Lesson 1: Course Intro – Monday, 1/13

- In our first lesson together, we had a meaningful and interesting discussion about what it means to be human. This was an important place to start for a number of reasons, some of which I summed up by noting: media and humanity are linked. It is unclear where we will go from here, but it is clear that media and technology will continue to be a significant part of our lives (and has been for all of human existence – just look at cave paintings). I think an important place to start a course about media and analysis is to reflect on what it means to be human. We will have many discussions in this class and we will see things from different perspectives. That prospect is exciting and frustrating all at the same time. We must remember what connects us, even as and especially if our opinions divide us. It is also important to reflect on our humanity as we work toward honing our analysis skills – the more we understand the self and the human condition, the more receptive we will be to reading and understanding others/characters and the messages in media.

- Together, we defined what we feel it means to be human – and got pretty profound.
  - Understand the balance between understanding the self as an individual and the self as part of a collective.
  - We envision the self as a physical and metaphorical entity.
  - Biology makes us human – our DNA is almost identical, making us a singular species or race.
  - Additionally, we all live on earth – binding us as a species in our experience.
  - Ideologically, we are complex and emotional beings who perceive reality – we understand that we exist (as a self/individual entity and as a group). We are aware. The fascinating piece here is – what is reality? As our technology becomes more powerful, it has continued to merge the human self with an online or virtual self. It is already sometimes difficult to tell what is real and what is not, imagine if true virtual reality existed.
  - Because we are aware and because we have logic and reason, we also have responsibility – the tricky thing here is, who is our individual and collective responsibility to? It is clear that as a group, we are not exercising responsibility to things like the environment or to each other.
  - We all have a heartbeat. It is that simple. And yet, that statement is also so complex. One the one hand, it reminds us that every single human, no matter how different, is alive. We are all born and we all die and in between, we have a heartbeat. We are the same in that much larger sense. And yet, the heartbeat brings up a lot of controversy – when does life begin? When does humanity begin?

- Right now, in this cultural and political moment, we still, as a people, don’t seem to believe that all humans are human, despite all of these (profound) things that bind us. There is wide spread discrimination based on gender, race, sexuality, age, disability, socioeconomic class, and religion. It is perhaps more important than ever, in this technological age that allows anonymous others to spew hatred and falsities out into the ether, for us to remember that we are all EQUALLY human.
Lesson 2: Classroom Community and Media and Technology – Wednesday, 1/15

- We had a meaningful discussion about what a classroom community should look like. My hope in having us think about this idea individually and as a group, is that we work to create the kind of classroom community that is meaningful for all of us. The following items came up in discussion as being important when establishing a strong classroom community:
  
  o **Engagement:** Students are 100% engaged, which connects to the idea of active listening. In an ideal classroom, all students interested in the material and are learning and growing in a variety of different ways. Students contribute to class discussions and support one another – not in the sense that they always agree, but in the sense that they fight for each other’s right to be in the room, to ask questions, and to express the self.
  
  o **Reserving Judgement:** This is not an easy task for any one. We all have biases – many of which we don’t even realize most of the time. It is important for us not to necessarily stop all negative thoughts but to at least become better at recognizing when what we think negatively about others is damaging, insulting, or hurtful. Now of course, we don’t all have to agree, and you can most certainly see some one else’s opinion as silly or worthless (after all, not all opinions have merit). However, it is our job as part of this classroom community to be open, to listen, to contemplate, to share, and to at least give others a chance. Remember, it is okay for you to be unsure or unaware and it is okay for others to be unsure or unaware. **None of us have all the answers and we all have the capacity to grow and change.**
  
  o **Active Listening:** we noted that this idea is about both parties paying attention in a reciprocal relationship. We need to hear all the parts (like with the study of music) and actively decipher what is being said. We must do the work of active listening by listening to understand not simply to speak again/refute/rebut. We also have to understand that all people learn and communicate differently.
  
  o **Names:** The one I added to the list is – it is important to know each other’s names. This is something we need to work at. Whenever you pair up with someone new in class, it is important to look each other in the eye, shake hands, and learn each other’s names. Building a community is about getting to know people on many levels, and their name is the foundation of that process.

- We also thought about and discussed how media and technology affect our lives.
  
  o For all of us, media and tech are daily and major parts of our lives. Even when we try to unplug or cleanse our lives of one media/tech or another, it still feels like we are constantly surrounded by more or plagued by the need to be connected.
  
  o We have to remember that media portrays a very specific reality, whether that is through news media, social media, television, film, music, etc. These texts are crafting a specific version of “normal” and “ideal,” which are actually quite arbitrary.
  
  o It is becoming increasingly difficult to know where the boundary between real and not real is. Our technology has enabled us to have online selves, which may or may not reflect who we really are. This line will only become more blurred as our technology continues to change how we live our lives. Imagine what will happen when bio tech becomes common place or true virtual reality.
Media and tech have pros and cons. Remember, any given hardware or software is not inherently good or evil – it is all about what we (individual and humans collectively) do with it.

We are all media consumers and creators, and in this course, we are all likely studying to work in the media industry in some form. It is important for us to remember that what we currently see in media does not have to be all we ever see – we can create something new and meaningful. We have the power to shape the media landscape and to create content that inspires, educates, connects, archives, and contributes positively to human life.

Lesson 3: Culture – Friday, 1/17

- We reflected on the idea of culture, then had a bit of speed-dating to share out and work on building our classroom community. It is important for us to reflect on that speed-dating experience. What was easy about it? What was difficult about it? What made you uncomfortable and why? It is important to reflect because talking to people (often strangers – and people who will become your colleagues) is an important skill. I like to have you journal first so that you enter into the conversation having already done some thinking (plus it is written down – you already did the work, now just time to read it out or share the idea). With this in mind, these things can help in these kinds of situations (ie – meeting someone new and talking)
  - Preparation: you can’t always prepare for a convo, so many happen on the fly, but you can prepare little tidbits that are likely to come up in certain conversations. For example – a little blurb about the work that you do and what you see yourself doing in the future. This info would be great at say a party where you are networking or in a job interview.
  - Prep some questions: Another way to prepare for these kinds of convos is to have some questions ready in your back pocket in case the conversation lags.
  - People want to talk about themselves: remember, we all just want to be heard. Part of what we identified as being important to a classroom community is important to a conversation – active listening. Part of active listening is responding to what you hear the other person say. Ask them follow ups – why do you feel that way? When did you start getting involved in that hobby? How did you know it was what you wanted? People want to talk, just give them something to talk about.
  - It is okay to be uncomfortable: most people are uncomfortable talking to someone new. Just embrace that feeling and know it is okay. The more we practice this skill, the easier it will become – those feelings of discomfort will fade.
  - Awkward – just say so: Sometimes just putting it out there can alleviate the tension. In the speed-dating, if you finish early and it is uncomfortable, just say – just this is awkward. You both laugh, tension is released, and now you might find yourself chatting more easily.

- During our speed-dating and group discussion, we talked about culture. It is important to think about the idea of culture in general, but also in terms of media analysis. It is important to understand that human identity is complex – we belong to many evolving
and changing cultures simultaneously. The cultures we are involved in will affect the way we see the world – the way we analyze media.

- We identified some elements of culture including: language (written and oral); personal shared interest and meaning; music; geography; food; tradition; beliefs, etc.
  - We talked specifically about the idea of geography. Geography is something that binds us to many cultures – our country, our state, our town, our high school, our college, our place of business, the classes we take. Each space has unique elements that bind the people in those places. It is important to remember that norms inside these distinct cultures might be different from others.
  - Geography is also an important element in understanding the idea of race. Race is not just the color of our skin, it is also our ethnicity and our place of origin. When we start contemplating place of origin as part of race, things get really complex, really fast. For example, if I am white but I am born and raised in Japan, am I Japanese? If my mother is Black and my father is Chinese, what does that make me? How we identify is complex and can evolve over time.

- We started to identify some of the cultures we belong to – millennial or gen z/youth culture; Philadelphia; Internet; college; small town or big city. All of these affect who we are and how we see the self and the world.
- We also started to try to define American culture – not an easy task – the way we see ourselves is rooted in our short history. The way others see us is not super flattering. American identity is also really complex (as is any national identity) because we might all see it differently. Some elements we identified are:
  - A mix of cultures: we are at the core a country of immigrants – with the exception of the Native people.
  - Occupation-based: unlike many European countries, we live for our jobs. Our occupation (or lack there of) defines us.
  - Capitalism: closely related to the previous item – we are materialistic and tend to believe in the (problematic) pull yourself up by your bootstraps paradigm.
  - Confrontational: perhaps this is where the sports/beer/guns comment belongs. They all fit. Lately, the one side or the other/us vs. them rhetoric has escalated, creating confrontation just for the sake of it.
  - Sex obsessed and also prude: compare our porn culture and our sex education…some mixed messages there.
  - Access: the idea of access – to food, to technology, to education – these things often define us (especially in terms of class).
  - Rugged individualism: this pioneer spirit has been part of our country’s image for a long time. It links in many ways to our capitalistic spirit as well. But when it comes down to it, we are all the same (not as unique as we want to believe).
  - Patriotism: this idea is often encapsulated in America through flags, red white and blue, fireworks, guns, and war.

Lesson 4: Ideal Media – Wednesday, 1/22

- On our second try at “speed-dating,” we saw some interesting results. The first time around, we did a good job. There was some discomfort, but overall, we made it meaningful. This time around, now that we knew the drill, now that we knew it was okay to be uncomfortable, we really thrived. The volume in the room during conversations was
louder (I found myself having to lean in closer than last time). The volume indicates more confidence – in what we were saying to one another and in ourselves. The conversations were more engrossing – most of us didn’t even notice when the timer went off and many conversations went over the allotted time. It also seemed like we went a little deeper in our conversations. A good take home here is – practice breeds not just skill, but confidence as well.

• When we worked to identify “good” media, here is what we discussed as a class:
  o **Good** might break down to mean – compelling, purposeful, beneficial, quality, culturally aware
  o **Subjective**: we noted that the idea of good is in the eye of the beholder and the idea of good could certainly change over time (even for an individual).
  o **Intent/Purpose**: we noted that purpose could be simply to entertain or make people laugh. It could be to educate or inform. It could be to inspire. Like with defining good, defining intent or purpose can take on a lot of different ideas.
  o **Culturally aware/relevant**: we had an interesting discussion around this idea. In many ways, media texts serve as time capsules – representing a specific moment in time, an era, a culture. Perhaps, a good text is culturally relevant in the sense that it recognizes the moment it is produced in and speaks to that moment. We felt that a good text has no time limit – even when viewed from another cultural moment (perhaps one more technologically equipped or more socially progressive) a text originally produced in a past era can still be considered good. Certainly, looking back at media from past eras is illuminating – it demonstrates clear ideologies that can help us to better understand that moment and the progression into this moment. I noted that Whoopi Goldberg did an intro to a Looney Tunes cartoon noting that these cartoons display racist sentiments (among other things). It was a series produced in a specific moment in time. We aren’t going to censor those elements because to do so would be to deny they happened, and to deny they happened is to deny the pain they caused.

**Lesson 5: Reading Notes Assignment – Friday, 1/24**

• The reading notes assignment has a variety of purposes. The most basic is that it proves to me you did the work. More importantly, this assignment will help you to become more capable of navigating academic readings and therefore other types of readings. It provides you with a note-taking template that you can use in any class that helps you to understand the content and provide you with the most important later when studying. It also provides you with an excellent tool for class discussion.

• Attention to detail matters. It matters now as a student. It will matter as a parent or guardian. It will matter in your career. Take the time to review the expectations of your instructors, your bosses, utilities companies, rental agreements, etc. and abide by those expectations, even if you think those instructions are tedious or unnecessary.

• I have provided you will all the tools you need to succeed with this assignment. These tools include – an instruction sheet, a detailed layout sheet, several examples and student exemplars, a rubric, and a prezi and lecture that broke down all of these materials.

• When doing the reading notes assignment, you can follow some steps that should help you to complete the assignment well.
Identify the context of the article and how that affects what you read. Pinpoint the date it was published, the author or authors, the title, the journal or book it came from. This information will affect your understanding of the content.

Start with the basics – get an overview: Read the title, read the abstract if there is one, read the section headings, read the introduction and conclusion. This information will give you a clear idea of what the article is about before you dive into it.

Highlight as you go – make a map for yourself for completing the reading notes. Highlight important (main) ideas, key terms, interesting ideas. Write notes in the margins, underline and circle. Make yourself a map so that when you go back into the article, you don’t have to reread the entire thing.

Identify the article’s purpose: is it an argument, is it a guide, is it a map of sorts? Why is the author writing and what do they want you to take away?

Identify the author’s argument and ponder it: What is his or her stance? What are some opposing stances? Where do you stand? Question the author. Although your opinion will not appear in your assignment, it is important for you as a critical reader to do this step with everything that you read.

Identify the author’s main points. Summarize his or her stance/argument. Pinpoint the main points/major sections that support that argument. Recap these items. Identify major examples.

Lesson 6: Intro to Media and Communication – Monday, 1/27

- Communication is: a process, transactional, symbolic, polysemic.
  - Process – continuous and complex, unfolds over time, each element affects the others.
  - Transactional – process in which there is constant mutual influence of communications participants.
  - Symbolic – it requires signs and symbols that have relationships to referents that are to some extent arbitrary (but generally agreed upon)
  - Polysemic – texts carry multiple meanings and can be interpreted differently by different people.

- Communication is complex and there are many different interpretations of what communication is. Some of the definitions that resonate most with me reflect the idea that human beings endeavor to be understood and that communication isn’t just what is made explicitly clear, it is also about what is implied, what is beneath the surface, and what isn’t said. Communication is the transmission of messages with or without intent. An individual is always communicating with the people around him or her whether he or she knows it or not.
  - Interestingly, communication works because we often have a shared set of symbolic understandings – the words we use to define items are completely arbitrary. We could call a pig a pig, but just as easily call it a cow. As long as we all agree, then that word works. I also drew a pig on the board. When asked, what is this, the group responded – it is a pig. Actually, it is a picture of a pig, but because we have an unspoken understanding that a picture can be called the thing itself, the answer pig is correct. The idea is that communication works because we
agree on the names of items and on their definitions, all of which are largely arbitrary.

- Communication happens through words (verbal and visual); images (still and moving); figures, charts and graphs; clothing, accessories, personal style; emotions (body language, tone of voice); behavior (actions, reactions, inaction); and aesthetics and editing (lighting, camera angle, staging, colors, etc).

- There is not only one way to perceive messages, they can be encoded and decoded (interpreted) differently based on our identities (backgrounds, beliefs, values, etc). Each person in the room might have a different and equally valid understanding of a text based.

- Mass communication has traditionally been seen in the following ways: the communication flow is largely one way from sender to receiver/audience and that communication shares an identical message to a vast and geographically dispersed group; communication is from one or a few to many – one or a few sources generate and distribute content to large, heterogeneous audiences; communication is anonymous (sources generally do not know their audiences and audiences do not know the sources, except at a general level; and audiences are seen as largely passive recipients of messages distributed by the media, with little opportunity for feedback and practically no opportunity for immediate feedback or interaction with each other.

- However, in more recent years, mass communication has changed as technological, economic, and cultural convergence have caused media content changes, media type changes, media use changes, media distribution changes, media audience changes, and media profession changes.
  - Technological convergence: specific types of media converging into a digital media form. We see this with smartphones, which have merged separate devices and media types like – books, radio, music files, television, film, calls, texts, emails, and Internet access – into a single device.
  - Economic convergence: the merging of Internet of telecommunications companies with traditional media companies (ex: Comcast and NBC Universal) – enables major corporations to produce and distribute content on their own channels – ultimately narrowing the possibilities for types of stories and content distributed.
  - Cultural Convergence: The globalization of shared cultural practices enabled both by easier travel and Internet communications. The changes in practices of media consumption, creation, and distribution – individuals have more interactivity and choice at each of these stages.

- Often, media and pop culture are viewed as an escape or a distraction – from the harsh realities of our personal lives and the world around us. It is perfectly okay to see media in this light; however, we must also remember that we still need to be active thinkers when we watch/listen because it is always sending messages about what is normal and abnormal, ideal and not, all of which are socially constructed and arbitrary.

- Media matters. Pop culture matters. They matter for many reasons, some of those reasons being:
  - Entertaining: These things are meant to entertain. Entertainment can bring us joy. It can bring people together, connect people, and encourage people to share ideas.
  - Influential: Pop culture texts are imbued with messages that influence how we behave, our perception of the self, others, and the world. These messages contain
ideologies – a belief system that is distributed through mass media from a very similar few to heterogeneous many. Our perception of society is dictated by those in power because our media is created and distributed largely by those in power.

- **Informative:** For good or bad, directly or indirectly, media and pop culture inform us. They shape how we understand the world and they have the power to be educational in a variety of ways. Television has always been a medium that has expanded our worldview – it continues to follow this tradition; however, we have to be aware that most of what we see is shown in a narrow way.

- **Historical:** Media and pop culture are time capsules of a sort – producing and reflecting back cultural norms. They document, in great detail, the ins and outs of a particular cultural moment, a space in time in human history. However, we must always be aware of whose perspective media is produced from and ask ourselves – who gets to produce media and who gets to decide what our history will look like?

• Important to this lesson was a discussion of the image from the series *Atlanta*. I like to utilize this image when we first start thinking about how media communicates a message. Even before we have tackled the basics of media analysis, we can look at this image and see some important ideas.

  - We need to identify the basics – the image contains three, mid-20s, Black men, each with a peach in his mouth. These things seem obvious, so much so that we often forget to identify them. However, these are some of the most important elements of this image and are critical to understanding some of the symbolic meaning in the image.

