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Elizabeth J. Tisdell

Patricia M. Thompson
Penn State University-Harrisburg

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Elizabeth J. Tisdell and Patricia M. Thompson,
Penn State University—Harrisburg

Abstract: *After providing a framework for critical media literacy education, this paper reports on the preliminary results of a study in progress exploring adult educators' consumption of entertainment media, how it affects their thinking about group identities, and how they draw on it in their teaching and learning.*

The entertainment media have a powerful influence on all of us. According to the A.C. Nielsen Company, the average person in the US watches about four hours of TV per day, which amounts to about two months of nonstop TV-watching each year (Herr, 2001). Clearly then, the entertainment media teach us something about ourselves as we map new meaning onto our own experience based on what we see; it also "teaches" us a lot about "others" in often unconscious ways. In the past few years, there has been some discussion on the role of entertainment media in students' learning among critical education scholars (Giroux, 1997; hooks, 1994; Yosso, 2002). The growing interest in the media's impact on education is evidenced by the fact that the Fall 2003 issue of *Harvard Educational Review* was devoted to the entertainment media's role in education. Critical media education scholars note the tendency of the media to both reproduce and challenge structural power relations based on race, gender, class, and sexual orientation in their portrayals of characters. Thus, given that learners are consumers of entertainment media, which serves as a medium for knowledge construction about their own and others' identities, these scholars argue that it is important to teach *critical media literacy* skills.

Thus far most discussions related to critical media literacy have focused on youth. Aside from a general reference to the significance of popular culture to the media in our lives (Miller, 1999), discussion of the role of entertainment media in the education of adults has been absent. This is surprising, because much attention in the field of Adult Education tends to focus on tacit knowledge and nonformal learning, knowing through life experience (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999), "other ways of knowing" (Clark, 2002; Dirkx, 2002), teaching to challenge power relations, and teaching for cultural relevance based on learners' group based identities (Guy, 1999; Sheared & Sissel, 2001). Furthermore, in the world of media studies, there have been a number of studies that focus on how adults construct their identities in light of popular culture (eg. Hall, 2001; Shim, 1998; Radway, 1984). Because adult learners are large consumers of entertainment media, critical media studies/literacy have a role to play in adult education. It is especially relevant in teaching about diversity and equity. In light of the lack of attention to this in adult education, after providing a framework for critical media literacy (adult) education through a review of the literature, this paper reports the preliminary results of a study in progress exploring adult educators' consumption of entertainment media, how it affects their thinking about group identities, and how they draw on it in their teaching and learning.

Related Literature and Theoretical Framework

There's a considerable amount of literature related to critical media literacy. The main bodies are summarized below as a backdrop to discussing the theoretical framework.

The Media's Role in Reproducing or Resisting the Dominant Culture
When considering the media in general, as Giroux (1997) notes, most often the media reinforce the images and values of the dominant culture. For example, most entertainment media feature characters that represent fairly traditional norms and values. Main characters are most often white; if they are adults, they are most often married (or clearly hoping-to-be married), middle to upper-middle class, and heterosexual, often in traditional and/or stereotypical gender roles, and race and class roles as well.   But entertainment media can also challenge traditional norms, in (non-stereotypical) portrayals of characters of specific cultural groups of those who either do not represent the dominant culture, or who do not ascribe to its values (Dolby, 2003).   Some entertainment media overtly or covertly, through both comedy and drama, deal with current social issues that focus on race, class, gender, or sexual orientation, and in some ways challenge the dominant culture, and in other ways reproduces in. For example, many recent entertainment media have overtly dealt with race/ethnic relations (e.g. *Boston Public, ER, Bernie Mac)*; interracial romantic relationships (*Six Feet Under, ER*); the lives and relationships of single women who aren't necessarily looking specifically to be married, thus challenging the notion of "happy" women as married (*Sex and the City; Girlfriends).* However, these same shows might reinforce the dominant culture's notion of class or other relations. Further, many shows now feature main characters who are openly gay or lesbian (*Will and Grace; The L Word, ER, Queer Eye for the Straight Guy; Six Feet Under)*, which brings to voice the traditional silence about sexual orientation, and challenges the notion that to be gay or lesbian is to be deviant, sad, and miserable, though some characters are portrayed in somewhat stereotypical ways.
Sometimes fictional characters take on national significance, and even become part of public debate on social issues.   Who could forget Dan Quayle's early 1990s criticism of the single motherhood of the lead character of *Murphy Brown* (as if she were a real person and not a fictional character) in arguing his "family values" agenda? Or the stir of the later 1990s caused by the coming out of the lead character of the fictional show, *Ellen* played by Ellen DeGeneres,?   Indeed, many of these fictional characters in entertainment media have an impact on our individual and our national psyche.   They are fictional, yet they become real in our own individual and collective experience of them, a blurring of the real and unreal that media scholar, Arthur Berger (1998) calls the "postmodern presence," referring to the presence of these fictional characters in our lives, and of what they stand for in relation to our constructions of identity. Indeed, the entertainment media has a role in shaping our consciousness about current social issues, and our beliefs about groups both similar to and very different from us based on multiple aspects of their/our identities of race, class, gender, marital status, and sexual orientation.   The media can reinforce cultural or gender stereotypes, or it can challenge them. In short, the entertainment media, for good or for ill, is one of the most powerful vehicles of nonformal education of postmodern life.
Critical Media Studies in Education
There is much discussion of the role of critical media studies in education. As Dolby (2003) observes, there are indeed those who are quite strident in their critique of popular culture from both conservative and liberal/radical perspectives among educators   Many conservatives hold the media partially responsible for anything from sexual promiscuity, to violence, to drug use among youth. Dimitriadis and McCarthy (2001) note that many liberals and leftists argue that the media serves the interests of the dominant culture, and tends to reproduce gender, race, and class relations. While virtually all critical medial literacy and

