

# **The Gendered Self: LGBTQ+ Narratives in Global Media**

Volume I

Edited by

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Series in Critical Media Studies



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# Contents

<b>List of Figures</b>	v
<b>List of Tables</b>	vii
<b>Introduction: Framing the Gendered Self in Intersectional Media</b>	ix
Tamanna M. Shah <i>Ohio University</i>	
Chapter One <b>Reinventing Scaffolded Selves: Visual Media Representations of Queer Infrastructures</b>	1
Cassandra Hayes <i>Texas Christian University in Fort Worth, Texas</i>	
Chapter Two <b>Queering the New Year: CNN, Anderson Cooper, and Televising a Transgressive Celebration</b>	19
Bruce E. Drushel <i>Miami University</i>	
Chapter Three <b>Quest for History: Queer Experiences During the Holocaust</b>	39
Harsha Singh <i>University of Delhi</i>	
Chapter Four <b>Self Is Sacred: Media Influences on Two-Spirit And Māhū Identity Through Lived Experiences</b>	59
Taylor Orcutt <i>Honors Tutorial College Ohio University</i> Sarah Liese, MS <i>Ohio University</i> Victoria L. LaPoe, Ph.D. <i>University of Cincinnati Department of Journalism</i>	

Chapter Five	
<b>Right to Sexual Orientation: Identifying Emerging Jurisprudence from U.N. Treaty Bodies Perspectives</b>	81
Dr. Sohini Mahapatra	
<i>National Law University Odisha</i>	
Chapter Six	
<b>Framing the LGBTQ+ Community in the Context of a Muslim-Majority Society: An Analysis of Malaysian Media Representation</b>	101
Kow Kwan Yee	
<i>University of Wollongong Malaysia</i>	
Mohamed Zaki Samsudin	
<i>University of Wollongong Malaysia</i>	
Chapter Seven	
<b>Beyond the Laughter: <i>The Ellen DeGeneres Show's</i> Constructive Lens on LGBTQ+ Identities and Mainstream Discourse</b>	121
Dr. Enakshi Roy	
<i>Towson University, Maryland, USA</i>	
Terrell Robinson	
<i>Towson University, Maryland, USA</i>	
Chapter Eight	
<b>New Girl: New Masculinity and Reinstatement of Patriarchy</b>	145
Sheyla Finkelshteyn	
<i>University of Kentucky</i>	
<b>About the Editors</b>	161
<b>About the Contributors</b>	163
<b>Index</b>	167

# List of Figures

Figure 5.1:	Overview of the analyzed cases.	92
Figure 5.2:	Analysis of Human rights violations faced by the LGBTQIA+ community.	93



# List of Tables

Table 1.1:	Example grounded theory analysis theme progression to identify concepts relating to queer infrastructures and the self.	6
Table 4.1:	Total Occurrence of Themes.	73
Table 4.2:	Percentage of Theme Occurrence in Total Videos.	74
Table 5.1:	Summary of Analyzed Cases: Data from 28 Cases.	87
Table 6.1:	Information about the selected news organizations.	107
Table 7.1:	List of Episodes Examined.	128





# **Introduction: Framing the Gendered Self in Intersectional Media**

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## **1. Introduction**

The construction of identity and the development of LGBTQ+ identities have been the focus of extensive scholarship, often aiming to make visible what has long been rendered “invisible” (Christina, 2010). However, how these hidden stories are told is just as significant as the stories themselves. Sexual and gender minority persons continue to be one of the most stigmatized groups, not only in the United States but globally, often facing heightened risks of discrimination, marginalization, and victimization. This makes representation a decisive battleground for equity and visibility.

Media representation plays a crucial role in shaping societal perceptions and narratives, acting as both a mirror and a magnifier for how LGBTQ+ identities are understood and valued. Yet, despite calls for intersectional approaches and broader inclusion, the LGBTQ+ community still struggles with unequal visibility and access to socio-political opportunities. This inequity exists not only in the content and framing of media but also in who controls the storytelling.

Volume I of *The Gendered Self: LGBTQ+ Narratives in Global Media* explores the transformative power of media as a force for LGBTQ+ representation and how it shapes public discourse across varied sociocultural landscapes. It delves into the intersections of LGBTQ+ identities with race, class, religion, and history, revealing how these facets converge to construct rich and complex portrayals. By emphasizing political, social, and historical narratives, this volume critically examines how media can either perpetuate stereotypes and exclusions or become a space for empowerment and nuanced storytelling.

