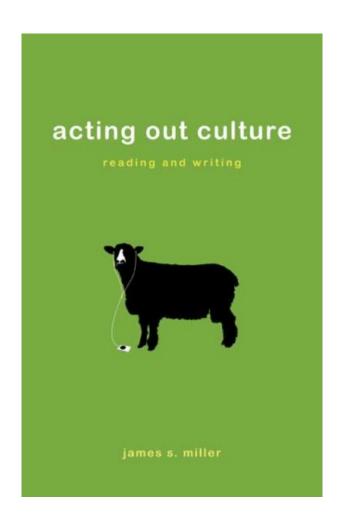
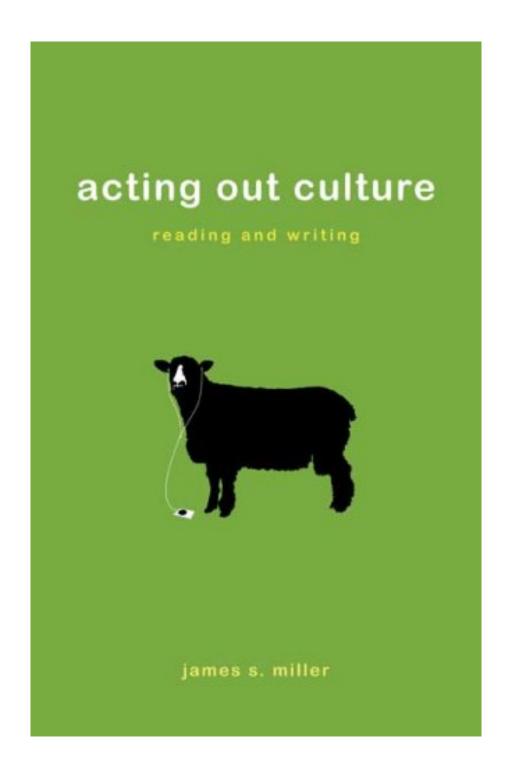
# ACTING OUT CULTURE: READING AND WRITING BY JAMES S. MILLER



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#### About the Author

JAMES S. MILLER is an associate professor of American Studies and American Literature at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater, where he teaches a range of courses on twentieth-century popular and literary culture. His scholarship focuses on issues of public memory and middle-class identity in twentieth-century America, as well as the role of commodity culture in shaping historical consciousness. His essays exploring these topics have appeared in such journals as American Studies, the Journal of American Folklore and The Public Historian. His book, Managerial Memory: History, Heritage and the Invention of White-Collar Roots, will be published by the University of Michigan Press in Spring 2008.

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Students are bombarded every day with media messages laden with rules: how true patriots should act, how healthy people eat, what real women should look like. Acting Out Culture is the first thematic composition reader to focus students' attention beyond what rules and norms govern their everyday behavior to how the rules themselves have been shaped over time. The author, James Miller, has drawn on his cutting-edge expertise in cultural analysis to help students inquire into those social norms and respond with writing that positions them as citizens making informed decisions about their world.

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Acting Out Culture Book Review

By Heather Brunner

Social norms are a big part of our culture. I had never looked at so many social norms until I read Acting Out Culture by James S. Miller. Miller uses many different essays to present the topic of the social norm. The purpose of this book is to give you different perspectives on the topics presented.

This is a composition book, but this book is not like your normal English composition book. This is a very current way of looking at social norms. The reader can relate to the essays because Miller uses very current

issues. James S. Miller is a professor at University of Wisconsin, Whitewater. Miller is trying to get the reader to see that the American culture is always trying to make you believe something because that is how they think things should be. These essays give the reader a different perspective on what the American culture is saying to you.

