



# *comm-entary*

*The UNH Student Journal of Communication*

*University of New Hampshire*

*2010 - 2011*

# Editorial Board

---

Kendra Mack - Editor-in-Chief  
Paige Clairmont - Associate Editor  
Lindsey Comeau - Project Manager  
Danielle Flynn - Design Chair  
Jake Nevrla - Copyediting Chair  
Kelly Martin - Publicity Co-Chair  
Megan Boselli - Publicity Co-Chair  
Stephanie Raddock - Fundraising Co-Chair  
Laura Yegge - Fundraising Co-Chair  
Brittany Hartnett - Co-Event Planning Chair  
Brittany Adelhardt - Co-Event Planning Chair  
Chelsey Canavan - Media Chair  
Chris Spencer - Board Member  
Jessica LaCroix - Board Member  
Katie Madden - Board Member  
Sara Coppola - Board Member  
Tara Durbano - Board Member

Melissa Deem - Faculty Advisor  
Kendra Mack - Cover Art

*Comm-entary would like to extend many thanks to the Student Activity Fee Committee and to the Organizational Resource Office for the funding of this journal. We would also like to thank the Department of Communication for their funding support and UNH Printing and Mailing Services for their assistance. Special thanks to Professor John Moore and to the Center for Cultural Citizenship. We would also like to thank all student authors who submitted and the faculty who supported them.*

# Table of Contents

---

<b>Swiss Multilingualism in Online News Sources: Opportunities and Restrictions through Linguistic Variance</b> Laura Yegge, Alexandra Davis, Meije Gernez, Crista Schmidt	<b>5</b>
<b>Coffee Shop as Drama: Ethnography of a Routine</b> Dave Day	<b>21</b>
<b>Perceiving Educational Implications in Video Game Design</b> Kelsey Loveday	<b>31</b>
<b>Sex and the City: Expanding the Feminist Toolbox</b> Natalija Ulemek	<b>39</b>
<b>Restoration for Former Child Soldiers in Uganda</b> Laura Yegge	<b>51</b>
<b>The American Beauty: Identification, Globalization, and the Miss America Pageant</b> Joanie Stolos	<b>58</b>
<b>“It’s Just Our Job”: A Qualitative Analysis of Police Lexicon Surrounding Publicly Salient Issues</b> Lindsey Comeau, Sara Coppola, Matt D’Arcy, Jamie Gray, Marc Smick	<b>66</b>
<b>A Single Case Analysis: “Woman Goes Berserk”</b> Lindsey Comeau	<b>76</b>
<b>A Real Man’s Game: Manipulations of Guilt and Rhetorical Displays of Masculinity by the UFC</b> Dane Miller	<b>92</b>

# **A Digitized Society: Digital Media & Cultural Change Forum**

102

---

**Mass Message: The Impact of Digital Media on  
Documentary Film** 103  
Kelly Martin

**Finding Reality in a Virtual World: An Analysis  
of the Authenticity of Traditional Dating Versus  
Online Dating** 107  
Joanie Stolos

**Citizen Journalism: Defining Bloggers' Rights** 113  
David Whitney

**The Internet and Social Networking: Building  
Virtual Relationships and Harming In-Person  
Relationships** 118  
Amanda Tan

**What Perez Says: an Analysis of Popular Culture** 125  
Lauren Freeman

**Disappearing Privacy** 129  
Angelina Bossone

# Swiss Multilingualism in Online News Sources: Opportunities and Restrictions through Linguistic Variance

Laura Yegge, Alexandra Davis, Meije Gernez, Crista Schmidt

## Abstract

Linguistic variance in Switzerland has long been a topic of discussion. The mass influx of new communication technologies adds new dimension to this issue. Though research has frequently examined multilingualism, there has been little investigation concerning the relationship between multiple national languages and technology. Due to its four national languages, Switzerland proves a useful case study for this development. This study will look at the presence of multiple languages in the dispersion of Swiss news online. It will examine online news sources to conclude whether or not individual languages offer more information in addition to whether or not the information provided is specialized in certain areas. Further, the research will evaluate the divergences between peripheral and dominant linguistic use within Switzerland. The research will be conducted through content analysis with supporting data added from surveys. The results of this research indicates dominance in one Swiss national language, Swiss German, as well as significant influence from a specific peripheral language, English. This dynamic has led to the emergence of an information divide within Swiss online news. There is a significant decrease in availability and quality of news in Switzerland's secondary national languages, Italian and Romansh. This research aims to offer clarification regarding the role each language plays in comparison to the others in Swiss society.

## Introduction

Historically, communication in society has been generally reliant on a single local language. Although some nations had early implementation of multiple national languages, the languages within the culture remained at a local or specifically ethnic level. Now, language is no longer based on locality; instead, it is rapidly developing into a global world. An influx of new mass communication technologies has given rise to new linguistic issues and reinforced the concept of peripheral and dominant languages. In order to actively participate in the global movement, societies have had to

implement additional languages into their culture. Entering the globalized world requires a different form of linguistic use, technological knowledge, and multilingualism that was previously not necessary. This use of language and rapid technological growth has greatly influenced linguistic choice, identity, and its role within the global world.

## Literature Review

### Multilingualism in Switzerland:

Switzerland has a distinctive relationship with multilingualism. According to Demont-Heinrich (2005), “Switzerland’s delicate linguistic balancing act has played a central role in the contemporary Swiss sense of national identity” (p. 9). Switzerland has four national languages, each specific to a region or canton: French, Italian, German, and Romansh. Cantons generally define a person’s language; however, each person still defines themselves as Swiss regardless of their spoken language. The sense of multilingualism in Switzerland is reinforced throughout daily routines and is introduced at the earliest ages of elementary school and early language acquisition.

Swiss children traditionally learn their first language at home and through the public school system, but are also quickly introduced to a second Swiss language (Dürmüller, 2002). The knowledge of a second Swiss language is mandatory in Switzerland. Being at least bilingual (or multilingual) is part of the Swiss identity. In the past decade, however, a new language has started to emerge in Switzerland: English. At first, English appeared to be borrowed into the Swiss national languages, with words such as “jazz” and “sport” (Dürmüller, 2002). However, English has growing steadily more dominant. The Swiss have used English in professional settings for at least a decade due to its global potential (Dürmüller, 2002).

Currently, the cantonal Departments of Education have begun to change the language programs in public elementary schools. The two models currently being introduced are a curriculum with English as a third and foreign language and a curriculum with English as a national *lingua franca*, or a language used in communication between people of different mother languages. Both models place more importance on English and acknowledge its potential importance in the future of Swiss languages (Dürmüller, 2002).

According to Durham (2003), English is often chosen as a *lingua franca* in Switzerland due to its neutrality, as well as its potential for international expansion. However, this “neutrality” is accompanied by

negative feelings from some members of the Swiss population. As more and more young people are exposed to English as a functional language, some observe a “tendency away from ‘languages of culture’ towards a language which is ‘merely functional and communicative’” (Dürmüller, 2002). Durham explains that “the presence of English can also be felt in advertising (Cheshire & Moser, 1994) and on the Internet, in that many Swiss Web sites provide pages in English, as well as in French, German and Italian” (Durham, 2003), emphasizing English’s entrance into the competition for most prominent language Switzerland. While Swiss German has maintained the role of the dominant language in Switzerland for the past century, many Swiss citizens think that globalization and practicality will place English in that position in the near future (Demont-Heinrich, 2005, p. 9).

### Case Studies:

Examining other multilingual nations enhances understanding of the relationship between linguistic variance and new communication technologies in Switzerland. The use of multiple languages within a single nation can rarely be seen as clearly as in Africa. Although impossible to generalize an entire continent, Africa’s history has made it an interesting study due to the fact that the current borders vastly differ from those of the past. In Africa, people of different ethnic and linguistic backgrounds live amongst each other unified by a national identity established through geographical borders. The boundaries have caused social tension due to the “imposition of one ethnic group’s language for official and educational purposes” rather than one specific language that reflects a national identity (Hameso, 1997, p. 2). Due to the multiple ethnicities living within the same national boundaries, the population is faced with the choice of whether to use their own ethnic language or a single, national language. This is similar within Switzerland, as all four languages take root within a specific canton or region, thus promoting local identity compared to national identity. Countries such as Kenya and Tanzania chose a ‘neutral’ language without roots in any particular culture or ethnicity. Choosing a peripheral language such as English, French, or Portuguese does not force any social group to choose between their ethnic or national identity (Hameso, 1997, p. 3). Linguistic choice excludes certain groups, allowing for one to dominate over another causing an imbalance in cultural representation. The use of a peripheral language stabilizes tensions and offers a cross-cultural solution in a globalized world.

In both Africa and Switzerland, external peripheral languages have become more widespread due to modern expansionism and drastic

increase in the use of digital technology and new media (Hameso, 1997, p. 4). Peripheral languages act as a means of power and control as people are better able to secure more desirable jobs with knowledge of multiple languages, especially those dominant in the global market. Multilingualism and knowledge of a peripheral language allows for a greater exchange of communication in both local and global settings.

Due to new media influences, linguistic choice has enabled individuals to communicate what they would not have been able to previously. Sabbah (2008) conducted a study in another multilingual country, Jordan, concerning language choice in relation to mobile text messages. This study was used to view the relationships between the mobile and linguistic choices or sociolinguistic functions of Arabic and English code switching. Code switching, in this case, was essential in SMS as it allowed the users to type fewer characters by using English, allowed more space within an SMS in comparison to Arabic, and allowed the use of English to discuss emotional or embarrassing topics (Khatib & Sabbah, 2008, p. 51).

Although in this particular case English code switching was implemented for ease and efficiency, this information can be extrapolated to explain how an infiltration of new media and technology has created new linguistic patterns. In fact, “new technology has immediate linguistic consequences” for the SMS due to the character restriction, shortening of words, and the global use of English (Khatib & Sabbah, 2008, p. 38). Implementing English has been a worrisome process to certain nations. However, most have allowed English to infiltrate slightly without dominating their own national language(s) (Khatib & Sabbah, 2008, p. 39). This relation between language and the use of new media creates a dichotomous relationship between being able to use one’s dominate language or being forced to comply with media by using either one or two periphery languages. Although technological development is often seen as a positive force, it is also influential in asserting specific linguistic requirements to the public.

### **Technological Development:**

According to Wellman (2004), the Internet became embedded in our everyday lives as of five years ago. Today, in the dawning of the third age of Internet evolvement, “[t]he Internet is helping each person become a communication and information switchboard...the person has become the portal” (Wellman, 2004, p. 6). People now have the ability to use the Internet in a way that best fits their needs. This has in turn created dependency on the use of online news sources as a common way for



people to receive news today. Today's reliance on online news has brought about a new approach to gaining information. Fortunati et. al. (2009) says, "The Internet is seen as the driver of a new role, more visible and public, for the readership" (2009, p. 15). It has allowed journalists to provide quicker news, the capacity to reach a broader audience, and an opportunity for readers to express their opinions publicly.

With the spread of online news usage, people are increasingly wary of the credibility of the information found on these sites (Fortunati et. al., 2009). Therefore readers tend to choose news websites they are familiar with such as newspaper or television bulletin sites. "In this case, the receiver himself or herself becomes, in a way, the source of online news" (Sundar & Nass, 2001, p. 1-2). There are several different types of online news services that people can choose from. For example, a reader of *The New York Times* who worries about news credibility can follow their familiar newspaper online through their website where the *Times's* editorial staff is the source of the news. Users check news sites against alternative sources as a way of validating online news credibility.

Online news brings about several issues, not only of credibility, but also of the accessibility of news through the language in which it is offered. Language shapes the world around us because it is a construction of our reality and worldview. Therefore, one's reality is constructed by the availability of online news in the language(s) they speak. Fowler (1991) says,

News is a representation of the world in language; because language is a semiotic code, it imposes a structure of values, social and economic in origin, on whatever is represented; and so inevitably news, like every discourse, constructively patterns that of which it speaks (Fowler, 1991, p. 4).

In this sense, news is a representation of construction not simply a reflection of 'facts.'

One of the principles from the foundations of semiotics, which were laid by the early-twentieth-century Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, states, "Between human beings and the world they experience, there exist systems of signs [(languages)] which are the product of society" (Fowler, 1991, p. 3). Language is critical in constructing realities and representing them in online news. As Fowler says, "There are always different ways of saying the same thing, and they are not random, accidental alternatives" (p. 4). We use language to access news and because language shapes our reality, different languages can create a different sense of reality. Therefore, it is important to understand in what language people in

Switzerland have access to online news because an entirely different reality is created depending on the language that is available to them.

### **Research Questions:**

Upon the examination of relevant sources, it is clear that there is a relationship between multilingualism and the use of dominant and peripheral languages within societies. In Switzerland, concerns have been building over the possible alteration of cultural identity within a previously cohesive nation as a result of language issues. While Switzerland has always dealt with the presence of multiple languages and experienced an apparent “peaceful cohabitation of linguistic communities” (Stotz, 2006, p. 5), recently, there has been additional pressure on societal norms arising from the institution and expansion of peripheral language use within the country. Simultaneously, there are indications that a dominant language may also be influencing these pre-established standards. The increasing degree of each of these elements’ role in Swiss culture is characteristic of expanding globalization and the development of technology.

Though much research has been done on multilingualism and its effects on cultures, in consideration of these emerging influential factors, it is also essential to examine the dissemination of information to a multilingual society. With the rising importance of technology as a source for attaining information in an exceedingly globalized world, online news sources have become a popular outlet. Therefore, it is beneficial to examine both the way in which news is distributed, as well as the manner in which it is received. Berger and Luckmann state that news is a “social construction of reality” (Fowler, 1991, p. 2). This demonstrates that not only is news important to society but also that it has the power to impact social perceptions regarding what information is being distributed. This begs the question: do audiences view news differently according to the language in which the news is provided? Furthermore, assuming that different languages influence society in different ways, how might news in a multilingual culture impact one’s viewpoint, given that certain information is only provided in (a) specific language(s)? Switzerland is the perfect microcosm for investigative research on this subject, given that its social order is affected now more than ever.

The literature reviewed suggests that there are multiple factors at play within multilingual countries that, in turn, directly influence cultural identity within those nations. Hence, considering these determinants, the research questions proposed are:

1. In a multilingual country, when viewing prevalent online news

- sources, does one of the national languages emerge as a dominant language?
2. Does a reliance on an outer language develop when multiple languages compete for media prevalence?

In sum, it is the aim of this research to gather data for the purpose of concluding to what extent the effects of multilingualism impact linguistic choice and identity through the use of online news sources, due to the growing dependence and increased use of such sources by the general public.

## Method

In an attempt to answer our research questions, a content analysis was conducted based on seven Swiss regional news web sites: *20 Minuten* (German), *Tages Anzeiger* (German), *Le Temp* (French), *24 Heures* (French), *Corriere del Ticino* (Italian), *Giornale del Popolo* (Italian), and *Radio e Televisiun Rumantscha* (Romansh). Two news sites, with the exception of the Romansh area since the language group only has one news site, covers each regional language sector of Switzerland. Regional news web sites were chosen (in opposition to general Swiss news web sites) in order to grasp local language behaviors. Through examination of these seven news sites, the goal was to record and recognize a series of general trends in the emergence and use of national, dominant, and peripheral languages in Swiss online news. To ensure minimum personal bias that may interfere with our analysis of these websites, a specific rubric was followed, aimed at exploring the aforementioned research questions.

To add to the content analysis data, a survey was distributed via a network of connections in the Romansh area of Switzerland. This enabled the examination of periphery data on the Romansh attitude, use, and constraints when using online news sources. As Romansh is the least used national language of Switzerland, it was anticipated that the peripheral and dominant language aspect of the study would be specifically applicable to this language region. The survey was written in English and then translated into Romansh in order to enable greater participation from those taking part in the survey without imposing English as a required prequalification. The results were then retranslated into English so the data could be processed. While this indicates a margin of error concerning translation issues and the possible diverse interpretations that the language may promote, it encouraged more participation through the availability of the document to our target language population.

A combination of convenience and snowball sampling was used

for the dissemination of the survey. The survey was electronically provided to a contact in the Romansh region of Switzerland. The contact, in turn, forwarded it to other contacts creating the snowball effect. In doing so, several participants with a variety of different backgrounds were gathered. However, in compensating for errors this method may have created, it is important to note that many of our contacts are in the academic field. Therefore, many of the participants likely shared similar social status.

These survey questions were all designed to be pertinent to the research, allowing each participant to divulge specific information about his or her views on online news and language choice. This provided supporting data to the content analysis and helped with examining the possible answers to our research questions. The first four questions inquired as to the background of the participant. They helped develop the base of the findings by providing the ethnic identity and linguistic knowledge of the participant. The next set of questions specifically focused on online news sources used by the participants and the linguistic choices they make when reading these sources. This information created basic knowledge of both the most used online news sources and how language plays a role within the choice of specific sites. This information was also compared to the questions about the participants' first language and native canton in order to reveal which languages are used in each region and what importance this signifies. The last set of questions related to how online news sources and languages are viewed throughout Switzerland and the effect that Switzerland's multilingualism has had on the participant, as well as the participant's perspective on the effects within the country was thoroughly explored. These questions brought to light the participant's view of a *lingua franca*, or infiltration of an outside language in Switzerland.

## Results

### Content Analysis Results:

The tables below compare the data retrieved from the seven different web content analyses performed on the Swiss online news sites. Table 1 displays the data recorded on the language of the headings appearing on the homepage of each site. The percentages display the how much each non-dominant language group appeared within the headings. The percentages slowly rise from German to French to Italian and finally to Romansh news sites.

Table 2 displays the data collected from the articles appearing on the sites' homepages. The numbers shown display the percentage of articles featuring either regional, national, or international news available. There

is no specific trend within this data, however the different results point to interesting conclusions (to be discussed in later sections).

**Table 1**

Headings	German (20 Minuten)	German 2 (Tages Anzeiger)	French (Le Temps)	French 2 (24 Heures)	Italian (Corriere del Ticino)	Italian 2 (Giornale del Popolo)	Romansh (RTR)
% in other Swiss Languages	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	11%
% in Peripheral Language	0%	0%	12%	13%	25%	30.8%	22%
% in English Language	0%	0%	12%	13%	25%	30.8%	22%

**Table 2**

Articles	German (20 Minuten)	German 2 (Tages Anzeiger)	French (Le Temps)	French 2 (24 Heures)	Italian (Corriere del Ticino)	Italian 2 (Giornale del Popolo)	Romansh (RTR)
% of Regional Articles	9.8%	15.6%	10%	18%	71.4%	33.3%	33%
% of National Articles	18.3%	28.1%	24%	13%	14.3%	25%	33%
% of International Articles	38%	23.4%	64%	49%	14.3%	41.7%	33%
% of Other	33.9%	32.9%	2%	20%	0%	0%	0%

**German:**

When looking at the German sites, it was interesting to note that nearly all content was in German, there were numerous articles in each area, and each article was fairly long. Both *20 Minuten* and *Tages Anzeiger* included between 60 and 70 articles on the homepage alone and each article that was examined was between 350 and 700 words in length. Article content varied from regional to national to international news and included a vast amount of cultural articles. These articles were specific and encompassed a broad range of topics.

However, it should be mentioned that while these sites included large amounts of information and contained many articles, *20 Minuten* was offered in only German and French while *Tages Anzeiger* was offered solely in German. This neglects the other Swiss national languages, supporting German as the most commonly used language in Switzerland. Also, it is valid to note that there were very few “borrowed” words and, in addition, the only words “borrowed” were English headings, such as ‘Digital,’ ‘Life,’ ‘People,’ ‘Sport,’ with the exception of one Italian substitution, ‘Gratis,’ in an article title. This indicates the importance of German in Swiss society and its overwhelming presence as the dominant language.

### **French:**

The news website source for the content analysis of French speaking Switzerland was, overall, in French. Besides several headings such as ‘Lifestyle’ and ‘Mobile’ written in English, less than 1% of any article analyzed included any foreign or “borrowed” words. There was no specific decisive trend between the uses of “borrowed” words in regional, national, or international articles. The only notable fact was that the international article had a “borrowed” word that was not English. The articles focused mostly on international subjects (between 49% and 64%), but national and regional (in order of most frequent to least) subjects were also covered.

In all, the news sites *Le Temps* and *24 Heures* seem to be very true to their French-Swiss identity. The websites do not offer their content in any other language. The language used is very much Swiss French, using expressions that would not be common in French used in France. The words “borrowed” from other languages seem to be mainly from English, with only one of the “borrowed” words in a non-English language (Italian). From the data gathered through this content analysis, it can be inferred that French speaking Swiss news sources do not depend on any other Swiss language. However, they do show a certain trend of necessitating English words, pointing towards a possible development of a dominant periphery language.

### **Italian:**

In the Italian language content analysis of Swiss online news, the *Giornale del Popolo* and the *Corriere Del Ticino* were analyzed. Both news sources are from the canton of Ticino in southern Switzerland. The news sites are only offered in Italian. From the *Giornale del Popolo* site, 30.8% of the headings on the homepage are in English. The names of those headings are ‘Home,’ ‘Newsletter,’ ‘Blog,’ and ‘Sport’. 33.3% of the articles on the homepage focused on regional news, 25% focused on national news,

and 41.7% focused on international news. There was no influence from a peripheral language found in the three articles analyzed (one of each: regional, national, international news). It was surprising to find that there were no “borrowed” words from any peripheral language. Since this site only offered news in Italian, it inhibited the amount and quality of news provided. It did not use any other Swiss national languages in the articles, which could create problems for the Swiss who are searching for national online news if they do not speak Italian. In addition, there were only 12 articles presented on the homepage; however, it did offer a good representation of regional, national, and international news.

On the *Corriere Del Ticino* site, 25% of the headings on the homepage are in English. The names of those headings are: ‘Home,’ ‘News,’ and ‘Sport.’ 71.4% of the articles on the homepage focused on regional news, 14.3% focused on national news, and 14.3% focused on international news. From one of the regional articles analyzed, 0.5% of its words were “borrowed” from English. One of the international articles “borrowed” 2.5% of the words from English as well. However, there were no “borrowed” words in the analyzed national article. Some examples of the “borrowed” English words are ‘Jockey,’ ‘Reebok Stadium,’ ‘fighter,’ ‘DVD,’ ‘BMW Oracle,’ ‘America,’ and ‘Extreme Series.’ It was interesting to find that most of the “borrowed” words are either brand names or refer to international sports news. It is clear that if there is a reliance on a dominant peripheral language, that language is English since several of the headings and “borrowed” words within the articles were taken from English. Once again, this site inhibits the amount and quality of news provided because it did not use any other Swiss national languages and only “borrowed” a few words from English. Also, there were only seven articles presented on the homepage and out of the seven articles, five of them focused on international news. This inhibits the quality of news offered because it is not a fair representation of regional and national news, especially when the majority of people going to this site will be looking for Swiss national news.

### **Romansh:**

Based on reviewing Romansh online news sources, many interesting findings emerged. First of all, unlike the other Swiss languages, Romansh had only one online news source. As found on the site, “*Radio e Televisun Romanscha (RTR)* is the only electronic media organization to provide public service output for Romansh speaking Svizra rumantscha” (RTR.ch). This site not only provides written online news but also includes music, television, and broadcasting of the news found within the site. The site’s news changes daily and the broadcasting is done 24 hours a day,

however, certain slots borrow outside news or current affairs programs from other Swiss cantons (RTR.ch).

After conducting the content analysis, the homepage revealed that of the nine headings, two (22%) of the headings were “borrowed” from English and one or 11% of the headings were in French. The English headings were, ‘PodCast’ and ‘Radio,’ and from French, ‘Dossiers.’ RTR had only three articles on the homepage, with one article each within the categories of international, national, and regional. Within the articles, there were very few “borrowed” words. From the regional article out of 157 words, only two, or 1.25% of the words were “borrowed” from English. These words included ‘CEO’ and ‘Gigawatts.’ Within the national article, of 52 words, 100% of the article was in the Romansh language. In the international article, out of 84 words, 97.6% were in Romansh and 2.3% were in English. The word “borrowed” was ‘NATO,’ which was used twice.

## Discussion

Several points of comparison must be made when looking at the culmination of data derived from the multiple language sources. First of all, there were large divergences between the number of articles provided for each language on the home page of the observed online news sources. For example, the German websites had around 70 articles displayed on the homepage, the French websites had about 30, the Italian sites had around 10, and Romansh had 3. In addition, articles varied in length and content. While German and French articles contained about 1000 words, the articles found on the Italian and Romansh sites contained only around 100. The content of the different sites also differed to some extent, containing international, national, and local information as well as varieties of cultural information. On the German and French sites, varieties of each were offered, while the Italian sites focused mainly on regional news. The Romansh site offered an equal amount in each category, however, the site lacked any variety as it only contained three articles on the homepage.

“Borrowed” words were another category that was examined and offered further analysis on the use of language within Swiss online news. The German sites used no “borrowed” words and the French sites contained less than 0.01% “borrowed” words. The Italian sites were mainly in Italian and contained less than 3% of “borrowed” words, all from English. The Romansh site was mainly in Romansh, with less than 3% “borrowed” words. From this, we deduced that German remained completely un-infiltrated by any other Swiss or peripheral linguistic influence. French was relatively un-infiltrated as well, while Italian and Romansh had a higher rate of “borrowed” words. Because both the Italian



and Romansh sites contained very short articles, the rate of “borrowed” words is significant as it reveals a clear inability to use solely the native language. The “borrowed” words themselves also demonstrate this, as they were namely international terms.

In correlation with the answers from the surveys we distributed, it can be concluded that Romansh once again is undermined due to German dominance. These surveys, while few, did offer further support that if the Romansh language is to be used, the language cannot stand by itself, as it is often replaced with German. Survey respondents clearly communicated that German is their primary language in regards to online news and one student even mentioned English as a primary language. Based on the content analysis and surveys, it would seem that German appears as the primary online language and English as the peripheral for Romansh speaking Swiss citizens.

As stated by Demont-Heinrich, Swiss-German is not only the most dominantly spoken of the Swiss language but also dominant over the online news sources that were examined. The findings showed that there were numerous German sites, with a variety of content. This was similar in French, which was at one point considered the secondary language of the Swiss-German area and thus supports the idea that it would be the second most utilized language online. As was also found in the literature review, English is slowly being admitted into Swiss society, partially through academia, but primarily via the use of the Internet. Based on our content analysis, most pervasive is the peripheral use of the English language, as most borrowed words within the headings and articles were in English. Previous studies, while not focused on the Internet or online news in particular, supported our research as well as provided new ideas for discussion.

### **Limitations:**

Upon completing the preceding research, it is necessary to address several possible limitations in the investigation, which could have influenced the project’s conclusions. The most prevalent of these are the language discrepancies that arise. Within the group of researchers, there was only one who was a native speaker of a Swiss language, French. Each of the others were not fluent in any of the languages being studied. Additionally, all of the researchers’ primary language is English. While helpful for consistency purposes, English is an outside language and could have impacted both how data was interpreted as well as what was expected in the results.

Second, when examining the data on each of the sites, a different person looked at each language. To reduce the likelihood of inconsistencies

among the results, a rubric was developed to examine the content for each site. Though efforts were made ahead of time to minimize inconsistencies, information was reviewed based on the personal opinions and perceptions of each researcher.

Additionally, only two websites were reviewed for each language. Although the sites were chosen based on their prominence online, there is no verification that those chosen are, in fact, the most used sites. Furthermore, looking at only two sites limits the results derived, as the data analyzed was only a sample of the total information available. However, due to the lack of Romansh site availability, it was decided that a more thorough examination of fewer sites was preferable.

Finally, the last inconsistency relates to the overall analysis of Romansh. None of the members of the group had any knowledge of the language. Thus, it was difficult to interpret the information viewed and recorded, and comparisons between the languages were problematic. Although these limitations are relatively inconsequential to the final results derived, they are necessary to mention in hopes that future studies or elaborations on the subject can better accommodate such shortcomings.

### **Conclusion:**

Research demonstrated that German is the dominant language in Switzerland, followed in order of use by French, Italian, and Romansh. The content analysis also found that English emerged as the main peripheral language. These two factors reveal the influence of multilingualism in Switzerland as is reflected within its online news websites.

The Swiss German area comprises the largest part of Switzerland, thus, its prevalence within online Swiss news sources is not surprising. This prevalence, however, demonstrates the neglect of the other three Swiss languages paralleling the results within the content analysis section. While the German and French regions have a substantial variety of information available, the Italian and Romansh cantons have considerably less. While unable to draw conclusions for the entire Swiss population, the research points to a clear distinction between language and online news, as well as the dominance of one Swiss language over the others.

Due to the fact that there is a significant decrease in availability of information in Italian and Romansh, the research concludes that there is a clear digital information divide within online Swiss news. This causes an imposed choice upon the non-dominant languages within Switzerland and it can be speculated that this is a direct result of German linguistic dominance and English as the primary peripheral language. By using languages for efficiency purposes and not cultural ones, an individual could possibly find

their native language overridden by the dominant national language.

The emergence of dominant languages has been a field of research for many years. However, within an economically and socially stable country such as Switzerland, issues of a digital information divide and its impacts are under-researched. Dominant and peripheral languages deeply affect the multilingual Swiss society and therefore more research on this topic should be performed.

This paper was written as an assignment for COM 370: World Internet Project taught by Professor Satomi Sugiyama at Franklin College Switzerland.