For LGBTQ+ individuals, media representation is not just about being seen but about *how* they are seen. The narratives told through films, television, online platforms, and advertisements contribute to a broader societal understanding of what it means to live as queer in different cultural, political, and historical contexts. These narratives wield immense power: They can amplify diverse

experiences, advocate for social change, and validate individual identities, yet they can also perpetuate harmful stereotypes, reinforce stigma, and render certain voices invisible. The representation of LGBTQ+ lives is thus not merely a matter of presence but a question of *framing* – how stories are constructed, which voices are prioritized, and what realities are reflected. Within this framing lies the potential to either disrupt or uphold power dynamics, making the stakes of media representation particularly high for LGBTQ+ communities.

In exploring the complex world of representation, it becomes clear that how subjects are valued often holds more weight than simply acknowledging their existence. Valuation – the act of ascribing importance, worth, and meaning – not only shapes public perception but also profoundly influences individual identities and societal norms. This book aims to spark a critical discourse, examining how various media, across diverse contexts and narratives, shape the valuation and representation of LGBTQ+ identities.

## **2. Media as a Mirror and Magnifier**

The concept of representation appears straightforward, but it is far more complex than it seems. Many assume they understand it, yet literature reveals a multitude of definitions and dimensions. At its core, representation is the act of bringing people's voices, opinions, and perspectives into decision-making processes. Politically, it entails leaders speaking, advocating, and acting on behalf of others. However, this definition barely scratches the surface, as it overlooks the varied and often conflicting facets of representation. The very nature of how representatives should act, who they represent, and the ways they engage can diverge, adding layers of complexity.

In media, literature, and cultural domains, representation is not merely about visibility – it goes far beyond mere acknowledgment. It is about how identities, divergent thoughts, and perspectives are valued, understood, and integrated within societal frameworks (Susan & Abes, 2013). Representation shapes how identities are accepted as part of collective narratives, contributing to broader discourses that influence personal self-identification, communal attitudes, and societal memory. While the term “representation” is widely used in discussions about inclusion and diversity, the deeper questions persist: What does representation really mean, and why does it matter? What kind of representation is meaningful, and whose stories are worth telling? Who decides the parameters of representation, and where does it unfold? Most critically, how much representation is enough, and does it fulfill its purpose?

Amisha Thomas (2019), Assistant Principal at City Academy of Bristol, asks a poignant question: Has representation evolved, or is there a need for more until every person and identity feels seen and heard? The underlying question remains,

“Where do I belong?” – a question tied to access, recognition, and, ultimately, positive representation.

Representation is a necessity – a response to historical oppression, colonization, propaganda, and erasure (Thomas 2019; Max and Baumgartner 2013; Karlynd 2017). Seeing someone who shares our skin color, thoughts, struggles, or characteristics can invoke powerful reactions – joy, offense, pride, or even denial. Yet, whether its presence or absence, representation makes a profound impact. While representation may not guarantee a ‘seat at the table’ for every individual, it opens up a discourse – a pathway to acknowledgment and recognition (Ana-Isabel 2018; James 2001; Kelly et al. 2018). Within this book’s scope, we explore the representation of gendered identities in media, identities that, despite recognition in some legal contexts, still grapple for normative rights and societal acceptance globally.

As we delve into the global discourse on representation, it is clear that many mediums are beginning to portray gendered identities, offering spaces for validation and safety. Retelling stories and constructing positive narratives about marginalized communities are not just educational; they are acts of reclamation – shedding light on the consequences of marginalizing people as “other.” Although societal progress has led to more equitable education and the decriminalization of same-sex relationships and marriage, approximately 64 countries (Amnesty International 2024) still deny the fundamental right to live according to one’s gender identity. Societal shifts are difficult due to entrenched norms and beliefs, but they are possible through collective, creative, and courageous efforts. However, even with judicial and financial advancements, many pressing issues around representation remain unresolved.

