1.

LAYING A FOUNDATION FOR STUDYING RACE, GENDER, CLASS, AND THE MEDIA

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The Media Matter

From *Sesame Street* to *Schoolhouse Rock* to *Dora the Explorer* to fake news, filter bubbles and sexting, ours is a mediated society. Much of what we know about, care about, and think is important is based on what we see in the media. The media provide information, entertainment, escape, and relaxation and even help us make small talk. The media can help save lives, and—unfortunately—can cause harm.

For example, the AMBER Alert system uses local radio and TV stations in conjunction with electronic highway signs to rapidly disseminate information about child abductions. Communication media allowed a doctor to perform a surgical procedure with which he was unfamiliar. He saved the life of a teenager in the Democratic Republic of Congo by following the instructions texted to him by a colleague half a world away.

Digital and social media can bring people together, but they can also drive people apart. One Florida attorney said that about 90% of her divorce cases involve Facebook in some way. Cyberbullying is extensive, and can cause significant harm. However, because researchers use different definitions for the concept, the numbers of young people reporting being cyberbullied vary widely. Based on Lee's (2017) review of the literature, on average, it's probably safe to assume that 10–20% of college students have been cyberbullied.

If the world is shrinking, and our village becoming global, it's because the media—both legacy media such as television and the more recent digital and social media—have brought things ever closer to us. The average American household has the television set on about eight hours a day. Worldwide, the average internet user is on social media more than five hours per day. When you consider how averages are calculated, this means that if you—as a busy college student with lots of homework and perhaps some extracurricular activities, not to mention work and/or family obligations—only have the TV on for about two hours, then some other household has it on for more than 14 hours. If you are on social media for about two hours, someone else is using it for more than eight hours. Now think about your involvement with other social institutions. How much time have you spent in the classroom in your entire life? (Because you're in college, it's a lot more than most Americans.) How does that compare to your time spent watching TV or on social media? How will that change as you leave the classroom but continue to watch TV and engage in social media? How many hours per day do you spend with your parents (and reflect on others who might not be as lucky) or with religious leaders? How can the media *not* affect us in some way?

A primary assumption underlying media research is that the media do matter—what we see, read, and hear affect us in some way. Different types of scholars, however, approach the matter of media effects differently. Social scientists try to model their research on the natural sciences and strive to maintain objectivity. They often employ experimental or survey methodologies testing for precise and narrowly defined media effects (such as how people's opinions change as a result of media exposure, how people's perceptions of others or about the world in general are affected by what they see/hear/read, or whether people behave more aggressively after being exposed to violent media content).

Critical/cultural researchers, on the other hand, reject not only the desirability of maintaining an objective, value-neutral position but also the very

possibility of doing so. Human beings, they argue, cannot distance ourselves from our social world; indeed, only by immersing ourselves in its practices can we understand them. A subjective interpretation is thus not just desired but required to learn how the media affect the world in which we live. These are fundamentally different assumptions from those held by most social scientists. The types of media effects that critical/cultural researchers investigate are different, too. They're much more broadly defined and often address the cumulative effects of a lifetime of exposure to media content—content that typically represents a limited range of viewpoints, ideas, and images. Ultimately, the media help maintain a status quo in which certain groups in our society routinely have access to power and privilege whereas others do not. Because the types of questions critical/cultural scholars ask are often different from those posed by social scientists, these scholars tend to prefer qualitative methodologies such as rhetorical or textual analysis, interviews, and ethnographic techniques. In addition, critical/cultural scholars extend their involvement with their research to include the ultimate goal of making the world a better place. If we can identify the ways in which our social structures function to oppress certain groups, then we can try to do something to make things more equitable.

This book contains work by both social scientists and critical/cultural scholars, although the latter group dominates. As you explore the readings, see if you can identify which perspective seems to guide the authors and how it affects the questions asked and the way the answers are sought.