critical education scholars would see the tendency of the media to reproduce structural power relations based on race, gender, class, and sexual orientation, they also argue that some media challenge such power relations. Further, they argue it is important not only to be aware of or to *study* pop culture, as it is unrealistic to expect people *not* to be consumers of popular culture.   Rather, it is important *to teach* critical media literacy—to teach how to deconstruct and analyze entertainment media, , particularly around portrayals of characters based on social structures of gender, race, class, and sexual orientation (Dolby, 2003; Holtzman, 2000; hooks, 1994, 1989; Yosso, 2002).

Thus far, most of these discussions and studies are focused on youth as consumers of popular culture and/or how adolescents of different cultural groups draw on popular culture in constructing their own and others' identities (e.g.. Dolby, 2003, Luke, 1999; McCarthy et al, 2003; Morrell, 2002). There have been a few studies about how traditional-age college students construct meaning and the identities of themselves and others in light of visual images and entertainment media, including Pauley's (2003) study of pre-service elementary teachers, and Yosso's (2002) study of Latino community college students.   Currently, there appear to be no research studies of critical media literacy or the use of drawing on entertainment media as a teaching tool specifically in adult education.

Theoretical Framework

In summarizing the thoughts of numerous critical media scholars, Yosso (2002) notes that they generally make the following assumptions about entertainment media apparent to students in teaching how to analyze media: 1) the media are controlled and driven by money; 2) media images are constructions—both of directors, actors, and other media makers; 3) media makers bring their own experience with them in their construction of characters, including their perceptions of race, gender, class, etc.; 4) consumers of media construct their own meaning of media portrayals in light of their own background experience; 5) unlike print media, entertainment media such as movies and television, are a combination of moving visuals, sounds, and words that combine in facilitating meaning; 6) it is possible to acquire multiple literacies in becoming media literate. Thus, critical media education scholars are essentially coming from a social constructionist perspective in analyzing entertainment media, in the belief that viewers are constructing further meaning in light of their past experience and beliefs, in dialogue with what the images and sounds they see and hear on the screen. Yosso's summary of these six assumptions serves as a theoretical framework for this study. It is important for educators to consider its role in shaping our learning and education, particularly as we attempt to deal with diversity and equity issues and a very diverse student population. The field of adult education has something to learn from the wider critical media studies in education field in this regard.

Methodology

The study is informed by a social constructivist paradigm of research in that, it is grounded in the assumption that human beings do not "find" knowledge, but rather construct it. As Schwandt (2000) explains "We invent concepts, models and schemes to make sense of experience, and we continually test and modify these constructions in light of new experiences" (p. 197). The overall study is a mixed method design of quantitative components based on a survey of adult education faculty and students across the country, and qualitative data based on individual interviews and focus groups. This paper reports on the findings of the survey data thus far.   After several revisions in light of pilot testing, the

final survey itself is composed of 32 items, focusing on: (1) viewing frequency and type of entertainment media viewed; (2) general preferences in TV and cinema; (3) main character preferences (based on gender, race/ethnicity, and sexual orientation), and (4) the amount and type of informal discussion of entertainment media among family, friends, and colleagues; and (5) the use of media in teaching; and (6) demographic information. It was requested that participants fill out Parts 1-4, and Part 6 of the survey, and to fill out Part 5 only if they were in a teaching role in their professional lives. Of the 32 items on the survey, 19 were either forced choice or likert scale items, 9 were related to demographic information, and 4 were qualitative list items, such as asking participants to list their favorite TV shows or movies and explain the reasons why. Thus far, approximately 125 surveys were distributed in masters and doctoral level adult education courses by adult education faculty at 5 different universities; 118 were completed and returned, though certain aspects of the demographic information were left blank on 6 of the surveys. 73 of the 118 survey participants had completed Part 5 on the use of media in teaching, which indicates that they have a teaching role in their professional lives. The data were entered in the SPSS program, and frequency counts based on demographic information, mean scores tabulated on likert scale items, and one-way ANOVA's were run on all likert scale and forced choice items based on gender, race, and sexual orientation.