GLAAD (2004), an organization dedicated to promoting LGBTQ+ visibility in media, found that exposure to LGBTQ+ individuals in media positively influences public attitudes: 80% of those surveyed were more supportive of equal rights after such exposure, and 69% felt comfortable initiating conversations with people of unclear gender. This demonstrates the media’s profound role in shaping societal acceptance. Storytelling (Joe 2013; Shagufa 1999) is a powerful tool – our brains are wired to connect with narratives, which shape our vision of who belongs in our communities. Through media, cultural expression becomes a catalyst for social justice and inclusive representation. Therefore, as we consider the mediums through which representation is conveyed, it is crucial to examine not just the stories being told but how they intersect with the lived experiences of diverse LGBTQ+ identities. Media narratives are not formed in isolation; they are shaped by and contribute to intersections of race, gender, class, culture, and more. By analyzing how these facets intertwine, we gain a deeper understanding of the dynamic nature of LGBTQ+ representation and how it can both challenge and uphold social norms. This examination of intersectionality lays the

foundation for a richer exploration of identity, visibility, and valuation within different cultural and social contexts.

### 3. Intersectionality and LGBTQ+ Identities

Intersectionality reveals the complexity of identity, showing that lived experiences are shaped not by a single aspect, such as sexuality or gender, but by the convergence of multiple identities like race, class, religion, and ability. For LGBTQ+ individuals, this means their stories are not homogenous; they are influenced by overlapping social positions and power dynamics. The struggle for visibility and acceptance becomes multifaceted as different intersections bring forth diverse challenges, privileges, and forms of oppression. Understanding LGBTQ+ representation through an intersectional lens allows an in-depth view of how these overlapping identities shape experiences, highlight disparities, and reveal how inclusion in one space can still mean exclusion in another. This framework is crucial to understanding the true scope of LGBTQ+ narratives and ensures that no one part of identity overshadows the others in the fight for equality and representation.

Central to this intersectional analysis is the construction of the *gendered self*. Our beliefs and values about gender play a significant role in shaping not only personal identity but also broader social norms. As Shealy (2015) suggests, our understanding of gender influences assumptions about behavior, informs stances on gender rights, and impacts responses to gender-based violence. It also deeply affects how individuals experience and express intimacy and relationships, which in turn shapes their gendered self-perception. Understanding why we hold certain beliefs about gender, and their roots in concepts of masculinity and femininity, is crucial, as “gender traditionalism” affects self-concept, relationships, and interactions with the world.

Gender traditionalism, defined as adherence to essentialist views of gender roles, often perpetuates gender inequity (Owen et al. 2013). Such beliefs are closely linked to broader constructs like religious ideology and cultural norms, all of which significantly influence life outcomes and social structures. This entanglement underscores the importance of examining gender within a larger societal context to understand how policies, practices, and lived experiences are shaped by our gendered self-understandings.

The distinctions between sex and gender are key to this understanding. While “sex” refers to biological attributes, “gender” encompasses socially constructed beliefs and expectations around what it means to be male or female (Craig 2015; Ciabattari 2001; Kahn 2009). These gender roles, while varying across cultures, are often seen as natural and become part of the individual’s self-concept (Shannon and Greenstein 2009). Scholars identify two primary views:

“essentialists,” who attribute gender differences to biology, and ‘social constructionists,’ who emphasize social and cultural influences. Many theories suggest that gender development arises from an interplay of biological, cognitive, and social factors, with Blakemore (2013) arguing that a multifaceted view is necessary. They suggest that gendered behaviors develop through a combination of evolutionary processes, hormonal effects, social reinforcement, peer interactions, and societal influences, all contributing to the formation of the gendered self (p. 17).

Media framing plays a crucial role in shaping public perceptions by highlighting specific aspects of reality and guiding audiences toward particular interpretations. According to framing theory, news media present a selective range of topics within certain subjective meanings, offering either episodic or thematic perspectives (Catherine and Myers 2004). An episodic perspective centers on individual case studies, focusing on personal stories and often isolating social issues from broader societal contexts. In contrast, a thematic perspective situates public issues within a wider social framework, encouraging a deeper examination of societal factors in addressing these issues.

When it comes to LGBTQ+ representation, the thematic framing of topics like sexual violence provides a space for readers to reflect on the broader contextual factors, such as how societal attitudes like homonegativity contribute to victimization. Understanding how media frames intersect with identities is crucial because these frames can either reinforce stereotypes and biases or challenge dominant narratives, shaping the gendered self and its portrayal in public discourse.