Race, Gender, and Class Matter

Like it or not, we do categorize people on the basis of race/ethnicity, gender, and social class. Our perceptions of our own and others' identities color all our interactions; they affect our expectations of others, our expectations of ourselves, and others' expectations of us.

According to Healey and O'Brien (2015), we make snap judgments about people (and things). We live in a complex social world, and we simply don't have time to ruminate about all the fine points of everything and everyone we encounter. So we categorize people and groups, often on the basis of nothing more than the visible more or less permanent physical markers of race and gender. Furthermore, the classifications we make affect our behavior toward others.

Why do the markers of race and gender stand out, rather than other attributes? Why are these the characteristics by which we categorize others? Because this is how we've been socialized. We could classify people according to length of hair, height, or even the size of their feet, but we don't. Ultimately, we rely on these characteristics because we have been taught to do so: prejudice "is the normal result of typical socialization in families, communities, and societies that are, to some degree, racist" (Healey & O'Brien, 2015, p. 79).

It's the same with gender—we've been socialized into a gender-conscious society that is also stratified (divided in a hierarchical fashion, with some social groups having more of the goods/services valued by society than others) along the lines of gender.

When our generalizations become overly simplistic, when we ignore evidence that they are incorrect, or when they become exaggerated, they have become more than mere generalizations; they've become *stereotypes*. Stereotypes reflect our (erroneous) beliefs that the few traits we stress are the most important, and that they apply to all members of the group. They deny the presence and the importance of individual characteristics. Stereotypes are an important component of *prejudice*, which Healey and O'Brien defined as "the tendency of an individual to think about other groups in negative ways, to attach negative emotions to those groups, and to prejudge individuals on the basis of their group membership" (2015, p. 21). Notice the two dimensions of this definition—prejudice has both a cognitive and an emotional element. Stereotypes are at the heart of the cognitive aspect of prejudice. Prejudice can lead to *discrimination*, although it doesn't need to, because even a highly prejudiced person can refrain from acting on her or his negative cognitive or emotional response to certain social groups. Discrimination occurs when people are treated unequally just because they belong to a certain group. People can be treated differently for many different reasons, but any time unequal treatment is based on group membership (even the perception of group membership) the behavior is discriminatory. Stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination reflect *racism*, *sexism*, or *classism* (although these concepts go much deeper than that and are defined differently by different people), depending on whether the stereotypes are rooted in race/ethnicity or gender.

A final word about race and ethnicity: although both are socially constructed, some people find it helpful to distinguish between race and ethnicity. To those who do, race is primarily defined in terms

of physical characteristics and ethnicity in terms of cultural characteristics. Markers of race include skin color and hair (delineating individuals as being, for example, of African, Chinese, Japanese, European descent); markers of ethnicity include religious practices, language use, mode of dress, dietary habits, and cuisine (delineating individuals as being Catholic, Hindu, Irish Americans). Those who employ this distinction tend to believe that the meanings attributed to both physical and cultural markers remain socially constructed; they are not propagating biological theories of race, which for good reason have largely been rejected.

Audience, Content, Production: Three Focal Points

Our media system is complex and incorporates a variety of interrelated components, each of which experiences many pressures from both within and without. Three of the major elements of the system are the producers, the audience, and the actual media content.[1] The chapters of this book are organized around those three elements.[2] *Production* involves anything having to do with the creation and distribution of mediated messages: how the messages are assembled, by whom, in what circumstances, and under what constraints. *Content* emphasizes the mediated messages themselves: what they present, and how; what is included, and by implication, what is excluded. *Audience* addresses the people who engage, consume, or interact with mediated messages: how they use the media, what sense they make of media content, and how they are affected by the media.

The production–content–audience distinction is consistent with commonly used models of communication focusing on the source (or sender), message, channel, and receiver. Scholars have presented these models in a variety of ways and with a variety of additional elements, but at their core they focus on who creates or originates the message (Sender/Source), how the source has presented the ideas she or he wishes to communicate (Message), how the actual message is conveyed (Channel), and to whom the message is sent (Receiver).[3] These SMCR-type models fit well with the social–scientific approach, and all have their roots in the work of Harold Lasswell (1948) and Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver (1949). The Shannon and Weaver mathematical model of communication has been most influential in the field.

