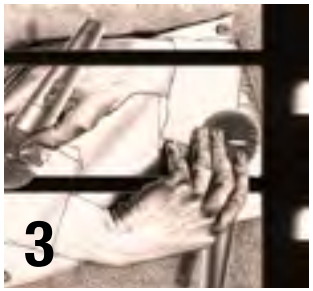

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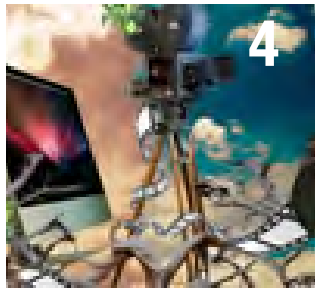

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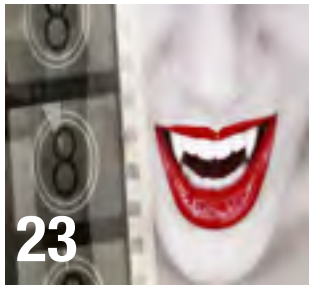

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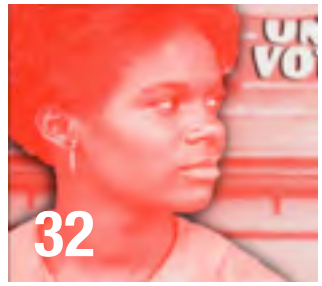

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Note from the Editors

I TOOK this project on because doing so would allow me to show my appreciation not only for Dr. Rhonda Hammer but also for her life-changing class. I benefited greatly because this class broadened my perspective, empowered me, and helped me to discover my true calling. When I was presented with the option of working on a CSW newsletter issue that celebrates he work as well as her class, I seized the opportunity without hesitation. I hope that special issue gives the reader a sense of this amazing course and its exceptional teacher. I also would like to give a special thanks to Zachary Andrews for extending his artistic talents to this project, as he designed all of the graphics accompanying each of the articles.

- Laura Nava

THIS SPECIAL ISSUE never would have been possible without the contributions of students who have taken my course in critical media literacy but who are also involved in other pursuits. That they found time in their busy schedules and lives to do so is one of the greatest compliments any instructor could receive.

I thank Laura Nava for taking on an editorial role in this endeavor. I was delighted when she contacted me last year to update me on her current media career as well as to direct me to an extraordinary peer website she has developed (MessyMedia.Tumblr.Com.) She also agreed to present excerpts from her media work to new class members and to provide advice on media projects and tips on employment opportunities. Her excitement and passion led me to ask her whether she would assist with this special issue. Little did she suspect, however, that it would be a complicated and involved process. The successful completion of this special edition is, in large part, due to her dedication and continuing efforts, which included persuading and working with Zach Andrews, who is responsible for the remarkable and eclectic illustrations included in this issue.

Laura and I would also like to express our gratitude to the UCLA Center for the Study of Women, whose commitment to research, scholarship, and community relations allows for the periodic publication of newsletters devoted to different courses. We are especially grateful to the Managing Editor, Brenda Johnson-Grau, for her encouragement, support, patience, and facilitation of this issue.

This special edition features personal essays and commentaries related to my course Critical Media Literacy and the Politics of Representation: Theory and Production, which one student has described as a "uniquely challenging ten-week course" wherein "students integrate media literacy theory with documentary production methods, culminating in the completion of a media project—usually a short DVD video—that examines some aspect of social inequality."

- Rhonda Hammer

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Where Theory Meets Practice

BY RHONDA HAMMER

Where Theory Meets Practice

BY RHONDA HAMMER

The greatest digital divide is between those who can read and write with media and those who can't.

– Elizabeth M. Daley, Dean, USC School of Cinematic Arts

BECAUSE our society is immersed in media 24/7, it is essential that students learn how to understand, interpret, and criticize the meaning and messages of media culture. My undergraduate/graduate course on "Critical Media Literacy and the Politics of Representation: Theory and Production," which is cosponsored by the Departments of Women's Studies and Education at UCLA and which was introduced in 2002, is designed to meet this challenge through the study of scholarly writings, media analysis, and the creation of media texts. This course is a response to what has been described as a literacy crisis, especially with regard to the diversity of media forums, which mediate our everyday lives. The success of this course is best expressed by the students themselves, in the articles in this special issue and in their media projects (which are accessible at http://women.ucla.edu/faculty/hammer/cm178/).

In more than twenty-five years of teaching, some of my greatest pleasures have been the demonstrations of critical thinking and creative

talents of my students. This has been especially rewarding given how many of them have been able to express themselves regarding their abilities to think outside of the box, which can be articulated through media productions (and is hardly exclusive to written papers). It is an honor and a privilege to be able to do for a living what one enjoys, and in this sense I am especially fortunate. In fact, I continue to keep in touch with some students who have taken various incarnations of my media and production courses over the last fifteen years and am delighted to report that their achievements, in media and academia, are impressive. Moreover, it is heartening to hear from so many that the media literacy courses empowered them to pursue their dreams and find employment that allows them to use their creativity.

Hence, teaching critical media literacy can be, as the eminent scholar and insurgent pedagogue, bell hooks (1994) describes it, a liberatory experience for both teacher and student. Yet, the scarcity of culturally critical media literacy classes, especially those that involve media production, owes much to the general lack of credibility afforded such courses. This dearth is also owing to limited technological support afforded such courses. As noted media and cultural studies scholar David Buckingham puts it:

> I am frustrated by the fact that teachers of media education still seem to be insufficiently recognized and supported. Despite the generally inhospitable climate, there is a great deal of excellent work being done in the field by highly dedicated teachers and committed students. Media education generates a degree of enthusiasm and enjoyment that is all too rare in contemporary schooling; and it offers a form of educational practice that is not just engaging for students, but also intellectually rigorous, challenging and relevant to their everyday lives.
>
> Without being at all uncritical of what goes on, I believe this is something we should affirm and celebrate. (2003)

In this introductory essay, I will argue for the necessity of these types of courses at all levels of education and briefly describe the history and format of my course.

CRITICAL MEDIA LITERACY AND PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

The founding fathers and unsung mothers of the American Revolution—one of the first successful emancipations from colonial imperialism—instituted a system of participatory democracy and government by and for the people. Indeed, the very nature of our democracy is dependent upon education that produces, what Thomas Jefferson described as, an "informed citizenry." Although the U.S. was built in part upon the genocide of indigenous peoples and although citizenship was initially reserved for a privileged few, it is through education and belief in the justice of a true democracy that many radical reforms have been provoked and instituted by "the people." This has included the kinds of coalition politics between members of those who held some degree of power with Othered, enslaved, and marginalized people, which is the basis of the kind of democratic tradition that was envisioned by many who were characterized as revolutionaries in their own time. It is also essential to note that it was often students who were part of the vanguard of these social and political movements. Unfortunately, as many experts argue, our participatory democracy is in danger of being replaced by a neoliberal "plutocratic" one which Donald Lazere—a leading cultural critic—defines as a capitalist economy which is ruled by the rich under an undemocratic government (2009: 277). Hence the need for engaged pedagogy and critical thinking within our educational systems is crucial:

> As bell hooks astutely reminds us: "Educational systems have been the primary place where free speech, dissent, and pluralistic opinions are valued in theory and practice."

William Boyer, another progressive scholar expands upon the importance of "citizen education" in which "people in and out of school have information that will help them regain control over government and laws affecting the economy" ((2003: xiii). Yet, contemporary "democratic education is being undermined as the interests of big business and corporate capitalism encourage students to see education solely as a means to achieve material success" (hooks, 2010: 16). hooks, goes on to warn that such thinking is at odds with engaged, progressive pedagogy and

that much of contemporary so-called education "makes acquiring information more important than gaining knowledge or learning how to think critically" (hooks, 2010: 16).

> The future of democratic education will be determined by the extent to which democratic values can triumph over the spirit of oligarchy that seeks to silence diverse voices, prohibit free speech, and deny citizens access to education. (hooks, 2010: 17)

Hence we must transcend the blinders of anti-democratic, neoliberal, supercapitalistic ideological myths in which money and power rather than human rights, social justice, and the common good are the most important measure of social worth. It is therefore the responsibility of progressive educators, students and citizens:

> …to honor education as the practice of freedom because we understand that democracy thrives in an environment where learning is valued, where the ability to think is the mark of responsible citizenship, where free speech and the will to dissent is accepted and encouraged. (hooks, 2010: 17)

In fact, escalating illiteracy, the deteriorization and privatization of education, as well as the prohibitive costs of opportunities for postsecondary learning, further ensures that a participatory democracy is under siege. For example in a "2006 study supported by the Pew Charitable Trust found that 50% of college seniors scored below 'proficient' levels on a test that required them to do such basic tasks as understand the arguments of newspaper editorials or compare credit-card offers" (Nemko, 2008). Furthermore, according to the same study only 20% had basic quantitative skills, while a 2006 federally commissioned report found that: "Over the past decade, literacy among college graduates has actually declined….According to the most recent National Assessment of Adult Literacy, for instance, the percentage of college graduates deemed proficient in prose literacy has actually declined from 40 percent to 31 percent in the past decade."

Yet this is not surprising if one considers that it is the corporate mass media, which has been elevated to the leading hegemonic source of educator in this country. Hence it would seem to be only common sense that we learn to critically engage media. Indeed, given the nature of our contemporary society and global world, it is crucial that all citizens become literate in media culture, emergent new media, and developing technology. Many argue that universities have a responsibility to provide students with such pedagogical skills. Critical media literacy courses should be a part of required curricula within all levels of educational institutions. The need for such courses is especially urgent in view of the escalating amount of time students engage with multiple forms of media.

For example, according to a 2005 study, many 8 to 18 year olds are devoting 8½ hours per day to media-related activity, while college students ages 18 to 24 spend "an average of 11 hours a day involved in some sort of media or digital communications" (Rideout et al, 2005). A more recent 2010 study, by the nonprofit Kaiser Family Foundation, reports that media consumption by 8 to 18 year olds has radically increased to the equivalent of 10 hours and 45 minutes per day because of media multitasking. Given that members of an entire generation are dedicating more time to entertainment media/digital interaction than to that required of a full-time job, it would seem to make sense that schools develop curricula to assist students to better understand and navigate what is considered to be the most powerful and influential ideological institution mediating our everyday experiences and perceptions of the world.

Henry Giroux (2010) argues that young people are under assault by "a global market economy that punishes all youth by treating them as markets and commodities," which, in turn, "commercializes every aspect of kid's lives." He adds:

> Corporations have hit gold with the new media and can inundate young people directly with their market-driven values, desires and identities, all for which are removed from the mediation and watchful eyes of parents and other adults.

Yet in the U.S. not only do teachers not receive adequate training in media literacy but many parents, administrators, and government officials consider media education—especially since the "no child left behind" edict—as unnecessary and define it as a "frill," which is hardly the case such in countries as Britain, Canada, and Australia (Beach, 2007: 1). Thus, within most schools and postsecondary institutions in the United States, it is generally afforded little if any credibility.

Furthermore, recent cutbacks at many colleges and universities have affected those courses and workshops where students learn the necessary rudimentary technological skills they need for pursuing critical media literacy projects.

The failure to teach students these necessary skills is often justified through undocumented highly inflated assumptions concerning students alleged digital abilitiesh:

> While popular rhetoric would have us believe that young users are generally savvy with digital media, data…clearly shows that considerable variation exists among fully wired college students when it comes to various Internet use (Hargittai, 2010: 108).

Hence, we cannot assume that students are already literate in even the most basic technological and digital skills. Indeed, the myths about this competency can prove particularly problematic, as Siva Vaidhy Anathan (2008) asserts:

> As a professor, I am in the constant company of 18-23 year olds. I have taught at both public and private, and I have to report that levels of comfort with, understanding of, and dexterity with digital technology, varies greatly within every class. Yet it has not changed in the aggregate in more than 10 years…Every class has a handful of people with amazing skills and a large number who can't deal with computers at all.

She goes on to argue that dominant myths concerning students media and digital literacy skills are elitist and even bigoted, in that it presume that all students have access to and/or experiences with digital technology. In fact, there are numerous reliable studies, and progressive pedagogical experts, that demonstrate a escalating racial, ethnic, gender, and class divide, or digital inequality, in relation to new technological literacies, including computer science, especially between disenfranchised and affluent youth. This is associated with, but not exclusive to, the schools they attend, and their family's educational background, class, and lifestyle.

