



Book Review

Review of *Integrating Pop Culture into the Academic Library*

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ABSTRACT

Review of Johnson, M.E., Weeks, T.C., and J.P. Davis, (Eds.). (2022). *Integrating pop culture into the academic library*, Rowman & Littlefield. 309 pp.

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One challenge faced by libraries of all types is how to best connect library resources and services with library users. With the growing diversity of college-student populations, academic libraries, in particular, search for innovative and effective ways to engage students with a wide range of interests and backgrounds. *Integrating Pop Culture into the Academic Library*, edited by Melissa Edmiston Johnson, Thomas C. Weeks, and Jennifer Putnam Davis, provides academic librarians with one approach to engaging with users.

The editors acknowledge that popular culture's role in academia has shifted, as access to higher education became more widespread. Higher education, which was once open to a select few and focused on classical texts, moved to embrace the use of popular culture in academia beginning in the 1970s. The editors argue that popular culture in academic libraries helps users connect with their libraries in meaningful ways, thereby increasing student engagement.

The chapters in the book offer both historical and theoretical perspectives on the role of popular culture in academia and academic libraries, as well as case studies with examples of how to incorporate pop culture into library collections, instruction, and programming.

The three editors bring different perspectives to the topic, representing various departments at Augusta University in Georgia. Melissa Edmiston Johnson is an associate professor and assistant director of reference and education services at the Reese Library. Thomas C. Weeks is an assistant professor and reference and instruction librarian, with liaison responsibilities in the social sciences and education departments. As a scholarship and data librarian, Jennifer Putnam Davis works as the liaison to the Research Office and Graduate School. The twenty-six authors contributing chapters to the book include different types of academic librarians and library staff, archivists, professors, and instructors from community colleges, colleges, and university libraries located across the United States.

The book is divided into four parts: (1) foundations, (2) collections, (3) instruction, and (4) programming. Foundations traces the development of popular culture as a discipline and its use in academia through a review of literature over the last 50 years. This section examines changing definitions of popular culture over time and highlights theorists including Karl Marx, Theodor Adorno, Antonio Gramsci, and Jürgen Habermas. In addition to the theoretical background, the section also includes two case studies demonstrating how popular culture forms can disrupt traditional publication models and appeal to students from underserved populations. This section underscores the importance of using popular culture materials to acknowledge and challenge traditionally exclusive structures in academic libraries and services. The range of pop culture materials discussed in this section includes formats such as zines, artist books, Argentinian *cartoneras*, listicles, and memes.

As the next section's title implies, Collections deals with the benefits and challenges of incorporating popular culture materials into an academic library collection. The types of library collections represented in this section span a wide range, including a special collection of maps

of imaginary places, an African Studies library combining film fiction and historical fact, to an academic law library using popular movies depicting lawyers in their legal education program. One common theme in this section is how engaging with these popular materials can attract students to library collections that might otherwise seem inaccessible or irrelevant. The authors also acknowledge the value of using popular culture materials to teach primary source literacy, an area of growing interest in information literacy instruction.

The Instruction section provides case studies using a range of popular culture texts and genres, including Harry Potter, the musical *Hamilton*, zines related to environmental issues, and the recent *Netflix* series *Enola Holmes* and its relationship to the original Sir Arthur Conan Doyle mysteries. Several chapters in the section demonstrate how using popular culture materials helps students engage in critical information literacy, as they are asked to question traditional notions of authority and attend to marginalized voices. In addition to arguing that students are more engaged in these pop culture-infused lessons, the authors also claim that the librarians are more engaged in their teaching because they can incorporate their interests into the lessons. The case studies also demonstrate the connection between creating engaging lessons using popular culture and facilitating an active learning environment.

The final section of the book provides examples of specific library programming based on popular culture materials. More than in the other sections of the book, this section acknowledges the challenges of designing and facilitating programming during and after the COVID pandemic, as many academic libraries were forced to transition in-person events and programs online. The case studies include descriptions of designing a paranormal walking tour of campus spaces, in-person and online game nights, a lecture and exhibit showcasing multicultural Barbies, a faculty speaker series to promote scientific literacy, and using *Pokémon* to discuss the importance of research data management (RDM). The final chapter on RDM workshops was one of the few in the book discussing assessment methods. The author endorses the use of assessment measures focusing on quality rather than quantity, arguing that the more traditional measures of quantity (i.e., how many students attended) could be seen as a product of white supremacist culture.

The strength of the book is the variety of examples presented in the chapters, which appeal to a broad range of academic librarians. Whether one's duties revolve around collection development, instruction, outreach, or a combination of those, the book offers practical advice. The opening section of the book provides a solid theoretical grounding in the status of popular culture in academia, making the book accessible to librarians who might be new to the topic. The examples in the programming section demonstrate how libraries could creatively utilize materials from their existing collections or readily available popular culture materials to design low-cost events, appealing to libraries that might not have funding for programming.

Several chapters throughout the various sections of the book discuss how popular culture materials can be used to encourage students to think about issues like positionality and bring in marginalized voices. However, few address possible adverse effects of incorporating popular culture materials on students, namely alienating those not familiar with specific cultural references. In the chapter discussing the use of popular films as part of a law library's instruction program, the authors acknowledge that too much reliance on popular culture materials could leave non-traditional or international students unfamiliar with the references feeling left out of the conversation. Acknowledgements like these are missing from other chapters in the book.

Overall, the book provides a solid foundation on the use of popular culture in academic libraries while also offering a variety of practical examples to appeal to academic librarians working with collections, designing library instruction, and planning programming incorporating popular culture materials to connect with their library users.