### Works Cited

- “24 Heures”. (2010). Web. Retrieved 9 December 2010. <http://24heures.ch>.
- “20 Minuten”. (2010). Web. Retrieved 9 December 2010. <http://www.20min.ch>.
- Calvet, J. (1998). *Language wars and linguistic politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Cenoz, J, & Jessner, U. (2000). English in Europe: the acquisition of a third language. *Multilingual Matters*.
- “Corrier del Ticino”. (2010).Web. Retrieved 9 December. <http://www.cdt.ch>.
- Demont-Heinrich, C. (2005). Language and national identity in the era of globalization: The Case of English in Switzerland. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 29(1), 66-84.
- Durham, M. (2003). Language choice on a Swiss mailing list. *University of Fribourg JCMC*, 9(1).
- Dürmüller, U. (2002). English in Switzerland: From foreign language to lingua franca. In D. Allerton, P. Skandera, & C.Tschichold (Eds.), *Perspectives on English as a world language* (pp. 114-123). Basel: Schwabe.
- Fortunati, L., et al. (2009). The influence of the internet on European journalism. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 14, 928-963.
- Fowler, R. (1991). *Language in the news*. USA: Routledge.
- “Giornale del Popolo”. (2010). Web. Retrieved 9 December 2010. <http://www.gdp.ch>.
- Hemeso, Seyoum. (1997). The language of education in Africa: key issues. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 10(1), pp.1–13. <http://www.sidamaconcern.com/pdf/language.pdf>

“Le Temps”. (2010). Web. Retrieved 9 December 2010. <<http://letemps.ch>.

Reagan, T. (2001). The promotion of linguistic diversity in multilingual settings: Policy and reality in post-apartheid South Africa. *Language Problems & Language Planning*, 25(1): 51-72.

Ridge, S. (2004) Language planning in a rapidly changing multilingual society: The case of English in South Africa. *Language Problems & Language Planning*, 28 (2), 199-215.

“Radio e Televisum Romantscha (RTR)”. (2010). Web. Retrieved 9 December 2010. <<http://www.rtr.ch/>>.

Stotz, D. (2006). Breaching the peace: Struggles around multilingualism in Switzerland. *Language Policy*, 5(3), 247-265.

Sundar, S.S., & Nass, C. (2001). Conceptualizing sources in online news. *Journal of Communication*.

“Tages Anzeiger”. 2010. Web. Retrieved 9 December 2010. <http://www.tagesanzeiger.ch>.

Whaley, L. (1990). *Endangered languages: language loss and community response*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wolfson, N and J Manes. (1985). *Language of Inequality*. Berlin: Mouton.



# Coffee Shop as Drama: Ethnography of a Routine

Dave Day

## Introduction

Interaction is a broad term for the behavior that people exhibit in the presence of each other. It includes both spoken and unspoken communication and embodies a rich set of culturally-derived expectations for processes and results. Erving Goffman, a noted twentieth century sociologist, provides a formal definition for interaction, being “the reciprocal influence of two people in one another’s presence,’ when close enough to have ‘copresence,’ or near enough to be perceived” (Goffman, 1963, p. 17).

Logically, the closer people are with one another, the more complex their mutual involvement tends to be. Goffman refers to such encounters as “situated involvements” (ibid., p.37), and when people are face-to-face and focused on one another, he uses the term “focused interaction” with the application of “face engagements” (ibid., p. 83).

Routines are sequential processes employed to organize and execute ordinary daily activities. Here, we focus on social routines used in face-to-face interactions that are comprised of commonly accepted frameworks for behavior, particularly in the conduct of conversations. A routine is therefore a handy “social toolbox” of techniques that provide orderly ways to engage and disengage from others. Routines are also used to direct involvement among topics or tasks. There are various tools which modulate the depth and quality of involvement, as well as interrupt the standard order as determined by the situation and the participants.

Emanuel Schegloff, a distinguished professor of sociology at UCLA, was one of the creators of a methodology termed “Conversation Analysis,” which is the study of verbal and non-verbal interactions and their essential structures. In his early work, *Sequencing in Conversational Openings* (Schegloff, 1968), he discusses how “the raw data of everyday conversational interaction can be subjected to rigorous analysis” (ibid., p.1075). He proceeds to deconstruct telephone conversations in order to identify various structures, including a basic alternating sequence of transactions

that he labels “turns” (ibid., p.1076).

In *Notes on a Conversational Practice: Formulating Place* [Schegloff 1972], Schegloff continues his highly structural analysis of conversations, specifically focusing on “insertion sequences” (ibid., p.76) in the context of physical locations being described during conversation. These sequences are pairs of closely-related statements which represent sub-structures for analysis when inserted into a conversation between other such pairs. The relevance of the work here shows that interaction sequences can be nested in complex ways while developing within the flow of the conversation.

In *The Routine As Achievement* (Schegloff, 1986), Schegloff reprises his earlier publications, describing telephone conversations as routine social action (or interaction). During these conversations, each step or phase accomplishes specific inter-personal tasks and is typically a preface and preparation for the next step. Schegloff describes such routines as having “seemingly formulaic character... [which] may lead to the judgment of a relative unworthiness for study, [but] for others ... this character has made ‘routines’ of various sorts .... especially attractive for study....” (ibid. p. 113). If scanned in a superficial way, routines appear deceptively simple—even trivial—but their very simplicity belies the complexity and richness of the actual interpersonal work being done.

Schegloff considers the routine of phone calls to be a special subset of ordinary conversation. His dissection of the structure and progress of this type of routine can be extrapolated from face-to-face routine as another form of ritualized conversation. In general, the steps to open a ‘channel’ of communication and employing it to reach a goal represent the same process used in other routines. For example, phone calls begin with a “summons/ answer and identification sequences” (ibid., p. 116), which are analogous to elements within the “client greeting” step below. He describes these sequences (ibid. p. 131) as “packages of adjacency pairs,” which are actions bounded to a corollary response that are typically found in predictable sequences. He then introduces “preemptions,” which are interruptions prior to these sequences (ibid., p.133). All of these elements are found in variants of the routine I discuss throughout the rest of the paper.

## Data and Method

In order to observe interactions driven by routines, I visited a local coffee shop (Starbucks) and sat at a counter where both the clerks and clients were in view. I was able to observe actions and words of people inside, as well as some of the conversations that the clerks had with drive-in clients via an intercom.

At the counter, I presented myself as any ordinary patron; I ordered

a coffee and a pastry and set up my laptop with notebooks as if doing classwork. From this view I was able to take brief notes on social interactions without drawing much attention. I spent just over two hours there on a relatively quiet afternoon.

### Background and Interview

Starbucks is one of a very large international chain of 16,000 stores operating in 50 countries. It was evident that these shops are designed and the clerks are trained according to a master plan. In order to assess the effect of corporate design on local activities, I interviewed a clerk, as well as getting side responses from two others. I asked first if clerks were asked to use a specific script when handling clients or if there was training or coaching. The female clerk said there was no rote script, but in fact there was intensive training and even role-playing. She said the style and approach that she learned were driven by a “mission statement” and a “creed,” which she then showed me. I have attached a copy as *Appendix A*. Both the mission statement and creed clearly intend to impose an ethical framework on the clerks, well beyond a simple set of performance expectations. (Note: Starbucks clerks are dubbed ‘baristas’ and between themselves, ‘partners.’ But these are not employee-owned stores.)

Much of this text is nebulous; the mission being “to inspire and nurture the human spirit...” does not function as an action item. Several key elements are: “create a personal connection by smiling, using customers’ names and sincerely thanking them,” “acknowledging any customer within 10 ft.,” to “own and immediately resolve customer problems,” and to “hand-craft each beverage to standard.”

This clerk (and others nearby) appeared to be taking this creed quite seriously, and considered it to be a sort of edict for customer contact. The mere mention of this creed seemed to elicit almost a reverent response as to a religious tome. Further, she noted that clerks were expected to monitor each other’s performances and to provide explicit correction if they were not in accordance with expectations. The clerk added that it is a common practice to be “pulled aside” for impromptu critiques. Also, clerks are required to take multiple test “modules” regarding customer interaction, as well as product related topics, and are tested and graded on compliance.

Finally, the clerk volunteered a staff-endorsed concept about the use of shop space: that the public seating area is intended to act as “a community resource,” intrinsic to the creed’s mandate in order to serve the neighborhood.

While the creed critiques and tests may not stipulate scripted speech, they comprise a closely drawn framework for expected behavior, which

is directed and enforced by several carefully crafted mechanisms. (Note: I conducted this interview after my observation, to avoid any contamination of the counter dialogs by clerk perceptions of my role.)

### **‘Coffee-Shop’ Routine**

A coffee shop has a fairly simple business model with a set of relatively invariant routines to match. The activity is to prepare and sell beverages, pastries and related products. The essential routine performed by a shop clerk facilitates these goals and consists of the following steps:

1. Client greeting
2. Client engagement (optional)
3. Order-taking
4. Money collection
5. Order prep
6. Product delivery
7. Departure close

Each step can be considered an “adjacency pair” because they are fundamentally an initiation-response set (Schegloff 1986, p.131). Generally, these shops are not heavily staffed and clerks are expected to handle these tasks quickly and efficiently; rewarding techniques that create instant rapport while performing multiple tasks simultaneously.

### **Discussion of Routine**

**Client greeting:** A client presents themselves as being ready to be served by standing near the counter, facing the clerks in the work area. (This could be termed as the ‘stage’ for the upcoming performance.) Within seconds, even if occupied with other activities, one clerk will almost always acknowledge the client’s presence in this zone. Even this preliminary contact requires the clerk to turn their head and entire upper body away from any primary activity and towards the client, which may require a 180 degree rotation. Goffman would term this concept as an allocation between the “main” involvement (the prep work) and the “side” involvement (the greeting) (Goffman 1986, p.43).

Within a minute, a clerk will specifically address the client by directly facing them while making eye-contact and uttering a greeting such as “how *are* you?” In this moment, the clerk takes “ownership” to service this specific client, while opening a channel for conversation. In some cases, the clerk may say, “I’ll be right with you,” but only if occupied with a prior



client's order. A client is then expected to return the greeting, and by their varied response, indicates if they want to enter or bypass the next stage which Schegloff calls the "summons/answer sequence," which is shortly followed by a true greeting (Schegloff, 1986, p.118).

**Client engagement:** A gracious chat may ensue if the client chooses to take time to talk, especially if the client has been served by this clerk in prior visits. This conversation may revolve around something trivial about the weather, or some neighborhood news, or occasionally about more personal matters. This type of conversation is almost always very short; the primary goal of both the clerk and client is to progress to an order. This phase tends to create a sense of welcoming and acceptance, but is usually bypassed if the client is a stranger or simply wants quick service.

This opening stage is an expansion of what Schegloff calls "identification/ recognition" (ibid. p.118). During this stage a more robust social link is established between the parties. The bypass of this stage would constitute "preemption" (ibid. p.133) by the client to move directly to the next phase; the 'priority' claimed is simply the client's choice to expedite the process.

**Order taking:** Soon, and with typically no transition except a short pause, the clerk will ask for a product order. The client will sometimes preempt this step to pose an order immediately after the greeting and a discussion of product choices often ensues. Once the order is taken, invariably, the clerk will repeat its components, taking "ownership" this time for content and accuracy.

**Money collection:** Orders are pre-paid, so the clerk enumerates the order items and price and asks for payment, which is then provided by the client. Money exchange is typically a quiet and almost grave proceeding; money is the ultimate token. The clerk invariably replies with a heartfelt "thanks." At that point, the clerk is excused from this situation and turns away from the client so they can prepare the order.

**Order prep:** An order can either be fulfilled as quickly as pouring a cup of coffee, or may require multiple machines and several minutes. While clerks do these jobs, they are expected to extend at least minimal greetings to any clients unattended to, who are currently "on stage."

If a clerk must handle a new client while preparing an order, it is essential to give off the impression that the current order is being well attended to, because anything less would signify an abandonment of the prior client's needs. If the current order allows for breaks in attention, such as brewing coffee, these gaps may be employed. If not, the clerk will often cushion the situation by making lighthearted banter which is addressed to either or both clients.

Clerks seem to make quick efforts to spark chat between waiting clients by opening up light topics. This not only fills the wait time, but also adds entertainment and distracts clients' attention away from the idea that another customer is being serviced more efficiently than others. This act may also be a token toward the credo to nurture a community (one cup at a time).

**Product delivery:** When the clerk returns with food products, each product is handed to the client with an almost subdued reverence; "This is your mocha latte with cream, and here is your grande coffee with vanilla flavor." Enumerating each item imparts special value, while again "taking ownership" and verifying the components of the order. This is truly a bestowal of gifts—gifts paid for by the recipient.

**Departure close:** In most cases, departure is signified by a simple exchange of "thank-you's" after the product is handed over. People typically visit a coffee shop incidentally when they are rushing around doing other errands. In some cases, clients will take their food to the seating area where they may stay for minutes to hours, doing computer activities or even conducting small business meetings.

### Discussion of Space

Throughout the observation, it became apparent that store layout and use of space is an important element of the routine's performance, in essence functioning as a "stage." The general areas were: a front entry and self-service area with multiple point-of-sale (POS) kiosks and wall displays, a general seating area with tables, chairs and music, a client "stage area" in front of a work counter, various "back-stage" areas for product prep, cash-taking, storage, taking breaks and other worker activities.

When a client enters the store, there's an implied obligation to purchase a product; in effect the stage is already set for a performance. Even those seeking only a restroom will probably feel the need to buy at least a token product. Often, clients will avoid the area immediately in front of the counter until they have composed themselves and have their food order in mind. In this preparatory stage, customers often mill around in the "neutral zone" formed by the entrance area, and may choose products from the POS displays (this area is analogous to a theatre's 'green room' or makeup room). Clerks implicitly understand that clients who have not entered the "stage" area should be completely ignored.

A client presents themselves to be serviced shortly after entering the "stage" zone, typically prepared with a "speech" designed for the clerk. This step is when a client now becomes "on-stage." Depending on their pre-coffee mental state, even the expected greeting may confound some clients

by momentarily disrupting the delivery of their spiel.

Despite the interview comments about “community resource,” it appeared to me that the client seating area is seen as space for paying customers. Each client had a favorite beverage and often a pastry on their desk—not just as sustenance, but rather as a token of fair use. It would be hard to imagine a community group sweeping in and commandeering this valuable commercial space.

The ‘back-stage’ areas (where food is stored and clerks may lounge) are hidden from the view of clients, similar to a theatre. What small elements can be seen are in relative disarray and are sparsely decorated—if at all.

One other space—the drive-thru window—employs a truncated version of the general routine. A clerk takes a drive-thru order when a vehicle arrives at the outdoor electronic terminal. Both clerks and clients use a compressed—even staccato—language style. Even so, clerks continue to “take ownership” at the order stage and again at the delivery stage by carefully enumerating products.

## Analysis

During the observation, I discovered that the coffee-shop routine is in fact a finely tuned performance with subtle but important variations from one client to the next. Even the variations are adjusted to give each client the impression of being treated in a unique and individualized manner. As I later discovered in my interview, the performance is strongly scrutinized and graded by fellow staff members; there is almost nothing accidental or casual about it.

The following are some examples of interaction between clerk and client, pointing out some interactional work being done which exceeds simple rote or routine. The first example is a creative opening between clerk and client:

*[Male client ambles hesitatingly toward counter, followed by a female clerk attempting to make eye contact]*

Female clerk: “Can I help you with anything, honey? You look confused and I want to help.”

*[Followed by a brief discussion of tea varieties, the client then orders a cappuccino which the clerk described grandly as “thick and slushy”]*

The clerk conveys attention, interest, and humor through the usage of a formal greeting, a term of endearment to a stranger, and the seizing on a bit of awkward behavior. In another light, the phrase “you look confused...” could be considered as a type 2 “fishing device,” which is meant to elicit

direct information about the client's needs (Pomerantz, 1980, p.188).

Intonation and inflection, or the “prosody” of the discourse, are difficult to convey here, but they are crucial components of the delivery. They are often used to customize the performance for different clients. Here, for example, a clerk takes a simple order from two men:

Female clerk: “Hi guys—how’re you doing?”

One client: “Great.” (Neither progress to order placement or chat)

Clerk: “What can we get you today?”

Client: “...a couple of frappes.”

Clerk: “Frappes—that’s a *good plan!*”

*[Clients smile]*

Clearly the clients did not seek approval for their order. The clerk affirmed the clients rather than the drinks when putting special and unexpected emphasis on the choice. Again, an element of humor or at least melodrama was subtly injected. This can also be seen as a compliment to the clients, met with a non-verbal response of acceptance (Pomerantz, 1978).

Another greeting, which bypassed any engaged small talk:

*[Female client approaches counter directly]*

*[Female clerk makes direct eye contact]*

Clerk: “How ya doin’ ma-m?”

*[Client gives a side-look]*

Client: “Good, thanks (0.2) may I have an iced drink?”

Clerk: “Yes you *can!*”

*[Clerk smiles and makes drink, then delivers it while making eye contact]*

Clerk: “Have a great one.”

*[Clerk smiles]*

Client: “You too” (in a cheerful tone)

By opening with an offhand, informal greeting and following a direct, almost terse order request with a dramatic affirmation, the clerk converted a dour business moment into something more playful and energetic. This client came in with a frown and left with a smile.

*[Clerk makes eye contact]*

Clerk: “How ya doin’ ma-m?”

*[Client does not reply; looks back briefly, then away at pastry case]*

Client: “Do you have any particular pastry?”

Clerk: “I believe we *do*.”

*[Clerk gets pastry from case]*

Clerk: “Last one—*lucky* girl!”

*[A chat follows about how fast the client’s choice of pastry sold out today—except for this solitary piece]*

Here, the clerk converted an anticipated disappointment into a special event for the (lucky) client while opening an avenue for chat.

Another interaction between a clerk and two male clients was unremarkable, except for a longer than usual prep stage:

Female clerk: “Thank you for your patience.”

*[Clerk does a little dance/wiggle]*

Clerk: “That’s all I can do!”

*[Waits for the blending machine to complete the drink]*

This was truly an entr’acte performance—almost a flirtation—and was met with broad smiles from the clients.

In general, male and female clients appeared to have reversed affective profiles: women would often engage in chat spontaneously after greeting the clerk as an expected preamble to conducting business. However, they left quickly after receiving their order. Men were often direct and even brusque with the ordering process, sometimes with little or no greeting. But during and after the prep stage, they seemed willing to stay and engage in banter (“business first, pleasure later”).

## Conclusion

Routines are in many ways the mundane “stuff of life,” functioning as the way in which people organize their ordinary experience and get essential tasks done. Each routine is at once an outline and recipe for performance that is meant to simplify—to impose a primer for order out of chaos. They are our daily marching orders.

But the ‘coffee routine’ does far more than fill someone’s cup. While providing a venue with its integral stage for interaction, Starbucks expands this simple recipe to help satisfy the yearning we all have for community, destination, entertainment, and for affirmation. Due to the degree they elevate the ordinary into the transformative, Starbucks garners the chance to charge far more for a cup of coffee than any rational assessment of value would support.

This paper was written as an assignment for CMN 572 taught by Professor Mardi Kidwell.

## Appendix A

### Starbucks Mission

*Our mission: to inspire and nurture the human spirit – one person, one cup and one neighborhood at a time.*

### Starbucks Barista Creed

I am proud and privileged to be a Starbucks partner.

1. I create a personal connection by smiling, using customers' names and sincerely thanking them.
2. I am considerate by acknowledging any customer within 10 feet.
3. I am proud of my professional appearance and adhere to Starbucks dress code at all times.
4. I am knowledgeable of my store's goals and sample actively to achieve them.
5. I own and immediately resolve customer problems.
6. I understand and uphold the Starbucks Mission in everything I do.
7. I am involved in the planning and problem solving of the work that affects me.
8. I serve my fellow partners and foster teamwork to the advantage of my customer's experience.
9. I share my knowledge, passion and excitement of coffee with partners and customers through regular tastings. My enthusiasm is contagious.
10. I am responsible for uncompromising levels of cleanliness and creating a safe and accident-free environment.
11. I hand craft each beverage to standard and customize to meet my customers needs. I honor our promise of quality.

I AM World Class!!

## References

- Goffman, E (1963) Behavior in Public Places, the Free Press
- Pomerantz, A (1978) Compliment Responses: notes on the co-operation of multiple constraints (Studies in the Organization of Conversational Interaction, Chapter 3), Academic Press
- Pomerantz, A (1980) Telling My Side: "Limited Access" as a 'Fishing Device", Sociological Inquiry (vol. 50, Chapter 3, pp.186-198)
- Schegloff, E. (1968) Sequencing in Conversational Openings, American Anthropologist
- Schegloff, E. (1972) Notes on a Conversational Practice: Formulating Place [Studies in Social Interaction] The Free Press
- Schegloff, E. (1986) The routine as achievement [Human Studies 9], Martinus Nijhoff Publishers



# Perceiving Educational Implications in Video Game Design

Kelsey Loveday

In contemporary society, media technologies have a prevailing influence on daily life. Society's high investment in technology is determined by the mutual influence that media and culture bestow on one another. However, contrasting speculations regarding these interactions between media technologies have been proposed both with negative and positive implications. Media articulations are designated by the cultural and personal values that encompass the interpretations that form these notions. Incorporating constructive notions from four scholarly articles within the field of communication, I argue that traditional video gaming theories should be re-analyzed, shifting focus away from the video content and towards the actual gaming experience. In compliance to this alternative approach, I illustrate the ways in which the meanings constructed by and in this medium can only be understood by acknowledging the cultural and virtual context in which it exists. Through this alternative examination, I argue that the potential benefits of game-play can be utilized by appropriating game design mechanics into educational settings. The implementation of video games in educational settings allows for a more enriching learning process.

Using a wide frame of reference in regards to media studies in "Cultural Framing of Computer/Video Games," Kurt Squire examines video games within the realm of media technology history. Paralleling the proposals of communication scholars Marita Sturken and Douglas Thomas, Squire feels that situating new media within the history of all media technologies allows for a more comprehensive understanding of a particular medium, as well as the surrounding discourse (Sturken & Thomas 5). Due to their novel cultural status, video games have been a subject of acute attention in society, entailing both anxiety and fascination. Taking into account the historical patterns between media and society, Squire asserts that this hyperbolic reaction is similar to the inception of other technological innovations (Squire, *Cultural Framing* 1). Accounting for the historical aspects of media discourse, Squire recognizes such societal concerns as reoccurring issues despite dominant discourse

assumptions that present video gaming to be a new and unique threat (Sturken & Thomas 5). Exemplifying the persuasive nature of language in representing new technologies, Sturken and Thomas proclaim that, “[t]his rhetoric is not simply a means to characterize new technology, rather it serves both to define new technologies and to construct them (7)”. Furthermore, dominant discourse often prevents the utilization of other ways of approaching and thinking about video games. Undertaking a more expansive perspective can rid the discursive constraints of the technologies’ potential role and functions and allow video games to be comprehended within their own context in order to determine their implications.

The comprehension of the historical and cultural context of video games can be understood as a social practice. As a social practice, Squire asserts that game-play may be characterized as an activity involving skills, resources, and tools which are generated by personal and cultural purposes (Squire, *Cultural Framing* 8). Media connotations are thus determined values and beliefs relevant to the cultural, rather than the objective, implications. Adopting a more extensive perspective prompts an enlightening recognition of the ways in which interpretations and behavior are better understood when located in their socio-cultural contexts. The positioning of video gaming within its own context encourages alternative perceptions that may have been overlooked initially or constrained by cultural rhetoric. New considerations of the perception of video games may reveal potential benefits of the utilization of this type of electronic technology.

Squire continues to critically examine traditional media studies in “From Content to Context and Cultural Framing of Computer/Video Games,” proposing that most often they reiterate adverse responses to the medium despite the lack of any real world evidence linking human behavior to gaming (2). Squire asserts that a majority of research has been grounded from the historical tradition that focuses on media effects. Henry Jenkins offers another critique of traditional video game theories, noting that media effect paradigms assume that players invest almost no conscious cognitive activity. Instead, he suggests that players are passive recipients to the perceived messages. Through the examination of actual experiences in game playing, users can be viewed alternatively as being consciously engaged and actively participating in the process of interpretation and meaning making. Acknowledging player agency is a defining feature in video games, recognizing a gamers’ competency and responsibility in shaping their own situations. Through the course of action they choose, users respond and construct their own experiences based on the meanings assembled in these circumstances (Jenkins, *Effects and Meaning*). Complementing this notion, Joshua Meyrowitz affirms that



media technology studies are frequently concerned with media messages, resting on traditional assumptions that media inject notions into people, thus fostering supposed effects on users' behavior (Meyrowitz 14). As a result of the development of the effects philosophy, the vast amount of media studies integrate problematic conceptualizations that disregard actual experiences into constructing assumptions regarding video gaming (Squire, *Content to Context* 10). Predominately recognized in communication analyses, past media critiques have focused on the medium's content, including surface features and representations within a game (Squire, *Cultural Framing* 21). Comparable to other popular conceptions of new media, these virtual worlds are often regarded as mere channels for transmitting information between environments, although it may be more constructive to understand video games as an environment in themselves (Meyrowitz 16). The view of the inception of video games as having the ability to foster a new social environment and encompass definitions, beliefs, and behaviors can also be considered a new type of view. Therefore, these new patterns and situations cannot be constructively compared to previous environments because they are comprised of different meanings.

Prevailing research tends to remove the game experience and players' behavior from personal and cultural contexts, changing the meanings constructed in its relative framework. Recognizing player agency is a central feature to the medium, comprehending the meanings of games may be only productive by understanding players' experiences which are mediated through this technology. This includes the way in which they inhabit these social spaces and what they do with them (Squire, *Framing Culture* 21). Following McLuhan's notions that the medium is the message, game-play situations cannot be removed and examined outside of their context without changing the interpretive meaning. Therefore, studying the medium itself is more productive, as opposed to examining the content (McLuhan 1). Furthermore, research and theory should shift focus towards the specific context and experiences that occur within the medium. Research should also focus on the player-constructed meanings so that video games' meanings are understood within the particular context.

Reevaluating approaches to video games can expose vast amounts of alternative potential that gaming practices may hold. The introduction of new media not only changes cultural and social environments, but also the ways in which people think and behave in these environments (Meyrowitz 33). Examining new ways in which the role of technology changes social contexts will liberate perceptions instated by discursive limitations, thus fostering the ability to locate new alternative assessments that may be beneficial. Squire notes that many of today's youth spend more

time immersed in gaming worlds than they do reading, watching movies, or watching television (Squire, *Content to Context* 19). As a result, this influential new medium is often where children first experience academic subjects, such as history, urban planning, and business, instead of through school, television, or movies (Squire, *Content to Context* 25). Coinciding with survey studies, Squire asserts that these game-play practices are changing attitudes of the current generations towards work and learning (Squire, *Content to Context* 19). Jenkins proposes that children are bringing their experiences from game playing into the classroom and therefore recognition of these changes constructively enriches educational practices. As video games have developed and increased in complexity, greater immersive interactivity has been introduced through innovative features which have been included into their designs.

Educational institutions have suffered from a cultural lag, failing to align teaching designs with the outside culture through which students are submersed. Electronic media create new social environments, reshaping behavior and social conceptions that should be utilized in education. The potential of these new situations may be hindered by traditional thinking, such as social anxiety towards change (Meyrowitz 15). Squire stresses that video games hold potential to influentially communicate powerful ideas, as well as open new areas of identity for learners that may be more suitable to their learning ability (Squire, *Content to Context* 19). Video games are a significant practice in which digital natives of the current generation are immersed and accordingly have altered their comprehension styles. Gamers have renovated their learning approaches to correspond with video game designs with the intentions of being successful. Within these designed experiences, gamers must learn through interactive participation with the game itself. In contrast, participants do not learn as mere passive recipients of facts and procedures, but instead actively acquire knowledge of how to exist in the world (Squire, *Content to Context* 22). Video games generate new social situations, facilitating new performances and coherent ways of thinking that must be accounted for (Squire, *Content to Context* 26). Recognizing this cultural shift, institutions such as business corporations, the military, and nonprofit organizations have utilized game-play learning paradigms to accommodate the new generation, in order to effectively express the institutions' ideologies. Nevertheless, educators have largely failed to address and respond to the current cultural context in their curriculums and utilize contemporary practices (Squire, *Content to Context* 20). Failure to adopt this new cultural paradigm in education will most likely lead to outdated teaching styles that are irrelevant to students' ways of thinking, knowing, and being in the world which have been molded

by gaming experiences (Squire, *Content to Context* 25). Thus, recognition of this transformation in contemporary society is vital. Educators should incorporate video gaming practice in academic approaches in order to most effectively engage students in the learning process

Adhering to a historical perspective, Michele Dickey, in “Engaged by Design,” exemplifies the ways in which educators have incessantly appropriated strategies and techniques devised by popular media in their curriculum designs. Similarly to Squire, Dickey stresses the ways in which learning structures need to incorporate not only the new cultural processes, but also utilize the current cultural values that underlie these designs so that educational goals are more personalized (Dickey 72). Recognizing the lack of educational research appreciative of video games, Dickey takes personal initiative to examine the game mechanisms that entice players. He asserts that video game popularity is due to the architectural purpose of engaging players (Dickey 71). Integrating these designed experiences in educational contexts can therefore have the potential to facilitate learning practices in which students can participate in meaningful activities. As a result, students can conceive a higher-level comprehension of a subject, its significance, and the concept’s relevance to personal context.