The book breaks down the social norms into chapters. The chapters are how we believe, how we watch, how we eat, how we work, how we fight, how we learn, and how we talk. Each chapter is composed of essays that are related to social norms of the topic. These chapters are arranged this way so there can be arguments between essays. Everyone should be able to relate to at least one of the stories. They make the reader really think about what America is trying to say about a certain topic. This is a very good book for a college level English class. The reason for this is that it brings up lots of discussions that allow students to really get involved in the reading. This book could also be read outside a class setting for fun. Because this book makes you think about things in a different way, it could be something that you can really enjoy.

Miller did a good job of making sure that the topics were well supported. He made sure that there were a few essays for each topic and that would allow the reader to be able to side with one or maybe all of the essays in the chapter. Miller's goal was to get you to think about social norms in a different way, and he does. My favorite essay was The Baby Genius Edutainment Complex: The New Smart Baby Products. The essay was about how parents now use DVDs, like Baby Einstein, to start teaching their children at a young age. The argument in this story was if these DVDs really make your children smarter. The author stayed on topic and the arguments in this essay were strong and well researched. After reading chapters of this book I have thought about some of the things that we do in life that are supposed to be the norm for us, and it shows you how society views people who don't fit into the norm.

The only bad thing about the book was that, some of the essays were too long. The writers make their point and then they go on for a while after that and the stories stopped being interesting. The essays don't really stay on topic of the social norm for the entire time. One example of an essay that does this is Big Organic. The question for this essay that is supposed to get the readers attention is, "Is organic really natural?" This question is a good one because organic is starting to become a big thing in our culture. You hear so many things about organic food now that you have to wonder if all the things that they say are true. This essay doesn't really answer all of the questions that you may have. It talks a lot about the grocery store, Whole Foods, then trails off.

I have dealt with social norms for my whole life. This book did a very good job of putting social norms into a different perspective. I really enjoyed the book because of how it made me think about how everyone lives by a set of rules because that is what someone says is normal. The book is very well organized and he fulfills his goals that he sets in the beginning of the book. He said that he wanted to make people think about how we view American culture, and he did this in his well organized composition of essays.

I would recommend this book to composition instructor. This was a very interesting book that I read in my English class. It brought up many discussions about what we thought about social norms in American cultures. This book allows you to agree or disagree with the author who picks the essays and the writers of the essays. Overall I really enjoyed this book.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

Acting out culture

By Jose M. Rodriguez

Around us all is the media. The media is no longer just books, television, and radio. It is everything about us. It has influenced the way we listen, the way we talk, and even the way we eat. In Acting out Culture, James Miller brings together more than forty articles to give his point of view on popular culture. The authors in this collection of writing speak of many different aspects of culture but what ties all these articles together is the influence of the media.

A common theme in these articles is Miller's ability to see the effect of pop culture on life's most mundane activities. He takes several articles and groups them into categories such as "how we watch" or "how we

work." If one reads these articles alone the connection to the title can be unclear. But, when read together you are able to connect the articles in a very unique way. In the section "how we fight" the authors talk about fighting in different contexts. In one context he was speaking of combat while the other was speaking of arguments. He was able to see the connection in these articles. The main idea was that technology is making it possible to make fighting less personal. Miller was able to make this connection along with many other throughout the book.

It is refreshing to come across a book that questions social norms. So much of the literature used in classes is very safe. They do not question culture or even suggest that there is any grey area, rather they suggest everything is black and white.

Many text books that we give our students, especially in literature, do not allow our students to think abstractly. Yes we ask questions at the end of chapters to encourage the student to think, but these questions are just pointing them in a direction of thinking. Acting out Culture gives the student the opportunity of free thinking. Miller simply gives you the information, in the form of articles, and he lets the reader draw his own conclusion.

I think Miller did a good job in piecing these pieces of literature together. Although there is no such thing as a perfect text book, nor am I claiming Miller's piece perfect, but it is difficult to point out a flaw. The order of some of the writings may be confusing to the reader and some of the articles may be lengthy, but these are hardly flaws

If a teacher was looking to discuss social normality's or pop culture and its effect on culture, then Acting out Culture should be at the top of their lists. It is a great collections of writings that would be a great learning tool in any classroom.

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