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ATTENTION TO PROBLEMATIC SOCIAL GROUP REPRESENTATION IN GUIDANCE FOR USING MASS MEDIA IN ENGLISH EDUCATION

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Abstract
While media studies amply document problematic social group representation in mass media materials, how English language educators are equipped to address these issues when they engage in the common practice of appropriating such artifacts for teaching is unclear. This research responds by collecting 319 prominent Internet sources providing guidance on using mass media materials for language learning and subjecting them to a content analysis. This analysis draws upon ten forms of problematic social group portrayal in the mass media as a conceptual lens. Analysis results indicate little attention to ableism, ageism, Christonormativity, classism, colorism, gender bias, heternormativity, lookism/sizeism, racism, and urbanormativity with articles universally acclaiming the integration of mass media materials into language teaching, primarily on the grounds of "authenticity." Defined as materials authored by and for native speakers, this is an authenticity insensitive to authentic *social group* representation. This research is significant because of teacher reliance on the Internet as a source of materials, because of the global reach of English language teaching, the power of mass media, especially for youth socialization, and because there is a lack of previous research concerning how language teachers are trained to consider problematic social group representation in mass media artifacts.

Keywords: authentic material, critical media study, English language teaching, hidden curriculum, teacher training

Introduction
Language teachers often incorporate mass media artifacts such as newspapers, magazines, movies, and advertisements into their teaching. Even some commercial textbooks now integrate such materials into their pages (Ahmed, 2017), but this practice may not be harmless. A considerable body of scholarship warns that mass media portrayals of social groups are often fraught with problems. For example, older people are routinely ignored and stereotyped (Ng, 2021), illustrations in print favor those with low-BMI bodies (Anderson-Fye, 2018), and urban life is routinely glorified while rural life is presented as inferior (Hayden, 2013; Young, 2016) or is simply rendered invisible (Bassett, 2003). Not only are such representations inherently unjust, but research has amply documented the troubling *effects* of exposure to such materials, demonstrating the

mass media's role as a key avenue of socialization, especially of children (Dubow et al., 2007). Examples of deleterious socialization effects of mass media include increased levels of aggression among young people exposed to violent media (Bender et al., 2018), internalization of norms for physical attractiveness and accompanying body dissatisfaction associated with visual media consumption (Kleemans et al., 2018), and unhealthy reliance upon product consumption as a dimension of selfhood resulting from exposure to commercials and other manifestations of consumer culture in the media (Genner & Süss, 2017).

Yet, it is not known how mainstream – as opposed to scholarly – voices discussing mass media use in language education prepare teachers to cogently employ these materials in light of the harm they may cause. The research discussed here responded by interrogating how potentially problematic forms of social group representation were presented in online sources providing advice about mass media use for language education. Emulating a teacher using the Internet to seek information, an extensive Internet search about mass media use in language learning was conducted with the resulting collection of materials being subjected to a content analysis to determine how they addressed the range of issues comprising problematic social group representation.

Rationales for the integration of mass media artifacts into language teaching

Integrating mass media materials into English language teaching (ELT) has a long tradition. While the use of radio and television broadcasts and movies from target language locales dates back to the 1950s and 1960s (Decker, 1958; Huebener, 1960), such practices especially gained impetus in the 1980s as an outgrowth of communicative language teaching coupled with the impression that traditional materials expressly created for language education presented inauthentic "textbook language" (e.g., Bryan, 1977; Porter & Roberts, 1981). The most notable example may be the typical model dialogs presented in texts as they often are based upon written language norms and omit important dimensions of spoken grammar such as hesitation sounds, restarts, ellipses, and linguistic mechanisms for turn taking (Baleghizadeh & Gordani, 2012).