  - Symbols – the peach is a symbol.
    - We aligned its meaning with the idea of Georgia – locating these men in a specific place (the south).
    - One student in another course noted it reminded her of the Housewives, who hold out the peaches in their hands (their hands, their world). This reference (an allusion) is almost certainly not what the producers of this image were going for; however, it is important in terms of understanding this image. When we see a text and think of another, it is worth examining. The difference between wealthy women holding the peach and young, poor, Black men with it in their mouths is certainly significant.
    - The placement of the peach is significant and we need to think about what is not being shown in order to understand it better. Someone holding it out (like in the example above) indicates ownership. Someone holding it and taking a bite could indicate pleasure. Someone who has it stuffed in their mouth is being silenced.
    - The placement is significant – stuffed in the mouth – reminiscent of a stuffed pig, apple in the mouth. It also calls on the idea of silence – being unable to speak. By calling on this image, the producer seems to be remarking on the way that Black people were (and in some places still are) equated with animals to make them appear subhuman, thereby making it easier to abuse and take advantage of them.
    - Additionally, we noticed that the men’s jaws are slack – they are not biting down on the peach. Perhaps the idea here is that they can taste but they
cannot fully have it – there is hope but that hope is never fulfilled (a false hope or promise)

- All of the symbolic elements of the peach are tied to the message we might take away from this image and work in conjunction with other facets of this image (the dark background and the men’s expressions – desensitized, sad, fearful) to create meaning. It could be a comment on class relations - on the lack of power the Black community has in general. It could be a comment on these men specifically in relation to the way the music industry (and the sports industry) exploit Black people. It could be about the lack of power these characters in particular feel in the context of this series. Although this image appears to be a simple promo for a television series, it contains some significant messages about race and class.

Lesson 7: Intro to Theory and Cultural Studies – Wednesday, 1/29

- Cultural Studies
  - An academic field that came to fruition in the 1960s and one that has a variety of sub-fields and areas of study that are often located around big picture identity categories.
  - It is one that takes seriously the study of pop culture texts and seeks to understand how power relations are produced and reproduced through these texts.
  - It is important for us to remember that there are no innocent texts – media is encoded with deliberate messages and it is encoded with unconscious messages.
  - We need to examine how pop culture texts represent big picture identity categories like race, class, sexuality, gender, and ability/disability in order to better understand how relations of domination and subordination are presented and perpetuated.
  - We need to remember that pop culture texts present clear role models and patterns of behavior that construct how we understand what is normal and ideal (and not). Cultural studies is an important field because it seeks to locate what norms and ideals are presented and the effect of those norms and ideals on individuals, groups, and the world.
  - We have already worked to start defining culture, which often includes elements like food, traditions/customs, religious practices, values, music, art, clothing/style, language, symbols, geography, and government. It also includes all of the practices we engage in – going to a coffee shop, going to a sporting event, etc.

- Theory:
  - A theory is a way of seeing. It is a way to focus on a specific subject matter and seeks to help explain and interpret a particular phenomenon. Theories help scholars to make connections and contextualize specific phenomena.
  - It is important to understand that the broader our knowledge of theory, the better – the more theories (perspectives) we understand, the more full our understanding of a particular phenomena can be.
  - I took us through the process of how we might use theory:
    - Select a text. A text is anything we create. It could be a film, song, video game, television show, an article of clothing, a sporting event, a Tweet, a debate, a piece of technology, etc. All of these texts are laden with
messages that help to illuminate the time period in which they are produced.

- Identify a Phenomenon. In this course, we are investigating hierarchies of power and ideologies embedded in pop culture texts – norms, ideals, privilege, bias, agency. We want to see what patterns appear in texts around these ideas. A good way to go about identifying a phenomenon in a text is to think about representation and to start with your gut. What questions come to mind when examining the text – questions like – why is there only one woman in this entire film; why does the only Black character serve as the “punching bag” for other characters; why does the guy in the wheelchair always appear in the background of scenes and never in the foreground?

- Select a Theory. A theory will help us to investigate the selected phenomenon by helping to define important terms/concepts and by providing a framework for analysis – a way of looking.

- Select a Method: a method is simply a means of investigation. It is a way to determine what data to collect, how to organize that data, and how to analyze it. In this class, we will be using narrative analysis, which pays careful attention to how texts are constructed in terms of plot, characterization, conflict, and themes.

- Analysis: What do you see, what do you hear, what do you think, what do you feel? What patterns do you notice, specifically in terms of how different identity categories are represented (or not). And remember, patterns make for strong arguments.

- Create an argument. An argument is, quite simply, the claim you are trying to prove. You support a claim using theory and using the tangible indicators you see in the text.

- Identify Implications: This is the so what – why does your argument matter? Why should anyone care? This is also where you want to think about what you did not tackle in your analysis and what ideas you might pursue in the future.

- **Analysis practice:**
  - We looked at some Vogue covers and spent some time looking at one of Justin Beiber and Hailey (what’s her last name??). We noted that analyzing an image like this (a cover of a magazine that comes out monthly) would need to be contextualized within a much larger pool of images so that we can locate patterns and make more tangible claims. As a single image, we noticed some clear ideals:
    - White
    - Heterosexual
    - Opposites attract – bad boy, good girl trope
    - Romance – not dating, not marriage (both of which require work) but romance.
    - The white dress suggests purity and virginity (which is actually the last thing we think about these two people)
    - The white dress also indicates marriage – the white of the dress and the giant ring indicate ownership as well as wealth and luxury.
The idea is – these are the things we should aspire to be – at least as this magazine sees it.

- We looked at the superhero image briefly and started to identify some important elements of the text and questions we had about the text. We noticed:
  - The men having bulging muscles and “masculine” builds.
  - There is only one woman – she is sexualized – does this mark her as powerful or not?
  - Only specific characters have weapons, with Wonder Woman holding a shield – what does this mean?
  - Why is this group predominantly white?
  - Why is Aquaman – person of color – farthest back in the frame?
  - What does this image say about what it means to be a hero?
  - How does the positioning of the characters as a whole indicate power?

- We also looked at some rom com posters. We thought about what these posters might suggest in terms of norms/ideals when looked at both individually and collectively. We noticed:
  - True love exists and it is White and heterosexual…
  - Men are strong – they sling women over their shoulders or hoist them up on their hips or shoulders – in some cases, they carry them like Neanderthals carrying a carcass home for dinner…
  - Women are petite and beautiful
  - White background – simplicity – perhaps indicating, love is simple…
  - Women appear as objects and men as the possessors of women and girls
  - Love is funny, fun, always and endlessly enjoyable
  - Love is for an audience
  - There are fundamental differences between men and women (so much so that there is a giant line down half of the posters separating men and women).
  - Women are coy and playful
  - Men are clueless in matters of love

Lesson 8: Media Analysis Basics – Friday, 1/31

- It is so important to start our media analysis unit with a few reminders.
  - Media matters. Pop culture matters. These things are so prevalent that we forget they operate as a sphere of influence containing specific ideologies that influence how we understand things like gender, race, sexuality, class, and ability. We consume so much media so much of the time that we often stop questioning the deeply embedded messages in media texts. Ideals put forth by these texts become normalized and naturalized, which makes us more likely to adopt these ideals and beliefs without even realizing it. In this way, pop culture texts are political.
  - In this course, we want to analyze and think about how media influences individual and group ways of knowing and being (how we act, construct our identities, and how we understand the self, others and the world). We also want to understand how television influences cultural norms, specifically what we perceive as normal and abnormal, ideal and not ideal.

- Norms – Ideals – Agency - Power
o **Norms**: are formed and informed by society, media and pop culture. They are standards that we create and agree on (through our choices) and they can and do change over time. Norms (particularly those we see reflected in media) help to shape what we consider normal (and natural) in terms of gender, race, class, ability, sexuality, and age (among other things). Often, norms reinforce implicit (conscious or unconscious) bias. I noted that when looking for the women’s hair styles on Google, the search yielded almost all white women. I didn’t realize until after I had put the images together that I had selected only white women - my own identity bias became clear. Bias isn’t always or necessarily based on hatred, but it is something we need to actively be aware of and counteract.

o **Ideals**: norms create ideas. We often look to pop culture to see how we measure up in terms of things like body type, clothing/style, sexual practices/frequency, skin color, gender presentations, wealth, and ability. The things we measure ourselves against are constructed, artificial, arbitrary. We need to locate privilege and power within a text and determine the consequences and implications. In order to do this, we need to understand what power and agency look like and how to locate characters with power/agency or a lack of it.

o **Agency**: can be located in the capacity to act (or speak); the capacity to bring out desired effects; the capacity to alter the surrounding environment; intention turned into action; control over the self, others and situations.

o **Power**: could look like dominance, control, and influence over the self, others and the environment. Power might manifest in different ways – physical, financial, sexual, ability, language, voice, and visibility. Sometimes it is easy to recognize power, sometimes it is very difficult. We need context and patterns to make clear claims about who has power within a text and what it might mean.

- Media texts are polysemic – they are embedded with multiple meanings. Texts are imbued with messages about power – who has it and who doesn’t, who should have it and who shouldn’t. Media texts and pop culture texts are laden with messages about big picture identity categories like race, gender, sexuality, ability, age, and class and normalize and naturalize specific ways of knowing and being in relation to those categories. When we looked at the *Pretty Little Liars* image, we noted that based on this image, this show seems to be saying that ideal women are beautiful and beauty for women is defined by thinness, whiteness, youth, long styled hair, makeup and jewelry (wealth), revealing clothing, lust, and coquettishness. Even the background of this image (blue with white clouds) creates an ethereal or heavenly feel, linking the “perfection” of these women with heaviness. This kind of message has implications – we need to think about the implications.

- Media analysis at its core is simple – what do you see? What do you hear? What do you feel? What do you think? Often, the things we see in (or recognize are absent from) a text relates directly to an element of our identity – maybe you notice gender first, or race, or class, etc. Go with that – what do you notice and why is it either bothering you or exciting you. We are all going to look at a text from different perspectives and those perspectives are often deeply related to our identity. We can examine the same text in a variety of ways by looking at how one particular identity category is represented or not. We can also look at a text using different theories as a guide. So while I want us to start with what grabs our guts, I also want us to try looking at texts from different perspectives.
as well. The most important thing is that we must locate patterns in a text and put those patterns into context – one example is an anomaly (still really important) but if it fits into a pattern, now we have a strong argument.

- It is important to note that critiquing a text is a complex process and one that can be deeply personal. Television texts in particular are especially difficult to analyze because they span across episodes, seasons, and years. When it comes to critique, we can like a text and still critique it. The goal is not to give a text a thumbs up or down (like or dislike). The goal is to expand the text with your critique.

- When analyzing we want to look at:
  - Subject matter (the reference) and how a text represents things identity categories like race, gender, sexuality, class, age, ability, etc.
  - Audience (reception) – we want to look for color, symbols, light and dark, body language, camera angle, facial expressions, sound, power, and narrative.
  - Creator (production) and identify the creator’s identity/bias in order to try to determine what ideologies (dominant belief systems) are embedded in a text. We also need to ask ourselves what the implications of that message are.

- When performing television criticism/analysis specifically (but this really applies to all media), it is important that we remember some ideas from authors Thompson and Mittell (2013) – TV is complicated; to understand TV, you need to watch TV; nobody watches TV the same; and criticism is not the same as evaluation. Criticism is not about a value judgement, it is not about liking or disliking a text. We can analyze a text whether we like it or not; our enjoyment has no bearing on our ability to analyze and critique. Additionally, our criticism should expand a text, not reduce it – we should see the text on new levels, not minimize it to something black or white.

- Analysis Practice
  - When looking at some specific texts, we looked again at the Atlanta image and recognized that the surface observations led us to a much larger and deeper message about race, class, and age.
  - We also looked at some images from Altered Carbon.
    - When looking at the first image, (in another class) two students had opposite views and both were valid and supported by the text – one noted it represented man’s power with a man looking out onto a world he would/has conquered while the other said it represented man’s smallness/weakness/helplessness as the city towers over his tiny form. Both readings are equally valid since both are supported by the text.
    - We thought the city could imply a media centered society and its overwhelming presence could indicate the power of/the affects tech has on the individual (who might also represent collective humanity).
    - The red coupled with the man vs. the city could represent conflict, specifically man vs. tech or man vs. society.
    - We also thought that the blue light/shadow that touches the front of his frame could represent the affect of the city/tech on the man himself or the contrast of red and blue could indicate good/evil and conflict.
    - We also noted that slight changes in the same image (pushing in on the figure, vertical vs. horizontal) altered the potential meaning of the image. When we push in, we get more of the man as the focus – we see a calm
face, but also a slight hunch in the shoulders, and we realize that because there is a red light reflected on his face, his shirt might not be the color red—again, indicating the power of the city around him.

- When we look at the same image in the horizontal and vertical form we see that horizontally, we see more of the city, marking its potential to overwhelm while in the vertical shot, the man appears to almost be part of the towering buildings.

  o We also looked at two almost identical images of Sherlock Holmes from *Elementary* and Walter White from *Breaking Bad*. The positioning of both men indicates that power is demonstrated in specific and recognizable ways—low angle shot imbues subject with power; framing the subject/symmetry presents the subject as front and center and of central importance to the image; light streaming in from behind coupled with the men seated (on a “throne”), legs wide, hands on knees indicates kingliness or godliness, imbuing them with power; the money both stacked and strewn about indicates power—so much money that if a few thousand spills it doesn’t matter; the stacked drugs and the casual gun also indicate that the subject has no fear and has a tremendous output.

**Lesson 9: Media Analysis – Color and Symbol – Monday, 2/3**

- **Color:** When analyzing texts, we want to look for color and symbols—often color is symbolic.
  
  o When identifying significant colors, we can look for an abundance of color, an instance of color, a repetition of color, color blocking, intensity/saturation, filters/shades, and a contrast of color. Often, these kinds of elements indicate places where we want to dig deeper and think about possible symbolic meanings.

  o When analyzing color, we must first take color out of context, identify all possible meanings associated with that color, then put that color back in context and determine which meaning makes the most sense. In understanding the versatility of color, we can also see that color is polysemic—it carries many possible meanings and connotations.

  o In determining the importance of color in a text, we should ask ourselves—how does color affect the mood/tone of a scene? Are there patterns/repetition of color use? What does color draw the eye to in a scene and why? How does color reflect characterization?

  o When looking at the color red for example, we came up with a host of ideas (associations with red), some connected, some interrelated, some with no connection to each other. Once we did this process out of context, it was easier to go back into different images and determine what possible meanings made sense.

- **Symbols:** When looking for symbolic meaning, we want to take many of the same steps that we did with determining the possible meaning of color.

  o Identify the symbol and take it out of context. Determine its possible meanings. Put the symbol back into context and determine which meaning makes the most sense.

  o We also need to determine how a symbol is being used throughout a scene/episode/series (across a text). We want to ask questions like: does the
meaning of this symbol change – if so, how and if not why not? How might this symbol mean different things to different characters and viewers?

- There are several basic types of symbols we want to watch out for including: animals, seasons, elements and weather, and fruit. These types of things are often imbued with meaning and might help us to better identify intended or unintended messages in a text. Again, the meaning is all about context.

- When looking at the Vampire Diaries promo (with the 3 figures holding out the fruit), we need to examine the fruit as a symbol. In this case, some important questions to ask are: Who does the holding of the fruit? How is it held? How is it presented? Answering these questions can help us to locate power in a text and can help us to better understand characterization. In this case, the figures are holding out what appears to be apples and a pomegranate (all dripping, blood-like). The gesture of holding out, coupled with them staring directly out at us the audience indicates a kind of invitation or challenge/threat – maybe a bit of both. This image and gesture could be about life or death, danger or safety, love or hate, brutality/violence and vulnerability – it creates a kind of duality.

- When we looked at the image of Bilquis, especially in conjunction with the quote about her character, we see a lot of symbolic meaning in the image that links her with Eve and sin (the apple, held out but protected), Medusa (the long curly hair), women’s sexuality (the flowers and heaving breasts), and the power of women – perhaps she represents all women, or harnesses the power of all women. When we couple this idea with context from the original text (and the TV series) – Bilquis sucks men up/consumes men through her Vagina there is certainly power in that act (reflected in the image) and a clear connection to womanhood and women’s power to give life (or take it away).

- When determining possible symbolic meaning, we must also think about what the producer might have intended. The image of Odin on the merry-go-round is a useful example. The merry-go-round could be read as childlike, fantasy, whimsy, and innocence. The real question here is: is the use of this symbol meant to align this character (Odin) with these qualities? OR is it meant to demonstrate a contrast (or irony) – he is not these things.

When analyzing the *Vampire Diaries* image, we looked specifically at color and symbol, though we also noticed a series of other elements that are important to analysis including the body positioning of characters, characters’ relation to the viewer and to each other, facial expressions, and body language. I have also included thoughts on this image from other classes.

- We started with some basics – 2 men, 2 women. 1 man standing, 1 kneeling. Both women standing – 1 facing forward, 1 presenting (animalistic, sexual), all in a diamond shape with one woman at the back and one kneeling man at the front.

- Red appears only on the one woman’s dress. Her see-through clothing and her turned body both indicated a kind of sexual presenting, yet it also indicated that she was obfuscating or obscuring something about herself. The red might have ties to sexuality and lust. Her presentation of her buttocks is perhaps an invitation or a goal the viewer should seek to obtain. The fabric is transparent, perhaps to invite sex, but perhaps as a symbol of who this character is – one thing on the surface, something else on the inside or perhaps she is open/free. One student who
has seen this image many times in class noted that the red and her turning away might indicate a kind of rebirth to the dark side. This idea was bolstered when another student noted that the dress reminded him of a wedding gown. Traditionally wedding gowns are white (purity) and this one being red might indicate a tainted or stained purity – a turn to darkness.

- The kneeling and standing poses have interesting possible reads and implications. The left man and back woman have power poses – staring out at viewer (challenge/threat, invitation) and square off, taking up a lot of space. The kneeling man in some ways appears animal or inhuman, making perfect sense since he is a vampire.

- The kneeling figure combined with the fire and water imagery and his own reflection are also interesting.
  - Is he an animal, or is he closer to prayer or to self-sacrifice?
  - Does kneeling (in prayer) indicate a desire for redemption?
  - Will the water symbolically wash away his sins – reanoint him?
  - There is power in both fire and water – both can give life or take it away – perhaps reflecting this character’s ability and power to do both as well.
  - There are a great number of symbols in this image that suggest this character’s duality. Fire/water; life/death; purity/evil; light/dark; power/vulnerability; human/monster – these ideas suggest this character is in conflict, perhaps seeking to find who he really is, caught between his desire to be good and his inherent nature to take life and be evil.
  - The reflection (something vampires do not typically have) indicates that push and pull/tension between humanity and being a monster and it also indicates that he is reflective, thinking about these dual sides of the self.
  - His power is also indicated in touching the flames but not being burned and in his corded muscles running up his arms as well as in his placement in the foreground and his challenge of the viewer with his eye contact.