In fact, sociologist Eszther Harfitti found that a majority of college freshman lack technological fluency and basic web related skills, which is related, in large part, to socioeconomic status. Demographically speaking, her study demonstrated that women, "students of Hispanic origin, African American students, and students who had lower levels of education were lacking in these abilities" (see Rampell, 2008). This is also not surprising given that generally marginalized students (especially Latino/a and African Americans, as well as many women) are not encouraged in their high schools to pursue postsecondary studies in computer science or fields that emphasize digital "knowledge-intensive abilities" (Margolis, 2008; Hargittai, 2008). Anathan asserts:

> Talk of a "digital generation" or people who are "born digital" willfully ignores the vast range of skills, knowledge, and experience of many segments of society. It ignores the needs and perspectives of those young people who are not socially or financially privileged. It presumes a level playing field and equal access to time, knowledge, skills, and technologies. The ethnic, national, gender, and class biases of any sort of generation talk are troubling. And they could not be more obvious than when discussing assumptions about digital media.

For those students who are seemingly literate in new media, study reveals that what they are familiar with is entertainment, gaming, gambling, and other interactive dimensions. These same students often lack the abilities to critically assess the media that occupies so much of their lives and relationships and to make informed decisions regarding the credibility of the information that they access. David Parry, a Professor of Emerging Media and Communications, argues that "students are not digital natives who possess some unique set of skills whereby they can magically manipulate the network and gadgets to do whatever they want with outstanding acumen…but rather they are;

> ...for the large part unreflective about the way they use these network technologies, and what is more are unreflective about the ways in which their use (or our use) has already been historically determined and shaped, an unreflective response which gives up power and control over to these systems.

Although it is essential that all citizens become literate in the employment of new media technology, this kind of knowledge is not necessarily empowering or characteristic of a more democratic participatory education, as is demonstrated by—what many believe to be—an overabundance of boring, uncritical PowerPoint presentations. Rather it is imperative that we

distinguish between media literacy, which can tend to celebrate the institutions of commercial media, in contrast to critical media literacy and alternative modes of production, which provoke critical thinking and practical applications to contextual relations. It is this distinction that characterizes this course and the critical media literacies that so many students manage to employ in not only their class assignments but in many dimensions of their everyday lives.

It is in this sense that proficiencies in critical media literacy must be no different from those required of critical thinking and inquiry in any academic, popular, or political pursuits. Doing so necessarily includes the engagement of "the politics of representation," which is loosely described as the manner in which dominant and marginalized people are represented in the media. Indeed, many of the students in my course are particularly interested in diversities and differences and or exclusions of representation, as well as social justice issues. Given that my own background and experiences are within the educational documentary domain, most students produce such montage-style video projects (although some have also produced websites or powerpoint presentations).

Hence, I argue for the importance of teaching critical media literacy from a perspective that seeks to empower students by giving them abilities to read, critique, and produce media, which teaches them to become active participants rather than "sophisticated consumers" in a highly hypermediated culture and society (Jhally and Lewis, 2006: 225). Given the power of the contemporary media and consciousness industry in that it shapes "virtually every sphere of public and political life" (ibid. 244), it is more important than ever—as Marshall McLuhan coined the phrase almost 50 years ago—to "understand media" (1965).

Teaching critical media literacy through production constitutes a new form of pedagogy in which students become more aware of how media is constructed, conveys dominant ideologies, and is an often unrecognized but nonetheless powerful source of education. These critical skills not only make students aware of how their own views of the world are mediated by media but also enable them to learn how to critically read, engage, and decode media culture. This further empowers them to give voice to their ideas and visions in a diversity of ways and invests them with the communications skills and abilities to both work cooperatively and assert their own individuality. And given the context of the brave new world in which we live—one recently transformed by the corporate neoliberal, economic meltdown of 2008, in which the employment opportunities of the past are hardly as plentiful, and entrance to graduate and professional programs are highly restricted, expensive, and no longer guarantee a successful career—critical media literacies become a mandatory requirement for understanding and engagement within this complex sociopolitical economic system. It is within this context that I will briefly describe the development and structure of my course, "Critical Media Literacy and the Politics of Representation: Theory and Production."

DESCRIPTION OF THE COURSE

The course is comprised of a 3-hour seminar and 90-minute weekly lab (although the bulk of the production work takes place outside of the scheduled periods). Students are required to complete three technical assignments, a group final media production, and a final paper that describes key concepts of critical media literacy, from readings, lectures, and media presented in the seminar (and available on reserve) in relation to their group project.

Since this class is one of the only classes, outside the film department, to incorporate the teaching of hands-on production skills, the course depends upon a multiplicity of UCLA resource centers and a variety of computer and technical experts. Indeed, contrary to popular myth, students' abilities to master these skills are dependent not only on the technology itself but on information technology professionals who teach the students appropriate use of the equipment (often in conjunction with websites). And although some universities and colleges have one central onstructional media center to provide such resources, UCLA does not. It has taken years to develop an infrastructure to support the course. The technical needs of the class are met through various on-campus units: OID/AV (Office of Instructional Development, Audio Visual), which provides some of the video cameras; CLICC (Computer Library Instructional Computing Commons), which provides a state-of-the-art classroom for lab sections, computers, and training specialists, who assist students with use of the equipment; ETU (Education

Technology Unit for School of Education, which makes available a media classroom for the seminar section of course, camcorders, computer lab, and two technicians to teach students iMovie and web page production in the labs. In addition Women's Studies purchased four camera kits (which include camcorders, microphones, tripods, and accessories), two through an OID equipment grant, and two from their own funds, as well as a computer for editing (also through an OID grant) for use by this class; SSC (Social Science Computing), which helped design and hosts the course website and a website for streaming the student projects. (Given this cornucopia of technical resources, on which the course depends, it is not surprising that students must become immediately fluent in this discourse of corporate-style acronyms, and what each one symbolizes). Indeed, students are provided with a chart so that they can become fluent in this specialized discourse: for example, "pick up the JVC from WS and wireless mic from ETU and bring it to CLICC lab, for editing workshop with Heath."

The course also requires a teaching assistant (TA) with production experience, which OID funded for a nonrenewable, three-year period. Since then, Women's Studies has sometimess provided teaching support, but this is difficult because of enrollment limitations, which is supposed to be no more than twenty-two students, (although it often exceeds this) as well as budgetary constraints. The role of the teaching assistant is a complex one, as these students are not only responsible for organization of the labs and equipment but also actively participate in classroom activities, assist students with the development of their projects, provide technical training, and be literate in the relevant scholarship. Every TA who has been involved with the course has been a first-class pedagogue and often a producer in their own right. Even more importantly, each has shared their passion for critical media literacy.

Moreover, many students who have previously taken the course return to do guest lectures and presentations as well as volunteering to assist in the labs and to teach the incoming students the tricks of the trade. These altruistic and unexpected contributions speak to the importance and significance of such classes to the myths about student apathy.

Each year, months before the beginning of the course, I meet with the representatives from all of the resource centers and the teaching assistant (if one is assigned) to discuss the technical aspects of the course: organization, coordination, and new technologies, programs, and teaching suggestions.

What never ceases to amaze me, even after ten years of teaching the course, is that every individual involved with the class do so because of their commitment to the students and to the course. Indeed, such ongoing involvement with the course is hardly a part of their job descriptions. For example, last year we introduced, for the first time, a separate sound workshop, which was taught by a graduate student (who received course credit) and a representative of CLICC. Furthermore this was only the second year in which a separate web-page production tutorial was scheduled with an IS (Information Studies) technician. It is these resource people who substantively contribute to the ongoing success of this course.[1]

The technical dimensions are taught at an introductory level and most of the students have no prior production experience. Before the class is finished, however, they are proficient in such skills, which include shooting techniques, lighting, sound, interviewing, editing, narration, storyboarding, and scripting. Students can also pursue web design, which involves meeting with experts outside of the course lab.

They also become knowledgeable in some of the scholarly research in the field, which involves learning about not only the practical codes or grammar of media production but also the theoretical skills necessary to consciously

1. These includes Jessica Mentesoglu, Supervisor for Instructional Technology Services, UCLA, Library Computing Center (CLICC); Alan Lebetkin, Resource Scheduling and Communications Coordinator for Instructional Technical Services for Library Computing Services (CLICC); Chris Dutton, Audio Visual Services Manager (AV), Office of Instructional Development (OID); Juan Halcon, Senior Coordinator for Audio Visual Services (AV), Office of Instructional Development (OID), Caroline Tam Kong, Instructional Technology Coordinator, Social Sciences Computing (SSCE); Heath Hewitt, Technician/Analyst, Macintosh General User Support Training, Educational Technology Unit (ETU), Graduate School of Education and Information Studies (GSEIS); Peter Kovaric, Chief Technology Officer, Director Educational Technology Unit (ETU), Graduate School of Education and Information Studies (GSEIS); David Cappoli, Digital Resources Librarian, Information Studies Department, Graduate School of Education and Information Sciences (GSEIS) and last, but certainly not least, Samantha Hogan, Student Affairs Officer, Dept of Women's Studies (WS); Richard Medrano, Administrative Coordinator, Women's Studies (WS) and Ramces Jimenez, Administrative Assistant, Social Science and Comparative Education (SSCE) Graduate School of Education and Information Sciences (GSEIS).

decode it. In this regard, I have developed a specialized reader as well as a constantly updated website with media and multiple articles from academic, professional, and popular forums. I also make extensive use of the Instructional Media Library films and videos, as well as my own personal collection, which I show in class and also make available on reserve. This often includes a growing goldmine of online documentaries. The number and diversity of guest lecturers who have presented in this course are astonishing and include leading academics as well as highly successful producers, director and artists from both independent and commercial media.[2]

The course website also provides for a discussion board in which students can choose from potential topics or "pitch" their own for the final assignment. This process often starts before the course formally begins and students are required to have broken up into groups and decided upon a general subject and form of media that they want to produce (for example, websites, documentaries, PowerPoint, or other artistic endeavors). Although we reserve some time in the course to discuss these projects much of the decisions and structure of these enterprises takes place through students' conversations with one another as well as with myself or one of the course assistants.

Needless to say, there is a lot of work involved in this class and students must be prepared to actively participate. Indeed, the form and substance of this course is at odds with most traditional classes and demands that students take on responsibilities, which require engaged critical thinking and practice and a workload that exceeds the worth of the 6 units they are awarded on its completion. Yet, each quarter the course is overenrolled and has a large waiting list. This fact raises questions about stereotypes of contemporary students, which include characterizations of them as lazy, passive, and solely concerned with grades. In fact, it should lead us to seriously interrogate the context in which this all takes place and the dominant paradigms of postsecondary learning, which many experts describe as commodity-based vocational training that bears little resemblance to a real education.

Indeed the brilliance of most of the final productions, which are screened in a small public forum at the end of the class, belies this assessment. Students have translated theoretical and practical concepts into a final group educational projects, which usually take the form of a progressive digital video montage or documentary that often uses media to critique media. Moreover, these productions are always informed by the student's own standpoints and voice and often address issues related to social justice and/or the politics of representation.

Many of the productions are so expertly conceived, in both form and substance, that they are presented in courses both on campus and off, at academic conferences, in art shows and lectures, and at film and media festivals. Other academics, teachers, students, and festival organizers often contact me about many of these projects. It is in this sense that the students have contributed to the growing field of pedagogical media resources.

Moreover, the enthusiasm they take in their productions is contagious, and it is within this context that there is a revolutionary shift in student and faculty attitudes, which transform the classroom into a challenging, provocative, and entertaining forum. As bell hooks describes it, to take "pleasure in teaching is an act of resistance countering the overwhelming boredom, uninterest, and apathy that so often characterize the way professors and students feel about teaching and learning, about the classroom experience" (1994: 10).

Given that student voice is central to critical media literacy approaches and practices, it is only apt that this special issue of the CSW newsletter features articles written by some of the graduates of this course. These writings capture the diversity and differing standpoints mediating the student's experiences and, I believe, speak to the efficacy of teaching critical media studies.

CONTENTS OF THE ISSUE

In her article, my co-editor Laura Nava manages to articulate the holistic nature of becoming critically media literate. Discussing what she learned in the course, especially in relation to her final group project, Now Showing: Gender, she reveals the transformative nature of

2. New media and cultural studies scholars/activists Professors Leah Lievroux and Douglas Kellner have presented in every class since the courses inception!

this kind of literacy. Moreover her subsequent experiences and current success speaks to the significance of critical media literacy not only in academic pursuits but in the practical relations of everyday life, including employment and activism.

Video documentaries by two groups were chosen for screenings at the prestigious UC Davis Feminist Film Festival in 2009 and 2010: Are You Black Enuf: The Politics of the Black Female Identity and Inside the Digital Closet are impressive examples of the issues often addressed in student productions. This achievement is even more remarkable given that both of the student groups had no prior production experience. The articles by Hasti Barahmand and Kunti Dudakia and Shante Espericutetas and Laura Nava discuss this experience as well as the form and content of their productions.