Technological developments have lent additional impetus to the practice of harvesting mass media artifacts such as movies, television programs, commercials, and print ads for use in English language classes. The Internet is often touted as an especially valuable source of language teaching materials simply due to its convenience (Arnó-Macià, 2012). The Internet also makes foreign language materials such as movies, magazines, and newspapers available in contexts in which they might have been difficult to access in the past: for example, a recent survey of English teachers in Libya indicated that they draw upon the Internet to access materials in English such as television programs, YouTube clips, and movies (Belaid & Murray, 2015). Language teachers also perceive Materials sourced from the Internet to be especially valuable because they can be more recent than textbook materials, even being updated on a daily basis (Belaid & Murray, 2015). Beyond this, though, *multimedia* materials from the Internet and also from sources such as DVDs are considered worthwhile for their motivational effects (Azmi, 2017). Arguments for the use of such materials in language education appeal to the notion that the teacher can supplement course texts with materials better aligning with learners' interests and fostering increased

motivation (e.g., Saeedi & Biri, 2016). Multimedia materials are also popular in language education because they are thought to provide a rich social context for language use (Hashmi, 2016) and can ultimately improve the communicative competence of language learners (Jeong, 2018). For example, a study by Kabooha and Elyas (2018) found that teachers' use of YouTube videos as part of an EFL class at a university in Saudi Arabia promoted vocabulary acquisition with students finding the videos more interesting than traditional teaching methods.

Theorizing problematic social group representation in mass media

The uncritical adoption of mass media artifacts for language teaching represents a problem given the troubling depictions of social groups consistently manifest within them, though. Such unjust representations are antithetical to the overall role of formal education as a public good since a public good should benefit all (Shaw, 2010). Furthermore, biases and stereotypes in social group representation manifest in such materials also compromise the interculturalism objective of English education (Berbain et al., 2021). Finally, research indicates that such problematic portrayals of social groups in these materials represent a hidden curriculum with potent socialization effects, particularly in the case of young learners. The following sections discuss important forms of problematic social group representation in the media followed by an explanation of their power as a hidden curriculum. As a whole, the situation demands great care when appropriating such materials for language teaching.

Unjust representations of social groups include ableism, or the invisibility and stereotyping of people with disabilities (Priyanti, 2018). This is an especially important issue because representation of people with disabilities in the mass media has lagged behind that of other minorities (Ahmad, 2010). These individuals are frequently constructed in mainstream discourse as not only deviant but as a burden to society (Beasley, 2020).

Ageism represents another common form of problematic social group portrayal frequently observed in the mass media. For example, one study of children's books found that grandparents in the stories were stereotyped as not employed, as dependent, and as very elderly (Crawford & Bhattacharya, 2014). Such stereotypes are at odds with reality: For example, around 40 percent of grandparents in the United States are employed (David & Nelson-Kakulla, 2019) while around half provide financial assistance to their children and grandchildren (Meyer & Kandic, 2017). International studies of grandparenthood indicate that the average age of grandparents is in the 50s and that rather than being decrepit, these individuals are generally in good health and are active (Leopold & Skopek, 2015). Gendered ageism is especially a problem in the media: Old women in Disney animated features, for example, are often stereotyped into either "the wicked old witch, the selfless godmother, or the demented hag" (Henneberg, 2010, p. 128).

In Christonormativity, being a Christian and/or accepting Christian practices is portrayed as a norm, as neutral (Langer, 2018; Moss, 2017, p. 16). Ferber (2012) sees Christonormativity as especially powerful since it often is coupled with other forms of privilege bolstering the associated effects. In terms of the mass media, Christianity, especially Protestantism, is normalized in Hollywood products thus promoting a "missionary" function and mass media "baptism" of

viewers (Steinberg, 2010).

Representations of social class in the mass media are also problematic. In particular, those from low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds are often invisible or stereotyped (Kellner, 2020; Marmol, 2018). One study found that mass media, especially television, Internet discussion platforms, and newspapers in Britain fostered the othering and denigration of lower-class people through the promotion of the stereotyped "chav" figure (Tyler, 2008).

Colorism is an insidious and prevalent visual mass media phenomenon in which those with lighter skin are privileged (Hall, 2018). This is a worldwide issue observed among different races. For example in Asia, skin lightening products represent an important part of the cosmetic industry (Leong, 2006), and in Japan lighter skin is connected to perceptions of authentic Japanese-ness (Arudou, 2015). Among African-Americans, those with lighter skin enjoy greater life chances (Ryabov, 2013). The mass media both reflect and recirculate these beliefs. For example, an analysis of "The Proud Family," an animated series portraying African-Americans, found that higher-status characters had lighter skin and more Eurocentric features (Steele, 2016).