- The setting – sets the mood and tone – the dark forest calls up images of deception and danger. Forests are also often linked symbolically to “unruly and dangerous” female sexuality. These dark woods might also symbolize that these characters feel metaphorically lost, which applies in particular to the kneeling character.

- In general, our observations helped us to pinpoint some specific elements in the image that stood out and that might carry deeper meaning. In analyzing more images, clips, or episodes from this series, we would want to see if these same elements reoccur. It is important to locate patterns when analyzing because they help us to form a more valid argument.

**Lesson 10: Media Analysis – Light/Dark – Wednesday, 2/5**

- Light/Dark: We also focused on analyzing light and dark in a text. When examining a text, it is important that we focus on how light and dark are used. This idea might manifest as black vs. white; dull vs. bright; opposing colors (color wheel); shadows; beams of light; ominous/foreboding settings.

- Elements of light and dark that might catch the eye and are worth investigating include: a beam of light; warm spots of light; lighting a fire; streaming light; warm glow/halo;
specific shade/tone; contrast in tone; neutral; flash of white; foreboding/ominous sky; natural light; highlighting/framing; face in shadow; emphasis on the night; smoky white on night.

- When examining light and dark in a scene, we should also look for: a character moving from darkness into light; a character moving from light into darkness; spots of light in a dark place; spots of dark in a light place; characters who “live” in the shadows; characters who are surrounded by light; quick cuts from night to day; a pop of color in a dark scene; comparisons between black and white; a beam of light; warm spots of light; streaming light; a specific shade/tone; a contrast in tone; neutral tones; natural light, highlighting and framing with light, and an emphasis on the night.

- When we see light, a move into light, a spot of light, it likely carries the symbolism of redemption, rebirth, clarity, epiphany, and/or awakening, while darkness, a move into darkness, or a spot of darkness might symbolize deceit, depravity, a slip into madness, pain and suffering, and/or danger. These meanings are not hard and fast, so when we examine light and dark (just like with color and symbol) it is important to look at the context of the character and scene.

- When analyzing the image of Neegan from *The Walking Dead*, we identified the following elements (some of which come from other class discussions)
  - The light in the scene comes from cars – it is unnatural, unwelcome, an intrusion, a surprise.
  - Light come streaming from behind Neegan, instilling him with power – the light takes on a spotlight quality, which could symbolize that he is center stage or in an arena. The gathered and static spectators reinforce this reading of him being center stage/in an arena. The idea that he is performing indicates that what he is doing is akin to sport or entertainment. In turn, this idea suggests he might take pleasure in this activity (gruesome murder) and the marking of this activity of sport or entertainment also marks Neegan as deranged, narcissistic, and masochistic.
  - The darkness in this setting could certainly be symbolic of his sinister nature of that he is a predator.
  - The light source coming from behind him and into the viewer’s eyes supports that claim as it makes him the center of focus and puts him in a clear position of power over the character and us (we are kneeling in front of him, prone and helpless). Additionally, the light aides in the victim feel for the audience as we are like a deer caught in the headlights.
  - In blocking the light, we also thought he appeared as an obstacle for the character at the end of the bat and that the contrast of light pointed at him and the shadows on his face indicated danger and the fact that he is two-faced, not what he seems, deceitful, or simply obfuscating something. Additionally, the shadow on his face could indicate the conflict/tension between man and monster – the real monsters in a zombie apocalypse are humans, not zombies.
  - His one black glove reminded us of the context that he treats his bat as a person, but also gave off some symbolism. The leather he wears on his jacket and glove had to come from death – to make leather, we use cows. This idea indicates that this is a man acquainted with death, someone that relishes in it. The glove also
reminded us of Michael Jackson. We might relate this allusion to the idea that like MJ, Neegan is a master of his craft, though Neegan’s craft is sadistic murder.

- We also looked at an image from *The Umbrella Academy*. I gave a bit of context for the image— all around the world, about 80 different women simultaneously become fully pregnant and give birth instantaneously. An eccentric billionaire buys up 7 of these children, believing them to have special powers, which they do. In this scene, we noticed:
  - The semi-circle of women and the mother herself are cast in shadow with the baby held aloft and highlighted by a beam of light. This beam could indicate the importance of the baby or simply that it is special. We thought it also might indicate a divine gift.
  - While the mother is in shadow, she is also centered in the image and wearing yellow, perhaps marking motherhood as important and significant— woman as the giver of life/the dawn of a new day.
  - The semi-circle of women (their positioning around the mother) indicate a kind of empowering woman’s support system— again, perhaps highlighting the importance of woman— to give life.

- When analyzing the *Elementary* clip, we noticed a good number of elements, specifically in relation to light and dark.
  - The train tracks are incredibly symbolic— coming and going; a journey; into darkness or into light; and of track marks on a addict’s arm where they inject themselves. In this case, the tracks lead into the darkness (where Oscar’s sister is dead having overdosed), indicating this is a place where relapse and drug abuse lead to death, destruction, decay, loss. The tracks that lead out into the light head away toward another destination, one unknown but perhaps better— though those tracks are still abandoned, marked by graffiti— marred. It will be work to take that road into the light.
  - We noted the way that the characters swap places within the scene— Sherlock moves from his back facing the darkness to Oscar’s back to the darkness and Sherlock looking into it. This series of position swaps might indicate the connection both characters have to each other and to darkness and the idea that they are both complex characters. So rarely are humans or characters only good or only bad. By having both characters face the light and the dark, stand in the light and dark, the scene might be indicating that each character has both good and bad to them.
  - As an audience, we are positioned in several ways throughout the scene— first, eye level with the characters, pushed in close (we are them, back and forth). Then we are above, god-like, surveying Sherlock’s violence. Then as Sherlock walks into the darkness, we noticed that he walks toward us, indicating that we too are with him, mired in darkness, complicit in his descent.
  - When we see him beating Oscar mercilessly, we noticed his head is framed by light blue sky. The shot at first goes from a low angle to a bird’s eye view. These angles present an interesting scene— one in which we see that perhaps, like the sky, Sherlock’s mind is clear, making his destruction of Oscar clear headed and thereby making his choice to shoot up clearheaded as well (a controlled descent— like the title states). The bird’s eye view might establish both characters as small
and weak, and this angle could ask us to see that despite the force of Sherlock’s violence, he is small and weak.

- In this scene, Oscar might represent Sherlock’s addiction, Sherlock’s battle with addiction, and/or Sherlock’s own inner monologue about himself. The mirroring of Oscar and Sherlock’s bodies as they jockey for position pre-fight reinforces this idea. Their clothing also suggests this idea – they are two sides of the same coin – there is a duality here, at least for Sherlock – sober vs. addict and good vs. bad. When Sherlock beats Oscar, the clear sky could also represent justice or it could represent a moment in which Sherlock sees the truth about himself in Oscar and tries to eradicate it.

Lesson 11: Media Analysis – Camera Angle – Friday, 3/7

- In continuing our media analysis unit, we looked at camera angles. Camera angles are significant for many reasons
  - It positions the viewer in relation to the scene/character
    - Encourages us to connect to the characters and content
    - Helps us to develop a deeper understanding of the text
    - Forces us to put ourselves inside or outside of the scene in specific ways – yielding insight
  - Draws the viewers eye across and to specific elements in an image/scene
    - Highlights certain elements
    - Draws attention to the symbolic meaning – faces, objects, spaces, interactions
  - Aesthetic and symbolic quality
    - Conventions – allows us to understand meaning quickly
    - Creativity – asking us to look from different perspectives
    - Continuity – asking us to see and understand meaningful patterns
    - Symbolism – asking us to take in the full scene and understand that the way something is shot demonstrates larger meaning.
  - All of these ideas work in service of:
    - Human understanding – we want to be understood
    - More complex understanding (of the human condition)

- In sum, camera angle has the power to convey important messages about power and relationships between characters and between the viewer and characters and stories. The use of specific camera angles can manipulate an image/scene and encourage audiences to understand a scene/character/conflict in a particular context and with particular emotions.

- We talked about several different specific angles to look for
  - Low angle shots often ascribe power to the character presented.
  - High angle shots often make characters appear vulnerable and weak.
  - A shot that features two characters facing each other on the same level indicates equal footing but can also a kind of face-off between opponents.
  - A character looking out at the viewer presents a challenge, threat, or invitation.
  - The viewers’ relation to the characters can also force viewers into uncomfortable, challenging, or interesting positions – as a victim; as a voyeur; as complicit in an act of violence; as a co-conspirator; as God (the recipient of rage or a plea for help); as witness to; as the character himself; and as part of the group.
When looking at the Bruno Mars video, we could see how camera angle was used deliberately to make him appear taller and more powerful. The low angle shots coupled with the brightness of his clothing and the black and white of those around him also worked to demonstrate his wealth, status, and power. We also noticed that by shooting him from above in a car, and by having the other men crouch down during an eye level shot, they were able to obscure his true height. This video makes it clear that a deliberate choice of shots can work to convey meaning and can work to present characters in specific ways.

We also briefly reviewed types of shots (in terms of foreground, middle ground, background), including long shots (extreme long, long, and full), which are often meant to emphasize the surrounding environment, the character’s connection to the environment, the smallness of man, and action and movement; medium shots (medium long, cowboy, medium, medium close up), which are meant to put an emphasis on the body and on the character; and close shots (close up, choker, and extreme close up), which are meant to put an emphasis on the character and his or her emotion. We also looked at images that showed us shots like: eye level, dutch angle/tilt, over the shoulder, bird’s eye view, cut aways, establishing shots, and point of view. We also noted that shots that feature specific backgrounds can help to ground a character in a particular place and provides clear mood and tone for a shot. When looking at the background, we want to determine how the camera angle positions the character in relation to that background as well as think about what is included and excluded from the shot.

We talked briefly about the idea of setting in relation to camera angle. Setting is critically important to our analysis because it can indirectly comment on what is in front of it (ie – a character or situation). The Mindhunters image demonstrates this idea – they are clearly in a prison (bars, dull color scheme, the lighting, the man’s handcuffs). In this scene the camera angle (coupled with the setting), present an imposing man. He fills the entire frame, making him appear larger than life (toughing the ceiling and the floor). He towers over us and over the other character, who is sitting. His touch is gentle but aggressive – the gentleness of it creating an eerie feeling – he could snap this man’s neck at any time, should he choose to.

We also looked at some images from Elementary and looked at the way camera angle creates specific lines for our eyes to follow. In one scene, we see Joan looking into (avoiding eye contact with) her own reflection demonstrating a potential conflict. In another, we get a bird’s eye view of Sherlock circled by case file material, our eye sweeps around him, he is at the center of it all, a controlled chaos. We looked at an image from above of a long spiral staircase – its potential symbolic meaning directing us to see a complex case, something never ending (no start and no end), something that Sherlock is caught in the middle of.

At the end of class, we analyzed a scene from John Wick. In it, we saw all the elements we have examined so far (color, symbol, light/dark, camera angle) come together to produce a captivating scene rife with meaning. In particular, we looked for tangible indicators of John’s power in this scene.

- We can sense the tension and stress of the mob boss not just from what he says, but from what he does and from the way the scene is constructed to allow us to hear and see particular things. For example, he drinks what appears to be vodka
and refills. We also see and hear him drink rapidly – he doesn’t make a face. These thing details help to layer tension into the scene and build the fear of John
  - When John first enters this scene, we see him shot from a low angle, making him appear powerful.
  - His face is obscured, creating a sense of mystery.
  - As he starts down the set of stairs, white light streams in from the hall behind him, making the darkness below more pronounced. Additionally, there is a great deal of dark/negative space to the right of the scene, reinforcing the darkness below. This moment has a feel that he is descending into hell/darkness, and the white light and his white T-shirt perhaps indicate a man seeking purity who has no choice but to descend back into darkness/chaos.
  - The light streaming from behind and into the darkness might also indicate the idea that John is both good and bad and that perhaps he is leaving the small chance he had to live a good life and is returning to the much more prominent darkness in his life.
  - The slowness of John’s movements down the stairs coupled with the echo of each footprint might indicate a heaviness in John’s spirit, but also certainly indicate his power and work to craft a persona/myth.
  - He is mythologized in this scene as the mob boss explains to his son that John Wick is not the boogeyman, he is the one you send to kill the boogeyman. His skill and danger is further pronounced when the man tells his son that he once saw John kill three men in a bar with a pencil and that he gave John an impossible task, which he managed to pull off. Additionally, he tells his son that John is coming for him and says to his son – you will do nothing because you can do nothing. Combined, these four stories/lines (in such a short space and in conjunction with him breaking the concrete) situate John as a myth, a legend, a god. This larger than life persona is then reflected in him coming down the stairs, especially in that his body takes up most of the frame vertically, making him appear to take up a huge amount of physical space.
  - The quick cuts between warm lighting and the blue tint of the basement suggest a heartlessness and coldness that enables John to be a ruthless and effective killer. The contrast between warm and dark lighting also enhances a sense of false security – the son has no idea what he is up against.
  - We see John’s strength as he smashes through the concrete and we know it is difficult (but not impossible) to unearth the past. The music rises up to present him as a figure seeking justice. And the mobster’s embrace of his boyish son indicates a final goodbye as well as disgust.

Lesson 12: Media Analysis - Application and Practice – Monday, 2/10
- During this lesson, we worked on applying our analytical skills, specifically in terms of analyzing color, symbol, light/dark, and camera angle. We looked at a series of images/clip and paid particular attention to how those elements established power within a scene, set the tone or mood of the scene, and/or provided insight into the characters.
- Elementary – series of 6 images: Observations and possible meanings
  - There is a kind of organized chaos in many of these images. He seems at peace in this chaos, comfortable in it. This large amount of information might demonstrate
his belief in the self to sort through it all. Within this chaos, we see stacks of books and papers – possibly speaking to his pursuit of truth and knowledge above all else. There is also a sense of obsession in these images, specifically in the one in the bathroom – a space where we have peace and quiet is littered with what looks like case files/materials.

- The light and dark of these images also seems important. In several, we see lamps and chandeliers lighting up a much darker space. There is a homey quality about the light but there seems to be more to it. There is a sense of epiphany in some of the images as the light highlights Sherlock’s face or books (knowledge). We also read the light and dark as being in tension, possibly representative of conflict or addiction.

- The camera angles – full medium shots – he is featured, but so is the background/surroundings. In this sense, he is contextualized by the setting and we can read the equal attention on him and the space as the insight that for Sherlock there is no separation between him and the work.

- Within this series, we also see a play between planning (the images with papers strewn about) and action (the last image in the morgue). That last image provides interesting context and reminds us how much our understanding of a scene and character can change with additional context. We saw a different version of the morgue image where it appeared that Sherlock was choking someone. When the scene pans out to this image, we see him in a morgue and we can assume he is not causing harm because Joan and the morgue doctor are so blasé and nonchalant.

- We also looked at a single image from the series You. The image depicts Joe from a unique angle, as if we are looking at him from inside of a wall. Some observations we made include:

  - The hole and his covering of the hole indicate he has a secret or is hiding something. The image prompted some allusions to other works like the Tell Tale Heart, Shawshank Redemption, and Dexter. These texts help to illuminate possible meanings in this image, for example, the hole in Shawshank relates to escape – perhaps Joe too is looking to escape (metaphorically) from something in his life or past.

  - The shape of the hole (especially within the frame of the image) is significant. We noted it felt like an unnatural viewing shape (as opposed to the standard square or rectangular frame or window). This idea prompts a sense of audience voyeurism – we (and he) are being sneaky, and we are observing some kind of secret. Hidden secrets often indicate shame and can often be connected with sex and/or violence.

  - This moment captures a sense of him being unfinished – the hole is jagged, the covering is only half down.

  - There is also a sense of façade – that Joe is hiding something, that he is in conflict. This idea is illustrated by the contrast of the warm room color/skin color and the darkness that fills the frame. We, the audience are in the dark, and Joe occupies a bit of both spaces. The sense of internal conflict comes in the shadows on his face, dividing him in two – good and evil. His lack of eye contact with whatever is inside the hole indicates a kind of shame or desire to escape (perhaps a desire to escape his own evil deeds or nature).
Finally, we watched a short clip from the film *Watchman*. Some of our observations included:

- The setting is certainly significant – a prison creates a sense of danger, of being trapped. In this case, there is the added sense of an unearthing of the character – the context is that he always wears his mask and it only comes off when he is in prison.
- He is a small, unassuming man, though he is shot from below in some cases, instilling him with power (over us).
- His power is also demonstrated in his stoic and calculated nature. We get the shot of the vat of boiling grease, we see him look at it – then he uses it to assault another inmate. His calm demeanor reads as dangerous, even more than the much larger, more muscled man’s does. This kind of self-control can be misread as weakness, but we see him very deliberately not simply bring the threatening man to his knees, but throw boiling grease on his face.
- One student remarked that there was something fascinating in the idea that his first move was defensive – to ward off a shiv attack. This is the kind of action we as the audience would see as justifiable. The second act, the boiling grease throw, is offensive. He has already beaten this man, but he wants to drive home his own viciousness and power.
- The boiling grease in itself is symbolic of the potential depravity/cruelty/calculation of this man – it will create lasting and devastating damage in addition to the in-the-moment pain. It will disfigure this man and could damage his throat and vocal chords if it got into his mouth. This action is meant to instill deep fear.
- The action has its desired effect – it silences a cafeteria full of grown men inmates. They stare, in shock and possible horror at the sight of a giant and powerful inmate in pain.
- The dialogue and the scene surrounding it further demonstrate Rorschach’s immense power. At first, in a low, rumbling, raspy voice he states – “none of you seem to understand, I’m not trapped in here with you.” Then, in a loud, clear, shout, he yells – “you’re trapped in here with me.” He shouts this in the middle of being jumped and punched by guards while he also fights back. In this moment, his voice sounds close, making us feel near to him, almost feel his voice and his statement.