Diversity issues are also fundamental to Krista Hawkins' coproduction, Commodifying Lolita: The Hypersexualization of 'Tweens' in America, which addresses the escalation of what many experts describe as the "sexualization" of girls in contemporary advertising and mass media. This oppositional video focuses particularly on media directed at the tween demographic, girls between 8 and 12 years old. She describes the development of this project in relation to her research.

Some students not only completed a class media project but went on to enroll in Independent Studies courses in which they produced more expansive documentaries on topics which are of indicative of their particular interests. In Stephanie Ohannesian's article, she discusses both of these; the first, called The Great Imbalance, is an investigation of the paradox of contemporary relationships to food that juxtaposes eating disorders with food insecurity. Her second coproduction, entitled Bite Me, which she pursued after completion of the course, is a provocative interrogation of the massive appeal and popularity of Twilight. Both focus gender and class relations.

The politics of gender are also examined by Richard Van Heertrum and Kip Austin Hinton in Deconstructing the Superhero: American Idols in Film—in particular, constructions of masculinity in the media and the "macho myth." Van Heertrum and Austin present a critical reading of the popularity of superheros, which is framed by an interview with leading cultural studies scholar John Lawrence.

Contemporary news broadcasts and their presenters are interrogated by Amanda Kenderes in Spitballs at Battleships: A Show and Tell of Women in the News. The deeply rooted sexism that is encoded in television newscasts is the subject of her inquiry, which employs some astonishing footage that would appear to reinforce her critique.

It is not only gender but also intersectional relations of race, class, and age that inscribe two projects which address the 2008 elections. In Voting in Black & White: Politics of Race & Gender in American Culture, Michelle Mearlette-Hernandez and her coproducers contextualize the Democratic primaries—in which, for the first time in U.S. history there was a woman and Black man, running for the office of President of the United States —through the use of material from historical archives and discussions of the Reconstruction Era, the suffragist movement, and the civil rights and protest movements of the 1960s.

The politics of representation are front and center in Heather Caban's coproduction A Generation of Change: The Historic 2008 Presidential Election of Barack Obama, which is a multiperspectival engagement of the optimism and radical changes that were associated with Obama's election. Juxtapositions of diverse interviewees and media montages characterize aspects of American history too often excluded from mainstream mass media.

In the closing article, CSW Research Scholar Myrna Hant discusses the relevancy of a pedagogy of critical media literacy. Indeed, Hant documents the remarkable success of her own unique teaching approach, which she developed, in part, during—and after—auditing the critical media literacy course.

Readers can not only read the student's reflections on their projects in this special issue but also view the projects themselves by visiting the course website, which includes these and other student media productions: http://women.ucla.edu/faculty/hammer/cm178/. In addition, CSW is hosting a special screening of excerpts from some of these student films on October 19th in Moore 3340.

Rhonda Hammer is a CSW Researcher Scholar and a Lecturer in Education and Women's Studies at UCLA.

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Critical Media Literacy Empowering Students

A screening of excerpts from some of the films featured in this special issue will be held on

TUESDAY

October 19

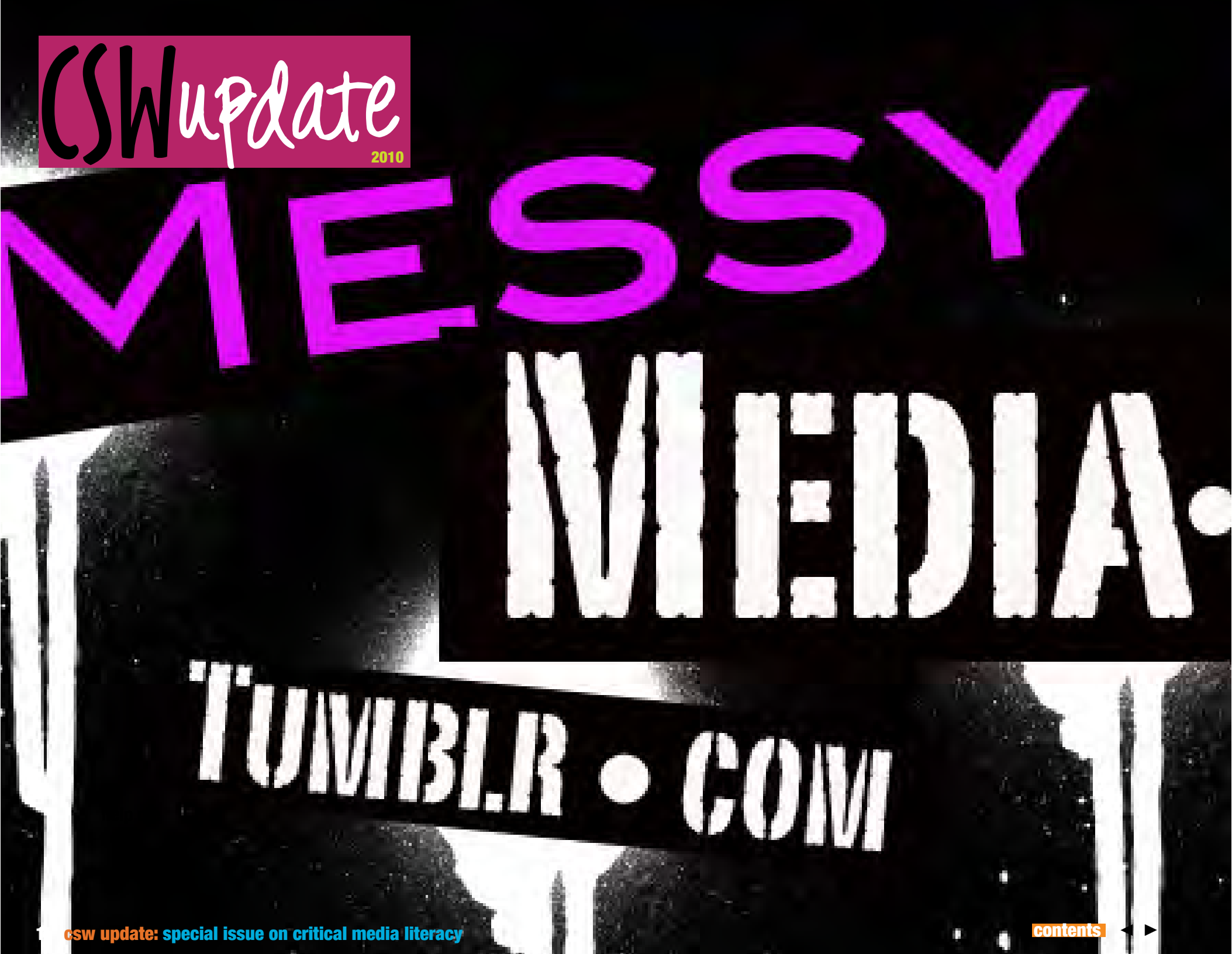
4 to 5:30 pm

3340 Moore, UCLA

JOIN US!

CSWupdate
2010

MESSY MEDIA



Catalyst for Change

BY LAURA NAVA

IT WAS my last quarter at UCLA and I was on the steady path toward becoming a lawyer. Then I took Communication Studies 178. Not only did it change my career path, it also changed my life. Although I had taken another class with Dr. Rhonda Hammer, this class was completely different because it not only challenged me to become media literate but also to create a project that reflected my newly developed media literacy. My group's project, Now Showing: Gender, was created with the intent to explore the role media plays in the socialization of femininity and masculinity, focusing on advertisements and reality shows.

The project soon became my baby. Like a first-time parent I learned, through trial and error, how to make my baby better. With every shot I became more conscious: of the angles of the shots in pre-production to the music I chose in post-production. As I became aware that a viewer would be receiving the content, I realized, in true media literate manner, that everything in a shot is used to convey a message. I felt as though I fully grasped the lessons of the course.

During the making of the final project, I experienced one of the most trying times of my educational career. Unfortunately the hard drive (an external mass-storage device), which seemed to have a will of its own, revolted against my group and decided to dump all of the edited video, visual, and audio material we had saved on it. We had lost at least 80 hours of our time, and we were devastated. Although Dr. Hammer was very understanding and told us we could simply present some of the rough footage, my love for this project drove me to try to reconstruct it, from scratch, in a day and a half, using some of the original video relying heavily on the editing logs, and scrambling for images and audio. Although missing much of the content of our nearly completed initial project—which we had spend months researching, shooting, and editing—we miraculously managed to complete a new version. Despite this disaster, which as I later learned is not uncommon within the fields of media production, my love for, and commitment to, decoding and analyzing media was strengthened. Now Showing: Gender showed me my true calling and I quickly changed my career path.

As my college career came to an end, I had managed to network with some people in the film industry. Although I made the contacts myself, the confidence I had was founded in the knowledge and, albeit limited, experience I had gained from the class in media literacy. Also, I learned how to "pitch," or present my skills. Shortly after graduation, I landed my first job—as Set Decorator Coordinator on The Blind, a feature film. Since then, I have not looked back and have worked consistently on projects from commercials to feature films, in positions such as Second Assistant Director and Talent Coordinator.

Not only did this course enable me to achieve success in the highly competitive field of entertainment, especially for women but also it also enabled me to become involved in new media activism. In particular, developed an interactive project, MessyMedia.Tumblr.Com, a blog that applies the conceptual and practical skills of media literacy. MessyMedia.Tumblr.Com was created to encourage my generational cohorts—along with any other interested people who feel compelled to analyze and filter the media—to share their insights with others in a public interactive forum. Though this medium, I involve myself and my immediate community in deciphering and decoding the media that affect our everyday lives.

This blog allows me to engender awareness and to politicize my generational community with regard to industrial media culture, which is so powerful because it operates largely at an unconscious level. Moreover, in itself and its role in giving voice to so many to share their concerns, actions and practices, this site celebrates and makes apparent the importance of alternative media and new media, which are becoming far more accessible.

The site is focused on politics and pop culture in the media. Also, I had a particular audience in mind, both privileged and marginalized, so that it is not limited to academic readers. Hence, proper grammar, punctuation, and paragraph structure are "out the proverbial window"; their usage is in a constant state of renegotiation (and translation), which is often the case with the development of new (emergent) forms of discourse that are especially appropriate for new technologies. Here is an example from one of my blog posts: "…but sadly 'Professors' who are thisclose to being above the student they are teaching in terms of education, do not cut it." I purposely removed the space between "this" and "close" to create a single word, which, I believe, better demonstrates the proximity I wanted to emphasize. I also consciously employ a writing style that is similar to, and representative of, the way I believe most people, especially tech savvy people—who are part of a new media generation—communicate. I also try to infuse the content with a bit of satire and dry humor for an easy read:

> Because if you put down the fear and think about it, all it really is….
>
> Quick! Look over there! -> A distraction.

Indeed, to paraphrase communication luminary Marshall McLuhan, new media creates a novel way of looking at the world and a new environment in which to live. Decades ahead of his time and close to half a century before the digital revolution, McLuhan's "insights made the concept of a global village, interconnected by an electronic nervous system, part of our popular culture" (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marshall_McLuhan). This description, I would argue, is an apt expression of the importance of blogging, even though too many regard it as a hobby or narcissistic endeavor, rather than a necessarily cooperative and highly significant mode of interactive communications that allow the voices of those who are often excluded from mainstream media to be heard. It is these voices that, I believe, will invoke change.

It is within this context that I was very involved in the creation of the aesthetics of the site. I wanted Messy Media to be "messy," represented by a messy border filled with ink splatter and different color and font types. However, the area in which I write is the antithesis; it is clean with black type on a white background. This format is designed, in part, to provoke the reader's participation, and many have begun to join me in filtering the media and becoming media literate.

In sum, I firmly believe in the wise words of Mahatma Gandhi: "You must be the change you wish to see in the world." Without Dr. Hammer, her guidance, and this class I do not think I would have found the manner in which to accomplish this great task that Gandhi has inspired me to undertake and be part of a progressive community of others who also share his vision. Developing an understanding of critical media literary theory and skills in production have empowered to develop an oppositional, alternative medium through which I can change, and in turn help change the world.

Laura Nava graduated over a year ago from UCLA. She graduated with B.A.s in Political Science and Women's Studies.

The First Frame

OUR SPECTACULAR JOURNEY AS AMATEUR DOCUMENTARY FILMMAKERS

BY HASTI BARAHMAND AND KUNTI DUDAKIA

ARE YOU BLACK ENUF WAS SCREENED AT THE 4TH ANNUAL DAVIS FEMINIST FILM FESTIVAL IN 2009.