Dickey distinguishes the three influential elements that are most beneficial in integrating video games into educational settings. These include situating the person in the first person perspective, articulating a strong narrative, and providing an interactive environment (Dickey 69). Not only does this prompt a more beneficial learning atmosphere, but also utilizes skills of current cultural value. Employing game-playing practices with emphasis on these three most influential frameworks, students can have the opportunity to be active players in the learning process. These immersive environments allow learners to interact first-hand with the material, potentially leading to greater conceptual understanding by means of generating a connection between experiential learning and informational representation (Dickey 72). With the ability to personally interact with the content, students are motivated to focus on the designated goals or problems, with the capacity to construct their own unique narrative in which they determine their own course of action (Squire, *Content to Context* 78). Video games provide increasingly challenging tasks, requiring players to stretch their cognitive and social skills in order to be successful.

Students may acquire such critical thinking through experimentation and discovery. Players are then able to analyze content and synthesize connections with the concepts at hand (Dickey 70). Opportunities are opened for reflection of decisions that were made as active problem solvers constantly search for better solutions to challenges.

(Jenkins, *Ambushed on Donahue*). Interactive media players embody a moral responsibility through which they consciously make decisions of action. Students hold accountability for the choices they make and this responsibility allows them to construct their own representations of the world and the human condition in it (Manovich 62). This practice may be further facilitated by student affiliation and collaboration with one another in which they can ask questions and share ideas for a broader understanding. Through examination of specific gaming experiences, constructive practices within games may be revealed, thus legitimizing their use in academic settings.

In addition to the previously presented notions, “Transformational Play” by Sasha Barab et al, further articulates and advocates the discernment of a new pedagogy for contemporary society that is found in game-play. This educational paradigm characterizes the learning process as a transformational experience, integrating the student, content, and context to provide for a more meaningful application and conceptual understanding of knowledge (Barab, Gresalfi, & Ingram-Goble 535). Through these gaming environments, participants have the opportunity to take on the role of the protagonist in which they aim to change the conditions of the content to achieve the presented goals. This transforms not only the virtual world, but also the participants’ own capacity to use these acquisitions towards more complex issues they may face in the real world (Barab, Gresalfi, & Ingram-Goble 525). Through the development and application of an increasingly cultivated academic understanding, students may be encouraged to establish a comprehension of content that provides the ability to recognize its utility and meaningfulness in relation to personal and contextual connotations (Barab, Gresalfi, & Ingram-Goble 533). Providing a highly interactive, deeply immersive, and experientially consequential atmosphere, students are granted the ability to experience and reflect on their interpretations of educational concepts through the course of actions that they choose (Barab, Gresalfi, & Ingram-Goble 534). This transformational gaming process facilitates higher levels of thinking through engagement. Through this, students have the potential to learn how to apply the content and understand the nature of the concepts. Students will also have the capacity to consider the impact of their actions through consequences presented in the games and critically reflect on the effectiveness of particular courses of actions intended to accomplish the desired ends (Barab, Gresalfi, & Ingram-Goble 527). This educational design presented through video gaming recognizes the importance of assimilating the situational context, the academic content, and the student in the learning process in order to mediate a more complex and purposeful

understanding. Utilizing the analytical framework constituted in video gaming, academic content can be understood more meaningfully by means of coordinating social, cultural, and personal circumstances, which construe greater investment and more intricate connections to the material.

Challenging the cultural work that provides negative connotations to video games is beneficial in revealing alternative interpretations concerning the medium and game players. Using notions suggested by the previously presented scholarship, it is evident that traditional video game theories need to be reexamined in order to take into account the surrounding socio-cultural context, as well as the experiences constructed by the players themselves. Beneficial mechanisms generated in these situations will be able to be recognized when undertaking alternative approaches. In regards to education, the actively engaging pedagogy encompassed in video games offers notions that can be appropriated to educational curriculum designs for more relevant and effective learning practices.

This paper was written as an assignment for CMN 696 taught by Professor Michael Albrecht.

### Works Cited

- Barab, Sasha A., Melissa Gresalfi, and Adam Ingram-Goble. "Transformational Play: Using Games to Position Person, Content, and Context." *Educational Researcher* 39.7 (2010): 525-36.
- Dickey, Michele D. "Engaging by Design: How Engagement Strategies in Popular Computer and Video Games Can Inform Instructional Design." *Educational Technology Research and Development* 53.2 (2005): 67-83.
- Jenkins, Henry. "The War Between Effects And Meaning: Rethinking the Video Game Debate." *Comparative Media Studies*. Massachusetts Institute of Technology. <<http://web.mit.edu/cms/faculty/WarEffectMeaning.htm>>.
- Jenkins, By Henry. "Coming up Next: Ambushed on Donahue" *Salon*. 2002. <[http://www.salon.com/tech/feature/2002/08/20/jenkins\\_on\\_donahue/print.html](http://www.salon.com/tech/feature/2002/08/20/jenkins_on_donahue/print.html)>.
- Manovich, Lev. *The Language of New Media*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002.
- McLuhan, Marshall. *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994.
- Meyrowitz, Joshua. *No Sense of Place: The Impact of Electronic Media on Social Behavior*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.
- Squire, Kurt. "Cultural Framing of Computer/Video Games." *The International Journal of Computer Game Research* 2.1 (2002)
- Squire, Kurt. "From Content to Context: Videogames as Designed Experience." *Educational Researcher* 35.8 (2006): 19-29.
- Sturken, Marita and Douglas Thomas. "Introduction: Technological Visions and the Rhetoric of the New." *Technological Visions: The Hopes and Fears that Shape New Technologies*. Eds. Marita Sturken, Douglas Thomas, and Sandra J. Ball-Rokeach. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004.



# Sex and the City: Expanding the Feminist Toolbox

Natalija Ulemek

## Abstract

Third wave feminism has been at the center of debate for many feminists due to the media's misleading and simplistic definitions. In this paper I examine the television series *Sex and the City* and use the third wave feminist theory to explain the construction of female identity in the show. I break down the show by analyzing the significance of relationships, both friendly and romantic, and the dynamic female identities present in the show. I argue that this show is empowering and liberating as it differentiates itself from media's reifications of "white supremacist capitalist patriarchy" (Hooks, 2000), by addressing issues of gender roles, career and family balance, and dating and friendships.

## Introduction

*Sex and the City* is an Emmy award winning cable TV program that originally aired on HBO for six seasons from 1998 to 2004. This hit television series portrays the lives of four successful women living in New York City. The show is based on a book written by Candace Bushnell who writes about the chaotic and complicated life of dating for women in their thirties and forties. The protagonist and narrator of every episode, Carrie Bradshaw, is an employed columnist for the New York Star (a fictional newspaper) who writes weekly articles under the column *Sex and the City*, hence the name of the show. Carrie is best known for her obsession with designer shoes and always making unique fashion statements. The character of Miranda is what the general public would consider a feminist. She is a career-oriented Harvard Law School graduate who eventually becomes partner at her law firm and is the only character with a stereotypical feminist short hairstyle. Miranda's cynicism towards relationships is the essence of her character and her straight to the point analysis of dating makes her the voice of reason among the other characters. Samantha is a character who is reaping the benefits of third wave feminism as her actions demonstrate. Samantha is confident, promiscuous, and secure with her sexuality, as she is best known for her numerous sexual encounters and her lack of interest in

conventional relationships. She is employed by a successful public relations executive. She is the only character in her forties, making her the oldest of the four women. “Frequently offended by Samantha’s lustful views on sex, Charlotte, is by far the most sexually conservative of the group” (Brasfield, 2006). Charlotte works as an art dealer until deciding to end her career to become a mother and raise her child. She has the most traditional outlook out of the four women on relationships and struggles to find a spouse who will fit into her fairy tale love fantasy. *Sex and the City* represents dynamic views of contemporary women’s dilemmas in dating, sex, and love. It is through the exploration of third wave feminism and media literacy that *Sex and the City* can be studied as a stepping-stone for women creating a toolbox of female empowerment.

This study uses the framework of third-wave feminism to address the theme of relationships in the series *Sex and the City*. Furthermore, it addresses the urgency for media literacy, because media literacy and feminism have a symbiotic relationship in our media-saturated society. The majority of previous studies on *Sex and the City* have looked at the series as a vehicle of postfeminism. (See appendix for detailed list of previous research). This paper will evaluate how we consume and produce popular culture and will analyze whether such expectations are realistic.

## Literature Review

Feminism has a great history of transitions and growth, developing in three different waves. First wave feminists fought for women’s suffrage and worked for abolition, whereas second wave feminists were activists who worked for women’s rights during the 1960s and 1970s. The second wave feminists fought for women’s integration into the public sphere and class equality, “These women were the parents and original role models for many third wavers, who grew up believing- indeed, taking for granted- many of the notions second wavers preached” (McKinely, 2005). Second wave feminism had two schools of thought that focused on slightly different goals. Lotz (2003) best sums up their differences by stating:

Liberal feminists at this time generally focused on integrating women into the public sphere and actively sought legal equality with men. In the early years of second-wave U.S. feminism (1967-1973), radical feminists argued that women constituted a sex-class and believed relations between women and men, rather than class or ethnicity, provided the primary site of oppression in society... By the mid 1970s radical feminism became less revolutionary and developed into cultural feminism (Bryson,



1992).

Second wave feminism is best understood with an emphasis on chronology because it encompasses all the feminist perspective from the World War II era through the mid 1980s. Among other things that second wave feminists found worthy of attention are the misconstrued concepts of body image and the notion that a woman needs a man to feel complete.

Third wave feminism is the final development in the movement considered for this study. “Third wave feminism opens a fascinating world of pastiche and contradiction. Indeed, it seems impossible to establish consensus on where the term comes from and how the movement started” (McKinley, 2006). Lotz (2003) argues that feminists are often misled by the popular media which makes simplistic interpretations and constructions of third-wave feminism. Mass media is the cause of confusion over this term because the general public becomes aware of feminism only when it is covered or appears in mass media outlets. Thus, interpretations of feminism tend to be overly simplistic and often categorize feminists as a monolithic entity. Third wave feminism is not as much of a movement like the first and second wave, but more of a generational shift because many of the third wave feminists were too young to have experienced the second wave activism (Lotz, 2003).

*Reactionary third-wave feminists* are those who criticized second wave feminists but still identified themselves as feminists. Lotz describes reactionary third wave feminists as anti-feminists because this group “seeks to discredit and criticize feminism as a goal in itself, not in a manner that suggests a constructive criticism that could lead to innovation and growth” (Lotz, 2003). The members of this wave were particularly successful in drawing media attention to third wave feminism, however their efforts negatively impacted third wave feminism as a whole. This is because they presented contradictory messages and harshly scrutinized second wave feminism by stating that the only message it presented was women as victims. “The use of a very generalized understanding of second-wave feminism and representing second-wave feminists as being of one mind serves as a key tactic in composing their criticisms” (Lotz, 2003). Reactionary third wave feminists were responsible for instilling into people a stereotype of feminists as man-hating, humorless, fashion challenged, lesbian caricatures.

*Postfeminism* is another arena of third wave feminism. Although scholarship attempts to build on past knowledge to reinterpret or redefine this term it often fails due to the unstable trajectory of the theory on postfeminism:

Postfeminism provides a framework for emerging third-wave perspectives, which have wrongly been perceived as defined by generation or lifestyle attributes... postfeminism addresses complicated theoretical development such as post-structuralism, while also emphasizing the need to combat oppression caused by identity determinants that intersect with gender (Lotz, 2003).

Postfeminism is about a conceptual and theoretical shift in feminism that focuses on expanding the theoretical framework of what constitutes an identity. To postfeminists, the definition of identity is not limited to gender differentiation, rather the term identity encompasses factors such as sexual orientation, class, race, and economic injustice. The postfeminist theory is clearly portrayed in the series through its dynamic characters and their very diverse outlooks on marriage, family, and careers.

### Third wave feminism and new social movements

Third wave feminism differs from second wave-feminism on a key ideological issue. Whereas second wave feminism sought to unite diverse women into a universal sisterhood, third wave feminism recognized racist, heterosexual, and classist implications and pursued strategies that re-conceptualized activism as separate from the idea of united sisterhood. "Third wave feminism is best categorized as a new social movement, a distinction denoting a marked shift in the theory and practice of social movements in the later twentieth century, postindustrial society" (Touraine, 1971). New social movements differ from those in the past in three ways. First, they de-emphasize class-based allegations. Second, they are fragmented rather than centralized and third, they emphasize cultural concerns such as power of language and media as a tool of oppression (Lotz, 2003). Emphasizing a singular agenda is not innovation, but regression. Third wave feminists do not undermine collectivity as they still rely on collective action to conjure change; however, they realize that it is unrealistic that everyone agrees on all issues. This construction allows feminism to be inclusive and at the same time address more problems across the social sphere and thus remain viable in diverse social contexts.

### **Media Literacy**

Media literacy is the ability to make sense of, experience, interpret, and analyze media messages that inform and entertain us every day.<sup>1</sup> The traditional definition of literacy was the ability to decode, understand and communicate in print. This definition has expanded to not only pertain to print, but also to encompass all visual and audio media as well. This

approach is useful in studying *Sex and the City* as it will help make clear the distinctions between latent<sup>2</sup> and manifest<sup>3</sup> content. When viewers engage in media consumption they are simultaneously consuming and producing messages conveyed to them, “Thus, we have theoretical convergence around the notion of contradiction” and “seeing the show as a mirror of reality and understanding the artificial underpinnings of its production” (McKinely, 2006). The incorporation of media literacy is crucial for people to become aware of the messages media presents because only when you recognize that there are manipulations do you address them. The media does a great job at oversimplifying complicated issues and dividing the world into “us and them” (Wilson, 2002).

In the analysis of the series, I will tie together third wave feminism and media literacy creating a new curricula that acknowledges the importance of recognizing and thinking about issues, not just consuming for entertainment purposes. The medium of TV has both the contradictory power to use and be used. Television provides the opportunity to react and to act.

## Method

Since this paper attempts to interpret *Sex and the City* as the labor of third wave feminism, I attempt to answer the topics listed below with a content analysis. My material consists of the first four episodes in seasons four, five, and six. This paper was rather a quantitative analysis than a fully detailed critical analysis on the show. The following topics are addressed and my findings are supported with textual excerpts from the episodes;

- 1) Sex and Female empowerment
- 2) Homosexual sex and female empowerment
- 3) Friendship

The following are three basic arguments of the third wave feminism that will be tackled with the topics listed above.

First, third wave feminists criticize the second wave feminists for instilling ‘victim feminism,’ the notion that women are sexually pure and mystically nurturing and hate ‘evil men.’ Second, third wave feminists dispute the notion of ‘sisterhood’ arguing that there are distinct divisions between race, culture, and class. There is no such thing as monolithic feminism, where everyone thinks, acts, and dresses alike. Third wave feminism is comfortable with contradiction, because we are all different. Lastly, third wave feminists focus on the power of media and its maintenance of oppression. These three arguments are used to explore to

the topics listed above.

### **Sex and Female empowerment**

*Sex and the City* gained widespread attention due to its frank discussions and explicit depictions of female sexuality. The show challenged the common cultural belief of what constitutes ‘appropriate’ when dealing with female sexual desires and behaviors:

For postfeminists like Carrie and her friends, gender differences, such as wanting to look sexy and flirt, are playful, stylistic, and unrelated to the operations of social power and authority. Women, if they chose, can work, talk, and have sex “like men” while still maintaining all the privileges associated with being an attractive woman (Gerhard, 2005).

A significant part of pleasure comes from talking about these desires and behaviors with one another. This, perhaps, is the biggest reason why the show was such a success. The main characters frequently gather together for meals or cocktails in trendy Manhattan locations where they engage in loud and candid discussions about recent sexual experiences:

Miranda: We slept together after our run.

Samantha: Did he live up to his nickname?

Miranda: Yeah it was good, except he (pause) kinda (pause) licked my butt. (All the women drop their utensils and look up)

Samantha: Be specific.

Carrie: Wait a minute, are we talking, tuckus lingus?

Miranda: I’m afraid so, and I thought it was weird. It’s weird right? Are we doing this now?

Miranda makes a confession and awaits advice or consolidation from the group, “The women’s explicit sex talk is a form of feminine discourse, a means of expression in which women acknowledge their lesser status within patriarchal society” (Brown 1994). In this space women can talk freely, where listeners validate their perceptions and everyone’s opinion is heard. By acknowledging their position in relation to the dominant cultural structure- where only men can have un-marital sex- the women gain strength from knowing that others understand that position. The women create their own space where they can freely discuss the subject of sex without judgment. This ‘free judgment zone’ is empowering because they know that others share that same point of view:

Carrie: Last night with Ray (giggles) I had the most intense orgasm of my entire life.

Miranda: I did my laundry. Continue.

Carrie: Doesn't make any sense, we've only been on two dates. . . I don't know about you guys, but I usually have to be in love for that to happen.

This statement makes gender a meaningful category because it supports the cultural and social assumption that women must be in love to have sex. "Second wave feminism established and validated women's desire for sexual pleasure beyond the confines of a monogamous heterosexual relationship" (Markle, 2008). The women openly discuss their physically intimate experiences as they struggle to still maintain meaningful relationships with men. "The desire to not only have sex without husbands, but good sex freed the burden of love, is a kind of sex that Carrie and her friends often state they want" (Gerhard, 2005). By speaking out against the cultural stereotypes, the women of *Sex and the City* undermine the media's oppression of women; that women do not have sex like men. Carrie is confronted with the contradicting desires of wanting true love and wanting a good lover, wanting independence and wanting a husband (Gerhard, 2005). This struggle with paradoxes is the best representation of third wave feminism, a result of a number of relatively unstable terms. The fact is that Carrie is not the first woman, nor the last, to battle with these opposing views of modern femininity.

### **Homosexual sex and Female empowerment**

Third wave feminism challenges the historical identification of heterosexuality as a distinctive gender by disputing the idea that heterosexuality is the only sexuality towards which all other forms of sexual desires are measured. *Sex and the City* blurs the boundary of heterosexuality as a monolithic sole identity when in the fourth season Samantha dates a woman named Maria. After their usual gathering over drinks Samantha leaves with her new girlfriend Maria and the others leave together. The following is their conversation:

Carrie: How does that work? You go to bed one night and wake up and POOF you're a lesbian?

Miranda: Oh poof I forgot to tell you I'm a fire hydrant.

Charlotte: I don't think she's a lesbian, I think she ran out of men.

Miranda: Then you go on strike! You don't eat pussy.

Carrie: EW! Did you just say eat pussy?

Miranda: I did, but just for emphasis.

Third wave feminists sought to combat the narrow minded and limited interpretations of love and relationships. The following responses are typical reactions that mimic our society's ignorance and lack of tolerance for homosexuality. Carrie, Miranda, and Charlotte attempt to understand or at least be supportive of Samantha's new relationship and over lunch ask her how everything is going:

Charlotte: So how is your relationship with Maria going?

Samantha: Well, did you know that when your vagina gets engorged it expands to the size of your fist! It's like a fabulous cave.

Charlotte: OK! Stop talking about your relationship.

Samantha: But it's fascinating. There are places a dick just can't go. . . .

Miranda: What's happening to you?

Samantha: I'm getting an education.

Disturbed and partially disgusted by Samantha's explicit and frank description of a vagina, the women, in this case, do not offer feedback or reassurance, they remain silent. Samantha and her friends stand as representations of third wave feminists and the general public, respectively. Samantha embodies a hopeful post revolution sensibility by exposing homosexuality, acting and talking as if it were not taboo. The simplistic notion that argues that only one type or sexuality can be correct and tolerated stems back to the media's simplification of complicated and diverse issues.

This example is evidence of why third wave feminists argued against a 'united sisterhood.' Not all women wanted to understand or be understanding of homosexuality and other non-conforming ideologies. Third wave feminists' argument for segmentation was a modern approach for inclusion because they recognized that life is complicated.

## Friendship

Immediately after tuning into the show, one quickly recognizes that these women are the most valued people in each others' lives, "And indeed, the show insists that these relationships are more lasting and trustworthy than those with men or potential husbands" (Gerhard, 2005). The women meet on a daily basis to discuss any trouble or concern they are having in their lives and regardless of the situation they are always supportive and emotionally available. In this example, Miranda, who is not a Catholic, is asked by her husband if it would be alright for their baby to be baptized. In the midst of her confusion about the baptism, she confronts Carrie and asks her to be the godmother. Carrie, who is also having difficulties

of her own, is struggling to write a book she was asked to assemble on the columns she writes, conveying a positive outlook on relationships despite all her failed attempts with them. She wonders if she actually believes in true love and is not sure what her outlook on love is. While both of their lives are in chaos Miranda confronts Carrie:

Carrie: Are you sure that I'm godmother material? Shouldn't you pick someone more maternal?

Miranda: No! I like that you're not.

Carrie: Here it is. This is such an awesome responsibility, but I don't know my own view on future. I think I'm possibly one bad day away from bitter. Don't you think I'm getting a little cynical?

Miranda: Not compared to me. Carrie you are my best friend . . . I don't know if I believe in any of this (referring to the baptism) but I believe in you. I want you to be my baby's godmother.

The bonds that they forge upon which they crucially rely provide the women with an endless stream of emotional support that men cannot give them. Even when Miranda confronts her husband about not being Catholic and not caring for baptism she can only truly release her frustrations and insecurities about the situation to Carrie. These two women rely on each other to pay attention to their worries, concerns, uncertainties, and troubles, "Ultimately, in function if not in name, they provide each other with an alternative family" (Gerhard, 2005). In this next example Charlotte is coping with her second divorce and Carrie is trying to get over a big breakup with her boyfriend, whose apartment she moved out of and is now looking for new place to stay. Charlotte places her wedding ring on the table and offers it to Carrie as a down-payment on her new apartment, that she is desperately seeking:

Charlotte: Will you take it?

Carrie: Are you sure? (takes a deep breath and reaches for her hand)

Charlotte admits that she liked the idea of the ring and what it represented and with that belief she was getting rid of her painful past and offering Carrie a new optimistic future. Instead of the boyfriend sitting across the table, it was Carrie her best friend., the 'proper' person for the ring. Charlotte knows regardless of what will or has happened, Carrie will always be there - just like the ring's symbol of eternity, Carrie will always be there for Charlotte and vice versa.

Even though the *Sex and the City* series has ended, it continues to

be an artifact worthy of study. “What made *Sex and the City* different was that it regularly suggested that this family of four could be enough to make up a life, a life still worth living without the husband and baby, a life led outside the historic feminine and feminist script” (Gerhard, 2005). While the show centers on the theme of relationships and often references men as suggested liberators of personal and sexual desires, it never fails to stress the importance of female friendships. Despite their differences and opposing view on relationships and life, the women are united through the core of friendship. Just as third wave feminists suggested, we are all different, but when united are resilient.

### Delimitations

The media has previously encouraged feminist consciousness, but has recently generated a profound anti-feminist message to ward off the powerful women who threaten their authority. Some critics argue that *Sex and the City* has reinforced the patriarchy. “Women get too powerful; men, via, the hegemonic force of media, launch campaigns to convince women of feminism’s failure, represented in backlash as day care crises, a corporate glass ceiling, the difficulty of finding men, and other false issues drummed up by ‘the man’ to keep women down” (Gerhard, 2005). One of the weaknesses of this paper is the lack of focus on media and their contribution to the social changes. Since this paper is a content study on relationships it barely mentions the impact on viewers and their responses to the show. Media is responsible for reproducing oppression and marginalizing those who do not fit the patriarchal capitalist ideology. These findings would have been stronger if I further discussed cultural studies in relation to media literacy.

Brasfield (2007) views *Sex and the City* as hegemonic feminist narrative and a social stratification in which many groups are marginalized and subjugated. She argues that *Sex and the City* contributes to “white supremacist capitalist patriarchy.” Although *Sex and the City* portrays unrealistic representations of opportunity and class, it makes up for it in the content and relevance of issues discussed. The limitations for this paper are also in the absence of socio-economic references and whether the character’s economic statuses were realistic. The socio-economic status of these women was in the upper-middle class, and largely reflected white middle-class strata.

For this paper, I purposely chose to leave out the issue of classism because it added to the entertainment value of the show. This is a false portrayal of reality due to the setting being cliché. The exaggeration of wealth, clearly unattainable through their professions, adds to the viewing



pleasure and relaxation. Despite arguments against the show and that it reproduces patriarchal hegemony, I argue that the content of the show is unorthodox, daring, and blunt. It frankly discusses the issues women and other oppressed groups deal with on a daily basis. It brings living room discussions about gender issues, relationships, sexuality into the public realm where people are forced to address them, or at least recognize them.

## Conclusion

The efforts of second and third wave feminism have made it possible for the media to allow sexually explicit discourse and feminist content in *Sex and the City*. This welcome innovation in women's representation on TV had also helped validate female friendships and the corresponding culture. *Sex and the City* was an innovative series that helped leverage women's ability to express sexual desires, homosexual relationships, and female friendships. The unorthodox views on marriage, sex, relationships, and gender roles have helped create new opportunities for women on TV.

The content analysis of the sampled episodes in seasons four, five, and six reaffirm third wave feminist rhetoric on a fragmented sisterhood that regardless of its opposing views, unites together to make changes on more than one front. The open discussions about homoerotic relationships and insecurities and doubts about marriage as a solution to eternal happiness challenge the hegemonic view of womanhood. Furthermore, the brash humor of the series helps ease the tension of the controversial subjects discussed. It is the ability to see ourselves in these characters works to confirm our sense of self and it is this ability that *Sex and the City* is able to capture the essence of modern women.

This paper was written as an assignment for CMN 758: Media Analysis and Criticism taught by Professor Joshua Meyrowitz

## Appendix

Previous studies I read and found relevant to my topic:

- 1) Carrie Bradshaw's queer postfeminism: discusses the recent trend in popular culture between postfeminism and queerness.
- 2) Role Model and The city: Viewer responses of the show and how it reflects American society today
- 3) Sex and the City: Hegemonic Feminist Narrative. Talks about Sex and the city as vehicle that reinforces patriarchal, white male, capitalist society.

- 4) Sex and the city and the consumer culture: this article show how the success of Sex and the City helped shape programs in the digital, multichannel era of television that allow for innovation in its sexualized mode of address.
- 5) “Can Women Have Sex Like a Man?: Sexual Scripts in Sex and the City”: Focuses more on interpersonal aspects, such as constructing gender through speech and action.

### Footnotes

- <sup>1</sup> [http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/teachers/media\\_literacy/what\\_is\\_media\\_literacy.cfm](http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/teachers/media_literacy/what_is_media_literacy.cfm)
- <sup>2</sup> The underlying message or framework
- <sup>3</sup> The obvious content, what is directly presented and stated

### Works Cited

- Brasfield, Rebecca (2006). Rereading Sex and the City: Exposing the Hegemonic Feminist Narrative. *Journal of popular film and televisions*. 34(3) :130-139
- Brown, M. E. (1994). Conclusion: Consumption and resistance—the problem of pleasure. In M.E. Brown(Ed.), *Television and women’s culture: The politics of the popular* (pp. 201–210). Thousand Oaks,CA: Sage.
- Bryson, V. (1992). *Feminist political theory: An introductions*. New York: Paragon house.
- Gerhard, Jane. (2005). Sex and the city: Carrie Bradshaw’s queer postfeminism. *Feminist Media Studies* 5(1): 37-50
- Lotz, D. Amanda. (2003). Communicating Third-Wave Feminism and New Social Movements: Challenges for the Next Century of Feminist Endeavor. *Women and Language* 26(1): 1-9
- Markle, Gail. (2008). “Can women have sex like a man?”: Sexual scripts in sex and the city. *Sexuality and culture* 12(1): 45-57
- McKinely, E. (2005). Waves of Feminist Identity: Viewing “Dawson’s Creek” and “Beverly Hills, 90210?”. *International Communication Association*. New York. Pg 1-27
- Shugart, H.A., Waggoner, C.E., & O’Brien Hallstein, D.L. (2001). Mediating third-wave feminism: Appropriation as postmodern media practice. *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 18(2) :194-210
- Short, K. (1994). Coming to the table: The differential politics of This bridge called my back. *Genders* 20: 3-44
- Touraine, A. (1971). *The post industrial society, tomorrow’s social history: Classes, conflicts and culture in the programmed society*. New York: Random House
- Zoonen, E.A. van (1992). The women’s movement and the media: Constructing a public identity. *European Journal of Communication*, 7: 453-476
- Wilson, J. (1995). Review of new social movements: From ideology to identity. *Social Forces* 73(4): 1633-1636



# Restoration for Former Child Soldiers in Uganda

Laura Yegge

This past summer I went on a Global Project Internship to Africa and worked with a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) in northern Uganda. I sat at the feet of those who are presently suffering from AIDS, poverty, and disease, as well as children who are faced with the tragedies of war. I went not only to serve the poor, but to discover and see firsthand the oppression and poverty caused by a 23-year-old war to apply my education and major to promote change within our generation and to be able to integrate this change back on my college campus and within my sphere of influence. In order to help child soldiers cope with their tragic experiences and haunting pasts, therapists work with the children using mostly traditional psychotherapy techniques. During my personal experiences in Uganda, I was able to apply my background in communication studies to analyze and compare two different approaches towards psychotherapy. Having worked with the child soldiers in Uganda, it is evident that the social constructionist approach was a more productive method of psychotherapy compared to the traditional cognitive-behavioral approach.