Lesson 13: Media Analysis – Sound – Wednesday, 2/12

- Sound contributes significantly to the way we analyze media. When analyzing sound in a text, we want to listen for the presence or absence of dialogue, music, ambient (diegetic) noise, and silence. These categories set the mood/tone of a scene, indicate character personality, establish power dynamics between characters, and increase a sense of audience presence (the feeling of being there). Additionally, well placed silence also encourages viewers to think about what is not being said, leading to a deeper analysis of a scene, conflict, or characters. When listening for these categories, we want to listen for:
  - **Dialogue**: who is speaking; tone of voice; pitch and volume; rhythm; speech patterns; what is being said; what is not being said
Music: is there music; type of genre; types of instruments; singing; changes in music; volume; mood/tone

Ambient Noise: pronounced/sharp; background noise; who or what makes the noise; with what effect; mood/tone; is it layered with music; is it layered with dialogue

Silence: Who is silenced; who silences; is there a pattern; length of silence; who ends the silence; how is it ended; an absence of all noise.

- When interpreting sound, we want to think about the elements of sound that will ultimately affect the tone or mood. These elements include:
  - Duration of notes – long or short
  - Dynamics – loud/quiet/silence
  - Tempo – fast/slow
  - Timbre – quality of sound – ex: tinkling, rattling, smooth, ringing
  - Texture – several sounds played or sung at the same time vs. one sound on its own
  - Pitch – high/low

- We watched a youtube video where the creator took the same clip from The Lion King and played silence and different music over the clip (ending with the original music). We noted that the change in music had some significant impacts including:
  - Affecting audience emotion
  - On the tone/mood of the story being told – the emotions change – suspense, romance, somber, etc.
  - The music changes our expectations about the rest of the text (because it changes the context and atmosphere). It sets our expectations of how we are supposed to (as Smith noted) “read into” a text. We recognize sound as a type of foreshadowing.
  - Music controls the significance of a scene – should we pay attention? Is it the climax or B roll? Where and when and on what should we shift our focus.
  - Music changes the way we interpret character actions, expressions, etc.
  - Music can imply off-screen action and can change the way we see character movement – are they moving toward something, or away?
  - Music affects the way we read other symbolic elements in a scene like color, setting, and camera angle.

- When we watched the Dark Knight clip, we could hear all of the elements of sound come together to create a tense scene where the power continued to shift from one character to another. We broke up the scene into four parts – part 1: the preface/precursor – the bomb, etc. Part 2 – Joker enters. Part 3 – Rachel steps in. Part 4 – Batman arrives. We spent most of our time discussing what happens in Part 2 and 3.
  - Just before The Joker arrives, the ba bum, ba bum of the drums rises in volume, its staccato beat punctuating the rest of the scene and creating a rise to a climax. That climax is The Joker coming out of the elevator, shooting a gun in the air and silencing the crowd.
  - The power he has in this moment is evident not simply because of the weapon, but because of the silence he creates in a huge room filled with people. To make this amount of people, in this large of a space go completely quiet is a feat.
Additionally, the silence brought on by the joker is also contrasted with the music that plays when Batman later arrives on the scene, making prominent the different between these two characters.

The tension of his presence is increased by the ambient noise of the tray dropping, the champagne sloshing out of the glass he whisks off of a table, the licking of his lips. The tray dropping in another text (like Archer) might illicit laughter. In this context, it is eerie, disturbing, unsettling. No one reacts out of fear. This ambient noise also emphasizes the silence because of how pronounced those noises are.

Although one man tries to stand up to him, it is Rachel who ends the silence the joker creates, putting herself in his way, isolating herself so he turns his attention to her when she says “Ok, Stop.” Her bravery is clearly demonstrated in this scene and her power to silence him is important. Additionally, when she interrupts him, the silence ends with an eerie drone and then music rising up to take the pace of the silence, demonstrating a blow to the joker’s power in this scene.

As he approaches and starts to circle Rachel, a low pitched one note, hair raising whine/drone begins and gradually increases in volume, as it becomes more likely that he will inflict pain on Rachel. This rising pitch along with his almost touching Rachel then grabbing her face, all while the camera spins around creates a tense and uncomfortable moment.

Interestingly, in this moment, as he circles her and as he tells her a strange and eerie story about his scars (which may or may not be true), she remains silent. That silence indicates both powerlessness (helplessness) and power (bravery). To be silent in the face of this madman and to be potentially seconds away from (a gruesome) death, belies courage. She does not give him the satisfaction of making her beg, or cry, or bargain, or plead.

In relation to Rachel, I mentioned an interesting idea by Gail Simone – women in refrigerators. This term is used to describe the way women characters in comic books or superhero stories tend to be disposable and are often dispatched in gruesome ways, which then insight the man hero to seek violent revenge. In this way, women become pawns that have little power in the plot other than to drive the men of the story to act heroically. Interestingly, while in this scene, we see an empowered Rachel, later in the film, she is captured by the joker, murdered in a particularly brutal and spectacular way, and that death drives both Batman and Harvey Dent to react in specific ways.

As Batman swoops in to save the day, his deep voice, the quick tempo of the music, and the drums and brass indicate a hero has come to save the day. We hear kicking and punching and finally we hear the glass break as The Joker presents a new challenge by shooting out the window and dropping Rachel out of it.

Lesson 14: Media Analysis – Facial Expressions – Friday, 2/14

- We briefly discussed Paul Eckman, a researcher who discovered micro-expressions (emotions that flash across our face in less than a 1/5 of a second). People who are good at reading micro-expressions can often detect when a person is lying – even when we say one thing, our face and body might say another. Eckman discovered micro-expressions when studying clinically depressed people who said they were fine but then committed suicide. When he slowed down the tapes, he saw the true emotion. He went on to study
native and isolated people, making a discover that (as of now) he believes all human beings make the same expressions of emotion, which include anger, disgust, fear, surprise, happiness, sadness, and contempt. When studying micro-expressions, people learn how to read the different facial muscle cues and spot the elements that apply to certain expressions. The presence of micro-expressions reminds us we may communicate one thing with our words and another with our bodies.

- When analyzing facial expressions, we need to read the whole face but also look at individual elements of the face including eyes, eyebrows, brow (wrinkles), lips, and cheeks – we have to remember that when we feel emotions, we activate a variety of facial muscles that correspond to displaying certain emotions. These elements of the face can tell us a great deal about the character.

- When we looked at an image from the series *Dexter*, we talked about facial expression and body language and what those elements say about the characters and their interactions. In this image, we see a variety of tangible indicators that demonstrate an intimate and affectionate relationship between the two characters:
  - The woman is tucked up, feet and knees drawn up into Dexter and herself. This gesture makes her appear childlike, innocent, small, helpless.
  - Her bare feet and the small patch of exposed skin at her back also suggest a kind of innocence or the idea of being laid bare.
  - These two characters are pressed front to front – an intimate gesture. When we hug, we are aligning our genitals and breasts/chests. This embrace isn’t one-armed, it isn’t from the side, it isn’t a pat on the shoulder. This embrace is full on – full front to full front with Dexter’s arms wrapped fully around her body, fingers splayed, pulling her in – this is a comforting gesture.
  - They are also pressed face to face – this is a gesture we reserve for people we feel close to. Imagine being this physically close to someone that creeps or grosses you out. Remember the scene with the joker and Rachel – she is actively trying to lean away.
  - Dexter’s face doesn’t read anger, it reads as something much softer. Gus lips are parted, eye brows slightly drawn, eyes narrowed slightly. This combination (in context with the rest of the image) suggests a man who is concerned for this woman.

- Body language and facial expression were central to analyzing the clip from *Orange is the New Black*. We watched the clip without sound, then went back (still without sound) and broke down the clip in small increments. We then watched with sound and found that all of our understandings of the scene without sound were correct, demonstrating the incredible amount of information we communicate without words. We noted the following (so of which comes from other class discussions)
  - Piper and Alex seemed to be jockeying for power in their relationship. It is clear that Piper does not want to be talking to Alex. Piper keeps averting her gaze; she continues to eat while talking; she starts to fidget with her napkin and tray; then she looks up, makes hard eye contact and clearly says fuck in a serious and menacing way. Alex looks irritated, and has a lot of “are you serious” expressions.
When Suzanne enters the scene, it is clear that she recognizes the tension between the two. She looks at Piper, then at Alex, and back at Piper, eyebrows raised in questioning (a who is this and what’s going on expression). When Suzanne sits on Piper’s side of the table, she establishes a clear power hierarchy – 2v1. When Piper (who is an opportunist) realizes that she can use Suzanne to get Alex out of her hair.

Suzanne’s power becomes when she rolls up her sleeves (prepping for work or a fight), when she opens her eyes wide and doesn’t break eye contact (a challenge – very alpha dog), when she touches Piper’s hair in an intimate way without permission, when she slams her hands on the table and stands, when she throws her food, when she hits her own head several times, and when she rebuffs Piper’s assertion that she is not her wife. She is a wildcard and she cannot be controlled. Piper sets her in motion without any hope of controlling what Suzanne does.

As more characters enter, the dynamic continues to shift. From Piper and Alex, to the entrance of Suzanne, to the entrance of the prison guard, who has authority over them all – just his presence forces Suzanne to back down; however, she is calm and doesn’t seem off put by the threat.

It is important to remember that when analyzing, what you see and hear is important, but equally important is what you do not see and hear. It is important to note what actions characters do not take and what words are not spoken. We have to try to understand why some choices were made over others. There is also much that gets spoken through bodies and faces that is never said aloud.

Lesson 15: Media Analysis – Body Language – Monday, 2/17

Prior to class, we read the Acaron article. This article discussed theories of space and body, examining how bodies and spaces affect one another. Main ideas included:

- Space is: sensory/perceptual, emotional, cognitive, social, and political, and for some, the spiritual and moral (p. 139). The concept of space is complicated. The idea of space and the way our bodies move through it affects how we see and construct the self, how we interact with others, and how we move through life on a daily basis.

- Space is, “a dynamic entity constituted out of a shifting ensemble of meanings, practices, and interrelationships” (p. 140). The relationship between body and space is constantly in flux. The way we are able to access or are restricted from spaces can change over time as the meanings of that space change, as the practices within it change, as social norms change, and as relationships change.

- “The body, as the nexus of experience, acts as both a receiver and actor, producing and being produced by spatial relations” (p. 139). The relationship between space/place and the body is a reciprocal one. The body affects the way space is constructed, but the way space is constructed also affects the way a body can move through it.

- Portability – Access and Mobility: This concept deals with the physical movement of our bodies through space and our sense of how our bodies move through space. A person’s portability is related to his or her ability (both biological and situational) to move and to move through particular spaces.
personal space (imagined as a small bubble around us in all directions) moves with us as we move.

- **Extensibility – The Space Beyond the Body:** This concept extends the idea of the body, noting that our embodied space extends beyond the skin to include physical and social spaces that we view psychologically as personal space (i.e., a diary/journal, a bedroom, a locked safe, a wallet).

- **Social Flexibility – When ‘My Space’ Meets ‘Other’:** The idea that we define a boundary of where our personal space ends and shared space begins. The transactions of a body/personal space within shared social spaces can have direct psychological and tangible physical effects on the body (comfort, sense of trust vs. anxiety, muscle tension, trembling) in relation to perceptions of safety or danger.

- **Transversality – Cutting Across Dimensions:** This idea ties together the others, highlighting the idea that the concept of space deals with both internal (the way we see the self) and external (movement through space and reaction to others in space) factors. Transversality is about the negotiation of boundaries, which is an internal and external event.

  - “Being able to shape the space in our daily lives relates again to a sense of agency, of the capacity to shape or mold the environment around us—to exert change” (p. 145). The author argued that the answer to her question—does the body shape space, does space shape the body—is yes to both. Being able to exert change with our bodies onto physical and metaphorical spaces relates to a sense of agency and power. However, space can just as easily shape the body’s movements, creating restrictions and limiting access or dictating the types of people and movements allowed in a particular space.

  - “Stakeholders that hold the power and ability to design public spaces inflict spatial difference—inequalities emerge through daily challenges to our portability. Inaccessibility to activities that promote integration as a member of a community affects transversality” (p. 146). The physical construction of spaces is just as important as the metaphorical/social construction of what is acceptable in those spaces. Analyzing the physical structure of spaces could be useful in determining how particular power structures are enacted by particular groups of people through the barriers that prevent or allow access to certain people. In life, we can look at things like—does a school have wheelchair access ramps for all buildings. In relation to media studies, we might look at patterns in how a film’s spaces are selected and used and how those spaces deny access to or allow access to particular characters.

  - “Embodied space is a locus of intersection, of multiplicity and an ongoing oscillation between physical, psychological, emotional, social, and political realms. Polymorphous boundaries are deconstructed, endlessly moving, intertwining, and embedding into each other to constitute our reality as beings-in-the-world (p. 146). Particular groups of people are affected when their embodied space is, “limited, restricted by others or the environment” (p. 146). This idea encapsulates the main idea of the article—bodies can shape space and space can shape bodies. People (and the social norms they adhere to) can affect the way physical bodies move through or have access to particular spaces. The
environment (the physical design and construction of a space) can also affect the way physical bodies move through or are denied access to spaces. The accessibility of a space or the restriction of it has physical, psychological, and emotional affects on a person and can have far reaching political and social implications.

- **When we analyze media, we also want to pay careful attention to how physical bodies move (or not) and how different bodies relate to the viewer, to each other, and to space. People’s body language, facial expressions, touch (or not), and their interactions with other bodies indicate power and control and illustrate the dynamics between characters. When breaking down body language and facial expressions, we need to think about context. Just like with symbols and color, we need to take a gesture or expression out of context, determine its possible meanings, then put it back into context to determine what makes the most sense. Also, often, most people tend to read body language and facial expression cues easily and without thinking. We tend to know when someone is happy, sad, frustrated, etc. But when analyzing media, we have to make this process clear – we have to note that because a character is smiling, the smile indicates happiness. In order to do this, we first identify what we think the character is feeling (what we sense), then we go back and pinpoint tangible indicators (the clues). For example, if we think a character looks hostile, we have to note that their eyebrows are drawn down and in, indicating anger.

- **Body Language:** We want to examine characters’ gestures, posture, and comportment, noticing how the character relates to himself, the space around him, and other characters. We want to break down the tangible indicators and try to locate their meaning. When analyzing body language, we want to look for:
  - **Posture:** Is a character straight up, slouched, laying back, sitting; are they hunched, knees tucked, legs crossed; are they broad shouldered, open; showing comfort or discomfort?
  - **Gestures:** what does a character do with his or her fingers, hands, arms, feet, legs; are they flailing or clam; restrained; where and how does their head and torso point/angle?
  - **Covered/Exposed:** are the arms folded; is the chest open, shoulders back; are they hunched; covering mouth or eyes with hands?
  - **Interactions:** are they touching someone else or not; are these touches (or lack of) intentional; are they making or avoiding eye contact; are bodies close or distant; are bodies front to back, front to front, back to back?

- When looking at body language, we have to remember that context is key. We can see the same body positioning (like in the *Gray’s Anatomy* images), but those positionings could mean very different things in different contexts.

- We practiced our analysis of body language with a clip from the series *Mad Men*. It was interesting for me as a media analyst to watch this clip after having just re-read the Acaron article. With that framework and perspective fresh in my mind, I saw the clip in some new ways. Here is what we (and some other classes noted about this clip) In this clip:
  - There is something going on between Don and Joan – intimacy of some kind, maybe it is sexual tension, maybe it is affection, maybe it is longing, maybe it is simply respect. There is so much that these two characters, when alone, are not
saying. The silence stretches between them in two different moments, indicating they want to say things but perhaps can’t or won’t.

- When thinking about portability and extensibility, it is interesting to note that Joan’s extends beyond her body onto the chair she places her bag on. She separates herself, puts a barrier there as a buffer. Don then extends his space across that gap, his arm out on the chair, reaching toward her.

- Both angle their legs and heads in to the other, indicating affection, attention, intimacy. Leaning in, crossing legs toward one another indicate presence/interest. If they had turned away, it would have indicated a lack of interest or even disgust.

- When Don and Joan are alone, they are situated as equals despite their different sexes/genders and different work positions. The camera angles specifically situate them as equals by shooting them on the same plane within a frame, and by switching back and forth between over the shoulder shots as they speak in equal turns. These kinds of shots indicate equality. They also speak in even turns, neither dominating the other.

- There is a clear contrast between Don and Joan alone together and when the other men enter the room. Where Joan was confident, filling the space with her voice and her body with Don, she shrinks in the presence of the other men (as she would have been expected to do). She is pushed to the side of the frame, behind Don as the men speak to him. She only speaks when spoken to, they only speak to her in regard to her dress, she bows her head, avoids eye contact, arms crossed in front of her, hands fidgeting. The message is clear – in this era, women were meant to be subordinate to men, especially wealthy, powerful men.

- Don and Joan’s intimacy is again illustrated when two of the men leave and Don turns his back to the third. This action shuts out the remaining man, creating a shared physical space between Joan and him. They share a loaded silence, a long look, she kisses his cheek and tenderly wipes away her lipstick from his cheek. He smiles genuinely and follows her with his eyes as she leaves the room. There is definitely chemistry here. I argue that throughout the whole series, Joan is one of exactly three women Don ever respects. They may have chemistry but they never sleep together. Don and Joan are perhaps too alike – she understands him in a way no woman does.

- This scene also establishes the ideas of the time when the other men enter the room - we see the ideal man in this clip as able-bodied, well dressed, wealthy, successful, and confident. We see the ideal woman as a caretaker, demure, subservient, and in some ways sexual.