The production–content–audience distinction is also consistent with how media studies can be approached within the critical/cultural studies perspective. These three realms are usually referred to as *production, text,* and *reception* by critical/cultural scholars and are considered *points of intervention.* Don't let the overt political stance implied by that term escape you—remember the goal of critical/cultural scholars: to understand how social structures serve to oppress and repress certain social groups in order to end that oppression.

Key Concepts and Recurring Themes

As you read this book, you'll begin to notice a pattern of recurring themes. Although these are typically defined when they're presented, it's important to have a sense of some of the key concepts you'll encounter. These concepts often inform the readings even if they're not explicitly mentioned. Thinking about these concepts right up front will help frame the readings that are to come. And speaking of framing...

Erving Goffman argued in his classic 1974 book that the framing of an event or activity establishes its meaning. In other words, *framing* is the process by which we make sense of the events around us. Frames are like story lines allowing us to interpret new information in the context of something we already understand. We use frames all the time, without even knowing it. For example, we might say to our friends that a new band is "like Nine Inch Nails with Kanye West." Or that a singer is the "next Lady Gaga." People pitching ideas for films or television shows often frame their ideas in terms of content the networks or studios already know and understand: "It's a Western set in outer space."

Journalists use frames as they prepare news stories, too, whether they know it or not. Despite journalists' quest for the objective presentation of what we call "facts" to their audiences, Gamson (1989) claimed that "facts have no intrinsic meaning. They take on their meaning by being embedded in a frame or story line that organizes them and gives them coherence, selecting certain ones to emphasize while ignoring others" (p. 157). Because news stories always emphasize some facts over others, we should "think of news as telling stories about the world rather than as presenting 'information,' even though the stories, of course, include factual elements" (p. 157). A story might frame something as an economic or a moral issue, a local issue, or one with far-reaching consequences. A story might emphasize the horse race aspects of a political campaign or the important issues and stances held by the candidates.

Framing is important because a great deal of research has shown that the frames employed by the media when telling a story can affect our attitudes and judgments about the issues and people involved in the story—especially, as Gitlin (1980) argued, when people don't have firsthand knowledge of and experience with the issue at hand.

In the case of this book, the information provided in this chapter should frame the readings such that you're on the lookout for certain concepts and that your understanding of the readings is bolstered by your knowledge of these concepts.

Symbolic annihilation is a concept often associated with sociologist Gaye Tuchman (whose 1978 work is widely cited, with good reason) but which was presented by George Gerbner in 1972 and George Gerbner and Larry Gross in 1976. The concept is rooted in two assumptions: media content offers a form of symbolic representation of society rather than any literal portrayal of society, and to be represented in the media is in itself a form of power—social groups that are powerless can be relatively easily ignored, allowing the media to focus on the social groups that really matter. It's almost like implying that certain groups don't really exist—even though we can't go out and actually annihilate everyone who isn't a cisgender, White, Christian, middle-to-upper-class male, we can at least try to avoid them in our mediated versions of reality. Tuchman (1978) focused on the symbolic annihilation of women, but the concept is applicable to any socially constructed group, whether based on gender, race, sexual orientation, ethnicity, appearance, social class, and so on.