Research into gender portrayals in the media has for decades revealed many instantiations of bias. These include lower amounts of representation of females as well as gender stereotypes, especially pertaining to social roles. For example, a recent analysis of over 2000 news sources revealed lower representation of women compared with men (Shor et al., 2019). A recent study employing natural language processing software to analyze media sources found that men were quoted at around three times the rate as women in news stories (Asr et al., 2021). Forms of gender bias can be subtle: an analysis of pronouns *he/she* used in the news media revealed that not only were *he* pronouns about nine times more frequent, but *he* was associated with more positive content (Sendén et al., 2015). In a demonstration of search engine bias, an analysis of images retrieved via search engine queries found that men tended to be portrayed in more agentive images while women tended to be portrayed in passive ways connected with emotion, warmth, and kindness (Otterbacher et al., 2019).

Heteronormativity involves the normalization of hetero relationships with homosexuality being stereotyped, demonized, or made invisible (Whitney, 2017). Portrayals of gay people in the media are especially important because they represent the only source of information about LGBT individuals for many (Landau, 2009). In the mass media, a related trope is that of the female body being put at the service of the white male (Diedrichs et al., 2011).

Lookism/Sizeism – the focus on a narrow range of body types as the most valuable form of personhood – has especially great power in the media. Specifically, possessing a thin body is often portrayed in the mass media either implicitly or explicitly as an avenue to attaining happiness, desirability, and career success (Benowitz-Fredericks et al., 2012). Equating a slender, low-BMI body with individual worth even extends to animated Disney features where analyses have documented a tendency for thinner characters to be positive and heavier characters to be villains (Klein & Shiffman, 2007). The results of such depictions include increased body dissatisfaction and heightened incidents of eating disorders – sometimes fatal – among media consumers (Giovanelli & Ostertag, 2009). One study found that an exposure of only three minutes to images of

ultra-thin models can result in increased dissatisfaction with one's body (Papp et al., 2013). So troubling is this phenomenon that some countries, such as Israel and France,have restricted the use of low-BMI models through legislation (Anderson-Fye, 2018).

Mass media's role in the reflection and promotion of racism has a long history, yet it continues to the present. For example, how crime is covered in the news can increase perceived links between crime and minorities among viewers. One study of local news broadcasts in Chicago demonstrated this phenomenon. It revealed that white victims of crime were over-represented compared with Black victims of crime (Beale, 2006). Overall, the mass media, including the news media, tend to construct racism itself as involving individual acts rather than systemic issues (O'Neill, 2009).

Finally, urbanormativity is troubling because of its widespread nature coupled with its potential repercussions. Simply put, urbanormativity is the normalization of an urban lifestyle at the expense of the rural one, and it is so powerful that it may even be considered as "urbanizing our consciousness" (Jansson, 2013). It represents a media phenomenon that is accepted to a surprising degree as the exploitation of rural people for comedic material attests with the "you might be a redneck if" genre being an example (Shirley, 2010).

Warrants for criticality toward these issues in ELT mass media use

There are a number of reasons for concern when media artifacts harboring such widespread forms of problematic social group representation are used as language learning materials. While it could be argued that the teacher using mass media materials as educational resources simply exposes students to content similar to that they typically encounter on their own, such as television programs, movies, advertisements, print media, and, especially, the Internet, in the case of the English class, students are *compelled* to attend. Around the world English is a required subject. ELT is also *trusted* with the teacher often being revered as an authoritative source of knowledge, especially cultural knowledge (Cho & Johnson, 2020; Trinh & Sachs, 2023). Also, misrepresentations of social groups are simply inherently unjust, and this is at odds with the public good mission driving formal education around the world (Menashy, 2009). If nothing else, the inclusion of mass media materials having problematic social group representations in ELT simply increases exposure to them, and amount of exposure to such mass media materials is linked to their effects (Mosharafa, 2015). Finally, in recent years the remit of ELT has expanded beyond its traditional focus on strictly linguistic goals to acknowledge and embrace the inherent relationship between language and culture. As a result, attention to many dimensions of identity construction such as age, social class, race, religion, and sexual orientation are now widely regarded as necessary aspects of ELT (Berbain et al., 2021).