I spent about a month working with former child soldiers in Lukodi, a village in northern Uganda. On the night of May 19, 2004, this village was surrounded and attacked by a rebel group called the Lord's Resistance Army. This was the bloodiest single day massacre of the 23-year war. Since 1986, the war between the Ugandan government and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) has wrought havoc on northern Uganda. The conflict originally arose following an attempt by the LRA to overthrow the government in the capital city of Kampala. For over two decades, the LRA, under the command of Joseph Kony, has abducted over sixty thousand children throughout northern Uganda. Following their abduction, children are forced to be mules, foot soldiers, and sex slaves for Kony's cult-like group.

All the girls at the NGO I worked with are former child soldiers between the ages of 14 and 19. Building relationships with them was an incredible experience. They were captured by the LRA at a young age and escaped, but could not return to their home village because they were seen

as rebels and/or their families were killed in the massacre. Not only are they struggling with growing up and maturing, but they also have to take care of their own children, which constantly reminds them of their horrible past. These girls not only experienced war, but also rape and sexual violence.

I learned a lot about communication in the month that I spent with these girls and by observing the rehabilitation process that they were going through. I noticed that the girls were often arguing instead of attempting to build relationships with one another in order help each other get through hard times. The therapy they were receiving to treat their posttraumatic stress disorder seemed like a very traditional practice in which the therapist relates to the patient as an individual. Learning about the social constructionist approach of relating in my communication studies, I asked if I could work with the girls and their counselor on some therapy techniques.

I had the opportunity to work with the girls, teaching them how to help each other and make the process easier by sharing and listening to one another in order to create friendships. However, they had been so brainwashed by the LRA that it was difficult for them initially to truly listen and care about someone else's experience when they have gone through so much themselves. I explained the dialogic view of listening to the counselor as a joint activity that involves constructing meaning together as co-narrators. She seemed to understand this idea and we noticed that the girls were having a lot more fun together and looked forward to their counseling visits as time went on. It was incredible to see the progress they made over time. By the end of the month, you could see relationships forming and girls inviting each other to join in their dancing and singing or to help them with cooking dinner. Although the fighting did not completely stop, they seemed to resolve their conflicts through words and communication instead of physical fighting.

Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is defined as "a serious psychological condition that occurs as a result of experiencing a traumatic event" (Foa, Keane & Friedman, 2000, p. 1). Following a traumatic experience, children may develop a variety of PTSD symptoms such as rage, excessive aggression, depression, numbing, panic attacks, distrust, high-risk behavior, sexual behavior, flashbacks, sleeping problems, suicide, and eating disorders. "Among former child soldiers in northern Uganda, 97 percent of a sample of children who had volunteered to participate in a study showed PTSD symptoms" (Wessells, 2006, p. 132). Since posttraumatic stress disorder entered the psychiatric realm, many types of therapies have been developed to treat it.

Play therapy, psychological debriefing, psychoeducation, cognitive-

behavioral techniques, psychoanalytic/psychodynamic approaches, eye movement desensitization and reprocessing, and medication have all been used to treat PTSD. The most common type of therapy that has been used is the cognitive-behavioral technique. This type of therapy is based on individual needs that are determined by a detailed personal assessment (Follette & Ruzek, 2006). This is the typical western approach to therapy, which includes a therapist, who has control, telling the patient how to cope with their problem.

When I first arrived at the organization in Uganda, I noticed the usage of cognitive-behavioral techniques. I believe this may be the first step in getting a the patient comfortable with sharing his or her experiences with someone, but is definitely not the only step in PTSD treatment. In family therapy, there will often be individual sessions with the child and then with the parents separately. But it is not until the joint parent-child sessions occur that the problem is usually solved, because then it becomes relational and they can communicate about their problems and create solutions together. The type of therapy used to treat patients suffering from PTSD is drawn heavily from the practices and styles used in traditional psychotherapy. Therapy offered for those suffering from PTSD usually takes place once or twice a week held in private sessions. The main goal of the therapist is to aid the trauma survivor in gaining the ability to effectively self-help and self-control (Coffey, 1998 ). I disagree with some of these ideas because this is a very individualized approach to therapy, which is less effective than the social constructionist approach.

Through a metatheoretical analysis of these common types of therapy, one will find that the unit of observation is micro and individual because it is focused on one specific individual's accounts. It seems as if the therapist is trying to persuade and seek to control the response of the patient, which is why the control metaphor fits this approach. Bochner, Cissna, and Garko (1991) say, "the explanation for what is going on between self and other [in the control metaphor] is presumed to be dependent on what is going on inside or under the skin of the individual communicators" (p. 23).

A second, dissimilar approach to psychotherapy is the social constructionist approach, which supports the idea that "no one can do anything to anybody" (Fruggeri, 1992, p. 41). This is the exact the opposite of the therapist-patient encounter of the typical therapy approaches, in which the therapist bases his or her actions upon the control metaphor. The social constructionist approach to therapy suggests that the therapies are not considered abstracted, but rather act as socially constructed realities. The constructed realities that each of us must cope with every day are not

ideas, they are created during communication processes (Fruggeri, 1992). This concept differs from most therapy techniques because the therapist becomes part of the interaction as a co-creator with the patient in the process of change.

From this relational view, a “therapist’s power and responsibility becomes redefined. They are freed from the notion of unilateral control and are instead placed in the dynamic of the systemic co-construction” (Fruggeri, 1992, p. 47). In this case, the therapist is seen as a participant in the construction of the reality, which differs from the reality that the patient has constructed from their past trauma. “We shape the world in which we live by creating our own ‘reality’ within a context of a community of others”(Lax, 1992, p. 71). The patient therefore needs a therapist and/or community around them to communicate with in order to create a new reality in which they can continue with their life and stop dwelling on the past.

The social constructionist approach differs from typical therapy methods in that it is a shift in understanding from the individual patient to the interaction between the therapist and patient, creating a co-construction of understanding. Patients unveil the story of their past to the therapist who then becomes a co-author with the patient of the story unfolding. The act of co-creating a new narrative with clients, without imposing a new story into their minds, is part of a process of this type of therapy (Lax, 1992). If the therapist and patient are able to develop a new story together, the patient can then use it until a new insight arises.

When applying a metatheoretical analysis to the social constructionist approach, it is evident that the unit of observation is macro and relational because the pattern of talk between people is jointly produced, creating a shared reality. The coordination metaphor fits this approach to therapy because “both self and other must assume responsibility for the co-creative part each plays in managing the meanings of their relationship” (Bochner et al., 1991, p. 30). This relational approach differs greatly from typical therapy methods, which focus mostly on the individual. The social constructionist approach plays a significant role in therapy when helping former child soldiers dealing with PTSD.

The child soldiers’ suffering does not end when the fighting ends; their traumatic experiences will continue to haunt them for a long time. Child soldiers are often portrayed as being crippled by mental health issues or as killers who have no morals. The view of child soldiers as being scarred for life is overplayed and untrue for most former child soldiers. When a former child soldier is labeled with these issues, “they not only face a future in which change appears unlikely but may also become subject to invasive

psychiatric procedure” (Burr, 2003, pp. 6 & 18). The label of being damaged and dealing with trauma can impede their recovery process because they may step into the victim role and become passive and hopeless.

The social constructionist approach criticizes typical therapy practices “for adopting an implicit or explicit imperialism and colonialism in which western ways of seeing the world are automatically assumed to be the right ways, which it then attempts to impose on others” (Burr, 2003, p. 7). Child soldiers frequently show signs of trauma, so most countries have psychologists who provide them counseling and support. However, many analysts question the validity of the term “trauma” because of the westernized practices it encourages. One must look beyond the trauma idiom of western psychology and recognize the importance of local cultural understandings and the resilience of former child soldiers.

In most war zones, researchers use methods developed in western societies, not taking into account that these methods may not apply in countries such as Uganda. Western societies tend to view the idea of “the self” as an independent entity. “This view makes it natural to think of trauma as an individual affliction deriving from painful, uncontrollable memories, shattered beliefs, and neurological problems that happen inside one’s skull” (Wessells, 2006, pp. 187-188).

In contrast, many non-western societies view the self in collectivist terms, suggesting that the individual approach to trauma therapy is less important than the relational impacts of war and views healing as a social process of repairing relationships rather than an individual learning process. This type of healing focuses on building trust in others as well as instilling a sense of community within a culture (Wessells, 2006). By talking and being among peers, friends, and those who share in the same life experiences, child soldiers gain valuable emotional support. This emotional support reduces the pain associated with losses, killing, and other traumatizing experiences.

Ironically, it is hard for some child soldiers to escape the LRA when they have the opportunity because they do not want to leave their valuable support of friends within the armed group. Former child soldiers who do have the opportunity to escape and return home face many stresses when dealing with fear of revenge attacks, re-recruitment into the LRA, poverty, and inability to earn a living. Most children do not have a family to return to because many of their family members have died in the massacre.

Fearing the former child soldiers and remembering the bad things they had done to most of their own families, many people from their villages make reprisal attacks against the children. For many children, it is hard to talk about their painful experiences at first while they are still in a very vulnerable state. Some integration centers and NGOs reteach former

child soldiers songs and dances that most of them knew when they were young in order to reconnect them with the memories of their civilian childhood. A child must go through a reintegration process which “involves the growth of the whole person and a reconstruction of the child’s place and role in the social world” (Wessells, 2006, p. 182).

In many cultures, people express feelings through shared nonverbal means such as dancing and singing rather than the typical one-on-one therapist-patient counseling method used by most Western therapists. Many integration centers and NGOs also hold daily peer dialogues which helps children solve problems through expressing themselves while developing positive relationships with others (Wessells, 2006). These dialogues allow the former child soldiers to express feelings about the group situation and work out any disagreements through talk rather than through fighting.

I noticed many of these issues from my experience last summer working with the former female child soldiers at a NGO in northern Uganda. It is difficult for western-run organizations to enter into a new culture wanting to help people, but ultimately making matters worse. These organizations try to solve the problems the only way they know how: from a western perspective. From my education in communication, I recognized how lonely and hurt these girls were and how often they fought with one another instead of sharing experiences of their hardships together. This is where my idea of applying the social constructionist approach to PTSD therapy came about and although I was not able to stay long enough to see complete results, I did see a significant change in the girls’ attitudes toward one another. Watching them share in fun activities, dance, and laugh together was something I never imagined would happen after the first few days I spent there.



This paper was written as an assignment for CMN 602: Theories of Interpersonal Communication taught by Professor Jack Lannamann.

## References

- Bochner, A., Cissna, K., & Garko, M. (1991). Optional metaphors for studying interaction. In B. Montgomery & S. Duck (Eds.). *Studying interpersonal interaction* (pp. 16-34). New York, NY: Guilford.
- Burr, V. (2003). *Social constructionism*. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Coffey, R. (1998). *Unspeakable truths and happy endings: Human cruelty and the new trauma therapy*. Lutherville, MD: Sidran.
- Foa, E., Keane, T., & Friedman, M. (2000). *Effective treatments for PTSD: Practice guidelines from the International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies*. New York, NY: Guilford.
- Follette, V., & Ruzek, J. (2006). *Cognitive-behavioral therapies for trauma*. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). New York, NY: Guilford.
- Fruggeri, L. (1992). Therapeutic process as the social construction of change. In S. McNamee & K. Gergen (Eds.). *Therapy as social construction*. (pp. 40-53). London: SAGE.
- Lax, W. (1992). Postmodern thinking in a clinical practice. In S. McNamee & K. Gergen (Eds.). *Therapy as social construction*. (pp. 69-85). London: SAGE.
- Wessells, M. (2006). *Child soldiers: From violence to protection*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University.

# The American Beauty: Identification, Globalization, and the Miss America Pageant

Joanie Stolos

The Miss America pageant is not only a medium of entertainment, but a societal identification of the ideals of beauty. It took 22 years for an African American woman to be crowned with this nationally-recognized glory and the wait was no accident. Stuart Hall's *Modernity and its Futures* states the full affect that Globalization has had on our national identity. From the effects of technology, as well as growth in minority population, it is clear that the Miss America pageant is a symbolic contributor to the nationally constructed idea of beauty, which is a narrative that has been constructed since the birth of the nation. Hall's claim of national identity helps to explain the post-modern phenomenon of globalization, and how it can be identified in the concept of the Miss America pageant of ideal beauty.

Stuart Hall examines the question of cultural identity in late-modernity and suggests that globalization is causing an identity crisis. Hall first identifies how the Enlightenment form of identity positioned people as individuals in control of their own selves. The Enlightenment period focused on each individual's inner core (275). This concept implies that a person's personality and actions are not controlled by his or her environment, but instead are determined at birth.

The concept of identity has shifted over time reflecting the growing complexity of the modern world. It became aware that the individual was not self-sufficient. The sociological subject has previously relied more on the outside world and has suggested that the individual constructs a deeper sense of meaning through his or her environment. This theory suggests that a person can still remain an individual yet their individuality is created in relation to significant others while forming values, meanings, and symbols of his or her own. Finally, during the post-modern era Hall argues that there is no permanent identity, which makes finding an identity a struggle. The perception of self is formed from how people are represented in the cultural system historically, not biologically. Identities have been formed and reformed, essentially causing a culture shock. The methods for stabilizing the social world that have been used for so long are

no longer prevalent in society today, therefore giving way to a more unified modern world.

Hall suggests this newer idea of self creates a more complicated search for identity. Finding a sense of identity is a challenge when more than one is relatable. For instance, Stuart Hall uses the example of Clarence Thomas, a Bush nominated African American conservative judge who was accused of sexual harassment by a young black woman named Anita Hill. This controversy caused white men, white women, and black women to become divided depending on how they identified themselves. For example, white feminists who are typically liberal on the subject of race may have originally supported Thomas, but post sexual harassment accusation they might side with Hill on sexual grounds. Anita Hill was also of lower social class, another element of identity with which people often associate themselves (Hall 280). In the process of developing a particular identity, problems arise due to the 'play of identities.' There are certain consequences when developing an identity, such as these multiple identities being contradictory. No single identity could outline multiple identities into a category of one "master identity." Identity cannot be gained or lost because of how the subject is addressed or represented in society.

Through this confusion of identity, Hall finds most people form a strong belief of national identity. Despite the consequences of this 'play of identities,' national identity develops a narrative which represents the nation as a whole. Each person has what Hall identifies as an "imagined community"—a system of cultural representation where meaning is produced. Each nation is a community that has the power to generate a sense of identity which is formed through retold stories and symbols of the past, including the nation's original themes of its values.

But the paper is wearing thin, for Globalization is disrupting many nation's ways of identifying themselves. With technology and time, people and products have been emerging in multiple cultures. A product made in China is no longer only sold in China, just as an Indian community is not only located in India. Anthony McGrew identifies this term as "those processes, operating on a global scale, which cut across national boundaries, integrating and connecting communities and organizations in new space-time combinations" (Hall 299). Hall states that the process of Globalization is causing distances between one another to appear shorter; the leap from one culture to the next is no longer a leap, but rather a baby step (Hall 300). Hall tracks the consequences of Globalization with three key elements which include cultural homogenization, the strengthening of globalization due to the resistance of losing certain identities, and the phenomenon of new identities of hybridity (new cultural forms) taking the place of

the old (Hall 300). Globalization is the process of cutting across national boundaries and as a result national identity is being displaced, a crisis of a person's narrative.

Stuart Hall's theory of identity and Globalization can be used to suggest that the Miss America Beauty Pageant is a key element in creating the ideology of American beauty. Furthermore, the controversy over the first African American winner of the Miss America pageant has disrupted the United States' view of this symbolic look of American beauty, and Globalization is a major cause in this. Hall's theory of how the "pure folk" are a key element in a nation's identity helps examine how a once greatly Caucasian-dominated United States is facing homogenization. This has affected not only the look of Miss America, but also the face of American beauty in general. This new outlook on American beauty has caused what Hall suggests is a new identity replacing an old.

The Miss America Beauty Pageant started in 1921 as a way for Atlantic City businessmen to "turn a profit by capitalizing on the country's fascination with beauty." (PBS) The first winner of the Miss America pageant was a thin, blonde girl by the name of Margaret Gorman. She was a mere 16 years old. (PBS) This girl perfectly demonstrated the narrative of American beauty. The ideology of beauty that she portrayed took on the "pure" American identity. As written in the New York Times article on Gorman's win, "She [Margaret Gorman] represents the type of womanhood America needs; strong, red-blooded, able to shoulder the responsibilities of home-making and motherhood. It is in her type that the hope of the country resides" (PBS). Margaret Cho suggests that the fascination of the Miss America pageant lies in the idea that there is a winner. There are actual guidelines that constitute beauty (PBS). In the 1923 Miss America pageant the breakdown of scoring was in the form of a strict point system to determine which contestant was indeed the most beautiful. This was identified by the following point system (Banet-Weiser 55):

Construction of Head: 15 points

Eyes: 10

Hair: 5

Nose: 5

Mouth: 5

Facial Expression: 10

Torso: 10

Legs: 10

Hands: 10

Grace of Bearing: 10

This begs the question: “What exactly a nose worthy of 5 points looks like, or how is a perfect level 10 hand identified?” This is not biologically what people envisioned as beauty, but it is the form that beauty has taken over the years of identifying America’s ideology on what represents attractiveness. The numbers are set up according to a pre-assumed standard, seemingly based on Caucasian characteristics. During this time, products that promised to bleach dark skin were sold over the counter and most black women straightened their hair to get rid of the “kink” (Craig 27). An African American woman remembers feeling the shame in her full sized lips, for she considered them “too big to be beautiful” (Craig 26). It is no wonder why African American women adjusted their natural black features to look more “white.” The Miss America pageant acted as a symbol of these beautiful features because the point system just so happened to equal out to Caucasian women in the Miss America pageants for the next 20 years. Banet-Weiser states, “Beauty pageants constitute and are constituted by mass media and are crucial factors in representations of ‘American’ women” (89). During the 1920s approximately 10% of females were African American in the United States, yet for the next 62 years they were not represented as ideal winners of this American beauty contest. Hall argues that people are keen on maintaining the identity of the “pure folk” and the 1920s breakdown of identifying beauty is a key example of this.

The use of the narrative of the “original” folk can be understood through the application of Hall. The United States has constructed a universally understood meaning derived from the original white, protestant, English puritans. According to Edward Sampson, other’s identities are formed by those who perceive them, which creates an identity that is required for that person to achieve his or her desired power (107). “The situation involves social categories that are in themselves based on power differentials (e.g. man/woman, black/white, civilized/primitive)” (Sampson 107). The meaning behind being black is more than just a skin color. It is an identity, an identity that is part of a rich culture and community that has struggled against white supremacist abuse (West 43). Sampson structures this argument around other’s emerging identities. African Americans were and still are used as a way in which Caucasian Americans develop their power and identity. Sampson’s theory of equality demonstrates that symmetry is formed among others that are “equal contributors to each other’s emerging identity” (107). Sampson suggests that African Americans are an asymmetrical source, a contribution to the development of white identity, which is the nation’s imagined “pure, original folk.” Using both West and Sampson’s theories of identity, it is clear that black identity is formed at the expense of others. The African American cultural identity is

used as fuel for Caucasian Americans to build their own identity (West 44). The lack of African American women in American culture is not necessarily due to the lack of population, but in that their identity is constructed to white women as the serviceable other. A white woman uses the identity of African American women in order to achieve the identity they most desire. As the serviceable other, the African American identity is used as a stepping stone for more dominant races to maintain their dominance.

The actual title “Miss America” identifies the winner of this contest to be a role model for females of the nation. “The very title of the Miss America pageant insists on this kind of negotiation: there is the illusion of self-evidence in the pageant’s claim on national feminine identity, because ‘Miss America’ encompasses both gendered and nationalist representation.” (Banet-Weiser 2). The pageant itself does not need to be identified as a symbol of American beauty, the discourse of the title itself says it all. The “America” in the title constitutes citizenship, while the “Miss” constitutes the idea of a particular, non-married, innocent female representation of the nation. (Banet-Weiser) As years went by, thin, white women represented this title, only enhancing this American ideology of beauty.

After 62 years of Caucasian women winning the title of Miss America, Vanessa Williams, an African American woman, won the pageant. This caused a great excitement among the black population; The African American woman was finally viewed as a symbol of beauty in American society. Gerald Early writes: “Most black women I know were overjoyed about a black woman becoming Miss America; it was, to their way of thinking, long overdue recognition of the beauty and the femininity of black women” (294). This change did not happen by accident. As stated earlier in this essay, Globalization is a major cause in the change of national identity. There are a couple of possible reasons for this change.

One major change in the American lifestyle was the dramatic increase in new media from the years 1920 to 1980. Color television was not developed commercially until the 1940s, never mind being a popular household item. The previously mentioned Gerald Early speaks of his first time watching the Miss America pageant in 1983, a time when color televisions were used, but were not necessarily assumed household items.

“I had no idea while I watched the telecast that our new Miss America, then Miss New York, was black. I was watching the show on a snowy black and white television and the girls seemed to be either olive or alabaster. I had, rather uncharitably, assumed all the contestants were white” (Early 297).

Although the concern of racial identities was very much real during the entire 1900s, technology was only developing its ability to properly represent different races. The following quote demonstrates the significance of the color television to the idea of national identity.

“Miss America is not the only one feeling conflicted about image and identity, about what to shed and what to add, about whom a woman is these days and how she should be represented. But a beauty pageant reveals this ambivalence in Technicolor glory. The finalists were like a bunch of raised-on-Star Search, pre-Hillary, would-be first ladies, each with a catchily named ‘cause’” (Barbara Lippert, “Identity Crisis for both genders”)

While technology advanced, racial identity was further brought into the public eye through the media.

Along with advancement in technology, the percentage of minorities in the American population are increasingly becoming more recognized, perhaps not as a symbol of classic beauty, but because of the increasing population of diverse races. From 1920 to the 1980, according to the United States Census, the percentages of minorities increased. In only 60 years, the Black population increased by 2%, the American Indian population .5%, and Asians 1.4%. Not only did this preexisting category of race increase, but new races were recognized such as the American Eskimo and a category labeled as “other” (US Census). Although minorities have always been present in society, during this time there was an increasing level of diversity in the United States. With a more noticeably diverse population, people began to take notice in types of beauty beyond the norm. This presented a new form of beauty, as well as a new form of identity--the idea of the exotic beauty.

The black woman was transformed into her own type of beauty, one based purely off of her ethnic looks. Early writes about the awe of Vanessa Williams, the first African American Miss America. Early does not necessarily suggest that this spectacle came from William’s immense intelligence, amazing talent, or anything else that would stand her apart from another extraordinary Miss America finalist. Instead, Early suggested on numerous times this awe is caused by the mere fact that she is black. One black man commented, “This is history, man. I would’ve come through a hurricane to meet *this* Miss America. They sure ain’t gonna pick another black woman to be Miss America no time soon” (Early 300). Another man said. while pushing to get his two young daughters in a picture with Vanessa Williams, “I knew I simply had to have my daughters in a photograph with

the first black Miss America” (303). In the eyes of the nation, Vanessa Williams was truly an exotic creature, a national identity that did not equalize black and white women, but created a separate identification for black women all together. Hall theorizes this identity hybridity is one result of Globalization.

Globalization has three major effects; first is the erosion of national cultures as a result of cultural homogenization, second is that National Identity is strengthened by the resistance of Globalization, and third (most accurately pertaining to the black Miss America exotic identity) is that the failure of national identity is only causing new identities to form. The African American winner is not viewed as a symbol of American beauty; she is viewed as a spectacle, a challenge to the norm of beauty. This has, in turn, created a new hybridity of minority women: the exotic beauty.

Over the years, beauty has been presented as a point system, a beauty pageant, and most importantly, an element of national identity. As the phenomenon of globalization increases, technology improves, and diversity melds an idea of a country’s physical appearance, the narratives that an imagined community once constructed will become obsolete. Miss America has never been and never will be just a contest. It is a symbol of national identity and what it is becoming.



This paper was written as an assignment for CMN 680 taught by Professor Jack Lannamann.

### Works Cited

- “American Experience | Miss America | People & Events.” *PBS: Public Broadcasting Service*. Web. 03 Dec. 2010. <[http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/missamerica/peopleevents/e\\_first.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/missamerica/peopleevents/e_first.html)>.
- Banet-Weiser, Sarah. *The Most Beautiful Girl in the World: Beauty Pageants and National Identity*. Berkeley: University of California, 1999. Print.
- Craig, Maxine Leeds. *Ain't I a Beauty Queen?: Black Women, Beauty, and the Politics of Race*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002. Print.
- Early, G. (1984). Waiting for Miss America. In *The Anitoch Review*. JSTOR Journals.
- Hall, S. (1992). The Question of Cultural Identity. In S. Hall, D. Held, & T. McGrew (Eds.) Modernity and its futures. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Race, By. «Historical Census Statistics on Population Totals By Race, 1790 to 1990, and By Hispanic Origin, 1970 to 1990, For The United States, Regions, Divisions, and States.» *Census Bureau Home Page*. Web. 09 Dec. 2010. <<http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0056/twps0056.html>>.
- Sampson, E.E. (1993). A Most Peculiar Self. In E Sampson Celebrating the Other. Boulder, ca: Westview Press.
- “Timeline.” *Television History - The First 75 Years*. Web. 09 Dec. 2010. <<http://www.tvhistory.tv/timeline1.htm>>.
- West, Cornel Ronald. “2 The Pitfalls of Racial Reasoning.” *Race Matters*. New York: Vintage, 1994. Print.

# “It’s Just Our Job”: A Qualitative Analysis of Police Lexicon Surrounding Publicly Salient Issues

Lindsey Comeau, Sara Coppola, Matt D’Arcy, Jamie Gray, Marc Smick

## Introduction

Scholars have long studied the interaction between police and citizens due to its significance in the lives of nearly every citizen. Everyone will encounter a police officer at some time or another, whether in connection with a crime or a simple traffic stop. Those who study police-citizen interaction focus on citizens’ perceptions of police actions. Do citizens appreciate police? Or do citizens view police negatively? How do police officers feel about these issues? Recent research has shown that scholars are interested in uncovering what goes *in* to police work, resulting in citizen satisfaction or dissatisfaction, rather than directly investigating citizen satisfaction.

Between 2005 and 2006, there was a 140% increase on the topic of occupational stress. Police strategy was most researched, at 41%, with 21.4% of that research focusing on community policing strategies (Bartholomew, 2009). Attitudes and behaviors of the police accounted for 12.5% of the research while 16% focused on their accountability and misconduct (Bartholomew, 2009). There was a significant decrease in the percentage of studies focusing on citizen satisfaction—over the previous seven years, studies of citizen satisfaction decreased by 65.8% (Bartholomew, 2009), proving that what comes out of policing is not as influential as what is put into it.

When researching police officers’ perceptions of other officers, force was an important component. Force is seldom used in most cases, but when it is, it seems to be perceived as excessive or unnecessary (Phillips, 2010). According to Phillips (2010), less than 1% of police-citizen interaction involved force; however, this small percentage was most likely to be used in dealing with young, African American, male, lower class, or intoxicated offenders. These findings are similar to those of a 2005 study by the Justice Department’s Bureau of Justice Statistics, which showed that blacks and Hispanics were more likely than whites to be subjected to force or the threat of force during all police-citizen interaction (Associated Press,

2007). Police believed that the use of excessive force might be acceptable under the proper circumstances, such as in retaliation and self-defense (Phillips, 2010). Is there justification for the more common use of force in conjunction with certain ethnic groups, such as African Americans, or is racial profiling an issue? This important question can be answered in multiple ways.

A question that directly points to policing practices asks whether or not police use race as a basis for stopping, questioning, and searching citizens. Media plays a huge role in the public's perceptions of racial profiling. "Problems" are socially constructed—certain situations are only believed to be problems because the public perceives them to be that way. Because of the way problems are framed, the media influences public perceptions of these "problems," their causes, consequences, and solutions (Graziano, 2010). An experiment by Graziano showed that fundamental beliefs surrounding race are that blacks are more likely to perceive profiling as a result of racism, while whites are more likely to view profiling as a result of blacks' greater involvement with street crime. In addition, the amount of crime in one's neighborhood can also influence citizens' views on treatment by police officers. The question our research attempts to answer is how do the police institutionally justify, explain, and feel about racial profiling. One portrayal of police attitudes toward this publicly salient issue is the 10/90 Theory.

A concept known as the 90/10 Theory, or the Gap Theory, suggests an alternative explanation behind public perceptions of police interactions with citizens. This theory explains that 90% of the community never needs or comes into contact with the police, but has an appreciation for them and the danger posed to them. The remaining 10% of the community takes up most of police's time, energy, are most dissatisfied with police action, and are also shown most often in the media. This small fraction of citizens takes up the majority of research and media coverage that influence public opinion on police. Additionally, Dr. George J. Thompson (2010) points out that because most of police's contacts are with that 10%, "it warps and distorts our view of the community," leaving police cynical. Thus, both the police *and* citizens are exposed to the most dramatic forms of police-citizen interaction, resulting in distrust of each other.