Lesson 16: Media analysis – Power, Norms, Ideals – Wednesday, 2/19

- When talking about media analysis more, it is important to think about the messages being sent by media and the implications of those messages. We have to remember that any mediamaker will have bias and that bias will likely be transferred into the text he or she produces. We also have to remember that most media is produced by very few media conglomerates (run by the same kind of person – White, man, wealthy); many of these companies have the power to produce content and distribute that content to viewers. This system makes it even more important for us as viewers to analyze what is being presented in these texts as normal and abnormal, ideal and not ideal. Often times, we see the same
messages over and over about what it means to be the “right kind” of man or woman, the “right” race or sexuality, the “right” identity. Often times that message shows us a narrow and limited portrayal of what ideal means, and although that ideal is arbitrary, it is one we (willingly) adhere to (unconsciously and consciously), thereby perpetuating the system in which a small, homogenous group of wealthy people establish societal norms that continue to make them money (at our expense).

- In talking about this idea, we talked ideology: the beliefs, values, and ideas of the ruling class become the ideas adopted by society. Ideology relies on the production and reproduction of this system of values by society itself. These beliefs create separations and hierarchies between groups of people and make those separations appear natural and normal, allowing dominant groups to elude criticism and ensuring that the people never rise up.

- We watched a clip of Jackson Katz. He discussed several important ideas:
  o He discussed hierarchies of power and how they are embedded in the very language we speak and in our construction of language. In discussing gendered violence, he made note that one of the ways dominance functions is through being unexamined. He demonstrated the way that perpetrators of violence against women often fall out of the sentence (off of the ledge of our psyche plane) and what is left is a shift toward blaming to the victim (John beat Mary → Mary was beaten by John → Mary was beaten → Mary was battered → Mary is a battered woman). The way we tend to think about these kinds of events ends up not just shifting the blame away from the perpetrator and onto the victim, it creates an identity that is based solely on victimhood.
  o He made it clear that as a society, we need to be asking a different set of questions. Instead of asking what the victim did to “deserve” what happened to them, we need to be asking questions about the institutions and cultures that support, cultivate, breed, and perpetuate violent and dehumanizing behavior. It is important to note – he is not saying all of this to make men feel bad or have us point to men and place blame. He is asking us to consider the larger societal institutions that we build and take part in that allow and sometimes encourage men to commit violence against women, against other men, and against boys and girls.
  o He also noted that when we hear the term gender, we tend to think women. When we hear the term race, we tend to think African American, Hispanic, Asian, etc. When we hear the term sexual orientation, we tend to think gay, lesbian, bi. In each case, the dominant group (men, white people, straight people) goes unexamined. The power of these groups goes unexamined because they remain invisible. In a way, these dominant groups are ultra-visible in pop culture, and because they are ultra-visible, they become invisible because we see them as the ideal or the norm.
  o This logic is why it is so important for us as viewers of pop culture to be aware of the biases in media and to question the ideals and norms presented by any given media text and by the industry as a whole.

- In reflecting on Jackson Katz’s speech, we need to think about the questions that we need to be asking about media as an institution. Here are the ones that came to mind for me:
  o What stereotypes does American media perpetuate and why?
What power hierarchy does American media create in terms of race, class, gender, sexuality, and ability?
What identities does American media privilege and how?
What identities does American media denigrate and how?
Who has the power to make major decisions in the film, television, music, news, and sports industries (and why)?

The trick part of media analysis is determining the answers to these questions and determining if the way different groups are represented is based on: unconscious bias, deliberate bias, or satire/social commentary. In order to try to tackle this task, we need to examine power intexts by examining colors, symbol, light/dark, camera angle, sound, facial expressions, and body language.

When analyzing ideologies within a text, we need to start by looking at power (and power dynamics) in a text. When analyzing hierarchies of power and power dynamics within a text, we want to take a careful look at the way physical bodies are presented and the ways in which they interact or are positioned in relation to each other and the viewer. We want to see if they touch or not and the intent of that touch; the gaze of a character and its intent; the physical power or weakness of a given physical body and the identity markers present; and the stance of a character and his or her relation to other characters. The interaction between characters is critical to our understanding of a text and will help us to determine intended and unintended messages. We want to look for patterns – if for example, women characters are continually relegated to the background, we need to look closer at the series and determine if this is a deliberate action, social commentary, or an unconscious bias against women.

When analyzing, we need to ask a series of questions that will help us to locate the (conscious or unconscious) biases in a text:
- How are characters being treated by the series?
- How are characters being treated by other characters?
- How does a character see the self?
- Which characters have depth and which do not?
- Which characters have growth/arcs and which do not?
- Which identities seem celebrated?
- Which identities seem to be the butt of jokes?
- Which identities seem to be shamed?
- Which identities seem absent or unheard?
- Is all of this done as commentary or not?

We spent the end of class looking at some images from Elementary. Today was all about locating power dynamics within a text. Next class, we will look at power in terms of norms and ideals and then try to understand the messages and ideologies in a text. When we looked at the single image of Sherlock and the man with the tattoos, here is what we noticed - Sherlock is not in power – the man with the tattoos is. The tangible indicators include:
- Tattoos – often symbolize toughness (handles pain) and can often be used for gang affiliation. Additionally, his face is covered in tattoos – certainly a painful process and a message to others that he is a wildcard.
- Although Sherlock is standing (as opposed to sitting), he clearly lacks power – his arms hang limply at his sides, he seems a bit stiff. There are men surrounding
him, boxing him in. Also, his outfit makes him seem out of place in what looks like a chopshop.

- The man with the tattoos is sitting and eating – a gesture that signifies casualness. He in no way appears threatened and instead exudes an air of calmness. It makes it feel like Sherlock is interrupting him.
- The tattooed man is also the least covered – his arms bare, which may appear to at first make him vulnerable, until we see the context – he is unafraid. It doesn’t matter if he is laid bare, he is in charge.

Lesson 18: Media Analysis – Power, Agency, and Ideology – Monday, 2/24

- We quickly reviewed some of the concepts from our previous lesson, specifically in terms of what Jackson Katz talked about – we need to ask the right kinds of questions. We need to turn our attention to the institutions that continue to perpetuate injustices (like sexual violence). We need to examine media with a critical eye and ask why certain identities are continually featured as normal/ideal and why others are featured as abnormal/shameful. We can start to examine these ideas by looking at all of the aspects we have already discussed in terms of media analysis and we can think about how these things and the overall construction of the narrative either give or deny characters agency (the ability to act and shape their own narrative).
- We spent most of our time analyzing one of the plot lines in an episode of Friends titled “The One with the Nap Partners.” In examining this plot line, we looked for power, and for norms and ideals – what is presented as normal and what is presented as shameful/abnormal. This episode is clear about what we the audience should consider normal and abnormal – in many ways, it does this through the audience laughter/laugh track/set-up and punchline. When we watch sitcoms, these moments are especially important to analyze because this is where the series is telling us we should laugh – by examining what the series presents as funny, we can start to locate its ideologies. When analyzing, we noticed:
  - The episode makes it clear that Ross and Joey should feel shame for napping together (physical intimacy between men). The episode makes it clear that intimate contact between (straight) men is shameful and disgusting. The tangible indicators that support this reading include:
    - The big reveal - the camera pans across the back of the TV they are in front of to reveal the two men napping, the audience laughs.
    - The men wake, realize they are physically touching, scream, and jump apart
    - They exclaim “What happened” indicating something terrible took place
    - Ross notes: “we fell asleep, that. Is. All!” indicating his discomfort and that anything more (sexually) than napping would be unthinkable and terrible.
    - They agree emphatically to never talk about it – keeping a secret in this case indicates shame
    - When Joey goes to leave, Ross emphasizes “no touch no touch” – the repetition of this phrase reinforces how “wrong” their nap was.
The nap is clearly equated with sex (physical contact between men), especially when Joey proclaims it was the best nap he ever had (a phrase that we might commonly say using the word sex instead of nap).

It is framed as something to admit to or feel shame over – they want to keep it a secret.

It is presented as an illicit affair – Joey notes he is headed upstairs but doesn’t explicitly invite Ross.

When the gang finds the pair napping again, they stand above them, arms crossed and Rachel clears her throat – both of these gestures indicate not only power (standing over) but also indicate an unanswered “explain yourself.”

Joey then springs up from, feigning anger and disgust, and Ross slinks out of the room, indicating shame.

Even the title of the episode focuses our attention on this particular plot line, setting us up to pay attention to it.

The episode also has a strange moment when Joey is trying to convince Ross to nap with him again. He offers Ross a drink. Ross asks what Joey has to drink, to which Joey replies – warm milk and Excedrin. The implication here is that Joey is willing to drug Ross in order to take advantage of him while Ross is unconscious. This implication implies sexual violence. This behavior is predatory and perverse and yet, the line gets a big laugh from the audience…

In addition to this very strange and alarming moment, the end scene follows up on a similar idea. While Joey feigns innocence and leaves the room (masculine), Ross (often more normatively feminine) is left to leave the room in shame. If we play out the sexual violence idea from earlier, this scene could be read as victim shaming.

As someone noted, just because the episode wants us to laugh, doesn’t mean we would under different circumstances. This is an important idea and speaks directly to why paying attention to where the show wants us to laugh is important. This is a moment where the show is saying – this is supposed to be funny. We have to think about why – why do they want us to see this moment as funny. In this case, we are supposed to see the idea of sexual violence (or at the very least, non-consensual intimacy) as funny, which offers a clear look at some of the ideologies perpetuated in this episode.

This moment reminded me of another episode I play for classes in which Ross tells a stranger (a beautiful woman) that he is a professional masseuse so that he can get her into his home, get her naked, and touch her. This is predatory behavior that again gets played for laughs.

These moments and the way this episode presents intimacy between men as shameful are why we must analyze pop culture. One single scene, that’s not necessarily going to change the way people act or think – it is a single snowflake. But over time, when this message pops up again and again across media, it starts to have an impact – it is a snowstorm. One of the ways the status quo/current ideology perpetuates itself is by seeming natural and therefore going unquestioned.
One student noted that this is just a single plotline – this note is important. These kinds of scenes should be paid attention to because they have such damaging possible readings. However, we would need to watch much more of the series to look for patterns that could help us to make a strong claim about the series and its ideologies. We could also look at this series in a historical media perspective or compare it to other content that is happening in that era or currently. There are many ways we could contextualize this episode and the messages that are happening in it. It is important to remember that individual instances are important, but that patterns help to solidify arguments.

- We also looked quickly at the trailer for the Netflix RomCom – The Perfect Date. There were many clear ideals and norms presented in just the few minutes of the trailer including:
  - The idea that we should desire a nice car, a hot girl, and money
  - Yale (Ivy League) is the gold standard – prestige and money – this idea also reminds us, in the context of this trailer, that this boy is qualified to go to Yale but can’t afford it – issues of access and colleges as business.
  - We get the classic hot girl vs. nerd girl (who is just a covert hot girl). The hot girl is shallow and into money and looks and clothes. The nerd girl is a free spirit and a bad dancer and artsy and sarcastic.
  - Men should change who they are for women and women should expect men to change for them
  - In the end, it is clear that the nerd girl (still hot) and the boy (also hot) will end up together and embrace the idea that they should be who they are and never compromise their spirit for anyone – even though the whole film is telling us to aspire to be hot and wealthy and strive for prestige.

Lesson 19: Media Analysis – Narrative – Wednesday, 2/26

- Narratives are important elements of media and of television – both past and present. Narratives help us to make sense of the world and our place in it, reflects particular understandings of the world, builds social bonds, and helps us to make sense of unexpected experiences. We see these purposes play out in Native American legends, bible stories, and Greek mythology, where the creators seek to explain particular (natural) phenomenon. Narratives also shape and are shaped by social and cultural norms, contexts, and ideologies. Narratives certainly reflect the viewpoints, identities, and values of the producers, but media narratives also reflect the ideologies of dominant groups in power.

- Narratology and narrative analysis are methods we can use to examine pop culture texts, specifically in terms of the way texts are constructed. Narrative analysis asks us to look at events and anecdotes in the story (what is in them, what is left out), overall plot development (how the story is told, in what order, with what language, how it opens, how conflict is established and resolved, how it ends), and characterization (who emerges as salient players and how do they interact).

- We expanded on narrative analysis and identified some categories we want to hone in on when analyzing a text:
  - Structure – plot structure, order of events, linguistic and literary devices
Storylines – major and minor storylines, how storylines intersect or run parallel to one another, whose story is being told

Characters – major vs. minor characters, who is telling the story, speaking vs. not, interactions, actions, and reactions

Conflicts – what types, who is involved, who creates conflict and why, are conflicts resolved and how, are conflicts repeated

Style – unusual camera angles, mood or tone, character interaction with audience, pace of the dialog, context

Theme – repeated elements, intended messages, unintended messages, big picture ideas, how themes tie in to ideologies

Truths – whose story is being told and not, who produced the text

- Narratives have the power to shape individual and group ways of knowing and being, cultural norms and ideals, and the audience’s relationship with and understanding of characters. When thinking about these ideas, we must remember to always look for the power hierarchies within a text. We want to locate who has power, who does not have power, who distributes or gives power, who takes away power, who does the speaking, who does the silencing, and who is being silenced. We can locate these things by looking at all the items we have gone over during our media analysis unit.

- When analyzing, we want to use connector/useful words to link the tangible indicators we notice in a text with possible meaning. Words like suggests, indicates, implies, represents, symbolizes, portrays, signifies, and conveys (among others) help us to form a coherent thought and argument. In the case of the Childish Gambino video, we could use the image of the guitar on an empty chair or the choir as an example. We might make statements like
  - The guitar might symbolize…
  - The empty chair in an empty room might represent…
  - The factory-style setting implies…
  - The color blue tones might indicate…
  - Featuring the all Black choir might suggest…
  - The opening of the door might symbolize…
  - The color palette in the scene signifies…
  - The lyrics during this scene illustrate…

- The following analysis of the Childish Gambino video come both from our discussion as well as the collective discussions from past courses. When analyzing the video *This is America*, we learned that a narrative can have many (sometimes conflicting) meanings that coexist. Part of the reason for analyzing this video is because Donald Glover seems to take care in crafting art that has a deliberate message. We can break down this video using some narrative functions – characters, conflicts, setting, and theme/repetition. We determined a number of possible messages in the text that could be intended or unintended:

  - Characters - We started to identify the characters in this video, all of which seem to have some symbolic meaning: Childish Gambino, Old man with guitar, Choir, Dancing Teenagers, Person on horse, Teen who takes gun, Sza, People filming with phones, police (in riot gear) and rioters, people running away.
    - We asked ourselves, in relation to the violence – why these victims, why this perpetrator. This imagery could certainly be a reference to Black on
Black crime. Though it also feels more nuanced. It could be commentary on the recent police brutality and white officers shooting unarmed black men. It also seemed to reference real gun violence – the massacre of a church group. In some ways, these figures – the man with the hood/guitar (Blues) and the choir might represent Black culture and serve as markers of the community. They are silenced (violently), which might also speak to systematic oppression.

- We also grouped the dancing teen/school students in with the choir and guitar man, thinking they might all represent aspects of Black culture/community. These groups might represent innocence in a variety of ways. One student noted that perhaps the choir and guitar man represent (in the Black community and outside of it) the way older generations are failing younger generations.

- There is a sense that Childish Gambino is leading the teens – he dances with them, but he appears to be leading in that he is standing at the front of their group and they move with him as he makes forward progress. We wondered if this movement was symbolic of the way younger generations are led into things like gangs, or perhaps a more wholesome idea – he is teaching them the way. There is a sense that he is delivering them out of or into something.

- In looking at these characters and the conflicts they are entwined in, we also see a possible comment on the way our society prioritizes guns over people. When the teen takes the gun from Childish Gambino, it is with a kind of reverence. He holds out a red cloth and carries it away, perhaps indicating that it is a much higher priority than those lying dead and wounded feet away. When the gun is taken away gently in a red cloth and the victims are left without a thought, we get the clear idea that they have been discarded and forgotten.

- In terms of Gambino doing the shooting, we talked about the lyrics – Guns in my area/I got the strap/I gotta carry em/I got the bag – we felt this could be a reference to gang violence or inner city violence. To feel safe, we buy more guns, but in buying more guns, we are ultimately much less safe. There is a sense of burden in these lyrics and a nod to guerilla warfare – like the background of the video, life is chaos, especially for Black people and young Black men.

  - Setting - His clothing seemed at odds with his surroundings. We thought it could be a possible reference to slavery, especially his shirtlessness in such a grim place.

  - We also get a Jim Crow reference in the first scene where CG mimics the Jim Crow image of a Black man.

  - We also noticed the young students dancing and CG’s exaggerated expressions, which also felt out of place against the background and against the chaos of what was happening behind them. We thought this juxtaposition of the happy dancing and the brutal violence was a comment on the way we are distracted by things that don’t matter (pop culture, our phones, our online lives) and forget the things that do (oppression,
brutality, access, etc.). We also felt this might be a comment on apathy and hopelessness of the individual – feeling powerless to change something on such a large scale.

- Additionally, we noted that perhaps the teens dancing in front of the chaos could draw our attention to the way media frame Black culture and the idea of violence. I noted that during Hurricane Katrina news outlets would post similar pictures of Black and White people carrying supplies through deep water. The captions linked Black people with stealing/looting and White people with surviving.

- Conflict - One message in this video might aim at exposing or discussing the idea that America generally coopts Black culture, celebrates it, reappropriates it, but when it comes to violence in or against the Black community, we don’t want anything to do with it. On this same thread, the video could also be commenting on the idea that industry people/leaders (white) are taking advantage of Black entertainers (“get your money black man”).

- When we think about the setting - an empty factory – it could mean many different things. In one way, it might represent the idea of mass production – the industry making money off of the pain of and the work of Black entertainers. One student commented that it (the factory) could be anywhere and so it could also be everywhere. This factory is not located in a particular place, thereby allowing us to see it could be located anywhere in the country, suggesting this violence, this oppression, our own ignorance is happening in many, many places.

- We also tried to determine Sza’s role in this video. She appears, static, a hood ornament, never speaks, isn’t heard on the track, just sits and looks pretty (passive). It is difficult to tell if this was intentional as commentary or simply an oversight. Does her presence speak to the neglect of Black women entertainers on purpose, or does it simply fall in line with how Black women entertainers are typically portrayed and treated?