Coupled with these concerns is the potential for such materials to form a hidden curriculum. The hidden curriculum is unintended and implicit patterns of content tending to echo relations of power in the broader society (Gofton & Regehr, 2006). Despite being unintended, the hidden curriculum has impacts upon learners similar to its intended counterpart. For example, a study of engineering students found that females were put at a disadvantage because of a hidden

curriculum teaching associations among masculinity, engineering, and the norms/values within engineering (Pehlivanli-Kadayifci, 2019). A study of indigenous students in New Zealand and Taiwan found that a hidden curriculum in textbooks inculcated connections between science and the West, fostering perceptions that they, as aboriginal people, had no place as scientists (Kidman et al., 2013). A study in Japan found that more competitive classroom practices promoted lower levels of altruism and decreased support for governmental social programs among students (Ito et al., 2015).

While mass media socialization is powerful for all age cohorts, research especially points to the susceptibility of children to these effects with the issue having been recognized at least as far back as 1933 in the well-known Payne Fund studies of movie impacts upon children (Valkenburg, 2015). The socialization power of the media is connected with the tendency for humans to accept any material as real by default (Mosharafa, 2015). News programs and "reality" television programs are especially perceived as factual (Specht & Beam, 2015). Also, even for works of fiction such as movies, "scripts, world schemas, and normative beliefs about behaviors can be acquired from observations without viewer awareness" (Dubow et al., 2007, p. 413). For example, media depictions of Blacks have been documented as having a strong impact upon the racial identity and self-esteem of Black adolescents (Adams-Bass et al., 2014). Children's books can promote confining gender roles (McCabe et al., 2011). Images are especially powerful in child socialization (Crawford & Bhattacharya, 2014). One potent mechanism for the impact of images upon young people is observational learning, the tendency to unconsciously glean knowledge about how the social world works – and to use this information in altering their own behavioral repertoire – based upon what is seen (Fryling et al., 2011). So powerful are mass media effects upon youth self-esteem, that some scholars have called for intervention programs designed explicitly to "enable them to withstand the pressures of mass media" (Amazue, 2014, p. 6122). These effects coupled with a worldwide lowering for the age of ELT study internationally (e.g., Chowdhury & Kabir, 2014; Yoneda & Shreves, 2015) increases the warrant for carefully evaluating mass media materials used in ELT.

The foregoing discussion has reviewed the rationales for including mass media materials in language teaching. It has also foregrounded problematic social group representation often evidenced within such materials. The possibility of harm from such content though its inclusion in English language teaching has also been considered and juxtaposed against the stated goals of (English) education in terms of learner empowerment and societal betterment. Despite this situation, the attention to problematic social portrayals associated with mass media materials within mainstream discourse discussing their use in language education is not known. To address this gap, this study investigates the main inquiry, namely "How do mainstream Internet resources pertaining to appropriating mass media materials for language education build awareness of and offer responses to possible ableism, ageism, Christonormativity, colorism, cultural stereotypes, gender bias/sexism, lookism, heteronormativity, racism, and urbanormativity within such materials?" The inquiry specifically addresses the following research questions:

1. What *amount of attention* is ascribed to these issues compared with other concerns?
2. What is the *quality of advice* provided for addressing these issues?

Method

Data collection involved harvesting online articles providing advice regarding the use of mass media artifacts for language teaching. The method used was predicated upon the assumption that the practitioner would draw upon mainstream search engine results. This approach was taken because research has documented a tradition of search engine use among teachers seeking teaching plans and materials, dating to the 90s (Becker, 1998; Warschauer et al., 2000). This tendency continues with teachers at all levels around the world making robust use of search engines, especially Google, to locate content and ideas for teaching (Kaba & Said, 2014). Materials were harvested from the Bing, Duck Duck Go, and Google search engines since these are the three top search engines worldwide; Google alone accounts for about 90% of the world market (Goodrich, 2023). Searches were conducted using the following search phrases and permutations:

Using images/pictures for/in English/language education/learning/teaching
Using multimedia/video(s)/movies for/in English/language education/learning/teaching
Using TV/television programs/shows for/in English/language education/learning/teaching
Using Internet Materials for/in English/language education/learning/teaching
Using magazine(s) for/in English/language education/learning/teaching

Search terms such as "use of TV programs in language learning" rather than, say, "*benefits* of using TV programs in language learning" opened the possibility for both pro and con stances.