Racial profiling, public perceptions of police action, and "problems" or "negative" situations are all issues to be addressed further. In our research, our main goal was to explore how police talk about, refer to, and address these publicly salient issues in both their ordinary and institutional identities. We chose to examine the lexicon used by police officers to describe "negative" situations in contrast to how the public

actually perceives them.

## Methodology

In keeping with the goal of the research, the most beneficial way to collect such information was through a qualitative study. Five separate interviews took place over a one-week span. These interviews were then analyzed together in search for common themes and familiarities. Before the interviews took place, a predetermined list of approximately 30 concrete questions was produced by a combined effort of the group. Our plan was to begin the interview with “light” questioning such as name, age, how long they have been working with the force, etc. After completing the “lighter” questions, the “heavier” questions were introduced. These questions consisted of topics such as the need to use force and any negative experiences or interactions.

Four of the five interviews were completed through a face-to-face interaction. The fifth interview was completed through email questioning. The qualitative study had a solid range of officers willing to cooperate. Each group member was instructed to contact an officer who agreed to be interviewed and have his/her information recorded. Recording the information would make referencing the interview easier at a later date. The majority of the recorded information would be written down and transcribed, while one interview was audio taped for transcription. Each face-to-face interview was accomplished at a location chosen by the officer, ranging from the Police Department itself, to the homes of the designated officer. Each officer was told the following information: All information of the interview would be disregarded after the completion of the research assignment and all names will be left anonymous. If the officers were satisfied with the terms, a signature would be required.

As previously mentioned, there was a good range of age and experience between the five officers involved. However, all of the officers interviewed were white males working in New England. Starting with the youngest and least experienced, the first officer interviewed was a 24-year-old patrolman from Durham, New Hampshire. He was a recent graduate of the Police Academy and had been working on the force for six months. The second officer interviewed was a 38-year-old Community Resource officer from Dover, New Hampshire. He has been working on the force for 15 years. The third officer was a 45-year-old Detective/Prosecutor with 18 years of service. He worked in both Greenland and Newington, New Hampshire. The fourth officer was 45-years-old as well, however, he was a Police Chief with 20 years of service working in Derry, New Hampshire. The fifth and final officer was the oldest and most experienced. He is

a 70-year-old retired Captain with 40 years of police employment. He was also our only officer working outside New Hampshire, in Haverhill, Massachusetts.

After the interviews were completed and transcribed, the team regrouped and relayed all the information acquired to find any common themes. These common themes would then be analyzed and discussed in comparison to the three other groups obtaining interviews in our class. Two of the class interviews were of negative citizen interactions with the police and the other was the same objective as ours; police interviews in search for “negative situations” with citizens. The results of the other research groups will be discussed in relation to this research later in this paper.

## Findings

There were two important points of consensus that materialized after the interview process. The first is that police conform to a pattern of institutionalized discourse that shapes the way they perceive their own, as well as other officer’s, actions in uniform and out. The second finding is that this institutionalized discourse incorporates the idea of danger, but redefines it as to “hero-ize” the police officer. This allows the officer to confront dangerous situations calmly, but also allows the community to give a level of respect to the officer while in their institutional identity and out.

### Finding 1. Institutionalized Talk: “The Gap Theory”

When preparing for our study on police perspectives of what constitutes a “negative” situation with a citizen, it became an important point of consensus that police and citizens have different qualifications for what makes up negative encounters. As discussed earlier, the majority of past research and news media have been focused on the negative outcomes of police misconduct and the public’s reaction to them. The instances documented in the media depicting police in high stress, physically dangerous situations are overwhelming. Institutionalized police discourse is focused upon defining these situations in a more favorable light, as to allow officers to approach potentially dangerous situations more confidently. However, recent research has begun to focus on the processes that go into the police profession. In this sense the police definition of police procedure, danger, and negative encounters with citizens becomes important, however these definitions are often not considered by citizens when citizens are critiquing the police.

To understand how police institutionally orient themselves towards citizens it is crucial to consider how police measure public perceptions and how they receive the knowledge to form these perceptions. The 90/10

Theory (Thompson, 2006) presented itself while conducting our interviews. As previously discussed, approximately 90% of the community never needs or comes into contact with the police, but has a great appreciation of the danger that they confront on a daily basis. However, the 10% of the population leftover takes up 100% of police time and energy and makes the most “noise” over police action. Therefore, the bulk of the community’s only interaction with the police is over the television or computer screen. The instances that the public grapples with are often the instances where the most dramatic forms of police-citizen interaction occur. While 90% of the community, according to this hypothetical theory, does not experience any police face-to-face interaction, it is the 10% that influences the majority of research, media coverage, and therefore public opinion.

This presentation of public opinion directly influences how police approach citizens while in uniform. The Gap Theory can be considered an institutionalized policing theory, an organized discourse that police use to describe an aspect of their occupation. As stated by Drew and Heritage (1992), the three goals of institutional talk are: (1) talk is always related to the goal (2) the talk often involves a special or particular way of talking, and (3) institutional talk provides an inferential frame for understanding specific situations. In community policing theory, this 90/10 theory is very useful, particularly its third goal: institutional talk provides an inferential framework for understanding. By understanding that ten percent of the community takes part in nearly all the crime, two things can be inferred: the first is that understanding the characteristics that comprise this ten percent is considered part of the job, and second, that because ninety percent of the community views the police in a positive light and receives their information from news sources rather than face to face interaction with the police, police are able to control public perceptions of their actions through positive public relations.

The issue of public relations is an interesting one; while this point was not brought up in this research project, our sister project discovered public relations to be a major theme. A connection can be made from The Gap Theory to public relations in that, by controlling what the majority of the community hears about the police profession, the police can control the public’s perceptions. Often people view the occupation of a police officer as a problematic one, one that dominates the officer’s life. The occupation is riddled with constant danger. Perhaps police want the public to believe that their jobs are full of dangerous situations because it places them in a position of respect, positions them as the “hero,” and garners admiration within the community. This is a point that needs more exploration, as its repercussions may be interesting and useful in studying the police.

As stated earlier, the officers interviewed approached their job in a normative method, in that what they do is just a job not a definition of who they are. There is a common misconception that police actions are based on personal bias. The officers interviewed expressed that the actions perceived by the public as negative, the actions that are more often than not mediated to that ninety percent, are the result of institutionalized practices of noticing the characteristics of the ten percent. Those characteristics often include race, age, gender, class, and dress. Basing action off these characteristics alone constitutes racial profiling, which is both publicly and professionally discouraged. However, incorporating these characteristics into a decision to initiate interaction is accepted.

## Finding 2. Defining Danger

As previously mentioned, institutionalized talk provides a framework for understanding. This is also true for our final finding. The public perceives the police officer's job as dangerous and what citizens define as dangerous is very different from what the police define as dangerous. The interviewees rarely referred to their jobs as being "dangerous," rather, they emphasized the officer's conduct within a situation, defining the source of danger within a situation as the officer's ability to manage unpredictable circumstances. Lexicon such as "vulnerable," "distracted," "(dis)comfort," and "surprised" are all used to describe the state of an officer in relation to a dangerous situation.

There was a common theme of recognizing the inherent danger within our interviews. The institutionalized ways of referring to this danger, the ways of treating delicate situations or potential threats, directly affects how officers approach situations that are most commonly mediated to the ninety percent. This finding demonstrates the emphasis on experience. There seems to be an inverse ratio in the police perceptions of experience: the more experienced an officer the less likely they are to feel vulnerable, distracted, or surprised, therefore the more likely they will be able to avoid dangerous situations. The emphasis on experience being linked to defining danger does have repercussions. Our interviewees expressed that when they first entered the field, they had little to no training in dealing with the general public. This means that vital experience is gained through "trial by fire." Trial by fire is dangerous and it can be inferred that the police interactions that are mediated through news and research are the result of inexperienced officers. Perhaps this conclusion can be linked to a previous conclusion, that this is what police public relations *want* the public to believe.

## Discussion

In our research we found a few recurring themes throughout the five different interviews. There was a great deal of emphasis on experience, for with more experience comes more of the instinctual gut feeling that police officers greatly rely on. A police officer does not have much knowledge or training in dealing with the public when first entering the force. An interviewed officer stated, "When I first started I would always feel a sense of relief when a more experienced colleague would show up." Yet, over time one gains the ability to learn how to better interact with the public and make the right decisions. In order to succeed as an officer, one must possess traits such as self-discipline, motivation, and verbal communication skills. Personality factors tend to play a roll in how police officers deal with people and handle situations. One officer claims, "You need to be able to think on your feet while things are happening without over reacting." In this light, the police expect a certain respect from the citizens whom they serve, but there is also a respect dynamic present within the force for those officers with the most experience.

The findings of our sister research projects showed that police officers approach situations with a community-policing stance while on the job. This point, while not explicitly stated during the course of our interviews, is upheld by this research. Beginning to interact with a person in a more relaxed yet still professional way may help to keep problem occurrences from getting out of hand. This type of approach helps to de-escalate a situation; a key component to community policing theory is communication skills. If a police officer approaches a situation with a more traditional stance, the citizen may respond with hostility or aggression that may lead to unnecessary action on behalf of the officer. If the interaction is a coordinated effort between officer and citizen, it has the potential to go in either a bad direction or a good one. One officer claims, "I see myself as 60% community and 40% enforcement." Whenever an officer enters an interaction it is a time to not only handle the situation, but also an opportunity for public relations. They present themselves in a certain light, which can give the citizen a positive or negative impression of the institution. Many citizens view police officers in a bad light, believing many abuse their power. A bad run in with an officer can greatly affect how officers are perceived by society, because individual officers are considered agents of the institution.

With experience also comes the ability for officers to compartmentalize their lives on and off duty. An officer goes about their job just as any other citizen would; it is just a job. They keep in mind that there are reasons behind why interactions and situations are the way



they are. In this sense, when an officer is on duty they are fully immersed within their job, which is considered important to them. Yet, police officers consider their off-duty life as a citizen to be equally as important. Learning to compartmentalize the many aspects of their lives may be a way to protect them from a relatively stressful occupation, a skill learned with time and experience.

## Conclusion

It was challenging to find answers to our thesis, which was “to explore and examine the lexicon that the police use to describe ‘negative situations’ with citizens,” due to the numerous viewpoints that exist. Our interview questions were designed to explore the nature of the lexicon and to figure out any common themes their rhetoric shared. We hoped that compiling this information with the other groups’ projects would reveal more similarities in police talk rhetoric.

This rhetoric is often revealed in arguments such as the “Gap Theory.” This type of discourse is an example of institutional talk and is described in three characteristics: (1) talk is always related to the goal, (2) the talk often involves a special or particular way of talking, and (3) institutional talk provides an inferential frame for understanding specific situation. These types of discourses can help describe how a police officer defines “negative situation.”

During our research we realized that most of this police rhetoric is gathered through experience, which allows police learn how to deal with the public and press. It helps them learn what types of police discourse are effective so they can use it on the job. The emphasis on “community policing” in recent years has undoubtedly changed the type of rhetoric that police officers use when interacting with citizens. “Community policing” has often diffused certain situations which could have been hostile if traditional, authoritarian talk was the primary discourse.

This research shows that police rhetoric is constantly evolving and has certain constraints, which often significantly affects how a police officer interacts with a citizen and subsequently characterizes said interaction. The common police rhetoric, referred to as “community policing,” has specific ways of positively affecting a citizen’s perception of the police and their interactions with them.

This type of community rhetoric can be viewed both negatively and positively. It is always good for a citizen to have positive interactions with a police officer. It encourages less violence and less overall tension between the two groups. However, when police interact with the press, they have the ability to shape the perceptions of the majority of society. This majority

does not interact face to face with the police very often, which is dangerous because they may not easily find out about instances of injustices done to certain groups or individuals. Public relations efforts are often designed to minimize the police departments' mistakes and highlight their positive qualities, creating a warped view of the actual situation at hand.

It is necessary for the citizens' reactions to police interactions to be more prominent throughout the media. This will make it easier for the public to see interactions from more perspectives, giving them a more well-rounded view of the police-citizen dynamic. More action can be carried out in regards to potential procedural changes when the issues are more visible to all involved.

This paper was written as an assignment for CMN 765: Police Talk taught by Professor Mardi Kidwell

### Works Cited

- Bartholomew, B., Gibbs, J., Mazeika, D., Ahlin, E., Joseph, p., & Miller, N. (2009). Trends in police research: a cross-sectional analysis of the 2006 literature. *Police Practice & Research*, 10(4), 383-407.
- Goodwin, C. (1994). Professional Vision. *American Anthropologist*. 96(3), 606-633.
- Graziano, L., Schuck, A., & Martin, C. (2010). Police Misconduct, Media Coverage, and Public Perception of Racial Profiling: An Experiment. *JQ: Justice Quarterly*, 27(1), 52-76.
- Meehan, A., Ponder, M. (2002). Race and Place: The Ecology of racial profiling African American motorists. *JQ: Justice Quarterly*, 19(3), 399-430.
- Phillips, S. (2010). Police officers' opinions of the use of unnecessary force by other officers. *Police Practice & Research*, 11(3), 197-210
- Thompson, G. (2010). Community Policing: The "Gap" theory. Retrieved October 21st, 2010, from <http://www.policeone.com/corrections/articles/126709-Community-Policing-The-gap-theory/>
- Associated Press (2007). Black, Latino drivers fare worse in traffic stops. Study: Minorities searched, jailed more often than whites when pulled over. Retrieved on October 21st, 2010 from <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/18383182/>

# A Single Case Analysis: “Woman Goes Berserk”

Lindsey Comeau

## Introduction

Police citizen interaction has been studied for years. The way in which police relate to citizens has changed drastically over time, with policing orientations developing from traditional, authoritarian philosophies towards more community oriented philosophies. Under the community policing orientation, officers are considered community liaisons, working with people to create safer neighborhoods. Traditional policing orientation defines the officer as a person who upholds the law to the fullest extent, seeking out and punishing lawbreakers. This paradigm shift in policing orientations has redefined the institutional identity of the police officer from enforcer to helper. At the same time of this shift, a great deal of federal funding became available for development, testing, and dissemination of alternatives to traditional policing models (Sherman, 2004). As a result, many police agencies have now established partnerships with community leaders, local businesses, government agencies, and local service-providers under the community policing philosophy. These fundamental changes have played a vital role in peacekeeping roles played by police by increasing direct contact with citizens, including persons with mental illnesses (Sellers et al., 2005).

This is especially important for officers who frequently work within the community conducting traffic stops, patrolling traffic, or keeping the peace. In 1984, Teplin performed field observations of police encounters with persons with mental illnesses in a large northwestern city. Arrests comprised 16.5% of these dispositions, 11.8% resulted in hospitalization, and 71.8% were handled informally (Sellers et al. 2005). Due to the propensity for those with mental illness to come into contact with police, and because police are now expected to have a heavy presence within the community they work in, research into cases where mental illness may play a part is important. Every interaction has the opportunity to end negatively, which compels the officer to be vigilant with potentially dangerous citizens. This need to be vigilant in conjunction with the community policing

philosophy positions officers to navigate the fine line between protecting the public and abusing police power; to protect themselves from crossing this line, police use a multitude of tactics in the attempt to “respect the face” of the citizen.

For this study, a single case in the form of a video clip titled “Woman Goes Berserk” is examined. The main intention of a single case analysis is not to introduce previously unknown findings, but to use what is known about the organization of conversational activities to analyze instances such knowledge should illuminate (Whalen et al., 1988). Sense making for police officers attempting to accomplish a traffic stop is dictated through a framework of institutionalized steps which the officer must accomplish. Meaning making works through the reciprocation of the actions of the officer by the citizen; if the citizen appears mentally unstable, or under the influence, the officer may deploy a multitude of tactics to regain control of the progression of the interaction.

## Literature Review

A recent article published by the *Orlando Sentinel* states:

“During the past decade, traffic stops have been a leading cause of death for police officers, according to the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund in Washington. From 2000 through 2009, 118 officers were killed conducting traffic stops, compared with 82 handling domestic-violence complaints and 74 during disturbance calls, said Memorial Fund spokesman Steve Groeninger.” (Curtis, 2010)

The death rate associated with traffic stops is a frightening reminder of the danger of a police officer’s job. Examining on a case by case basis police-citizen interactions that result in force may provide insight into the behaviors and utterances (that the officer may or may not be conscious of) that trigger exaggerated responses by people who may appear to be mentally unstable. Police officers quite often fear persons with mental illnesses because they believe that most are unpredictable and dangerous. On the other hand, persons with mental illnesses have reason to fear the police because the police have the power to take them from their homes and into custody. Neither has an understanding of the other and this can set the stage for a physical confrontation (Ruiz and Miller, 2004).

Previous research has examined tactics that police officers commonly use in these types of confrontations. Staying calm, indicating

to a person with mental illness that you will listen to them and that you are suspending disbelief helps abate the situation with someone who is agitated. It is useful to recall that persons with mental illness may have significant histories of victimization and trauma (Lipson et al., 2010). Front-line officers are left with the need to stabilize these situations and determine whether the person poses a danger to themselves or others. The concern that persons with mental illness are violent reinforces the view of their potential lethality and can result in the use of unnecessary force (Ruiz & Miller, 2004). This concern should be covered in police training because individuals with mental illness are four times more likely to be killed by the police (Cordner, 2006). Exploring individual cases and the conversational turns that eventually result in police use of force may illuminate how police action may or may not provoke seemingly unprovoked, frantic responses by citizens.

## Data and Method

This paper studies the case of the YouTube clip titled “Woman Goes Berserk” and focuses on the first 48 seconds of the video, or the first 19 lines of talk (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8frzKP3L1qQ>). This paper was written in conjunction with three other papers which all together cover the entirety of the interaction. The clip was first transcribed in parts, with each part being transcribed by each researcher. This transcript, as well as the video clip, make up the data for this research. The first section of the transcript is displayed below for ease of reading purposes. The transcript in its entirety can be found at the end of this paper.

## Analysis

The “Woman Goes Berserk” clip clearly begins as a routine traffic stop. Traffic stops, like most other routine police business, can be categorized into an overall structure with organized “parts,” through which the officer must get through to deem the interaction as positive. The parts are: (1) Pre-Beginning, the officer sees or notices a problem; (2) Summons, the officer uses a siren, flashing lights, and tailing to get the driver to answer the summons (i.e. pull over); (3) Opening, the officer and citizen greet each other, the officer asks for identification (typically in the form of a driver’s license and registration), and sometimes offers a “problem preview” (i.e. “You were goin’ a little fast there.”); (4) Problem Presentation, the officer can do this in one of two ways: the first being a problem solicit, “Do you know why I stopped you?” or a problem proffer “I stopped you because your tail light is out”; (5) Police Action, the officer issues a warning or citation, or makes an arrest; and, (6) Closing. The progression through these

steps aids the police officer to gain the necessary information to complete his/her institutional goal, that of enforcing traffic laws, helping with traffic flow, reduce traffic related death/injury, and educate the public about safety. The talk used to work through these steps facilitates the movement between the beginning and ending of each traffic stop encounter, and with each step the police officer uses his/her discretion to assess the attitude of the citizen they are interacting with.

Closely examining one instance of interaction between a police officer and a citizen can offer much insight into the interactional work police must do to maintain the traffic stop structure. This is done by using information already known about traffic stops to illuminate “what went wrong” in individual cases. Two examples of this information are attitude tests and directives. The attitude tests previously mentioned can be used to benefit the officer, as to inform the officer of how much (or how little) the citizen is willing to comply with the officer’s directives. A directive is an action to get someone to do something. Police directives, in an institutional sense, exist on a continuum, extending from requests to commands to the use of force. Being the least imposing and the “nicest” form of a directing, a request gives respect to the face of a civilian; ‘face’ meaning the identity individuals strive to maintain in social settings. Individuals take a line during social interactions to maintain face, i.e. a person communicates and acts in ways that indicate understanding of a situation and its interactants (Goffman, 1967, p. 5). Loss of face results in a tarnished self-image. A command is the opposite of a request. When a command is issued the civilian may feel they have no choice but to follow the directive, as a command is often imposing and aggravated. The escalation of a directive from request to command is largely based on the discretion of the police officer in response to the reciprocated actions of the civilian during the process of a traffic stop; these reciprocated actions can also be considered responses to an officer’s attitude tests.

It is important to briefly discuss the expectations that police have of civilians in the traffic stop process. Considering that police have a preset progression of events intended, and the way in which an officer progresses through the intended steps of a traffic stop largely depends on the re-actions of the citizen, then it is logical that the officer seeks out relevant answers to his/her questions. What the officer deems relevant is based on a set of predetermined social norms that can be identified and described. Adjacency pairs are the initiating and responding actions, or the receipt and evaluating actions, that make up the turns of talk between the participants. Adjacency pairs are a type of moral order that are held together by accountability (Class Lecture, 10/19/10), meaning

people depend on each other to know how to react in certain types of situations. Initiating actions have a wide range of possible next actions. Speaker and listener work together to create the outcome of an interaction, especially in police-citizen interactions. The ways in which people construct alternative response types is called preference structure (Class Lecture, 10/19/10). Using this terminology, the way in which responses are packaged is considered “preferred” or “dispreferred.” Preferred packaging is characterized as simple acceptance or agreement, is often produced without delay or in overlap. Preferred packaging shows unproblematic alignment and maximizes solidarity between the persons involved (Class Lecture, 10/19/10). Dispreferred packaging is characterized by complexity, delay, hesitation, prefacing, appreciation tokens (i.e. “Thank you, officer!”), and accounts. Dispreferred packaging softens and forecasts rejection and attempts to maximize social solidarity in the face of rejection (Class Lecture, 10/19/10). Typifications can also be made in regards to relevancy rules. When analyzing an interaction it is beneficial to identify the “ones and twos” of the talk, as to show the turns that the conversation takes. Using this terminology, a one creates the relevance of a two. Furthermore, it is treated as a problem if a one is not followed by a two, and the party that uttered the one may go in pursuit of the two. In this sense, the one not only expects, but requires a two. Putting a name to the turns within a conversation is a helpful tactic in articulating how the individual lines of talk relate to the “point of no return” and to the overall outcome of the interaction.

In studying police interaction, much insight can be gained through conversation analysis. Previous research has illuminated the hardships that police face when approaching civilians in routine traffic stops. While the interaction may start normally, there are times when the initial cause for the summons is not the cause of police action. In this way, police are constantly on the offensive, especially when facing a potentially mentally unstable person. Police power is not a given, but rather an interactional accomplishment through the coordinated effort of each party. The officer and the civilian’s actions both set up and affect the other party’s actions. Because people with mental illness may react to police action differently than what police expect, police must pay particular attention to instances where normalized institutional sequencing of events is received and reciprocated by a civilian in out-of-the-ordinary ways. Conversation analysis may provide another layer of understanding to how the outcomes of traffic stops occur, especially when those outcomes are not expected.

Conversation analysis is an approach to the study of natural conversation, especially with a view to determining the following:





Fig 1. Still from "Woman Goes Berserk"



Fig 2. Still from "Woman Goes Berserk"

participants' methods of turn-taking, constructing sequences of utterances across turns, identifying and repairing problems, and employing gaze and movement. Studying how conversation works (particularly in the policing "Traffic Stop" situation) between parties illuminates the work police must do to maintain order at the most basic level. Examining individual cases allows for close evaluation of each line of talk, and for this paper the chosen interaction of the clip "Woman Goes Berserk" demonstrates the way in which police very often use non-verbal cues in conjunction with verbal directives increases in intensity (along the directive continuum) in reciprocation of the civilian's actions that are ultimately in response to the actions of the police officer. This back and forth presents a level of unique complexity that may make the insights gained through conversation analysis more socially persuasive.

### **Woman Goes Berserk- Overview of the Case**

Within the first few seconds of the interaction it is apparent that the driver will pose a problem. The driver fails to comply by not allowing the officer to get out of the street. As soon as the driver pulls off of the street (right after the summons), she (the driver) jumps out of the car and demands the officer to answer her questions. She begins yelling at the officer and kicks him when he tries to detain her. This has been identified as the "point of no return." The interaction goes continuously downhill from this point, with the woman becoming more irrational as the interaction goes on. What originally began as a minor traffic violation quickly turns into a problem of compliance and cooperation as the driver begins to act in a disorderly manner, going as far as to assault the police officer. The actions of the officer, especially in the beginning of the interaction, are affected directly by the actions of the driver. Within the first few lines the officer is positioned as the reactor to the driver's actions despite attempts at regaining his authority over the situation. Because the officer is consistently reacting to the actions of the driver, the progression of the use of directives directly follows the progression of the driver's breakdown.

The interaction takes place during the day in the parking lot of an apartment complex that is close to a busy intersection. The officer is a tall, well built male. The driver is a petite, older woman. It is clear that English is not her native language. Further along in the interaction a passerby makes comments about the interaction between the officer and driver, but that is not the direct concern of this paper.

#### Section I- Summons to Point of No Return

Below is the transcript for the first section of the interaction. The

highlighted portions of the transcript are the lines of talk considered to be most closely linked to the “point of no return” and the overall structure of the interaction. These first nineteen lines are crucial to the conclusion of the interaction as it is apparent within the first few lines that the driver (S) will be difficult to interact with.

### Transcript

1. O: nine. we have live ( ). pull Up Pahlea:se.
2. PU::LL=at car: up:: Get me outtotha road,
3. (5.0)
4. O: we'll be outta tha way here (.) in ju::st a minute.
5. (5.0)
6. O: gracious, (4.2)
7. S: whatt↑s the problem? (2.0)
8. O: Let me see your li↑cense please, and insurance.
9. S: ↑I sure do?
10. (.)
11. O: let me see it.
12. S: YOU Don't TALK BACK TO [ME
13. O: [hey. Hey. HEY
14. S: <DON'T TALK BACK TO ME>
15. O: °send me some backup ple[ase
16. S: [b-b-bring anybody  
you want=
17. O: =I wanna see your in::surance please ma[m
18. S: [GO  
away?|=
19. O: =DO::not. (3.0) Do not to:uch me please (.) like  
tha::t, okay?

#### *Lines 1-6*

The clip starts with the officer summoning the driver and requesting her to pull up off of the street. This is the first indication that the interaction may not be a positive one. The manner in which a driver pulls over during the summons phase of a traffic stop is indeed an attitude test. As discussed previously, preference structure is fundamental in determining the overall feel of the interaction. The answer to the officer's summons test in “Woman Goes Berserk” is preferred with dispreferred packaging, meaning that the driver pulls over immediately, without hesitation, but pulls over in such a way that the police officer's cruiser remains in the road blocking traffic. This can be inferred from line 4 when

the officer addresses citizens who are not in the camera's view. Lines 3 and 5, both silences, are the points in which the driver and officer are moving their cars post-summons.

Line 6 is particularly interesting, as the officer is not addressing the driver but himself. "Gracious" can be understood best grammatically as an interjection that is used as an exclamation of surprise or dismay. While the officer is not speaking directly to another person, this exclamation gives a glimpse into the mindset of the officer before getting out of his cruiser, which is important as the officer's initial reactions to a situation directly affects how he will conduct himself throughout the interaction.

#### *Lines 7-12*

Face to face interaction between the officer and driver does not start until line 7, when the driver exits her vehicle through the driver's side and approaches the police cruiser asking, "What's the problem?" This initiating action on behalf of the driver leaves the officer at a disadvantage, as the officer does not get the chance to greet the driver in the preferred way, with the driver seated within their vehicle, quiet, with their license and registration ready to hand to the officer. In examining this critically it is important to note that the action of the driver approaching the officer does not create a negative context for interaction in all police-citizen interactions. However, when the officer is the party who *summons*, and the driver is the party who is *summoned*, the officer is the party who has the burden of approaching the driver, not vice versa. This breach by the driver can be reciprocated by the officer in a multitude of ways that are dictated not only by police procedure, but also by the context in which the interaction occurs. The officer may have responded differently had this interaction occurred at night, had the driver was a male, or had the driver been intoxicated. In these instances, the officer may have resorted to using physical force earlier in the course of the interaction.

The driver exits her vehicle while the officer is still inside of his cruiser. In response the officer exits his cruiser and approaches the driver, which is indicated by the two-second silence at the end of line 7. At line 8 the officer does not answer the driver's initiating action, "What's the problem?" Instead, he offers his own identification question, "Let me see your license please, and insurance." In this way, the officer is responding to the driver's one with another one. He proceeds with the overall structure of the traffic stop, attempting to move onto the identification phase. The officer in moving on with the traffic stop progression clearly disregards the initial question posed by the driver, which would often compel the driver to go in pursuit of an appropriate reciprocating action. However, in this case

the driver responds to the officer's identification question with a preferred response.

The officer's identification question is phrased in a very particular way. The driver has broken normalized traffic stop routine in two distinct ways thus far in the interaction: by answering the summons in dispreferred packaging and by approaching the officer before he exits his cruiser thus exhibiting challenging behaviors. "Let me see your license please, and insurance," is a request for identification that is simultaneously respecting the face of the driver while attempting to accomplish police business. The officer mitigates the directive through "let me see" and "please." "Let me see" allows the driver to formulate her own answer; "please" is used as a respect token. The softening of the directive despite the driver's breaches in the routine may be because the officer recognizes that the driver may be mentally unstable or because the driver is a petite older woman.