Tuchman argued that through absence, condemnation, and trivialization, the media reflect a social world in which women are consistently devalued. As noted above, when the media consistently fail to represent a particular social group, it becomes easy for us to assume that the group either doesn't exist or doesn't really matter. So, if the media consistently present an image of a social world that is (in terms of numbers) dominated by men, Tuchman argued, the media have symbolically annihilated women. But women are not completely absent from media content. Symbolic annihilation also looks for evidence of condemnation or trivialization. Perhaps women are reduced to incompetent childlike beings needing protection from men. Perhaps they're only valuable when they're attractive, young, thin; when they're sexual rather than smart. Perhaps they only function well in the home, getting into all sorts of trouble—some comic, some tragic—when they dare leave the confines of the traditionally acceptable roles of wife and mother. Even when enacting socially appropriate roles, however, women's contributions may be seen as less valuable than those made by the men of the house. As you're reading the following essays about a variety of social groups falling outside of the straight White middle-to-upper-class male norm—whether it's women, transgender people, the poor, the homeless, the uneducated, African Americans, Muslims, Latin Americans, Native Americans, or even so-called "White trash"—consider the extent to which, and how, a group might be experiencing a form of symbolic annihilation in the media.

Intersectionality. The variety of social groups noted above raises an important issue: no one is a member of just one social group; we are all a product of a combination of experiences and identities, rooted in a variety of socially constructed classifications. The social reality experienced by gay White males, for example, differs from that experienced by White lesbians or by straight White males—and that of economically disadvantaged gay White males differs from gay White males with greater access to economic and other resources. The social reality experienced by White women differs from that experienced by Black women. The concept of intersectionality helps us understand the futility of trying to know what it means, for example, to be "Native American." None of us can ever be *only* poor, *only* Native American, *only* female, *only* bisexual, *only* hearing- or visually impaired. We all experience multiple identities that combine, or intersect, to help us understand who we are, and who others are, and to help others understand who we are. Our unique combination of identities affects all of our interactions with others. You'll see this is a dominant theme throughout this book. Some readings overtly address intersectionality by acknowledging the interaction of race, gender, and class, but notice how other readings might be informed by intersectionality even though it may not be a key focal point.

Cultural/social identity is another concept you'll come across repeatedly, and not only in readings addressing intersectionality. We all have the sense that we belong to a particular cultural group (or several such groups), even if we haven't consciously thought about it. The more we've thought about it, though, and the more importance and emotional significance attached to our membership in these groups, the more important this cultural identity is to us. Sometimes a cultural or social identity is so pivotal to us that we never approach any social or communication situation without being aware of ourselves as

(for example) a gay man. At other times, an aspect of our identity might hardly be considered.

The way issues of identity are handled can serve to reveal or highlight various social tensions rooted in issues of difference. Conduct an online search for the character Pat originated by Julia Sweeney on *Saturday Night Live*. If gender didn't matter, Pat wouldn't be funny, wouldn't have been a recurring character for four years, and wouldn't have spawned a feature-length film. If race didn't matter, we wouldn't still, even after his death, care about Michael Jackson's evolving appearance, how many and what type of cosmetic procedures he'd had done, and whether the lightening of his skin was due to vitiligo.[4] We wouldn't have people arguing about who is and is not Black, or who has the right to employ traditionally Black modes of dress and speech. Members of one social group (in particular the dominant White group) might go so far as to remove someone else's cultural or social identity. We see examples of this every time someone (usually White) says something like, "I don't see him as Black." As you read this book, note how frequently issues of identity are considered, even if the authors don't explicitly use that term.

Social Construction of Reality. The previous discussion of social identity reinforces that identities are negotiated within a social context.[5] Sometimes identities are forced upon or denied to people (as in the "one-drop rule," which claimed that any individual with at least one drop of African blood was Black, or Native American tribal membership based on blood quantum or direct tribal lineage). Sometimes identities are rejected, either by an individual herself (as when people of one social group attempt to pass for another), or by others (as when acquaintances of a trans woman who uses the pronouns she/her/hers refuse to respect her wishes and insist on calling her "him"). But most often we understand and accept what it means in our culture to be lower class or middle class, male or female, Black, White, Native American, Latino/a, Japanese, Korean, Chinese, and so forth. How do we do this? We learn what it means to be a member of a certain social group through our interactions with others. By consistently being treated in a certain way, we begin to expect to be treated in that way. This is exemplified in the process of engenderment, by which a biological female becomes a socially constructed feminine being and a biological male becomes a socially constructed masculine being. We learn what boys and girls (and later, men and women) act like, do for fun, think is important, are good at, and so on. A similar process is also at work in

constructing our ideas about people of various racial and ethnic groups as well as different social classes.