Selection of search results for inclusion in the data analysis was based upon several factors. First, those promoting materials *intended* for language teaching were excluded since the goal was to consider only the appropriation of mainstream mass media materials. Second, results requiring site memberships – whether paid or not – as well as access gained only by the user being associated with an educational institution were excluded. Although the research focus was upon ELT, materials promoting use of mass media artifacts for languages other than English were included on the grounds that the methods discussed apply to foreign language learning more broadly. Some sources did not specify that the materials be derived from mass media sources. For example, a number of articles discussing the use of pictures for language learning specified no explicit source. Such results were discarded. Only results in the English language were collected.

The resulting materials were subjected to a content analysis in which each area of focus was considered by looking for material associated – explicitly or implicitly – with the topic. For example, ageism might be specifically mentioned or the material might simply discuss something along the lines of fair representation of the elderly. The degree of importance attributed to these target

issues was assessed by comparing the *amount* of advice given for them with the advice given for other issues. The *quality* of advice given was assessed in several ways with the overall method being how easily the advice could be followed combined with the cogency of the advice vis-à-vis best practices. Ease of following mainly considered specificity while alignment with best practices included how the advice was in accord with scholarship and formal teacher training.

Findings and Discussion

Findings

Examples from the collected corpus have been included to clarify meaning and to lend credence to the conclusions of the analysis. Because the results of this study especially indicated shortcomings in attention to problematic social group representations in these materials, many examples provided illustrate these shortcomings. The intent is not to denigrate or embarrass these content creators. Importantly, many forms of *useful* advice offered in these materials are mostly not discussed since the areas addressed did not represent the focus of this study. This selective nature of the results must be stressed as it would be unfortunate if this publication were to serve as a disincentive to sharing language learning advice.

Amount of advice about social group representation and importance

The searches conducted for this project yielded a corpus of 319 materials providing guidance in the use of mass media artifacts for language education. This number reflects searches being taken to their conclusion and the results being subjected to the winnowing process described above. The first finding is simply that all of these materials *advocated* the use of such resources, despite the neutral search phrases. The second finding pertains to the small amount of attention to potentially problematic social group portrayals in mass media artifacts: Out of the 319 materials, only 16 provided any guidance whatsoever for attention to the social issues discussed here.

The issues of concern addressed in these 16 materials were cultural bias (including "Western" bias), religious bias, stereotype, gender bias, and ethnic/racial bias. Additional areas of concern that could potentially encompass the issues of focus were critical viewing, critical discourse analysis, and safe/child-friendly content. In the corpus of 319 materials discussing mass media use in language teaching, attention to the possibility of ableism, ageism, Chrisonormativity, classism, colorism, lookism, heteronormativity, lookism/sizeism, and urbanormativity in such materials was entirely absent.

Quality of advice about social group representation

Where advice was provided regarding social group representation, quality of this advice was low. Much of those providing advice did so in ambiguous ways with little systematic guidance. For example, one search result simply warned that some materials may be "too culturally biased" (Ahmed, 2017, p. 197). Another material expressed the concern that content should be "safe" and "child-friendly" (Wiik, 2021), but did not elaborate. This can be compared with the greater details provided for using mass media materials to teach the traditional language skills of grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary. For example, one writer considered how

mass media materials can be employed to teach specific grammatical structures and vocabulary (Using pictures to teach English, n.d.). Another discussed in detail how pictures can be used with English language learners to support Common Core standards as well as to build on the various dimensions of Bloom's Taxonomy (Ferlazzo, 2012). Interestingly, the topmost skill in Bloom's Taxonomy is "evaluation" which would seem to be a natural fit for teaching students to take a critical approach with images, but such an approach was not invoked in this case. In a treatment of the use of authentic video materials, another author discussed the issue of promoting comprehension of these materials for learners and even unpacked technical issues such as the implications of different digital storage media (Kaplan, 2018). In terms of fostering "comprehension" of such texts, authors spoke only of the *intended* messages of these texts rather than comprehension of ideologies implicit within them, including how the target issues in this study were treated.