Line 9 is the driver's response to the officer's identification request. The driver's response is preferred, as it comes without hesitation and is followed by the driver in line 10 returning to her car to retrieve the requested items. However, her answer "I sure do" is not a linguistically correct answer to the officer's request of "let me see your license please, and insurance." What can be inferred from this response is that the woman assumed the officer's request was phrased "do you have your license," which is much more of a direct question rather than a directive. It may also be inferred that the driver may speak English as a second language, therefore leading her to answer incorrectly.

Line 11 consists of a continuer by the officer. "Let me see it" comes in response to the driver's answer "I sure do" which, linguistically, is the response to a variation of the officer's request for identification. The continuer by the officer, "let me see it," encourages the driver to continue her action of retrieving the requested information. This continuer also attempts to speed up the action of the driver because the officer needs this information to accomplish the identification phase of this encounter. The embodied behavior of the officer, at this point, amplifies these intentions of the continuer by entering into the personal space of the driver. The officer follows the driver to the driver's side door and leans forward towards the driver, which can amplify the intimidating nature of the officer. This slight body movement, while the officer may not have been conscious of it, positioned the driver to react in another set of ways; and, as the clip shows, the driver does not react preferentially.

Line 12 is preceded by the driver pushing her finger into the chest of the officer while uttering "You don't," then, taking a step back while uttering "talk back to me." The officer's non-verbal cue of leaning forward

as to emphasize his continuer of “let me see it” was reciprocated by the driver pushing back into the officer’s personal space even further, going so far as making physical contact with the officer. Examining the utterance itself, “you don’t talk back to me,” is a command, and when paired with the physical action of the driver, can be considered a direct threat to the face of the officer. As a response to the officer’s continuer, this utterance can be considered an over-reaction. The reciprocated action of the driver illuminates how sensitive people can be to the embodied behaviors of a police officer during a traffic stop. This over-reaction may also signify to the officer that this driver may be showing signs of mental illness or may be under the influence. The progression of this physical confrontation continues throughout the remainder of the video clip and is one of the major themes that make up this traffic stop.

*Lines 13-16*

These lines of talk make up a carryover sequence in which the officer and driver continue to have a physical confrontation, which causes the officer to radio for backup in line 15. Lines 14 and 16, “you don’t talk back to me,” and “bring anybody you want,” are further commands issued by the driver delivered in particularly aggressive ways; these four lines of talk lead up to the point of no return in lines 19-21, when the officer moves to physically detain the driver.

*Lines 17-19*

The close to this phase of this traffic stop begins with the officer continuing towards his institutional goal with requesting for identification in line 17, “I wanna see your insurance please ma’am.” This statement is a curious one, as the driver has clearly portrayed agitation with the officer. The use of a formal address, “ma’am,” signifies that the officer still wants to respect the driver. “I wanna see,” and “please” are also interesting. “I wanna see” poses the directive as a want of the officer, which may or may not allow the driver to allow or deny the officer’s request. “Please,” in this context, works as a respect token, emphasizing the officer’s calmness despite the frenzied behavior of the driver. However, in line 18 the officer’s calmness is met with the driver’s command “Go away.” The driver’s demand is accompanied with repeated physical contact to the officer. This causes the officer to struggle with the driver, eventually grabbing her wrists and in line 19 saying, “Do not. Do not touch me please like that okay.” Even despite the struggle with the driver, the officer continues in his politeness by using the terms, “please,” and “like that okay.” “Like that okay” acts a softening, mitigating clause, moving the command of “Do not touch me”

down the directive continuum into a request. This tactic of remaining calm when dealing with a frantic party can be equated with the tactics of a parent handling a child having a temper tantrum. When a child begins to cry and scream seemingly without provocation, the parent often tries to overcompensate by remaining calm, but being stern with the child. Whether this tactic in this situation was appropriate or not is made more apparent as the confrontation continues. However, the use of the tantrum tactic begins as early as the first few lines of talk, in this way the officer is locked into keeping his cool as becoming more aggressive may cause the driver to react in even a more frantic manner.

### Section II- The Confrontation Continues

This second section of the traffic stop “Woman Goes Berserk” is dominated by the driver. The officer tells the driver that he wants to put her in his cruiser, to which she resists. To this the officer reciprocates in physically lifting the woman off of the ground and over to his police cruiser, out of sight of the video camera. This marks the last time the officer and driver are seen on camera for the rest of the clip. Lines 20-21 contain the point of no return, in which the driver begins to kick the officer repeatedly, which results in the officer physically attempting to detain the driver. After moving off camera the officer asks the driver “what’s the problem here” in line 26. To this the driver answers preferably, “I have to lock my door.” This response overlaps with the officer’s question and gives the officer a coherent, linguistically correct answer. However, this brief instance of coherence is followed by another escalation of incoherency dominated by the driver screaming that she has to lock her door, eventually leading up to the driver screaming that the officer is raping her.

### Section III- Officer Calls for Backup

Section three consists of the officer calling for backup. This is a logical response to the driver’s hysterical screaming. Line 44 consists of the strongest demand thus far expressed by the officer in “Hey, will you settle down?” This request is continued in line 46. The driver’s noncompliance is continued in this section, especially after the appearance of the passerby (P) in line 53; the officer offers to lock the driver’s door in line 56, to which the driver reciprocates by exclaiming “no.” Line 56 ends with the driver demanding the officer to get off of her, which indicates that the officer thus far has been unable to effectively detain the driver by putting her inside of the police cruiser. This problem is addressed further in the final section of “Woman Goes Berserk.”

#### Section IV- Problem Presentation-Close

In this section, the driver continues yelling, “get off me.” In response, the officer tells the driver that she is going to be put in the car. A citizen interjects to make a smart remark to the suspect and the officer tells him he does not need help. Next, the officer and suspect are engaged in an interaction regarding what she has done wrong. The problem presentation phase accomplished in lines 70-71 illuminates two things. The first that the only phase thus far accomplished in relation to the institutional goal of a traffic stop has been the problem presentation; and second, that the problem of the driver having negative, seemingly unprovoked physical contact with the officer has developed into the major problem of the interaction, rather than the initial problem that spurred the traffic stop. The officer indicating the driver’s pushing at lines 19-21 as the major problem makes that the point of no return for this situation. At line 71 it seems like the driver has finished her yelling and screaming, and is willing to hear what the officer has to say. In the last few lines of the interaction, it becomes apparent that this is not the case as the driver continues to scream and commanding the officer to go away so that she can lock her door.

#### Conclusion

By studying the micro-details of the interaction, the turns that lead up to the point of no return become increasingly clear. By consistently reacting to the actions of the driver, the officer is placed in a position to use force that could have been avoided if he had developed and utilized stronger directives. Throughout the driver’s assault to the ‘face’ of the officer, the officer maintains a level of composure that can be simultaneously commended and questioned. If the officer had used a directive as soon as the driver stepped out of her vehicle at line 7, what would have happened? Of course this is a hypothetical question, and unfortunately one that cannot be answered concretely. For officers who work with the public on a daily basis, dealing with problematic situations is as common as a metal worker handling high temperatures; “the hotter the material, the cooler the handler,” is one way to approach these confrontations.



This paper was written as an assignment for CMN 765: Police Talk taught by Professor Mardi Kidwell

### Works Cited

- Cordner, G. (2006). *People with mental illness: Problem-oriented guides for police problem-specific guides series*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services.
- Curtis, H. (2010, December 09). Traffic stops among most dangerous police duties. Orlando Sentinel
- Goffman, E. (1967). *Interaction Ritual: Essays on Face-to-Face Behavior*. Anchor Books
- Lipson, G., Turner, J., & Kasper, R. (2010). A Strategic Approach to Police Interactions Involving Persons with Mental Illness. *Journal of Police Crisis Negotiations*, 10(1/2), 30-38.
- Ruiz, J., & Miller, C. (2004). An Exploratory study of Pennsylvania police officers' perceptions of Dangerousness and their ability to manage persons with mental illness *Police Quarterly*, 7(3), 359-371.
- Sellers, C., Sullivan, C., Veysey, B., & Shane, J. (2005). Responding to persons with mental illnesses: police perspectives on specialized and traditional practices. *Behavioral Sciences & the Law*, 23(5), 647-657.
- Sherman, L. W. (2004). Research and policing: The infrastructure and political economy of federal funding. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 593, 156-178.
- "What Is Conversation Analysis?" *SIL International: Partners in Language Development*. Web. 14 Dec. 2010. <<http://www.sil.org/linguistics/GlossaryOfLinguisticTerms/WhatIsConversationAnalysis.htm>>.
- Whalen, J., Zimmerman, D., and Whalen, M. (1988). When words fail: a single case analysis. *Social Problems*, 35 (4).

## TRANSCRIPT

O= officer S= Suspect (driver) C=civilian

## Section I

1. O: nine. we have live ( ). pull Up Pahlea:se.  
 PU::LL=at car: up:: Get me outtotha road,  
 2. (5.0)  
 3. (5.0)  
 4. O: we'll be outta tha way here (.) in ju::st a minute.  
 5. (5.0)  
 6. O: jesus, (4.2)  
 7. S: whatt↑s the problem? (2.0)  
 8. O: Let me see your li↑cense please, and insurance.  
 9. S: ↑I sure do?  
 10. (.)  
 11. O: let me see it.  
 12. S: YOU Don't TALK BACK TO [ME  
 13. O: [hey. Hey. HEY  
 14. S: <DON'T TALK BACK TO ME>  
 15. O: °send me some backup ple[ase  
 16. S: [b-b-bring anybody you want=  
 17. O: =I wanna see your in::surance please ma[m  
 18. S: [GO away?=  
 19. O: =DO::not. (3.0) Do not to:uch me please (.) like tha::t, okay?

## Section II

20. (11.0)  
 21. O: Ma'm I wanna put:: you in tha car  
 22. S: NO, you can't do whatever you WANT!  
 23. O: o::kay  
 24. S: you can't do whatever you want!  
 25. S: you can't do whatever you want.  
 26. O: What's the problem he[re?  
 27. S: [ w.. I have to, I HAVE TO LOCK MY  
 DOOR!  
 28. S: I HAVE TO LOCK MY DOOR!  
 29. S: I HAVE TO LOCK MY DOOR!  
 30. O: (radioing [base)  
 31. S: [(screaming)]  
 32. O: [five could you step on it, please?  
 33. S: [SCREAMING  
 34. S: SCREAMING  
 35. S: HE[LP ME! HELP ME!  
 36. O: [ Five could you back me up please?  
 37. S: HELP ME! HELP ME! HE'S RAPING ME!  
 38. S: HE'S [HURTING ME!  
 39. O: [Pardon?

## Section III

40. S ↑HELP ME! HELP [ME!  
 41. O [I:: need a back up [ple:ase.

42. S [↑HELP ME:!  
 43. S ↑HELP ME:!! HELP ME:!  
 44. O (0.5) Hay. (1.0) Settle d-will you settle down?=  
 45. S =↑HELP ME:!! (.) HELP ME:!! (.) HELP ME:!!=  
 46. O =Alright. I got somebody comin. [Settle down.  
 47. D [(Dispatcher's voice comes over radio)  
 48. S (2.0)  
 49. O Thank you.  
 51. D (Dispatcher's voice comes over radio)  
 52. S (↑Why are you taking me:?)  
 53. P Get in the car and shut up.  
 54. O [(officer speaking; inaudible)  
 55. S [↑I wanted to lock my do↑[or!  
 56. O [I'll lock it fo:r you..  
 57. S No↑oo:!! (1.0) I don't want you to lock my door=get off me!

**Section IV**

58. D: GET OFF:: ME: (0.5) GET OFF ME  
 59. O: No[=ma'am you're gettin-=in=the car  
 60. S: [(NO NO )  
 61. S: [NO::::  
 62. O: [hhhhhh Yes=ma'am  
 63. S: NO::::  
 64. O: [You're gettin=in the cahhhr  
 65. C: [( [ , yurr an: idi:ot)  
 66. S: [NO::::  
 67. O: Thatsanuff=sir hhhh ha ha=[I got=help comin (.) thank::=you  
 68. S: [NO::  
 69. (2.0)  
 70. S: WHAT=AV=I=DONE::  
 71. O: Well:: you started pushin=on=me=thats=tha=[first one thing  
 72. S: [SO GO AWAY ::: I WANT TA  
 73. S: LO::CK=MY=DOOR::  
 74. S: YOU ( ) (.) AAAAAHHHHHHHHHHHHHH ( )  
 75: (muffled wrestling/screaming)

# *A Real Man's Game: Manipulations of Guilt and Rhetorical Displays of Masculinity by the UFC*

Dane Miller

In its early days, the Ultimate Fighting Championship seemed destined to disappear from American TV screens as quietly as it appeared. Viewed by critics as loosely organized street-fighting, the sport of mixed martial arts (MMA), specifically the UFC, catered to a niche audience and struggled to turn a profit. That is until Dana White and the Fertitta brothers stepped in. Since 2001, the UFC with White as its commander-in-chief has blossomed into a multi-million dollar enterprise and achieved widespread acceptance. As Tim Lemke for *The Washington Times* writes, “It’s common knowledge that mixed martial arts is one of the fastest-growing sports in America. But the sport essentially is dominated by one entity - the Ultimate Fighting Championship - as rival leagues fight to gain a foothold and, in some cases, struggle even to stay in business.”

The question is how did White along with co-owners Lorenzo and Frank Fertitta change perceptions of their business and turn a small-time novelty into an empire? The answer can be found in the company’s rhetorical image creation. Using Kenneth Burke’s guilt-redemption cycle, this essay will show that the UFC’s success is due, at least in part, to its manipulation of guilt associated with male masculinity, and the creation of a culture that exhorts, through rhetorical displays and language, hand-to-hand combat and gladiatorial traits as virtuous.

First, let us examine how televised sports define America’s concept of manhood. Michael A. Messner conducted a study of televised sports coverage and condensed the major themes identified into what he termed “The Televised Sports Manhood Formula,” which is, Messner tells us, “a pedagogy through which boys are taught that paying the price, be it one’s bodily health or one’s money, gives one access to the privileges that have been historically linked to hegemonic masculinity—money, power, glory, and women” (392). Messner also asserts that in a time such as ours when the traditional definitions of masculinity have been called into question by feminist and gay rights movements, “[T]he Televised Sports Manhood Formula provides a remarkably stable and concrete view of masculinity as grounded in bravery, risk taking, violence, bodily strength,

and heterosexuality” (392). The only combat-sport, or pseudo-combat-sport as is more the case, that Messner’s study observed was professional wrestling, specifically World Wrestling Entertainment. The WWE is not in fact a genuine instance of hand-to-hand combat since the fighting is choreographed and played out in a scripted plotline.

Kath Woodward focuses her study exclusively on pugilism as a spectator sport in the book *Boxing, Masculinity and Identity*. She states,

[B]oxing offers a space in which masculinities are very visible and invoke associations with physicality, risk-taking and even violence, that those who wish to buy into that masculinity but who are not participants in the sport have to accommodate in other ways. Interactions outside the sport offer one possibility...as does spectatorship, either of fights or of fight films, which offers a much more open field for collaboration (14-15).

Since the UFC incorporates a great deal of boxing technique in its competitions, it is reasonable to assume that similar implications about masculinity are made in mixed martial arts competitions as they are in boxing.

In addition, a study conducted by Nancy Cheever sought to identify the gratifications of viewing mixed martial arts. Respondents to her survey, which was made available through an MMA magazine website, were 98% male. “It appears there are six general areas that drew the men to view the sport on the regular basis when (they) first saw it or heard about it,” Cheever says. “The first is the sensational and violent qualities of MMA (violence), including the blood and brutality, the knockouts, and watching men beat each other” (39). Later in her analysis, Cheever finds “there appears to be five characteristics of mixed martial arts that are most entertaining for its viewers: The first is its violent aspects (violence): these include violence, brutality, blood, seeing someone get hurt or hit in the face, watching them beat each other up, and that people get beat up and no one gets in trouble for it” (42).

Contemporary televised sports support a view of masculinity that embraces power, bravery, and violence as virtues. The question then becomes is this current perception of masculinity a product of our modern-day media or is the media simply appealing to well-established conceptions? Thousands of years ago, Roman gladiators were praised for the same traits perceived in the MMA fighters of today. Gladiatorial combat was very much a spectator sport that took place for the entertainment of the public. As described in *Sport and Spectacle in the Ancient*

*World*, “Like fighting cocks or pit bulldogs, the gladiators represented their masters and fans, providing vicarious self-validation of Roman militarism and machismo. The combats were war games...deep dangerous play indeed, but not pointless slaughter and sacrifice” (270). Gladiator battles were demonstrations of endurance and skill performed by trained combatants.

If violence and brutality are inherent traits of the male gender, as they appear to be, then society, especially contemporary American society, has implemented significant sanctions to discourage these traits from being actively expressed. In few arenas are men, or women for that matter, granted immunity or given rewards for engaging in hand-to-hand combat. There are laws restricting physical violence and more generally “unprivileged physical contact” between people (Title LXII). Prison inmates with a pension for violence are often referred to as “animals,” suggesting that the impulsivity with which they resort to violence makes them undeserving of the title of “man” as defined by modern standards. By contrast, men are expected to exercise restraint in their dealings with conflict. Our society has put constraints on certain traits associated with primal masculinity, but when expressed in the proper forum, those same traits not only remain associated with the masculinity but also become praiseworthy.

This dichotomy leads us to Kenneth Burke’s guilt-redemption cycle. Bernard Brock constructs the following summary of Burke’s cycle in his essay titled *Rhetorical Criticism: A Burkeian Approach Revisited*:

[G]uilt...sets off a psychological reaction in people. Guilt reduces social cohesion and gives people the feeling of being less than whole, so that they strive to have this guilt canceled or to receive redemption. The act of purification may be either mortification or victimage. Mortification is an act of self-sacrifice that relieves guilt, whereas *victimage is the purging of guilt through a scapegoat that symbolizes society’s guilt*. To be effective, the process of purification and redemption must be balanced; the act of purification must be equivalent to the degree of guilt if one is to receive redemption. Psychological guilt, purification, and redemption result from the rejection of hierarchy, or pollution (186, emphasis added).

As previously stated, the modern American man is expected to mediate conflict in his life using dialogue or other non-violent means of resolution. Even the age-old idea of “boys will be boys” has become the target of increased scrutiny. Kevin Miller, a long time construction worker currently employed with Pike Industries in NH, said in a conversation with the author

that as the result of increased bureaucracy, conflicts among employees that might have erstwhile been resolved in a brief scuffle between two men are now subject to formal methods of resolution, including extensive documentation by supervisors. The implementation of bureaucracy in even the most blue-collar of industries is evidence of society's increased favor for civility and restraint. It is my assertion that the degree of separation of men from their primal nature by the stringent demands of society causes the modern man to feel guilt – that to some degree, the true essence of manliness is diluted by the rigid social structures of contemporary American society.

The UFC provides for men, who comprise the vast majority of viewers, an opportunity for victimization as a means of alleviating their guilt. Thomas Johnson writes, “These are our nation’s one-on-one, man-on-man gladiatorial contests, cultural theaters of mediated sport where the explicit goal is to inflict maximum pain, and to injure one’s opponent in the pursuit of victory” (70). The idea is that by watching these contests and immersing oneself in the culture of MMA, men are brought more in touch with the often taboo elements of raw, unmitigated masculinity.

Extensive pre-fight interviews with the fighters and in-depth profiles that focus on the fighters’ lives outside of the sport, including their families and often humble origins, encourage viewers to identify with the competitors. The combatants are normalized to some degree and portrayed not as freaks of nature, but as talented “everymen” earning a living. These connections between viewer and competitor make it easy for the audience to purge its guilt through the scapegoat of the fighter; the viewer is vicariously vindicated and achieves redemption through the performance of *his* fighter.

By linking itself to the ancient traditions of gladiatorial battles, the UFC uses the guilt of the modern man as a means of self-promotion. Hollywood has romanticized the concept of the gladiator in such films as the appropriately titled *Gladiator* starring Russell Crowe. The main character, Maximus, is a former general and military hero who is usurped of his power and forced to fight as a gladiator. His valiant performances in the Coliseum garner Maximus significant notoriety, all the while his only desire remains to avenge the murder of his family. In the end, he kills the man responsible for the murders before Maximus himself dies a noble death (*Gladiator*). Films such as *Gladiator* create an image of the Roman gladiator as the pinnacle of masculine virtuousness. Indeed even in their own time, gladiators, especially those who fought of their own accord, were exalted as upholding the virtues of courage, skill, and honor (Kyle 121). Recently some scholars have found evidence that many gladiators underwent

extensive weapons and hand-to-hand combat training (119). Also, contrary to popular belief, many of the contests were not fought to the death, as it was considered honorable to win without killing an opponent (119). Above all, it seems, gladiatorial contests were intended to serve as highly skilled acts of competition between expert combatants who demonstrated virtues such as valor and strength through their performances, while never fearing to embrace the brutality inherent in battle.

To highlight comparisons made between the UFC and ancient Roman gladiator battles, I examined four fights from recent pay-per-view events and focused my analysis on the language employed by the fight commentators, Joe Rogan and Mike Goldberg. Two of the fights were from the heavyweight division: one between Kimbo Slice and Matt Mitrione, and the other between Frank Mir and Brock Lesnar. One fight was a light-heavyweight championship bout between Forrest Griffin and Anderson Silva. The fourth fight was a welterweight championship match between Dan Hardy and Georges St-Pierre, or GSP. It is worth noting that all of the fights are found on a site called MMA Share, the motto for which is, "Bringing the Coliseum to your computer" ([mmator.com](http://mmator.com)) - an overt comparison between gladiators and MMA fighters.

At the beginning of the Lesnar-Mir fight, ring announcer Bruce Buffer announces, "Two UFC heavyweight warriors have now entered the world's ultimate proving ground for champions." The octagon in which the fighters compete is no longer just a ring - it has been transformed into a "proving ground;" the fighters are "warriors" and "champions." These terms compel the audience to think of the fight as bigger, more symbolic than just a martial arts competition.

Kimbo Slice is also referred to as a "tough warrior" when he refuses to quit despite enduring a beating at the hands of Matt Mitrione. This gives insight into the UFC's definition of a warrior: a warrior, we understand, is someone who continues fighting courageously in the face of defeat. In similar fashion, gladiators were praised for their ability to endure pain and bodily injury, and to maintain honor even when confronted with death by offering their necks for the deathblow (Kyle 270).

In the end, Mitrione is not just victorious, he imposes "domination" over Slice. The idea of domination versus submission is recurrent in UFC fights. In fact, unlike boxing where fighters can only win by decision, knockout, or technical knockout, MMA fighters can also earn submission victories by inflicting a great deal of damage on an opponent or putting an opponent in an inescapable position that forces one fighter to signal submission, either verbally or by "tapping out" with his hand. After Lesnar defeats Mir and demonstrates the "power in his fists" by causing



Mir to “splatter[] blood,” he too is said to have shown “total domination” over Mir. The descriptions of Lesnar’s strength and brutality relate to the sensational demonstrations of gladiatorial traits. Georges St. Pierre, too, is described as having shown “complete domination” over Hardy after five rounds of competition that were undeniably controlled by GSP. In fact, GSP’s repeated takedowns of Hardy are described as “psychological warfare.” When framed as such, GSP’s tactics are not just a strategy designed to gain the upper hand against Hardy, who would much prefer to fight on his feet; they constitute acts of war with Hardy playing the role of the enemy.

At one point, GSP attempts to submit Hardy using a painful armlock known as a kimura. As his arm is forcefully bent behind his back, Hardy grimaces but refuses to submit. “He’s gonna rip his arm off! (sic)” exclaims Joe Rogan, speaking to the brutality with which the move is being performed. After avoiding submission and escaping GSP’s hold, Rogan assures, “There’s no quit in Dan Hardy,” exhorting the same kind of gladiatorial courage displayed by Kimbo Slice in his fight against Matt Mitrione.

Contrary to the notion of courage, Forrest Griffin suffers an “embarrassing knockout” in his fight against Anderson Silva. Speaking of Griffin’s performance in the cage, Rogan says, “He looked so tentative and slow.” Rather than fighting with bravery, Griffin showed signs of fear and unpreparedness, according to Rogan. Cowardice is the antithesis of the virtue of courage and is therefore reviled in both gladiators and UFC fighters.

Other language to describe the fights serves to enhance to violence: Silva’s legkicks are “lethal”; Mitrione throws “vicious shots” that “brutaliz[e]” Slice. As we saw earlier in Cheever’s findings, watching two men fight without the possibility of anyone getting into trouble serves as part of the draw for UFC viewers. Employing language that heightens the danger and intensifies the raw masculinity on display allows the audience to feel that it is tapping into a part of the male psyche that has been eliminated from nearly all other social arenas. The guilt of men is assuaged and redemption is achieved through a connection with overt expressions of primal aggression and fearlessness.

Certainly though this same guilt affected men during the 1990s when the UFC first emerged. Constraints on violence and aggression are not recent developments. Why then did the pre-2001 UFC not experience the same kind of success that it does now? Poor marketing and development may have played a part. The UFC is a business like any other and if it was managed poorly, its failure was inevitable. The structure

of fights could also have played a role in the league's struggles. There is an adage in boxing that styles make fights. If true, styles often *broke* fights in the early days of the UFC. Because referees were less intrusive to the action, two fighters well-versed in wrestling or other grappling-based styles often wound up in long chess matches of fights that held little entertainment value to anyone without an intricate knowledge of the styles being employed. The fighters would struggle for position against one another for entire rounds with few if any punches being thrown. Other fighters had almost no ground techniques and would be quickly dispatched by a jiu-jitsu or wrestling specialist. In the opposite scenario, some fighters went up against dominant strikers only to be knocked unconscious within seconds.

The most notable differences between the "old" and "new" UFCs, however, are the levels of constraint controlling brutality. The 1990s UFC did not have weight classes, meaning that fighters with significantly different body types (height, weight, reach, etc.) could fight against each other. Fighters headbutted, pulled hair, and broke limbs in pursuit of victory. The original tournament system led successful fighters to compete in multiple matches in the same day, compounding the risk of damage to the body and brain. Critics were outspoken in their opposition to the UFC and Senator John McCain even referred to it as "human cockfighting" (Syken). Because it was the subject of such staunch opposition, the UFC had difficulty finding sanctioning bodies and organizations to support its brand of competition.

Criticism of unrestricted man-to-man violence is understandable in society as we know it today. Over the centuries, increasing importance has been placed on the individual more so than in ancient times. However, gladiatorial battles also faced detractors in their own time. The Greek rhetorician Lucian saw them not just as "bestial and crude," but also as a waste of talent; he thought gladiators would be better used in defense of the country (Crowther 122). Other philosophers saw gladiators as a spectacle that was harmful to the souls of the audience (122). It seems unbridled violence can function as a source of guilt for some spectators.

In the years preceding White and the Fertittas' involvement, the UFC took steps towards legitimacy: The wearing of gloves became mandatory, strict round limits and weight classes were implemented, and certain techniques, such as headbutting and striking the back of an opponent's head, were forbidden from competition (Strickland 1). White and the Fertitta brothers, who had connections to the Nevada State Athletic Commission, quickly set to work revamping the UFC's image (Strickland 2). Soon, pay-per-view events regained popularity, as did DVDs of UFC

events. The show *The Ultimate Fighter*, which debuted in 2005 on Spike TV, featured a group of amateur fighters competing for the promise of a “six-figure contract” with the UFC. The show drew more fans to the UFC and became an instant success. As the UFC gained more acceptance, the talent pool from which it drew its fighters grew and the skill level of the league increased dramatically. Fighters who are not well versed in both grappling and striking are now weeded out before they ever get to the UFC, making for dynamic fights in every weight class.

In the early days of the UFC, many viewers experienced guilt in response to witnessing largely uncontrolled savagery employed inside the octagon. As a means of achieving redemption, some chose to simply abstain from viewing the contests, while others actively opposed the UFC’s existence as a means of creating division between their own values and those on display in the cage. As the league transformed into a more structured forum for legitimate athletic competition, albeit a violent form of competition, it was able to shed its barbaric image.

Cheever’s study confirms the notion that audiences enjoy violence as long as some form of structure governs the brutality. In fact, respondents in Cheever’s study appeared to favor competition that was “highly violent” as opposed to that which was less violent, so long as the televised violence adhered to a set of rules (48). Similarly, Bryant finds that violence in some sports is expected by viewers and that “social and moral considerations that might otherwise impair and hamper enjoyment are diffused and should have little impact” when there are rules in place (261).

“What makes UFC so great,” says co-owner Lorenzo Fertitta, “is that every single man on the planet gets it immediately. It’s just two guys beating each other up” (M. Miller). Ostensibly, men *do* get it. The audience of the UFC is overwhelmingly male, and those in charge of promoting the league know this all too well. The modern American man is subjected to restrictions of his primal masculinity every day. Development of our social structures has led to the condemnation of violence as a means of conflict resolution, even in realms in which a degree of physical altercation had previously been condoned. This separation of man from basic elements of his masculinity evokes within him feelings of guilt, in a Burkeian sense. Viewing other men, to whom the audience can relate, exercise their own primal masculinity in the form of violent competition allows spectators to purge their guilt through the process of victimization. Fighters become scapegoats through which the spectators achieve catharsis from their guilt; viewers feel that they can be part of the action without taking part in it.