Building on the understanding of media framing, various framing devices, such as catchphrases, depictions, imagery, and sentence structures, are employed to shape how a news story is presented (Busch 2020). These frames significantly influence public opinion and are often crafted to serve the interests of political elites (Anne et al. 2015). For instance, Rose and Baumgartner (2013) found that, since the 1970s, American media has framed poverty within a neoliberal narrative, emphasizing individual responsibility over systemic factors. This framing has contributed to policy shifts that reduce governmental support for the poor.

Connecting this to intersectionality and LGBTQ+ representation, media framing not only shapes public perception but also reinforces or challenges the way intersecting identities are understood within societal discourse. By presenting certain narratives or omitting others, media can either perpetuate stereotypes or bring to light the complexities of the gendered self. In the context of LGBTQ+ experiences, how media frames issues like discrimination, identity, and violence influences societal attitudes and can ultimately impact policy decisions and the lived realities of marginalized communities.

To further explore how media framing affects marginalized identities, June (2017) conducted a qualitative framing analysis of digital American news media coverage of transgender, non-binary, and gender non-conforming murder victims. The study found that 36% of news articles misgendered trans-identifying victims, often dehumanizing, blaming, or criminalizing them. Moreover, transgender victims of color were notably underreported. Despite these challenges, some articles did show themes of empowerment by using correct pronouns and avoiding references to previously held names, as well as increasing visibility by educating readers about the transgender community.

These findings illustrate the complex landscape of media framing for LGBTQ+ individuals, where moments of empowerment and accurate representation exist alongside pervasive misrepresentation and underreporting. This volume builds on these insights, offering a comprehensive scope of contributions that delve into the varied intersections of media, identity, and power. Through diverse chapters, we aim to unpack how different framing devices and narratives impact the visibility, perception, and experiences of LGBTQ+ identities, highlighting both challenges and strides toward equity and inclusion.

#### **4. Scope of Contributions**

This volume draws together a cohesive exploration of diverse themes, each unpacking the multifaceted ways in which LGBTQ+ identities are represented, negotiated, and reimagined through various forms of media. From visual media and popular culture to legal frameworks and digital spaces, the chapters collectively explore how these narratives intersect with broader societal discourses, offering critical insights into the power of representation.

We begin the volume with Cassandra Hayes's chapter, "Reinventing Scaffolded Selves: Visual Media Representations of Queer Infrastructures." This foundational chapter examines how visual media portrays the role of networked technologies in the development of LGBTQ+ identities. Uncovering how these technologies are creatively reimagined and transformed within films provides a nuanced understanding of the intersection between technology and identity. Through highlighting the inventive and subversive ways LGBTQ+ individuals interact with these systems, the chapter opens a dialogue on innovation, representation, and the influence of technology in shaping personal and societal identities.

Chapter 2 examines how mainstream media incorporates queer elements into widely viewed cultural programming, especially during significant events like New Year's Eve, which often blend commercial and cultural celebrations. Bruce Drushel's "Queering the New Year: CNN, Anderson Cooper, and Televising a Transgressive Celebration" offers insights into how queer visibility is integrated into such events, engaging audiences and challenging traditional

boundaries, even as these moments intersect with religious and cultural end-of-year festivities.

The essence of Harsha Singh's chapter revolves around how history, as an empirical tool, can be dominated by hegemonic narratives that often exclude or misrepresent marginalized communities, particularly queer individuals. The chapter explores the process of erasure within historical records, specifically focusing on the violence and subjugation faced by the queer community, such as the destruction of the *Institut für Sexualwissenschaft* during the Holocaust. By analyzing personal narratives like those in *The Men with the Pink Triangles* by Heinz Heger, Chapter 3 highlights the importance of reclaiming these erased histories and making the personal political. It critically examines how subaltern studies can provide a space for reinterpreting and recovering these hidden narratives to authentically represent historical oppression and trauma. It provides a critical analysis of how the representation of queer experiences in historical records shapes broader cultural narratives and affects the perception of LGBTQ+ identities. By revealing the mechanisms of exclusion and the power structures embedded in historical discourse, the chapter contributes to the overall exploration of how media and narratives influence the visibility, valuation, and recognition of marginalized identities.