The most common rationale offered for the use of mass media materials in language learning was to foster authenticity. The idea of materials being authentic because of being created by and for native speakers was prominent. One author made a distinction between the "safe" but limited and artificial language of the classroom and the authentic, arguing that any samples of language not intended for language teaching are authentic, and that these include "newspapers, magazines, TV programs, movies, songs and literature" as well as the Internet (Bernardo, 2006, p. 62). Another author spoke of "authentic movies" as valuable in language education but did not provide examples (Rokni, 2014). A different author discussed the use of "authentic" cartoons, providing "The Looney Tunes Show" as an example (Saeedi & Biri, 2016). Several articles suggested that the American sitcom Friends was valuable for its authentic depictions of culture (e.g., Ethan, 2015). Many of the articles specifically referenced pronunciation (e.g., Learning English with TV Series, n.d.). One article spoke of the chance for learners to acquire "right" pronunciation and grammar via mass media materials (Badan & Onishchenko, 2021). Although a few articles argued for the value of these materials in presenting what they termed "authentic" culture, either this was left undefined or it was constructed by focusing upon limited and ambiguous areas such as body language or "setting."

The discussion of *problems* with mass media use was limited. As noted, the issues of concern in this study appeared only in a few of these sources. Whether they did or not, the articles collected for this study were universally laudatory in tone regarding their discussions of mass media use for language education: none was written for the *primary* purpose of offering caveats about the use of these materials and the few warnings offered were presented in an offhand and tangential manner within such laudatory articles. When any such acknowledgment was included, it tended to come later in the article. A good example was one article of around 14 single-spaced pages of text in which the issue of authentic materials was dealt with in detail. The text included the following advice about mass media adoption for language teaching:

[T]here are huge resources on different TV channels which can definitely help learners develop their listening informally. Channels like BBC, National Geographic Channel, Animal Planet, Discovery, Adventure1, Star Plus, HBO, CNN, AXN, CN, ESPN offer news, interview, talk show, travel show, movies and

sports commentary which informally help learners develop general comprehension in listening. (Akintunde & Famogbiyele, 2018, p. 8)

The article abounded in guidelines for using such materials, including a section on using them for listening in which a bullet-point breakdown of twelve ways to employ materials was provided. Later, the article turned to some limitations in adapting materials. As part of this section of around 600 words, the article devoted only seven words to problematic social group portrayals, stating that "personal / political / religious bias, gender favoritism, etc." are possible (Akintunde & Famogbiyele, 2018, p. 13). No specific examples or guidance were provided. Thus, in an article of around 7000 words total pertaining to authentic instructional materials, these seven words were the only ones referencing problematic social group portrayals. It must be stressed that scant as the attention to the issue of problematic social group representation was in such articles, they were notable as exceptions to the overall tendency to pay no attention whatsoever to these issues in the collected corpus.

Discussion

The goal of this project was to understand how mainstream discussions of the use of mass media materials for English language teaching addressed concerns with the problematic social group portrayals of ableism, ageism, Christonormativity, classism, colorism, gender bias, heteronormativity, lookism/sizeism, racism, and urbanormativity often observed within them. Internet searches were conducted to collect online sources of advice about mass media use in ELT with the 319 resulting materials being subjected to a content analysis. Results indicated a universal advocacy for the inclusion of such materials when neutral search phrases such as "using images in English language teaching" were used.

There was little attention to problematic social group portrayals. In the cases when there was such attention at all, it was selective by being limited to a few issues, and the advice provided was not explicit, systematized, or operationalized. Provided guidance made an appeal only to common sense, such as the advice that care must be exercised to make sure that materials were not "too culturally biased" (Ahmed, 2017). Another material warned of the need to be careful about "child-friendly content." (Wiik, 2021). Such general advice does little to empower teachers in the detection and elimination of forms of problematic social representation noted here. This contrasts with the detailed instructions often associated with promoting the acquisition of linguistic features such as vocabulary and grammar.