The UFC understands the frustrations of the modern man and uses them strategically. Through rhetorical use of language and display,

the UFC draws comparisons between its fighters and Roman gladiators. The result is the creation of an image of the “real man” that is highly attractive to men who feel that their own masculinity has been repressed. Central to the UFC’s image of the real man are ideas of bravery, strength, and brutality. However, the league’s history has shown that perceptions of barbarism in the sport cause men guilt, rather than alleviate it. The UFC achieved legitimacy through the implementation of rules that both protected fighters from serious injury and heightened the overall level of competition. The increased structure in the sport, along with better marketing, has yielded the UFC a massive fan-base of millions of viewers, the vast majority of which are men.

Though not a publicly traded company, the UFC now has an estimated worth of over \$1 billion - a substantial appreciation for a company that cost the Fertittas and Dana White a total of \$2 million (M. Miller, Rovell). Its success, however, is no accident. The evolution of the UFC from floundering sideshow to billion-dollar brand name was the product of masterful rhetorical image creation. The management of perceptions of the UFC by White and the Fertitta brothers should serve as a paradigm to other business owners seeking to better their company’s public image.

This paper was written as an assignment for CMN 756: Rhetorics of Display taught by Professor Lawrence Prelli.

### Works Cited

- Brock, Bernard L. “Rhetorical Criticism: A Burkeian Approach Revisited.” *Methods of Rhetorical Criticism: A Twentieth-Century Perspective*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Eds. B. Brock, R. Scott, & J. Chesebro. Detroit : Wayne State University Press, 1989. 183-195.
- Bryant, J., P. Comisky, and D. Zillmann. “The Appeal of Rough-and-Tumble Play in Televised Professional Football.” *Communication Quarterly* (1980): 256-262.
- Cheever, Nancy. “The Uses and Gratifications of Viewing Mixed Martial Arts.” *Journal of Sports Media* 4.1 (Spring 2009): 25-53. *Project MUSE* 27 April 2010 <[http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/journal\\_of\\_sports\\_media/v004/4.1.cheever.pdf](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/journal_of_sports_media/v004/4.1.cheever.pdf)>
- Crowther, Nigel B. “Roman Gladiators.” *Sport in Ancient Times*. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2007. 103-123.
- “Georges St-Pierre GSP vs. Dan Hardy – UFC 111.” *MMAShare*. N.p. 28 Mar 2010. Web video clip. 10 May 2010. <<http://video.mmator.com/2010/03/gsp-vs-hardy-ufc-111.html>>

“Gladiator.” *IMDb*. IMDb.com, Inc. N.d. Web. 10 May 2010.

Kyle, Donald G. *Sport and Spectacle in the Ancient World*. Malden, MA; Oxford: Blackwell Pub., 2007. 269-278.

Lemke, Tim. “UFC beating down rivals.” *Washington Times*. 17 Jun 2008. Web.

“Matt Mitrione – Kimbo Slice – UFC 113.” *MMAShare*. N.p. 8 May 2010. Web video clip. 10 May 2010. <<http://video.mmator.com/2010/05/matt-mitrione-kimbo-slice-ufc-113.html>>

Messner, M.A., M. Dunbar, and D. Hunt. “The televised sports manhood formula.” *Journal of Sport & Social Issues* 24.4 (2000): 380–394.

Miller, Kevin C. Personal interview. 2009.

Miller, Matthew. “Ultimate Cash Machine.” *Forbes.com*. Forbes.com, LLC. 10 Apr 2008. Web. 10 May 2010.

Rovell, Darren. “UFC Owners Struggling in Vegas.” *CNBC.com*. CNBC, Inc. 19 Mar 2009. Web. 10 May 2010.

“Silva vs. Griffin – UFC 101.” *MMAShare*. N.p. 8 Apr 2010. Web video clip. 10 May 2010. <<http://video.mmator.com/2010/04/silva-vs-griffin-ufc-101.html>>

Strickland, Jonathan. “How the Ultimate Fighting Championship Works.” *HowStuffWorks*. Discovery Communications, LLC. N.d. Web. 10 May 2010.

Syken, B. “All the rage.” *Sports Illustrated* 31 Oct 2005: 30. “Title LXII Criminal Code: Chapter 631 Assault and Related Offenses.” *NH General Court*. State of NH. 4 Aug 1979. Web. 10 May 2010.



---

## **A Digitized Society: Digital Media & Cultural Change Forum**

- Mass Message: The Impact of Digital  
Media on Documentary Film** 103  
Kelly Martin
- Finding Reality in a Virtual World:  
An Analysis of the Authenticity  
of Traditional Dating Versus Online Dating** 107  
Joanie Stolos
- Citizen Journalism: Defining Bloggers'  
Rights** 113  
David Whitney
- The Internet and Social Networking:  
Building Virtual Relationships  
and Harming In-Person Relationships** 118  
Amanda Tan
- What Perez Says: An Analysis of  
Popular Culture** 125  
Lauren Freeman
- Disappearing Privacy** 129  
Angelina Bossone

# Mass Message: The Impact of Digital Media on Documentary Film

Kelly Martin



Digital media is everywhere. The average college student probably doesn't go through a single day without interacting with some form of it. As you read this sentence, students around the globe are talking on their smart phones, watching class lectures via podcasts, catching up on their favorite TV shows online, and checking Facebook—for the ninth time today. While these are all direct demonstrations of how digital media has impacted society, indirect implications of digital technology are also apparent and important. In particular, the influence of digital media on documentary films is a significant (and often overlooked) result of digital media change on our culture.

Author John Corner called it “the art of record” and filmmaker John Grierson described it as “the creative interpretation of actuality” (Ward, 2005, p. 6). However one labels documentary film, it is obvious that this genre of motion picture is considered a powerful and inventive form of media. While fictional film and television dominates popular culture today, “the history of motion pictures began...with the documentation of daily life” (Fox, 2010, p. 20). Documentary film has come a long way since the first (of what we would consider traditional) documentaries were created in the 1920's, but recent developments in digital media have revolutionized the production, distribution, and cultural impacts of documentary film.

One example of these impacts is demonstrated in the following story: In March of 2004 the McDonald's Corporation announced that they would be phasing out the option to “Super Size” meals in their restaurants, a mere twelve days after the initial screening of Morgan Spurlock's successful—and low budget—documentary *Supersize Me* (Galloway and Kwansah-Aidoo, 2005, p. 71). In May that same year the company also announced it was introducing adult Happy Meals which came with a salad, bottled water, and pedometers—and today, the McDonald's menu includes low fat milk, yogurt parfaits, apple slices to substitute fries, and over ten salad options to add to a meal (Menu). While the McDonalds Corporation is still known for serving less-than-healthy food, there is no arguing that many who viewed Spurlock's documentary think more about what and where they eat than before watching the movie.

The story of Spurlock's film is a perfect example of how the development of new technology in the realm of media is influencing documentary filmmaking. Filmmakers such as Spurlock have been able to create important, issue-driven films very cheaply and "perhaps more crucially, [to] find ways of getting them to a reasonably large audience" through the use of digital media and technology (Ward, 2005, p. 101). In terms of production, million-dollar camera equipment and edit suites have now been replaced with cheaper, more accessible equipment. For less than \$2,000 a consumer can buy a Digital Video (DV) camcorder and personal computer and "suddenly, you have the capacity to create video that rivals that of a television station" (York, 2008, p. xiii). These technological advancements in digital media are the first step for everyday consumers in creating quality, low budget films.

Digital media has also impacted the distribution of these films. The internet is a vast connection of people, places, and ideas, so it serves as the perfect medium for filmmakers to distribute movies. For example, producers can upload scenes, teasers, or full videos to large databases such as YouTube and Vimeo. These databases utilize search tools so that interested viewers can search and view clips directly related to their interests. The advantages of this "client/server" model are that searching for videos is easy and reliable, since the internet is available 24/7 (Fulton, Montgomery, O'Rourke, York, & Burkhart, 2008, p. 315). Furthermore, a website such as YouTube allows filmmakers to distribute videos and information online without having to pay for costly server space (Fox, 2010, p. 192). Finally, digital devices such as smart phones and tablets allow consumers to carry and share these videos everywhere they travel.

In addition to inexpensive and easy distribution, digital media allows filmmakers to publicize and create buzz around important documentaries. Social media sites are a "powerful communication tool" that have "the ability to reach niche groups" when sharing videos, ideas, and other information (How to Use Social Networking Sites). Hosting sites such as YouTube allow viewers to "share" videos on social media outlets like Facebook and Twitter. As people continuously share and forward digital media links they produce "exponentially branching patterns of distribution" (Fox, 2010, p. 192). While sites such as YouTube may seem cluttered with "vlogs," clips, and ads, it is often the most interesting or important videos that people choose to pass along.

While digital media obviously have the ability to influence nearly every industry, its impact on documentary filmmaking is especially important in the context of larger cultural and social changes. Because digital media and technological advancements allow filmmakers to produce,



edit, and distribute films inexpensively, average citizens are given a voice, an ability to share important messages that could have a larger impact. In other words, digital media and technology is being used to “‘democratise’ [sic] the process” of filmmaking (Ward, 2005, p. 102).

This democratizing form of rhetoric gives people the ability to talk about important cultural topics through issue-driven films in the hopes of proposing and influencing change. For instance, filmmaker Robert Greenwald’s 2005 film *Wal-Mart: The High Cost of Low Prices* argues that the corporate giant Wal-Mart has negative impacts on local communities and businesses (Fox, 2010, p. 188). The 2008 film *Food, Inc.* also aims to educate the average consumer by unveiling problems in the U.S. food industry and explicitly telling viewers ways in which they can enact change. This film is also a good example of how digital media can further be used to promote a cultural movement, even after the movie has been released. The film’s official website, which is referenced at the end of the documentary, acts as a digital campaign community in which interested viewers can buy the movie, link to a partnering organization’s blog, subscribe to an e-newsletter, sign the “Child Nutrition Reauthorization petition” and much more (Hungry For Change). The internet is more frequently being utilized as a way to promote an important documentary film and to form a community around an important social topic.

The medium of film (versus a book, an article, etc.) is also important because movies are not discriminate based on literacy levels and are more likely to reach a larger audience of “average” consumers. This is important because many documentaries (such as *Food, Inc.*) argue that it is the average American consumer that really has the power to influence change. At the end of Mark Achbar and Jennifer Abbot’s 2003 documentary *The Corporation*, filmmaker Michael Moore describes this, by stating that corporations believe average people

...will watch this and they won’t do anything because [the corporations] have done such a good job numbing their minds and dumbing them down. The people aren’t going to leave the couch and go do something political. They’re convinced of that. I’m convinced of the opposite. I’m convinced that a few people are gonna leave the movie theatre or get up off the couch and go and do something, anything, to get this world back in our hands.  
(2:21:22)

Because documentary film can be produced “by the people-for the people,” especially with the help of digital media, it is a powerful tool in the

realm of cultural change.

The impacts of digital media and technology on documentary film are as important as they are diverse. The ability to produce, distribute, and promote movies inexpensively has allowed average consumers to create influential, quality films. Issue-driven documentaries are often an important tool in sparking or forwarding important social change, whether it is in the realm of democracy, health, agriculture, business practices, or other forms of social activism. Therefore it is just as important to analyze factors, such as digital media, that influence this method of communication.

### Works Cited

- Achbar, M. (Producer), & Abbot, J. (Director). (2003). *The Corporation*. [Motion Picture] U.S: Big Picture Media.
- Allbusiness.com. (2008, Dec 24). How to Use Social Networking Sites for Marketing and PR. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from [http://www.nytimes.com/allbusiness/AB11702023\\_primary.html](http://www.nytimes.com/allbusiness/AB11702023_primary.html)
- Fox, Broderick. (2010). *Documentary Media: History, Theory, Practice*. Boston: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Fulton, C., Montgomery, M., O'Rourke, J., York, M., & Burkhart, J. (Eds.). (2008). *The Videomaker Guide to Video Production*. Burlington, MA: Focal Press.
- Galloway, Chris and Kwansah-Aidoo, Kwamena. (2005). *Public Relations Issues and Crisis Management*. Southbank, Vic: Thomson Social Science Press.
- Hungry For Change. *Food, Inc*. Retrieved from <http://www.foodincmovie.com/index.php>.
- Menu. *McDonald's*. Retrieved from <http://www.mcdonalds.com/us/en/food.html>.
- Ward, Paul. (2005). *Documentary: The Margins of Reality*. London: Wallflower Press.
- York, Matt. (2008). Introduction. In C. Fulton, M. Montgomery, J. O'Rourke, M. York, J. Burkhart, *The Videomaker Guide to Video Production* (pp. xiii-xiv). Burlington, MA: Focal Press.

# Finding Reality in a Virtual World: An Analysis of the Authenticity of Traditional Dating Versus Online Dating

Joanie Stolos



The internet breaks the norm of meeting a significant other, yet the outcome is typically the same - a relationship. Online dating may cause a sense of anxiety in many, but for some it creates a comfortable and efficient environment to meet a significant other. In the GLBT environment, the internet is a safety zone where GLBTs can express their sexuality freely. For those that are workaholics, the internet creates a sense of efficiency. For middle-aged internet users, online dating is a place where they can find what they are looking for, when typical social environments grow scarce. Yet, despite how well online dating sites trigger the feeling of reality, the essence of truth really does not exist in any medium. Yet people are still on a constant search to discover this element of "truth." Despite online dating's reputation for taking away the romance and excitement in developing relationships, online dating has grown increasingly popular over the past several years. In this essay, I explore the reasons why singles (and non-singles) turn to online dating. Although many skeptics argue that virtual relationships cannot be considered real, I argue that online dating is a space in which users can be themselves and express what they really desire, and that authenticity is an individual creation.

Over the recent years, cell phones, social networking, instant messaging, and many other digital media have instilled a fear that face-to-face communication has been lost. Many fear that children will grow up no longer understanding the core values of communication, values defined as communication without the help of technology. Technology has changed what has always been done, therefore producing an anxiety among many (Sturken and Thomas). To some technology is more efficient; to others it is lacking the essence of what is real. "The belief that communication technologies can promote connectivity is coupled with the fear that actual human connection has been irretrievably lost" (Sturken and Thomas 3). Despite its reputation, technology is a form of communication that has many positive aspects and is developing new and successful ways to communicate. The process of accepting something that challenges beliefs that have been instilled in culture for many years is difficult; but, through acceptance, twenty-first century technology will adapt and become part of

the norm.

New media is often not seen as natural or favorable, especially when it is so heavily compared with old media. Ilana Gershon develops the concept of remediation, the ways in which people's media ideologies come from their comparison to older and newer media (92). A culture's language is what develops meanings and symbols among a particular society. These meanings and symbols depict the norm. People form a language in which they interpret new media relating their culture and experience. This establishes different ways in which people use media, causing problems when someone tries to figure out someone else's motivations (Gershon 92). Bolter and Grusin suggest that the core of people's engagement with a new medium is how well the medium represents reality (Gershon 98). Considering that online dating is a source of dating that contradicts much of the traditional ideologies of proper relationships, people are very skeptical of the relationship's authenticity.

People all have ideals and standards, and identifying exactly what they want upfront creates a more realistic start to a relationship, as opposed to trying to adapt to a significant other's faults. 61% percent of home internet users have some type of primary-internet relationship online (Stafford, Kline, Dimmick). Although the most popular ways to meet a mate is through friends, work, or social events, online dating's popularity has increased by 17% in the last two years (Peter and Valtenburg). Fiore and Donath propose that "online personal systems would seem to provide the ideal example of a marriage market (1396). This is because online dating sites offer a larger pool of participants; and options from which to choose, with the ability to specify certain criteria on desirable qualities. Primary questions while making an online dating profile often include "Do you smoke?", "How often do you drink?", and "Do you have any children?" Some of these qualities may be of greater concern to some than others; therefore, by weeding out undesirable qualities the awkward clarifying process is avoided. According to Paul Hollander, online dating sites make avoiding the frustrations of contemporary western techniques for meeting a mate easier whether through the advice of others, superficial first impressions, or appearances (69). With the pressure to work hard in a struggling economy, singles find exactly what they need by searching for the qualifications they are looking for or not looking for, such as whether the candidates smoke, do drugs, have children, as well as what they are looking for such as marriage, sex, or just a fling.

Online dating sources often supply more dating options than the option of a serious relationship. Often online dating offers the option for users to choose whether they are just looking for a fling or even just a

sexual encounter. To many this may seem crude, but the medium actually simplifies the situation and avoids misunderstandings. Debbi Gardiner suggests that online dating is popular in the United States because singles' hectic work schedules do not allow for them to "flirt in smoky bars" (22). The same honesty does not work in typical social settings such as a party or a bar. This is perhaps why skeptics, those who often fear new technology, continue to bash online romance. The internet is really just setting off the relationship on a more realistic understanding between each person. When bringing the context of online dating to "real" social settings, conversations would go such as this: "Do you want to have sex or form something more serious with me?" or "I am only looking for a one-night stand." These statements seem very unlikely, but are very honest and essentially what people are really thinking. The internet's format allows for a more direct response from people.

Websites are especially significant for the GLBT population. The internet provides a more comfortable environment for those who struggle with social acceptance in other environments. Because personals sites promise privacy and discretion, members of groups who have traditionally been marginalized or stigmatized, such as gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals (GLBs), may benefit most from such sites, which allow them to seek friendship, romance and life partners while minimizing their efforts and exposure to overt social scrutiny. Not only do online dating sites make for easier communication within GLBT communities, but online dating also bridges the physical distance between GLBT singles so that they can more easily find each other. Lever theorizes that GLBT individuals use online venues as a means of sexual identity development, sexual exploration, and community building (233). People tend to work best with those they can relate to. After years of scrutiny, the queer population has found a place where they can privately explore their feelings and relations to each other. As O'Riordan explains, heterosexuality is the "unmarked category" (86). The internet creates a space for GLBTs to have a virtual space where their sexual preferences can be automatically assumed, just as the offline assumed sexual preference is heterosexuality. On the internet, they have a sense of belonging, a place where they can be their real selves opposed to acting a certain way in order for society to accept them.

According to a study done by Stephure and Boon, age is a very relevant factor in the equation of online dating. Older singles are faced with the challenge of weeding out those who are unavailable as the percentage of singles decreases over the years. According to the Socioemotional Selectivity Theory, "as people age, their sense that their lives are finite increases and they become increasingly focused on the present and goals

associated with emotional regulation and less focused on the future and future-oriented goals” (Stephure and Boone 659). Emotional relationships are a huge factor in this theory; therefore, as people get older they are more likely to be actively looking for a mate (Stephure and Boone 659). To add another challenge, finding a mate tends to be more challenging with age. While younger singles tend to be more social and involved in changing environments, older romance-seekers tend to be involved with the same routine and work scene. Older women are disadvantaged in their own social networks and greatly benefit from organized online dating sites (Lever 235). Studies have shown that older individuals may have “less involvement in ‘natural’ institutions such as school and university that facilitate meetings by bringing together large numbers of potential dates” (Stephure and Boone 661). Therefore, older individuals are more likely to desire the speed and convenience of dating sites, along with the sheer volume of the user base. When those who are available are identified from the beginning, older singles will more likely feel comfortable advertising their real selves when there is less risk that they will be disappointed with a person’s unavailability.

McKenna suggests that internet dating is a way for people to be able to expose their “true” selves. The sense of anonymity created by the internet allows people to be more comfortable disclosing personal information, skipping over the typical obstacles that couples have to go through. McKenna compares this to the theory of meeting someone on a train. There are many instances on a train in which people disclose very personal information to people that they hardly know. The idea that this particular person is a complete stranger and that they do not have access to his or her social circle creates a sense of comfort in that this personal information cannot be “leaked” to any mutual friends (McKenna 2). Therefore, because people feel less at risk when sharing with strangers, they can more easily express their true selves online, and are more apt to form closer relationships than offline.

Then again, it is a struggle to identify exactly what constitutes as one’s true self. According to Erving Goffman’s theory of situationalism, people tend to develop two different types of themselves, a front stage self and a back stage self. People most often use online dating to connect with what they believe to be his or her real selves. Both the front stage and back stage are equally “real”, for they are simply just different versions of how people convey themselves in certain situations. Through online dating people can pick and choose what elements of his front and back stage he wants to show. In a solid relationship, each person in the couple brings out the other’s best characteristics. With online relationships, each user’s favorite characteristics are already spelled out, making it easier for a prospect to

adapt to exactly what version of themselves they want to be.

Heino, Ellison and Gibbs explore the “marketplace effect” of online dating, using familiar terms related to shopping. They argue that “metaphors are conceptual frameworks that allow individuals to make sense of new concepts by drawing upon familiar experiences and frameworks” (Heino 429). Because people live in a world that has been constructed by their own languages, Heino’s perspective on creating a language familiarity with online dating may decrease the anxiety of skeptics. “Not only are metaphors a form of vivid and expressive language, they afford different ways of viewing the world, which actually shape people’s social construction of reality”(Heino 431). They explore metaphors that are of typical usage for relationships. These include “love is a journey” or “an uncontrollable force” (Heino 431). Their studies have shown that most people who use online dating services describe their transactions in a way in which they “sell” themselves. They compared an online dating profile to a resume and an interview, for it is a promotional tool that may not always be 100% the truth, but the way in which it is presented is significant (Heino 435). By using metaphors to relate technological skeptics to a more familiar language, Heino shows that online dating can constitute as authentic to anyone willing to take a different view.

Truth is a characteristic instilled in person through years of experience. Truth is a cultural knowledge; the idea that “honesty is good” would not be so prevalent in society if people were not told it. Some believe that face-to-face communication is the only way to honestly get to know an individual. Others believe there needs to be a forum, a set of guidelines for one to follow so that one can break apart his or her individual characteristics. People are constantly in search of his or her real selves, or finding a “real” man/woman. Yet, every person is in fact not a singular individual. One man can be a father, a husband, a lover, a worker, and many other things. Each of those roles requires certain individual characteristics, but all in the same person. Online, someone can edit his profile picture to make himself look slimmer or lie about smoking habits. Yet he or she is being who he or she wants others to see. That person is playing a role. Match.com promises to accurately identify a user’s personality, while eharmony.com’s home page identifies itself as “[a] place where millions of people are brought together based on the things that really matter.” But these promises cannot be kept when each person creates who they want to be online, and that perception of themselves becomes his or her reality.

## Works Cited

- Gardiner, Debbi. "Love in the Age of Spam: Online Dating Sites Are Slashing the Sleaze to Help Grownups Find Mates." *Japan Inc.* 1 Feb. 2003. Print.
- Heino, Rebecca, Nicole Ellison, and Jennifer Gibbs. "Relationshopping: Investigating the Market Metaphor in Online Dating." *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*. Web. 28 Nov. 2010. <<http://spr.sagepub.com>>.
- Hollander, Paul. "The Counterculture of the Heart." *Society* 41.2 (2004): 69-77. Print.
- Lever, Janet, Christian Grov, Tracy Royce, and Brian Joseph Gillespie. "Searching for Love in All the "Write" Places: Exploring Internet Personals Use by Sexual Orientation, Gender, and Age." *International Journal of Sexual Health* 20.4 (2008): 233-46. Print.
- McKenna, Katelyn Y. A., Amie S. Green, and Marci E. J. Gleason. "Relationship Formation on the Internet: What's the Big Attraction?" *Journal of Social Issues* 58.1 (2002): 9-31. Print.
- Napoli, Philip M. "Technological Visions: The Hopes and Fears That Shape New Technologies - by Marita Sturken, Douglas Thomas, & Sandra J. Ball-Rokeach." *Journal of Communication* 56.3 (2006): 626-27. Print.
- Pauley, Perry, and Tara Emmers-Sommer. "The Impact of Internet Technologies on Primary and Secondary Romantic Relationship Development." *Communication Studies* 58.4 (2007): 411-27. Print.
- Smith, Gregory W. H. *Erving Goffman*. London: Routledge, 2006. Print.
- Stephure, Robert J., Susan D. Boon, Stacey L. MacKinnon, and Vicki L. Deveau. "Internet Initiated Relationships: Associations Between Age and Involvement in Online Dating." *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 14.3 (2009): 658-81. Print.





## Citizen Journalism: Defining Bloggers' Rights

David Whitney

The book *Blogging* by Jill Walker Rettberg submerges readers in a profound analysis of the world of blogging from the eye of a renowned 'blogger' and communication researcher. Rettberg delves into many aspects of blogging and the ways in which digital phenomena have changed the way we communicate and share our ideas in contemporary society. Rettberg begins by defining a blog and all of its complexities and ends by giving the reader some valuable insight geared toward the future of blogging from her own perspective. The chapters in between cover everything from the history of electronic writing to the rise of social networks and personal branding. In the following paper I look closely at an interesting section of Rettberg's book titled "Citizen Journalists," and tackle the issue of distinguishing the difference between journalists and bloggers, and ultimately, why this matters.

Rettberg quotes journalist Abbott Joseph Liebling who says, "freedom of the press is guaranteed only to those who own one" (Rettberg, 84). In the mid-twentieth century this was true. Those who did not own a printing press were not able to spread their ideas efficiently and could not get their ideas to reach a large scale audience. Mainstream media controlled the airwaves and the outlets which decided what was published and who was publishing the material. In the book *New New Media*, Paul Levinson writes, "The telegraph in the 1830s gave the written word the capacity to be sent anywhere in the world- or anywhere connected by wires and cables- instantly" (Levinson, 18). The telegraph was revolutionary because it allowed reporters to file their stories instantly with the newspaper they were writing for. This still didn't allow *anyone* to have their work published or ideas heard, but only those who were working as journalists for a certain newspaper or media outlet. Flash forward to modern day technology and the fact that anyone who is literate and has access to a computer, be it private or public, has the ability to blog about whatever he or she wants. These blogs can then be published at the click of a button and have the potential to reach large audiences. Not only has this created the term that Rettberg refers to as 'Citizen Journalist,' but this has created a whole new form in the way we communicate and share our ideas. Levinson writes, "Blogging takes the dissemination of news and opinion one big step

beyond the telegraph by allowing ‘reporters’- that is, people, everyone- to file their stories instantly not with their newspapers but on their blogs and, therein, with the world at large” (Levinson, 19). Society no longer has a single source of news, but instead we use the internet to collect news from many different sources. Blogging has allowed people to become reporters or journalists even if it is not their profession. Rettberg explains,

This new freedom to publish at will has caused journalists and editors to reevaluate the role of mainstream, professional media. If you want more information about a current event today, you can easily search across blogs, newspapers and other sources, finding stories far more diverse and extensive than those traditionally printed in a newspaper or relayed on the television news (Rettberg, 85).

Blogs are beginning to intersect with journalism, and the line that separates the two is becoming arguably less distinguishable.

Being a journalist or engaging in the field of journalism does not require an individual to have a certain degree or special license. Before blogs and personal websites gave people the freedom to publish whatever work they wanted at free will, being a journalist usually meant publishing your work through a certain medium such as a newspaper, television, or radio. Rettberg makes the argument, “Today, this may also mean that you are a blogger- but if it does, that’s means it is much harder than previously to determine whether or not an individual is a journalist” (Rettberg, 89). The question is whether bloggers should have the same rights as journalists when it comes to protecting their sources’ anonymity. Journalists are protected by shield laws that vary from state to state. Levinson explains, “shield laws, which protect journalists from being forced to reveal their sources to prosecutors and courts and do not address the right to publish, per se” (Levinson, 38). Journalists argue that without such laws they could not do their jobs properly because their sources could not trust that they would not be revealed. Rettberg writes, “Without such protection, many people would not feel safe speaking to journalists about contentious issues” (Rettberg, 89). Bloggers should have the same rights when it comes to withholding the identity of their sources as journalists. They are practicing a new form of journalism, something Levinson describes as media within media, the idea that “journalism, a form of communication, is a medium that can be presented via other media, such as newspapers, radio, TV broadcasts and written and video blogs” (Levinson, 40). People should be able to blog and express their ideas freely and be protected under first

amendment rights.

Rettberg writes about an incident in 2004 when bloggers leaked information about certain products Apple was planning to release. Apple sued a blogging source that went by the name 'John does', who they believed leaked their secrets to bloggers. Apple claimed that, "bloggers who had published the information were legally required to identify their sources, and thus reveal who the 'John Does' were" (Rettberg, 90). The bloggers argued that their sources were protected because they were acting as journalists. Apple claimed that they were not journalists so the confidentiality of their media sources was not upheld by the law (Rettberg, 90). The bloggers seem to fit the definition of a journalist according to the Merriam-Webster online dictionary, which is simply, "a person engaged in journalism; especially: a writer or editor for a news medium," "a writer who aims at a mass audience," "a person who keeps a journal." A blog can function as an individual's news medium, so he or she should be protected in the same way journalists are. This issue has raised concern from the Electronic Frontier Foundation which is currently, "battling for legal and institutional recognition that if you engage in journalism, you're a journalist, with all of the attendant rights, privileges, and protections" (Rettberg, 90). These shifts in legal definitions are important for bloggers and new media as a whole. People are beginning to redefine the nature of journalism and what it means to be a journalist, and this is a necessary change that comes with new media.