- This video is a great way to think about how social commentary looks – it paints a picture that is sometimes confusing. We have to ask ourselves who acts, what do they do, and why do they do it. It is important to understand when a text is outright neglecting certain identities, and when a text plays on specific imagery to point out injustices. This video is not designed to create specific cultural norms, it is commenting on them, pointing out the flaws, and asking us to consider change.

Lesson 20: Media Analysis – Production Prep – Friday, 2/28

- During today’s class, we did some preparation for our production days when we return from break. Something important to understand is that we must practice analyzing texts to become better producers of texts and we must produce texts to become better analyzers of texts. The more we know about the opposite area, the better we will be at the one we are more invested in.

- In explaining our purpose, I took some basic ideas from poetry writing courses I took in college. There were several basic and fundamental principles of poetry writing that my professor instilled in us:
When we write poetry (and in this case, produce an image/video), we want to take something abstract and make it concrete (tangible – “thingyness”).

We want to take something big (an emotion, a conflict, etc) and make it small and specific.

So, instead of writing (or having a character say) – “I am sad” we might instead say: “As we ate/and talked/you looked away,/but when your eyes/met mine/they were bare/white walls/and the last box/in an empty room.” Or, you might feature a character living out this same imagery. In making these complex and abstract ideas tangible, we make the work interesting, we hook our readers and viewers, and we ask them to engage in a specific moment that is rife with emotion and that causes them to feel something (maybe what we intend, maybe not).

In our writing and in our visual media, we should strive to create interesting and meaningful imagery. Coming up with that imagery is not easy. To start on this process, I proposed that you think about some questions that should help you to open up the emotions you are trying to portray:

- What does it mean to feel these emotions?
- What do these emotions look like?
- What do these emotions sound like?
- What tangible indicators mark these emotions?
- What other emotions feel connected?
- What personal memories are connected to these emotions?
- What images flash in your mind when you see these words?

The point of the coming production lessons is that as you try to bring these emotions to life, you will utilize the analysis tools we have learned in order to do so. You should be thinking about color, symbol, light/dark, camera angles, sound, facial expressions, body language, and power dynamics.

Lesson 21: Media Analysis – Production: still images, Monday, 3/9

Today, we went out in groups to shoot some still images. When we debriefed, we talked a bit about what was challenging and what was exciting. Here is what we discussed:

- Group work can be challenging and exciting. Group work has the potential to be dynamic and full of energy. When we vibe with one another, we can enhance each other’s ideas and work, taking the original concept to new and meaningful places. However, group work can also be challenging because there are too many voices (everyone wants to lead) or too few (no one wants to lead). Sometimes, we can’t pick a direction because there are too many ideas in the mix and no one wants to make a concrete decision.

- Working in a creative group can give you insight into how the much larger and more formal process might work. If you are part of a team (as a lower level employee) try to fill the gaps that you see – be what the group needs in that moment. If you are leading a team, pick wisely. Choose a group that includes different people who can fill the following roles – an ideas person, someone who takes action, someone who sees the big picture, someone who has good follow through, someone who is a good communicator.

- An exciting and challenging element of the work we did today was seeing that our best laid plans don’t always come to fruition. This can be frustrating, but
ultimately, this will happen – you will have deadlines and budgets. If the weather isn’t cooperating, you better find a way to make it work. It can also be exciting to have to change the plan and make things work in the field – it can force you to be at your max creative capacity, yielding inspired work.

- We talked about the idea that especially as an amateur media producer, we don’t always know the rules – meaning, where can we go and what are we allowed to do and shoot? There is not necessarily a concrete answer here, but you should keep people’s privacy in mind as you work.

**Lesson 22: Media Analysis – Production – Video – Wednesday, 3/11**

- We continued to apply our analysis skills during some production work. Today, the focus was video content. It was interesting to see that many groups finished before time was up, indicating that you went out with clear intent.
- We noted again how planning is important, but how much can go differently out in the field. Sometimes, a change in something like weather can be challenging, sometimes, it can inspire even more creative and meaningful content. This idea certainly brings to mind the importance of post-production. As Smith noted, every piece of media that gets put out (by major companies at least) is highly scrutinized. Sometimes, you shoot knowing that you will edit something in or out in post-production. Sometimes, you don’t notice until later in the editing room that changes must be made. The whole idea of laying out content to shoot and actually shooting it requires tremendous planning, foresight, and creativity.

**Lesson 23: Media Analysis – Analyzing Our Creations – Friday, 3/13**

- In class on Friday, we looked at the work each group produced. We didn’t get to all of them, but we got to a good deal of the images and one of the videos. There are some important take aways from the work we looked at:
  - We will rarely capture the perfect shot on the first try – sometimes we won’t know what is working until we get back into the studio to review what we have.
  - Tiny changes can make a huge difference. We looked at Ben and Juwan’s images – we can see the full series as they made small adjustments and waited for the right people to walk through the shot. The final product does a nice job of demonstrating loneliness. We picked out a series of tangible indicators (some intended, some perhaps unconscious or seen only by us as we analyzed) including:
    - The series of paired people in the background (in a pleasing Z shape that leads our eyes to and from the lone figure)
    - Ben is static while others are in motion
    - His eye line is cast down, into the self
    - Hands clasped
    - Within the frame, though his body appears large in the foreground, he takes up very little space in the shot
    - The black and white has a somber feel
    - Others carry bags while Ben has nothing.
  - In their photos of Juwan at the tower, we can see that the small changes (cropping out the people, including the top part of the tower, and changing the position of the body and camera) all work to create a lovely shot. They have two versions –
one with the blue sky (which almost looks unreal) and one in black and white – both taking on different tones even with that small change.

- Location is key – selecting the right place for a shot is important. In Billy and John’s shot, we can see the strong leading lines, the way the walls are dynamic, almost giving the feel of motion. Additionally, we see that these lines lead out of the darkness and into the light. They ended up overlaying two images on top of one another and adding some darkness to the walls and a more saturated light. In the final image, one figure runs out of the darkness into the light and one is in the light facing the dark – creating some possible symbolism through a duality.

- Be aware of the way lines draw viewers’ eyes through a scene and lead us to or away from something important. Like with music or poetry or prose, we want our shots to be dynamic – for viewers to feel movement even through it is a static image. In their cup image, the strong lines of the pavement structure the image and draw the eye to the object. They also tilted the frame to create a more dynamic motion.

- Framing is important – what we include and exclude in a scene can drastically alter the way we read it. We can see this in Freedom and Esteban’s two different images of the lone man and again when we look at Sha and Hannah’s image of the same figure. We can also see the idea of framing in the runner image. We talked about how we might photoshop out the man so the focus moves from the Temple T to the woman and her shadow moving forward.

- With framing, the direction of the shot matters as well. Do we want a horizontal or vertical shot? Often, give the way screens are horizontal, we should shoot that way. However, that is not to say we should never shoot a vertical image. We do want to think about the way a more vertical image stretches up and down while horizontal will expand sideways. We can see some nice vertical shots with Isaiah and Sierra and we can see in their videos and images that two people acting the same idea can look and feel completely different.

- Color matters – in Jared, James, and Brian’s images of Jared with the candy, the sunlight hitting the heather blue/gray shirt is striking. It is also of note that simplicity can be just as striking as something more complex.

- Camera placement affects the way the viewer relates to the scene and character. In Meesh and Isabella’s images, we can see how as the camera placement changes, we become more or less engaged with the character.

- An extreme close up can tell us a lot about a character or situation even though we are only getting a small slice of the scene. In Michaelia, Sherv, and Jake’s extreme close up shots, the beauty of the image is striking and we also get a clear note of anxiety – the cigarette down to the nub and being used to light another. We get the subtlety of the stop sign blurred in the background and the striking contrast of the lines of his palm.

- It is important to think about how the setting (inside or out) will change a shot. Additionally, Leena, Sam, Tatiana, and Jessica’s stairwell image reminds us that the way you situate the image will change your vision.

- We also watched Billy and John’s video. We watched the raw footage and then the final version where they bumped up the contrast and added a score. The pov shot coupled with the selection of music and timing of the score are well done,
working to create a creepy feeling. They allow us to hear certain noises—the
clicking of the locked handle, the push of the door bar, the echo as the door clicks
shut. As the character pushes through the door, we hear the music, which is at first
subtle, swell to engulf the character and us as he stares down what looks like a
dead end. Lots of tangible indicators that work to put the viewer on edge.

Lesson 24: Media Analysis Unit Wrap Up & Intro to Application – Online for Wed, 3/18

- In this lesson, I recapped some of the major points from our media analysis unit. These
  included the need for cultural studies and for theory. Pop culture texts are laden with
  messages, intended and otherwise. The messages we see in pop culture media posit
  norms and ideals that are highly exclusionary and often extremely prejudicial of myriad
  identity and social categories. These messages then shape how we construct our identity,
  how we see others, and how we see the world. For these reasons, it is important that we
  take pop culture texts and the analysis of them seriously.
- I recapped the importance of theory, noting that it is a way of seeing that helps us to
  analyze and interpret specific phenomena. In our case, we are thinking about the ways we
  can use specific theories to investigate the way media texts represent identity categories
  like race, gender, class, ability, sexuality, and age.
- I recapped the way research tends to work in this field:
  o Phenomenon: first we identify moments or patterns in a text. In our case, we are
    looking at hierarchies of power and representations of identity in texts and the
    way these texts craft norms and ideals.
  o Theory: we select a way of looking (a theory) that helps us to define important
    concepts and provides a framework for our analysis.
  o Method: we choose a means of investigation, which helps to determine what data
    we collect, how we collect it, how we organize it, and how we analyze it. In our
    case, we are using narrative analysis, which puts emphasis on the elements of a
    narrative and the way they are constructed.
  o Analysis: we look for patterns around the data we are collecting and determine
    what it all means.
  o Argument: we posit a claim and work to prove it using theory and textual
    evidence. We will see how the authors of the articles we read do this very thing.
  o Implications: we address the so whats. What do our conclusions mean and why
    are these conclusions important. Also, how might this research continue and how
    might it have been different if we looked at different facets or with a different
    theory?
- I took us through the four remaining readings in the course and noted that all of them, in
  varying degrees, are examining a pop culture text; pinpointing and analyzing a
  phenomenon; utilizing narrative analysis as a method; utilizing other’s scholarship
  (theory); making clear claims; and identifying implications.
- It is important to remember that these scholars are, and we are, investigating pop culture
  texts because they are laden with messages of power. As Foucault noted—power
  produces, it produces reality. The messages we get from these texts determine how we
  live our lives, who is in charge of our lives and decisions, and how the world functions.
Lesson 25: Analysis Application – Butler Article – online for Wed, 3/18

- In this lesson, I reviewed the Butler article and his main argument. It is important to remember that this series is a contemporary show about a bygone era (the 60s) that captures the essence of the era but also critiques the power structures of that era. Butler argued that *Mad Men* sees the 50s/60s through a contemporary filter and provides a clear critique of the power structures of that time that subordinated a variety of minority groups (p. 38).
- He argued that the show critiques the power structures of this time period through visual style, specifically through mise-en-scene (set design, lighting, costume design, placement of actors, etc.), cinematography (framing, camera angles, choice of film stock, camera movement, etc.), and editing (what makes the final cut, for how long, and in what order).
- Butler examined set design as an element of mise-en-scene, demonstrating how specific set designs worked to not simply ground the show in era specific items for period authenticity, but also used recurring sets (the office and home) “to express the rigidity and repressiveness of early-1960s American society” (p. 39). He demonstrated that the layout of the office set worked to constrict the women and position them as subordinate while allowing the men to master space and move through it at will (p. 39). He also argued that the mise-en-scene of Drapers’ home space, a visually perfect space for a perfect family, is at odds with the despair of the characters in it, thus creating a critique of “mid-century America’s superficial normalcy and repression of the messier aspects of human behavior in the name of conformity to the dominant social order” (p. 41).
- Additionally, he argued that the mise-en-scene grounds the show and the viewers’ understanding of the characters in period specific historical events. He argued that in some episodes, these elements evolve in the episode “from seemingly insignificant set dressing to major narrative catalyst, blending the personal crises of the characters with larger moments in American history” (p. 42).
- He also noted the difference between a multi-camera show and a single camera show. He argued that the single-camera mode allowed for specific shots that allow viewers to understand characters in a deeper way, allows more movement of characters through multiple spaces and into new scenes, and helps viewers to see more of a full scene.
- I asked you to keep some ideas in mind as you enter into the viewing of the first episode of this series:
  - What uncomfortably, cringeey moments arise in this episode – these are important moments because it likely means there is something going on there (something the mediamaker’s are trying to draw our attention to).
  - How is Butler’s argument playing out – where do we see visual style choices being used to critique the 1960s and the power structures at play in that era?
  - Why is Don Draper such a compelling character – this series is about characters and character development. Don, like a real person, isn’t all good or all bad. We often find ourselves rooting for him (as he is painted as a sympathetic character in some situations) even though he does some terrible things.
  - What era-specific social norms are being presented in this series – what has changed since then and what remains the same?
Lesson 26: Analysis Application – Mad Men – Online for Friday, 3/20

- There are a lot of uncomfortable moments in this episode. These moments are likely the mediamakers drawing our attention to the power structures and cultural norms and ideals of that era. It is important that we don’t mistake these moments as this series being racist or misogynist, or bigoted. These moments are deliberately captured to feature the power hierarchy at play in 1960s America and are crucial to understanding the messages of the show (and its critique of the era) because they reveal some deeply entrenched and hateful ideology that was common in this era. Some of these moments include:
  o When Don is talking with the Black waiter in the first scene and the waiter’s boss comes over and pointedly dismisses the waiter.
  o When Peggy gets into the elevator for the first time at work and the three ad men ogle her and make untoward remarks regarding Campell’s upcoming wedding.
  o When Joan first tells Peggy that the men are looking for a mix between a mother and a waitress (and implies they want sex) and tells Peggy to go home, put a paper bag over her head with the eye holes cut out, get undressed and evaluate herself in the mirror.
  o Basically everything Sal says (later in the series he is outing, making everything he says in this episode a clear and desperate attempt to appear “normal” and hide his sexuality).
  o When Don and Sal outright make fun of and dismiss the psychologist.
  o When Pete first meets Peggy he looks her up and down, objectifies her, and harasses her, commenting on her looks.
  o All of the comments about Jewish people, specifically surrounding the Rachel Menken storyline.
  o When Don bypasses Rachel, mistaking the man in the room for the business person he is meeting with.
  o When Don refuses to continue the meeting with Rachel Menken because she challenges him and disagrees with him and storms out remarking he won’t let a woman speak to him like that.
  o When Peggy is at the gynecologist – we will break this one down in detail.
  o Pete tries to shake Don’s hand and get on this good side but is rebuffed.
  o Don similarly rebuffs Peggy when she comes onto him (likely after feeling the pressure from the men and women in the office to appear sexual and please her boss).
  o Pete then goes out to a strip club for his bachelor party and is rebuffed by a woman he hits on.
  o After having dressed Peggy down and sexually harassed her at work, he shows up at her apartment, drunk, and she lets him in to have sex.
  o Don returns home, revealing he has a wife and kids waiting for him in the suburbs, despite the fact that he was with another woman at the beginning of the episode and people seem to think he is single.

- These uncomfortable moments don’t just tell us about the time period and the constraints of it, they also reveal a great deal about the characters. As a pilot episode, this one is quite well done, especially because it gives us so much insight into so many main characters so quickly, without ever even revealing anything about their backstories.
We learn about, in particular, Don, Pete, and Peggy’s psyches. Work to develop these characters, to show us their psyches. We learn in these moments that at the very least, Peggy and Pete are likely feeling desperately alone. Peggy is surprised when Pete wants to have sex with her, revealing a deep self-consciousness, which was touched on when she hit on Don.

Don is also clearly deeply unhappy, made clear in his comments to Rachel Menken that he love was invented by ad men and he lives life like there is no tomorrow because there isn’t one. We also get this idea in Don’s pitch to Lucky Strike – he notes that happiness is a billboard screaming from the side of the road that whatever you are doing is okay, that you are okay. This is really the crux of the show and Don – everyone is pretending that having it all means being happy, but no one is happy at all.

We also get little hints that Sal is hiding something (which we later find out is that the is gay and deeply closeted…he even has a wife). He makes several interesting remarks, one of which is when the psychologist tells Don and Sal about the death wish. He remarks – “so we’re supposed to believe that people are living one way and secretly thinking the exact opposite, that’s ridiculous.” This moment is telling – Sal is living out this exact idea as a closeted gay man. This moment and him making this remark represents Butler’s argument that the series is one giant critique of life in the 60s. Everyone is living a lie even though it hurts to do it and they don’t really know what it takes to be happy.

The uncomfortable scenes are important to analyze/discuss as they are likely the scenes that critique the era (through the visual style). One scene I pinpointed was when Peggy was at the gynecologist.

The visual layout of the scene puts Peggy at odds with the doctor and marks him as significantly more powerful as he stands and then examines her while she lays prone and looking away.

He tells her he isn’t there to judge her, but most certainly does, making sure to note that she should have a husband (if she wants to use birth control) and that loose women don’t get husbands.

He calls her a strumpet (a whore) and notes that just because the pills are 11 dollars doesn’t mean she should be the “town pump” to get her money’s worth. He inserts himself into her sex life – the commentary seems to be that medical professionals and men have no business inserting themselves into peoples (ie women’s) sex lives but in this era they do.

Part of the visual style that helps to make this scene uncomfortable for Peggy and therefore for us the audience, is the sterile feel – it is cold and metallic in the room. The camera zooms in on the metal speculum, which will be inserted into Peggy with little regard from the doctor for her comfort. It then plunks down in the dish when he is done with finality – his is the final word. Another message here seems to be that women in this time don’t get a choice (in much of anything).

In this scene, we see what Butler argued – the frame of the shot makes the exam room appear as if is closing Peggy in, reinforcing the discomfort she is in. This coupled with the clinical lighting and sterile cold feel (even the gloves are gross) demonstrates how little power Peggy has in this environment. Additionally, the
shots of Peggy, legs spread, Doctor inspecting show Peggy as not only lacking power, but as trying to escape the moment – she stares at the image on the calendar in a similar way to how we see Joan looking in the image where she is being sexually assaulted. The calendar in this scene does double duty – it sets the scene with the era and is an important marker of Peggy’s discomfort. This scene seems to show us not only how little power women had in this era, but also how much they had to endure – they had no recourse. When the doctor walks away from what plays out almost as a sexual assault, Peggy is just left to live with it.