The importance of race and gender in our society has nothing to do with physical attributes of race and gender and everything to do with society's interpretation of what it means to be a member of a particular gender or racial/ethnic group. What it *really* means to be a Black man, or a Latina, or a Muslim in our society is entirely dependent on what we *think* it means to be a Black man, or a Latina, or a Muslim. As you read this book, think about what the media are telling us about what it means to be a member of a given social group and how that reflects to us what that group is, does, and values.

The perspective that race, gender, and social class are socially constructed phenomena is in contrast with an alternative viewpoint, one which sees race and gender, in particular, as deterministic or essentialistic (unalterable; a law of nature, immutable). There is something akin to a nature versus nurture debate between these perspectives. Weighing in on the nature side are the determinists. Differences among groups are rooted in biology. Sigmund Freud's statement "anatomy is destiny" is often presented as "biology is destiny." One's character is fixed at birth, based on the presence or absence of male reproductive organs. One's family tree roots one into a specific racial category; members of different races have different traits; it is biology which (it is claimed) makes certain races naturally more or less musical, athletic, intelligent, and so forth. Such a position is not one with which I am comfortable. The social constructionist perspective, on the other hand, is more analogous to the nurture position.

Importantly, seeing these groupings as social constructions allows us the opportunity to lessen or remove inequity. If we identify the presence of racism, classism, sexism (and heterosexism), we can hope that with awareness, the social reality we construct through our interactions and our social institutions will reflect a more egalitarian approach to engaging issues of difference.

At the core, each of these phenomena—racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism—is about power relationships. Our society is hierarchical; some groups have more power than others do. The hierarchy allows the dominant group to consider itself superior to the subordinated group(s), and to treat members of the subordinated groups differently just because of their membership in that group. The hierarchy allows the dominant group to determine, among other things, in which group an individual belongs and the

normative or proper place of the subordinated group. Overt racism, for example, decreed the proper place for African Americans was at the back of the bus and away from the "Whites Only" drinking fountains. Overt sexism said that a woman's place was in the home (preferably barefoot and pregnant). The isms in our culture are less overt nowadays, but without doubt they remain. The 2015 US Supreme Court decision struck down laws prohibiting same-sex marriage, but associated issues (such as the right to refuse service to LGBTQ people) remain. The dominant group can define whether the lived experiences of the subordinated group do, in fact, constitute a problem that might be worthy of society's time, attention, and resources—and the ever-present ideology of the American Dream makes it all too easy to dismiss claims of unequal opportunity made by subordinated groups, and to say that if they would only apply themselves, try harder, they would succeed. Dominant groups can rationalize why so few people from an underprivileged background, or women, or people of color, have advanced to truly important positions in society (there are notable exceptions, of course, but not of sufficient number to demonstrate equality). The dominant groups can proclaim that affirmative action is no longer needed, and that we are living in a postracial, color-blind, gender-blind, and classless society. As the readings in this book will show, we are not.

Discourse is a concept frequently employed by scholars. It is used and defined differently by different people, but at its core, discourse refers to ways of conceptualizing, discussing, or writing about various social phenomena (such as racism or sexism). Discourses can be seen as interpretive frameworks that have a powerful role in defining the phenomenon of interest, in determining exactly what it is and how it can or should be dealt with—or even whether it should be addressed at all. In a way, the concept of discourse is related to framing. It's probably safe (albeit simplistic) to say that discourse is a richer or denser concept that tends to be favored by critical/cultural scholars, whereas framing is more narrow and tends to be favored by social scientists.