The chapter "Self Is Sacred: Media Influences on Two-Spirit and Māhū Identity Through Lived Experiences" by Taylor Orcutt, Sarah Liese, and Victoria LaPoe examines how media shapes and influences the development, acknowledgment, and acceptance of Two-Spirit and Māhū identities (Chapter 4). These identities, which predate colonization and were traditionally honored in Indigenous communities, have been significantly affected by European colonization, Christian beliefs, and Western knowledge systems. The chapter emphasizes how media representation – or the lack thereof – impacts the visibility and cultural understanding of Two-Spirit and Māhū individuals, who continue to face cultural erasure and political challenges in the U.S. The authors aim to amplify the voices of these Indigenous individuals by using Indigenous Standpoint Theory and social media content to conduct a thematic analysis, allowing for an authentic exploration of their lived experiences. The chapter highlights the media's responsibility in portraying these identities accurately and its potential to serve as a tool for empowerment and reclamation of identity. This chapter aligns strongly with the volume's exploration of intersectionality and representation by centering the lived experiences of marginalized gender identities within Indigenous communities. It contributes to the larger debate by offering a nuanced view of how intersecting factors – colonization, religion, and cultural norms – affect the media portrayal of Two-Spirit and Māhū people.

While media plays a crucial role in reshaping cultural narratives, the legal and human rights landscape for LGBTQIA+ individuals remains fraught with challenges and setbacks. Ananya Chakraborty and Sohini Mahapatra, in Chapter 5, provide a sobering examination of the global struggles faced by queer communities, emphasizing that it is not our differences that divide us, but rather the failure to recognize, accept, and unlearn the misguided norms that perpetuate inequality. This chapter delves into countries like Russia, Sri Lanka, and Uganda, where queerness is criminalized, and societal prejudice is codified into law, resulting in pervasive human rights violations. By offering an analysis through the lens of U.N. treaty bodies, the authors expose the harsh realities of legal discrimination while highlighting the need for global accountability and the pursuit of equality.

While exploring demographic representation and the varied spaces in which LGBTQ+ identities are portrayed, it is crucial to address the backlash that often arises, especially when religion plays a significant role in shaping societal attitudes. Islam, in particular, frequently surfaces in debates about the acceptance of same-sex relationships and identities. In Chapter 6, Kow Kwan Yee examines how Malaysian media navigates LGBTQ+ representation within the complex framework of a Muslim-majority country. With Malaysia's unique dual legal system, combining civil law and Shari'ah (Islamic) law, the country presents a social landscape where traditional Islamic values intersect with evolving global discourses on LGBTQ+ rights.

Shifting from the influence of religious and legal contexts to the role of popular media, Chapter 7 explores the ways in which talk shows, such as *The Ellen DeGeneres Show*, portray and represent LGBTQ+ individuals. This chapter discusses the struggles and triumphs of the community through narratives of coming out, activism, and humor—often underrepresented facets of LGBTQ+ life. By fostering an inclusive space, these shows contribute to normalizing diverse gender identities and experiences in mainstream media, providing a different but equally impactful platform for representation.

After exploring films, we shift our focus to sitcoms: a unique space where characters and narratives can develop in-depth over time. Sitcoms allow audiences to engage with and laugh at real-life scenarios, providing a distinctive perspective on societal values and norms. The final chapter of the volume, by Sheyla Finkelshteyn, critically examines the portrayal of masculinity in these shows, highlighting how they reinforce superficial notions of manhood as gender ideals. By analyzing plot elements, this chapter uncovers how patriarchal ideologies are subtly reasserted, even within narratives that appear progressive.

As readers engage with the chapters of this volume, we hope to inspire a critical discourse that not only addresses visual media's role in representation but also brings deeper value to the individuals who face discrimination for



expressing their true selves. LGBTQ+ representation is far more than an academic topic; it is a vital part of the ongoing fight for equality, recognition, and acceptance. Each chapter in this volume illustrates the transformative power of media narratives in shaping societal perceptions of LGBTQ+ individuals, either uplifting them or highlighting the challenges they face within the broader social framework. Such valuation impacts everything from identity formation and self-worth to societal acceptance and policy change.

This book explores how media reflects and shapes the current societal framework, revealing a long and often overlooked struggle for acknowledgment and representation of LGBTQ+ experiences. This history, rarely given its due space, underscores that celebrating diversity today is built on the courage and resilience of those who were once denied their very existence. Through these contributions, we hope to create meaningful change through understanding representation, acknowledgment, and the struggle for equality.