- Don, the title character, is compelling— we hate him but we love him. We want him to be better, to succeed, but we disagree with his many horrifying choices, including his penchant for cheating on his wife. He is a fascinating character because even in just this first episode, we see that he is brilliant – he knows his audience, he can think on his feet, he is creative, and he is a smooth talker. He is both loyal and dishonest. He seems deeply unhappy. Don is the epitome of putting up a façade – on the outside, his life seems perfect – good career, lots of money, beautiful wife, 2 kids, a mansion in the suburbs; however, he is deeply unhappy. He tells Rachel Menkin that he does not believe in love and that he is living like there is no tomorrow because there isn’t one.

- We looked at the last scene and examined Don a little closer. This scene certainly works to demonstrate Butler’s argument about visual style and its use to critique the norms and oppression of the 1960s as well as unveil the carefully crafted façade under which much unhappiness lay during that era. Don’s unhappiness with what appears to be a perfect life is clear in his extramarital affair, which is made more pronounced when it is revealed that he has a beautiful wife waiting for him at home. Even when we are introduced to her, she is revealed almost with a flourish, lying in bed, in a nighty, makeup on, giant diamond on her finger. Don doesn’t appear to have any guilt when he interacts with her – not a hint of wrong doing. As the scene progresses, we see a grim look on Don’s face as he stares out past the children, his hands gently touching their sleeping forms, his wife looking on from the doorframe. The scene works to do as Butler argued – as the camera pans out, the walls close in on Don, trapping him. This scene demonstrates the despair that Don might feel. This scene, which pans away to reveal the façade of their giant house, a scene that comes at the end of an episode filled with the ins and outs of Don’s life, reminds us that though he lives the ideal life, it is far from ideal. Interestingly, Don’s face is half lit and half obscured in shadow. We thought that this dyad might represent on the one side – hope, real love and on the other, nothingness, depression, isolation. Perhaps the scene tells us that he does feel real love and affection for his family. Perhaps he is just projecting his lust after other women on Betty. Perhaps he is only capable of lust. Perhaps he is powerless and trapped either by the love he feels or by the lack of it.

Lesson 27: Analysis Application – Revisiting Don and Joan – completed for Wednesday, 3/25

- This lesson was all about looking at a text from different perspectives (using different lenses). We can imagine that a scholar’s argument/perspective is akin to us looking through a particular set of sunglasses. When using different theories or perspectives to analyze a text, we are looking at the same text/scene but we are looking for different things and looking with different eyes.
• I recapped Acaron’s argument, then broke down the Don and Joan hospital scene using her argument. The focus of that “looking” was to analyze the scene in terms of bodies and space using concepts like portability, extensibility, and social flexibility. Items that came up included Joan’s use of her belongings to extend her claim to the space on the chair; Don’s use of his arm to extend his claim of the chair; the way certain bodies (white bodies) are able to claim certain spaces that Black bodies are not; the angling of Don and Joan’s bodies (heads and crossed legs) to close the space between them; the way others move through the space but Don and Joan have claims to it; the way the “rules” change when the businessmen enter the scene; the way Don turns away from the last man and resituates the space so that Don and Joan are in their own personal bubble; the intimacy between Don and Joan as evidenced by her kissing his cheek.

• I then recapped Butler’s argument noting that the physical things we would want to look for in the text include:
  o Use of recurring sets that express the rigidity and repressiveness of the time/society
  o Power structures reflected in set design
  o Scenes/framing that traps the characters
    ▪ Characters shot through doorways (keeping camera outside the room – depicting isolation)
    ▪ Low light or fluorescent light
    ▪ Low angle shots that include the ceiling
  o Picture perfect facades
  o When television sets provide crucial narrative information
  o Consumer products and the imagery attached to them through advertising
  o The order and framing of shots
    ▪ The looks of characters at other characters
    ▪ Looking but unobserved
    ▪ Various angles in the same scene
    ▪ Switching between different POV shots between different characters in the same scene
    ▪ Looks returned and unreturned.

• After rewatching the scene, I broke down the scene using the same stills but apply Butler’s argument. Now, what becomes prominent are/is: the emphasis on products with the soda machine, which is featured prominently in several scenes; the grim, fluorescent lighting; the crumbling of picture perfect facades; the looks of Don and Joan at no one; the way the viewer is situated in relation to Don and Joan; the ordering of the shots/frames that situate Don and Joan together (as apart from others); the shot of the group that shows ceiling and floor – pressing in on the characters; the swapping of POV shots of Don and Jon as they talk; Don’s lingering look at Joan walks away.

• It is important to look from different perspectives because it provides a more layered and nuanced understanding of a text. We will be more informed if we practice looking at all things from different perspectives (the perspectives of others). As we continue to read more scholar’s work, it is important that we are able to evaluate each one’s argument/perspective and determine (by examining the text ourselves) if their perspective is supported by enough tangible evidence in the text. We must also be able to utilize those perspectives to enhance our own understanding of a text.
Lesson 28: Little Article – completed for Monday, 3/30

- In this lesson, I reviewed the content of the Little article about women, ageing, and Hip Hop. It is important to note that Little addresses a variety of topics in her work including: hip hop as a genre; women in the music industry; women in hop hop; age narratives; socially constructed notions of aging; women’s age narratives in hip hop; age and authenticity; and culture. It is also important to remind ourselves that we belong to many cultures at the same time and cultures tend to overlap and intertwine. We often code-switch between cultures (and cultural spaces) and each culture has its own norms, values, and ideals. When reading research about a specific culture (or the convergence of several specific cultures) it is important to remember this context.

- Little examined the way women in Hip Hop engage with socially gendered notions of aging by utilize the genre as a “vehicle for subverting age narratives” (p. 34). She specifically analyzes the work of Missy Elliot, whose career has spanned several decades and who is entering her mid-40s in order to better understand how women in Hip Hop are negotiating feminine aging. Little examines how Missy Elliot has constructed a narrative in her work that seems to incorporate age-denial (a narrative that distances women artists from a narrative of aging and decay) or a certain kind of agelessness.

- Little noted that other scholars who investigate Hip Hop as a culture highlight the way this culture is reductively linked to youth culture, disallowing a better understanding of “how we grow up and grow older with popular culture” (p. 35). She referenced Forman’s idea of age-representing, a process by which a rapper might adopt “‘flexible conceptualizations of aging according to the context at hand’” (p. 36) by referencing terms like back in the day and names like O.G. In referencing other related research, she noted that scholars have addressed the hyper-masculine and often misogynistic Hip Hop space that commodifies the Black female performative body, which has “often been the target of reductive gender stereotyping and patriarchal narratives” (p. 37). She noted that scholars have suggested that female hip hop artists often seem to be “required to adopt masculine positioning or to express themselves in terms of male desirability in order to be validated as artists” (p. 42).

- Little noted that although Missy’s Hip Hop identity has reflected a layered sexual object/subject position, it only constitutes part of her identity, thereby allowing her to avoid some of the challenges of aging that other more sexualized female artists have faced. She noted that Missy’s linking of sexuality to power, a choice that has remained unchanged over her career, is perhaps at play in the longevity of Missy’s career.

- She also noted that this (Missy’s) performative identity is perhaps much more of a decision to develop a brand than to express empowerment and is likely the product of a host of decision makers rather than just her as an artist. This idea is reminiscent of Smith’s article where he acknowledges that media productions are worked on by a huge number of mediamakers and are highly scrutinized.

- Little argued that part of what may make missy appear ageless is the recurring trend of blending the real (hip hop iconography – imagery that references “real, authentic, traditional” markers of Hip Hop) and unreal (cartoonesque animation) to create imagery of herself that is in some ways non-human. She noted that while other rappers have used cartoon imagery, Missy does so by using CGI to alter “her own performing body whilst retaining an overall unchanged image of the physical self” (p. 39), crafting a cyborgian
image of herself that “gives the impression that her body can always remain both changed and unchanged” (p. 39).

- Missy’s use of Hip Hop iconography in her videos serve as cultural anchors, marking her as authentic and associating her with traditional elements of hip hop, thereby grounding her as a veteran. In blending this authenticity with artifice – cartoonesque self imagery – Missy, align her with “accepted codes of Hip Hop culture,” which imbue her with authority, while “eclipsing any hint of aging or change in Missy’s performative self” (p. 40). Missy utilizes Hip Hop iconography as temporal cultural anchor points, which mark her as both authentic and as an authority. In some cases, her reference points like Cabbage patch kids and Little Prepsters, ground her own youth in the time of Hip Hop’s inception, while simultaneously providing temporal distancing that addresses her experience and maturity. In this strategy, Little argues, there is both age-denial and an assertion of authenticity and veteran status.

- Little argued that “Missy has created a performative self-narrative whereby she can lay emphasis on the positive traits of her aging self; wisdom, maturity, authority, whilst simultaneously de-emphasizing those that society perceives as negative for the aging female (the decaying body) through her rejection of a hyper-sexualized identity, consistency of stylistic tropes, and humorous digital manipulations of her physicality” (p. 41).

- When watching the Missy Elliot videos, we want to keep an eye out for the tangible indicators that prove Little’s argument. We want to identify if her argument is sound and what the implications are of this argument. We want to look for references to back in the day; children and childlike play; hip hop iconography, CGI or editing of the face/body; clothing/style (among other things).

Lesson 29: Analysis Application – Missy Elliot – completed for Wednesday, 4/1

- In this class, I broke down the five Missy Elliot videos we were analyzing in relation to Little’s argument. When breaking down these videos, we were looking for the tangible indicators that support Little’s argument, which asserted that Missy Elliot utilized the genre of Hip Hop as a vehicle for subverting age narratives, specifically those that feature the aging of women as a narrative of death and decay.

- Throughout Missy’s videos, from 1997 (her first solo album) to 2019, Missy has maintained a narrative of agelessness (or age denial as Little would argue). I identified patterns in her videos and lyrics – tangible markers of her age denial narrative. In many ways, this narrative and its features are intricately linked with Missy’s brand identity/image. That image, a Little noted, is one that is carefully crafted by not simply the artist, but by her entire team. The items that continued to appear in these videos that served Missy’s age denial narrative include:
  
  o **Outfits and outfit changes:** her outfits often ground her in Hip Hop culture through color, style, references to deceased artists, and brands (like Adidas). I noted that the continual changing of outfits has the effect of keeping us guessing and tending to obscure her age (we can never pin her down). Her outfits often also cover her body up, change the shape of her body, and are generally theatrical, again making it difficult to discern her true age or any changes in her physical body over time.
o **Makeup and styling:** Her makeup is flawless. Shout out to her makeup and skin care person. She consistently appears, across time, as timeless in relation to her facial features.

o **Guest appearances:** She frequently incorporates other Hip Hop artists and rappers in her videos as well as commemorative imagery for deceased artists. Featuring these people and images has the effect of grounding her in the origins of Hip Hop – marking her as authentic, as a veteran, as an O.G. By coupling this authenticity and maturity with the ageless quality that comes from the makeup, styling, and clothing, she maintains an ageless quality while still empowering herself as authentic and legitimate.

o **Hip Hop iconography:** Like with the guest appearances, utilizing Hip Hop iconography throughout her videos allows Missy to ground herself in the origins of Hip Hop, further allowing her to identify the self as powerful, as integral to the genre, and as a pioneer. These identifications mark her as essential to the genre, helping to create a feeling of long lasting noteworthiness.

o **Lyrics:** Her lyrics too utilize a variety of references to Hip Hop iconography and to back in the day. She also features many lyrics that announce her power, her popularity, and her skill. Again, these elements work toward building authenticity.

o **Strange and ever-changing settings:** The continual changing of settings within a single video and across videos makes it difficult to locate Missy in space and time. Her 2019 video could easily be her 1997 video and vice versa. There are very few markers that specify time and place. She also includes moments that seem like flashbacks or have a retro or nostalgic feel (color, tone, filter). These scenes blur the sense of time as well, making it difficult to pin down an age progression for Missy.

o **CGI – face and body:** By utilizing CGI, Missy’s face and body become malleable in ways that do not require physical modifications (like plastic surgery). Because she utilizes these digital modifications, her body appears to be more mobile and malleable than a physical body otherwise might be, allowing her to skirt the issue of age and the limitations of a normal aging body.

o **Sexuality and gender blending:** As Little noted, Missy’s brand of sexuality is different than other female rappers and Hip Hop artists. While others like Lil Kim, Foxy Brown, and more recently Cardi B and Nicki Minaj build their brand around overt sexuality (including sexy, revealing outfits, large breasts, big booties, and overtly sexual imagery), Missy utilizes more innuendo and places much less emphasis on these same physical features. Missy is frequently fully clothed (often while other women dancing around her are less so). Sexuality is still an important part of her brand, but because it is less focused on the physical body (at least in the same ways as for the other artists), and because it has both a normatively masculine and feminine quality, it allows her to age normally without having to alter her physical body.

o **Dance:** Missy’s celebration of dance in her videos is an important part of her brand that grounds her style in Hip Hop culture and history. She is often both reflecting back on past dance moves integral to the genre and incorporating cutting edge dance moves and choreography. The use of dance in her videos also marks her as agile and nimble, helping to offset her real age.
Children and childlike imagery: By featuring children and childlike imagery, Missy is blurring the age lines, marking herself as both child and adult. In some videos, like in “Throw It Back,” the video opens with a girl who could have been Missy as a child, walking through the halls of Missy. This moment is exactly what Little is talking about – Missy is able to blend the young and old, demonstrating her own youthful spirit (and body) while also demonstrating her longevity in the game and her own authenticity.

Lesson 30: Analysis Application – Caputi Article – Completed for Wednesday, 4/8

- *Orange is the New Black* is an original Netflix series that explores many contemporary cultural issues, including same-sex relations, transgender rights, racial discrimination, and socioeconomic disparities. Caputi argues that *Orange is the New Black* seemingly represents a new breed of show that includes increased diversity and representations of otherness, but she notes that these exposures are only offered through the “safe” and “normal” protagonist who is blonde, white, and upper class. The show touches on many important issues of social justice in the prison industrial complex, but Caputi is critical that these injustices seem most unjust to Piper who is “registered as someone who does not belong in prison” (p. 1135). By focusing on Piper’s class advantage, the show defines Piper as distinctly different from the other inmates, implying that she is somehow better than her more marginalized counterparts. Caputi blames “marketing mechanisms” for watering down the impact the show could have in raising awareness to social injustices and fairly representing marginalized groups (p. 1140). In some ways, *Orange is the New Black* only perpetuates commonly held stereotypes as it “caters to heteronormative, racist, classist, and ableist standards” even as it attempts to enhance cultural awareness (p. 1143).

- Caputi noted that while *Orange is the New Black* is often considered progressive in terms of its representation of a diverse group of women and its representation of prison life, the show is still hegemonic in that it filters the narratives of marginalized women through the white protagonist. The narrative in many ways neglects the stories of older women, trans women, lesbian women, non-white women, mentally ill women, and poor women, leading Caputi to question if the series accurately represents marginalized women’s stories, or if it instead contributes to the ideologies and stereotypes that support the prison industrial complex.

- In relation to the prison industrial complex and cultural imperialism, Caputi discussed the notion that the mediating of marginalized women’s stories through Piper is particularly problematic because the show establishes Piper as “the same” when she is actually quite different. Piper makes note that she is the same as everyone in here – made a bad choice and living with the consequences. However, what Caputi notes is that in reality, Piper is a rich white lady who got bored with her life and turned to crime. The other women, women in prison, Caputi argued, are a product of their environment, of institutionalized oppression, and of a culture that sees them as “other,” marking them as dirty, impure, devious, and deviant in contrast to the wealthy white woman, who doesn’t seem to belong in prison and with whom the audience is asked to sympathize.

- We discussed an idea that Caputi talked about – oppression.
  - She cited Young who noted that oppression is structural and it is, “embedded in unquestioned norms, habits, symbols and rules” (p. 1133). This idea was familiar
to us because it relates directly back to Jackson Katz who discussed the importance of asking the right kinds of questions, of shifting blame away from victims and back onto the institutions and cultures that create environments in which people are routinely oppressed.

- Caputi also noted that oppression is carried by, “unconscious assumptions and reactions of well-meaning people in ordinary interactions, media and cultural stereotypes, and structural features of bureaucratic hierarchies and market mechanisms – in short, the normal processes of everyday life” (p. 1133).
- I demonstrated some examples of this kind of oppression: 1) in the average size of seats in places like classrooms or airplanes, which indicate the appropriate size of a person; 2) in the assumption that skin colored bandaids are meant for white people, 3) in the gendered colors and object choices in toy aisles, 4) in the choice of only two genders in public bathroom signs; 5) and in religious language on government money. These kinds of things are every day, easily missed oppressions that contribute to a system that makes assumptions about good and bad and presents clear ideals and norms.