Ideology is a concept of fundamental importance to critical/cultural studies, with roots in Marxism. As with discourse, definitions of ideology abound. For our purposes, ideology is best understood as a set of deeply held ideas about the nature of the world and the way the world ought to be. There are many different ideologies, and they all affect how any given society has been socially constructed. Some ideologies are more repressive and some are more egalitarian

than others. Even within any given society, multiple ideologies can be found, but one ideology is usually accepted by most of the society's members. We call this the *dominant ideology*.

Discovering and articulating a culture's dominant ideology and how it's perpetuated is important to critical/cultural scholars, because if it serves to oppress and repress certain cultural groups, these scholars would like to see it changed. Media perform a pivotal role in perpetuating the dominant ideology, because media texts so often produce and reproduce that ideology. If we (as members of a society) don't see much that represents an alternative way of approaching or understanding our world, it's unlikely we'll embrace an alternative ideology. Because of this, it's vital to examine how media represent members of a culture's social groups. In our culture, we should look at media depictions not only of the dominant social group (cisgender, White, middle-to-upper-class, Christian, male) but also of the subordinated groups (LGBTQ people, women, people of color, people of lower economic classes, and the like).

We should also look at how the media represent groups that explicitly challenge the status quo. The media can ignore such challenges only up to a point—sometimes the groups become so large and well organized that they must be acknowledged. But when they are portrayed in the media, groups challenging the dominant ideology are often represented as deviant, as fringe elements, as disorganized—anything other than offering a viable and beneficial alternative to the way things are. An example of this occurs when the media represent feminists as hairy-legged, lesbian, man haters who want to destroy the sanctity of the nuclear family. In labor disputes, maybe union negotiators are described as demanding whereas management is doing what is logical during the current economic climate. In the early days of the environmental movement, its members were seen as hippies, and called tree huggers. Members of the women's movement were called bra burners. These portrayals provide examples of what it means to belong to these groups and in so doing represent to us all the dominant ideology in action. Why should we take these weirdos and their crazy ideas seriously? If that's all we see, that might be all we know.

Critical Thinking and Media Literacy

One of this book's goals is to encourage you to think critically about the media. *Critical thinking* has been defined in a variety of ways, but at the very

least, it involves "the ability to examine issues rationally, logically and coherently" (Stark & Lowther, 1988, p. 23). However, a fuller definition helps delineate the processes involved more clearly. A group of experts gathered by the American Philosophical Association defined critical thinking as "purposeful, self-regulatory judgment which results in interpretation, analysis, evaluation, and inference, as well as explanation of the evidential, conceptual, methodological, or contextual considerations upon which that judgment is based" (Facione, 1990, p. 2). Essentially, for the type of course using this book, critical thinking boils down to asking and trying to answer the following types of questions (which will take a variety of forms, in part due to whether they're directed at media content, media production, or media audiences): What do I see? What do I think it means? How did it get that way? To what extent is that appropriate, a good thing, or handled effectively? What does this tell me about some aspect of our media system, or our society? And finally, why do I say that?

Being critical participants in our media system means constantly asking questions and doing our best to answer them in a logical and defensible fashion. We should engage in a systematic but not necessarily linear process of thinking through these issues, defining terms and concepts, looking at and evaluating evidence, considering the pros and cons of various positions, acknowledging underlying assumptions, and justifying our position.

As elements of critical thinking are tailored to fit the media context, the result is a way of thinking that shares a great deal with the idea of _media literacy_. Although the United States falls far behind much of the rest of the developed world in terms of the extent to which media literacy is developed and integrated into the educational system, we are beginning to understand its importance. For example, Wulff (1997) argued that media literacy is a key component in people's ability to participate actively in a democratic society, as well as within a global context.

But what exactly is media literacy? It involves expanding the general concept of literacy (the ability to read and write) to what the Aspen Institute called "the powerful post-print media that dominate our informational landscape" (Aufderheide, 1993, p. 1). Media literacy "helps people understand, produce and negotiate meanings in a culture made up of powerful images, words and sounds" (p. 1). The Institute provided further guidance as to what it actually means to be media literate: "A media literate person: Can decode, evaluate, analyze and produce both print and electronic media. The fundamental objective of

media literacy is critical autonomy in relationship to all media" (p. 1).