APRIL 16, 2009, marked perhaps one of the most momentous and exhilarating experiences in our filmmaking careers—in fact, it may have been the only event to qualify us as documentary filmmakers to begin with. How did we reach such a climax in our careers without really ever having one?

The story began in the winter of 2007 during a Critical Media Literacy course taught at UCLA by Dr. Rhonda Hammer. Understanding how the media constructs images to influence and sway the public in different politically charged ways, and identifying and critiquing those characterizations is the course's objective. As we became progressively more aware of the influencing factors of media, we took our first step toward learning how to create film within this consciousness. Naturally, we began our venture into the video-making world with little more than a camera, microphone, and a question. Though our topic had yet to be finalized, we knew the video documentary would delve into the politics and social representations of black women, and how black women deal with their intersectional identities. The double consciousness of black women, who concurrently negotiate their race and gender, was the focus.

We experienced many ups and downs in the making of the film. Professors scheduled to be filmed about race, gender, and class cancelled their appointments or technical difficulties halted the filming of an event or interview. Such humps and hurdles are part of the process of

filmmaking; luckily we were able to jump over these obstacles and still preserve our vision.

The heart-wrenching, sleepless, stressful, patience-testing editing process was nonetheless incredibly rewarding. Our efforts to produce a realistic, critical commentary about the black female experience came to fruition in our labor of love entitled Are You Black Enuf? The Politics of the Black Female Identity. Despite our own critiques of the film's perfection, we were eager to share it with our class and friends; after much deliberation, and encouragement from Dr. Hammer, we submitted it to the Davis Feminist Film Festival.

Devoted to challenging prejudices and stereotypes through film, this annual film festival at UC Davis, promotes scholarly and inter-community dialogue and draws films and documentaries from around the world. We had no real expectations about our chances of being accepted. As we prepared our application and statement for submission, we believe it would be no time before we received an email of rejection. This made it all the more astonishing and worthwhile when we received a letter from the director stating that our admission was accepted and would be screened. A bit speechless at the honor, we were nonetheless proud and excited for the opportunity to have our piece shown to a large audience.

We promised each other that we would make it to the festival, although it meant a 400-mile drive for one of us and interrupting a busy law-school schedule for the other. With butterflies in our stomachs and a prayer in our hearts that this community of artists and filmmakers would accept our film, we entered the theater. Prior to the screening, we were introduced, for the first time, as filmmakers and award winners to a select group of attendees. Though feeling shy, we mingled and answered questions about our film and why we had created it. It was an unforgettable moment when a couple approached us to say how excited they were to watch our film, noting that they had made the decision to attend after reading about our submission. With an audience of nearly three hundred, we were introduced on stage then quickly ran to our seats, hoping that an invisibility cloak could mask our fear of rejection.

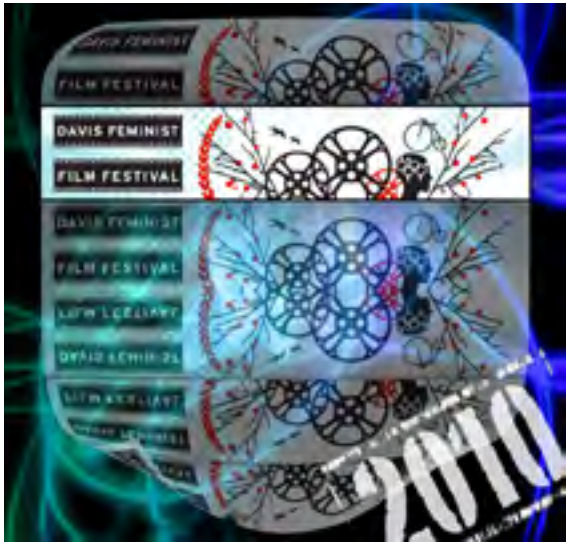
The film begins with a black screen and subtle African drumming that increases in tempo with narrated spoken word and flashing video montage. Though we sat facing the screen, we were really watching the audience react. It is nerve-racking to bare the product of your hard work, sweat, and tears for all to judge; however, the experience of letting your piece speak to an audience is unforgettable. At the conclusion, the audience erupted into applause, which was music to our ears and calming to our nerves. The first frame of our film is just sound with no image, it is a blank palette that leads to our creative expression which follows. The first frame is our deep breath, our closed eyes, and our hope that despite a short resume, we have a relevant message to share. And remarkable it was to share.

Kunti Dudakia graduated summa cum laude from UCLA in 2007 with a B.A. in Communications Studies and Women's Studies. She received the CSW Constance Coiner Undergraduate Award in 2007. She is currently attending law school at UC Berkeley School of Law (Boalt Hall) where she is the Co-Solicitations editor of the Berkeley Journal of African-American Law and Policy and Co-Chair of the Student Liaison Committee for Faculty Hiring. She is the William K. Coblentz Fellow at the Thelton E. Henderson Center for Social Justice, where she is conducting research on mental health and women of color for an upcoming symposium where she hopes to present an original thesis.

Hasti Barahmand graduated from UCLA with a B.A. in Women's Studies and Education in 2008. She is currently a J.D. candidate at the University of Iowa. A scholar and women's rights activist, she has focused largely on exploring and bringing to light the multifaceted and intersectional experiences of women of color within the U.S. Her works include the research documentary "Queen Kong–A Strategic Look into Hip Hop." She looks to pursue a career in educational law and policy with an emphasis on academic curriculum and access to higher education.

Critical Media Literacy, LGBT Representation, and Blurred Realities

BY SHANTE ESPERICUTETA (WITH LAURA NAVA)



INSIDE THE DIGITAL CLOSET WAS SCREENED AT THE 5TH ANNUAL DAVIS FEMINIST FILM FESTIVAL IN 2010.

IN 2009, I enrolled in Dr. Rhonda Hammer's Critical Media Literacy course because I was interested in media literacy and wanted the opportunity to produce a video documentary. On the first day of class, I was apprehensive and even had second thoughts about staying, especially after the students from the previous year presented their projects. These were amazing, especially taking into account the fact that most had never produced before taking this course, and I doubted that I could ever accomplish a similar feat. Yet, a year later it was the short documentary made by my group, called Inside the Digital Closet, which received similar acclaim. It was only then that I truly appreciated the empowerment of this experience and realized that the critical theories and skills I had learned in this course were practically applicable to other projects, assignments, and events and activities in everyday life that are not necessarily related to media because I came to realize that there is no one absolute truth but rather different and multiple realities and standpoints.

My group learned how current media creates problematic and often harmful stereotypes that are essentially oppressive to the community. Our group decided that the central topic of our project would be the misrepresentations of queer people in the corporate mass media. We wanted to distinguish between the meanings of what it is to be queer and queer theory with that of LBGT (Lesbian, Bi-Sexual, Gay, Transgender). Unlike much of gay and lesbian

studies, which focus on the "recovery of gay experience," queer theory "builds upon critical challenges" to the idea that gender is part of the essential, normal, primarily biologically determined self, rather than being largely, "a social construction of sexual acts and identities" (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Queer_theory). As cultural critic Alice Echols (Shaky Ground: The Sixties and Its Aftershocks. New York: Columbia University, 2002) describes it: "Queer theory calls into question the conditions by which binary oppositions (male/female, heterosexual/homosexual) are produced" (140). In other words queer theory and activism "contests the idea of sexual identity as stable" or fixed (p. 140): "Whether in the political or academic arena, queerness involves a critique of normalization" and what is often labeled as peculiar or even deviant (p. 141). I feel confident that we accomplished our goal, in that our short documentary examines ways in which current popular media misrepresents the queer community relating to issues such as promiscuity, ridicule, and abnormality. We integrated clips from reality television as well as from scripted shows to illustrate these stereotypical portrayals and included interviews that help to define, analyze, and further question these portrayals.

When we presented the project in the final class, in front of our fellow students, family members, friends, professors from the Departments of Education and Women's Studies at UCLA, and Dr. Hammer, I was anxious but confident that it would be well received, but it was only after I saw it on the screen with an audience—and heard their applause and praise for the project—that my nervousness subsided. Considering the praise that Inside the Digital Closet had received, Dr. Hammer encouraged us to enter it into festival competitions. We had intended to do so but never found the time. Nonetheless, Dr. Hammer took it upon herself and entered it into a festival, and for her efforts on our behalf I will be forever grateful! One year after its production, we were surprised and excited when she informed us that Inside the Digital Closet was one of the 19 chosen—out of more than 150 submissions from around the world—for public screening at the festival.

Although the festival was a bit of a trek to attend, I could not have missed seeing our film played on a big screen. I was anxious as to how the other filmmakers would receive it. In spite of the butterflies in my stomach, my heart was pumping with adrenaline in both anticipation and excitement. I was introduced to Michelle Yates, the festival's director, then to other filmmakers and artists from the community. They were all eager to hear about my experiences in Dr. Hammer's class, as they had heard about it from other students who had presented the festival. I had no idea that this festival was so prestigious, and I want to stress how this screening has opened up further opportunities for the group, given that we were now considered to be successful video/filmmakers. At the opening of the festival, I was introduced to the audience as a first-time filmmaker, and I beamed with pride as I stood up and waved to everyone in the auditorium. The director of the event praised Dr. Hammer and her course, which is widely respected within the progressive film community.

After a few films were screened, the opening scene of our film appeared. The butterflies disappeared and were replaced by a feeling of accomplishment and intense joy as I viewed our film in the company of hundreds of people. I will never forget the applause and praise, including that from my friends who seemed impressed by the quality of the production, which they knew was my first attempt. This experience further revealed to me how privileged I was to have gained the skills to create a film that examines a topic that is too often considered taboo. I can honestly say that creating this film and seeing it on the big screen at a film festival stand as the proudest moments of my academic career. For that, I am forever grateful for the opportunities that taking this class has provided me. Taking this course was a life-changing experience for me, and I plan to employ and pursue critical media literacy in my future endeavors.

A recent graduate of UCLA, Shante Espericuteta holds a B.A. in Sociology and Women's Studies. Planning to pursue a career in social work, she is currently applying to graduate programs for Fall of 2011. She works full time for Victoria's Secret as an intimates category manager, volunteers at her local YMCA as a day-camp coordinator and enjoys training for half marathons.

Media Literacy for New Generations

BY KRISTA HAWKINS

Media Literacy for New Generations

BY KRISTA L. HAWKINS

AS A MOTHER OF TWO GIRLS, I am passionate about empowering and protecting children. I immediately knew what I wanted to explore in my film project for Dr. Rhonda Hammer's course on "Critical Media Literacy," because I had been noticing that my daughters were getting some negative messages about what it means to be female, messages that were contrary to what I have tried to teach and show them. I have always monitored their viewing of television programs, but stereotypical ideas about femininity were nonetheless creeping into their consciousness. Even though I began to watch some programs with them so that we could discuss the often-subtle negative messages, I didn't feel I was doing an adequate job of explaining this complex issue.

Directing and co-producing Commodifying Lolita: The Hypersexualization of Tweens in America gave my group the opportunity to combine media literacy discourse, feminist theory, personal artistic expression, and activism. I also learned how to use media as a catalyst for discussion, education, and social change. Examining the hypersexualization of "tweens" (girls between the ages of 8 and 12), our film reveals a connection between the hypersexualization of young girls and the prevalence of pedophilia in the U.S. Why, our film asks, does a society that claims to oppose pedophilia and child pornography market images that promote the sexual exploitation of young girls ?

Making the film was empowering to the members of my group but making it available to others was important to us and to Dr. Hammer. We were guest lecturers in her graduate film course, "Film and Society: The Politics of Representation," and for her undergraduate/graduate course, "Critical Media Literacy and the Politics of Gender: Theory and Production." To showcase our documentary and the artistic work of other students, I cocurated an exhibit, "Art as Social and Political Commentary," at UCLA in 2007. It addressed the ideological nature of stereotyping and the politics of representation with regard to gender, race, ethnicity, class, and sexuality. I am also pleased to report that our documentary was selected for use in a cultural studies course at Otis College of Art and Design.

With Dr. Hammer's encouragement, I was also able to complete my honors senior thesis, "Selling Sexy as 'Cool': HIV/AIDS and the Voice of African American Girls."An exploration in using art and media literacy as social, educational, and retention tools in the creation of HIV/AIDS prevention materials, this 12-week project entailed working with a small group of inner-city girls.

As I now pursue graduate study, I am still searching for new ways to incorporate media literacy and alternative media texts into my artistic, social, and political activism. Equally important, my daughters (aged 11 and 14) have also gained; they are more empowered as media viewers and are creating and producing their own alternative media texts.