The sample included the following demographics: *Gender*: 30 Men (26.4%), 84 women (73%): *Sexual Orientation*: 105 heterosexual (93.8%); 7 Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual (6.3%); *Education*: 31 bachelor's (27.7%); 75 master's (67%); 6 doctorate (5,4%): *Race/ethnicity:* 70 white (61.4%), 22 Black (19.3%); 10 Asian (8.5%) 5 Latino/a (4.4%); 2 Native American (1.8%); 3 Mixed race (2.6%), and 2 "Other" (1.8%); *Age*: 10 (age 20-25); 30 (age 26-34); 31 (age 35-44), 34 (45-55), 7 (56-65); 1 (over 65). 73 of the 118 filled out the section on use of media in teaching, indicating a profession teaching role in their work lives.

Summary of Results

In terms of the general findings of the study thus far, 58.5% of participants indicated they watched 1-5 hours of TV per week, whereas 19.5% indicated they watch between 5-10 hours. In terms of types of television shows preferred, most frequently watched were comedy shows whereas the least frequently watched were reality shows. On all the questions regarding the degree to which they discussed characters or themes of television shows or movies, 64% indicated they discussed it occasionally or more often the next day at school or work; 72% did so with people they knew enjoyed it, and 84% indicated they brought it up if it was relevant to the conversation. Because some of the more interesting aspects of the findings were related to character preferences and the use of media in teaching, these aspects of the findings will be discussed in more depth below.

Character Preferences

More than half of the participants, 55.9% (n= 62) indicated that they most often watch TV shows that feature equal numbers of men and women in lead roles, though 23.4% (n=26) indicated that they watch shows with more men in lead roles, while 18.6% (n=22) indicated they preferred women in lead roles. There was no statistically significant difference based on gender, race/ethnicity, or sexual orientation in the ANOVAs that were run in this regard.

In regard to questions about whether or not participants choose to watch TV shows that feature gay, lesbian, or bisexual (GLB) characters in lead roles or strong supporting

roles, 33.6% indicated that they did while 66.4% indicated that they did not. However 53.3% indicated that they did watch shows that featured an occasional GLB character. There was no statistically significant difference based on gender, though not surprisingly, there was a statistically significant difference in the ANOVAs run in regard to sexual orientation on both of these questions at p<.001. Further, there was a statistically significant difference based on race/ethnicity on one of the sexual orientation questions with those who are white more likely to choose to watch shows that feature an occasional GLB character at the p=.03 level. The white participants also chose to watch shows featuring a GLB main character more often than people of color, although this only approached statistical significance (p=.082.) In regard to the questions regarding whether or not participants choose to watch shows that feature a person of color in a lead role or strong supporting role, 87% indicated that they did and 76% indicated they watched shows with more than one person of color in a lead role. There was no statistically significant differences based on gender, or sexual orientation, but there was for race/ethnicity at the p<.003 level on both questions.

Use of Media in Teaching

As noted above, 73 of the 118 participants answered the questions regarding the use of media in teaching, indicating that they were teaching professionals. Most indicated they referred to entertainment media only "occasionally" but 32% indicated that they did so frequently or very frequently. They were somewhat more prone to use media examples to discuss stereotypes. Again most indicate that they did so occasionally, 41% indicated that they did so frequently or very frequently. However, actually showing TV clips or movie clips in classrooms is generally rare, though 40% participants reported that they use movie clips occasionally or slightly more often.

Conclusion and Implications for Practice

While these results are preliminary and need to be interpreted with caution, they do suggest some interesting results thus far. To be sure some of the results are not surprising, such as that the GLB participants were more likely to watch shows that feature GLB characters, or that people of color choose shows with people of color in lead roles. The fact that most shows that feature GLB characters feature white characters might account for the significance of the ANOVA on that those who are white chose to watch GLB characters more often than people of color.

Sixty four to 84% of participants indicated that they discussed entertainment media occasionally or more often. Given that we only have quantitative data thus far, we don't know *how* exactly they are discussing it; nevertheless, the fact that they do so indicates that people are engaged in the construction of knowledge consistently based not simply on what they see in the media, but in their discussion with others about it. In addition, given that those who teach do draw on it in their teaching occasionally or more often, and do so occasionally to discuss stereotypes, at least hints at the fact that many adult educators are engaging in critical media literacy at least at some level in the way that Yosso (2002) describes. But the specifics of *how* they are doing it can only be determined by the qualitative data.

In conclusion, it is clear that entertainment media has at least some effect on how all of us continue to "learn" about gender, race, class, sexual orientation, both as passive consumers, and as active meaning makers. Engaging in active viewing and discussion and deconstruction of character portrayals both in our individual lives and as teachers of adults in

classrooms and training sessions is clearly a way of raising consciousness, not only about the "pedagogy of pop culture" but also about gender, race, class, culture, and sexual orientation issues in the world.   While the study is preliminary and needs to be interpreted with caution, it offers a beginning look at adult educators as consumers of entertainment media and as educators of critical media literacy.

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