Media literacy is, according to the Center for Media Literacy (n.d.):

a 21st century approach to education. It provides a framework to access, analyze, evaluate, create and participate with messages in a variety of forms — from print to video to the Internet. Media literacy builds an understanding of the role of media in society as well as essential skills of inquiry and self-expression necessary for citizens of a democracy.

The College Board English language arts framework (Brinkley, n.d., p. 55) has articulated the competencies associated with media literacy as follows:[6]

1. Students who are media literate communicators demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the ways people use media in their personal and public lives.
2. Media literate students know and understand the complex relationships among audiences and media content.
3. Media literate students know and understand that media content is produced within social and cultural contexts.
4. Media literate students know and understand the commercial nature of media and demonstrate the ability to use media to communicate to specific audiences.
5. Media literate students understand, interpret, analyze, and evaluate media communication.
6. Media literate students use a variety of technological and informational resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.
7. Media literate students understand, interpret, analyze, and evaluate media communication.

As you read this book, consider these media literacy competencies. Notice how the authors reflect these competencies in their writing. Think about how your responses to the items presented in the *It's Your Turn* section of each reading reflect these competencies. Try to exhibit these competencies as you read/see/ hear media content and as you create or produce media content for class or other purposes. You'll probably find that the more you do it, the easier it is to respond in a media literate fashion to the *It's Your Turn*

items as well as to the media content you encounter in your day-to-day life. Perhaps, it'll even become second nature, which would be good, because a more media literate media user is a more empowered and less vulnerable media user.

Notes

1. There are other elements affecting media, such as the legal/regulatory system, but even though regulators could be considered either a specialized segment of the audience or a facet of the larger environment within which production takes place, this book won't specifically attend to that part of the process.
2. Classification systems such as the one used here are useful devices to help us organize and make sense of ideas and processes, but they're not perfect—some readings don't fit neatly into a single category. In particular, as will be discussed in the *Audience* section, the concept of *produsage* (Bruns, 2008) represents an important hybrid of production and usage—in which tendrils from two areas which used to be clearly separate have now begun to merge. As you read this book, think about the questions posed in item #3 in *It's Your Turn*.
3. Although this book doesn't have a special section devoted to the channel of communication, some readings do focus on how the channel of communication might change the relationship of the participants within the communication process and perhaps even the communication process itself. Note also that one of the alternate tables of contents organizes the readings by medium.
4. Consider the difference between a darker-skinned person lightening her or his skin and the voluntary skin darkening undertaken by Whites at the beach, in tanning salons, and so on. What does this reveal about the power hierarchy in our society?
5. The social construction of reality concept was first presented by sociologists Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1966), and has had a large impact on many disciplines.
6. The original quotation contains four instances of "mediate literate" instead of "media literate." For readability, I have chosen not to reproduce those errors.

IT'S YOUR TURN: WHAT DO YOU THINK? WHAT WILL YOU FIND?

1. At this point, does the social–scientific or the critical/cultural studies approach seem to make more sense to you? Why? What do you think are the strengths and weaknesses of each approach?
2. Consider the term "points of intervention" used within the critical/cultural studies tradition. Why do you think they use that term? Would social scientists ever employ such a term? Why or why not?
3. As you read this book, think about how some readings have been categorized as being about production, content, or audience—do you agree with all of the classifications? If not, why do you think it appears in that category? Where would you have put the reading, and why? As you're considering this, think about what this tells us about the integration of the various components of our media system. Also consider what this tells us about the nature of any classification system; reflect on how such systems can be helpful even though they're flawed.
4. *Intersectionality* is presented as a major recurring theme in the chapters that follow. To what extent do you think it's important to acknowledge the variety of influences on our cultural identity? To what extent do you think it's possible to isolate just one element (say, gender or race) for study—what is lost, and what is gained, by doing so?

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