Lesson 31: Analysis Application – OITNB – completed for Friday, 4/10

- This episode clearly highlights Piper’s white and class privilege. The series is in many ways deliberately pointing out this privilege to demonstrate how unfair the system is to those without that privilege, but it also seems to unconsciously privilege Piper as well. Caputi noted that, “the script overtly draws attention to Piper’s unfair class advantage, but it also covertly privileges her” (p. 1136). The show does this through things like only showing Piper’s booking and strip search, not Watson or Daya’s even though they are booked on the same day. This overt privilege, although demonstrating Piper’s unfair advantage, also indicates to the audience that Piper doesn’t belong here. By reinforcing the idea that Piper doesn’t belong, the show also seems to reinforce the separation between whiteness (“purity”) and otherness (“deviance”).
- Examples of Piper’s privilege in this first episode (some on purpose, some unconscious) include:
  - The clean (white) bathrooms in the opening scene including a clawfoot tub
  - The pig roast – a “final meal” – the ability to have the part in the first place; the gift of a pig roaster; the purchase of an entire pig (and for only 4 people to eat).
  - Piper and Larry’s home – it has a large back patio and a giant master bathroom
  - She preps for prison by reading books about what to do in prison
  - Her friend comments that she is sad Piper will miss her baby shower and she doesn’t want Piper to let her eyebrows grow in (as if these concerns are valid to people living in prison)
  - Larry drives Piper to prison (in his eco car) – she has the privilege of not being booked, handcuffed, and put into a police car and instead shows up at her own leisure.
  - The engagement ring – big diamond, came from Larry’s family
  - He proposed on the beach
  - Piper traveled after college (and went to college)
  - Talking back to the guards – the audacity, the entitlement
- Her plans for prison (like it is a vacation) – get ripped, read all the books on her Amazon wishlist, learn a craft.
- She is more concerned with Larry updating her website and the versions of iPhone she will miss than surviving what is to come.
- Piper gets to say goodbye. She is not booked and handcuffed and hauled off to jail. She spends time at home (enough that her and her fiancé can take a trip to the beach where he can propose) and the night before going to prison they have a pig roast (for only 4 people), she has sex with her fiancé, and she gets to wait with him after he drops her off (like it is summer camp).
- They eat their favorite fancy sandwiches while they wait for her to be processed.
- Makes note that the shoes in prison look like Toms.
- At the prison, her advantages are clear – she has a trusted loved one with money who can mail a check for her commissary account. She has a lawyer in the family to give her advice. She has a support system to return to when she is released. These are things that the average person in prison will not have.
- Some other important things of note – Piper never has to consider life in prison. It is totally foreign to her and her naivete shows in the choices she makes and the way she speaks about prison. Her privilege is that she never has to think about it. It is a given that as a White, wealthy kid, she will never have to even consider prison.

- The opening scene is important. The scene deliberately makes clear distinctions between Piper’s past and her present circumstances, between her life of privilege and the reality of prison. It is clear that the episode is doing this on purpose – demonstrating Piper’s clear privilege. But it also, perhaps unconsciously, makes it very clear that Piper does not belong. It seems to tell us that Piper doesn’t belong in prison because she is the “nice blond White lady” who grew up with wealth and the privilege of never having to think about her race or the possibility of prison. In featuring Piper as not belonging, it also props her up as ideal, as normal, as something above her current circumstances, and in doing that, the episode also positions Black, Hispanic, poor, lesbian, trans, and older women as different from Piper, as somehow deserving of these circumstances, as other.
  - Taystee’s introduction certainly establishes her as other, specifically in contrast to Piper in the opening scene. Audiences meet Piper as a baby and then a child in a pure white, clean bathroom as she narrates, telling the audience about how much she loves baths/showers and getting clean. This happy place transitions into adult life where we see her alternately with Alex and Larry, enjoying the thrill of sex. These scenes stand in stark contrast to the dirty shower stall of the prison. When Taystee enters, we also hear an announcement for inmates to get checked for lice – a marker of dirtiness that gets associated with Taystee. In contrast to Taystee, Piper does not belong – and in this sense of not belonging, Taystee becomes other.
  - We also pondered the song choice in this sequence. It is “I’ll Take You There” by an all Black group from the 70s. It plays over Piper’s backstory and then gets picked up by Taystee in the present. We wondered what it meant to have this song playing and to have Taystee singing it (in her beautiful, soulful voice). Do we see Taystee as invasive, predatory, disruptive, having no boundaries OR is she something more complex, more nuanced?
• This narrative utilizes a variety of visual techniques in order to establish a particular truth – Piper’s truth. Within the narrative, Piper is framed as the lead character and it is through Piper that the audience is introduced (and slowly) to the prison system – in some ways this narrative structure assumes the audience is like Piper and makes the audience’s entry into prison parallel to Piper’s (as opposed to Watson’s or Daya’s who are both admitted on the same day). This narrative also establishes clear power dynamics, specifically between the guards and prisoners but also between same sex lovers, heterosexual lovers, mothers and daughters, families, socioeconomic classes, genders, and quite clearly between white women and non-white women.

• In this episode, white privilege is constantly reiterated. We see here get dropped off at prison (after a send off meal of a full roast pig the night before). She has someone who will put money in her commissary account. She has a lawyer in the family. She gets special favors from the officers. She has traveled extensively, went to college, got a proposal on the beach, read books about surviving prison, and wants to utilize her time in prison to get buff and learn a craft. As Caputi noted, this privilege is deliberately shown in order to highlight white and class advantage, yet at the same time, there also seems to be an unconscious design within the narrative to frame Piper’s story (the white and wealthy story) as prominent and more important. Piper is Jenji Kohan’s Trojan Horse – the cool, white blond next door who is the inroad for stories about marginalized women. Piper is also used as a device through which viewers can enter into the world of prison, presumably one they know little about.

• This episode establishes Piper’s white/class privilege, frames Piper as a character audiences should sympathize with, and establishes otherness in contrast with Piper. The episode does this in a variety of ways – establishing Piper’s home life and past life through cut aways, establishing a clear contrast between Piper’s past surroundings and her current ones in prison, establishing friends and foes, creating barriers between Piper and “other” characters, establishing the race “tribes” in prison, utilizing setting, lighting and music and ambient noise to establish conflict.

• It is important to understand this concept of “othering.” Establishing certain characters as other (or as opposed to or opposite from Piper), also establishes those characters (as Caputi argued) as deviant, impure, devious, and dirty. Almost every other character we meet is positioned as other. Additionally, while most of the White women get named, none of the other women (with the exception of Watson, who gets mentioned in passing by Morello – the van driver). Names are significant, linking a human being with their humanity. Does the episode not name these women in order to comment on the dehumanizing aspects of prison, or is this unconscious bias – only the White women “deserve” to be named? We meet a series of other characters, but they are presented in limited and specific ways.
  o On the perp walk, lesbians, Black women, and older women are positioned as aggressive and intimidating.
  o Taystee (Black) and Sophia (Black and trans) – are both featured as intimidating in their use of unwanted touch against Piper. They get represented as invasive and as having no boundaries.
  o Daya and her mother (LatinX) are presented as heartless/callous. Daya is also denigrated for not speaking Spanish.
  o Nicky (Lesbian) is presented as sexually deviant.
- Alex (Lesbian) is presented as manipulative and heartless
- Red (Russian) is presented as vengeful.
- Flores (The woman in the bathroom stall – who we later find out is talking on a contraband phone) is positioned as insane, scary, a threat, unkempt and dirty (also linking her Spanish language with these ideas and leaving her nameless).

- Caputi discussed the idea of othering – the representations above speak to that othering. Remember, this process of othering (whether subtle or overt) allows certain groups to hate others, to fear them, to see them as inferior or inhuman. We often see this occur in times of tragedy like 9/11. After 9/11, a surge of patriotism helped to other all Middle Eastern people, making it easier for Americans to ignore the death and destruction occurring in the Middle East or ignore discrimination against Middle Eastern people in the states.

- An important question that we must ask about television narratives and the truths displayed in those narratives are - when is something intentional (and what would that mean) and when is it not (and what would that mean)? It is important for us to evaluate this show (and all shows) in terms of the truth being told. What is the producer’s intended message? Does that intent matter? In what ways is the producer, the actors, the network, the audience influenced by major identity factors like gender, race, sexuality, class, ability, age etc?

**Lesson 32: Analysis Application – Papacharissi & Fernback – completed for Wednesday, 4/15**

- We have discussed big picture identity categories throughout this course. Identity is certainly central to this series as is the intersectionality of identity categories. We have discussed gender, sexuality, ability, age, race, and class already this semester. It is also important to remember that less visible or tangible concepts like religion, politics, place of origin, friends, and family are also big picture categories that play a major role in identity construction. Many of these identities play out in this series. In thinking about identity after watching the episode and prior to discussion and clips, we noted that it is important to ask ourselves the following questions: 1) How does each category shape us; 2) What are the established (unspoken or spoke) societal norms for these categories; 3) How does television, reality television specifically, and media more generally help to shape these norms; 4) How do these categories intersect with and complicate one another?

- The idea of queerness is essential to analyzing this episode. Queerness is an idea and term that people (scholars and the average person) will define differently. It can be used as an umbrella term to encompass all kinds of other identities (lesbian, bi, trans, gay, etc) but it is also its own distinct entity, as are the other identity categories that might fall under it. Each identity has its own history, culture, politics, and personal meanings. This term is certainly complex, but the important thing to remember is that it is okay if we all define it (and ourselves) differently. For this course, I ask that we do think about queerness as that which is outside of or pushes back against the norm, specifically in terms of sexuality, gender, and sex.

- It is also important to understand that queer theory (and feminism) seek to understand how identity categories like gender and sexuality are represented in pop culture texts and how those texts produce, reproduce and disseminate specific ways of knowing and being.
Queer theory looks to upset what is presented as normal and that which excludes those considered outside the norm. It also hopes to destabilize the perceived link between anatomical sex, social gender, gender identity, sexual identity, sexual object choice, and sexual practice.

When looking at media, we want to examine representation of different big picture identity categories. In this case, we want to ask questions about LGBTQIA representation. Questions like:

- How many queer characters are present?
- In what context are these characters presented?
- Is gayness or queerness the conflict itself?
- What conflicts arise (if any) as a result of queerness?
- When can/do these characters speak?
- What do they say or not say?
- Are they silenced, why, by who?
- What jobs or activities do they participate in?
- What socioeconomic class do they belong to?
- What ethnicity or race are they?
- How do these characters embody gender?
- What traits (physical, emotional, personality) do they have?
- How are these characters presented in relation to the ideal or norm?
- How do other characters react to queerness?
- In what way is the audience supposed to see this character and or identity?

Papacharissi and Fernback note that up until the 1990s, most portrayals of gay people in popular media featured gay people as comic relief, as the victim or villain, and as stereotypical (gay men as only effeminate and lesbians as only masculine). Often, gayness was only shown as a personal or relational matter and not within the political context of gay identity and rights. Gay characters were often presented as the catalyst for the development of heterosexual characters. Often, in that era (and continuing into the current era), we see gay men as almost exclusively white, wealthy, effeminate, and well dressed. We see lesbian women almost exclusively portrayed as white, wealthy, beautiful, sexy, and the stereotypical pinup for straight men’s sexual fantasies. The authors argue that in this same tradition (of othering), the original Fab 5 are positioned as other – they arrive and leave, relegated to the cultural margins.

In discussing Bourdieu’s concept of the habitus, which the authors use as a lens through which to analyze the series, I discussed some of his other concepts.

- Cultural Capital: this idea speaks to the idea of capital – instead of speaking about money, it addresses they more symbolic realm of culture. Cultural capital refers to elements like skills, tastes, posture, clothing, mannerisms, material belongings, and credentials. When we share cultural capital with others, we form a sort of in group (“People like us”). This idea can certainly create a sense of collective identity; however, Bourdieu argued that cultural capital is a major source of social inequality.

- Habitus: the physical embodiment of cultural capital – the deeply engrained habits, skills, and dispositions that we acquire through our life experiences. Our cultural environments (how we grow up – what we see as normal or essential to survival) determines our cultural capital. For someone growing up in a poor...
neighborhood, essential survival skills might include knowing how to hustle to make money and knowing how to avoid the cops. For a person growing up in wealth, essential survival skills might look like table manners and the right kind of clothing. If these people swapped environments, their cultural capital would no longer be a boon but rather a detriment. What is really important to understand is that because we grow up with specific norms, we assume that the things we know are natural, which can create a clear divide between the haves and the have nots (and between races, genders, sexualities, abilities, etc).

- Media series as a kind of habitus – a structuring structure. Media naturalizes certain practices and ways of thinking; it calls on its own history and tradition; it structures collective and individual identity; it encourages and inspires particular individual and collective action, and it generates clear norms and ideals.

  - Papacharissi and Fernback’s major argument is that *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* is, “a site for queer discourse that both challenges and reassures dominant perceptions of homosexuality (p. 349).
    - Challenges norms: They argue that the show does challenge some norms by doing the following: having a unique representation (5 gay men on reality TV for the first time); it reverses the traditional power structure with homosexuality as the norm and with gay men, not straight men, setting the ideals; presenting the gay habitus as the ideal cultural space that straight men should aspire to occupy; gay and straight men interact without homophobia; and the gay men work to better the lives of the straight men through their expertise, which is often used to stereotype gay men as feminine but is used here to improve the life of a straight man.
    - Perpetuates norms: They argue that while the show does challenge some norms, it also perpetuates many more by: having the change be only superficial; by entering into an already culturally diverse space (making push back less likely); by featuring the Fab 5 as other especially in their entering and retreating from the makeover space; by presenting gay and straight as distinct opposites; by having gay and straight men only interact within a specific space for a limit time; by reinforcing the gay flamboyant man stereotype; by representing stereotypical gay expertise; by presenting the Fab 5 as somewhat comical and non-threatening; and by reinforcing a consumerist rhetoric.

**Lesson 33: Analysis Application – Queer Eye – completed for Friday, 4/17**

- Like in all reality programing, this series has a clear narrative structure. They intro the person getting the makeover; we see the ways in which he or she needs help; the Fab 5 have a sort of intervention and go through the home and personal space; the healing process begins – out with the old in with the new, best self, confidence, updated space, self care; the reveal; emotional breakthrough; Fab 5 watches from afar as he or she tries on his or her own; reflection.

- For this kind of series, we always want to scrutinize the first episode. In this case, why Tom? Why is he the first participant? Why is he the entry point into this entire series? In this case, Tom is an older, White man, who lives down south. We are set up to be wary, thinking he will be homophobic and resistant to change. Yet, when we see his story, he seems eager for the men to help him, he knows he needs help, he is open and loving, and he sees himself as having made good relationships with the men. He is a great first pick
because he is also: self-deprecating (relatable); a good ole country boy that usurps our expectations; a big softie; never too old to change; admits he needs help; is good natured; romantic; loves children; has passions. The imagery used to portray these ideas, craft his on-screen persona, and drive his narrative are specific – southern imagery, the old car, the old pictures, the old recliner, him physically engaging with the other men, etc.

- In terms of Papacharissi and Fernback’s article, here is how the show seems to fit into their argument:
  
  o Challenging Norms: We get 5 very different gay men as leads and they do (across the course of the series) get some depth. We get behind the scenes style footage that humanizes them (as celebrities and as gay men); gay men and straight men getting along; the move to the idea of self-care; a push for living healthy and moving forward; a push toward loving the self rather than superficial change; the series makes over gay and straight men and women and trans people.
  
  o Perpetuates Norms: we still see the Fab 5 entering and leaving, giving them a specific space in which to interact with the participants and effect change; the story is still rooted in consumerism; we still get gay and straight as opposites (in some regard); it does reinforce the flamboyant gay man stereotype and they still have stereotypically gay expertise; there is a lot we aren’t seeing.

- Overall, it is interesting to apply the argument from the article to this new iteration of a past show. While it is one of my personal favorites, that doesn’t mean it is perfect or can’t be critiqued. The big thing to remember with reality TV is that it is scripted – it is shot and edited with specific narratives in mind. That is what we get and what we see. In this case, the story of Tom is deliberate and serves as an entry point for straight audiences into a more queer world. In that way it is both good and bad – good in that it provides wider representation of queerness to a larger audiences, bad in that it tends to reinforce the idea of a mainstream audience being a straight audience.

Lesson 34: Final Assignment Introduction – completed for Monday, 4/20

- One important take home from this lesson is simply that the final project is a chance for you to contemplate the self and be creative. We have discussed and practiced media analysis this entire semester. This project is your chance to speak back to the media industry with your own media. This is a time for you to think about who you are and what your story is. What is your voice? What is your truth? Who are you at this moment and how did you get here?

- A big part of this project is utilizing the course material to create a specific message about who you are. Instead of just telling us with words, you will tell us with images, with music, with camera angles and lighting and shadows and colors. It is my hope that in doing this project, you will see just how empowered you are to create meaningful media and put it out into the world.

Lesson 35: Selecting a Message – Completed for Wednesday, 4/22

- In the Crash Course videos, the narrator discussed some different ways that people and philosophers have conceptualized the self and personal identity. There are some that think about the self and identity in terms of the body or in terms of memory. These ways of conceptualizing the self bring up questions about who we are in relation to what we remember or to how our physical body changes over time.
The point of watching those videos was to start thinking about and conceptualizing identity in ways you may not have thought of before. It is important that we sit and ponder who we are and why we make the decisions we do. It is important to think about how our identities are crafted and how they are connected to other people. We have certainly learned this semester that media helps to shape our identity – the way we see the self, the way we see others, the way we see the world. In this project, I want you to think about who you are and how you can convey that to others through media. Selecting a message for this project is simply about thinking through the parts of you that feel important in this moment and selecting the techniques that will best make that part of you come alive on film.

Lesson 36: Planning the Production Process – completed for Friday, 4/24/20

- Working on a large scale project can be difficult. It can be tricky to figure out a message and to figure out how to convey that message. We identified some items that can be useful in this process:
  - Break a project into smaller pieces:
    - Create a to do list: break a larger item into smaller tasks that can be completed over a period of time, one step at a time
    - One step at a time: break down a project by elements and take one at a time
    - Get feedback: ask for feedback from peers, teachers, etc. along the way to make sure you are on the right track before getting too far along.
    - Timing: break up the project over a series of days or weeks.
    - Editing or not – determine at the outset if editing will be something you need, want, or are capable of doing so you can plan.
  - Mimic what you like:
    - Find the media you like and try to mimic the style.
    - Mimicking isn’t copying, it is about building your skill set and your voice and learning how to make your voice your own.
  - Brainstorming
    - Web diagraming can help you to break down big ideas into much smaller parts and pieces.
    - Stream of consciousness: is about just letting the ideas flow.
    - Storyboarding – is about putting a visual together to help you better determine what to shoot and how.
  - Rule of thirds: a technique that can be useful when thinking about what to include in the frame and where to include it and what to exclude.
  - Test Runs
    - Try taking lots and lots of shots in different lighting, from different angles, with different framing, in different settings, and at different times or types of days
  - Low tech hacks: get creative and utilize what you have in the house to create interesting and dynamic shots.