In 2007, Krista L. Hawkins graduated magna cum laude from UCLA with a B.A. in Women's Studies: Art and Media and received the iArts Undergraduate Award. She is pursuing a master's degree in the Marriage and Family Therapy/Clinical Art Therapy Program at Loyola Marymount University. She is also the co-director of self-esteem workshops for teens and utilizes critical media literacy in the curriculum.

The Days I First Learned I Had the Right to See, Not Only Watch

BY STEPHANIE OHANNESIAN

CSWupdate 2010

The Days I First Learned I Had the Right to See, Not Only Watch

BY STEPHANIE OHANNESIAN

IT SEEMS HARDER and harder these days to find individual conviction in relationships pertaining to current societal events, given that so many voices on so many issues go unheard. Convincing people that I did in fact have a point of view on various topics would, I thought, require effort and commitment to become a fully fledged expert on a particular topic. It would also require hoping that the big picture on huge global issues would somehow at some point find its solution, at least in my own mind. The irony, however, in this way of thinking is that the everyday life-altering things each of us witnesses and experiences are in fact the cornerstones of so many of these global problems. Our vision as individuals, and as students, and how we choose to interpret what is given to us—be it on the street, on TV, or in the classroom—is in fact up to us. If we choose to ignore, for example, current toxic standards of beauty or choose to walk by an obviously needy person digging through trash, we give up our power and allow them to continue. One of the best ways to start on this journey to self-empowerment seems to be in finding other people who are also interested in such questions. By finding like-minded people, we can begin to discuss and debate a variety of dominant cultural beliefs and practices, which the majority seems to accept as the norm (or what the esteemed cultural studies expert, Stuart Hall, has called "common sense"). In other words, there is a pressing need for courses or workshops that provide students (of the classroom and of the world) with the opportunity to express their own concerns and help them to gain the necessary critical skills.

My first experience with finding and using my own voice was through Dr. Rhonda Hammer's class on critical media literacy. She gave us free reign to think of a topic we wanted to explore, one that pushed our buttons or one perhaps was not given proper attention in our estimation. My group (consisting of three female students) began brainstorming. We soon realized we all had had jobs in the restaurant industry, had tried our hand at show business, and had grown up in Los Angeles. Those commonalities raised the issue of food and affluence in L.A: the cultural obsession with thinness and the neediness of individuals and families who don't get enough healthy nourishment. was Intrigued but skeptical about our topic, Dr. Hammer nevertheless trusted our passion about a society where people not being fed for two very different reasons. After interviewing experts in the fields of psychology, nutrition, and media culture and spending the day with a man by the name of Bob, who had gained 150 pounds during his first year living on the streets because of the fatty foods available in shelters,

we completed The Great Imbalance. No one had taken the time to put the two issues together: starving to achieve a standard of beauty and consuming unhealthy food because you have no other resources are both toxic to health and well being. Seeing the juxtaposition for the first time both touched and shocked the members of our audience.

After the release of Twilight, Dr. Hammer asked students to take a look at why this series about vampires and eternal love had become such a popular culture phenomenon. Our goal with this documentary entitled Bite Me was to find out what the audience was looking for and was getting from the books and the films. Fans seemed to be yearning for undying love, commitment, family support, and connection, and we captured these yearnings in our film. Many of the people we interviewed spoke about feeling alienated and about wanting to feel a connection to something. We never would have thought that such telling statements would have come out via a documentary on a film about vampires, but they did.

Her encouragement gave us the confidence to try and make a strong statement. Learning how to view media and society critically gave us the chance to control what we, as citizens, are normally spoon-fed. This process also allowed created a forum for our peers to be challenged as well. Many of documentaries that have been produced under Dr. Hammer's tutelage have been met with gasps and "a-ha"

moments from the audience because they are seeing, perhaps for the first time, something that have have seen many times without really seeing it. Being taught how to see in this way and having the opportunity to put my vision into action have been life-changing experiences for me. Given similar opportunities, everyone can gain the power to understand the underlying realities of what we are all exposed to every day. Developing critical media literacy is a basis for making choices, becoming aware, and avoiding becoming the victim of mass media and the spin doctors of the media machine. If we each take responsibility for what we will and will not accept, those that have the power will have no choice but to listen.

Stephanie Ohannesian graduated with honors from UCLA in 2009 with a B.A in Women's Studies: Media and Social Construction of Gender. She has been a member of Alpha Gamma Sigma Honor Society as well as Alpha Gamma Epsilon where she began her volunteer work with Union Station Foundation, Feminist Majority Foundation as well as with The Courtwatch Project through the National Council of Jewish Women. She is in the process of applying to law school where she plans on continuing her studies in human rights law with an emphasis on women's rights and hopes to combine legal work with public service announcement filmmaking.

American Idols in Film

BY RICHARD VAN HEERTUM AND KIP AUSTIN HINTON

Making the short video documentary, Deconstructing the Superhero: American Idols in Film, on the politics of superheroes was a whirlwind experience. We learned filmmaking techniques while expanding our analysis of popular culture, especially in relation to media constructions of masculinity. Research was situated within the historical context of film studies and included interactions with a diverse range of students and faculty, both inside and outside of the classroom. Our own film combined short interviews with students, framed by a longer interview with Emeritus Professor John Lawrence, who has written extensively on the role of superheroes in American culture. We then juxtaposed these interviews with clips from a number of recent superhero films. Our documentary thus not only offered an entryway into video/ filmmaking techniques but it also encouraged a more critical view of media itself.

This experience has greatly contributed to our growth as cultural critics and as engaged pedagogues; we have employed methods of critical cultural studies and media literacy and the theories and practices we learned in the class in our own publications, teaching, and research projects. Richard, for example, is currently co-editing a book Hollywood's Exploited: Public Pedagogy, Corporate Movies, and Cultural Crisis (Palgrave, December 2010) that looks at various identity markers and their relationship to filmic representation. He completed two chapters for the book, one on the death penalty and film and

the other on representations of social class in three contemporary films set in Boston. He has also completed a chapter for another book analyzing the relationship between irony, youth culture, and The Daily Show and The Colbert Report. Kip's dissertation research is on a video-editing class for farmworker students; several of those students' films were accepted for screening at the 2010 California Association of Freirean Educators Conference. Kip also presented on critical media literacy during the Social Justice Seminar at the 2010 American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting in Denver.

As shown by our own academic experiences, a theory-and-practice course connects students to a critical media literacy agenda. Students develop skills in deconstructing media texts, which can in turn empower youth to produce their own media (Kellner and Share, 2007). Given that the majority of students in our class were women and people of color, we found ourselves in a minority position, which allowed us to better understand and explore different standpoints. With the encouragement of Dr. Hammer and other students, we decided that an exploration of representations of whiteness, masculinity, and democracy, as depicted by the majority of superheroes in film, would allow us to understand this form of popular culture in a dialectical fashion.

We began the video documentary, Deconstructing the Superhero: American Idols in Film by asking why superhero films are so popular. Students offered a number of perspectives, but they centered around the genre's "macho" nature (in an arguably increasingly emasculated world), heroism (in a world where heroes and positive role models are harder to find), pure entertainment value, ability to do things humans cannot, and sense of nostalgia. Superhero films, as many experts argue, instantiate our desire for a pacified world where fear and uncertainty are confronted by the outside hero (Jewett and Lawrence, 1977). This is often based on a nostalgic 1950s–style utopia that builds strong audience affiliation to traditional gender roles, innocence, and exceptionalism as traditional American mythology.

We next explored the relationship of superheroes to religion, in a section subtitled "Jesus in Tights?" John Lawrence pointed out the proximity of the superhero to a secularized version of the New Testament, with a savior from beyond coming down to rescue earth from iniquity and evil. This is clearest in Superman, the story of a boy from Krypton sent to Earth by his parents just as their planet is about to be destroyed. His parents make the ultimate sacrifice, sending their newborn son to earth to rescue humanity, with his Hebrew name of God and constant references throughout the films to the biblical line "the son becomes the father and the father becomes the son" (Kozlovic, 2002). Lawrence points out that these are "smash-mouthed Jesuses" who use violence to exact their definition of justice–the destruction of evil and restoration of law and order.

This relates closely to our next theme, the relationship of superhero films to democracy. Umberto Eco (1979) once argued that Superman is a conservative figure whose role is to restore rather than transform the social order. This is true of most superhero films from the Spiderman series to those of Batman and even Wonder Woman. In all cases, they take on some threat to society and, by defeating it, restore order to the community–never actually challenging society to change. As Lawrence and Jewett describe it, these films fall under the rubric of the American monomyth (1977, 2002), an escapist fantasy where a generally solitary, violent individual, or small group saves a community from some great evil–betraying the ideals of democratic responsibility and participation, of reasoned and intelligent debate and of reins on power. Redeemer characters are the only ones who can save society from danger or evil (often embodied by corrupt or inept politicians, bumbling police and federal agents and the collapse of the other social institutions entrusted to protect us). While none of the male or female students we interviewed ever thought about the underlying politics, we argue that these films are subtly powerful ideological instruments that, among other things, offer anti-democratic messages against collective action or social change. Instead, an outsider comes in to save society from some peril, often tied to contemporary fears like global warming, technological hegemony, terrorism, or simple greed, and restores the current order of things – legitimating society as it is, rather than as it could be. This is backed by the passive nature of the rest of the characters in these films, who tend to be victim-

ized or watch the action from near or far. Lawrence calls this a form of "spectator democracy," where we look to a patriarchal figure, like Bush post-9/11, to restore order and save us from forces beyond our control.

We conclude our film by exploring more transgressive or democratic possibilities of the films. As Monika Messner argues: "with its themes of xenophobia, alienation and ambiguity, Bryan Singer's X-Men transcends the classical superhero movies, demonstrating a social consciousness and calling attention to racial and sexual inequality" (2002, p. 226). Even in Superman Returns and recent Spiderman films, we see scenes where Lois Lane and her new husband, doctors, or the crowd help a superhero under attack by their archenemy. Lawrence pointed out that this might relate to a post-9/11 world, where there is interest in real heroes like policemen and firemen and we see the limits of an all-powerful figure fighting an evil that is diffused and hard to define.

While we managed to communicate complex ideas in our film, it was not always a smooth process. We had no experience operating the camera or positioning people and objects to get a good shot. We were not immediately successful at recruiting and prepping interview subjects. Documentary directors need a certain amount of self-assuredness, and it took us time to figure out how to appear competent. Footage originally perceived as great revealed its flaws only in editing: odd lighting, poor sound, or a distracting pattern on a shirt.

The editing process itself was an even bigger hurdle. Even with effective hands-on instruction, the time and meticulous detail involved in cuts, transitions, and shot selections were overwhelming to us as novice filmmakers. Though student appropriation of movie clips is legal under fair use (Hobbs, Jaszi, and Aufderheide, 2009), the conversion and manipulation of commercial DVD clips was time consuming and difficult. One computer crash destroyed an entire day of editing on our first film (this is not unusual or unique, and others in the class lost even more work). However, a crash can be a blessing in disguise–assembling a sequence the second time was always faster and usually better. In the end, we had to tag-teamed the editing with our classmate Brian Trinh for 24 hours to complete the final cut on time.

For the two of us, the deconstruction of ideology and the deconstruction of the filmmaking process have proven invaluable. Like a superhero story, filmmaking can be either democratic or authoritarian. Media production is not seamless or direct – it requires critical literacy about layered processes, which makes it an ideal context for teaching and learning. Overall, we gained valuable skills for the future, as we continue our own quest for truth and justice . . .