Levinson also touches on a story that is similar to the above case that involved Judith Miller's 2005 imprisonment for failing to reveal her sources in the Valerie Plame CIA leak investigation (Levinson, 39). I believe it is not ethically or morally correct for a journalist to go to jail for protecting the anonymity of his or her sources. Therefore, I also believe that it is wrong for a blogger to face consequences or punishment by law for protecting sources. People need to accept that with new technology and new media comes blurred lines and intersecting genres. People are apprehensive to do this and fearful of emerging technologies and how we use them. Sturken and Thomas convey this point in the article *Technological Vision and the Rhetoric of the New* when they say that,

the visions of technologies as life-transforming, in both transcendent and threatening ways, have been reiterated and embraced again and again throughout history, from the development of the printing press to the computer; from the telegraph to the cell phone; from photography and cinema to television; with new technologies taking the place of more

established ones in a seemingly endless cycle (Sturken and Thomas, 2).

People feel threatened by a new medium known as blogging which they feel has the ability to transcend a more established medium like journalism.

In December of 2008 Judith Miller of Fox news reported that, for the first time, more online journalists than print journalists had been arrested around the world in 2008 (Levinson, 39). Besides a blogger being subjective about the material they are posting, I would argue that in a sense he or she is delivering news to the public just as a journalist does. If someone is out on a walk or going about his or her business and happens to witness something news worthy, he or she should have the right to relay the news to the public. If people choose to do this through blogs, then they should be protected under first amendment rights. Some people post personal videos to their blog documenting something they think should be brought to the public's attention. Levinson brings up a case about a blogger named Josh Wolf. He was videotaping protests in San Francisco and later posted some clips on his blog. A police officer was assaulted during the protests and Wolf was asked to turn over his tapes. When he refused, he was arrested and put in jail (Levinson, 38). I agree with Wolf's attorney Martin Garbus who said, "I would define a journalist as someone who brings news to the public" (Levinson, 40). In this situation, that was all Josh Wolf was trying to accomplish. The fact that a cop was assaulted was irrelevant, and Wolf should have full control of the tapes he recorded. This is yet another example of how the lines between journalism and blogging are becoming blurred and less distinguishable.

As our society moves farther into the age of new digital media and blogging, it is essential that our society establishes some guidelines and laws that protect bloggers as well as journalists. There needs to be federal shield laws that protect bloggers. People need to realize that the practice of journalism has new outlets. Journalism is no longer limited to newspapers and television broadcasting but can be practiced through blogging and other uses of the internet. A blogger should have first amendment rights as a journalist, and the government should not be able to deter or infringe upon these rights. Journalism is evolving, and we need to consider creating legal definitions for blogging and journalism.

Works Cited

Levinson, Paul. *New New Media*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 2009. Print.

Rettberg, Jill Walker. *Blogging*. Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2008. Print.

Sturken, Marita and Douglas Thomas. "Introduction: Technological Visions and the Rhetoric of the New?" *Technological Visions: The Hopes and Fears that Shape New Technologies*. Eds. Marita Sturken, Douglas Thomas, and Sandra J. Ball-Rokeach. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004.

# The Internet and Social Networking: Building Virtual Relationships and Harming In-Person Relationships




---

Amanda Tan

People are changing their ideological view of social communication as new media emerge. Different types of technological communication from person to person are easily accessible as new forms appear. People are able to communicate via social networking sites, telephones/cellphones, IM (instant messaging), and the list can continue. As new forms of communication grow, modern society gain dependency on the internet and the issue of all these new media starts to emerge, such as ruining social face-to-face relationships and an individual's' ethics. The following paper, I argue that modern society rely on social networking via internet to grow their social relationships. Discussions around new social networking via the internet encourage users to find groups surrounding their interests or relating to people's personal experience and build upon those relationships. I will then argue that social networking via the internet is damaging individuals' in-person relationships and ethics because of increasing dependence on social networking via the internet. The ways feature of the internet contributes to people isolating themselves from the real world. Using scholarly articles, it will serve for the purpose of the two opposing arguments. The final last parts will bring together the two arguments and show the cause and effects.

The following articles discuss the importance of using computer-mediated technology as a form of communication and the uses of this generation. Bakadjieva and Smith discuss society's use and dependency of building relationships and communities on the internet (Bakadjieva and Smith 81). Coyle and Vaughn bring in the uses of different social networking sites as conducted in a study (Coyle and Vaughn). Both articles draw together the emerging uses of social networking, and the ways society ritually uses social networking to building, enhancing, or reconnecting social relationships.

Bakadjieva and Smith suggest the reliance of the internet in the current society. People depend on the internet to build new virtual relationships with one another by personal experiences in the real world. Understanding different narrative stories, such as single parenting or sense of belonging, Bakadjieva and Smith concludes, using the internet "empowers" an ordinary person (Bakadjieva and Smith 80). People rely on

the internet for different things, as discussed in the article it creates for the people to have power on the internet and proceed with hierarchy. People were able to join other people by relating to their problems and build a new relationship via the internet. Joining social networking websites build relationships and use the notion of media ideologies. Gershon defines media ideologies as, “a set of beliefs about communicative technologies with which users and designers explain perceived media structure and meaning (Gershon 3).” Forums and social networking groups on the internet provide people a sense of community and belonging to express one’s emotions. People are building upon certain relationships because they are able to use the internet to relate to one another.

The internet enables people going through the same problems to come together in many ways. Bakadjieva and Smith talk about different personal experience people can connect to each other by using the internet. Personal experiences include dislocation, isolation, family spread around the globe, current job situations, and sense of belonging (Bakadjieva and Smith 71). The internet brings people together from all over the place and allows them to talk to one another and build new relationships and connect virtually. Levinson talks about the features of Facebook and the use of the “group” application, which allow users to develop a group and people who have similar interests or want to join may join and start discussing issues with one another (Levinson 126). The internet gives society endless possibility as individuals’ intentions differs. People can build online relationships with anyone in the world that peaks their interests. This entails to the social support people get from other people around the globe and grow dependent on online relationships.

Different social networking sites are available for society to use with many purposes, as Levinson argues, “Whatever their objective differences and advantages, their ultimate value is the good they do for each individual user’s needs (Levinson 121).” The purpose of each site targets people to gain popularity and a community. By creating different forms of technological communication, the developers target people to be consumers in the developers’ services. People’s intention on different sites differs, but Coyle and Vaughn suggests from research that people’s number one use of social networking is keeping in touch with friends (Coyle and Vaughn 15). Bringing together the ideas of Levinson and Coyle et al., gives the understanding and intention of both the developers of the social networking sites and society. Modern society uses social networking websites to connect to each other throughout the world. The developers acknowledge the needs of society and tend needs through the virtual world.

The relation of the two articles intertwines different social uses

and society relying on the internet to socially connects with one another. As Bakardjieva et al suggests people use the internet to find other users in society who can relate to one another and build upon a relationship. The intention of using social networking sites brings the intention of connecting with each other and keeping in touch with friends, as the article Coyle et al talks about. Society relies on the use of the internet in many ways. With new social networking sites emerging, it gives contemporary society endless options. Relationships built on social networking websites via the internet gives society an option to connecting with the world and as Kirkpatrick suggests the intention of Facebook, “as a tool to enhance your relationships with the people you know in the flesh—your real-world friends, acquaintances, classmates, or co-workers (Kirkpatrick 12).” People are able to build an online community and network through these social networking sites. The benefits of social networking are endless and continue to grow. Both articles fail to bring in the negative aspects of social networking and the internet.

Networking with people can be a great thing, but when tides starts to change and people rely on social networking websites to build new relationships and consume society’s time, consequences arise with in-person relationships and the ethics revolved around relationships. In “Understanding Media,” McLuhan talks about the issues that arise with social networking and the internet, “personal and social consequences of any medium—that is, of any extension of ourselves—result from the new scale that is introduced into our affairs by each extension of ourselves, or by any new technology (McLuhan 1).” When new media emerges, society gets ahead of using the new media to its full potential, not realizing the issues that may arise with the new technological communications. The new media of social networking sites via the internet possess the issue of ruining face-to-face interactions with one another and the cultural ethics of people. As people start to develop new relationships on social networking sites, people tend to lose relationship skills and ignore those that are physically present to the person.

The following articles will present the issues of new media, specifically social networking sites, and the internet. I will first present issues of skills and ethics contemporary society lost. “Relationship Networking: Society and Education,” talks about the relationship skills and ethics society has lost over time due to the internet evolving (Barnes). Society’s ethics change over time because new technology does not educate people on the social norms of generations before. The discourse of the next article written by Hampton brings up the issue of modern society using the internet in the public’s sphere and ignoring those around them (Hampton



and Gupta). The following argument will issue evidence of the effects of using social networking sites via the internet in public.

Barnes presents the idea of the eight different factors that influence people's societal skills (Barnes 735). Many of the key factors play in the role of society's incapability to have fundamentals of ethics and social skills. Barnes talks about the reasons why society lacks the knowledge of ethics, which are due to the changes in technology and is use as a "substitute for face-to-face interactions (Barnes 738)." I will argue the points Barnes make as a factor and relate it back to the issues of social networking via the internet. Barnes introduces the issue of technology teaching society to use more "freedom" when talking to employers and not building upon ethics (Barnes 737). Using different social networking sites, people are able to express their feelings through their statuses; Levinson brings up the point of social networking sites to be "much more personal communication (Levinson 7)," people freely express themselves as they post what they are feeling. People are risking their jobs and personal relationships with the people they work with because of contemporary society developing the habit of speaking before thinking. When people enter social networking sites, Levinson talks about the groups on Facebook, where people join and write that they feel as necessary. Technology and new media brings consequences along with the positive. The discourse of the shift in generation contributes to the issues of new media. As new technological communication emerges, physical people skill will diminish.

The next couple of factors Barnes talks about involve the game Second Life. Second Life is a virtual reality game, people are able to create an avatar for themselves and live life through a virtual world (Linden Research ). The correlation between the game and the issues of the new media is the actions taken place in the game relates back to the way people act in society. When people create a new life, it presents the challenge of the authentic relationships people have with each other on the game and bringing it back to reality. Brookley and Cannon disregard the user of the game, and suggest the different ways people are able to pretend to be someone they are not from the liberatory perspective (Brookey and Cannon 146). In modern society, people make-up who they are to enhance their lives online, but their online self is not a reflection of who they are in reality. Using Goffman's approach of front-stage and back-stage, people present themselves online using their front-stage by perceiving themselves as someone else to fit in with the virtual world, but back-stage or offline the person is showing their true self (Merowitz 36). The ethics of online relationships is that it creates an issue in contemporary society when people reinvent themselves because people are unable to conclude the relationship

they built with someone else through the internet without knowing their back stage.

The next issue of the internet and social networking sites is the use of the internet in a public sphere. The public sphere is being out with other people surrounding them or not in one's private space or home. Hampton and Gupta's article discusses the finding of their research, when people move from their private sphere to the public's sphere, the use of wireless internet interferes with social interaction in the environment (Hampton and Gupta 844). People use different types of technology to interact with one another, when Hampton and Gupta conducted their study participants used cellphones and laptops to connect to the internet (Hampton and Gupta 844). They concluded that people escape their everyday lives in the private sphere and enters into an environment in which they are able to keep to themselves in public by using the internet.

Cutting off the social interactions with people physically around other people brings the issue of individual's social interactions, Hampton and Gupta concludes, "The dominant interpretation of the relationship between public space and social interaction suggests that the modern urban environment is responsible for increasing social segregation, isolation, and non-involvement (Hampton and Gupta 835)." People are ruining physical relationships around them because the internet consumes individual's full attention. Social networking sites brings people together and creates relationships with one another, but the idea of face-to-face contact is soon to be in non-existence because of new media of communication emerging.

Hampton and Gupta's findings of isolation closely relates with Gerson's "*idioms of practice* (Gershon 6)." Idioms of practice in media are the way people coordinate the meaning of using different media, also refer to the social constructionist view, co-creation of everything (Gergen 40). The idioms of practice and isolation converse with one another because both involve the attention of society to create the meaning of social networking sites via the internet and divert attention onto the computer. Gershon discusses the problems with communication via technology as social and technical. Socially people are to figure out the meaning of messages, timing, and the appropriate ways shifting the attention of individuals solely on the internet in front of them (Gershon 7). Pulling in together Gerson and Hampton et al. brings together the issues of people isolating themselves from the environment around them. Society's attention of forming the ideology of the media contributes to the issue of lacking person-to-person interaction as a form of communication in this generation shifts over to social networking sites. As people start to use social networking for relationships, contemporary society starts to lose the physical relationship

skills and ethics.

Barnes brings up ideas of the internet effecting people's ethics and social skills as Hamptons et al brings up the issue of people only paying attention to the internet contributes to the dependency of the internet on society and ruining in-person relationships. Barnes article brings up points to aid in the discussion and findings of Hamptons et al, the interpersonal skills people develop to act in society slowly lacks formal ethics because one's free use of expression is made available through the internet. As people enter into the public sphere, isolation and social segregation occur while using the internet. Discourses of the articles bring up different points to point out the negative aspects of new media. Issues in new media emerge as new technologies are also emerging.

The cause and effect of social networking and new media emerge as each author offers a different perspective. The arguments Bakadjieva et al and Coyle et al suggests the positives of using the internet as the tool for people to rely on to connect people virtually, which is the cause of new social networking through the internet. Society is able to relate to one another via the internet and build virtual relationships. People's relationships online build the networking community, but the effect in contemporary society is losing the social networking community with in-person relationships. Hampton et al. and Barnes offer the effect of using the media as a problem, as people are ignoring the physical world around them and losing the physical relationships. Barnes brings in the factors of the societal change and the interpretations of using the new media as a negative effect. Modern society changes the relationships people have with one another as they enhance their virtual relationships and put money into developing programs to enhance the online experience. Hampton et al. talks about bringing in the social networking sites and internet into the public sphere, places people are physically around other people, and isolating themselves by using the internet. Both arguments serve into people relying on social networking sites via the internet to build relationships but damaging the physical relationships surrounding them.

Reviewing the contemporary scholarly articles contributes to societal issues. The issue of people losing relationship skills of talking to each other face-to-face, the ethics of being in the work force and expressing their emotions without thinking, disconnecting from the real world, and moving to the virtual world, and the list continues. As the pendulum swings back and forth, the constant debate continues about the effects of new media, the benefits of connecting people through social networking sites via internet and the effects occurring to the people consuming themselves in the new technologies.

### Works Cited

- Bakadjieva, Maria and Richard Smith. "The Internet Use of Everyday Life." New Media and Society (2001): 67-83.
- Barnes, Susan. "Relationship Networking: Society and Education." Computer-Mediated Communication (2009): 735-742.
- Brookey, Robert and Kristopher Cannon. "Sex in Second Life." Critical Studies in Media Communications (2009): 245-164.
- Coyle, Cheryl and Heather Vaughn. "Social networking: Communication revolution or evolution?" Bell Labs Technical Journal (2008): 13-17.
- Gergen, Kenneth. Relational Being: Beyond Self and Community. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Gershon, Ilana. The Breakup 2.0. New York: Cornell University, 2010.
- Hampton, Keith and Neeti Gupta. "Community and Social Interaction in the Wireless City: Wi-Fi use in Public and Semi-Public Space." New Media and Society (2008): 831-850.
- Kirkpatrick, David. the facebook EFFECT!. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010.
- Levinson, Paul. New New Media. Boston: Ally & Bacon, 2009.
- Linden Research . What is second life? n.d. 10 December 2010 <<http://secondlife.com/whatis/>>.
- McLuhan, Marshall. "Understanding Media." n.d. 1-47.
- Merowitz, Joshua. No Sense of Place: The Impact of Electronic Media on Social Behavior. New York : Oxford University Press , 1985.
- TrafficD. List Of Social Networking Sites. 2010. 12 December 2010 <<http://traffikd.com/social-media-websites/>>.

## What Perez Says: an Analysis of Popular Culture

Lauren Freeman



Since its initial introduction and eventual popularization, the Internet has become a culturally accepted source of information and entertainment. One may rely upon the Internet not only for scholarly information or as a tool used to simplify one's life, but also as a means to satisfy boredom with little effort or exertion. The need to be entertained by that which is found to be socially relevant or enjoyable has been capitalized upon by a man named Mario Lavandeira Jr., better known by his moniker, Perez Hilton. Hilton independently created and maintains a website called PerezHilton.com, which provides easily accessible and up to date celebrity-based gossip and photographs to those who choose to visit the website. Each story is short- usually no more than one paragraph in length, and is accompanied by a photograph. Hilton assumes creative license by frequently using Microsoft Paint to scribble lewd comments and doodles on the photographs, and frequently titles each article in similar taste. Internet traffic to the website has ranked it as the 614<sup>th</sup> most visited website in the world (Alexa). Dubbed "the most hated site on the internet" by Hilton himself, it has become a prime example of a "pop cultural" phenomenon. PerezHilton.com embodies popular culture because it appeals to a mass audience, is easily accessible, is inclusive, and reflects the values of contemporary society.

Perezhilton.com is an example relevant to the definition of "popular culture." In his piece titled "Notes on a Rationale for Popular Culture," historian Russel Nye details that popular culture "reflects the values, convictions, and patterns of thoughts and feelings generally dispersed through and approved by American society (Nye, 22)." When applied to the website, Nye's definition proves to be true. Hilton's celebrity gossip not only includes pieces of information that he has deemed be newsworthy, but also includes his own opinion on the piece. Hilton's "take no prisoners" approach to each story has resulted in defamation lawsuits, cases of copyright infringement, and offended, disgruntled celebrities who have publicly fired back at many of his accusations and reports (Business Wire). The publicity that the negative attention has created has crafted Perez into a self proclaimed "internet gossip phenom." The attention has in turn resulted in book deals, a radio show, television appearances, concert

series, and widespread media coverage. Hilton has created a piece of popular culture that's popularity is perpetuated by its consumers. Although opposition to the site is present, the support behind it proves that it is an example of popular culture. The gossip blog boasts a startling 13.5 million unique visitors on average, and a total 280 million average "hits" each month (Hilton). The large number of unique visitors and constant media attention that the website obtains prove that it is in tune with the patterns of thoughts and feelings of its audience. The audience continues to return and consume that which Hilton publishes, often taking it a step further and commenting in agreement on each piece. Hilton has capitalized on a previously untapped market, and has created a service through which his large audience is easily entertained. In reference to the content of his website, Hilton explains, "It is fun and easily digestible. It is like fast food. I am the McDonald's of the Internet (Fillo)." Hilton's claim that he is the "McDonald's of the internet" alludes to the website's mass appeal and to its nonexclusive tendencies, both of which tenants are vital in a cultural text's ability to be classified as popular culture.

Through his daily reports, Hilton provides the public with a kind of culture that transcends regionalism. Each post is accessible to all who possess basic reading skills and have access to the Internet. Language is not a barrier, for Hilton writes in basic English, requiring that his readers possess little to no formal education. In addition to the use of inclusive vernacular, translations of the website are offered in 51 languages, allowing the website to cross cultural boundaries. The Internet is accessible at any time of day, and in any geographic location. The site is discriminatory only in that those without access to the Internet cannot read its posts. Age, race, gender, socioeconomic status, education, cultural classification, and geographic location are all discriminatory factors which are eliminated and are not relevant when analyzing the website's mass appeal to its audience. These factors are not relevant for they neither prohibit nor enable the ability of one to access and engage in the website's content. According to Nye, popular culture is that which is able to reach the "widest possible audience in the most efficient way (5)." In addition to using the Internet, which is a cultural staple in developed countries, Hilton updates his blog every 12.5 minutes (on average) from 4:00 AM until 10:00 PM (Fillo). Constant updates and the use of a widely popular medium by which to distribute the information combine to make the posts accessible to a wide audience in a very efficient manner, for they are continually refreshed therefore transcending time zones.

Popular culture reflects the values we have already constructed (Williams). The main consumers of Perezhilton.com are American (though

they are not the only consumers). American values are that of beauty, wealth, power, and success. American values are represented in those who are chosen by the American culture to become celebrities. Perez Hilton's website is a piece of popular culture because it reports and reflects upon the embodiment of American values, as they appear in American celebrities. Hilton constructs heroes and heroines and then satisfies his audience's need for access to its own culture-constructed God-like figures, through daily reports on their personal problems, business endeavors, mishaps, and slip ups. Hilton creates an avenue for which his readers can humanize their idols. The humanization of said idols, in turn, constructs a new and obtainable meaning of American values to the audience. Popular culture is accessible to the masses, and reflects the values already constructed by the society.

Perez Hilton is a popular artist. A popular artist "finds his public via the newsstand, the movie screen, the book-of-the-week list, the TV tube, the paperback... (Nye, 6)." Hilton has found his audience through what was at the beginning, a personal hobby, which has exploded in to a cultural influence with a multi-million reader strong audience. Hilton does very little marketing for his website, for the controversy surrounding it does most of the advertising for him. The audience, in this case, has found the artist, instead of the artist finding the audience. The popular artist "expresses not only what he feels, but through what he feels, he expresses what many others do (6)." Hilton has become the voice of his people, reflecting his audience's opinions about cultural figures, policies, and values. It is because he successfully constructs a form of popular culture that Perez Hilton is a popular artist.

For the purpose of this analysis, Russel Nye's definition of popular culture is most fitting and appropriate, for it addresses not only the opinions and feelings of a society, but also that the society's values must be embodied within a cultural text and that said text must be generally dispersed through a society for it to be considered popular culture. The method of analyzing a cultural artifact in respect to its ability to reflect a culture's feelings, opinions, and values, as well as being able to be widely distributed is most useful because it accepts popular culture as it is, without bending it to make it seem as though it is a tool used to oppress, liberate, or solidify status. By Nye's definition, popular culture is simple, entertaining, and inclusive. Perezhilton.com is an embodiment of this definition. As opposed to an online literary journal or an online news website, which appears as drab, confusing, and exclusive due to the use of highbrow terms and subjects, Hilton peppers humor and imagery in to his uncomplicated, entertaining stories, making them enjoyable and accessible

to all. Perez Hilton is a shining example of a reflection of popular culture in contemporary technological society.

### Works Cited

- Fillo, Maryellen. "Perez Hilton, 'The McDonald's Of The Internet' - Hartford Courant." *Featured Articles From The Hartford Courant*. 23 Apr. 2010. Web. 06 Oct. 2010. <[http://articles.courant.com/2010-04-23/entertainment/hc-perez-hilton.java.artapr23\\_1\\_perez-hilton-celebrity-blogs-paris-hilton](http://articles.courant.com/2010-04-23/entertainment/hc-perez-hilton.java.artapr23_1_perez-hilton-celebrity-blogs-paris-hilton)>
- Hilton, Perez. *Celebrity Gossip Juicy Celebrity Rumors Hollywood Gossip*. *Blog from Perez Hilton*. Web. 05 Oct. 2010. <<http://perezhilton.com>>.
- Nye, Russel B. "Notes on a Rationale for Popular Culture." *The Popular Culture Reader*. Eds. Jack Nachbar, Deborah Weiser, and John L. Wright. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1978.
- "Top Sites." *Alexa the Web Information Company*. Web. 06 Oct. 2010. <<http://www.alexa.com>>.
- Williams, Raymond. "Culture is Ordinary." *The Everyday Life Reader*. Ed. Ben Highmore. New York: Routledge, 2002.
- "X17Online Sues PerezHilton.com for Copyright Infringement | Business Wire." *BNET | News Articles, Magazine Back Issues & Reference Articles on All Topics*. Web. 06 Oct. 2010. <[http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m0EIN/is\\_2006\\_Nov\\_30/ai\\_n16880034/](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0EIN/is_2006_Nov_30/ai_n16880034/)>.





## Disappearing Privacy

Angelina Bossone

In a capitalist society, such as in the United States, the main goal is to make profit. Things, like commercial products, need to be made faster and easier to quickly get to the consumer and make sale. However, new media such as the internet can also play a role in consumerism. The internet has branched out from e-mail and instant messaging to social networking sites (like MySpace, Youtube, and Facebook) that have become huge influences in daily lifestyles, making communication faster and easier. Yet, there comes a cost with the improved communication and entertainment of the internet. The cost is that of media surveillance. The following shall discuss the relationship society has with new media and how it puts the privacy of its users at stake. Google, Facebook, and the GPS (Global Positioning System) will be examined to display the unknown surveillance it partakes in while in use. A major ethical conflict is presented that questions the importance of privacy in contrast to common surveillance by new media.

In 2006, when Facebook became the new popular social networking site, its users took the time to fill out information about themselves that contained interests of movies, books, music, activities, and even contact information (Campbell, Martin, and Fabos 53). Sites like Facebook display where a person went (or goes) to school, where they live, the kind of relationships they are involved in, and where they work. Aside from the personal profiles, pictures are uploaded, messages are exchanged between people, and users become “fans of” something that shows even more of what that user finds interesting. There is always the risk of online predators; however, no one ever really considers the risk of media surveillance. All of the data that Facebook collects is stored into their database about each and every one of its members. Ari Melber believes that Facebook has not exactly “friended” privacy rights (1). Facebook is more concerned about the marketing of user data than of the privacy rights of its users.

When logged into sites like Facebook, one sees advertisements on the side of the page. These advertisements are based upon the data collected about the user. This process of targeted advertising is called “data mining” (Campbell, Martin, and Fabos 60). This practice is often

viewed as unethical because it is done without the knowledge of the user and also disregards privacy. “Companies can use technology to mislead users,” says Melber. “User privacy is giving way to Web sites’ desire to market to their friends and family” (1-2). It is the most targeted kind of advertising in history, as companies can easily market advertisements to the appropriate audience (Campbell, Martin, and Fabos 57). Data mining shows the relationship society has with the media of social networking sites and how the privacy of its users is not always considered. The relationship is asymmetrical, and social networking companies have more power over its own users. It often goes unnoticed that when filling out data fields on social networking sites, not only is the website collecting that information, but it does not have to do the work to figure out what its members like (to target for advertising), because its members do the work for them.

Information about people is not just found on social networking sites – it can be found on the internet itself through search engines. The most popular search engine, Google, has revenue of billions of dollars each year just from the advertisements that accompany keyword searches (Campbell, Martin, and Fabos 57). “Computer hackers don’t need to break into highly secured databases to find valuable information. In fact, sometimes the most private of things can be found in the most public of places – on Google” (Faber Video). Things like names, addresses, phone numbers, ID numbers, credit card information, passwords, and social security numbers can be found through a Google search. Like Facebook, Google scans through emails (Gmail) to find information that can be linked to advertising (Campbell, Martin, and Fabos 57). Aside from that, it keeps a record of every search to have ever been in existence and can even be traced back to the specific individual who searched it. It may be a scary thought, but if the information is on the internet – then Google can find it and share it (Faber Video). This brings about the possibility of identity theft and even the idea of always being watched online. It is almost like every movement is unsafe, which can be especially disturbing when one starts to question who it is that is actually watching.

This issue of surveillance is applicable beyond the internet. Now, the idea spreads to person tracking. A person can be tracked through what they do online or where they are from when they scan into a location with a card, fingerprints, or face recognition. A person can even be tracked through global positioning systems (GPS), including those that can sometimes be active in cell phones. A GPS traditionally is supposed to be used to help direct a person to get to a location from within a car. GPS devices are now being advertised to monitor how a person drives. Parents are being encouraged to monitor and track their children’s driving with a

GPS and are given the ability to find their location, their speed, the number of passengers in the car, and even if the driver is wearing a seatbelt (“GPS” 2). This is the approach to social control that if a person feels like they are being watched, then they will act accordingly. “Teens will make their best independent decisions under supervision or while they are monitored with a tracking device” (“GPS” 2). This statement can be argued in the issue of trust between a parent and child and also the idea that the teen may even become nervous if they know he or she is constantly being watched while driving, and therefore anxiety may cause his or her driving to be even worse. The whole idea of a person’s driving being tracked brings up the question of whether or not this could allow “police to issue speeding tickets without officers actually being present or insurance companies to judge your driving habits before determining your rates” (Faber Video). This could be helpful for the government to monitor our actions, but horrible for maintaining the public’s right to privacy.

Social networking sites and search engines that collect data for advertising as well as the tracking of people and media surveillance is all implemented as a faster and easier way to monitor people within society and to advertise and create better consumers. Fast and easy money is always favorable in a capitalist nation. Sadly, within the process, the rights of people (such as privacy) may often be forgotten. The actions of everyone are constantly being watched through media surveillance. Sometimes, people do not even know they are being watched. New media have more power in society and this risks the privacy of the public. Facebook, Google, and GPS (along with many others) all can be used to track people’s actions. Media surveillance is expanding – from video cameras (or even webcams) to the use of phones and the belief that the government can listen in. People should be concerned with surveillance and the protection of their privacy. It is unethical to be under surveillance without consent or will.

## Works Cited

- Campbell, Martin and Bettina Fabos. "The Internet and New Technologies: The Media Coverage." *Media & Culture: An Introduction to Mass Communication*. Boston: Bedford, 2010. Print.
- Faber, David. *Big Brother Big Business*. CNBC, 2006. Video.
- "GPS Teen Tracking & Monitoring." *Vehicle-Tracking-GPS*. HealthGoji. 2009. (Web) 25 Feb. 2010. <<http://www.vehicle-tracking-gps.com/teen-driver.htm>>
- Melber, Ari. "Facebook Surveillance vs. Google Disappearance." *Huffington Post*. 18 Feb. 2010. (Web) 25 Feb. 2010. <[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/ari-melber/facebook-surveillance-vs\\_b\\_87223.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/ari-melber/facebook-surveillance-vs_b_87223.html)>