The use of mass media materials as resources for language teaching was often touted for their authenticity. Authors' construction of this authenticity failed to address the issue of problematic social group portrayals and, indeed, actually masked the issue under the assumed value of materials having their origins with native-speaking creators. For example, some claimed that movies and television dramas or comedies represented chances to expose students to "authentic culture." Teachers using these materials were thus led to believe not only in their harmlessness, but in their benefit as valid representations of the target societies.

An example of this biased construction of authenticity was the recommendation that the American sitcom Friends be used for its authentic

representations of American culture. Yet, "Friends" reflects ageism with all of the main characters being in their twenties, classism with the characters living in expensive New York apartments, lookism with all of the characters having low-BMI bodies, and ableism with all possessing mainstream physical ability. In terms of race, all of the main characters were white. They were also all hetero. None of the main characters was a language learner nor an immigrant (all six of the actors were born in the United States as well), and all spoke with mainstream American accents. While three of the six main characters were Jews, they were presented in stereotypical ways as being brought up in well-to-do families and as embracing Christian practices and points of view (Topić, 2017). The series was inherently urbanormative, depicting the metropolis as the exciting place to be. None of these issues was discussed in the articles pertaining to the use of "Friends" for English learning, aptly illustrating the tendency to construct authenticity selectively.

Conclusion

This study is significant in providing evidence for an area of ELT that needs attention: While the use of mass media artifacts in ELT is a mainstream practice, those promoting it here treated these materials as benign, indeed as inherently beneficial. They failed to acknowledge possible forms of problematic social group portrayals discussed by critical media studies for decades. This practice is not simply a harmless oversight; rather, it is dangerous and doubly so when such media are foisted upon students by trusted language teachers as "authentic" representations of the target society.

This study is also significant because of its suggestions regarding discursive constructions of authenticity in language education. The selective focus on language while ignoring social representation was central in this. Actually, although not the focus of this study, the very notion that scripted performances such as movies and television programs represent authentic language is itself a dubious one. This study suggests, then, that authenticity in language education has often come to mean virtually any language artifact from the target culture outside of the traditional language text. One clear problem is that many mass media materials are commercial products. They are designed to cater to the preconceptions and ideological proclivities of the consumer rather than to *foreground, trouble,* and *disrupt* them as education should do. The construction of authenticity in language education should be augmented with scrutiny toward "social authenticity" if such materials are considered for teaching about society and culture.

In a wholly different sense, though, materials such as "Friends" *are* authentic as they *do* reflect the complex histories, ideologies, and regimes of social power inherent in the society. "Friends" as a cultural artifact grows out of these realities while also demanding complicity on the part of the viewer for understanding and enjoyment to occur. The critical approach capitalizing upon such artifacts as illustrations of these issues for the language learner – reading "against" the text – was not invoked in the materials collected for this study, though, despite frequent claims regarding need for media literacy and the promotion of critical thinking in education. There is no reason why developmentally-ready students cannot themselves engage in critical analyses of

the sort provided for "Friends" in this paper. This should start with pivotal questions from critical theory: Why have the materials been created? Who benefits from these materials? Who is systematically misrepresented or even excluded? The ten specific forms of problematic social group representation discussed in this paper can also be invoked.

There were several limitations to this research. First, the Internet searches forming the basis for data collection were conducted in English only. Also, how teachers actually use this advice is not known, nor is the manner in which learners navigate the resulting materials to which they are exposed. These are questions for future research. Another one is how, exactly, the impacts of these materials may be *more* potent than typical mass media artifacts because they are associated with formal education, especially given the trust placed in ELT, its ubiquity, perceptions of the language classroom as a neutral conduit of knowledge about language, and perceptions of the teacher as an authority on the target culture and society.

When faced with perceived shortcomings of traditional materials, the incorporation of mass media artifacts into language teaching may seem a ready remedy. This is especially true now that the Internet facilitates downloading target language artifacts with ease. Yes, incorporating mass media materials from the target language into the classroom is easy and seemingly warranted, but, as this project has illustrated, doing so may harbor a danger of its own when coupled with a lack of critical awareness. The role of the modern educator as far as this role relates to the mass media should be to *counter* its negative effects upon child socialization. This study provided evidence, instead, that language education may be *complicit* in promoting these effects. This study thus demonstrates a clear need for greater attention to the issue of social group representation and, especially, for appropriate training of language educators along these lines.

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