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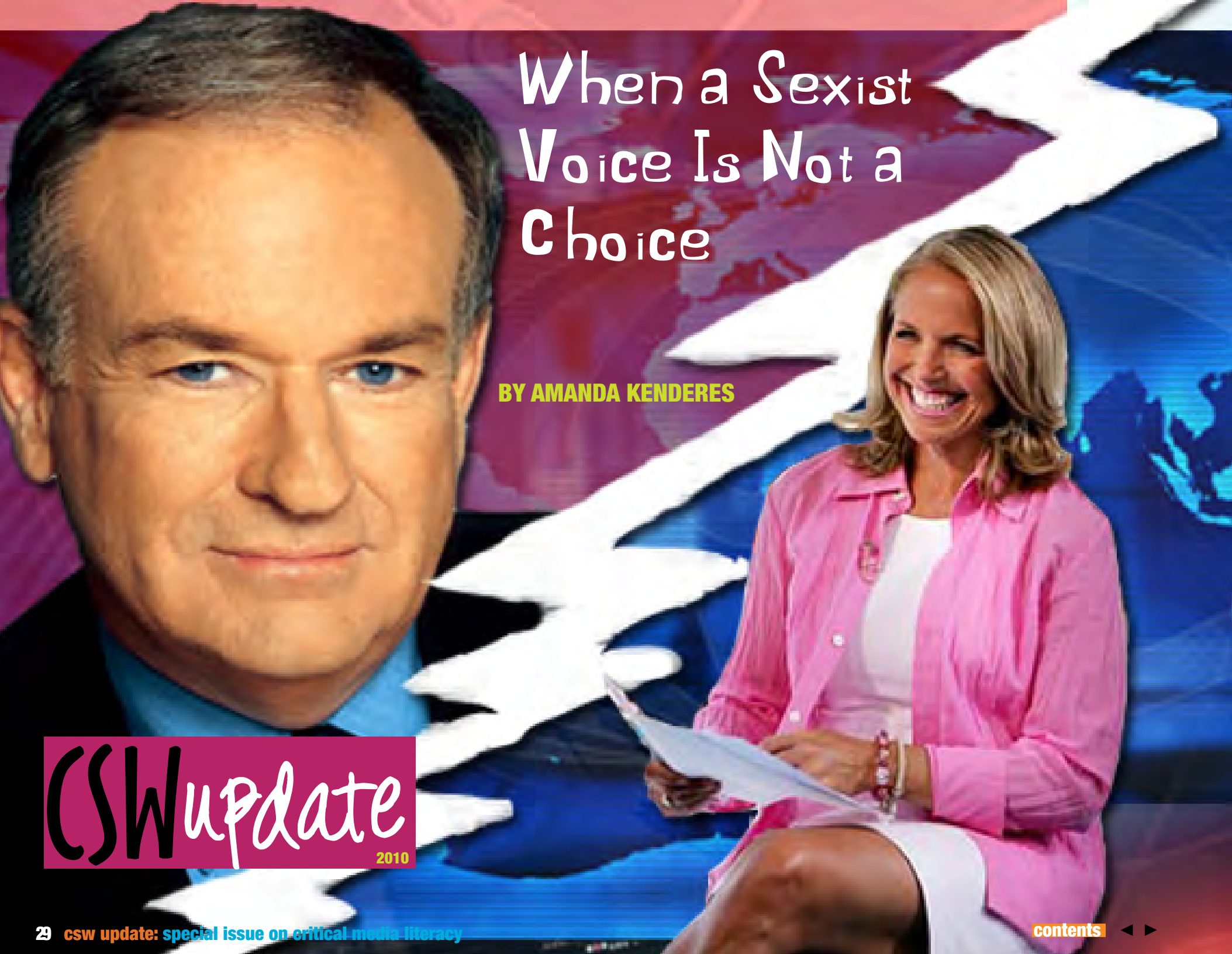
When a Sexist Voice Is Not a Choice

BY AMANDA KENDERES



CSWupdate 2010

When a Sexist Voice Is Not a Choice

REPRESENTATIONS OF WOMEN IN NATIONAL BROADCAST NEWS

BY AMANDA KENDERES

Can information be objective when profit-driven? How can individuals engage in civic life when the United States, ostensibly democratic, is in practice plutocratic? When her socioeconomic value is derived more often from her appearance than from her intellect, how is a woman to gain financial security without catering to such expectations and stymieing her intellectual pursuits? Even more importantly, how can issues of gender parity in the workplace be resolved at the workplace level when the workplace itself is built on sexism? These questions and others inspired me to produce Spitballs at Battleships: A Show and Tell of Women in the News. This minidocumentary (26 min) exposes the fallacy that national broadcast news is a source of objective journalism and examines its greater role as entertainment. Certainly, women are part of the news and therefore part of the entertainment. Recognizing this, the film asks a broader and perhaps more pithy question: Are women agents in the degradation of the news or victims of sexism and misogyny?

To frame this inquiry and begin to explore it, I followed the mantra of "show and tell," organizing my visuals and soundbites to reveal what the news shows us and what it tells us. My title comes from a phrase used by Bernard Goldberg, former CBS News anchor and currently a commentator on Fox News. When discussing representations of truth and power on the news, he warned liberal activists and women, "If [you] want to take shots at me… [you're] throwing spitballs at battleships." I found the phrase perfectly suited to my project, since it effectively illustrates a power asymmetry and demonstrates the hostility often encountered by resistance groups.

In 2009, for the first time since it was founded in 1980, CNN News took third seat to Fox News and MSNBC. A likely reason, and one that my film affirms, is that Fox News and MSNBC have increased their focus on sensationalism, and, along with this, female objectification, sexism, and misogyny. While this argument may seem difficult to substantiate, it is not; a quick search of "sexism Fox News" or "sexism MSNBC" on youtube.com or google.com yields a hefty return, where a search of "sexism CNN" does not. Even such a cursory search proves

to be a consistent and accurate barometer of what a more in-depth inquiry reveals: among the examples, women newscasters on Fox News and MSNBC are consistently scantily dressed; images of women in bikinis, bras, thongs and other revealing attire are used as B-roll (supplemental footage intercut with the main shot in an interview or story) to enhance economic and political reports that would otherwise lack sensation.

Beyond the visual sexism, male news anchors on both stations consistently make remarks (directed toward their female colleagues as well as toward women in the news stories they covered) that are demeaning, dehumanizing, objectifying, violent, or otherwise misogynistic. Chris Matthews, anchor of Hardball on MSNBC, for example, asserted that Hillary Clinton did not win a New York Senate seat "on her merit," but because her husband "messed around." On Fox News, Greg Gutfeld, host of *Red Eye*, noted of Courtney Friel that, "if she got any cuter, [he'd] have to beat her to death with a Dr. Hammer." A regular on Fox News, Marc Rudov stated that "when Barack Obama speaks, men hear: 'Take off for the future!' and when Hillary Clinton speaks men hear: 'Take out the garbage!'"

To help us elucicate the mechanisms behind such sexism, several professors are interviewed: Juliet Williams, Leah Lievrouw, and Doug Kellner of UCLA; Gail Dines of Wheelock College in Boston, and Justin Lewis of the University of Massachusetts. Williams, an associate professor in the Department of Women's Studies, reminds us of the feminist concept of "male gaze," which is in her words, "the normative gaze, the dominant presumed watcher." This concept helps us in considering the central question posed by the film: Are women agents in the degradation of news or victims of sexism and misogyny? As the film shows, women are indeed implicated in their own objectification; yet, they are also victims in that the objectification.

Broadcast news has not always been slanted toward entertainment. The film reveals that women in news have not always dressed this way or been treated this way. The documentary also tackles the issue of resistance, exploring the treatment of professionals (Mika Brezensiki, Gretchen Carlson, and Helen Thomas), who have resisted sexist representations and the degradation of the news. Such resistance is not taken seriously and often backfires, as women's resistance frequently becomes part of men's entertainment.

One of the interviewees, Doug Kellner, provided suggestions on how to fight sexism in the media (namely, tuning into alternative news stations and sharpening one's one skills in critical literacy), the mainstream news media is still a major source of information about the world. As Justin Lewis states, the news media "tells us what's important and who's important." As such, it's telling us that it's important for women to sex themselves up; that it's important for women to be young, white, thin, and toned; that men are more important than women; that men's voices are more important than women's voices; that the will of men is more important than the will of women; and that entertainers are more important than politicians. What will the quality of our democracy be if these are the beliefs of its citizens? What are the consequences of having these persistent sexist attitudes on network news normalized for millions of viewers? Since broadcast news is some people's only window into local, national, and global events, the voice of sexism becomes the standard, not a personal choice. As sexism is becomes impossible to dodge, media literacy is all the more critical. Such course offerings as "Critical Media Literacy and Politics of Gender: Theory and Production," become central to ensuring that future generations can recognize the misleading messages about women that the mainstream media promotes.

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Armed through Education

BY MICHELLE MEARLETTE-HERNANDEZ

Armed through Education

THE POWERFUL INTRICACIES OF THE VIDEO-MAKING EXPERIENCE

BY MICHELLE MEARLETTE-HERNANDEZ

AS A UCLA UNDERGRADUATE, I had the great fortune to be a student in Dr. Rhonda Hammer's "Critical Media Literacy and the Politics of Representation: Theory and Production" class. As a result of her dedication and organization of a diversity of class components, we gained the skills necessary to speak another language—the language of media representation. To be more effective, the class was divided into small groups based on shared interests, which allowed us to immediately focus on the final class assignment, which was the creation of an alternative critical media production that addressed issues and/or relations rarely depicted in mainstream media (and/or those which many believe are often misrepresented in popular culture.) Given the stereotypes of current students as being literate in new media technology, It is surprising to discover that the majority of the students in my class had little expertise. No one had experience in video production and editing or in developing a media piece. Hence, the members of my group, which included myself, Darlene Edgley, and Vivian Lealiiee, had doubts about whether or not we would be able to complete our group project. In fact, before taking this class, I believed that filmmaking (that is, media storytelling) could only be achieved by "real" film or video makers.

Since we had to develop a general theme for our production by the second week of class, our group decided that we would take on something "simple" that addressed how consumerism shrouds our nation and hinders too many of us from being involved in the political process. Rather than telling us outright that this topic might be too expansive for a ten-minute production, Dr. Hammer advised us to use this idea as a general framework for our documentary. She also reminded the class that our project would take on a life of its own and possibly move us in another direction, despite hours of storyboarding, gathering images, and shooting and collecting video. This turned out to be the case with our production, which we entitled Voting in Black and White: Politics of Race and Gender in American Culture.

We became interested in—and kept returning to—issues related to divisions of race and gender associated with voting and voting rights in the United States. Moreover, given our own standpoints and experiences as women of color, we were especially interested in media representations.

For example, because of my non-traditional identity and experiences, I don't fit the ste-

reotypical demographic of the typical college student and am often overlooked at UCLA. I realized that this was due, in large part, to mass-media images of 35 (and older) women as married (or divorced) and/or as mothers whose lives primarily revolve around domestic household jobs. In contrast, my roles were that of full-time caregiver to my chronically ill mother, full-time college student, and full-time worker. Unlike the dominant stereotype, I am also single and have no children. Yet, I discovered that I am, in fact, a positive role model for other women who want to pursue their education and return to school, despite the hurdles of age and other responsibilities. For example, I have encouraged two of my friends to enroll in night classes. In fact, all of the women in my project group lived diverse and non-traditional lifestyles, which hardly matched prevailing media representations, or lack thereof, given our "invisibility" in so many domains of media culture.

It is within this context that an examination of the 2008 contest between Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama for the Democratic presidential nomination became especially relevant. This contest provoked us to examine the realities of disenfranchisement in a so-called democratic society, especially in relation to gender and race, which is too rarely addressed in commercial media culture or even within institutions of higher learning. Indeed, these kinds of social movements are even ridiculed in what many (mis)identify as a post-feminist or post-racial society, as is often the case with portrayals of the suffragist movement of 1848 to 1920. It, hence, became important to us that we include an historical account of some of these struggles in our documentary. This decision was, in part, informed by the emphasis of the course on theory, which included critical media literacy and cultural, antiracist, feminist, queer, and other perspectives that were concerned with representations of gender, class, race, ethnicity, sexuality, and age. It is crucial to note, however, that an especially unique aspect of Dr. Hammer's critical media literacy course is that it is not solely a media production course but is designed to integrate critical media literacy and to be inclusive for all levels of video, film, and new media experiences. Hence, it is not surprising that the course attracts a majority of students who are marginalized in different ways and affords us the opportunity to engage and share our own personal perspectives and experiences with one another.

Taking advantage of the classroom forum to discuss the development of our project, we decided to document this monumental event and attempt to capture the importance of this occasion. As this was a significant occasion, as it was the first time in US history that the two leading contenders for the Democratic presidential nomination were a white woman and a Black man. This was, in fact, incredibly serendipitous, given our interests in the intersectionalities of gender and race, and thus inspired us to contextualize this event within the historical framework of what has been called "The Reconstruction Era," a period that had afforded such radical changes in relation to rights of Black men, and later women, in that they were finally recognized as citizens. It was within this framework, that we went on to demonstrate, in our production, how these political struggles paved the way for the establishment and support of these two candidates.