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## About the Contributors

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# Index

## A

āina, 66  
algorithmic identities, 2  
Anishinaabe, 62, 63, 64  
Anishinaabemowin, 62  
anticlericalism, 69

## B

Bakhtin, 30, 31, 32, 33, 35, 37  
belongingness, 127, 131, 135  
*Berita Harian*, 106, 107, 108, 109

## C

*Cegah Pondan*, 110  
ceremonial, 64  
Christianization, 66, 67  
colonial, 59, 62, 67  
content analysis, 14, 72, 101, 106,  
108  
critical analysis, 4

## D

dehumanize, 105  
denaturalize gender, 136  
denominations, 69  
discourse, 37, 70, 103, 121, 165

## E

Embraced Wilderness, 11  
episodic frames, 61, 110  
episodic framing, 108  
Eurocentric, 63, 65, 66

## F

feminine, 9, 59, 146, 151, 152  
framing theory, xiii, 101, 106

## G

gendered self, xii, xiii, 2, 11  
geopolitical, 69  
Grounded theory, 6

## H

hegemonic, xv, 70, 104, 109, 115,  
149, 150, 151, 157  
heteroglossia, 31, 37  
heteronormativity, 3, 62, 63, 136,  
148, 154  
Holocaust, xv  
homosexual, 84, 89, 91, 105, 140  
homosexuality, 90, 105, 106, 108,  
112

## I

Indigenous, xv, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63,  
64, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 72, 73, 75,  
77  
*Indigiqueer*, 63, 75, 78  
infrastructure of intimacy, 2  
institutionalization, 34  
intersectional lens, xii  
intersectionality, xii  
Islamic laws, 102

## J

jurisdictions, 81, 83, 84, 85, 94  
jurisprudence, 81, 82, 84, 86, 94

*jus cogens*, 83

## K

*Kosmo!*, 106, 107, 108, 109, 114  
kua xing bie, 111

## M

*machine learning*, 70  
māhū identities, 59, 60, 66  
Malays, 104, 107, 115  
masculine, 9, 59, 145, 146, 150,  
153, 154, 156, 157  
masculinity, xii, xvi, 137, 145, 146,  
147, 151, 152, 153, 154, 157  
mercantilism, 69  
misrepresented, 114  
*mufti*, 109  
multiethnic, 104

## N

*Nádleehí*, 63  
narrative, 4, 150  
nationalism, 69, 111  
New Girl, 145, 146, 147, 148, 149,  
150, 152, 153, 154, 155, 156, 157  
*non-refoulement*, 81, 94

## O

openly gay, 23

## P

patriarchal, xvi, 145, 146, 148, 149,  
150, 152, 154, 155, 156, 157

## Q

queer, ix, xiv, xv, xvi, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6,  
7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 19, 20,  
22, 23, 24, 25, 28, 29, 33, 34, 35,  
37, 63, 66, 121, 123, 129, 137

queer infrastructures, 2, 10  
queered, 3, 11, 15  
queerness, 3

## R

*reinvention*, 1, 2, 4, 6, 9, 11, 15  
ren, 110  
renyao, 110

## S

self-determination, 95  
selfhood, 8, 10, 12, 15  
self-image, 126  
semi-mythical, 67  
Sexual Orientation, 83  
*Shari'ah*, xvi, 102, 116  
*Sin Chew Daily*, 106, 107, 110, 111  
sitcom, xvi, 29, 123, 145, 149, 150,  
152, 153  
social identification, 125  
Social Identity Theory, 125, 138,  
139, 140, 142  
Standpoint Theory, xv, 60, 62, 72,  
75

## T

textual analysis, 145, 146, 147, 150,  
156  
thematic analysis, xv, 72, 121, 122,  
126, 127, 128, 131, 134, 135, 138  
Tribal, 61, 62  
Two-Spirit, xv, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63,  
64, 65, 66, 67, 69, 71, 73, 75, 78

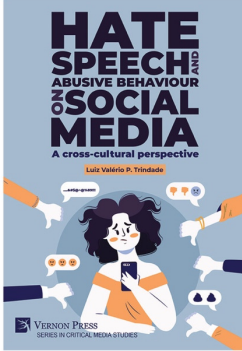
## U

Unemotional, 148, 153

## Y

yao, 110

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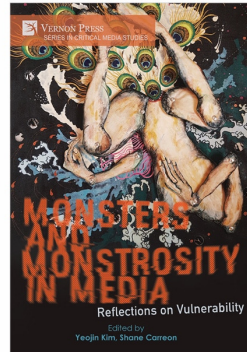
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