PRODUCTION PROCESS

We were surprised to discover how these same issues—related to resisting bigoted views and practices—were actually correlated with events and attitudes expressed during the 2008 Democratic Party primaries. And, as a result of this, our group's focus took shape. Although the workload was more than we initially anticipated, we found ourselves obsessed with both the topic and process, which spurred us to work weekdays and some weekends, as well as to pull a few all- nighters. Much of this time was spend constructing a number of montages, which depicted the development of the Reconstruction period, juxtaposed with footage and photos from the suffragist movement, political resistance in the 1960s, and the media frenzy surrounding the 2008 Democratic Party primaries. Throughout this process, we learned how to find and download historical film footage photos, which included how African Americans were barred from voting. And even though this can be especially time consuming, we were delighted to discover how much archival footage featuring the civil right movement and other social justice movements of the 1960s is readily available—if you know where to search.

It was through this process that we also discovered and learned more about the struggles of women—many of whom were actively involved in abolitionist organizations. This led us to reexamine and incorporate key visuals and discussions of the political intents of civil rights and women's liberation movements. We found that relations of bigotry, bias, and discrimination—although hardly symmetrical to that of racism—were similar to the kinds of hostilities and sexism directed at the early suffragist movement, which protested against the gender bias that prevented women from being able to vote. Moreover, given the intersectionalities between race and gender and that it was only African American men who were finally recognized as fully "human," and afforded the right to vote through the Fifteenth Amendment in 1870, we demonstrate in our documentary that it was only through the efforts of the early women's movement in the U.S. that all women—especially women of color (many of whom were in leadership positions in the movement)—were afforded the right to vote, through the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution, which, unbelievably, was ratified in August of 1920, fifty years later.

We then went on to combine much of our archival footage with that of coverage of the 2008 Democratic primaries and laid down a powerful soundtrack to accompany these images. To further articulate and strengthen our examination, we cut in historical stock images, including photographs from the civil rights movement, 1960s social justice groups, and public protests. Rather than employing a scripted narration, we interviewed a diversity of activists and concerned citizens, in order to critically engage the history of bigotry in the U.S. (which many argue continues to exist) and to highlight the kinds of progressive changes, which were (counter to many revisionist scenarios) provoked through political movements, in conjunction with public protests, in a diversity of forms.

Unfortunately, due to the state of contemporary mass media—which is now almost totally owned by large corporations that actively censor and manipulate form and content—massive political demonstrations and people's opposition to global and national policies and events are virtually ignored. This is especially problematic given that media culture is a powerful force for shaping people's values and perceptions of the world they live in. Hence, media is one of the most important instruments for the communication of ideas, values, false representations of everyday practices, and so-called common-sense reality to a broad spectrum of local and global audiences. Therefore, having the hands-on experience of constructing our video project from idea to completion—which included carefully selecting video footage, interviews, music for the soundtrack, as well as stock and filmed dialogue and images—assisted us to better understand that what we see in print, film, and television is actually carefully constructed and mostly controlled by those in positions of power behind the camera. It is vital to democracy to represent an all-inclusive spectrum that includes race, class, gender, sexuality, age, and other marginalized relations and to actively resist the dominant "invisibility" that characterizes much media of the past and present. For, as cultural studies expert Stuart Hall reminds us, inferential racism and sexism is often reinforced through lack of any representation of "othered" peoples in media culture.

On the successful completion of our project, we felt an enormous sense of pride, power, accomplishment in our newfound abilities to tell powerful stories. When we screened our project to the entire class in a festival-type forum at the end of the quarter, we invited our families, friends, and significant others to take part in our successful media production experience. It was also extremely heartening to see a number of faculty and staff in attendance at this screening. I am delighted to report that the audience applauded our project with enthusiasm, which was most definitely music to our ears.

IMPORTANCE OF CRITICAL MEDIA LITERACY

Our experiences in the "Critical Media Literacy" and "Media: Gender, Race, Class and Sexualities" courses provided us with the necessary skills to be able to critically decipher stereotypical media representations and convey an alternate view that challenged the norm. These two classes provide students with the tools to become critical thinkers, which empowers us to view media and the politics of representation through a new lens. The media's influential power continues to impart restrictive paradigms

related to race, gender, age, sexuality, and class. As a result, a large portion of society remains invisible and completely erased from view since they fail to fit the norm. These two media classes cumulatively empower students by providing the necessary skills they need to communicate alternative ideologies through technology and media.

As a result of learning more about the complex conscious and unconscious discourse of communication employed in media culture, I am convinced that adoption of critical media literacy classes at all levels of education is imperative, since they provides the skills necessary to communicate alternative experiences, which may otherwise be unheard or invisible. For example, as a career counselor, I hope to organize career development workshops for girls in junior and senior high school to assist them in understanding how gender and career choices often align. I employed media presentations to engage students in this regard, in a UCLA Labor Center Project. My presentation included a female electrician, who discussed her experiences of being a "visual representation" for introducing this relatively untraditional profession to girls and women at career fairs. Many times, she reported, young women would approach her at career fairs and express their interest in becoming an electrician, which they had never considered as a viable option because they had never met or seen a woman working in this field,

This experience has inspired me to continue to educate students in workshops that present possibilities for nontraditional careers for women. I hope that such media-mediated workshops will provoke women to consider a wider range of employment and professional possibilities. Similarly, Darlene Edgley, who was one of the co-producers of our documentary, is currently working on a critical media project, as part of her M.A. thesis in African American Studies, which will investigate health issues in relation to Black lesbians. Her work will necessarily include identifying media representations or lack thereof. Hence, literacies in critical media and its practical applications have armed us, as videographers and critical thinkers, to educate and cultivate social and political change.

Michelle Mearlette-Hernandez graduated summa cum laude from UCLA in 2008 with a B.A. in Women's Studies and Labor and Workplace Studies. She is enrolled at CSU Northridge in a Master's program in Counseling with a focus on career development. Currently, her graduate thesis project is focused on portfolio Careers. She has also developed Life Tamer, a Los Angeles–based life-management company.

Critical Media Literacy Empowering Students

A screening of excerpts from some of the films featured in this special issue will be held on

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The Power of Production

REFLECTIONS ON CM 278

BY HEATHER L. CABAN

CERTAINLY THERE ARE times when every educator wishes that they possessed the master remote for media culture so that with just a push of a button they were able to turn it off, or at least choose the channel. Unfortunately, the ubiquity of the media and its inextricable imprint on students makes the possibility of such control impossible. As a result, I firmly believe that educators must embrace the media in their pedagogical practices, recognizing its possibilities and preparing students for their encounters. Given the omnipresence of media in our everyday lives and that as Douglas Kellner describes it in Media Culture (Routledge, 1995), "media culture is now the dominant form of culture which socializes us and provides materials for identity in terms of social reproduction and change," I advocate the adoption of a critical media literacy pedagogical approach.

Much of my beliefs and understandings regarding critical media literacy were informed by the theories and activities that were part of Dr. Rhonda Hammer's course. I recall the excitement that I felt seeing the course listed. It became the focal point of my schedule and I remember choosing my other courses in relation to this one. It drew me because it was one of the few, if not only, courses that professed to explore the production aspect of media. A staunch proponent of critical media literacy, I had never seen it in practice, and I hoped that the course would make the theories come alive. Giving life to theories, I soon learned, requires long hours and considerable cooperation. This one course demanded as much work as my

I find television very educational. Every time someone switches it on I go into another room and read a book.

–Groucho Marx

other courses combined. The journey from media consumer to media maker was long and not without obstacles, but each phase brought me closer to uncovering what was to be a new type of transformative power located in dialogue and action.

Since the course was grounded in both theory and technical understanding, we were provided with camcorders on the first day of class. My first few minutes "playing" with the camera felt odd as if I had just been fitted with a prosthetic device designed for someone else. When I tired to zoom in on a person's face, I instead found myself peering into their pupil. Attempting to pan the camera slowly, I jerked it too quickly. Once I was introduced to the tripod, I was at least able to get a steady shot. After lessons on lighting and camera positioning, my partner and I became more confident. Though our backs ached from lugging our equipment around campus for practice sessions, we were prepared for the first assignment. We were asked to shoot a short videoclip that demonstrated our newfound, albeit basic, abilities. We framed ours as a public service announcement highlighting the importance of water preservation. Not yet Michael Moore, but in our own minds it was a huge success.

The crescendo of the course was to create a minidocumentary. Each group explores a topic of personal importance and to provide a countervoice to existing media representations or lack thereof. Encouraged to use media to critique media, we were provided with examples. During class we watched clips of radical documentary filmmaker Emile de Antonio's In The Year of the Pig (1968), which relied heavily on montage editing and media clips, including a diversity of archive-based segments, to create a narrative of critique. Through this process, de Antonio was able to expose and decode ideologies for his audience. Michael Moore's documentaries, also viewed in class, employ a similar method. The fact that both rely so heavily on archival/media footage demonstrates that meaningful documentaries might not necessarily require exorbitant budgets; having ingenuity and determination to secure footage can play an even greater role. Sites such as YouTube and Google images could now be viewed as valuable resources. As a requisite for incorporating existing media representations, we also became well versed in a little something known as "fair use" (a legal doctrine related to the use of copyrighted material).

Our documentary, A Generation of Change: The 2008 Presidential Election of Barack Obama, explored the historic nature of the most recent election. Because my partner believed that age was being overlooked in the narrative of the election, we used this as a guiding lens. Based on what was discussed in class, we chose to keep our storyline open. We asked each interviewee the same five questions. After that, we decided to enter a more naturalistic, free question format. I recalled the class lecture on cinema verité, in which we viewed Mick Jagger stripped of his cockiness while watching the video of a shooting that took place at a Rolling Stones' concert. I was amazed by its rawness and fascinated by a process that could coax this out of someone so normally image conscious. Through our interviews, given their structured format and purpose, could not be placed in the same genre, I really hoped that we might be able to get the same flash of intimacy. One of the directors commented that in his work, he "wanted what we got, not got what we wanted"; my partner and I operated similarly— in that we did not preselect a narrative and hoped to get multiple interpretations.

Filming the interview turned out much more complex than I had expected. In many cases the setup took longer than the interview. Microphones had to be correctly placed and operational, the lighting had to be appropriate, the background had to be nondistracting, and so on. In addition, interviewees needed time to become comfortable with interviewer and camera. The finished products that we had seen onscreen looked so effortless and so polished. It was not until the end of our first interview that we understood that elements that seemed trivial, like the placement of wall hangings and the positioning of lampshades, could make the difference between an interview appearing credible rather than comical.

Impressed by Dr. Hammer's own "We didn't start the fire" montage, as well as those in Moore's Farenheit 9/11, and amazed at montage's potential for compacting pages of ideas into seconds of video, we were certain that we wanted to open our video with one. Collecting and converting images into compatible iMovie format was time consuming, though we found that it was much easier to have too many to choose from than too few. My partner felt an emotional investment in the Black Eyed Peas' song "Where is the Love?"; so, we attempted to find images to match the lyrics. Since our theme was "change," we wanted to have black-and-white images dialogue with color photos, effectively juxtaposing the past with the present. Though the mood of our piece was meant to be reflective, we realized that some humor would be necessary, which is why we included John McCain's "face of anger" in the middle of the montage. Beginning with a montage focused on lack of love, respect, and dignity, we ended with a brief montage of victory entirely in color. This represents a full circle. In addition, the "Yes, We Can" song that accompanies the closing montage is sung by will.i.am, one of the members of Black Eyed Peas. The theme is an end that would not be possible without the beginning, a full cycle.

Editing the documentary was the most challenging, yet perhaps the most rewarding, part of the process, in that it was where the message and artistic vision were realized. The entire path up to this point had been a process of experimentation and discovery and this was no different. We began the shooting of the documentary with a loose framework and now it was time to piece things together. My partner agreed to embark on the first round of edits, producing a rough cut. Performing what to me seemed some kind of sleight of hand, she transformed our file full of clips into something comprehensible, even inspiring. In order to arrive at this point, I know that she must have imbibed numerous jugs of coffee and endured several sleepless nights.

After this initial editing, we met and discussed changes. First, we experimented with the ordering of the images. Having the visuals match the audio was essential to the overarching message and the entertainment experience. When constructing the beginning and ending montages, we had to be especially meticulous, as every line had one or more corresponding images. Getting the sequence right meant listening to the song over and over while shifting, adding, and deleting images. The images, so strongly imprinted, still appear in my head whenever I hear the songs. Sound levels and effects became another important element. My partner came up with the idea of the sound of footsteps with a completely black screen at the beginning. We liked the idea so much that added the same effect at the end. The footsteps trod on, signaling that change has started but is not complete. It is ongoing.

Forced to acknowledge the encroaching due date, we agreed on a final cut and were ready to transfer it to a DVD for the public screening. Uncooperative machines and defective discs caused last-minute panic; upon burning the final copy, however, we felt a subdued sense of accomplishment. Although still uncertain about how others would receive it and knowing that we could have done even better with more time, we felt sure that we had created something in which our own voices resonated.

We are most proud of the segment relating to media representations. A teenage interviewee mocking the ridiculousness of the fact that many Americans get their political news from "fundits" is juxtaposed with clips of Matt Lauer citing statistics about the influence of Stephen Colbert and John Stewart on young voters and a near 80-year-old who claims these outlets are the only ones that she allows herself the pleasure of viewing. As a sequence, it provides a dig at the media and a bit of levity. We also enjoyed some of the commentaries about Reverend Jer-

emiah Wright. His was the only representation that all four interviewees brought up as bothersome, and their comments represented an important critique of the media and a "talking back" for us. Most mainstream media outlets portrayed Rev. Wright in a negative light, showing reactions of "normal (white) folk" being appalled, with few images of non African-Americans defending Wright.

Our project ended up much differently than we had envisioned. The fact that Obama won the presidency drove us to reorient and reexamine the message that we were exploring. To be honest, our mood had changed dramatically, from criticizing media representations out of a fear of a repeat of George Bush's two elections, to, though cliché, a mood of almost astonished hope. In a sense this experience made it all the more clear that a media driven by immediate events is inevitably shrouded in ideology.

Dr. Hammer's course fulfilled its objective twofold and was one of the most meaningful experiences of my graduate studies at UCLA. I draw on the concepts and skills learned throughout her course daily, as I teach English Conversation to Education majors at a university in South Korea. Making a significant break from the existing curriculum, I have designed my course around the topic of "globalization," with an emphasis on the role of global media and new media technology. Students are asked to critique media representations employing a variety of lenses. Using a Facebook fan page for the course, they openly engage in weekly discussions, sharing links to videos, news stories, and images for critical discussion, which is continued during class. For many, this is their first experience in analyzing media. Several students have approached me with questions concerning additional methods of including media in the classroom, and I have responded to them with examples taken from Dr. Hammer's course. Amazed when told that we were expected to create our own documentaries, more than one has asked me to include a production aspect in my course for next semester. And, Dr. Hammer has given me invaluable advice concerning my dissertation. She has encouraged me to use the observations gained from the course that I am teaching. in the in-class and online discussions, the video analysis assignments, and the incidental feedback have provided a rich amount of data. Without the experience of this course and Dr. Hammer's direction, I don't believe that my dissertation focus would be as meaningful.

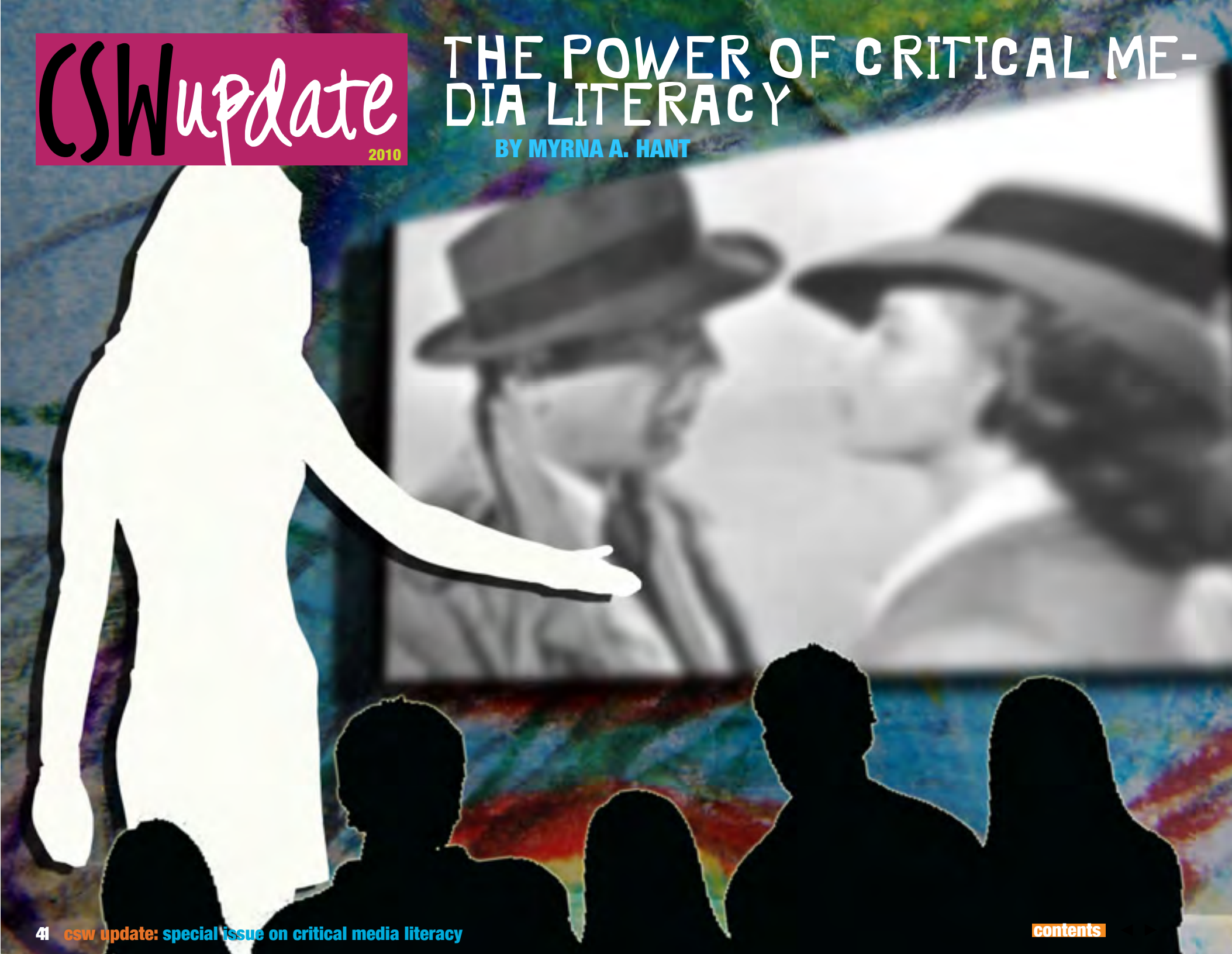
This class has served as a remarkable model of how a critical media literacy course should be taught. The way in which the syllabus coherently wove together theory and production made it the first example of praxis that I have seen in a UCLA classroom. Uncovering the mystery in the production of media messages has made me realize my own potential for creating media that has impact. All of the final videos produced could easily be used as educational material or components of a curriculum embodying the tenets of social justice. To be honest, I am not sure if I will ever again make a documentary, though a webpage or short video clip may not be far out of reach; however, I feel confident that I now have the ability to help others to start their way.

Heather L. Caban is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Social Sciences and Comparative Education in the Graduate School of Education at UCLA. She is currently conducting research in the area of new media literacies and globalization in Seoul, South Korea.

CSWupdate 2010

THE POWER OF CRITICAL MEDIA LITERACY

BY MYRNA A. HANT



The Power Of Critical Media Literacy

BY MYRNA A. HANT

SEVERAL YEARS AGO I decided to leave an administrative position at Chapman University and to pursue new goals. Soon after I left Chapman, I audited Dr. Rhonda Hammer's "Critical Media Literacy" course, an experience that enriched all aspects of my new work life. My return to scholarly studies was provoked, in part, by my interests in the intersectional relations of research, teaching, and community activism. In each of these areas I became aware of the empowering dimensions of critical media literacy perspectives. This course, and another like it,[1] enabled me to better apply theoretical and pragmatic approaches to both my research and my teaching. Moreover, this course helped to inspire me to engage in the kinds of scholarship that had been put on hold during many of the years I had spent working in academic administration and raising a family.

In order to pursue my research interests, I applied to, and was accepted as, a Research Scholar at the prestigious UCLA Center for the Study of Women. At this point in my returning studies, I knew that I wanted to investigate depictions and portrayals of particular marginalized peoples, in at least one of my projects, and discovered that the dialectical and polysemic nature of what is often described as "the politics of representation," was especially appropriate for these kinds of endeavors. As Douglas Kellner describes it:

> Critical media literacy needs to engage the 'politics of representation' that subjects images and discourses of race, gender, sexuality, class, and other features to scrutiny and analysis, involving critique of violent masculinities, sexism, racism, classism, homophobia, and other hurtful forms of representation. A critical media literacy also positively valorizes more progressive representations of gender, race, class, and sexuality, and notes how many cultural texts are ambiguous and contradictory in their representations. (2008: 160)

I had become patently aware of the dearth of positive representations of mature women, or what often appeared as a lack of any kinds of representation, in commercial mass media and popular culture. After further investigation, it became apparent to me that the majority of images of mature women in television often serve to perpetuate stereotypes and, in the case of older people, usually a negative one. Incorporating conceptualizations and theories from this course assisted me to approach my research, in this regard, in a far more sophisticated manner than I might otherwise have done. This encouraged me to draw on particular series, including the classic 1960s program Bewitched and the cult TV favorite The Sopranos, to demonstrate how older women continue to be depicted on television as caricatures, informed by

1. Professor Douglas Kellner's graduate course in the "Introduction to Cultural Studies."

ageist ideologies. This method was a radically new for me, as I had never considered that I could actually engage specific media in my writings.

My research then focused on portrayals of certain ethnic (with emphasis on Jewish ones) and African American mothers in the media, from the early 1950s series The Goldbergs to such contemporary shows as Curb Your Enthusiasm and Everybody Hates Chris. I am now pursuing representations of ethnic and mothers of color within a period in which many baby boomers (generally identified as those born between 1946 and 1964) appear to be in denial about the aging process and therefore are redefining what it means to get older. This has become especially the case with consumer-based corporate media in which some television advertisements, in an effort to sell drugs or insurance, present an ultra-active senior who isn't really a "senior" at all. A welcome respite, from the classic (mis)representations, occurred in the early 2000s when such programs as Judging Amy and Six Feet Under presented more realistic and counterhegemonic depictions of older women. Unfortunately, most others continue to resort to hackneyed stereotypes.

Critical media literacy has also assisted me in my pedagogical pursuits. For example, I teach a series of courses, which I call Women Who Misbehave, for the Osher Institute at UCLA. In it, I present women and women's issues that rarely receive attention. At present I am teaching a series of classes on the Women Adventurer, including such luminaries as Gertrude Bell, Freya Stark, Isak Dinesen (Karen Blixen), and Beryl Markham. These multitalented mavericks were famous in their own times, but are, sadly, largely unknown to contemporary audiences.

Indeed, to better facilitate an engaged pedagogy in the classroom, I have become literate in the production and incorporation of archival footage and video and film clips, as well as a diversity of media forms in my PowerPoint presentations. These are skills perfected from those I initially gained in Dr. Hammer's course. The latest in my multimedia PowerPoint projects is a presentation on ethnic women "who misbehaved," which will focus on such social justice mavericks as Clara Lemlich, Emma Lazarus, and Emma Goldman. The employment of these kinds of media productions has become mandatory for effective contemporary education.

Social activism today is also unquestionably dependent upon media interpretations. As President of the Board of P.A.T.H. (People Assisting the Homeless), I am often asked to present a positive image of the homeless and the work that we are doing in the community. It is essential that the homeless be presented as individuals who are similar to those of us who are not homeless—that is, as people with goals and hopes. Dr. Hammer's course clarified for me not only how we think we are projecting ideas, concepts, and images but also how the viewer interprets these. The politics of representation promotes, ultimately, more or less assistance for the homeless. It is in this sense, that I have endeavored to develop media presentations that further the objectives of increased public awareness and involvement.

It is incumbent on any educated person to thoroughly understand the implications of the media. Undoubtedly, Dr. Hammer is doing a great service in educating her students to become cognizant of its pervasive manipulation. Because the course is not only theoretical but also pragmatic, it is highly accessible to students, regardless of their background or experience. I have readily applied her course material to my divergent interests and consider myself lucky to have discovered her class.

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Myrna A. Hant has been a CSW Research Scholar since 2001. Her research focus is popular culture/television with an emphasis on portrayals of 50+ women and men in the media. She is the author of articles on older mothers/women on primetime television programs such as Bewitched, All in the Family, The Sopranos, and Curb Your Enthusiasm. With a Master's in English, an M.B.A., and a Ph.D., Dr. Hant is an instructor in gender studies and later-life transitions at the UCLA Osher Institute.

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CSW Update is the newsletter of the UCLA Center for the Study of Women. It is published monthly during the academic year. UCLA faculty, staff, and students are welcome to submit articles for inclusion. If you have questions, please email the publications staff at cswpubs@women.ucla.edu

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